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Education in transit: the school between ruins, labyrinths, and passages

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Abstract: This article examines the role of the school as a transitional space, drawing on Walter Benjamin's metaphor of the Parisian arcades to analyze the mediation between private and public spheres within the educational context. Grounded in the reflections of Hannah Arendt, the study explores how schools can maintain their institutional autonomy, resisting reductions to mere extensions of the family unit or instruments of societal ideology. In addressing the issue of school violence, the article contends that educational institutions should not rely solely on repressive or technological strategies, such as surveillance and monitoring systems, but should instead be envisioned as dynamic environments of transition and experimentation, where education emerges in the interplay between tradition and innovation. The analysis is based on Benjamin's dialectical materialist framework, which facilitates a critical interpretation of the school's function as a site of mediation and transformation. Through this lens, the article conceptualizes the school not as a static entity, but as a generative space of possibilities, fostering learning through the mediation between memory and futurity, between the past and the unrealized potential.
Keywords: Philosophy of education; school as passage; Walter Benjamin; Hannah Arendt; school violence.

1 Introduction[1]

Contemporary schools face threats that compromise their essential function of mediation between the private and public worlds, being pressured by ideological forces that dispute their meaning and control. On the one hand, there is a growing tendency toward the privatization and individualization of education, which manifests itself in policies encouraging homeschooling and the expansion of educational models tailored to specific niches, aligned with particular cultural, religious, or market values. This perspective stems from the idea that schools should be an extension of family principles and that teaching can be reduced to the transmission of technical or moral knowledge, disregarding its public and socializing functions. Such a movement, although presenting itself as a defense of educational freedom, inserts itself within a

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matrix that seeks to dissolve the collective dimension of school, weakening its capacity to form critical and autonomous citizens (Guilherme; Picoli, 2018).

On the other hand, the school is also targeted by political instrumentalization, often being reduced to a field of dispute where different groups attempt to mold it according to their agendas, whether by imposing restrictions on the teaching of certain subjects or by subordinating the curriculum to specific ideological directives. This polarization places education in a fragile position, in which its formative role is displaced to serve external projects, compromising its intellectual autonomy (Gascón, 2018; Gascón; Fortunado; Aguilar, 2023). Both tendencies – whether the privatization of school as a closed and exclusive space or its subordination to dominant political narratives – operate from an ideological understanding that ignores the school as a territory of plurality, according to which learning cannot be conditioned by private or doctrinarian interests, but oriented by the construction of critical thinking and commitment to democratic formation. Thus, the contemporary school finds itself cornered between forces that, although apparently opposing, share the same intention of capturing it as an instrument of power, distancing it from its function of introducing new generations to the world reflectively and autonomously.

In synthesis, the central dilemma of school today lies in the attempt to reduce it to an extension of the private sphere (home, identity, culture, gender) or to an instrument of the public sphere (doctrine, party, the State). This confrontation reflects not only the dispute between identitarians and redistributivists, but above all, between those who want to subordinate education to the preservation of family values and those who see it as a mechanism for immediate social transformation. In the midst of this confrontation, the school loses its character of mediation and transition, being captured sometimes as a space for reproducing the past, sometimes as an apparatus for indoctrinating the present.

However, in an expanded view, the school is, by definition, a space in constant displacement. Situated between the private world of the family and the public world of society, between the tradition of the past and the uncertainty of the future, it configures itself as a paradoxical territory that simultaneously protects and exposes, conserves and transforms, orients and deconstructs. In The Crisis in Education, Hannah Arendt (1992) identifies the school as a liminal space, a place where young people are not yet fully inserted into the public world but begin to familiarize themselves with it. However,

this transitional function finds itself under strong tension in modernity: the school needs to preserve the legacy of the past without fixating on traditional authority and, at the same time, needs to prepare students for an unpredictable future without surrendering to the pathos of the new. How, then, can education fulfill this mission without losing itself between nostalgia for a world that no longer exists and the unreflective acceleration of contemporary demands?

In this context, Benjamin (2009) offers a potent metaphor for understanding the school as a space of passage: the Parisian arcades. Just as the Parisian arcades connect fragments of the city and reveal the coexistence of different times and experiences, the school can be understood as a space of intersection between protected childhood and the demands of the adult world, between the security of the known and the exploration of the uncertain.

Therefore, the initial question that guides this discussion seeks to understand how the school can fulfill this threshold function without completely submitting to either family affection or the demands of the social and political environment, and how it would be possible to enable pedagogical work in the rupture between past and future. In other words, how to preserve tradition without becoming a fossilized space and, simultaneously, open oneself to the new without dissolving into the ephemerality of the present? The answer to this question is grounded on the reflections of Hannah Arendt, who describes the school as an intermediate space, and from Walter Benjamin's metaphors about the Parisian passages, which symbolize the transition between distinct times and realities.

To interpret this displacement of the school as a space of passage and mediation, we use Walter Benjamin's dialectical materialist methodology. This approach is grounded in the notion of dialectical image. It also stems from the principle that history should not be understood as a linear and progressive succession of events. On the contrary, history is a field of forces in constant tension. In this field, the past is never definitively closed. It can be brought to light based on present needs. Benjamin's "materialism" is not anchored in the presuppositions of economic determinism of base over superstructure, as proposed by orthodox Marxist readings. On the contrary, it integrates elements from the Frankfurt School's theoretical turn by acknowledging that cultural, symbolic, and religious constructions – that is, elements of the superstructure – can also influence forms of economic and material organization. Benjamin's critique

of the idea of progress, common to both hegemonic Marxism and bourgeois Enlightenment, places him in a singular conceptual position. Instead of thinking of history as a linear succession of rational and cumulative stages, he proposes actualization as a central category: a vertical, discontinuous, and constellational reading of history, capable of bringing forth hidden meanings of the past in the present time.

