It is because the *parrhesiastes* must take a risk in speaking the truth that the king or tyrant generally cannot use *parrhesia*; for he risks nothing.

—Michel Foucault

AN INTRODUCTION, AND/OR A PREFACE

In his presidential address, which is included in this collection of papers, Kip Kline suggests that the time has arrived to redirect the work of philosophy of education away from the path of critical theory, and thus to depart from what he described as the discourse of *parrhesia*. Little or no tangible changes in the day-to-day life in schools can be linked to the work of critical philosophers of education, Kline observes, and, thus, our energy would be more productively exerted within other discourses, such as the postmodern pragmatism of Rorty. As an audience member during Kline’s thought provoking address, I wondered if Kline’s observation and subsequent arguments wouldn’t be more appropriately deployed as a critique of the discursive practice of philosophy of education. In anticipation of my own paper that I would present during the conference, and which appears below, I wondered if the matter at hand wasn’t so much whether or not critical philosophers of education had made any “real” contributions to the practice of education in schools, but, rather, whether or not critical philosophers of education had made any real contribution to the practice of writing and thinking in the field in general?

And this wonder led me to ask Kline during the Q&A if in fact the practice of *parrhesia* was one that when taken up was meant to *enact* the structural or organizational difference in its very performance. Put otherwise, perhaps critical philosophy of education as *parrhesia*, the act of free speech, or “fearless speech,” as Foucault describes it, might be better understood as the enactment of politics, or what Rancière calls redistribution of the sensible, an


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interruption of the normative. With the disruption of the conventional, this kind of critical philosophy offers a demonstration of an alternative, of a “possible world.”

While all this may sound familiar, I contend that it has yet to be understood insofar as it has yet to be practiced. In other words, I take Kline’s critique of critical philosophy of education to accurately indicate a failure amongst those who have taken up the tradition of parrhesia to take up the risk-taking venture of parrhesia, i.e., to speak freely and fearlessly, or as Nietzsche exhorted, “to live dangerously!” And thus I propose that the time has arrived for parrhesia to be enacted as a practice of politics in the discursive field of philosophy of education through disruptive forms of writing that interrupt the conventional arrangement of communication within the arenas, or public realms, where the field is rooted and propagates itself.

The following is an attempt to perform parrhesia. The piece that appears below is part of the ongoing effort to take up an original philosophy of education, here and now, through revelatory forms of writing that might best be described by what Walter Benjamin calls “collection”: “The true, greatly misunderstood passion of the collector is always anarchistic, destructive. For this is its dialectics: to combine with loyalty to an object, to individual items, to things sheltered in his care, a stubborn subversive protest against the typical, the classifiable.” What is offered below is philosophy of education as parrhesia: thought arranged freely, and outside the current convention of writing philosophy. It is “destructive,” in the sense that it is a momentary interruption and redistribution of the discursive field. And, at the same time, it does not seek to act under an over-arching principle, nor to re-establish, nor re-form the field. Hence, it is anarchic. As parrhesia, it is political free speech, which, to borrow from Arendt, characterizes it as nothing more, or less, than

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2 Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics,” in Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010). I’m indebted to my colleagues David Backer, Daniel Friedrich, Tyson Lewis, and Mike Schapira from the NYC metro area Radical Philosophy Recherché Group for guiding me to new insights on Ranciere’s work, and for enabling me to make connections with my project of originary/original thinking and writing differently.


4 With the preface I am offering the reader an introduction to the “drama” of the work that unfolds in the main body with the poetic philosophy. It might be analogous to the famous preamble made by Socrates at the beginning of the Apology where he informs his judges that he will be speaking in the manner that is natural to him. In other words, Socrates speaks in safe, diplomatic and conventional terms before taking up his defense and speaking with the voice of a parrhesiastes.

human “action”: “To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word archein, ‘to begin’ . . . indicates), to set something into motion.”

Hence, the piece is an attempt to initiate, to begin something and, here in this context, to begin by re-collecting what has been forgotten so as to renew the conversation of philosophy of education. In turn, while claiming to initiate, it does not claim to be “new,” because it is by design anachronistic. Its form is conspicuously of another epoch, indeed, of the era when philosophy was initiated, and in this sense, as a work of (re)collection it is, to put the matter audaciously (again, parrhesia = fearless), an attempt to be an authentic, genuine, and original work of philosophy of education. Working within, and thereby recovering, the ancient form of Parmenides in order to initiate something new. Or, as Benjamin writes: “The genuine picture may be old, but the genuine thought is new. It is of the present.”

