

# The eloquent education of sensitive experience. On the implicit in the experience of everyday life

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Following the pedagogical-critical tradition which considers the relations between education and existence as the primary matrix of educational comprehension and analysis, this paper aims to explore the implicit meanings of daily life as “cultural objects” to be decoded. Indeed, such cultural objects and their significant lived experience transversally inhabit the formal, non-formal and informal contexts of education, characterizing the constitution of individual personality in a manner that is decisive yet too often lacking in awareness.

In particular, the point is that the processes of subjectivation take shape from the nexus between closeness to and distance from the world, settling within the sensitive experience of everyday life. Therefore, finding the implicit educational meaning and causing it to emerge becomes not only one of most urgent ethical and pedagogical needs, but also one of the interpretative keys of the experience of our times, since it allows us to uncouple the polarizations educator/learner, intentional/unintentional education, subject/world, recovering the paradigm of relationship as a constitutive element of lived experience.

*Keywords:* lived experience, everyday life, sensitive experience, reciprocal relation, existence.

*L'educazione eloquente dell'esperienza sensibile. Sull'implicito nell'esperienza del quotidiano*

Nel solco di una tradizione pedagogico-critica che individua nel rapporto tra educazione ed esistenza la matrice irrinunciabile di comprensione e

d'analisi educative, il contributo propone l'esplorazione dei significati impliciti della quotidianità in quanto "oggetti culturali" da decifrare. Infatti, tali oggetti culturali e il loro vissuto significativo abitano trasversalmente in contesti formali, non-formali e informali dell'educazione connotando in maniera decisiva, ma troppo spesso inconsapevole, la costituzione della personalità individuale.

In particolare, l'idea è che i processi di soggettivazione prendano corpo a partire dal nesso che descrive prossimità e distanze con il mondo, annidandosi nell'esperienza sensibile del quotidiano. Sicché, scovare e far emergere l'implicito educativo diventa non solo una delle esigenze etico-pedagogiche più urgenti, ma anche una delle chiavi interpretative dell'esperienza del nostro tempo, poiché consente di sfuggire alla polarizzazione educatore/educando, educazione intenzionale/educazione inintenzionale, soggetto/mondo, recuperando il paradigma della relazione come costitutivo dell'esperienza vissuta.

*Parole chiave:* esperienza vissuta, quotidianità, esperienza sensibile, relazione reciproca, esistenza.

### *The rediscovered existence*

One of the most pedagogically relevant socio-cultural effects of the unprecedented times we are living in seems to be the rediscovery of what is missing and what is worth<sup>1</sup>. The search for the meaning of existence, the exploitation of the embodied relationships, the recapture of the direct relations self-world, the re-appropriation of beauty as a fundamental need, emerge from the silent astonishment of reality to question humans. Thus, while the irruption of the unexpected has subjugated the interpretative paradigms of reality to a new order of sense (the claim of a definitively disoriented humanity?), the indecency that has followed it has subordinated humans to its own arrogance (the end of self-determination? Or of freedom?)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Furio Semerari (Ed., 2017) had already worked in this direction, anticipating a trend which has since been decisively amplified by the pandemic.

<sup>2</sup> We will not take into account here the many interpretations that were immediately produced about the effects of the pandemic on the human and on education. The risk, in fact, would be to attempt hasty conclusions that, once again, leave no room for actual

In this overview it is interesting to note the return to elements that are surely not new to pedagogical studies. After having long-constituted the great trajectories of the approaches of the philosophy of education, with the end of the last century and with their sedimentation in the current discursiveness, the concepts of existence, intersubjectivity, corporeality, perception, have found their scope of meaning obscured. The same has occurred in the philosophy of education. Overwhelmed by the urgency of specific answers to immediate needs, prescribed by an imperative of performativity that has marked the decline of the 'projectual' instances open to the possible (Merlini, 2009), the missing (structure of existence), the essential (condition of intersubjectivity) and the search for meaning may now be emancipated from the condition of implicit paradigms of education and of educational thinking.

