

# The School Device: Experiences and Territorialities

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## Abstract

The school device, as a line of governmentality, disputes the body of young students through the construction of the so-called model student: quiet, attentive, and obedient. Young students in turn dispute their own bodies to the device through de-territorializations and territorializations that produce interstitial spaces created by sociality, placing the socialization process under tension. In the relationship for the control of territories, the cyberspace or digital territory promotes areas of conflict where young students have certain kinds of expertise opposed to pedagogical processes, while these find the relationship uncomfortable. Faced with the COVID-19 contingency, the school device had to colonize that territory when schools had to be shut down. Thus, we seek to answer the question of how, by territorializing screens, the school device's strategy has restricted the relationships of sociality and the production of interstices.

**Key words:** school device – sociality – cyberspace – young students – new communication technologies.

## First territory: the school device (socialization)

The school device involves a relationship of different functions and operations that make it possible to exercise powers in the shape of knowledge, especially pedagogical knowledge, articulated to educate individuals civically and technically: spatial functions that operate in the distribution of the body, corporal functions that operate in the shaping of the bodies, disciplinary functions that operate in the orientation of the body, and so on. The school device is aligned with external devices, which are coordinated with it. Most central is the family device – not the family itself, but the way in which it must function to align itself with the school device. Michel Foucault provides important clues to understand this alignment where the link is the medicalization of the family; that is, its transformation into a compact, closed institution, the nuclear “holy family”: “at the very moment the cellular family is enclosed in a dense affective space it is invested, in the name of disease, with a rationality that links it to an external medical technology, power and knowledge. The new family, the substantial family, the affective and sexual

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family, is at the same time a medicalized family” (2017: 236). For the school device to work there must be a family form run through by powers and knowledge, from which its surveillance contours and responsibilities over the children are defined in order to raise physically and morally “healthy” individuals.

[...] that restricted family was asked to take care of the child’s body simply because the child was alive and should not die. The political and economic interest that begins to be discovered in the survival of the child is surely one of the motives why there was an attempt to substitute the lax, polymorph and complex apparatus of the greater relational family by the limited, intense, and constant apparatus of family surveillance, the surveillance of the children by the parents. The latter have to take care of the children, watch over them in the two senses of the phrase: preventing them from dying and, of course, keep an eye on them and at the same time guide them. The future life of the children is in the hands of the parents. What the State asks of them, what the new forms or relationships of production demand, is that the expense made by the very existence of the family, of the parents and the children who have just been born, does not go to waste because of their early death (Foucault, 2017: 241).

With this movement, the disciplinary and bio-political power technologies are articulated from the moment the individuals are born with an institution reshaped to foster the life of the children, a life that must be healthy in order to prepare healthy agents for production. But the economic motive (healthy life) has a technical necessity and a political one since, in order to operate adequately, the body health demands ethical quality; that is, the ability to understand the boundaries of social relationships and an ability to produce knowledge to play a role in the productive apparatus: the individuals must be educated.

[...] this education must follow a rationale, a number of rules that must ensure the survival of the children, on the one hand, and their domestication and normalized development, on the other. However, these rules and their rationale are the property of agencies such as educators, physicians, pedagogical knowledge, medical knowledge. In short, a set of technical agencies that frame and are over and above the family itself (Foucault, 2017: 241-242).

Family and school must be articulated, but it is clear that the family will not orientate, distribute and educate individuals according to the needs of society at large. Thus, as pointed by Pierre Bourdieu, the pedagogical work of the first order carried out in the family, more centered on the individual’s vitality, must be if not eliminated at least hidden away or discredited by the pedagogical work of the second order, because “the degree of specific productivity of any pedagogical work [...] depends on the distance that separates the *habitus* that tends to inculcate (that is, the cultural arbitrariness imposed) from the *habitus* inculcated by previous pedagogical

work” (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1996: 83). A nuclear family is necessary to procreate the children of modern schools. Somehow, family and school have a common origin because their evolutions push towards the same goal: the production of modern subjectivity.

At the same time, parents are asked not only to guide their children so they can be useful to the State but also to make an effective retrocession of the children to the State, to entrust, if not their basic education, at least their training, their technical education, to a teaching that will be directly or indirectly controlled by the State. The great vindication of state education or state-controlled education can be found precisely when the masturbation campaign began in France and Germany between 1760 and 1780 (Foucault, 2017: 242).

