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# “The Place to See and the Place to Reflect” the Use of Theatrical Techniques in the Teaching of Philosophy

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**Abstract:** A reflection on how to teach philosophy with the help of theatrical techniques and scenic interpretation tools, building an allegorical environment for the presentation of philosophical content. Considering Plato's explanation of the allegory of the cave, where he starts from 'appears' or 'imagines' and describes his narrative, in a complete way, in a theatrical approach to use the imagination of his listeners. And thus building a scene, a representation of what he wanted to teach his interlocutors. In addition to reflecting on contemporary caves, built in the rooms of young people, who are isolated, attentive only to the images produced on cell phone and computer screens, without being sure about the veracity of the information received in these 'walls' of modern caves. Also following the approaches and paths of Deleuze and Foucault in their considerations on the constructions relevant to the study of philosophy and its learning, this article aims at this reflection as a contribution to the art of theatre, the 'teatron', the place for to see. And to see how this seeing is a metaphorical perspective, something that is also a philosophical question, both in the direct and in the metaphysical sense. In addition to being a matter of experience made possible by immersion in the world of ideas and imagination, in a reflective, pragmatic way and with a view to learning and teaching philosophy.

**Keywords:** Teaching, Philosophy, Theater

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## 1. Introduction

When we reflect on learning, especially learning related to the teaching of philosophy, what comes to mind for many students are many texts, contents and tiring, even sleepy, classes. Of course, one cannot fail to mention that many teachers are looking for a rescue and innovating in their classes. However, when thinking about high school education, where today's students are faced with an endless range of distractions, this reflection is necessary, on how to make an attractive class, the subject captivating and not lose the quality of the content.

*More than in other times, it is crucial to create didactic strategies that facilitate overcoming the distance between the theoretical and epistemological demands of philosophical knowledge and the educational deficiencies of a large part of the students. The greater the distance between the student's cultural starting point and the demands inherent to philosophical knowledge, the greater the importance of the mediations to be instituted by*

*appropriate didactic instruments; not having conditions for autonomous access to specialized knowledge, these students are the ones who most need help to get there.* (Rodrigo 2009, p. 30) [16]

Realize that since the pre-Socratics, philosophy has been developed many times in a figurative, observant and reflective way. From Thales of Miletus and the water, Anaximenes and the air, Heraclitus and the becoming of his famous transforming river and even Zeno and his arrow, frame by frame. Figuration always helps to exemplify the reflections of philosophers, in the Republic Plato, when referring to the allegory of the cave, says that Socrates begins his story with:

*“[...] it imagines men in an underground dwelling in the form of a cave, provided with a single entrance overlooking the light in all its width. They are found in this place, from childhood, legs and neck tied with chains, so that they are forced to remain there and look only forward, unable, as they are, by chains, to turn their heads. The light of a fire kindled at a great distance shines above and*

*behind them;..." [15]*

Thus bringing a whole scenario and a scene to be built in the mind of his listener and to this Glaucon replies that "I figure all of this", making Socrates' allegory and figurative intention even clearer, as well as its effectiveness. But when we bring these examples and reports to the classroom, how do we present them? With a full board, a handout or a monotonous and dull reading, when we can practically 'assemble' the cave and stage the allegory, using simple but effective resources.

## 2. Foucault Analyzed by Deleuze

Reflecting on this teaching, on this way of teaching will inevitably lead us to Deleuze's [1] thought regarding the role of the notion of theater as a movement of philosophizing. And when we think about this, we will also reflect on Foucault and his *Theatrum Philosophicum* [18], when he says that "Western philosophy has not been interested in the theater, perhaps since its condemnation by Plato", and it was necessary "to wait for Nietzsche so that, once again, the question of the relationship between philosophy and theater was formulated with all its acuity to Western philosophy" [8].

In this way, I fear the objective of not only reflecting, but also proposing practical possibilities to encourage the teaching of philosophy as if we were walking on the sidewalks like the peripatetics.

Therefore, we must consider, reflecting, staging and appearing from the world of ideas to Deleuze, Foucault and so many as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, or even Heidegger and walk this path that leads to being:

*"The path that leads to being – thinks Heidegger – passes through man, insofar as he is alone to question himself, put himself in question and reflect on his own being. The philosopher must, therefore, start from human existence (in Heideggerian language, *dasein*: being-there), as it is immediately given to consciousness, in order to rise to the unveiling of being in itself, the ultimate objective of all reflection. philosophical."* (Heidegger – Life and work, 1999, Editora Nova Cultural Ltda. Comment by Marilena de Souza Chauí) [9].

