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Encountering the realm of sensuous history has been a new and stimulating experience. Coming from the discipline of intellectual history, my focus had primarily been on conceptual history with philosophical texts as source material. Grappling with educational space as a topology of sensuous perceptions has certainly challenged my way of thinking and opened up for further explorations of the educational space in-between.

The German writer and thinker Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) moved like a nomad or flaneur between different humanistic disciplines. As his friend Hannah Arendt describes him in the introduction to *Illuminations*, he was not to be cap-
tered within a certain denomination. As Arendt explains, "[t]he trouble with everything Benjamin wrote was that it always turned out to be sui generis". Most of all, his writings are characterised by a fusion of form and content where he often used literary montages to create what he defined as thought-images (Bilddenken).

According to Benjamin, history can only be seen as a surrealistic collage of ruins. His thought-images intend to arouse a broad, sensuous perception. They were also meant to resist reproduction and misuse, as he saw fascism using and distorting art to strengthen its political agenda. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," he urges that politics should not be aestheticized and stresses the importance of politicising art. Following Benjamin’s ideas, contemporary theories of aesthetics also politicise the beholder. This prompts interest as to what can be uncovered in the interpreter’s gaze. In this essay, I want to direct this interest into a reflection on educational space. My aim is to explore how the concept of

201 Ibid.
202 An example of this can be found in the passage “The Sock” in his book Berlin Childhood Around 1900 (Cambridge 2006). Walter Benjamin recalls the pleasure of unfolding the secret treasure inside a rolled-up sock. As he unfolds it, he miraculously discovers that content and form are inseparable. In Sigrid Weigel’s book Body- and Image-Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin (New York 1996), 3, the images are explained as “the third,” where form and content come together.
203 The nihilistic image of history articulated via the thought-image of the angel of history is a part of his “Theses on the Philosophy of History”: “A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees only one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress”. Benjamin (2007), 257.
204 Benjamin (2007), 241.
205 I am in the early stages of my Ph.D. project "Re-Thinking Humanity in the Humanities: Martha Nussbaum’s Actualizing of Aristotle. Concepts of Hu-
space can be interpreted as a methodological approach in the history of education as the topology of a reflective, relational in-between. I wish to probe how this perspective can be applied by analysing visual material. Relevant questions include:

- How can we visualise the non-visible?
- What are the value and conditions of the in-between educational space?
- What does bodily presence imply in higher education?

Along with its exterior, interior and features, I claim that there is an obvious but invisible space in school that is most relevant to the discussion of educational spaces. The in-between I am looking for is characterised as an open space for reflection, questions, confusion, invention, imagination and critical thinking. Moreover, it is a sensorial space connected to emotion, which I believe is also highly relevant for rational thinking in higher education. I will touch on some of the characteristics of this space as it appears in between texts, in between bodies and between texts and bodies, as a correlation between what has been and what is yet to come. Educational historian Ian Grosvenor stresses that photography should "be read not as an image, but as a text [...] open to a diversity of interpretations". Educational researcher Jane McGregor explains that, "[s]patiality (or space/time) is more than physical or social space. It is the recursive interplay between the spatial and the social, the product of complex on-going relations". I will focus on the understanding of educational spaces as “intersections in space/time”, where space is mediated by our interaction.

206 Grosvenor et al. (2004), 319.
207 Benjamin’s thought-image blurs the demarcation line between text and image, in which text also can be read as image.
208 McGregor (2003), 263.
209 Ibid.
In her book *Between East and West*, Belgian philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray searches for new approaches to knowledge and science, arguing that a contemporary humanities preoccupied with the past is incapable of transforming knowledge into ways of formulating the future.\(^{210}\) Like Benjamin, she compares history to ruins. Irigaray explains how the humanities are in danger of becoming “dedicated to the description of what already exists”. As for Benjamin, who wrote between the world wars, he warns that any attempt to pin history down is ultimately shallow and untrue.\(^{211}\) Benjamin and Irigaray both emphasise the importance of re-thinking science and history, which I believe is a crucial task for the humanities today.