The school device is a central line for the operation of the technologies of power. It worked splendidly with the preeminence of disciplinary technology and its articulation with bio-politics by preparing the bodies of individuals for their civic and technical education, since “when families are asked to take charge of the children’s body itself [...] they are also asked to detach themselves [...] from their actual presence, from the power that they may exert over them” (Foucault, 2017: 243) to pass it to the school device. However, although in general terms they claim that the school device worked increasingly better as it was being perfected and adapted to contexts and needs, unexpected or unplanned-for effects allowed for the emergence of the youth individual, an individual who, as a byproduct, implied constant adjustments and readjustments in the device. From the beginning, the device was shaped as if it was geared towards passive individuals subjected to socialization processes in which deviations, more or less planned for, were treated specifically. But the youth individuals, as an incontestable effect, shaped their own learning and relationship processes, their own knowledge, thanks to sociality, an alternate process sometimes opposed to socialization, i.e. the civic and technical education of individuals. Frank Musgrove observed that “the public school of the eighteenth century was an organization hostile to strangers and divided by ages: ‘A huge society of youths aged 8 to 18, guided by an unwritten code of their own creation, almost a free republic of 100, 200 or 500 members [...]’” (Musgrove, 2008: 241), a danger of valorizations created through the horizontality of peer relationships. The school, beyond the school device, became the territory inhabited by these individuals, “by mid-century, public schools had generally become the true fortress of adolescents” (Musgrove, 2008: 246). The role of the school as a territory is undeniable, as is that of the school device as the cogwheel of global power technologies in the production of the young individual, since not only were the children separated from the family for the sake of their civic and technical education but also from the rest of society, both inside the school in age groups and with respect to economic activities, generating a sort of waiting room for their insertion in the labor market:

It is the great achievement of British schools from the mid-nineteenth century on that, although they separated young people from the greater worries and concerns of the world of the adults, they granted their members a status that seems to have proven to be an adequate compensation. This has allowed for a relative “adjustment” of the social order, albeit not in any way free of friction, resentment, and hostility (Musgrove, 2008: 248)

Interestingly, Musgrove’s text is called “The invention of the adolescent”. Nevertheless, as I have stated above, rather than an invention it is an unexpected effect of a device with well-defined expectations about the State-Family-Individual relationship, based on a strategy of governmentality.

This separation of our children in the schools – which are increasingly taking on more and more “extra-curricular activities”— for a longer training period has had a particular effect in their formative years. They are “separated” from the rest of society, forced internally towards their own group of coetaneous peers, compelled to spend their whole social life with people of the same age. With their classmates they form a small society, most of whose important interactions take place within itself, and maintain only a few links with the adult society outside it (Coleman, 2008: 111-112).

James Coleman’s text is called “The adolescent society”, again that strange entity, a social appearance. It is a spasm in a surveilled territory. The meeting of peers, with clearly defined agendas and relationships with the economic world postponed, has the specific elements for everyday relationships to come together and create spaces for sociality. Coleman brings us to the postwar twentieth century, when the youth outgrow the constricted space of schools to gradually become individuals who have rights and are consumers, whole beings in their cultural, political, social, and economic productions, but hard to grasp for traditional institutions, leaving to new social organizations a more subtle and productive approach by getting involved in the processes of generating their own ethical, aesthetic and linguistic values.

As if having an institution such as the present high school exist segregated from the rest of society were not enough, there are other things that reinforce this separation. For instance, adolescents have become an important consumer market, and special types of entertainment are geared almost exclusively towards them: popular music is the most significant, and films – since television took away their adult audience – are increasingly a special medium for adolescents (Coleman, 2008: 112).

In his study Coleman discovers the pieces that allow for the emergence of specific horizontal values promoted by a sociality that knows very well, thanks to the agents who experience it, how to oppose when it is required or articulate when it is necessary to the socialization processes: “It may be evident that the institutional changes that have segregated young people in

our society in high schools produce an ‘adolescent culture’ with its own values” (Coleman, 2008: 113). There is in that “may” some doubtfulness, normal when he assumes that the school is completely separated, and therefore the students are. What must be understood is that in the school the territory is inhabited by finding and creating interstices, some of them very clear, as zones hidden from the eyes of adults, distances or closeness that obscure the view, different kinds of darkness that young students discover, while there are others, the most elementary beginning with meeting, being together. From that moment on there is a crack that opens a gap, forcing upon the school device the need to make the socialization process coexist with sociality. A central point in Coleman’s study, and in those of many other specialists, is the importance of the mass media for the creation of the adolescent market. A market that has expanded with new technologies has allowed young people not only to become creators of contents at many different scales but also to broaden the spaces for sociality by embedding into the space of school a third territory added to that of the body and the school: the digital world.

