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# Urban pedagogy: a proposal for the twenty-first century

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The urban has been studied by students of geography, politics, aesthetics/culture, architects and politicians. Educational researchers in defining the urban as a field of research and practice have looked at schooling and its institutionalized role in cities. A wider discussion of the very character of urban experience and its relevance for pedagogic reflection and practice is a topic that still has to be explored. There are of course some exceptions, such as the Center for Urban Pedagogy in the US and its interest in environmental experiences in an urban context and researchers looking at the community–school relationship or the role of the family and locality. This essay makes an argument for urban pedagogy in the twenty-first century. The inspiration for this proposal is taken from psycho-geographers, both classical (the dialectical imagery of Walter Benjamin) and contemporary (Iain Sinclair) and their emphasis on *erfaringspedagogikk* (the pedagogy of experience). A number of topics are covered: the movement of pedagogy to informal, less institutionalized arenas, the flâneur, educating the senses (emotions, acoustic, visual/optic, taste, tactile), signifiers and commodity culture. It is argued that these topics can share a concern with living and learning to live in the urban.[1] Towards the end of the essay, how to realize urban pedagogy is raised as a topic for discussion.

## Introduction

It is not uncommon for educational policy-makers to claim legitimacy for their work by connecting it with the desire to enhance literacy through learning. Take for example a recent (Norwegian) Government commission on proposed educational reform, where improved literacy is to include reading, writing and numeracy, as well as digital competence. These are regarded as fundamental skills based upon the ability 'to identify, to understand, to interpret, to create and to communicate' (St Melding, Nr. 30). Could it not be argued that to live in an urban environment requires the development of its own fundamental skills resting upon identification, understanding, creation and communication? One must learn to identify, understand and interpret

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urban experiences. One must create one's own life chances, make choices and learn to communicate with others in swiftly changing urban situations. This is one of the goals of this essay: to propose a framework capable of developing the kinds of skills that might constitute a future urban pedagogy.

What might be the status of such knowledge? A second goal of this essay is not to propose the establishment of a single, all encompassing paradigm for urban pedagogy. As Kuhn put it, the social sciences (including pedagogy in its different forms), as opposed to the natural sciences, lack the stability necessary to talk of paradigms with their regular 'normal, puzzle-solving research' (Kuhn, 2000, p. 223).

Instead, in the spirit of Lakatos (1970, pp. 132–133), the intention is to propose a research programme—one of many possible ones—capable of developing skills in urban pedagogy. A research programme—Lakatos's phrase—entails a hard core of assertions (his term was hypotheses), a protective belt of auxiliary, less strong assertions, a positive heuristic (suggesting paths of research to pursue) and negative heuristic (telling 'us what paths of research to avoid').[2] Lakatos restricts negative heuristic to the core assertion, which is not to be problematized, and positive heuristic to the questioning of the auxiliary assertions. In this essay I will suggest that the core assertion can also be researched in a positive heuristic manner—with the goal of not questioning its validity, but of increasing our understanding of it. In addition, auxiliary assertions can be examined from the viewpoint of a negative heuristic in order to protect them—asking what is necessary for assertions to hold, rather than be questioned and modified or abandoned.

Two different research programs might have been examined. Firstly, exploring the urban environment as a socio-ecological system. This was the approach adopted by Wirth (1964, p. 180) in his classic study of the 'city as a way of life': 'Human ecology [is] less concerned with the relationship between man and his habitat than with the relationship between man and man as affected, among other factors, by his habitat'. This forms the core assertion for today's Center for Urban Pedagogy in New York.

A second research program for urban pedagogy has been proposed by Jones (1997) in London. Central to his view is the relationship between the school and the community. If the latter is dysfunctional, the school becomes a surrogate family. If the school is dysfunctional in the sense of discouraging learning, then learning in the community becomes central. He draws attention to the experiments in US in the 1960s and 1970s when children learning zoology would do it at the zoo, those learning drama would do it at the local theatre (Wilson, 2004). Learning in the community can also take place through the religious schools organized by different ethnic groups at weekends. That such schools exist might reflect how 'peripheral groups, seldom have access to significant institutions in a manner sufficient to bring about a reallocation of power and resources, including those related to education' (Jones, 1992, p. 210).

