

# **The Philosophically Educated Teacher as Traveler**

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## ABSTRACT

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My dissertation investigates teachers' thinking within that "oscillating place of difference" that is the classroom. I propose that teachers think and see differently in the classroom because they have practiced, like travelers, the dynamic thinking which makes them open to novelty, attentive to difference, reflective wayfarers on the paths of the world. I offer a threefold articulation of teaching into thinking, traveling and philosophizing. My guiding figure is that of teacher as traveler.

I focus on the teacher's way of seeing the familiar and the unfamiliar in the classroom. Reliance on teaching routines is considered as a sign of the need for the teacher to feel at home in the classroom, and as a response to the inherent uncertainty of the educational experience. Dewey's conception of reflective thinking is put at work to explain teachers thinking in the classroom: reflection is a twofold movement of the mind that at first focuses on the given particular of the experience, and that also expands and opens up the given to new possible interpretations.

The third chapter proposes to historicize the metaphor of teacher as traveler by considering Graeco-Roman thinking about travel and movement in relation to knowledge and wisdom. I consider the thesis that traveling is conducive to learning and wisdom. Herodotus explicitly connects travel to knowledge. The presence of itinerant teachers in Ancient Greece seems to reinforce this connection, as does the mythological representation of the ideal teacher as the centaur Chiron. I then posit an antithetical idea: that traveling be counterproductive because

in travel the person is exposed to distraction, loss of focus, fragmentation. This antithesis is endorsed by Seneca's *Epistles to Lucilius*.

The dissertation moves to a re-examination of the figure of teacher as traveler in relation to the idea of home. The traveler reaches out and explores novelty and alterity in a meaning-making relation to where she is from. Similarly, the teacher thinks in the classroom by being attentive to newness and difference while keeping in mind the home or familiar: her routines, her curriculum, her tradition

Montaigne's humanistic philosophizing is considered in its constitutive dynamism. The way to the knowledge of home-- and the wisdom deriving from it-- passes through the encounter with the Other, be it the indigenous inhabitant of the new world, or the neighboring country, or a different language. Like a traveler, a teacher retains her freedom to move and to choose the direction to her steps, and carries the necessary provisions and supplies: enough to get around, but not too many to weigh her down. The teacher as traveler can read the world of experience, can read her discipline, and can read her students by paying attention and knowing their pace.

The encounters that are at the heart of the educational experience, between teachers, students, works and things of the world, all concur to exercise the mind of a traveler: a mind that finds itself "at home" in the world.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction: Toward a Re-imagining of Teaching**

### 1. Introduction

My study is a philosophical inquiry into teaching and into the kind of thinking that is at work in teaching. Though teaching is an activity in which everyone has engaged occasionally at one time or another, I am interested in studying what is done by those who make of teaching in formal settings a significant part of their existence (teachers and professors). I hypothesize that, regardless of the subject-matter taught, teaching involves a reflective mode of thinking that is akin to philosophical thinking. There is a particular quality to teachers' thinking that enables them to navigate the challenging uncertainty of the terrain where teaching and learning take place. I am interested in exploring this quality and how it shall be sustained through the practice of philosophical thinking.

Being a teacher myself, I have often dealt with the intuition that the secret of what goes on in schools is rarely grappled with in the description of teaching skills or in the evaluation of teachers' and schools' performances. Being an educator of future teachers, I worry that most of what we deem useful for prospective teachers to learn does not touch on this doubtlessly present yet elusive quality of thinking. Being a philosopher, I nurture a hope that philosophical thinking may concur to the cultivation of such a disposition. I am fascinated by what I see at work in the classroom: the constant exercise of balancing and dealing with the unforeseen as it comes up, by this discernible but perhaps un-measurable disposition to switch frames of reference and to move from one position to another in the educational space.

My study aims at unearthing what makes teachers irreplaceable in schools of any level, from pre-k to universities. There is something that teachers and only teachers do: intentional, thoughtful, artful teaching to students about subject matter. No software, parent, self-help book can do it this way. What makes teachers irreplaceable, their secret, is undeniably there: yet it eludes definitions.

What teachers do in regard to thinking discloses some defining traits of the educational experience. I am after something that is hard to grapple with as it cannot be ever abstracted and considered *in se*. Because I take teaching to be situated (i.e.: it pertains to a particular experienced combination of circumstances) and situational (i.e.: not only *descriptively* it takes place *in a* situation, but it *cannot be thought of* without a relation to a situation), I consider it inherently related to the context in which it takes place. This context is what in my research I refer to as “the classroom”: the physical space shared by students and teacher in which education happens. The classroom can be anywhere: a playground, a porch, an agora, a soccer field, a café. But it needs to be *somewhere*, in a common space within whose boundaries individuals encounter.

A classroom is the intersection of worlds. Every time a teacher enters her classroom, she ventures in a territory that is and stays only partially known to her. In this territory, however, she will perform her daily teaching through a constant interpretation and mediation of countless opposing or diverse needs, expectations, duties and tasks. The classroom space is a place of encounters, battles, negotiation of identities. It is where boundaries are set and challenged, in an ongoing movement which encompasses sameness and difference of students, teachers, and disciplines. The classroom is a land whose map is never fully drawn.

Imagining and anticipating how to build a provisional sense of direction, how to choose where to stand, and maybe even simply how to stand in this space, is a daunting endeavor. Just as a traveler may venture in a newly discovered land, with both hopeful expectation, and an anticipation that accepted frames of reference may be challenged, the teacher enters the educational space as an unpredictable frontier.

Because teaching is *in the situation*, a consideration of the space in which it occurs will provide elements to start sketching that situated dynamic thinking that I propose characterizes it. Within the educational space, the teacher occupies a place, a position from which she exercises her thinking and teaching. In my next section, I examine different conceptions of the teacher's place, resulting in an idea of "oscillating space of difference" that will serve as backdrop for the whole inquiry.

## 2. What is the teacher's place in the educational space?

An inquiry into the teacher's place shall begin by considering the immediate multivocality of the question. The term *place* assumes two different, however strongly related, meanings: initially it indicates a physical position, where the teacher's body is primarily situated. At the very same time, *place* comes to indicate also a non-physical position, the site of thoughts, emotions and in general of dispositions of the mind where the teacher's body is situated (Epstein-Jannai, 2001). The teacher feels her place as extremely personal, private, subjective and emotional, yet this uniqueness is transferable to others in the very act of teaching.

Teaching has an oxymoric quality due to the fact that it inhabits the tension between at least two different dimensions, be it the objective-subjective, or the theory-practice, or the institutional-individual. The teacher's place in the classroom is that of a standpoint in relation to

both students and knowledge. Epstein-Jannai writes: "I am pointing to a specific mental, logical, and emotional position, in relation to a wide range of issues (intrapersonal, but most strongly interpersonal), which structures the teaching situation in such a way as to permit students' personal construction of knowledge and not only knowledge repetition" (p.6).

I will temporarily accept the idea that teaching could be the standpoint from which the teacher connects to student learning. Learning is understood, in agreement with a long tradition, as an inquiry that gives shape to the path on which one enters life: an existential "path of stepping into the world"(p. 8). Learning is the process of making sense of the world and of one's life in it. So understood, learning is not only and not primarily about gathering information: rather it is a complex enterprise of inquiry into experience with the finality of searching its meaning. The teacher's position in relation to her students' learning needs then to be expression of her stand towards learning, knowledge and meaning.

From this standpoint, the preoccupation with the quality of knowledge is more relevant than the one with the objects of learning. Hence, the teacher's teaching can be situated in the "place of doubt" (p.9): learning takes place when perplexity about the world, and our path in it, is accepted and considered inherent to the inquiry of learning itself. This leads the author to suggest that "when the teacher is in the place where teaching takes place, the possibility of absolute knowledge articulated as scientific and precise knowledge, (...) no longer exists."(p.9)

The teacher, in order to set conditions for teaching and learning to happen, has to be guarded against the seductions of perfect knowledge and dogmatism. She knows that quest for knowledge can be talked about in terms of lack of it. Socratic irony as dialogical manifestation of doubt is part of a discursive strategy that allows teaching and learning to take place. Irony applies both to the teaching praxis as experienced and as theorized as a specific kind of speech.

Epstein-Jannai conceptualizes irony as the teacher's place in the *text* of the class. Irony as a matter of fact describes "teaching's dual nature: to be at the real moment of doing, inside and outside the institutionalized framework"(p.12). The ironic stance showcases the teacher's ability to shift her positions from inside to outside the given situation. For the purposes of my inquiry, this insight is suggestive of the hypothesis that teaching implies the capacity to swing positions or places in reference to a common shared space.

The location of education can be viewed as a space of opening between teachers and students. Gert Biesta (2004) writes "This gap is a necessary condition for communication- and hence education- to take place. A pedagogy of relation should, therefore, acknowledge and affirm the uncertainties and risks and the possibilities that are at stake in this gap" (p.11). In-between the actors of the educational experience, a space is opened which constitutes the relation itself. If there were no difference, there would be no distance, and no movement, therefore the relation could not take place. Without difference, no learning is possible, thus no education. This space in between is unrepresentable, and elusive: "the unrepresentability of what makes education possible, rather, highlights the performative nature of the process of education, that is, the fact that education exists only in and through the communicative interaction between the teacher and the learner"(p.21).

Biesta contributes to clarify that the in-between, the space that makes education possible, structures processes of thought, meaning and communication. When a teacher abandons "the safe side of knowledge" (Anders Saefstrom, 2003), her assigned place from which she could exert her role of depositary of knowledge and power, she is not abandoning thinking; rather, she is moving where thinking and meaning are made possible. The connectedness and difference of the things



related qualifies this space, more than the specificity of the things that are put in relation (teachers, students, curriculum, institution, traditions and so on).

This space can be understood as a middle ground. Middle grounds are difficult to theorize because they do not succumb to the dichotomies we rely upon so promptly (cfr. Oyler and Becker, 1997). "Middle grounds have a bad name in professional philosophy. Too often, occupying such a position is condemned as a refusal to take a stand, a plea for undecidability and indifferent tolerance, a desire to have things both- or all-ways, hence a feeble form of fence sitting"(Code,1991, p. 318). Inhabiting the middle ground of teaching and learning requires that the teacher gives up her side of the metaphorical fence and practices the art of balancing in precarious equilibrium.

When the classroom is considered, fences are multiple as there are always more than two sides at play; thus requiring an extraordinary ability to move and navigate the uneven territory that is continuously re-described by the emergence of new events and factors. The idea of a middle ground could indeed evoke a space in which the two opposing sides are neutralized through a lukewarm lack of involvement.

As my inquiry moves, I need to clarify that in my conception, the educational space cannot be marked by any one couple of opposing factors. An interpretation of it in terms of dichotomies risks a fundamental mistake: that of flattening the constant variability of its components. By reducing the dynamic complexity of this middle ground, we superimpose a static, simplified scheme on the alive ever moving experience of the classroom. The spatial metaphor itself can give rise to such a deadening outcome if it is not constantly questioned and unsettled.

It is with a similar concern that Doris Santoro (2008) considers the dichotomy instituted between teacher-centered and student-centered pedagogy from a radical questioning of the spatial metaphor on which those two models are constructed. She shows that the margin-center schema functions differently depending on the general framework of reference. In feminist theories, this schema serves "to name and criticize a central locus of power while at the same time illuminating the actual conditions of those who reside at the margins"(p.314). This metaphor is a tool to describe and to offer an interpretation of the classroom situation. When this same schema is deployed in a prescriptive way, a diagnose of the situation in terms of teacher-centred-ness implies that the prescribed cure for this situation be reversing it to a situation of student-centred-ness.

Santoro with great efficacy shows that the student-centered pedagogy has the undesirable outcome to place teachers at the margins of the classroom experience. The marginalized teacher exerts a "pedagogy of disappearance"(p.316), "predicated on the notion of invisible labor" (p.317): she gives up expertise and her capacity to have any influence on the classroom. Responsibilities are abdicated though with the best of intentions, and when professional responsibility is enacted, this takes place with a sense of guilt on the teacher's side. Santoro suggests that the disappearance of the teacher "reinstates outdated prescriptions of 'women's proper place' based on bourgeois ideals of domesticity "(p.317). If applying a student-centered pedagogy posits the teacher in a marginal position, then, the author writes, "the marginalization of teachers should not be less problematic than the marginalization of students"(p.317).

The problem lies in the use of this margin-center spatial metaphor. When this metaphor is accepted, one of the two protagonists of the classroom experience, either the teacher or the student, is placed at the margins. They are polarized by the use of the metaphor. If we take a

closer look at this conundrum we realize that the issue is twofold: firstly, it operates on the idea that there are proper places, fixed positions to be occupied by one role. Secondly, this particular metaphor implies that the margins and the center never meet. Santoro explains: "The margin-center schema leaves little room for the dynamic negotiated space required for the multiple, shifting positions involved in teaching and learning relations. When a teaching position is taken as a static, self-evident location, (...) the multiple purposes practices and meanings available in various approaches to teaching are diminished."(p.314).

Santoro is rightly guarded against the mechanism of reversal that simply repositions excess of power from one opposite to the other. She urges for a creative recovery of a different spatial metaphor that allows for thinking the educational experience without giving in to the exclusionary logic of the margin-center schema. She proposes to consider the concept of "in-between" as an essential pedagogical concept that offers "a more inhabitable spatial metaphor for teaching and learning relations"(p.329). She suggests that the "in-between", as a space of movement that makes the relation possible, opens the potentiality coming from the fact that entities in relation are not fixed in a specific location. Such openness to potentiality clearly applies to the educational relation as well: "The in-between provides a space where the positions of all involved in a relation have the capacity to change through the relation, and, indeed, must change if a relation is said to truly take place. The in-between constitutes the teaching and learning relation acknowledging the distance between teachers, students and their objects of study as well as the space for movement that should ensue as a result of learning."(p.330)

What goes on in an educational relationship, as Santoro phrases it, is often oversimplified. The "transmission approach" which assumes teachers to know exactly where students are and how to make them learn through delivering instructions, is a case that shows

how a static and somehow motionless understanding of the educational relation betrays the relation itself. What makes the relation such is its dynamic quality. Being in a relation means understanding that the poles in relation keep changing and moving: they cannot be fixed down to one single identifiable position. Identities are not settled: they are there to be disrupted, if not systematically, at least as a possibility for the educational relationship (p.331).

An "oscillating space of difference" is compounded within the educational relationship. Santoro writes: "But it is in its dynamism that the in-between exceeds static representation. Dynamic relations call for conceiving of teachers work as necessarily mobile. Rather than attempting to locate the proper or best place for good teachers, we will need to investigate movement within the space for good teaching" (p.332).

Before taking on the invitation to explore the teachers' movement within the oscillating space of difference, I wish to comment on the implications of accepting this description for ways of thinking about the educational experience in general. This hardly definable ground: the "in-between" or "middle ground", recurs in the different theorizations of teacher's positioning (Oyler and Becker, 1997, Espstein-Jannai, 2001, Biesta, 2004, Santoro, 2008). If there is an urgency to leave behind conceptual oppositions that do not reconstitute the fullness of what goes on in the classroom, such urgency however collides with the difficulty of thinking otherwise about teaching. Thinking in relation to a spatial quality can spread out some folds of the experience of thinking itself, though it needs to be asked if the use of the concept of "place" is helpful for this, or if this concept on the contrary contributes to "solidify" the experience changing it to something different. On this I agree with Oyler and Becker (1997) when they comment:

From the title of our article onward, we have used a metaphor of "places". Although this metaphor has helped us to develop and articulate our thoughts, we are aware of some dangers. First, it helps us to think of the positions we encounter as something we can walk away from, as something we can leave behind. The metaphor suggests that we can

find a new territory not connected with this older places. Second, this metaphor in some way works to homogenize and reify. It helps make the positions we counter seem to be static frozen entities, too stable to be the living positions of actors in the field of real interactions. (p.466)

The very use of spatial metaphors risks to reduplicate that abstractive placelessness we were trying to avoid. But it seems impossible to be loyal to the experience of thinking and thinking about teaching without appealing to spatial metaphors. Perhaps this conundrum shall be maintained in its tension. In order to do this, we need to operate a reversal of the order in which we tend to think of thinking.

Taking "place" as a metaphor implies that there is a moment in which thinking is not in place. Thinking takes place out of the horizon of our experience, and then we transfer this original experience to some spatial dimensions so that we can metaphorically speak of it. If the spatial metaphor is a secondary derived trait of the experience of thinking, then there is something like "absolute thinking" or maybe an "absolute thinker" before the act of thinking itself. Similarly, if there is a teaching before its spatial conditions, then we are allowed to imagine something like a teacher before teaching, an absolute teacher who does not need to enter the classroom, or whose entrance in the classroom is merely an application of real teaching taking place aloof.

It is difficult to even think about thinking unless we think of it from a position, maybe swinging between two or among many positions. Thinking is inherently positional. That can be a reason why any metaphorical take on thinking leaves us unsatisfied and in danger of betraying our experience of it: because metaphor is not a derivative version, a "translation" in spatial terms of what goes on elsewhere, but it is the very place in which thinking, indeed, *takes place*. To this, I think, hint the scholars that seem to run into the misty idea of "in-between-space" or "middle-ground" as that where thinking, and teaching, come about.

As Montaigne writes, for the mind to be everywhere is like to be nowhere. Much of educational theory places teachers' thinking in the everywhere of generalized models to be applied, or in the nowhere of disappearance. The teacher's mind is *not* everywhere and is *not* nowhere: it moves in the problematic though alluring zone in-between, within which teachers think of themselves as in oscillating constant movement.

My study moves from this preparatory setting to an inquiry in the movement within the educational space. In doing so, I take on Santoro's concluding suggestion that "rather than attempting to locate the proper or best place for good teachers, we will need to investigate movement within the space for good teaching" (p.332). Unknown territory whose map is perhaps undrawable, the space of teaching and learning is nevertheless that which teachers need to inhabit. How to move within this space, is something to be further thought about.

### 3. Methodology of the study

The question about methods assumes particular relevance in preparation to an inquiry, as mine, that plans to take on the possibility of philosophically rethinking teaching in today's world. The election of a method depends on the epistemology informing the inquiry that is about to start. When teaching is considered, two competing models based on diverging conceptions of reason and thinking can be seen at play: from one side, a rational method comprising universal rules that can ensure valid knowledge. On the other side, a reasonable method in which argumentations carry conviction with a force related to local knowledge of concrete events, and not to universal, abstract rationality (cfr. Toulmin, 2001, p. 84 and ff). I incline toward a method of reasonableness not because I believe it is possible to select one approach at the expenses of the other, but because I find this approach to be philosophically

more apt to the exploration of the experience of teaching. The model I chose to adopt relies on informal or situational logic that uses metaphors, poetic imagination and non deductive thought.

To rely on metaphorical descriptions in order to gain a deeper understanding of what teachers do is to acknowledge that reasoning and logic are informed by ways of imaginative rationality. David Hansen (2004) writes: "Teaching constitutes at one and the same time an idea and a practice that we can characterize, in the sense of describing the character of the work much as we find ourselves describing the character of painting, fishing, raising a family or being in love. In this time-honored, evidently permanent aspect of human sense-making, terms of art and metaphor are invaluable vehicles of insight and understanding." (p.127). An exploration of the occurrence of forms of thought in images about teaching allows for insight and understanding of teaching because of the relation between the images and the theory such images want to illustrate.

This relation is one of solidarity but it also searches for points of tension within the theory. Images and metaphors are neither completely heterogeneous nor isomorphous with the body of concepts they want to translate (cfr. Le Doeuff, 1989, pp. 3-20) Therefore, looking at images provides a unique perspective on teaching. Images do not reduplicate the concept they want to convey, but in conveying the concept they complicate it and provide a whole new set of questions and connections about the theoretical enterprise in which they are at work.

The guiding image for my study is the teacher as traveler. This image refracts ideas of movement, exploration, and translation. And as even images of travelers refuse to stay still, this guide conducts me between different realms of experience, across disciplinary borders and in alternations between literal, exegetical, and conceptual explorations.

In this light, my proposed argument will be developed through a variety of approaches. I engage in deep exegetic reading of chosen authors of reference (Italo Calvino, Dewey, Herodotus, Seneca, Montaigne), which inform my conversation with other sources from the world of educational scholarship, of historiography, and literary theory. Conceptual analysis helps me clarify and articulate the thinking I develop in this multi-voice conversation. Megan Laverty (2010) writes: “Judgments about our concepts are inescapably circular: individuals have no choice but to trust the received meaning of concepts, while seeking opportunities to alter them.” She continues, “conceptual understanding is experienced as a task to be undertaken or, alternatively, as an obligation to be fulfilled—it is, if you like, our distinctly human vocation”. She suggests that we cannot simply accept concepts and ideas as an inherited given, rather, we must “take [them] up and make them fully and uniquely [our]own.” (p.29). For me, the call to “take greater responsibility for our conceptual understanding” (p.20) is heeded to with work on figures and ideas in conversation with works of my inherited tradition.

At first glance revisiting works of philosophy and literature, some of which written many centuries ago, may seem removed from the project of thinking about the teacher today. Nonetheless, I will show that those works can assist us in making sense --perhaps a new sense-- of the longstanding practice of teaching.

#### 4. Trajectory of the dissertation

After this introduction, I start my inquiry by posing a question about the irreplaceability of teachers. What do teachers do, that nobody else and nothing else can do in the educational



experience? They think and see differently in the classroom because they have practiced, like travelers, that dynamic thinking which makes them open to novelty, attentive to difference, reflective wayfarers on the paths of the world.

The second chapter aims at instituting the figure of the teacher as a traveler. Substance to this figure is found in the interpretation of a work of literature, *The Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino. I offer a reading of the relationship between the two characters of the book, Marco Polo the explorer and Kublai Kahn the emperor to whom Marco reports, as an educational relationship. Marco Polo is a traveler, a student of the world. For this reason, I uphold, he is a teacher to the emperor.

My interpretation of Marco Polo as a teacher unfolds into a second section of the chapter in which I undertake a conceptual exploration of “being a teacher”. This exploration focuses on the teacher’s way of seeing the familiar and the unfamiliar in the classroom. Reliance on teaching routines is considered as a sign of the need for the teacher to feel at home in the classroom, and as a response to the inherent uncertainty of the educational experience. Routines when adopted with flexibility can indeed leave an open space for reflective thinking about the present situation.

Dewey’s conception of reflective thinking is put at work to explain teachers thinking in the classroom: reflection is a twofold movement of the mind that at first focuses on the given particular of the experience, and that also expands and opens up the given to new possible interpretations. The reflective wayfarer (Dewey, 1933, p.13) comes to signify the thinker for whom reflection “is the method of the educational experience” (Dewey, 1916, p.163).

The third chapter proposes to historicize the metaphor of teacher as traveler by considering Graeco-Roman thinking about travel and movement in relation to knowledge and

wisdom. The organization of the chapter consists in two moments: in the first, I posit the thesis that traveling is conducive to learning and wisdom. Consequently, those who teach enact some form of traveling because it is through this outward movement that they have gathered what they can now teach. Herodotus explicitly connects travel to knowledge. The presence of itinerant teachers in Ancient Greece seems to reinforce this connection, as does the mythological representation of the ideal teacher as the centaur Chiron.

In the second part, I posit an antithetical idea: that traveling be counterproductive because in travel the person is exposed to distraction, loss of focus, fragmentation. Seneca's *Epistles to Lucilius* well embody the sentiment that the only advisable movement to the person seeking wisdom is the straight forward path of the philosophical discipline. Seneca's point deserves consideration because it encapsulates two objections that are heard in many other versions: one, that only finalized movement is useful and productive. Two, that all is needed to reach wisdom and thus happiness is at hand in one's home. Any movement of reaching out ends up spoiling this ideal of domestic felicity as it contaminates it. "Why would you want or need a teacher to travel?" Seneca seems to ask, "Let her go out in the world, and she will get lost, while all she needs to know is very close by: in the walled space of her lesson plan". Seneca's point is well put and it signals the need for my inquiry to rearticulate and deepen the connection between teaching and traveling that I have initially affirmed.

The reexamination passes through the idea of home: a clarification of the presence and role of the home in the movement of the traveler contributes to state that the connection between teaching and traveling is actually threefold because it requires philosophizing as well. The traveler reaches out and explores novelty and alterity in a meaning-making relation to where she is from. Similarly, the teacher thinks in the classroom by being attentive to newness and

difference while keeping in mind the home or familiar: her routines, her curriculum, her tradition. In the trajectory of my inquiry, the threefold articulation of teaching into thinking, traveling and philosophizing takes place through a reading of Montaigne's *Essays* and *Journal of Travel to Italy*.

The fourth and fifth chapters are dedicated to the formulation of a synthesis between the two aforementioned positions. Montaigne's humanistic philosophizing is considered in its constitutive dynamism. His work shows that travel is conducive to learning and wisdom when it is done well. Chapter four starts by considering (without any pretense at exhaustiveness) some historical and cultural traits of Early Modernity, such as the development of Humanism, the introduction of the printing press and more importantly the geographic discoveries. Against this background, I reformulate the alternative between the idea that the experience of the world is beneficial to education, and the idea that the way to education is focused knowledge of one's own.

Within an early modern frame, this alternative becomes an option between *road* and *book*. Montaigne assists in seeing that the world is not opposed to, but it is truly the way to gain knowledge of the self. In the Renaissance, *world* came to indicate something different and new: a larger known extension of ocean and lands inhabited by new peoples. Montaigne shows that the way to the knowledge of home-- and the wisdom deriving from it—passes through the encounter with the Other, be it the indigenous inhabitant of the new world, or the neighboring country, or a different language. He also shows that no travel is possible if one does not carry her books with her: metaphorically suggesting that the relation to otherness and novelty is sustained by a relation to familiarity and home.

Chapter five continues the analysis and connects it more explicitly to themes of teaching and learning. Montaigne's main writings on education (I:25, and I:26) are read through some of the writings on the New World (I:31 and III:6). The chapter outlines education as the lifelong preparation of more embracing ways of looking and thinking, open to the novelty and difference of the experience, preparation carried out in the development of judgment. The teacher's judgment is developed when her freedom of movement and thought is preserved and valued. A teacher with a "well formed" mind is the opposite of the pedantic tutor who accumulates knowledge without ever owning it, showing a "dependent and mendicant ability" (I; 25, p.101).

Like a traveler, a teacher retains her freedom to move and to chose the direction to her steps, and carries the necessary provisions and supplies: enough to get around, but not too many to weigh her down. The teacher traveler attends to things of the world and to the words that say them. The parallelism put forth by Montaigne between traveling and reading allows for an idea of reflectivity as capacity to judge, in a combination of artistic ability with a relational concern. The teacher as traveler can read the world of experience, can read her discipline, and can read her students by paying attention and knowing their pace (I:26, p.110).

The encounters that are at the heart of the educational experience, between teachers, students, works and things of the world, all concur to make the mind of a traveler: a mind that finds itself " at home" in the world.

## 5. Conclusion

I want to set off my dissertation with the story of a traveler. This story generates many more questions about the connections that I suggest in the study.

It is a story about a sixteen year old Dutch schoolgirl who sailed around the world alone: Laura Dekker who completed her 518 days journey arriving in Sint Marteen on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 2012. She is the youngest solo sailor to circumnavigate the globe, having travelled 27,000 nautical miles in a 38-ft yacht named Guppy. Laura, who was born on a sailing boat in the port of Whangarei, New Zealand during a seven-year trip by her parents, is a smart, determined girl who has always known she would be a sailor. Now that her big adventure is at the end, she has a book project and a film is being made about her. She writes on her blog<sup>1</sup>:

*Thanks a lot for all the title suggestions for my book. In the meantime I've made my decision and will let everyone know when I'm at the Hiswa boat show in Holland. I am still enjoying Bonaire for a few more days before heading out into the cold--with the plane this time. I took a two day break from writing my book and went sailing with my minicat. There's been a lot of wind the past few days so that was great fun. Writing the book is a lot of fun too, reading all the pieces I wrote along the way and thinking about it all really makes me wanna leave again, or at least most of the time...*

*Laura 3.1.2012*

Laura's voyage is over. Now that her adventure is finished, she seems intentioned to go back to school and complete her high school degree. Since Laura is sixteen now she has no longer an obligation to attend school. Nevertheless, she has an obligation by law to receive a graduation before her eighteenth birthday. The solo sailor reported that the Dutch social services have tried their best to stop her from pursuing her dream<sup>2</sup>. A newspaper article<sup>3</sup> explains that "a Dutch court originally blocked her voyage and only permitted her to set off after she bought a bigger, sturdier boat than the one she originally planned to use; fitted it with advanced navigation and radar equipment; enrolled in a special correspondence school; and took courses in first aid and coping with sleep deprivation." Even after having won the right to sail, Laura still felt that

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<sup>1</sup> (<http://www.lauradekker.nl/English/News.html>)

<sup>2</sup> (BBC News 21 January 2012, Anna Holligan).

<sup>3</sup> (The Huffington Post 1.11.2012, Toby Sterling).

she and her family were being scrutinized by the Dutch authorities. During her journey, her father was summoned by truancy officers because the schoolgirl had failed to complete her homework on time. A journalist commented<sup>4</sup>: “and yet it is perhaps no surprise that the authorities might have something to say about a 14-year-old girl dropping out of school to go off round the world on a boat of her own”.

