

Imaging Past Schooling: the Necessity for Montage **Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn, Kate Rousmaniere**

‘history breaks down into images, not into stories ‘

(Walter Benjamin in Smith ed. 1989, 47)

‘it is not that the past cast its light on the present or the present cast its light on the past: rather an image is that in which the Then and the Now come into a constellation like a flash of lightning. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill.

(Walter Benjamin in Smith ed. 1989, 49)

MODERN TIMES

The logic of modernity is that of three great axes and of the constraints upon them; production-organisation-power; its rhetoric is that of movements of change and experimentation, of tensions that favour the new and the untried. (Benko, 1997, 7)

West Europe and North America in the later stages of the nineteenth century experienced a period of accelerated processes of modernisation which demanded rapid accommodation to new conditions. Major transformations in economic and industrial structures and technological advancements saw cities grow as capital was concentrated and mass migration enlarged the workforce. Work and workers were ‘re-made’ as labour processes were broken down, rationalised into component activities and reassembled into efficient production units. Economic and industrial developments increasingly involved the state in planning and managing change. Lives were speeded up as ‘time-space’ was compressed. Work, schooling, family life and leisure increasingly became the object of surveillance - life experiences were classified and documented - as technologies of the social evolved. Medical science expanded with the emergence of psychiatry and the movement for scientifically measuring and classifying intelligence and disorders. Norms of social behaviour were imposed on all spheres of social life and individuals were increasingly expected to conform and be attuned as citizens to broader socio-political objectives. The emergence of mass democracy in the advanced capitalist states was matched by increased consumption and the development of intensely nationalistic ideologies (Berman, 1983; Harvey 1989; O’Shea, 1996).

THE MODERN CITY

‘So many people, and so many messages; so many traces of intimate journeys, news, meetings, possession, rejection, with the city renewing its fabric of transaction every moment of the day and night, as a snake casts its skin, leaving the pattern of the lost

epidermis behind as 'mere' rubbish. (Hughes, 1991, 64)

The city was/is the quintessential site of modernity, the locus of the modern experience. Urban culture was 'the culture of modernity' (Savage and Warde, 1993, 111). The modern city was 'light, ordered and predictable' (Miles, 1997, 33), but it was also a site of flux, of movement and dislocation, of the transient, the fleeting and the contingent. The form of the city was/is not static. The city 'is a metaphor for social change, an icon of the present at the edge of the transformation of the past to the future' (Short, 1991, 41). It was a space of intoxication and excitement; of confusion and energy. It was a site of heterogeneity and diversity; of cultural bifurcation; of local traditions and mass consumption, of variability and multiplicity. It was a space of 'variable geometry, formed by locations hierarchically ordered in a continuously changing network of flows: flows of capital, labor, elements of production, commodities, information, decisions and signals' (Castells, 1983, 314). The city was a place where the residues of previous pasts continued to shape the present, where the vernacular landscape reflected the layered 'traces of previous generations' struggles to earn a living, raise children, and participate in community life' (Hayden, 1996, 15). The city was a frame for social activity (Simmel, 1902) It was a space 'permeated with social relations 'not only supported by social relations but 'also producing and produced by social relations (Lefebvre, 1991, 286) It was a space in which elements of the population were confined in a range of institutions with common architectural languages: the asylum, the workhouse, the infirmary, the prison and the school. (Miles, 1997, 33). It was a space of strangers and casual encounters and engagements. It was a space where the experience of social and cultural differences were intensified. To live in the modern city was to experience fragmentation, commodification and marginalisation. To experience life in the city was to engage with 'immediacy, impact, sensation; to be modern was to live in an environment of visual impression (Bell, 1976) The experience of city life was central to the production of meaning and identity.

THE MODERN SCHOOL

If popular education be worth its great price, its homes deserve something more than a passing thought. School-houses are henceforth to take rank as public buildings, and should be planned and built in a manner befitting their new dignity.

(Robson, 1874, 2)

'Look at those big, isolated clumps of buildings arising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-coloured sea.

'The board-schools.

'Light-houses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future.