With respect to the balance between school and community, Jones (1997) continues to argue that beginning teachers should remain aware of these different options, while concentrating their daily efforts in the state funded and formal school system. In other words the school as an urban institution remains central.

Whitty (2000, p. 86) is also skeptical to the role of the community with respect to school self-management and notes: 'Strategies of neighborhood empowerment also have their limitations, since communities are far from equally endowed with the material and cultural resources for self-management of their schools'.

The research program examined in this essay departs from the two mentioned above by making urban experience the key element, rather than the urban environment or schools in the urban community. It has much in common with the work of Ball *et al.* (2000). They have shown how for some adolescents the urban is experienced as bounded in terms of distance, so that it enhances the values of family, locality and most importantly security (p. 149). The opposite is the case for other adolescents who see the global city, for example London, as an unrestricted and challenging wealth of opportunities.

Following their interest in how the urban is experienced, but without emphasizing the career choices of adolescents, urban experience itself gains a foreground and not a background, taken for granted position. The core assertion proposed is the following: 'Living and learning to live in an urban context entails an awareness and understanding of urban experience'.

Accordingly, the goal is to explore how a research program based upon this assertion might provide a framework to develop the skills for an urban pedagogy. The subjects participating in such a pedagogy might be youth or adults. While the specific details of the curriculum will be the subject of a subsequent essay inspired by SooHoo *et al.* (2004), some indications on how this proposal can be realized will be presented in the course of the essay, especially in later sections. In order to explore urban experience, it is first necessary to pose a preliminary question:

## What is the city?

In the early work of Harvey (1973) the city was understood as a place where the logic of capitalist production, reproduction, circulation and exchange was played out to spatially map different classes. In his later work (1989a, b) the cultural dimension of this logic receives greater attention, but still within a framework dominated by the capitalist logic of flexible accumulation and its spatial representation in the city.

In his later work, Castells (1996) envisages a slightly different function for the city. It is the site where the *space of flows*, supporting a flow of communication, meets the *space of places*, where people belong in a corporeal sense. This enabled him to highlight the role of changing communication patterns among inhabitants as they come to terms with these different flows. Baumann (2003) in *City of fears, city of hopes* has developed the ideas of both Harvey and Castells to focus on how in an age of what he calls liquid modernity urban inhabitants are more sceptical and fear face-to-face interaction. People have, he argues, a preference for cultivating 'islands of similarity and sameness' (p. 30) among those of a similar socio-economic background. Segregated housing patterns emerge.

Bauman's proposal is that planners create spaces where people can have more shared experiences; to develop shared horizons based upon face-to-face interaction:

'propogation of open, inviting and hospitable public spaces which all categories of urban residents would be tempted to regularly attend and knowingly/willingly share' (p. 34).

These writers to a varying degree talk directly about urban experience and its changing character, but what still remains is a reflection on the relevance of urban experience itself for educationalists. How for example, might the spaces Baumann talks of be created and how might people be schooled into desiring and managing such experiences?

If we move to academic journals, such as *Urban Education* and *Education and Urban Society*, is it possible to find any advice upon an urban pedagogy focusing upon urban experience and its pedagogy? Examining these two journals, the kind of topics covered are typically the social segregation of pupils in different schools, social inclusion, cultural diversity, and gender. However, while these topics are undoubtedly to do with living in urban areas and attending schools, the focus is not upon urban experience itself. Instead, the focus is upon the urban schools and what happens in them and how the schools might assist in the reduction of different forms of inequality, such as socio-economic.

Thus, once again there is little reflection on urban experience itself. Moving it to the foreground and making it a topic for urban pedagogy is the goal of this essay.

## Experience and pedagogy

In making urban experience the core assertion in a research program on urban pedagogy, the ambition is to remain close to what educationalists have called the experience of 'learning by doing'. The focus in this context becomes different kinds of urban experience and how they are to be identified, understood, interpreted, chosen and communicated.

