

# Pedagogy of resistance: the denial as a key element of (de)formation

Rodrigo MATOS DE SOUZA\*, Ricardo CASTAÑO GAVIRIA\*\* and Elizeu Clementino DE SOUZA\*\*\*



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## Abstract

In this article, the authors propose a reflection on the idea of negativity in a critical and philosophical perspective that can approach in other ways the meanings and purposes of the formation of both the individual and the thought in current times. The denial, or yet, a philosophy of negativity (Adorno, 2009) is presented as a breeding ground for a reconfiguration of the pedagogical ideal and its possibilities to question the anthropological and historical features of what is introduced to us as the truth. The attitude of resistance is, in this text, a key component to the possibility of this philosophy of negativity, which allows us to expand our horizon of thinking and action. The actual intent couldn't be further from an irrefutable conclusion, quite the contrary. We intend to inspire a provocative debate that destabilizes both the idea of the self-conscious individual and of how they relate with the world. We understand that this is a way to open possibilities to other experiences and narratives about the process of formation and (de)formation in the education.

**Keywords:** Theodor Adorno; resistance; negativity

## Pedagogía de la resistencia: la negación como pieza de (de) formación

### Resumen

En el presente artículo nos hemos propuesto reflexionar sobre la idea de negatividad en una perspectiva crítica y filosófica que pueda acercarnos de otra manera al sentido y propósitos de la formación del sujeto y del pensamiento en la contemporaneidad. La negación o mejor, una filosofía de la negatividad (Adorno, 2009), se presenta como lugar de reconfiguración del pensamiento pedagógico y de sus posibilidades para cuestionar el carácter antropológico e histórico de lo que se nos presenta como la verdad; la actitud de resistencia constituye aquí una pieza clave de esa posible filosofía de la negación, que nos permite ampliar nuestro horizonte de pensamiento y acción. El sentido último no es llegar a concluir nada, por el contrario, intentamos abrir una provocación que desestabilice tanto la idea de sujeto cognoscente como de sus relaciones con el mundo, consideramos que de esta manera se abren las posibilidades a otras experiencias y narrativas sobre los procesos de formación y (de) formación en la educación.

**Palabras clave:** Theodor Adorno; resistencia; negación

\* Professor at the Universidade de Brasília (UnB). Doctor in Education and Contemporaneity, by the University of the State of Bahia. University Campus Darcy Ribeiro. Faculdade de Educação, Brasília/DF, Brazil | [rodrigomatos@unb.br](mailto:rodrigomatos@unb.br)

\*\* Post-doctorate at the Federal University of Mato Grosso. Doctor in Education and Contemporaneity, by the University of the State of Bahia. Cuiabá/MT, Brazil | [rcastanog@gmail.com](mailto:rcastanog@gmail.com)

\*\*\* Investigator 1C CNPq. Full Professor of the Universidade do Estado da Bahia. Doctor in Education from the Federal University of Bahia. Salvador/BA, Brazil | [esclementino@uol.com.br](mailto:esclementino@uol.com.br)

To resist is necessary, but to resist what, and why? The rhetorical aspect of this question aims at a series of epistemological and cultural issues, which we many times avoid when seeking harmony and conciliation, a less problematic life, a pedagogical practice as stabilising of life. The idea of thinking about conflict, what is disrupting seems to be the responsibility of opinion only, and of the outraged conservative person who always reacts when something does not suit them and when it affects them, and as a result they maintain a comfortable as an observer of reality.

In that sense, resistance only entails a mechanism of individualistic self-determination that ends up contributing to the state of things established by a formation project. This project delineates the foundations of models of desirable subjects, particularly of the selfish competitor promoted by contemporary capitalism in its neoliberal phase.

Reactionaries seem to have taken into account the epistemology and educative space of a particular conception of formation as long as the subjects wait for events, wait for the measures, and then make demands about what happened. However, few of them transform or think about transforming what makes them uncomfortable, or try to take a look at the facts in a different way from how they are presented to them.

