

Improved commitment in educational search for meaning.

The 'anomalous' case of relationism

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ABSTRACT

The pedagogical perspective of relationism has been developed in Italy by Enzo Paci, between the end of the Fifties and the Sixties of Twentieth century. It has influenced some of the most interesting developments of the next philosophical-educational reflection so that it remains, still today, a significant source of pedagogical question, especially concerning its methodological structure and the ethical commitment. A such ethically oriented idea of education has tasks that seems to be very topical: to safeguard the freedom of culture against the subjection to the reproduction of cultural models and the drifts of specialization; to respond to the social demand for a less partly, fragmented and utilitarian comprehension of reality; to decode the relationship's knots, which permeate subjective and collective existences, by standing again on their meaning, on their genesis, on their outcomes. From this picture emerge some significant alternatives of educational experience as practice of relationship between subject and world.

Keywords: Enzo Paci – Relationism – Phenomenology - Educational commitment – Cultural crisis

Impegno rinnovato nella ricerca educativa di senso. L' 'anomalo' caso del relazionismo

L'orizzonte pedagogico del relazionismo è stato elaborato in Italia da Enzo Paci tra la fine degli anni Cinquanta e l'inizio degli anni Settanta del Novecento. Ha influenzato alcuni degli sviluppi più interessanti del pensiero filosofico-educativo successivo, tanto da rimanere, ancor oggi, una fonte significativa d'interrogazione pedagogica, in particolare riguardo alla sua struttura metodologica e all'impegno etico. Un'idea di educazione così eticamente orientata assume funzioni che sembrano essere decisive: salvaguardare la libertà di cultura contro l'assoggettamento alla riproduzione di modelli culturali e alle derive dello specialismo; rispondere alla domanda sociale di una comprensione della realtà meno parziale, frammentaria ed utilitaristica; decifrare i nodi di relazione che permeano le esistenze individuali e collettive stando ancora sul loro significato, sulla loro genesi e sui loro esiti. Da questo quadro emergono alcune alternative significative dell'esperienza educativa come pratica di relazione tra soggetto e mondo.

Parole chiave: Enzo Paci – Relazionismo – Fenomenologia – Impegno educativo – Crisi della cultura

Giving sense to existence. Enzo Paci's relationism and European cultural crisis

When, in 1957, Enzo Paci publishes *Dall'esistenzialismo al relazionismo [From Existentialism to Relationism]*, the text that founded his philosophical perspective, he already has a significant interpretative background that binds together time, truth and relationship. Time and relationship are two elements that inexorably constitute the subject. Truth is what the subject searches for, what he needs, and it is the rediscovery of the content of experience, or, in other words, the reclamation of the direct and authentic knowledge of the world, not influenced by the obvious.

Starting from "original negative condition" of the subject, upon which Heidegger and Sartre had already worked in the terms, respectively, of the "being e-jected" and "nothingness", for Paci man is "an unsolved problem" (Paci, 1957, p. 288). In a strictly pedagogical sense, man "is not a complete substance in itself, but a task to fulfil" (Paci, 1954c, p. 70). This is a task of formation of subjectivity and existential planning that entails "a new positive affirmation of freedom" (Paci, 1950, p. 43). The idea of the subject as a problem and as freedom says much about the Relationistic view of education, but time and relation, especially, define the contours and instruments.

Setting out the question of education on these bases defines that preliminary approach to the search for the origins which cannot presuppose anything since its core of meaning draws directly on experience. On the one hand, if education may be seen as a form of culture, or as an immediate presence in the subject finds himself thanks to the very fact that he exists, on the other hand it becomes emancipation of the subject from this condition. So, the urgency to give meaning to the existence turns education into a *necessity*, an existential need. This is the indispensable condition that makes of man what he is, and which emancipates him from the pointless brutality of his "being e-jected".

Relationship, truth and time are, therefore, the three paradigms of relationism. But how do they act together in an educational direction?

The subject, seen as the "missing existent", attempts to recover the original negativity by building the form of his own existence. And he does so thanks to his relationship with the world. Therefore, the subject's being-in-the-world is for Paci the *relationship*, which means connection, contingency produced by facts, that become vital, imaginative, reflective action. In this context, intersubjectivity has a key role, albeit not the only one. In fact, the very intersubjective relationship is, at the same time, unavoidable and dynamic. Each man is *constitutively* – in other words *always* – in-relationship-with. And each relationship is always dynamic. This means that no man can exist, act, speak, develop himself without all kinds of relationships that necessarily he has with the other – because each experience of relationship is always, in a sense, formative, in so far as it contributes to the knowledge of the world and to the search for meaning. Even so, no man can set the relationship with the other – or the other himself – in something definitively known.