A number of points can be made about the character of urban experience in an urban pedagogy:

- It was Simmel (1950) who highlighted the difference between urban and rural experience. In the latter, a person is more likely to meet familiar faces, the pace of life was slower and the number and intensity of stimuli was less. In urban experience the opposite is the case. Urban and rural experience are therefore different.
- From an educational point of view, to increase one's understanding of urban experience through experiencing it in a 'learning by doing' manner is to participate in a project of *bildung* (self-formation). It entails a self-overcoming as new urban experiences confront old ones. (Dobson *et al.*, in press) They are revalued and retained or discarded. For some adolescents, such a self-overcoming might result in a heightening of identities, which are more fragile than secure (Ball *et al.*, 2000).
- Perhaps the most important character of urban experience is that it entails experiences that take place in informal arenas. Pedagogy is moved from the formal, institutionalized space of the classroom with fixed and stable teacher–pupil roles

to the street and the community expressed in the life of the street, where many other shifting significant others can be figures of identification and the source of mimetic inspiration.

Thus, when urban experience becomes the source of educationally valuable experiences that are less formal, of high intensity and they can bring about self-formation, we are talking about an *erfaringspedagogikk* (a pedagogy of experience). Writers such as Kolb (1984) and Wallace (1999) have considered *erfaringspedagogikk* in terms of how experiential learning becomes the basis for observations, integrated into abstract conceptual schema. A growing literature on reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987) has also been inspired by the desire to understand the role of *erfaringspedagogikk*. What these perspectives share with an interest in urban experience, is the belief that practical experiences, in this case outside of a formalized context, can become the object of reflection in institutionalized, school settings.

Moreover, a pedagogy of experience supports identity formation (*bildung*), without necessarily making any judgments on the moral quality of these experiences. Nonetheless, it is possible to do so, as suggested by Jameson in his advocacy of 'cognitive mapping'.

Cognitive mapping for Jameson (1988, p. 353), building upon Lynch's (1960) classic book, *The image of the city*, aims to imagine not only the experience of urban space, but how this is connected with socio-economic, class-based and global experiences of exploitation. His proposal (1984, p. 92) entails a 'pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system'. The goal is therefore clear: to make sure 'we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle', but how he means to do this, other than through cognitive maps, is unclear.

## Protective belt assertions

Around the core assertion of urban experience as the subject matter of urban pedagogy a number of protective belt assertions are proposed. They rest upon the core assertion of urban experience, but are less strongly held in the sense that they can be modified and even abandoned without meaning that the legitimacy of the core assertion is questioned. This means that protective belt assertions—other than those described below—might be proposed. The criterion for selection is that they contribute to a heightened understanding of urban experience.

### *(a) The flâneur*

To saunter, stroll, wander, promenade, to be a flâneur—these are the terms describing the walker who has time on their hands. Not then the commuter in a rush, or the child running for their school bus. For Benjamin, the flâneur planted his feet one after the other, in order to let the seed of uncharted and unexpected experiences grow in an unhurried fashion. The allegorical connection with nature and a

metaphor drawn from plant life was deliberate on his part: 'The style of the flâneur who goes botanizing on the asphalt' (Benjamin, 1983, p. 36).

The walker is able to plant and reap experiences from an activity, which has become increasingly unnatural to many urban dwellers, addicted as they are to the intoxicating thrill of motor, train and air travel.

This most natural of activities, walking, could also have a pedagogical, political and even military goal for Benjamin. It was to creatively recapture and re-experience space surrendered to planners, architects and the owners of capital:

> Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands, and of how, from the very scenery that for the flier is only the unfurled plain, calls forth distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects at each of its turns like a commander deploying soldiers at a front. (Benjamin, 1979, p. 50)

Sinclair (1997) walking across London and De Certeau (1984) in his charting of everyday pedestrian space have both followed Benjamin's footprints and possessed similar pedagogical and political intentions. To give the flâneur a political rather than leisurely goal. More of Sinclair later; De Certeau was interested in the way people used space, often walking in areas or directions that urban planners would not have liked. They reacted against the panopticon goals of planners.

This was the intention of the International Situationalists, among them Debord (known for his *Society of the spectacle,* 1977), who talked of drift (*dérive* in French)—the unplanned walk of locomotion without a goal, where one just followed one's feelings to map the psycho-geography of a place and how it felt, e.g., threatening or the opposite. Situationalist psycho-geography can be defined as the following: 'the specific effects of the geographical environment … on the emotions and behavior of individuals' (Anon, quoted in Sadler, 1998, p. 92).