When focusing the ideas of this text in the question about what is *negative*, what is questioning in contemporary thinking, it is necessary to find a dialectics that tries to perceive what has not been said, what is hidden, what in many cases has been abandoned for questioning the central elements of culture. We try to search for a philosophy of *No*, in contraposition with a search of what is positively beautiful; a philosophy of contrast, of comprehension of incompleteness and finitude, of “ugliness”, and of the evil that constitutes human beings.

That is why philosophy is more in denial than in affirmation. As Merleau-Ponty would say, the philosopher is always beyond the constituted (things as they are, or society as it is), because it is bored in the constituted (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 68). Philosophy is actually an attitude that faces negatively the given –the constituted, what is–, to look for in the given tension that crosses it, pretending to take it towards other more real con-

figurations, which of course did not appease the philosopher. This negative moment in front of the given to the constituted –to the “participated” of Plato– is what Merleau Ponty emphasizes and will be of great utility or will be fundamental in the classification of philosophical anthropology (San Martín, 2013: 42).

What is the use, then, of worrying about those things? About the ugly, the incomplete, the evil, what has not been said? Precisely because of these background issues, because they are not guided for a positive idea of the subject (pedagogy has been for long a synonym of what is positive, affirmative) such elements where placed along and being useful for analogies so as to think about pedagogy as an example. In this sense, studying what is not schooled is transformed into a search of what can be educative in what is not schooled. The study of marginal culture turns into an attempt to bring it to the center. This approximation of what is excluded is a way of making it acceptable and significant to the central cultures. A constant attempt of transforming negation into critical affirmation, of framing the way of thinking into other models that allow us to analyze the memory of evil (Adorno, 2012; Mèlich, 2004).

To resist is to work with and in contradictions. In this sense, memory means the search of comprehension mechanisms of those who are excluded and negated. Memory means to refuse to accept any discourse that tries to naturalize power games, to analyze the relationship between subject-object without being tied to its negative characteristics, without understanding them as defining. It means to put the focus also in the borders, in the frontiers; to reaffirm the borders as places and not just passages. It means working with ambivalence and contradictions.

We will try, then, to make here two textual movements so as to take clear what we want to say. The first movement will consist in placing theoretically a pedagogy of negativity as resistance. The second one will consist in placing other spaces of production of knowledge, against which pedagogy of control tries to make forget the processes in which the human monstrosity lives every day, with a naive conception of lineal and anthropologically correct education.

## Negative philosophy: a key element for resistance

From a nietzschean critique (1998), in the philosophical tradition, many have thought themselves to have the authority to criticize what is traditional, either in rejection movements –sometimes reactionary ones– or in conceptual<sup>1</sup> criticism. Adorno (2009), in his *Negative dialectics*, seeks to trespass this dichotomy when he places his criticism in the model- genesis of classical philosophical thinking, the dialectics. The process of conceptual and methodological dispute that survived from Heraclitus to Marx finds in Adorno a consideration that tries to get over this, the fact that “does not lend itself to endorse the existing” (Pucci, 2014: 6), a persistent negation.

the negative dialectic is the attempt of a continuous rescue of the intransigence of thought in the impious criticism of the spiritual and material constructs of instrumental reason. It means the de-positivization of thought and the reconquest of its virtuality to disenchant the world (Pucci, 2014:5)

the negative dialectic, (...) could be called anti-system with logically consistent means, it strives to place in the place of the principle of unity and totalitarian domination of the supra-ordered concept, the idea that would be outside the charm of such a unit (Adorno, 2009:8)

The adornian criticism proposes to search for what is outside the thinking systems, for that which has not been reduced to identity or fundamentalism and which, because of those, is outside the guiding principles of reasoning. He considers that negation can be a guiding principle or a thought in which systems<sup>2</sup> can be deconstructed.

Negativity then, means the search for what is not regulated and administered within the epistemological game that reminds us that being inside the system means being “the force that releases the dialectic movement in knowledge, which is the one that rises against the system” (Adorno, 2009: 35). It means being against the essential game of thinking, which imparts a model of managerial thinking, in which people have to choose between restrictive alternatives, a yes or no, subjecting us to

the approval of a dual system of thinking that does not allow for a third alternative.

