

The family and the school as childhood socialising agencies: an analysis in the light of the sociology of childhood

A família e a escola como agências socializadoras da infância: uma análise à luz da sociologia da infância

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ABSTRACT

The sociology of childhood (hereafter, SI) seeks to reaffirm that children should be perceived as social actors, subjects of rights and co-creators of their culture. It is possible to do this using various languages and narratives, such as in the reality of schools and the streets, or in the fiction of short stories and cinema, as in the work "The 400 Blows" by François Truffaut (1932-1984). The method used was the use of documentary and/ or fiction films as a questioning instrument, and to reflect on the film in the light of IS knowledge, making incursions on the roles of school and family, considered childhood socialising agencies. After the bibliographic survey above, the possibility is allowed that this essay may contribute in an unprecedented way to the discussion of the theme, based on the interconnected reflections between its theory and Truffaut's filmic elements, particularly the film "The Misunderstood", from 1959. The constant gaze which sees the children as the future deprives them of any possibility of living the today, of activating their role and effectively connecting with their time. In "The 400 Blows", one can see Truffaut's discomfort with school education and the role of the family, denouncing the indifference that the adult world shows towards children. Together with the desire to escape both aesthetic and thematic conventionalism, Truffaut contributes to confronting the desubjectivised view of childhood and as one more support for the critique of the model that is now considered dominant: the adult-centered school model.

Keywords: Children. Nouvelle Vague. Sociology of childhood. Truffaut.

RESUMO

A sociologia da infância (doravante, SI) procura reafirmar que as crianças devem ser percebidas como atores sociais, sujeitos de direitos e cocriadores de sua cultura. É possível fazer isso a partir de várias linguagens e narrativas, tanto na realidade das escolas e das ruas quanto na ficção dos contos e do cinema, como na obra "Os incompreendidos" de François Truffaut (1932-1984). O método utilizado foi o uso de filmes documentais e/ou de ficção como instrumento de problematização, com o intuito de fazer reflexões sobre o filme à luz dos conhecimentos da SI, realizando incursões sobre os papéis da escola e da família, consideradas agências socializadoras da infância. Após o levantamento bibliográfico acima, permite-se a possibilidade de que este ensaio possa contribuir de forma inédita para a discussão do tema da SI, a partir das reflexões interligadas entre a teoria dela a partir dos elementos filmicos de Truffaut, particularmente da película "Os incompreendidos", de 1959. O olhar constante de que as crianças são o futuro retira-lhes qualquer possibilidade de viverem o hoje, de ativarem seu papel e de se conectarem efetivamente com seu tempo. Em "Os incompreendidos", percebe-se o incômodo que Truffaut demonstra com a educação escolar e com o papel da família, denunciando a indiferença que o mundo adulto apresenta em relação às crianças. Unido ao desejo de escapar do convencionalismo tanto estético como temático, Truffaut contribui para enfrentar a visão dessubjetivada da infância e como mais um apoio para a crítica ao modelo sobre que ora se outorga como dominante: o modelo escolar adultocêntrico.

Palavras-chave: Crianças. Nouvelle Vague. Sociologia da infância. Truffaut.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the child-childhood pair in modern society is of interest to Sociology, among other fields of knowledge. Recognised as an object of study in the sociology of education (hereafter, SE), the introduction of a new perspective on the subject led to the emergence of a new disciplinary field between the 1980s and 1990s: the sociology of childhood (Quinteiro, 2002; Marchi, 2010; Prado & Voltarelli, 2018). SI seeks to break away from hegemonic views of children as a biological phase or merely defined legally, and childhood is treated as a transitory category, introducing a crisis of paradigms within the field of SE. Within the scope of SI, according to developmental psychology, children should not be perceived as a becoming (developmental perspective), and childhood should not be seen as a transitory social category. Contrary to these premises, children are considered as already being in a collective view, and childhood as a permanent social category.

> Unlike individual childhood, sociological childhood is much more susceptible to historical changes, while the dynamics of individual childhood can be found in personality development. (Qvortrup, 2014, p. 25)

Moreover, children should be seen as social actors, rights holders, and co-creators of their culture. Children engage in a creative appropriation of their experiences and, consequently, are culture producers, that is, they coconstruct their social world (Corsaro, 2005). In this regard, it is imperative to revisit the discussion of childhood from this alternative perspective. There is a need to reexamine real and fictional spaces in which children are represented and reinterpret the role they have in their childhood and in society, within their historical and cultural context, while reacting to the adult-centric view held of them. It is necessary to denaturalise the individualistic and atomistic view as the mainstream perception of the child-childhood pair. By using concrete examples, it is possible to problematise this understanding of childhood and respond to the prevailing paradigm that children do not possess citizenship and that there is only an incomplete social aspect within them. This can be done through various languages and narratives, such as in the reality of schools and streets, or in the fiction of stories and cinema.