Paci attributes the highest and most difficult task to education: not to educate by showing the way, but to educate by searching for one's own existence. And this prominent position emerges from the field of the intersubjective relationship. The solitude of the subject, here, is not called into question: the constitutive relationship with the other permeates the formation of the subjective personality and orients hopes and critical intelligence. The fact is that this relationship is not at all 'naturally' positive: it does not say anything on its own. Its meaning should be cultivated, created, built. More than that: it should not be "fetishized", and so never left to its 'already-been', to the setting of a cognitive certainty of the relationship with the other, in the terrible and, at the same time, comic naivety that this relationship and its meaning can be definitively codified and, exactly for this reason, disarmed and abandoned to oblivion. In fact, Paci writes: "an encounter does not have a purpose just for one or the other. The purpose transcends whom you meet. It is in the *meaning* of relationship. Both of them live for the *meaning*. They are their own, and really their own, if neither of them is only himself" (Paci, 1961b, p. 23).

In this sense, for Paci, the problem of 'sharing' meaning is ill-conceived. The meaning of a relationship is of course determined by its actors, the present situation, what generated the relationship itself, and everything that surrounds and passes through it. But this is not enough: the meaning nourishes itself and lives in the dynamism of the reciprocal building and not in the facticity of the mere event. The meaning, therefore, does not imply any 'pact', any formalization of truth that nourishes the relationship. This remains significant if, and only if, it *can say* and *give* something else, according to the phenomenological idea of *Paarung*, that is the mutual comprehension ("take-with-us").

Far from any rhetoric of kind sentiments, education is for Paci the essential fuel of existential development. But this development has in itself all forms of problematicity, and it must have: change, loss, exhilaration of possibility, inexorability of choice. We could say that Paci's subject is never alone, because always implicated with someone or something else", thanks to which he becomes what he is. So that each subject builds the form of his life by choosing, by planning, by acting in a horizon of individual responsibility, because he can never adhere or overlap with the other. This ethical instance ought to be very clear to educators, because, according to Paci, "to educate means to appeal to existence, to teach [means] to believe that you can fix existence in a technical repeatable formula" (Paci, 1950, pp. 14-15). This statement reveals the key to understanding a responsible educational relationship and, above all, it allows the need for its characteristic authenticity and truth to emerge. According to this, the need to know and to understand becomes the prior form of relationship between subject and subject and between subject and world. It is the reason why Paci can see man as nothing but "a knot of relationships".

The second fundamental paradigm of relationism – *truth* – emerges in the pervasive forms of relationship, concretely delineated in the peculiarity of each situation. This kind of truth is far from any metaphysical characterization, and Paci conceives it as horizon, as research, as *telos*. In fact, it is built from time to time, from situation to situation, as a maze of

experiences, from which it is necessary to remove any dregs and ideas that falsify their meanings and cover their intrinsic sense.

In other words: 'truth' always needs to be disclosed; it is always dynamic; it is never the same as itself ("fetichized"); it cannot be caught definitively. When it sediments in 'objectivity' – it "crystallizes", according to Paci –, and it immediately loses its sense of truth. For Paci, in fact, "only what is free from pretence and prejudice makes sense [...]. Only what discloses itself, moves from being hidden toward becoming disclosed, has a significant, not an imposed, direction that I autonomously experience makes sense" (Paci, 1963, p. 480). But, at the same time, truth is not implicit, it is not the "in-itself" of things, and men have not simply to deal with the fact that they must find it. Indeed, truth is the object's core (in German: *Kern*), which changes according to the subject in connection with the time. According, therefore, to the meaning of that object for the person that, from time to time, makes experience of it. That is, in short, a process of knowledge that implies a way to know "always and again" (*immer wieder*), an expression of Husserl very close to Paci's thought.

It is worth highlighting the importance of this passage: the self-education, which Paci identifies as an indispensable process in building an existence always on the search for its horizon of meaning, must be free from those stereotypes and prejudice that any cultural tradition has attributed to it over time, rooted the common conscience and ended up falsifying world knowledge itself by occulting its most authentic meaning, which derives from the direct relationship between subject and object. This is why meaning can never be univocal, if we want to safeguard knowledge. Therefore, the educator's tasks will be to search and show how those stratifications have codified social and cultural practices in models, rules, interpretations of meaning that insert themselves into the common conscience as something obvious and certain becoming something that is no longer worth exploring or challenging. In this sense, relationism not only restores the role of "critical conscience" to the educator, but, above all, it intends to reclaim the positivity of inquiry as an educational practice, rejecting the implicit arrogance of affirmation in order to make individual and common knowledge freer and stronger in contrast to appearances. So it will be possible to rebuild and support both the concrete nature of individual experience (against its cursory formal and abstract classification in the context of theories of behaviour or of worth), and an idea of free accessibility to knowledge and culture. This idea requires commitment and implies the bewilderment that goes with the lack of certainty. At the same time, however, it returns the role of protagonist on the social scene to subjects and their relationship with the world. For Paci, then, it is a question of "making of existence our own passion".

