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SOMMAIRE

Compte-rendu

STRATEGIC CRITICISM AND THE QUESTION OF (IN)ACCESSIBILITY OF THE OTHER

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*Hay tantissimas fronteras
que dividen la gente
pero por cada frontera
existe tambien una puente*
Gina Valdes

[There are too many borders
that separate people
but for every border
there is also a bridge
(My translation)]

One of the questions posed in this special issue was *'how to approach alterity in education when we cannot really claim to know what alterity is or to have access to forms of alterity?'*. Before attempting to provide a contingent answer, I feel it is important to briefly historicize both the implied 'answer' in the question posed (i.e. why seeing otherness as inaccessible could be a good answer in our engagements with difference) and the question to which this might be a viable answer to. This is a significant step in order to check when, where, under what circumstances and why this question may be worth asking rather than assume this is a general question about how we should approach difference in any circumstance.

In *'Refashioning futures: Criticism after postcoloniality'*, Scott (1999) presents an empathetic critique of postcolonial theory's traditional emphasis on representational and epistemological claims as grounds for justice – the claims that tend to ground essentialist claims of identity (something that is challenged by the notion of inaccessible alterity). He suggests that our cognitive-political present demands a practice of strategic postcolonial criticism that *"cannot operate in the manner of a General Hermeneutic, a Master Narrative, a View from Nowhere (or from Everywhere) and the Panoptic of a Critical Theory"* (p. 4). He illustrates this by drawing attention to contradictions inherent in anti-essentialist critiques of essentialism. He argues that anti-essentialist modes of critique attempt to expose the naivety of essentialist positions using an *'epistemological law'* (*op. cit.*: 9) that declares that cultures are heterogeneous, subjectivities are inscripted in language, identities are fluid, community borders are constructed, and so on. This strategy of delegitimisation and dismissal of

essentialism, according to Scott, is used to establish epistemological superiority by historicizing answers to questions that are left unexamined on both sides. Scott explains:

> *« The anti-essentialists are not interested in what constellation of historically constituted demands may have produced the supposedly 'essentialist' formulations. They are not interested in determining what the strategic task at hand was or what the epistemic and ideological material conditions were that formed the discursive context in which their moves were made and their positions taken. [...] The main problem with the anti-essentialists is that like all rationalists they read as though the questions to which answers are to be sought are perennial or canonical questions, as though the questions to which the essentialists they are criticizing were responding are necessarily the same as their own. » (*ibidem*)

For Scott, anti-essentialist critiques of essentialism ironically share the same rationalist desire for mastery, certainty and the command of an essential meaning or inscription. Scott proposes a strategic criticism that requires a logic of 'question and answer' where any proposition needs to be understood in relation to the question to which it is regarded as an answer within a particular discursive domain. He later develops this concept into a form of reading of past, present and future imaginaries (Scott, 2004) that aspires to unlock a new vocabulary of possibilities for future futures that can re-animate the present and generate unexpected horizons of transformative possibilities.

According to Scott (1999), reconstructing questions becomes an important task and, as questions are situated and contingent (rather than universal and canonical), they need to be understood in relation to cognitive-political spatial temporalities that are dynamic in nature. In other words: both questions and answers frequently change, as contexts change. Scott's own proposition is that a strategic criticism requires not only a reading of the past to better understand the present (which often commands a strategy of counter-design), but also a reading of the present to re-evaluate contingent demands for the future (e.g. stakes, lines and play of forces): what priority questions are worth pursuing answers to. He calls these contingent demands historically situated 'problem spaces' consisting of "*conceptual-ideological ensembles, discursive formations and language games*" (*op. cit.*: 4), whose conditions of existence are context dependent and therefore provisional. When conditions change, new problem-spaces are generated and answer to previous problem-spaces, although still coherent, lose significance and purchase.

Thus, Scott (1999; 2004) argues, having a debate over appropriate questions is more productive than having debates about adequate answers whose questions have been forgotten or taken for granted. When the latter happens (which is often the case in academic debates), a problem-space is normalized:

> *« The theoretical apparatus by means of which answers are generated is rapidly accepted and is simply applied without further thought given to the domain of questions that constitute the problem-space; so much so that once the game is known it is possible to anticipate in advance the moves that are to be made in an argument. This is clearly so, for instance, in the essentialist/anti-essentialist debate »* (1999: 8).

