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What Counts as Philosophy of Education?

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When Hélène Cixous, critic and philosopher, was asked to deliver an Oxford Amnesty Lecture in 1992, she thought immediately of the millions deprived of liberty over the world; of the tortured ones, and of the forgotten men and women for whom Amnesty International was organized. Like many philosophers in the West, she was aware of the loss of legitimation of what used to be taken for granted about human subjects: freedom, social justice, and equality; and she found herself in tension with regard to a desire for the old standards and an acknowledgment of postmodern scepticism and questioning. She accepted the invitation and then recalled the questions being posed today about traditional norms and principles.

Is there such a thing as an inalienable self? Is the Western conception of the person "as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness . . ." defensible in this time of multiple perspectives and multiple realities? (Geertz, 1983). If the self, as defined by an eighteenth century ideology of rights, does not exist, whose freedom are we trying so hard to protect? In any case, are "self" and "freedom" what they used to be?

And I asked myself who these questions were meant for. For a "philosopher"? If they were meant for me, for "myself," what have I to say about freedom and the self?

I wondered whether I should not point out that *all* the components of the philosophy of the self in the West have, on the one hand, had a liberating effect, since the values of freedom of expression, of opinion, and so on, have been associated with them; but point out too that this philosophy was undermined by aspects unforeseen and at the time unforeseeable, repressive aspects having to do with phallogocentric and colonial patterns of speech. And so, if I were to work towards this philosophy, might it not be necessary to do two things at once: to emphasize both the permanent value of the philosophy of rights and, simultaneously, the inadequacy, the limits of the breakthrough it represented; to construct and deconstruct, to praise and criticize, at one and the same time. [(Cixous 1993, pp. 201–2)]

The definitions of human rights have often assumed the existence of an autonomous, somehow disembodied self who *possesses* rights. The very notion of possession implies a type of power and, at once, a repression of any kind of dependency. The self, in such definitions, seemed to be identified against or in exclusion of an *other*, either feminine or in some sense subordinate. Not everyone agrees that the repressive aspects of Western philosophy derive primarily from phallogocentrism and colonialism. There is little question, however, that power has effects on the ways in which discourse practices are organized. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, much of what we are able to say at any given moment is controlled by rules and conventions embedded in our social institutions, along with what he called a "régime of truth" (Foucault 1980, pp. 131–3). These rules and conventions also control discussions of the "philosophy of rights"—for so long embodying exclusions few people dared name—so it may well be with talk of growth, inquiry, development, and habits of mind in the discourse of education and the schools.

Educational philosophers also are drawn to assertions of the "permanent value" of Western philosophy when it comes to articulation of their beliefs, even at a time when multiculturalism has become the focus of so much attention. At once, many are impelled to indicate its shortcomings, its blind spots, its insufficiencies. The tension Cixous experienced, the consciousness of being required to "construct and deconstruct," the recollections of the "liberating effect" of so much now called canonical or "Eurocentric": all these relate to the question of "what counts as Philosophy of Education" today. We have, most of us would admit, come a long way from the conception of philosophy as "the mirror of nature" (Rorty 1979), from notions of objectivism, from confidence in authoritative foundations of what we consider knowledge to be. Whatever our philosophical specialty, most of us are very concerned about communication, intersubjectivity, and the role of language in providing social bonds. We work, in some dimension, from Ludwig Wittgenstein's conception of language games and the "forms of life." (1968). We understand that they are governed by different rules; but in their intersections, they seem

to compose a fabric that may replace the encompassing and transcendent matrix that assured *a priori* truths.

This differs considerably from a conception of objectively existing frameworks in which we can somehow ground a normative order of consequence for young people in our schools. Yet it remains difficult to set aside our commitments to theoretically-grasped principles like freedom, justice, and equality. Similarly, for all our familiarity with the problematic of the "Enlightenment Project" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972), we are still drawn to idealistic renderings of reason linked to progress and to humanism. They continue to draw us towards them, either as regulatory norms or unrealized possibilities. In a moment of shattered frameworks and alternations between scepticism and hopelessness, they seem to glow in the dark as reminders of what might be, and of what is still to be achieved.

Cixous, like many writers and artists of our time, chose to argue against unwarranted imprisonments as if they offended what everyone knew were universal principles of justice. Many of us oppose what we think of as "reason" to terror in the case of the *fatma* issued against the novelist Salman Rushdie. A number of educational philosophers are committed to the Deweyan vision of education "as a freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims" (Dewey, 1916, p. 115). The view may not be ascribed a universality; but many will say, along with Dewey, that the meaning of the idea of education has not been adequately grasped if educators do not believe it feasible to instill "as a working disposition of mind" a confidence in a "fuller, freer, and more fruitful association and intercourse of all human beings with one another. . . ." Dewey went on to say that the end of such intercourse might be the overcoming of international jealousy and animosity.

