

Pedagogy as Transformative Event: Becoming Singularly Present in Context

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ABSTRACT

So much of our work in education is based on the idea of transformation: that somehow through education each of us has the opportunity to change, to alter ourselves, or to be altered in some way. But what are the conditions of this transformation? To what extent do – and can – our educational theories depict the possibility for transformation? How does the transformative potential of education actually disrupt the more formative, socialising effects of education itself? This paper addresses these questions by exploring the idea that transformation is not just about ‘surface’ changes in attitude or behaviour on the part of our students but is involved in a change of being in the world, or what I will call ‘becoming present’. The paper is exploratory rather than argumentative in tone in its attempt to sketch out an idea of transformation as an event that is fundamentally pedagogical. In its most general sense, this paper works toward a specifically *pedagogical* theory of becoming, a theory that takes into account the singularity of becoming and that seeks to render the ways each of us exists in the world with others as being eminently of educational concern.

The Road to Transformation

Cormac McCarthy (2007) begins his elegiac depiction of apocalyptic life in his novel *The Road*, with a sense of the timelessness that haunts a world where little survives, a world that is ‘barren, silent and godless’ (p. 2). Every night is darker, every day greyer than the one before it. The nameless main character, a father, no longer knows what month it is, having ‘not kept a calendar in years’. His wife is now dead, having committing suicide some time after giving birth to their son in the wake of the unnamed cataclysm that has befallen the earth. The father wanders the bleak landscape with his young son in search of food, shelter and some respite from the unbearable sameness that is death’s faithful servant. Within this silent and godless landscape, there is no apparent change, little faith in survival, and indeed few chances of enduring. Yet, in the figure of the son, the father not so much sees but grasps the possibility of another beginning. It is this boy’s existence that makes life not simply worth living, but makes life itself liveable. The father ‘knew only that the child was his warrant. He said: if he is not the word of God God never spoke’ (p. 3): his warrant, his guarantor, a heraldic promise. As the story unfolds, the son indeed becomes the spiritual and moral centre of a world where some have turned to roaming the roads in their cannibalistic hunt for prey, substituting human flesh in lieu of proper food. Time and again, their encounters with others reveal the bare life to which all have been reduced: starvation, sickness, madness and injury – a Hobbesian nightmare that relentlessly compels the violent defence of one’s body and soul. But the motherless boy, although not able to remember a time before this bare life, enters these encounters with strangers by claiming through deed and word that he ought to help them. He regularly questions his father’s defensiveness and gives away precious food to fellow sufferers. He is one of the ‘carriers of the fire’ (p. 231), and like the fire, he is

spontaneous in his gestures and speech, flaming the conditions necessary for another kind of life. But in what this life will consist and which shape it will take are questions left unanswered at the novel's end.

What are we to make of McCarthy's grand tale from the perspective of education? Is this merely a morality play, a parable of Christ-like goodness to be used in the education of moral character? Is this a warning of the current trajectory of our environmental crisis, which without educational intervention seems inevitably to be leading to a nightmarish scenario of apocalyptic proportions? Is it a critical object lesson on consumer society, on the devastation wrought by our insatiable appetite for market goods, which makes cannibals of us all as it destroys the natural world we depend on for our survival? All these possible readings take the sweeping gesture of the novel as their focus, and while these may be quite adequate avenues to pursue, I think that it is in the 'God of small things'¹ where we can best find resonance with our educational pursuits.

Specifically, it is the figure of the boy, whose newness ushers in the possibility for something other to take place, a possibility for transformation, that, to my mind, encapsulates those seeds of anticipation and optimism that lie within our educational endeavours. To claim, of course, that education has transformative effect is to capture the very dream of educationalists: that our work indeed has the potential to change others' lives. Education, from this perspective, might be seen as the practice of staging such a transformative event. However, *The Road* is not educational in this sense. It is not that the boy will occasion an event, or act as a catalyst for one in which the moral and political register of the world will be altered; rather the boy *is* the event, he *is* its moral and political promise. He exists in the world not as a 'product' of his circumstance – neither as one who has been socialised into becoming a predictable figure of suffering and hardship, nor as one who turns to violence as a means to stave off what seems to be impending death. Instead he is one who is engaged deeply in the context of its unfolding: he is at once fully present and susceptible to the horrific circumstances not of his own making. And thus, to my mind, the transformative event he embodies speaks to something I think of as belonging quintessentially to the concerns of our field.

