

Educational disquiet among drifts, shipwrecks, horizons

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From operational performativity to the indistinctiveness of ideas

Why think of Education (again)? Has it not already been thought enough, from time to time, looking at every aspects and every possible declinations, even arriving at its idea of death? And above all: why think about Education now, in times of a practicality which is claimed per se as reflexive?

Anyone who is now involved in education knows how much educational performance is required: in the forms of emergency or in the optimization of social processes and in the cogency of here and now; in the forms of innovation and competitiveness when it must look towards the future.

Emergency, productivity, performativity: these are, at least on the surface, the three fundamental pictures (and this is the language) of our pedagogical time. But those who are involved in Education know even more, starting from the fact that these 'passwords' do not evoke at all neither the sense of educating nor the idea of what is missing the most in education. For some considerable time now, underestimation or misunderstanding of the crisis of European culture has led and still leads towards the urgency to perform, considering thought – and more importantly critical thought – as an activity which can be settled in terms of reasonability and good sense. In effect this may be enough to understand who we have become and, above all, which and how many chances of transformation we may implement if necessary.

And yet, it is not enough. As this language and the atmosphere it describes – our *Zeitgeist* – only seem to propose again the old formula of the lack of possible representations, considering the adherence to the naked truth as an urgency, as an imperative to emerge from the crisis. And actually, since crisis finds its deepest and furthest roots in culture rather than in economy – roots which continue to be reproduced in the crisis itself¹ – perhaps one may indulge a new interpretation of reality. Here, once desires, projects and the same conditions of decidability and even the usual determinations of space and time are suspended, it is necessary to obtain some thick emotional and cognitive armor to face the hostile coarseness of our world.

But again it is not enough, especially for those who are methodologically inspired by the idea of “education as critics of education”², and who are required a far more articulated and convincing disenchantment. And this very restless and questioning dissatisfaction rises from the need to interrupt the excitement of the performance flux so as to take time to meditate. To stop and, according to Nietzsche, ‘to carry the problem around’³.

¹ I.e. a kind of Girardian “sacrificial crisis”, where the defeated of primitive societies disappear inexorably (in this case of previous civilizations, or civilizations considered marginal) and where, it must be remembered, “in the conclusion of sacrificial crisis what is at stake is the *possibility* of human societies.

It must be discovered what such conclusion is made of and what makes it possible”. Cf. R. Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (1972) Eng. tr. by Patrick Gregory, *Violence and the sacred*, London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. For an articulated social-historical look on the dynamisms which regulate the crisis of western society, see N. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (1969), Eng. tr. by Edmund Jephcott *The Civilizing Process*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1969.

² Antonio Erbetta’s expression may be traced throughout his production, but especially in *La pedagogia come teoria della cultura*, Milano, Marzorati, 1983; *Luoghi di crisi. Sulla pedagogia come critica della pedagogia*, Torino, il Segnalibro, 1994; *L’educazione in quanto esistenza*, in Id. (ed. by), *L’educazione come esperienza vissuta. Percorsi teorici e campi d’azione* (2005), Como-Pavia, Ibis, 2011, pp. 19-54; *Decostruire. Che cosa e perché*, in Id. (ed. by), *Decostruire formando*, Como-Pavia, Ibis, 2010, pp. 15-28. For a comment on such interpretative hypothesis see “Paideutika. Notebooks on education and culture”, *For an education as critics of education*, 17, IX, 2013.

³ This quote refers to the most pedagogical text by Nietzsche, where the figure of Master-philosopher invites his young disciples not to be “careless and hasty”. Here, the juvenile

Which problem, then? Actually the point would be to identify how to interpret our time which sees in the widespread perception of crisis a real way of being-in-the-world, despite the tales we have been told and being aware of the damage done to our destinies on an economic and financial level. A “way of the self”⁴ which converges in common spaces: a widespread atmosphere of disorientation, of non-involvement, of inactivity, and the contextual imaginative construction of a world which no longer needs to question the sense of events and experience⁵. Up to the fact that the sedimentation of an unsolved crisis of culture has resulted in leaving room to a mass of facts that neurotically fill our daily routine and which are alarming sings of a deadweight loss: the loss of an horizon of meaning which makes reflexivity – and a *culturalized* reflexivity – the essential instrument for any educational perspectives. Hence, as a consequence, the risk of deformation of consciences, the concealment of an idea into its opposite, the counterfeiting of emancipatory practice into a conformist operation, the erosion of critical hermeneutics in its fashionable vulgarization. From such considerations, then, the need to tail the real in its most evident aspects, as well as in the meaning of its losses.

Therefore: are we irreparably in times of accomplished nihilism? And what would this imply? And finally, what are the drifts for Education?

Firstly, *speed* as the decline of temporal planning replaced by a self-acting hyper-efficiency characterized by short-term experiences and

hunger for knowledge and ‘conquest’ of the world requires, as a counter melody, passion for reflection: “Take your time, carry the problem with you, but think of it every day and night”. See F. Nietzsche, *Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten* (1872), It. tr. *Sull'avvenire delle nostre scuole*, Milano, Adelphi, 1973, p.101 (En. tr. by J.M. Kennedy, *On the future of our educational institutions*, Edinburgh, Morrison and Gibb Ltd., 1910).