Scott states that the moment a problem-space is normalized is the moment when it is necessary to remember, re-interrogate and problematize the context and set of questions that enabled the emergence of the available answers to check whether the problem space has changed and/or been expanded with the previous exercise and whether new questions have emerged. Scott (1999: 156) conceives of criticism *"as a self conciously strategic practice, a practice of entering an always-already constituted field of argument"* where it has to decide contingently in what manner and with whom to proceed. For Scott, the force of critical practice is measured by its ability to open up spaces for new meaning and new questions. In

the next section, I will focus on reading the past to better understand the present as an exercise that may help a re-reading of the present to re-evaluate contingent demands for the future.

Five different positions: problem-spaces of difference in education

In my provisional effort to re-create the practice of strategic criticism drawing on Scott's ideas, I will offer a tentative (simplified and situated) cartography of how the concept of inaccessible alterity emerged in discussions about identity/alterity in education through a spectrum of positions developed in response to different identity/alterity related problem-spaces. I have articulated these differences around 5 inter-related positions in on-going conflict, all of which are interested in engagements with the Other. I deliberately excluded the position of ignoring or negating the existence of the Other that constructs the Other as a perfect stranger who the self can 'expel' (see Ahmed, 2000). I have also used the letters A, B, C, D and E to refer to different positions, although I do not imply linearity, development or teleology – all positions are contingent on problem-spaces, so they exist at the same time and are inter-related. I briefly outline basic assumptions of each position and offer a summary of questions and answers in relation to each of them, as well as possible new questions at the end of this section. I have also tried to map these positions against empirical work in (anglophone) education that directly or indirectly related to them (in supportive or critical ways).

Position A, common in colonial and neocolonial relationships, projects a (negative and fixed) mis-identity onto the Other to construct a (positive and fixed) mis-identity of the self in ways that justify dominance/subjugation and concentrations of power/privilege (see Bhabha, 1994). This is rationalized as an entitlement based on merit. This merit is validated through a social hierarchy where those in a position to define meaning and with control over resources are considered to be in a more advanced state of civilization/ education/ development and to be heading humanity towards a seamless and teleological (often racially defined, hetero-normative, patriarchal, able-bodied, and class marked) idea of progress, while 'Others' are perceived to be lacking civilization/ education/ development, 'dragging' humanity in its pursuit of progress (see for example Willinsky, 1998; Battiste, 2000; Shields, Bishop and Mazawi, 2005; Andreotti, 2011a). This over-humanization of self (e.g. in terms of intellectual, rational, technological and organizational capacity) and de-humanization of Others, whose difference is perceived as a deficit, is based on an ambivalent logic constructed to justify cultural supremacy where the Other is potentially equal, but necessarily inferior (Bhabha, 1994). This ambivalence frames potential equality as a threat to the narrative of superiority of the self and triggers the anxious repetition of a chain of (also ambivalent) stereotypes about the Other and stories of originality, origination and purity of the self (and the community where it is inserted) in an attempt to eliminate the threat of ambiguity and justify dominance and inequalities (ibid). Therefore, knowledge about the Other is used to pathologize difference (Shields *et al.*, 2005) and to maintain domination: to know the Other in order to control the Other (Gandhi, 1998).

Position B is a slightly modified version of A (deployed in liberal-humanist narratives) that recognizes and foregrounds the problem of structural inequalities, but downplays (or denies) the problem of epistemic violence, and hegemonic dominance as the cause of structural inequalities (Souza, 2004; Andreotti, 2011a; Taylor, 2011). It attempts to eliminate the pathologization of difference as the source of the exclusion of the Other by eliminating difference itself and by emphasizing sameness. As hegemonic dominance is not recognized as a problem, this position projects the self onto the Other through paternalistic and salvationist ideas of inclusion and integration (into a norm already pre-defined, but not evident to those

