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Making sense in education: Deleuze on thinking against common sense

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ABSTRACT

According to a widespread view, one of the most important roles of education is the nurturing of common sense. In this article I turn to Gilles Deleuze's concept of sense to develop a contrary view of education—one that views education as a radical challenge to common sense. The discussion will centre on the relation of sense and common sense to thinking. Although adherents of common sense refer to it as the basis of all thought and appeal to critical thinking as instrumental in eliminating its occasional errors, I shall argue, following Deleuze, that common sense education in fact thwarts thinking, while only education which revolves around *making* sense may provoke thinking that goes beyond the self-evident. I demonstrate how making sense can become an educational encounter that breaks hierarchies and generates thinking independently of the thinker's knowledge and place in the sociopolitical order. The present article attempts, therefore, to put some sense into Deleuzian education for thinking, and thereby shed new light on its radical-political, counter-commonsensual power.

KEYWORDS

Deleuze; education; thinking; sense; common sense

Introduction

According to a widespread view, one of the most important roles of education is the nurturing of common sense. Whether common sense is taken to be anchored in human nature or a sociohistorical construct, it is generally assumed that education is required to elicit or cultivate it. By fostering common sense, the community nourishes shared meanings and values, rendering them self-evident for virtually all its members (Gadamer, 2004; Gasparatou, 2017; Kumashiro, 2004).

In this article I turn to Gilles Deleuze's concept of sense to develop a contrary view of education—one that views education as a radical challenge to common sense. The discussion will centre on the relation of sense and common sense to thinking. Although adherents of common sense refer to it as the basis of all thought, claiming that critique of one aspect of common sense must rely on others (Peirce, 2011, pp. 290–301; Rescher, 2005), I shall argue following Deleuze that thinking requires breaking away from common sense and the image of thought it produces. Hence, common sense education in fact thwarts thinking, while only education that revolves around *making* sense may provoke thinking that goes beyond the self-evident, producing truly political effects.

Although Deleuze himself barely touched upon educational questions (Bogue, 2004, p. 327; Morss, 2000, p. 195), in recent years his philosophy draws growing attention from education scholars (Masny & Cole, 2015; Reynolds & Webber, 2004; Semetsky & Masny, 2013). For Deleuze, philosophy is all about thinking differently, in an unorthodox, non-commonsensual way, and various scholars have examined

the relation of education and thinking in his writings (Kohan, 2011; Munday, 2012; Semetsky, 2003, 2004; Wallin, 2014). However, the literature tends to ignore Deleuze's concept of sense, developed mainly in *Difference and Repetition* (1995, hereafter *DR*) and *Logic of Sense* (1990, hereafter *LS*), and disregard the strong connection of thinking and sense. As a result, the relation between thinking and sense and that between thinking and the various cognitive faculties in Deleuzian radical political philosophy has not yet been examined in the educational context. In what follows, I demonstrate how making sense can become an educational encounter that breaks hierarchies and generates thinking independently of the thinker's knowledge and place in the sociopolitical order. The present article attempts, therefore, to put some sense into Deleuzian education for thinking, and thereby shed new light on its radical-political, counter-commonsensual power.

Common sense and the image of thought

In the third chapter of *DR* (pp. 129–168), Deleuze presents common sense as one of eight postulates foundational of 'the dogmatic image of thought', which dominates the philosophical tradition (see also Deleuze, 2006, p. xii). According to Deleuze, dogmatism characterizes philosophy from its very beginning—not only from its historical beginning in Greece, but wherever any philosopher chooses to begin, namely the presuppositions of philosophizing. Even when the philosopher attempts to critically eliminate any explicit presuppositions Deleuze calls 'objective'—such as the scholastic presuppositions regarding concepts of rationality and animality Descartes refuses to accept in the second Meditation when he takes care not to define man as a rational animal (Descartes, 1996, pp. 17–18)—he still accepts others that are implicit or 'subjective', such as those related to the nature of thought or the meaning of being, in Descartes' case. Such presuppositions are easy to accept because they are not articulated explicitly and systematically, but are rather 'contained in opinions rather than concepts: it is presumed that everyone knows, independently of concepts, what is meant by self, thinking, and being' (*DR*, p. 129).