Thus, Walter Benjamin's "materialism" functions as a critical apparatus, receptive to the interruption of the prevailing historical continuum, rather than a reaffirmation of infrastructure as the driving force of history. This differentiation is fundamental to avoid conceptual reductions that evaluate Benjamin through the lens of a materialism that he precisely questions and subverts. Bolle (2009), one of the foremost interpreters of Walter Benjamin's work in the Latin American context, makes this inflection explicit by stating:

> Distancing himself from the progressivist vision of history, which orthodox Marxism shares with bourgeois thought, Benjamin aims to "demonstrate a historical materialism that has annihilated within itself the idea of progress" and "whose basic concept is not progress, but rather actualization" [N 2,2] (Bolle, 2009, p. 1156).

This formulation evidences Walter Benjamin's rupture with traditional historical materialism and his commitment to a critical and discontinuous reading of history. Therefore, this approach does not contradict historical-dialectical materialism but expands its critical capacity by integrating cultural and symbolic mediations in the analysis of historical processes. Like Walter Benjamin, this work is not anchored in a mechanistic reading of the relationship between base and superstructure. However, it invests in a dialectical analysis of culture as a field of contradictory forces, capable of revealing fissures, possibilities, and interruptions in the course of history. The conceptualization of school as a passage does not replace the analysis of historical determinations; it reformulates them, unveiling how the school experience constitutes itself as a contested terrain and the actualization of social meanings. Far from being an escape from history, this is a more subtle and attentive approximation to how it inscribes itself in language, institutions, and cultural practices – including in school. In this context, cultural and symbolic objects, such as the school, are not seen as epiphenomena of an economic base, but as places of condensation and dispute of

historical meanings, with the potential to reshape even the fundamental aspects of material existence.

Taking these reflections into account, this article aims to investigate how the school can affirm its vocation as a space of transition, without reducing itself to either exclusively protecting the family model or the technocratic functionalization of the public sphere. Initially, Hannah Arendt's perspective is addressed, which understands the school as an intermediate realm between the private sphere and the public realm, marked by the tension between conservation of the world and introduction to the world. Next, Walter Benjamin's contribution is examined, especially the metaphor of the Parisian passages, to rethink the school as a liminal space, between ruins and possibilities, where distinct historical times interweave. The following section explores how these conceptions broaden the discussion on school violence, shifting it from the field of control and monitoring to one of listening, mediation, and symbolic reconstruction. Finally, the contribution of the dialectical image in Benjamin's materialist reading of history is deepened, which breaks with linear temporality and activates fragments of the past as potentials for reinventing the present and the future.

This text will explore how the philosophical contributions of Arendt and Benjamin provide interpretative tools for a more critical understanding of the school. Rather than viewing the school as a static space for reproduction, it is seen as a dynamic environment filled with possibilities, where tradition and renewal, authority and disruption, exist in a creative tension.

2 **Educating at the limit:** the school caught between the collapse of authority and the reinvention of the new in Arendt and Benjamin

Hannah Arendt's perspective on the crisis in education is deeply connected to her life history. A German-Jewish philosopher, Hannah Arendt studied under Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, and the collapse of the Weimar Republic profoundly influenced her intellectual development, the rise of Nazism, and her experience of exile. Fleeing from Nazi Germany, Arendt lived in France and later moved to the United States, where she established herself as one of the most influential political thinkers of the twentieth century. Her experience with totalitarian governments and the rupture of tradition in European political and cultural life influenced her vision of education as a site of mediation between past and future.

It is thus that Hannah Arendt's thinking about education is not merely conservative, but a defense of the school as a decisive space for constructing citizenship. Instead of seeing education as a tool for adaptation to the present, she conceives it as a field of mediation between what was and what still can be, ensuring that the new does not emerge as mere repetition of the past, but as a space of responsible creation.

For Hannah Arendt, the educational crisis was not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader crisis of authority and tradition in modern societies. In The Crisis in Education (1992), Hannah Arendt argues that the school can be a space of transition between the past and the future, preserving the cultural legacy without fossilizing it, and at the same time, preparing young people for novelty without yielding to the ephemerality of the present. She critiques educational reforms that aimed to blur the lines between adults and children, and have led to a loss of the educator's responsibility and undermined the transmission of knowledge.

Arendt (1992) discusses the central role of schools in the socialization process of children. For Arendt, the newcomer, having no familiarity with the world, needs to be gradually introduced to it. Insofar "as it is new, care must be taken that this new thing comes to fruition in relation to the world as it is" (Arendt, 1992, p. 239).

Thus, the school remains a place where the teacher takes responsibility for the world and prepares newcomers for future participation in the public realm, without leaving them to navigate the world alone. The teacher acts as a mediator between the child and society, introducing them, in a gradual and oriented manner, to the public realm. In this sense, the school provides a protected space where newcomers can experiment, question, and understand the world without being prematurely exposed to its demands and complexities. This careful mediation is essential for the school to fulfill its mediating function, enabling newcomers to develop intellectual maturity and understanding of the world without being left to fend for themselves in the adult world before they are ready to take on responsibility for it.

Therefore, the school preserves its mediating function, protecting a space in which newcomers are gradually and carefully introduced to the world. This prevents them from being prematurely influenced by social or political interests, which often dominate in the public realm. This arrangement prevents the school from falling under private control, which would jeopardize its world-introducing function, and protects it

from being used as an instrument of political indoctrination. Education, in this context, can be understood as a process that exists between two worlds. It is neither completely autonomous nor does it fully belong to either realm. In other words, Arendt (1992) adds:

> The problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, yet must proceed in a world that is no longer structured by authority nor held together by tradition. (Arendt, 1992, p. 245).