Laura’s story is of great interest for me as I am about to develop my inquiry. She is a young, gifted child who has spent nearly two years at sea by herself. For this, her family has been suspected of neglecting her education. How are we to think about this case? Have the Dutch social services “tried to stop her from pursuing her dreams?” Has Laura been denied a fundamental right by leaving school and embarking in her adventure?

This is quite puzzling for me. If from one side, I see the concern of the social services, on the other I am also drawn by the courage and strength of this girl. While I have not found much commentary on the educational questions presented by this case, one<sup>5</sup> of the rare news articles that commented on it titles: “School Books on Board”.

I find the image of Laura reading books on the long solo voyage quite moving. She seems to have in her ways embodied a little bit of what Montaigne meant when he said “I do not travel without books”. A picture she posted on her blog would also be telling: it is at first view a silly Winter Holiday picture. It represents a Santa hat on a plastic globe, held by Laura’s hand, on the background the ocean. Jean II de Gourmont’s engraving “Congnois toy toy-mesme” (1562, figure 3) represents something similar in its structure: a character with a headgear, whose head is in fact a globe.

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<sup>4</sup> (BBC News 21 January 2012, Anna Holligan).

<sup>5</sup> (Schulbücher über Bord <http://www.spiegel.de/schulspiegel/ausland/0,1518,787288,00.html>).

Laura Dekker may be the voyager that comprises knowledge of the world with knowledge of the self. I would love to have her as my student. And here perhaps lies the problem with this story and figure. When I see her on her boat, I cannot stop thinking she is a very young adventurer. Where is her teacher? Is there place for a teacher on Laura's boat? If we accept that Laura had a right to substitute her (compulsory) schooling with a two year solo navigation, should we think that she could do without a teacher? Are teachers irreplaceable in education?

## Chapter 2

### 1. Introduction

This chapter considers the question: What do teachers do that makes them irreplaceable in the classroom? They “think differently” because they “see differently”. I maintain that teachers’ capacity to think within the educational space of difference is deeply connected with philosophical practices of attention and movement. In this chapter, an opening section presents a literary pair from Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*: Kublai Khan the emperor and Marco Polo the explorer and ambassador. The relation between the two is framed as an educational relationship in which Marco Polo teaches his student Kublai. In the narrative, most elements of my proposed way of understanding the teacher as traveler are highlighted and discussed. I leave this section holding my guiding metaphor as it emerges from my reading of the story.

The ensuing section articulates the idea that teachers think differently in the classroom. The appraisal of teachers’ special mode of vision is measured against a conception of expertise, in favor of an interpretation that views teachers as “at home” in the classroom. The sense of familiarity will not be separated from the experience of foreignness, surprise, and uncertainty that qualifies the life of the school. The role of routines in teaching is examined as a case in which the process of familiarization can put in the shadows teachers’ element of thinking. Reflectivity is considered as the way of thinking enacted by teachers when they decide according to the situation instead of following predetermined sequences of action. In it, intuition and reflection are combined. The mind of the teacher moves in the time of teaching with modes of openness and responsibility. The image of the wayfarer is found again at the end of the chapter not merely as an illustration of a theory, but as a figure that reflects and expands the theory by searching for points of tension within it .



## 2. Teacher and student in *Invisible Cities*

Kublai Khan does not necessarily believe everything Marco Polo says when he describes the cities visited on his expeditions, but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with a greater attention and curiosity than he shows any other messenger or explorer of his (Calvino, 1972, p.5).

These are the opening lines of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. This work consists in a collection of fifty two lyrical sketches of cities belonging to the boundless extension of the Tartar empire. We read of cities of memory, of desire, of trade. We read of cities and eyes, of cities and names, cities and signs. Of thin cities, continuous cities and hidden ones. The cities are self-contained worlds that do not relate to each other. At times Marco Polo describes them in the tiniest details; at times he considers the whole: he is always looking at where no one else looks. The accounts of the cities are not "stories": nothing happens in them except a lyrical description of the cities themselves. The only seeming connection among the different accounts is offered by the insertion of framing material that tells an overarching story presenting the interaction between Marco Polo, the explorer who produces the accounts, and the Emperor Kublai Khan. The framing parts offer images of a relationship between the two in which certain ideas or questions are dramatized, especially ideas about listening and telling, and teaching and learning. In sum, these parts display the unraveling of an original and challenging educational experience. The emperor is bored and indifferent to the growing unrelenting power of his dominion. At times, he feels desperate to ever be able to make sense of the emptiness that takes hold of him in the evening. He listens to the stories of the young Venetian trader, Marco Polo, as a possibility to find some recognizable patterns of meaning in his realm.

Arguably the stories are not reported as Marco Polo uttered them to the emperor: all we know from their mode of communication clashes with the style in which the accounts are written (see Breiner, 1988, pp. 561-562). Marco Polo recounts cities to the Emperor because he is an ambassador. The text does not tell us about his travels: what he does, and if he really has seen the cities he tells of, is unrevealed to us. His function is fulfilled in the telling. Kublai is the listener and the reader of the explorer's stories. He provides a sort of unity to the narration through his main concern: the empire. He stands for any reader who listens to the stories having in mind what most matters to her. The first page gives a clear indication that Kublai is "us"- who take in the descriptions and provide unity to the collection of images through our own interest in it. Calvino writes: "In the lives of emperors there is a moment which follows pride in the boundless extension of the territories *we* have conquered ..." (p.13, emphasis added). From now on, Kublai refers to himself in the singular. Breiner (1988) notes that "by this device Calvino enforces an extreme implication of the reader throughout (and incidentally raises a question about whose voice it is that speaks the frame)" (p.563). One is led to feel that she is Kublai, as the narrative slips from first to third person and back in an imperceptible way. Kublai learns from Marco as the reader learns from what he reads. Their learning is mainly an exercise of interpretation sustained by a vital concern with meaning.

Many are the traits that contribute to make their relationship an educational one. From the opening lines we learn that between the two there is listening, with attention and curiosity: "but the emperor of the Tartars does continue listening to the young Venetian with a greater attention and curiosity". Something in Marco's embassies wins over the emperor's ennui. Marco is a trader. He trades experience and knowledge. Marco Polo and Kublai Khan represent different cultures as well as different professional praxes. What maintains them together is a

shared need of knowledge and meaning. The empire is a muddled and undifferentiated territory: “in the Khan’s mind the empire was reflected in a desert of labile and interchangeable data”(p.22). Marco Polo is interesting to the emperor because he helps him make sense of the empire. His sketches, descriptions of the cities he maybe visited, maybe invented, are what the emperor needs to develop a knowledge of his empire, of his power and ultimately of himself. The trade is by no means a simple passing of something from hand to hand. The knowledge and meaning being traded emerge only from the interaction between the two. Marco does not possess it, nor does the emperor. Only in the exchange some possibility of meaning emerges. Kublai learns from the elusive ambassador. Marco learns to read the emperor’s expectations in his facial expression, in his questions, in what he does not say. Learning would not take place unless both were engaged in it. Kublai cannot learn to read Marco’s stories unless Marco learns to read the Emperor. Together they develop a language that is only theirs. Their language springs from the intention to communicate parts of experience that are otherwise foreign to the other. “The emperor is he who is a foreigner to each of his subjects, and only through foreign eyes and ears could the empire manifest its existence to Kublai ” (p.21). The need for meaningful knowledge is born out of this undeniable foreignness to one’s own property. The empire belongs to the emperor, yet he can only make sense of it “through foreign eyes and ears”.

Likewise, Marco Polo who does not speak any of the languages of the empire, find his own points of access to it and manages to translate his experience to the emperor. “Newly arrived and totally ignorant of the Levantine languages, Marco Polo could express himself only with gestures, leaps, cries of wonder and of horror, animal barkings or hootings, or with objects he took from his knapsacks- ostrich plumes, pea-shooters, quartzes- which he arranged in front of him like chessmen” (p.21).

The sovereign has to interpret “the ingenious foreigner’s improvised pantomimes”. He can decipher the signs, but still cannot see the connection between them and the cities visited. Marco Polo the teacher arranges the souvenirs of his travels in front of his student following the scheme of a chessboard: Marco and Kublai are rival emperors, each of them a chess player, “rival readers meeting over a continent, a text, a chessboard” (Breiner, 1988, p.569). The image of the chessboard is a strong one and it will recur other times in the framing narrative. It suggests that the roles in the relationship between Marco Polo and Kublai, that I am reading as an educational relationship, are fluid and shifting, and so are the balances of power. We see this with clarity in a particularly intense episode.

The emperor is in a bad mood. He challenges Marco Polo: all the other ambassadors inform him of real (we would say “data heavy”) news: famines, conspiracies, or the discovery of a turquoise mine. “And you?- he asks- You return from lands equally distant and you can tell me only the thoughts that come to a man who sits on his doorstep at evening to enjoy the cool air. What is the use, then, of you traveling?” (p.27).

The real question, initially formulated as a question of utility (“What is the use of your traveling?”), seems instead to revolve around ways of looking. As a matter of fact, the emperor continues: “My gaze is that of a man meditating, lost in thought-I admit it. But yours? You cross archipelagoes, tundras, mountain ranges. You would do as well never moving from here.” The challenge is radical. Marco Polo the traveler is asked, why travel, at all? Where do you direct your gaze to, when you travel? What do you gain, by traveling?

The answer to this question is nearly whispered- in fact, from the story one cannot tell if it is uttered or only imagined. The answer is a complicated one. Traveling is vitally connected to memory, memory of the travel, but even more so, memory of what the traveler left behind.

“Home” is the word hardly uttered but still ever present. “Venice”, Venezia, the city of his childhood, mentioned *en passant*, is what Marco Polo tries to retrace in every city he explores. The answer is unsatisfying, so Kublai thinks, because it binds the travelers’ gaze to a backward direction. “You advance always with your head turned back?” or “Is what you see always behind you?” or rather, “Does your journey take place only in the past?”(p.28).

The question hits the traveler, every traveler, considering that the experience of departure from home, one’s past and familiar place of origin is gradually muted into an experience of foreignness and also alienation. What kind of home is the home looked for from a condition of foreignness? What kind of past is the past that one carries in the future of a destination still uncovered?

What he sought was always something lying ahead, and even when it was a matter of the past it was a past that changed gradually as he advanced in his journey, because the traveler’s past changes according to the route he has followed: not the immediate past, that is, to which each day that goes by adds a day, but the remote past. Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places. (pp28-29)

The emperor is implacable. The question of why one travels, at what one is directing her gaze when she travels, how she leaves home, if she does, and how she finds home in the places she explores while acknowledging that they are not home, is a question to be asked over and over. Being able to entertain such questions is a mark of the educational pregnancy of the relationship entertained by the emperor and the merchant. Marco’s answer, “Elsewhere is a negative mirror” says and does not say, because of course, what is a negative mirror, and how one sees oneself in it, is a whole new thing to explore.

The education of Marco Polo and the emperor continues when the emperor starts taking a more active role in their interactions. From now on, he decides, the emperor himself will

describe cities to Marco Polo, waiting to hear from him if the cities indeed exist and are like he had imagined them. Kublai's intention is to understand the logic followed by Marco: he "dismantles the city piece by piece and reconstructs it in other ways"(p.43). Here the flexibility of the roles of teacher and learner is patent: Kublai is the one who listens, but he is also now the one who wants to start exploring, in his way. In order to do this, he needs to understand how Marco Polo thinks. Initially, he hopes to find the secret rule to apply. But this does not work, as the cities Marco Polo explores are always different than the ones the emperor tries to describe. The emperor is looking for a model, in the hope to deduce from it all possible cities. This model, says Kublai, "contains everything corresponding to the norm. Since the cities that exist diverge in varying degree from the norm, I need only foresee the exceptions to the norm and calculate the most probable combinations" (p.69). But this is not the way in which the experience of a traveler informs her thinking. There is nothing in the journeying that can be deduced from a norm. Yes, a traveler thinks with a model. But this model has to contain the possibility of infinite divergence and spontaneity. "I have also thought of a model city from which I deduce all the others" Marco answered, "it is a city made only of exceptions, exclusions, incongruities, contradictions"(p.69).

Towards the end of the collection, they have a shared language and what matters most a shared imagery. Kublai has learned about the world through Marco Polo, the traveler, and Marco has learned to speak fluently the emperor's languages. But most surprisingly, the aging Kublai does not need anymore to listen to Marco Polo's tales. He is tired. There is that moment of established familiarity, in any educational relationship, in which once more, the question "why are you my teacher?" is asked. The emperor says: "I do not know when you have had time to visit all the countries you describe me. It seems to me you have never moved from this garden"(p.103). When the elder emperor proposes to take out the chessboard again, it is not to

simply display the objects from his knapsacks. He asks him to play chess and Marco abides his request, except then starting to talk about the chessboard itself:

Then Marco Polo spoke: "Your chessboard, sire, is inlaid with two woods: ebony and maple. The square on which your enlightened gaze is fixed was cut from the ring of a trunk that grew in a year of drought: you see how its fibers are arranged? Here a barely hinted knot can be made out: a bud tried to burgeon on a premature spring day, but the night's frost forced it to desist." Until then the Great Khan had not realized that the foreigner knew how to express himself fluently in his language, but it was not this fluency that amazed him. "Here is a thicker pore: perhaps it was a larvum's nest; not a woodworm, because, once born, it would have begun to dig, but a caterpillar that gnawed the leaves and was the cause of the tree's being chosen for chopping down . . . This edge was scored by the wood carver with his gouge so that it would adhere to the next square, more protruding . . ." The quantity of things that could be read in a little piece of smooth and empty wood overwhelmed Kublai; Polo was already talking about ebony forests, about rafts laden with logs that come down the rivers, of docks, of women at the windows . . .

Marco Polo, the emperor's teacher, knows something special: he knows how to look attentively, how to read quantities of things in a small piece of wood. He has learned this by traveling. He is able to teach well insofar as he has allowed for his thinking to explore, to move, to experience or to imagine that which is not necessarily at hand or stated. Marco Polo the practitioner knows his discipline. He can trade, barter, read maps, and make himself understood. But he also knows something more precious: he knows to lean forward, consider attentively a small piece of wood, and read in it stories of nearby and faraway experiences together with his student. That makes him the teacher.

### 3. What is "being a teacher"? A conceptual exploration

I begin my inquiry with a question about "being a teacher". Mine is a question of definition that stems from a preoccupation with the place and the irreplaceability of teachers in

schooling and in education. In doing so, I enroll myself in the Socratic tradition as outlined in the early dialogues by Plato. Within such tradition, the quest for a definition aims at uncovering the fertility of a radical questioning. Terms are not defined once for all. Instead, because it appeals to the experience shared by the interlocutors, the attempt at defining opens spaces for dialogue and allows for a recognition of *aporia*. It is in this spirit that I consider the question: what is being a teacher? It is a generative question that focuses my interest by opening a space, a roaming space shared with many who have entertained the same query. While there is no expectation to set the answer, there is hope that by entering a conversation with practitioners, scholars and thinkers about this question, my own thinking about it will contribute and unfold new views on this essential question.

What does “being a teacher” mean? In my inquiry, this question is asked through the lens of the experience of the traveler. In Marco Polo’s story, one emblematic moment for my query is when the emperor asks Marco: “What are you teaching me? Why are you traveling?” This question starts a delicate exchange that nevertheless opens the way for a meaningful exploration of Marco’s way of looking and of his nostalgic relation to his hometown.

Kublai as a student has every right to ask his teacher: “What makes you my teacher? What is it that you do, that makes you different from the other imperial messengers? Why should I listen to you?” Marco as a teacher has the duty to attend to this question, and to let himself explore with his student an honest answer to it. Being not a neutral question, but one implicating views on vocation, mission and uniqueness of the person to whom it is addressed, the question about “being a teacher” also exposes the teacher’s vulnerability. One needs to know how to endure uncertainty in order to be able to bear this question. Certainly Marco has developed this capacity in his many explorations.



The question tackles one of the basic human experiences. As with dreaming, eating, dancing, and loving, it can be assumed that many share an experience of teaching and being taught. Teaching is surely an activity in which most of us have engaged occasionally at one time or another. In this sense, the significance of my inquiry embraces the spectrum of basic human experiences. Yet, I need to carve out a more specific object. Thus I elect to study what is done by those who make teaching in formal settings a significant part of their existence (teachers and professors).

Teachers deal with knowledge in relation to its movement, growth and sharing with others who want to learn. Teaching is a multi-vocal, complex and multilayered activity, involved in all aspects of human existence. Teaching takes place in social contexts and it is informed by the emotional, interpersonal and developmental aspects. When I chose to focus on those dimensions of teaching related to knowledge and to thinking, I am aware that in doing so I am inattentive towards the other aspects of being a teacher, like the emotional and social ones. This does not imply a dismissal but it simply is a delimitation of my object of inquiry.

After this delimitation, I propose to address the question about “being a teacher” as a question inquiring into the ways of teachers’ thinking in the classroom. I want to unearth that very special way of thinking that teachers are capable of: what enables a teacher at the same time to, for example, explain a grammar rule, while noticing that Annie in the third seat is not in her usual pensive mood, and while requesting attention with a gesture. The teacher is also keeping in mind that she will have to collect money for the fieldtrip at the end of class, and that the Principal asked to see her after school to discuss some curriculum changes. The minute after this, that same teacher is connecting the use of that grammar rule to a particular poetry style, and she is trying to come up with an example from a song of Jay-Z. At the same time she is calling on

Tom who has been texting during class, and after noticing a general lack of attention, she decides to change her lesson plan and to start a group activity. What kind of thinking is at work here? How is it connected to the way of looking of Marco Polo, who was able to read the smallest piece of wood and make it meaningful with his student? The mind moves in constant swinging, and then stops, focuses on a particular piece of the experience to immediately open it up to the myriad other things and stories that can be recalled, and so on. While certainly the movement of the mind I have described above characterizes thinking at large, I see it at work, so to say, in its bare essentiality while teaching.

Generally speaking, scholarship and common sense agree in identifying two possible modes of understanding teachers' way of thinking in the classroom. One possible way is to recognize a set of teacher skills that can be learned or better memorized and then applied as a kind of know-how to the diverse teaching situations. Another way consists in appreciating that what teachers do mirrors a very specific kind of expertise- whose traits need to be explored but that cannot be reduced to sets of skills. Philip Jackson's (1986) examination of the method of teaching can be seen as fitting in the second category I listed above. He asks: "Is there more to teaching than the skilled application of something called "know-how"?" (p.1). Certainly, every teacher has to master the material taught and this achievement comes with an additional set of knowledge-related demands, regarding for example the methodology of inquiry proper to the material and the history of how each field was constituted.

However, I agree with Jackson that there is a specific "way of doing things" (ibidem)-- what he refers to as "method"--related with instructional content but not in any way conflated with it. All of teaching calls for a "method". The method of teaching is not a collection of teaching strategies (what maybe might be described as the technology of teaching); rather, it is

the way through which teaching and learning take place, a way deeply connected with epistemic conceptions of what it means to think and to experience. To gain experience in teaching means to become more and more familiar with this “method” of teaching. “Expert teachers” are more thoughtful than those who still have not lived enough that kind of experience. Here “more thoughtful” does not indicate that they “think *more*”, but rather that “they think *differently*” (p.87).

The idea that teachers “think differently” lends itself to much questioning. Firstly, it will be asked: what does “thinking differently” mean? Then, the adverb “differently” shall be explored. We will have to ask from what is this difference constituted. Finally, can we say that such difference is what makes a teacher? The questions are overarching ones and they will inform all of the following inquiry in the dissertation.

The piece of experience I want to comment on next thus serves as entry point to the terrain in which such questions are asked. The experience, lived and narrated, is where questions, doubts and insights are inextricable and yet reflected upon. Jackson (1986) tells the story of how he started to work as a Nursery School principal. Because he knew very little of Nursery School, he decided to spend some time in the classroom simply observing every teacher to get a sense of what they were doing. After some time, he thought to have caught what made them teachers. Over a lighthearted discussion with the school teachers over lunch, he jokingly proposed an impression of the “nursery school teacher”. His impression included mimicking postures and gestures and was met with laughter by the teachers. It also started a conversation about whether him or anyone else could really get away with impersonating a teacher without others realizing he was an imposter. Within this conversation with teachers about what makes “real teaching”, a small observation about the difference between teachers’ posture and his own posture in talking

to a child triggered a new thread of reflections about how he arrived to this observation. He writes: “I noticed that when nursery school teachers spoke to individual children or listened to what they had to say they first descended to the child’s height by bending at the knees until their faces were at on a level with the child’s own. At the same time, I was bemused to note, when I myself spoke or listened to a child I tended to bend at the waist rather than the knees. As a result, I hovered above the tyke like some huge crane, causing him or her to gaze skyward and, if out of doors on a bright day, to shade the eyes while doing so”(p. 76).

This seems quite a minute observation- but what the philosopher does with it is definitely worth inquiring into. He sees that any judgment on whether one is teaching is informed by an act of interpretation that relies on the background of a shared historical and cultural context, in which events are observed and interpreted on the ground of common sense (see p. 83). He notes that teaching is “not as much seen, as it is read” (p.84). When we are sure that what we are observing is teaching, we do so on the basis of some unarticulated and unquestioned understanding of teaching. Jackson returns to his observation about the posture from which to speak to a child. He writes that he “saw” immediately that the teacher’s posture entailed a better way of doing things. Nonetheless, he questions the immediateness of his seeing: his evaluation that the teachers had a better way to speak to a child implies assumptions about teaching. Into his way of looking at what he saw in the classroom is also contained a consideration of why the teachers behaved the way they did.

This point pertains more generally to every perceptual encounter: what we see “makes sense” because we interpret what is offered to the senses on the ground of assumptions coming from a mainly unarticulated form of knowing. That is what Jackson defines “tacit knowledge” (p. 84). Meaning is always constructed through interpretation. The practicality of this lies in the

fact that “if we had to ponder afresh each thing we saw and heard, life would be more of a puzzle than most of us could stand” (p. 86). But, it is important that we question our habitual way of interpreting the world. We could either find our commitments to the way we interpret reality reinforced, or we could see that a new interpretation is needed. This questioning of established interpretations of the world is what Jackson calls “the task of looking at the familiar as if it were once again strange” (p.86).

Teachers too, he suggests, are involved in the task of interpreting and this is no special task, as it pertains to everything human. Jackson suggests that, focusing on perception alone, a difference between how “experts” and “laymen” perceive should be noticed. He proposes that the same difference in perception holds for teachers and “non-teachers”. The expert sees differently. The same field is perceived with a finer vision. In the same way, teachers distinguish themselves from laymen because they see and think differently. He writes:

Expert teachers “see more” than do non experts. They are alive to the latent pedagogical possibilities in the events they witness. Within a classroom setting, they anticipate what is going to happen. They can spot an inattentive student a mile off. They can detect signs of incipient difficulty. Their senses are fully tuned to what is going on around them. They are not easily rattled. As younger students sometimes swear it is true, they behave as though they had eyes in the back of their heads. (p.87)

A teacher is “expert” when she/he has learned to look at a special portion of the world in a certain manner. What is exactly this manner? It is a heightened way of perception and of response to the perceived. Jackson goes on to suggest that this way of perception builds into a sense of “feeling at home” in the classroom that is as genuine as hard to specify (p.88). The teachers’ special mode of vision contributes to her feeling “at home” in the classroom. The feeling of familiarity accompanies the growth of expertise in the teacher who, having developed this way of perception, sees her situation as familiar. Teachers’ expertise is the capacity to see

and perceive in a finer way that portion of the world, which is the classroom. There is rest and comfort in the sense of belonging there and of feeling at home in the classroom. However, I would like to suggest that exactly in those moments of familiarity, the teacher is able to look for something unfamiliar in it. As Jackson himself wrote, we should be always engaged in questioning established interpretations of the world. This task is more so true of that portion of the world we call “classroom.” Here too, “the task of looking at the familiar as if it were once again strange” (p.86) is imposed on us by the very interpretative disposition of human existence. Marco’s piece of wood is familiar, perhaps obvious and plane. But he looks closer and realizes that it is full of venations and ribs, shades of color and knots revealing a long, surprising history. Marco can look at the familiar and see its new unpredicted qualities. Jackson would agree that this capacity reveals the teacher in him.

#### 4. Are teachers at home in the classroom?

Teachers are experts when they develop a mode of seeing that enhances a sense of familiarity in the classroom. The idea of teachers’ expertise calls into question the relation of teaching to common sense. According to common sense, one is an “expert” when nothing surprises her anymore, when she has developed her ways of perceiving and decision making so as to feel she is in command. Expertise is a matter of specialization but moreover so it is a matter of power and social position. Robert Welker (1992) has shown that relying on expertise to qualify the work of teachers has some important limitations for a more inclusive understanding of what teachers do. He highlights the “technical intrusion of expertise in educational matters”(p.12). Expertise often times speaks “the language of dominance” as it positions the “expert” as the technically competent professional to whom decisions are delegated.

Technological dependency and public apathy are the main backdrops of excessive reliance on the idea of teacher expertise, as is a general sense of disempowerment felt by those implied in the educational experience who do not “qualify as experts”. A telling example of the patronizing use of the label of “expertise” can be found in the practice of “classroom run through”. This indicates a technique of school supervision in which the supervisor (that could be the school principal or a specially appointed expert) visits one classroom for few minutes to “take the pulse” of student learning in it (cfr. Downey, 2004). Walk –throughs are intended as non formal evaluation processes and imply regular follow up conversations with teachers. Though interesting in theory, in my view the walk-through model can deplete the teacher’s autonomy and sense of ethical responsibility due to the intervention of an “external expert”. In my concluding chapter I offer some comments on a walk through that took place in an elementary public school in the Philadelphia district and its disastrous consequences.

The issues with the idea of teacher expertise are many, but for the purposes of this section I will focus on what is at stake when the idea of expertise fosters a sense of exclusive familiarity with the environment. If we think of teachers as experts, we assume that they must feel perfectly at ease in the classroom: the classroom should be a natural comfort zone for them. Instead, I am proposing in my study that the sense of feeling at home in the classroom should be combined with that particular way of looking that sees elements of unfamiliarity in that very environment in which one feels at home. Perhaps a teacher can be experienced, but not “an expert”, for there is never going to be a moment in which the classroom stops surprising her. When she feels “at home” in the classroom, at the same time she is aware that some things in the classroom are *not* home. In the teachers’ experience, there is connectedness between the familiar

and the unfamiliar, between the known and the unknown. Reliance on teaching routines is a trait of the teacher experience in which the connectedness is at play.

Being at home means knowing one's way. When I am entering my home, I know where the light switch is and can reach it even in the dark, I know where the dresser's corner bumps out on the hallway so that I am able to avoid it, and so on. I rely on a set of behaviors and strategies that I know to work well, given that I have tried and repeated them over and over. The feeling of home is strictly related with that of familiarity which endorses the reliance on routines. If then we accept that teachers are those whose expertise makes them "at home" in the classroom, a look at how they do act when they are "at home in the classroom" will illuminate something of the teachers' experience.

A discussion in these terms is related to the attempt at defining teaching as a craft, a concept which, at first glance, is opposed to art and suggests elements of technicality and repetition of skillful patterns of action. A thorough examination of teachers' professional craft knowledge is offered in Brown and Mc Intyre (1993). The authors investigate experienced teachers' thinking during their classroom teaching. In this study, teachers' craft knowledge is articulated in salient patterns emerging of teachers' account of their classroom teaching. These patterns are considered routines having a discernible "goal", a given set of conditions and one or more actions chosen in the pursuit of the goal. For instance, an art teacher may have the goal that students produce imaginative work. Some conditions to take into account would be for instance the students' lack of technical skills or their tendency to produce quick drawings with no detail. It is likely that that teacher will respond to this set of goals and conditions by choosing one or more actions, like assisting the student with the technical aspect, or suggesting to add some detail to a drawing (pp. 91-106).



Brown and McIntyre recognize that there is a variety of possible structures of routines. They express a conviction that classroom decisions demand speed and also immediacy. “A teacher who stands in front of a class, systematically searching through a plethora of concepts and theories of teaching, is likely to find the class has deteriorated into a turmoil, or left, before a decision is made”(p. 101). The time factor seems the most compelling reason for why teachers rely on routines.

After conducting interviews with teachers about their routines, the authors seem ready to accept conclusions that would undermine their very presuppositions. They comment that it is obvious that teachers do not simply “decide a goal and pick up the right action to achieve it.” They acknowledge that “the complicated nature of teaching decisions comes about because there are a large number of different Goals which teachers have, a virtually infinite variety of combinations of Conditions impinging on teaching and a vast array of possible Actions from which to chose”(p. 101, capitalization in the original). A teaching routine can rarely be described as a straight arrow from one action to one goal.

Scholars who are aware of the complex, ever changing finesse implied in teaching can thrive in seeing two researchers so clearly dedicated to uncover the general structure of teachers’ thinking acknowledge that, even within their own frame of reference, this is ultimately not possible. It is indeed a good moment of scholarly honesty when the authors doubt their choice of describing what teachers do as “routines”. They write: “In common with what is normally thought of as routine activities, they are spontaneous and largely automatic, but in their complexity they are quite different”(p. 102).