(Conan Doyle, 1893)

The end of the nineteenth century saw a shift from education based on voluntary enterprise to a system where the state increasingly controlled the education of the urban child. Institutions, buildings and employees were designed and formed in a process by which cities created modern futures through the invention of the public sector. Education in the city was shaped

and regularised through technology - a complex set of artefacts, actors and structures, and a set of socially constructed principles, procedures and processes, devised to function effectively and realise a purpose (Lawn, 1999, 54-55). This purpose - a designed solution to mass schooling - was according to Markus social control:

[control] is in the buildings which were adapted or purpose built, the space thus created, and the material contents of this space - furniture and equipment. Above all, it is in the order imposed on the human bodies in this space, down to their tiniest gestures, including the gaze of their eyes (Markus, 1996, 12)

Similarly, for Hamilton the modern classroom was invented, together with a teacher, furniture, texts and aids, to produce a designed effect as a form of batch production (Hamilton, 1989). In the classroom pedagogic techniques and disciplinary practices developed as 'technologies of government' (Donald, 1992, 47). At the same time this regularised space, this environment for the 'separation, segmentation and segregation' of childhood (Schlereth, 1990, 15) where relationships were formalised and institutionalised, existed within the modern urban landscape. The child in the urban school also lived in a distinctive socio-cultural, psycho-social as well as material and intellectual environment - the modern city.

SCHOOLING AND THE EXPERIENCE OF MODERNITY

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world - and, at the same time, threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are '[modernity] pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air'. (Berman, 1983, 15).

What was/is the position of children in modernity and how did/do they experience and respond to the condition of modernity? Can we explore how children in the past experienced the tension between the 'possibilities' and the 'uncertainties' of living in the modern city, how they experienced the contradictory impulses of modernity? How did they engage with the 'planned, designed, built, inhabited, appropriated, celebrated, despoiled and discarded' of the modern landscape? (Hayden, 1996, 15) How did they experience living through and making sense of the processes of modernisation? How did they negotiate their life and their identity within a complex and fast-changing world? How did they make sense of the cultural and material changes which were accelerated in the modern city? How did they experience and respond to the spatial and temporal ordering of modernisation?

Is it possible to discover how children interacted in the new public spaces associated with the growth of cities, how they became the object of observation and classification both in private and public places? If in the modern city the public was the private realm of men and the home the private realm of women (Walker, 1996, 23-26) where were childrens'

spaces and how were they socialised for this later binary division of space? Is it possible to engage with and understand children's sense of space and self in the past

What of the modern school in the modern city? How were schools actually created as a mix of designed purposes, social networks, technical operations, technological innovation and craft skills, as an intervention in culture and in social production. Unintended consequences, heterogeneous networks, ill fitting financial and technological strategies and disorganised response placed schools in fluid contexts which disrupted or even originated counter discourse.

How did teachers and children interact with designed space? What were the routines of the modern classroom, what kind of activities did it contain, and what sort of expressions and lives inhabited its space? What was its pedagogical order, and how was the curriculum mediated in its spaces? What was the lived reality of teacher and pupils' lives in and around that classroom? How were messages regarding the appropriate constituents of children's behaviour framed and disseminated? How did children actually experience the 'techniques' which rendered them 'the object of various forms of control, knowledge and concern'? (Donald, 1992, 31) Is it possible to discover how children resisted, confronted or negotiated the 'symbolic norms of behaviour' promoted in the modern school? What were the intended and unintended outcomes of educational innovations in the modern city? What were the silent, residual, embedded and sedimented practices of schooling? How did links between architecture, pedagogy, examinations, curriculum, artefacts and ideology shape pupil and teacher lives in the modern city?

In sum, is it possible for historians of education to explore how children experienced both becoming the subjects and the objects of modernisation and to map and explore the complex interfaces in the 'total social relationships' of schooling - the 'ways in which schools, pupils, teachers, educational activities in general, related to wider social experience' of the urban space? (Silver, 1983, 22)

Questions such as these have been of central importance in a series of international seminars (Birmingham, Toronto, Rotterdam) over the last three years on the 'Silences and Images of the Classroom', involving historians from Northern Europe and North America. The seminars have been concerned with the unasked question, the construction of historical facts and the silences around significant elements of urban history of education. Although the seminar series began with the idea of the classroom, they functioned as a space in which issues about the categories, traditional areas of inquiry and representations in urban education and its methodology were explored (Grosvenor, Lawn and Rousmaniere, 1999) In this sense this paper - with its exploration of montage and its use of ideas found in the work of the Weimar philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) to answer the questions posed about modern schooling - represents an echo of earlier conversations. At the same time it also presumes an openness amongst historians of education to the possibilities inherent in new cross-disciplinary approaches in social science and in the application of critical theory (Burke, 1992).

