# Photography as an Emancipatory Tool

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The question of equality is inscribed in all knowledge transfers and one of the key ambitions of modern education has been to come up with strategies to tackle both obvious and latent inequalities. The great sociological debate of the second half of the 20th century was partly based on exploring how, why and to what extent inequalities are being reproduced inside the educational system. In his most influential book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (*La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*, 1979), French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu argued:

> "It must never be forgotten that the working-class 'aesthetic' is a dominated 'aesthetic' which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics. The members of the working class, who can neither ignore the high-art aesthetic, which denounces their own 'aesthetic', nor abandon their socially conditioned inclinations, but still less proclaim them and legitimate them, often experience their relationship to the aesthetic norms in a twofold and contradictory way. This is seen when some manual workers grant 'pure' photographs a purely verbal recognition (this is also the case with many petit bourgeois and even some bourgeois who, as regards paintings, for example, differ from the working class mainly by what they know is the right thing to say or do or, still better, not to say): 'It's beautiful, but it would never occur to me to take a picture of a thing like that', 'Yes, it's beautiful, but you have to like it, it's not my cup of tea.'"[1]

On top of this, in Bourdieu's view, inequality in understanding and appreciating art is inscribed not only in our class, but also in how we get treated in the educational system because it constantly mirrors and reproduces class differences. This means that we can only surpass the class we were born into materially, but our tastes and views stay inherently tied to it. Here we will try to explore how reproduction of class differences can be subverted in institutional and non-institutional knowledge transfers and how photography can be used to enable the spectator to explore emancipatory positions of looking and avoid adhering to the aesthetics that keep the social status quo. The aim is surpassing the notion of the dominant aesthetic in general, as well as dominant social narratives, by circumventing the distinctions Bourdieu describes. Instead, we will try to

1 Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 41.

offer possible emancipatory practices in appreciating and understanding photography as an art form that can be used in nurturing positions of equality no matter what the social background of the spectator is.

## THE PEDAGOGICAL MYTH

In his 1986 book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (*Le Maître ignorant:Cinq leçons sur l'emanicipation intellectuelle*), French philosopher Jacques Rancière offered an implicit critique of Bourdieu's ideas by focusing on the real-life story of Joseph Jacotot, a 18th century Frenchman who was driven into exile during the Restoration. This experience led him to develop a method for teaching illiterate parents how to teach their children to read without having the skill themselves. Jacotot became a sensation for a brief period because he was teaching people things he could not do himself, like horseback riding, painting, or playing an instrument. Rancière uses his story to critique Bourdieu's views and enter the debate on education that was very much in focus in France in the 1980s. His position is that we are not preordained by our class for life, meaning that a working-class child can become an excellent classical pianist or a painter as well as a person who deeply understands and appreciates art in a way that a child from the upper classes does. For Bourdieu this is possible, but represents an exception to the rule,[2] while Rancière wants us to open to true possibilities of what equality can give us if we acknowledge it and use it without prejudice as Joseph Jacotot did:

> "For if you think about it a little, the 'method' he was proposing is the oldest in the world, and it never stops being verified every day, in all the circumstances where an individual must learn something without any means of having it explained to him. There is no one on earth who hasn't learned something by himself and without a master explicator. Let's call this way of learning 'universal teaching' and say of it: 'In reality, universal teaching has existed since the beginning of the world, alongside all the explicative methods. This teaching, by oneself, has, in reality, been what has formed all great men.' But this is the strange part: 'Everyone has done this experiment a thousand times in his life, and yet it has never occurred to someone to say to someone else: I've learned many things without explanations, I think that you can too… Neither I nor anyone in the world has ventured to draw on this fact to teach others.' To the intelligence sleeping in each of us, it would suffice to say: age quod agis, continue to do what you are doing, 'learn the fact, imitate it, know yourself, this is how nature works.' Methodically repeat the method of chance that gave you the measure of your power. The same intelligence is at work in all the acts of the human mind."[3]

2 Bourdieu himself was from lower class, his father was a postal worker.

3 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 16.