Although a large part of the studies of the philosophy of education, guided by different approaches or ethical perspectives<sup>3</sup>, have been committed to decoding contemporaneity for at least half a century in order to coordinate contexts and situations to the meanings of education, the issue of the implicit meanings, crossing both the thematic fields and the interpretative approaches, does not seem to have been raised with the necessary recursiveness and forcefulness. Let us be clear: a long path has been walked in the explication, deconstruction and emersion of the dogmatic and latent meanings of

occurrence and the necessary critical distance - even temporal - that is essential to a real understanding. The urgency of dictating new perspectives, new paradigms, reacting to the unknown, seems, in fact, to be more often an attempt to exorcise - if not to exploit - a crisis without equal in recent history. Rather, here we are attempting the path of a radical awareness of the irreversibility of an event that, while leaving no room for any form of acquiescent fatalism or concerned caution, intends to proceed with constant determination in understanding.

<sup>3</sup> The picture of the Italian philosophies of education, from the last century to today, appears definitely varied and dynamic. If in the second half of the last century they were predominantly identifiable by 'approaches' or 'schools' (from Angelo Broccoli's Marxism (1974) to Alberto Granese's hermeneutics (1975) to the empiricism of Raffaele Laporta (1996), from Giovanni Maria Bertin's problematicism (1968) to the phenomenological pedagogy of Piero Bertolini (1988)), by the end of the century and the beginning of the new millennium, it is rather the problems that appear to be prevailing (education as a criticism of education by Antonio Erbetta; education as a cure and risk by Rita Fadda; Eidos of education starting from the model of German *Bildung* by Mario Gennari; autobiography as Care of the Self by Duccio Demetrio; art as a pedagogical instrument by Marco Dallari or as a countereducational action by Paolo Mottana; emotional life as a key to education by Vanna Iori; the ecology of the mind by Luigina Mortari; metatheory and the device of the pedagogical discourse by Franco Cambi).

the educational praxis and ideas, also monitoring the symbolic reconfigurations of the educational agencies and of the theoretical paradigms of reference (Massa, 1986; Mariani, 1997, 2000, 2008; Erbetta, Ed. 2010; Cappa, Ed., 2009; Giachery, 2015).

Such a context, however, has displayed a disquieting process of normalization of the critical-pedagogical perspectives<sup>4</sup>, which only currently can the philosophies of education discuss and contextualize again. This in the attempt to regain the broad horizon of its own heuristic calling, in the field of the necessary articulations between subject and history, possibility and necessity, immanence and transcendence. Therefore, it seems urgent to set existence again at the core of reflective attention, so as to arrange the main themes emerging *within* a complex pattern of components and to consign, contextually, the *telos* of education to its own cultural and social role. Indeed, thanks to the extent of the horizon of the philosophy of education, it is possible to grasp those shades of meaning which connect and tie submerged aspects of individual existence, which however intertwine in the immanence of existence representing the explicit ethical connotations of one's own participation in life.

In fact, since the beginning of the century, the weakening of the philosophies of life has implied the loss of continuity in the discussion of the ques-

<sup>4</sup> Consider the recursiveness with which a 'critical' approach not better defined is proposed within the scientific debate. That is, an approach that, unlike the analyses quoted, aimed at bringing out the deforming implicit of current education, assumes the radical criticism to the dominant thought – whether its origin be from Frankfurt or deconstructive or post-structuralist – as an obvious and unavoidable variant, therefore, actually, harmless. As Rita Fadda writes, it is a matter of “emerging from the generic (no one would ever admit to practicing an uncritical thought), from an idea of critical pedagogy declined in the most disparate ways, from a polysemy of the term ‘criticism’ that, from richness and meaningfulness, becomes confusion and absence of any and every element of regulation, of theoretical discipline, of reference to guiding principles that orient and filter” (Fadda, 2009, p. 17). In this sense, from the beginning of the nineties of the twentieth century, Antonio Erbetta defined the need for pedagogy itself to be a “criticism of pedagogy”, to assume upon itself, consciously and explicitly, the antinomy that connotes it as the science of description and as the science of prescription, without stumbling on either the limit of a false neutrality of data or on that of ideology (Erbetta, 1994). In other words, what saves education from being regulation and what saves pedagogy from being ideology is, according to Erbetta, their respective placement on the self-critical horizon that, with Nietzsche and Rilke, Banfi, Simmel and Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, means *staying* in the “places of crisis” that constitute that same antinomy in order to seek, right there and not in an abstract elsewhere, an authentic direction that unites education and existence (Erbetta, 1998).

tion of the subject, either considering its persistence obvious, although fragmentary, as the background of the question, or leaning towards an explicit anti-subjectivism. Such a condition, then, seems to have made the subject itself transparent, indistinct and, ultimately, disembodied. Absent even from that 'reality plan' so dear to empiricists/realists, the embodied subject seems to have learned how to live far away both from the meticulous codifications of its own already-being and from the ontologies of its 'real being'.