The boy occasions two possibilities for consideration from our educational point of view. He is the transformative heart of the novel that holds open the possibilities for the future at the same time as it is he who exists most fully in the contours of the present. For instance, he responds to his father who says, with characteristic adult hubris, 'You're not the one who has to worry about everything': 'Yes I am, he said, I am the one' (p. 277). Indeed, claiming for himself his ineluctable place in the world, the boy transgresses what has become commonplace – the violence, carelessness and selfishness that he sees in others. Reaching beyond his 'social' environment, beyond the confines of a situation that threaten his daily existence, he nonetheless is profoundly both *in* and *of* the world. Unlike his father who remembers a time past and who longs for a life far kinder and gentler, the son through his very engagement and presence in a specific time and place is the one to offer the possibility for change and newness. He breaks, as it were, through the seeming continuum of past and future.

It is this coming together of transformation and presence, I claim in the pages that follow, which provides us with the raw material out of which we make our dreams in the field of education. Through the work of Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero, I develop an idea of transformation that recognizes the centrality of one's presence in the world, and the specific ways in which our presence is always an engagement with a particular context. In naming this event of transformation as a pedagogical act, I seek to make clear the ways in which pedagogy, like the motherless boy, is founded on a second birth – one that is bound up with the relational aspects of being present in context with others. But before I delve into the more

detailed aspects of this position, I first turn to address a central question: when we dream that dream of transformation in education of what are we dreaming?

Education and the Dream of Transformation

There is no shortage of educational theories and philosophical explanations for the kinds of transformative dreams we have in mind when we pursue our educational projects and engage in teaching practices. Education, since classical times, has been concerned with ‘influence’, that is, the Hellenistic ‘paideia’ was eminently about shaping a life in accordance with the highest aims of virtue and civic duty; it has been seen to be a process of enculturation and bound up with notions of civilization and perfection (Marrou, 1956, p. 142).ⁱⁱ And although the specific end result or goal of that process might be different depending upon whether one reads, for example, Plato or Aristotle, the process itself is nonetheless caught up in the capacity to alter the individual who exists here and now into becoming someone else, someone better, in the future. This aspect passes on to early Christian formulations of education, and according to Jaeger (1961) in a follow-up to his classic study of paideia, there is a sense in which education becomes concerned with the chastisement of the sinner in order to bring about change. Yet change, in itself, is not what is of prime importance; rather it is the instantiation of another way of life that matters: a life that is both righteous and pious. This idea of influence works its way into the modernist humanist tradition, whereby students are seen to be infinitely malleable even as they embody forms of resistance to their teachers (Bushnell, 1996, p. 21). In this way, the humanist tradition acknowledges educational influence as central to its project even as it recognizes the obstacles to its own success.

From a perspective closer to home, R.S. Peters (1967) saw education as necessarily implying intrinsic value. Along this line, education indeed has some connection to change – that something of worth will come about through one’s experience of being educated. “It would be a logical contradiction to say that a man had been educated but that he had in no way changed for the better....” (p. 3). The influence of education is here then tied to the ‘worthiness’ of transformation insofar as change can lead to some kind of betterment. An altogether different emphasis of education’s influence and its capacity to transform is captured in theories of socialisation promoted by sociologists such as Durkheim. Socialisation builds on the idea of a normative influence that exists not in the service of personal betterment but in the service of a smooth-running society. More contemporary figures such as Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) offer us a picture of education even further removed from the optimism of Peters in seeing the nature of our schooling enterprise as committed to reproduction. Educational influence on this account is viewed as inherently conservative and transformation is routed along the path of sustaining the status quo.