⁴ This expression indicates the forms of the relationship subject-world which are part of what we call, from an educational point of view, ‘subjectivities’ and which constitutively avoid the possibility to be classified and categorized. The issue was debated, particularly, with regard to the relationship between narration of the self and diary writing in E. Madrusan, *Forme del tempo / Modi dell'io. Educazione e scrittura diaristica*, Como-Pavia, Ibis, 2009.

⁵ Then let allow us, in this regard and with the aim of avoiding, here, the long clarification required by the theme of existential disorientation, of emancipatory practice and of education in situation, to refer to E. Madrusan, *Costruire il proprio posto nel mondo. L'educazione tra senso dell'impegno ed etica della situazione*, in M. Tomarchio, S. Ulivieri (eds) by), *Pedagogia militante. Diritti, culture, territori*, Pisa, ETS, 2015.

their instantaneous dismissal⁶. Secondly, *insignificance* as the constitutive affirmation of utilitarian instrumentality, also for those aspects of culture which have always considered the search for meaning, the meaning of experience and the taste for the world and its manifestations as their field of investigation and their reason for being⁷. As a counterbalance: the *rhetoric* of the new – which is, according to Benjamin, always the same – which gives rise, in cultural terms and as a third step, to the imperative for innovation. Innovation intended not just as something which looks, with new eyes, at the cultural planning of a future yet to be imagined, but rather, more ‘didactically’, as looking at the eternal chase of the myth of novelty.

Finally, almost as a background to the above, *conceptual taming*, i.e. that form of simplification which, although existing at all times, returns to appear with greater force in the same false consciousness for which, reluctant towards any “fatigue of concept”, knowledge becomes a docile instrument of persuasion. Where, in the case of education – in any of its many forms – the simplifying attitude should be seen as a real social threat. Similarly, resulting from the desire of taking possession of – hence controlling – every portion of knowledge and every corner of action (of translating into one’s own professional efficiency every element that may have a semblance of utility, correctness and formal order, which may resemble productive and efficient perfection), this cultural *omniphagia*, with outstanding colonizing force, obsessively tries to simplify the complex, to make the difficult easy, to make the problematic comprehensible, defined the undefinable, including in the vocabulary of orthodoxy – also pedagogical – even the lexis of radical forms of culture. Particularly in Education the plurality of sense should be defended from any attempt to homologate, the words of critical thought, of disenchantment, of problematic nature, of antinomical dialectic, of ‘educational denial’ should be returned to their own emancipatory

⁶ With regard to “experience consumption” cf. E. Paci, *Funzione delle scienze e significato dell’uomo*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1963 (En.tr. by Paul Piccone, James E. Hansen, *The Function of the Sciences and the Meaning of Man*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1972). For a pedagogical reading of the issue cf.: E. Madrussan, *Il relazionismo come paideia. L’orizzonte pedagogico del pensiero di Enzo Paci*, Trento, Erickson, 2005.

⁷ Cf. F. Merlini, *L’efficienza insignificante. Saggio sul disorientamento*, Bari, Dedalo, 2009.

origins and to their original sense, rescuing them from the incongruous shadow of disciplining⁸.

Actually, in the excitement of reality opportunistically represented as chaotic, where educational practices are required as emergency, prompt, efficient and economical performances, we lose sight of that very possibility of the quest for sense, together with the idea of problematic and reflexive education. More seriously: meaning coincides *sic et simpliciter* with the bare performance of action. However it is clear that such a performance describes a certain idea of reality as imperatively affirmed. The domain of reality as 'unquestionably' does not have, here, time to wonder about its representation, and, probably, not even provide for this possibility. The luxury of inquiring, in this case, even takes on the characteristics of disregard for the superfluous. Hence we sometimes suspect that we are dealing with an ideological forgery.

In other terms, the emphasis given to procedurality, which thus interrupts its way of being – i.e. instrumental to what is situated and, each time, pondered – silently transforms them into a moral value, as if the cogence of situation – which historically remains as such, in time of crisis and in the specific circumstances of its epiphenomena - might justify the lack of significance and of questioning reflexivity⁹.

⁸ Such issues have been long discussed by the most significant exponents of national pedagogy: from Bertin to Laporta, from Bertolini to Cambi. As a first exploration, cf. G.M. Bertin, *Educazione alla ragione*, Roma, Armando, 1968; P. Bertolini, *L'esistere pedagogico. Ragioni e limiti di una pedagogia come scienza fenomenologicamente fondata*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1988; R. Laporta, *L'assoluto pedagogico*, La Nuova Italia, 1996; F. Cambi, *Abitare il disincanto. Una pedagogia per il postmoderno*, Torino, Utet-Università, 2006. With regard to 'educational denial' see VV.AA. (ed. by A. Erbetta), *L'educazione come esperienza vissuta*, cit., pp. 100-110.