In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* Rancière tries to avoid the trap of beginning and ending his argument with inequality by using equality as a starting point instead, and he wants to advocate the equality of intelligence present in all acts of the human mind. The teaching method of Joseph Jacotot was based on the idea that all men have equal intelligence, no matter their social and economic standing or, as Rancière writes: "This was not a method for instructing the people: it was a benefit to be announced to the poor: they could do everything any man could. It sufficed only to *announce* it. Jacotot decided to devote himself to this. He proclaimed that one could teach what one didn't know, and that a poor and ignorant father could, if he was emancipated, conduct the education of his children, without the aid of any master explicator. And he indicated the way of that 'universal teaching'—*to learn something and to relate to it all rest by this principle: all men have equal intelligence*."[4]

## INTELLECTUAL EMANCIPATION VIA PHOTOGRAPHY

Rancière posits emancipation as a prerequisite of this practice, and here I will try to suggest possible tools for using photography as a means for bypassing the pedagogical myth that divides the world into two and intelligence itself into two by saying that "there is an inferior intelligence and a superior one".[5] The other possibility at hand is that of surpassing the division that states there should be those who explain and those who need explanations. We can teach ourselves anything if we perceive ourselves as emancipated and this entails giving our will and our imagination free rein.

If a teacher is not explaining, what is his or her role in the pedagogical process? Rancière explains that there are two wills and two intelligences in the act of teaching and learning and calls their coincidence *stultification* as opposed to *emancipation,* which he defines as "the act of an intelligence obeying only itself even while the will obeys another will".[6] He goes on to explain it in detail as follows:

> "This pedagogical experiment created a rupture with the logic of all pedagogies. The pedagogues' practice is based on the opposition between science and ignorance. The methods chosen to render the ignorant person learned may differ: strict or gentle methods, traditional or modern, active or passive; the efficiency of these methods can be compared. From this point of view, we could, at first glance, compare the speed of Jacotot's students with the slowness of traditional methods. But in reality there was nothing to compare. The confrontation of methods presupposes a minimal agreement on the goals of the pedagogical act: the transmission of the master's

4 Ibid., 18.

5 Ibid., 7.

6 Ibid., 13.

knowledge to the students. But Jacotot had transmitted nothing. He had not used any method. The method was purely the student's."[7]

Intellectual emancipation is thus seen as a process of exploring one's own intelligence, and here I will suggest how photography can facilitate the process of coming to terms with one's capacity of understanding the world without being taught by someone else how to do it. The observer of the photograph who is experiencing an act of emancipation will be referred to as an emancipated spectator as a nod to another book by Rancière. In 2004 he was invited to open the fifth International Sommer Akademie of Frankfurt-on-Main by introducing reflections on the spectator based on ideas developed in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*[8] and the result was the influential essay *The Emancipated Spectator*, published in 2009 in a book of the same title. In the essay he states that emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting, thus expanding on a position he established in his 1987 book by seeing the spectator as "separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act".[9] In *The Emancipated Spectator* Rancière's previous concern with the equality of intelligence becomes a call for equality amongst onlookers. He thus advocates the democracy of looking, which is defined by creating a unique number of specific versions of engagement with a particular image. Possible strategies for developing these unique models of engagement will be explored in the second half of this text. Photography as an art defined by its dependence on representation of the real world represents a good ground for exploring how the onlooker can be turned into an emancipated spectator, one who no longer passively observes and intakes the information, but also actively participates in the production of meaning on his or her own terms. As Rancière explains it, referring primarily here to the spectator in performance arts, "This is a crucial point: spectators see, feel and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem, as, in their way, do actors or playwrights, directors, dancers or performers."[10] Here we will explore how photography as a medium can empower students who take part in any kind of educational process to create and think on their own terms, thus attesting the prevalence of their own intelligence and creativity. The key element is to allow them to take their own subjectivity as a valid starting point in appreciating art and to give permission to their own intelligence to interpret it while taking into consideration various specific elements of pictorial representation.

