

Initiation, not Indoctrination: Confronting the grotesque in cultural education

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to differentiate initiation from indoctrination, and to return a positive significance to the notion of initiation, as a pedagogy that contributes not only to the perpetuation of a particular form of life or community, but that provides the next generation with means to advance that knowledge beyond its existing boundaries. When we conflate the terms 'initiation' and 'indoctrination' or only mark a minor difference between the two, we lose meaning. The explanatory and predictive power of our statements is weakened by this failure to take seriously the difference between these two terms. By ignoring the progressive potential in initiation, and condemning that pedagogy as uncritical, educational theorists fail to recognize the intermediate steps that need to be taken in educating a student to be a creative and responsive thinker within a cultural, i.e. symbolic, context. Within the pedagogy of initiation crucial methods for teaching students to engage existing representations of truth, rules of practice, and principles of meaning-making are employed. This article draws upon case studies and theorists in anthropology to offer a description of initiation that holds progressive potential, and explains the possible relevance of initiatory pedagogy for multicultural education.

Keywords: initiation, culture, narrativity, multiculturalism, rhetoric, cultural pedagogy

I will not pursue this point here, but after all, Plato, a speculative philosopher, if there ever was one, did acknowledge his philosophical debt to the teachings of the Eleusinian and Orphic initiations of Attica. We have no way of knowing whether primitive initiations merely conserved lore. Perhaps they also generated new thought and new custom. (Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*)

When we conflate the terms 'initiation' and 'indoctrination' or only mark a minor difference between the two, we lose meaning. The explanatory and predictive power of our statements is weakened by this failure to take seriously the difference between these two terms. This loss of meaning, and therein of applicable pedagogical knowledge, is due in part to the elevation of critical, autonomous thinking to the *summa bonum* of education, the ultimate goal to which all educational processes must tend if they are to be judged proper. In this idealization of critical thinking, we tend to oppose those others,

initiation and indoctrination, as not only insufficient but also illegitimate. These others are considered easier, tempting, but in the end productive of the opposite of an enlightened individual. In our desire for clarity we construct binaries. Indoctrination and/or initiation are identified and defined only in a negative relation to critical pedagogy. They exist in the literature of educational inquiry for the primary purpose of establishing an explanatory contrast with and for critical pedagogy.

The goal of this article is to differentiate initiation from indoctrination, and to return a positive significance to the notion of initiation, as a pedagogy that contributes not only to the perpetuation of a particular form of life or community, but that provides the next generation with means to advance that knowledge beyond its existing boundaries. Educational theorists that currently conflate the meaning of indoctrination and initiation do so with a better pedagogical method in mind. But by ignoring the progressive potential in initiation, and condemning that pedagogy as uncritical, they fail to recognize the intermediate steps that need to be taken in educating a student to be a creative and responsive thinker within a cultural, i.e. symbolic, context. Within the pedagogy of initiation crucial methods for teaching students to engage existing representations of truth, rules of practice, and principles of meaning-making are employed. These are some of the same methods which those condemning initiation are calling for to advance a critical pedagogy. But in initiation these are not individualistic cognitive methods and activities, rather they are grounded in the existing codes and symbolic contents of particular traditions.

The goal of producing the autonomous, critical thinking subject idealized in the Enlightenment period of European history is no longer as clearly and distinctly *the* goal to which we set ourselves as educators. And with it, even the vaunted ‘critical pedagogy’—as oppositional as it may ever declare itself—has come into question as being the sole right way to educate in the wake of which all others fade into indoctrination. We have begun to question seriously enough to start attending to the *différance* of our critical differences. I would like to propose here that we consider initiatory pedagogies as a source of exemplary symbolic practices from which educators can selectively borrow and adapt to enhance their ability to introduce students to their own active and creative role in the authorizing and authoring of the symbolic elements of their society.

Making the Distinction

Indoctrination has been well-defined for some time, probably most definitively by Thomas Green, as a pedagogy identified not by the content of what is taught, but by the way that content is taught (Green, 1972). Indoctrinatory pedagogies present the existing cultural codes and vocabularies as the authoritative determinants of action and judgment. Any deviation from the code undermines not only the legitimacy or propriety of an act or judgment, but moreover undermines its meaningfulness. In an indoctrinatory classroom, the employment of alternative norms or standards is seen not merely as another way of doing or judging however improper or misguided, but as nonsensical.

It is because indoctrination is an expected form of cultural education that we have the controversy over such texts as *Huckleberry Finn*. It is not the narrative’s formal merit as a work of literature that is questioned, but rather, the life style and ethical relations which

it represents through the plot and actions of its main characters. Those who would ban *Huckleberry Finn* believe that cultural education should indoctrinate students into a particular cultural order and that *Huckleberry Finn* represents a degradation of that order. They object not because the text represents an alternative ordering and selection of symbols producing a possible alternative normative meaning, but because the symbolic arrangement is itself wrong and false. In such cases of educational censorship, the rhetoric of cultural representation is conflated with its logic; in other words, the conventions of a community are understood as the absolute conditions of the possibility of meaningful symbolic representation.