The use of documentary and/or fictional films as a tool for problematization is an interesting and engaging possibility to rethink the world of childhood from the perspective of SI. In a recent experience in a postgraduate education course at the University of Brasilia, Dr. Monique Voltarelli used this strategy to discuss various elements of this emerging area of Sociology. Although it was not among the films used in the course, the author of this article selected a film that is considered a landmark of French and

world cinema: "The 400 Blows" by François Truffaut. The film tells the story of Antoine Doinel, a teenager in conflict with the education system and his family in 1950s France. Besides its artistic, technical, and aesthetic importance, the film provides an important resource for discussing the issue of the child's invisibility as a social subject with rights and as a social actor belonging to the social fabric in which we all participate.

The objective of this essay is to reflect on the film in the light of SI knowledge, making some incursions into the roles of schools and families, considered socialising agencies of childhood (Gusmão, 1999).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to identify possible scientific research associating the work of François Truffaut with the sociology of childhood, a bibliographic search was conducted using specific terms on the Capes Periódicos Portal. In the first search, using the terms "sociology of childhood", it did not yield any results. In the second search, with "Truffaut and childhood sociology", it returned with one paper, however, the Truffaut's work cited was "The Wild Child". In the third search, the terms "François Truffaut and childhood sociology" also did presented any results. When the search was conducted using only "François Truffaut," 2,662 files were retrieved, and, as indicated by the platform, the abstracts of the thirty most relevant ones were analysed. The time frame for the search was from 1997 to 2021. Two of the articles mentioned the work "The 400 Blows" from a pedagogical perspective, although without explicit elements of the sociology of childhood. These two papers will be mentioned throughout this essay. After the aforementioned bibliographic review, it is possible that this essay can provide a unique contribution to the discussion of the sociology of childhood through interconnected reflections between its theory and Truffaut's filmic elements, particularly the movie "The 400 Blows" from 1959.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

François Truffaut (1932-1984) was a producer, director, and screenwriter recognised for the aesthetic power of his films and his commitment to reclaiming cinema as an art form. The legacy of his work is central to understanding a movement in cinema known as the Nouvelle Vague (New Wave). Identified as a vanguard and countercultural movement, it emerged as a reaction to what had happened to French cinema in the post-war period, which

> it had returned to the characteristics it had in the 1910s, with films seeking success through the emotions of their viewers, well-defined scripts with a beginning, middle, and end, and clearly

defined protagonists, making use of the new widescreen technology. Essentially, they were highly embellished and emotionally engaging films, but visually too cluttered in the eyes of some critics, to the point where the essence of the work was lost amidst so many adornments. (Santos, 2017, p. 22)

In 1954, Truffaut wrote an article in which he expressed the need for a "new wave" in French cinema, which he referred to as "psychological realism" (Santos, 2017). He believed that cinema needed to be recognised as an end in itself and to react against the lack of active direction in the prevailing filmography in France. In addition to its political and social engagement, this new way of making films was also a small revolution from a technical point of view, with changes in the use of cameras and on-set filming. The relevance of the movement influenced many other directors worldwide, including in Brazil, and effectively contributed to the emergence of the "Cinema Novo" movement led by Glauber Rocha and others (Santos, 2017). Truffaut made films to challenge paradigms and was recognised for creating numerous works in this regard.

One of the key works often cited as marking the movement is "Les Quatre Cents Coups" (The 400 Blows), originally released in 1959. The film was nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay, received a Palme d'Or nomination at the Cannes Film Festival, was nominated for Best Film and Best Newcomer Actor at the BAFTA Awards, won the Best Director award at the Cannes Film Festival, won the Best Film award from the French Film Critics' Union, and won the Best Foreign Film award from the New York Film Critics Circle (Starling, 2011).

The 400 Blows (Les Quatre Cents Coups)

Antoine Doinel is a teenager among many in 1950s France. The first scene of the film takes place in school, where one can immediately perceive the authoritarian speech of the teacher addressing a class exclusively composed of boys. When Antoine annoys the teacher, he is punished. Punishment and sanction are recurring devices in Antoine's school pedagogy. The teacher quickly reminds them that "recess is a reward, not a right" (Truffaut, 2011). The teacher ironically warns, "What will France be like in 10 years?" addressing the statement to all the students, expressing disbelief about their future. After class, the students refer to the teacher as a "jerk," but quickly explain that "it's his profession."