But education’s influence and transformative potential, even after the criticisms of Bourdieu (and even amongst theorists who accept his reproduction theory), have continued to take on a central role in those educational projects tied directly to a normative goal: this includes politically informed endeavours, such as feminist, anti-racist, democratic and multicultural education, and some forms of moral education. Here the influence of education is to be used in the pursuit of attaining not only better awareness of issues, but also a change in attitude, values, beliefs, and possibilities for action.

What all these movements in education imply is that transformation of the self – and, for some, of society more generally – is not simply possible but also desirable.ⁱⁱⁱ Thus Freud was, in this respect, right: that our dreams do contain the fulfilment of wishes – even when they turn into nightmares. For it is also, as I’ve written elsewhere, that the demands by which we exert our educational influence can become the stuff of our own bad dreams (2003, p. 23).

Our desire to change others' lives carries with it a moral force that makes it difficult to sort out (particularly in practice) what is properly transformation and what is imposition. And this is reflected in how transformation itself has been treated within the educational literature: it is often made subservient to the aims, goals, and definitions of education. Even with those 'transformative' educational projects (often politically motivated), such as feminist, anti-racist and multicultural education, that have more or less definitive ends against which to measure a particular change (i.e., that this student has indeed become politically aware of sexism; or has embodied certain reflective attitude toward their own prejudices), very little focus has been placed on the process of transformation itself. That is, transformation is seen to have taken place merely when certain pre-defined attitudes, behaviours, considerations, and concerns have been displayed – that is, when our expectations come to manifest themselves in our students – without any theorising around transformation as event or phenomenon. Indeed, what all the theories mentioned above seem to rest on is a notion of change that is tied to a notion of formation – that is, education seeks not only to alter, but also to instantiate a form of being along the lines of a certain trajectory, be this academic, social, political or moral. But in order to be trans/formed, if we follow the logic implied in these educational theories, need not one be 'present' in some way to the influence being exerted? And even more importantly for my purposes here, does not this presence and the particular ways one is susceptible to influence actually signal as well the conditions upon which any transformation is possible – despite whether or not this alteration leads to the formation we desire?

In posing these questions I'm suggesting that transformation is something other than the mere achievement of being educated into pre-defined roles or abilities, no matter how well intentioned they may be. The character of the boy in *The Road*, for instance, cannot be said to be fulfilling any definite aim as he embodies an event of transformation; we do not know what he becomes, we rather are shown who he is when he is with others. By contrast, educational theory has been quite consumed with what children ought to be in the future as opposed to who they are in the present. *What* the boy becomes is not, however, what drives the narrative in *The Road*; it is, rather, his continual assertion and exposure of himself in the here and now that matters. Educationally speaking, the question that I think deserves to be addressed is how do we reframe our attention to education so that the here and now matters? How can we live with the uncertainty that students might not become 'what' we ask them to be? That is, can we tolerate the idea that our very dream of transformation might in fact actually be heading down a road that has no definitive end, that a student can become someone that has nothing to do with our own desires?

Now, while the issue of how an individual is or becomes transformed might lead some down the path of psychology in search of answers, I think the exploration of the conditions of transformation – and the importance of the here and now – is best addressed in terms of our own field. I say this primarily because educational philosophy (or more appropriately some approaches within it) is in a better position to explore the *particularities* of these conditions. Although like many psychological theories, philosophy has been accused of offering a totalising picture of human existence through its pursuit of ontology, and its claims to know what 'humanity' is (of which I have been critical myself), there are nonetheless within its disciplinary purview a range of perspectives that enable us to think the category of the particular more fulsomely.

For example, recent theoretical investigations into the nature of being in the present and its importance for education, have focused on the ethical and political dimensions of subjectivity as a 'coming into presence' (Biesta 2006) and on the ways in which an attentiveness to the 'gap' between past and future that is the present can shape what it is we 'do' in education (Masschelein 2009). What both Biesta and Masschelein bring to our attention is how the idea of the present, the here and now, belongs intrinsically to education.

