

On nature and body education in the anarchist perspective of Escuela Moderna de Barcelona¹

Sobre a natureza e a educação dos corpos na perspectiva anarquista da Escola Moderna de Barcelona

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ABSTRACT

The work discusses some prescriptions for the education of bodies in the anarchist experience of the Modern School of Barcelona. Anchored in a set of reflections on nature for the better development of education. We analyse different documents as a compendium of nature knowledge, textbooks, and articles published in *Boletín de La Escuela Moderna* in the period between the 1880s and the first decade of the 20th. century. Despite capturing the modernizing trend of education, it also recovered the tradition to defend a “return to nature”. The anarchists showed themselves attuned to the appeals of their time, but innovated in proposing an education that questioned the *status quo*, authoritarianism, and advocated the worker’s emancipation. For them, educating was more than instructing. For this reason, activities such as day-trips, travels, in addition to school practices in which nature was explored and understood, were essential for students to overcome obscurantism and

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ignorance that helped stimulate all forms of domination. In that experience, the education of bodies was fundamental.

Keywords: History of education. Body education. Nature and education. Anarchist education; Modern School of Barcelona.

RESUMO

O trabalho discute algumas prescrições e práticas para a educação dos corpos na experiência anarquista da Escola Moderna de Barcelona. Ancorados em um conjunto de reflexões sobre a natureza para o melhor desenvolvimento da educação, percorremos documentos que vão desde tratados sobre a natureza, livros didáticos e artigos publicados no *Boletín de la Escuela Moderna* no período entre a década de 80 do século XIX e a primeira década do séc. XX. Capturando a voga modernizadora da educação que, no entanto, recuperava a tradição para defender um “retorno à natureza”, os anarquistas se mostraram sintonizados com os apelos do seu tempo, mas inovaram ao propor uma educação que questionava o *status quo*, o autoritarismo e advogava a emancipação dos trabalhadores. Para eles, educar era mais do que instruir. Assim, se eles também repercutiram essa preocupação com a regeneração do povo, a sua proposta assumia características particulares, no sentido de formar sujeitos capazes de lutarem por uma sociedade mais justa, livre e igualitária. Por isso, atividades como passeios, excursões, além de práticas escolares nas quais a natureza fosse conhecida e compreendida, eram atividades essenciais para que os alunos superassem o obscurantismo e a ignorância que ajudavam a fomentar todas as formas de dominação. Naquela experiência a educação dos corpos era fundamental.

Palavras-chave: História da educação. Educação do corpo. Natureza e educação. Educação anarquista. Escola Moderna de Barcelona.

Introduction

The possibility of men’s return to nature was present in the imaginary of several educational reformers throughout the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, resuming marks left by tradition. Though the definitions were diffuse, depending on the different contexts, nature was seen as an environment to be pursued by man and the ideal place to form children’s bodies. Still in the 18th century, many thinkers showed an “idyllic” inclination in the search for a human formation in harmony with nature. Names as Jean Jacques Rousseau

(1712-1778) and John Locke (1632-1704), thinkers who helped found liberalism and were notably involved in the educational debate, appeal to nature to create their pedagogical reflections. They would become references to many reflections that would mark the pedagogical debate through the 19th century, the focus of this work.

Echoing the common background of the time, the search to reconcile men with nature also became a path taken by reformer and socialist thinkers, since the beginning of the 19th century. Among the idealist proposals and the criticisms to modern life, these thinkers aimed to clean the wounds of industrialization, the superpopulation in the big metropolises which led to the increase of disease contamination, poverty, hunger, unhealthy housing – all this as part of a moment in which the so-called “popular classes” were the most affected ones. The contours and the density of those criticisms provide the premises of its concepts, in which going to nature was understood as a search (or a reunion) for a natural essence forgotten by the intense civilization and urbanization of cities, an understanding that can be seen in the reflections of utopic socialists, such as Fourier (1768-1830) and Saint Simon (1760-1825) (VIDAL, 2019)².