This confidence in the uses of intelligence and the possibility of social harmony is very much in the Enlightenment tradition. It even evokes the so-called "metanarrative"—or the grand narrative—associated with the all-encompassing world view of the Age of Reason, a view of ongoing progress that anticipated all questions and offered a range of predetermined answers (Lyotard 1984). Even as we are moved by it and often motivated by that narrative, we are bound to recall the repressive ends it—along with the discourse of rationality—came to serve. Reason, like science itself, can be dominating and oppressive, especially when it claims under all circumstances to have the "best answer" to social problems. Stephen Toulmin, looking back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has written about calculation being "enthroned as the distinctive virtue of the human reason," while the life of emotions "was repudiated as distracting one from the demands of clear-headed deliberation" (1990, p. 134). Dewey himself once warned against the "monopolistic jurisdiction" of true-and-false meanings with the reminder that "the realm of meaning is wider . . . it is more urgent and more fertile" (1958, p. 410).

More serious than that jurisdiction, of course, was the transformation of rationality in so many places into instrumental rationality; with all its linkages to technology, its neglect of self-reflectiveness, its setting aside of value considerations. We are all familiar with the ways in which instrumental rationality has been used to legitimate not merely bureaucracies and social engineering, but Hiroshima, the Holocaust, the massacres in Vietnam, and even (from a different point of view) Stalin's Gulag. We are aware that science and scientific method cannot be subsumed under the rubric of instrumental rationality; and we are equally aware that reflection on the relations between theoretical science and its applications must be part of what "counts as Philosophy of Education." D. C. Phillips, discussing the diversity of methods and theories in the spheres of the sciences, has written that contemporary Philosophy of Science "does emphasize the importance of research programs progressively opening up new phenomena, the exposing of assumptions; and the giving and receiving of strong criticism." (1981, p. 255). As critiques diversify, even within educational theory and research, it is important to hold this in mind. The contributions made by the sciences to medicine, psychology, the environment, and (on occasion) social policy decisions cannot be set aside. Educational philosophers also need to attend to feminist approaches to the sciences (Keller 1985): "feminist empiricism" and "feminist standpoint epistemologies" (Harding 1986, pp. 136-162). There is also a persistent dissonance between the predictability and organization of the sciences and the multiplicity, heteroglossia, contingency, relationality, and what Mikhail Bakhtin called "carnival" of social life (1981). We may wonder whether languages and methods enriched and expanded by feminist and humanistic ideas may become less tainted as we plead for freedom, human expression, and the growth of compassionate communities.

While wondering, we cannot set aside the texts that compose so much of our tradition and provide so many of our references and allusions, texts by: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Jefferson, John Stuart Mill, George Herbert Mead, William James, John Dewey, Paulo Freire. Can we prevent such texts from being undermined by the "unforeseen" and the "unforeseeable"? How can we expose the inadequacies (and the racism, and the sexism) in so much of the discourse without disposing of the texts—and our own intertextuality—as well? Must they be shredded? Must we start again? Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, "Earth's Holocaust," comes to mind. It tells of a great bonfire built on the American prairie to burn the world's accumulation of "worn-out trumpery." People toss in everything from thrones to uniforms, to guns, to vats of wine. At length, they begin throwing in books and pamphlets: "the weight of dead men's thought which hitherto has pressed so heavily on the living intellect that has been incompetent to any effectual self-exertion" (1969, p. 200). At the end, Hawthorne reminds us that the human heart must first be purified if crime and misery are to disappear; but "if we go no deeper than the intellect and strive, with merely that

feeble instrument, to discern and rectify what is wrong, our whole accomplishment will be a dream" (p. 209).

The story communicates the weight of dead authorities, as it holds intimations of later positivism and reaches forward to the days of multiple language games. It also suggests that "self-exertion" on the part of the "living intellect" is a far more reliable panacea against "trumpery" than a vast fire on the prairie. Hawthorne renders obvious the degree of conceptual mastery that makes people feel entitled to destroy, or exclude, or ignore. At once, he makes clear the notion that formal reason, in disembodied form, cannot cure human ills nor solve existential problems. If free and enriching dialogues are to take place in the spheres of education, among teachers or learners; if serious efforts to deconstruct and to redescribe are to be undertaken; people must reach out from their own lived situations in as many directions as seem feasible. Educational philosophers, in their turn, must identify themselves as situated in the same fashion and actively participant in a community—stretching back in time and forward towards the unexplored. This means engaging with the canonical texts so as to make them our own, enlarging and diversifying the canon even while consulting the texts that have defined us to this point: the analytic and logical texts, the experiential, the linguistic, the phenomenological (Archambault 1965, Green 1971, Hirst 1965, Peters and Hirst 1970, Phillips 1981, Scheffler 1943, Soltis 1981). No list can be more than suggestive. To create "what counts," educational philosophers have to discover their own intertextuality, extend their minds towards the horizons, shape and reshape their traditions. In the shaping, in the interpretation, in the reflection, the questions will multiply. Posing the questions, loving the questions, philosophers may open whatever doors there are.