In the study of performing arts and in theatrical initiation courses, one perceives a search for oneself, in order to interpret a character one has to know oneself. This correlation with Heidegger is a reflection of this 'being there', something that I believe is well figured in the scenic environment and also a way to seek an understanding of his philosophy.

Reflecting on Foucault, for his intense surrender to theater as a form of expression and a way of doing philosophy without, however, losing objectivity in our pedagogical and philosophical quest. Reflecting on education, on philosophy and on theatrical techniques and tools, we intend to objectify this reflection so that we have a conceptual and effective harvest in the way of teaching philosophy.

Education has gone through endless changes in pedagogical approaches, especially philosophy, the mother of all disciplines, has been losing its place, ceasing to be what it originally was. Of course, we know that countless fields

arising from it were dismembered, the first philosophers knew much more about cross-cutting themes and interdisciplinarity than all the current implements of the new high school. They practiced biology, botany, astronomy, physics and chemistry among others and together with philosophy.

Today philosophy has become resigned to ethics, epistemology and aesthetics basically. A philosophical application is attempted to new themes such as Life Project [4] and aspects of citizenship. A pragmatism and a sense of efficiency indicate that production is better than reflection, notoriety than ethics. And even in the little that is brought to the student about philosophy, it is taken in a heavy, dense and tiring way. Because in a large majority of schools, mainly state schools, where teachers from other areas are placed to teach the discipline. With this sad reality, the quality of teaching is relegated to the background.

Distant from the initial approaches, but with the same existential needs. In a liquid and theatrical world, reality, the value of truth and perception of oneself and being are left aside and discouraged by educators. So this focus is necessary and why not say this rescue of philosophy through an approach that brings together the demands of a society in an identity crisis with the essential philosophical authenticity. Without forgetting to consider the liquid [3] aspect of our time, we need to think about a philosophical education that uses some more immersive, inclusive and also simplifying communication tools.

The use of dramatization and theatrical staging can create this environment in order to make students have multiple sensory perceptions and thus a greater capture and absorption of the proposed learning. As Deleuze concludes, all of our ability to create thought is related to practical action. And still quoting Deleuze's thought, which alludes to the identification of the hunter with the game when he is on the lookout for it and shows us that it is necessary to be on the lookout, attentive to the event that is taking place [6]. Right in the introduction *In Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze analyzes the movement of thought as a theater in opposition to representation and exemplifies how actors who knew how to use the technique of conceptual theatrical production Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and developed new ways of 'doing' philosophy', with language scenic and theatrical.

*It is in this sense that something completely new begins with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. [...] They invent, in philosophy, an incredible equivalent of the theater, thereby founding the theater of the future and, at the same time, a new philosophy.* (DELEUZE, 2006, p. 26). [7]

In this way, we can infer that through this type of dramatized, scenic thinking, the concept 'embodies' and is updated, creating life in the mental and teaching scenario [19]. Thus bringing an empiricist and experiential conceptualization in the classroom environment.

But we still need to check Foucault's reflections on the issue with a little more attention and for this we need to think about this 'philosophical theater' [12]. For to stage a philosophical text, we need to abandon certain assumptions of the philosophical tradition and be open to a new philosophical

way of thinking. Making, in a way, a deconstruction not only in the way of 'teaching' but also in how to approach philosophy and its concepts.

In the first place this deconstruction of the traditional approach, we will have to go through the aspect of the use of metaphors, as mentioned, but now with the objective of verifying Foucault's approach. Metaphors were widely used, in maieutics the figure of Socrates' childbirth, the already mentioned allegory of the Cave, the figure of the dove and the resistance of the wind in its flight by Kant [13] or even the one used by Nietzsche [13] of the philosopher being thrown by nature as a arrow among men. According to Claus Langbehn, "the theater metaphor occupies a prominent place in philosophy and its history".

So we turn to a quote from Foucault:

There was the philosophy-novel (Hegel, Sartre); there was philosophy-meditation (Descartes, Heidegger). Behold, after Zarathustra, the return of theater-philosophy; absolutely no reflection on the theater; not absolutely theater pregnant with meanings. But philosophy turned into a scene, characters, signs, repetition of a unique event that is never reproduced. [14]

Within this universe that was being shown to us through allegories, figurations. Metaphors and endless dialogues in Plato's books, we perceive an outline of what Deleuze calls 'a new way of doing philosophy' when referring to Nietzsche. Foucault corroborates this statement and demonstrates its fascination when he says:

*I would like to try to describe the way in which men in the West saw things without ever asking whether they were true or not, to try to describe the way in which they themselves showed, through the play of their eyes, the spectacle of the world. Deep down, I don't care whether psychiatry is true or false. Anyway, that's not the question I'm asking myself. I don't care if medicine says mistakes or truths, that matters a lot for patients, but for me, as an analyst, that's not what interests me, especially since I'm not competent to make the distinction between true and false. However, I would like to know how illness was staged, how madness was staged, how crime was staged, for example, that is, how it was perceived, what value was given to madness, crime, illness, what role they were made to perform. I would like to make a history of the scene in which an attempt was made to distinguish between true and false, but it is not this distinction that interests me, but the constitution of the scene and the theater. I would very much like to describe the theater of truth. How the West built for itself a theater of truth, a scene of truth, a scene for rationality that has now become a kind of hallmark of Western men's imperialism, because their economy, the Western economy, has perhaps reached the end of its history. At the end of their heyday, most of the forms of life and political dominance in the West have undoubtedly reached their end. But there remains something that the West will certainly have left to the rest of the world, a certain form of rationality. A certain form of perception of truth and error, a certain theater of true and false. [6]*

And here he intensifies the question of the meaning of the Greek word that designates 'theatre', the place of seeing, as a philosophical question, more than that a primordial question, describing his desire to describe how one sees, how one perceives, leading to question for a great theater, for an inference about the scene and what can be seen from it. Where one cannot perceive what is true or not, where living is staged and where one cannot unravel what is scenic or not. Where, according to the definition of Constantin Stanislavski, "Acting truly means being right, being logical, coherent, thinking, fighting, feeling and acting in unison with the role" [17]. That is, what Foucault intends is not to question established wisdoms, their values of truth or not, but rather to present concepts in a representative, figurative way and thus establish inferences and lessons learned.

Fleeing from the dichotomy of true or false, what is sought is the conceptual representation of knowledge. Thus, he invites us to the theatrical experience when he states that the book *Difference and Repetition*, by Gilles Deleuze, "is the theater, the scene, the repetition of a new philosophy: on the bare stage of each page". It is from this perspective that he invites us to open Deleuze's book, in the same way "as the doors of a theater are pushed open, when the lights on a ramp are turned on and the curtain rises". For him, Deleuze's philosophy, like Nietzsche's, can be seen as a philosophy-theater.

By referring to Deleuzian theater, he points to a different way of doing philosophy, questioning it, through the figurative staging of concepts and thinking about differences. He quotes that "Deleuze's book is the wonderful theater where these differences that we are, these differences that we make, these differences between which we wander are presented, always new".

### 3. Theater as a Teaching Tool

Having here a point for our counterpoint, our reflection that seeks in the theater as a tool for teaching philosophy and even more than that a living deconstruction of the traditional model of the unquestionable master, who makes his inquiries according to his pre-ready concepts, already described in your 'book of knowledge', in your notebook with questions and ready-made answers, in your template for measuring knowledge. Because in reflecting differently, reflecting differences, one can end up finding new reflections and even other new questions. This thought that does not obey the school model, which expands thought and provokes free thinking and thus arrives at the desire to not only teach theories about philosophy, but to provoke philosophizing. For just as the teaching of history should bring reflection, on what was and what should be, only theoretical teaching, although very valuable, may not provoke philosophical critical reflection.

In addition to his interest in theater, Foucault encouraged and even acted, created a radio theater entitled 'The use of the word'. And as he states:

*(...) I think that the theater turns its back on the party, turns*

*its back on madness, that it tries to attenuate its powers, to control its subversive form in favor of a beautiful representation. The theater, in the end, rips apart the participants of the party, to give birth, on the one hand, to the actors, and then, to the other, the spectators. He replaces the mask of the party, which is a mask of communication, with something that is a cardboard, plaster surface, more subtle, but which hides and separates.*

And when commenting on him, Roberto Machado says:

*"Foucault possessed like few others the ability to dramatize ideas, to create new concepts. His classes and his books, by covering conceptual precision with images, are of extraordinary beauty. Perhaps he was the greatest contemporary French orator and writer. He knew how to say things like no one else: with beauty and rigor"* [12].

Looking now to systematize what we have observed so far and using Badiou's speech:

*Deep down, theater and philosophy have the same question: how to address people so that they think about their lives in a different way than they usually do?* [2]

After all, the philosophical theater that we propose is based on this focus, making it possible instead of seeing and reflecting. In this reflection, if what we usually do and ourselves is not transformed into our way of being and acting as teachers and also as learners of this vast field, then there would be no reason for such reflection. However, aware that we are of our arduous task in this field, we continue with this very clear objective: to rescue the teaching of philosophy with the help of these tools so that students want these classes, reflect on them and thus, who knows, take a liking to thinking.

