

Nikolina NEDELJKOV<sup>1</sup>The City University of New York  
The Graduate Center, Program in EnglishUDK  
316.74:37

---

## ENDURING SCHOOLING: AGAINST NOISE, AND IN THE SERVICE OF THE REMIX

**ABSTRACT** In an age increasingly oblivious of the role of education as a means of genuine exchange, the threat of pervasive corporatization seems to overshadow the distinctions between individualism and individuality, uniformity and unity, to name just a few instances of noise in the communication channel. Thus, there is an indisputable need for sustaining the awareness about at least two vital aspects of education. One concerns its authentic characteristic of conveying information, while the other is considered within the context of societal institutions. Both are in a certain way related to the relationship between the communal and the individual. Both imply education heavily relying on the common currency of exchange between and among humans: language. As such, it is integral to the mutually conditioning relationship between discourse and cultural realities. In the dominance-ridden, ruthlessly accelerated world in pursuit of sweeping commoditization, a hostile climate of mindless competitiveness and unscrupulous utilitarianism, strangely coupled with the myth of progress and accrument of knowledge for its own sake, more often than not appears to be infinitely more a recognizable vocabulary than that of the gift. Reading novels of Lee Rourke and Irvine Welsh through the prism of cultural critique of McKenzie Wark, Jon Savage, Michael Bracewell, Paul Virilio and Terry Eagleton casts light on the potential of the remix as a form of peaceful/peaceable resistance against oppression, and in the service of communal cohesion. It opens up an avenue for the community of learners to think a possibility for reshifting onto the *hic & nunc* / *anticarpediem* pattern. It disambiguates bewildering noise in the battlefields of the struggle for power, thereby elucidating the significance of unity and individuality within the questlike endeavors such as education.

**Key words:** education, information, cultural realities, resistance, humbleness, language, communication, the remix

---

1 E-mail: nikolina.nedeljkov@gmail.com

## HOW SIGNIFICANT AND/OR HOW TO SAY IT

At one point, I realized that my ideas about education needed to be considered in a way different from how I used to think about it. That in the past education mattered, while nowadays it has no such significance, I did and did not approve, but I could not specify how and what aspects of the observation either were or were not in accord with my views. I opposed the suggestion that education did not matter anymore. And yet, there was a strong sense that, somehow, its role has been slightly modified.

Further contemplating upon the issue led me to understand that it was not quite accurate to assume that it had no relevance. The sheer fact that nowadays considerably more people pursue a university degree than in the past, in both undergraduate and graduate programs, is indicative of a greater demand towards obtaining higher education. Presumably, it suggests that there is some kind of need for higher education. It may as well signal that education is sought, by and large, because there is a correlation between social relations and what individuals know, need to know, and/or want to know. Or not. By extension, this could be indicative of education being of some kind of importance.

In an age increasingly oblivious of the role of education as a means of genuine exchange, the threat of pervasive corporatization seems to overshadow the distinctions between individualism and individuality, uniformity and unity, to name just a few instances of noise in the communication channel. Thus, there is an indisputable need for sustaining the awareness about at least two vital aspects of education. One concerns its authentic characteristic of conveying information, while the other contextualizes the polemic within societal institutions. Both are related to the notions of communality and individuality. Both imply education heavily relying on the currency of exchange between and among humans: language. As such, it is integral to the mutually conditioning relationship between discourse and cultural realities.

In the dominance-based, ruthlessly accelerated world in the pursuit of sweeping commoditization, a hostile climate of mindless competitiveness and

unscrupulous utilitarianism, strangely coupled with the myth of progress and accumulation of knowledge for its own sake, more often than not appears to be infinitely more a recognizable vocabulary than that of the gift. However, the mutually conditioning relationship between corporate culture and education by no means obscures the wholesome awareness / practice of exchange. Nor does it entail an equation between individualism and individuality. Likewise, it does not imply that uniformity should be identified with unity. It certainly does not afflict the possibility for communal cohesion and the right to individuality.

It seems that ever since humanity started rushing along the path towards progress, there has been a decrease in recognition of education as a means of communication. Instead, it has become a form of accruelement of knowledge with little consideration for the possibility of providing a basis for communal cohesion and enhancing the right to individuality. It seems that such an approach excluded from the conversation the very idea that initiated it. In other words, the very reason why education matters has been neglected. Precise articulation of the kernel of education might exceed both linguistic and epistemological apparatuses as we know them. One may be inclined to equate the elusiveness in question with absence. Few things are more inaccurate than such an assumption.

A precise definition of exchange, communication, and exploration of the realms of knowledge might not be accessible either through linguistic or epistemological apparatuses. This seems to be a component of cultural flows that enables manipulative interventions aiming to divert education towards goals and ideas strikingly different from the playfulness inherent to questlike endeavors.

*if not getting paid for housework is regarded as a betrayal of monetizing labor, it might be a good response against the misconception about the logic of somnambulism*

To say that fruitful communication—spreading information and conveying the message—is constitutive of education is to indicate its antiutilitarian character. Now, there are at least two ramifications of such a statement. Firstly, it can erroneously be characterized as potentially illogical, provided the

supposed incommensurability between antiutilitarianism and reciprocity. The misleading reasoning can be repaired via McKenzie Wark's observations (2013). He considers the idea of the gift within the context of the world under a threat of reckless commoditization. In such a world, financial economy has allegedly usurped the realm of art to the point that clearly calls for reconfiguring: "With finance capital in particular, it is not just that financial 'products' are like contemporary art. They *are* contemporary art" (Wark 2013, § 20).