This negation, insofar as it challenges the adaptation, does not substitute the existing order but can critically suspend the adjustment process derived from an exacerbated realism. Denying the present reality does not mean the pretense of annulling the world (as a way of reacting to the annulment of the subject), but scarcely understanding that the experience includes a transforming relationship of the subject itself. In more strictly Adornian terms, it would be the rejection of the existing. This rejection is something that must be incorporated into the experience, so that it does not degenerate into adaptation and adjustment, being able to approach formation (Silva, 2017:91)

Dismounting the system is not an epistemological act (Adorno, 2009): it is an alternative to transfer the classifier speech that looks for concrete truths, or better still, that understands the concrete as true. This movement is the one that needs to be dismantled, because the “concrete”, the existent, shortens thinking and identifies what cannot be as something exotic. “What is diverse from the existent seems to our eyes as sorcery, while in the real world false proximity, homeland and safety are, in turn, figures of witchcraft (Adorno, 2009: 36).

Then, finding what cannot be systematized, what has not been experimented, that which ramified thinking cannot be classified; finding the strange analogy (which models of representation and argumentation are denied), and dialogue as a distinctive fact and the (why not) utopic one, in detriment of the dialogue with the existing, are ways of finding, or at least of starting to seek, other ways of seeing phenomena in a non-essential way, in a *negative* way.

In this sense, a negative philosophy is constituted as a criticism that tries to show that relativism in its manifestation intends to find itself.

Bourgeois skepticism incorporated by relativism is ignorant regarding its doctrine. Meanwhile, constant hostility against the spirit is more than just a trace of bourgeois subjective anthropology. This hostility comes from the fact that the concept of reason that was one day emancipated needs

to fear, within the existing production relationships, that its consequences exploit these relationships. Because of this, reason limits itself; along the whole bourgeois era, the idea of autonomy of spirit was accompanied by its relative self-contempt. He does not desist from the fact that the constitution of existence directed by him, to forbid that development for freedom, that resides in its own concept (Adorno, 2009:39).

In this way, the negative dialectics is opposed to relativism and absolutism. Not in the sense of looking for a middle ground, a comfortable renamed relative space, but it tries to get through the extremes, from one radical point to another, trying to show its no-truth, the challenges and deviations, the turnings, the vanishing lines of a model of thinking that was not challenged for long. The most important concern from an anthropological and historical perspective is the idea of the subject as a point of arrival, and not as the ultimate horizon of possibility. This movement implies to profoundly remove the methodological conception with which critical thinking is built.

In order to do this, it is necessary to learn how to resist the temptation of communicating the existent immediately. In a way, it is similar to a compulsion, in Adorno's words, that confuses, "the communication of what is known with what is known, and even when placing it if possible in a higher position, since currently each step goes towards liquid communication and falsifies the truth" (2009:43).

So, the acceleration of the processes of communication, the immediate and the version take more and more time the space of criticism, of thinking, and of reflection.

The seduction of the immediate (Han, 2013), of the given forms that leads the subject to establish a superficial relationship with things and with other subjects exposes a process of SEMI-formation<sup>3</sup> (Adorno, 1996) that is more and more present in the context of global culture. This culture is led by the interests of the capital and is subjected to the rules of consumerism and show business as self-affirmation, leading to the impoverishment of the experience mentioned by Benjamin (1994), reducing it to the levels of excellency and productivity required by the capital. The loss of dense experience turns into a business

and the SEMI-formation, many times, is a desirable "formation".

This way, a Negative Pedagogy tries to escape from the traps of semiformalization, from the established model of culture, from what can be said in an immediate way, from the search of the existent and the identical, and from the process that uses negation in the service of positivistic synthesis. This trap of negating to affirm does not fit with a Negative Pedagogy.

Negative Pedagogy would pursue this task of the non-identical (...) that is always underhanded by the principle of identity that reduces everything to the logic of the equal, of the identical, of the administered. It looks for its own language, one that gives a voice to what claims to be said, that talks about the humane, of real pain, distant from the alienating risks of the discourse of the technique, as a common place in the middle of an explosion of fragmented knowledge, in which all sensible and autonomous beings can give their contributions (Bandeira y Oliveira, 2010: 6).