The larger project, of which the following is an example, is also an attempt to take up what Reiner Schurmann calls the “phenomenology of the original”: a thinking enacted through a writing that interrupts the present arrangement of the field of work and welcomes the return of “classical” representations of perennial or immortal questions. Thus, the piece is enacting parrhesia as an interruption of the current conventions of writing philosophy of education by (re)collecting ancient philosophic formulae: verse, aphorism, allegory, epistle, parable. Like the critical work of Benjamin’s collector, the phenomenology of the original proceeds on two fronts: “it recalls the ancient beginnings and it anticipates a new beginning, the possible rise of a new economy among things, words and actions.” In turn, the piece is a work of “original thinking,” or one that recalls the iconographical forms of the past in order to open up gaps, breaks, and spaces of possibility in the arrangement of words, concepts, and ideas in the current field of work.

To summarize: the form of the piece is a per-formance of original thinking, an en-actment of parrhesia. Hence, it is not an “argument” but a “demonstration” of the possible and alternative forms of practicing philosophy of education. Here, in this instance, the demonstration is a reconfiguring of “original” connection between logos and mythos. That is, the form of this demonstration recovers Parmenides' retention of mythos and logos in order to enact the parrhesia that interrupts the normative and, in doing so, calls attention to what is established as the conventional, compelling a questioning of the governing forms of writing philosophy of education today. Heidegger, in one moment of remembering Parmenides, says “Myth means the telling

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7 Walter Benjamin, Schriften II, 314, quoted in Arendt, “Introduction,” 44.
word...*mythos* is that appeal of foremost and radical concern to all human beings which makes man [sic] think of what appears, what is in being...*Logos* says the same."9 By re-collecting Parmenides’ poem the “form” of my piece is a method or formula, a relationship between the symbolically represented concepts, that is intended to respond to the question concerning the immortal conversations in philosophy of education. To work in a “poetic” form, and to describe this as a demonstration of original thinking, is to describe the writing as not simply a “translation” of an aesthetic experience, or even an artistic expression, but, rather, as an attempt communicate freely in response to a question posed to the community of philosophers of education: Are there immortal questions in philosophy of education?10

As Foucault tells us:

The *parrhesia* comes from “below,” as it were, and is directed towards “above.” This is why an ancient Greek would not say that a teacher or father who criticizes a child uses *parrhesia*. But when a philosopher criticizes a tyrant, when a citizen criticizes the majority, when a pupil criticizes his or her teacher, then such speakers may be using *parrhesia*.11

Whether or not it “counts” as an example of *parrhesia*, the writing that enacts original thinking, which carries the force of critique and confrontation, also bears the burden of risk for those articulating it. And this brings to mind Foucault’s reading of Kant’s essay on enlightenment, where the emphasis is placed on the so-called motto of the enlightenment: *Aude sapere*: “dare to know,” “have the courage, the audacity, to know.”12 It is no small matter to have one’s non-conventional and, by design, disruptive writing “dismissed,” “ignored,” “rejected,” and rendered “out of bounds.” Indeed, the risk involved in the demonstration is the risk that the writing will, in being recognized as

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10 I’m indebted to the ongoing email exchanges with Larry Green, who was also present at OVPES 2011, and heard the reading of my piece at the conference. Larry’s comments and questions after a close and careful reading of my piece helped me to clarify and articulate the theoretic “backdrop” of the piece. The present introduction and/or preface unfolded first from responding to Larry.


12 When we replace “know” with “write” we do nothing to violate the spirit of Kant’s challenge. In fact, we may have sharpened it insofar as writing, specifically the kind we are referring to, is exemplary of “scholarship” or public use of reason that Kant has in mind, and is himself exemplifying. Cf. Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?,” in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1986), 263-269; Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 32-50.
non-conventional, fail in its attempt to create new discursive space. Put otherwise, there is no guarantee that the writing will demonstrate, that the thinking appears as “original.” But therein lies the paradox of writing “freely”: one is compelled to take the risk to “say something,” but there is no guarantee that a new space will be initiated. Writing is always a leap of faith that one has readers.