within it). This position may challenge class, gender, sex, race and ability marked forms of exclusion, but it does not question that which they assume people want to be included into (e.g. civilization/education/development represented in the Nation-State, the school, modern metropolitan-consumerist society). The effort is for the (dominant) system to become more flexible and more hospitable in order to welcome an Other who wants to 'be the same'. However this sameness is not an equality of capacity (for decisions or contributions) but of (projected) shared needs and aspirations: the Other is expected to value our social consensus, to aspire to be the same as us and to take part in 'our' community (fundamentally) on our terms. If their comfort requires 'us' to make accommodations for tolerable differences, or even appreciate them as colorful assets (e.g. ethnic foods, some forms of clothing, religious practices, music and arts), we will be doing our part. Therefore, knowledge about the Other emphasizes sameness over differences (which are seen as superficial): the other is represented as a mirror of the self (and whatever does not fit the mirror is either ignored or abhorred). However, this also opens up the way for redistribution through recognition enacted in 'inclusion' (as a quick fix) of a packaged dish of diversity, cooked to order, where the Other is 'allowed' to keep and even share his/her culture as long as relationships of dominance and shared aspirations for sameness are not significantly challenged (see Dei and Caliste, 2000; May and Sleeter, 2010; Andreotti, 2011a).

Positions A and B are perceived by position C to mis-represent the reality of the Other through the construction of inauthentic knowledge and the use of force to prohibit the political sovereignty and freedom of the Other to represent her/himself (see for example Said, 1978; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). In other words, in (neo)colonial relationships characterized by hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, and paternalism, the Other is accorded a negative/lower (mis)identity (which is often internalized) and denied the right to self-representation and self-determination. As a response to this problem, position C proposes the emancipation of the Other (from domination) through the defiance or reversal of the hierarchy of values attributed to difference. This is done by placing an emphasis on the right to signify one's own (positive and fixed) strategically self-determined collective identity (see Ladson-Billings, 2005; Esteva and Prakash, 1998; Cannella and Viruru, 2003). Therefore, creating knowledge about 'Others' becomes politically incorrect as a progressive attitude requires opening spaces so that Others (who have been racialized, subjugated and discriminated against) can speak for themselves, on behalf of their communities. This position is framed to justify reclamation of power/privilege as reparation, rationalized as resistance and as entitlement based on retributive justice. As this position is a reaction to (and is therefore conditioned by) the material and symbolic victimization, suffering and vulnerability (created as an effect of the dominance and mis-representation of positions A and B), it is often assumed that the only legitimate knowledge that can be produced about conditions of oppression is the knowledge produced by the oppressed who have been 'emancipated' from the internalization of imposed mis-representations (Freire, 1976). The implication is that any outsider representation is perceived to be inauthentic and potentially epistemically violent (i.e. reproducing patterns of domination or appropriation). Therefore knowledge about the Other (produced by the Other herself) is supposed to represent the Other authentically and objectively (see Spivak, 1988 for a postcolonial critique of subaltern voice).

Positions D and E react to the problems (of essentialism) created by position C based on poststructuralist and anti-essentialist ideas. Position D targets collective narratives of identity by highlighting the discursive hybridity and heterogeneity at the core of any form of identity and community construction, emphasizing the dogmatic and coercive limitations of essentialism, in order to dismiss it as an epistemological error (as illustrated by Scott earlier). This position promotes (anti-essentialist) individual narratives of fluid, multiple and fragmented identities of complex and contingently discursively situated individuals and

communities (see for example Dion and Dion, 2009, Youdell, 2010). Building on position D, position E emphasizes the difficulties and problems of signification itself (in positive, negative, hybrid, fixed or fluid conceptualizations by the self or the Other) and the uncouncious components of culture (see Britzman, 1998; Todd, 2003). In this sense, both the self and the Other are un-narrativisable and inaccessible in objective terms, i.e. both ideas of self and Other always escape signification, their 'truth' cannot be captured by narrativisation . If self and Other are conceptualized as inaccessible, at least three possible proposition may follow: 1) that all attempts to signify identity and alterity are futile (i.e. progress can only be grounded on certain/stable knowledge and therefore inaccessibility is a dead end); 2) that all attempts to signify identity and alterity are limited, partial, uncertain, provisional, contingent, but necessary and indispensible, and therefore they need to be constantly problematized and re-created in response to new contexts and problem-spaces; 3) that identities are both accessible (as social-political inevitable historical and contingent constructions) and inaccessible (as metaphysically embodied existences). Propositions 2 and 3 require a letting go of the desire for stable knowledge that can give us a degree of predictability (in its 'only' fluid or 'only' essentialist modes), and propose the idea of *'justice-to-come'* as an agonistic, non-teleological and non-narrativisable project (a priori) – something we cannot effectively engineer, but that we know it when we see it. Position 2 foregrounds discursive formations and cognitive-affective-relational assemblages (the limits of what can be known), while position 3 foregrounds that which is non-discursive (our relationship to what cannot be known) – both are extremely important. The implications of combining propositions 2 and 3 is explored subsequently in the next section of this article.