Therefore, the essential condition of existence is the awareness of its dual connotation: on one side, the education that we call today 'other-directed' and, on the other side, the self-formation. Here, the latter is not to be interpreted in the meaning of the *Bildung* idea, but rather as *work*, as a cogent effort to try to satisfy the need for meaning. And since meaning, like truth, is not axiomatic but dynamic, it must be practically developed, sharpened, discussed again, rebuilt. So much so that existence itself and its form are the contingent, real,

tangible expression of a lively and pulsating education, which aims to swing from the original negative condition to the positivity of meaning.

In this context, the experience of life (*Erlebnis*) holds an essential role, because existence takes shape starting from our own life experience. Now, for Paci, “in its fundamental structure, experience does not appear as a data system, but as a connection of needs” (Paci, 1957, p. 79) and “it is not only knowledge of conditioning but it is, in fact, impossibility, limit, finiteness, the harsh law of need, consumption, time” (*Ivi*, p. 78). This means that experience is the action of the subject in the world, where acting is strongly connected to thinking and interpreting. Experience, then, is not a passive or induced reaction, but it depends on formative work that starts with the realization of our own condition and with the urgency to revive existence. Paci’s night-time work of writing his diaries bears witness to this. It was a task by which he traced daily events, glances, objects, encounters, historical circumstances and from which he drew the need to give meaning to what had happened, even if on a provisional and contingent basis. The fact that Paci decided to publish a selection of these pages with the title *Diario fenomenologico [Phenomenological Diary]* with the explicit intention of proving how phenomenology is not an abstract theoretical exercise but a practical, reflexive attitude, shows once more his pedagogical vocation¹.

If existence is the experience of life in the world and need for truth, it remains in any case inevitably linked to the dimension of *time*. This is the third essential element of relationism: the dialectical dimension of time between limit and possibility. In this respect Paci changes the second principle of thermodynamics into the existential condition of *irreversibility*, that is to say the impossibility of going backwards into the past. But, in this case too, he places it within a relationship. The dimension of time is itself a relationship: a strict connection between past, present and future, within which the subject is a witness both of continuity and discontinuity. In fact, time itself is dispersion, entropy, infinity – an infinite past and infinite future. Man exists in this indeterminate nature, but he has been placed there in a historically circumscribed and socio-culturally determined time. It is exactly this paradox that links finite and infinite and that produces a dialectical tension between limit and possibility. The limit is determined by the finiteness of human beings, but, in order not to remain infinitely undetermined and negative, it entails a form and a planning capable of endowing continuity on the experience of the tides of time. Such continuity in turn originates from the field of possibility.

In this sense, from being human categories able to manage time, past, present and future become tools with which each subject can build the form of his own existence. Here it is possible to highlight the interpretative option of relationism in respect of the progressive and cumulative vision of neo-positivist nature, through which the representation of time matches with the stratification and the exponential accumulation of experiences. Today we

¹ Cf. Paci, 1961b. For a pedagogical profile of relationism and to explore Enzo Paci’s private diaries in this sense, see Madrussan (2005).

might say: the optimization of performance. The linear and cumulative logic that sees in the tides of time the necessary and necessarily positive condition of human action – and of progress – is, for Paci, a dogmatic abstraction. In this sense, progress itself and any ‘optimistic’ position is simply the achievement of an ideological strain. The real risk is, once again, to take for granted human development and its exponential growth, and to lose sight of real processes of realization of common life, shrouding in rhetoric the experience of the world and mistaking the weakness of a state of mind – thinking positive – with the contingent condition of human being.