In indoctrinatory teaching, a particular order is presented as the rules assuring good and truthful participation within the community. A particular rhetorical code, i.e. a set of established relations between symbols, is given absolute and universal status. The order is given the status of truth, assuming a referential relation between the symbolic relations and reality. The code, which establishes correctness within a community, is presented as the only means of making sense. Describing indoctrinatory pedagogies, Bourdieu states, ‘as the process of institution [or indoctrination] consists of assigning properties of a *social* nature in a way that makes them seem like properties of a natural nature, the rite of institution tends logically ... to integrate specifically social oppositions, such as masculine/feminine, into series of cosmological oppositions ... They constitute a simple difference of fact as a legitimate distinction, as an institution’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 118). Right (cultural correctness) and truth are conflated. Thus in indoctrinatory pedagogies the distinction between logic and rhetoric is overshadowed or subsumed by the assumption of a given set of truths. There is no treatment of *possible* conditions of meaning-making; there is only one way of speaking and acting meaningfully. Rhetoric subsumes logic.

Initiatory pedagogy employs neither the same means nor has the same goal as indoctrinatory pedagogy. But the distinction between these two pedagogies is not often well-drawn. In his article, ‘Education, not Initiation’, Gert Biesta argues that initiation is a pedagogy guided by the metaphor of transmission (1997). He states that proponents of initiation regard the student as passive. In this, initiatory pedagogy is judged as failing to account for the true nature of learning, which is an engagement between teacher and student in which knowledge is not merely passed from teacher to student, but in which knowledge is generated out of a performative engagement. Biesta, arguing against initiation in favor of critical pedagogies, states,

Once it is recognized that the input of education is not passively assimilated but performatively identified so that there is always a *margin* or a *gap* between input and output, and once it is acknowledged that this margin or gap is constitutive of the very process of education, it not only becomes clear that culture—in the broadest sense of the word—is located in the ‘performances’ of individual actors, but also that the continuation of culture is by necessity dependent upon the transformative and differentiating performativity of these actors. (1997, webpage)

Biesta claims that to understand education as initiation is to fail to grasp the transformative and differentiating aspect at the heart of the educational process. Biesta argues

that education must account for the ‘communicative, intersubjective, and interactive’ nature of actual learning in a social context marked by plurality. By failing to do so, according to Biesta, initiation is judged to fall short of the requisites of a critical and liberatory pedagogy.

Smeyers and Burbules, in ‘Education as Initiation into Practices’, argue that education into existing social practices can in fact have a ‘liberating, rather than merely “conserving” or reproducing’ outcome (2006). But initiation is still understood as a pedagogy suited merely to achieving a ‘pre-reflexive familiarity’ with the repertoire of concepts and practices ‘necessary to communicate and interact with each other’ in a particular social context. ‘With respect to such practices one cannot *not* be initiated, because not being so initiated would imply not being in any human relationship at all’ (2006, p. 442). Burbules and Smeyers argue that there is a way to educate which encourages a ‘critical/reflective mode of enacting practices’. The distinction between initiation and indoctrination is not central to their undertaking, as they conceive it. Their goal is to make the possibility of a liberating education intelligible in terms of practice. But by considering initiation as a pre-reflexive form of education ‘which one cannot not undergo’, initiation is characterized as learning to follow ‘a certain procedure, without necessarily being able to articulate how or why’ (p. 442). In this, they have failed to recognize the procedures internal to, rather than potentially additive to, initiatory pedagogies that employ exactly the techniques of ‘narrativization’ that they argue would ‘give rise to a more critical/reflective relation to practice’ (Smeyers and Burbules, 2006, p. 449).

In this article, I hope to make more than a semantic or terminological claim. I am not just arguing that these authors are using ‘initiation’ improperly. Rather, I am arguing for a clarification of a distinction and an understanding of initiation as a practice of cultural education different from indoctrination. Moreover, I want to explain the unique aspects of initiatory pedagogies that promote not a passivity, but rather a creative agency in relation to the symbolic resources of a given society. Biesta argues that transformativity and differentiation are crucial aspects of cultural education, and I argue that initiation is a pedagogy which, properly understood, teaches students to engage in the differentiation, articulation, and transformation of constitutive elements of culture. Smeyers and Burbules, at the close of their argument state that it is by examining the narrativization of cultural practices that the conditions for a liberating potential in educational practices can be found. In this article, I argue that in initiatory pedagogies, it is exactly through certain guided narrative practices that a progressive lesson is taught—one not merely preserving of certain customs, but rather generative of new ones.

R. S. Peters called for an initiation into a discipline or a field of thought—with its history and norms, literature and methods, standards and criteria—as an achievable and respectable goal of education. And he distinguished this from indoctrination. For Peters, indoctrination was the process of fixing a certain set of beliefs in the next generation.

Societies can persist in which bodies of knowledge with principles immanent in them can be handed on without any systematic attempt to explain and justify them or to deal honestly with phenomena that do not fit. Fixed beliefs are thus perpetuated. When this is done we are presumably confronted with what is called indoctrination. (1967, p. 19)

In contrast, in initiation, as Peters understood it, students are not to be taught that the conclusions of past practitioners are always and forever true nor are they to be taught that the methods are laws of practice beyond revision. Rather, by initiation, he meant that one would be given the knowledge and skill necessary to communicate, engage, and, if called upon by circumstances, advance the field through inquiry necessarily critical of the existing and legitimated knowledge therein. ‘The problem of the teacher is to pass on a body of knowledge in such a way that a critical attitude towards it can also develop’ (Peters, 1967, p. 19). According to Peters, initiatory pedagogies do not exclude the teaching of critical skills, but they include them in relation to the advancement of a particular field of given knowledge. In so locating the goal as an internal one within a given field, he limits the applicability of initiation. It is a pedagogy designed to teach a practical knowledge necessary for the preservation and advancement of a particular field of knowledge. Peters’ notion of initiation is a rather conservative pedagogy. Initiation, according to Peters, did not develop students’ capacity to recognize and mediate relations between the knowledge and criteria of other fields as an essential aspect of initiatory education, as I will argue it does in a broader notion of initiation described below. Rather, for Peters, initiation entailed the embedding of one in a particular way of life and inquiry.