Their work seeks to open up new possibilities for research and teaching by shifting the focus of education away both from its socialising or reproductive function and from its tendency to gear its practices toward a pre-defined future. Instead, they ask us to consider how we engage with students in the here and now, and in what ways our attending to the present opens up new concerns for educational thought itself. Moreover, their work suggests that we need to pay attention to the singular ways each of us (students, teachers and researchers) exists in this present and the ethical and political demands this makes on us. What I wish to develop further here as an extension of Biesta's and Masschelein's ideas are the ways in which the present not only belongs to education, but how it actually contains the transformative potential of education.

However exploring transformation as having educational import can be seen to be problematic in light of the preceding discussion. I raised above the issue of the paradoxical aims of transformation and formation in education and so in turning to examine the transformative side of the coin, so to speak, I do not wish to suggest that the notion of education can be freed entirely from its impulse to 'influence'. Indeed, education, whether we speak of schooling or more informal sites of learning, always seems to occupy a place of paradox^{iv} – that is, it seeks to transform its subjects as it offers them definitions of what it is they should or can become, or at least depicts for them the benefits of such becoming (we find these even in the German tradition of *Bildung* and its claim to an open-ended future of becoming^v). Thus framing our attention to transformation as an intrinsic element of the educational endeavour means having to bracket 'education' as a term, since both in practice and theory it works in the impossible space of formation and transformation.^{vi} Hence I turn to the term 'pedagogy', not in order to resurrect its classical connotations in terms of civilizing and upbringing, but in order to signal the inherently relational quality of transformation that I am after. Although pedagogy has a wide variety of meanings and usages, some of which merely serve to gesture to some ideological or political focus in teaching (feminist pedagogy, border pedagogy, anti-racist pedagogy), pedagogy is most often thought of in terms of classroom practices, as something that occurs between teachers and students. Wider definitions, however, have focused on the exchange not only between teachers and students, but also between texts and readers, between films and audiences and the knowledge produced through this interaction (Lusted, 1986). Pedagogy, then, can be seen, in a general sense, to refer to the *process* through which these relational exchanges come to condition the kinds of knowledge we can have and more importantly, the kinds of being we can become (Castoriadis, 1997). As having its focus therefore on process and exchange, pedagogy enables us to think about how our becoming someone is necessarily transformative. That is, it does not assume that we exist outside of these exchanges by virtue of our birth; instead, each one of us is engaged in a process of becoming that is relational and on-going.

Becoming Present in Context: A Second (Pedagogical) Birth

As with the character of the boy in McCarthy's novel, 'all persons, female and male, are inevitably born from their mother's womb as finite beings' (Cavarero 1995, p. 6). But all, also like the boy, exist beyond the mother, in a world peopled by others with whom we must engage. This, as Adriana Cavarero puts it, occasions a second birth which she credits to the thought of Hannah Arendt: 'Arendt does not highlight the concept of birth as a coming from the mother's womb, but accepts the Greek meaning of birth as a coming from nothing. Despite this, the central position of birth within her work brings about a subversive shift in perspective with respect to the patriarchal tradition that has always thrived on the category of death' (Cavarero 1995, pp. 6-7).

Indeed the notion of natality has been seen to be Arendt's major contribution to a history of thought concerned with the depiction of existence in the face of human mortality. Instead, refiguring our emergence as subjects in terms of birth, she demonstrates an unfashionable obsession with the palpability of human existence: 'nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live' (1959, p. 10). For her, as Cavarero pointedly expresses, birth is not simply a physical act, but a symbolic one, one that is not determined by circumstance, but one that is an act of creation. Like Augustine in this regard, who claims that it is God who creates change, 'making all things new' (1.IV.4, p.5), Arendt privileges the transformative character in which newness comes into being. Thus she seeks to depict the human condition, not in terms of a literal or agentic God, but in terms of the mystery that characterizes all acts of genesis. For Arendt, our existence rests upon a miracle: the 'infinite improbability' of the earth and human life (2005, p. 111). In line with McCarthy's portrayal of the son as an incarnation of the word of God in a world that is 'barren, silent, and godless', Arendt's focus on birth also enables a reversal of this portrayal, characterising the world in terms of creation, speech and mystery. However, unlike Augustine who attributes a divine agency behind the act of creation, Arendt, in returning to the Greek genesis, draws us closer to the miracle of spontaneity that accompanies our becoming present in the world with others: 'in other words every new beginning is by nature a miracle when seen and experienced from the standpoint of the processes it necessarily interrupts' (2005, p. 112). It is a leap into an unknown event of transformation – not a leap of faith – that guides her thinking on natality. 'It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins' (1959, p. 157).