Partly hyperbolizing the role of corporate culture, partly provoking art that has been reduced to the parameters of "boughtness and soldness" (ibid., § 15) the claim demands a response: "A task of our time might be to free the aesthetic from its complicity with commodity forms, even attenuated ones, and practice it again, in the everyday, as a sensibility of the gift" (ibid., §9).

The sound of this utterance is a resolute *NO* to the bewilderment caused by versatile interpretations of the concepts such as valueless / value-free / virtuelessness. One of the meanings concerns valuelessness in terms of objectivity. The other echoes a slightly metaphorized version of the concept implying ethical signification. In other words, it can be related to the meaning of the word virtuelessness. Needless to say, this stands in sharp contrast with the antiutilitarian aspect of supposedly value-free education. It might be neither entirely objective, as the epistemological paradigm teaches us how it operates, nor is it divested of virtue. That its purpose might exceed precise verbalization can mislead one to conflate it with the valuelessness of corporate culture. This constitutes the second ramification of the aforementioned possibility of wandering along the sinuously logical alleys. Their erratic curves are by no means the only way of thinking about the subject matter.

It is crucial to maintain the distinction between these seemingly reverberating meanings and phenomena: "Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing" (Wilde 2007, 42). Neither a nostalgic longing for the times bygone, since no historical epoch is worthy of complicity in the proliferation of inhumane social relations, nor idealized future anticipations--neither in the key of longing for the lionized past nor somnambulist projections into a romanticized future, disregarding

the relevance of being present in the here and now--the remix celebrates *anticarpediem / hic & nunc* perseverance in the reemergence of selfless, yet reindividualized, fellow humans enduring the hindrances to patient, persistent creation of a free culture based on love and trust.

Part of it can be understood through the prism of Wark's ruminations about philoxenia. Again, it could be thought of in the context of possible interpretative nuances. The meaning of the love of strangers, or its traditional signification of hospitality, in order to exclude the possibility of misinterpretation, should be restricted, specified, and void of sweeping generalizations. Notionally, as much as it signifies relating to the other, so is it a demand for non-identification. Further, as it invites experiencing otherness as one's integral part, so does it decisively require selectiveness with regard to relating to it.

## ERRATIC PATHWAYS OF POWER-NARRATIVES

This can further be contemplated upon through Lee Rourke's novel *The Canal* (2010), delineating redemptive educational capacities of the preservation of the childlike. Having quit his job, the main character / narrator, spends his long days on a bench opposite an office building decorated by numberless computer screens and workers sitting in front of them, at their desks. It can easily be the building in which he used to work prior to deciding to explore the realms of boredom of a different kind. While narrating about an adventureless adventure by the canal, somewhere between London boroughs of Hackney and Islington, he might as well, somehow, still be in the office, in front of the computer, imagining a different world to be his everyday: the palpably intangible space between or within the spaces that attempt to subjugate everything to the dictum of economic power and upward mobility:

“From where I was sitting, if I stared straight ahead, I could clearly see that the building was split into two halves: the ground floor, by the esplanade, above the murky moss by the water's edge, was packed with rows of snazzy flat-screen monitors, each accompanied by an office worker—some on phones, some not. The five floors above this bustling office consisted of the goldfish-bowl-like abodes of the upwardly mobile” (Rourke 2010, 5).

As the novel is unfolding along the estuary storyline, recollections of childhood bring a relief. Back then, one was not happy because pollution was incomparably lower. One was neither happy nor unhappy because of that for a simple reason: the child does not care about such things, as maintained: “I thought nothing of the pollution back then” (ibid., 4). Further, the episode in which the narrator is being taught by his brother how to climb the tree and descend from it is suggestive of the modified perception of power he acquires later on. He urges his brother not to leave him. The brother encourages him to open his eyes, leads him step by step, confidently catches him once he comes down, and carries him back home on his shoulders. The trust of the scared, distrustful one now acquires fully fledged meaning in the hard-won safety (ibid., 161).

How different the communication between them is from the world in which one would be glad to see a lower level of pollution because one knows what it is. How their shielded conversation is immeasurably remote from the office space that not only deprives one from the private sphere, but transforms the public realm into a zone void of communication, despite the verbal content being the apparent currency. How very incommensurable the brothers’ understanding of control and power is from the corporate culture’s corruption, either as a means or as a consequence of ensuring the dominant position in the arena of unscrupulous progress rush.

Despite the stultifying aggressiveness of the torpor of those dominance-ridden, demigods’ empires, their energies are not entirely different from those of the overtly violent street gang Pack Crew, depicted with astonishing precision as “a cacophony of teenagers and testosterone—a heady combination” (ibid., 20). Indeed, the description of empty days of emptying glasses reflects the meaninglessness of those worlds and longing for the safety of the imaginary shelter until the knots of the absence of communication start are disentangled:

“I spent the whole weekend with them, drinking in the same pub, with the same people, the same faces; drinking the same drinks, saying the same things. After I had exhausted myself saying the same things I simply said nothing. I let those around me say the very same things for me. I drank. I can’t

even remember stopping to eat, although I figure I must have done at some point. All I really wanted was to be back at the canal. My weekend was a waste. I wanted to be back on that bench, waiting for her” (ibid., 13).