Upon arriving home, Antoine is greeted by his mother with the phrase: "Go buy some flour." There is no affection, no positive surprise at her son's arrival, only the use of adult-centric power dynamics to fulfill a household demand. Antoine responds with silence and obedience.

The next day, Antoine leaves home to go to

school, but gives up on the way. It is his first experience of "delinquency," of "loitering." On the street with his friend, he sees his mother kissing another man who is not his father. The event is a quick surprise for both, however Truffaut's camera lingers more on Antoine, who seems to quickly overcome the moment, perhaps dazzled by his "freedom," or maybe because he doesn't reciprocate concern for someone who doesn't care about him.

The possibility of being seems to finally exist: autonomy instead of socially determined heteronomy. Antoine gains some agency, experiencing potential subjectivity, perhaps for the first time. The streets hold two significant meanings in Truffaut's work. The first representation is aesthetic, cinematic, since the streets symbolise a breath of fresh air in the claustrophobic, studio-bound cinema of the time—a fact that Truffaut and the Nouvelle Vague actively confront. The second representation is internal to the film, representing Antoine's agency over his life and the possibility of escaping the socialising influences of school and family. Together, school and family exert forces that deny subjectivity to children. The school, being morally orthopedic (Foucault, 2014), and the family, with its privatising power over childhood. In this case, both operate to homogenise childhood within an adult-centric and ethnocentric framework, obedient to dominant relationships, aiming for a world of order, the guarantee of the status quo, and the reproductive nature of education denounced by Bourdieu (Gusmão, 1999; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2012).

On the streets, Antoine exists. At home, the rhythm of invisibility unfolds. Money is not spent on him. Instead of a mattress, he sleeps in a sleeping bag, and this is not a problem for any of them: neither for the family nor for Antoine (at least not yet). When the parents converse among themselves, it seems as if Antoine doesn't exist. When he is remembered, he has no name: "ask the boy." Antoine skips class, and his mother is not surprised; in fact, she shows no interest. When the teacher asks about his absence, he hesitates briefly to come up with an excuse, he justifies himself by saying "my mother died". Paradoxically, when using a lie to justify his absence, he resorts to a truth, that is, Antoine is an unwanted child, as revealed in subsequent dialogues.

At school, there is an authoritarian and punitive pedagogy based on sanction and punishment. The student must memorise the poem; if they don't know it, "the grade is zero." When his "dead" mother appears at school, Antoine is slapped twice by the teacher in front of his classmates, inside the classroom. The spectacle of punishment is in full swing, designed to discipline the punished and "teach" the others (Foucault, 2014). The "dead" mother then complains why she "died" and not his father (it would be a case of narcissism or reflection)? Antoine is present but abandoned; he is invisible. As for the mother's expectations regarding her son's education,

the prevailing forces are already programmed: "I don't care if [Antoine] is last in class; I want him to behave." The school principal adds, "So, we are in agreement." The school has its function: to organise the morality of childhood, supported by the power relations of adults, adult-centric colonialism (Santiago & Faria, 2015). The adult is there to attribute abilities and tasks to the child so that they become adults. In other words, there is no citizen there; there is a becoming, a transformation that requires the educational moralising apparatus to materialise: Antoine's protagonism has been erased. When Antoine sleeps away from home, his mother finally recognises his absence. There is a search for reconciliation, but there is not enough sufficiency in this reunion. Back on the streets, Antoine is caught stealing a typewriter from the company itself. He is reported by his stepfather to the police commissioner and is detained. The stepfather reveals that they tried affection, persuasion, and punishment, but nothing worked. The commissioner believes that the way to correct him is to send him to the Observation Center, but for that, the parents must transfer their "parental rights." The stepfather agrees. In his haste to relieve himself of a burden, he alienates his stepson to another as if disposing of something that never truly belonged to him, not even emotionally. Antoine's family invisibility is now "official." Antoine is transferred and cries for the first time inside the police car, under the nighttime lights of Paris. At the Center, with other young people, he is not visited by the stepfather and rejects his mother's visit. Before this rejection, the mother still has time to say that "the stepfather is no longer interested in you." When subjected to the psychologist at the Center, Antoine tells his story, and Truffaut aims his camera at him, never showing to whom he is speaking. Truffaut seems to notify the viewer that it doesn't matter to whom Antoine is speaking: for the first time, he has a voice, that's the focus! Free, authorial, authentic, and confident in his words, Antoine reveals that he was raised between daycare and his grandmother's house, that his mother had him as a single parent and was unable to raise him. He says that his mother believed he should not have been born, that she admitted to wanting an abortion.

