

The world 'once more': Walking lines

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During the last seven years I travelled with post-graduate students in a course on 'world-forming education' ("éducation mondiale")¹ for 10 to 14 days to post-conflict cities (Sarajevo, Belgrade, Tirana, Bucharest, Kinshasa) and non-tourist megapoles in China (Shenzhen, Chongqing). Students were asked to walk day and night along arbitrary lines drawn on city maps. Lines starting and leading nowhere particularly, lines without plan, crossing at random neighborhoods, buildings, areas. Everyday, during long talks, I asked each of them very simple questions: What have you seen? What have you heard? What do you think about it? What do you make of it? At the end of the travel they had to present in the streets somewhere in the city their 'look at the city'. In the future, I hope to be able to report on these educational experiments. However, here, I just want to say something about what, for me, is at stake in these travels and why the course is called 'world-forming education'.

Since the 17th century education has been conceived as the art of representation, related to justification and explanation. Indeed at least since Comenius published *Orbis sensualium pictus* (*The World in Pictures*) in 1658, education has been concerned with presenting the world 'once more' i.e. to re-present it in a 'critical' way. The whole of forms of life is so confusing that, according to Comenius, it must be presented to the child or the young 'in the right order'. Since then, the central questions of any education seems to be: What, in view of the enormous amount of what can be learned, should be learned? And how can what is considered to be worthwhile be transmitted, or given to, the new generation? These questions, at least apparently, are still the one's we have to ask today. So, in his recent inaugural lecture at Stirling University Gert Biesta (2009) stated: "Education, in its widest sense, is about how we welcome 'newcomers' into our world. It therefore raises important questions about how we (re)present our worlds to newcomers – something which involves selection, choice and judgment." (p.1)

One could state indeed that modern education is about the world 'once more', the world explained and represented in a 'right order' in response to a reigning confusion. However, in the last century this idea of representing the right order has been strongly complicated by the increasing awareness of the implied problem: How is the representation related to what it represents? The Belgian painter René Magritte offered maybe one of the strongest and most famous images of this problem. He made a painting of a pipe with the caption 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'. This is not a pipe, but a painted pipe and one cannot decide whether the painted pipe represents the 'real' pipe. This means that when we let children 'see the world', we don't show them the world, but what we see as the world, and what we consider to be important, valuable and useful about it. Therefore, educators do not only have to think about the 'right' representation but should be aware that they are not showing the world, but representing it: 'ceci n'est pas le monde'. And then the question seems to appear again, and even more emphatic as with the seventeenth century thinker Comenius: What do we have to represent and how to represent it?

However, my hypothesis is that the problem of education in our (post-modern) times is changing. Not in the first place because we moved from education to learning and to 'learning to learn' as the main aim (thereby seemingly solving the problem of 'what to learn'), but because our condition has changed (related partly to the omni-presence of images). Indeed, in contrast to the very common idea in educational theory and philosophy that one of our main endeavors in education should be to raise a critical awareness with students that every 'world' is but a view on the world, just one vision, one perspective, each and every person having her own perspective so that we have a plurality of perspectives and that everything is an interpretation (a reading) – 'ceci n'est pas le monde', but a vision on the world, a 'window', 'a frame' - , I would maintain that today this awareness is very widely spread and indeed has become the basic stance (I am always struck by the fact that students who I ask to describe what they see, when we are walking cities, always reply, before even saying anything else, that what they see is of course only a perspective or an interpretation and moreover a too limited one). And I would maintain that it confronts education with a problem which is, so to say, opposite to the modern one. Not: How to represent the world and how to make students aware that this representation is not the 'real world'? This awareness is present enough. But: How to turn the world into something 'real', how to make the world 'present', to give again the real and discard the shields or mirrors that seem to have locked us up increasingly into self-reflections and interpretations, into endless returns upon 'standpoints', 'perspectives' and 'opinions'. This problem, I think, is neither an epistemological one (about true representations) nor a normative one (regarding what to value, what to select, how to judge), but is precisely about the (dis-)distance i.e. the way we relate to the world, it is about the right distance which opens up an existential space. This problem does not concern images, symbols or signs (related to stories and interpretations), but concerns the gaze and the ethos of looking itself. "... to give again the real to realize it is genuinely to look at it" (Nancy, 2001, p. 34) It is not about the problematic of representation. Indeed this problematic has been debated in all (im)possible ways (its relation to the real and to illusion, its subjectivity or objectivity, its historical, social, cultural determinations, etc.). It is about a look at the world as a regard for the world and its truth. This movement is not a movement beyond what is visible, but a movement towards its work or power, not only to make it known, but to make it 'real' or 'present'.