The flâneuse? Benjamin with his concept of the flâneur might have reproduced the male culture of the nineteenth century, where the only public role allowed for the sauntering woman was as a prostitute, or as an embellishment on the sleeve of their husband's wealth (Wolff, 1989). To botanize the asphalt in such a masculine manner is then to consign women to the status of objects through the gaze. The walker ceases to be concerned with living plant-life; and instead of planting the seeds of political revolt they take the life of those on the street, in particular women, denying them an active role. When the male walks in such a predatory manner a woman is less able to experience being a flâneuse without fear for their own safety.

Fear and urban experience raises the question of how the city is imagined (Westwood & Williams, 1997). Pile, inspired by psychoanalysis, also draws heavily upon Benjamin's concept of phantasmogia, in order to highlight the procession of images passing before the urban dweller. These images can take on the character of a dream experience and can be the source of 'wishes and desires, anxieties and fears' (2005, p. 96). In other words, the images we have of the city can influence how it is experienced both consciously and also in a more indirect unconscious manner. Cardinal, in autobiographical fashion, gives a graphic description of fear and violence in an American urban context. He recalls his own upbringing, 'fighting, even when you

lost, was at least respectable' (Cardinal, 2004, p. 43). Moving from the streets and neighbourhood to schools, it was not however considered acceptable as a socially agreed solution for conflict resolution.

The activity of the urban flanêur represents a corporeal and creative way of upsetting imposed usages of urban space. This can be desired and contribute to a positive heuristic. The opposite is the case when women are made into objects, which becomes part of a negative heuristic.

### *(b) Educating the senses*

Simmel observed the emerging urban culture and life style of Berlin around 1900. He noted that one had to train the senses. For example, one had to learn to look at strangers when on a tram (positive heuristic), rather than try to talk to them (negative heuristic). The observation has relevance today, when we see young children who have not learnt this and attempt to talk to the strangers. Another way of putting this is to say, that one must be more guarded in disclosing one's inner feelings and emotions. Simmel's advice (1950) was to protect the emotions by acting in a rational, potentially cold and objective manner.

It is also the case that the other senses must be educated in addition to the visual/optical, such as the acoustic, olfactory, tactile and gustatory. Certain sounds, we learn, are background sounds, such as the muffled sound of London at night or early in the morning (Bull & Back, 2003). Other sounds occupy a foreground and must be consciously identified, e.g., the sound of people running to catch a bus. The smell of food from restaurants as we pass them connects us to our sense of taste and we recall, for example, the taste of salty chips in paper.

In the previous section fear was been mentioned. It is something that is sensed, through the ears for example. In this connection McLaren (2000, p. 243) has talked of the manner in which rap music functions as an experience of the urban: 'Rap unmakes feelings of security and safety in middle class homes and neighborhoods. It indexes areas of concrete rage and generalized despair'.

For some, rap functions as part of a negative heuristic, something to be disciplined, controlled and avoided where possible. Other the other hand, it can also function as part of a positive heuristic, something to be desired: 'by bursting through the representational space of Whiteness and by advancing political solidarity in the form of an imagined community of struggle' (McLaren, 2000, p. 250).

Educating the senses connects with the romantic tradition of *bildung* proposed by writers such as Schiller in Germany and Rousseau in France. By senses I am, therefore, thinking of the full repertoire of senses: visual/optical, acoustic, olfactory, tactile and gustatory.

### *(c) Signifiers, codes and commodity culture*

Signs, composed of signifiers, signifieds and referents, are organized into sets of codes (or grammars) that we must learn to use if we wish to communicate

(Gundersen & Dobson, 1996, p. x). In the case of urban experience and its codes, access to them is important. But what is a code?

Bernstein (1971–1973) sought to understand the code-based character of the pedagogic process. He coined the term 'elaborated codes' and their opposite, 'restricted codes'. For Bernstein (1986, p. 474), the former referred to a form of communication that utilized a range of 'syntactic alternatives which speakers take up in the organization of speech'. The latter codes were more restricted in the range of codes utilized. Bourdieu (2004, p. 17) was also interested in the coded character of interaction, specifically cultural capital as a code governing pedagogic activity and societal recognition and access to power. Thus, different cultural groups have their own cultural preferences embedded in:

> … longlasting dispositions of the mind and body, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines). But, they both underplayed, or perhaps even lacked Benjamin's insight that codes in an urban space can change with each new generation, in a dialectical process of opposition, where the breaking of one code and the imposition of its successor can be a violent and turbulent affair. (Dobson, 2002, p. 4)

This means that if pedagogy is to have more than a descriptive task limited to exposing and confirming existing codes in society, it must have additionally a political and emancipatory project: the breaking and making of new codes in an urban environment that reaches beyond the bounds of the classroom.