Arendt (1992) highlights a fundamental tension of education in the modern world: it must rely on authority and tradition to introduce newcomers to the world. Nevertheless, it operates in a world where these references have lost their structuring force. This paradox puts the school in a challenging position, as it must balance the need to conserve the world with not becoming a space of mere reproduction of the past. In addition, when educating for a world that is constantly changing, schools must not overlook the rupture of tradition and the loss of authority, that is, the gap between the old and the new. It needs to reinvent its mediating function between the new and the established. In this sense, the school functions as a threshold space, ensuring that newcomers are introduced to the world with sound judgment, while avoiding an abrupt or alienating introduction.

Interpreting Hannah Arendt's perspective on education requires careful reading, particularly regarding her vision of the school as an intermediate realm between the private sphere and public realm. In The Crisis in Education (1992), Arendt argues that schools should prepare newcomers to be introduced to the world, without confusing their role with that of society. This perspective contrasts with her ideas in Reflections on Little Rock (2004), published in Dissent magazine in 1959, where her emphasis on family rights over education sparked intense debates. In the article, Arendt (1992) raises concerns about state intervention in the racial integration of schools in the United States, arguing that education should be kept separate from political affairs. This contradiction highlights the necessity of contextualizing her ideas to avoid anachronistic readings, recognizing both her critique of progressive pedagogies of the 1950s and the fragility of her position on school segregation.

The historical context surrounding Walter Benjamin's book The Arcades Project (*Das Passagen-Werk*) (2009) is heavily influenced by the political and social transformations of the interwar period. The rise of fascism in Europe, the collapse of the Weimar Republic, and the crisis of modernity suffuse his critical investigations. For

Benjamin (2009), the experience of modernity was characterized by shock experience, fragmentation, and the accelerated tempo of urban life. He examined these elements in his analysis of the *flâneur*, the detached observer who strolls through modern cities.

Benjamin's biographical trajectory is closely intertwined with the development of the Arcades Project. A German-Jewish intellectual, dialectical materialist, and cultural critic, he faced persecution under Nazism, which forced him into a life of nomadic exile. His investigation of the passages began as a physiognomic exploration of modernity's cultural forms but evolved to encompass urgent political and philosophical themes. This shift reflected his view of history as a constellation of struggle between forces of domination and messianic possibilities for redemption.

The Arcades Project was never completed. In 1940, while attempting to flee the Nazi occupation of France, Benjamin ended up taking his own life at the border between France and Spain. His fragmentary work on the passages remains a powerful testimony to his singular philosophical method – a mosaic of references, citations, and analyses that seek to capture modernity in its remnants, ruins, and unfinished promises (Gagnebin, 2010).

Walter Benjamin (2009) understands the passages, known in Portuguese as "*galerias*", as architectural structures emblematic of nineteenth-century metropolitan modernity, especially in Paris. These iron-and-glass-roofed passageways, filled with shop windows and stores, functioned as liminal spaces between private and public, creating a milieu of circulation where the phantasmagoria of modern metropolitan experience achieved concentrated expression. For Benjamin (1992), the passages were not merely architectural phenomena; they also represented symbols embodying transformations in the structure of experience and the commodity's penetration of quotidian existence.

When defining the term "passages" in the dictionary *Concepts of Walter Benjamin*, Heinz Brüggemann (2014) highlights that, in a 1932 letter addressed to Gerhard Scholem, Benjamin mentions *Das Passagen-Werk* (The Arcades Project) among the four books that designate "the true site of ruin or catastrophe" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 887). This indicates that Benjamin conceived the passages not just as physical spaces, but as ruins of modernity, sites where dream images of technical progress interweave with the debris of history. In the same letter, he discusses the challenges

associated with the literary forms he explored over the past decade, acknowledging the difficulty of conveying the experience of modernity through words.

Brüggemann (2014) emphasizes that, for Benjamin, literary forms constituted not merely external representations of his thinking; they functioned as physiognomic expressions of modernity, veritable instruments of historical cognition. His approach to the passages manifests a constellation between the oneiric and the technical, combining elements of Surrealism with a critique of industrial capitalist development and metropolitan transformation. As he points out:

> Benjamin wants to assimilate these forms of concretization into his historical thinking. For this, no object seems more appropriate than the old passages of the twenties, which Aragon, Hessel, and Kracauer had taught him to see (Brüggemann, 2014, p. 888).

This character of the passages enables Benjamin to deploy them as a cipher for modern experience, articulating their connection to the commodity form, patterns of consumption, and mutations in the sensorium. They constitute a site of enchantment and estrangement, where the modern subject becomes caught within the commodity's phantasmagoric logic, yet where traces of the past maintain their capacity for awakening. Thus, The Arcades Project is not just an exploration of Parisian passage architecture; it is also a constellation of philosophical and historical critique that addresses modernity's internal contradictions, its unredeemed promises, and its utopian potentials.

The Parisian passages embody the fragmentary experience of modernity and the transience of cultural forms. They constitute spaces of circulation and encounter, but also of dispersal and oblivion, functioning as metaphors for the modern condition, wherein the subject does not achieve fixity but remains in perpetual transit between different realities. For Benjamin (2009), the passage functions not merely as a material site but as a concept that enables the comprehension of history and human experience as a process of mediation, where each moment bears within itself manifold possible directions.

Thus, according to Vaclav Paris, it was inspired by Aragon that Walter Benjamin describes the Parisian passages as spaces of potential and transformation, liminal places that challenge the rigidity of social structures.

> Just as the passages in Aragon are a liminal space or "passage" between the different subjective and objective, private and public domains, Benjamin's passages are both interior and exterior, part real and part dreamscapes, doorways into a collective experience (Paris, 2013, p. 24).

Therefore, the passages serve as zones of intersection, where intérieur and extérieur merge, creating a hybrid environment between the real and the oneiric. This liminal character resonates in various aspects of contemporary life, wherein subjects do not position themselves within fixed territories but within currents of perpetual metamorphosis. The concept of passage suggests that there exists no determinate terminus. However, a trajectory marked by tensions and dislocations, where each exit can lead to a new entrance, and each experience inserts itself into a constellation of open relations. This understanding of time and space as non-linear instances reveals a critical vision of modernity, in which subjects are compelled to navigate instability and the multiplicity of meanings.