He realizes the exacerbating effect corporate surrounding has on him, so he opts not to partake in it. The boredom of the office environment he finds stupefying. He decides to indulge in daily observations of passers-by walking or cycling along the towpath. Instead of sitting in the office, he distanced himself differently. The boredom of the days spent seated on the bench brought to him different insights, different stories. One would be prone to assume that it also brought to him an inalienable right to thoroughly explore the meanings of words and the subtlety of the distinctions between and among them:

“I liked my spot across from the flat-screen monitors and superfluous balconies. I liked being bored—I liked what it was doing to me. The word “boring” is usually used to denote a lack of meaning—an acute emptiness. But the weight of boredom at that precise moment was almost overwhelming, it sure as hell wasn’t empty of anything; it was tangible—it *had meaning*” (ibid., 8; original emphasis).

Immersing himself in daily conversations with the girl whom he met during his hours spent on the bench stands in contrast to coercive socio-political mechanisms pertinent to corporate pantheons that strive to dissolve individuality into a soluble mass amalgamation. Once he himself was introduced to the enchantment of the sense of omnipotence. He was sitting in his room from which he could observe airplanes taking off from and landing at Heathrow Airport. It was a rainy day. He was in the room from which it was possible to see the verisimilitude of the roofs of Hackney. As if one were sitting on the bench by the canal. Or, some other space.

The narrator draws the reader’s attention to the imaginative realm of the fantasies of childhood. The protagonist is in a Dan Air Boeing 727. He likes his food during the night flight and he likes the turbulences during the descent. Strangely, he is in the aircraft’s cockpit, where he is at one point accompanied by his father. The world in front of his eyes is being magically transformed: “When the pilot allowed me to sit in his chair, seeing the entire world below

me, I remember something seeping into me that I had never felt before: importance. I felt powerful. I felt like I could control the world” (ibid., 35).

How incredibly it helps one demystify seductive travesty of kinship, discern and preclude uncritical identification between adulthood and maturity, and reveal incommensurability between the childish and the childlike. How confusing is the notion of virtuality of office computer screens sometimes mistaken for the original meaning of the word virtual. How bewildering is the character of the girl with whom the protagonist spends long jobless hours by the canal: between a chimera and a metaphor of the narrator’s search for the boredom to bore him to surrender.

How tightly knit are both the relationship between those symbolic realms and the character’s being deadened by militant sedentariness of corporate culture and dulled by its implacable, unquenchable thirst for obfuscation. How inexplicable is the affinity for adopting a godlike character. Or not.

In the novel, are certain kinds of distinctions indicated:

“I’ve never been able to fathom why it has taken us so long to develop a system of existence that makes no sense to me. I really don’t know if this is my failing or theirs, or whether I am somehow unhinged, or different—but the feeling is that I now know something, something blindingly obvious, something they can’t see” (ibid., 195).

The blindingly obvious might easily be yet another linguistic subtlety providing a key for reading in the light of the distinction between the words bondage and bond. Being free from the forces that confine – “gravity was nothing to me” (ibid., 199) – is revealed as a diametrical opposite to the previously recognized appeal of deceptive godlike powers now disentangled.

By the canal, facing his reflection on the water’s surface, one is no more tempted to worship a delusion of omnipotence. His struggle over the feeling of dislocation is immortalized in the symbolism of the dead swan murdered by the gang, entailing the death of the girl who was trying to save the dying



bird. With the disappearance of noise epitomized by the characters of the girl, the gang, the swan, the setting such as the canal, the office building, aircrafts, and by other elements of the novel metaphorizing obstacles to a clear vision, gone is the swan and all somnambulist logic. The situation illuminates how invaluable cherishing certain experiences from childhood is. With particular emphasis on the nuances between different kinds of awareness and unawareness, the view, too, elucidates the delicacy of versatile sorts of significance. The context invites reiterating the notion of the gift, as presented in Wark's parlance. How it is perceived from the perspective of the child has nothing to do with the utilitarian version of reciprocity and everything to do with the joy of not owing anything to the world (Wark 2013, §1). What may be inferred from Wark's rhetoric is that growing up in consumer society, one develops a sense of obligation and, along with it, quite often a fabricated sense of indebtedness. Needless to say, it causes countless conundrums. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to believe that selectively preserving memories from childhood can disambiguate the confusion aimed to be imposed on one, along with an infantile fantasy of carelessness and valuelessness as liberatory and pure. It may also reveal a blissful abundance of the potential for learning.

### **THE EDUCATION-KNOWLEDGE NEXUS IN THE SERVICE OF SOCIAL COHESION: TOWARDS THE COMMUNITY BASED ON LOVE AND TRUST**

To be different in the context of Rourke's novel is another *NO* to the confusion obscuring the difference between facelessness and solidarity. Bewildering cacophony is noise in the communication channel. When it occurs, the remix devises means of resistance to distorted communication flow. This entails an awareness about an incapacity to grasp the totality of it. Paradoxically, the realization of such a limit enables an insight into at least two things. One is that it might be indicative of the limits of human power. The other builds on the former. It is the avenue such an acknowledgement opens up: it inspires the remix as a form of peaceful/peaceable resistance against noise in the communication channel, against the logic of reckless self-centeredness and hostility of nihilo-cannibalist culture.

Embracing humility and rebuking self-grandeur reasserts both the limit and the greatness of the human, simultaneously engendering fruitful communication within the community based on humanness:

“If this sounds unpleasantly slavish and self-denying, it is only because we forget that if others do this as well, the result is a form of reciprocal service which provides the context for each self to flourish. The traditional name for this reciprocity is love” (Eagleton 2007, 91).

Little of such reciprocity seems to be the currency the gang of fellow-chancers use in Irvine Welsh’s *Skagboys* (2012). A prequel to the celebrated *Trainspotting* (1993), the novel in retrospect casts light on the narrative about junk euphoria endemic among Edinburgh youth of the 1980s and 1990s, as captured in Welsh’s fictitious accounts. The reader is exposed to the story that requires from one a specific kind of suspension of belief.