Elizabeth Bishop, in the poem "January First," wrote about the year's doors opening and about having to invent "once more, the reality of this world." At the end, she says:

When you open your eyes
we'll walk, once more,
among the hours and their inventions.
We'll walk among appearances
and bear witness to time and its conjugations.
Perhaps we'll open the day's doors.
And then we shall enter the unknown. (1983, p. 274)

Taking this seriously, we may have to explore our own *bildung*, our self-formation as persons and as educational philosophers. For many, the authors listed previously evoke speakers and writers who are models—or thinkers against whom we may have chosen to rebel. In absorbing them as models or in refusing their ideas, we define and continue to redefine ourselves. When

many of us began, we were not conscious of the "patriarchal" (what Cixous called "phallogocentric") at the core of what we read. Often, as we now know, the adjective has been used to make us aware of a core, a kind of center in many philosophical pronouncements, sometimes even in the most rigorous analysis. As many feminist critics view it, it is a mode of communication tightly constrained by rules of logic, linearity, and (on occasion) a range of largely technical rules. Valuing distance and autonomy, such thinkers are "more exclusionary," unlikely to pay heed to the interdependence of "they" and "we" (Belenky et al. 1986, p. 4). It is at least likely that this mode of knowing and way of being prepared the ground and origin of what is described as instrumental rationality. This is another open question to be pondered in educational philosophy. We may find it to be of considerable moment that people who think in that manner are prone to assert that the rule-governed, "neutral" cognition of which they are capable can be relied upon for realistic representations of the world. (Judith Butler, seeking a paradigm for this mode of cognition, turns to the Gulf War and the celebration of the "phantasmatic subject, the one who determines its world unilaterally, and which is in some measure typified by the looming heads of retired generals framed against the map of the Middle East, where the speaking head of the subject is shown to be the same size, or larger than the area it seeks to dominate. This is, in a sense, the graphics of the imperialist subject, a visual allegory of the action itself" [1992, p. 10].)

We might think of the interplay in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. (Novels, of course, do not argue. They set forth; they present; they offer metaphors; in some indirect fashion, they illustrate.) At the beginning, Mrs. Ramsay is talking to her little son about going to the lighthouse.

"Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow," said Mrs. Ramsay. "But you'll have to be up with the lark," she added. To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled the expedition were bound to take place. . . . "But," said his father, stopping in front of the drawing-room window "it won't be fine". . . . What he said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth. (1962, pp. 3-4)

Mr. Ramsay, usually thinking with the aid of abstract symbols (sometimes, the letters of the alphabet) is convinced (as is his irate little son) that he represents reality accurately, in contrast to his wife. When Andrew tries to explain to the artist Lily what his father does, he says: "Think of a kitchen table then, . . . when you're not there." So she always saw, when she thought of Mr. Ramsay's work, a scrubbed kitchen table . . . lodged now in the fork of a pear tree . . ." (p. 26). In truth, his is the kind of mind that constructs what is believed to be real; it excludes almost on principle his wife's sad hesitations, his young son's despair, the length of the shadows in the garden, the feel of his own organic life. Whether or not we choose to see Mr. Ramsay as rep-

resenting some masculine "essence," it is clear enough that the mode of thinking described excludes and subordinates intuition, imagination, feeling, and metaphoricality. Narrowing in on a particular type of cognition, the person favoring this way of sense-making has only a partial view of things. The rigor, the exclusiveness, the abstractness cannot but affect the discourse used in speaking about freedom, human rights, and education as well.

So it is with what Cixous calls the "colonial." Identifying with and making dominant a "First World" type of rationality and technicality, colonial thinking has not only imposed a "right" way, with a "right" pay-off; it has, in many cases, deformed, belittled, or exoticized what has been considered "undeveloped," "primitive," and implicitly regressive. We have only to recall the treatment of Native American cultures in this country. We have only to review our conception of those cultures Edward Said has grouped under the rubric of "orientalism" (1978). Said, among others, has written many times about the dependence "of what appeared to be detached and apolitical cultural disciplines upon a quite sordid history of imperialist ideology and colonialist practice" (1992, p. 41). The apparently detached has been assumed to be objective, unbiased, analytical, and rational. Using such perspectives, we have simply been unaware of oppositional habits of speech and thought: rendering people in the Middle East *other*, excluding them from what some of us might still call "the family of man."

We do recognize, of course, that our slow acknowledgement of our long confinement to a "Eurocentric" canon has made some of us sensitive to the traces of colonialism in practice and in our thought. It is still difficult for many of us to conceive of, much less sympathize with what Gayatri Spivak speaks of as "alternative histories" (1990, p. 269). Willing to revise our own history, we find it hard to acquiesce to Toni Morrison's view with regard to the growth of individualism. Fused with "the prototype of Americans as solitary alienated, and malcontent," she writes, "individualism was a response to 'the potent and ego-reinforcing presence of an Africanist population'" (1992, p. 45). A sense of absolute power, Morrison writes, was elicited by the presence of slavery, or "a bound and unfree, rebellious, black population" against which white men could measure their difference. For her, the new white man (the "American Adam") was a deliberate construction with regard to the "other, along with such associated qualities as autonomy, self-reliance, and what is often taken to be liberty." Again, if these qualities constitute a paradigm of what it takes to be an American, most of the world's people—along with many newcomers to the United States—are forever marginalized.