⁹ In fact, already according to Horkheimer, "progresses of technique and the reason for self-preservation do not explain the decadence of individuals: the responsible is neither the production for itself but rather the forms in which it occurs [...] Method becomes absurd only when people see job, research and invention as their idols." Eng. tr. from the Italian edition: M. Horkheimer, *Eclisse della ragione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1969, p. 133 (Eng. *Eclipse of reason*, 1947). For a full pedagogical view of Horkheimer's thought see G. Giachery, *Indignazione morale e profezia pedagogica. L'ultimo Horkheimer*, Como-Pavia, ibis, 2012. Further in these pages the issue regarding self-preservation and mystification of technicality (and operability) become predominant especially in the current sense of the educational problem of the subject.

What clearly emerges, then, is the perhaps irremediable contrast between urgency for education and its incompatibility with the non-thought about education. In fact, if it is not possible to really educate in the absence of the most critical reflexivity on the real, then the strident friction between the performativity of educating and the indistinctiveness of ideas may be explained through its functional being to a limiting order. Here are the reasons why it is worth continuing to unmask the backgrounds of the world trying to focus on the way our time fills the *distance* which separates reality from its own representation.

Then, starting from the words that delimit our existential field and our educational horizon, it is necessary to claim the urgency of constantly *re-thinking* its meanings and its boundaries. Here *thinking*, from a pedagogical point of view, becomes restless experience and experience of disquiet, characterized by some constitutive elements: the uncertainty regarding the usual interpretative paradigms, the sense of unrelatedness in respect of the paraphrases of the world we have been accustomed to, the loss of incisiveness of the languages of habit, the simplification of the complex compared to the intrinsic problematic nature of experience. To think, in conclusion, as risk, as an educational bet¹⁰.

Thus, to think as reaction to the falsification of a thought which is imprisoned in the boundaries of the already-said, already-given. Philosophically thinking, also, taking the philosophy of education out of the mortifying silence where it is too often imprisoned.

Even more: thinking of education not according to what we do, but acting in situation without losing sight of the widest cultural horizon where we are inscribed.

In this sense, what never ends, at least for critical-investigating attitude, is the need to understand and re-describe the subjects we are and the world we live in, according to a sense which is able to *say* it: i.e. a world which expresses the incisive *Bedeutung* of the real. This is the perspective according to which we must see the *critical distance* from the way the world would like us.

¹⁰ There is an obvious reference to the famous Pascal's "vous êtes embarqués", whose educational value is highlighted in "Paideutika. Notebooks on education and culture", *For and education as critics of education*, 17, IX, 2013, pp. 11-18. With regard to Pascal and education see M. Peretti, *Blaise Pascal, Lettura dei Pensieri alla luce dei massimi sistemi sull'educazione*, Roma, Città Nuova, 1986.

Distances: the reality of metaphors. Drifts, shipwrecks, survivors.

A first step would be to reconsider the relationship between reality and representation with regard to some *topoi* of our culture. The idea of education as *navigatio vitae*, together with the metaphors of drift and shipwreck, consist of an account of reality which restores to our perception a precise correspondence with what Papi called “the feeling of life” typical of contemporaneity¹¹.

The threatening taste of drifts finds its deep reasons in the sedimentation of a judgement, ethically reassuring, on the landing place, on the firm anchoring to the mainland, where nothing moves of its own accord and where everybody can exercise a degree of control over their own existence. The open sea is on the other hand the realm of the unknown: it is, indeed, the experience of not-knowing, the hardest possible experience. It is not only the suspended time which comes before the storm and announces the possible shipwreck, but it is, above all, the accelerated loss of directional control. It is like being in the dark, in never-ending movement, in insecurity, isolation, wait.

Without indulging in the refined aesthetics of metaphorical representation and in all the complex surveys which have dealt with it, through different approaches, in this context we will use metaphor and its interpretation by Blumenberg with the aim of regaining the concordance between reality and representation. This means no longer accepting a division which makes incompatible the two poles of the argument, but rather considering the idea that these are two views of the world that can be expressed only in an unconceptual manner¹². In fact Blumenberg dealt with a real history of the topical forms of European culture expressed along the line of those metaphors that are not changeable into concept. A history which provides for two possible levels of educational argument. One re-

¹¹ This expression was adopted by Fulvio Papi in a text which offers many and very intense resonances to the reflections of these pages, especially in respect of the seriousness required to consider that in our time the chance to remain in the thought *must* be seen as a real luxury. Cf. F. Papi, *Il lusso e la catastrofe*, Como-Pavia, Ibis, 2006.

¹² Cf. H. Blumenberg, *Theorie und Unbegrifflichkeit* (2007); Id., *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (1981).

fers to the semantic range of metaphorical narration, with the recovery of the 'sensitive intelligence' which it implies: educating the subjective gaze to penetrate the present. The other regards the historical caution needed in reviewing the different forms of culture according to the continuous interpretative lines of the world: educating the subjective and collective gaze not to separate the present from the past.