On a gray day, like the entire film, Antoine is playing football with the other residents. When taking a throw-in, the ball quickly goes out again, landing at the back of the field. Antoine returns the ball to his teammates but notices a gap under the fence separating him from freedom. He doesn't hesitate. He sneaks and crawls under the wire fence and escapes. The supervisor of the residents (representing the coercive apparatus of adults) starts blowing his whistle and runs to capture Antoine. Meanwhile, Truffaut's camera begins its conclusion. It silently follows, with many other silences, Antoine's uninterrupted run. Antoine runs, the background scenery changes, and nothing else is accompanied by the camera except Antoine's run. It seems like long minutes with

Antoine running toward his freedom without being interrupted. Antoine reaches a beach, always alone, never being caught. Finally, with his feet wet from the moving waves, Truffaut's camera widens its shot and distances itself from Antoine. Now, it reveals an Antoine alone, but the true revelation is different: Antoine is now.

Childhood and Pedagogy in Truffaut

My films are a critique of the French fashion of educating children. (Truffaut, 1970)

In addition to numerous national and international nominations and awards, Truffaut's filmography reveals a recognised engagement with childhood and pedagogy (Gispert, 2016; King, 2017). Truffaut's involvement with childhood is evident in works beyond "The 400 Blows," such as "The Wild Child" and "Small Change." In all of them, Truffaut displays discomfort with the school system. He acknowledges the influence of other directors like Jean Vigo and Roberto Rossellini (Gispert, 2016). A New York critic would write: "His attitude towards lower-ranking French educators is nothing short of admiration compared to what he thinks of the French police" (King, 2017).

Returning to "The 400 Blows," Truffaut portrays the classroom as a sad reality of authoritarian, stifling, and mortifying pedagogy (Freire, 2019). The student's silence signals invisibility: it is not possible to co-create anything, there is no space to be. The student should not think, should not exist, only repeat - just as the teacher does with the poems recited in unison. The lessons revolve around the word spoken by the teacher-system and the cultivation of memory, mechanically. Intelligent and sarcastic, Truffaut ironically uses a passage from La Fontaine's fable to make his criticism clear. Antoine constructs a small altar to pay homage to Honoré de Balzac, manifesting his agency, his desire to inscribe himself as a subject, but he is overcome by the repetition of "The Hare." Voiceless, the student equates the feeling towards school and prison, and when Antoine transitions from one to the other, their institutional differences may exist, but their final statuses are equivalent.

In the Observation Center in France or the example of the Disciplinary Institute in Brazil, the way to deal with the behavioral imperfections of children and adolescents under an adult-centric rule is the next step to restrain the inconvenience of the "misunderstood." If in the film Antoine plays football and seeks other solutions, forced labor becomes the orthopedics to correct the moral deviations of young people, as seen in Brazil (Priore, 2016).

The expectation underlying Truffaut's presentation is that there would be a possibility of a democracy engendered with student participation, that democratic values could be promoted, as had happened recently in pedagogy in the United States with John Dewey's progressive education (Gispert, 2017) or experimented with even more open models, such as Alexander Neill's in England (Carbonell, 2016).

"The 400 Blows" is an obvious denunciation of the invisibility of childhood.

The Invisibility of Childhood

What can be observed in Truffaut's works is the indifference that the adult world displays towards children. Along with the desire to escape both aesthetic and thematic conventions, Truffaut contributes to challenging the desubjectivised view of childhood, seen merely as a stage of innocence and purity (Gispert, 2016). Furthermore, it is an incomplete stage, characterised by silence and social invisibility.

