

Philosophy of Education in a Poor Historical Moment: A Personal Account

Ilan Gur-Zeev

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Abstract Under the post-metaphysical sky “old” humanistic-oriented education is possible solely at the cost of its transformation into its negative, into a power that is determined to diminish human potentials for self-exaltation. Nothing less than total metamorphosis is needed to rescue the core of humanistic genesis: the quest for edifying Life and resistance to the call for “home-returning” into the total harmony that is promised to us within nothingness.

Keywords Humanism · New progressive thinking · Old progressive thinking · Diasporic philosophy · Transcendence · Self-annihilation of the West

It was in an unusually rainy day in February 1955 when I was born to the Vilcek family in Haifa. From my present perspective I can recollect that “Haifa” did very little to become genuinely humanist. It was obsessed much more with finding some respite from the harrowing insistent cries of mothers and fathers; parents of my friends who after they went to bed at night began to let loose awful secrets about children, sisters, parents from “there” who were killed in endless impossible ways; addressing immediate as well as two millennia of accumulated memories, strives and worthy suffering that were suppressed or sublimated. A special role was reserved here for the disguise through daily secular routines of an ostensible normality within the framework of personal and national emancipation, or at least, within the process of cultivating a new generation of Jews, *Sabars*, who would grow up to become people capable of not losing their mind or their consciousness. The highest of aims was to become partners in the edification of a worthy society that will constitute a paragon, a light to all nations on earth. And so, from my early childhood, I was faced with the responsibility of maturing into a master violinist or at least a very famous writer. You could not compromise with my mother on anything less than that. The two pillars of my education at that stage of my life were Ze’ev Jabotinsky’s *Death—or conquering the mountain* on the one hand, and my father’s *Never ever—but really—never ever*

I. Gur-Zeev (✉)
Haifa, Israel
e-mail: ilangz@edu.haifa.ac.il

give up! My father's mantra had a special tone for my young ears. After all, he was the only corpse in the Mauthausen concentration camp that recollected itself and came back to life from the mass grave into which it was thrown by the Nazis after his execution. Halisa, our neighborhood, was not just an arena of remembrance of the silenced presence of the Arab neighbors who in 1948, after losing the merciless battle they initiated, fled the city in terror and left behind dreams of a better future, old cooking pots, colorful ceramics and mourning houses. For us, the kids of Halisa, it was at the same time also the land of hugging sun, wonders and hope. Oh hope, Oh hope!

Nevertheless, Halisa was an emissary that devoted itself to the humanist promise that within an effective *purity* the conditions are set for the betterment of human qualities, the progress of knowledge, a personal as well as national psychic and epistemological balance and cultural flourishing—if only we could be genuinely creative and brave enough.

As a typical showground of modern Jewish national revival, Halisa was truly committed to educate for *courage*. Accordingly, at the age of three I already watched *Michael Strogoff* at *Vered*, the neighborhood cinema, as a pedagogical preparation for my manhood soon to come. In retrospect I can say that for our family viewing *Michael Strogoff* enabled a meeting between the resolute Omsk-born Russian hero and the decisiveness of Zionist education to give birth to “the new Jew” who would not go like sheep to the slaughter, would be unbelievably creative in the old-new homeland, and would defeat not only the Diaspora as a temporary-predatory home but also Diaspora as a Jewish ideal and universal mission. As a Zionist version of the humanist agenda this educational project carried a strong Universalist commitment. In its non-ethnocentric manner it was supposed to manifest the quest for returning “home” into harmony, symmetry and balance of the kind that calls us back “home” to nothingness, an invitation that totally negates the spirit and contents of Jewish Diasporic *Messianism without a Messiah*.