7 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 14.
8 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 1.
9 Ibid., 8
10 Ibid., 13.



## PHOTOGRAPHY AS A WOUND

In his famous book on photography, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (*La chambre claire*: *Note sur la photographie*, 1980), Roland Barthes writes the following: "As Spectator I was only interested in Photography only for 'sentimental' reasons; I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe and I think."[11] Barthes proposes that we read photographic images in connection to two distinct themes that he believes can be found in any photograph. The first one he defines as the one of information, the part we take in because we belong to a certain culture and recognize certain common narratives in the photograph. Barthes names this layer 'studium,' using a Latin word which means "application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity."[12] It is the studium we see when we recognize a certain historical event or a person in the photograph, we participate in it culturally, by recognizing and affirming we belong to a certain social narrative. Thus, we can say that studium teaches us what things looked like. This is why Barthes rightly notices that studium is a kind of education that allows us to read the Photographer's myths and thus society's myths in the photograph,[13] which leads him to the conclusion that photography is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of Tableau Vivant.[14] This connects Barthes' and Rancière's thoughts on the spectator because they both seek out ways to transform him or her from a passive onlooker and consumer of the studium, i.e., the existing social order, myths and narratives, into an active spectator not obeying the existing politics inside the image. It is this active onlooker that we call here an emancipated spectator, an onlooker that can produce new positions, values, and perspectives. By looking at images primarily in terms of his or her own subjectivity, which is also able to transform into creativity, the emancipated spectator explores the possibility of finding new imaginary places, layers, thoughts, and ideas inside any given image at hand.

This brings us to Barthes's second theme in photography, which he calls 'punctum,' explaining that it is the element in the photograph that disturbs the studium, it is "that accident which pricks me."[15] In other words, punctum is an instance that mobilizes our subjectivity, an element in the photograph that speaks to our own private history, especially to our wounds, as Barthes calls them. Here we will suggest how detecting and describing the punctum can help empower students to become actively engaged in the production of new meanings and new possibilities of looking at images.

11 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 21.
12 Ibid., 26.
13 Ibid., 28.
14 Ibid., 32
15 Ibid., 27.

Defining what moves me in a photograph helps to set in motion a whole new production of ontological and phenomenological understanding of what a particular image could represent. As Barthes writes: "What characterizes the so-called advanced societies is that they today consume images and no longer, like those of the past, beliefs; they are therefore more liberal, less fanatical, but also more 'false' (less 'authentic'), something we translate, in ordinary consciousness, by the avowal of an impression of nauseated boredom, as if the universalized image were producing a world that is without difference (indifferent), from which can rise, here and there, only the cry of anarchisms, marginalisms, and individualisms: let us abolish the images, let us save immediate Desire (desire without mediation)."[16]

Desire is always inside the image and there are different ways of seeking it out, in voicing it and in making it the very point of our encounter with a certain photograph. And desire is the most subversive, the most enticing when it seems to be hidden, when it is not performed but invoked. The mediation Barthes mentions is the same as the stultification that Rancière opposes to emancipation because the effect produced by a work of art is being filtered and packaged for us within the situation in which the work, no matter whether it is a photograph or a painting or an image from a film, has to be explained and thus mediated to us, and, as Barthes writes: "The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality."[17]