One is supposed to reinvent the characters whose destinies are allegedly known. Nevertheless, they can be read anew. The Mark Renton of *Skagboys* has an air of vulnerability hardly comparable with the junk-induced immunity to the harsh edges of the world that he develops in *Trainspotting*. By contrast, Sick Boy is revealed in a fully fledged form of both his natural cunningness and addiction-based survival skills. For example, in order to ensure horse supply for himself, he, having gotten Maria Anderson hooked to the drug, forces her to prostitute herself. In a psychedelic scene of succession of intercourses with local clients, she has an obfuscated vision of Wi Dickson, whom she believes to be responsible for her father’s death. The encounter is a phantasm within which Simon Williamson penetrates her, while transforming into a nightmare imagery of the man who caused her descent to the chasm of addiction and prostitution (Welsh 2012, 223–4). The sinister aspect of the character of Sick Boy seems to be maximized, but, at the same time, played off against its caricatured version. Were it viewed through an ironic filter, his darkly unscrupulous, unselective means of obtaining skag and a trainspotter’s mischievous camaraderie might seem to acquire an almost childlike aura. Well, almost.

Further, Begbie does not dominate the scene as he does in *Trainspotting*. A considerable portion of the novel is void of Frank’s presence, notably due to

drug related charges and consequential imprisonment. This sounds not much discordant with the depiction of the character of Begbie, the trainspotter, unlike the strangely serene, almost aloof character in some scenes in the prequel. An angular lyrical streak is interwoven in his conversation on the bench with Alison. The female character in question emerges in the novel as almost diametrically opposite to the heroin-ravished desperado she is being transformed into, as the novel progresses and as accentuated in *Trainspotting*. Having lost her mother to cancer, her baby to a death in the haze of drugs ruins, and all her dreams to the desertlike life of a buzz seeker, in *Skagboys*, she is still sensitized to the vibrancy of poetry and its potentials to respond against social ills.

Contrary to these divergences, the character of Spud is suggestive of a continuity of sorts. If any, oscillations in this character are mainly reflected in the degree of addiction. His vernacular is impossible to mistake for somebody else's. Danny's reactions are childlike despite the overshadowing murkiness resulting from the chemically altered biochemistry.

The first part of the book focuses on Mark Renton, a youngster from Leith, who comes to Aberdeen partly in search for higher education, partly to experience a different setting, meet different people, and exercise his right to independence. Partly, Rents is just trying to escape the gloominess of the repetitive, indistinct Edinburgh days. To an extent he does, albeit only by replacing them with Aberdeen everyday equally void of excitement. Irvine Welsh, *Skagboys*:

“But the chaos ay Edinburgh reminded me ay how much ah'd grown tae like the ritual ay ma life in Aberdeen. It made us realise that ma free-spirit pretensions were bullshit. In reality ah saturated ma days wi routine, until it pissed us off tae the point that ah wis compelled tae subvert it wi a dramatic break. A skag binge helped. Here, though, ah had Fiona, ma studies and ma walks. And the reason the trips back home had lessened: ah'd hunted doon a source ay gear” (ibid., 163–4).

Mark's college days start with a modest academic ambition, considerable enjoyment in obtaining knowledge, and enchantment by emotional and erotic intensities of the relationship with Fiona, herself a student at the same institution of higher education. Alas, the modesty of the academic ambition

is rather rapidly degrading. A reasonable hunger for cognizance is being, if not satiated, then certainly obscured. His investment in what seemed to be a romance flourishing into a more-or-less steady relationship, if not commitment, is being hard-headedly sabotaged by his own affinity to subvert a possibility to bond and to practice the gift.

Instead of conspiring against the onset of increasingly heavy heroin intoxication, Rents is decidedly commitment-resistant. The sweeping indulgence experienced with Fiona scares him. He would rather spend his time with Don, the dealer, and Donna, a prostitute. She enables him access to bodily sensations divested of intercourse. Rather, she insists on allowing him to give her oral sex, or, expertly dubbed, cunnilingus, as Si enlightens benighted Rent Boy (*ibid.*, 185). The detail is evocative of the scene in which Mark has an affair with Charlene while previously working on a ship, having accepted state supported immersion in the luxury of welfare and the job provided for him and the acquaintances. Unlike Donna, the prostitute, Charlene wouldn't permit him to cunnilingus her. She insists on intercourse, emphasizing the character of their relationship being not that of lovers: "It's just a shag" (*ibid.*, 335).

On the other hand, Don provides him with a pleasure of a different nature, before he disappears causing Renton's decision to quit college, leave his girlfriend, and go back to his native Edinburgh to start a life of a full time junkie. Instead of bonding, he will be able to immerse himself in the destructiveness of drug misuse, thus concealing the obstructiveness of the commitment-phobic side of himself. He will indulge in the fakeness of the communal spirit available to him in a distorted form of union with his mates in petty crimes to support the ever accruing habit. Only, he will later, in *Trainspotting*, call them acquaintances. He won't be happy and he might even know it. But, he won't be deluded by the deceitful glamour of success, prosperity, prospects for a matrimonial farce, and the complicity in advancing the monstrosity of commodity driven social relations in the company of so called friends. Or, so heroin speaks.