Circumscribing the limits of this article to the Spanish context, we observe between the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, a significant number of intellectual ideas with similar ideals and purposes, such as those defended by Francisco Giner de los Ríos, Manoel Bartolomeu Cossío, and Ricardo Rubio, intellectuals from the Spanish movement of educational renovation gathered around the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*. In that context, it is also worth highlighting, the catholic initiatives, as those of Jesuitic schools, besides the experiences of *Escuelas del Ave María*, supported by Father Andres Manjón (FRADES, 2016). In Barcelona, the experiences of *Escolas Bosques de Montjuich* (MARTÍNEZ, 2000) and *Escola Municipal Parch de Montjuich* stand out, which, according to Torredadella Flix (2020, p. 15), aimed to solve students’ hygienic-pedagogical problems, presenting as measures “The need to breath

2 “Nature” is far from being a categorical term. Raymond Williams (1992) mapped the historical development of the term in English showing how it, according to the time and place, meant the “physical world”, the environment external to culture, the landscape, the observable phenomena, the instincts, etc. During its development, the term “naturalism” was also not precise. This explains the polysemy found in the sources and, therefore, in the article. Often, it can be understood as a “aspect”, a “dimension”, or a “character”. As we try to show, naturalist education would be characterized by an ideal that advocate for less “artificial” forms, emphasizing experience over ideas, less teacher-centered, more open to the spontaneous development of students’ faculties, if the suitable tools were used for that end. A naturalist education would take students close to what is essential, key to life, according to the assumptions of many reformers. We can argue that the scientism and an environment of romantic reflection helped disseminate that ideal.

clean air and exercise the body in healthy environments”. Finally it is possible to notice these naturalist aspects in the concepts of anarchists who inspired the experience of *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona*³, prominent men in the fields of science and education who appeared in the pages of *Boletín de la Escuela Moderna*, as Élisée Reclus and Paul Robin. We focus on their formulations.

The prescriptions and activities for the education of children’s bodies in schools, to stimulate students’ contact with nature, were diverse, from tours to daytrips, summer camps, outings in parks and woods, up to visits to Natural museums and laboratories. Their aim also varied: they intended the vigor of physical health and the body strength by bathing in the sea and the advantages of breathing a fresh air; filling free time with games in parks and woods, just for leisure, besides the search of knowledge about nature – even about human nature- in outings and daytrips dealing with Geography, Geology, Biology, Hygiene, Physiology, etc. (SOARES, 2003).

For this article, we choose as primary sources the editions from 1901 to 1904 of “*Boletín de la Escuela Moderna*”, an informative paper of *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona*, and the manual “*L’École Nouvelle: esquisse d’une éducation basée sur les lois de l’évolution humaine*” (1904), written by Jean François Elslander (1865-1948), used as a support material and for teacher training in *Escuela Moderna*. From them, it is possible to see some prescriptions given by the Principal Clemence Jacquinet, as well as those of previously mentioned anarchists Élisée Reclus and Paul Robin, and the description of activities guided towards a naturalist dimension on the formation of students’ bodies. From these sources, enlightened by the bibliographical references on the theme, we seek to deepen the understanding on the relation between nature and

3 So as to keep the narrative and the central argument of the work, we decided to write as a note the main researches that focuses their analyses on *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona*. We first highlight the works of Pere Solà Gussinyer (1978; 1980) for their relevance in the academic field and, especially, because the author is the main reference on the subject. Besides those, we suggest the works of Angel Cappelletti (2012), Nora Muro (2009), and the doctoral thesis of Pascual Vicente Velázquez (2008), through which we can establish a detailed panorama of the historical trajectory of *Escuela Moderna* and its school practices. Moreover, there is the work written by its founder Francisco Ferrer y Guardia (2013) which, besides being an excellent source, is a great reference to understand the purposes and the projects aimed by *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona*. All these Works are available in Spanish. For Works in Portuguese, see the researches of Prado da Silva (2015; 2016) and the doctoral thesis of Santos (2014). The first deals with the dissemination of *Escuela Moderna* in the western world and the history of its founder Francisco Ferrer y Guardia. Santos’s thesis approaches the pedagogical ideas that circulated in *Escuela Moderna* and the development of some school practices, aiming to clarify its rationalist education and establish its differences with the liberal education of that moment.

body education in the scope of anarchist thinking, highlighting some fundamentals of *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona*, founded by Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, in 1901. The time frame of 1880s is because we wanted to collate, with no intention to compare, the renovating experience of *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, which established in Spain some of the bases for naturalist education through its emphasis on body education. We want to highlight with this that the experience of *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona* was inserted in a common time background o, though, in the anarchist experience, the revolution was an explicit objective. Defining himself as an “Enemy of social inequality”, Ferrer y Guardia said: “(...) I didn’t limit myself to lament its effects but wanted to combat its causes, certain that this way will positively lead to justice, that is, that desired equality that inspires revolutionary eagerness” (FERRER Y GUARDIA, 2013, p. 37).