When we apply this reading to social and cultural experiences, the passages reveal themselves as powerful metaphors for understanding the processes of subjective and collective formation. They constitute sites where tradition undergoes transformation, where the novel emerges without entirely negating the archaic, and where the subject simultaneously experiences permanence and change. This interplay between continuity and rupture reflects the very dynamic of Benjaminian modernity, in which the past never disappears entirely, but manifests itself as traces in the fissures of the present, opening space for renewed readings and reactivations.

Benjamin (2009) deeply explores the concept of transition and the idea of a space of passage that connects different times and social realities. Although his work is fragmentary, it offers significant insights. The Parisian "passages" are not just physical structures. They also serve as metaphors for cultural and historical transformations. This idea can be related to the transitional role of school, which bridges the private and public realms. We previously discussed this perspective in relation to Arendt's text, "The Crisis in Education" (1992).

> The Arcades Project may not be Walter Benjamin's most expressive work due to its sheer volume and complexity. However, it stands out because of its unique structure, reflective quality, and the provocative questions it raises. It challenges us to think critically about life in contemporary cities, particularly in megacities like São Paulo. In a country like Brazil, where a significant portion of the population migrates from rural areas to large urban centers, Benjamin's insights are invaluable for understanding the social, political, and economic issues that continually evolve in these settings (Kirchner, 2007, p. 12).

Kirchner (2007) highlights that, in the Brazilian context, Walter Benjamin's perspective, as defended in The Arcades Project (2009), becomes particularly relevant in light of accelerated urbanization and the inequalities prevalent in large metropolises, such as São Paulo. The migration from rural areas to urban centers redefines spaces, social interactions, and ways of life. These urban structures symbolize the contradictions of modernity, revealing both its promise of progress and its inherent tensions and fragilities. Contemporary large cities embody this same ambiguity: while they serve as centers of innovation, cultural diversity, and opportunities, they also harbor issues such as segregation, precarious employment, housing crises, and structural violence. Benjamin (2009) challenges us to view these urban spaces not as static realities but as dynamic territories, shaped by displacements, resignifications, and symbolic disputes.

In Brazil, where urbanization has often occurred rapidly and chaotically, Benjaminian thought can serve as a valuable framework for understanding the urban challenges that emerge and evolve daily. The experience of city life is constructed by social interactions that take place in both public and private spaces, which are marked by inequalities in access to housing, transportation, leisure, and education. The expansion of metropolitan areas has led to the formation of marginalized peripheries, increased internal migration, and the growth of informal settlements, creating an urban landscape that requires new approaches for interpretation and intervention.

Benjamin's work (2009) invites us to view the city as a space with multiple temporal and symbolic layers. In this context, social interactions are not neutral; they reflect the history and the societal forces that shape our lives. The concept of passage can extend beyond urbanism and be applied to various aspects of social life, including cultural mediation, the circulation of knowledge, and the construction of subjectivity in the contemporary world, as we will discuss further below.

3 **The school between control and passage:** challenges in addressing violence beyond monitoring

The connection with education becomes clear at this point. Walter Benjamin demonstrated profound engagement with pedagogical issues, although he did not focus specifically on schools as institutions. During his youth, between 1913 and 1914,

he composed critical essays on authoritarian education within German schools, denouncing disciplinary teaching methods and advocating for children's autonomy and creative capacity. His attentiveness to childhood found expression in various educational initiatives, such as the radio broadcasts in the series "Enlightenment for Children," wherein he presented cultural and historical materials in forms accessible to young listeners. Moreover, he collaborated with Asja Lacis on a proletarian children's theater project, developing a pedagogical approach that emphasized self-determination and experimental practice. His interest in toys and children's culture supports this perspective, highlighting childhood as a space for imagination and inventive potential.

In this regard, reading The Arcades Project as a cipher for schooling is highly relevant. Benjamin thus addresses education in the passages:

> A generation's experience of youth has much in common with the experience of dreams. Its historical configuration is a dream configuration. Every epoch has such a side turned toward dreams, the child's side. For the previous century, this appears very clearly in the arcades. Whereas the education of earlier generations explained these dreams for them in terms of tradition, religious doctrine, present-day education simply amounts to the distraction of children (Benjamin, 2009, p. 433).

In this citation, Walter Benjamin (2009) emphasizes the connection between youth, dream experiences, and how education engages with this oneiric dimension over time. He suggests that every era has a childlike aspect that is drawn to dreams. In the nineteenth century, this tendency was clearly evident in the Parisian passages, which served as spaces for circulation, discovery, and fascination. However, Benjamin (2009) notes a shift in the role of education: whereas, in the past, education interpreted these dreams in light of tradition, today it tends to provide mere distraction, diminishing its potential for personal growth. This critique aligns with a broader vision of modernity, where authentic experiences are often replaced by superficial consumption and entertainment. In the educational context, this means that schools are transformed into environments where reflection and in-depth knowledge are frequently overlooked. Instead, there is a focus on pedagogy that emphasizes adaptation to the immediate present, lacking a critical engagement with tradition and failing to open up possibilities for the future.

Urban and educational experiences are both dynamic realms where various influences intersect and societal contradictions become apparent. When considering

the purpose of education in a context marked by inequalities and social challenges, the metaphor of passages helps us view schools not just as spaces for mere reproduction but as territories of transformation and possibility.

Similar to the Parisian passages that facilitate movement between different times and experiences, schools can be understood as transitional spaces. Here, individuals navigate various forms of knowledge and move from the private world of childhood to the public sphere of citizenship. Rather than being static spaces, schools embody a dynamic nature, enabling subjects to explore new possibilities for being and existing in the world. Following Benjamin (2009), where each passage opens multiple pathways, schools are not solely about content transmission; they serve as territories for experimentation, critique, and reinvention.