The *Vered* cinema was an arena for various and widely different family experiences. Some were very local. I can still hear the neighbors shouting, “Stop the screening and wait, the Vilceks are coming, the Vilceks are coming!” For our family a film such as *Michael Strogoff* must have been not merely a local experience. At least for my grandmother, my mother and my father it must also have been an occasion to revisit powerful memories, memories of East Europe and Russia, memories such as the ever green fields and endless ways in which their non-Jewish neighbors killed their relatives in the Slovak town of Levice only a minute before the Nazi army actually entered it. Or the memories of Keyla, my wonderful grandmother, who on April 6, 1903, at the age of 16 in the city of Kishinev saved her sisters and brothers from slaughter by their neighbors who came with sticks, kitchen knives and bare hands to kill Keyla and the entire family, as they did to so many other Jewish families in that particular pogrom. These memories were interwoven with fresh memories of the despair and bravery of our young men and women in Israel's War of Independence that had been fought only few years earlier. The historical, literary, and anti-Diasporic Jewish psychic representations culminated in an educational Eros that insisted on becoming a garden of Enlightenment in the wilderness. This powerful movement insisted on a humanist future in the old-new homeland, as against what they saw as the barbaric eastern reality into which they had arrived. In all its rich aspects that light of my childhood in Wadi Halisa in the 1950s has become impossible under the present post-metaphysical skies.

As an invitation to holy progress and transcendence, that humanist light has rather shamefully faded in a non-heroic and non-tragic manner. Presently it has no presence as the manifestation of Eros, as a call to give birth to strives or rebirth, as *hope* that was so vividly present in Halisa of the 1950s. The holiness of that vitality has been exiled, along

with the preconditions for salvation by a humanist killing-God-each-moment-aw. Halisa has become an impossible possibility in the form of concrete utopian manifestations of naivety, courage, Eros and responsibility for justice or for great deeds such as the endeavors of Michael Strogoff, the heroes of Karl May or the heroic Israeli pioneers, who for the last 100 years despite the enmity of the governing power on the one hand and the violent reception by the local Arabs and Bedouins (who did not know that they were soon to become “Palestinians”) on the other, insisted on working the high-cost deserted land, fighting dysentery, and offering their sons and daughters a humanistic-oriented education.

This has become unfeasible in face of the entry into the arenas of mega-speed in the era of the exile of holiness and the triumph of post-metaphysical ecstasy and postmodern spectacles; in the new factuality of hyper-reality there is no air for the breath of Utopia of a self-declared moral avant-garde, or for the promise of edifying humanity or for its deification within which it progresses toward responding to the invitation of Eros; an invitation that begins at the moment of Genesis of the destruction of nothingness, which is also the birth moment of the invitation to “home-returning” which during the history of the dialectics of immanence and transcendence has also given birth to so many offspring (who are Thanatos-oriented) adorned as the agents of Love of Life.

Under the post-metaphysical sky “old” humanistic-oriented education is possible solely at the cost of its transformation into its negative, into a power that is determined to diminish human potentials for self-exaltation. Nothing less than total metamorphosis is needed to rescue the core of humanistic genesis: the quest for edifying Life and resistance to the call for “home-returning” into the total harmony that is promised to us within nothingness.

As for me, in the last couple of years a new beginning has become a must; to save that which is worthy to be saved, to redeem that which is redeemable, to re-invent that which is to be transformed, and, most of all, to give birth to hope. But what are the still possible gateways for a humanist in a post-humanistic era? Could it be that it is morally wrong to offer a non-oppressive humanist education in an era that is devoted to the destruction of the preconditions for the edification of humanity, an historical moment at which relating to humanity as an agent for supreme transcendence is considered a unique version of violence that should be challenged by all possible means? In response to the question of humanistic-oriented education in a post-humanist era it is of relevance to say few words about the specific *togetherness* of Diasporic humans. I will address this togetherness by articulating some characteristics and potentials of the *Orcha*.

Orcha, the Hebrew word for a caravan of camels, commodities and humans in the desert, is a telos, a negative Utopia that is actualized in, or absent altogether from a concrete reality and is enabled solely for individuals. Never for collectives. In its essence Counter-education is dedicated to the affirmation of Life. As part of the *Orcha*, it is the grand affirmation of Diasporic life, an unreserved “Yes!” to eternal Love of Life; it is an enduring mature homeless-improvisational co-poiesis. Improvisation here goes hand in hand with responsibility; responsibility for enduring transcendence, responsibility for enduring self-positioning and becoming courageous and gay. Courageous gayness enables happiness when it becomes a holy work, an erotic co-poiesis which extends a hand to the otherness, even when it is the alterity of the other.