According to Adorno (2012), the formative experience in the *bildung*<sup>4</sup> perspective would be an action in which the subject constantly confronts this concept with his contradiction<sup>5</sup>. In this way, he would be exposing his own limitations and doubting of what *exists* in the hegemonic meaning, creating a crisis with that which is already given, that which *is*. In our own terms, it would mean thinking the formative experience, and its political and historical trajectory, as a way to overcome the ties to the empirical –and, in a way, to empiricism–. It would mean to think of it as a criticism to the research processes that always produce the same type of results, about the constant apology of the scientific context, which ends up producing research which is too specific to a particular place, very little interrelated, repeated, positive and acceptable. In the best scenarios, it produces academic versions of products and ways of the cultural industry.

It is in that sense, the one of proposing (and opposing) resistance to a model of education/formation taken from a conservative, and reacting, mentality which is unaligned with the interests of popular classes. We expose the issue here addressed, which is also inspired on

the melichecka idea (2004) of *lesson*, in the sense of proposing a reading which is critical of reason, and at the same time with the possibility/capacity of transformation that the act of reading involves. In this way, we establish these provocations/concerns as possible topics in the hope and resistance of encouraging reading.

### Lesson one: Resisting is rejecting

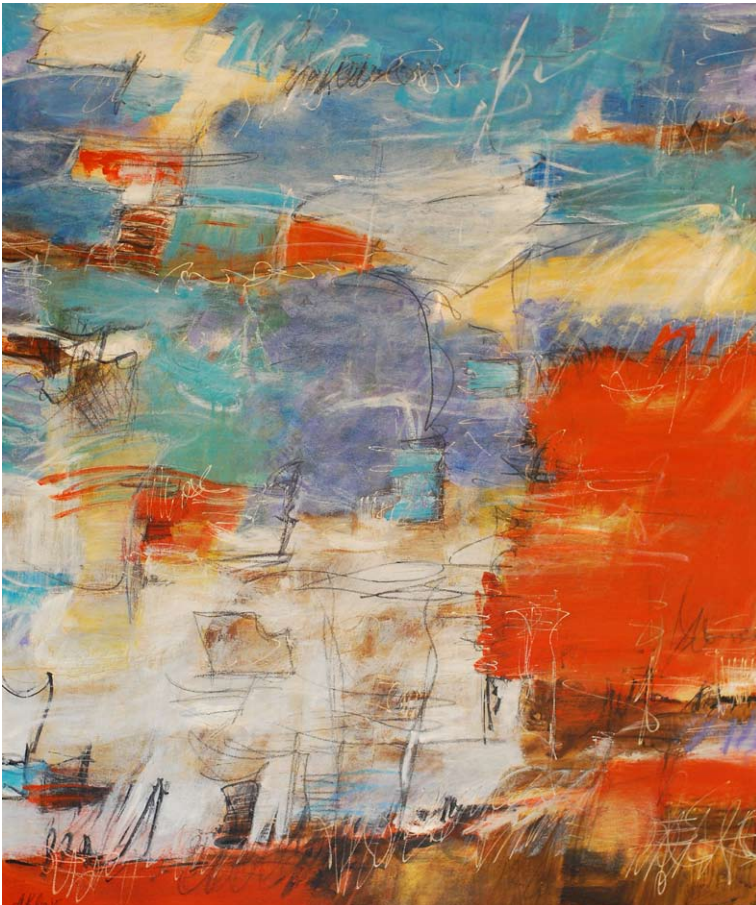
“To deny is not to suppress purely and simply; is to think that another position is always possible” (Silva, 2014: 92)

The die is cast within the dialectic game: the agonizing and antagonizing positions are already recognized by the participants. In the face of this, a pedagogy of resistance establishes an initial position of negation as an attitude of *Doubt* (Flusser, 2011) and with this provocation to the existing and established,

the repudiation of what is given occurs. When what exists becomes the only way of thinking, and hyperrealism is the point from which one starts to think, the very process of thinking rejects the possibility of denying what may be presented; thus, what is presented is reproduction, rather than production; it is verification rather than discovery and curiosity.