As is the withdrawal from university, so is Mark's return to his home town suggestive of the tone of the novel's tracking the *Trainspotting* themes. At the same time, these diverse aspects of the retro-unfolding narrative reveal

the UK social realities amidst the erosion of the mythologized imperial grandeur underpinning the microcosms full of elusive orbits, deceptive glow, uncanny class divisions, weird sense of ethnicity, economic recession in disguise, power relations along cultural divides of the indefinable character, the notion of wealth whose semblance with any abstract concept is worthy of philosophizing as much as it calls for economic strategizing, the advent and the spread of the AIDS pandemic, subcultures whose vivacious urbanity creates defiantly nonconformist responses against the calamities of valueless economically minded cultural realities.

The impasse of the hypocrisy of the officialdom, its complicity in the proliferation of illicit use of drugs, criminalization of both drugs and certain demographics, and the impact of such policies on the semi-atrophied social strata, slumberous and nearly immobilized by the insufficiency of choices, might be implied in the following critical account:

*-- On the one hand the government are encouraging the authorities to come down hard on drug use, on the other they're acknowledging the growing problem of heroin addiction in the community. So there is the strong chance of a custodial sentence if you don't cooperate with this rehab programme. Your parents are outside, and have been informed of the situation. What do you want to do?*

*Decisions, decisions.*

*-- Ah'll sign up.*"(ibid., 395; original emphasis).

By collectively signing up, for the lack of an alternative to the detoxification offered, they demonstrate willingness to cooperate with socially designed assistance. The three-week program is followed by a several-hour aftermath preceding a relapse. About the counselor at St Monans, whom the gang mockingly call Skinny-Specky, Mark notes in his diary kept during the rehab program. He presents a view that reinstates the core of culturally constructed collisions:

*"Skinny-Specky made some comment about salt in porridge (she took sugar in hers) and we playfully derided her English habits. She insisted that she was Scottish, but Ted and Skreel told her that posh Scots were, to all intents and purposes, the same as the English. I mentioned that there were actually working-class people in England, and social class supplanted nationality as the parameters of our discussion"* (ibid., 413; original emphasis).

Having outlined the intricacies of the class-nation myth, Rent Boy continues with writing his journal further disambiguating kierkegaardian vertiginous anxiety loaded with free-spirited bullshiteering. In one of the entries, he will write in response to the notice on the plaque outside the Scottish Parliament evoking barely decipherable oscillations along the center-periphery divide, all the while readdressing the thoughts about the question of supremacy: “ENGLAND EXPECTS EVERY MAN TO DO THEIR DUTY” (ibid., 473; original emphasis). About this, the character ruminates: “We stopped to look at it, both of us flabbergasted as to how blatantly and effortlessly fucked up Scotland could be” (ibid.; original emphasis). Like in *Trainspotting*, where Scottish national idiom is defined by Tommy via Iggy Pop in the vocabulary of polytoxicomania as the vernacular of the oppressed, *Skagboys* goes on to specify the profoundly transnational stand:

“If being Scottish is about one thing, it’s about getting fucked up, Renton explains, working the needle slowly into his flesh. – Tae us intoxication isnae just a huge laugh, or even a basic human right. It’s a way ay life, a political philosophy. Rabbie Burns said it: whisky and freedom gang thegither. Whatever happens in the future tae the economy, whatever fucking government’s in power, rest assured we’ll *still* be pissin it up and shootin shit intae ourselves, he announces, pulsing with glorious anticipation as he sucks his dark blood back into the barrel, then lets his ravenous veins drink the concoction” (ibid., 355; original emphasis).

Needless to say, this is undoubtedly a commentary on the complexity of the merciless socio-economic circumstances, detrimental for sound countercultural responses, causing social apathy, dissolving communal cohesion, detrimental for the sense of individuality, and impairing social relations and human relationships by and large. Irvine Welsh, *Skagboys*:

”The rat race n that. Stressed if yuv goat a joab, stressed if ye huvnae. Everybody oot fir themselves, at each other’s throat n daein each other doon. Nae solidarity nae mair, ken? The work is ower, it’s aw gaun, n thaire’s nae particular place tae go” (ibid., 340–1).

But, go they do. Into the adventure through the cityscape known, however revealed in a phantasmagoric haze of sickness-exhausted bodies and minds.

Completely unaware that a contingent of brown is being transported towards the city from another part of the country, Mark is awoken to the reality of the morning following the night spent with Hazel. Still sound asleep, her presence is a reminder of safety. No, they did not have sex—is what Mark realizes with a relief reconfirming Hazel’s unthreatening symbiotic friendship. They could not have sex—it is the contract between the victim of incest and of the heroin-crushed libido. Having realized there is nothing worrying about the previous night, Mark focuses on the quandary caused by the increasingly aggressive withdrawal. Sick Boy wakes up to the same reality. Only, in contrast to the routine calls to Swanney, Seeker, or whoever could procure heroin, the morning to which they awake brings no ritual visits to the places where withdrawal-induced miseries can end. Of all the places on the planet, Edinburgh finds itself with no readily available much needed substance.

As the gang is assembling, they embark on a journey that starts as an aimless stroll through the well known neighborhoods whose facial features appear not as familiar as they do when smack supplies abound. Pilrig, Leith, Gorgie... way too unwelcoming without safe havens such as Swanney’s or Seeker’s. The walk starts acquiring distinct characteristics as Mark, Si, Spud, Matty are heading towards the source: Blandfield Works, pharmaceutical manufacturer. They realize that the plant can only be reached via the ceiling and in order to accomplish it, they find themselves at the point from which they overlook the old Gorgie Station. Trainspotters. They need tools that will enable access to opioids. They decide planks they find as they go can do the job.