## MEANINGLESS SCENES

How can this be explored in a particular instance of using photography in an educational context? We will use one specific photographic series as a starting point for practicing emancipated looking in classrooms. In his ongoing series *Meaningless Scenes* (*Prizori bez značaja*, 1981.-) Croatian photographer Boris Cvjetanović focuses on seemingly unimportant, unspectacular details from everyday life. There seems to be no studium in these photographs in a sense that we cannot talk about the social importance of the motif that was documented in the photo and we have to use our creativity to come up with an answer as to why it is of importance for the photographer. This series calls to mind the comment that Bourdieu mentions, attributing this comment to working-class spectators who approach certain photographs: "It's beautiful, but it would never occur to me to take a picture of a thing like that".[18] The very title of the series wants to abolish the idea of producing meaning from the act of taking a photograph (Cvjetanović also calls this series *Photographed*). The negation of studium leaves the spectator only with the punctum, which can be described as finding an answer to a question of what the photograph and the photographed *means* to me. As Barthes puts it, photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.[19] Cvjetanović's series is a good starting point for exploring the possibility of using photographs in classrooms to nurture emancipatory looking, the kind that is based on active interpretation and creation.

Let us look at two specific examples from the series. In one of the photographs, called *Nerežišće 1991* (the name of a village in the hinterland of the Croatian island of Brač), we see an inflated kid toy boat on the floor under the open window. It is a deeply intimate scene that really seems to represent nothing of common interest; the photograph just embodies a pure act of pointing at something seemingly insignificant as if saying: "Look at this boat." Rather than noticing that there is an inflated boat in the room, the photograph proposes that we reflect on it by capturing it as a usual detail in the room. It is a sort of invitation to think about things we take for granted, things we see all the time, but never reflect on. And maybe a more accurate word, rather than think, would be to daydream. As French philosopher Gaston Bachelard writes in his book *Poetics of Reverie* (*La Poetique de la Reverie*, 1960) there are two types of reverie or daydreaming, the one that is passive and the one that is active and that he calls poetic reverie.[20] The poetic reverie is the one that calls for action: "All the senses awaken and fall into harmony in poetic reverie. Poetic reverie listens to this polyphony of the senses, and the poetic consciousness must record it."[21] If we apply this idea to Cvjetanović's work we can say that his Meaningless Scenes induce in the spectator the active states of reverie that can result in production of his or her own words and images. Specifically, if his photographs from this series be used in a situation of knowledge transactions, students can be asked to produce their own texts, poems or any other kind of prose inspired by his work and to react to it by producing their own photographs or finding images that remind them of the image in question.

Another example we will use is a photograph also entitled *Nerežišće 1991,* which shows a big crystal bowl on a traditional white tablecloth. The bowl is a very decorative object, the kind that is used for sweets or something alike, but Cvjetanović photographs it while it is empty, while it just stands there like an empty object, thus inviting us to reflect on the very purposelessness of this spectacular decorative object. It is a kind of thing that does not serve any use, it is just there, or, as Bachelard would put it: "There is no doubt that consciousness is destined for greater exploits. It manifests itself more strongly as it turns to ever more highly coordinated works. In particular, the 'consciousness of rationality' has a quality of permanence which poses a difficult problem for the phenomenologist: he is obliged to

16 Ibid., 118-119.
17 Ibid., 119.
18 Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 41.
19 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 38.
20 Bachelard, *Poetics of Rêverie*, 6.
21 Ibid., 6.

explain how various moments of consciousness are connected in a chain of truths. But, at least at first glance, the imagining consciousness, in opening out on an isolated image, has more limited responsibilities. The imagining consciousness, then, when it is considered in relation to separate or isolated images, might contribute themes to an elementary pedagogical system for phenomenological doctrines."[22]

Here is a list of possible exercises that can be used with any of Cvjetanović's photographs from the series *Meaningless Scenes* to encourage active participation of the spectator and to practice emancipated looking as a part of a pedagogical system based on phenomenological doctrines:

1 Looking at the photograph for a long time and describing and writing down the range of free associations that come to mind and then arranging them in a kind of surrealist poem.

2 Imagining that the photograph is a part of a film and then writing down the story of this film and describing its atmosphere, characters and so on.