Is it not the case that racial and sexual codes visible in urban space have been changing? For example, mixed-race relationships are more openly expressed, but not necessarily accepted. Benetton exploited this in their *United Colours of Benetton* advertisements, mixing Black and White signifiers of skin colour. Another example is homosexuality, which is more openly seen on the streets than in previous decades.

In other words, the visual signifiers we see on the streets are carriers, or should we say the corporeal metaphors, of different codes, which we must in turn learn how to interpret and assign a meaning. Some of them will change, like fashions, for example to talk to yourself while walking down a street is a signifier of the person with his mobile and some hands free device. It may change with the next technological advance. Other codes change more slowly and reluctantly, e.g., the racial codes.

One code whose meaning is fairly constant is the one embodied in commodities presented for purchase. Marx talked of this code in terms such as use and exchange value. Thus, each commodity at its point of sale contained components of exchange value and potential use value. To this Benjamin (1983) added exhibition value, as commodities are displayed. This last mentioned value can 'fall' as people become accustomed to the commodity on display. It can 'rise' in value if it gains the aura of mass popularity or cult status.

Benjamin was sensitive to both the code and aura of commodities. He demonstrated it in his view of the consumer seduced by commodities in department stores and also the flanêur intoxicated by membership of the crowd:

> The crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; someone abandoned in the crowd. In this he [the flâneur] shares the situation of the commodity. He is not aware of this

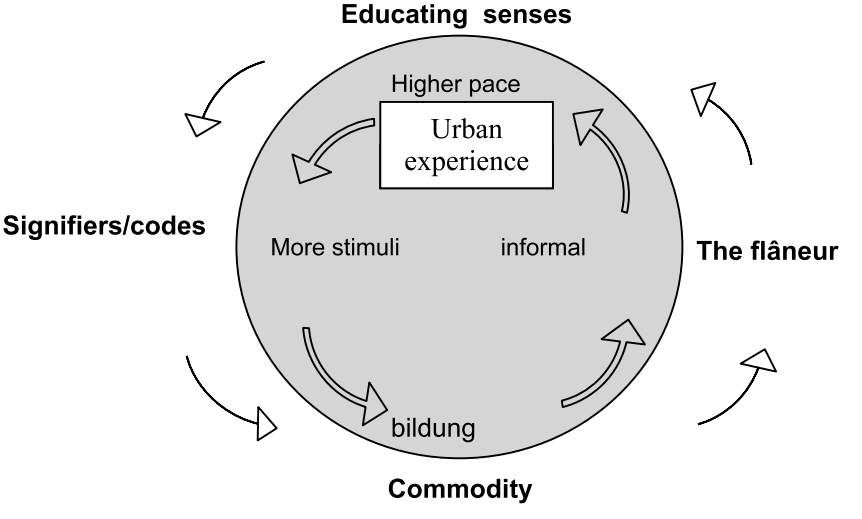
> special situation, but this does not diminish its effect on him and it permeates him blissfully like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations. The intoxication to which the flâneur surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers. (Benjamin, 1983, p. 55)

In such a manner, Benjamin had found a way of describing and also experiencing the secular opium of the people and the intoxication they had learnt to enjoy.

My point is simple, in the urban space a person must learn to interpret the codes encountered, and upon this basis, shared understanding and communication with others becomes possible. Speech communities become possible. Once again different moral positions can envisaged: those supporting the intoxication of the commodity and its codes (a positive heuristic), and those taking an opposite view (a negative heuristic).

The core assertion and the protective belt assertions can be presented in a diagram, where the protective assertions feed off and yet at the same time support the core assertion. They are like moons around a planet, each with their own gravities of attraction.