When we ponder curriculum, or questions as to what knowledge is worth communicating (and in what forms), we might ask whether we can construct and deconstruct at the same time. There is some agreement among educational philosophers that knowledge is a social construct, emergent from reciprocal relations among people inhabiting a shared world. Not only may it derive from transactions among individuals and their histories; at the same

time, it may come from engagements with what are thought to be public knowledge systems. Many of us are aware that what is called *social reality*—Toni Morrison's, Virginia Woolf's, John Dewey's—is also constructed, even as we are attuned to the likelihood that what is called *reality* may also be understood to be interpreted experience.

As Alfred Schutz saw it, the interpretations that feed into our knowledge may begin in subjective common-sense modes of understanding. These are gradually structured or patterned by *schemata* made available by those who may be called our predecessors and contemporaries (1967, pp. 22–23). What we often take for granted as given, as merely normal for all onlookers and knowers, has actually been translated or constructed. It is or has been contingent on particular meaning systems, conversations, locations in the social world. To recognize this is often to have a shock experience. This has been the case for many educators when they have been made to see the influences of patriarchal or colonial (or nationalist, or imperial, or provincial) language on our formulations of what we believe to be true—or even good and right. At the same time, it has been very difficult to deal with the challenges to the referentiality of language in a world that once seemed to stand still and to be susceptible to representation. Now we too frequently find ourselves simply playing a range of often incommensurable language games (Wittgenstein 1968). Where, we ask ourselves, are the intersections of the languages associated with the form of life called history and those identified with the arts, or chemistry, or ethics, or economics? And how does this all relate to a notion of human consciousness thrusting into the world around, grasping the appearances of things? What (again) does it signify to utter words like “freedom”, “growth”, “learning”, “meaning”, “quest”? How do we move from games and texts and discourse to the material actualities of lived lives?

We are only now becoming used to the possibility that what is called the *signifier* (either a meaningful spoken sound or a meaningful mark inscribed on a page) is what we can be sure of, while the *signified* remains a possible or an open question (Barthes 1967, Lacan 1977, Gates 1988). We are becoming slowly aware of the signifiers in our discourse and our thinking; each one being what it is because it is different from another. Once we give priority to the signifier and realize that words refer and relate to other words, not to some objective world beyond, meanings proliferate and become richer. Hierarchies of meaning, like hierarchies in general, become more and more absurd. If culture can be partially understood as a discursive meshwork, a corpus of intersecting texts or discourses or codes, we begin to think again of initiating the young into what has to be understood as a *conversation*, written or spoken, perhaps begun, as Michael Oakeshott has written “in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. . . . Education, properly speaking is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish

the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation which, in the end, gives place and character to every human activity and utterance” (1962, pp. 198–9).

This has been widely quoted in discussions of Philosophy of Education in recent years. But if it is to count in the present context, we need to hold in mind that the great *conversation*, like culture itself, becomes subject to transformations by means of critique and reflexivity. Of particular interest to today's educational philosopher is the matter of plurality and pluralization. We can no longer speak in abstract terms about “Mankind” or “the child” or even “the partnership of this conversation.” We are being asked to think of persons in their plurality, in their distinctiveness, no one a duplicate of any other. At once, we are learning to acknowledge the worth and power of different cultures and civilizations, out of which identities are being negotiated. We are varying and complicating our notion of the historical past and the multiple heritages that study the past. At once, we are striving towards untried conceptions of our society—always composed of newcomers, but now made up of newcomers who cannot be submerged in some conforming whole. To learn to “recognize the voices” now is to pay heed where educators seldom paid heed before: to living beings of all classes, from almost countless countries on the globe. We are being asked to recognize the sound of exile, of expulsion, of abandonment; we are being asked, as never before, to attend to the voices of all sorts of women, men, and children too, to empower them to make meanings in the disparate, sometimes savagely unequal lives they live. Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote that we are “condemned to meaning” and that “true philosophy consists in relearning how to look at the world . . .” (1967, p. xx). If that world, that “reality”, is understood to be variously interpreted experience, “learning to look” (certainly for educators) may mean learning how to reflect with others upon intersubjectivity itself and upon the possibilities of strangers coming together to relearn and to transform. The philosopher's obligation may involve enabling all sorts of persons to think about the ways they direct their attention, the vantage points they take, the naming, the caring, the concern.

In these days, it may not be sufficient to work at constructing the world as meaningful, to achieve the various often contending texts, to *see*. Philosophers may recognize the place of deconstruction at the same time, deconstruction as an intellectual move to complement what we have learned in the past about concept clarification, about what John Passmore called “critico-creative thinking” (1972, p. 36) and about what R.S. Peters described as “qualities of mind” that might be called “human excellences”. To deconstruct, according to Jacques Derrida, is to “practice an *overturning* of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system” (1982, p. 329). He means the disclosure of certain oppositions that are built into our language and that shape our thinking: white/black; male/female; cogni-

tive/affective; literal/figurative—all binary oppositions, with the superior member of each pair set ahead of the other. Derrida describes the system as one of hierarchical logocentrism. Logocentrism suggests that a center, an essence, a fixed principle lies at the heart of what we write too much of the time. The notion of the hierarchical has to do with the subordination of terms and the constitution of the subordinate terms as other, to be grasped as what the first excludes.