In opposition, therefore, to this misrepresentation, relationism claims a connection between past, present and future that should not be predetermined, but submitted to the attention and the critical examination of individual intelligence. In this way, the identity of each subject, his place in history and in the contingent situation he has to live, becomes the opportunity to *emerge* from the tides of time *by working* on building his own existence, in connection with others and the world. Each person is, at the same time, the outcome of his own past (and of the past of humanity) made excited and lively starting from reflection and the responsible assumption of his meaning in the present. Only this, in fact, allows him to plan his own future in Paci’s idea of *prefiguration* or “planning anticipation” (Paci, 1961a, p. 233), which is the real *telos* of education. So the future is already present-time in each embryonic form of planning, and it does not match at all with the temporal delay outcomes of a commitment in a non-committal ‘after’.

From this point of view, the relationship between past-present-future regains the dynamism need-consumption-work of experience, in two meanings: the first concerns the fact that the actual representation of life constantly copes with the reworking of past experience in relation to future experience. The second meaning concerns the fully pedagogical idea that the “consumption of experience” alone cannot completely satisfy the “need for meaning”, because this need demands an elaboration of experience, which is the outcome of a personal, transformative and transcendental exercise. So that time, truth and relationship are the structure of relationism – here very briefly represented – according to a spiral trend, in which relationship is represented in its multiple declinations and always as the ability to establish and cultivate connections between experiences or between experience and reflection, as well as being tightly and inexorably bound, in turn, to time and truth. For this reason, if time is the contingent and necessary condition of permanence in the world and if truth is functional to the emergence from the necessary condition by acting, knowing and planning, they have a mutual influence in terms of subjective existence². This is where the attention of relationism

² The antinomy between permanence and apparition is based on Whitehead, very significant reference in the creation of relationism. In particular, here, we make reference to Whitehead (1929a), although, in a more pedagogical sense, Whitehead (1929), remains obviously fundamental. Furthermore, the proximity between Paci and Dewey is clear in the idea of the dimension of time as process (Dewey, 1897). Concerning studies on Dewey in Italy, see at least Visalberghi (1951), Borghi (1955), Granese (1966), Spadafora (1997; 2003).

converges: it is in existence and in its contingent expression the need emerges to transcend the mere matter-of-fact in order to open and follow a horizon of meaning.

In this context, education is placed *between* immanence and transcendence: it is ingrained in the materiality of existence as much as in its overcoming. This is why, for Paci, education is *need, work*, “paideutical and ethical exercise” (Paci, 1961a, p. 162). So, nothing concerning education can be codified in formulas, precepts, protocols of action, nor of interpretations. Still, education is the most real and concrete product of any culture, as well as the most urgent and significant experience that the subject lives in respect to his effort to respond to the mere survival and social productivity. In fact, it is still the process of formation that changes entropy into harmony, disorder into planning, perspective dispersion into intentionality. The subject, in other words, educates the past to become reflection, to turn the passive approach into active realization. Acting in this manner, he *works* on the form of his own existence and, on the other hand, on changing his own original culture: if nothing else, because the revolution that the subject achieves in giving form to his own existence lies in “seeing and feeling” a world that is no longer there, ready-made, but is one “to be made, has become a task” (Paci, 1961b, p. 43).

This is true: this cultural regeneration in the shape of an educational-transformative task implies the *original negation* of prejudice. If nothing else, because the revolution that the subject achieves in giving form to his own existence lies in “seeing and feeling” a world that is no longer there, ready-made, but is one “to be made, has become a task”.

Even more nowadays, in the age of cultural waste, of lost perspectives and of ambiguous reality, which aim to amplify a miniscule and partial view of experience and of culture, so risking losing the complete picture, problematically opened to the possibility: a picture in which reality can support its own past and its own future together.

Enzo Paci’s relationism as ‘anomaly’ in his cultural context

From a historical point of view the first and most evident of the many peculiarities of Enzo Paci’s relationism concerns the difficulty in conventionally setting it in the Italian cultural scene of the Fifties and Sixties of the last century. It is true, however, that those were years of great turmoil and fundamental change. The cultural debate, still strongly dominated, at least in the Fifties, by spiritualism and personalism, together with Marxist philosophies, together different perspectives gradually gathering form and strength: on the one hand, by focusing more attention on fathoming the processes of change affecting the whole of Europe and the USA; on the other, by resorting to a more accentuated problematization of cultural reflection.

In the pedagogical field, the consolidation of a new pedagogy, influenced by the thoughts of Dewey – along with Visalberghi and Borghi –, and by a militant and radical

pedagogy – I am thinking, for example, of personalities such as Aldo Capitini – very attentive to the social function of education, came to produce an overall picture, in which the multiplicity of cultural approaches, even if antithetic with one another, converged in a fundamental need to restore the concrete emancipatory dimension of education. From this point of view, obviously, Italian Marxist pedagogy also played a key role in promoting a critical connection between school and work. On the other hand, also *en philosophie*, the match was played out between various orientations in a cultural debate that became increasingly animated: from neo-idealism to neo-illuministic rationalism, from critical-problematic rationalism to existentialism, from historicism to Anglo-Saxon neo-positivism.