Yet, this second birth – this creation of something 'startlingly' unexpected – is only possible by virtue of our exposure to others, and thus what might seem at first to be a discrete act of miraculous creation becomes one that is compounded in and through our relations to others via speech and action: 'with word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance' (1959, p. 157). One becomes a 'who' – a singular, unique who – at the moment of speech and action. Unlike liberalism's abstract individual, the who-ness of which Arendt writes is a uniqueness that emerges in a particular time and context. Specifically, it is a uniqueness that *appears* in the in-between space with other human beings; it *reveals* itself in speech and action. 'This revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them – that is, in sheer human togetherness' (1959, p. 160). However, as she goes on to emphasize here and elsewhere, living human beings are not simply appearances like other objects in the world, but they actively disclose themselves in their encounters with others: 'To be alive means to be possessed by an urge toward self-display... Living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them' (1978, p. 21). In this sense, the living subject both appears to others and does so through her own activity. To be alive is to make one's appearance on the world stage. Thus, if we return to *The Road* for a moment, in contrast to the many walking dead around him, the boy inserts himself into the world as a marker of his unique being. Human beings are not simply distinct, but they distinguish themselves; that is, they actively put forth their who-ness in the very gesture of their words and deeds. As Cavarero writes, 'as the direct descendent of the natal impulse toward self-exhibition, the human faculty of action bears indeed, in Arendt's view, the task of actively revealing the uniqueness of personal identity... Put another way, *who* each one is, is revealed to others when he or she acts in their presence in an interactive theatre where each is, at the same time, *actor* and *spectator*' (2000, 22).

Thus the uniqueness of the individual speaker and actor is dependent upon two elements. First, he or she is revealed through the very act of utterance and the deeds committed. Secondly, this revelation is dependent on the presence of others to hear and witness it. 'This disclosure of the "who" in contradistinction to the "what" somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does' (1959, p. 159). Arendt is adamant that it is a unique presence that announces itself through the space in-between people, through the 'web of human relationships' (1959, p. 163). In an important sense, because uniqueness emerges through the events of speaking and acting, Arendt forecloses the possibility of viewing uniqueness as some sort of essence; it is instead always contextual and specific – and as Cavarero adds, embodied. This is underscored by Cavarero who cautions against the romanticism often attached to uniqueness: 'in the uniqueness of the *who* there is no homage to the self-centered and titanic subject of romanticism. The *who* does not project or pity herself, and neither does she envelop herself within her interiority. The *who* is simply exposed; or, better, finds herself always already exposed to another, and consists in this reciprocal exposition' (2000, p. 89).

This exposure, then, in our encounters with others, means that my becoming present is dependent on the other's 'necessary presence' (Cavarero, 2000, p. 89). Thus, in this way, because each of us is unique and radically different, we exist in a context of plurality right from the beginning. Our speech and action which are the conditions of our second birth are therefore not individualistic projects, or solely about 'me' acting for myself, but are fundamentally tied to a host of others with whom and to whom I reveal myself. There is, therefore, a pedagogical element at stake here, not in that there is some overtly didactic function that others exercise over me, but because what the other gives me is the possibility for becoming present in the world. The possibility to take my place is thereby conditional upon the relations I have with others and the knowledges, languages, and meanings that both separate and bind us together. The pedagogical event of exposure to other unique beings is therefore one that introduces newness into the world through a context that is fundamentally plural. As Arendt herself puts it, 'human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings' (1959, p. 156).