However, it is not coincidence that the myth of our tradition continually recalls the metaphor of the journey, of shipwreck, of adventure, of danger. And from Rimbaud's *Bateau ivre* onwards, considering other aspects, the deconstructive narration of our history has only re-elaborated the idea that we are magnetically obliged to the very experience of drift¹³. From here, then, the allusion to loss: of direction – existential planning – of reference parameters – the emptying of the sense of the usual paradigms – of the helm – the educator as guide, teacher, intellectual¹⁴.

This is why drift becomes for us a real space-limit, a semantic interval which connects reality and representation. That is a narrative of our time for which the metaphor incorporates and expresses not only many implicit meanings of our contemporaneity, but above all it restores the continuity of a significant atmosphere that, although modifying its characteristics, remains full of existential results, past, feelings, sediments, ways of being, reflexive dialectic. According to Blumenberg, it *precedes* any conceptual elaboration: not in the sense of anticipation, but rather in a rationality of another kind, which is neither primitive nor archaic, but rather archetypic and paradigmatic. The "absolute metaphor"¹⁵ says what cannot otherwise

¹³ Very precious and significant, with regard to mythologies, is F. Jesi, *Lettura del Bateau ivre di Rimbaud*, with "Introduction" by G. Agamben, Macerata, Quodlibet, 1996. In addition, of course, to R. Barthes, "Nautilus" e "Bateau ivre", in Id. *Mythologies* (1957), It. tr. by L. Lonzi, *Miti d'oggi*, (1974), Torino, Einaudi, 1994, pp. 74-76 (Eng. tr. by Annette Lavers, *Mythologies*, London, Paladin, 1972).

¹⁴ On the (outdated) figure of the intellectual/educator see "Paideutika. Notebooks on education and culture", *Intellectual educators*, n. 16, VIII, 2012. On the pedagogical dimension of disorientation please see at least: G.M. Bertin, *Disordine esistenziale e istanza della ragione*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1981; R. Fadda, *Sentieri della formazione. La formatività umana tra azione ed evento*, Roma, Armando, 2002; F. Cambi, *Abitare il disincanto*, cit.; A. Erbetta, *Pedagogia e nichilismo. Cinque capitoli di filosofia dell'educazione*, Torino, Tirrenia Stampatori, 2007.

¹⁵ Cf. H. Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* (1960), Eng. tr. By Robert Savage, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2010.

be said: it is a look at the world which is already an *experience of the world* without becoming a conceptual description of the world. Then, according to Blumenberg, through this interpretation, myth is not the original mark of a culture, but something selected. Myth corresponds to a persuasive narration of intelligible meanings to a dark world, and yet sinisterly and threateningly possible (powerful), which is actually exorcised from mythological narrative. Ultimately myth is an exorcism which recounts what we fear¹⁶, imprisoning it into something bearable. But what matters to Blumenberg is, unlike other (even more famous) interpreters of myth, “the semantic character of the investigation into metaphor”¹⁷. Similarly, torn from its rhetorical function¹⁸, metaphor is situated on the very ridge between the known and the unknown, between the familiar and the disquieting, between the determined and the undetermined, between the accomplished and the unaccomplished. It says what we cannot say, focuses on a fantasy story (or phantasmal) what remains unintelligible, chaotic and obscure in reality.

And in this darkness the metaphor of shipwreck becomes fundamental¹⁹. And with it and in it is the decisive figure of the survivor, as opposed to the spectator. The survivor is, in this case, the one who experiences the most radical concern and disorientation. If drift is the inexorable power which carries the voyager away from what is familiar and surely goes towards the unexpected, shipwreck is its experience. This way Blumenberg tells of anti-heroic castaways who survive themselves even before they survive the storms of life. But he also tells of spectators who, watching the

¹⁶ Cf. M. Cometa, *Mitologie dell'oblio. Hans Blumenberg e il dibattito sul mito*, in A. Borsari (ed. by), *Hans Blumenberg. Mito, metafora, modernità*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1999, pp. 141-166.

¹⁷ Cf. E. Melandri, *Per una filosofia della metafora*, in H. Blumenberg, *Paradigmi per una metaforologia*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina 2009, p. 159. That is, Melandri continues, the hermeneutic importance in respect of the entire history of culture, so that “history of modern thinking requires the archeology of the ‘un-thought’”. *Ivi*, p. 163.

¹⁸ Cf. R. Bodei, *Metafora e mito nell'opera di Hans Blumenberg*, in A. Borsari (ed. by), *Hans Blumenberg. Mito, metafora, modernità*, cit., pp. 29-43.

¹⁹ Cf. H. Blumenberg, *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer* (1979), Eng. Tr. by Steven Rendall, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996 and Id., *Die Sorge geht über den Fluss* (1987), Eng. tr. by Paul Fleming, *Care Crosses the River*, Stanford University Press, 2010.

shipwreck from the shore, feel all the burden of being helpless witnesses, although to their advantage they have the educational chance to think about their own have-seen. And he also tells of the many shipwrecks in harbor, which are the most ruinous, the most numerous ones. Metaphor, here, gives shape to the fear – horror – of becoming irreparably lost – when the obviousness of things – sailing entails constitutively the risk of shipwreck – suddenly overwhelms. From here, then, the metaphoric counter melody of the soil, of education as something which teaches us to stay grounded. Such an expression, however, does not indicate at all the denial of dream, of imagination and of whatever cannot be sold to the market of the culture industry. Instead it indicates the spade and the plow: the work for that survival which concretizes the chance of an ulterior sense, of pleasure and perhaps also of the right ‘to get to the bottom of matters’, to overturn the surface so as to fertilize the soil.