The characters of Keezbo, Second Prize, and the memories of Billy, Mark’s elder brother, enter the scene as the plot is unwrapping and the gang is tirelessly cutting across the concrete desert. Tirelessly, until it becomes apparent that the source denies them access. Until Spud vocalizes the wrongness of it all and announces that it has to stop. The aggregating component is seeping out through the crevices of the survival urge. They are not sure where each of the mates is. They seem to have lost Spud. They need to find the way back.

Back through the awareness of the experience of nothingness, having realized “that you couldn’t simply turn your back on nihilism; you had to

live through it and hopefully emerge out the other side, leaving it behind” (ibid., 530). As if it were an echo of Seeker’s remark from the beginning of the chapter:

“Although he’d become a valued customer, Seeker made Renton feel as if he was somehow disappointed in him for being on junk, that he was better than that. – Mark Renton, he smiled, -- you’re a strange yin. Can never quite figure you oot.

Like everything Seeker said, Renton was aware it carried a barely suppressed element of threat. But this, he supposed, was as close to friendship and respect as it was possible for Seeker to get” (ibid., 503).

As if it were concentrated circles emanating from the epicenter of sickness before they reached Blandfield Works whose name is flashing out from the sign of a three-storey victorian building. As if they were from the books of the eras bygone: “[T]he Punks were the Postmodern children of Dickens” (Savage 2001, 374). As if they were renegade children of Dickens asking themselves: “*Who are these people, these aliens, that we move among in such sadness?*” (Welsh 2012, 506; original emphasis).

As if the walk through the citydesert were a journey through the history of Scotland, as presented in the novel:

“The Scottish Enlightenment. You could trace the line from that period of the city’s global greatness, to the Aids capital of Europe, going straight through that mix of processing plants and warehouses within those security fences. It was a peculiarly Edinburgh brainchild of medicine, invention and economics; from the analytical minds of the Blacks and Cullens, filtered through the speculations of the Humes and the Smiths. From the deliberations and actions of Edinburgh’s finest sons in the eighteenth century, to its poorest ones poisoning themselves with heroin at the close of this one” (ibid., 516–7).

As if the lurking wake up call “What are we daein here?” (ibid., 506) were evocative of the statement such as: “History is made by those who say ‘No’ and Punk’s utopian heresies remain its gift to the world” (Savage 2001, 541).



## AGAINST ROBOZOMBISM

Back to the reminiscences of David, Mark's late younger brother. Like those memories, alongside the triumph of the failure to rob the plant, should be the gateway to "a kind of eternal childhood" with which Mark claims to be rewarded (Welsh 2012, 530). In accord with questioning the nature of the closing episode, one wonders whether it is so, or, perhaps, if Mark and company are unaware of succumbing to oppressive instruments of social control deploying a model of extended childhood as a manipulative device. He might as well be one of Thatcher's infantilized adults epitomizing fetishization of youth pertinent to commodity culture sentiment, as presented in Michael Bracewell's analysis (Bracewell 2002, 15).

Mark, a collage dropout, whose decision to return to Edinburgh could be motivated by a need to pursue different kinds of experience, other kinds of knowledge, might not be exemplary of fashionista affinities. His choices can partly be perceived through the lens of Bracewell's remarks about the social climate during the decades portrayed in Welsh's novels:

"Now, since the designer consciousness of the late 1980s has given way to the quest for spiritual hygiene and social responsibility that pumps the heart of New Labour's New Britain, the nurturing of our inner child by any means possible has achieved a new fashionableness – at the expense, perhaps, of our inner adult" (ibid., 124).

Welsh conjures up a hybrid vernacular combining local slang with standard English, clearly indicating idiosyncrasies of a specific subcultural milieu—an idiom of the outcasts. Demarcating the intricacies of drug-related phenomena, the narrative technique invokes the question of voicing out the predicament of the socially underprivileged. In an age of the proliferation of social margins, this complicates the entrenched perception of the center-periphery divide and the historization of the distribution of political power. Mark's streetwise scholarship provides him with plenty of material for retrospective contemplation, as he writes in one of his journal entries: "*Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards*" (Welsh 2012, 462; original emphasis).

Yet, neither backward nor forward fabrications of cultural realities and / or selfhood is in the postfuturist parlance spelled out either as a nostalgic longing for the times bygone, since no historical epoch is worthy of complicity in the proliferation of inhumane social relations, nor idealized future anticipations. Rather, firmly anchored in *hic & nunc* / *anticarpediem* turntablist poetics, the remix seeks sources of storytelling, i.e., creative / critical remapping of cultural realities in counternostalgic, antisomnabulist legacy of punk rock mafathers: perseverance in the reemergence of genuine communication in the key of humbleness invigorating solidarity within the community of selfless, yet reindividualized, fellow humans enduring the hindrances to patient, persistent creation of a free culture based on love and trust. Focused on the existing vocabularies, always bearing in mind the inherited ones, postfuturist DJs draw inspiration from selectively remixable tradition and current stories, and yet, distance the inquiry from reestablishing social relations based on inequity, austerity, and inhumaneness. On the contrary, the remix is recuperation of the past, reimagining the future, and resurrecting the present.

In *Skagboys*, the sources of reconfiguring the conversation between change and preservation hide in the least expected interstices in the intersection of the time axes. First, of all the characters, it is Seeker whose random commentary becomes a basis for Mark's insight into a possibility that some of the acquaintances might be friendly. Only, the attitude is severed by heroin's emotional obstructiveness and the capacity to hinder making a clear distinction between bonding and bondage. However, rather than on the level of characterization, plot, or any central literary element of the novel, a quirky sense of communality is woven in the connective tissue of the storyline--the "Junk Dilemmas" interludes, diary entries, casual observations.