Thanks to the radicalism of his propositions and the acuteness of this challenge, Parmenides was the great point of departure. Through him thought achieved self-awareness as an independent power; compelling in its conclusions, it unfolded its potentialities and so attained to the limits where thought incurs failure—a failure which Parmenides did not discern, but which he invited with the enormous demand he made upon thought.13

Language is also a place of struggle... For me this space of radical openness is a margin—a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a “safe” place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance.14

This is what happens to us in music: First one has to learn to hear a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life. Then it requires some exertion and good will to tolerate it in spite of its strangeness, to be patient with its appearance and expression, and kindhearted about its oddity. Finally there comes a moment when we are used to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing; and now it continues to compel and enchant us relentlessly until we have become its humble and enraptured lovers who desire nothing better from the world than it and only it. But that is what happens to us not only in music. That is how we have learned to love all things that we now love.15

14 bell hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Place of Radical Openness,” Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1990), 145.
15 Nietzsche, The Gay Science, 262.
BEGINNING

It begins with Parmenides’ Poem.
It begins with Parmenides’ “Way of Truth”
This “it” being the immortal
Conversation of philosophy.

This conversation that is the
Journey of our “becoming
Human together,”

to paraphrase the timeless message
we hear from Gilgamesh, that
oldest of epic tales.

Philosophy, the immortal conversation,
which recounts, like a
grand epic pilgrim’s tale,
the story of our
becoming human together.

This story, in which we all partake in,
has a beginning, or beginnings,
and one of these
beginnings occurs in 6th century BCE
Greece, at Elea, with Parmenides.

Most of you know the tale told
by Parmenides.
For me it is one of the most
powerful allegories of philosophy,
the immortal conversation,
as initiated by a
transcendent moment,
a stepping back before
moving forward,
and of philosophy as
a journey of learning,
as education.

Parmenides poem, his Way of Truth,
is a tale of a young man,
a “youth” transported to the
heavens in a chariot
guided by Sun Maidens
to the gates of Night and Day
where Justice, holding
the keys to the gates
is persuaded by the
Sun Maidens
to let the youth, the
young Parmenides,
pass through and
arrive at the
center of all things
where he is greeted with
hospitality by the
Goddess (Thea)
who welcomes this
young stranger,
telling him he has arrived by no Ill Fate
but by the Path of Necessity.

Here, with her, she tells him,
he will learn of the
truth
of Being and Thinking
unified.
Of presencing,
existence and existing.
Of the Immortal Way of Truth,
and the path of mortals,
which he must avoid.

The Way of Truth, she teaches him,
Is the path of unity.
Where all is the perceived in its
Proper togetherness together.
To think and to be are
The Same,
She instructs him,
and you must think
this unity,
think the unity of Being,
or what I am calling “the becoming of human together.”

The way of mortals, she teaches
Him, is the way of opinion,
perishing thoughts,
words and deeds,
forgettable and forgotten.
The way of non-being.

The Goddess dwells at the center
of all things, steering the universe.

She is Eternal
Stands in eternity,
Guiding the immortal conversation of thoughts,
Words and deeds worth remembering, remembered.

OF RETURNING AND RETRIEVING

So this is the poem of Parmenides.

In this tale of transcendence, the
young Parmenides must return.
Return to the houses of the night
with the teaching he has
received of the two paths.
Taking up one, understanding
the other.

We might understand this return
as the life and travels of Parmenides,
taking up the immortal conversation
travelling through the world of Greek antiquity,
visiting mighty Athens with
his student Zeno, as we are
told by Plato in the dialogue
he wrote in tribute to Parmenides.
In the Parmenides, we see a
young Socrates engaging in
dialogue with an older Parmenides,
the teaching of his poem
at the center of
their conversation.

The sudden appearance of Socrates, here,
reminds us that the conversation
of philosophy begins, again, anew,
with the rejoining of the
teacher and student, and with the
latter posing the First question,
the basic question, regarding the
teaching, of the teacher:
Who are you?  What are you telling me?
With this question, the conversation begins again.

We hear this questioning at the beginning of each school year, each semester, and if we listen attentively, at the beginning, middle and end of every lecture, every seminar.

Who are you?
What are you telling me?

The questions remain present.

I’m not so much interested in the grammar of the question as I am in its ontology:

What the question says about us, and who the question is that begins the conversation of philosophy.

Who is this question that begins again the conversation of philosophy?

The Question is identified, recognized as the speech of the stranger, the one who arrives from abroad.

Jacques Derrida in his seminar lecture “Foreigner Question: Coming from Abroad/ From the Foreigner” offers us an important context for this Question.

Derrida:

the question of the stranger is a question of the stranger, addressed to the stranger...As though the stranger were
being-in-question or being-in-question of the question.¹⁶

Derrida goes on to remind us
of the arrival of the
question-as-stranger,
making appearances, first and foremost,
in Plato’s dialogue
the Sophist.