3 Describing the imaginary space outside the frame of the photograph and thinking about different sensory aspects of this space like smells, sounds, lighting.

4 Identifying the punctum and relating this punctum to other images that produce a similar kind of 'wound' or feeling for the spectator.

5 Thinking of possible names for the photograph and explaining why and how this name corresponds to what is presented in the photograph.

6 Imagining a photograph that could form a diptych with the existing one and describing both the existing and the imaginary photograph as a part of one whole.

## FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHY: STORY AND HISTORY

The concept of the emancipated spectator can also be enacted in looking at photographs taken from films because they also present images that can be used in classrooms in a way that aims to be devoid of both socially and culturally prescribed positions of looking and understanding. They are particularly interesting for acknowledging and exploring the presence of other images inside them, be these images of paintings, photographs, or references to scenes and images from other films. Specifically, Barthes' studium, when applied to photographs from films, becomes a reference to an imaginary history, a history that consists of the works of art and fictional worlds they have created. To understand the studium of a photograph from a film we must enter its diegetic world, as well as the diegetic worlds created by other films. This fact was probably most famously explored by the French director Jean-Luc Godard in his *Histoire(s) du cinema*, an 8-part video project begun in 1988 and completed in 1998 in which he reflects both on the history of the 20th century and on the history of film and the relation between the two. The form of this video is that of an assemblage of images from various films, paintings and photographs by which he explores different kinds of emancipation from the stories they were meant to tell. In his book *Film Fables* (*Film fables*, 1998) Jacques Rancière writes: "The style of montage Godard developed for *Histoire(s) du cinema* is designed to show the history announced by the century of films, but whose power slipped through the fingers of their filmmakers, who subjected life of images to the immanent death of the text. Godard takes the films these filmmakers made and makes with them film they didn't make. This calls for a two-step process: the first recaptures the images from their subjection to the stories they were used to tell, and the second rearranges them into other stories."[23]

The same two-step process that Godard uses in his project and Rancière describes could be used in classrooms when working with film images to achieve emancipatory ways of thinking about the stories and narratives we are being served through the photographs that surround us. Deconstructing these narratives is an important first step in developing emancipatory positions when approaching photography. It should be made possible for students to not only detect the studium of a certain photograph, but also to understand how it is constructed. This process can help tackle the latent inequality that is inscribed in both the relation of teachers and students and in how students from different social and economic backgrounds get treated by the educational system. The act of deconstruction is best explored by comparing how studium is created in a photograph that is presented as a document (say of an important social ritual, such as a wedding or a funeral) and in a photograph that comes from a fictional reality that simulates these rituals.

The process used in the classroom could be that of taking a set of photographs of historical events or some other events that are socially or culturally significant and then using this two-step activity:

1 Identifying and describing the studium by answering the question of what story is being told by the photograph, what values are being perpetuated and what ideas are put to the fore.

2 Finding photographs that offer a different version of the story, which can serve as a kind of counterargument to the values, ideas and stories enacted in the first photograph.

22 Ibid., 2.

23 Rancière, *Film Fables*, 171.

To make this process more tangible, the stories constructed by the studium can also be described as society's mythologies, as Roland Barthes did in his famous book of the same name, originally published in 1957, in which he explores the tendency of social value systems to create what he called modern myths. In the essays collected in the book he explores a selection of cultural phenomena that he claims have added meaning that has been culturally conferred upon them. For example, he writes about electoral photography as the acknowledgment of something deep and irrationally co-extensive within politics:

> "What is transmitted through the photograph of the candidate are not his plans, but his deep motives, all his family, mental, even erotic circumstances, all this style of life of which he is at once the product, the example and the bait. It is obvious that what most of our candidates offer us through their likeness is a type of social setting, the spectacular comfort of family, legal and religious norms, the suggestion of innately owning such items of bourgeois property as Sunday Mass, xenophobia, steak and chips, cuckold jokes, in short, what we call an ideology. Needless to say, the use of electoral photography presupposes a kind of complicity: a photograph is a mirror, what we are asked to read is the familiar, the known; it offers to the voter his own likeness, but clarified, exalted, superbly elevated into a type."[24]

This kind of reading of photographs could be used as a model in classrooms in order to deconstruct myths and narratives and contest them by creating emancipatory gestures, which we explore next.