### **Second territory: the interstices (sociality)**

In his classic study, Frederic Thrasher (2021) identified a specific social space from which young people created their own distinct world, a social space that, in Bordieu’s terms, is solidified thanks to a close-knit web of nearby *habitus*, a territory that seems to be beyond the boundaries of society, a social space occupied and created by young people: the interstice. Interstices appear in the midst of social objects waiting to be occupied, as well as created:

The most significant concept of the study is interstitial, that is, pertaining to spaces that stand between one thing and the next. In nature, foreign objects tend to accumulate and cluster in every crack – in interstices. There are also fissures and cracks in the structure of social organization (Thrasher, 2021: 80).

An interstice is not just a space “in-between”, because if that “in-between” is empty it is just distance, nor is it the mere appearance of the crack or fissure, an alley created by poor urban planning. The interstice is an inhabited space, and when it is not problematic its inhabitants are as invisible as the absence of distance between an element and another perceived by a watchful eye. Social objects, to stay in the game, make interstices wider or narrower depending on the capacity for social integration. Where societies promote greater distances interstices will be warmer, inviting to their inhabitation.

An interstice is a manifestation of an economic, moral and cultural frontier, and a “manifestation of the period of readjustment between childhood and maturity” (Thrasher, 2021: 96). Distances come about not only due to economic, political and social marginalization, but also due to a generation gap. Interstices come about where a social plane is fractured by accelerated movements. In interstices young people find spaces where they can be together without

adult surveillance to create groups where belonging is fundamental for the individual, offering somewhat communitarian, neo-archaic characteristics (Moreno, 2018) insofar as the collective takes precedence over the individual, opposed to the modern principle of individuality in which collectivity is mediated by well-defined social and political institutions (political parties, companies, organizations).

Young people's experience is defined by the interstitial quality, where the conditioning factors are the result of different social marginalizations. In the interstice the vacuum is filled by the production of their own values, by a sociality-horizontality among peers, without institutional superiority, which Maffesoli (2004) identifies as neo-tribalism. However, interstices appear where adult supervision cannot reach. Thus, the street, the park and other spaces where young people can meet are interstitial spaces par excellence, as can be observed in the following excerpt recorded by Thrasher about a party that ended in a fight:

These young people do not seem vicious but rather children who, under the influence of alcohol and the flames of their animal spirit kindled by mad music, simply abandon any caution and restriction as they would not anywhere else. Close supervision and the absence of alcohol would have made it little more than an innocent party (Thrasher, 2021: 318).

Thrasher describes a party in the 1920s, which could very well have happened at a different time, to explain the need for supervision of youths when they meet at concerts, parties, or games. Again, the school should be the space with the least qualities to inhabit and create interstices. For young students, inhabiting their bodies as a territory from where individual and collective action is acquired and given meaning involves bringing into constant tension two processes that run through them at school every day:

On the one hand, the vertical axis of socialization. This process is the quid of the school, its compass and its reason to exist, producing citizens equipped with the most effective values to become healthy workers committed to a specific economic morale; in other words, producing bodies that are docile, strong and healthy for work and weak for political resistance.

On the other hand there is the horizontal axis of sociality, the process that emerges when they are together, when individuals share experiences and learn by being together, thanks to their own knowledge. The effect of this sociality is the production of their own values, which are often opposed to the general values.

In this tension, the school becomes a place for the production of experiences. It is in the tension of both axes where the body becomes a space for struggle and resistance, generating conflict. The body is inhabited through experience, and when it is inhabited and historicized through relationships with other bodies it conceives the present as a time in contrast with universal abstract time, giving materiality to the inhabited body as an objective space.

Insofar as the body is not, strictly speaking, the individual or the self, it is dissociated, and it is thanks to this dissociation that the body must be inhabited, representing it as a territory. In the tension between socialization and sociality the individual inhabits his or her body and disputes it to the school device. The experience goes beyond the fact, through the body, and it is through it and its senses that it feels and perceives itself to be later interpreted, organized and constructed as an experience; that is, narrated. The inhabited body designates the mode of life and shapes how the experience is lived, and especially how it is narrated; that is, how it is signified, through which embodied contraptions, which signifies how the body is inhabited socially and how this territorialization is expressed.