Diasporic counter-education is dedicated to the cultivation of seriousness, joyous seriousness, which gives birth to irony as against cynicism and mechanistic attitudes to courage. As such it maddens the (anti-humanistic-oriented) new progressivists. At the same time it is met with disregard by the rapidly growing mass of disciples of the quest to be totally swallowed by the postmodern pleasure machine. In the last couple of years I have

found it impossible to continue what I have been doing as a matter of dogmatic routine quite easily in academia and public life for the last 20 years. I felt that I could not go on with the celebrated dogmatic-ecstatic cult of radical “critique” and fashionable leftist “resistance”, even if participating in this new progressivist feast almost automatically ensures international academic status, high income, easygoing self-forgetfulness and endless invitations to the most prestigious academic arenas. It is so tempting and profitable to participate in this ecstatic bacchanalia first and foremost as a quasi-religious *purification* among the majority in the West; disciples of the new meta-narrative even when their consciousness and rhetoric are still loyal to “old” (humanist-oriented) progressivism, even if the organization of their psyche, their new openness and sensitivities are already part of the “new” progressivism. Many of these friends and colleagues are outraged by my present work.

Why does my new work irritate so many of the new progressivists in such strange and sometimes embarrassing ways? Is it because part of my attempt is to think about thinking that is beyond the modern-postmodern educational struggle? Or is it because of my insistence on paving paths to a religious erotic dynamic? Or is it because of the clash between responsibility to Life as against the struggle in the service of Thanatos and its call back “home” within two rival anti-Diasporic agents of the new progressive thinking: (1) a postmodern agenda with the support of anti-Enlightenment heroes such as Deleuze, Baudrillard, Karl Schmitt, Heidegger and Nietzsche and (2) an anti-postmodern new progressivism under the flags of Žižek, Badiou and Lenin. And where do these rival new-progressivists meet? Before the shrine where they ecstatically crucify “the Jew” again. Anti-Judaism (and anti-Judeo-Christian civilization) has become the gate to quasi-redemptive ecstasies in the absence of any redeeming authority.

Today education does not dwell in any particular locus. Education has become an open question. Facing its impossibility is one of its actualized forms of self-presentation. While normalizing education is always positioned in a specific arena, even in the form of mega-speed and hyper-reality arenas, counter-education is well aware of its aim to prepare us in a worthy manner for life in the *Orcha*, for the eroticism of eternal nomadism not solely within a specific “home” and its diverse borders but also and even much more so in-between, in the nowhere land between different space–time relations. As preparation for a worthy Diasporic existence within cracks and transgressions, Diasporic counter-education is the manifestation of *the totally other* to the “home-returning” call. It is an improvised, happy way of life that in the form of the *Orcha*, is always on the move, never hindering an improvised co-poiesis as a form of Love of Life.

Counter-education differs from normalizing education at once in its homeless genesis. The Odyssey of the *Orcha* has no end, not just no “home”; and yet it does have a challenge to address, and a never-complete essence to actualize. Counter-education is an eternal becoming-toward-the-world. It is never settled in one particular, or isolated, arena. It is a Utopian occurrence, a flow. Always under way. It is never solely “horizontal” nor is it solely “vertical”, like a prayer in the monotheistic religions. Even when enclosed within a specific arena such as a post-modern, a modern or a pre-modern, it is never to be controlled, domesticated or reduced to an unproblematic reduction or formula.

Diasporic philosophy teaches us that every attempt to enlighten the “location” or even the paths of counter-education must bear in mind the rich effects and dynamic “mutual influences” within each arena, and among the various arenas, as against the illusions of dichotomous positioning such as “modern education”, “democratic education”, “feminist education”, “spiritual education” and so forth. Normalizing education is enabled by its specificity within a concrete showground, determined by concrete preconditions, reactions

of defined enemies, and other reactions and infiltrations which might be reconstructed and “properly” addressed. Counter-education is different in its preconditions, essence and aims. It is never the outlet or agent of a specific “home”, never an agent of specific interests, agendas or origins beyond its Diasporic negative Utopia. The Diasporic human must challenge these and other manifestations of the given. He should prepare himself to crisscross arenas, cultural streams, different space–time relations and horizons of different kinds. Yet most of all, the religious Diasporic of the post-secular world must prepare himself and us for an existence within different “houses”, “in-between” as well as in a “no-man’s-land” that is dynamically located in the space between different arenas, unknown space–time relations, as well as unique or undeciphered and too familiar historical, bodily, moral and spiritual relations and contexts. Normalizing education will melt like snow in Sahara before such richness. But counter-education will be enhanced by such dangerous and enabling openness because it has a holy mission. Because it takes seriously its responsibility to continue the striving of Life for transcending improvisational co-poiesis as against the various, competing “home-returning” invitations to nothingness as our eternal “home”.