Paradoxically, it is also infused in the whole of the very last chapter, ambiguous as it might be. Unlike the prevalent high octane narrative in the greater part of the novel, the very last scene poses to the reader puzzling possibilities of interpreting the looks exchanged between Mark and Simon and the silence saturating the atmosphere of the room—the silence “into which all time collapses” (ibid., 531). Given that the second chapter of *Trainspotting* is entitled “Relapsing,” the paralyzingly “frozen second” defying time might not be all that undecipherable (ibid.). As a symbolic device telling a tale exceeding

the plot of either the prequel or the evolvement of the retrospectively introduced trainspotter narratives, the looks exchanged might be a token of the victory that needs no explanation. If the former, the possibilities for further inquires include wondering where in the age of the onset of the legalization of drugs and politics of medicalization resistance can be found. More precisely, uncommendable form of countercultural activism as it might be, drug misuse in habitually politically indifferent social segments can be a visceral response against cultural realities that dilute vision of the human face.

Nowadays, intercultural dialogues, including intergenerational ones, appear to be understood in terms of economic vocabulary. One might be led to think that such a subtext of power relations is the only currency of social exchange. Furthermore, this could signal vulnerability, nearly incapacity for wholesome resistance. Youth might find taking the stance towards the situation to be of the highly delicate character. In a culture plagued by oppressive infantilization, superficial, forced entertainment is one of the most prominent means of social control. Flawed/afflicted maturity, (un)masked immaturity, and childishness oftentimes strangely conspire in muting sound social responses against bewildering noise, thereby dissolving communication capable of solidifying solidarity and generating refacement.

Alongside intergenerational dialogue, the production of knowledge is clearly integral to discursively negotiated, occasionally noise-infested, cultural realities. Paul Virilio's antidistraction theory, as presented in his book *Open Sky*, may illuminate such cultural flows by remarking pollution by velocity: "Alongside air pollution, water pollution and the like, there exists an unnoticed phenomenon of pollution of the world's dimensions that I propose to call *dromospheric* – from *dromos*: a race, running" (Virilio 1997, 22; original emphasis). The pollution is related to "forgetting *the essence of the path, the journey*" (ibid., 23; original emphasis).

He proposes dromology as antidistraction antidote against desertification resulting from dromospheric contamination: "*the desert of world time* – of a *globaltime* – complementing the desert of flora and fauna rightly decried by ecologists" (ibid., 125; original emphasis). Thus, dromology, an ecology recuperating "the pace of public life" (ibid., 23), can be taken to have the capacity

to redeem the public realm void of communication, despite verbal content being the apparent currency. In that context, the center of the subject-object thematic is relocated into the gap between them—on the path so persistently kept out of the critical focus: “Between the subjective and the objective it seems we have no room for the ‘trajective’” (ibid., 24). Or, do we not, indeed?

Like skagboys, wandering through the desert of trainspotter narratives, humans are perplexed by superimposed acceleration of activities, which more often than not aims to engender quantified accumulation of material wealth, an increase in bank statements, and property values. Yet, it threatens to deprive individuals of the time to think, enjoy, and be with each other. Work hours and workload are often directly proportionate to consumer purchasing power, and clearly discrepant from human needs.

Whirlpools of frenzied time may feel like a syncopated rhythm in a jazz tune. Like knots in time, they seem to tie the communication flow. As if it were inhibited, not very gently prevented from continuing to facilitate exchange in the communication channel. Syncopation like noise. Until the strings sound resistance against captivity. The winds accept the call for dissensus. The percussions agree, too.

One wonders how discourse can approach such complexities. Based on Terry Eagleton’s ideas, one is prone to think that cultural theory has an almost impossible task (Eagleton 2003). One aspect of the problem concerns the fact that cultural theory deals with art, religion, subcultures, entertainment, to name a few. What Eagleton accentuates is that each segment of culture constituting the subject matter of cultural theory is part of human life, reflects how people live, and informs social relations and communication / exchange among and / or between humans. Hence, cultural theory may not be as troubling as it appears, should it sustain a reasonable balance between heavy-laden, self-referential technicality and jargon-free reductionism.

In other words, as a vocabulary reflecting how people live, create, know, and learn, to name a few ingredients of cultural realities, cultural theory should not be detached from the subject matter in order to preserve an insight into the

questions pertinent to it. Nor should it lose a vibrant distance from what it explores and avoid identification with it in order to ensure discursive status.

Of particular significance regarding the academic aspect of cultural theory is that, as a rhetorical apparatus, it calls for the aforementioned balance, thereby making itself comprehensible both to the community of scholars and to those not fluent in the vernacular. If it is not resilient to the nondiscursive influx, it tends to desensitize itself from the vital themes comprising the field of study. By contrast, if it is articulated solely in a jargon-free style, it might: (a) be simplistic and/or insufficiently distanced from the object level; (b) be utilitarian; (c) not be intelligible even to itself; and (d) not convey the message clearly. The crux of the polemic calls for a response in an antibabylonian fashion, divesting itself of the image of an ivory tower and remaining vocabulary in the service of humanity. Just as cultural theory is and should be. Just as education is and should be.

Based on Terry Eagleton's insights in *After Theory* (2003), invoking McKenzie Wark's thoughts from *The Beach beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International* (2011) about the work of Alexander Trocchi and, more broadly, the legacy of the Situationist International, low tech poetics emerges from the reintegrating potential of the remix. Originating in music, the remix combines textual, audio, and visual expressive modes. Creating a hybrid idiom, it puts in conversation certain elements of high culture with a more accessible, yet not oversimplified, not less rigorous idioms. Firmly anchored in humbleness, it disambiguates the deceitful idea about the totality of discourse, all the while investing in the capacities of critical / creative reading-writing. Likewise, it objects to the delusion of human omnipotence, simultaneously acknowledging the limits and power of the human.