The events of the post-war in 1898 and the ascension of regeneration ideas, a movement that inflated the criticisms and called for the need of cultural, political, and economic restructuring in Spain so as to reach the same level as other European countries, motivated the emergence of different schooling experiences, offering the contours of a societal project: Europeanize the people and raise a new Spain (VIÑAO, 2004, p. 19-20). The anarchists of *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona* were also concerned with the regeneration of the people, however, with particular ideas in the sense of forming subjects able to fight for a fairer, freer, and more equalitarian society. The program presented: “ The mission of *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona* is to turn the boys and girls trusted upon us into people who are educated, truthful, fair, and free of all prejudices” (FERRER Y GUARDIA, 2013, p. 38). To do so, science and nature were key elements to education: “For it, we substitute the dogmatic study for the reasoning of natural sciences” (FERRER Y GUARDIA, 2013, p. 38).

A return to nature? The place of body education in *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona*

Concerns of naturalistic character are present in the prescriptions and practices of *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona* since its inauguration. In that event, Salas Ánton, a physician that was part of the Consulting Board of the School, briefly announced the educational system.

Not here...in a spaced limited by four walls, but in the open field, alternating woods, orchards, gardens, cereal cultivation land, and broad sidewalks, we should have gathered them for this act, as we continue those great naturalist pedagogues, that established teaching in the direct contact of the student with nature (BOLETIN, 1901, p. 4).

The physician reinforces that students' education should take place in contact with spaces such as woods, gardens, and parks, including those still present in the city of Barcelona, which would be the ideal places for the end. The closure of children in school should be overcome to reconcile them with a forgotten nature – a brief but important moment to break with the ordinary and civilized life – in the attempt to stimulate the “natural instinct” and children's spontaneity as they exercise their freedom. The conquest was welcomed when men dominated the knowledge over nature. Hence, the usefulness to learn about nature was key to preserve humanity, from its domination and transformation in favor of men's interests and needs, what was in vogue in the 19th century.

In a prescription given in the *Boletín* by anarchist Élisée Reclus on Geography teaching, the author reinforces the need to elaborate an efficient method for students' learning. This way, he suggested outings and daytrips as a good strategy and emphasize the motto “Return, then, to nature!” (RECLUS, 1903, p. 65). The French geographer assured that “to learn, first we understand” (RECLUS, 1903, p. 65) and, therefore, the need for children's experience with nature to master the knowledge over it.

We must consider that the educational outings were widespread in Spain, specially the experiences of *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* – ILE⁴. Under the guidance of Manoel Bartolomeo Cossío, the practices of outings in ILE were boosted. According to Mayor Mayor (2002) there were many objectives:

4 The reference to the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* is not casual here. It was a pioneer experience of educational renovation in Spain in the 1870s. Some of the basic assumption of body education on ingrained in its practices: physical education, games, outings and daytrips, hygiene, aesthetic education. Its leaders were inspired by the educational experience in England and Germany, mainly articulating arguments of scientism and an environment of romantic reflection. Many of its assumptions are in the horizon of expectations of the intellectuals who worked at *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona*, even if the ideological delineations of both initiatives were different. However, both faced a tradition and proposed ways of pedagogical renovation which would mark school experience in Spain, and, in a way, the world.

We seek a type of life in contact with the resources and experiences provided by nature...To the physical exercise that supposes a proper excursion, we add the acquisition of notions from other subjects of great interest to children: agriculture, biology, botany, history, art, geography, etc. (MAYOR MAYOR, 2002, p. 220).

The daytrips aimed to allow a multidisciplinary learning for children, a moment in which they could obtain a scientific knowledge through a direct contact with nature. Therefore, the development of these activities wanted to educate children regarding natural, physical, chemical laws, the sciences of agriculture and botany, the knowledge of relief, land, mountains, rivers, and seas – all aiming to highlight men's power and the control over the natural world.

Under the title “*Contra la Naturaleza*” (Against Nature), the French anarchist Paul Robin connected his proposal to that of Reclus understanding that knowing nature was important to control it. This control of nature presented itself as a key action to maintain the survival of civilization, because

In many cases men could reach a certain work power to win over nature, to preserve themselves from its pernicious influence, to convert into useful things the phenomena originally bad or indifferent and immensely improve its benefits (ROBIN, 1902, p. 68).

This excerpt becomes emblematic, because, beyond praising men's work as a mark of the progress of civilizations and the conquest of freedom and autonomy over the burdens caused by nature, it also presents us a displacement of the romantic thought which understood nature as a good element, detaining virtues, generous by excellence, up to the point of believing that everything that came from nature would be good and beautiful, as suggested by Soares (2015, p. 152): “...the understanding of a generous nature, full of virtues and ready to educate and cure results from a certain nostalgia experienced by those who live in the cities, their hardships and challenges”.