Diasporic philosophy enables counter-education by its insistence that the human subject is some-one and not something, that there is much more in the subject than the contingent power relations within specific arenas. No human is thrown totally on the mercy of local and universal manipulations, nor is she an effect of the arbitrariness of the infinity of the moment. While the Diasporic human too is called back “home” into the consensus, harmony, total victory, truth or other agents of nothingness, she insists on Diasporic existence within the *Orcha*. This is her *Derech-Eretz*, her Diasporic existence-on-the-move. This is because for the Diasporic human both meaninglessness and determinism become a *gate to openness*, to self-elevation and rebirth within Diasporic togetherness; openness knocks on the door of the freedom of the Diasporic human and awakens her maturity toward Love of Life as a starting point for counter-education, for cultivation of worthy post-secular perspectives of the survivors, of those of us who have made a decision for responsible, improvised co-poiesis that overcomes all calls to be swallowed in any kind of collectivism, nihilism and all other versions of the “home-returning” project.

As a genuine fruit of worthy Diasporic existence counter-education is never at home. On no account is it domesticated; always active in its nomadic crisscrossing specific arenas, concrete material, psychic and symbolic conditions with their specific histories and realities. The Diasporic dimension of counter-education is dedicated to refusing the invitation to enter a deep sleep as the too-long-awaited genuine Messiah. Diasporic existence is enabled within this dynamic multifariousness only in light of hope. Yet even attunement to hope is to be cultivated and is never a given fact. It is never self-evident, nor is it given cheap, in keeping with its nature to appear at an unexpected moment, or to refuse to burst in altogether.

The openness of broken Being is the Burning Bush that calls humans as they might become, yet are not-yet. Always, not-yet. The human never dwells alone on a remote island, away from her smoldering, but actualizes her blaze by her very existence in the sense of what she is and in the sense of her becoming-toward-the-world. As such, and only as such, the Diasporic human is an absent presence, a never-completed-stream, an infinity that every moment anew is called back “home” to nothingness while her responsibility to Life calls her to continue the act of creation, to join eternal improvised-mature co-poiesis. This is why the human is never the mere sum of her subjectification manipulations and is never to be reduced to a meaningless construct, not even to a mere victim of the deceiving power that is enabled by the blend and mutual relations of the different fields of time–space

relations, speeds, symbolic exchange, material dynamics and the other games which call the human to accept self-forgetfulness and the forgetfulness of her forgetfulness, enabling the normalized human a deep sleep as a substitute for Diasporic existence.

Today's new progressivism offers self-forgetfulness under the flag of "nomadism" and "resistance" as a camouflage to deep sleep and self-forgetfulness. This is why *today education as an open question must be re-articulated*. And where is it being presently reformulated as the most enigmatic call? Under a Western post-metaphysical sky in face of the quest of Judeo-Christian civilization for self-annihilation. Our generation is unique. It is a generation that within Judeo-Christian civilization has exiled the killer-of-God-each-moment-again, deconstructed and secular holiness, has taken the fragmented remains that have become estranged to their essence—even as bad memories—and disseminated them within the centrifugality of the various mega-speed hyper-realities. Holiness has been forced to flee and find refuge within the ecstatic meaninglessness of the postmodern pleasure machine at the cost of its transformation into its negative. Anti-Judaic commitment (as distinct from anti-Semitism) becomes the meta-narrative of a new kind of progressivism. This is the source of the vitality of post-humanistic progressivism, which while it calls for an alternative to the oppressive legacy of Judeo-Christian civilization opens the way to a new, unrestrained, violence. Sometimes under the flag of the unrestrained justification of the counter-violence of the victims and sometimes in light of the suggestive power of the idea of violence for the sake of an aimless violence, anti-Enlightenment is becoming stronger by the day.