Here are, then, two different images, two opposite educational trajectories, two views of the world that are far from each other: on the one hand *education to take risks*, related to the power of the waves, to the darkness of the depths, to face sudden change and to live with the permanent need of ‘playing it by ear’. On the other hand *education as care*, marking the need to cultivate the soil limited by the fence, in a non-migratory and permanent way, together with the idea of building something which will leave a trace in time, without asking anything in return for the hardest effort but the natural result of everyone’s work.

Thus conceived, the metaphor fills the ‘distance’ which separates reality from its widespread representation. By saying what cannot be said otherwise, it opposes that absolutism of reality which is capable of representing the sole administrated reality of the already-known, that reality regarding functions, roles, mechanisms, strategies, modules, templates, registers, and whatever may infect the creation of possibilities.

According to this same interpretation, the third figure is the technicist hyperrealism, which has marked our modernity and of which we have believed to possess the instruments necessary to sail without risk, hence proclaiming the end of shipwreck with foolish arrogance. Hyperrealism breaks its own myth almost immediately, interpreting navigation technique as a training tool to shipwreck.

So the very risk of shipwreck can be calculated fatalistically like other possibilities. As a powerful and reassuring sterilizer of consciences, tech-

nique would then have a precise educational task: to teach how to control dismay, fear, emotion, foolishness, horror. And this as far as the extreme consequences, which consist in the fact that absolutism of reality obliges contemporary thought to perform an almost cannibalistic action: to build a new ship with the remainders of the previous shipwrecks: to build using junk. The most remarkable aspect of such an inversion becomes, then, the existential and cultural attitude through which the realistic-technological activism not only tries to tear our history from its narrative sense so as to place it in the semantic poverty of fatalism, but, from a pedagogical point of view, the reduction of education to the convinced acquisition of what is useful for survival. In this sense, as Blumenberg well interpreted, the domain of technique is not the domain of man over something which is a stranger to him (nature or history, as it was in the past), but, on the contrary, it is the assertiveness of man over his own world. And at this very point in our history our 'Copernican revolution' takes place, i.e. the moment man learns to produce with his own hands the object of (his) power – reality – thus learning to fear himself²⁰.

So that the magmatism of the visions of the world which contend the chaotic scene of present time ends up deploying, essentially, only one, monolithic, representation of reality. That is absolutism of reality, which does not see any other truths but the polished surface of things, where there is no room left for any suggestiveness, any imagination, any reflectiveness which may suggest the presence of shadow zones – unconceptual thus unsayable except for in metaphors – that support and represent subjectivity itself. Hence, also the difficulty of being close to one's own subjectivity and of whatever requires a dose of impossibility, incompleteness, darkness. Of whatever has no more to do with the simple and ambiguous need to adapt (in a cannibalistic way) to the present, but rather emerging from it with critical intelligence so as to represent it differently from the current way.

The only real experience of thought, which intends to 'stay grounded', on the shore, in order to give shape to its own existential matter, consists, in a seemingly paradoxical way, in the full awareness of being, as always,

²⁰ Cf. H. Blumenberg, *Geistesgeschichte der Technik* (2009).

to quote Pascal, offshore. That is: only by discussing its very own reasons, does disquiet become the expression of a mankind that cannot be lost and removed.

So, the disquiet of thought for the embodied subject and the significance of the *not-known* for culture will mark the two possible determinations of our time. Where subject and cultural elaboration intertwine, whether they still have a possible connection, in the very action of giving shape to their own subjectivity, to the world, to relationships with others.

Horizons: the disquieting knowing. Almost-nothing, glimpses, new beginnings

Thus one feels obliged to wonder not about the darkness of our time – as it cannot change – but rather about which human figures it might express. That is which human forms it builds and selects; which ways of understanding the world it arranges and trains; how such modalities affect the present and what actions they produce; and for us, above all, what idea of education and which educational procedure contribute to the creation of such a humanity.

In other words: who is the subject we think of? What is the *proprium* of that subjectivity?