Imaging the Modern
To be for montage
is not to be for pastiche -
for a jumble of atomistic elements

for a whimsical hotchpotch
to which there is nothing more.
To be for montage
is to be for the totality of fragments,
in which the p(r)o(s)ectics of the textual strategy
are the politics of the textual strategy.
Consciously, rather than by unreflected default.
(Pred, 1995, 27)

Benjamin's work covers a wide range of themes, but much of it is motivated by a desire to understand the nature of experience within the contemporary present. For Benjamin, in order for the present to be understood and recorded the complex relationship between the past and the present, between history and events occurring in the lived Now had to be understood. Benjamin's concern with this problem was intertwined with two other interrelated themes in his work: first, his fascination with the urban experience, of living in the modern metropolis; and second, the problem of representing that urban experience (Buck-Morss, 1989; Weigel, 1996; Gilloch, 1996).

In his cityscapes (Naples, Moscow, Berlin and Paris) Benjamin produced a 'micro-sociology of everyday life and of the city'(Tacussel, 1986, 48). The spaces, buildings and monuments of the modern metropolis which framed social activity also provided surfaces upon which 'traces' of human social activity could be found, read and deciphered. 'Living' meant 'leaving traces' (Benjamin, 1983, 169) and Benjamin, according to his contemporary Ernst Bloch, was possessed of:

a unique gaze for the significant detail, for what lies alongside, for those fresh elements which, in thinking and in the world, arise from here, for the individual things which intrude in an unaccustomed and non-schematic way, things which do not fit in with the usual lot and therefore deserve particular, incisive attention (Smith, 1988,340)

In the cityscapes Benjamin's critical enterprise was to make 'visible' the 'invisible', to record the traces left behind by the inhabitants of the modern city.

In two works, 'A Small History of Photography' (1931) and 'The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction'(1936) Benjamin advocated photographic and film images as being the unique modes of expression which reflected and responded to the demands of modernity, which captured the 'traces', the discontinuities, the fragmentation and transitory nature of the modern experience:

The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law. Thus, for contemporary man the representation of reality by film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thorough going permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is

free of all equipment (Benjamin, 1979, p235-36).

The technology of the camera enabled photography to penetrate the surface of everyday observed reality:

With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals in them entirely new structural formations of the subject. So, too, slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones 'Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye - if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored 'the camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and liftings, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses (Benjamin, 1979, 238-39)

The photographic or film image recorded moments of everyday experience but at the same time re-presented the moment in and through the image, it de-contextualised it and thereby allowed the viewer to look into the world as well at the world, and thus give meaning beyond the event shown. It made analyzable 'things which had heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception' (Benjamin, 1979, 237)

Photography and film enabled the 'traces'- the everyday minutiae of the modern experience - to be retrieved:

By close-ups of things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action (Benjamin, 1979, 238)

For Benjamin this act of retrieval was 'to brush history against the grain', it was to hold on to and document those everyday experiences in the city which were not recorded in the dominant historical narratives which celebrated 'the victor':

'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another (Benjamin, 1973, 259).

In representing the modern experience in his cityscapes Benjamin rejected

conventional narrative structures in favour of a 'discontinuous, fragmented literary form and style 'which captured the fragmentation and fluidity which was the essence of the experience of modernity. (Gilloch, 1996, 18). Benjamin sought to present his ideas through texts in which form and content coalesced, where the experience of living in the city was embedded into the structure of the text, into the methodology of presentation, and where direct presentation obliterated all traces of the author:

Method of this project: literary montage. I have nothing to say, only to show. I won't filch anything of value or appropriate any ingenious turns of phrase. Only the trivia, the trash - which I don't want to inventory, but simply allow it to come into its own in the only way possible: by putting it to use (Benjamin quoted in Buck-Morss, 1991, 73).