Fieldwork: Trying to Visualise the Non-Visible

Participating a course on the uses of history in Berlin gave me the opportunity to attempt to capture a visualisation of the in-between. As partners in dialogue, I brought Irigaray and Benjamin with me. During our week in Berlin, we followed the footsteps of war. The city’s narrative of the past runs as a parallel time in contrast to the temporality and movement of here and now. This narrative appeared to me as a compact mausoleum of the dead, an on-going attempt to recognise injustice. The museum stories (texts, images, videos, etc., and all the little explanatory plaques at memorials and monuments) together with the teachers’ lectures explained how history has been used by different parties, from World War II until the collapse of the wall. We heard examples of how identities were created through propaganda; we heard the story of the victorious right and the errors of the fallen. Above all, we heard the story presented in a manner that reflected not only prevailing political circumstances but also the political will of people to live and organise their lives. What were the hopes, desires, fears behind

\(^{210}\) Irigaray (2002).

all the -isms? How did they cope with their crushed or unfulfilled dreams? What did their experience leave for the future?

These overarching questions expose attention to how we can respond to monuments that manifest memories of a time that no longer exists. In this context, Benjamin’s description of the past as relational and in a state of becoming can help us to illuminate how we approach history and the stories we construct to describe the Other’s use of history. Further questions will then be brought up: What do we do to the Other, as well as to ourselves when we accept ourselves as interpreters of collective grief and individual memories? How can history be solidarity with a pluralistic, complex and contradictory world of experience? What happens when we turn our gaze from the story being told to the storyteller?

The photographs I have taken have been assembled as a montage to visualise the relational, dialectical topography appearing in educational space as a tentative thought-image.212 My intention has been to visualise how fragmentary, often unnoticed aspects emerge and dialogue with one another.213 The educational space between is interactivity, which is constantly open to the creation of thought-images.

Thought-Images as Visualising Space/Time

Educational historian Catherine Burke emphasises that “emotions can challenge the grand narrative of school”.214 She highlights the hermeneutic understanding that appears in interpreting photographs of schooling as a relationship between “fa-
familiarity and alienation”. This opens up for autobiographical reflections of schooling that include emotional experiences, a complementary path running alongside the one-way street of the grand narrative of education. Burke further warns of the implications of the regeneration of the idea of education as "progression and improvement that disallows or renders problematic any radical critique”.

The familiarity of educational space as common ground brings the recognisable to the fore. The challenge, however, is to understand the unrecognized, the unknown. Benjamin’s thought-image can rouse sensitivity to the contextualised conditions of perception and receptivity to divergent interpretations and perceptual experiences. It also implies a critique of modernity and its depreciation of sensuous experience. In the Enlightenment view, history has moved in a linear direction toward the future. In respect to human differences and changing global conditions, it is necessary to illuminate the complexity of history construction and the historicity of its very own narrative.

Grosvenor argues that the senses are a product of space and time, which affects our perception and memory. This resonates with Benjamin’s writings, where he seems to believe in truth, but truth as becoming. Benjamin describes how the optical view lends attention to blind spots not recognised by the “naked eye” and that “the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses”. Photography provides an opportunity to dwell upon the unrecognised, to focus on details overlooked as inconsequent. Benjamin sees this opportunity as a chance to break with the distorted, stereotypical reproductions of valuable originals. Looking through the eyes of the Other, we identity our own view of the Other, power relationships and ourselves. To become receptive to the awareness of our own construction of history, it is

215 Burke (2001), 194.
216 Ibid., 195.
217 Grosvenor (2012), 676.
218 Benjamin (2007), 236.
219 Ibid.
220 Catherine Burke has described this by highlighting the view of the child in educational history and spatiality. Burke (2006).
necessary to alienate oneself from the familiar and integrate emotion as experienced knowledge.