Thus, the philosopher tries not to presuppose any concrete content—any thoughts to be true or anything as real—without proper examination. When accepting the 'form', however, when assuming to know what it means to think and to be, he already accepts some material 'element'. This element

consists only of the supposition that thought is the natural exercise of a faculty, of the presupposition that there is a natural capacity for thought endowed with a talent for truth or an affinity with the true, under the double aspect of a *good will on the part of the thinker and an upright nature on the part of thought*. It is because everybody naturally thinks that everybody is supposed to know implicitly what it means to think. (*DR*, p. 131; italics in original)

That is to say, the philosopher presupposes that thought's purpose and manner of operation are self-evident—that it always proceeds linearly towards truth and knowledge, and that its form actually dictates its substance and is not merely an empty pattern indifferent to content. Dogmatism lies above all in thinking about thinking; namely, it characterizes thought as both the activity *and* its object: thought operates dogmatically when it accepts a pre-given image of itself. The Cartesian cogito is here much more than a mere example—it is the common sense become philosophical' (*DR*, p. 133), for it embodies the most important, most dogmatic philosophical presupposition, according to which everybody knows what it means to think, and everybody thinks in the same way and for the same purpose.

Deleuze understands that philosophy's adherence to what everybody knows, to common sense, is an expression of a desire *not* to be dogmatic, *not* to start from arbitrary, scholastic presuppositions:

When philosophy rests its beginning upon such implicit or subjective presuppositions, it can claim innocence, since it has kept nothing back ... It then opposes the 'idiot' to the pedant ... the individual man endowed only with his natural capacity for thought to the man perverted by the generalities of his time. The philosopher takes the side of the idiot as though of a man without presuppositions. (*DR*, p. 130)

The reliance on the self-evident is therefore motivated by an anti-authoritarian, egalitarian creed, and is supposed to bridge the gap between layman and scholar by rejecting scholastic presuppositions accessible only to the latter.¹ However, Deleuze thinks that common sense actually expresses common opinion, *doxa*, which is also replete with implicit theoretical as well as practical presuppositions, the self-evidence of which makes them even more dogmatic—an *ortho-doxa*.

Hence, educating for common sense is doubly dogmatic: it not only uncritically accepts certain views as true; it does so while assuming it trains students for critical thinking, but in fact only legitimizes a pattern of thinking saturated by these very assumptions. The student, according to the common sense philosophy, can reach the right conclusions all by herself, if only she would think ‘properly’—the difference between student and teacher is merely temporary and would be eliminated in due time (Rancière, 1991)—thereby yielding to the intellectual and political order embedded in the presuppositions (Gregoriou, 2004, p. 235).

Concordia facultatum

Deleuze philosophizes through conceptualizations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996), and his concept of common sense is unique and original, relying on but also transcending previous conceptualizations. It integrates common sense as *doxa* or common opinion with other conceptions, especially Aristotle’s and Kant’s. For Aristotle, common sense (*koine aisthēsis*) integrates the data of the five external senses, making it possible to know when properties with no common measure belong to the same object (Aristotle, 1957, p. 103). In much the same way, Deleuze claims that the operation of common sense—as well as of thought itself as long as it adheres to the dogmatic image—consists of integrating data and recognizing objects. But unlike Aristotle, Deleuze does not define common sense in relation to the five senses; following Kant, whose concept of common sense (*sensus communis*) marks a relation of different cognitive faculties, understanding and imagination (Kant, 1987, §21), Deleuze argues that in order to recognize an object all faculties must collaborate:

Recognition may be defined by the harmonious exercise of all the faculties upon a supposed same object: the same object may be seen, touched, remembered, imagined or conceived ... No doubt each faculty—perception, memory, imagination, understanding ...—has its own particular given and its own style, its peculiar ways of acting upon the given. An object is recognised, however, when one faculty locates it as identical to that of another, or rather when all the faculties together relate their given and relate themselves to a form of identity in the object. (DR, p. 133)

That is to say, the natural activity of thought, according to the dogmatic image, is to enable harmonious cooperation of the faculties, or *concordia facultatum* in order to recognize objects, to know what each really is. Thought, therefore, ‘is not a faculty like the others but the unity of all the other faculties which are only modes of the supposed subject, and which it aligns with the form of the Same in the model of recognition’ (DR, p. 134).