We may use interchangeably the idea – and the image it generates – of embodiment and territorialization insofar as the agent (self or individual) inhabits the body. Thus, the body acts according to experiential frames of reference; that is, according to processes in which the axes of socialization and sociality cross paths, where there is a dispute between the individual who territorializes or embodies the body and the institutions that seek to orientate the “correct” forms of this territorialization or embodiment (I will only use the idea of territorialization from now on), Michel Foucault’s so-called anatomopolitics (2001). Young students are in the middle of this dispute. They are experiencing materially and symbolically the territorialization of their bodies, and the way in which they inhabit them leads to conflict between them and the adult world (the school, the family, and other institutions). They are subjected to the imposition of body itineraries; that is, the relationship between the practical and symbolic training, which in the school as an institution has to do with civic and technical education, and run into conflict with processes of identity that take place in the school as a territory to be inhabited. That is, the dispute over the body as a territory runs against the meaning that young students give the school as an institution where they go to acquire certain skills and the territory they inhabit with their peers to develop their own identities, interstitial spaces where they produce aesthetic, ethical and linguistic values in the shape that many authors recognize as youth cultures (Feixa, 1998; Feixa, Urteaga, 2005; Reguillo, 2000, 2012; Urteaga, 2011), different cultures that take shape collectively to allow young people to territorialize their bodies according to the identities in formation among peers collectively and individually.

The school offers interstices, the first of which is the simple fact of meeting with their peers. Being together involves the experience of horizontal relationships where the sociality process begins, making cracks in the search and inhabiting architectural darkness (aisles, restrooms, behind buildings, etc.) and creating interstices where the gaze of the adults is overwhelming. In this respect, the appearance of new communication technologies and the artifacts that expand them has had the effect of broadening interstices easily occupied by young students. Although adults have always feared the morbid influence of mass media upon young people, as if they were what the school demands they be (passive individuals empty of knowledge and expe-

rience), nowadays the effects of new digital communication media seem to be more complex for adults to assimilate since they are both tools and entertainment, which was not the case with comics, adventure novels, films, television, music, or videogames. In principle, all those elements are within the grasp of the user with a smartphone and a connection to the internet, but so are photographs, videos, audio, texts and images that may be created by them, thanks not only to the gadgets' technological advancements but also to transmission platforms where anyone can become a commercial phenomenon or influencer. In this respect, Thrasher says about the fears of adults that:

Every new invention that facilitates human mobility both in speed and in means of transportation – every new device that increase the liveliness, speed and propagation of ideas through communication – carries with it the germ of disorganization. This is because innovations such as newspapers, films, as well as the automobile and radio, tend to disturb social routine and break the old habits upon which the superstructure of social organization rests. Nobody would conceive of abolishing automobiles or the radio. Neither can newspapers or films be suppressed. To continue enjoying the benefits of modern inventions we must learn to get along with them, and finally to control them (Thrasher, 2021: 182).

The interstices created by and in the digital world are a pending issue to be addressed by the school device, seeking to pathologize it on the one hand and pedagogize it on the other, subjecting it to pedagogical knowledge but also to medical and legal knowledge.

### Third territory: the screens

The digital world is a third territory through which interstitial actions and meanings are produced away from the gaze of adults: cyberspace. This is not the place to debate on the most proper term, 'digital world' or 'cyberspace'. I will use them interchangeably for the time being, but more inclined towards 'cyberspace' after Franco Berardi's definition:

Cyberspace is the sphere of connection of countless sources of human and machine enunciation, a realm of connection between minds and machines in boundless expansion. This sphere may grow indefinitely because it is the point of intersection of the organic body and the inorganic body of electronic machines (Berardi, 2017: 203).

What Berardi calls cybertime is the organic, what we may call the corporal boundary, because despite the sensation of simultaneity produced by some platforms and applications time is still a barrier to overcome. It is even more rigid than space, especially because it takes place in that other space: cyberspace. Depending on the ways in which young people inhabit their bodies and the school space, the way they embody the web affords them the ability to become cy-

borgs (Moreno, 2016). If cyberspace is the “intersection between the organic body and the inorganic body of electronic machines”, it is so thanks to the screens through which touch, sight and hearing are amplified. To achieve this amplification, the gadget must be literally close at hand, limiting its use by providing other functions when one has the object. Somehow human beings have always been cyborgs since we embed, incorporate, add and use elements foreign to our body (clothing, glasses, tools, etc.). The issue with screens is that their use is “improductive” and even “disruptive” in school. Thus, the cyborg quality is interstitial since through their screens young students slip into other places with their ears, eyes, or hands, increasing their capacity but also becoming blind, deaf, or hand-tied to fulfill their role as attentive students.