However, becoming present in context is no easy affair, and is unstable from the beginning. Arendt claims that our lives are spoken in a way that enables me to appear to others whilst also setting in motion unpredictable outcomes. Since we exist in continuous exchange with other people, our action 'strikes' others; it is released into a world in which the outcomes of those actions generate unpredictable reactions – and unpredictable sufferings (1959, p. 169). They are 'boundless' 'because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation' (1959, p. 170). That is, we do not know what the effect our becoming present will have on those we in fact depend on for our very becoming. Moreover, that we depend on others to hear and respond to our words and deeds, our stories, means that when we speak to others our uniqueness 'brings to the scene a fragile and unmasterable self' (Cavarero 2000, p. 84). And thus we are not the 'authors of our own stories' (Arendt 1959, p. 164) but are reliant upon the stories others tell about us: we are, as Cavarero puts it, narratable selves awaiting our narration (Cavarero 2000, p. 86). Hence we speak without fully knowing who we are beforehand; who we are emerges only in the specific context of the present that we share with others.

Thus there is in my becoming present a singular I that emerges as a newness inserted into the world. For Arendt, this is a miraculous, transformative event and it is loyal to the idea that newness can only exist as a radical presence; it is not a newness in the past, or one that is yet to come, but one that is here and now. In introducing newness into the space between past and future, the present is transformational – not simply for how it can shape future events, but

because it breaks into the apparent seamlessness with which past and future are often connected. Returning to McCarthy's depiction of apocalyptic time in which all days are like the ones before it, the Arendtian present is a transformative event that breaks through such monotony. In becoming present, the boy shifts the contours of time, challenging our habitual understandings that demand to know what will happen in the end – *what* will he be? He inserts himself into the world, through his words and deeds, through acts of revelation that are always directed toward the strangers he encounters and that tell us instead something about *who* he is.

What is so important to remember is that this present of which I am speaking here is a *specific* present: it is neither abstract nor general. We become present in the world as unique beings in a time that is neither determined by the past nor entirely shaped by the future. This is why in the novel it is the boy who can become present, and not the father who has no idea what time it is and therefore no sense of the 'aliveness' at stake in the present; his major focus is on survival, not life as such. The present, moreover, is an explicitly narrative, relational present, a space and time where speech and action occur in context with others. 'Wherever human beings come together – be it in private or socially, be it in public or politically – a space is generated that simultaneously gather them into it and separates from one another... Wherever people come together, the world thrusts itself between them, and it is in this in-between space that all human affairs are conducted' (Arendt, 2005, p. 106).

It is in the in-between of our relationships that each of us is transformed and becomes present. This in-between space is not generalizable, but is radically singular, located as it is in the evanescent present. What I am therefore claiming here is that it is not ontology as it is traditionally understood which can capture this coming into being, but pedagogy that best depicts the 'I/others/in-between' as a constellation that conditions this singular event of transformation. And thus, it is not presence or the present itself that is educational, but the contextual, relational aspects of it – and their very specificity – which make it pedagogical. Built on the idea of exchange and interaction, it is not simply that each of us 'learns to become' but that each of us discovers herself and is discovered anew through our appearance to others and through the ways in which others reflect back to us a story of ourselves that we are waiting to claim.

Retelling the Dream, or Going Down the Road of The Unexpected and the Particular

In exploring pedagogy as transformative event, I have discussed the ways in which one's becoming present is uniquely singular and occurs in context with others. What Arendt and Cavarero point to is the irreducibly particular nature of this occurrence and the unexpected, startling ways this can happen. Transformation is thereby, on the hand, nothing we can generalise about since *who* I am can never be the same as *who* you are although we can certainly share certain characteristics of *what* we are (women, English-speaking, white, working class) and, on the other hand, nothing we can predict or control as if one's becoming present could be planned, imposed, or compelled. Thus when we return to the question I posed earlier: Can we tolerate the idea that our very dream of transformation might in fact actually be heading down a road that has no definitive end, that a student can become someone that has nothing to do with our own desires? The answer must be an equivocal 'well, it depends'.