Reaching back into the Scriptures, we can see the origins of such hierarchies in Eve being born from Adam's rib; we can find it in the opposition Toni Morrison dramatizes when she speaks of the white man constructing the black man as other, defined in terms of what the white excludes. Derrida wants to overcome the privileging of the *logos* and the systematized, the abstract and the universal. He wants to make questionable concepts like *presence* and *center* and to allow for a decentering, a move towards fluidity and process. There are complexities, of course; but Derrida is offering us a novel way of looking at ourselves and our texts in ways equivalent to "relearning how to look at the world."

What counts as Philosophy of Education in the face of all this? Can we construct and deconstruct, and still preserve? We may find ways of shaping the kind of "common world" Hannah Arendt had in mind when she wrote:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. . . . She went on: And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (1961, p. 196).

The questions throb. What can philosophers do to make "renewal" in such terms meaningful? What can be done to permit the values of freedom of expression, of opinion to continue having a liberating effect in a multi-faceted "common world"? How can we permit a democratic philosophy to retain some permanent value in spite of our discoveries of the "unforeseen"?

Some of the high points in democratic philosophy may have been reached in discourse generated by the Civil Rights movements, feminist movements, and movements for the gay and lesbian persons among us, for the disabled, the excluded. Vaclav Havel in *Letters to Olga* wrote:

Are there any visible signs that an "existential revolution" is happening in the world today? I can't help feeling that if you are open to hope, you can find timid signals in many things: in movements of youth in revolt

such as have broken out periodically since the 1950s, in genuine peace movements, in varied activities in defense of human rights, in liberation movements (as long as they don't degenerate into mere efforts to replace one kind of terror with another) . . . in ecological initiatives, in all the constantly recurring attempts to create authentic and meaningful communities that rebel against a world in crisis, not merely to escape from it, but to devote their full efforts—with the clear-sighted deliberation and humility that always goes with genuine faith—to assume responsibility for the state of the world (1988, p. 372).

There have been as many disappointments as triumphs since this was written a decade or more ago in a prison cell; but what Havel said remains relevant, in part because he avoided a totalizing vision, because he moved beyond text to particulars, because he spoke of community and deliberation and responsibility.

There are implications here for an approach to morality that may find a place in the teaching of Philosophy of Education today. Our problem, in many places, is still one of reconciling experiences of connectedness, embeddedness, caring, and obligation with the desire some of us nurture for regulatory norms of some sort—again, for an incarnation of principles that presumably define our democracy. We have not yet found a place for the feminist ethic founded in "caring" in the spheres of power and public policy (Noddings 1984); and, surely, one of the concerns that must count is the concern for transforming public spaces to allow articulate and principled action on the part of human beings who know what it signifies to be "I" to another's "Thou" (Buber 1970), to refuse reification and submergence in an "It-world" (p. 96).

Buber was troubled by the spectre of such submergence. He asked whether the greatness of statesmen and businessmen did not depend on their way of seeing human beings. The point was to see human beings as "centers of services and aspirations that have to be calculated and employed according to their specific capacities" (p. 96). The point was for human beings to confront each other in meaningful relationships. Striving for this, striving to prepare the grounds for it in classrooms (through dialogue, through the reading of journals, through collaboration in learning), educators cannot but be aware of how much is deflected by the languages still in use, most poignantly in the schools. There is constant talk about the ways in which schools meet the demands of technology, prepare for the workplaces, and offer training in skills. There is a reiteration of the centrality of "outcomes," curriculum tools, competencies. We speak of the young as "human resources," not as persons with the potential for thinking for themselves and the potential to choose. Our Enlightenment-rooted orientations to human dignity, to human rights, to the rule of reason slip too easily into process-product approaches, not to speak of preoccupations with outputs and efficiency.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (for all its now apparent colonial tone) speaks to these matters even today. Marlow, who has just returned from a long immersion in the African wilderness, is meeting with his company's officials on a yawl anchored in the Thames. He is reminding the lawyer, the accountant, and the director of companies how the early Romans must have felt when they first landed in the wilderness that would one day be England. They faced, he says, as he has faced, "the incomprehensible." Then he bursts out: "Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency" (1952, p. 221). He is thinking of the indifferent cruelty of the ivory traders along the river in the Congo, the natives roped together, the ruthless raping of their land. Efficiency, he knows, becomes a screen. It becomes what Milan Kundera called a folding screen "set up to curtain death" (1984, p. 253); to exclude "everything from its purviews which is essentially unacceptable in human existence" (p. 248). Philosophy has traditionally worked to break through the screens, even as it has pursued its "love of wisdom," and its struggles against mystifications and bewilderments. The difference today is in the loss of old legitimations, of anchor points; but the struggle and the search go on. Conrad spoke of the necessity of values as "barriers against nothingness." Many existentialists, conscious of living towards their own deaths, have written about choosing themselves as indispensable or, as in the case of Sartre on at least one occasion, choosing themselves as if for all human beings. Values may be groundless; but an act of rebellion, a taking of initiative, a repairing of a lack can create values. We are characterized, wrote Sartre, by our going beyond a situation, by our orienting ourselves to something still to come which we are trying to bring into being. "This is what we call the *project*" (1963, pp. 91–92). Starting with the project (doing philosophy, teaching young people), we develop a *praxis* that opens into what has not yet been. "A flight and a leap ahead, at once a refusal and a realization, the project retains and unveils the surpassed reality which is refused by the very movement which surpassed it. Thus, knowing is a moment of *praxis*, even its most fundamental one" (p. 92). It can be said that if teaching is our project, and if teaching responds to a need or a lack (absence of literacy, susceptibility to indoctrination, inarticulacy), the *praxis* created by the teacher builds a kind of wall against meaninglessness; it brings value into the world.