However, the rhetoric of “perverse nature” does not gain relevance in the prescriptions and practices of *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona*. What can be seen is a stimulus to activities in which there is a return to nature to enjoy the benefits it has to offer. One of those benefits would be the restoration of the connection of men with the natural world, which would have been forgotten by civilization. This can be seen in a ‘lesson of things’ activity. In

an example that uses a children's tale, called "*Lección de Historia Natural*", it describes a dialogue between father and son about the child's visit to the zoo. Questioned by the father on what he had seen in the zoo, the son answers: "I've seen many animals: chickens from many countries, royal peacocks with that beautiful fan; goats, sheep, monkeys...after panthers, tigers, hyenas, lions! Terrible beasts!" (BOLETIN, 1903, p. 76). Given the apparent value given to the animals, considering the "meanness" in the child's imaginary, as carnivore animals eat other animals to feed themselves, the father tries to deconstruct this understanding and justifies that the animals each other because that was their nature, they are moved by instinct. Going beyond these explanations, the father considered that bad were the man who killed not only for survival, but to satisfy their pleasures and excesses.

Yes, men are bad; why do they not do as the panthers, the hyenas, tigers, and lions that kill to eat, but they kill for the pleasure of killing and in nature they are the only ones capable of killing with such cruelty. Had just eaten, this would not stop them to go out to the field and kill partridges, woodcocks, turtledoves, and all types of birds that brighten the woods and whose sounds we like to hear when taking a stroll....There he goes for no more than simple leisure: he sees one bird flying, aims, shoots, and that being that, one moment before, was full of life and sang an hymn to nature, falls hurt by the lead of the hunter who enjoys himself killing (BOLETIN, 1903, p. 76).

The lesson presents nature as something good, as it would respect the natural impulses of living beings; the elementary instincts that are expressed in animals would be ways of surviving. In men that impulse was forgotten (or neglected), what led them to an unstoppable quest for conquering and domination. Corrupted by civilization and the pleasures granted by progress, men would not be concerned by their natural instincts, nor their natural development: they would be fascinated in the quest for satisfaction through simply subjugating nature. Embedded on this purpose, they would wish not only to survive, even if this would be opposite to a harmony between men and nature. Still on the tale, the father reinforces that this supposed meanness would be even present in men's moments of idleness or leisure: "Yes; so you can see how cruel he can be, he considers that among the many amusements of civilized men are pigeon-shooting, dog and cock fights, and even bull racing" (BOLETIN, 1903, p. 76).

It is precisely faced by this negative perspective of men's action towards nature that the educational prescriptions and practices aimed the "reconciliation of men with nature" (TABORDA DE OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 93). As an almost therapeutical and regenerative conquest, the contact with nature and the mastery of its knowledge became a pedagogical obsession of the period. The program of *Escuela Moderna* on Natural Science, presented by Principal Clemence Jacquinet, clearly announce that the contents taught aimed knowing the natural world, including men, preserving its autonomy and existence, and the harmony in the relation of both. Those contents composed an ample program of body education:

All students will be taught to recognize their own bodies and the precepts of basic hygiene which are indispensable to keep health.

The teacher will first show the armor of the human body, the skeleton; after the muscles, organs of movement, making them understand that the bones do not all have the same hardness; that, on the contrary they started completely soft in the child and, they only acquire their consistence by the end of their growth and that is very important to always continue with regular attitudes so as not to alter the body shapes when they are still flexible. The deformation of the skeleton is not only a physical disadvantage, but also causes serious disturbances in health, forcing the internal organs to take an abnormal position (JACQUINET, 1901b, p. 37).

Knowing the works of human physiology would be useful to maintain men's physical health and their natural and healthy growth. Hence *Escuela Moderna* seemed to be committed with the goal to prescribe an education of the body that respected the natural ways in which children developed. Children were stimulated to have activities that allowed their full and harmonious development. "The games, the work, will be the natural reasons that we will give to physical training...It affirms the understanding that no methodic and rational gymnastics can substitute, from the educational point of view, the natural gymnastics of games and work" alerted the French naturalist J. F. Elslander in his manual (ELSLANDER, 1904, p. 196-197, our translation). As the author suggested, no methodic gymnastic would be as efficient as the "natural gymnastic" of games and work activities, as it was assumed that they would develop children's whole body, not privileging isolated parts. Criticizing the methodic gymnastic, he continues: "these regulated movements, invariably less diverse than those from free exercises, do not guarantee an even distribution of the activity among all body parts" (ELSLANDER, 1904, p. 197, our translation).