The meaninglessness in a post-metaphysical era which exiled the killer of God must compensate itself for the loss of holiness. And it compensates itself with ever more ecstatic quasi-nomadism and openness to violence on the one hand, and to the invitation of the postmodern pleasure-machine on the other. Those of us with more attuned ears will however, hear another music also, the music of *the totally other*. This old-new music re-invites us to Love of Life. This is the moment of birth of counter-education from the womb of Diasporic existence.

Diasporic philosophy is a way-of-life, a flow of *Derech-Eretz* with infinite faces and a dynamics that cultivates existence within the *Orcha*. Within counter-education it prepares us for crisscrossing the different arenas, logics and powers and realizing Love of Life "in-between". At the same time it is also a flow of connecting the infinite differences of totality, and challenges the quest of its particles to accept the invitation to "home-returning" into nothingness. Its nomadic and its integrative dimensions alike fertilize improvised counter-education.

Diasporic counter-education is erotic in its essence: Love of Life enables transcendence within and in-between its endless arenas and dynamics as an alternative to the invitation of the world of Jihad, new progressivism and the pleasure machine, that are nothing but present-day manifestations of the quest for returning to nothingness. The eternal improviser flourishes within the *Orcha*. There response-ability is cultivated to respond-abilities of the kind that will be presented by *Derech-Eretz*. The Diasporic human accepts responsibility to Life as transcendence over a fragmented and self-negating cosmos, toward self-elevation-within-alterity, toward improvisation as the complementary dimension of joyous Love of Life. Counter-education addresses and cultivates the intimate connection between responsible improvisation and holiness, between commitment and irony and negative Utopia. It acknowledges that in the postmodern condition holiness is exiled and that gone are the preconditions for the edification of humanity in theocentric as well as homocentric *Zeitgeists*. It acknowledges, however, that this also is a gate. A gate to holiness that is true to itself. Counter-education acknowledges that under the post-

metaphysical sky Diasporic projects as well as “home-returning” projects are no longer actualized within a positive Utopia. This awareness is a first step to a non-naïve addressing of holiness in a post-secular era. Holiness becomes (in a negative manner) broken yet simple, as in the days of pre-agricultural civilizations when humans were at the beginning of cultivating their humanity, ate uncooked food, and there was still no established difference between prayer, singing and an improvised nomadic holy dance of existence. The mature eternal improviser is a consistent (negative) utopist. The realization of this negative utopianism is an improvisation enabled in the eternity of the moment, within specific material and symbolic conditions. Counter-education paves the way to coexistence between the flow of the eternal improviser, negative Utopia in action and the uniqueness of the holy co-poiesis within the *Orcha*.

The Diasporic dimensions of the *Orcha* do not run fast for negativism, deconstruction, nihilism or cynicism: it is committed to the holy work of Diasporic improvisation and transcendence; creation that begins with training in response-ability to improvisation and courage. The courage to hope and the power of ironic belief within Love of Life is the improvisation of the Diasporic human, her “home”.

While the *Orcha* has no last, appeasing, station or nirvana, it does have an aim: the transcending realization of a non-Thanatos-oriented co-poiesis and not solely within the cosmos. Counter-education is a creative addressing of specific challenges within a concrete field; however, at the same time it also teaches to address the holiness of the clashes, integrations and a-sympathies between the countless particles and manifestations of infinity. Negative intimacy with the cosmos unites the different Diasporic individuals who meet in the *Orcha*. In the improvised responsible co-poieses men and women are invited, again, to experience intimacy with the cosmos within and in-between the infinity of the moment and the realities of the changing historical and existential actualities.

There are endless paths and gates to approach Diasporic counter-education. Among them we should mention cultivating responsible improvisation, rehearsing courage, training in mature self-love or healthy breathing in face of the violence of the new progressivism and its *Zeitgeist* in the era of the exile of Spirit. Diasporic philosophy shows us that not only counter-education is possible: possible even today are also philosophy of education and counter-education as holy work. Such a counter-education offers us gratitude and courage, meaning and *hope*. Hope that is not determined by or an agent of “success”, “victory” or dogmatic radicalism which invite us all back “home” into nothingness as our total redemption. It is Diasporic hope, a non-optimistic hope that enables counter-education within the *Orcha*, the flourishing of Love of Life, and improvisational responsibility under the post-metaphysical sky.