Taking this game to a necessary tensioning means understanding that, if a research *field* assures that it is only interested in what is empirical and probationary (what is hyperreal), its dialectic game is limited by what exists, and then its antagonizing and agonizing positions will be absorbed within a spectrum of non-contradictory thinking, by which its own creative poetics is annihilated and thinking is conceived as a controlling and reproductive activity.

In Pedagogy, this scientific movement of common sense upholds the belief that research in Education should be empirical and



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that it needs to be about a reality that is tied to the notion of context, or else it is not valid research. In this way, an epistemological “device” is used as basis, which makes other views of educational facts and their diversity invisible.

Rejecting is, in this sense, to apply a pedagogy of resistance to the point of affirming that something else exists besides “what exists” and thinking, that other questions founded on other experiences and epistemic keys –as Zemelman (2012) reminds us, they can even constitute an alternative way of thinking that searches for new spaces for understanding, apart from the classic disciplinary foundations– that other questions can be formulated– that other kinds of provocations emerge and transform the field. In the case of Education, rejecting empiricism as the only means would make it possible to approach other fields of knowledge, and as regards the production of theory, it could mean the development of a “theory” of education which is not colonized by categorical imperatives and other epistemologies, as it has been happening even until today on the level of an affirmative pedagogy that fosters an only anthropological model of man.

The production of rejection is also a kind of behavior and implies an ethical posture that encourages us to be always on the alert of the processes of colonization of thought. In this way, it is challenging us, but also looking for other models, other images and projects of humanity, in their anthropological and pedagogical meanings. This is not about rejection just for the sake of it –of epistemological production in search of other perspectives for phenomena that have already been explored by hyper realist and positivist science (which is also defined as post-modern, complex, and anti-positivist) that ignores processes, fields, interceptions, edges and margins as places of productions of negative thinking. In a practical sense, rejection denotes going counter regulated fluxes, which takes us to a second lesson.

## Lesson two: To resist implies to go in a wrong way

It is difficult to resist the wave, the sea, the pre-established images, the comfortable and widely accepted processes, the logics of tests and results, as from the physical and intellectual point of view there is some attrition pro-

duced by going against the stream. Staying with what already exists, obeying its limits, circumscribe to the systems that have already been extensively developed, and contributing with one leaf for the *tree of knowledge* is much more comfortable than trying to sow new seeds on barren lands. This works not only for life in general, but also for research processes.

Putting fluvial and agricultural metaphors aside, going counter, in the counterflux, going against the stream, being in contradiction is also a way of resisting. It is to put oneself in the difficult situation of perceiving distances that affect a field of studies or concept, which can make us question it and the recognition of difference as discontinuity, which provokes a rupture with the notions of progress, continuity and coherence.

In this sense, to dislocate oneself, physically and conceptually, is to run away from given representations, from the already developed system of concepts<sup>6</sup>, giving place to differences in form and content, to the representation of what does not let us see what is unique, hindering our thought about things by keeping it at a level of generality (Schöpke, 2004). The break of classic representation –to reduce what is presented to us to something that is already present in our senses, that corresponds to our experience– pushes the subject to a creative perspective, in which the relationship, the event and the possibility will be the impulse for establishing new inferences about the world.

Resisting does not imply to stop representing the world, to stop conceptualizing, not to recognize traditions of thought, rather it implies to act upon given circumstances, observing how things are presented in a singularity, resisting to the models of general presentation to act heuristically with one’s own formation/education, searching in the interstices, in the margins, for the difference in what is equal, that which breaks with repetition and engenders the creation of other subjects and other pedagogies.

And, for being within the flux and looking to find it, this tactical movement within the terrain of the other (De Certeau, 1998), of which nothing is certain in its dimension, of the size of the other which is resisted and denied. Creating a weak act, a technology of resistance of the strongest one, turns the identity

of the rejected into an attack, in whose trade subjects build ways of living in the field of the “enemy”.

This movement is, mainly, an ethic dimension that establishes a way of being in the world, a reaction to knowledge that rejects epistemological passivity, producing from the margins the micro, the preliminary, a way of resisting that sometimes ignores dimensions and the effects of the capital, that can be more collaborative, but that acts against it intuitively.