I want to develop a more progressive possibility in initiatory pedagogies that is brought out in the anthropological literature on initiation. In these descriptions of initiation, it is understood as a means to achieve the change of an individual’s status within a community, in which the confrontation of the initiate with the radically other is an integral part. I will argue that this aspect of initiation contributes to a more progressive potential in the knowledge and skills taught through initiatory means, neither consistent with indoctrinatory nor critical pedagogies, but relevant to the teaching of skills needed within a multicultural and globalizing world in which one must be able to mediate and articulate symbolic relations between multiple cultural systems.

Describing Initiation

Anthropology defines initiation as a rite of passage in which an individual, or rather, a group sharing a common status within a society is temporarily exiled, subjected to grotesque or sacred normative representations, and then re-integrated into society as members holding a new status, a new identity, and authorized to perform new roles. The status change is from that of one who did not have a certain level of authority to make judgments within the community to a level of authority in which the individual was to have authority over a particular area of social interaction. Thus the initiate advances from child to adult, or follower to leader, or generalist to specialist. Those who have been initiated are expected to have the skills and knowledge necessary to make decisions on behalf of the community for those areas over which they have been given jurisdiction. The focus of this process is, then, not on the well-being or the full development of the individual, but rather on the well-being and the full development of the community. Initiation serves the best interests of the community by making sure that the decisions made regarding responses to conflict and stress are made by those who have achieved a

level of knowledge and skill for determining what is right and wrong in a particular area of practice.

In anthropology, there are, of course, differing interpretations of initiation. I will base this discussion of initiation on the analysis of Arnold van Gennep offered in the 1920s, as it is developed in the work of Victor Turner and further by Pierre Bourdieu (Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1967; Bourdieu, 1991). This interpretation of initiation builds upon a structuralist notion of culture as a symbolic system which undergirds the normative beliefs and the judgments of a particular community. But along with Turner, it focuses attention on the use or performance of those symbols by practitioners in the field of interaction, and with Bourdieu, it focuses upon the logic and rhetoric of cultural practice. This analysis of initiation emphasizes both its role in reproducing existing symbolic systems as social structures, as well as the practices by which individual actors become active agents in the rearticulation of those structures by putting them into play in an ever-changing, historical, and social world.

Initiation is a complex process through which the symbolic repertoire and grammar of a culture are made strange so that their manner of functioning can be understood, so that the elements of culture can be grasped and fashioned, not merely accepted as a given and fixed set of beliefs. Initiation is an immersion into an existing symbolic system, occurring when the codes and repertoires are already familiar to the student. But in initiation the familiar is made strange. Initiation is a concentrated immersion, and one that takes place within a normally ritualized context. Therein the initiate encounters the familiar only as transfigured in the grotesque. The extant codes and symbolic vocabularies of the initiates' culture or society are subject to a process of presentation which advances through a series of stages, each requiring a different positioning of the initiate in relation to the symbolic system, each teaching a different method of symbolic interpretation and articulation, and each introducing a different ethical comportment in relation to alternative or anterior symbolic articulations.

Separation

Arnold van Gennep, in his study *The Rites of Passage*, breaks down initiation into three stages: separation, limin, and aggregation. The first stage of initiation, separation, is meant to establish difference where there was identity, to disrupt the naive correspondence assumed in the thought process of the uninitiated, and therein reveal the human mediating factor, i.e. the contingency and the constructedness, within the symbolic representation of the culture's world. This is achieved through disruption, differentiation, and the inversion of signifying components used within the culture's established symbolic representations. The relation between the logic and rhetoric of symbolic constructions are highlighted by the breaking up of the components and their repositioning in ways that often break with normative and rhetorical rules.

An example of this process is clearly described from a structural perspective in Vidal-Naquet's account of the initiation of young Spartan males in which they are sent out into the borderlands and expected to hunt and trap for themselves (Vidal-Naquet, 1986). In Spartan society, hunting and trapping was considered a barbarous and ignoble way of life, and the borderlands remote from or deprived of civilization. The

initiates are displaced and their relation to the norms of their society are put into question. They are made other. Another example is found in the Athenian rite of initiation, the *ephebia*, in which children are initiated into adulthood. In the performance of this rite, the initiates are made to wear the garb of the opposite sex (Vidal-Naquet, 1986). This inversion is a breaking of the rhetorical code. The code, which establishes the rules of proper behavior, determines the appropriate garb for signifying one's identity with a particular gender group. This symbolic regulation creates and maintains a particular notion of gender difference and identity. In the rite, the transvestite behavior breaks the rules of conventional behavior. But though both the Spartan and Athenian examples transgress appropriate behavior, the performance remains a meaningful symbolic act. The initiates learn that the inversion of relations, though inappropriate, still produces meaningful acts according to the symbolic logic of their culture.

Because in both the Spartan and the Athenian cases, the separation and the reversal of binary symbolic and normative relations occurs as part of a ritual, this gesture is experienced as a legitimate wrong. As such it allows for the reflective consideration of significance of this alternative behavior. The acts of exile and cross-dressing reproduce the binary logic of the community's symbolic constructions of class and gender. The rules broken are those that guide the proper performances of labor and gender. The rules which these inverse performances continue to obey are the logical relations between categories of identification and differentiation (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Thus the exiling and the transvestite appearance of the novices within the controlled context of the ritual performance has a symbolic meaning, which is precisely to accent both the rhetorical rule which it breaks, and the logic in which it partakes. The lesson of the transgressive symbolic representation is not that there is a correspondence between the symbolic and the real, but rather that the potential for symbolic significance lies in the representation's employment of an articulated binary relation.