Berardi’s distinction between conjunction and connection is interesting to find the interstitial quality of cyberspace as a third territory disputed within the school device:

I also call **conjunction** the concatenation of bodies and machines that may generate meanings without following a pre-established design or obeying any internal law or aim. The **connection**, on the other hand, is a concatenation of bodies and machines that can **only** generate meaning by obeying an **intrinsic design** generated by man, and **respecting precise rules** of behavior and functioning. The **connection is not singular**, intentional or vibrational. It is, specifically, **an operative concatenation** among agents of meaning (bodies or machines) previously **formatted** according to a **code** (Berardi, 2017: 28).

In research with secondary school students aged 12 to 15 it can be noticed how screens, despite their impulse for individuality and self-absorption, generate interstices occupied by being together: where space enables constant surveillance, a group of girls hunker down to watch a video, using their bodies to hide the gadget whose use is forbidden by fears unable to be articulated by the school device in a pedagogical demand. It is argued that they lose attention, waste time, slow down their own learning and hinder the others’ learning. However, without clear arguments to prohibit their use, in some schools, without any compunction, students are forbidden from using smartphones by collecting them before class, arguing that this will prevent them from being stolen since the school cannot take any responsibility for stolen phones. Young students bring their smartphones into the classroom, check them in their recess and idle time, send messages, memes, videos, songs, audios. They conjugate body, space and cyberspace to inhabit in their own way, despite having to put up with a number of rules and restrictions the school imposes on them.

The conjunction is, in Deleuze’s terms (2008), an *ecceity*, an event that does not accumulate, a tactic, as Michel de Certeau (2000) argues, that opens ways to become another. The conjunction is negative because it deviates from the hard line of everyday life at school. Thus it is experience and, as such, the source for the narrative that individuals will pour over the school experience, literature, poetry.

The connection, on the other hand, is the functional relationship of units-individualities that interact according to a code or language, not an event. There is no literature or narrative but an algorithm, a series of codes required to achieve a specific end.

Thus, the territorialization-incorporation is a conjunction that takes place within sociality. The goal of civic and technical education is the functionalization-operation of individuals. It is the connection to achieve the qualification demanded by society, and takes place within socialization. For young students, inhabiting the territories implied in the school device means establishing conjunctions and connections between their body and the different machines they are confronted with. These are not frontal oppositions, since the conflict emerging from the tensions between the axes of sociality and socialization is usually solved thanks to the individuals' tactics, from a tolerated deviation, explained by François Dubet (1998, 2003), to the comfortable ignorance of adults of the youths' activities in the classroom and the school. That is, by inhabiting the spaces of the school device the individuals involved conjugate to live, knowing that it is a livable place because they in fact live in it. Perhaps the following quote from Michel de Certeau will serve to exemplify the argument, substituting "city" by "school":

Three different (but conjugated) functionings of the relationships between spatial practices and significant practices are outlined in (and perhaps based on) these symbolizing knots: the believable, the memorable, and the primitive. They designate what "authorizes" (or makes possible or believable) spatial appropriations, what is repeated (or remembered) of a silent and withdrawn, and what is structured but undersigned by a childhood origin (*infans*). These three symbolic devices organize the *topoi* of the discourse of the city and about the city (the legend, the memory, and the dream) in a way that also escapes urbanistic systematicity. They can be recognized in the functions of names: they make inhabitable or believable the place that they invest with a word (by being emptied of their classifying power, they acquire the power of "allowing" something else); they remind of or evoke the ghosts (the supposedly disappeared dead) that still move, crouched in actions and bodies in motion; and insofar as they name – that is, impose a summoning emerged from the other (a history) and alter a functionalistic identity by detaching themselves from it – they create in the same place an erosion or no-place that undermines the other's law (2000: 118).

If the conjunction is tactical, in the sense of its momentary nature, and therefore does not accumulate power, then the connection is strategic because it accumulates enough power to become an institution. On the same lines, narration-poetry is tactical, especially when it is oral, but we must consider how it is expressed and transmitted through cyberspace, where it remains, and a tweet may come back like a boomerang with greater violence depending on the media climate. Young people launch their messages, images, videos, audio, multimedia, and so on as if they were screaming or laughing out loud, and that is how they must be regarded in the

future. The algorithm is always strategy, especially that algorithm designed to grow and learn as it devours information to feed Big Data. To understand this, we need to intervene Michel de Certeau's quote:

According to the three different and conjugated functionings of the relationships between spatial practices and significant practices – the believable, the memorable, and the primitive – used by Michel de Certeau to designate what “authorizes” (or makes possible or believable) **cyberspatial appropriations**, what is repeated (or remembered) of a silent or withdrawn memory, and what is structured but undersigned by a childhood origin (*infans*), **but not distant nor socialized, but socializing and with sociality activities**. These three symbolic devices organize the *topoi* (places) **of the discourse of the web and about the web (the legend [fake news], the memory [the search history] and the dream [modifications with filters and programs])** in a way that also escapes the **cybernetic systematicity of the algorithm but, in a regurgitation game, feeds it, offering a view in real time of how people think, as in the dialog in the film *Ex machina*: “that is what is strange about browsers, it was like finding oil in a world that did not know about internal combustion engines. Lots of raw material and nobody knew what to do with it. My competitors only wanted to monetize it through purchases and social media. They thought that browsers were a map of what people thought, but it is actually a map of how they think”**. They may be recognized **in the functions of avatars, filters and schemes, in insults, trolling and “likes”**: they make inhabitable or believable the place that they invest **with a word, image or video (by being emptied of their classifying power, they acquire the power of “allowing” something else, another use or misuse, shit storm or digital lynching or the elevation of grey individuals turned into influencers, who would somewhere else amount to very little or nothing)**; they remind of or evoke the ghosts (the supposedly disappeared dead) **that still move, crouched in videos, images, publications, tweets always static and in motion**; and insofar as they name – that is, impose a summoning emerged from the other (a history) **and alter a functionalistic identity by detaching themselves from it** – they create in the same place an erosion or no-place that undermines the other's law.

This inhabitation of places in the school device may be perceived in the following field observation:

In a private school in Mexico City, at the hour of recess things seem to be very different from what happened in the school in Puebla. It is a large building with an astroturf football field, well protected with nets to keep soccer balls from falling outside and full of boys playing while those who are not playing walk by yards, corridors, staircases and other spaces. One notices vigilant gazes, but not screams or intimidating presences for the youth. The interstitial spaces multiply and no noisy alarms can be observed. This school implemented a system where all the students use tablets for their lessons. They keep

everything there: readings, notes, research, etc. Unlike in the public schools mentioned, where the use of cellphones is forbidden with the argument that the school cannot take responsibility for stolen or lost cellphones (as told by students, there seems to be no academic pretext), in this private school the use of electronic devices is encouraged, an even the tablet is preferred to the cellphone, but the use of social networks or non-academic sites is not permitted. Here, the interstitial space is in the devices, because a well valued and disseminated secret is the use of a site through which the direction of social networks is triangulated to avoid the blockage of the devices. In my years of office work for the government this information was prized since unofficial communication sites were blocked and chats, social networks and unofficial e-mail accounts could be accessed through meebo.com. I guess the students in this secondary school use something similar to circumvent the blockage, create the crack, and inhabit the digital interstice.

After the health emergency of 2020, in order to complete the school year, every level of education migrated to education at distance or digital education. This is not the space to discern the differences between them, but we must recognize that they exist and that, faced with the crisis, the implementation of online classes took place with some difficulty, especially in the possibilities of matching the knowledge of teachers and students.

In this respect, it is interesting to consider what a teacher in Mexico City told me in a workshop offered to teachers in a secondary school for adults, whose students are in fact minors who have not been accepted by other schools because of their behavior or low grades: "they call them 'digital natives', but when you ask them to use Excel or PowerPoint they have no idea how to do it". The difference between using and being born is important to understand how the user emerges from connectivity; in these times, most adults are users, since depending on our needs we have learned to use new technologies in our working environments to be able to work better. On the other hand, whether we agree or not with the notion of "natives", the fact is that young people nowadays, from their early years, are in contact with the electronic devices through which we inhabit cyberspace. This relationship promotes the interstice at school. Inhabiting cyberspace is very different from using it: an individual who uses it, works, and one who inhabits it lives, experiences. Therefore, an adult is often skilled in the use of the tools required for work, and a young person, to say it academically, says: "I have creativity to create images with funny texts" (Young student in a private secondary school in Puebla, Focus group 2018); that is, memes.

### **The irruption of the school into cyberspace**

The health emergency, as far as the educational system is concerned, began in Mexico on March 14 2020, when the Ministry of Education (SEP, Secretaría de Educación Pública) started the vacation period of Holy Week early and extended it for a month, from March 23 to April 20 in all

schools. In-classroom classes stopped indefinitely. On March 30 a national health emergency was declared in Mexico.