However, before looking more closely at this, it is necessary to emphasize here that positions A and B are still prevalent in society and in education, and that, as a consequence, strategically, position C still offers a viable political response for subjugated groups because it focuses precisely on power relations and speaks through dominant modes of (antagonistic) communicative engagement and representative political processes. If existing (neo)colonial dominance is a central question of one's problem space (especially from the perspective of those inhabiting racialized, sexualized, abnormalized and/or class marked bodies), positions D and E (which emerge as responses to questions of different problem spaces) do not yet offer intelligible political answers for the question/problem of systemic oppression, subjugation and disadvantage. Position D risks serving to evade historically and collectively defined unequal flows of power and possibilities of signification (at work in positions A and B), inadvertently depoliticizing the debate and individualizing identity (which may also serve and advance market oriented goals). Position E risks focusing solely on the un-narrativasible and equivocal (non-teleological) 'forward' and evading responsibility for past patterns of signification which maintain epistemic and structural systemic inequalities, or of conceptualizing injustice itself as un-narrativisable (see Andreotti forthcoming) – risks that are too high if the priority is addressing structural inequalities. A summary of questions, answers and practical implications is presented in Table 1 and a visual representation of the dynamics between the 5 positions is presented in Figure 1.

Table 1: 5 identity/ alterity positions

	Question	Common answer	General application	What is at stake?
A	How to advance the projects of progress, order and civilization through modernity?	create a hierarchy of positive/negative, lower/higher, backward/modern difference	construct a positive (mis)identity of self through a negative mis-representation of the Other.	Belief in exceptionality and superiority grounding justifications of virtuous dominance and earned privilege

|	Question	Common answer	General application	What is at stake?
B	How to make modernity more inclusive?	focus on sameness and commonalities	promote integration while making the system itself more flexible towards tolerable practices of different communities	Belief in innocense and benevolence grounding denial of inflicted harm
C	How to address epistemic dominance, systemic racism, subjugation and mis/ under/ non-representation?	reclaim the right to self-represent and self-determine, demand reparation, foreground collective experience	challenge previous hierarchy values of difference by promoting only positive representations of communities that have been mis-represented/ subjugated/ racialized before	Protection of lands, culture and language, a system of value that can counter the racialization of bodies and internalized oppression (especially for children)
D	How to address the problems created by essentialism, including imposed notions of communalism?	Foreground individual experience to highlight the error in the construction of fixed single identities.	Emphasize representations of the Other's identity as complex, fluid, multiple, fragmented, contingent, and uncertain	Unrestricted self expression, disruption of normalized oppressive practices
E	How to think about identity/ alterity taking into account the limits of language, and impossibilities of representation and interpretation?	represent the Other as inaccessible or un-narrativisible	1) think of every narrative as contingent, including our own, 2) understand the other as inaccessible in an existential way and as contingent in a political way	Establishment of connections with others that do not depend on cognition and that work against constructed separations
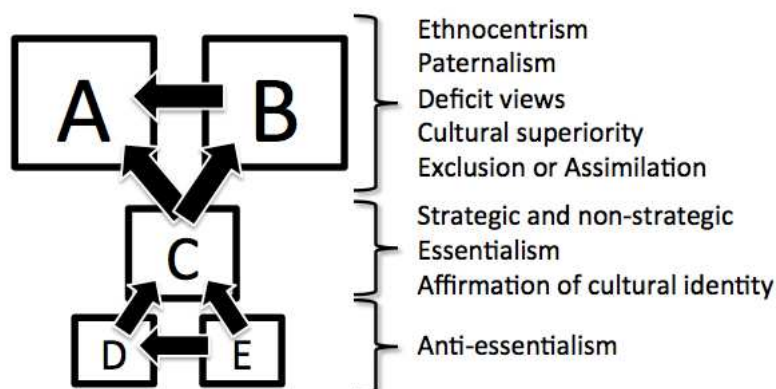
Figure 1: Five positions in conflict