The stage of separation emphasizes this logic of difference which underlies the normative significance of the culture's symbolic repertoire. It might not be explicitly stated in the course of the lesson, but it is shown to the student within the course of his/her performance through the manipulation of the expected symbolic relations. In the case of the *ephebia*, the identity of either gender relies upon its difference from the other. The separation of components (male/female) which make up the ruling normative relations highlights their difference, their inversion highlights their interdependence. The Spartan lesson teaches that the center relies upon the margin, the citizens' well-being upon the suffering of the outcast. These are opposed but interdependent categories, symbolically constituted and put into play.

In initiatory teaching, the first step of separation is intended to establish in the mind of the student that the articulation of normatively meaningful statements is made possible only through the opposition of valued terms. To teach this fact of the symbolic nature of normative meaning, we find that the initiates are exiled or displaced into anterior positions within the symbolic order of their society. It is this displacement and separation which is the essential first step to introduce the initiate to the normally unspoken possibilities *inherent within* the system.

Limin

The second stage of initiation, the *limin*, is the guided encounter of the initiates with grotesque and sacred representations of the culture's symbolic repertoire. These representations are produced through exaggeration and hyperbole, mixing and matching to create monstrous and divine symbols composed of various signs drawn from incongruous sources. They are transgressive of the rhetorical code, but they represent a possibility of meaning-making which is necessary for the maintenance of the system. These symbolic grotesques make sense in that they can be understood, i.e. they signify but they are at the same time wrong. They are the little-seen and sometimes heard in the wee hours of the night, occupants of the basement and attic of the community dwelling. They are necessary to the functioning of the order, either as consequences or causes. But they would be disruptive if brought into the light of the everyday.

This encounter with the monstrous representations drawn from the exaggeration or perversion of the symbolic repertoire accentuates the lesson of separation, in that it reveals the distinction between the potentiality of meaning in symbols (logic) and their appropriateness and correctness (rhetoric). But it now goes further to show that alterior symbolic constructions can be understood. Though they do not have the corresponding relation to right or correctness, they are still logical possibilities (and therefore meaningful) within the extant system. Initiates learn that symbolic representations are mediate forms, that is, they are constructed to convey a sense of right and wrong, good and evil, but in and of themselves they are neither true nor false. The monstrous as well as the divine, which are the causes and consequences of moral/immoral social action, are to be recognized as the result of humanity's breaking of the code in their creation of meaning through the manipulation of the signs of the symbolic world.

During the *limin* phase, the potential to create alternative and meaningful symbolic constructions is explored. Initially the initiates are confronted by monstrous constructions revealed by their teacher and generated through the recombination of signs and symbols to create strange aggregates. According to Victor Turner, 'monsters are manufactured precisely to teach neophytes to distinguish clearly between the different factors of reality, as it is conceived in their culture' (1967, p. 105). Turner relies on William James' description of the law of dissociation to describe the function of the grotesque in initiation. 'As James himself put it, 'What is associated now with one thing and now with another, tends to become dissociated from either, and to grow into an object of abstract contemplation by the mind' (Turner, 1967, p. 105). This abstraction, through separation and recombination of signifying elements, allows the students to grasp these as relational elements which are subject to the selective and organizational decisions of their articulators. They reveal a symbolic system at work, with its own rules of logic and rhetoric, not merely a static and existing reality.

Many of the cultural narratives that have achieved canonical status in the West (as well as the East, South, and North) contain monstrous figures which seem to serve the pedagogical function of teaching the initiate to understand the logical potential underlying the symbolic system which is their culture. The thief-hero or the trickster are familiar figures in canonical tales told to children in order to teach and entertain, but clearly they are not figures to be strictly imitated as exemplary moral citizens. The myths

of Prometheus and Hermes, the adventures of Robin Hood, Monkey, Raven and Anansi are case narratives for this purpose. Such tales are particularly apt for use in an initiatory as opposed to an indoctrinatory pedagogy in that they focus on the wrong that makes sense. In this they fascinate by revealing the logic behind the cultural narratives as the source from which the 'wrong' draws its reason and significance through symbolic acts of substitution, inversion, and recombination.

An example of this pedagogical method of initiation, as conducted within the stage of the limin, and appropriate for our contemporary multicultural and global society, might be the tasking of students with creation of tales that interweave the narratives of trickster figures from multiple cultures. Thus students would be engaged in the act of creating grotesques through a process of mixing and matching symbolic elements from multiple cultural systems. Students would be required to articulate stories that not only employ characters from multiple traditions, but also to work them into a story that communicates to their fellow students normative, ethical, and moral messages which are products not of either, but of both traditions. Students are thus engaged not merely in the threshold moment, or literally, the limin, within their respective culture, but are engaged in a moment at the crossroads between cultures. But this is to hint at a potentiality of the pedagogy of initiation that moves it beyond cases of its actual practice as recounted in anthropological ethnographies, to its potential usefulness in contemporary multicultural contexts.