Ultimately, what appears as the implicit of education is, today, its existential horizons, just as the relationship between education and existence seems so compelling as to be reciprocal. On the one hand, there is existence as the condition and as the destiny of the subject, that is to say as what circumscribes the possibilities and limits of everyone within an order which is not only ontological-temporal (Heidegger, 1927/1976) but which is also the achievement of a peculiar form of relationship between subject and world (Paci, 1957). On the other hand, there is education as "the keystone of existence" (Erbetta, 1998, p. 44), because "by distancing itself from the immediacy of the world, it introduces an order of things, a plausible horizon of meaning" (*ivi*, p. 26).

Is it, then, a matter of returning (regressing?) to the philosophies of existence?

It is rather a matter of rethinking existence starting from the forms through which significant expressiveness is rooted in daily life, since this is the exact place where the dialectic request between determination and indeterminacy manifests itself as culture.

In other words, if it remains certainly true, as Spranger claimed, that "life educates", to the extent that it decides the inexorable circumstances of each life, hence giving shape to it, it is also true that the awareness of such a process, along with the possibility of governing it and giving it direction, pertains to the action of distancing from mere life performed by education (*ibidem*). It is, then, a matter of critical education that does not intend to forge, smooth, correct, leaving to the subject it educates the duty or the accident to notice its implicit action. On the contrary, the education which releases the subjective intelligence, showing it the implicit meanings, that is providing it with those instruments necessary for the recognition of the dialectic between subjective will and desires, on the one hand, and, on the other, social, cultural and educational conformation.

*Education, lived experience and everyday life*

*Erlebnis* is not only one of the key-words definitively introduced into the philosophic language by Husserl's phenomenology – which, in the wake originally left by Dilthey, determined its centrality as a structure of knowledge –, but it is above all an expression which has now entered the pedagogical language even beyond its original meanings, to interpret the most subjective component of experience, mainly consisting of perceptions, emotions and meanings that are not necessarily determined by circumstances.

In truth, the phenomenological-existential sense of the word includes a component which is far more relevant than the simple use of the subjective 'point of view'. Such meaning, in fact, calls into question the concurrence of two conditions: the immediate intuition that allows such experience to 'emerge' from the indistinct flow of current experiences (*Erlebnisstrom*) and the elaboration of its meaning with respect to existence as a whole. Therefore, nothing extemporaneous or punctiform, but, on the contrary, a plexus of relationships where subject and world relate to each other.

It is thanks to this perspective that existence and lived experience become an agency: to exist. That pedagogical existing that Piero Bertolini had identified as a founding perspective of phenomenological Pedagogy at the end of the eighties (Bertolini, 1988, n.e. 2021). That lived experience which Antonio Erbetta had interpreted as the very key of education, and of a pedagogy that was markedly phenomenological-*existential* (Erbetta, 1992, 1994, Ed. 2001, 2005/2011). It is the "education as lived experience of man as culture" that no longer makes, here, the subject a "naked life", but rather an agent of culture who *can* – within his own margins of freedom – redeem himself from a non-proper existence, through the forms of culture that history makes available to him and which he himself is capable of regenerating.

Therefore, with respect to the sense of the lived experience, it is not a matter of making a philological clarification, which might, however, be necessary in reopening some long-standing hermeneutic questions. It is instead a matter of intervening on a potential educational drift. Because, in the face of the radical disorientation caused by the pandemic and its dreadful breaking of habits which *really* make the future an exhausting uncertainty, the risk that is looming is that the paradigm of existence emerges as a clumsy temptation to find an escape path from a present which is too demanding and suffocating. Almost as if claiming the need for existence may actually mean oppos-

ing the full-time of the world with one's own feeling of life, the full-time of the world. Or again, almost as if the suspended or missed or involuntary life which corresponds to the real daily life could be evaded by escaping into the idealized, desired life of elsewhere.