Here the name given to this
Stranger by Plato is…stranger (xenos)

As stranger, he begins, again,
the conversation, by being
the question, by
questioning Parmenides
telling of the tale
of the first teaching
of the Way of Truth
i.e., overturning, deconstructing
the logos of Parmenides.

Derrida reminds us next of Socrates
Being the question
Identifying himself as
the stranger, the outsider
on that day he defended
himself, offering his
apologia in his own speech.

Derrida:

Sometimes the [stranger] is Socrates himself, Socrates the
disturbing man of question and irony…the man of the
midwifely question…In The Apology of Socrates (17d), at
the very beginning of his defense, Socrates addresses his
fellow citizens and Athenian judges. He defends himself
against the accusation of being a kind of sophist or skillful
speaker. He announces that he is going to say what is right
and true, certainly, against the liars who are accusing

him…He declares that his is ‘foreign’ to the language of the courts, to the tribune of the tribunals: he doesn’t know how to speak this courtroom language, this legal rhetoric of accusation, defense, and pleading; he doesn’t have the skill, he is like a [stranger].

What is significant here is that Socrates’ request was based on the cultural and social norm, convention, and practice of hospitality (xenia)

Here we recall this hospitality as always present at the beginning of the conversation, we recall the Goddess welcoming the young Parmenides.

Said Socrates to the Court:

Welcome me as stranger, as outsider. Listen to me as I speak in my usual strange way, that way you have come to know as mine, so you are familiar with it, although you have always found it defamiliarizing and disruptive.

Hence I have been brought here today.

Remembering and Retrieving

Derrida does not, however, recall the Strangeness of the young Parmenides, the youth, changed, transformed and altered, who returns to the houses of the night, where we must imagine he was welcomed back like Odysseus upon his return to Ithaca, unrecognized yet familiar.

But unlike Odysseus, warrior, who slays the suitors, and allows the bard and messenger to go free, for he holds the song of the singer to be beyond human value.

Unlike Odysseus, the stranger returning as the transformed youth returns bearing the question, as the question—who is this? compelling the question—
who are you?
what are you saying?

The young Parmenides, the youth, Returns, a stranger, one who Bears the question by being the stranger.

But his strangeness is of a particular kind of ontology/modality like Socrates later, the young Parmenides has become a question
to himself, beginning a conversation, with himself, eme emauto, the silent dialogue of the self, thinking.

Herein we recall the strange identity of the learner as philosopher, philosophy as education. Here too we find ourselves becoming human together (on a path) that always finds us discovering and recognizing ourselves both unknown to ourselves, yet familiar.

When we recall the initial return of the young Parmenides we recall the modality of the stranger, of discovering oneself to be the stranger,
no longer the one
who others recall.
A modality, so central to
the immortal conversation of
philosophy, recounted again
and again.

An important example of this
Discovery of the self as stranger
in the aftermath of receiving an
education is the persona

John Jones, in W.E.B. DuBois’

“On the Coming of John,” from

_The Souls of Black Folk_.

In this tale of a youth transported
away from his home
to receive a transformative education
about the “way things work,”
the hero, John Jones, returns
finally to his home town of
Altamaha, after one final
“lesson,” while attending a
performance of a Wagner Opera.
Crashing down to earth after
Transcending to the heights
with Wagner, Jones announces
his return.

Returning home, Jones discovers himself
to be a stranger to the community,
familiar but wholly changed, different.

Jones recognized himself to now be
capable of one and only one
practice, the vocation of teaching,
an educator, or one who
can alter the course of events,
disrupts the arrangements of
things.

Jones discovers himself, as
stranger to be the teacher.

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But he quickly discovers what Hannah Arendt will say later about the difference between education and politics: one cannot educate adults.  

Jones discovers this first when he rises to speak to the gathered congregation of his community, speaking to them of what has been, what is, and where they ought to go, together, relinquishing sectarian borders that keep them apart. The gathered congregation understands nothing of what Jones has to say, for he is now a deconstructed son of the community, a stranger to the adults.

But in this state of strangeness, he is recognized by his young sister, who asks him if learning makes one different, and she says she would like to be different…

Thus he becomes aware that as stranger, outsider, as one capable of disrupting and altering the arrangement of things, Jones is positioned to be a teacher, and this implies working with children.

Towards A Phenomenology of the Original

So what might we call the deconstructed self now ready to enter the

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conversation of philosophy, to teach?