The practical reason for the revelation of the meaningfulness of the grotesque, the reason behind the pedagogy of initiation, is to prepare those who will be assuming an authoritative role to deal with the unavoidable if not necessary contradictions and conflicts within their cultural system. All systems when put into play in the world of human relations generate contradiction, either internally or externally as they encounter the multiplicity of empirical facts or alternative demands of competing subsystems. Initiates must be taught to meet such conflicts and contradictions not only as empirical realities but as symbolic phenomena subject to articulatory practices. Initiations are simulated, controlled encounters with such symbolic conflicts in which it is the initiates' task to actively mediate the competing demands.

The rite must resolve the specific contradiction that the original dichotomy makes inevitable by constituting, as separate and antagonistic, principles that have to be reunited to ensure the reproduction of the group. It must do so through a socially approved and collectively endorsed operation, that is, in accordance with the objective intention of the very taxonomy which give rise to the contradiction ... In fact, the union of contraries does not abolish the opposition and when united, the contraries are still as opposed as ever, but quite differently, manifesting the dual truth of the relationship that unites them, at once complementary and antagonistic, *neikos* and *philia*, and what might appear as their dual nature outside this relationship. (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 212–3)

The type of mediate symbolic action that is to be learned and achieved by the initiate is not an absolute resolution, but a temporal mergence of difference through symbolic action. The grotesque phenomena confronting the initiate are to be understood not as a

mistakes produced by chance and chaos, but as necessary and required parts of the system. Such monstrous forms are to be understood as internal, persisting features of the culture; they belong to it as logically sustained and sustaining elements. Initiates are to learn that the symbolic logic of their culture is not a logic that abhors, but rather incorporates contradiction and reversal, as a means of making the system of normative signification sufficient to meet the needs of an historically dynamic society.

This particular stage of initiation, the *limin*, aims to empower novices to take action themselves, to discover their own potential and learn the skills for symbolic action. This occurs through their confrontation with the grotesque in the borderlands or the sacred in the center. The initiates learn to rely upon their own powers to 'deal with' these Others who present an alterior sense of the normal world. The student must understand the logic and be competent in the rhetoric, in order to interact with these grotesque others in their own moment of conflict, exchange, and union. Initiates learn to understand these grotesques as not simply insane or nonsensical, but as signifying a cultural truth, yet in an improper or abnormal way. It is up to the novices then to adapt their own discourse in such a way as to permit them to engage meaningfully with the others. It is a matter of the student relying upon their knowledge of symbolic logic and adopting a grotesque rhetoric to interact within these alteriorities. The logic stays the same, the rhetoric is different.

The initiates must learn not only to recognize and understand the meaningfulness of the grotesque, but also to interact with the grotesque in a manner that is meaningful to both themselves, as representatives of the norm, and these Others. To be successful in these interactions, they must take advantage of the polysemious nature of symbols, that is, the multiplicity of possible meanings and relations which constitute the cultural order.

By the principle of the economy of symbolic reference, logically antithetical processes of death and growth may be represented by the same tokens, for example, by huts and tunnels that are at once tombs and wombs This coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal. (Turner, 1967, p. 99)

The polyvalence of such symbols makes them potent catalysts and mediators for the process of articulatory work to be engaged in this middle initiatory stage of a symbolic cultural education. The multiplicity of meanings available to initiates in this marginal realm point to a poetic potential in the grotesques as well as the initiates who must engage in a meaningful and meaning-making 'conversation'.

It is in the *limin* phase that the student is thrown back upon his/her own poetic resources. It is here where they recollect their capacity to do symbolic work. Within this same stage of initiation, students are required to learn to participate in the grotesque, in the articulation of monstrous symbols. It is here that they learn their own creative potential to formulate meaningful alternatives. This is the time that a certain skill and cunning, normally denied the value of virtuous behavior, receives its due as potentially valuable. The ancient Greeks refer to this 'virtue' as *metis*.

Odysseus is able to avoid, escape, or circumvent these dangers and temptations
[and I might add to cohabit with some of them when necessary] because of

his *metis*. His cleverness ... relies upon a certain capacity for adaptation under duress. He is able to formulate a third way because he can approach a problem unencumbered by static assumptions. He is ingenious in recombining and using what is available at hand in inventive new ways. (Burbules, 2002, pp. 10–11).

The virtue of *metis* is a skill exercised in this phase of cultural education. Behavior inappropriate in normal circumstances, such as lying, deception, rule-breaking, and disguise are expected and required for the successful movement through this stage of the initiatory pedagogy. It is only through such methods of transgressing the normal code of social interaction that initiates can successfully pass through this stage. Not the sort of behavior one would deem proper as the aim of teaching culture, except that it is necessary for the adaptation of culture to historical forces, both internal and external.

Although established normative relations are undone and the alternative relations are created by initiates in their play with symbols, such active learning is still motivated by the logic and the particular code of symbolic selection and organization. Thus instead of pure random substitution, participants engage in substitution based upon metaphoric and metonymic correspondence. Although existing normative relations are subject to challenge, substitution, and inversion, these recombinatory articulations are still motivated actions based upon given, extant orderings of symbols. As the initiates play with the terms and relations of the symbolic system governing representation and expression, they come to recognize and understand the rules and codes that constitute the normative order, as well as the relational combinations that work to produce meaning even in altered, borderline contexts. In this pedagogical process, the initiate gains a pragmatic understanding of the symbolic representations, a pragmatic understanding that advances beyond the more absolutist and universalizing understanding of the indoctrinated.