Education, then, is still about giving the world 'once more', however not about its representation, but its 'presentation' in the literal sense: making it present. The given must be given again in order to become really given: it must be received and recreated to be what it is. To give again the given is to 'realize' it, to make it impress, to insist on its present and presence. Which is not a mere matter of vision or the symbolical representation of a cognitive or cultural content (or a story or a frame). The present is not what appears as such and before us (as an object of knowledge), but what is experienced when we are attentive or when we are 'present in the present'. Evidence, then, is not what is simply given, but what comes to appear when the gaze cares for the present. Presence is not a mere matter of vision; it offers itself in encounters, worries or concerns.

Looking is regarding and consequently respecting. The word respect also has to do with regard (*respicere*): it watches for... turned toward, ... guided by attention, by observance or consideration. A rightful look is respectful of the real that it beholds, that is to say it is attentive and openly attending to the very power of the real and its absolute exteriority: looking will not tap this power but will allow it to communicate itself or will communicate with it itself. In the end, looking just amounts to thinking the real, to test oneself with regard to a meaning one is not mastering. (Nancy, 2001, p. 38)

What the city travels offer, then, is not the opening of a window onto the world (a vision or view, a sight or insight) or the showing of a scene (as in a theater), but what they offer are lines as a cut in the world onto this very world. What is at stake in this traveling is not discovering far countries and exotic habits, but making the (slight) move which shapes the mapping of a 'there' to a 'here'. The line as a cut, the walking as copying the line by foot together with the mapping of the line are devices to enter a space, to enter the world, they are devices for penetration, before they are devices for contemplation and reflection. This device does not work by opening up (broadening, widening, multiplying the views) but by mobilizing the look, making it vigilant and attentive. As Nancy states, the gaze no longer faces a representation or a spectacle from the outset, but the eyes are carried away, mobilized. This cannot occur without conducting ourselves differently in regard to the world. It is not about symbolic or imaginary vision, it is not dealing with sight but with looking: opening the seeing to something real, taking a look at the intensity of evidence, "taking care of the real – of what resists, precisely, being absorbed in any vision (representations, imaginations)", offering a pregnant experience. The world 'once more' is not an 'original' reality behind (the vision, perspective) but its evidence, the 'there-is' or 'being there', which requires either luck or an art to make it happen, the art of a pedagogy which says: "look, I won't let your attention become distracted, look! Instead of waiting for thrills and a denouement, for stories and explanations, Look!" It impresses the gaze by offering cuts, incisions as lines that mobilize the gaze, attract it, take it along. But the line does not define the gaze. Walking the lines is walking without an agenda, without an end but with a burden, a charge: What is there to see and to hear? And what to do with it? How to respond to it? The task of pedagogy, then, is to offer lines and to keep the walkers to the line, preventing escape from the burden, from 'being-there'.

Note

In Dutch as in French there is a distinction between 'globalisation' and 'mondialisation'. In the translation of Jean Luc Nancy's work, the first is translated as 'globalization' and the second by 'world-forming', referring to the french for world: 'monde' (Nancy, 2007, p. 36). It is in this second sense that 'éducation mondiale' has to be taken: 'world-forming education'.

References

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