As an example of the core and protective assertions I would like to look at the work of Iain Sinclair. I will pass over until later the question, 'who is the educator in urban pedagogy?', saying only at this point that in Sinclair's case, what appears at first sight to be a self-taught pedagogy is in fact revealed—by his own admission—to be a form of urban experience that he has experienced, developed and learnt in the presence of one important significant other, his photographer companion, Marc Atkins.




*Note:* The idea for the diagram was given to me by Rita Brodalen and Hilde Tobaissen.

Figure 1. The core and protective assertions in the proposed research program on urban pedagogy

## An example: the urban pedagogy of Iain Sinclair

Of his walking projects, Sinclair is most recently known for the one around London's orbital road, the M25 motorway. In this book passages such as the following can be found as he tries to escape the claw-like hold of the urban:

> The harder the rain comes down, the faster we stride. We're erasing everything we investigated on the original walk. The smoke from the burning stack at the London Waste facility in Edmonton is distinguished from river mist, spray from the elevated carriageway. The sky has dropped. (Sinclair, 2002, p. 452)

His writing style has been noted for its stinging acerbity. The reader encounters a writer struggling to find the signifiers to express his politicized interpretations. In this he agrees with Jameson who says representation is 'the struggle with and for representation'. But whereas Jameson (1988, p. 348) wants to see representation as first and foremost *figuration* and as not necessarily political, Sinclair always searches for an ideological and organic realism:

> The A13 shuffle through East London is like the credits sequence of the Mafia soap, The Sopranos; side-of-the-eye perspective, bridges, illegitimate businesses about to be overwhelmed by the big combos. Black smoke and blue smoke. Waste disposal. A well-chewed cigar…To drift through low cloud, through the harp strings of the suspension bridge, is to become a quotation; to see yourself from outside. (Sinclair, 2002, p. 40)

Sinclair's books are a mixture of text and photographic images—more text than image. The text documents—sometimes in almost note fashion—the walks he has undertaken. But his walks are far from random and unplanned in the sense implied by the *dérive* (drift) of the International Situationalists. Sometimes he has walked a certain path several times, and he has always either before or after making the walk, researched the history of what he sees. So, his books are carefully crafted and edited reflections of his experience as a flâneur.

In Sinclair's celebrated *Lights out for the territory* (1997) that we find a clear example of the core and protective assertions outlined above and their connection with urban pedagogy. Sinclair's project in this book was to provide a record and understanding of the hidden mythical, psychic geography of London. Not then the London of public survey cartography—the one charting the manner in which myths of people are connected to the place in which they inhabit or have inhabited. He defined the planned walks as follows:

> The notion was to cut a crude V into the sprawl of the city, to vandalize dormant energies by an act of ambulant sign making. To walk out from Hackney to Greenwich Hill, and back along the River Lea to Chingford Mount, recoding and retrieving the message on walls, lampposts, doorjambs: the spites and spasms of an increasingly deranged populace. (Sinclair, 1997, p. 1)

The signifiers he maps are graffiti, shop signs, pub signs; always with the view of looking for a connection to the people of the area. Graffiti for instance (p. 1), are understood as signifiers, which parody the codes of capitalism—like capitalist commodities they advertise their meanings for consumption. For example, the graffiti 'we're behaving like insects' (p. 15) found in Dalston paradoxes how we are all

mass consumers following each other in our purchases and not the least, in our walking habits.

Sinclair uses the term flâneur on several occasions, along with the term psycho-geography (p. 85) and its clear reference to the International Situationalists. His definition of the flâneur is, 'a stubborn creature, less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversation pieces, than in noticing everything' (p. 4).

As an illustration of his method, consider how on one of their walks they stumbled across the funeral to one of the Kray brothers (notorious in the London gangland of the 1960s). The local support for the figure was marked in the tributes and funeral procession—the East End had its 'reputation to uphold' (p. 69). Sinclair identified a connection between pitbull dog traditions of the East End and the dog breeding dreams of Ronnie Kray. In following the procession, they suggested that their understanding of the flâneur changed: the flâneur as stalker (p. 75). He closes this account of the funeral by noting how even drug-pushers in BMWs make the journey to touch the Kray gravestone. The connection between living/mortal and dead/immortal is made.