The conundrum seems caused by the assumption that a spontaneous action needs to be automatic. This assumption should be examined. Are there other ways of exerting spontaneity

that do not imply a standardized pattern of response? Indeed, spontaneity and automatism could be opposite when qualifying actions. I propose (see following chapters) that thinking possesses a spontaneous dynamism, attuned to life's dynamism but not replicating it. Because the dynamism of thought is an expression of freedom, thinking follows only its unforeseeable diverse directions in a way that has meaning but not a fixed meaning. Spontaneity of thinking therefore allows for freedom and innovation rather than automated patterns of response. An other point to consider regards the temporal factor. In Brown and McIntyre 's view the element of time pressure triggers the adoption of routine strategies. However, being pressed for time does not seem to necessarily imply a routine based response. A spontaneous response may be as rapid and on the spot as an automated one. The question of how thinking is involved in spontaneous actions- and what kind of thinking- is left unexamined in the study I am referencing. Brown and McIntyre do not seem preoccupied with the possibility that teachers do think *in* the classroom, while teaching under difficult conditions. They assert: "Certainly, teachers do not have time to reflect in their classroom about the choices open to them, and they very rarely articulate the kinds of thinking they have revealed in this study..." (p. 112).

Access to the thinking underlying teaching is of difficult gain, considering that teachers can only comment on the reasons of their choices *ex post*, when asked to analyze or comment about their experience. Perhaps because of this Brown and Mc Intyre chose to consider that thinking about teaching takes place *only after* teaching itself is performed. Before their investigation, they are already inclined to accept that "experienced teachers' effectiveness (is) dependent on a fluency of action which would be possible only if the action was spontaneous, largely automatic, and based on only a very limited conscious examination of available options" (p.107). Teaching is organized around an automated, non reflective and mainly unconscious

repertoire of actions. Their choice of the metaphor of “craft” instead of the one of “art” points exactly at their choice to look at the familiar regularity of what teachers do in their classes, and at its generalizable features. They somewhat flippantly gloss that “teachers’ flashes of artistic genius will be a bonus” (p.19). Unquestionably, given the assumption that teachers act mainly unthinkingly, because of the urgency of the situation and of their need to build up familiar patterns in the classroom, it must be admitted that even good teaching resembles at best the craft of a skilled artisan with none of the creative, new, different courses of action. Though I disagree on the general presuppositions of Brown and Mc Intyre’s analysis, it should be acknowledged that it points out a danger: teaching *can* become thoughtless when it implies the adoption of predictable strategies hindering the teacher’s initiative and freedom.

The adoption of routines signals a particular relation between the teacher’s mode of thinking and her sense of time. We have seen that the element of time, and especially of time pressure, is considered a factor that motivates teachers to the “thoughtless” adoption of patterns of actions. Dewey’s analysis of the relation of thinking to experience in *Democracy and Education* (1916) contributes to show that the automatic reliance on routines expresses a lack of “real” thinking. He writes: “The opposite (...) to thoughtful action are routine and capricious behavior. The former accepts what has been customary as a full measure of possibility and omits to take into account the connections of the particular thing done. (...) Routine says in effect: ‘let things continue just as I have found them in the past.’ (p.146). Thoughtful action does not accept the familiar simply because it is such. Valuing the past *qua* past expresses a closure of possibility that for Dewey marks the renunciation to thinking. The incompleteness of the situation, which triggers the process of thinking, is denied by the reiteration of preconceived modes of action.

Routines showcase that the teacher thinks the situation to be closed up and thus, gives up thinking and falls back on what has worked out already.

I would like to challenge the idea that routinary behaviors in the classroom are necessarily signs of teachers' waiving their thinking. Routines viewed as the establishment of regularity can actually be part of the laborious task of making oneself at home in the classroom. Teaching is inhabited by a constitutive uncertainty, to which it is natural and justifiable to respond through the creation of familiar, unsurprising modes of decision and action. Margret Buchmann (1993) relates the role of routines in daily practices to a general sense of uncertainty in teaching. They are a specific response to the "general problem of uncertainty" (p. 219). Routines can reduce the perceived uncertainty of the classroom. Standard procedures are built upon habits of thought and action that are developed with the growing pedagogical skill of the teacher. Relying on routines has the welcome effect of liberating the teacher's mind and allowing for attention to the unexpected.

Routines are entrenched in teachers' teaching and can effectively reduce the anxiety coming from the realization that so much of what happens in the classroom is marked by uncertainty (Jackson, 1986, ch. 3): uncertainty in the students' learning, in the outcomes of teaching, in the use of authority. If the term "uncertainty" suggests negative appreciation of the classroom experience, we could speak instead in terms of openness, fluidity, awareness of possibilities, or freedom from rigidity (Buchman, p. 216). Uncertainty seen this way can become a desirable quality of the teaching experience. Too much certainty in the classroom may create preference for teaching styles in which certainty is easier to attain. Uncertainty is vital to professional practices (cfr. Schön, 1983). It brings about flexibility and breadth instead of rigidity and narrowness (Buchmann, p. 216). Attachment to routines is justified because they

preserve the regularity and the perceived certainty. But one needs to be able to break out of them when appropriate, when a surprise arises, and the novelty disrupts one's practice.

The immediacy of most of the actions upon which teachers decide while teaching is a factor to be taken in consideration while trying to articulate a conception of teachers' thinking. I suggest that there is a way to acknowledge teachers' thinking by asking how teachers manage to think with sophistication and attention even under time constraint in the classroom. Roughly said, Brown and McIntyre's idea that, because it is difficult, then it does not happen, does not seem to do justice to teaching. We should ask how teachers enact reflective thinking in their teaching instead of assuming that no such thing exists. If the present of teaching is thoughtless, why would other tenses of teaching be thoughtful? Where would all the thinking about the preparation for class, and the *ex post* reflective evaluation of one's own practice, evaporate in the moment of the actualization of the practice? Acknowledging the immediacy of teaching does not necessarily imply accepting teaching to be based upon non-reflective modes of expertise.

How can teachers develop "craft knowledge" without a reflection on the classroom experience that not only takes place after the experience, but that is also and foremost activated in the very moment of the experience?

Susan Hart (2000) posits that no re-evaluation of the classroom experience can take place without the reframing of pre-existing thinking, reframing that is by itself reflective. She writes that "a view of professional expertise as heavily reliant on intuitive judgment is not necessarily incompatible with a view of professional expertise as also involving reflection"(p. 141). Hart raises a fundamental question: how is classroom expertise intuitive *and* reflective at the same time? She continues "perhaps rather than starting from the assumption that teachers do not have

time to think, we need to be exploring what kinds of reflection teachers do spontaneously engage in and why, and how those are adapted to fit the circumstances of teaching” (p.145).

Expert practice is in need of a reflective capacity, which operates together with intuitive ways of thinking. Reflection provides intuition that is an immediate insight into the situation, with the possibility for self-correction. Reflection comes into play in a second moment, as a second thought or a re-framing or re-evaluating of the decisions made once they prove inadequate. How is then possible for thinking to monitor itself during the experience? What is a practitioner to do if her best chance at good judgment is *belated* by its very nature of “coming after” the experience?

##### 5. On reflectivity in teaching

The model of reflective practice proposed by Donald Schön (1983) shall provide help to disentangle our puzzle. Schön looks at “the characteristic mode of ordinary practical knowledge” (p. 54) as antithetical to the positivist epistemology of practice as technical rationality (p. 31). Under this paradigm, decisions to act are merely an instrumental problem because the ends of the action are fixed and clear. This model does not account for practical competence in situations for which it is not possible to simply “apply” theory. Following parallels between daily experience and the experience of professionals, Schön puts forward the idea that there exists a “knowing-in-action”, a kind of knowing inherent in intelligent action. This has the appearance of a spontaneous behavior that “does not stem from a prior intellectual operation” (p.51). Knowing-in-action is the characteristic mode of ordinary practical knowledge: in doing, we carry out spontaneously actions and judgments which reveal a knowing that we are

unable to describe. An example of this is borrowed from Polanyi's examples of the recognition of faces. Once we know a person's face, we can recognize it among many others, though we cannot usually really explain why we recognize it (p.52). This "knowing" what one is doing is not disjointed from "thinking" about what one knows oneself to be doing. As he puts it, "not only can we think about doing, but we can think about doing something while doing it"(p. 54). The examples he provides: a pitcher finding the groove, a jazz musician improvising, support his view that reflection in action is needed when the situation, or the performance, leads to surprises. We respond to the unexpected brought about by the intuitive performance by reflecting-in-action.

John Dewey (1933) has the same kind of words when describing "reflective thinking", that he takes to be "the best way of thinking" (p.3). Reflective thinking originates in a state of "doubt, hesitation, perplexity" and it involves an inquiry to find what will settle the perplexity or resolve the doubt (p. 12). This note confirms the presence of what Schön defines as "the element of surprise" originating reflective thinking. Surprise is the interruption of an expected outcome of a situation in which actions are spontaneously brought about by a form of thinking that is not yet reflective. The element of surprise- be it positive or negative- becomes fundamental when we consider Schön's understanding of professional practices. A practitioner, he writes, "is a specialist who encounters certain types of situations again and again"( p.60). The use of terminology like "case" or "repertoire" confirms the idea that specialization and professionalization are constituted through the repetition of situations encountered by the practitioner. Every teacher could, if she wanted, easily classify her students in types: the cheerleader, the geek, the overachiever, and so on. Or classroom situations: the "no-one-has-done-homework-because-of-superbowl" day, the "first-day-of-spring" lack of attention, just to

name a few. Familiarity and a sense of assuredness come with the development of expertise. Yet, Schön notes, as the practice becomes routine, and “knowing-in-practice becomes increasingly tacit and spontaneous, the practitioner might miss important opportunities to think about what he is doing” (p. 61). This takes place when he develops the capacity to neglect the phenomena that do not fit into the routines of his “knowing-in-action” and consequently becomes more and more rigid and narrow-minded. Such a practitioner has “overlearned what he knows”, and needs reflection to correct his overlearning. Reflectivity allows the practitioner to experience situations of uncertainty and uniqueness, that he was not letting himself experience because he was being selectively inattentive to surprising phenomena (p. 61).

If Dewey highlights that reflexivity is required by situations of novelty and surprise, what he calls problems, Schön suggests that reflexivity is also what enables us to recognize such situations. The circularity of those claims cannot scare us, because what else if not reflectivity, this double folding of the mind on itself in a kind of mirroring, can nourish circularity? Reflective thinking takes place in the present. Schön explores the present of the action as the dimension of reflective practice. He denotes as “*action-present* the zone of time in which action can still make a difference to the situation” (p. 62). What counts as “the present of the action” depends on the kind of practice. He writes, “the action-present may stretch over minutes, hours, days, or even weeks or months, depending on the pace of the activity and the situational boundaries that are characteristic of the practice”(p.62). In this sense, the present of the action stretches beyond “objective time” and reveals traits of time understood as duration: not the instant, the now and here, but that pace and extent of time for the practitioner to think of her actions in view of their meaning. For instance, a teacher may well think of a single class as a unit of her practice, but from another perspective she may think of the whole semester or school year



as her unit, thus stretching the “present” in which her action, informed by reflection, can still make a difference.

Marco Polo, the first figure of teacher considered in this inquiry, well displays that the time of teaching is not the time of technical objective measurement. Marco relates to his experience as it winds and unwinds in the existential span of growth, discovery, and loss. Marco’s experience of time turns and changes with his movement through life, offering itself as an alive ever changing possibility for new meanings. Calvino (1972) describes Marco Polo’s relation with time: “Arriving at each new city, the traveler finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places” (p.29). Like the traveler who keeps changing his relation to his own past and future, reconfiguring it as he journeys through new cities and lands, so the teacher stretches her perception of the time of her action and reconfigures it as she moves in the educational space. The way our teacher relates to the situation will change the way she thinks and consequently acts on it. If she sees the situation as *possible* and *not predetermined*, she will take on the task of thinking reflectively about it in the present, and will hold back from mechanical repetition of standard procedures.

#### 6. The reflective wayfarer

Reflective thinking is thinking *per se* (Dewey, 1916, p. 146). It is nothing else than a “better way of thinking” (Dewey, 1933, p.3) compared to other ways of thought in which we engage. Everyone is always immersed in a flux of “things thought”, a chaotic and idle sequences of mental streams. While every sequence of thought can be named “thinking”, reflection involves a “con-sequence” and not merely a sequence of ideas. When we order our “thought

things” in a way that lets each thought have the next one as its proper outcome, and that lets each outcome lean back to its antecedent, we then turn the stream into a train or chain and this is reflective thought proper (Dewey, 1933, pp.4-5). Reflective thinking has a purpose beyond the sequence of mental images. “The train must lead somewhere” (p.5), that is, the sequence of ideas must be oriented towards a direction. When we say “think it out” we suggest that “an entanglement must be straightened and something obscure cleared up” (p.6) through thought. Reflective thinking consists in the movement of disentanglement and bringing out (which, I may note, surprisingly recalls the Latin root of education, *e-ducere*= to lead out). It happens when “thought implied is made explicit” because reflection consists in the rendering explicit the “intelligent element in our experience” (1916, p. 146).

Another meaning we attribute to thinking has to do with unconsciously accepted, or believed, content of thoughts. These thoughts are not the result of examined evidence: they are rather picked up from tradition, instruction or imitation (1933, p.7). In contrast, reflective thinking examines beliefs and prejudgments with a conscious effort to measure them against evidence. Thinking can be a stream of mental images, fantasies or reveries that flow without a clear direction, and could be uncritically accepted. By contrast, reflective thinking consists in “turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration” (p.3).

Reflective thinking is articulated in two phases. Thinking originates in a state of uncertainty that triggers a need for inquiry. When something unexpected interrupts one’s experience, it “perplexes and challenges the mind so that it makes belief uncertain” (1933, p.13). The mind then entertains starting to search and to inquire so as to resolve the situation of uncertainty in which it finds itself. In order to be reflectively thoughtful, one needs to endure a state of doubt till when she finds justifying reasons. For example, on a warm spring day a

sudden chill breeze can be experienced as a disruption. One could then turn her head up and check if there are clouds in the sky. Such a small ordinary experience contains already the elements of “better thinking”: a perplexing situation triggers an inquiry. Looking up to check the sky for clouds is indeed performed with the intention of “bringing facts before the mind” in order to reach a conclusion on the basis of evidence. The act of looking then “exemplifies in an elementary way the operation of hunting, searching, inquiring, involved in any reflective operation” (p.13).

When intentional, the act of looking, as that which offers phenomena to the attention of the mind, represents the quality of inquiry involved in any reflective thinking. Looking is the action through which one enters in contact with the world and takes in the elements of it as matter to build her thoughts. Attention is the focusing of the mind on the elements of one’s field of experience. The movement of focusing is necessarily a narrowing down, as by bringing some elements of our experience into focus others are left out. Attention relates to what is near and familiar, but it is elicited by what is out of reach and unfamiliar. One’s field of experience shall be narrowed down or cropped only to be successively expanded by a development of one’s thinking. Dewey writes that “ the necessity of the interaction of the near and the far follows directly from the nature of thinking” (p.290). By this he means that thinking is nourished by the dynamic relation between what is present and what is absent (the near and far), so that, for instance, a foreign matter through thinking is made familiar and this in turn becomes a resource to reach out to new foreign ideas.

Reflective thinking, in Dewey’s view, consists ultimately in an act of balancing the new and the old, the foreign and the familiar, the difficult and the easy. This balancing is ever dynamic and it requires a constant flexibility. The “free play of the mind upon a topic” manifests

a serious playfulness that is “the ideal mental condition” (1933, p.286). Intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness, and flexibility allow for the “ unfolding of the subject on its own account”: hence the seriousness of the interaction which makes the exploration possible, because it needs not comply to pre-established aims or beliefs. Reflective thinking as serious playfulness, or playful seriousness, is enacted out of a dynamism that is the sign of a full and significant vitality. Thinking as balancing of the far and the near, or the bending or flexing of the mind to meet the field of experience, is enacted in movement. If looking, as Dewey suggested, “exemplifies in an elementary way the operation of hunting, searching, inquiring, involved in any reflective operation” (p.13), similarly, the act of moving, traveling, roaming, shall be seen as exemplifying the operation of balancing the near and the far that “follows directly from the nature of thinking” (p.290).

The metaphor of the traveler shall be seen as appropriately expressing this Deweyan conception of reflective thinking: consider Marco Polo, elegantly balancing “the near and the far” in his travels and in his relationship with Kublai. The traveler’s gaze, comprising curiosity, open mindedness and flexibility, is the mark of a mind that moves reflectively within the realm of experience. Dewey helps us see that this kind of thinking is naturally at work in teaching.

This connection is implicitly reinforced by the striking and not unintentional fact that numerous illustrations of the points made in the chapter titled “ What is thinking?” consist of images of moving or traveling. Exploring thinking as “ the suggestion of something not observed”, Dewey writes the following example: “A man is walking on a warm day.” We follow this man and his train of thought as he realizes the air is getting cooler and he looks at the sky to check if there are clouds (1933, pp.9-10). As I noted earlier, this is a basic yet uncontestable case showing that reflective thinking starts with a change in one’s situation that triggers examination

and inquiry. Now I want to highlight that the individual enacting reflective thinking happens to be walking. Again, in the paragraph entitled “Reflective thinking impels to inquiry”, the example is provided by the figure of a sailor and explorer, Columbus. His thought about the shape of the earth is compared to the one held by the others who did not think a circumnavigation to be possible. Men who took the earth to be flat were resting “upon the limits of their vision” and they were not searching for new evidence. Their thinking relied on habits of navigation and on traditional cosmology. Columbus was thinking in a different way. “Because he doubted and inquired, he arrived at his thought.” He was “skeptical of what from long habit seemed most certain and credulous of what seemed impossible, he went on thinking until he could produce evidence for both his confidence and his disbelief” (p.9). This is reflective thought because it is an active and careful examination of one’s beliefs.

Finally, the section “The Importance of Uncertainty and of Inquiry” presents us with the image of the “perplexed wayfarer”:

A man traveling in an unfamiliar region comes to a branching of the road. Having no sure knowledge to fall back upon, he is brought to a standstill of hesitation and suspense. Which road is right? And how shall his perplexity be resolved? There are but two alternatives: he must either blindly and arbitrarily take his course, trusting to luck for the outcome, or he must discover grounds for the conclusion that a given road is right. Any attempt to decide the matter by thinking will involve inquiring into other facts, whether brought to mind by memory, or by further observation, or by both. The perplexed wayfarer must carefully scrutinize what is before him and he must cudgel his memory. He looks for evidence that will support belief in favor of either of the roads- for evidence that will weight down one suggestion. He may climb a tree; he may go first in this direction, then in that, looking, in either case, for signs, clues, indications. He wants something in the nature of a signboard or a map, and his reflection is aimed at the discovery of facts that will serve his purpose. (pp. 13-14.)

The perplexed wayfarer enacts reflective thinking when he climbs a tree and looks for signs, clues and indications. The condition for reflective thinking lies in the capacity to adopt a stance- a vantage point, detached from the ground but still connected to it, and from there to

discover. What is to be discovered? Dewey rightly suggests “ facts” or “signs” that will serve to find direction at the crossroad. But first, the openness of the situation shall be discovered and appreciated. Reflective thinking takes the situation as never complete, rather it “considers its bearing upon what may be but is not yet”(1916, p.147). The present is taken in as organically connected to future possibilities. It is not closed up. The reflective mind is not “mechanical”, it is not “isolated” nor “severed” (p. 145). It is open to meaning, alive and connected. Thinking opens the space of future possibilities in the present and by contemplating “what may be but is not yet” it takes the form of an exercise of responsibility. Openness to future possibilities does not happen at the expense of the present: “to live in the present is compatible with condensation of far-reaching meanings in the present” (1933, p. 287).

Above I was wondering how the reflective capacity is one with intuitive thinking (see p. 21). The puzzling movement for which the present is apprehended intuitively in the moment but understood later in reflection is made possible by gaining a different way of looking at the present. This way of looking consists in understanding that the present situation is unlocked and alive, not “half dead”(1916, p.159). It stems from a double movement of the mind, backward and forward connection with the experience. It is nourished by the sense that time is not the linear succession of severed instants, but it is the duration in which meaning is found as that organic connection with the things experienced. The thinker has a playful seriousness that balances the near and far by maintaining the present open to future possibilities. She is reflective because the swinging movement of her mind manages to keep the present open by bringing out, *e-ducatng*, the implicit meaning of her experience. This Dewey means when he asserts that “thinking is the method of an educative experience”(1916, p. 163).

7- Conclusion: should teachers feel at home in the classroom?

Jackson proposed that teachers “see differently”. This chapter has been an examination of this “seeing differently”. The suggestion that teachers are at home in the classroom because they see differently has been problematized. The idea of teachers’ “expertise” has been ruled out as a sufficient account, while the sense that teachers *go through experience* in a different way has been maintained. That way entails that familiarity and foreignness are perceived as both present in the classroom and in the educative experience. Teaching routines have been looked at as an instance of the process through which teachers feel at home in the classroom. Reliance on teaching routines is not thoughtless and it is better understood as a response to the classroom inherent uncertainty. A key element has been recognized in the problematic idea that acting under time pressure does not let room for thinking. From here, two threads have been gathered: first the thread regarding the dynamic of reflective thinking in the present; and second the thread of how to deal with the situation’s instability and novelty. Reflective thinking has been analyzed as the movement of the mind combining intuition and reflection in the present with a playful seriousness. Traits of openness and responsibility characterize it.

The image of the wayfarer well captures all this. The wayfarer “looks” from her tree, a concerned and detached position, and explores the new land in which she is traveling. Is she at home in the new land? No, she is not. She is and stays a newcomer. She is on the road. “Thinking is the method of the educative experience”. *Method* means the way, the road *through which* and *after which*<sup>6</sup>. By thinking, the teacher is not always at home. But she is “at home” in the habit of paying attention to the familiar and unfamiliar traits of the experience. Hansen

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<sup>6</sup> From the Ancient Greek *meta*, (see <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dmeta%2F> C. II ) and *odos*, ([http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Do\(do%2Fs\)](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Do(do%2Fs)))

(2007) writes: “I saw that my education both inside and outside the schools had been a process, at least in part, of learning how to pay attention to the everyday and the apparently ordinary. I realized this was a habit in which I was at home” (p.42).

The teacher is at home in the habit of paying attention to the educational element of what happens in the classroom. She is familiar with that way of seeing that lets her discover novelty in the well known and familiarity in the new and foreign. “Learning how to see things differently,” writes Jackson,

whether inside the classroom or anywhere else, makes a great deal of difference in how we respond to our surroundings. Waking to a fresh view of things invariably alters the way we think and subsequently act, even though the connections between perception, thought, and action may be greatly attenuated and all but impossible to verify. This is the faith of both art and science, whose insights continually awaken us to an altered vision of the world. How does this awakening happen? There doubtless are many ways that it occurs (...) I would rather suggest that the common and ordinary aspects of our lives to which classrooms certainly belong, are precisely the parts that call most urgently for renewed vision.

(P. Jackson in reissue of *Life in Classrooms*, intro, p. xviii)

Classrooms, Jackson glosses, as part of our common life, call most urgently for a new way of seeing. They call for teachers that find a home in the habit of paying attention to the educational elements of the experiences taking place within the classroom walls. It is perhaps ironic that my guiding metaphor in exploring how to develop this capacity is that of a traveler, who breaks out of any wall and leaps in to new landscapes. Marco Polo, who introduced this chapter, embodies the traveling teacher. All he learned is condensed in the last scene of *Invisible Cities*, in which he develops magnificently detailed stories and descriptions by looking closely at the ebony square in the chessboard that stands between him and the emperor, his student. All his travels are gathered and collected in the moment in which, motionless, he leans forward and looks at the tiniest piece of wood. His power, his intention, his experience are focused on the



small square. Like a teacher within the enclosed walls of his classroom, Marco Polo concentrates in the given situation all he has learned when wandering outside. By attending to the situation, he finds in it the space to break it open, he unlocks the square piece and refracts it in the myriad possibilities of meaning. He accepts responsibility for it because he sees that the present is ripe with far reaching meanings, offered to the attentive gaze of teachers and students that know how to open them. This is the way of reflective thinking, and she who walks down this way is on the path of education.

### **Chapter 3. The Figure of the Teacher as a Traveler in Classical Cultures**

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter looks at ways the metaphor of teacher as traveler is sustained and articulated through considering Graeco-Roman thinking about travel and movement in its relation to learning, teaching, knowledge and wisdom. Here we find an articulation of this relation together with a sense of its inherent ambivalence. The chapter is composed of two sections. In the first part, I posit that traveling is conducive to knowledge and wisdom. I propose the explicit connection between travel and knowledge in Herodotus as the birth certificate of this idea. The introduction of the figure of the itinerant teacher in Greece accompanies a consideration of the mythological representation of Chiron, the ideal teacher of heroes and gods.

In the second part, I address Seneca's criticism of the idea that movement and travel are conducive to knowledge and wisdom. He asks: "Can wisdom, the greatest of all the arts, be picked up on a journey?" (Ep. CIV) where the implied answer is: no, it can not. When Seneca calls into question the philosophical value of travel, another focus of interest emerges: that of familiarity and of home. The metaphor of travel, which in the dissertation crystallizes the idea that teaching needs philosophizing, needs further examination and unfolding.

2. “As one who loves learning and wisdom you have journeyed the earth”: the itinerant teacher in Ancient Greece

In the ancient world, teachers *travel* because of many reasons. Because they possess a knowledge that is to be shared, and useful to different communities; because something in their work makes them similar to physicians or healers; because they can be seen as intermediate creatures that share traits of different worlds. Teachers travel because traveling makes some kind of learning possible. We see this in the figure of one of the earliest travelers: Herodotus, who celebrates wandering as a means of acquiring knowledge.

For the following section, I follow Silvia Montiglio’s outstanding analysis in *Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture* (2005). In the archaic era, travel was a dangerous undertaking, a life risking condition very seldom chosen, most often passively undergone by the traveler. Travel was a dreaded destiny as it is suggested by Odysseus’ line that “for mortals, nothing is worse than wandering” (*Odyssey*, 15.343). The reasons whereof were multiple: from the objectively harsh conditions of seafaring to the archaic sense that to wander was a punishment inflicted by the gods, to the perception that wandering was the destiny of unburied bodies. The assumption was that wandering connoted lack, homelessness, exile. In the archaic use, the verbs used for wandering (*planaomai* and *alaomai*) express “a notion of unstructured moving around or away from a path.” Moreover, they signify a movement outward or away, like that of the exile who is expelled from his city. Finally, they mean “traveling far and wide” and they are applied to “a category of men of learning who go about the world for sake of knowledge.” For example, Hecataeus was credited with having perfected the map of the earth because of his experience as a “much wandering man” (*polyplanes aner*). This use, however present in Herodotus, is not

prevalent at this point in history. In archaic times, a conception of wandering as the movement of the outcast prevailed.

Wandering was inherently ambivalent, and possibly still is. A wanderer “could be praised for his superior knowledge or blamed for his idle taking” (Montiglio, 2005, p.3). Odysseus, the archaic wanderer, was both a liar and a godlike stranger. Dionysus, the wanderer god, roamed the world thus becoming “a stranger”. He could not be pinned down because he has not fixity, he could not be grasped because he is multiple. He is the god of liquid elements and he is like the sea: “wine colored” (p.75). His strangeness “culminates in madness, the illness that makes its victims wander.” He lives in proximity to the human condition.

The ambivalence of the condition of wandering consists in the perception that wandering is both a “mark of helplessness” and “yet of superior power” (p.91). To wander means “to know everything and to know nothing” (p. 3). Even though wandering acquired a more positive meaning throughout the centuries, “thanks to the glamorization by sages and men of learning who attached this condition to themselves” (p.4), it preserved its ambivalence. The end of the chapter considers Seneca’s radical question about the value of travel for acquiring wisdom: is it a deviation from it or a means to it? The question inhabits the very experience of wandering. Now let us step back and consider the moment in which the connection between traveling or wandering and meaning is affirmed.

Herodotus signals the shift in perception and practices of wandering. In his work, wandering becomes the condition for knowing. He can write because he has traveled and seen. And, conversely, he has traveled not because of some divine punishment or madness, but in order to gain experience and information for his story writing. In *The Histories* he inserts his authorial persona through the language of travel (Dewald, 1987). Herodotus signals a significant

shift in the perception and evaluation of travel in comparison to the earlier centuries of Greek civilization. Such a change is remarkable because it highlights a constitutive fluctuation of the idea.

That traveling and wandering are means to acquire wisdom is made clear from the first paragraphs of book I. Here Herodotus writes about Solon (whom Montiglio suggests to be Herodotus' alter ego, p. 133) who had left Athens after reforming the city's laws and had journeyed to Egypt before arriving to Lydia. Welcomed at the court of king Croesus in Sardis, Solon is addressed by the king Croesus who highlights the philosophical aspect of his journeys.

“My guest [*xenos*] from Athens, we have heard much about you in Sardis for your learning and wisdom [*sophia*] and for your travels [*plane*]. We hear that as one who loves learning and wisdom [*hos philosopheon*] you have journeyed the earth, for the sake of seeing it [*theoria*]. So now I want to ask you who is the happiest man you have ever come across” (Herodotus, *The Histories*, I.30.2 my translation).

The king's welcome to Solon crucially depicts the relation between travel and *sophia*. Solon has traveled around in that he is “philosophizing” (the Greek uses a present participle, that I take to indicate the activity of loving or pursuing wisdom more than an identification with a role or figure, such as could be indicated by a different word choice like: “as a philosopher”) for the sake of seeing the world. Herodotus' choice of the term *theoria* to describe the cause for which Solon travels is of particular interest. Montiglio (2005, p. 131) explains that “*theoria* is the contemplation of a spectacle from a distance”, and the term is eventually chosen by philosophers after the fifth century for the contemplative life. She suggests that *theoria* should be taken to signify a “higher degree of involvement than that of a spectator in the object of one's

contemplation”. This is supported by comparison with another term, *theasthai*, a verb that refers to the contemplation of spectacles in the way of watching.