Schools at all levels, especially in higher education, sought to complete their school terms by switching to online classes. The first obstacle they ran into was the inequality in connectivity. Although it may be claimed that most young people aged 12 to 29, according to government agencies, are inhabitants of cyberspace, this must be nuanced by taking into consideration social and regional inequalities. That is, all young people inhabit cyberspace, but they do it in unequal conditions. Young indigenous students in Oaxaca (Meneses, 2019) do it differently from their Afro-descendent peers (Ramírez, 2020). The same may be said of marginalized young people in cities, public school students, or those who attend private schools. It is not the same to have a regular plan with a telecommunications company than to buy a small amount of cellphone time once or twice a week. Infrastructure is also fundamental: in the same city, some neighborhoods have optical fiber connection and others do not. This issue deserves further analysis, but this meme might express it more eloquently:



Beyond all these problems, the relationship with cyberspace, as I mentioned before, is different from whether one is an inhabitant or a user of cyberspace. Social networks are rife with videos about how this difference implied conflict for which the school device was not prepared, even if it was in its agenda. The colonization of cyberspace by the school device was not planned but quite fortuitous. It involved pains for all individuals immersed in the device, first of all for teachers. The memes that mock the inability of many teachers to, for instance, operate a projector in the classroom, made fun of their limited technological skills to work in a digital medium where they not only had to show a PowerPoint presentation but also share videos, texts, images, audio, and become the screen contents itself.



A confrontation of knowledge about digital media was inevitable. On the one hand, students mocking their teachers mercilessly, as in the case of an inexperienced teacher who began his class and then a student, whether with the tacit agreement or the complicity of his classmates, told him that he could not hear him and suggested that he press at the same time Alt + F4 in his keyboard. Anyone with a minimal knowledge about PCs knows that this command closes the active window, in the case of that teacher the platform he was using for his class. As he unwittingly closed his session he could hear the laughter of the students. This kind of “trolling”, in the language of socio-digital networks, took place countless times. The experiences of teachers “bullied” by their students represent the payment of dues to try to inhabit an interstitial space whose main value is the absence of adult supervision. The irruption of teachers – not just any adult – could not be left unanswered.

On the other hand, the most viral videos at the peak of the lockdown were those of angry, harassing, ignorant, etc. teachers exposed by their students, using their knowledge to cope with the colonization of cyberspace by the school. Its response, perhaps, to the new learning of the teachers and the stress caused by new demands, was to colonize beyond the screen to reach the household through excessive homework.

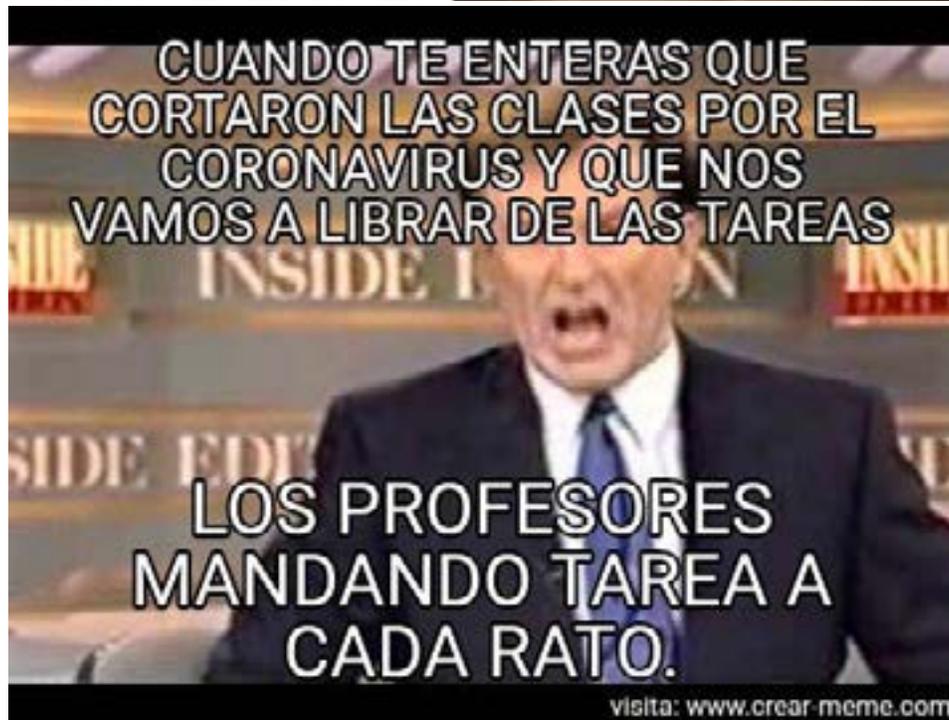


Mr. Jaleo  
@mr\_jaleo

Tú con 31 tareas virtuales /// El profe pasando la cuarentena



Por favor que alguien le corte el internet a los maestros



When I speak of the colonization of cyberspace by the school device I am referring to the interference of the functional needs of civic and technical education in the ways young people inhabit this space. They do not know how to “use” technological tools because they do not work with them. Cyberspace is not a place where young people seek to use knowledge to become professionals, and if they do it is under the influence of the ludic. Professionalization is a form of capitalist colonization where cultural productions are monetized, moving into another form of relationship which is also beyond the scope of this paper but must be noted because somehow the work of youtubers, gamers, tiktokers, instagramers, etc. goes through the aesthetization