This position is quite similar to the one of Herbert Spencer (1888) when he defends games over gymnastic, as the first provides an adequate amount of physical exercise to children's bodies, besides being a more natural way to physically develop the student.

As natural spontaneous exercise was forbidden and recognizing the bad consequences of the lack of exercises, there was the adoption of a system of factitious exercises- the gymnastic. We admit that gymnastic is better than the total lack of exercise, but we question if it is a substitute of equal value to games...first, those regulated muscle movements are not necessarily less varied than those in youthful leisure: they do not guarantee an equitable distribution of action in all body parts: the result is an exercise that focus on specific points, becoming tiring more quickly (...)

The formal exercises of gymnastic are preferable to the lack of exercise-also establishing that they can be positively used as an extra assistance: however, we question if they could substitute the exercises designed by nature. To girls and boys, game activities that impel our instincts are essential to the body well-being (SPENCER, 1888, p. 245-247).

We can see that in Elslander's previous prescription there was a search for the spontaneous, the impulse, the experimentation of freedom that could never have as a rule the control over children's natural development: it understood that children's development should be done naturally. This experience of freedom, an indelible feature of anarchist ideals, spreads onto other activities, also considered natural, such as fights and dance. Through them, as highlighted by the author, one would exercise "all the needed resources for the spontaneous and aggressive games to which young people are passionate about". In his prescription "an exercise should be done in conditions of harmony and grace, to have a certain scope" (ELSLANDER, 1904, p. 205, our translation).

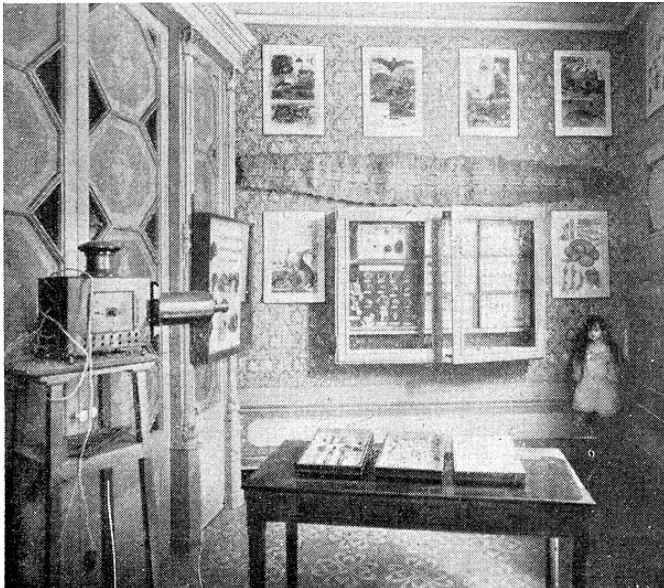
Elslander affirms that, due to the social reorganization and the technological evolution experienced so far, society had lost its "natural instinct" and, because of that, also its elementary physical capacities. Calling upon tradition, the author alluded to the Greeks to emphasize a society that respected the harmonious development of men, mainly the physical one. Elslander affirmed that the game, the dance, and the fights that, for the Greeks were a preparation for life, should be considered as examples to be emulated, as "they obeyed the impulses of natural life, which tend only to fulfill healthy desires" (ELSLANDER, 1904, p. 207, our translation). Finally, the author summarizes his appointments on the naturalist formation of children's bodies:

...it is easy to find the elements of a complete physical education in nature and in life, there is no need to use artificial means when the children, in all their muscles, in all their bodies, tend so powerfully towards a full organic development (ELSLANDER, 1904, p. 209, our translation).

Natural life was unquestionably the model to be emulated and, to do so, one needed to know it. Thus, the principal Clement Jacquinet also highlighted the need to know the natural laws and phenomena:

To complement their lessons on nature, teachers will also teach to understand current geological phenomena, the place of Earth in the universe, the main astronomic movements, the formation of Earth crust, of atmosphere, of clouds; the action of water as vapor, the rain, and the ice; internal phenomena; volcanos and earthquakes; atmospheric phenomena: winds, storms; the action of light on life (JACQUINET, 1901b, p. 37).

FIGURE 1 – ROOM OF NATURAL HISTORY OF *ESCUELA MODERNA DE BARCELONA*



SOURCE: Nuevo Mundo, 1907. Archive Fundació Francisc Ferré y Guàrdia.