Croesus mistakes Solon’s love of seeing the world for mere, shallow watching it. He welcomes the guest and shows him his riches asking him to “watch” (*theasthai*, not *theorein*) the spectacle (Herodotus, I.30.2). He hopes to impress the guest and to obtain the sage’s designation as “happiest man” in the known world. The gaze of Croesus is less intelligent and deep than the gaze of someone who sees the world because he is loving wisdom. He is a tourist or a voyeur whereas Solon embodies the philosophical traveler. Still, even from his superficial stance, Croesus perceives that Solon’s undertaking is related to his love of wisdom and that it enables him to answer a question about human happiness. Friedman (2006) notes that “Solon, like Herodotus, or maybe, we should say, Herodotus, like Solon, is capable of a certain ability to see human affairs in the broadest of possible contexts. It is an ability that is linked, for both of them, with their experience of travel” (p.167). She continues “whatever type of theoretical knowledge both Solon and Herodotus might have, is inextricably linked with their own placelessness and engagement with *theoria*”.

I want to consider the connection between the activity of philosophizing, that of traveling, and a view on human fulfillment and happiness. It is my intention to show that this connection shows itself in the act of teaching, as it will become clearer in the course of the chapter. In order to do this, I look at some lines in the opening part of *The Histories*. Herodotus writes: “I will cover minor and major human settlements equally, because most of those who were important in the past have diminished in significance by now, and those which were great in my own time were small in times past. I will mention both equally because I know that human happiness never remains long in the same place” ( I.5, p. 5). This comment is offered in the

context of a paragraph in which Herodotus introduces some considerations about his method for writing. He establishes himself as an inquirer-historian by declaring his intention to probe every human settlement, on the ground of two considerations. The first one is factual and it implies an appreciation of the flowing of human history: some cities that are important now were less important in the past and vice versa. The second reason is presented in conjunction with the first. It expresses the conviction that the human condition and its perfection, happiness, are not fixed and stabilized because they never stay put. As a “student and observer of human happiness, he commits himself to following its migrant ways” (Friedman, p.166).

Herodotus’ self-acknowledged method for his travels appears to allow for a potentially unlimited scope of movement. Montiglio comments that “the fifth century world travelers intentionally take multiple roads: their only destination is the world itself. They may know (or think they know) where they are going each time, but they cannot predict (and do not want to predict) all the directions they will follow or even the end of the voyage” (p.128). The method for this open and centerless travel is justified on the ground of the human experience. Because human happiness is not fixed, is transient, mutable, capricious and unforeseeable in its manifestations, the individual who pursues an understanding of it commits herself to traveling. The realm being explored is then, importantly, the realm of the human in its manifold experiences. Within this realm, therefore, the traveler wanders with a movement that proceeds from the variability of the experience itself.

The relation between *theoria* and placelessness allows for an understanding of *theoria* as “productive and creative engagement with the foreign”(Friedman, p.166). Solon chooses to leave his hometown, Athens, and by doing so he elects to be *atopos* or without a place. The dislocated perspective is actively chosen and pursued.

Similarly we saw in the previous chapter that Marco Polo left Venezia, his hometown, thus taking on the condition of homelessness. We saw that this condition, while allowing for the development of a special gaze on the world, also nourishes the journey in that “home” is both the place left and yearned for. Displacement is the experience from which the traveler’s gaze is directed, perhaps confusingly, but also creatively, in every direction: forward, backward, and everywhere.

With Herodotus we now see that the capacity of *theoria* is developed in displacement: leaving one’s home is condition for the encounter with the foreign. Being able to see it and to consider it in view of questions of human happiness arises from the practice of philosophizing (*The Histories*, I, 30,2). A moving image that captures the idea that *theoria* springs out of placelessness is offered by the story of Arion the poet.

The story of Arion appears in what is seemingly a digression from the main line of storytelling in book I of *The Histories*. It comes immediately before the introduction of the longer story of Croesus, in which Solon the sage appears. The proximity between the two figures, that of Solon the legislator and itinerant sage, and that of Arion the poet, singer and traveler seems to suggest a significant communality between the two. Arion “was the leading cithara-player of his day” and he was credited with the invention of dithyramb and the production of the first one in Corinth (*The Histories*, I, 24). He was based in Corinth at the court of Periander, even if he was originally from Methymna. Herodotus tells that Arion set out for a travel because he wanted to see Italy and Sicily. When he decided to fare back home in Corinth, he hired a crew of Corinthian sailors for the travel “since he trusted no one more than Corinthians”. An undeserved trust, as we are informed that the sailors plotted to throw him overboard and take possession of his riches.



When Arion found out, he tried to convince them to spare his life. The sailors “were unmoved”. Herodotus continues:

In this desperate situation, since that was their decision, Arion asked their permission to stand on the thwarts in his full ceremonial costume and sing; when he had finished singing, he said, he would do away with himself. They liked the idea of having the opportunity to listen to the best singer in the world, so they pulled back from the stern in the middle of the ship. Arion put on his full ceremonial costume and took hold of his cithara. He stood on the thwarts and sang the high-pitched tune all the way through; at the end of the song he threw himself into the sea as he was, in his full ceremonial costume. (I.24)

Arion is not simply a poet: Herodotus stresses that he is “the first” to invent a specific meter, and also the best performer. There is something exemplary in the way in which he practices his art. Though not explicitly claimed, Arion’s status as court poet is easily assumed by the reader, as well as his work-related travel as itinerant poet. At the beginning of the Arion digression, the narrator announces it as a “wonder”. There are indeed many wonders in the little story: Arion’s art; his betrayed trust in Corinthian sailors; his courageous choice about how to end his life. Truly, the image of the poet in his performance gear singing his last song standing on the ship in the middle of the sea stands as a striking case for the idea that human fortune never stays too long in the same place. It is a wonder to contemplate. Friedman (2006) comments that “it is a perfectly encapsulated image of the intersection of [Arion’s] *techne* and his itinerancy”(p.171). The poet performs his craft and with it he also enacts his agency in deciding how to exit life. The dramatic image of Arion expresses at the same time the vulnerability of the itinerant poet and the power of song for one’s life. The poet with his song exerts mastery upon his art and his life even in the life threatening situations due to his itinerancy. He has no place, but he stands on the moving ship in the moving sea. Wearing his ritual performance costume and holding on his cithara, Arion, “the best singer in the world”, commits suicide. The last wonder in the little story

consists in the fact that he survived. A dolphin- possibly sent by Poseidon- “ picked him up and carried him to Taenarum”(I, 24).

Arion, the best poet of his time, saved by a dolphin, eternizes the figure of the itinerant bard with his power and powerlessness. Herodotus insistently remarks both his exceptional talent and his professionalism (see the many references to his gear). Arion belonged to a varied professional category of itinerant practitioners: the *demiourgoi*. A *demiourgos* was a public worker or handicraftsman. With different professions falling under the definition in different times, in general it could be said that the term indicated a class of free professional, self employed and not tied to any particular community, who made a living by traveling from *polis* to *polis* offering their services. In Greece, the teacher-professor was considered a professional in the class of *demiourgoi*. Teachers enjoyed a special status as itinerant professionals.

In Classical Athens the teacher enjoyed the same social status and remuneration as a physician. The Sophists are described as itinerant teachers who offered education for a fee (see Plato, *Protagoras* 313d) at times with some admixture of charlatanism. Later in the Hellenistic period, when education was a public responsibility, the *paidonomos* and *ephebes* might engage skilled itinerant teachers for short periods. Research on teachers in the Hellenistic period portrays the wandering teacher as one of the professionals who lent their work from home to home (Nilsson, 1955; Cribiore 2001). They were called *kathegetai*: “itinerant teachers who moved from town to town offering their services and looking for better employment” (Cribiore, 2001, p.53). A *kathegetes* lent his services to male and female students who lived far from the large educational centers. Teachers of secondary education who worked as private instructors were often moving from one center to another in search of better employment.

A testimony of the teachers' itinerancy is found in a papyrus letter, written to Ptolemaios by his mother. She writes: "Do not hesitate to write to me about anything you might need. It grieved me to learn from the daughter of our *kateghetes* Diogenes that he sailed down, for I had no anxiety about him, knowing that he was going to take care of you to the best of his ability" (as quoted in Cribiore, 2001, p. 48). The letter continues with the mother's recommendation that the son follows his pedagogue's advice in choosing a new suitable teacher. Teachers' itinerancy depended on their precarious financial and social position (p. 54) though it also revealed their important role in the ancient educational scenario. Contemporary Roman legislation guaranteed same privileges to physicians and teachers (*Edict of Vespasian*, referenced in I. Hadot, p. 223).

If we move from historical considerations to an exploration of mythological representations, we find that tradition held the centaur Chiron as the educator of heroes and gods. The "wise centaur" (*Iliad*, XI, 832) was the legendary teacher of many, like Asclepius, Actateon, Jason and Achilles. Henri-Irénée Marrou (1956) explains that multiple sources depict Chiron teaching Achilles the arts of hunting, horsemanship, javelin-throwing, and playing the lyre. He also taught the young semi-god the art of surgery and pharmacopeia (p.7). The very Asclepius, the God of medicine, learned the art of healing from Chiron (*Iliad*, IV, 218). Chiron derives his name from the word *cheir*: Chiron could be understood as "He of the Skillful Hands" (Robbins, 1975, p. 211). The many arts in Chiron's curriculum express the ideal of the knightly hero in Greece's archaic era.

However, the figure of Chiron survives its Homeric *ethos* and comes to represent the ideal teacher. Numerous representations in the centuries contribute to the image of Chiron as a caring and skilled teacher who takes charge of teaching the art of living. Ovid (*Fasti*, V, 379-414) relates the story of Chiron's death. Hercules, in the course of his twelve labors, arrived to

Mount Pelion, where he was hospitably received by the centaur Chiron and his pupil, the young Achilles. While admiring Hercules' splendid weapons, Chiron accidentally dropped one poisoned arrow on his foot. The wound was incurable, and unbearably painful, leading Chiron to voluntarily renounce his immortality and die<sup>7</sup>. Of interest for the purposes of my inquiry is that the teachings of Chiron seem related to the art of healing but also to the art of being master of one's own life – to the point of eventually deciding to relinquish immortality if it means prolonging a life of suffering.

Chiron is the centaur who surrenders his immortality, the itinerant practitioner always in movement thanks to his horse legs, the skilled healer who nevertheless could not heal his wound, a creature in between several worlds: the human, the animal, the divine. Chiron is a teacher.

In Ancient Greece, knowledge and wisdom are acquired and performed in movement. The “student of the world” embodied by Herodotus’ Solon explores the world in order to gain knowledge of human things and of human happiness. The “itinerant practitioner” as seen dramatically with Arion, and with less pathos in the brief exposition regarding the social status of *demiourgos*, roams the world in order to display and communicate his wisdom and knowledge. I want to point out that any neat distinction between the two types of wandering with respect to their goals is artificial, because “the teacher learns while he goes about to teach, and the student develops a reputation for wisdom while he goes about to learn” (Montiglio, 2005, p. 100).

The tradition about the “Seven Sages” recognizes that teaching and learning are interconnected. A Sage is usually credited with having traveled to research, and with dispensing his wisdom down the road. Solon is the philosophical wanderer who is also mentioned by Herodotus as a *sophistes* who came from Sardis to Greece as a teacher (*The Histories*, I, 29). In

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<sup>7</sup> According to Pliny, instead, he recovered (*Historia Naturalis*, xxv, 6).

Plato's *Laws* the Athenian Stranger has traveled to Crete as both someone who has things to teach and who wants to learn. It is truly difficult to separate teaching and learning in the travels of a wise individual, because they are co-implied into one another: one cannot teach unless he learns. The teacher/student moves along with a movement that does not resemble a straight journey, but rather can be described as "a curvilinear and centerless movement" that is "organically multidirectional"(Montiglio, 2005, p. 139)

### 3. "What benefit has travel of itself ever been able to give anyone?": a radical objection

According to a contrasting perspective, the unpredictable movement of the curious traveler is not necessarily conducive to thinking, and particularly to that thinking that searches wisdom: philosophical thinking. Rather, because it encourages dispersion and fragmentation of the gaze, that movement can cause leakage and loss of focus instead of motivation to exploration and inquiry. The outward movement of the traveler can indeed hinder his inward attention. The multifold learning of many things (*polimatheia*) achieved by engaging in human contact through travel can take place in opposition to wisdom. Traveling shuns the sustained, focused application required for a course of inquiry towards wisdom.

Recalling my guiding image of the teacher as traveler, the radical objection I am considering would translate in a different image: that of the static, resident teacher. Why scatter or dislocate when all a teacher needs is focus, mastery of her content knowledge, and control of the classroom? It could also translate into the idea of the specialist who never steps out of her "discipline". Why explore different perspectives when they could threaten the integrity of scientific boundaries? Finally, it would translate into the thinker who follows a "straight path" and never deviates- not even when her experience seems to require adjustments of her preferred

frames of reference. Preference for this way of thinking is informed by a radical criticism of the value of movement for the pursuit of knowledge and thinking.

While I do not subscribe to this criticism, I find that a thorough examination of the philosophical argument underlying it will provide a decisive insight into the value of movement itself. The next chapters take on the challenge and find that the value of movement can be really maintained only if its relation to the idea of *home* is preserved. In the last section of this chapter, I decide to explore the referred standpoint in Seneca's formulation. Seneca does not recommend travel to the aspiring wise man.

Seneca was born in the year 4 B.C. at Corduba (nowadays Spain) at the border of the Roman empire. He was "born in the province, educated at Rome, prominent at the bar, a distinguished exile, a trusted minister of the State, and a doomed victim of a capricious emperor" (Gummere, 1916, p. ix). He was a philosopher, a writer, a politician, and for some years the tutor of the young Nero. He committed suicide to avoid violent death at the hands of Nero's emissaries in 65 A.D. The *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* is a collection of letters addressed to a younger friend, written with the clear intention of educating Lucilius to a philosophical life. In it, amongst themes like the relevance of philosophy for life ( Ep. XVI), on silence and study ( Ep. LVI), or on good company (Ep. LXII), Seneca addresses the theme of travel ( Ep. XXVIII, CIV). The emotional tone of the correspondence reveals that the themes discussed are germane and that they relate to the inquiry about how to live. At the opening of Epistle XXVII, for example, Seneca explains that he gives advice to Lucilius not as a shameless man who wants to "cure his fellows" when he is "ill himself" (XXVII,1. p. 193), but rather he discusses with his friend "troubles that concern [them] both". He illustrates their common condition with the telling image: "just as if we were lying ill in the same hospital". This *caveat* shows both the nature of a

co-shared philosophical inquiry and the awareness that such inquiry deals with matters of life and death.

Epistle XXVIII begins with a question, replying to a letter from Lucilius in which he complained that a travel he had entertained had not helped him to feel less sad or less weighted down. Seneca asks: “are you surprised?” and he continues: “You need a change of soul rather than of climate” (XXVIII, 1, p. 199). The human being cannot free himself from his own faults by simply moving his body. His faults will follow him wherever he travels (XXVIII, 2, p. 199). With a rhetorical device, the exact same argument is repeated after this formulation in the second person, this time reported as an utterance by Socrates: “why do you wonder that globe-trotting does not help you, seeing that you take always yourself with you? The reason which set you wandering is ever at your heels.” Showcasing the futility of such an attempt, Seneca continues by questioning the pleasure derived from “seeing new lands” and from “surveying cities and spots of interest.” He comments: “ all this bustle is useless (...) because you fell along with yourself.”

Traveling to shake off life’s troubles and burden recalls the movement of a ship with a cargo: “when stationary (it) makes no trouble, but when it shifts to this side or that, it causes the vessel to heel more quickly in the direction where it has settled” (XXVIII, 3, p. 201). We are followed by our baggage if we let it be attached to us, and our movement is fettered by the weight of it. Setting oneself in motion while one is troubled is like “shaking up a sick man”(XXVIII, 3, p.201), in that the unrest causes even more pain.

Indeed, the theme of travel as attempt at healing a sickness, probably existential, is retrieved in another letter in which Seneca comments that “the remedies which are most helpful are those which are not interrupted. You should not allow your quiet, or the oblivion to which you have consigned your former life, to be broken into” ( LXIX, 1). No quiet (*otium*) is possible

if one moves around. The Stoic preoccupation with self mastery implies a steady uninterrupted work on oneself, in condition of retirement and quiet. Movement, the kind of movement that consists in constant wavering, “means an unsteady spirit”(LXIX, 1). Seneca fears the fragmentation of the spirit when it outflows because of travel. Travel crystallizes the straying from the philosophical way.

In the XXXVII letter, a clear case is made in favor of the straight line movement which describes the philosophical life. In order to free oneself, one has to exert power on his life, so as to overcome the necessities that cannot be escaped. “This way”, he continues, “will be afforded you by philosophy. Betake yourself therefore to philosophy if you wish to be free” (XXXVII, 3, p. 255). Seneca maintains the conviction that there is only one way to achieve freedom: “there is but one path leading thither, and it is a straight path; you will not go astray. Proceed with steady step.” [*Una ad hanc fert via, et quidem recta; non aberrabis. Vade certo gradu*] (XXXVII, 4, p. 255). The straight path of philosophy is in fact the opposite of the disorderly movement, or better, in Seneca’s word choice, whirling [*in medio turbine rerum*] in the midst of which the individual is dazed and stupefied, asking: “how did I get here?”(XXXVII, 5, p.257).

Here we are at the heart of the problem: spinning on himself, confused and lost, the astray traveler has lost his way to wisdom. The philosophical journey has a centripetal nature, which “demands a highly concentrated mental effort, a relentless vigilance (*intentio*). Traveling is a threat to *intentio* because it prevents the mind from taking hold of itself” ( Montiglio, 2006, p. 563). Hadot (2002) writes: " Philosophy was a unique act which had to be practiced at each instant, with constantly renewed attention, which means constant tension and consciousness, as well as vigilance exercised at every moment"(p.138, quoted in Montiglio). The steady work of the mind, the vigilant effort to master one’s desires and thoughts, is disturbed by the shaking



erratic movement. "But how," you ask, "does one attain that goal? You do not need to cross the Pennine or Graian hills, or traverse the Candavian waste, or face the Syrtes, or Scylla, or Charybdis, although you have travelled through all these places for the bribe of a petty governorship; the journey for which nature has equipped you is safe and pleasant" (XXXI, 9, p. 227). The secure and straight journey is again the philosophical one: *iter tutum et iucundum*. Attention to the pursuit of wisdom is endangered by distraction.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Seneca rewrites the exemplarity of the Homeric hero Odysseus. Recalling the episode in which Odysseus, sailing past the island of the Sirens, had himself tied to the mast so that he was able to listen to the Sirens' song, without being seduced by it, Seneca indicates that the hero is not to be taken as a model. The crewmen instead, with their ears plugged by wax, are those who should inspire Lucilius. "In short, you will be a wise man, if you stop up your ears; nor is it enough to close them with wax; you need a denser stopple than that which they say Ulysses used for his comrades. The song which he feared was alluring, but came not from every side; the song, however, which you have to fear, echoes round you not from a single headland, but from every quarter of the world" (XXXI, 2, p. 223). The world's seduction skirts Lucilius and everyone who is on the path to wisdom. A severe self inflicted deafness seems the best choice in view of the goal.

Though impressed by the rhetorical effect of such a striking proposition, I will now attempt at balancing this view, always drawing upon Seneca's letters. Even when expressing his vehement distrust, the philosopher seems to maintain an (unwilling) ambivalence towards the appraisal of travel in view of the philosophical life. Montiglio (2006) in her excellent study draws our attention to several passages that display such ambivalence. In the CIV Epistle, Seneca

is concerned with how to maintain his health in old age, to honor his wife Paulina's love for him.

A good part of the letter is focused on the blaming and disapproving of travel. He writes,

What benefit has travel of itself ever been able to give anyone? No restraint upon pleasure, no bridling of desire, no checking of bad temper, no crushing of the wild assaults of passion, no opportunity to rid the soul of evil. Travelling cannot give us judgment, or shake off our errors; it merely holds our attention for a moment by a certain novelty, as children pause to wonder at something unfamiliar. Besides, it irritates us, through the wavering of a mind which is suffering from an acute attack of sickness; the very motion makes it more fitful and nervous. Hence the spots we had sought most eagerly we quit still more eagerly, like birds that flit and are off as soon as they have alighted. (CIV, 14)

Attention in travel is superficially excited, it grasps an object of momentary seduction, and quickly leaves it, in result leaving the mind aggravated and nervous. Traveling wields a vexation on the integrity and endurance of one's mind. The long list of things that traveling fails to achieve for human freedom comprises judgment, truthfulness, self mastery and morality.

*Straying from the straight course*, an expression made popular by the later formulation of the Christian precepts, is an accurate description of what Seneca takes travel to cause to human existence. Remarkably, to such powerful restatement of his ascertained position on the theme, follows a beautifully convincing list of the discoveries allowed for by travel. He continues:

What travel will give is familiarity with other nations: it will reveal to you mountains of strange shape, or unfamiliar tracts of plain, or valleys that are watered by everflowing springs, or the characteristics of some river that comes to our attention. We observe how the Nile rises and swells in summer, or how the Tigris disappears, runs underground through hidden spaces, and then appears with unabated sweep; or how the Maeander, that oft-rehearsed theme and plaything of the poets [*exercitatio et ludus*], turns in frequent bendings, and often in winding comes close to its own channel before resuming its course. But this sort of information will not make better or sounder men of us. (CIV, 15).

The main element of interest in the lines I quoted lies in the emotional contrast between the concluding line, reaffirming the uselessness of travel, and the lengthy, poetic enumeration of the things to be gained in it. In it, we find familiarity and awe. They spring from the revelation of

new shapes and qualities of a beautiful valley, and from the contemplation of the rising and flooding of the Nile, as well as of the puzzling course of the Tigris. More importantly, the Maeander, with its twisting and turning flow, is mentioned as the river that lends itself to the exercise and play of the poets. The Maeander's serpentine shape is the exemplary challenge to the ideal of the straight unwavering route that one should follow in life. Seneca condemns this dynamic, yet the shift in his voice signals that he possibly harbors contradictory feelings about his position. Montiglio (2006) convincingly explains that "The Meander carries away the traveling Seneca along its sinuous banks and drives him farther away from his previous focus by conjuring up poetry as sheer entertainment, a playful diversion [*ludus*] that replicates the playfulness of the river itself, a meandering of the mind away from the straight path to wisdom." It is an "enraptured detour" after which Seneca takes on once again the severe voice warning against the dangers of travel, "as if startled out of a reverie" (p.567).

Another insight I want to borrow from Montiglio's study regards the idea that in the quoted passage literary practice is represented as a form of travel. She notes that "traveling, reading and writing are indeed intertwined in Seneca's prose"(p.567). Other lines in the same letter reveal this connection. After repeatedly having warned Lucilius, Seneca says:

If you would enjoy your travels, make healthy the companion of your travels. (...) The miser, the swindler, the bully, the cheat, who will do you much harm merely by being near you, are within you. Change therefore to better associations: live with the Catos, with Laelius, with Tubero. Or, if you enjoy living with Greeks also, spend your time with Socrates and with Zeno: the former will show you how to die if it be necessary; the latter how to die before it is necessary. (CIV, 22)

In the movement natural to one's life, it is important to associate with sage companions.

Evidently, the ones mentioned can provide company in the conversation with their ideas and works. Travel companions are thinkers whose ideas one meets in books- either first handedly

written or reporting sayings and stories. In fact, reading could be considered a form of travel.

When discussing Lucilius' reading habits, Seneca warns him against reading many books in a cursory way. He writes:

Be careful, however, lest this reading of many authors and books of every sort may tend to make you discursive and unsteady. You must linger among a limited number of master thinkers, and digest their works, if you would derive ideas which shall win firm hold in your mind. Everywhere means nowhere. When a person spends all his time in foreign travel, he ends by having many acquaintances, but no friends. (...) There is nothing so efficacious that it can be helpful while it is being shifted about. And in reading of many books is distraction. (II, 1)

Unrest is dangerous for the mind. The traveler to many places is like the reader of many books: both lose focus and by hurrying here and there, do not let themselves become familiar with the ideas or places they are visiting. Their minds are not stable, and thus not at ease with themselves. Reading many books from different genres is like an unstructured, dispersive travel. Shifting, dwindling, turning: for Seneca, these are unhealthy movements that ultimately undermine the struggle towards stability and self mastery.

Seneca's distrust of the potential in travel to foster a philosophical life becomes even more evident when contrasted to the advised counter-strategy. This lesson can be found again in the Epistle XXVIII with which I have begun this examination. Following the lines in which he chastises the futility of travel for dispelling one's own state of illness caused by lack of wisdom, he writes:

That trouble once removed, all change of scene will become pleasant; though you may be driven to the uttermost ends of the earth, in whatever corner of a savage land you may find yourself, that place, however forbidding, will be to you a hospitable abode. The person you are matters more than the place to which you go; for that reason we should not make the mind a bondsman to any one place. Live in this belief: "I am not born for any one corner of the universe; this whole world is my country". (XXVIII, 4-5)

The interpretative line that sees Seneca's inward-looking conception of wisdom as undermining the importance of the outward wandering reader or traveler is complicated by a more careful

consideration of the above cited lines. Travel could conduct the person to wisdom as long as it is experienced alongside with a process of familiarization of the world. Seneca shares full-heartedly the Stoic teaching on cosmopolitanism. He proposes here that the aspiring sage will be able to find herself at home in the world, if she will have made her way towards it through an intentional, focused enlargement of her circle of concern.

The complex concept of *oikeiosis* expresses the ethical movement of expansion of one's own areas of concern. *Oikeiosis* is derived from *oikos*, that in Greek signifies "house", "household", or any dwelling place. Some thing is *oikeion* (in or of the house, family, kin) to the individual when it is the individual's own. In Stoic philosophy, something is *oikeion* when it is endeared by nature<sup>8</sup>. One's primary concern will be around things that are *oikeia* to him, because they are his own. The impulse toward the preservation of *oikeia* things is *oikeiosis* (Brennan, 2005, p.155-168). The individual's task is to love and take care of that which is his own, which is primarily his reason, and to progressively enlarge this care for things that become *oikeia* to the individual. Hierocles' model of the individual at the center of expanding concentric circles functions upon the process of *oikeiosis*. Brennan (2005) explains that an *oikeion* is an object of concern, and *oikeiosis* the process through which, thinking of something as *oikeion*, one takes the *oikeion*'s welfare as a reason to act. Through this process, others are perceived as one's own. The individual who is on the safe way to wisdom in the Stoic tradition, knows how to progressively expand the circle of the familiar. The cosmopolitan ideal informs the sense that it is possible to find home everywhere.

The whole world is "a hospitable abode"(XXVIII, 4) to the individual who works on his *oikeiosis* and gradually expands his circles of concern. However, precisely when such an

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awareness is reached, the vainness of actual exploration and travel becomes evident, or so Seneca contends. The epistle continues by restating the conclusion that the sage individual does not, really, need to travel but is content with what is close by and familiar.

If you saw this fact clearly, you would not be surprised at getting no benefit from the fresh scenes to which you roam each time through weariness of the old scenes. For the first would have pleased you in each case, had you believed it wholly yours. As it is, however, you are not journeying; you are drifting and being driven, only exchanging one place for another, although that which you seek, - to live well, - is found everywhere.  
(XXVIII, 4)

Journeying in the world is not a journey to wisdom. Seneca's stoic ideal of *domestica felicitas* is linked with his intuition that the soul needs to be contained, not exposed to voices and landscapes. One should be able to "stay at home" and pursue a philosophical journey dominated by vigilance and a mental effort of *intentio*. Lavery (1980) comments that "If all of life is a journey, the Stoic is always on the road; but, at the same time, he is at home everywhere. The Stoic is a resident pilgrim" (p.154). The image of the resident pilgrim well embodies both the ambivalence of the idea of life's journey and its inevitableness. It is undeniable that Seneca felt a fascination with travel and with the metaphors of journeying, and his warning that traveling may prevent the mind from the disposition of self mastery- taking hold of itself- cannot be taken as simply a recommendation for the philosopher to "stay home". It represents instead a radical challenge to the established idea that movement conduces to learning and wisdom. Seneca individuates and exposes the possibility that movement and exploration of the world could be threatening to the personal search for wisdom.

### 3. Conclusion

From the discussion of Seneca's ambivalent assessment of the value of travel for the philosophical life I have gathered elements for understanding what travel brings to philosophical thinking. Not any kind of movement is conducive to better thinking. Not every journey is educational. Not every traveler thinks well nor does every thinker travel well. A study about what it is to "travel well" will allow me to see what it is to "think well" and how to educate for this. The primary connection between travel and thinking, posited at the beginning of the chapter, is layered with relations to teaching, education, and philosophical thinking.