The counterpoint to an arena of self-centered, competitive, solely cumulative erudition, nihilo-cannibalist rivalry, indistinguishable, uniforming amalgam suppressing individuality and mimicking, rather than containing, contemporary culture's coercive, somnambulist, massifying, monetarist dictum is the awareness that opens up an avenue for thinking a possibility for reshifting onto the pattern that illuminates the significance of humbleness.

Disambiguating noise in the battlefields of power—oppressive cultural flows aiming to distract education from the pivotal playfulness—cultural theory may elucidate the significance of unity and individuality of fellow humans within the questlike endeavors such as education. It also opens up the avenue for the remix.

Language is elusive. But it is also protective. So is knowledge. So is education. At the moment, education is leaning towards a cumulative pattern of obtaining knowledge. It reflects the model of progress for progress' sake, absurdly resonating with its supposedly oppositional, utilitarian nature that humanity seems to have acquired, oblivious of the need for disrupting such a logic with a friendly reminder that progress is and should be in the service of human beings.

Furthermore, it can cast light on the angle from which the pursuit of knowledge can be seen as the channel for genuine communication invigorating solidarity within the community of humans. Building on the symbolic in Jon Savage's punk historiography, revealed is just how incredible those sources of enhancement are: "The lack of an overall, defined ideology was heavily criticized but, just like Punk was at its most powerful when impossible to define, this is not a weakness, but a source of strength" (Savage 2001, xvii).

The angle casts light on education to be constitutive of a vibrant source of resistance against noise, and in the service of the remix.

Weakness as strength. Language that eludes, but also protects. Maybe only such epistemological knots can, in a quirky way, explain why the struggle for power is not all education is about. Maybe they can also highlight the distinction between education not being important any more and a slightly altered nature of its significance. This can certainly be indicative of the threat of noise to distort the message and preclude the flow in the communication channel. Disentanglement of syncopations reawakens the sounds muted in a frozen moment. Like the reconstitution of communal cohesion. Like refacement : rebirth of the human face through alternating cycles of noise and silence : reintegration of the subtonic layers preserving the wholesome sound of creation.

## LITERATURE

- Bracewell, Michael. 2002. *When Surface Was Depth: Death by Cappuccino Other Reflections on Music and Culture in the 1990's*. Boston: Da Capo Press.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1986. *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985*. London: Verso Books.
- Eagleton, Terry. 2003. *After Theory*. New York: Basic Books.
- Eagleton, Terry. 2007. *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rourke, Lee. 2010. *The Canal*. New York: Melville House.
- Savage, Jon. 2001. *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*. Revised edition. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Wark, McKenzie. 2011. *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International* London: Verso Books.
- Wark, McKenzie. 2013. "A Christmas Carol: Dedicated to Scrooge, and His Art Collection." *Verso Books Blog*, December 11. <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1201-a-christmas-carol-dedicated-to-scrooge-and-his-art-collection>
- Virilio, Paul. 1997. *Open Sky*. Translated by Julie Rose. London: Verso Books.
- Welsh, Irvine. 2012. *Skagboys*. New York: Norton.
- Wilde, Oscar. 2007. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray, A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Michael Patrick Gillespie, 5–184. New York: Norton.

Primljeno: 6.09.2014.

Prihvaćeno: 7.10.2014.

## Trajno školovanje: protiv buke, a u službi remiksa

---

**Nikolina NEDELJKOV**

Gradski univerzitet Njujorka

Centar za postdiplomske studije, Odsek za anglistiku

**Sažetak:** U vreme koje sve više zapostavlja ulogu obrazovanja kao sredstva istinske razmene postoji opasnost da bi korporatizacija mogla da zamagli distinkciju između individualizma i individualnosti, između uniformnosti i jedinstva, što su samo neki primeri šuma u komunikacionom kanalu. Stoga je nesporna potreba za održavanjem svesti o najmanje dva ključna aspekta obrazovanja. Jedan se odnosi na njegovu autentičnu karakteristiku – prenos informacija. Drugi se tiče odnosa između zajedništva i individualnosti. Oba podrazumevaju da se obrazovanje u velikoj meri bazira na jedinstvenoj valuti razmene među ljudima: jeziku. Kao takvo, ono je integralni deo uzajamno uslovljavajućeg odnosa između diskursa i kulturoloških stvarnosti. U svetu koji traga za radikalnom komoditizacijom, dominacija, beslovesno ubrzavanje, brutalna konkurencija i beskrupulozna utilitarnost kodirani u sentimentu neprijateljstva, a u čudnoj sprezi sa mitom o progresu i uvećavanju znanja koji su sami sebi svrha, često deluju kao mnogo prepoznatljiviji rečnik od jezika poklona. Čitanje kreativnih i kritičkih idiosinkrazija u ovom radu potcrtava potencijal remiksa kao oblika mirnog/miroljubivog otpora protiv represije u službi jačanja zajedništva. Time se otvara mogućnost za preusmeravanje na *hic & nunc / anticarpediem* model, rasvetljava bukom prouzrokovana konfuzija u areni borbe za moć i pokazuje značaj zajedništva i individualnosti u kontekstu potrage kao što je obrazovanje.

**Ključne reči:** obrazovanje, informacija, kulturološke stvarnosti, otpor, skromnost, jezik, komunikacija, remiks