The search for value, like the search for meaning, may be negated by those who are, in Hannah Arendt's language, "thoughtless." She had in mind an "absence of thinking" as in the case of Adolf Eichmann, and the use of cliché-ridden language: "Cliches, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence" (1978, p. 4). It is not only language that raises the folding screen, as most of us know. In Christa Wolf's *Accident: A Day's News*, a German woman narrator

contemplates "the desire of most people for a comfortable life, their tendency to believe the speakers on raised platforms and the men in white coats" (1989, p. 17). Surely, this mode of unthinking acquiescence is of direct concern to the educational philosopher. The narrator's feelings of desperation are in part occasioned by two important material facts: the fallout from the Chernobyl accident is spreading over the German countryside she inhabits, and her brother is having delicate brain surgery which (although she cannot know it in advance) he does survive. Reading this, we are reminded of the significance of context, even—and perhaps especially—in the "doing" of educational philosophy these days. At the end of the novel, the narrator also summons *Heart of Darkness*:

How he managed to free himself from concepts such as "device," "effect"—the hardest thing of all. But enough for today. That writer, he knew the meaning of sorrow. He set right out into the blind spot of that culture to which he also belonged, and not in thought alone. Fearlessly into the heart of darkness. . . . So does this person speak to me. So shy, I could hardly expect to find such words as "hate" and "love" in his works. "Greed" I found often. Greed, greed, greed . . . (p. 108).

In the course of the story, the narrator has been doing domestic tasks; she has been talking to her daughter on the phone, reporting about the pollution, asking about her grandson playing "me Punch" in the kitchen. She has been waiting in dread for news from the hospital. There are tears, bad dreams, memories; and finally, "how difficult it would be, brother, to take leave of this earth." Perhaps it is the circumstances of a woman's life that keep her so grounded, that help her refuse words like "device" and "effect". But is it necessarily a feminine tendency to link the prevalent thoughtlessness and denial with the actuality of "men in white coats"? And that last affirmation of "this earth," which she knows is terribly polluted by the nuclear leak, perhaps spoiled, but which calls out for rescue, cleansing, and a kind of provocative care. Is that necessarily a woman's affirmation as she feels the china cup in her hand, the soft earth under her feet? Or is it the kind of interest and concern that can be taught?

The hunt for ivory described by Conrad, the "Grand March" Kundera brings to life as he makes us feel the pressure of ideology and marching tunes, the accident at Chernobyl that gives rise to Wolf's intermeshing themes: all point to actual, material consequences of patriarchal and colonial thinking. They are entangled not only with patterns of speech, but with actualities that attentive readers are enabled to see. Paradoxically, perhaps, they grasp them by bringing into existence an unreal, imagined world, the *as if* world of the novel. Making the enactments and perspectives of a novel objects of their experience, they not only become increasingly aware of the traces of other texts. Sartre wrote that the literary object "though realized

through language, is never given in language," and that the reader must always invent (under the guidance of the author) the revelation the writer has undertaken by means of language and project beyond the words "a synthetic form" (1949, pp. 41-44). What we project is an event within our consciousness provoked by imagination. We summon up a Marlow, a German woman writer, a Violet on her way to Harlem in the 1920s; we lend them, as it were, our lives. Granted, they are not empirically *real*; they are not to be found on the river, in the streets, on the fields; but they are intended by acts of imagining, perceiving, judging consciousness. At the very least, urged beyond language, we experience the space between what we have projected and the actuality, the materiality of a world that cannot be represented, but which can be lived.