As a second illustration of his method, at the end of the book Sinclair and his photographer colleague, Marc Atkins, are trying to find the secret about Charlton House. They visit it only to be refused entry. And then a stroke of luck, they hear of a small pamphlet written about it by a local historian. Eventually they track it down in a local library. Sinclair discovers how the house was built upon a site that had for centuries been used as the conclusion of a pilgrimage out of the City of London. It had been an ancient place of worship. Sinclair notes the connection—this house also marks the end of their journey out of London. Moreover, there is a personal connection for Sinclair—Adam Newton was the builder of Charlton House and his (Iain Sinclair) wife's family had once owned a property frequented by Newton.

In Sinclair's urban pedagogy we find the core assertion—urban experience—the life of the streets and the community, outside the formal sphere of the school, experiencing the pace of and stimuli of urban life and as in the example above, learning about himself and his relative as an indication of *bildung*. The protective assertions are also present: the flâneur in different version, stopping to eat local food (usually a full English breakfast) early on all the walks as an indication of the education of the senses (taste), the reflections on commodities. In the work of Sinclair it is, however, the reading of signs, looking for their political and mythical meanings, that remains uppermost in his interests. There is an open critique of governments and capitalism—his view of codes and signifiers is always political. Put simply, it is a politics of representation.

## Realizing urban pedagogy—how?

In debates on informal pedagogy it is not unusual to encounter the following kind of view:

> Learning is social and comes from our experience of participating in daily life. Lave and Wenger developed a model of situated learning that proposes that learning involves a

> process of engagement in a community of practice … but the community of practice metaphor does not explain how the process of developing identities in communities of practice occurs. (Phoenix, 2004, p. 24)

While writers such as Phoenix are sensitive to the role of style and masculinity/femininity in how youth identities are constructed in everyday practice, they limit their focus to the formal setting of the school. It is in this setting that they envisage informal pedagogy to be taking place. What is ignored is the informal pedagogy taking place outside of the formal school institution. And it is precisely this which forms part of the core assertion in the proposal for an urban pedagogy made in this essay.

Jones (1997) considered the community as an experience outside of the school. But, as noted, he continued to regard the school as the most important site for education. In opposition to him, the community, as expressed and experienced in the life of the street remains central to my conception of urban pedagogy. It is here that the educational efforts for such a pedagogy might be concentrated.

In moving to such an arena, identity formation—*bildung*—is less fixed and controlled by the formal teacher-pupil relation of the school. The role of peer groups, respected community elders and the media-mediated views of style and consumption occupy a key role. The answer to the question, 'who does the educating in an urban pedagogy?', is that it is not necessarily the teacher in the classroom. Likewise, the answer to the question, 'who are the pupils in such a pedagogy?', is not necessarily those of normal school age. They can be adults. However, some caution must be taken with respect to the age of the younger participants. The activity of the flâneur should not be allowed for those too young to wander the city on their own. This means that youth in their mid to late teens would represent the younger age bracket for participation, and they might walk in pairs or small groups, rather than alone. Of course, accompanied by adults, the age of participants might be younger.

Following the lead of Ball *et al.* (2000) urban pedagogy might emphasize the role of the family as it exerts an influence on the socialized frames of perception and thought of adolescents (p. 23). This would make the family an important source of educational influence, such that family members become teachers about how the urban can be experienced.

Flemming Røgilds, in his series of books on youth in an urban environment, in particular *Det Utsatte* (The Marginalized, 2004), describes and accounts for the manner in which peer group interaction is fundamental to identity formation. For him urban pedagogy is more to do with peer group influences than the family. Thus, for many of the immigrant youth he follows in Copenhagen, adults—whether teachers, parents or community elders—are not considered to be the prime models for identity formation. Whether we call these peer groups forms of subgroups, or even gangs, is not of relevance to the key point, that peers can be a primary focus for identity formation in the kind of urban pedagogy proposed above. This is an argument that applies to many youths who would not claim an immigrant background. For Røgilds, the immigrant youth take part in what he calls border pedagogy—a term he takes from the American educationalist Giroux (1994)—as they build identities in the border region between Danish and immigrant identities.