Even in such an articulated framework – here only broadly described –, Enzo Paci's relationism remains an anomaly, which is difficult to place in a univocal research current. Of course, the strongly phenomenological significance of his system, together with the fundamental Marxist and existentialist tendency, make this one of the most tightly anti-dogmatic and critical philosophical positions of the later twentieth-century culture. Nevertheless, what proved to be so unacceptable in this framework was the influence of Husserl, the strong phenomenological connotation of relationism, further accentuated during the Sixties, and the "Husserl Renaissance", all promoted by Paci. It was, indeed, so explosive within this context that it aroused suspicion.

Another issue that relationism seems to avoid with respect to contemporary cultural articulations is its intentional distance from any traditional, moral, cultural, ideological or normative aprioristic reference. The fact that this tendency derives at least in part from Enzo Paci's cultural edacity thus confirms the quality of the breadth and far reaching perspective of his thought³. In the Sixties the intensity and rigour with which Paci tackles some of the most complex knots in human experience, further developing relationism in various directions and drawing from natural sciences, cybernetics, art, architecture, literature, economics, seem, rather, the key to understanding the essence of his ethical commitment to an authentic process of renewal of philosophical and cultural thought⁴. Paci has strongly pursued here,

³ Giuseppe Semerari, who was most familiar with Enzo Paci from a philosophical and also human point of view, wrote that his *eclecticism* –so much envied to become a presumed theoretical limit –must be interpreted in Giusto Lipsio's sense, that "identified in the eclecticists the ones who *read carefully and choose judiciously*". Or in the Platonic sense that regards "the impossibility of a univocal and for good talk" (Semerari, 1991, p. 17).

⁴ Enzo Paci's philosophical-cultural reflection is long and heterogeneous. If we wished to retrace just the main points, we must point out, after his first studies on Parmenide (Paci, 1938), his interest in existentialism (Paci, 1943), the outcome of a long and clear gestation that produced the publication of various prior contributions on "Studi filosofici" ("Philosophical Studies"). The Fifties are marked by two works on Kierkegaard (Paci, 1954a; 1954b) and by the affirmation of time and relationship as decisive questions (Paci, 1954c). This until 1957, date of the decisive book *Dall'esistenzialismo al relazionismo [From Existentialism to Relationism]*. In the Sixties Paci expressly devotes his studies to Husserl (Paci, 1960; 1961) and then, finally, he takes care of the first Italian translation of *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1961), without forgetting the connexion with the other cultural approaches such as anthropology (Paci, 1962), sciences (Paci, 1963), literature (Paci, 1965). In this period, he achieved the maturation of the 'cultural relationism', with *Idee per una enciclopedia filosofica [Ideas for a philosophical encyclopaedia]* (1973) and with a Marxist tendency in

furthermore, the most significant fidelity to the teaching of his master, Antonio Banfi: intellectual freedom⁵.

It is necessary to note how the outcomes of this intellectual approach, in many ways the only one in the debate of his days, appear today as further proof of his epistemological farsightedness. In fact, when, in 1952, he founds the Review “aut aut” – Review that still remains one of the most vibrant and interesting intellectual laboratories on the Italian scene –, he is thinking exactly about freedom as the only necessary paradigm for his challenge, and simply because the meaningfulness of the thought itself depends on it. Even Pier Aldo Rovatti, Paci’s student and current Editor of “aut aut” confirms it when, at the Review’s 50th anniversary, he asserts that

The aut aut is very easy: either cultural freedom or barbarism”. I remember that Paci took barbarism to mean a retreat to what he called “comeback positions”. They are the false solutions that reassure us, and particularly the conceptually easy metaphysical solutions behind which we hide. On the contrary, cultural freedom – which Paci considered a point of no return, because once you have freedom you must play it – forces us to risk by experimenting ways that maybe dominant culture does not appreciate, or clearly considers blind alleys. The search for thought can even lead to where is does not know it is going.. [...] Allow me to underline that this program is highly topical. (Rovatti, 2001, p. 9)

The latter observation is so true to enable us, today, to draw on the pedagogical horizon of relationism as one of the most enriching philosophies of education.