According to some of the most convincing exponents of our time – from Ulrich Beck to René Girard, from Slavoj Žižek to Michel Serres, from Luciano Gallino and Marco Revelli to Peter Sloderdijk²¹ – what

²¹ Cf. U. Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft. Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Sicherheit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2007, Eng. tr. by Ciaran Cronin, *World at Risk*, Cambridge, Polity, 2009; Id., *La crisi dell'Europa*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2012; Id., *Costruire la propria vita*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2012; N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, cit.; R. Girard, *Violence and the sacred*, cit.; Id., *Pour un nouveau procès de l'étranger* (1976). *Système du délire* (1976). *Eating disorders and Mimetic Desire* (1996), Id., *Géométrie du désir* (2011); M. Serres, *Temps de crises*, Paris, Éditions Le Pommier, 2009; Eng. tr. By A.M. Feenberg-Dibon, *Time of crisis*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2013; M. Revelli, *Poveri, noi*, Torino, Einaudi, 2010; Id., *I demoni del potere*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012; L. Gallino, P. Borgna, *La lotta di classe dopo la lotta di classe*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012; L. Gallino, *Potere e mutamento sociale*, in "Paideutika. Notebooks on education and culture", *Power and education*, n. 14, VII, 2011, pp. 9-18; Id.,

characterizes our existence is risk, grudge, vulnerability, precariousness, violence, loss, cynicism. And if according to Sloderdijk what dominates is, particularly, an hyperactive cynicism of individual self-preservation and of collective indifference, it is still true that “subjects feel neither ‘at home’ nor ‘in themselves’ nor in their usual habits”²², neither when they wonder who they are nor when they use their “strategic reason” according to the dominant model of “antagonistic cooperation”²³.

But such hermeneutics ends up confirming the idea of a skepticism between life and feeling of life for which it becomes decisive, from an educational point of view, to win back those factors – decisive in their impregnability – which constitute the very power of education, like the spaces of residuality that make of every subject whatever he or she becomes.

It is true, as Bodei states, that “this process is difficult. Most part of men turns away from what is hidden in their own inner being as well as from the depth of life”²⁴. But it is also true that re-learning to read “always again” their own life and time is one of the decisive tasks of education.

And it is also true, in contrast, that the “absolutism of reality” above mentioned does not seem capable of validating disquiet, drifts and shipwrecks but through negation and mystification – which is the same – only taking into account what it is able to control. That is why, as a consequence, such areas of reflexivity, language, representation, inner experience and hermeneutic capacity are hungry for a renewed connection with a world of culture that can express them and, above all, that can build visions of the world which achieve them in their differences and richness of significance.

Visions, then, where it is possible to recognize disquiet as a fruitful condition and not as a social disease. In this sense, the educational task ap-

Vite rinviate. Lo scandalo del lavoro precario, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2014; S. Žižek, *Violence*, London, Profile Books LTD, 2007; Id., *The sublime object of ideology*, London, New York: Verso, 1989; P. Sloderdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* (1983), Eng. tr. by Michael Eldred *Critique of Cynical Reason*, foreword by Andreas Huyssen, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

²² Eng. tr. from Italian edition: P. Sloderdijk, *Critica della ragion cinica*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 2013, p. 356 (Eng. tr. by Michael Eldred, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, cit.).

²³ Cf. It. Edition: P. Sloderdijk, *Critica della ragion cinica*, cit., pp. 365-366.

parently is to give body and voice to the shadows as areas of intersubjective recognizability and of mutual closeness, as well as force fields where drift becomes intelligible to anyone as an indispensable occasion for thought. In this way the *educational* demand for the subject who is already challenged by his fragmentary character becomes at the same time an action of decontamination from the all-inclusive and homologating languages of superficial truth.

A feeling according to which whatever is part of a life lived in making sense is still frustrated by the uselessness in which the performative competitiveness (in the case of well-being) confines it or the search for material survival (in cases of social marginalization and poverty) forces it.

Perhaps one of the most silently determinant challenges of the contemporary world is that whoever educates must and can give voice to the 'rest', to the residuality that remains out of any interpretative category and that makes everyone something elusive, unfinished, incomprehensible. Only in this way, after all, is it possible to imagine an education that is committed to witnessing the need for what remains elusive and yet constitutive of subjectivity. Thus the pedagogical attention can retrieve that tiny fragmentary existential nature that makes each one of us what is beyond the rules of current interpretation and that, nevertheless, constantly re-describes the dynamics between subject and world: intuition, irony, charm, boredom, witz, adventure, taste, non-sense, shadow, the unforeseeable, the unfinished, grace, mystery, misunderstanding, and whatever else can be identified as the semantic space that interprets the ways in which the individual subjects give shape to each other²⁵. It is a matter, then, of a vital, pulsating, curious, starving past, always in search of the most suitable words – maybe metaphoric – in order to pronounce the problematic nature of existence and of the disquieting feeling of the world. But it is also a matter – and here especially – of knowing each other, according to preliminary attitudes that set the chances of encounter or conflict. Ways of relating, then, which are ways of knowing.

With the deep awareness that, according to Aldo Gargani, everyone always lives, actually, a different story compared to what he believes he has

²⁴ Cf. R. Bodei, *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

to tell, this *small collection of fragments of meaning* delineates some levels of observation on which to stop in order to describe reality, thus becoming a way of knowing, a privileged object of investigation.

At the same time, education as knowledge corresponds to the exercise – too disquieting – of casting light on the relationship which connects and welds the subject to the world, showing how, each time, the distance that separates the two poles of a relationship is nothing but the saving area of a new critical and cultural interpretation of their link, of a new narration of their intertwining and reorganization. Until disquiet becomes the feature of the relationship subject-world. In this way, maybe, knowledge, too, might aspire to regain a more recognizable and less abstract dimension and the narrations arranged for and by culture may be eloquent again.