It depends I think on what we're willing to do with our dreams. A dream of transformation that only sees change in students in terms of pre-defined outcomes – be these narrowly defined in light of the current culture of testing and managerialism that seems to be invading all levels of European education, or broadly defined in terms of character, attitudes and beliefs – ends up, in my view, putting too much emphasis on the future as if the students

we teach were not already engaged in living a life, a very particular life, with their own loves and hates, their own desires and passions, their own crises and traumas, a life which is revealed and exposed in encounters with others. Even our most well-intentioned images of the future risk eclipsing those processes through which students come to make a life, become present, if we are not attentive simultaneously to the ways in which such images mirror our own concerns in the world. Educating *for* the future – even one that claims to be open-ended – runs the danger of foreclosing on those possibilities for becoming that Arendt claims are part of our human condition. Instead, what her and Cavarero’s work has suggested is that our educational endeavours depend on a new orientation to the present and the transformation that this makes possible. This does not mean that we should stop dreaming of a better future, but perhaps we need to begin to retell the dream of transformation differently.

Viewing pedagogy as transformative event in fact means shifting our understanding of the relationship between education and time, which would radically alter our focus on educational phenomena. That is, recognizing the particular and unexpected ways we become present, means focusing our energies, both as teachers and researchers, upon the local, contextual, and singular aspects of our daily work in the here and now. It means paying attention to the singularly different ways students take their place as speaking and acting subjects and it means engaging with the ‘who’ of education and not simply the ‘what’. That is, it requires us to bring into our discourses of teaching and learning a focus on the actual flesh and blood subjects who make up the educational encounter. In other words, taking transformation seriously means articulating policies, programmes and curricula that have at their heart not some abstract ‘image’ of humanity that students are expected to fulfil but a sensibility for the fragility and interdependency that resonates with what it means to live a life. In revitalizing education through the idea of second birth, we begin in a sense of generation as opposed to one of mere survival. Reintroducing pedagogy as transformative event back into the discussion of education of course does not do away with the paradox I discussed earlier; but what it can do is help to stimulate another kind of response to the difficulties and frustrations we encounter when we are imprisoned by own dreams. That is, transformation need not be seen as being subservient to our missionary efforts to shape, form, and instantiate ways of being for our students; rather, to use the language of Arendt, transformation needs to retain something of the miracle and mystery of becoming present as an essential aspect of our educational work. Framing our attention to the particular and the unexpected, however, means making room for theories that do not seek to reduce the particularity of the subject as being simply manifestations of a general pattern, but as involved in rich, complex, and embodied events of becoming that resist encapsulation.^{vii} And thus the dream of transformation that can be retold from this position is one where the newness of life can find its rightful pedagogical home. For no matter how deeply we dream, we simply cannot know where the road will end.

Notes

ⁱ This is the title of Arundhati Roy’s 1997 novel.

ⁱⁱ Interestingly, Marrou (1956) comments on the how the notion of culture implied here has a personal meaning, something that is retained in the English and French meanings of word, but missing from the German *Kultur*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Of course Bourdieu is not himself ‘desiring’ reproduction, but his work shows how reproduction is a desire on the part of the state.

^{iv} See Løvlie (2008) for a discussion of the pedagogical paradox. As will be seen further below, I’m suggesting that we refer to education as embodying a paradox, whereas the project

of transformation is fundamentally an act of pedagogy. This is not meant in any way to suggest that the actions and speech of teachers are not in conflict (the meaning that Løvlie gives to the pedagogical paradox), merely that what I am referring to as pedagogy here is confined to the event of transformation.

^v See Masschelein and Ricken (2005) for a discussion of *Bildung* and *Erziehung* and how the latter, which concerns itself more with upbringing, is actually often put in the service of the former.

^{vi} Interestingly, the character of the boy in McCarthy's novel has ceased his 'school' lessons with his father; he is truly uneducated by all conventional standards and thus does not occupy this paradoxical space.

^{vii} See Grannäs and Frelin (2010) for a discussion of the absent present, which they use as term to depict students' and teachers' negotiations of the complexity of their roles beyond the regulatory order of schooling.

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