On the other hand, from the perspective of existence, any aspect of taking shape becomes an aim of pedagogical reflectiveness: from the minute experiences of daily life to the more complex and demanding questions, but always with an eye on the relationships that are inscribed in their reciprocity.

After all, just as the anthropo-psycho-social implicit of the pre-ordered meaning of the daily minuteness has been analyzed as a space of critical legitimacy of an ordinariness that is far from being obvious but which, even so, remains separate from a tension to project (De Certeau, 1990/2012; Goffman, 1959/1969, Žižek, 2014), this critical relevance also needs to be reaffirmed and reinterpreted in the pedagogical field in light of the 'great implicit' of becoming.

According to this interpretation, not only can the lived experience of everyday life regain the meaning of a more explicit perspective (and less rhetorical than the simple optimistic appeal to the future), but above all it can claim its ethical-critical industriousness. Firstly, because if lived experience is, according to Enzo Paci, the heart of relationships between subjects, events, different temporal vectors, then it is also the expression of an intersection of meanings which, as the complex knot, irreducibly builds subjectivity to the singularity of its aspects (Paci, 1957, 1963, 1973; Madrussan, 2005). Secondly, because this knot is not simply the result of the subjective modification of meanings already determined and assumed as such *by* the world. But – far more ambitiously – it is the attempt to give sense to the relation self-world through the constant reconsideration of those meanings. This second-level distancing work requires an ethical-educational awareness for which the philosophic component of knowledge is not sufficient, but where the educational component of philosophic thinking is necessary so as to shape oneself *towards* a possibility to be concretely achieved. It is in such a complex (the intersections of relationships) and stratified context (the levels of cultural analysis between subject and world) that the selective structures of interpretation of the individual experience (for instance: school-related or even didactic *or else* educational) prevent showing those relations of sense that are, in effect, connected to each other – and lived as such – on the existential level.

A possible cultural graft between anthropo-social and philosophic-educational perspectives can be achieved, as we have tried to show elsewhere (Madrussan, 2020), by intersecting the phenomenological-existential perspective and Cultural Studies, especially those of the origins, in which a lived experience was prevalent and was still narratively full of implicit meanings to be revealed (Hoggart, 1957/2009; Williams, 1961/1968; Thompson, 1963/1980). It is no coincidence that, in Cultural Studies, the role of education is socio-culturally characterized by the ability to inspire *agency*. That is, as an action of transformation of the meanings induced by the producers of experiential consumption.

Actually, phenomenological-existential pedagogy definitely acts as disclosure of the implicit structures of knowing to generate conscious knowledge. For their part, Cultural Studies operate by disclosing the ideological and intentionally shaping the connotation of the meaning transmitted in daily life. Both perspectives are characterized by the fact that they are methods of reversing the sense and of exposing the deceptions of the unreflective life. Where they differ at least theoretically is on the levels of elaboration of purpose: the former operates on the *Erlebnis* as the experience of a bodily-intellectual knowledge that is potentially capable of transcending itself; the latter operate on the *lived experience* as a precipitate of a cultural sediment of the human that resists the manipulation of the sense. In both perspectives, not by chance, education can become the decisive space of awareness and emancipation.

Now, such a correlation regarding the possible transcendence of meanings avoids the risk of epistemic opposition between determinist and subjective perspectives, keeping them rather in a reciprocal dynamic tension. This is not all: this theoretical graft returns its anti-reductionist pertinence to existence, where, in particular, the lived experience recovers the organic dimension of rational exercise and of sensitive perception. In the lived experience, in fact, and within the flow of existence, feeling and knowing, tasting and doing, sensing and realizing, perceiving and building the concept are not part of an event (*eventus*), but rather the occurrence of the event (*evenio*).

It is in this field, then, that the lived experience returns to be the occasion of a reflexive distancing which does not cease to tell of the world while talking of the subject. And it does so again by pinpointing the most fruitful ethical support in the aesthetic connotation of *feeling*. If not the least contaminated, at least the most open to the possible.



*The eloquent education of the significant aesthetic*

It is precisely the experiences of everyday life that are open to a significant educational and formative potential. This can be related, originally, to the experience of an existential limit-situation – as in the case of old and new marginalities (Calvetto, 2013, 2020; Giachery, 2010, 2019) –, one’s own feeling of the world and of interpersonal relationships (Erbetta, Ed., 2004; Massara, 2009; Madrussan, 2017; Pincioli, 2018), the minute existential gestures that create unnoticed sedimentations of sense on which it is possible to act following an unveiling direction (Erbetta, 2001; Madrussan, 2003, 2008, 2009, Ed. 2018, 2021).