The image clearly shows a concern with an education of the body that is articulated around the knowledge over nature, or the environment, and men. In that perspective, it is an integration amongst them. We should remember that the school programs in the end of the 19th century had a strong scientificity appeal:

...it is no wonder that part of the rhetoric on nature was anchored in a perspective of domain and/or taming of those forces that challenged men supremacy, therefore, a cultural one. The defense of laboratories, Natural History, Physical education, Hygiene, and the care of the body (TABORDA DE OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 94).

Thus, “positive” science, the trend at the time, was incentivized and expressed in school programs, aiming to turn knowledge into something useful, aiming to model and transform nature and, therefore, men.

However, these strategies to transmit such knowledges did not always meet what would be represented in nature— as outdoor spaces, woods, gardens, and parks; often, nature was brought to the classroom and the knowledge was adapted to school reality through didactic books, maps, pictures, globes, lab equipment, and, when possible, visits to the Natural Museum. “We can see how these return to nature was rationalized and adapted to the conditions of urban and social life, methodically thought and methodologically organized” (SOARES, 2015, p. 155). This was also true to the educational conceptions defended by anarchists and socialists. What differs these educational perspectives from the traditional ones, such as Catholic and liberal ones, were the aims of education, which would target emancipation, freedom, and the criticism towards arbitrary forms of authority. Thus, as it was largely defended in the period, the use of installations and instruments to deepen the study of the natural world was needed. As explained by the principal of *Escuela Moderna*, the classes in which nature was directly presented to students, so that they could see it in all its materiality, were the most attractive ones and raised more interest.

In the first Normal year we start to familiarize students with the microscope; we have studied germination, observing several grains planted with this purpose, once again we have admired the efficient curiosity that children apply to this work as it is much more attractive and fruitful than a lesson learned from the books, no matter how well the teacher explained and commented it (JACQUINET, 1902, p. 75).

In other activities, to apprehend this useful knowledge they needed to “install” the natural phenomena in school spaces or visit other installations, as Natural History museums. However, these visits should be guided and provide a systematized program of the contents to be transmitted to visiting students, thus, they could not be characterized as a simple visit to kill time. As highlighted by Jacquinet, students should find in the museums

...true occasions to learn how to see and to compare, finding the necessary complement to the class lessons, all that is said is applicable, further increasing by the lightness of age itself, by the fact of visiting in community, and doing so by surprise, from time to time and as a simple distraction (JACQUINET, 1903, p. 102).

In this line of thought, as highlighted by the principal, these visits, when done without a clear objective, reiterated the possibility of students observing the beauty of nature through the mobilization of their sense, because

...the museum, which should contribute to raise its own originality, would be disastrous if it does not make them feel the natural beauties, nor targets their sensibilities, they became inert in their intelligence, facing mute and mysterious collections that, far from teaching about life, make us feel the death (JACQUINET, 1903, p. 102).

In Jacquinet’s understanding, students should apprehend the “natural life” as it would take place in nature, in this sense there was the need to excite this sensibility in the children during visits to the museums. Therefore, we can perceive that the stimulus for an education that proposed the return to nature also had among its goals the development of students’ sensibilities; thus the concern with studies on the “organs of the senses” (JACQUINET, 1901b, p. 37). Because it is through the senses that men get in contact with nature, and this same nature should be attentively observed to be understood.

In different parts of *Boletín de la Escuela Moderna*, we can see this interaction between corporeal senses and the development of sensibilities. As explained by Reclus (1903) on the outings and daytrips to teach Geography: “Instead of rationalize on what is inconceivable, we should start by seeing, observing, studying what is beyond our view, at the reach of our senses and our

experiences” (RECLUS, 1903, p. 65). Jacquinet highlights the need to search a deeper knowledge of nature through the sight, the look, the observation, be it on the classes on the laboratory using microscopes, or visits to Natural History Museums. In her opinion “the museums of natural history aim to instruct through the viewing of objects, raising visitors’ personal observation” (JACQUINET, 1903, p. 101).

It was on the refinement of students’ senses the window that would open new sensibilities arising from the observation of these natural phenomena; the experience would allow acquiring knowledge, as well as the awakening of affections.