My next chapter works on the hypothesis that the philosophical educational value of traveling resides in the possibility to problematize, disassemble, and reimagine the relation between home (the known, familiar, loved proper and immediate environment to one's life), and frontier (the unknown, yet to be explored, unsettling and fascinating land of one's journeying). A closer look at that moment in history in which the conception of "home" and "frontier" ruptured will shed light on what it is to travel well. I suggest that the traveler has to maintain a sense of "journeying residency" that is nourished by the exercise of imagination. This kind of geographic imagination redefines the interplay between known and unknown in terms of curiosity, wonder, and capacity to find direction where a map is still not given. This hints at the presence of a poetics of thinking which is built around practice, rhetoric and reasonableness more than on theory, logic, and rationality (on this see Toulmin, 2001).

It is necessary to raise again the question I started this chapter with: How are thinking and traveling connected? In the next chapter I propose that they are inherently related due to the dynamic quality of thinking itself. This relation becomes clearer when we consider philosophical thinking, a mode of traveling, I propose, that calls into play concepts of home, citizenship,

attachment and detachment, belonging and alienation, ultimately challenging a simplistic or touristic understanding of traveling.

In some sense, being a philosopher requires the capacity to leave one's home, to explore and follow one's inquiry threads, to get lost and to adopt a viewpoint "from without" one's familiar and cherished ways, ideas, and judgments. Socrates serves as a demonstration of the problematic relationship between the philosopher and the home: not fully integrated in the *polis*, that punished his biting philosophical thinking, yet Socrates is the citizen who elects to spend his life in the *agora* and who dies as a result. If philosophical thinking is the thinking of the one who comes to the inside from outside, who belongs and does not belong, it could be that the capacity to "travel well" is a condition for the individual to develop such philosophical disposition.

The territory I am going to explore next, the work of Michel de Montaigne, is lit by a similar concern with the philosophical life viewed in terms of movement. Montaigne, who lives and writes at the beginning of the modern age in which conceptions of the world and of travel transform, will have much to offer to my inquiry. Through his work, I will connect the theme of travel with that of home, which are not even thinkable apart from one another. Home is the reference point out of which (and toward which) travel takes place. Understanding this relation will allow for a better description of how to travel in order to philosophically think, that is, it will help us see how to make of travel an education and to make teachers of those who travel.



## **Chapter 4. Montaigne: a Traveler between the Culture of the Book and the Culture of Discovery**

### 1. Introduction

How does one become educated? Does one need to experience the world outside of her home in order to learn? Or is the exploration of the outside only a distraction from what really matters, namely knowledge of oneself? This chapter looks for a way to reconcile the opposition between these two descriptions of one individual's growth. I propose that she who travels, who leaves home and then comes back, enacts the movement of thinking which makes education possible. This becomes clear when traveling implies a confrontation not only with difference, but with a radical alterity. Such an encounter is typified, from a European point of view, in the discovery of the Americas which marks the beginning of the Modern Age.

Early Modernity sees an opening of the geographic boundaries that alters the conception of travel and of what is gained through travel. This, together with the new cosmology, a different conception of science and of method, and the new emphasis posed on the individual interpretation of the Scriptures by the Reformation, marks the start of the new era. An examination of the multiple factors leading to Modernity lies beyond the boundaries of this inquiry; I chose to look at how practices of travel and movement are interconnected with conceptions of thinking and learning at the beginning of Modernity in the hope that this will offer a plausible response to the Stoic objection, presented in the previous chapter, that experience of the world is not necessary for attaining wisdom.

In the course of the chapter, I initially consider the new disposition stemming out of the Renaissance about the role of experience for the attainment of knowledge. Relying on research in history of ideas, I describe the shift from the trust that truth could be found in books to the idea

that truth be attained only through inquiry based on experience. New objects find wide diffusion at this time: the press books. A look at some of their frontispieces helps illustrate the shift of Modernity. Then, I turn to Montaigne as a thinker who lives in between the two conceptions, and by considering his travelogue and selected essays, I sketch a humanistic conception of traveling as a path to self discovery. In the next chapter I propose that such a conception be reflected in the image of those who teach as travelers. This image addresses the divide between *res et verba*, or broadly theory and practice, book and road, by offering a way to overcome this opposition.

## 2. A framework

My intention in the opening section is to introduce some considerations about the Early Modern new understanding of the role of direct experience of the world in the attainment of true knowledge. Timothy Grafton's *New Worlds, Ancient Texts. The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (1992) opens with the description of a pivotal scene: the Jesuit Jose' de Acosta was passing to the Indies and was expecting to find a torrid climate zone, according to the Aristotelian natural philosophy. Instead, he writes, he and his companions found a temperate climate: they were cold. He notes: "What could I do but laugh at Aristotle's meteorology and his philosophy?" (quoted in Grafton, p. 1) Grafton reads the learned traveler's laughter at his ancient books' teaching as a sign of the irreversible change in the understanding of the seat of truths, and consequently of the relation between the thinker and his books. He writes: "By the early seventeenth century knowledge had burst the bounds of the library" (p. 3). Empirical studies in astronomy and anatomy had revealed mistakes and inconsistencies in the traditional physical science; meanwhile, the discovery of the New World and of its peoples had cast doubts on

biblical accounts on the origins of humanity and on classical cosmographies. Living in a universe whose boundaries kept expanding, philosophers and scholars knew that ancient books were not central to the intellectual life, or better they were such only in so far as a new awareness of the meaning of Antiquity for the current times was made possible.

Francis Bacon's idea that the ancient time was the childhood of humanity- *Antiquitas saeculi juvenus mundi* (*De augmentis scientiarum*, Bk I, aph 84) points at the perception that in some ways the wisdom of the past was not a perfect sum of knowledge but simply the beginning of humanity's way of progress. The Renaissance use of the term "antiquity" to signify an attribute of the modern times tells of the newly found awareness of being "older" than the ancients and thus able to express authority. An examination of this paradoxical use of the concept of antiquity in the Renaissance (Von Leyden, 1958) correlates it to a new sense of history developed through an analogy between historical perspective and that of the visual arts. In Von Leyden's study, an exemplification of this mode of relation to antiquity is provided by a lengthy quote by Sir William Temple that I find worth reporting in its entirety:

I suppose Authority may be reasonably allowed to the Opinion of Ancient Men in the present Age; but I know not why it should be so to those of Men in general that lived in ages long since past; nor why one Age of the World should be wiser than another; or if it be, why it should not be rather the latter than the former; as having the same Advantage of the general Experience of the World, that an old man has of the more particular Experiments of Life.

(An Essay upon the Original and Nature of Government [Works (London, 1720), I, 101], as quoted in Von Leyden, 1958, p.485)

Antiquity, taken to be the basis of authority, that is of the legitimation of knowledge, is predicated of those who have "more particular experiments of life": truths found in the books of the Greeks and of the Romans were being challenged by what was learned from direct experience of the world.

The origin of this shift can be sought in travel, and, specifically, in transatlantic explorations. Tzvetan Todorov's beautiful study, *The Conquest of America. The Question of the Other* (1986), endorses this idea. In it, he posits that "it is in fact the conquest of America that heralds and establishes our present identity" (p.5). It is so because of the paradigmatic value of the encounter with the other, an encounter that gave place to "the greatest genocide in human history" against the native American peoples. Since Columbus' discovery, Todorov writes, "the world has shrunk (even if the universe had become infinite), *the world is small* as Columbus himself will peremptorily declare (Lettera Rarissima, 7/7/1503); men have discovered the totality of which they are part, whereas hitherto they formed a part without a whole" (p. 5). A description of Cristoforo Colombo's motives for the explorations as new Crusades includes medieval beliefs and values, such as the description of America as the new Jerusalem and of his travels as a new crusade. However, Todorov suggests, Columbus had some traits that show a mentality closer to the modern one. He seemed to enjoy discovery as an activity whose rewards are inherent in the activity itself. This, what Todorov takes to be a sign of a "modern mentality", is shown in the grammatical use of the verb "to discover". For Columbus, that is an intransitive action. He writes, "I wish to see and discover" (October 19<sup>th</sup> 1492, cited in Todorov, p 13). Discovery is not a means to an end, but, rather, an end in itself.

Todorov does not discount Columbus' many references to gold and riches as a motivation to further the explorations, but he reads those as functional to secure support to the expedition from the Spanish monarchs and to motivate Columbus' sailors and travel companions. In the man Columbus evidently the motives of greed and conquest coexist with missionary aspirations and with a novel, modern curiosity towards the experience of the world. It is important to note that the coexistence of diverse motives speaks to the complex challenges of historical

periodization and to the inadequacy of labels such as “modern” or “medieval”; the acknowledgment of intricate overlapping of motives, ideas, and sensibility is most likely to foster some understanding of who we are now at the other end of modernity.

The discovery of the past as a time distinct and separated, though related, to the modern time preceded the discovery of the New World and was immensely relevant to the transformation of the cultural world. The humanists, those devoted to *studia humanitatis*, had been challenging the scholastic system of the universities and their canon for at least a century. They criticized both the focus on formal argumentation, and the conviction that all philosophy worth knowing resided in commentaries of the Aristotelian corpus. Grammar, rhetoric and philosophy were now taught outside of the official academic institutions in schools aiming at an education suitable for new intellectual classes engaged in civic life.

The new philosophy of man championed by the early humanists was centered on the renewal of ancient ideals. “For these individuals the only way out of centuries of darkness, decadence and corruption was by returning to the ancient *sapientia* and recovering its exemplary ways of living and thinking as well as the language which was its vehicle” (Vasoli, C., 1988, p.60). Attention to the past was heralded through a new philological criticism: the discovery and editing of unknown Greek and Latin texts helped separate antiquity from myth and fable. The development of historical consciousness made possible an evaluation of the testimony of the past. Early modernity, growing out of humanism, builds upon such historical awareness. It thinks of itself as a new era distinctively aware of the rupture with what came before it<sup>9</sup>.

Bacon’s title page of *Instauratio Magna* (London 1620, see figure 1 in the appendix) tells the whole story: it shows a ship sailing past the Hercules Pillars that are represented as classical

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<sup>9</sup> More on this in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Schmitt, C.B., Skinner, Q., Kessler E., Kraye J., 1988, and in Reynolds and Wilson *Scribes and Scholars* 1991

columns. On the background of a serene sky, a caravel has just surpassed the last known part of the world. It is now adventuring in the ocean. Two sea monsters seem to observe its sides. The so called “Hercules pillars” are represented as actual doric pillars. The limits of ancient knowledge – and navigation- are to be surpassed thanks to a new model of inquiry. At the horizon, a ship that has already ventured far can be observed. Discovery is not a solitary enterprise; rather, it is only thanks to combined efforts of many that the boundaries of the known world have been forced through. There is a line on the bottom of the page that reads: *Multi pertransitabunt et augebitur scientia* [Many will pass through here and knowledge will increase]. Bacon’s great launching of a new way of knowing celebrates and foregrounds the modern success of sciences and technologies, advocating for the only book a true philosopher should trust: the book of nature. Grafton (p.198) comments that this marks the end of a time in which reading was the main way of attaining important knowledge, and the beginning of a time in which discovery is the central mode of learning.

The frontispiece of *Moeurs des sauvages américains compare au moeurs des premiers temps* ( Joseph F. Lafitau, Paris, 1724, figure 2 in the appendix) displays a full blown illustration of the shift of modernity: here the student is seated at a desk and represented in the act of writing with a pen. Three winged figures, an older man and two children, encourage the student to pay attention not only to the text on his desk, but also to consider the natural sciences, medicine, and all that the frontispiece has in its close up: a globe, an idol, medallions, sculptures of eastern look, a measuring instrument. All these objects are amassed without an apparent order, and they recall the new *Wunderkammer*, or cabinets of curiosities, that were becoming the environment of the scholar’s study. The display of objects arrayed as natural facts to offer to the student’s gaze is also a display of the newly gained idea that there, in “facts”, is where the source of knowledge

lies. By the 1600 it had become accepted that nothing written in a book could ever supplant the experience of the world.

### 3. Montaigne on the road

I turn to Montaigne whose essays are wired with the novel Renaissance sensibility deriving from the awareness of being on the cusp of something completely new. Montaigne maintains a posture of dangerous balance, continuously lost and found again, between the culture of the book and the culture of discovery. He travels to discover, and discovers to think; but what he finds in his explorations is, foremost, himself.

Montaigne is the thinker for whom travel is an exercise of self-discovery in the exploration of the world; and at the same time, conversely, it is an exercise of exploration of the world in the examination of the self. He is a traveler in manifold ways: he travels for work, he travels for leisure, he travels the historical distance between himself and his beloved authors, he paces endlessly in his library. He travels in that he thinks and writes. Travelling, thinking, teaching and writing are connected: “Who does not see that I have taken a road along which I shall go, without stopping and without effort, as long as there is ink and paper in the world?” (III:9, p.945).

The world is indeed the way to gain knowledge of the self. Geralde Nakam (2001) proposes to read Montaigne’s gaze through the engraving “Congnois toy toy-mesme” by Jean II de Gourmont (1562, figure 3). She interprets the engraving and *Les Essais* as developing the same idea and advice in that for both the Socratic precept “know yourself” shall be practiced in the conjunction of world and self (p.15). Nakam maintains that the engraver had no knowledge of Montaigne’s work (that was going to have its first edition eighteen years later), nor had

Montaigne of the engraving; but both the engraver and the essayist, were responding to the same world. The date of the engraving, 1562, sees the beginning of civil wars in France. The incredible character illustrating the precept: *Congnois toy toy-mesme* wears an armor. He is possibly a knight and he inhabits a world at war. The armor defends him and defines him at the same time. This knight is represented partly as a fool with a helmet having two points at whose ends we can see two bells. He is holding a scepter, on which we find the only present representation of the human face: what seems to be a grinning older man conjoining the stick of the scepter to the sphere on its top. The words: *Vanite des vanites tout est vanite* appear around the sphere. How should the warrior fool be interpreted? This could signify the folly of the civil war, which seems to envelope any viable reflection on humanity in that historical occurrence. The precept “know thyself” cannot do away with the given fact that humanity is at war with itself, so that an armor seems the only sensible attire for embarking on such a task of self-knowledge. But the warrior-fool may as well find a place in the reflection of humanity on itself: inspired by the Ecclesiastes (Nakam, p.16) both the engraver and the writer meditate on the vanity of most human aspirations, and find value in confronting one’s own limits.

One of the ways in which to receive the socratic precept is then the way that leads to knowledge of the folly of the world and to the exercise of reflection bringing to a sharp and fair judgment of it. The fool warrior wears a medallion chain, on which the words are engraved: *O combien est vain le souisi des hommes et toutes choses/l’homme fol est la vanite universelle./tout desir est plaisir a qui plaict./et l’honoeur du signeur nest point laict.* The embroidery on his costume reads: *nul eureux quapres la mort* [ no one is happy until after he has died]. The fool warrior is warning against the universal folly of humanity that follows vain aspirations and does



not recognize them as such. It is not an accident that the fool is also the last character in

Montaigne's "On Vanity":

It was a paradoxical command that was given to us by that god at Delphi: "Look into yourself, know yourself, keep to yourself; bring back your mind and your will, which are spending themselves elsewhere, into themselves; you are running out, you are scattering yourself; concentrate yourself, resist yourself: you are being betrayed, dispersed, and stolen away from yourself. Do you not see that this world keeps its sight all concentrated inward and its eyes open to contemplate itself? It is always vanity for you, within and without; but it is less vanity it is less extensive. Except for you, O man", said that god, "each thing studies itself first, and, according to its needs, has limits to its labors and desires. There is not a single thing as empty and needy as you, who embrace the universe: you are the investigator without knowledge, the magistrate without jurisdiction, and all in all, the fool of the farce. (Essays, III: 9, p 766).

Humanity's folly seems to reside in the fact that humanity does not look at itself, nor does it know itself. Knowledge of the universe is unsubstantial unless it is rooted in knowledge of oneself: the man who does not look into himself is scattered, dispersed and ultimately alienated from himself. The grimace of the fool is a mask being waved as a reminder of the fruitless attempts at knowing the world without knowing oneself.

This reminder is issued as a "paradoxical command". This is made evident by the flow of the argument for a prioritization of the "know yourself". The god, in Montaigne's account, continues the plea by recommending "do you not see that this world keeps its sight all concentrated inward and its eyes open to contemplate itself?" We are supposed to acknowledge the importance of looking into ourselves by looking at the world and recognizing that the world keeps its eyes open to contemplate itself. How can the world- and indeed, anything- keep its eyes open onto itself? It can only be through a reflective movement, and through something in which the gaze can reflect itself. Bringing forth the Delphic command, man is told to learn from the world. A paradoxical command for sure, yet one that must be obeyed.

What does the warrior fool, this champion of humanity, see when he obeys this command and looks into himself? What do I see when I look at him, and open the helmet to see whose face is represented? Instead of a human face, what I find is a map of the known world. The discovery of the American continent had altered the traditional perception of the world and had changed the work of cosmographers. Major advances in cartography took place thanks to both the new explorations and the printing techniques. The first whole –world maps began to appear in that time ( cfr. Woodward, 2007). The new world was a place of conquest and exploitation, of new trades and incredible monetary riches; but it was also a chance for the modern European gaze to consider its own difference and originality. The fool-warrior illustrating the precept “know yourself” reveals a view of the world underneath his armour, there where one would expect to find his face. Looking at himself in the mirror, that is: through reflection, our character can see the map of the world. Maintaining this same reflecting process, looking in the world he can see reflected his own face.

A double mirroring movement seems then to sustain and enact the gaze of the individual in search of self knowledge. A play of reversals seems to take place when things are looked at through that gaze: Europeans and natives, self and world, moderns and ancients lose their opposition and find new ways of relation. Our fool-warrior can find knowledge of himself in the exercise of this reflective view on the world: like the naïve observer that Montaigne claims to trust so much at the beginning of the essay “On the Cannibals”, the fool recognizes the truth of what he sees. The “savages” are an image of the other which may function as a confirmation of the modern superiority only to a foolish observer: and perhaps our observer, though naïve is not foolish.

Marc Fumaroli (1992) describes this dynamic by proposing to see the “savages” as a mirror in which the modern fool can ironically recognize his own decaying face (p.26). Facing “another world” is interesting primarily because the removal from the ordinary life renders some of our delusions all the more evident. The discoveries were taken as a sign of the clear superiority of modernity over the past, and the newly discovered peoples with their exotic customs were simply confirming the feeling of progress and of superiority of the Europeans over the natives. Such conceptions were of capital importance to the way early modern Europe was starting to form an understanding of itself. Early modern Europe understood itself as a civilization of progress and rationality by contrasting itself from what it was not: not the ancients, not the natives. The warrior in the engraving by Jean II de Gourmont can express the foolishness of assuming uncritically such conceptions; the fool can make fun of the self-importance wiring these ideas and with a somersault he points out that we can very much mirror ourselves in those whom we deem so different.

Montaigne’s appeal to the figure of the fool functions as a strategy of Socratic irony, to dismantle shallow conceptions and start the search for real knowledge of the self. The philosophical figure of the fool seems then to cover the very function of prying the world open by lifting the mask of accepted hypocrisy. The fool serves as to overthrow established and bound visions of the world in favor of a more free exploration of its novelty. Timothy McDonough (2001) has an article, “The Fools’ Pedagogy: Jestings for Liminal Learning” in which he considers the figure of the fool in the Renaissance as enacting the pedagogical intention to “encourage a positioning of the subject in such a way that he or she could manage the shift in world conception gracefully”(p.107). He insightfully notes that “when we laugh at the jests of the fool, we are not

laughing at the absurdity of his statements, but at our recognition that within his discourse he is doing something we thought undoable, questioning something unquestionable”(p.115).

The fool looks at the world in Montaigne’s philosophical way. The special way of looking of Michel de Montaigne is at work in the double mirroring of self and world: it takes a proper position that is not firmly in-between the two. Nakam calls Montaigne a “*génie du regard*”(p.17). I find this expression challenging to render in the English language. Montaigne is the most expert gazer, he is an artist of sight, he has a unique gift for looking at things. His gaze is always placed in a state in-between, but this being placed is not fixed. It is a constant re-positioning of itself exercised through a continuous movement within the intermediate space (Nakam, p. 17). In the double mirroring of the reflective movement, there is a variable that is always moving, deeply individual and constantly in the exercise of judgment: that is the gaze of the philosopher Michel de Montaigne.

That is the gaze of a man who made of learning through his life his main purpose. The perpetual change in the position of the observer allows for multiplicity of perspectives in the examination of life and ideas. Montaigne expresses his views through a “*vision bouleversée*”, an overthrown vision that he achieves through a permanent discipline of his self. This discipline consists in a constant rejection of established views in favor of a new vision that is more precise and also more fit to the world. Life itself, as the next section will show, is characterized by constant dynamism and by an irreducible diversity. Being able to see this is what makes of Montaigne a genius of the gaze. I will suggest later that his work constitutes an ideal mirror in which the teacher can further trace her own movement-as-teacher.

### 3.1. Montaigne on the dynamism of thinking

This section deals with the ever present recognition in Montaigne's work of the dynamism of living and conversely of thinking. In "Of Three kinds of associations" he writes: "Life is uneven, irregular, and multiform movement" (III: 3, p.621). Dynamism: the constant fact of movement, not a constant regular movement, but an irregular and unequal one, is a quality of biological life. Life has an erratic movement; it proceeds through leaps and dashes, it bounces back and forth with times of unpredictable rest. Montaigne notes this in the context of an examination of how to educate his self. The acknowledgement of the continuous movement of life enables him to recognize the dynamism of thinking. It is indeed because he cannot "nail himself" down to his own humors, that he has to admit that living consists in allowing oneself to break free from the "necessity of a single course" (ibidem). To live for a human means to think, and to live is to be moving. Montaigne thinks thinking to be made possible by movement. He notes that thinking is always characterized by an inherent dynamism: "At the first thoughts that come to (the mind), it stirs about and it shows signs of vigor in all directions, practices its touch now for power, now for order and grace, it arranges, moderates, and fortifies itself"(p. 621).

Thinking is described as a stretching by which the mind exercises its power and handles a subject (whatever subject) forcibly or gracefully. Any subject can be made object of such treatment: anything can be made "large and stretched to the point where the mind must work on it with all its strength (p 621)". Here Montaigne might be pointing to the fact that his essays deal with the most disparate variety of topics, and his mind has applied itself with vigor to all that has awakened its interest. He confesses that a state of idleness is not healthy to him, as in that state his mind stay agitated and under a constant strain. When the mind is idle, ironically it is also most in motion, it is aroused and also distracted from the study of itself. Interestingly in this

same context Montaigne seems to also offer a justification for his peculiar way of writing: here more insight about the dynamism of thinking can be found.

“Of Idleness” (I: 8) similarly presents considerations about the movement of thinking while trying to justify and describe the author’s purpose in writing the *Essays*. Idleness, Montaigne contends, can be dangerous. The ground on which it can be dangerous and is indeed experienced as such by the writer is nevertheless different than what common sense would expect. One would think that idleness, as a state of calm and absence of work, could sustain boredom and indolence. The danger in idleness seems to be that of an excessive familiarity: when one does not engage in any activity, one is motionless and reaches a state in which nothing surprises him nor interests him. Life becomes boring. This outcome is not what Montaigne sees in idleness, though. With a movement quite much like a fool’s somersault, Montaigne reverses the meanings commonly associated with the word and rather considers idleness as a state of agitation. It is the state in which thinking can begin. Its danger lies in the facility with which the idle mind experiences hard to master movement, as the mind is set in motion with an unsettling and unforeseeable trajectory.

For the author, this state is akin to that of an unsowed land which grows a multiplicity of wild weeds, or to that of a woman that needs a seed of a different kind than herself to be made fertile. It is noticeable that both comparisons deploy images dear to the imagery of pedagogy: education as cultivation; or, Socratically, education as begetting. Like soil that must be made fertile, so it is with minds. At a closer look, however, neither the land nor the woman are sterile: on the contrary, the issue seems to be that they are over-producing in a disorderly way. He continues: “Unless you keep them busy with some definite subject that will bridle and control them, they throw themselves in disorder hither and yon in the vague field of imagination” (I:8,

p.21). Idleness is the natural state of the mind, a state in which the mind dangerously runs unchecked and produces shapeless, excessive offspring of imagination. Subjects keep the mind busy by “bridling” and thus controlling it.

A connection between the metaphor of the bridle and the idea of the home has been suggested (Van den Abbeele, 1992, pp.12-19). The bridle tames and domesticates the mind: in doing so, it channels the movement of the mind towards centers of interest, and it also keeps the mind within the walls of its proper home. The problem of idleness, it is proposed, becomes the problem of property or better of the proper habitat: a mind in a constant state of agitation does not recognize its own bearings and cannot establish its home, the place in which, to recover the previously used metaphor, gardens can be cultivated and children grow. The following citation of Martial: *Quisquis ubique habitat, Maxime, nusquam habitat* [he who lives everywhere lives nowhere] reinforces the correlation between the requirement of bridles to the mind and the preservation of a place where to live.

It is not surprising that in the immediately following lines Montaigne calls upon the idea of home to explain what he was trying to achieve by his early retirement. He confesses to have retired to his home in the determination to keep away from bothersome concerns so as to “let (his) mind entertain itself in full idleness and stay and settle in itself” (I:8, p 21). He seeks repose in idleness: but he does not find it. What he finds, instead, is the state of purposeless unbridled movement of the mind. The mind cannot settle in itself and make itself at home: Montaigne wants to stay “*chez soi*” but his mind is relentless and runs everywhere. Here a defining metaphor is offered:

On the contrary like a runaway horse, it gives itself a hundred times more trouble than it took for others, and gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after the other, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their ineptitude and

strangeness at my pleasure, I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in the time to make my mind ashamed of itself. (I:8, 21)

A line from Lucan: *variam semper dant otia mentem* [idle times always make the mind distracted] introduces this capital metaphor of the horse. The “varied” mind is a runaway horse. When Montaigne removes himself from the world in search for a space of self reflection and repose, he finds his mind escaping his desire of control and quiet and instead sprinting in all directions. It is the move towards self reflectivity that indeed spurs and unbridles the horse. In its run, the horse (the mind) gives birth to fantastic monsters. A few lines previously he had described the dangers of a mind running disorderly “hither and yon in the vague field of imagination.” At that point, it seemed that the only possible outcomes of such disorderly movement be wild weeds or shapeless lumps. Now, instead, it appears that more appealing creatures originate from such movement: fantastic monsters that Montaigne wants to contemplate at his pleasure. The monsters have two qualities: they are strange and useless [*l'étrangeté et l'ineptie*]. Their master (who is Montaigne in this proliferation of metaphors? Is he the owner of the horse? Is he the stable out of which the horse runs away?) wants to contemplate them at his pleasure, for this reason, he says, he starts putting them in writing [*de les mettre en rôle*]. The horse is perhaps bridled by this intention, unless of course the author chooses to let it run as he takes in and studies the chimeras and monsters born out of this lack of order and discipline.

Montaigne seems to say that recording the strangeness and ineptitude of the chimeras, making a scroll of them, is the main motivation for his work: the essays as we know them. The offspring of his mind are retraced in writing, recorded and somewhat mapped. It could be that the runs of the unbridled horse end up describing a space that is Montaigne’s home: the *chez moi* he



chose before starting to write his essays. This prepositional clause, *chez moi*, expresses a location by using a preposition introducing a personal pronoun. It is a very interesting way of indicating a spatial qualification through a personal reference. It has been noted that it “designates an interiority as vast as the entire surrounding region of Gascony or as restricted as the innermost core of Montaigne’s private being”(Van den Abbeele, 1992, p.18). When Montaigne decides to retire *chez soi*, he hints at a whole territory worth exploring, in which he can unbridle his mind, let it run free and then contemplate its wonders. This territory may well be the territory comprised in the space between *moi* and *chez moi*, between the self as unquestioned given (*moi*) and self as that to which one returns and finds a place (*chez moi*). Under this light, the line in “Of Glory” casts well the territory of Montaigne: “As for me, I hold that I exist only in myself (II:16, p.474)”. [*moi, je tiens que je ne suis que chez moi*]. Interiority, the space between “I, myself” and “at my place, at home” is explored and mapped through a reflective consideration of the free movements of the mind in it.

Freedom of movement is surely the condition for knowledge of the self and consequently for fashioning of the self. Montaigne writes: “If it were up to me to train myself in my own fashion, there is no way so good that should want to be fixed in it and unable to break loose” (III:3, p 621). The movement he wants to preserve by making sure he can break loose out of fixed fashions, for how good they may be, is the movement of the unbridled mind. The very conditions of life as constant unequal movement (III:3, p. 621) demand that room for the movement of the mind be safeguarded. Dynamism of the mind responds to dynamism of life. Any intention towards the fashioning of the self must consider the constitutive, vital need for freedom of movement of the mind.

Conversely, also the movement of the body becomes required to the activity of thinking. One of the dangers of spending much time on books is maintaining the body inactive while the mind is exercised in books (III: 3, p.630). A similar logic is at work in both Montaigne's study and work: it is the logic of movement. The space in which most of study and work take place, his library, respects such logic and also enables it. Montaigne offers a long description of his library at the end of the essay "Of three kinds of associations" (III:3) in which he examines his relationship with friends, with women, and with books. Books, he writes, bring assistance to his life and are "the best provision" he has "found for this human journey" (III:3, p. 628). He then says that when he is *chez soi* he turns more often to his library from which he can see his whole household. It can be suggested that the expression *chez moi* is pregnant as it once again signifies both the physical space of the property, and the psychological space of interiority, as I discussed above. So, he turns aside to his library, from where he gains a view of his ménage. The position of the library room lets him obtain a viewpoint from which he can overlook his property: once again spatially reenacting the movement of metacognitive observation (to step out of oneself in order to look onto oneself) implied in reflection.