It may be useful to begin from here: culture conceived in the antinomy between barbarism and civilization, in order to rebuild the roots, the meaning and the perspectives of relationism⁶. First of all, because its constitutive substratum precisely ties it to its time and defines it as a necessarily disruptive thought, explicitly situated beyond and against

his perspective (Paci, 1974). We must not forget, in this already very rich picture, the highly successful experiment of the *Diario fenomenologico* [*Phenomenological diary*], published in 1961 and re-edited, thanks to its success, in 1973.

⁵ Enzo Paci owes much to his Master and, in general, some essential points: the relationship between life and culture, the idea of a philosophy of culture capable of interpreting the present, the conservation of an anti-dogmatic rationality. Concerning the relationship between Banfi and Paci see at least: Neri (1986), Paci (1990), Cacciatore (1992), Paci (2005); Madrussan (2005).

⁶ The question of the relationship between barbarism and civilization, in which Vico’s resonance is explicit, originates in one of Paci’s very famous works dedicated to the Neapolitan philosopher (Paci, 1949). The outlines of this antinomy remain in all later works, almost as a constant warning to critical vigilance. For a pedagogical reading of this problem, let me refer to Madrussan (2002).

conventional spaces of a reflectiveness bound to the need for reassurance, by describing, in the meantime, its strong ethical and, here, ethical-pedagogical instance. Secondly, because that conflict between the elaboration of knowledge that accepts current rules and the search for a new preliminary approach towards culture implies, indeed, Kierkegaard's risk of radical choice. As we shall see, if the modernity of relationism may no longer be the detailed assumption of its outcomes, of course it may rightly be the force of its methodological structure that today poses far from ordinary questions in the cultural horizon in which we are moving.

In fact, the immediately original element of relationism is the need for a *preliminary approach* able to orient the eye towards each aspect of reality we want to explore. This means no longer building the reflection and the research on strengthened bases, but on the disorientating orbit of possibility, by working with intellectual responsibility on the comprehension of the crisis of our own time. Indeed, it is not a question of a groundlessly polemical approach, of an obstinate search for an unreal *degré zéro* of culture. This is rather the deep ethical need to bring back to knowledge meaning and sense, and to a knowledge that strongly thirsts for worldviews that can more incisively decipher the present⁷. This is a perspective that rejects with the same determination both an elitist view of knowledge and its specialized and self-serving fragmentation, all for a cultural composition which keeps as its fundamental purpose the constant regeneration of the relationship between man and world. Not a progressive development of knowledge starting from dogmatic and indisputable bases – all too often so far from their own origins that they take for granted the founding paradigms – but the constant renewal of culture as an interpretative tool in the hands of man, the one who experiences, tries to understand, gives meaning to that culture.

Well, it is not difficult, now, to realize how this *preliminary approach* is the essential discovery that Paci owes to Husserl's phenomenology, that is to say that to that *Weltanschauung* that passed through the crisis of European culture of the Twentieth century like the blade of a knife. And it is not difficult to recognize in this discovery the debt that Paci owes to his Master, Antonio Banfi, one of the first, in Italy, to draw on German phenomenology as the source for some of the decisive tendencies of his thought. Banfi, in fact, introduced phenomenological thought in Italy, thanks to the studies he made in Germany at the beginning of the Twentieth century and thanks to his direct acquaintance with Husserl and Simmel⁸. And what Banfi considered most persuasive – and Paci too – was

⁷ For further analysis of Paci's thought refer to: Semerari (1977), Verra (1985), VV.AA. (1986), Vigorelli (1987), Dal Pra (1989), Papi (1990), Zecchi (1991), Scaramuzza (2000), Sini (2005), Renzi-Scaramuzza (2006).

⁸ The importance of Husserl and Simmel in Antonio Banfi's thought is documented by Banfi himself in his essay of 1946, entitled *Tre Maestri [Three Masters]*, in which both philosophers were related to his Italian Master, Piero Martinetti. The essay, useful in describing the importance of these relations, is now in *Scritti letterari [Literary writings]* (Banfi, 1970). Concerning Banfi, we refer at least to: Banfi (1926, 1950, 1961, 1967); Bertin (1943); Papi (1961). Concerning the pedagogical question in Banfi's thought: Bertin (1961), Erbetta (2008/1978).

Husserl's idea of building a philosophy of culture "dominated by ethical urgency to offer convincing and complex answers to the crisis" (Erbetta, 2008, p. 53). Answers that Paci looked for, above all, in the recapture and formation of subject in the age of crisis.