Nature persecuted by all the tools of science could be potentially transformed into knowledge objects also in the educational scope, especially in schooling. However, the greatest instrument for its exploration would also be “natural”: the *senses*. The use of senses to search for an understanding of the “natural thing” had as an essence the education of the ways to notice and sense the *thing*, *nature*, and *reality*. Touch, smell, hearing, taste, sight (and to some, the synesthetic perception) should be educated as to, in some cases, allow the appropriation of nature by the students, so that they could develop an attitude of autonomy, through experience and enlightening, towards culture and society (TABORDA DE OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 94).

Thus, educating the senses and the sensibilities are also part of the educational scope proposed by *Escuela Moderna* regarding body education. It was in the domain of the natural world that the studies that allowed students’ emancipation, the main project of this pedagogical concept, should take place.

As an example, we can observe the trip done by *Escuela Moderna*, organized by the geologist Odon de Buen (a collaborator of the *Escuela* and Professor at University of Barcelona), to the Arago Laboratory at Banyuls-Sur-Mer (France). On *Boletín* the impacts caused by this trip and the contemplation of the scenery during the way to the lab are described:

In the train, full of joy, we started the trip. When the light of the day allowed to satisfy the lively wish of all the travelers, the majority of which have never left Barcelona, to see and receive new impressions, they admired the beauties of the landscape, cultivated fields, woods, chicken pens, mountains lost in the fog of a faraway horizon... all passing quickly in front of their eyes, creating grateful and deep sensations (BOLETIN, 1904, p. 32).

The richness of details portraying how the beauty of the landscape was seen by students allows us to emphasize that, for the *Escuela Moderna*, this return to nature had as a principle the search for a natural kindness, a true beauty that existed in humanity in the old days, but that were detoured by the civilizing apparatus and by the great progresses of modernity. Romantic echoes linger in this idealization, even though positivist science was the motto of those prescriptions. However, we should note that even that science advocated for men's redemption.

FIGURE 2 – SOUVENIR OF A SCIENTIFIC TRIP TO BANYULS-SUR-MER (FRANÇA), WITH GEOLOGIST ODON DE BUEN



SOURCE: Boletín de La Escuela Moderna, 1904. Archive of International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

This other image allows us a glimpse on the concept of a good nature from which everything was good and beautiful. This understanding was anchored by a moral dimension that was even reflected in the ability of organization and students' discipline in the classroom or in activities beyond the school context. There was an understanding that the most natural way for students to relate to each other was as nature would do, that is, based on cooperation and solidarity. Competition and selfishness, for instance, were attitudes fostered by civilization which would corrupt and not reflect students' natural will. This is how the principal of *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona* expressed herself when explaining about the discipline in the school and the way teachers acted to raise this "natural feelings" in the students.

It is not possible to inspire in all children elevated feeling and wish that they only act under the power of noble objectives; because most men, small or big, are more easily influenced by their interests than their generous ideas, but exactly because of this, we focus our efforts in teaching – what is clearly right, – that the well-understood interest of each one is on fulfilling his/her duties, that our happiness is closely intertwined with our way to understand and practice justice, that is, the good (...)

In each step of life, be it for ourselves, be it for the others, we can prove the consequences of our acts regarding our current lives and the future of the next generation; all our care should, then, be devoted to care for this life and make it more and more conformable to our natural ends (JACQUINET, 1901a, p. 23-24).

Jacquinet claimed that nature could be punitive when "natural moral" was not practiced. Still referring to students' discipline, she explained that, when a lazy student does not do his duties and obligations, he ends up taking more time to end his tasks, resulting in less time to play.

...the lazy one sees himself obliged to devote more time to work than others, to recover the lost hours, that he could not use by having fun; so we help to show that he is punishing himself and that he imposes a bigger task to get a smaller result than if he had done a good work from the beginning.

This is the fundament of natural law which we all suffer and that, with no grace or forgiveness, inflexible punishes all our excesses (JACQUINET, 1901a, p. 23).

Apparently, this attachment to nature as the owner of truth, promotor of a unique beauty, guide of certain and incorruptible ways, but punitive when needed, has an almost religious emphasis. If we substitute God, punitive and vindictive, for Nature – we have a similar motto. Thus, Soares (2003, p. 24) explains:

The absolute and violent domain of men over the natural world slowly gives way to other understandings and attitudes and a semi-religious devotion for the wild nature establishes itself, especially, among those that do not depend on or do not need the land to provide for their more immediate needs. It is established an understanding in which nature is beautiful but, above all, beneficial, and has a healthy spiritual power over men.