The point is that, although the subjectivity described by the contemporary world is incomplete, fragmentary, disenchanting and lacking, it nevertheless continues to experience a *sensitive* tension towards the things of the world. Such resonance of the sensitive experience is interpreted – from Merleau-Ponty (1945/1972; Lisciani-Petrini, 2002; Carbone, 2004) to the most radical Rancière (2000/2016) – as a mode of relationship. It actually and always describes a process of subjectivation and, simultaneously, of ethical-political construction. Thus, the analysis of the sensitive experience does not aim to define an aesthetic theory or a theory of art – not even a political or pedagogical theory – but it aims to show the dynamic *how* of that relation. However the examination of such modalities of relation from a point of view of the philosophy of education cannot disregard the cogency of the processes of formation/deformation acted on and by the subject, whether he is educator or student. The balance of the ethical-pedagogical view with respect to the dynamisms underway prevents the underestimation of the different components at stake – individual and social, micro and macro-cultural –, but above all it implies subjectivity as the ultimate term – with respect to the existential project – *and* as situated configuration – here and now – of the educational agency.

The context in which such a relation takes shape is the extended daily life, intended not so much as time of repetition of the identical insignificant ordinary, but rather as a field of involuntary (but not inert) knowledge, useful for a double pedagogical analysis. On the one hand, the opportunity to discover one’s own feeling and the significant re-action of the subject in the making lurks in the “unbeknown” (Certeau, 1975/1977) which animates and colours the experience of daily life. On the other hand, it is right

in those colourings woven by taste, by the representation of the possible, by the desire of the impossible and by the exercise of imagination that the lived experience should reconnect with the overall texture of existence. An existence which is contextually perceived as the common condition and as characteristic of the self.

The relationship with a literary text, the listening to a piece of music, the relation with images – photographic, cinematographic, figurative art –, the habit of a certain self-representation related to the elaboration of one's own public figure, the configuration of a certain worldview through instruments of cultural appropriation and use, the exercise of one's own imagination with the symbolic aid of metaphors and allegories, the tension towards the poetic and oneiric, are just some of the principal examples of how, while escaping from the descriptive predictability of social determinism, a large part of what marks the subjective *proprium* cannot be traced back to the narrow mesh of coded knowledge.

It is not coincidental that the sensitive lived experience is transversal to the conventionally circumscribed fields of formal, non-formal and informal education, since it rather matches existence. With regard to existence, education appears as the (re)construction of the web of meanings and, with that, it becomes *eloquent*, to the extent that it does not allow the ordering rationality of the real summarize itself. Its significance, in fact, lies precisely in *knowing how to express* the recognition of the self in the forms of the unexpected and of the ineffable.

Here there are possibilities of sense in action, which everyone can easily feel as their own, but that just as easily can be reduced to superfluous object or, even worse, to temporary escape. The fact that the aesthetic experience has been so long nourished by the exclusive dominion of the artistic canons and of the ideal is, perhaps, what has made it paradoxically unexpressive for many people, as well as ideologically represented as the sole dominion of the bourgeois classes. And, presumably, its unwillingness to be reduced within paradigms of measurability and empiric factuality is also what has made it one of the great implicit meanings of education. Subtext to the text of the description, of the reflection, of the analysis, perception is the result of the pathic meeting between subject and world. In fact, this is the place where bond, affection, the need for ulteriority or, vice versa, distance, hostility, indifference to certain embodied experiences are nourished or consumed. But it is precisely these that request, then, to be included in the widest scenario of

history, of the material and cultural given conditions and of the formative/ deforming effects they induce.

It is, then, up to those who educate and think of education to notice a fruitful 'text' of the self-developing in the sensitive lived experience, making its significance explicit and taking into consideration the heterogeneity of the "cultural objects" of daily life – literature, music, figurative art, cinema, etc. – which are suitable for interpretation both as ties of relations and as chances of knowledge and awareness. Because, if it is true that existence, in its dynamism between continuity and discontinuity, begs to be understood as a complex of relationships, it is also true that such comprehension is possible only through education.

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