The Parisian passages, as described by Walter Benjamin in *Das Passagen-Werk* (2009), serve as a powerful metaphor for understanding school as a threshold space between the private and public realms. These semi-covered corridors, which traversed city blocks and connected streets, shops, and crowds in nineteenth-century Paris, were areas for circulation and encounter, as well as for pause and contemplation. Benjamin (2009) characterizes them as spaces of fragmented experience, where time seemed suspended, and the everyday became unfamiliar when viewed from a new perspective. This sense of estrangement and suspension – key elements for critical thinking – allows us to apply the metaphor of passages to schools. Rather than viewing school as a place of straightforward social reproduction, it can be seen as a passage, a fruitful interruption between childhood and the adult world, and between home and the public sphere.

This interpretative key, inspired by Arendt (1992), emphasizes that schools should provide a dedicated time for formation – an interval distinct from the pressures of production or consumption. This necessary period allows for the cultivation of thought, judgment, and coexistence, enabling educational practices to develop with depth and care. However, this aspect of suspended time has increasingly been undermined by the uncritical adoption of digital technologies and the rise of surveillance measures as responses to conflicts within schools.

In this context, school violence has often been addressed through technological solutions focused on control. These include security measures such as facial recognition cameras, social media monitoring, and incident databases. While these

tools aim to contain conflicts quickly, they represent a reactive approach to technology. They focus on mapping risks, monitoring behaviors, and documenting incidents, but they do not address the underlying causes of violence or promote meaningful changes in school relationships.

It is precisely at this point that Santos Júnior's (2023, p. 65) warning gains relevance:

> In this context, educational institutions must focus not only on sharing academic knowledge but also on taking on the responsibility of fostering a safe and inclusive environment for all students. To achieve this goal, schools must go beyond merely addressing violence and bullying; they should also adopt proactive strategies that promote empathy, mutual respect, and effective conflict resolution (Santos Júnior, 2023, p. 65).

This citation not only adds to the analysis, but also shifts focus: moving from control to care and from surveillance to bonding. It emphasizes the importance of an educational approach that transcends repressive measures and punitive thinking. Addressing school violence necessitates policies and practices that prioritize listening, dialogue, and the ethical development of subjects.

While these resources may provide quick responses to address critical events, they do little to tackle the structural causes of violence and instead reflect a trend already established in society at large. A paradigmatic example of this approach is the initiative in the state of Bahia, where facial recognition technology was implemented to enhance public security. However, as Cebrian *et al*. (2024, p. 26) illustrate, the results were disappointing:

> While the intent behind implementing facial recognition technologies is to enhance public security, no significant reduction in violence has been observed. The crime rate and related indicators have remained nearly unchanged. Specifically, between 2018 and 2021, the number of homicides rose from 1,122 to 1,255 (Cebrian *et al*., 2024, p. 26).

The uncritical application of this model in schools creates additional risks. By prioritizing control over listening and dialogue, such measures worsen feelings of exclusion, distrust, and stigmatization, particularly among students. In some cases, they may even intensify conflicts, as Casagrande, Costa, and Fernandes (2019, p. 1040) warn, when suggesting the urgency of a more critical approach:

> It is essential to bring the issue of school violence into discussion by analyzing its contexts, frequency, and the ways it is justified. This analysis is crucial for

> considering changes to the current situation regarding incidents (both reported and shared online) in Brazilian schools (Costa; Fernandes, 2019, p. 1040).

When viewed through the lens of this security paradigm, a school risks losing its role as a "passage" – in the sense described by Walter Benjamin as an intermediate and formative space. Instead, it may become merely a point of surveillance and risk management. This shift diminishes its unique qualities as a place for reflection, experimentation, and building relationships, making it more akin to environments like the street or home, which are already overwhelmed by digital stimuli. To truly serve an educational purpose, the presence of technology must be guided by ethical, pedagogical, and democratic principles, emphasizing care for others and active listening as foundational elements, rather than simply serving the functions of efficiency or control.

To embrace Benjamin's concept of passage, we must reassess the significance of experiential time, the transformative moments, and our ability to perceive the world in new ways and think independently. Thus, the school should not be viewed merely as a reflection of society; rather, it serves as a place of mediation and an opening to the new – a space where time does not rush by but becomes meaningful. This viewpoint helps us understand that issues such as school violence and the impact of technology cannot be examined in isolation from the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they exist. In fact, it is in the interplay among these elements that we find the potential for a school that nurtures individuals capable of engaging with the world through critical awareness and ethical sensitivity.

Abramovay (2005) broadens the concept of school violence to encompass not only extreme and dramatic incidents, such as homicides and the possession of weapons, but also everyday conflicts, institutional practices, and social dynamics that contribute to the perpetuation of violence within the school environment. This perspective shifts the focus from viewing violence as an isolated event to understanding it as a structural and multifaceted phenomenon, linked with the historical, social, and cultural context of the school.

> The defense of a broader understanding of violence is based on recognizing it as a phenomenon closely tied to the social, historical, and cultural context in which it occurs. This perspective allows for the inclusion of various actions, behaviors, and processes that involve different individuals – such as students, teachers, community members – and the school institution itself. Consequently, violence is not limited to severe and dramatic incidents, such

> as homicides or the possession and use of weapons. It also encompasses conflicts, behaviors, and institutional practices that are part of the daily life within educational settings (Abramovay, 2005, p. 79).

The author's broadened understanding of violence emphasizes the need to reconsider the role of schools not just as places of repression and control, but as environments for education and mediation. In this setting, different groups – students, teachers, and the community – can work together to create a safer and more inclusive environment. To effectively address school violence, we must go beyond punitive measures and surveillance technologies. Instead, we should implement strategies that encourage dialogue, active listening, and community involvement in school life.