Initiation is meant to prepare individuals to be active agents of cultural maintenance and, in moments of crisis, agents of change. Thus there is a need to make sure that this human mediation of the cultural system is conducted responsibly. Now the distinction between good and evil takes on a symbolic all-too-human quality and this qualification of this distinction is important for the novice who is to be made ready, not merely to shun evil and embrace good, but to actively engage in the conflict over the proper instantiation of norms and values for the sake of the community.

Aggregation

In an initiation into a monological, or rather mono-rhetorical, culture in which a particular code is clearly dominant, and where the initiate is expected to become a judicious participant, the grotesques need to be experienced as monstrous and threatening, the sacred as mysterious and transcendent. The newly acquired skills of the initiate for producing alternative symbolic representations pose a threat. To answer this threat, the initiation process ends in a third stage, aggregation. In aggregation, the rhetorical code is re-legitimated in the educational proceedings as the proper means of resolving the dissonances and problems encountered in the limin period. This process begins under the novices' own initiative, in their overcoming of the grotesque or coming-to-

terms with the divine through the creative manipulation of the available symbolic resources. In the stage of aggregation, the initiates learn a respectful mastery of the culture's code.

By way of the authority and power of the cultural code, the initiate is given the means to put right the wrong. In the phase of aggregation, the novice learns to use the symbolic code to solve the problems and defuse the dangers of the grotesque and sacred. In the limin phase the novice learns to understand and communicate with the monstrous, to play along so as to coexist, but in the phase of aggregation, s/he learns how to put to right the wrongs, to defeat or gain a boon from the monstrous or divine through appeal to a consistent, applicable, and developed symbolic code.

The riddle game is an example of this process by which the initiate learns to apply the cultural code in their emergence out of the limin state, an example which can be found in a number of cultural narratives. There is a simple and clear example of the riddle game staged in a narrative of initiation, in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. The 'Riddles in the Dark' chapter of *The Hobbit* corresponds to this stage of aggregation and the emergence of the initiate from the marginal space of the grotesques back into the cultural space regulated by a normative code. In the chapter, the hobbit finds himself separated from his companions, in an underworld chamber occupied by a twisted example of his people or race. This grotesque other, Gollum, chose exile as a permanent condition. In the midnight world, they engage in a riddle game as the means for the hero securing safe passage out of the subterranean chamber. The riddles are plays upon words and concepts relying upon a knowledge of connotative meanings and requiring dexterity with metaphor and simile. The hobbit offers the grotesque riddles that require knowledge of the world from which Gollum has chosen exile, for example, the similarity between an egg yolk and the sun. This is knowledge which the grotesque has difficulty recalling due to his extended occupancy of the subterranean world. In order to secure a boon from the other, the hobbit calls upon symbolic representations and their metaphoric meaning-relations that are well established in the norm-governed community, but whose sense is lost to the permanent exile.

Through dexterous and wily application of the code in the world betwixt and between, the initiate not only learns to coexist with the grotesques but to master them or gain something essential from them. In this mastery, the initiate comes to recognize the superiority of the cultural code and its value in overcoming the challenges confronted in the limin stage. Odysseus's misadventures also play out this basic path of overcoming the monstrous through the wily application of cultural symbols and artifacts, for example, his play upon the name 'Nobody' used to escape the Cyclops. The concept of zero is one that is not accessible without the aid of an advanced arithmetic system; something the Cyclops with their limited vision are incapable of conceiving. The riddle which the Sphinx asks Oedipus is also such as to require Oedipus's reflection upon the conditions of being human. It is only by his capacity to reflexively engage with the knowledge of what it is to be human that Oedipus can pass through the territory of the Sphinx and back to his people.

For cultural education in a public school setting, it is not likely, nor wholly desirable, to turn to actual practices of exile and direct confrontation with grotesques. Instead we rely upon texts, symbolic narratives to represent those moments of dangerous engage-

ment. The student's engagement with those texts, guided by a teacher, is meant not only to provide an example of cultural initiation, but also to provide them with the chance to encounter the monstrous and to interpret and manipulate the symbols and symbolic relations represented in the narrative. Initiates are posed hypothetical, speculative, and fantastic problems such as riddles, enigmas, paradoxes, all requiring an imaginative stretching of the given symbolic order. Techniques for symbolic manipulation include skill with analogy, metaphor, metonym, and other types figurative speech such as irony, hyperbole, euphemism, and pun. How often such methods of symbolic problem solving are employed is directly tied to the tolerance of the code to non-determinate forms of problem resolution. The teaching of these lessons requires not only a tolerance for disproportionate and even monstrous replies from the students, but also the capacity of the teacher to utter contraries, contradictions, and paradoxes while themselves retaining authority and legitimacy. Thus the importance of a liminal space for such instruction.

These gestures, though sometimes shocking to the system, are arguably necessary to the maintenance and health of the culture in which and through which they are made. As long as there is an aggregative phase in the teaching of these cultural texts, then the initiates, or the students reading the tales of Robin Hood, Coyote, or Monkey, Homer, or Conrad experience a productive transgression in which logic becomes the heart of the experience, and the efficacy of a code its moral.

The stage of aggregation in the initiatory process of cultural reproduction is primarily concerned with the conservative and ideologically reinforcing features of the process of cultural education. This aspect of initiation is foregrounded in Bourdieu's discussion of 'Rites of Institution' such as those employed in elite schooling. These rites control the transgression of social boundaries. They are meant to permit and facilitate the transgression of socially constructed norms while at the same time reinforcing and maintaining distinctions within the society-at-large. The educational processes of initiation, especially through its employment of a stage of reaggregation in elite institutions, is aligned with and facilitates the workings of power as hierarchical in society.