Thus, between those who have historically been placed in positions of epistemic privilege where they can define meaning in ways that stick (Bauman, 2000) and those who have not, there are highly emotionally charged conflictual possibilities that are both incommensurable and inter-dependent. On one side of this divide (where definitions can be defined in ways that stick), one may choose to despise, control, rescue, save, want to be saved by, project complexity on, know that one cannot know, or be open to being taught by the Other. On the other side (where definitions are dumped), one can choose to respond with self-hatred/self

harm, belief in the labels ascribed by others, reject, play, or refuse to play the (language) game of definitions, change the size of the ball/goalposts, change the rules/grammar of the game or attempt to destroy the game. Looking at the complexity of these relationships as a fresh problem space, I found a new begged question: how can we think differently about self and Other beyond the trends of fixing identities, forging new *'forwards'* collectively without losing track of our past and the origins of our own undeserved (i.e. historically inherited) epistemic privilege (so that we do not evade our complicities in structural/material and cognitive/epistemic injustices)?

The existential inaccessibility and the social-political accessibility of the Other

In *'Pedagogies of Crossing'*, Alexander (2005) analyses current forms of political engagement that may not recognize or address the problem of inhospitality in its metaphysical and existential dimensions. Drawing on Yoruba cosmologies, she sees the root of the problem as the pain of dismemberment of an interdependent body-spirit caused by different attempts to eliminate its inherent difference/heterogeneity. She states

> *« since colonisation has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels, there is a yearning for wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong, a yearning that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which, when satisfied, can subvert, and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment. » (Alexander, 2005: 281)*

She suggests that political discursive strategies of membership in coalitions, like those of citizenship, community, family, political movement, nationalism and solidarity in identity or ideology, although important, have probably not addressed the source of this yearning. For Alexander, these coalitions have reproduced the very fragmentation and separation that she identifies as the root of the problem. She states that the source of this yearning is a *'deep [metaphysical] knowing that we are in fact interdependent – neither separate, nor autonomous'* (*op. cit.*: 282). She explains:

> *« As human beings we have a sacred connection to each other, and this is why enforced separations wreak havoc in our Souls. There is a great danger then, in living lives of segregation. Racial segregation. Segregation in politics. Segregated frameworks. Segregated and compartimentalised selves. What we have devised as an oppositional politics has been necessary, but it will never sustain us, for a while it may give us some temporary gains (which become more ephemeral the greater the threat, which is not a reason not to fight), it can never ultimately feed that deep place within us: that space of the erotic, that space of the Soul, that space of the Divine. » (*ibidem*)*

One way of approaching the Other (and the self) as both accessible and inaccessible is to make a strategic distinction between ethics, aesthetics and politics constructing them as different and interdependent directional forces (rather than different realms). Aesthetics can be conceived as a directional force of the embodied metaphysical (individuated soul and/or non-individuated spirit, for a lack of better words) towards the world (as illustrated by Alexander); politics as the directional force of conviviality and communication through language/discourse and its created acquired/imposed subjectivities towards the embodied self; and ethics as a force-field at the interface where the two forces meet, where they often clash and where the possibility arises for the production of scripted and unscripted forms of existence. Through aesthetics, this conceptualization addresses that which is non-discursive

(non-narrativisable). Through politics it makes room for discursive formations that shape shared and individual realities (consensus and constructed identities) and creates assemblages of cognition-affect-relationality that mobilize desires, capacities and needs in specific ways. Ethics opens the way for politics and aesthetics to have no escape but to face each other, so that mutual teachings can emerge to renew and enlarge possibilities, assemblages, configurations of capacity, necessities and stories we tell ourselves and others.

Ethics enables politics to 'teach' about the complexity of the embodied insufficient self and the difficult realization of a profound inter-dependence and inter-relationship (that combines immanence and transcendence) and that may consist the (r)evolution (I borrow this idea from Gloria Anzaldua), while it also enables the metaphysical/aesthetic force to intervene and enlarge possibilities for signification in the social-political realm. In the ethical force field lies the demanding task of differentiating between unscripted existential/metaphysical interventions, and that which is consciously and sub-consciously acquired or imposed – what stories and assemblages become necessary for being with Others and for movement through discursive and non-discursive realms. The Buddhist greeting 'Namaste' (the God in me greets the God in you) can be interpreted to embody this ethic: I choose to address and call an inaccessible dimension of our existence before I address your embodied discursive subjectivities through mine, so that our 'inaccessible' selves can also feel invited into the conversation.