Hence, education becomes cognitive exercise, identifying three modalities through which that ‘small collection of fragments of meaning’ becomes a real instrument of education. In the first case, at least according to Vladimir Jankélévitch, it is a matter of seeing the richness of the ‘rest’ in its being an *almost-nothing* which seems to result in the awareness – unreachable and exalting – that fullness, totality, unity are simply disembodied and silent representations of knowledge.

On the other hand, knowledge inhabits the “do-not-know-what”: what knowledge is lacking to be complete. So that, according to Jankélévitch,

a knowledge which is lacking in something can be true, and a knowledge which is not lacking in anything can be false! That beats everything, doesn't it? A work can be known in full details and at the same time continue to be disregarded [...] Under this aspect, exhaustive knowledge would be sophisticated and false and specious, while incomplete knowledge would be deep and true. Knowing everything that has to be known and yet knowing nothing despite such encyclopedic knowledge – here is the mockery of misunderstanding! Yes, I can know all categorical data, place, moment and number, with no exceptions, knowing where, when and how much and, nevertheless, misunderstanding.

Actually, misunderstanding knowledge was not lacking in anything... only the essential was missing! With no doubts, nothing determinable or precisely definable: since it is not a matter of this or that... In any case my unexplainable dissatisfaction, my unreasonable disillusion persist in protesting against the irreprehensible omniscience.

And yet something is missing! Something is missing and nothing 'lacks'; something is missing which is nothing; which is nothing and is everything; which is therefore *almost nothing*. In fact the almost-nothing is this very nothing which is everything²⁶.

Here: the knowledge which is lacking in a “do-not-know-what” and the resulting feeling of lack end up forming that disquiet of knowledge which corresponds also to educational disquiet. This latter, ultimately, ceases to be simply the quality of a mood to become the preconceptual condition of existence. Here disquiet is a resource, continuous creation, the inexhaustible glimpse²⁷.

This brings us to the second way of the disquieting knowing, which has the *glimpse* at its core. It consists in noticing, having a glimpse of the do-not-know-what which is missing in order to seize the essential of a certain knowledge, it is “a kind of qualitative jump through which the infinite distance from the almost-everything to everything is suddenly bypassed, canceled, swallowed!”²⁸. In order to glean something from this condition, which is nothing but the condition according to which knowledge can be

²⁵ Some pedagogical reseraches within these fields are: G.M. Bertin, *Ragione proteiforme e demonismo educativo*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1987; M. Contini, *Figure di felicità e orizzonti di senso*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1988; R. Massa (ed. by), *Linee di fuga. L'avventura nella formazione umana*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1989; P. Bertolini, *Fenomenologia dell'avventura: oltre il già-dato*, in Massa R. (ed. by), *Linee di fuga*, cit., pp. 19-33; F. Cambi, *I silenzi della teoria: il nascosto e l'impensato*, in F. Cambi e S. Ulivieri (eds by), *I silenzi dell'educazione*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1994; A. Erbetta (ed. by), *In forma di tragedia. Luoghi e percorsi della coscienza inquieta*, Torino, Utet-Libreria, 2004; G. Giachery, *Tra sogno e realtà. Lo scacco formativo del moderno*, in “Paideutika. Notebooks on education and culture”, *Boundary shapes*, n. 12, VI, 2010, pp. 109-129; S. Calvetto, *Per una pedagogia dell'impensato*, in “Paideutika. Notebooks on education and culture”, *Power and education*, n. 14, VII, 2011, pp. 91-121; Id., *Gli spazi pedagogici dell'avventura*, in L. Bonato, E. Lusso, E. Madrussan (eds by), *Viaggiare. Percorsi e approdi di genti e saperi*, Torino, L'Harmattan Italia, 2014, pp. 253-264.

²⁶ Eng. tr. from Italian edition: V. Jankélévitch, *Il non-so-che e il quasi-niente*, Torino, Einaudi, 2011, pp. 140, *passim* (V. Jankélévitch, *Le je-ne-sais-quoi et le Presque-rien*, 1980).

²⁷ An attempt to show this can be found in E. Madrussan, *L'inquietudine educativa*, in A. Mariani, (ed. by), *Venticinque saggi di pedagogia*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2011; Id., *Briciole di pedagogia. Cinque note critiche per un'educazione come inquietudine*, Roma, Anicia, 2012; Id., *Non è come sembra. Sull'imprendibilità della relazione tra maestro e allievo*, in VV.AA., *A Warm Mind-Shake*, Torino, Trauben, 2014, pp. 232-331.

understood as provided with sense, as vivified by a proper meaning, there is no possible recipe: knowledge must be seized in its incompleteness. As it becomes educationally decisive “to stop considering the almost-nothing as the arithmetic difference between everything and almost-everything and instead recognizing in it the mystery of totality in general”²⁹, then the almost nothing becomes the waste which protects knowledge from the risk of simplification, of the ‘fully known’, of the abstract appropriation of a perfect shape. Therefore, “a sudden insight³⁰ corresponds to a totality always unfinished”. Through this interpretation, the glimpse corresponds to an announced unveiling, to a surprise of a moving shadow which brings out the instant of comprehension. An instant which was very well understood and masterfully described by Aldo Gargani, who opposed it to the attempt of limiting knowledge to the already-known through what he called the analytic attitude of “repetition compulsion applied to every situation occurring”³¹. Where, on the contrary,

understanding is at the same time to stop understanding, understanding does not mean – contrary to what one normally thinks – drawing the conclusion of a known process that has been long dragged towards its end. Understanding is a change of state³².