### **Lesson three: Pedagogy of resistance as negative pedagogy**

Finally, we get to the positioning that orients our own proposal, where a possible pedagogy of resistance is characterized as a negative pedagogy, a counter pedagogy that points to the necessary problematization of the epistemological canons that build disciplinary truths and the hegemonic cultures that limit research as the politic action in Education to prototypes and models of thought and practice.

The pedagogy of resistance would be a proposal that conceives the subject and knowledge as possibilities, where production of knowledge can occur in other places and from other languages, which lets us identify other ways to produce subjectivity and “truly” believe without believing the traps of relativism.

A pedagogy of resistance would be the intellectual reflection that allows us to identify other crossroads and developing trajectories; thus, allowing subjects to adopt a libertarian gesture, as the Bolivian professor Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) says. In other words, it means to bet for other types of corporeality, other exchange relationships, other dynamics in the production of valid knowledge; in sum, identifying the subject as a that does not end in a promise of success and that contradicts itself as part of its own self-discovery.

This would not be an unprecedented pedagogy. We do not think there is a will to find an agreement as a “novelty”, as we depart from critical theory in the adornian perspective, in which this view is inspired. What we look for with this provocation is to generate debate about other readings and interpretations that allow the construction of a particular view based on our own historical and spatial references, which are capable of producing their

own episteme, an appropriation of knowledge from the subject’s experience.

The places, spaces and contexts in which the pedagogies of resistance circulate and are built go hand in hand with social movements, with the processes of promotion and alternative and peripheral cultural production, even with conceptual works that seek to codify particular methodological forms and critical epistemological proposals for the production of knowledge. Negative value is not found only in the denial of what is already established, its value is inscribed in its restorative power of the ability of independent thinking that looks for new possibilities of interpretation and action.

### **Final considerations**

The discussion put forward in this paper is not self-conclusive, it rather is a starting point, a provocation that we would like to reach the diverse spaces of school and the spaces of academic production of education, and the adjacent sub-fields. We hope that this discussion will help the subjects to produce a narrative that organizes and processes epistemological rights, and that resistance leaves a mark on those practices, such as ethics, a view of the world from a permanent formative key. In a world where critical education is under constant attacks by neoliberal governments that put the emphasis on their work on educational administration, resisting is necessary. It is key to learn to resist as a pedagogical behavior in the contemporary debate about education.

Education is under attack, and not for the first time, it is being accused of not providing what it should provide. These attacks are originated with two aims: populism and idealism. Populism can be seen through the simplification of educational worries when they are belittled for personal matters or matters of instrumental election. This is done through a representation of educational processes as simple, unidimensional and direct, that should be managed by teachers through the ordering of knowledge and the ordering of students, based on scientific evidence of what works (Biesta y Säfström, 2011: 1)

This instrumental and utilitarian perspective of education seems to spread like powder throughout the world and conveniently, from north to south, serves the seemingly democratic

attacks on education and educational research that does not comply with the needs of the market. Resisting is to teach to resist. It seems one of the few actions that education can still carry out before the systematic advance of totalitarian views to avoid becoming mere reproductions of the establishment (Souza, 2016a; Souza y Souza, 2016b). This reflection shows the necessary (de)formation of what is established for and in the subject as is the need to (de)formation in pedagogic key of the diverse disciplinary fields that produce knowledge aimed at controlling; negativity is (de)formation meaning to go against the supposedly natural order of things, of the history of culture. A negative pedagogy in reaction to resistance is, in essence, a (de)formation pedagogy.

ucation can play a role in the development of that position— is that everything that exists must be seen both by the affirmative side of its existence and by the negative side of what it could not exist and have something else in place. That relativization of the existing can be operated through denial. To deny is not simply to suppress, it is to think that another position is possible. reality is not a positive fulfillment and things do not exist in an absolute way. Even if it agrees with this in theory, in practice people behave as if everything were necessary to that logic, which would be immanent to one's own things, being able to justify everything. That is the dangerous aspect of exacerbated realism and adaptation. Therefore, the contradiction of the existing (in the sense of contradicting it) is an attitude that aims for emancipation because it produces resistance against what is imposed as the only option of reality” (Silva, 2014, p.92).