Even though this *ethos* is manifested and is present in the practices and prescriptions of *Escuela Moderna*, it confronts a particular landmark of the school that is the clear wish to break away from the Christian and clerical ideas of the time. When announcing the prescriptions to teach Geography at *Escuela Moderna*, Reclus highlighted that modern science broke with the clerical thought, and this became the great engine of the mentality of that time. “All history of modern science, compared with the scholastic of the Middle Ages, could be summed up into: “go back to nature” (RECLUS, 1903, p. 65, our translation).

The return to nature demonstrates that truth was not in the divine forces of Christianity anymore, an important feature of Iberian culture. It was not the will of God that would move men, nor the type of knowledge that was a privilege of the Catholic church representants. On the contrary, truth would be in nature: modern man would deal with “real things”, the only force that would act on men would be the natural laws. Thus, there was the need to search for answers about nature on itself, so that it could be controlled and then preserve humans’ autonomy and freedom. The education of the bodies was the vector for this pedagogical aim.

When analyzing the program of *Escuela Moderna*, this position is even more explicit. During the beforementioned school inauguration, Salas Ánton explained that the practices of naturalistic teaching would be a way to break away from the old dogmas of clerical teaching, that led to a “false interpretation of the senses”: “We are completely different from the old and discredited system that consists of filling children’s memories with dead letters, seasoned by the foolish authority of the domine, a submissive slave of dogma and those who rule” (BOLETIN, 1901, p. 4).

This aspect represents the particular position of *Escuela Moderna* on the significant anticlerical movement, anchored on tradition and the immobility of the body and the prevalence of the soul. It seems that *Escuela Moderna* was based on a naturalistic education to reinforce the full capability of science to transform nature, preserve human's existence and autonomy; however, it also insists on establishing a position of displacement from the Christian practices at the time. It is not simply laicity, it is a combat against the behaviors and procedures of the Catholic Church, attempting to show that *Escuela Moderna* had become an antagonist alternative to the bourgeois and Christian elite in Barcelona (and in Spain) at that time.

Final remarks

The establishment of a way that appeals for a naturalistic education of the body, aiming the search for a natural instinct forgotten by men, does not mean that these practices aimed to search a more elementary and primitive way of organized life. About this, it is important to highlight that, especially when anarchism becomes the ideological tendency of the analyzed school, there is no reference to the search of a type of primitive social organization, a reintegration of a primitive and non-modernized men in the prescriptions and practices of *Escuela Moderna*; on the contrary, as in the rhetoric of other pedagogues and reformers at the time, the goal was an adaptation and integration of urban and civilized reality to nature – hence the rural tours, the visits to woods, gardens, parks, and to the Natural History Museum and the laboratories, the hygiene classes, games, etc. It is not on the imaginary of *Escuela Moderna* to abdicate from the benefits, the advantages, the comfort, and pleasures provided by modern life, but conjugate both possibilities. This position of *Escuela Moderna* can tell us a great deal about anarchism as a modern ideology that, far from scaping the rhetoric of “progress”, “development”, and “modernization”, a feature of the reforming boost in the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th, subverts this rhetoric in favor of a project of society that could guarantee the benefits that were exclusive to the Spanish elites to the working class and its children. That is, *Escuela Moderna* did not aim a primitive/wild society, but a reconciliation of men with nature without losing sight of the modern age promises: people's prosperity through science. The Spanish experience reveals how the anarchists used this naturalistic/scientific conception to politicize their social mobilization according to a desired project of society. Contrary to other ideologies, of liberal or reactionary tendencies, which moved on the opposite direction of depoliticization and use of this tendency to

justify social inequalities and the maintenance of power by an elitist hegemony, with aristocratic features (PELAEZ, 1996; SIERRA, 1996, 1999).

Finally, this proposal of education of the body *in* and *through* nature was also anchored on the stimulation of children's senses and sensibilities. There was the need to develop children's sense organs through experiences that they would acquire when in contact with the surrounding world. Thus, we can affirm that this formative via had two paths: first, the experience of nature to educate children, promoting their development and knowledge. Through the contact with nature, children should know it, recognizing themselves in that environment so that they could best enjoy it- thus the usefulness of experience. The second path was on the development of children's senses in contact with nature, a new sensibility. Contemplating nature would be a way to develop fruition and recover feelings that were forgotten by urban life. Hence, the simple outings in the field aiming to contemplate and observe natural life would become key, as they would bring to life the aesthetic dimension kept by the natural world. The development of practices and prescriptions that cultivated feelings of happiness and joy, pleasant sensations in contemplating nature, connected to the usefulness the knowledge about it, were the objectives aimed by *Escuela Moderna de Barcelona*. Hence, the centrality of body education in that project.

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