Therefore the style of an existence and subjectivity, which puts at the heart of the educational and self-educational path the missing, the margin, the glimpse and everything which has “no tangible mark”³³, may prove to be an initial but not insignificant antidote for the acquiescent renunciation of a knowledge that can no longer be significant. Under this sign the

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 47.

²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 46.

³⁰ *Ivi*, p. 47.

³¹ Cfr. A.G. Gargani, *Il testo del tempo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1992, p. 120. With regard to Gargani and an interpretation of his autobiographical production from an educational point of view see: E. Madrussan, *L'esistenza come confessione. Aldo G. Gargani e la frase infinita*, in Id., *La parola nuda. Scritture di confessione e pedagogia del disvelamento*, Torino, Tirrenia Stampatori, 2003, pp. 83-110.

³² Cf. A.G. Gargani, *Il testo del tempo*, cit., p. 117.

³³ V. Jankélévitch, *Op. cit.*, p. 289.

disquieting education becomes a continuous new beginning, a digression, moving away from the involved reality.

From here, finally, the third modality of the disquieting knowing: digression. It has to do with distance, with going towards the margins of what is known, going beyond the codified horizons of knowledge so as to see our own cultural object from elsewhere. In such situations, according to Gargani

Intelligence has to cross itself and complete the bravest action, that is letting itself get carried away where it does not expect to be, so as to face again, eventually, the destiny of human minds which have become ways to be in the world, to face the destiny of complex inner vicissitudes that eventually are *gestures of existence*³⁴.

A gesture that, according to Blumenberg, allows intelligence to describe the world which “acquires sense through the oblique paths that civilization traces into it”³⁵. Not through the linear paths of logical consequentiality, of mechanistic performativity, but rather through digressions, misuses, long parentheses. In fact he deemed that

we can only exist because we make digressions. Should anyone take the shortest route, only one person would arrive. From a starting point to a point of arrival there is only one shorter route, while there are lots of indirect ways. Civilizations consists in discovering and opening, describing and recommending, giving value and rewarding deviations. Therefore on the one hand it seems to be characterized by an insufficient rationality, as in the strictest sense only the shortest way gets the quality mark of reason, and whatever branches and passes alongside on the right and on the left is, strictly speaking, the superfluous, which can tackle with difficulty the issue of its own reason of being. But on the other hand digressions give civilization the function of humanizing lives. The pretended ‘art of living’ of the shortest way is, in the consequentiality of its exclusions, barbarity.³⁶

³⁴ Cf. A.G. Gargani, *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

³⁵ Eng. tr. from Italian edition: H. Blumenberg, *L'ansia si specchia sul fondo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1989, p. 115 (Eng. tr. *Care Crosses the River*, cit.).

³⁶ Eng. tr. from Italian edition: H. Blumenberg, *L'ansia si specchia sul fondo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1989, p. 114, *passim* (Eng. tr. *Care Crosses the River*, cit.).

After all – we may add – isn't the need of thought perhaps already inclined to look for its own safest power far from the comfortable space of procedurality without obstacles? Isn't it true that the urgency to claim room for thought, in our times, means to recognize intellectual dignity to whatever is not living within the spaces of the certain, indisputable and verifiable?

Therefore, with the exception of the need to think, it will be a matter of making room for empty time, maybe also for the time of boredom and the “suburbs” of life, teaching the gaze to go through the world, the language to search for essential words, re-learning to know by re-interpreting culture.

Indeed,

the opacity of each thing, word, term, expression which contribute to build that cohesive all, but not necessitating, which is the scene of sense, explains why it is eventually a matter of a scene of sense rather than a rationality understood as mechanic automatic procedure of implication among the elements of the speech; of a scenario of sense then instead of the alleged deployment of a reason which is totally illuminated.³⁷

It will be at the end of this voyage that our triple educational exercise may hope to question again thought as a radical interpreter of the present time, and for the same reason, asking the forms of culture to take up a route, whatever it may be, once more.

And if anyone should think that after all this is the story of all time, of every man in every era, or else that the corresponding disquiet is an educational risk, it will be however necessary to remember what every educator knows better than anyone else: “Nothing can be learnt from experience, nothing from history [...] the shipwreck of the fathers isn't of help to their children – the sea knows no traces of what has been”³⁸.

³⁷ Cf. A.G. Gargani, *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

³⁸ Eng. tr. from Italian edition: H. Blumenberg, *L'ansia si specchia sul fondo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1989, p. 29, *passim* (Eng. tr. *Care Crosses the River*, cit.).

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