Frequently, as Sartre reminded us, novels like those mentioned appeal to our freedom by presenting the world insofar as it demands human freedom. "And if I am given this world with its injustices, it is not so that I might contemplate them coldly, but that I might animate them with my indignation, that I might disclose them and create them with their nature as injustices, that is, as abuses to be suppressed" (pp. 62-63). Richard Rorty and others have spoken of the absence of an underlying authority we can turn to when we want to support judgments of what is offensive or what needs repair. The only way to think about the world in any case, writes Rorty, is by means of language:

One can use language to criticize and enlarge itself, as one can exercise one's body to develop, strengthen and enlarge it, but one cannot see language-as-a-whole in relation to something else to which it applied, or for which it is a means to an end. The arts and sciences, and philosophy as their self-reflection and integration, constitute such a process of enlargement and strengthening. But philosophy, the attempt to say "how language relates to the world" but saying what *makes* certain statements true, or certain actions or attitudes good or rational, is, in this view, impossible (1982, p. xix).

We can take this seriously and, at once, hold in mind the likelihood that Cixous's Amnesty Lecture had actual consequences in the form of increased donations, letters to prisoners, protests to government representatives. Whether such words as hers (or ours, as philosophers of education) appeal to people's indignation or, as in Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1948) to some shared determination to refuse complicity, or to a set of beliefs shared by members of the community, we would like to believe that they do more than simply extend the conversation Oakeshott described. This is not meant to imply that the articulations described were endowed with a kind of universal referentiality. They did not come as if "from nowhere" (Putnam 1981, pp. 49-50). They were uttered by situated beings whose words were like a *call* to those who

paid heed, a call to action of a sort, to take initiatives, to heal, to repair. And, in doing so, to create values—surely a central concern in philosophy.

To search for some single source of legitimacy or to turn to a single standard or norm would be to cancel out heterogeneity and difference, both so prominent in our own day. To think monologically, in fact, would be to overlook the plurality of logics that exist, the local discourses, the particular little stories not always accounted for in contemporary philosophy. What of consensus, however? What of the kind of communicative action Jurgen Habermas hoped would lead to significant agreements or to the recognition of a "universal interest everyone can acknowledge"? (1987, p. 235). For Lyotard and Hans-Georg Gadamer, and perhaps for modern educational philosophers, there might be a turn towards practical judgment, or what is called *phronesis* (Lyotard 1985), taking into account a variety of narratives and entangled language games. For some (Gadamer 1981, p. 80), *phronesis* is linked to a dialogue among persons who have regard for one another, who share the same local community. Cixous turns to poetry with somewhat the same relationship in mind: "by sharing unhappiness, by being strangers together, people and poet reconstitute an internal homeland" (1993, p. 207). Cixous then asks questions that might lead us to the heartland of what might count as Philosophy of Education today. She speaks of how a prison summons up the thought of freedom in its full splendor, the thought of freedom, "the duty to be free." And, after a moment, "We who are free, are we helping to expand the realm of freedom on this earth, are we responsible? Do we need a camp, a prison, a war, to free us from our indifference to ourselves and from our fear of others? So we do not forget our good fortune?" (p. 219).

Whatever counts as Philosophy of Education today must begin in queer questions, those not susceptible to logical or empirical resolutions. Whatever shape they take, they must be defined with the contexts of multiple transactions, those in which diverse human beings are intimately involved. Even if they extend to the far reaches of metaphysics or are limited to the clarification of terms, they are posed within the frames of overlapping institutions—public schools, local and state bureaucracies, communities, universities—the carriers of heritage. Most often, they are articulated in the local spaces where educational dialogue is most likely to occur. Some may focus on critical consciousness; some on personal choosing and commitment; some on social or political resistance; a few, overarching frameworks erected to combat relativism and the anarchy so many see "loosed upon the world" (Yeats 1959, p. 186). Some of us may come to realize that the situations in which we do philosophy are hermeneutical situations, situations in large measure familiar because we have been struggling to make sense of them over the years.

Whoever we are, we have engaged the traditions made available to us against the background of our lived lives and the prejudgments we have made over time. The horizons of our lived experiences have been, to one degree or another, open. A horizon, writes Gadamer, signifies a range of vision "including

everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (1975, p. 315). As more and more perspectives open for us, as we see into wider and wider worlds, our lived vantage points remain crucial if we, like so many others in this moment of time, reject the possibility of a universal vision or an objective ground. Once we accept the notion of vantage point, we become aware that no one has a total vision from any place in the world. We see aspects, profiles; whole visions—landmarks, historical studies, short stories—they always lay ahead to be achieved. One of the great powers of imagination is that it opens the possibility of such achievement; it opens vistas on what might be, what is not yet. Imagination moves us out of confinement, through the windows of the actual, so that we can summon up alternative realities. We can break with the frozen, the reified, as we can with the purely formal and abstract. The poet Wallace Stevens, who pondered so deeply the relations between imagination and reality, said in dealing with his "rationalists":

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling.
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.
If they tried rhomboids,
Cones, waving lines, ellipses—
As, for example, the ellipse of the half moon—
Rationalists would wear sombreros (1954, p. 75).