Deleuze complements common sense (*sens commun*) with what he calls good sense (*bon sens*), namely ‘the norm of distribution from the point of view of the empirical selves and the objects qualified as this or that kind of thing (which is why it is considered to be universally distributed)’ (DR, pp. 133, 134). That is to say, common sense determines the cooperation of the cognitive faculties, the very ability to recognize objects and classify them, while good sense is responsible for placing specific objects in specific categories, namely for people’s ability to recognize similar objects as belonging to the same categories. As James Williams (2008) explains, common sense is responsible for the ‘capacity to account for the identity of things (*what is this?*)’, while good sense is ‘a principle for the distribution of any possible object (*any possible object can take its place in a classification of objects according to predicates*)’ (p. 133; italics in the original; see also Williams, 2004, p. 118). Good sense enables different people to have the same common sense and thus think according to the same presuppositions. Therefore, the presuppositions uncritically accepted by the *doxa* reflect the relations between the faculties dictated by thought which obeys common sense and good sense: together they create a unified, identifiable object out of the plurality of faculties and sense data and a unified, identifiable subject to which all ordered faculties belong, and so also a unified community in which all subjects recognize the same objects and communicate about them in a common language.

Accordingly, common sense is not only a general frame in which education can take place; it has an inherent educational dimension for it generates and shapes subjects. More than a set of presuppositions, it is an active force operating both within and among individuals, determining what is perceivable and thinkable, what is meaningful and valuable, what is right and wrong. It educates in every act of

recognition and communication, thereby laying the ground for ‘reasonable’ experience and action, binding life and thought to a predetermined order.

Thought and thinking

Deleuze does not doubt that common sense is valid in the daily, banal contexts in which we recognize objects. Common sense is necessary for communicating and moving along in the everyday world (Williams, 2008, p. 30), and educating in accordance with its presuppositions is therefore to a certain extent unavoidable. The problem for Deleuze lies in the imperialism of common sense, in the way it takes over thought and action, casting them in conformist patterns:

On the one hand ... acts of recognition exist and occupy a large part of our daily life: this is a table, this is an apple, this the piece of wax, Good morning Theaetetus. But who can believe that the destiny of thought is at stake in these acts, and that when we recognize, we are thinking? (DR, p. 135)²

Recognition takes place *in thought*, but does not involve *thinking*; it is ‘Incapable of giving birth in thought to the act of thinking’ (DR, p. 139), for it does not allow for anything radically different and new to happen. Everyday experiences articulated in ordinary language simply do not exhaust the fields of thought and experience (Bogue, 2004, p. 340; Hwu, 2004, p. 183). Hence, even when trying to be critical, common sense thought in fact reaffirms and reproduces the prevailing political order and the meanings it assigns to subjects and objects: ‘thought “rediscovers” the State, rediscovers “the Church” and rediscovers all the current values that it subtly presented in the pure form of an eternally blessed unspecified eternal object’ (DR, p. 136).

This means that the traditional attempt to tie education to common sense results in practice, and perhaps deliberately so, in a continuous effort to neutralize unorthodox thoughts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996, p. 70; see also Cole, 2017). Education for genuine thinking, therefore, will have ‘the power of a new politics which would overturn the image of thought’ (DR, p. 137). The starting point for such education—and so also new philosophy—is necessarily rejection of common sense as such, and this cannot be achieved by generating another common sense. It must make a radical break with common and good sense, with *doxa* and the harmonious activity of the faculties. But what might thought or philosophy unguided by a common sense be like? How can such thinking make sense, and in what sense can it be educational? In what follows, I address these questions through Deleuze’s concept of sense.