Ending this approach with a reflective and theatrical practice, describing the classroom for an approach to myth, or as we prefer Plato's Allegory of the Cave:

We started by transforming the room through a reflector placed at the back of the classroom, causing the shadows of the students to be projected on the wall where the blackboard is, already causing a scenic appearance. Creating a reflective environment, being able to make a certain mystery about what was happening, but making a brief narrative of the text of Plato's Republic.

In the next moment, requesting that the first row of classes take the place of the chained men, while the others generate images through shadow projections, with different objects. After this moment, a brief explanation of the text followed by a new moment where the students' rooms are compared to caves and their cell phones and notebooks with the walls of the cave and thus bring up the questioning of what is really true, what one believes to see or to perceive.

The construction of this image of the cave and the correlation of this metaphor with the realities of these adolescent rooms, where television and computer screens present these distortions of reality, will be the reflective topics of this presentation. As well as the virtuality presented in some films such as *The Matrix*, which, in addition to providing subsidies for the presentation of Hilary Putnam's theory of the brain in vats, offer us an approximation in terms of technology, to some philosophical concepts, but with an attractive

language to the students accustomed to games. They can also be approached scenically, thus inserting the students in the situation and generating the desired reflection.

Socrates' concepts of dialectics and maieutics can also be transformed into scenes, either with the text as it is, or with notions of philosophical debate with students showing their perceptions and points of view, but in an experienced way and directed towards teaching and the Learn. In the same way, Socrates' Apology can be transformed into a theatrical play and reflect on the theme, on the defense of truth and the right to think.

In no way do we want to despise so many approaches full of creativity, from so many philosophy teachers who seek and teach classes full of attractions and different philosophical approaches. But if you realize that because there is often a use of professors from other areas, in philosophy teaching, sometimes only content, not for harm, but end up bringing the type of class mentioned at the beginning.

Can Shakespeare's "to be or not to be" be related to existentialist reflections? How many relationships can be traced with philosophical reflections and dramaturgy? How many philosophical reflections have been staged in human history? How much can be approached with these works?

How could we be a little peripatetic, if not walking and philosophizing with our students? But would we be even more staging Aristotelian thought with scenic and reflective richness, wouldn't we achieve greater success?

Roughly speaking, these examples bring a nuance of what can be provoked through a more scenic exposition and with the use of theatrical techniques and tools in the teaching environment, to help the presentation of philosophical concepts.

## 4. Conclusion

In the face of everything we've talked about so far, it is necessary to consider the current moment, the virtuality of life, where we are invited to be fragmented, in part what we are and how we live in the world and society that we consider 'real' and those we are on social media. With profiles filtered, retouched, made up and distanced from the real being, existentially confused, socially confused and still imprisoned in caves being led by the images projected on cell phones, increasingly distant from what we really are.

The theatrical proposal even seems contradictory, but essentially scenic art in an interesting way actually projects a greater encounter with the real being, through analogical empathy and the personified incarnation of the other and his lived reality, bringing a greater approximation of self-knowledge and of reflecting on philosophical concepts. Thus generating a social, empathetic and altruistic health, through this experience causes an immersion in this conceptual scene, impacting both the actor and the audience with this representation of the concept.

Considering these aspects are wanting to cause free thinking, more than bringing content, more than passing on information. Because we don't really teach philosophy if we

don't provoke reflective and critical thinking, not only about the world, but about oneself. In order to generate thinking beings. With questioning boldness, but also with a self-reflexive practice, not negligent or naive, but effective, conceptual and exploratory, in the investigative sense of thinking. Thus provoking the emergence of new thinkers or at least new thoughts, new approaches, daring in the sense of suspension of judgment, free from plastered teaching standards and with the empathic experience of the reflective moment, from the angle proposed by the thinker and author of the concept. Whether in Plato's cave, using Gyges' ring or even entering Heraclitus' river, as many times as necessary, without ever repeating the experience due to the transformation generated by the conceptual action of the revived scene.

Just like Foucault's challenging and provocative look that invites us to this experience too, but from the teaching angle, the teacher who challenges himself, dares, acts and embodies the necessary character, in the scenario that is necessary to generate learning in his pupils. If necessary, be like the greatest master, who wraps himself in a towel and washes the feet of his disciples so that they learn humility in a figurative and practical way at the same time and thus transform the lesson into an unforgettable class.

And it is with this perspective that I close these considerations, but not the questions, as they will give us their strength so that we move forward, with hope and optimism, but with the necessary seriousness to always prioritize what is essential and authentic in our exist as teachers.

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