While in the library, the place where *soi* becomes *chez soi*, the thinker describes his activity: "There I leaf through now one book, now another, without order and without plan, by disconnected fragments. One moment I muse, another moment I set down or dictate, walking back and forth, these fancies of mine that you see here" (III:3, p.629). The activity in the library is unplanned and disorderly, characterized by musings and incessant walking, and creative: very much like the unbridled horse of the mind as described in "On Idleness." Movement is the condition for the life of the mind. He continues: "My thoughts fall asleep if I make them sit down. My mind will not budge unless my legs move it" (III:3, p.629).

A mobile mind may be able to seize and judge the polymorphic experience of life in its ever changing conditions. For Montaigne, a mobile mind is exercised when the whole person is set in motion, and she starts journeying through life. In the next section, I consider Montaigne's view and narrative on travels.

### 3.2. Montaigne 's philosophy of travel

The essay "On Vanity" (III: 9) is written completely after Montaigne's travel to Italy. This essay offers extended observations on the function and need for travel in the author's life. In the chronology of Montaigne's life and work, the travel to Italy takes place between the publication of the first and second volume of the essays in 1580 (normally referred to as the *a* stratum) and the final publication of 1588 including revisions of the first two volumes and a third volume (*b* and *c* strata). While I cannot enter the discussion between scholars about the supposed discontinuity and difference between the early essays and the late ones<sup>10</sup>, I find useful to consider in his writing the continuity of problems, themes, and questions that are developed in constant correlation to his life experience. It is suggested that "what Montaigne brings back from his travels may be what led him away in the first place" (Van den Abbeele, p 5) and I cannot but agree with this idea that both his voyaging and writing be sustained and inspired by similar cares. In this spirit, I will not consider the question of the difference between the volumes and will operate under the assumption that the travel to Italy is a central event in the author's life not because it sections it into two part; but because it serves as the core at the heart of the author's deepest concerns.

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<sup>10</sup> On this see for example, Frame's *Montaigne's Discovery of Man* (1955). This work espouses an evolutionary approach to the Essays, for which the essays grow from an earlier or impersonal quality demonstrated in the first two volumes to a more personal and humanistic attitude in the later one. The travel to Italy would mark the passage between the two dispositions.

In my previous section I have suggested that the home, what Montaigne indicates as *chez moi*, demarcates a space of interiority to be explored by the reflective movement of the mind. Unsurprisingly, Montaigne prefaces his considerations about traveling with a long reflection on his household, and the governing of it. Travel as the movement of leaving home, obviously presupposes one, and it implies that there, home, is where return will be made. He confesses that the desire to travel is elicited in him by two factors: the “greedy appetite for new and unknown things” (III:9, p.723), and the joy in “turning aside from governing [his] house” ( III:9, p.723). The two factors are correlated, as the desire for newness is nourished also by the author’s inability to be pleased with his own (a pleasure he considers “monotonous and languid”, *ibidem*). He takes it to be a quality humans share, to “be better pleased with other people’s things than with our own, and to love movement and change.” He adds, “I have my share of that.” He recognizes that many do not find pleasure in novelty and indeed cherish what they already have. They “take delight in themselves” and they are “in truth happier” than him, even if they are not wiser. Wisdom resides in recognizing with Horace that “each hour proceeds on a fresh horse”: apprehension of life’s flux seems to sustain both wisdom and the desire to travel. It is tempting here to connect the fast horses on which hours ride [*quod permutatis hora recurrit equis*], in the quote from Horace, to Montaigne’s image of the mind as an unbridled horse. In fact, it is the movement of the mind attuned to the flowing of things that nourishes curiosity and desire for the unknown.

If wisdom consists in the movement of the mind in accordance with the continuous flow of everything else, and if the philosopher’s inclination is to listen to the “greedy appetite for new and unknown things that help to foster the desire to travel”, then, it is possible to inscribe the practice of traveling to the modes in which the philosophical life is cultivated. One thing that

becomes clear in the way Montaigne approaches the theme of travel in “Of Vanity” is namely that such a cultivation of the philosophical life takes place in relation to that of home. It could indeed be that the pursuit of wisdom appeals for both positions, home and leaving home, to be taken care of. I hope this to become clear in the following parts of the chapter.

Turning aside from governing his house contributes to Montaigne’s desire to travel (III:9, p.723). He acknowledges the pleasure deriving from “being in command, were it only of a barn”, and in “being obeyed”; yet, this pleasure, he writes, is “too monotonous and languid”, and “mingled with bothersome thoughts”. A description of the kind of worries that are implied in the managing of the household follows: tenants, neighbors, weather, crops, and marriage. He continues by telling that he undertook the management of the household late in life, after having developed a different disposition towards his life. He does not aim at acquiring riches; he does not want to acquire anything it seems, rather, he declares to aspire only at “acquiring the reputation of having acquired nothing”, just as he has “squandered nothing” (III:9, p.723). And if this aspiration seems to contradict the thinker’s constant appreciation for change and instability, instead it can perhaps add something to that appreciation. In a world that is constantly moving and changing, one needs to hold on to and maintain something as immutable. What one aims at conserving is what one has inherited: the household, the family wealth, the family name. Those count as “home” for Montaigne. Home is at the same time a source of boredom and of petty concerns, and what he measures his life upon. In this sense, he does not want to add, neither to detract to what he has received. He seems to recognize a duty in continuing his father’s legacy: “My father loved to build up Montaigne, where he was born; and in all this administration of domestic affairs, I love to follow his example and rules, and shall bind my successors to them as much as I can” (III:9, p.726).

Home is the measure of life in two ways. Firstly, it seems to show the extent to which one should manage his gains and losses. Montaigne has a meter on which to evaluate possessions and also to survey his desires. Such a meter is provided by his father's inheritance. Then, home also functions as to provide a weight to his own existence. His desires, he declared, push him away from home (the "greedy appetite for new and unknown things that help to foster the desire to travel"). Yet home is what his father loved to build up and by doing so he set an example not only in regard to the administration of domestic affairs, but moreover so in regard to a general approach to life. He writes: "I wish that (...) my father had handed down to me that passionate love that he had in his old age for his household. He was very happy in being able to keep his desires down to his means, and to be pleased with what he had" (III:9, p.727). A measured life in which desires are tamed in a pleasurable way is what Montaigne wishes to be able to realize.

He is unable to achieve it the same way his father did, though. He wishes he had inherited that love, so that to be able to be fully committed to what he sees as a way to "restore" a "semblance of life" to "so good a father"; but he has not. None of the pleasures of housekeeping "can amuse (him) very much"(III:9, p.726).

Why is it? It is not because "his heart is set on some higher knowledge". He rejects such a charge vehemently. He writes: "I would rather be a good horseman than a good logician" and supports this claim with a quotation from Vergil about the utility of something that "meets a need". Of course here it should be asked what are Montaigne's needs. It appears that being a good horseman better responds to what he is short of. It would seem as if Montaigne's life needed horsemanship more than logic. In the following line he writes: "We entangle our thoughts in generalities, and the causes and conduct of the universe, which conduct themselves

very well without us, and we leave behind our own affairs and Michel, who concerns us even more closely than man in general” (III:9, p.726).

These lines are framed between the beginning of the next paragraph in which he declares “Now I do indeed stay home most of the time” and the preceding claim that he “would rather be a good horseman than a logician”. This may cease to be a puzzling statement if, once more, the momentous metaphor of the mind as a horse is retrieved. Montaigne the thinker prefers to be able to keep his mind on a tight rein, or eventually to chose to set it free and unbridled. The capacity to master his mind and to follow its movement is vital to him to a greater extent than any formal reasoning skill. Echoing Seneca, he seems here not to see the necessity to master the general laws of the universe, when the universe conducts itself well without our help. There are more pressing matters at hand. When thinking about the home, what is at stake is not a generality, but Montaigne himself.

Michel<sup>11</sup> stands or falls with his horsemanship: hence it is as such, on the back of his horse, that my work will follow him in order to understand what traveling in relation to leaving home means to him. As a result, my next section explores the journal of his travel to Italy.

### 3.3. The *Journal de Voyage*

The *Journal de voyage de Michel de Montaigne en Italie par la Suisse et l'Allemagne en 1580 et 1581* is a unique text. Unintended for publication, it was retrieved in the 1700s and

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<sup>11</sup> I am not aware of many other instances in the Essays in which the author refers to himself only by his given name. It normally calls himself as Michel, Seigneur de Montaigne.

attributed with certainty to Montaigne.<sup>12</sup> It records Montaigne's travel in France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy, partly in search of a cure for his kidney stone disease. He travels from June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1580 to November 30<sup>th</sup> 1581. The travel itinerary is all but linear: unlike the typical Grand Tour, undertaken as an educative rite of passage characterized by an exposure to classical antiquities and Renaissance art in set stages, Montaigne's travel follows a complex, indirect route with frequent detours.<sup>13</sup> Montaigne travels with a party composed of his younger brother, a secretary (by whom the first part of the journal is written) and other companions. They travel by horseback, taking their time with numerous stops. The purposes of this travel are many and interlayered, ranging from a response to a sense of curiosity to the relief for leaving "home" behind with all that it entails, to the hope to heal or to alleviate his kidney stone disease with visits to mineral water spring localities.

The composition of the journal reveals it as something more interesting than a mere chronicle of the journey. The text is built through a meshing of voices, languages and styles. The fabric of the narration is lacerated in many parts. The first pages of the journal are missing, likely due to the circumstances of the manuscript preservation and retrieval. The writing of the journal does not begin with the beginning of the journey; therefore, the narration does not have a proper beginning. The journal starts when the journey has already been undertaken, en route, so to say: at Beaumont-Sur-Oise and not at Montaigne, where the travel had began.<sup>14</sup> The accidental mutilation of the manuscript points inevitably to the consideration that the telling of a travel does have a belated quality. The narrative can only begin *in medias res*, after the journey, or the movement leading to it, has begun. And in doing so, it causes interruption and it announces that

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<sup>12</sup> On this, see Garavini (1983) pp 101-118 and Frame (1983) pp xiv-xxxiii.

<sup>13</sup> Schneikert (2006) provides a chronologie of the travel and a map on pp. 61-63 from which the non linear quality of the route emerges. Bideaux (1988) qualifies it as a "zigzag itinerary" (p.456).

<sup>14</sup> For more about this see Frame (1955) pp 110-120



the telling of the experience does not cover all of the experience itself. The hiatus between the thing experienced and the words to tell it is never fully composed, as can be seen by the constant moving of the point of view of the observer and by the experimenting with the languages.

The text of the journal is initially written by an anonymous scribe, who refers to Montaigne as his master and in the third person. This first section takes the form of a biographical sketch. The telling here is a retelling of an experience whose primary subject is not the author of the text (yet he is the master for whom the story is written). The hand that is writing this section oscillates between dependence from the master and attempts at autonomy. An example shall be found in the part of the journal describing the Roman Carnival. Here, the scribe observes and describes the details of the celebrations that were held supposedly with the Pope's permission, "more licentious" than the past years. He notes: "we found, however, that it was not much of a thing" (p.82). Here the subject, *nous*, suggests that this opinion is shared by the writer and his company, most likely the Monsieur de Montaigne. A few lines later, the journal offers some comments on the beauty of Roman women: the idea that they are commonly more attractive than the French ones, even though there is no more "perfect and rare beauty" in Italy than in France is an opinion that the scribe firmly attributes to Montaigne. The remark: "he said" [disait-il] serves this purpose and it highlights the coexistence in the travel account of the two perspectives: *nous* and *il*, portrait and self-portrait labor side by side to coexist in this part of the text.

A second breakage (after the initial loss) in the text occurs when the *secrétaire* is let go and Montaigne takes on the journaling by himself. This happens during Montaigne's first stay in Rome in February 1581, and no explanations are offered for it. Montaigne seems to ascribe this decision to a moral duty of continuing the narration by himself. He writes: "Having dismissed

the one of my men who was doing this fine job, and seeing it so far advanced, whatever trouble it may be to me, I must continue it myself” (p.83) [*il faut que je la continue moi-meme*]. What is this duty of writing? I wonder if perhaps Montaigne is disliking the fact of being the subject of a book whose author is someone else. Perhaps the split instituted between the protagonist of the journal and its author needs to be bypassed. Perhaps this too- the distance between living one’s life and telling one’s life- is a wound that could be healed by traveling, similarly to the intention of healing the kidney disease by drinking the many thermal waters of Switzerland and Italy. Nonetheless, this question shall be answered only by way of conjecturing, and what is left, the “given” is a text whose authorship passes from hand to hand in the course of the narration. This fact opens a place of reflectivity: in the distance and the proximity between “il” (Montaigne, character in the third person as narrated by the scribe) and “je” (Montaigne, author and character in the first person as narrated by himself) there is room for the continuous movement of the mind with itself.

A third rupture takes place when Montaigne, now firmly in command of the journeying and of the journaling, decides to leave the French language and starts writing in Italian. The second rupture described above could be understood in terms of mastery: of wanting to re-appropriate authorship over one’s own biography, over the writing of one’s life. This one, instead, seems to make sense under the sign of a loss of mastery. Montaigne leaves a language he masters perfectly to venture in the writing in a language that is not his. He wants to write in the same language spoken in the area he is touring and in order to do so he gives up his native tongue. Such a loss for such a precise writer!

Yet that this is a decisive step toward a diminished authorship should be problematized. It was suggested (Van den Abbeele, 1992, p 10) that the reason for this change be mimetic. By

trying to use a foreign language Montaigne wants to “master” his situation as an outsider and a traveler. He wants to be more attuned to what is around him. Traveling for him runs parallel to writing. He comments in the *Essais* that he will go along the road he has chosen “as long as there is ink and paper in the world”(III:9, p.945). As a result of this, it is reasonable that he prefers to use a language in which he is less proficient but that can tell his experience in a better way. Schneikert (2006) notes that leaving French for Italian allows Montaigne to “be an other” because taking on the language of the hosting country reveals an opening to what is foreign and other (p.205).

Secondly, it has been argued that Montaigne’s written Italian is very well mastered. Garavini(1983) shows that his Italian is modeled on the language of Boccaccio and Petrarca and she dismisses the critics claiming it to be poor (pp. 119-131). Montaigne’s Italian mixes the humanist literary speech with the terms from the local dialects, learned through exchanges with men of the working class. It embodies thus his peculiar eclecticism that, once more, lets him overcome set boundaries to receive organically, by traveling, the whole experience (in this case, the experience of a whole culture and not only parts of it).

The discussion of the hypothesis that Montaigne performs choices leading to a loss or a gain of mastery reveals that it is difficult to read this as a linear trajectory. Mastery or ownership over one’s life and over the story of one’s life is not achieved through a cumulative process. It is not saved, grown, or piled up and then steadily possessed. Rather, it is experienced in the keeping up and attunement of the individual to the ever-shifting conditions of life, of which travel exposes the irreducible traits. Then, the choices of Montaigne the traveler should be understood as responses to the dynamic conditions of his life. Shifting the locus of control does not entail a loss of mastery. Instead, it fosters an enriching decenterment that increases the possibilities of being

in touch with the experience of life because life itself is always moving. The promise in all this for the teacher lies in the recognition of life's constant dynamism, to which she can respond by keeping to switch her position.

By changing language Montaigne shows that he learns by traveling. He learns that in order to grasp one's experience and to tell it, a constant movement is necessary: and this movement is experienced radically in the abandonment of the mother tongue as well as of home. He writes: "Let us try to speak this other language a little, especially since I am in this region where I seem to hear the most perfect Tuscan speech..." (p.126) [*Essayons de parler un peu cette autre langue, me trouvant sur-tout dans cette contrée où il me paroît qu'on parle le langage le plus pur de la Toscane*] (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup> The term "essayer" refers here not only to the attempt at speaking another language. It also and chiefly points at the fact that this choice, the choice of writing in another language, is to be understood as a practice of the *essaying* itself- of Montaigne's way of relating to his own existence and to the world.

It is by leaving home, and by experiencing the challenges and alienation of a different language, together with the joys of discovery and communication, that Montaigne feels at his proper place. When he travels, he is "chez soi". For instance, during his second stay at La Villa (August 14-september 12 1581) he writes: "I received a warm welcome and greetings from all those people. In truth it seemed I had come back to my own home" (p.152) [*da vero si pareva ch'io fussi ritornato in casa mia*].

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<sup>15</sup> This is the French translation by Meusnier de Querlon dating from the first publication of the *Journal de Voyage* in 1774. The Italian says: "Assaggiamo di parlare un poco questa altra lingua massime essendo in queste contrade dove mi pare sentire il piu' perfetto favellare della Toscana particolarmente tra li paesani che non l'hanno mescolato e alterato con li vicini." ( p.419, *Journal de Voyage*. Nouvelle Edition avec des notes par le professeur Alessandro d'Ancona, Città di Castello : S. Lapi, 1889.

This note in the first person, written in Italian, is confirmed by a very similar remark offered in the second part of the journal written in French by Montaigne. He is describing Rome, the city where he has taken up the task of writing the journal by himself. He writes that there everyone is at home (p.97). This feeling at home is not only Montaigne's: everyone, he writes, can feel at home there. "I used to say about the advantages of Rome, among other things, that it is the most universal city in the world, a place where strangeness and difference of nationality are considered least; for by its nature it is a city pieced together out of foreigners; everyone is as if at home" (p.97).

It is possible that he feels "chez soi" because he sees that everyone [chacun] there feels "chez soi". He compares Rome to Venice, a city as well filled with foreigners. The comparison serves to reinforce the proposition that Roma is a "most universal city". In Venice, foreigners do not feel at home. There, they are "nevertheless as if at someone else's house" [comme chez autrui](p.98).

A compelling case shall be made at this point for the correspondence between what I have counted as ruptures in the text and the mentions of "being at home". The first mention (p.97) takes place in the same section dedicated to the sojourn in Rome, at whose beginning it is made known that the unnamed scribe had been dismissed and Montaigne was taking on the task of writing the journal. This event was discussed above in the sense of a choice revealing a shifting of the locus of control in the narrative. The second mention of "feeling at home" comes about during Montaigne's second stay at La Villa (p.152). It was upon his first arrival at La Villa (p.126) that Montaigne decided to "essay" turning to the Italian language. La Villa, that place that sees him lose his most familiar way of expression, what I had read above as the radical "leaving home", is the place in which he feels at home. Then, vagabonding between languages or

between homes intensifies and reveals the frame of Montaigne's life: that very *essaying* that compounds for him thinking, writing, and living.

#### 4. Travel as education and education as travel

The writing of the travel journal exposes Montaigne's varying positions as author, subject, master, and as a growing individual. It reflects namely the dynamic reflective movement of his gaze. In it, biography and autobiography, *ils* and *je*, *nous* and *il*, native tongue and learned language all concur to outline the problematic, reflective nature of Montaigne's response to the invitation "know yourself". "On Vanity", the chapter in which Montaigne's reflection on his travels are predominant, ends with a renewed proposition of the Delphic command. Montaigne travels and writes about traveling as an enactment of his search for knowledge: knowledge of the world and of his self.

The reasons for which Montaigne and his party ventured through Switzerland, Germany and Italy are many, as I have touched on above. Yet they all seem to somehow culminate in the sojourn in Roma. Despite the declared intention not to visit any place twice during his travel (*Journal*, p.51), Montaigne visits Rome three times: for five months from November 1580 to April 1581, then again in the month of September 1581 and lastly for two more weeks in October 1581 winding up his affairs before returning home to Montaigne. But then, indeed, Rome is home to Montaigne in a truer sense than his hometown.

He writes: "The care of the dead is recommended to us. Now, I have been brought up since childhood [j'ai été nourri des mon enfance avec ceux-ci] with these dead. I was familiar with the affairs of Rome long before I was with those of my own house. I knew the Capitol and its location before I knew the Louvre, and the Tiber before the Seine" (III:9, p. 762). He

nourished himself with the dead of Rome. Caring for them is recommended as it would be caring for oneself, because through upbringing, that is through education, they have become part of Michel de Montaigne. In the following lines, the mention of his father emphasizes and confirms that Rome stands for Montaigne's home in a direct way. He continues, after naming Lucullus, Metellus and Scipio: "They are dead. So indeed is my father, as completely as they; and he has moved as far from me and from my life in eighteen years as they have in sixteen hundred"(III:9, p.762). While associating his father to those remarkable Roman figures works as to strengthen and highlight the connection Montaigne feels with them, the claim that they are all removed from him by the same temporal distance remains indeed bewildering.

The past is far and irreparably disjointed from us. Once they leave the community of living beings, those who are not anymore with us are lost and this is an irretrievable loss. They melt into a past that does not touch us, in that we-the-living are only in the present. Montaigne wrote elsewhere: "When I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep" (III: 13). He is a man of the present, with an acute awareness of it and of its occurrence.

However, his take on the present is reinforced by his relation to the past. He continues: "Nevertheless I do not cease to embrace and cherish his memory, his friendship, and his society, in a union that is perfect and very much alive"(III:9, p.762). Acknowledgement of the distance does not inhibit the maintenance of a vital relation. It is really because the distance has been recognized that a relation of life is made possible. If that is the case, then Montaigne is well attuned with his times.

As we saw in the introductory section of the chapter, the development of historical consciousness, due to the studies of the Humanists, allowed for Early Modernity's understanding of itself as a new time. Because they could look at the past, mainly at their Roman and Greek

past, as a time gone, different and separated from them, individuals were able to think that their present was theirs and stood in their hands, rich of possibilities and ripe with new knowledge. This perspective on the past reinvigorated the love for it and its teachings. Only because the difference from it and the rupture with it were accepted, it was possible for people of the present to look back and love what was past.

In the distance, relating to what is part of oneself but is lost becomes a matter of vital importance. Education of oneself then must embrace the “memory, friendship and society” with what is gone because that is what makes present possible. The present, Montaigne’s present as he approaches Rome in his travel, is motivated and ultimately also made possible by what has passed and is part of his inheritance: his father, his cultural tradition, his home. Traveling is made possible by home, and one shall learn in travel if home is embraced and its memory, friendship and society are cultivated.

Moving closer to Rome signifies for Montaigne arriving home. Recognizing Rome as his hometown and being recognized as a citizen makes of him a *cosmopolites*: he is a citizen of the universal city, thus, he is a citizen of the world. I report again his words here: “I used to say about the advantages of Rome, among other things, that it is the most universal city in the world, a place where strangeness and difference of nationality are considered least; for by its nature it is a city pieced together out of foreigners; everyone is as if at home” (p.97).

The universality of Rome does not depend on its uniformity. Rome is a city where difference and strangeness find place. Foreigners are domiciled there and Rome elects its Pope regardless of his origin (possibly here Montaigne describes an ideal more than the actual reality of the Papal court in the Renaissance). Rome is a patchwork, a quilt of foreigners. Such is Montaigne, as such is every human being. He had written earlier that “We are all patchwork, and



so shapeless and diverse in composition that each bit, every moment, plays its own game” (“On the Inconsistency of Our Actions, II:1, p. 244). Montaigne “therefore” searches to “obtain the title of Roman citizen” (Journal, p.98). He elects citizenship in the city that resembles him and his nature the most. He obtains it after overcoming some difficulties. He receives the letter-patent on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1581, and the fact gives him “much pleasure”.

The same feeling of pleasure is confessed at the end of “On Vanity”. Here he reports that the “authentic bull of Roman citizenship,” “pompous in seals in gilt letters,” feeds his “silly humor.” He transcribes it in due form, justifying the transcription with his intention to satisfy the curiosity of “some person”. The whole bull is copied in the original Latin with what is perhaps the longest quotation in the essays. A notable fact is that Michel de Montaigne in the bull is mentioned without his family name, Eyquem. Michel abandons his father’s name to bear the name of his land. This fact could be seen as a denial of the father’s paternity “to set himself up as self-engendered” (Van Den Abbeele, p. 35). Or, I suggest it could be understood as a way for Montaigne to come to terms with his inheritance. More than giving it up by denying his patronymic, Montaigne seems to intend to widen it by taking on a more comprehensive name. He also may be imagined to say “this is where I am from and this is what constitutes me”: again, the home being pressingly there whenever questions of “identity” are posed for Montaigne.

After the citation of the whole document, Montaigne comments that “being a citizen of no city” he is “very pleased to be one of the noblest city that ever was or ever will be”(III:9, p.766). Certainly this one can be added to the number of disconcerting claims with which Montaigne punctuates his writing. How can the diplomat, soldier, mayor of Bordeaux, close adviser to the king Henry of Navarre and peace negotiator, the knight Michel de Montaigne, claim to “be a citizen of no city”? This identification as “citizen of no city” might be understood

as a strong gesture of self identification as a philosopher and a teacher, if we consider that the “citizen of no city” echoes the figure of Socrates. In “The education of children” Montaigne writes: “Socrates was asked where he was from. He replied not “ Athens”, but “the world.” He, whose imagination was fuller and more extensive, embraced the universe as his city, and distributed his knowledge, his company, and his affection to all mankind unlike us who look at what is underfoot”(I, 26, p. 116).

Montaigne, very much like Socrates, finds it useful to deny his citizenship in order to claim a wider and fuller one. Similarly to the movement by which he dropped his family’s name to adopt his land’s one, now Montaigne lets go of his citizenship to adopt a new one. Likewise, also in this occurrence the movement is towards a more embracing outlook. Socrates, very much like Montaigne, knew to embrace “the whole world as his city”. They both can do this because they are philosophers and teachers. They have learned to “look” further than their own feet. Truly, it is appropriate to the purpose of my inquiry to emphasize that the capacity to look stays at the core of Socrates and Montaigne’s world-citizenship. The passage continues with this consideration: “If others examined themselves attentively, as I do, they would find themselves, as I do, full of inanity and nonsense” [Si les autres se *regardaient* attentivement, comme je fais, ils se trouveraient, comme je fais, pleins d’inanité et de fadaise]. (III:9, p.766 emphasis added). The verb used, *regarder*, translated by Frame as “to examine”, means more specifically to look at, to watch. The verb recurs in the passage many more times: “This common attitude and habit of *looking* [*regarder ailleurs*] elsewhere than at ourselves has been very useful for our business.” The reason for this, he writes, is that we are a miserable object to our gaze, hence “nature has very appropriately thrown the action of our vision outward”. It is painful and discomforting to look at oneself. Consequently, “look [*regardez*], says everyone, at the movement of heavens,

look at the public, (...); in short, always look [*regardez*] high or low, or to one side or in front, or behind you”.

These lines follow the Roman citizenship Bull and signal a hasty shift in the emotional tone of the closing part of the chapter “On Vanity”. The connection to Socrates, that I proposed helps explain Montaigne’s declaration of not having a citizenship, is at work in the passage from the Roman Citizenship bull to this anxious and passionate appeal for a discipline of the gaze. This brings to the last paragraph in which a dramatic paraphrase of the Delphic precept “know thyself” is presented.

This invitation is, as Montaigne declaims, paradoxical. The beautiful image of the sea that “grows troubled and turbulent when it is tossed back on itself” well unearths the pathos with which Montaigne realizes that the imperative of Socratic knowledge is extremely hard to fulfill. Here, moreover, an articulation of what the recommended *regarder* looks like can be found.

He writes: “Look into yourself, know yourself, keep to yourself; bring back your mind and your will, which are spending themselves elsewhere, into themselves; you are running out, you are scattering yourself; concentrate yourself, resist yourself: you are being betrayed, dispersed, and stolen away from yourself.” The mind moves, and in order to watch itself, its movement needs to be seconded. Freedom of movement shall be preserved: in this education consists. Penalty for not preserving such freedom would be the death coming from the rigidity of stillness. We run out, we concentrate ourselves; we are dispersed, we gather ourselves; we are stolen away from ourselves, we keep to ourselves. And so on. Stillness is not achieved nor desirable, as what we aim at is an education to life in its ever changing dynamism.

## Chapter 5 Thinking Travel and Education with Montaigne

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter consists in providing a working argument about the teacher as traveler through an examination of the philosophical experience of teaching and traveling. I take as a point of departure Montaigne's lines: "If it were up to me to train myself in my own fashion, there is no way so good that should want to be fixed in it and unable to break loose" (III: 3, p. 621). I propose to read these lines in relation with the inherently dynamic quality of the mind and of life. The dynamism of the mind is nourished by the play of a reflective gaze roaming between the different positions of the subject. Such dynamism shall be respected and maintained as it allows the space for fashioning of the self. This dynamism implies a paradoxical, and also dramatic in its challenges, knowledge of the self. In the previous chapter, freedom of movement was recognized as the condition for knowledge of the self and consequently for shaping and forming of one's self, that is of education.

A project of education of the self must preserve the person's freedom of movement within it and also away from it. She who wants to educate herself will not desire to be fixed in any one idea, no matter how perfect the idea is. Freedom of movement of the mind is condition for knowledge of the self and at the same time it is a condition for the fashioning of the self, that is the project of education.

In my previous chapter, I have ascribed the practice of traveling to the modes in which the philosophical life is cultivated, on the basis of the acknowledgment that travel encodes the movement of the mind in accordance with the continuous flow of everything else. Travel has been understood as a movement which takes place in relation to what is left behind and at times

found upon return: what has been named the home. “Home” indicates the weight or measure of one’s life in terms of what has been passed over and received: family, residency, possessions, and especially language. The pursuit of wisdom, that is the philosophical life, appeals for both positions, home and leaving home, to be taken care of.