- 6 Again, remember that in this perspective the concept of theory could not be restricted to a coherent and systematized order of concepts that define with total certainty a field of knowledge production. The idea of theory here, is oriented in a critical, open and unstable in its central ideas, that is, the central can always be placed between said.

## Notes

Traducción al inglés Laura Proasi (Grupo GIEEC-CI-MED-UNMDP)

- 1 “After breaking the promise of coinciding with reality to at least remain immediately in front of its production, philosophy was forced to criticize itself mercilessly” (Adorno, 2009: 11).
- 2 On the criticism of the system concept see also: Souza (2012).
- 3 *Halbbildung* (in German), which in the words of Adorno himself (2012, p 23) is “a false experience restricted to the affirmative character, resulting in satisfaction for the consumption of cultural goods”.
- 4 Schematically, *Bildung* is work on oneself, cultivation of talents for self-improvement. She aims to make individuality a harmonious totality, the richest possible, a totality that in each one remains linked to its unique style, to its originality. *Bildung* is, then, life in the highest sense (Fabre, 2011: 2016).
- 5 “What can it mean an education for contradiction and for resistance? [...] People are encouraged to fully approve what exists, as if it were unnatural or utopian to oppose what is imposed as reality. This naturalistic attitude towards things is so widespread because it corresponds to a dogmatism that is not even the result of strong beliefs, it simply plays an accommodating role. To hyper-realism therefore corresponds something like a will to only affirm, in the sense of always corroborating reality. It is the atrophy of the critical capacity, certainly, but we must understand it not only with existential and cultural impoverishment, also from the point of view of the objective conditions, that is, of the climate of the naturalist “consensus” that rejects any attitude of contestation and criticism so they threaten to appear. Well, what has to be considered –is how ed-

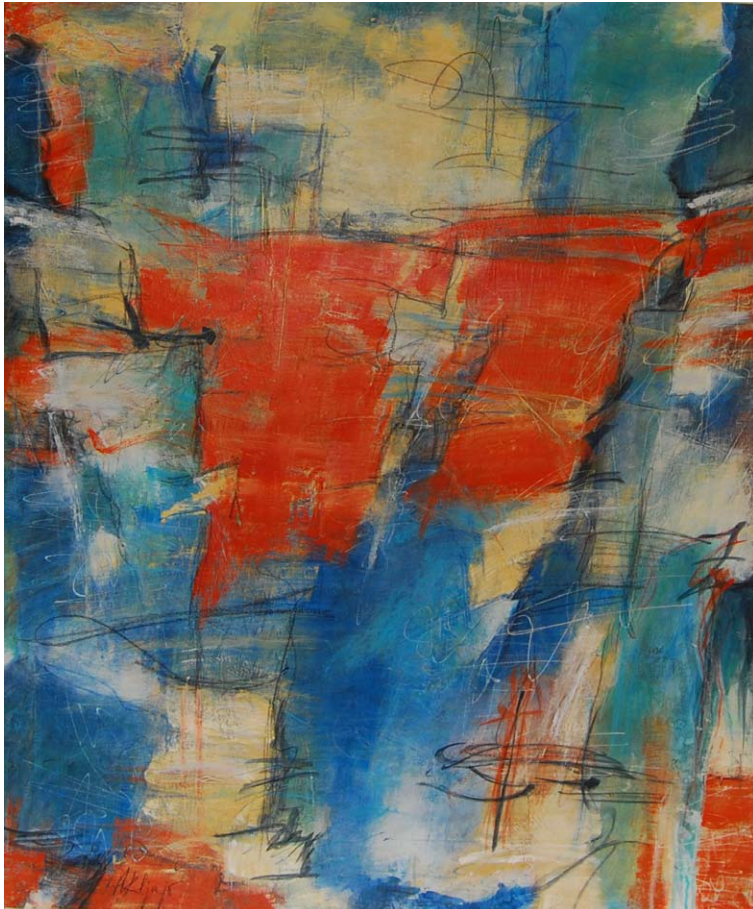
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