In sum, the three stages of initiation constitute a pedagogy that is a means of handling a potentially dangerous passage of power between generations, and preserving power in the face of social challenges and historical change. But there are competing tendencies within this pedagogical process. The understanding of symbolic relations and the capacity to manipulate symbolic relations gained in the threefold stage of initiation gives the initiate a degree of power within the society in relation to the normative and valuative structures. Initiatory pedagogies teach the skills needed to reproduce and maintain the code in the face of challenges, but also teach one to recognize the possibility of formulating new symbolic utterances which transgress while retaining efficacy in relation to the code. 'Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise' (Turner, 1967, p. 97). In the initiation process the responsiveness of the system to manipulation are accentuated within a confined and controlled space of social interaction. It is a type of symbolic cultural laboratory encouraging and enabling experimentation.

In this education into power and distinction is also included the training needed to create and alter the symbolic relations constitutive of existing institutional structures. As

Bourdieu states, 'In short, if it wishes to understand the most fundamental social phenomena, which occur as much in pre-capitalist societies as in our own world (academic degrees are just as much a part of magic as are amulets), social science must take account of the symbolic efficacy of rites of institution, that is, the power they possess to act on reality by acting on its representations' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 119). If we look at initiation from a structuralist and societal perspective, and not merely as a stage in an individual's development, then we find that what is occurring is not merely the reinforcement or reproduction of existing relations through their transmission to the youth-made-adult, but an education into the management of the norms of a society. It is one in which the individual is given the capacity and authority to manipulate symbolic relations constitutive of social norms. This process is normal and well-guarded by those in power. Access is restricted to preserve the existing normative structure. Thus these rites and this educational process work to preserve distinction and hierarchy and perpetuate the given symbolic and normative order. But, this does not mean that it must. Such training and such a transmission of knowledge and power is a dangerous venture for the established order, but in a democracy, in which all are meant to be rulers, this capacity becomes a necessary one for each and every citizen.

Explaining Initiation's Multicultural Relevance

In a contemporary employment of initiatory pedagogy, the stage of aggregation should not result in the reassertion of a particular cultural code. Rather, to meet existing multicultural and global social conditions, the stage of reaggregation must be reconceived to encourage the recognition of the potential for meaningful and meaning-making interaction between multiple codes. To achieve this new goal, the symbolic rhetoric of the cultural narratives needs to be brought to the fore as the matter of pedagogical interest. In opposition to the use of narratives to establish particular symbolic relations as right or wrong, cultural narratives need to be employed to teach how symbolic relations are formulated and attributed with normative significance. The goal of such multicultural pedagogy, drawing from the lesson plan of initiation, is to teach those rhetorical skills and practices through which the symbolic representations of cultural norms are articulated and disseminated.

Understanding one culture's narrative representations supporting a particular normative order does not preclude the understanding of another's symbolic and normative representations. Traditional stories pose their questions and lessons through rhetorical tropes which if accented in the telling (as in initiation rituals) represent the normative order as a matter of choice and contemplation. The particular efficacy of initiatory narratives lies in their play upon and exploitation of the malleability of symbolic codes. Initiatory narratives can also be made to employ multiple or derivative codes that ask the initiates to master not only a particular code but also the logical and rhetorical skills needed to interact across codes. On the logic of myths, Jean Paul Vernant states,

Myth is not only characterized by its polysemy but by the interlocking of its many different codes. In the unfolding of its narrative and the selection of the semantic fields it uses, it brings into play the shifts, slides, tensions and

oscillations between the very terms that are distinguished or opposed in its categorical framework; ... Thus myth brings into operation a form of logic which we may describe, in contrast to the logic of non-contradiction of the philosophers, as a logic of the ambiguous, the equivocal, a logic of polarity. (Vernant, 1990, p. 239)

The logic of myths and the rhetorical tropes employed in initiatory pedagogies teach students to move beyond the explicitly-stated and given norms toward other possibilities, not through arbitrary, free leaps of the imagination, but rather logical processes of inversion, substitution, and fusion. Even within a single cultural tradition there are multiple tales which do not all coalesce in a non-contradictory manner when it comes to their explicit normative declarations (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, 1995). Such diversity within a particular mythology permits and even encourages the tactical manipulation of symbols within that system. The ability to integrate new symbolic elements from other cultural systems is supported by this ever-present diversity within any particular complex symbolic system.

Traditional narratives from different cultures need not be taught in isolation from each other in order to teach cultural knowledges. They may also be used in conjunction, not only for comparisons sake, but also for the sake of learning the skills of symbolic manipulation. When confronted by multiple tales, and given the task, not only of reading them together, but of re-telling or re-writing them together, then ‘we are entitled, or compelled, to ask, “who’s representation?”, “what series?”, “why these events?”, “why are they connected in this way?” and so on. [This] ... introduces a new awareness of the rules of the genre, and in a Wittgensteinian sense, a new knowledge of how to play the game, perhaps even how to change the rules’ (Michael Peters, 2000, p. 31). The use of multiple tales from multiple traditions would then facilitate more than just the recognition of similarities and difference between cultures, but also knowledge for articulating statements of normative significance across that difference.

A multicultural education that borrows from the lessons of initiation would be one that focused upon the citizens’ acts of symbolic representation in their reciprocal determination of the norms and values of the community. Not merely their maintenance and communication, but the process by which they are articulated and negotiated. This education would prepare students to articulate symbolic representations of cultural identity and difference, supporting values and norms, which they determine as the good they create out of the cloth of the many versions of the good that exist in their shared society. Similarly, Derrida in ‘Structure, Sign, and Play’ is emphasizing a particular taking up of structures, emphasizing not their indoctrinatory acceptance, but their liminal possibilities.