If we consider the school as a liminal space, as suggested by Benjamin (2009) and Arendt (1992), its purpose goes beyond simply helping students adapt to their private or social environments. Instead, schools should provide formative experiences that equip students to engage with the world without resorting to violence, while promoting mutual recognition and peaceful conflict resolution. Therefore, rather than functioning merely as places of discipline and surveillance, schools need to become environments that encourage autonomy and collaborative knowledge construction. This approach ensures that various forms of violence, whether overt or subtle, are addressed not just as individual concerns but as social and institutional issues.

The responsibility of schools should not be equated with the notion that they must fulfill all of society's demands or mirror the external world. As Arendt (1992) and Benjamin (2009) argue, schools should serve as threshold spaces that mediate the relationship between the private and public realms, as well as between the past and the future. When the focus is solely on repression or disciplinary control, there is a risk of transforming the school experience into a rigid and functional structure, which undermines its potential to foster critical and reflective learning.

On the other hand, if the school adopts only an adaptive role – merely responding to social pressures or technological trends – it risks losing its ability to mediate effectively. It may become just a space for conformity, rather than a place for fostering engaged citizens. Addressing issues such as violence and bullying should start with an educational approach that prioritizes dialogue, respect for others, and the collective construction of knowledge. These elements can transform schools into genuine spaces for growth and experimentation, rather than mere environments of

surveillance or uniformity. In this context, it is crucial to establish a consensus in which technology acts as an ally in the educational process, rather than a suppressive force.

> If we agree that technology in our classrooms should support a new pedagogy where students learn independently with guidance from their teachers, we can make much more rapid progress toward this goal. However, if each person continues to interpret technology's role differently, achieving this goal will take significantly longer (Prensky, 2010, p. 204).

The approach criticized by the author does not break away from the logic of violence; it merely manages it. For the school to continue being a space for critical thinking, it is essential to use technology consciously – one that not only addresses violence but also actively works to prevent it. Benjamin (2009) teaches us that modernity should be critically examined rather than accepted unconditionally, while Arendt (2002) warns against the danger of allowing external demands to dilute the essence of schooling. Therefore, technology must be integrated into education in a manner that preserves the transformative nature of the school. The experience of estrangement, which is vital for learning, cannot be overshadowed by the immediacy of digital technology or by technological standardization.

In discussing school as a place of passage, it is important to view technology as a tool rather than an ultimate goal. Instead of allowing digital immediacy to overshadow important formative experiences, we can use technology to broaden our perspectives, encourage new ways of participating, and promote critical thinking.

According to Arendt (1992), schools should function as autonomous spaces that exist between the private realm of family and the public realm of society. They should not simply be an extension of either of these two spheres. Just because children are born into a digitized world, it does not mean that schools should imitate this environment without critical examination; they should not merely reflect the private sphere or act as passive mirrors of society's technological advancements. Benjamin, on the other hand, emphasizes that educational experiences should include the interruption and suspension of uniform time, which is essential for meaningful learning. If schools yield entirely to the logic of technology and digital surveillance, they risk losing their educational purpose, turning into mere spaces for adaptation and conformity.

Technology can be incorporated into education thoughtfully, not as an end goal but as a means to enhance the pedagogical and social possibilities within schools.

Instead of solely reinforcing monitoring and discipline practices, technology can, when guided by pedagogical and ethical principles, become a valuable tool for promoting more dialogical and inclusive interactions. This approach not only helps prevent violence but also promotes digital citizenship by encouraging student engagement, respect for differences, and democratic coexistence. In this way, technology transitions from being merely a control mechanism to becoming part of an educational project dedicated to creating more just, sensitive, and open relationships that embrace diversity. Additionally, schools, as spaces of passage connecting different times and spheres of social life, can utilize technology to expand horizons and encourage critical thinking, thereby avoiding the reduction of educational experiences to mere metrics and security protocols.

4 Between ruins and possibilities: the school in Benjamin's dialectical constellation

Benjamin challenges the conventional belief that knowledge and experience accumulate in a steady and evolutionary manner. Instead, he suggests a disruptive and fragmentary approach, where ruptures, discontinuities, and surprising reconfigurations characterize historical time. This perspective introduces a way of interpreting history in which the past and present enter into a constellation, allowing for the redemption of interrupted experiences and the creation of new possibilities.

This concept aligns with the view of school as a space of passage and mediation. Within this framework, tradition and innovation, memory and the future, as well as protection and exposure, do not negate each other; instead, they coexist in a dynamic and productive tension. This tension is primarily supported by three main pillars:

- The dialectical image serves as a key to understanding both the past and the present. Benjamin argues that grasping the past is not achieved through objective and documentary reconstruction; rather, it is through constellations of images that arise in the present, enabling us to reinterpret history. As Brüggemann (2014, p. 888) notes, Benjamin referred to The Arcades Project as a "dialectical fairy tale," a realm where literary expression and philosophical thought intersect. This suggests that historical analysis extends beyond mere facts and chronologies; it involves the emergence of images that crystallize social and cultural tensions. In this context, the metaphor of the

Parisian passages plays a crucial role, facilitating an understanding of schools as spaces of transition and connection between different historical periods.

- The materiality of history and experience: Unlike the idealist tradition, Benjamin emphasizes that history is marked by its material traces – objects, architecture, writings, and everyday experiences – that carry latent meanings and can be redeemed. His analysis of the Parisian passages, for example, goes beyond an architectural study; it investigates how these spaces reflect the dreams and failures of modernity. In the realm of education, which reflects broader society, it is essential to avoid approaches that rely solely on abstract conceptualizations without considering the concrete historicity of practices and institutions. From Benjamin's (2009) materialist perspective, school can be understood not merely as a space for transmitting knowledge, but as a place where traces of the past are activated and gain new meanings through the experiences of students and teachers. This actualization does not occur in an idealized or timeless manner; instead, it happens through specific constellations between the past and present, shaped by symbolic disputes, social contexts, and ongoing historical processes. Understanding school in this way requires shifting the focus from general conceptualizations to the analysis of materialities, traces, interruptions, and potentialities that characterize its existence as an institution in a constant state of reinvention.