This connection is shown with clarity in Montaigne’s relation with the city of Rome and with his idea that Roman citizenship be, indeed, a global citizenship. Rome is and is not the place where he belongs. Originally, by birth, he is not Roman. But he feels at home there, for two reasons: in force of the relation he developed with the Latin language and culture; and because he has traveled to reach it. His way to Rome has called for several ruptures and experiences of decenterment. It entailed that it- the “way” and the experience of it- be written. The travelogue shows that Montaigne learns by traveling.

He learns that in order to grasp one’s experience and to tell it, a constant movement is necessary. This movement is experienced radically through travel. He writes: “Let us try to speak this other language a little, especially since I am in this region where I seem to hear the most perfect Tuscan speech...” (*Travel Journal*, p.126). He uses the term *essayer* (“let us try”) and in doing so he does not only mean the attempt at speaking another language. It suggests that the whole matter, the travel and its journaling, shall be considered as a practice of the *essaying*: that is of Montaigne’s way of making sense of his own existence through the roads of the world.

Once in Rome, Montaigne denies his citizenship and takes on a new one, more embracing and somehow universal. We learn in “On the Education of Children” that Socrates, just like Montaigne, knew to embrace “the whole world as his city”. They both can do this because they are philosophers and teachers. They have learned to “look” further than their own feet. Travel has let Montaigne exercise his sight so that he can look at things in a different way. What

Montaigne recommends as an educational principle- that the student be let roam free and rub against “other peoples’ brains” (I: 26, p.112) is what Montaigne first handedly feels and thinks through his travels.

This chapter looks into the ways for which travel can be seen as responding to a Montaignean sketch of education. The teacher as a Socratic figure is reflected in the living metaphor of the traveler. Travel fosters a way of thinking that is so inherently educational as to allow for teachers to be imagined as travelers. In order to see this, I consider specifically the kind of thinking that is enabled in traveling. I reflect on Montaigne’s thinking on the discovery of the New World. The radical novelty of the experience of the New World lets a central dimension of travel emerge: travel builds the space of movement for thinking of what is other. Once this relation is made clear, I move to explore the educational views expressed in selected essays. Finally, I return to the opposition I ascribed to the beginning of Modernity: that between book and road, or theory and experience, tradition and experimentation, to suggest that, with Montaigne, a new figure of the teacher shall be imagined. Emerging from this inquiry, one finds the teacher as a Socratic figure of philosopher and traveler, and with it a productive way of considering the opposition aforementioned: book and road shall be composed in the practice of philosophical education.

## 2. Thinking travel

This section considers what kind of thinking is enabled in traveling. I propose that, in travel, a logic of representation of alterity is at work. I intend to look at the enactment of such

logic in Montaigne's reflections on the newly discovered continents of the Americas<sup>16</sup>. For the European consciousness, the dawning of Modernity sees a pivotal encounter with alterity when the Americas are discovered. The Americas, and the American natives, represent a challenge, an opportunity and a problem from the perspective of the old European representation of the world. The new world is the "other" and it is encountered as such. With "alterity" I mean the quality of being "other", as a defining trait recognized in the experience of that which is different than "I."

The surprising experience of the New World allows for an essential dimension of travel to appear. In travel, one finds a possibility of movement that opens the ground for thinking of what is other. When they caught sight of the new land, with its bewildering vegetation, unknown fruits and beautiful peoples, the European explorers were presented with the prime instance of difference. What they saw was so utterly foreign to make them doubt it could even fall within the realm of human things. How Europe dealt with the newness of the discovered lands is telling: what, in the words by Todorov (1982), was "the most astonishing encounter of our history", an encounter that "will never again achieve such an intensity", produced "the greatest genocide in human history" (pp. 5-6). We look back in horror to the conquest, exploitation and destruction of a continent. Horror contains a sense of disconcert as well: by what reasons was such a disaster rendered possible?

The question is not only, and perhaps not primarily of interest to the historian; it is a question for everyone concerned with the results of the full-blown encounter with alterity. For we can accept that what happened then shows as magnified what is at stake with every such encounter. There exists, in any instance of contact with the other, a chance that it turns into a clash. Such encounters take place, so to say, on a rim standing between two abysses: that of the

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<sup>16</sup> Abecassis (1992) writes that "no phenomenon can equal in the XVI century that radical figure of alterity constituted by the American native" (p.195, my translation)

annihilation of the other; or that of indifference or assimilation. The traveler stands on a fine edge and needs to keep finding a balance. A double movement is present and it is hard to resist its contrasting thrusts. Todorov notes that “the postulate of difference is a difficult one. (...) [it] readily involves the feeling of superiority”(p. 63). Between postulating difference and postulating equality, the traveler finds again and again the challenge of recognizing the other as different and the same. The challenge was not met by the conquistadores, and the conquest of America remains “marked by ambiguity: human alterity is at once revealed and subjected” (p.50).

Montaigne reacts with the same horror and dismay to the annihilation of the New World. “Of Coaches” reflects these very feelings. Written eight years later than “On Cannibals”, this essay provides an account of Montaigne’s response to the destruction of the new lands. “Of Coaches” is seminal in that it presents the unavoidable connection between thinking and travelling: both human activities put the subject in relation with what is other; and by instituting a relation to it, they present the danger of its annihilation (the other is eaten up via destruction and assimilation) or of the annihilation of the relation (the other is not considered via indifference). In other words, the traveller is constantly on the border between the two dangers. She walks on the line between being a conqueror and being a tourist. If she is able to think in accordance with life’s dynamism, if she is not knocked of balance by the ever changing presence of alterity, and can relate to it, then like a tightrope walker she has found her ways to travel. “Of coaches” prepares this set of considerations and in doing so it also suggests, although in an indirect way, not only that the good traveler is a philosopher, but also how a traveller shall philosophize in order to learn.



Montaigne opens his essay noting that “It is very easy to demonstrate that great authors, when they write about causes, adduce not only those they think are true but also those they do not believe in, provided they have some originality and beauty. They speak truly and usefully enough if they speak ingeniously ”(III:6, p.685). Evidently, he wants to frame his essay within a longstanding conversation about the question of how to “write about causes”, hereby operating upon a straight reference to the Aristotelian understanding of *philosophia* as the science of causes. Causal investigation is one of the ways in which philosophy engages with the world. Philosophy asks the question “ why?” and searches for reasons to explain the natural world or human action (see Aristotle, *Physics* II 3 and *Metaphysics* V 5). Moreover, in the same line Montaigne tells that, for him, the activity of causal investigations cannot be disjointed from the telling of the investigation. He puts forth that when authors write about causes, they follow not only criteria of truthfulness, but also criteria of originality and beauty. It can be easily objected that it is not easy to see how the two sets of criteria can coexist: one either searches for the “ true” cause of something; or he accepts the ones that are finely said because they are original and beautiful. Probably the reader at this point has in mind the great alternative staged in some of Plato’s dialogues between Socrates: the philosopher teacher who searched the essence of things, and a Sophist (be he Protagoras, or Gorgias): the teacher of rhetoric who was interested in presenting a convincing speech rather than a truthful one.

Montaigne seems to believe that the opposition between truthfulness and usefulness, figuratively between Plato’s Socrates and Plato’s sophists, is a false one and is overcome in the practice of those who write beautifully about causes. The evidence to support his claim is found in the following example about the reason why we bless those who sneeze. He continues: “We produce three sorts of wind. That which issues from below is too foul; that which issues from the

mouth carries some reproach of gluttony; the third is sneezing. And because it comes from the head and is blameless, we give it this civil reception”(III:6, p. 685). How are we supposed to take this evidence? What is this example supporting? The argument is not particularly elegant, nor the language to express it. It does not seem to be proving that one can write beautifully about causes. Should we then take it to prove that reasoning about causes- the Aristotelian understanding of what is philosophy- should not be beautiful?

Perhaps instead, we are supposed to receive it as a judgment about the very same idea that writing about causes be the utmost way of philosophers to talk truthfully. A few lines above, Montaigne had noted that great authors “speak truly and usefully enough if they speak ingeniously”, seemingly implying that a beautiful speech would, by itself, also gather enough of those qualities of truthfulness and usefulness (that are not opposed but can be had together). It could be that the example about sneezing serves the purpose to mock the idea it seems to support. Montaigne continues: “Do not laugh at this piece of subtlety; it is, they say, from Aristotle”. A scathing line expresses at the same time the awareness that the example is laughable, the ironic command to avoid laughter, and the real target of the introduction to “Of Coaches”. This being not Aristotle himself, but the traditional *ipse dixit* and the scholasticized gravity of a certain way of intending philosophy. The ironic command: “do not laugh! It is Aristotle’s, they say” may be uttered by a Montaigne in a teacher’s position.

In the utterance of the warning: “Do not laugh!” Montaigne wears the fool mask. “On Vanity” has already shown that the fool has a serious message to communicate by exerting his philosophical irony. Montaigne wears the fool mask to invite us to see that the matter: how we think and talk about reasons, is indeed very serious. How we orient our thought to inquiring about what we experience is a crucial matter. Paraphrasing Montaigne’s words, we know which

causes have a direct impact on us not through argument, but through “necessary experience” [*moi sais bien que cette cause ne me touche pas, et le sais non par argument, mais par nécessaire expérience*] (p.363). The weight put on the experience shows the importance of the introduction to “Of Coaches”: Montaigne frames his essay on the New World with a necessary consideration about the kind of thinking that can be used to understand our experience. It is a way of reasoning that does not do without experience, but that passes through it.

This way shall be explored quite appropriately then, in a piece of writing that moves from considerations about ways of understanding the causes to considerations about ways of moving- and to finally unfold the author’s deepest concern about the destruction of the New World. The line of reasoning in the essay could be traced as moving from thoughts about ways of thinking (in which an abstract, logician’s way is opposed to an experiential, traveler’s way) to a display of what is at stake when the experience is not fully thought of: the dangers of denial and also annihilation of it. The horrified report of the blind destruction reserved to the population of the newly discovered continent is a full manifestation of the failure of experience when it is unthought of (perhaps the “unexamined life”). The dimension of travel exposes the radical presence of alterity and of novelty. A challenge is posed to thought: the challenge of thinking through the experience of alterity and newness without negating it.

The announcement of the discovery of the new world is preceded by an astounding declaration of the deep inadequacy of our ways of knowing in comparison with the richness and vastness of the world. The world- life, indeed- is infinitely creative and ultimately unknowable in its entirety. Our conception can cover life only partially in both space and time. Montaigne borrows and adapts a comment by Cicero: “If we could view that expanse of countries and ages boundless in every direction into which the mind plunging and spreading itself, travels so far and

wide that it can find no limit where it can stop there would appear in that immensity an infinite capacity to produce innumerable forms.” ( Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I, 20, in Latin in the original text, III:6, p. 692).

The boundless magnitude expands itself in regard to space (“countries”) and time (“ages”). Even if it were possible for us to position ourselves as to view the boundless expanse, we would simply realize that it gives birth to innumerable forms. This kind of fertility, Montaigne explains, characterizes nature. It marks also our ways of knowing and thinking: “We do not go in a straight line; we rather ramble, and turn this way and that. We retrace our steps”. Our knowing of the world with difficulty matches the infinite creative and moving forms of the world. Our knowledge is “a miserable foundation for our rules” and it is “apt to represent to us a very false picture of things” (p.693).

Montaigne is concerned primarily with the challenges encountered and not satisfied by our thinking in the face of alterity and newness, that is, really, of the world of life. To a world that “ glides along while we live on it” (p.692) we respond with ridiculously inadequate notions of historical progress, or, likewise, of decline. Two quotes by Lucretius are used to show both the conviction of the world’s decay and ruin, and of the world’s youth and novelty. Such inferences are vain, Montaigne says, and the poet operated them in relation to the weakness or liveliness of the minds of his time. The idea that the age of the world is to be inferred by comparison to the health and livelihood of the minds of the time does not stand the test of reality. Opposing conclusions can be drawn about the same time: like those of the world’s progress and of the world’s decay, when thought of by a knowledge that is shortsighted and weak. Our knowledge is inadequate because it “embraces little and has a short life both in extent of time and of matter”(p.692).

The weakness of our knowledge poses problems not only because we have representations of the world untrue and misleading, but moreover so because on such representations (such as that of historical progress) we found the rules and norms of our behavior. The issue at stake here is chiefly epistemological, but from it an ethical issue is streaming immediately. In the essay's crescendo, the considerations on the falsity of ideas of progress culminate in the image of the king, Montezuma, pulled to the ground from his chair of gold amidst the corpses of his army (p.699). The heroic figure of the defeated king stands high in comparison to the felony of the greedy and cruel Spaniards. Montezuma joins the rank of great souls like that of Socrates, who, after the rout of his army, being on foot, walked resolutely and unafraid out of the battle field ( p.686). Of course, while Socrates' courage impressed his enemies in that occasion and they let him make his escape, a very different end is met by Montezuma, whose enemies are not able to recognize and honor his courage. The moderns, who feel indeed at the highest point of civilization and look back at the ancients as backwards, clearly lose in the comparison of the war ethics and of the treatment reserved to the defeated. Similarly, in "On the Cannibals"(I: 31), the reader was brought to question who was indeed practicing cannibalism, if the Brazilian people or the French ones.

The comparisons instituted or suggested give place to sets of ironic reversals: the civilized are not such; the savages are not such; our heroes, like the conqueror of Peru, Marquis Francisco Pizarro, are not such. There is certainly irony in the gaze Montaigne poses on the conquerors, and in general on the Europeans with their presumption of superiority. Yet, the dominant emotional tone of the last part of the essay is sadness at the loss and destruction of the new world. The grieving is exacerbated by the wonder at the beauty of what has been lost.

He writes: “Our world has just discovered another world (and who will guarantee us that it is the last of its brothers, since the daemons, the Sibyls, and we ourselves have up to now been ignorant of this one?) no less great, full, and well limbed than itself” (p.693). The first mention of the discovery of the new world comes well into the essay, in the last third of it. The other world is nothing less than the one we know: a brother of ours, and perhaps not the only other existing world either. “We”: the contemporaneous Europeans, were ignorant of this one, as were, in Montaigne’s puzzling list, the daemons and the Sibyls. What kind of knowledge, perhaps a divinatory one, would have let us be aware of the existence of the new world? Or perhaps, a more interesting question to ask would be: how long can we maintain our ignorance that makes us monstrous?

The problem is, in fact, that “we” are still ignorant of the new world even though we have discovered it. Our guilty, self-righteous ignorance makes us monsters; and it makes the cosmos, figuratively, an in-between creature: half human, half inhuman, as the demons mentioned above. The pride taken by the moderns in the discovery of the new world is badly placed. Montaigne observes that, if “we” think of ourselves and of the new era, modernity, as a winning giant, the truth is that the giant is dying. The giant is indeed a monstrous hemiplegic one. For one half- the European one- is paralyzed; while the other part is in full vigor (p.693). The vital half of the cosmos is the new world, and it is described as a newborn.

He continues: “not fifty years ago it knew no letters, no weights and measures, nor clothes, nor wheat, nor vines. It was still naked at the breast, and lived only on what its nursing mother provided” (p.693). The new world is tender, hopeful, and strong. It is harmoniously constituted, it is free and intelligent, radical and natural. Its encounter with the conquerors is depicted with mythical tones. G. Nakam (2001) beautifully writes in this regard: “An infant

world, naked, disarmed, is visited by an unknown monster, mounted on an apocalypse beast, bearded, armored in shiny metal, with a dreadful roar. The Conquest is a tragic eposée” (p. 348, my translation).

*Retombons à nos coches*: let us fall back to our coaches. This is the opening of the last paragraph of Montaigne’s chapter. Let us go back to our seats and from there let us view the last sequence of the history of the tragic encounter. What has been noted to recall an *ante litteram* cinematographic experience (G. Nakam, 2001, p.349) frames the scene of the fall of the last king of the Inca. Atahualpa, captured and pulled to the ground from his chair of gold by a horseman, remains triumphant even when defeated. Montaigne exhorts us, who read his work, to follow him in the concluding movement of his essay: a double movement composed of distancing-falling back to our seats; and of taking cognizance of a reversal- the triumphant defeated king.

Such movement characterizes the gaze of she who, in travel, learned the ways of looking and thinking of what is “other”. I have described it earlier (chapter 4) as a reflective movement that sustains a double mirroring of self and world. The traveler’s gaze is projected onto the world of her experience in a constant re-positioning of itself. The change in the stance from which to observe is constant, because it is roused by the games of reversals offered in the double mirroring. Continuous change allows for a multiplicity of perspectives that shall be considered in their whole and not as mutually excluding one another. The traveler knows that there is only one right way of receiving the experience of the world without negating it. This way consists in responding dynamically to the quality of dynamism proper of both world and the traveler.

The European colonizer is thus the opposite of a traveler. He is unable to respond to the vitality and novelty of what he sees. He deploys stale categories that justify his greed and will to destruct. His way of thinking finds it impossible to perceive what is unexpected and other

without killing it, both in thought and in practice. He thinks, so to say, in an armored way: a hard metal defends his mind, making him perhaps invulnerable. But it also imprisons him and does not let him breathe. Nothing of the new world can touch him, as his armor effectively protects him. A mind shielded from the traits of vitality proper of the experience of the world can only enact a mechanical, rigid movement that does not attune itself to the movement of life. Such an encumbered movement! Such a lack of grace and of naturalness. Cruelty comes from the denial of life brought about by the armored way of thinking. Rejection of the other, due to incapability to even perceive otherness in its presence, is indeed lethal. The weakness of human knowledge, the inadequacy of our ways of knowing in comparison to the richness of the world of experience (III:6, p. 692) shall not be amended by shielding it with the cold and lifeless armor of a scholastic warrior. What happened with the discovery of the new world confirms that such a remedy is useless and deadly.

The way to a more embracing way of looking and knowing shall be prepared and fostered through one's life: such is the task of education. My next section considers the respects in which education responds to its task in relation to the traveler's gaze.

### 3. Thinking education

Traveling responds to the ideal proposed in the two chapters written explicitly on the subject of education: "Of Pedantry" (I: 25) and "Of the Education of Children" (I:26). The correspondence is multiverse. Initially, and more obviously, there is a literal interpretation for which actual, physical travel is considered part of a good education. Then, there is a sense that the movement of travel concurs to the movement and to the refinement of one's thinking. Finally, the correspondence can be taken to imply that the whole understanding of what it means



to educate and to be educated cannot prescind from the exercise of dynamic thinking signified by traveling.

The main argument presented to sustain such correspondence rests on the consideration that learning requires apprenticeship. Montaigne mentions two famous Milanese dancing masters, who cannot teach to dance by simply showing the steps to their students. In the same way, one cannot be taught to handle anything without practicing it, because it is impossible to “train our understanding without setting it in motion” (I: 26, p. 112). The practice, it is suggested, consists in taking “everything that comes to our eyes” as “book enough”: facts and events or experiences of daily life “are so many new materials”. Human understanding is put to work and set in motion in the exercise of reading the given of human experience: everything that is offered to the subject is “book enough”. The contrary of bookish education is an education to recognize that experiences may serve as books. Everything can supply “new material” to human understanding. “For this reason,” Montaigne continues,

mixing with men is wonderfully useful, and visiting foreign countries, not merely to bring back, in the manner of our French noblemen, knowledge of the measurements of the Santa Rotonda, or of the richness of Signora Livia’s drawers, or, like some others, how much longer or wider Nero’s face is in some old ruin there than on some similar medallion; but to bring back knowledge of the characters and ways of those nations, and to rub and polish our brains by contact with those of others (I:26, p. 112).

Human understanding is activated by putting oneself in relation to others. Traveling abroad can set conditions for this to happen in so far as it is experienced with a right disposition. The disposition is inspired by a desire to “bring back knowledge” of one kind. Not every traveling is by itself educational, as many, “in the manner of our French gentlemen”, carry back knowledge that is irrelevant. Examples of such knowledge include measurement, length and width, and the decoration of a renowned dancer’s culottes. Montaigne puts forth that the kind of knowledge to

be gained from “mixing with men” regards “characters and ways” of the nation visited: *les humeurs et leur façons*. It is indeed the knowledge of qualities that the traveler is after. Qualities, instead of measurable quantities: this is what is worth “bringing back” or better, “relating” (the original text uses the verb *rapporter*) to ourselves. Certainly, qualities are also that which is more difficult to gain knowledge, and a relatable knowledge, of. Yet measuring one’s mind with this task is namely what makes the mind exercised, flexible, smooth and ultimately able to judge experience.

Hence, travel is needed to “rub and polish our brains by contact with those of others.” This image tells at the same time of the idea we can work on our minds and improve them, and of the awareness that such improvement can only take place by contact, that may imply friction, with the minds of others. The work on one’s mind has two main traits. It is artistic: the “polishing” [*limer*] recalls Horace’s well known expression *labor limae et mora* (*Ars Poetica*, ll 290), the labor and delay of the file, indicating the slow and meticulous refinement needed for a work of art. The work on one’s mind assumes qualities of the work of an artist on her way of knowing. It is a reflective work, because it is exercised by the subject on herself and specifically on her way of thinking and knowing. But Montaigne interestingly binds the trait of reflectivity in a new way. It may be asked, what is the tool for this filing to take place? Where is the file in this metaphor? There seems to be no ‘external’ tool. The polishing takes place by contact with the minds of others. It is by connecting the *labor limae* to the presence of others, with whom to enter in contact, that the experience of difference is allowed and reworked, so as to make the mind more beautiful. Work on one’s mind is not only artistic: it is also and perhaps primarily relational.

Travel is the name for the experience that makes room for such a work on one's mind to happen. A mind that is polished – that is, intentionally made into a work of art through intercourse with others- can “bring back” knowledge of characters and ways. A last note is to be made about the idea of “bringing back” knowledge. If on one hand it may seem to hint that knowledge is a good that can be transported, thus brought back, on the other hand it may suggest that knowledge is primarily searched for in relation to home. The knowledge searched for, and attained, is that which one “brings back”: the movement of discovery implies a correspondent movement of gathering or collecting. I have argued above that the double movement constitutes travel properly. I have recognized Montaigne as depicting travel as a movement which takes place in relation to what is left behind and at times found upon return: what has been named the home. I have proposed that the idea of home encompasses the core of one's life: family, residency, possessions, and more so language. The passage I am analyzing now spotlights that an educated mind knows what to “bring back home” from her experience of difference. That travel is a mode of movement, and thus responding to the inherent dynamism of both life and mind, is confirmed by the following remark in which Montaigne continues: “I should like the tutor to take him abroad at a tender age”. The original text says [*Je voudrais qu'on commençat à les promener*] where the verb *promener* indicates both to take out someone and also, in the reflexive form, to take a walk or stroll. To be taken out entails to walk, to move, and this is advised from a very early age, as it attunes and exercises the child's mind to experiencing difference and to knowing its ways and humors in making the way home.

I insist that Montaigne's emphasis on travel as part of education is based on the idea that the movement constituting travel assists the movement of one's thinking and consequently the refinement of one's judgment. The correspondence between physical travel and dynamism of

thought can be traced clearly in those passages of the essay in which Montaigne puts forth a parallelism between *traveling* and *reading*. Such correspondence is shown in that part of the essay in which Montaigne proposes that the formation of judgment is indeed what education aims at. After quoting Dante on the value of doubting, it is suggested that the pupil needs to be exposed to a variety of ideas, even if she is not able to choose which one to adopt. Montaigne defends the opportunity of hesitating in front of an array of choices instead than uncritically picking one. Embracing another person's opinion shall happen only by the pupil's own reasoning: otherwise, it equals to slavery ( I:26, p.111).

Truly, for Montaigne, the exercise of judgment is a matter of freedom: giving it up means conversely giving up that freedom and enslaving oneself to the authority of the author read. The relation between freedom of thinking and movement had been just reinstated few lines previously. When one does not judge critically of what she reads, her "mind moves only on faith, being bound and constrained to the whim of others' fancies, a slave and a captive under the authority of their teaching"(p.111). Montaigne explains that "our vigor and liberty are extinct" because of the fact that we have grown used to "leading strings": being under the control of another enslaves us and weakens us. It is necessary that freedom be safeguarded and the student let know that she shall "choose, if she can", whose ideas to make her own. Montaigne writes: "he must imbibe their ways of thinking, not learn their precepts" (p.111). [*il faut qu'il emboive leurs humeurs, non qu'il apprenne leurs precepts*].

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the parallel between traveling and reading is reinforced by this last note. What the pupil searches for in books is the same she searches for in travel. While reading, she must "imbibe their ways of thinking"(p.111). While traveling, she must "bring back knowledge of the characters and ways of those nations" (p.112). The French text shows

unambiguously such a correspondence. In both mentioned instances, the word Montaigne chooses is *leurs humeurs*. Reader, traveler; student, teacher: what they are after, is experience and relatable knowledge of the world's ways of thinking, of valuing, of living. In sum, "education, work, and study aim only at forming this"(p.111).

In the formation of judgment as faculty, human understanding flourishes and thrives there where human experience is lived through and read through. When human understanding is set in motion, it finds that everything in its life shall be read and judged, in so far as it recognizes that experiences come and present traits of difference and novelty. Human understanding is put to work and set in motion in the exercise of reading the given of human experience: everything will suffice as new material for it. What I had named earlier in the previous chapter as "the opposition between book and road" proves, in Montaigne's thought, to be a polarity rather than a mutually exclusive relation. He writes: "I don't travel without books. (...) It is the best provision I have found for this human journey (...)" (III: 3, p .628). The human understanding does not need to choose between the book and road, because they are in fact held together in the exercise of judgment. Such is, as I already suggested, a primary concern of education. Marc Foglia (2011) explains that "education is made through the reciprocal mediation of experience and of philosophy, mediation whose author is personal judgment" (p.94, my translation). Education of judgment takes place in the give-and-take of one's own experience and the philosophical thinking about the experience itself.

"Of practice" (II:6) sets convincingly the connection between education of oneself and experience. Practice forms the self because through experience judgment is exercised, and prepared for life's tasks. It is important to take notice of the fact that, Montaigne notes, not every vital task can be practiced fully- some defining ones, like death, take place only once and cannot

thus be experienced and practiced. It is pointedly about such tasks anyway, that the value of practice as preparation becomes evident. In relation to such events one learns that formation of the self implies preparation and exercise through “education, work and study” (I: 26, p.111). The essay starts: “Reasoning and education, though we are willing to put our trust in them, can hardly be powerful enough to lead us to action, unless besides we exercise and form our soul by experience to the way we want it to go; otherwise, when it comes to the time for action, it will undoubtedly find itself at loss” (II:6, p. 267).

With this reflection Montaigne opens his chapter, in which he unfolds the value of experience in consideration of the direction given to one’s life. He takes on the analysis of *the* experience that marks human life: its end. He provides accounts of how human beings familiarize themselves with death and “try it out to a certain extent” (p.268). Life is at stake: to learn to die is to philosophize (I: 20), and likewise, philosophizing is what teaches us to live (I: 26, p.120). Meditation on death is one of the philosophical exercises<sup>17</sup>. Montaigne thinks of practice by offering a prolonged meditation on death: thus making it clear that the “practice” [*exercitation*] being talked of, is the practice of living. It is, it can be suggested, the practice which “walks man to action” [*pour nous acheminer jusques a l’action*] by forming the individual’s judgment.

Teachers should work with students, aiming at exercising and forming judgment. This process cannot happen through role modeling, as Montaigne does not trust the imitative nature of learning through exemplarity (see Hansen, p.149). Emphasis on education’s finality to form judgment requires that the subject’s relation to exemplary models be complicated. Montaigne explains that his very advice shall be examined and not uncritically accepted by the tutor.

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<sup>17</sup> Pierre Hadot unfolds at length the philosophical practices aiming at kindling a transformation in the individual, among which the exercise of preparing to one’s own death. See Hadot (1995) chapters 1, 3.

Introducing his considerations about the education of children, he writes: “and in this matter on which I venture to give him (i.e. the tutor) advice, he will take it only as far as it seems good to him” (I:26, p. 110). This consideration, albeit seemingly incidental, encapsulates the Montaignean view that the ultimate measure for action resides in the individual’s free and unfettered judgment. Parenthetically, such a line succeeds in communicating to the reader- and perhaps the reader is a teacher searching for advice- the importance of her individual understanding in receiving and seizing any educational advice. Which seems vital, for often the literature addressed to teachers does not live up to the educational principles it preaches: it is prescriptive, condescending, infantilizing. Montaigne is very far away from such a mode of addressing the tutor. He knows that no tutor can educate her student to exercise judgment unless her own freedom is preserved and valued.

The tutor, he continues, will be a person chosen for her “character and understanding” more than for her “learning”, since she will have to “go about [her] job in a novel way” (p.110). The novelty implied in any educational undertaking requires some qualities in the teacher: that she be “formed” and free. “Of Pedantry” (I:25), the essay preceding “Of the education of children”, sketches by contrast the figure of the teacher. By depicting pedantry as that useless disposition to accumulate the knowledge of others without every owning it, with what is defined as a “dependent and mendicant ability” (I:25, p. 101), Montaigne tells us that the teacher shall be its opposite: independent, and self sufficient. Such are possibly the personal qualities, it could be suggested, that enable the tutor to “go about her job in a novel way”. If the image of the traveler then can be maintained, the tutor, like a traveler, is independent and “owns” enough to sustain herself in her undertaking. She has enough of a solid ground to be able to lean forward and explore new ground. Unraveling the metaphor, and also narrowing its scope to a consideration of

the traveler's resources, or else of the teacher's possession, it seems that insisting on a well formed rather than a well filled mind for the tutor does not entail a void mind either. Montaigne comments: "as plants are stifled with too much moisture, and lamps with too much oil, so too much study stifles the action of the mind, which, being caught and entangled in a great variety of things, may lose the ability to break loose, and be kept bent and huddled by its burden" (I:25, p. 98).