We must first try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différance* of this irreducible difference. Here there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose *conception, formation, gestation, and labor* we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operation of childbearing—but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as

is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity. (1978, p. 292)

The attempt 'to conceive a common ground' in the structures, signs, and plays of our multicultural and globalized society does not demand either an acknowledgement of incommensurable difference or the assimilation of differences. As Derrida puts it, it requires rather the recognition of 'the *différance* of this irreducible difference'. The ascription of incommensurability to differences between cultural orders must be deferred, and between the various normative structures a possibility held in abeyance. We must grasp the creative potential, the gestative operations immanent to the moments of the convergence of different symbolic structures. In these encounters, hybrid symbolic utterances of new norms and values can be born, but it is up to the participants active in those moments of convergence to conceive of the possibilities and exercise the articulatory skills necessary to *bring them to term*.

The limin phase of the initiatory practice corresponds to the moments of convergence which Derrida signals. In its initiatory pedagogical use, the limin is a testing ground in which the skills needed to successfully navigate the moments of convergence can be taught. It is up to educators to realize the pedagogical potential of these moments and teach transfigurative practices in relation to extant cultural symbolic systems. A transfigurative third stage of the contemporary initiation pedagogy may need to replace the reaggregative third stage. A cultural pedagogy that employs the techniques of initiation, slightly augmented with an attention to the possibility of new articulations across multiple symbolic systems, equips students with rhetorical and logical knowledge and skills needed in a globalizing and increasingly multicultural society.

Conclusion

Initiation is a pedagogy in its own right that employs techniques unique to it and has its own goal not necessarily commensurable with the goals of either indoctrinatory or critical pedagogies. And while it is distinct, it yet manifests aspects of a pedagogy that current critical educational theorists are advocating in order to adapt critical pedagogies for a multicultural society. It employs the techniques of performativity and narrativity which are called upon by Biesta, Smeyers, and Burbules to overcome the limiting educational outcomes of indoctrination, as well as the limiting outcomes of critical pedagogies as currently conceived. But whereas critical pedagogies are handicapped in their dealings with issues of cultural belonging, initiatory pedagogies do not leave students in a state of permanent exile, to determine their own answers free from the bonds of a given symbolic or normative order. Initiation is a pedagogy meant to help students work creatively and progressively within a particular normative and symbolically constructed field, especially in response to both internal and external challenges. It is a pedagogical means to both transmit a knowledge of a tradition by teaching students to master a symbolic code and repertoire, and also to engage them in the development of their own capacities to manipulate that code to create alternative pronouncements and judgments in the face of historical and normative challenges to the system.

I am not advocating that initiation rites be instituted in academic institutions. They are already there. I am only advocating that educators rethink and rework the pedagogy of initiation to in a way that can help develop a multicultural education suited to the challenges faced by a public educational system in an increasingly pluralistic and globalizing society. To that end I echo the suggestions of Biesta that our teaching of culture must account for the performativity inherent in such an educational practice (Biesta, 1997). And I support further pedagogical development of narrative skills in both teachers and the students to encourage ‘“liberating”, rather than merely “conserving” or reproducing’ outcomes as is argued by Burbules and Smeyers.

Anthropological accounts of initiation as practices for the advancement of individuals in status and responsibility in a given community support Biesta’s argument that there is a performative element in which the learner is not passive, but rather a creator of the knowledge. There is a gap between what is presented by the teacher and what is learned, and this gap is made explicit to the student in initiation as a crucial part of their education in and through the stage of separation. In the stage of limin, the student is encouraged to explore and create using the materials of the tradition in ways not normally permissible. The pedagogical techniques of initiation are used to encourage an explicit awareness of students’ own role as not only recipient but also author of the knowledge gained. In order to make use of these pedagogical techniques in a contemporary school, initiatory practices need to be adapted, abstracted, and altered. But they are techniques, actual grounded, contextual practices which can be employed to achieve the crucial intermediate step in the educational process from indoctrination to a critical, reflexive pedagogy appropriate for a multicultural and globalizing society.

Smeyers and Burbules call for an examination of the potential of the narrativization of practices as holding liberating potential in education (2006). In ethnographic accounts of initiatory practices there can be found substantive and informative accounts of the use of narratives to encourage reflexive and creative engagement of students within a particular order or system of thought. Such case studies possess a wealth of data describing the rhetorical techniques for the engagement of students with traditional or canonical texts promoting a creative if not critical engagement. I am not arguing that these techniques be adopted just as they are, but rather proposing these accounts be used as sources of adaptable narrative practices for teaching students mastery of symbolic systems or normative orders presently influential in their society.

Initiation is a distinct type of cultural education that develops a different set of knowledge and skills, promoting competencies for different social roles and activities, than do indoctrinatory or critical pedagogies. It is not an ideal type of pedagogy to be striven for or employed in every educational moment. It is limiting in many respects and inappropriate if not properly adapted to meet the needs of the specific social context in which it is employed. But if taken as a separate and distinct type of pedagogy, it provides a set of techniques and strategies for cultural education that have been lost sight of in the idealization of critical/liberation pedagogies and the demonization of indoctrinatory pedagogies. Initiatory pedagogy should be given serious consideration as a way of both educating students into particular sets of normative orders and practices, and of teaching them to articulate new symbolic relations heavy with the possibility of new norms within a multicultural public.

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