The ellipse of the half-moon is an expansion, not a substitution. Even to suggest a glimpse of the half-moon is to bring an open window into view, a possibility of looking beyond what here is fixed and ordinary. When the image of the rationalists wearing sombreros appears, it suggests as well that rationalists—no more than any other selves—are not to be understood as fixed, predefined, or mere essences. They can wear square hats and sombreros; they can become as well as be.

We end in some manner where we began—with talk of language, power, and identity. We end with the unanswered questions about diversity and relativism, with aching questions about who inhabits and who dominates a fading public sphere. There is the need to enable all kinds of persons to break with confinement and to challenge hollow prescriptions and formulae; at once there is the need to make a community in which a plurality of persons can participate and through participations choose their projects and themselves. We are told on all sides that we cannot decide whether our lives add up to anything or not, no matter how unified our narratives. Life, according to Rorty, ought to be viewed as "a web of relations to be rewoven, a web which time lengthens every day" (1989, pp. 42–43). There is always more to be woven; the quilt, the carpet, are forever incomplete.

The idea of webs takes on increasing importance as we ponder the bringing into being of new orders, new modes of communication at a time of shifting identities, reaching towards an inclusiveness never seen before. We want, as we think about what counts as Philosophy of Education, to affirm identity and difference and to do so, when we can, by means of dialogue. In the midst of so much discussion of pluralization and the relation of diverse others to the changing self, Hannah Arendt's words about weaving webs of relationship may take on a new meaning. She was writing about action and speech, and about human beings' "agent-revealing" capacities and about the world of things out of which so many of our interests rise.

These interests constitute, in the word's most literal significance, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together. Most action and speech are concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds are about some wordly objective reality in addition to being disclosure of the acting and speaking agent. . . .

Since this disclosure of the subject is an integral part of all, even the most "objective" intercourse, the physical, worldly in-between along with its interests is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking directly to one another. This second subjective in-between is not tangible, since there are no tangible objects into which it could solidify; the process of acting and speaking can leave behind no such results as end-products. But for all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common. We call this reality the "web" of human relationships. (1958, pp. 182–3)

Yes, Arendt was thoughtless enough to focus on *men* as a generic term; she paid little heed to the patriarchal domination even of the "in-between"; she saw little possibility of the encounters in the private world affecting and perhaps transforming what happened outside where people could appear before each other "as the best they knew how to be." Nevertheless, she did see persons in their plurality, with all their distinctive perspectives, engaging in new beginnings, being in process, refusing essentialism. Involved in action as they were, they found their action, their beginnings falling into already existing webs.

The disclosure of each person and the setting of each new beginning start, for Arendt, a new process which emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer and affects the life stories of all those with whom she comes in contact. The stories are the outcomes of action; but no one can be the author of any eventual outcome. Again, we are in touch with a process and with an ongoing interchange, a dialogue, often an imaginative dialogue that sustains the telling and allows for no solidification. Out of the process, in which

increasing numbers may be involved, the common world emerges. It is always susceptible to renewal and continually being brought into being. Constituted as it must be from many vantage points, from many fused horizons, it may turn out to be a multi-faceted world and a strangely inclusive one. Diverse meanings will emerge, highlighting dimensions of the webs that interconnect and sometimes delicately catch the light.

Entanglement cannot be overcome; nor can the effects of power on perspective, choice, and even dialogue. Michel Foucault's concept of power/knowledge is still here to be confronted by educational philosophers, along with the idea that certain knowledges are "disqualified," while others have been thought to be elite. Opposed as Foucault was to scientism and positivism, and to the confusions in the social and the natural sciences, he was unwilling to set aside the claims of formal knowledge because of the corruptions of institutionalization. The research project that interested him did not posit an empirical-positivist dualism. What it did was "to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchize, and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects" (1980, p. 83). He wanted to reactivate local, minor, popular, and perhaps subjugated knowledges in opposition to the hierarchies in which so much of knowledge had been thrust. Foucault wanted to detach the power of truth "from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (p. 113).

It is not a question of overwhelming "erudition" with the formerly disqualified. Nor is it a matter of identifying the cognitive with the hierarchical or the hegemonic. Yes, it is a matter of constructing and deconstructing once again. It is a matter of attaining the kind of thoughtfulness so important to Hannah Arendt, who was so horrified by thoughtlessness and heedlessness that she called upon her readers passionately "to think what we are doing" (1958, p. 5). That, in many respects, is what Foucault has done: thinking in terms of problems, in terms of questions. According to Foucault:

Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and question it as to its meaning, its conditions, its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem (Rabinow 1984, p. 388).

Thought, the pursuit of meanings, freedom, and concern: there is no final summing up the themes of what counts as Philosophy of Education. Passion should infuse all these: the passion of sensed possibility and, yes, the passion of poetry and the several arts. Thinking of ourselves as subjects reaching out

to others and attending to the shapes and sounds of things, we may resist the anaesthetic in our lives and the drawing back to anchorage. We have to know about our lives, clarify our situations if we are to understand the world from our shared standpoints, our standpoints as philosophers of education ready to commit ourselves to small transformations as we heed the stories, the multiplex stories, as cautiously we work to transform.

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