Reducing the conversation either to only accessible/discursive or inaccessible/non-discursive realities puts the (r)evolution at risk. Foreclosing the inaccessible/non-discursive and, as a result, de-mystifying existence becomes an arrogant pursuit of evolution through rationality alone: knowing the world to control it (see Mika, 2012). Foreclosing the accessible/discursive and, as a result, over-mystifying existence makes room for the discursively constructed ego to dissociate from the social political realm or to create shared realities that justify actions and revolutions motivated by conscious and unconscious fears (which are very different from the desire for wholeness mentioned by Alexander). Cajete (2000) states that we have both what he calls *'rational'* and *'metaphoric'* minds and reminds us of the need to use each in the appropriate context, while warning us that the metaphoric mind has been historically repressed through colonial modernity. The enlargement of the rational mind at the expense of the metaphoric mind is very destructive in terms of relationalities and collective cognitive perceptions of interdependence as it causes the *'yearning for wholeness'* to be confused with a yearning to *'belong'* through discursive formations (e.g. ethnicity, citizenship, identity). Some postcolonial strands of thought attempt to work through these very discursive formations to subvert them from within, focusing on the political (see Andreotti 2011a; Andreotti 2011b); other strands attempt to disrupt signification beyond such constructs, focusing on the ethical-metaphysical (see Moore and Rivera, 2011) as exemplified by Spivak (1999: 56) in her proposition of alterity as the "*experience of the impossible*" illustrated in the excerpt:

> « *If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us, it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away – and thus to think of it is already to transgress, for, in spite of our forays into what we metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is not, indeed, discountinuous.* » (*op.* cit*: 46*)

Balancing the modernist amplification of the rational mind may require a different conceptualization of language (as a metaphor) and reality itself (as elusive) (see Andreotti, Ahenakew and Cooper, 2012) in a way that goes beyond traditional dichotomies without excluding these dichotomies or creating new dichotomies through their negation. This, in turn,

first requires those over-socialized in the use of modern reason with its focus on 'knowing' the world and the Other, to perceive the limits of their over-socialization as a loss and recognize both the complexity of the social-political discursive dimension of the Other and the limits of discursive signification itself.

This is what the project *Through Other Eyes* (TOE), attempted to do didactically through its pedagogical aims and methodology. TOE was an international initiative that was partly funded by the Department for International Development in the UK from 2005 to 2008 to create a creative commons online programme of study presenting indigenous worldviews/critiques/perceptions of international development. Drawing on postcolonial and poststructuralist theories, rather than being a project 'about' indigenous people, TOE was framed as a project about the limits of modern reasoning triggered by radical alterity (offered by indigenous logics making intelligent and intelligible use of the metaphoric mind). The TOE initiative aimed to support educators to develop a set of basic tools to reflect on their own knowledge systems and to engage with other knowledge systems in different ways. This set of basic tools was designed to enable educators

− to develop an understanding of how language and systems of belief, values and representation affect the way people interpret the world
− to identify how different groups understand issues related to development and their implications for the development agenda
− to critically examine these interpretations – both 'Western' and 'indigenous' – looking at origins and potential implications of assumptions
− to identify an ethics for improved dialogue, engagement and mutual learning (Andreotti and Souza, 2008a: 2)

TOE's methodology of learning to unlearn, to learn, to listen and to reach out attempts to model the possibility of self-reflexivity as doubtful knowing that is consciously aware of the limits of signification. The project literature (see Andreotti and Souza, 2008a; Andreotti and Souza, 2008b; Souza and Andreotti, 2009) which articulates the project's rationale for an educational audience in positions A and B (as described before) attempts to interrupt the universalization of totalizing modern institutional scripts that capture/trap existence into given signifiers of identity, citizenship and hierarchies of humanity/development. This priority implied an initial over-valuation of rationality (or what is known) in the educational process. However, our hope was that, through a deconstructive methodologically (Derrida, 1976; Spivak, 1990), this emphasis would point to the limits of rationality itself. The purpose of the project drawing on the work of Spivak (1990; 1999; 2004), within this educational/discursive context, is explained as follows:

> « *Learning to unlearn is defined as learning to perceive that what we consciously identify as 'good and ideal' (however complex it may be) is **only one** possibility and this possibility is conditioned by where we come from socially, historically and culturally. It also involves perceiving that we carry a 'cultural baggage' filled with ideas and concepts produced in our contexts and that this affects who we are and what we see and that, although we are different from others in our own contexts, we share (discursively) much in common with them. Thus, learning to unlearn is about making the connections between social-historical processes, conflicts and encounters that have shaped our contexts and cultures and the construction of our knowledges and identities. It is also about becoming aware that all social groups contain internal differences and conflicts and that culture is a dynamic and conflictual production of meaning in a specific context.*

Learning to listen is defined as learning to recognize the effects and limits of our perspective, and to be receptive to new understandings of the world. It involves learning to perceive how our ability to engage with and relate to difference is affected by our cultural 'baggage' – the ideas we learn from our social groups. Hence, learning to listen is about learning to keep our perceptions constantly under scrutiny (tracing the origins and implications of our assumptions) in order to open up to different possibilities of understanding and becoming aware that our interpretations of what we hear (or see) say more about ourselves than about what is actually being said or shown. This process also involves understanding how identities are constructed in the process of interaction between self and other. This interaction between self and other occurs not only in the communities in which we belong, but also between these communities and others.

Learning to learn is defined as learning to receive new perspectives, to re-arrange and expand our own and to deepen our understanding – going into the uncomfortable space of 'what we do not know we do not know'. It involves creating different possibilities of understanding, trying to see through other eyes by transforming our own eyes and avoiding the tendency to want to turn the other into the self or the self into the other. Therefore, learning to learn is about learning to feel comfortable about crossing the boundaries of the comfort zone within ourselves and engaging with new concepts to rearrange our 'cultural baggage': our understandings, relationships and desires.

Learning to reach out is defined as learning to apply this learning to our own contexts and in our relationships with others continuing to reflect and explore new ways of being, thinking, doing, knowing and relating. It involves understanding that one needs to be open to the unpredictable outcomes of mutual uncoersive learning and perceiving that in making contact with others, one exposes oneself and exposes others to difference and newness, and this often results in mutual teaching and learning (although this learning may be different for each party involved). Learning to reach out is about learning to engage, to learn and to teach with respect and accountability in the complex and uncomfortable intercultural space where identities, power and ideas are negotiated. This process requires the understanding that conflict is a productive component of learning and that the process itself is cyclical: once one has learned to reach out in one context, one is ready to start a new cycle of unlearning, listening, learning and reaching out again at another level. » (Andreotti and Souza 2008b: 28-29).

TOE invites students to re-arrange their attachments to absolute certainties and desires for consensus, intelligibility and discursive completeness. Instead, the intention was to support them to explore the agonism and excitement (expressed to me once as passion and desperation) of dwelling in the discomfort of engagements with provisional certainties, dissensus and non-teleological futures, where difference is seen as a powerful force of inspiration and a push towards the limits of existing possibilities.

Educational scholars have started a discussion on how to create the conditions for this type of experience through education. They draw on ideas originating within and outside of Europe from thinkers such as Levinas, Ranciere, Derrida, Mouffe, Maturana, Spivak, Caputo, Vattimo, Lorde and Anzaldua, and different schools of thought such as psychoanalysis, mestizaje, poststructuralism, postcolonial theory, indigenous studies and even early German romanticism. In recent educational discussions drawing on Levinas' ideas, the inaccessibility of the Other is often discussed in combination with the inaccessibility of the world and of justice itself. Sharon Todd, Clarence Joldersma and Gert Biesta offer a few glimpses of this important conversation. Todd (2003; 2009), for example, suggests, amongst other things, the introduction of humility into the educational process as preparation for the Other/the World and as a challenge to the arrogance and epistemic violence of modern education:

> *« [...] what transformational role can education play in order to make a difference in the world if it already presumes to know what it wants that world to be and what it wants students to become? Isn't this simply a function of arrogance? An arrogance that claims in the name of others how they ought to live and what they ought to value? How might we instead introduce humility into education in such a way as it can open itself up toward an indefinite future at the same time as it takes a stance toward past and present injustices? » (Todd, 2011: 509.)*

Clarence Joldersma (2011) proposes a new vocabulary to talk about the relationship between understanding, ethics and justice, where education (different from schooling) is about 'understanding', a primordial way of being/coping, which he conceptualizes as improvisional and contingent 'generalized anticipations'. Joldersma conceives ethics as an asymetric relation where another human has a rightful claim on itself, and, precisely because of human interdependence, ethics is what calls understandings to account:

> *« The very character of human understanding discloses the permanent possibility for, and inescapability of, human interdependence. The ethical thus manifests itself with respect to the understanding in a relation to the other that falls outside of one's anticipatory possibilities. As an ethical relation, the other is precisely outside of the reach of one's provisional interpretations of the world, while legitimately breaking through the particularities of those interpretations by calling them to account. » (Joldersma, 2011: 443)*

From his perspective, education, as generalized anticipations about the world that depend on the Other's interruptions, is what orients people towards the social, towards the call of justice.