Regarding Antoine, Truffaut his lends us impression:

> "Antoine Doinel is the opposite of an abused child. He is not treated. He is not treated at all. His mother never calls him by his name - 'my son, can you clear the table?' And when he is clearing the table, his father talks about him as if he is not there - 'what are we going to do with the boy during the holidays?" (Starling, 2011, p. 42)

The story of the film confirms this idea. In the small apartment where Antoine and his parents live, there are no props that reveal his presence. Rally flags are seen on the walls, reflecting the stepfather's interests. Antoine's invisibility alternates between school authoritarianism and the neglect and disinterest of his parents: Antoine disappears there, crushed between them. Truffaut makes use of these alternating indifferences. Antoine and many other young people in various parts of the world go unnoticed. If we refer back to the passages described by Ariès, we have historical testimony of this silence. It was with Ellen Key, in 1900, with "The Century of the Child," that childhood gained some space. Beyond the privatising view of the family and the developmental view of psychology, there is now an expectation for a genuine social place for childhood. The "psychological child has indeed been decontextualised and decontextualised in order to be defined in individual terms" (Qvoutrup, 2014, p. 29). This is the gap filled by SI. Adult-centric expectations reduce children to potential humans and corroborate the "idea that they are not authentic contemporaries of adults" (Qvoutrup, 2014, p. 32). The constant view that children are the future deprives them of any possibility of being today, of activating their roles, and effectively connecting with their time. Deprived of arenas where they can be agents of social participation, they live with general indifference, a cruel way to silence and ignore them. Without the realization of rights, without a voice,

without social recognition as a category, children suffer in all environments, including those that should provide protection - such as the family and school. In this context, school and family can become risk factors, as observed and asserted, especially in times of pandemic and confinement (Platt, Guedert & Coelho, 2020). There is a dialectical need to consider the familiarization of children and their schooling as unequivocal events of socialization, citizenship, and protection, in addition to ensuring reduced vulnerability and increased social participation. Fictional examples like Antoine Doinel resonate in many homes and educational and corrective institutions.

CONCLUSION

Through his lightweight cameras reintroduction of the Nouvelle Vague to confront the industrialised cinema pointed out by Benjamin and Adorno), Truffaut gives life to Antoine, accompanies his actions side by side, and restores his protagonism, his social agency. This is the serious and objective line drawn by SI: to respond to the question of silence and invisibility of childhood, with all the inherent plurality it possesses. Through their congruences, the cinema revealed here and the SI engage in resistance against the adult-centric colonialist paradigm. There are no power relations without resistance (Santiago & Faria, 2015). Although fictional, it is important to consider that "The 400 Blows" bears autobiographical traces of Truffaut: he uses his script to retell his childhood experience. As a result, one can consider that without spaces to be child-subjects, would "delinquency" be an unavoidable alternative to escape invisibility? Would it be a cry from the excluded? Would it be a way to have their voices heard and considered? Could schools, families, and corrective institutions simply be obedient devices of social reproduction? Don't they function as shackles against emancipation within a known narrative administered by an adult world, which in turn is also a victim of historically constructed power relations? There is also a complaint that, although seemingly distant from Truffaut's Parisian time and context, is constantly updated: the issue of necessary pedagogical plurality. There is still a treacherous territory to traverse regarding the type of school that childhood and adolescence require. Are they truly consulted about it? According to the SI, the participation of these actors in its construction and implementation is necessary. There is an extensive bibliography on a school centered around the teacher, the administrator, and the state, in other words, another action organised around adults, another adult-centric assertion. A pedagogy should be organised in its decisions and parameters with the co-participation of childhood, confident that there are individuals within each of them.

That is precisely the core around which this article is organised, in order to provide support for more democratic management in the school space, lest post-school democratic moments go through such insecure and shaken times. The democratic institution (why not the school?) values having subjects with guaranteed agency, guaranteed voices, and assured rights, and they should be primary participants in the process in which they should be at the center. After all, the graduate is the student, not the adult. There is a readymade and commonplace discourse about the "student's protagonism." Does it truly exist on the school ground? There was no room here for discussions of documents, laws, and regulatory frameworks that already ensure these participations in the school context, including, for example, the definition of their evaluative processes. However, other authors have already engaged in this discussion in depth, a discussion that should be at least mentioned as further support for the criticism of the model that is currently

assumed to be dominant: the adult-centric school model.

We already know "who" the misunderstood ones are: children whose childhoods have been denied as a generational category, whose protagonism has been canceled. The question now is to identify "how many" they are and "how many more" will suffer from this theft of self, a product of the non-recognition of childhood in this new perspective, and to react. As a degree of freedom and a glimmer of hope, Antoine's final scene can be interpreted as him running, fleeing, alone, crossing many landscapes until he liberates himself on the beach. The beach is another place, a heterotopia, neither dystopian nor utopian, but another place. A place where protagonism is possible, a place where the subject and the child are inseparable.

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