Improved commitment and perspectives of relationism

When, in the Sixties and Seventies of the Twentieth century, relationism strode onto the Italian cultural stage, it met and interpreted the marked climate of a transformation process in progress: the political and social scene of the Italian "economic miracle", the turmoil that anticipated the 1968 protest movement, their subsequent affirmation as a need for disclosure and desecration of the world's economic and political processes, the urgency of a different cultural and social commitment, etc. These are phenomena that Paci interpreted, in one respect, as an expression of the European cultural crisis, which Husserl had foreseen, and, in another sense, as a lever for an overall and indispensable revitalization of our culture. In 1974, in fact, Paci wrote that "even though we have plunged into the crisis, we are not able to feel its current climax to the full; its reappearance in forms that denounce it but that always cover it up again" (Paci, 1987, p. 292). Hence the need for improved commitment. In the 'environment' of Paci's cultural genealogy (Papi, 1990; Ferrari, 2004) and in the pedagogical domain, we can name philosophers of education such as Giovanni Maria Bertin (Bertin, 1968, 1973, 1981; Bertin-Contini, 1983) – Antonio Banfi's student too – and Piero Bertolini – a direct pupil of Paci and founder of Phenomenological Pedagogy (Bertolini, 1958, 1988, 1996, 2001) –, who represented this commitment by employing the efforts to build the theoretical-pedagogical structure in order to satisfy the urgency to intercept "always again" the problems of their time⁹. Although each one has its own specific peculiarities, the philosophies of education which derive from this cultural genealogy have preserved that methodological approach. Problematicism, relationism, phenomenological pedagogy and their developments such as the phenomenological-existential horizon of education (Erbetta, 1994, 2005; Iori, 2006) and the deconstructive horizon (Mariani, 2000, 2008; Erbetta, 2010), have so far worked towards, the deep, anti-rhetorical and disclosing comprehension of social, economic, cultural processes which define educational views through their complex relations. All these different philosophies of education always give preference to critical reflection, to doubting the obvious and the conventional and even their own theories, but above all warning of the

⁹ A simple historical fact might help both highlight the passion which, in those years, the Authors mentioned had for pedagogy, and imply the richness of the cultural dialogue that, most probably, linked Masters and Students. In this respect 1961 is a particularly significant year: Banfi publishes a work about the problematicity of education; Paci publishes *Diario fenomenologico* with the explicit aim of offering the reader a pedagogical demonstration of the indissoluble knot between life and culture; Bertin, in his turn, pays tribute to the Master by publishing the first work on Banfi's idea of education. Only three years before, in 1958, Bertolini published his *Fenomenologia e pedagogia [Phenomenology and pedagogy]*, which was published just one year after Paci's book *Dall'esistenzialismo al relazionismo*.

cursory need to please and amplify dominant positions. They had to save, then, a free and critical education, capable of emerging from the ordered and pre-ordered tide of current values¹⁰. This means education committed to:

- disclosing the ideological backstage, which generates and captures current morality;
- exercising a pedagogical practicality, capable of tackling real social problems by employing critical intelligence and cultural wealth as instruments of comprehension and intervention rather than judgments of social adaptation;
- pursuing an ethical question, inclined to consider the problems, instead of preparing immediate an urgent, still encoded request;
- nurturing an educational reflection, capable of maintaining high the attention on the problematicity of reality.

We must be aware of the fact that our European cultural crisis has still not found any authentic forms to overcome the self, in spite of its developments, its ramifications, its affirmation of the subject's breakdown and settlement of its effects in an "age of disenchantment" (Cambi, 2006) permeated by the need to face its "sense of tragedy" (Erbetta, 2004). At the end of his life, by way of cultural heritage and with extraordinary farsightedness, Paci writes: "The disclosure of masks and concealments imposes itself. Especially when they play with the themes of transformation, transition, collapse, absolute newness" (Paci, 1987, p. 293).

In this sense, in fact, relationism should not be seen only as a fruitful and rich genesis, but it could also be reconsidered as still relevant towards the problems raised.

First of all, the need to safeguard *cultural freedom* from:

- a) the subjection to the reproduction of cultural models, according to which, as per Foucault too, the individual's freedom ends up being sacrificed, losing its own problematicity;
- b) the drifts of specialism, that permeated the pedagogical scene of the Seventies and Eighties until the latest utilitarian approaches to the economic-institutional demand raised in the Nineties, according to a scientific and instrumental model that risks becoming a rigid delimitation of reflexive spaces of action;

¹⁰ Two examples: think about the explosiveness, at that time, of Bertin's "educational demonism" and about his defense of an anachronistic Nietzschean pedagogy (Bertin, 1977, 1987, 1995), or about the change produced by Piero Bertolini in the problem of child deviance and of the need to reinterpret educational paradigms of the "difficult youth" according to a phenomenological perspective of experience of life, the relationship between subject and an educational relationship based on reciprocity (Bertolini, 1965, 1988; Bertolini-Caronia, 1993). About G.M. Bertin: VV.AA., 1985; Baldacci, 2004; Contini, 2005; Calvetto, 2007. About Bertolini: Tarozzi, 2006; Erbetta, 2009.