of work; that is, the search to satisfy aesthetic desires rather than ethical searches, an aesthetic of work which has serious implications when dealing with the values inculcated by the school device.

This colonization has gone hand in hand with a de-territorialization: the school has been taken away from young people. Thus, their interstices have been emptied and filled with school demands, not only in their screens but also in their homes, their rooms.



The health crisis of 2020 has made it clear that the activities conducted in schools and their spaces, beyond the transmission of knowledge, are territories of sociality where the youth experience produced by a horizontal everyday coexistence anchored to the present of a few with specific values, in which there are ethical productions that must be understood in their own terms, takes place (Moreno, 2016). Somehow, one of the effects of the colonization of cyberspace by the school device is the weakening of these spaces by their proximity when the screen is saturated.

Perhaps for its new inhabitants a screen must be full to say something. That may explain the harsh demands of teachers that students keep their cameras on all the time, being visible, limiting interstices. Without a doubt, teaching on screen has caused pain to teachers, as well as physical and emotional fatigue, but it has also exposed prejudice and violent attitudes, as in the case of a teacher who asked a student to turn on his camera: "My camera is broken, it's totally broken, I can't even get video", the student apologized, to which the teacher responded "So what is the point of taking classes if you don't have all the elements?" "Teacher," the student replied, "that's not very considerate, many classmates don't have access to their cameras, many families can't even afford a webcam or a cellphone". The teacher's response shows how the infrastructure shortcomings took shape, the imposition on all the individuals involved to have classes online and the way that inequalities are treated: "That spiel is not necessary, the poor were already left behind".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See on: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3304334642991892>

Teaching in socio-digital networks somehow suffered the same mutilation, since the spaces echo in the bodies, inviting them to do this or that. A school bench has a shape and a disposition in space, an orientation about what to do in it where it is. Most students and teachers did not have spaces ready to take and teach classes. The space invited to other activities that had to be defeated by the strong conjugation established among the individuals by the devices, because it is not a weak relationship in itself; to the contrary, it is how it is experienced that strengthens it or debases it.

Teaching without sight, smell, and touch, dispossesses the other whom I cannot even look in their eyes, since the placement of the camera is not intended for that exchange of looks but only to see, unveil, turn on the camera to spy on the intimacy of others, both teachers and students. The images on social networks of teachers welcoming their students online, showing everything, are a bit poignant:



Without a doubt, as Byun-Chul Han (2013) points out, this colonization broadens the transparent qualities of modern society, which unveils, undresses, shows everything without a qualm, shamelessly. Thus, the anti-erotic effect of this colonization is evident. The saturation of the screen blurs the erotic novelty of virtual sex and leaves instead a pornographic one in which

cyber-eroticism is weakened the most, since it consists of seeing without looking, capturing only the image projected, without smell, without touch.

If we speak of digital natives, we need to analyze the political fiction of being born-nation. For this reason I prefer the notion of digital inhabitants, because we migrants (users) can also become inhabitants by proposing, against all fictions, actions that allow for a better inhabitation of cyberspace, leaving colonization and the violent activities it entails behind in favor of a territorialization where a dialog of knowledge that involves emotions and desires can take place.

Inhabiting implies consuming. How do we consume? What do we consume? When do we consume? By answering these questions we can calculate rhythms, times, productions. If we see the digital world digital as resistance-creativity, we must seek parallelisms between different connective and conjunctive phenomena, events, to achieve ours at this juncture. We must research events such as:

Yosoy132 (2012)

Sismo (2017)

Elections (2018)

Covid-19 (2020)

According to the use of new technologies, creation of apps, communication, organization, action, we must make a politics of the impolitical, a psycho-politics (Han, 2014) of resistance to Big Data to disrupt it. As Michel Foucault said "If we found a place – and it may very well exist – where freedom is effectively exercised, we would discover that it is not thanks to the nature of the objects but, I'll say it again, to the practice of liberty" (Foucault, 2012: 147).

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