Similarly, Biesta (2010) proposes that education should be conceptualized as coming into a plural and undefined world. Biesta (2012) elaborates a useful distinction between 'learning from the Other' and 'being taught by the Other', where learning from the Other relies on aspirations of the self for something knowable, languageable and intelligible and 'being taught by the Other' represents an unexpected (and sometimes painful) interruption and enlargement/transcendence of our referents and our ego, caused (but not necessarily purposefully) by the Other. From these perspectives, what the Other can teach us is precisely the limits and thresholds of our own cognitive-affective-relational assemblages and the magnitude of an undefinable universe of unexplored possibilities. Biesta also offers a useful conceptualization where education is about preparing and supporting people for 'being in the world' between two destructive impulses: the impulse to control the world (which in effect destroys the world), and the impulse to withdraw from the world (which in effect destroys the self).

Having said that, it is important to emphasize that, in the discipline of education (in its anglophone 'modern' articulation), the discussions between explorations enacted in different languages, contexts and intellectual traditions, is just starting. Therefore, what I have mentioned in this article is just the beginning of a new long, contested and stimulating on-going conversation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to return to problem-spaces and questions and answers related to accessibilities and inaccessibilities of the Other. I started this paper suggesting that a more useful form of critique could focus on relevant questions in contemporary problem-spaces

instead of adequate answers to canonical questions that we have often forgotten. I tried to illustrate this strategic form of criticism by mapping the questions, answers, limits and interplay between five common positions related to identity/alterity that I have noticed in education. I then argued that it could be useful to explore a conceptualization of the Other as both politically accessible and metaphysically/existentially inaccessible in order to open different possibilities for cognitive-affective-relational assemblages and for a reconceptualization of the inter-relationship between aesthetics, ethics and politics, which I tentatively defined as directional forces. I hinted at how this could be put in practice in education and at existing academic conversations on this topic.

I would like to finish this paper with a metaphor in my attempt to balance my own over-inflation and valuation of rationality constantly fed by my academic work over-reliant on and conditioned by alphabetic literacies in anglophone spaces of enunciation. This metaphor also emphasizes the need for rigorously mapped problem-spaces (not necessarily articulated through rationality) and for the search for questions worth asking over the search for adequate answers.

> *« What if racism, sexism, classicism, nationalism and other forms of toxic, parasitic and highly contagious viral divisions are preventable social diseases?*
>
> *What if the medicine involves getting to terms with our violent histories, being taught to see through the eyes of others (as impossible as it sounds), and facing humanity (in our own selves first) in all its complexity, affliction and imperfection, its latent (pleasant and unpleasant, healing and harming) capacities and contingent necessities, agonistically embracing everyone's capacity for love, hatred, compassion, harm, goodwill, envy, joy, anger, oppression, care, selfishness, selflessness, avarice, kindness, enmity, solidarity, malice, benevolence, arrogance, humility, narcissism, altruism, greed, generosity, contempt and reverence?*
>
> *What if our holy texts (both religious, activist and academic), our education (both formal and informal), our politics and agency, and our ways of knowing and being have carried both the mutant virus that spreads the disease and the medicine that prevents it?*
>
> *What if learning to distinguish between toxins, viruses and medicines involves disciplining our minds, bodies, psyches, and spirits by confronting our traumas and letting go of fears of scarcity, loneliness, worthlessness, guilt and revenge (generated precisely by the imperative for autonomy/independence, self-sufficiency and control)? What if we have to learn to trust each other without guarantees?*
>
> *What if the motivation to survive alongside each other in our finite planet in dynamic balance (without written agreements, coercive enforcements or assurances) will come precisely through being taught collectively by the disease itself?*
>
> *What knowledge would be enough, what education would be appropriate, and what possibilities would be opened, then? » (Andreotti, 2012: 29)*

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