## EMANCIPATORY GESTURES

Film images, photographs and paintings are all part of the republic of images, part of a greater scheme, and in genre films the story is told in a way that plays with our emotions and our senses. Thus, the first step in using, say an image from the famous Hitchcock film *Birds* (1963), would be to name which affects are being manipulated by it, which ideas and stories are perpetuated by it. The second step would be the emancipation of the image from the given narratives, stories and histories by the act of giving it a new story, one that does not necessarily comply with the official values of society and its film industry. This is what Rancière, talking of Godard's method, describes as using images from the films that have been made and turning them into films that haven't been made and telling stories that haven't been told. What is there in an image that is present but cannot be seen is a good question to start with when we want to initiate an emancipatory looking that can bring students closer to the hidden truth of their own ability to harness, recreate and rethink the images that surround them.

24 Barthes, *Mythologies*, 91.



Godard himself uses an example from George Stevens's film *A Place in the Sun* (1951) with Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift to tackle the fact that Nazi concentration camps were not documented enough by film cameras. Director George Stevens was one of the cameramen sent by the American troops to shoot the camps after the end of the Second World War and Godard finds the connection between his photographs of the camps and that which we did not get to see in the images from his films, especially this one, that serve as a kind of resurrection of images from the camps. As Godard himself explained in the voice over of his *Histoire(s) du cinema*: "If George Stevens had not used the first sixteen-millimetre colour film at Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, undoubtably Elizabeth Taylor's happiness would never have found a place in the sun."[25] The stories that have to be told outside the already given social narratives are the key prerequisite of any emancipation and of the freedom to live and be the subject of social change and new possibilities of understanding our place in the community we are a part of. The goal is not to stay subjected to the ideas of what certain class and culture entail since we want to affirm that we were all born equal and have equal intelligence as well as authentic creative potential for transforming the reality around us.

The theme of the gesture is very easily recognized and seems to be crucial for the topic of emancipation and can be used when working with the images already mentioned, no matter whether they come from photography or film. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in the text "Notes on Gesture" from his book *Means Without End: Notes on Politics,* writes the following: "In the cinema, a society that has lost its gestures tries at once to reclaim what it has lost and to record its loss. An age that has lost its gestures is, for this reason, obsessed by them. For human beings who have lost every sense of naturalness, each single gesture becomes a destiny. And the more gestures lose their ease under the action of invisible powers, the more life becomes indecipherable. In this phase the bourgeoisie, which just a few decades earlier was still firmly in possession of its symbols, succumbs to interiority and gives itself up to psychology."[26] The question of how the gestures captured in images themselves can be emancipated is one that haunts both Agamben and Rancière, who recognizes Godard's way of transforming the images from films such as *Nosferatu*, *Faust*, *Metropolis* or *The Son of Frankenstein* into a kind of encyclopedia of essential gestures and archetypal poses of humankind.[27] What is crucial here is the fact that Godard tries to transform these gestures into ones that emulate the banal and the everyday, thus presenting a kind of turn in the paradigm of cinema. He wants to take history out of the gestures and leave only the story, or the punctum, the individual, subjective gesture of a particular person who does not necessarily correspond to all of humankind.