Montage was a central feature of Benjamin's cityscapes; it offered the possibility 'of doing justice' of 'giving shape' to the modern experience (Caygill, 1998, 64) 'Traces' of the modern experience, whether visual or literary, were assembled and put 'to use' to bring elements of the past, the debris of history, into the present. At the same time, such images - liberated from their original context - were juxtaposed in a montage of modernity which illuminated elements of common experience, but also disjunctures which provoked and disconcerted the viewer/reader and 'counteract[ed] illusion'(Benjamin quoted in Buck-Morss, 1991, 67). The critical power of montage was its power to shock: 'to bring about an explosion which would bring down the Dream House of History by forcing a discarded, forgotten, even repressed past into an unfamiliar, unreconciled constellation with the present'(Gregory, 1991, 28). The strange became familiar and the familiar became strange. Montage also offered viewers points of entry into the labyrinth of personal reminiscences of the modern experience:

'I should, rather, speak of a labyrinth. I am not concerned here with what is installed in the chamber at its enigmatic centre, ego or fate, but all the more with many entrances leading into the interior. These entrances I call primal acquaintances; each of them is a graphic symbol of my acquaintance with a person whom I met, not through other people, but through neighbourhood, family relationships, school comradeship, mistaken identity, companionship on travels or other such 'situations. So many primal relationships, so many entrances to the maze. But since

most of them - at least those that remain in our memory -for their part open up new acquaintances, relations to new people, after some time they branch off these corridors (Benjamin, 1979, 319)

The mosaic of modern images were 'only half the text. The reader of Benjamin's generation was to provide the other half of the picture from the fleeting images of his or her lived experience' (Buck-Morss, 1995, 292). Montage was, therefore, a mechanism for conjuring and linking people and experiences, moments and discontinuities associated with the fragmentation of the urban experience.

Imaging the Modern School: the Necessity for Montage

No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has so to speak seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long forgotten moment the future subsists so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it. (Benjamin, 1979, 243)

A photographic image: a middle-aged uniformed male inspector from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children delivers a summons to a woman. The woman is standing on a step, holding one child in her arms, while two other children look on. The woman and all the children are dressed in worn and tattered clothing. The age of the children can be readily guessed from visual clues, but that of the woman (the mother?) remains indeterminate. The woman's face expresses a mixture of anguish and anger as she gazes at the inspector. His eyes, in turn, are fixed on the summons which, as yet, he still holds. A second image: a room in a school with two nurses standing by a table and surrounded by fourteen boys dressed in a range of poor quality suits. Twelve of the boys stare out directly from the image returning the gaze of the image-maker. Seven of the children are displaying an uncovered arm or leg. There is a kettle on the wooden floor, a large wooden cupboard, a desk, and on the wall there are pictures of nature scenes and a sign written in italics: *Highest Attendance Week Ending* 'The date is hidden by a plant. A male teacher/health worker is posed sideways on talking with a pupil. A third image: fourteen children are sitting in a circle on the floor of a classroom, their circle follows the shape of a line painted on the floor. Three children have their hands in the air and are engaged in a conversation with a female teacher/ adult helper. The teacher/helper sits crossed-leg and a child sits in her lap, her face covered by her crossed hands. A second adult looks on. There are low shelves, a chalkboard, a tying frame and carpets. A fourth image: an empty classroom, an epidiascope is on a desk at the front; a fifth image.

Such images are familiar to historians of urban education. Decades, possibly a century after some of these images were captured, a group of historians looked at these and other images of classrooms and tried collectively to make meaning out of them, drawing on their own experiences, knowledge, technical expertise, and each other. Over the course of two meetings, two years apart, on opposite sides of the Atlantic, this group of about twenty academics from different countries in North America and Northern Europe looked at series of photographic and moving images of classrooms: photographs from Holland in the Second World War and the Dutch West Indies in the early twentieth century; a slide show of teachers in Boston in the 1970s; and images of schools in Birmingham, England at the end of the nineteenth century. The task set before the group was to make meaning out of the photographs, to bring their own cultural context and perspective to the image and to, in a sense engage in dialogue with the original photographer. The task was to look reflexively at both the photograph and at the photographer, and to question the relationship between the classroom and the lens, and then the relationship of the image to the present. The result was a montage of personal responses interwoven with historical questions. The following is an extract from an account of those meetings:

Sometimes, the absence of formal knowledge from the photograph provided us with information. One person noted that by looking at photographs of classrooms that were not identified and dated, we were in a sense 'freed' from our responsibility as historians and we could concentrate on our reactions and our ideas and feelings about the culture of the classroom. We recognized the power, and the authority of our own interpretation. 'I don't know anything about this picture, but I can still use it in several ways' said one of us. Part of the montage was the silence behind and before and after the photograph was taken. What was interesting was often not the photograph itself, but what was left out, what was absent. Did the preparation for the shooting of a still photograph mean that the normally active and noisy experiences of the classroom were interrupted? In posed photographs of classroom groups, the children and the teacher stand unnaturally frozen, and we asked: is this really a classroom, or is it merely a photograph of people standing stiffly together in a room? Is a classroom more than the four walls and identities inside it? Is a classroom also the activity and movement and social relations?

The work that led to the creation of the photograph was also absent, and this also made us wonder if, in fact, we were looking at a classroom.

Nowhere in the scenes of classrooms did we see the physical work of cleaning and decorating the room for the photographer, the disciplining of children to dress and behave properly for the photographer, organizing time in the school day for the photographer to come into the classroom, and monitoring students to get back into the rhythm of school after the photographer left.

In this way, we noticed the haunting silence of the images: who was missing from the formal image of the classroom (parents, the child who was expelled from school, the child held back in punishment, the teacher doing yard duty) and whose character and life story was absented from the photograph. We considered the multiple stories behind the blank and expressionless face of a student who might, merely minutes before, have enlivened the class with a joke, a spitball, or comic behavior.

Some images were so powerful that they 'stunned us into silence', the image literally displaced talk, which in a sense made the 'making of history' a silent and unwritten account. The image, literally, spoke for itself.

The images of classrooms of the past also touched us very personally. The fragments from the past are so familiar from either our own lives as students or our role as parents or teachers.

We will always be writing some of our own history in the history of the classroom, even as that history becomes a democratic project - we see ourselves, and our former classmates, in our work.

The process of close observation made us question classrooms even more so that we wondered about the mystery of what has gone on in so many millions of classrooms. 'The more I study the classroom, the less I understand what it is', said one of us. Another of us echoed: 'Although I've been in classrooms most of my life, they became invisible to me-- I ignored what they looked like and how they shaped what I did'.

What was in front of the camera existed in the present and is captured as a moment in that present, but once mechanically recorded and chemically fixed the moment was gone, it ceased to exist in the Now but existed somewhere else. An image from the past brings an absence into the present. It produces a 'trace' of human activity which can be deciphered. Montage offers a mode of engagement with this somewhere else.

Presented with a mosaic of images (visual or literary) - of the modern school, of the designed space, of pupils and teachers inhabiting that space, of the artefacts of learning and teaching, of elements in the cityscape, of 'traces' of living and learning in the modern city (eg the images described above) - the historian of urban education can venture into the landscape and encounter, read and decipher the 'traces' of urban schooling of Benjamin's excavated cityscapes. At the same time, the historian can not only retrieve and reconstruct the experience of past schooling but can also illuminate elements of that past by juxtaposing the images in alternative patterns to produce different meanings and understandings of past schooling. By deliberately deploying the ordinary with the extraordinary montage can confront the reader/viewer with the possibility of seeing and making associations which otherwise would go unmade. The juxtaposition of images can produce mutual illumination and new (hi)stories of urban schooling can be told.

Through 'spatio-temporal contrasts and contrafactuals' (Caygill, 1998, 119) the historian can investigate the questions which occur in the interplay between image and viewer. The cut-and-paste of montage allows what is peculiar, what is unsaid, what is insignificant, what is excluded, what is at the margin of urban schooling to become an object of knowledge. Montage enables the historian of urban education to reveal the complex interrelations between old and new. Looking at images across and through time the historian can identify elements of continuity and disjuncture, engage with changing discourses of education, architecture, urban planning and modernisation and ask questions about the material impact of educational discourse as revealed in and through the images.

Montage as a process raises as many questions as it answers. Benjamin wrote in *One Way Street* (1928): 'Quotations in my work are like wayside robbers who leap out armed and relieve the stroller of his convictions' (Benjamin, 1979, 95). Montage offers the historian of urban education

both a method and a task: to shock, and by doing so, to illuminate and retrieve that which lies hidden and forgotten.

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