- Critique of the teleological conception of history: While Arendt (1992) views school as a space that protects newcomers and ensures world-maintenance, Benjamin (2009) offers a more open and dynamic perspective. He does not see school solely as a means to prepare students for a predetermined future, but rather as a space where the unfulfilled potentialities of the past can be activated. This perspective suggests that the history of education should not be understood merely as a progressive accumulation of pedagogical advancements; instead, it should be viewed as a series of interrupted promises, unrealized dreams, and possibilities that remain open.

This text highlights the hybrid nature of Benjaminian work, which blends philosophy, history, and literature to illustrate the complex and conflicting nature of modernity. Inspired by this perspective, this article aims to view school not as a static institution but as a dynamic structure in ongoing reconstruction. It emphasizes teaching as a means of moving beyond merely reproducing the past, positioning the school as a space for critical development and experimentation. In this exploration, issues such

as school violence and the increasing use of surveillance technologies are not treated as isolated problems; instead, they are examined within the context of historical tensions between tradition and innovation, as well as authority and change. By analyzing these challenges from a dialectical standpoint, the article argues that contemporary schooling should be seen as a battleground for symbolic and political contests. Here, decisions are made not just about what to teach, but also about how to maintain and reshape experiences in an era characterized by fragmentation and the pressure for performance.

Walter Benjamin views the city as a labyrinth of meanings, where the *flâneur* wanders among fragments of the past and present, absorbing remnants of modernity. He writes, "[...] the city is the realization of the ancient human dream of the labyrinth. The *flâneur*, without knowing it, pursues this reality" (Benjamin, 2009, p. 474). This idea resonates with the concept of school as a liminal space, where diverse perspectives, historical periods, and knowledge converge, enabling students to develop a critical perspective and broaden their understanding of the world. Just as the passages in Paris connect different spaces and times, a school can be a place where education is not a fixed, predetermined path but a journey of exploration, deviations, and reinventions. As Matos (2009, p. 1138) notes, "[...] reliving the unlived is the revolutionary experience of the *flâneur*, because their wandering is the sign of beginning life anew each day in a 'propitiatory magic'." Therefore, learning should not be seen as a linear accumulation of information but rather as an open experience, where the past is not a burden but a field of unrealized possibilities.

There is a fundamental distinction between the figure of the Benjaminian *flâneur* and that of the teacher. The *flâneur* wanders through the city aimlessly, taking in various fragments of modern life. In contrast, the teacher cannot simply indulge in this kind of wandering contemplation. Instead, the teacher must act as a prospective narrator, reinterpreting the past and envisioning possible futures. Their role extends beyond that of an observer; they serve as a mediator of knowledge, guiding students through the complexities of history and the challenges of the present.

The research highlights that the methodological approach of Benjamin's dialectical image allows us to reconsider school not as a fixed space for knowledge transmission, but as a dynamic structure where tradition and transformation intersect. This framework facilitates a more nuanced understanding of contemporary debates

surrounding education, steering clear of simplistic analyses that confine school to merely an extension of the private sphere or as a tool of the public sphere.

Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt both focus on the relationship between tradition and renewal in education, but they start from different philosophical perspectives concerning the school's role in this process. Arendt (1992) argues that education should serve as an intermediate space between the private and public realms. Her view is significantly influenced by her critique of the crisis of authority in the twentieth century. She believes that schools should protect newcomers from being prematurely exposed to political and social conflicts. For Arendt, the primary role of education is to ensure world-maintenance by introducing newcomers to established traditions before they enter the public realm. Therefore, education cannot fully adapt to current demands, as its essential mission is to transmit a cultural legacy that provides a framework for understanding the world and the responsibilities that come with it. In contrast, Walter Benjamin approaches this discussion from a dialectical and materialist standpoint. He argues that the relationship between the past and the future is shaped not merely by a straightforward transmission of tradition, but by the potential for redemption and the reinvention of disrupted historical experiences.

The difference between Hannah Arendt's and Walter Benjamin's views on formative experience can be observed indirectly. Although neither thinker directly addressed school as an institution in their main philosophical works, their broader reflections on tradition, authority, and temporality provide insights that illuminate the educational field. From Arendt's perspective, school can be seen as a space of protection that gradually introduces students to the everyday world, although this interpretation may require some nuance. Conversely, Benjamin presents the idea of school as a transitional territory where learning takes place through experimentation and the critical reconstruction of different temporalities. In Arcades, Benjamin (2009) notes that modernity tends to dissolve genuine experience, replacing it with distraction and accelerated time. From this viewpoint, school should not merely serve as a mechanism for adapting to the present world; instead, it should function as a space for interruption, allowing new generations to revisit and critically reappropriate history.

This perspective from Benjamin (2009), while not directly addressing schools, provides insight into how educational institutions historically manifest within specific social relations. Unlike the Arendtian approach, which focuses on the stability and

authority of tradition as essential for transmitting the everyday world, Walter Benjamin's framework encourages us to consider schools through the tensions and discontinuities that characterize modern experience. The concept of school as a space for transition and mediation is not merely an abstract idea; instead, it seeks to interpret, in light of Benjamin's critique of linear time and the loss of experience, how the school functions at the intersection of the past and present, blending elements of ruins and potential, authority and innovation. Thus, this perspective is grounded in lived historical processes, understanding school as a site of contested meanings and policies of memory and forgetting. It reveals itself as a place where new ideas can arise from the fissures in established structures.