The danger of a "too filled" mind consists the possibility that it is suffocated by the quantity of things: that mind is kept prisoner, bent and immobilized. The overfilled mind is frozen and unable to free itself, very much analogously to the mind of the armored warrior in the cruel conquest of the new world<sup>18</sup>. Too much study, erudition, too many unexamined opinions do not leave room for the mind to move. A mind that does not move is a dead mind, that cannot possibly be put in charge of educating others.

However, an empty mind is not recommendable either. The teacher shall have owned enough knowledge and be enough learned to afford her that self reliance I was discussing earlier on. Right after the lines I just quoted, Montaigne modulates his idea: "But it works the other way, for the more our soul is filled, the larger it becomes" (I: 25, p.98). Pedantry is not really about the quantity of things hoarded in one's mind: it is instead about the way in which such things are made own and disposed in the space of one's mind. Minds can be made larger instead than more filled. Minds, I would insist, are made larger if they experience the kind of free roaming movement we have qualified as "travel". The example Montaigne provides goes as follows. He presents the case of the ancient philosopher Archimedes, who put his knowledge to his city's use by building defense machines. He notes, talking about ancient philosophers in

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<sup>18</sup> see this chapter, pp.13-14



general, that “they, if at any time they were put to the test of action, were seen to soar on such a lofty wing that it clearly appeared that their heart and soul had been marvelously enlarged and enriched by the understanding of things” (I:25, p.99). Montaigne proposes that, because of the work of formation of the mind and soul, they (mind and soul) are made figuratively able to fly. They are made larger and richer, without being made heavier, since they have been exercised not by accumulating things, but rather, by *understanding* them. It thus seems as though things, understood, are what shall inhabit the tutor’s mind. Some paragraphs later, he comments: “we labor only to fill our memory, and leave the understanding and the conscience empty” (p.100). Amassing and collecting things and words unexamined do not make the mind able to pass the “test of action”. With lucidity Montaigne suggests that such a mind- a storage mind, if it were, needs not even to actually “contain things”. Adducing the example of that rich Roman who surrounded himself with men learned in everything, and used to call on them whenever he needed a sentence, or an argument (p.100-101), Montaigne hints that the same way applies to those “whose ability dwells in their sumptuous libraries”(p.101). It may be superfluous to notice that the problem resides not in the sumptuous library, but in letting one’s ability lie there, instead than in one’s mind.

The teacher’s mind may be “burdened”, “stifled”, “entangled” (p.98), “inflated” and “swollen”(p.101). Or else, it may be “large” (p.98), “enriched and lofty” (p.99), and “full” (p.101). It may be “more learned”, or else, it may be “better learned” (p. 100). Commerce of one’s understanding with “things” is what makes the difference. The teacher who is not a pedantic caricature shall “attend to things.” The student whom such teacher teaches shall, in turn, attend to “things” rather than to “words” as well.

The fact, the experience, that learning requires an understood exchange with the world, is that which, appreciated, enables the person to form her own judgment. The idea that education is foremost about “things” is supported on this ground. When describing how shall a tutor with a “well-formed head” teach the child, Montaigne perorates: “right from the start, according to the capacity of the mind he has in hand, (to) begin putting it through its paces, making it taste things, choose them, and discern them by itself” (I: 26, p. 110). The teacher will put her student’s mind in motion by “making it taste things.” “Taste” here may be taken to indicate both the sensorial experience and also the element of appreciation of it. The aesthetic side of the experience is being pointed at through this expression. Choice and discernment of things, the next steps of the student’s mind set in motion with the teacher, indicate elements of the exercise of judgment implied in the learning experience.

“Words”- traditionally opposed to “things” in discourses of logic and of language- will be present as well, but only when exchanged in dialogue concerning the things experienced. “I do not want him to think and talk alone, I want him to listen to his pupil speaking in his turn” (p.110). Hansen (2002) notes that engaging the child with things “tenaciously and playfully complements the task of learning how to speak of the world in a moral spirit. (...) For Montaigne, indefatigable seeker of the honest word, right speaking respects the aleatory world humans inhabit” (p.149). An education comprises attending to things in relation to paying attention to the words that respect such things. “Things” [choses, res] indicate matter, content, what we are talking about. “Things” clarifies Hansen, “is a metaphorical term that stands for concrete experience of what the world brings into a person’s life, as well as what it offers if the person responds with an open mind and open senses”(p.149). An education to things is not an alternative to an education to words. It is indeed what makes the latter even possible. In this

sense, words- the “right words”- follow the experience of the world as it is lived through with openness and respect.

Montaigne relies on the understanding of the relation between “things” and “words” proposed by the classical rhetorical tradition. “Things” or *res* indicate the content, which is the subject matter of the orator’s speech; while “words” or *verba* indicate its style, that is the verbal form it receives. By endorsing the primacy of “things” over words, Montaigne aligns himself with Horace, Cicero and Seneca the elder (I: 26), as seen with the successive quotation of lines from these three authors underscoring the injunction to “hold the thing”-live it, grab it, get it, so that the words will follow by themselves. The priority of *res* has a vital relevance because it stems from the realization that nothing can substitute the person’s engagement with experience. Vickers (in Kessler, Maclean, eds, 2002) explains that the belief that the thing said could be distinguished from the style or form was often expressed through the metaphor of clothing (p.288). Style is the “verbal dress of thought”. Words are the verbal dress of things. Montaigne’s preference for a natural, effortless style reveals a position that is not only and not primarily concerned with matters of rhetoric: what is at stake is one’s stance in the world and what would be called, in a different context, one’s social and narrative identity.

Under this light, the address “To the Reader” bears the mark of a statement regarding Montaigne’s project of essaying his self, as it can be confirmed by the occurrence of the same metaphor of clothing. He writes,

If I had written to seek the world’s favor, I should have bedecked myself better and should present myself in a studied posture. I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice, for it is myself that I portray. (...) Had I been placed among those nations which are said to live still in the sweet freedom of nature’s first laws, I assure you I should very gladly have portrayed myself here entire and wholly naked.

He portrays himself- with both a descriptive and a prescriptive movement- “to the life”[au vif] and in his “natural form” [*forme naïve*]. Simple unstudied form is what suits his intent and his purpose, the project of his self being surely matter of his book, but moreover so of his existence. The words chosen to say his life, Montaigne’s words to say Montaigne’s life, will be alive, natural, unstudied, and effortlessly suited to it with no artifice. Honesty and responsibility towards his experience are moral, rather than rhetorical, qualities. Such is Montaigne’s pronouncement at the opening of the *Essays*.

That same intent shall be at work in the teacher’s education of the student. Making sure the student attends at things translates into a disposition of attentiveness for the world of experience, and for the words chosen to say the experienced relationship. The freedom of movement of the student’s mind needs to be safeguarded so that “things” find room in it. Words unrelated to things risk overstuffing the mind. The teacher knows or learns the ways of movement, the favored patterns or lack of such, the velocity, the rest stops, the rhythm of her student’s mind. She knows because she has studied him, by long observation and association. Montaigne writes:

It is good that he should have his pupil trot before him, to judge the child’s pace and how much he must stoop to match his strength. For lack of this proportion we spoil everything; and to be able to hit it right and to go along in it evenly is one of the hardest tasks that I know; it is the achievement of a lofty and very strong soul to know how to come down to a childish gait and guide it. I walk more firmly and surely uphill than downhill. (I: 26, p.110)

The teacher should observe and study the pace, the steps and velocity with which the student moves. “Trot” refers to the physical movement and to the mind’s one. It is very difficult to pay attention to another person’s rhythm of thought. It takes a “lofty and strong soul” to achieve that capacity of attentiveness and openness. The same words describing the mind of the philosophical

teacher in “Of Pedantry” (I: 25, p.99) depict here the attentive teacher who can judge the right proportion in the student’s manner and speed. Which teacher can do this? She whose mind is made lofty, full, and better learned (pp.99-100) in the way I described earlier on<sup>19</sup> has the capacity “to come down to a childish gait and guide it”. The capacity to “go downhill” with balance, strength and judgment is recalled centuries later by P. Jackson (1986). He writes: “I noticed that when nursery school teachers spoke to individual children or listened to what they had to say they first descended to the child’s height by bending at the knees until their faces were at on a level with the child’s own” (p. 76). Capacity to adopt this posture, he explains, depends on the teacher’s way of seeing: a teacher *sees things differently*<sup>20</sup>. This way of seeing, I have proposed, consists in being attuned to the ever shifting dynamism of the experience and of thought- so that, in order for teaching and learning to take really place, it is requested that the teacher has practiced *travel*: the encounter and discovery of alterity and newness experienced and found meaningful in view of self knowledge.

A teacher who has formed and educated herself in this fashion shall encourage learning in her student. What has been explored as a dichotomy between “book and road” proves valid only for the sake of better understanding a shift of emphasis at the start of Modernity towards a more relevant role of direct experience of the world. The teacher’s quest for a different way of seeing composes the dichotomy by thriving in the points of contact between the two supposed alternatives. Such different way of seeing, I have proposed, can be found in the parallelism put forth by Montaigne between traveling and reading. There is where reflexivity takes a relational bend and becomes more accurately, the capacity to judge. Our teacher, with a well formed mind,

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<sup>19</sup> see pp.22 and following in this chapter

<sup>20</sup> for a discussion of this point, see chapter II pp. 12 and following

is then able to reach the child's height and to seize the child's steps with balance and attention.

Where do they go once they have found each other?

#### 4. Conclusion

Education is an exercise in freedom. Montaigne writes: "for all this education I do not want the boy to be made prisoner" (I: 26, p.121). It is mainly a philosophical education, and a conjoined enterprise by the student and the teacher. They will explore together everything. Their classroom, and their textbook, is the world.

This great world, which some multiply further as being only a species under one genus, is the mirror in which we must look at ourselves to recognize ourselves from the proper angle. In short, I want it to be the book of my student. So many humors, sects, judgments, opinions, laws, and customs teach us to judge sanely of our own, and teach our judgment to recognize its own imperfection and natural weakness, which is no small lesson. (I: 26, p.116)

The two metaphors used to qualify the world are evidently related to one another and to the humanistic consideration of the relation between cosmos and individual: the world is a mirror and the world is a book. As I put forth earlier on, the two –world as way to self knowledge and world as text to be mapped and interpreted- find an agreement in Montaigne's thinking. Self discovery and exploration of the world are co-implied in what I described as a relational understanding of the reflexivity of judgment. This is the heart of any educational intention, be it education of one's self or of another. Through a philosophical education, reflection provides the angle from which to view oneself, the world and others. The philosophical experience of traveling assumes meaning in view of home: thus the relatable knowledge is found, reported to one's own sense, and then, again, moved away. Traveling as a mode of learning comes back home but does not stay there. The purpose is in the end to make a mind which will "find home"

where it moves because it has practiced the encounter with the world's alterity and novelty and has learned to mirror itself in them and to read them finding meaning. Education makes one "at home everywhere" because it is the experience through which one learns to leave and to come back in a steady, swinging movement. He writes: "For our boy, a closet, a garden, the table and the bed, solitude, company, morning and evening, all hours will be the same, all places will be his study; for philosophy, which, as the molder of judgment and conduct, will be his principal lesson, has the privilege of being everywhere at home" (I:26, p. 122).

Together, teacher and student experience the world in its astounding variability and philosophize about their experience, in that every part, moment, spark of human life serves as "book enough" to those whose gaze is being exercised. Because they engage in forming their ways of life and judgment, they are philosophers. Because they do so in courageous, open exchange with the world in its familiar and unfamiliar parts, they are travelers. Because they aim at forming that "wonderful brilliance (that) may be gained for human judgment by getting to know men"(p.116), they are educating themselves. *Traveler, philosopher, teacher, student* are but "words" that cloth and reveal, in the most natural way possible, the living "thing" which is our naked human existence.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion: the Teacher as Traveler

### 1.Introduction

In my concluding considerations, I want to relate the sense of my inquiry to the existential situation of being a teacher in the classroom today.

Many times, we teachers feel stuck. The students come, grow, and leave, cohort after cohort. We stay the same. They move, they develop, they grow. We cannot see our own growth with the same clarity. We are motionless, caught in the repetition of the institutional routines. The administration imposes its iron grip on us. We are expected to give up our judgment and agency. We sit there and feel the blow.

William Johnson, a teacher at a public high school in Brooklyn, wrote on the New York Times in March 2012:

Worst of all, the more intense the pressure gets, the worse we teach. When I had administrators breathing down my neck, the students became a secondary concern. I simply did whatever my assistant principal asked me to do, even when I thought his ideas were crazy. In all honesty, my teaching probably became close to incoherent. One week, my assistant principal wanted me to focus on arranging the students' desks to fit with class activities, so I moved the desks around every day, just to show that I was a good soldier. I was scared of losing my job, and my students suffered for it. (Confessions of a 'Bad' Teacher, The New York Times, Sunday Reviews, 3.5.2012).

Mr. Johnson was given instructions to follow with no questions. He was made slave by a principal who did not respect and preserve the teacher's freedom of movement. His words are particularly important not only for what they describe, but also because they appeared on the most diffused newspaper in the context of a public discussion about the appalling decision made by the New York City Department of Education to release its numerical ratings about the evaluation of teachers.



In an elementary school in Philadelphia, the third grade students and their teacher, Jaime, found their reading corner removed after a Holiday weekend. The week before, a District walkthrough team had visited the classroom and described the reading corner as “clutter” asking the teacher to remove it from the classroom. Jamie reports that the students loved that corner, with beanbag armchairs, ottomans, cushions and stuffed animals surrounding a large, low table with baskets of books arranged by topic, and used it regularly developing interest and passion for reading. The reading corner had been donated by members of the local community. After it was taken away, a donor brought the case to the SRC (School Reform Commission) meeting at the beginning of January. I report an excerpt of what he read:

Now, these 8- and 9-year-olds do not understand why their special spot is gone and why they have to read at their desks. They think they are being punished, and they have no idea why. Moreover, relationships among the staff at [the school] have been seriously damaged. Of course, since [the school] is an Empowerment School, skilled teachers (...) are effectively handcuffed to the scripted curriculum. They are not free to use their knowledge and expertise, because the District says that it is better for them to act like automatons and follow the script. The walkthrough process only adds insult to injury. Besides denying them the freedom to apply their teaching skills, they are also taking away teachers' classroom resources. (Andrew Ganim, Walkthrough team deems reading area 'clutter,' removes it Feb 09 2012, Public School Notebook <http://www.thenotebook.org/blog/124514/walkthrough-team-deems-reading-area-clutter-removes-it>)

Local papers developed an interest in the story and interviewed Jaime. An article in the most read blog about Philadelphia public schooling received an impressive number of comments and reactions from the readers. After attention was raised about the facts, the district's Chief Academic Officer personally went to the school, dragging in the principal and the regional superintendent, who had caused the whole problem about the reading center. They made sure the reading center was returned. “However” Jaime continues, “one armchair and ottoman was

missing, so the principal bought a new one: it's apparently in her car”(from a private correspondence between me and the teacher).

We teachers have many reasons to feel trapped, immovable, somewhat frozen in our work. If we cultivate a way of thinking that instead keeps our dignity and liberty present, we are able to carve places of freedom in the constricting circumstances and break free. Jaime, the third grade teacher, was able to think even within the boundaries posed by the absurd violations she was exposed to. She started to bring her case to the attention of her community. Her kids also spontaneously wrote a letter to the principal in which they asked her: “we are told we should not bully other kids, why did you bully our teacher?”

The story ends well, but it also tells of the constant threats coming to teachers’ autonomy by the mere fact of working in an institution. In some ways like Arion, the poet described by Herodotus that I mentioned in chapter 3, Jaime is at the same time powerless and powerful. She is powerless, due to the abuses she and her students underwent, but she also has much power that comes from having cultivated her life and her students. Like Arion on the prow of the ship, singing his beautiful song, Jaime raised her intelligent voice, was listened to by her community, and found ways to resist the shameful insult.

In the course of my study, I have described a traveler teacher philosopher who “move[s] within the space for good teaching” (Santoro, p.332). It is this image that I want to offer to us real, embodied teachers. If a widely accepted description places teachers “in the trenches”, I hope with my work to have shown that it is indeed possible to turn the trenches from lines of conflict into terrains of hopeful exploration. The next section looks at the sense of offering a description of this teacher.

## 2. Why offer a sketch?

David Hansen (2011), towards the end of his book *The Teacher and the World* proposes to imagine some exercises for the teacher. The exercises have the aim of sustaining the person in the cultivation of her self as a “response to pressure, teachers can ready themselves through a variety of exercises for the challenges, difficulties and possibilities of education in a globalizing environment” (p. 33). One of these exercises consists in the formation of a personal canon made of meaningful works that can help every teacher think through her own individual experience. Hansen insists that a personal canon has no pretense of offering specific instructions about techniques or strategies. Rather, it offers “the voice of wisdom, courage and imagination” (p.108). Writing about the works composing this canon, he continues:

In effect they say to the teacher: “Are you actually surprised that educating is difficult, and yet also wondrous? Are you really shocked that your school is rent by competing agendas and yet also positions you to mature? Are you really stunned to be witness of both the good and the bad in human nature? You, teacher, dwell at crossroads of people, places, institutions, and more. There are no preset boundaries there that rule out the manifold expressions of human nature—remembering to, that that very nature is ever-changing in ways nobody can mark or calculate, since we are all too close to see it. You will encounter every day, every hour, and perhaps every minute the problematic and the promising, the frustrating and the liberating, the depressing and the delightful” (p.108).

A strong reminder of the complex beauty of education shall be heard, even amidst trying and arduous conditions, in the conversation between works of thought and the actual living thinking that teachers practice while they teach. Listening and responding to this reminder can “deepen one’s care for the world itself” (p. 109). The conversation I have developed in the course of the dissertation embraces many voices, that could be seen as forming some personal manual or canon in the way described by Hansen. My guiding image has been refracted in different directions, into a kaleidoscope of figures, different for color and form. In the

dissertation, we have encountered many of those figures: from Marco Polo, to the teachers in the Kindergarten observed by Phil Jackson, to Solon the sage, Diogenes the *kateghetes*, Chiron, Seneca, Montaigne's Latin tutor, the Milanese dance teachers Pavel and Pompeo, pedantic teachers, the teacher with a well formed mind, Mr. Johnson, and my friend Jaime.

By responding to the many figures and voices who partook in the conversation, I attend to the reminder issued by them of the complex beauty of our shared enterprise, education, and I develop my response intentionally as an exercise of care. With my last strokes I wish to sketch the figure of the teacher as traveler as it emerged from the inquiry of the dissertation. By doing this, I enact a kind of *essaying*: I attempt at making sense of the world from the particular angle of my existence. A sketch is a reflective outlining of the figure of an experience, a draft always susceptible of new redrafting. Still, in its temporariness, a sketch offers one meaningful retelling of the experience, of which it captures, even for a glimpse, some deep and secret traits.

What I am about to offer, at the end of my study, is then not a summary, but an attempt at perceiving the study in its lines and features. By doing this, I aim at doing two things. First, I want to practice a mode of essaying, which nourishes my own teaching. Essaying is made possible by a mode of looking and thinking that every teacher practices. Stephanie Burdick Shepherd (2012) talks insightfully of teachers as sketch artists. She writes: "Teaching is something like this. At times it can be a messy and chaotic activity. And yet, if we do not admit that it is the constant sketching, the redrawing of what it means to educate and to be educated, asking ourselves what we should notice and pay attention to we may very miss what it is to teach at all".

Second, by sketching the figure of teacher as traveler, I want to expose a meaning for this figure. This meaning is not a prescription, rather, it comes in the form of a question, or of a

desire. The Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2000) in her book *Relating Narratives:*

*Storytelling and Selfhood* tells a story that was recounted to Karen Blixen when she was a child:

A man who lived by the pond was awakened one night by a great noise. He went out into the night and headed for the pond, but in the darkness, running up and down, back and forth, guided only by the noise, he stumbled and fell repeatedly. At last, he found a leak in the dike, from which the water and fish were escaping. He set to work plugging the leak and only when he had finished went back to bed. The next morning, looking out of the window, he saw with surprise that his footprints had traced the figure of a stork on the ground. (p.1)

Cavarero asks the question with Blixen: “When the design of my life is complete, will I see, or others see, a stork? Does the course of every life allow itself to be looked upon in the end like a design that has a meaning?” (p.1).

She comments that the design could not be anticipated because it is not “projected or controlled”. On the contrary, it stems from the man’s response to an emergency: the leaking dike that he repairs in the darkness of the night. “His journey mixes intention with accident”: his steps leave behind a figure that results from them without following a plan. The unpredictable unity of the stork is seen only when the experience that traced it is concluded. For the man of the story, the unforeseeable meaning of his night is outlined in the figure composed by his steps. Cavarero concludes by repeating Blixen’s question: “When the design of my life is complete, will I see, or others see, a stork?”, to which she responds: “The figural unity of design, the unifying meaning of the story, can only be posed, by the one who lives it, in the form of a question. Or perhaps, in the form of a desire” (p.2).

It is then in the interrogative mode of a wish, that I now offer this description.

### 3. The teacher as traveler

The philosophically educated teacher looks, thinks, and moves as a traveler.

She has a new way of seeing: she looks with attention and considers the educational elements in her classroom. She looks closely and perceives telling details, she then steps back and lifts her gaze to far away things and ideas. She focuses back her gaze on what is she is tending to, and so forth in a swinging of close by and far away that substantiates thinking. If she lets her attention be excited by something and she quickly leaves it after having grasped it, she does not let this vex her mind, because she has maintained her mind's integrity and endurance with practice and exercise of instability.

She recognizes uncertainty and dynamism as qualities of the educational experience and knows how to sail across them. Her capacity to do this descends from the fact that she is acquainted to a sense of displacement: of having left home and of not having a predetermined "proper place" in the classroom. Her way of looking allows her to maintain the educational terrain as partially known. Because she is aware that there is always so much more to be discovered, while being a *teacher* she is always also a *student* of the world. She knows that surprises keep arising and she is open and flexible. She has a regular routine in teaching that she holds on to, knowing that at every moment her habits can be altered or suspended if the situation requires it.

She has a way of thinking that stems from her reflective gaze. Her thinking encompasses knowledge of the world and of her self, while in each realm (world and self) she moves and transforms the familiar in unfamiliar and the unfamiliar in familiar. She thinks in relation to finding meaning in her experience: a meaning that needs to be relatable and that assumes relevance in view of the point of departure of the exploration. Alterity, difference and newness are met in the exploration and are recognized. Her way of thinking keeps the situation open to countless new possibilities of interpretation, solution or developments.

She views time as a dimension of her essaying- attempting at reading life and at forming it. By viewing the present as not concluded, she acknowledges it as living, open ended, and promising. She carves out in the given situation the room for her agency and through her thinking she opens it up to new growth. Because her freedom depends on her capacity to see the given as open, and to generate new ways from it, she has a serious playfulness. Serious, because much is at stake in her work: matters of life and death. Playful, because the importance of her task is respected only when she finds conditions of freedom, by opening room for movement and action and finding how to play, reversing points of view through irony and creativity. She is seriously playful because, by viewing the present time as ripe with far reaching meanings, non concluded, and still open, she accepts responsibility for it. Assumption of responsibility is for the teacher an exercise in freedom.

She is free and is not enslaved, not even under probing conditions. Her freedom derives from the fact that she can make a place for possibility within the educational space. Her way of thinking translates into unfettered and unbound judgment. She has formed her judgment by polishing her mind, that is by artistically shaping it, through contact with the minds of others: contact that takes place in conversation, in exploration and interpretation.

Our teacher can read: to her everything is “book enough” as in everything she will trace the signs of the human strive towards meaning. She reads with her students and engages in tasks of translation and familiarization, followed by problematizing and questioning. She can read but is not bookish, as she knows to preserve her mind’s freedom in the presence of the written word’s authority. She thinks that nothing written in a book can supplant the experience of the world, nevertheless she feels that many things in books help make sense of said experience. In

the same way, she understands books and traditions through her experience of the world, enacting the double vision championed by Montaigne.

Our teacher travels light. She has enough provisions to sustain her in her movement, but not too many that would encumber her. She has a solid ground that allows her to lean forward and leap into the exploration of new things. She has many ideas but does not cram her mind with unexamined opinions or weighty displays of erudition. She is not pedantic, instead she has a larger mind shaped and furnished in the free roaming movement I name “travel”.

In her travels, she knows no straight line, nor safe itinerary, but she allows herself unconstrained wandering; for she knows that her destination will come towards her as she keeps exploring for things to take home. In the enactment of travel, she is not a tourist, nor is she a colonizer. Uncaught between the supposed alternative between indifference and appropriation, she jumps out of it and instead aspires at maintaining the grace of a newcomer. She is, and stays, a beginner because the more she acquaints herself to her land, the more she finds how much more there is to get to know and experience. She is and stays an amateur (Masschelein, 2011, p.534) as the further she adventures, the more there is for her to discover with a loving gaze.

In her travel, she is not armored, because she prefers to get in touch with the experience, unshielded and sensitive. She is no scholastic warrior, rather she lives unmasked and truthful to the human endeavor. With her dynamic search, she challenges the ideal of a straight, unwavering route. She disassembles the relation between the home and the abroad, and reimagines it in many new ways. Our teacher is at home in the habit of paying attention: she discovers novelty in the well known and familiarity in the new and foreign.

She is a philosopher if we accept that traveling is a mode of philosophizing: she philosophizes in that she travels well, when she leaves her home, to explore new territories and



risk losing her cherished ways, ideas, and judgment. A good traveler calls into question her currently accepted views and has an eye for the splendor of unexpected finds. As a traveling philosopher, our teacher is also always in touch with the home she left behind, meaning that she keeps in mind the place she is from, her tradition, ancestors, language, and discipline. She knows that she belongs and does not belong there, because our teacher has decided to leave it and to keep finding home in the world.

#### 4. Questions to explore

The work has explored the dimensions of teachers' thinking in the classroom as philosophical thinking through the figure of the traveler. Intentionally, the study was demarked in relation to themes and questions of thinking. References to traits of the experience of life as dynamic could not be avoided, nor could an assumption (that was also a joyous appreciation) about the constitutive and irreducible diversity in the human experience of the world. Due to this initial delimitation, a whole world of other dimensions of teaching were left unexplored, even if occasionally touched upon: the social, political, and emotional sides of teaching. While I think it was a legitimate decision for the sake of my inquiry, I find that a deeper consideration of some elements will contribute to a better use of my guiding metaphor.

My first focus of perplexity regards the consideration that the teacher, moving in that oscillating space of difference we name classroom, has an embodied presence. How do facts of corporeality, sensation, emotion, work with the mainly perceptive and epistemological description of teachers' thinking that I have proposed? The image of the traveler letting herself exposed to the experience of otherness and newness *without armor* suggests that these facts concur to qualify the experience of travel. The idea of exposing one's *bare skin* to the encounter

with the other, which I have somewhat advocated, also calls into play considerations about self boundaries, self preservation, courage, and vulnerability. Teaching is such a difficult endeavor also because it calls into question the teacher's whole existence, that is an embodied existence. The wear and tear of teaching signals that it is an all embracing, all consuming task. It also signals that teaching is in the hands of the other. Teaching is a relational experience. Teaching is unpredictable also because it necessarily involves more than one person. This brings me to the second theme in need of further research.

When I concluded the first chapter, I posed a real question I have: in the boat of the child solo sailor who circumnavigated the globe, is there a place for a teacher? Why cannot I accept that Laura Dekker taught herself quite much during her two-year experience? I started by assuming that teachers are irreplaceable and by asking why. During the inquiry, some elements have convinced me that teachers are such in that they can inhabit the condition of learners- of students, beginners, explorers. If so, then, I find a big problem in understanding when the teacher is needed and when, instead, one can be a teacher to herself. I have a doubt, and a hope, that the way of thinking I have been describing could well be ascribed to a good student as well. It could be that this mode of thinking only comes to be, or *takes place*, in the interaction teacher/student, without being special property of any one. This hypothesis would require a whole new imaginative effort, in which I would need to figure some *multi-center-ever-dynamic-shifting-focus-inter-subjective-cross-temporal* thinking and learning. I lack a guiding metaphor for this, and it promises to be a whole new territory to explore.

Finally, I can see that my work requests that I articulate and theorize the tacit idea of philosophy that has informed the inquiry. I have been guided by an understanding of philosophy as *philosophizing*, that is a mode of thinking which implies experiences of de-familiarization,

problematization and clarification in a dialogue with others and with texts from the philosophical tradition. This understanding, that I have implicitly adopted in years of study of the discipline and of teaching, found its explicit formulation for me in the context of a intense and beautiful dialogue with other teachers of philosophy quite recently. I look forward to more philosophizing, with the sense that a deeper exploration of “what is philosophy” will make available a more compelling ground for the idea that philosophy is the method of education.

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## APPENDIX

FIGURE 1

The title page of Francis Bacon's *Instauratio Magna* (London, 1620)

FIGURE 2



*Moeurs des sauvages américains comparés aux mœurs des premiers temps* ( Joseph F. Lafitau, Paris, 1724)

FIGURE 3