25 Rancière, *Film Fables,* 183.
26 Agamben, *Means Without End,* 53.
27 Rancière, *Film Fables,* 175.

In the history of painting this can be compared to the turn that some art historians detect in Rembrandt's work who has, in their opinion, made ordinary people and their lives the subject of his art. In the voice over Godard paraphrases the text from Élie Faure's book *History of Art* (*Histoire de l'Art*, 1919-21) in which he praises Rembrandt's method of capturing those elementary gestures of life or, as Rancière explains, "Godard relies on this history and the poetics of history to transform Hitchcock's affect bearing images into icons of pure presence or to use Élie Faure's text on Rembrandt to transform shots from *Fântomas* or *Son of Frankenstein* into images of the elementary gestures of human life."[28]

The same exercise could also be used with promotional photographs as John Berger famously did in his BBC television series *Ways of Seeing* (1972), which was later turned into a book of the same name. For example, he analyzes and compares the expressions on the faces of two women, one the model for the famous painting by Ingres and the other a model for a photograph in a girlie magazine: "Is not the expression remarkably similar in each case? It is an expression of a woman responding with a calculated charm to the man she imagines looking at her—although she does not know him. She is offering up her femininity as the surveyed." Through this analysis an awareness is raised about whose stories are being told and who is left mute in history as such and in the history of art specifically. Analyzing different poses people take when photographed, as well as how the gaze is constructed by the very act of posing, is also an important factor in developing emancipatory looking.

Acknowledging the fact that images communicate through gestures is of vital importance because, as Gorgio Agamben rightly notices in his *Notes on a Gesture*: "Even the Mona Lisa, even Las Meninas could be seen not as immovable and eternal forms, but as fragments of a gesture or as stills of a lost film wherein only they would regain their true meaning. And that is so because a certain kind of *litigatio*, a paralyzing power whose spell we need to break, is continuously at work in every image; it is as if a silent invocation calling for the liberation of the image into gesture arose from the entire history of art."[29]

The method of mentally liberating gestures in images can be used in a three-step process and can be practiced with both photography and painting and be used by comparing the two:

1 Identifying, describing, and naming the gesture present in a certain photograph or painting.

2 Finding other photographs or paintings that use the same kind of gesture.

3 Creating a kind of emancipatory gesture that could be used as a counterpoint to the existing one. The definition of this new emancipatory gesture is that it is active, it sets things in motion by not keeping the status quo.

## PHOTOGRAPHY AS A TOOL OF EQUALITY

To conclude, we can say that photography can be used in institutional and non-institutional transfers of knowledge as an emancipatory tool in working both with studium (official History) and punctum (individual Story), the first presenting the social and the second the private domain. In transfers of knowledge, as suggested here, the key moment is letting spectators identify the layers of the photograph themselves and then react to these layers through a set of emancipatory actions that affirm the equality of their own intelligence to that which is being communicated in the photograph. By looking at photographs in a way that starts with the presumption that we can express our opinions, ideas and thoughts and thus affirm that we are part of a universal chain of human ideas is a way to a deep confirmation of our equality. If educators conform to this rule, they will do the same thing the ignorant schoolmaster Joseph Jacotot once did: "Show how, by translating themselves to each other, they were translating a thousand other poems, a thousand other adventures of the humankind of classical works from the story of Bluebeard to the retorts of the proletarians on the Place Maubert. The search for art was not a learned person's pleasure. It was a philosophy, the only one the people could practice."[30] Thus photography and visual arts in general, when used as emancipatory tools in classrooms, represent the key element in overturning not only the pedagogical myth of supreme masters and their ignorant students, but also the deconstruction of the dangerous myth that we are born to be prisoners of our class, culture and taste. An emancipatory gesture of actively expressing our feelings, thoughts, and ideas outside the boxes we were previously given is a good starting point for gestures of true emancipation, those that lead to a lived experience of equality and empathy. Images speak and gestures speak and if we give ourselves permission to voice them and perform them, we become part of the chain of ideas that runs through the history of humankind reborn in our right to practice emancipatory looking by constantly insisting that we have both the right and the intelligence to find our own ways of seeing.

28 Ibid., 178.

29 Agamben, *Means Without End*, 55-56.

30 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 136-137.

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