Walter Benjamin does not directly equate the role of the teacher with that of the *flâneur*. However, it is possible to draw a parallel between them in terms of education. A teacher, much like a *flâneur*, should explore diverse landscapes of thought, engaging with a variety of sources and delving into multiple realms of reflection. They should be attentive to the traces of the past and the possibilities of the present. Nevertheless, a teacher's role in the classroom cannot be limited to mere wandering and contemplation. Instead, they must act as a mediator and provocateur, encouraging students to take their own risks in the pursuit of knowledge. This process involves reconstructing meanings, activating memories, and envisioning futures. The key difference between Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin lies not only in their views on the teacher's role but also in their conception of history. According to Arendt (2002), the continuity of tradition is essential for constructing citizenship and fostering responsibility in a shared world. In contrast, Benjamin (2009) believes that the past should not be preserved for its own sake; rather, it should be critically reactivated to catalyze transformation and reinvention.

The divergence in Hannah Arendt's interpretation of Walter Benjamin's work becomes particularly clear when we analyze her reception of The Arcades Project. As Ramos (2016) points out, Arendt approached Benjamin's ideas through a lens that aligned her more closely with Heideggerian thought. She suggested that, even without being aware of it, Benjamin met Heidegger's call to "think poetically." However, this interpretation overlooks a crucial aspect of Benjamin's methodology: his critique of metaphysics and his commitment to a materialist philosophy of history, which significantly diverges from Martin Heidegger's ontological preoccupations. Ramos

(2016) notes, "the disappointing thing is that the entire text seems directed at demonstrating that, in reality, Benjamin is the writer who truly responds to the Heideggerian demand to think poetically" (p. 125-126).

Ramos (2016) warns that Walter Benjamin rejected the notion of being closely aligned with Martin Heidegger. In a correspondence from 1930, Benjamin expresses his intention to organize a reading circle with Bertolt Brecht to provide a strong critique of Heideggerian philosophy. This disagreement indicates that Hannah Arendt's attempt to categorize Walter Benjamin within the Heideggerian tradition distorts key aspects of his work. It reduces his dialectical methodology to a mere poetic sensibility, which Benjamin believed was inadequate for critiquing modernity.

5 Conclusion

This article emphasizes the importance of viewing school as a transitional space. The educational experience should not be reduced to mere knowledge transmission or serve solely as a tool for social control. Throughout the analysis, we highlighted how Walter Benjamin's metaphor of passages allows us to see school as a territory for movement and experimentation. It is an environment where new generations navigate the shift from childhood to adulthood, from the private realm to the public sphere, and between tradition and innovation. This perspective restores the image of school as a place for critical engagement, capable of providing a supportive environment that neither isolates students in a bubble of alienation nor forces them into uncritical conformity with external pressures.

Walter Benjamin's dialectical materialist approach, grounded in the concept of the dialectical image and the idea that history is not a linear and progressive sequence of events, allows us to reconsider the role of teachers in the gap between the past and the future. This perspective encourages us to view schools as environments where the dynamics of control and transition can be engaged when addressing challenges related to school violence, moving beyond mere surveillance. Schools then become spaces for collective construction, where confronting violence takes place through shared experiences and mutual recognition. However, this emphasis on polarization could erode the school environment as a unique and independent space, separate from both private and public spheres.

Historically, education has interpreted the dreams of new generations through the lens of tradition, as noted by Walter Benjamin. However, today there is a trend towards diminishing this mediation, either by reducing education to a purely technical framework or by turning it into mere entertainment. The contemporary challenge is not only to view school as a liminal space, a space of passage, but also to ensure that this transition is not just a movement between two rigid spheres. Instead, it should be an area for active experimentation. Consequently, the role of the teacher evolves; they are not merely custodians of tradition or advocates for the future, but rather mediators who facilitate this transition. They serve as narrators who reclaim what has been scattered throughout history and help envision possible futures.

In the context of school violence, viewing the school as a space of passage prompts us to question approaches that address violence solely through repressive and technological measures, such as digital monitoring and surveillance systems. When technology is used without thoughtful pedagogical consideration, it can turn the school into a space of control, undermining its educational and transformative role. While security cameras and monitoring systems can help reduce violent incidents, they do not address the underlying causes of violence, nor do they foster an educational environment that values dialogue, active listening, and the collective development of solutions.

The Arendtian perspective emphasizes that schools should not merely serve as extensions of the private sphere or direct reflections of society. When they are reduced to mere surveillance structures, schools lose their educational autonomy and become subject to external demands that overlook their essential role in bridging the past and the future. Similarly, Walter Benjamin warns us about the dangers of an increasingly fast-paced world, where experience is diminished, and learning is reduced to mere adaptation to the present. Conversely, schools should be spaces for interruption and critical questioning, where education is not confined to disciplinary norms or empty technical skills, but is instead viewed as a meaningful intellectual and social journey.

The fight against school violence should not be seen merely as a collection of technological solutions and punitive measures. Instead, it must focus on creating an environment that promotes belonging, empathy, and critical thinking. If schools are regarded solely as places of surveillance or as reflections of societal demands, they will lose their potential for personal growth. However, if schools are viewed as dynamic

passages where experiences and realities are mediated by meaningful education, it becomes possible to create a genuinely democratic and welcoming environment. In such an environment, violence can not only be suppressed but effectively addressed through a collective effort to build knowledge and foster coexistence.

In this scenario, the school must reaffirm its autonomy as a space for public formation, where diversity, critique, and dialogue take precedence over external pressures that seek to reduce it. Just as Benjaminian passages demonstrate the coexistence of different times and experiences within modernity, the school continues to play a mediating role. It ensures that knowledge is neither just a repetition of the past nor an unreflective imposition of the present. To achieve this, teachers need to act as prospective mediators, connecting students to historical experiences without confining them to those experiences. This approach allows students to envision new futures while navigating the uncertainties of the new. In this way, the school can continue to be a legitimate passage space – not merely a territory for ideological appropriation but an environment for the exploration of knowledge, perspectives, and possibilities.

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