- c) the constant trap of “barbarism”, that always takes root in any experience and which remains hidden by the passiveness that goes through the routine of collective and individual lives. The barbarism that is closest to hand, the one that does not concern an external or evident enemy is the most dangerous against which it is important to take care.

Secondly, it is a question of answering the social demand for a less partially fragmented and utilitarian *comprehension of reality*, according to which the pedagogical reflection should interpret the wounds and the contradictions of our time, by searching for different ways. So, the idea of relationship as the central knot of cultural and interpretative possibilities seems to be still a relevant and prolific perspective: a fertile formative ground, where we tackle uncertainty, the unthought, the contradictoriness, the meaning and where the multiplicity of cultural approaches can really be useful for a meaningful critical view (Mariani, 2011).

Not least: this is what Paci tried to do also by means of the Review “aut aut” and through his diaries, in the constant commitment to critically oversee his own cultural and human experience¹¹. In fact, “aut aut” not only hosted significant contributions by the sharpest intellectuals of that time – writers, philosophers, artists, architects, scientists, sociologists, ethnologists, psychologists, educators, and not only from Italy – in a comparative perspective, but it started from a problem which was either closely linked to a precise historical circumstance, or emerged from a common atmosphere. This is, perhaps, the most methodologically fruitful cultural action. And it is increasingly necessary in a context where the perspectives are weak, where cultural rigidity is defended and where the positions are more and more self-referential, to the detriment of a broad comprehension of the contingent reality, inspired by relationship.

Thirdly, referring to the pedagogical aspect of relationship, we can consider that its connection with the search for truth and with the subject’s life, can today be interpreted by a deconstructive analysis. That is to say: as opportunity to *decode knots of relationship* by highlighting again their meaning, their genesis and their consequences. Therefore, by highlighting the traps of experiences and their meaning as formative opportunities to understand our own way to be-in-the-world, interpreting them according to their semantic tangle and looking at them with the courage of a new and culturally strong recomposition.

In the same way, concerning the centrality of the subject, we must repeat that it is not an abstract idea of ‘strong’ subjectivity connected to the being-in-relationship – this idea, however, did not even concern relationism. In fact, the concept of the relationship as the original condition actually blocks any subjectivist temptation. What remains rather inescapable is the fact that only the subject can explore the existential situation in which he is immersed, and according to which he must demystify both his actions and the reality of experience, to educate himself, to understand and participate. So, this is not a sovereign

¹¹ The link between culture and diary writing, where the relationship between subjectivity, situation, time and writing becomes emblematic expression of self-formation, has been explored in Madrussan (2009).

subject, but a subject that is always responsibly connected to the reciprocity of his relationships.

Finally, relationism's suggestions concerning the *idea of education* can be articulated in four fundamental epicentres:

- a) education as the *need for form*. This is an original *prerequisite* that makes education an inescapable *existential* need and that places it on a different plane in relation to the simple social norm;
- b) education as *“exercise”*, as the constant attempt, as training for life and for the search for the form of our own existence. In this sense, the exercise, which Paci defined “paideutical and ethical”, is always *situated*, contingent, and it becomes, from time to time, *practice* where *life and culture* meet in a mutual involvement;
- c) education as *way to “learn, see and feel always again”* (Paci, 1988, p. 132), by thus recognizing, the reasons of commitment to the situated exercise in the *methodological request* of the critical detachment, which, alone, enables the effort of a free and fruitful conscience. A detachment that, in its own ‘seeing and feeling’, works in the direction of existential planning;
- d) education as *restless experience*, as incessant *reflexive practice* of experience, starting from the awareness of the inescapable ambiguity of education and the problematicity of the subject's life¹².

These are the four conceptual knots that entrust the present prefiguration of an inexistent future with the expression of the critical ability of education. They work, then, starting from the idea of an education that is a “critique of education” (Erbetta, 1994; VV.AA., 2013), in order to describe to the subject who educates himself and to education itself, an unexplored and contingent field of possibilities, still to be rebuilt.

¹² This theory is better explained in Madrussan (2012). For a more in-depth treatment of “education as experience of life”, see: Erbetta (1998, 2005).

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