Reiner Schurmann calls this modality of thinking “the phenomenology of the original,” for it “lays bare formations of presencing that govern being in the world.”

Here today as we raise the question concerning the presence of the immortal conversation in and of philosophy of education, we take up the formations that govern our field, the being of a philosopher of education in the world today.

Thus, we raise the questions concerning the possibility of teaching this or that but in doing so we remain too close to what is familiar, and thus too far from retrieving thinking because we remain too familiar to ourselves.

Thus, we must find a way out, a poros, a way out of our abode we call philosophy of education—an academic discipline—

learning to speak, write in strange new ways so as to retrieve the ontology of questioning that initiates again the conversation.

The phenomenology of the original proceeds by way of deconstruction locating the right, the gap the in-between, the way out that will also serve as a way back in.

Schurmann: the phenomenology of the original by way of deconstruction raises

the question of the origin ontologically or turns the condition of thinking back upon the thinker so that this phenomenology, that receives the same as other the familiar as unfamiliar is a break in the perception of the arrangement of things.

The old appears new, And the thinker as newcomer, learner, the insider positioned momentarily outside the formations that govern the field of knowledge.

Call this position one of transcendence, And thereby retrieve the moment of Parmenides’ poem, his Way of Truth.

Transcendence: vertical, first, Then, horizontal, when the thinker returns inevitably, to the horizon, to the field to initiate the conversation.

The vertical transcendence via deconstruction, the outward as upward, the return as a retrieval and a forging ahead, towards original thinking.

Schurmann: the phenomenology of the original by way of deconstruction that catapults us, a transporting transcendence toward a “retrieval of the ‘original’ would require an occurrence, a happening…”21 a reversal of our

21 Ibid., 132.
history, tradition:
    a turning around that moves
us towards a retrieval of the original.

**Re-Arranging the Present**

DuBois, in arranging *The Souls of Black Folk* sought to disrupt the formations that governed the field of social knowledge by initiating his thinking, each chapter with music and lyrics, specifically the lyric and music of “sorrow songs,” spirituals, or what we might call The Blues.

In disrupting the current and thereby opening a space for the future, the new, DuBois retrieved what he called the original gift of African Americans to the world.

The strange and unusual arrangement of his writing moved towards original thinking.

What remains, for us, here, in philosophy of education, today, is a thinking expressed or communicated in a way that deconstructs the order of things and thereby locates a gap or break, a portal that will make way for a departure and return.

I began with Parmenides, and so I conclude by retrieving a question posed by another persona from ancient Elea, that stranger
from Plato’s *Sophist* who wondered: “Are we today even perplexed at our inability to understand the expression ‘to be’? not at all.”

A question in the form of an assertion, we retrieve a rhetorical set of questions:

Should we not be perplexed at our question whether or not there are immortal questions in philosophy of education?

Should this not cause us to step back and wonder at the formations that govern our field, arranging what and how can be said, where and when?

Should not the strangeness of what is familiar cause us to think, again, about what we are doing, saying, teaching?

Should not the familiarity of it all not compel us to move outside what we take to be philosophy of education, so as to renew and initiate, again, a thinking, a questioning, which would evoke and inspire learning?

And if we should heed that call to deconstruct so as to move beyond the given,

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22 Plato, *Sophist* 244a. This quote appears in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, and subsequently in Schurmann’s *Heidegger*. The movement of this question, i.e., from Plato to Heidegger to Schurmann and, finally, to this piece, is an example of the two-front movement of original thinking (retrospective, prospective).
will we not “experience the perplexity” and confess ignorance at what we are doing and why, and in doing so look not to the past for recovery, or the present for renewal, but to the future for retrieval of the thinking that will inspire learning.

We look to find that opening to move toward original thinking by experiencing the strangeness of the familiar, the present.

As Schumann puts it: “Original thinking—the thinking in which the origin is understood as inception—proceeds on two fronts, retrospectively as well as prospectively. It recalls the ancient beginnings and it anticipates a new beginning, the possible rise of a new economy among things, words, and actions.”

AN AFTER-WORD ON POETRY AND IMMORTAL QUESTIONING

And so, on our way toward thinking, we hear a word of poesy. But the question to what end and with what right, upon what ground and within what limits, our attempt to think allows itself to get involved in a dialogue with poesy, let alone with the poetry of this poet—this question, which is inescapable, we can discuss only after we ourselves have taken the path of thinking.

23 Schurmann, Heidegger, 133.
24 Heidegger, What is Called Thinking?, 18.