Benjamin’s ideas are valuable in the analysis of educational space. Photography can visualise that which is easily missed both in theory and practice. Moreover, Benjamin stresses that truth only appears in short glimpses, as experience meets perception. In other words, truth is multifarious and situated. As a result, exploring educational space as it appears in thought-images of the past, present and future opens up for a wider political discussion of the mission and condition of education. In Benjamin’s thought-image, history appears as heterogeneous and fragmentary. It reveals contradictions between form and content, which relationship might be one of the great political challenges to the future of education and its impact on the lives of individuals and their shared society.

**Toward the Future: The Value of Visualising Educational Space**

Visual material adds a sensory perspective to research. By paying attention to a variety of perceptual sources of experience, and thereby knowledge, educational history can provide a deeper understanding of the past and present alike. Interpretation will result in pluralistic fragments of reception that are valuable in highlighting the factual existence of sensory knowledge and its impact on knowledge in general. Reflecting on this enables us to grasp ideas about the future in all its complexity.

Postcolonial and feminist critics have argued against Western epistemology, its concept of the rational man and ontological assumptions, which have been constructed on a fundament of dichotomies including man/woman, mind/body and rationality/emotion. When unheard voices in history have been raised to redress this imbalance, it has often been within a scientific frame set by this idea of rationality. As feminist philosopher Sara Ahmed argues, the acceptance of difference is only adequate as long as the Others assimilate the given conception of what this difference implies. This requirement for conforma-

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211 Grosvenor (2012).
222 Sara Ahmed [lecture at Södra Teatern in Stockholm on her book *Willful*](#)
The concept of space as *space/time* is valuable for visualising the invisible, volatile aspects of education as a process, how time and space structure early childhood and later educational environments on all levels. As well as intellectual growth, time and space shapes "bodily experience and identity". This requires a critique of an educational discourse based on the idea of education as intellectual growth and cultivated or suppressed emotion.

Searching for the educational space *in between* foregrounds thoughts about the potential in activating other research methods, like an optical view via photography. Investigating photography as a research object suddenly turns the lens back on me as a researcher. Object and subject are thereby located in an educational space *in between*, a space of becoming. I believe that educational history together with philosophy has great potential for "the cultivation of sensible perception" by thinking about the way we think, even though balancing on the very borders of science means putting you at risk.


223 Irigaray (2002), 17.
224 Ibid., 56.
225 Ibid., 145.
226 Mertens (2012), 264.
228 Irigaray (2002), 56.
Post Comments

Almost a year after this text was written, I read Grosvenor’s text “Imaging Past Schooling: The Necessity for Montage.” He develops his argument through an interpretation of Benjamin’s work, not far from my own tentative attempt to investigate the sensuous history of education, although my focus has been more directed towards a meta-perspective. Trying to recall the writing process, I wonder if I had read about Benjamin’s emphasis on montage in relation to educational history. I don’t think I had. However, I do remember sitting with a pile of pictures, trying to work out which ones to use for the article. Should I choose the monument to persecuted homosexuals, manifested in the stone-cube with motion picture scenes of kissing couples? Or the elderly woman in front of a Nazi torture chamber? Would the picture of my colleague taking photos of the Soviet monuments add understanding to the text? And should I arrange the pictures chronologically or thematically? Such categorization would certainly be contradictive to the text presented. Hence in the work of Walter Benjamin, the concept of time as progress or space as determinable is dissolved. Benjamin’s emphasis on the fragmentary thought-image functioned as an implicit guide to my ultimate choice — cutting up the squares, letting the pictures work in relation with each other. Montage visualises discontinuity, which is essential to our understanding of life and the world, displaying discontinuity as a visible object of research and a tool for research as well.

This perspective opened the door onto my interest in concepts of aesthetic education. The montage acts as a reminder of our own role in constructing tentative interpretations of meaning; in Grosvenor’s words “[m]ontage enables the historian [...] to reveal the complex interrelations between old and new.” My emphasis on the space between has turned my gaze from the pictures per se to the cracks between the shards. What is discovered in this relational area opens up for reflection on our own historicity in the practice of interpretation.

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230 Ibid.