Many classroom educationalists will be skeptical about letting their pupils wander the streets. And this will represent one of the main criticisms of the proposal presented above. But to back off from increasing pupil awareness of different forms of urban experience is to neglect the everyday context and challenges that many pupils face. As a prelude to actively seeking urban experiences teachers might run workshop sessions—in the school classroom—where pupils tell of their experiences, of the senses they use, of memorable stories and so on. Different elements of the diagram above might be focused upon in turn.

Not all urban experiences should be sought and in the workshops the less desirable and dangerous ones can be discussed and ruled at as topics to actually experience. The journeys into the urban arenas, outside of the school, can therefore be limited and directed, so that they do not become an unconstrained wandering in the spirit of the International Situationalists. Such random and unplanned drift (*dérive*) can be reserved for students who are older; for example of college age.

One way of documenting urban experience is to let pupils/students work on their own joint projects. To reflect the different senses enervated the projects can be multi-modal, composed of text, images, sounds, tastes and surfaces that can be touched. This might entail everything from images taken on mobiles to the recreation of small 'tasters' of food sampled on the journeys into the urban.

Participants in urban pedagogy will be encouraged to organize and reflect upon their urban experiences. Much of this reflection can be cross-disciplinary in character, drawing together knowledge from different fields and subjects, such as the history of construction (a favourite topic in the work of Walter Benjamin), literacy defined widely in terms of how different cultural signs are made and understood, the sociology and psychology of urban inhabitants, living conditions, personal health and safety and so on. Moreover, participants will be the opportunity to work upon their soft skills; those connected with working in groups, and selecting urban issues and problems according to interests.

## Concluding remarks

In the resultant cross-disciplinary research programme proposed above, with the goal of developing skills in an urban pedagogy, the core assertion of urban experience has been based upon four elements: higher pace of life in the urban sphere, more stimuli, the informal and *bildung*. These can be researched and investigated through a negative heuristic (suggesting what not to investigate) and a positive heuristic (suggesting what to investigate). Around this, four less crucial assertions were added as a protective ring: signifiers/codes, involvement with commodities, the flâneur and an education of the senses. It is also possible to investigate each of these auxiliary assertions in terms of a negative and positive heuristic.

However, a difficulty arises—in Lakatos's conception the protective belt assertions could be modified or abandoned if found to be deficient. It is possible to argue that some of the ones proposed should in fact be included in the list of core assertions. For example, is it not the case that the flâneur should be part of this

core? Not necessarily, the urban can be experienced from the car or the tram. So, it does not have to be part of the core. Similarly, the experience of commodities is not necessarily a core assertion. Not only commodity experiences are possible in the urban arena. It is harder to argue that signifiers, codes and an education of the senses should not be part of the core, especially when *bildung* seems to involve some form of educating the senses and learning to understand and interpret the codes. The solution, not attempted here, could be simply to include them as elements in the core assertion.

Moreover, it might be argued that socio-economic class might be a protective belt assertion, since the experience of the urban changes according to class. This would concur with the work of Ball *et al.* (2000) who highlight the differential, divisive and unequal manner in which the urban is experienced. For some social groups, the city is experienced as a place of danger rather than security. The importance of social class for experience was identified also identified by Benjamin (1983, p. 117): *erlebnis* (repetitive experience, 'passed through and lost') is typical of the working class as they work and less likely to be *erfahrung* (collectively shared, historical experience that is recalled as meaningful).

Irrespective, whether new elements are added to the protective belt or moved into the core assertion, a focus upon urban experience would still stand as the key defining element of a research programme, and content for the urban pedagogy proposed in this essay: 'Living and learning to live in an urban context entails an awareness and understanding of urban experience'.

This does not preclude others constructing different research programmes and curricula for an urban pedagogy. Instead of drawing upon experience, the focus might be on the urban as an ecological site. Not that the different research programmes should fight for hegemony: a tolerance for differences should be encouraged.

## Notes

1. An earlier version of some of my ideas can be found in the following series of publications: *The urban pedagogy of Walter Benjamin. Lessons for the twenty-first century.* Part I, II, III (London, Goldsmiths Press, 2002). Also online: www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/cucr/pdf/benjamin1.pdf (http:…Benjamin2.pdf) (http:…Benjamin3.pdf).
2. I would like to thank Rune Hausstatter for drawing my attention to the work of Lakatos as a way of moving beyond the ideas of Kuhn.

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