The sense of common sense

According to the dogmatic image of thought, all subjects sense and make sense of things the same way. Hence, the sense of everything that makes sense is essentially communicable; sense is always common, at least potentially. But Deleuze thinks that this view relies on a misleading concept of sense. Against this traditional concept, against that sense which is always either common-sense or non-sense, Deleuze develops a new concept which is inherently political.

Common sense philosophy, argues Deleuze, defines sense as the condition of the true: to be true, a proposition must make sense (DR, p. 153). But a false proposition also has sense, hence sense is broader than what it conditions, namely truth or falsity. Sense lies in what the proposition expresses, and the proposition is true when the dimension of expression corresponds with that of designation—or denotation, as it is called in *Logic of Sense*—namely with the object to which the proposition applies: as when the person designated by the proposition ‘this is Theaetetus’ is in fact Theaetetus. The sense that is expressed stems either from the dimension of manifestation, namely ‘the relation of the proposition to the person who speaks and expresses himself’ or from signification, defined as the proposition’s relation to other concepts and propositions from which it is derived (LS, pp. 13–14).

From the point of view of language as a system (*langue*), sense is determined by signification, and from the point of view of the actual use of language (*parole*), it is determined by manifestation. But both manifestation and signification, which are supposed to endow the expression with sense and

make designation possible, in fact depend the latter's ability to correspond with what is expressed—for manifestation or signification that is neither true nor false makes no sense at all. This 'circle', as Deleuze calls it (LS, p. 17), means that sense is limited to the dichotomy between truth and falsity, and is opposed only to non-sense or absurdity, namely to what has no sense at all and can be neither true nor false.³

This concept of sense is perfectly suitable for the dogmatic image of thought and for the common sense which is one of its postulates—the successful correlation between expression and designation is nothing other than successful recognition, a coordinated operation of all faculties. This conception implies that thought operates properly when it successfully recognizes objects, and that unsuccessful thought is simply a case of misrecognition. The range open for thought is therefore narrowed down to the duality of correct and incorrect recognition: error is 'the sole "negative" of thought' (DR, p. 148). However, error is not perceived as deviation from the dogmatic or dichotomous image of thought: we err when faculties do not cooperate properly, as when we confuse something we see with something else we recall. Even when errant, thought operates according to the model of common sense—only the specific accord of the faculties, good sense, had temporarily malfunctioned: 'It is as though error were a kind of failure of good sense within the form of a common sense which remains integral and intact' (DR, p. 149).

Philosophers of all times, writes Deleuze, have been aware that thought is irreducible to true or false recognition, and used other concepts to characterize different modes of failure in thought: from 'superstition', through 'inner illusion' and 'alienation' to 'madness' and 'stupidity' (DR, p. 150). But the dogmatic image refuses to acknowledge all these as thought activities, for it assumes that any thought that cannot be formulated in a true or false proposition is senseless, and hence not exactly thought; it takes these failures to be the result of causes external to thought rather than as internal failures which are indicative of thought's nature. Deleuze, on the other hand, insists that 'Cowardice, cruelty, baseness and stupidity are not simply corporeal capacities or traits of character or society; they are structures of thought as such' (DR, p. 151). To be sure, Deleuze does not commend these thought structures, and by no means does he recommend cowardice, cruelty, or baseness—but rejecting these structures requires taking them into consideration, realizing they are indicative of the rich complexity of thought and its various modes of operation (Deleuze, 2006, p. 98). The problem Deleuze confronts is therefore a Kantian investigation of conditions of possibility: stupidity is 'the object of a properly transcendental question: how is stupidity (not error) possible?' (DR, p. 151). To answer this question Deleuze offers a new understanding of sense that does not reduce it to designation or denotation and is not satisfied with the exhaustive dichotomy of recognition-error.

The sense of sense

Instead of the dogmatic, commonsensical image that reduces sense to one of the familiar dimensions of the proposition, Deleuze considers sense as an independent dimension, distinct from manifestation, signification and designation. While in the dogmatic image the relation of sense to truth is merely external—for sense is neutral in relation to truth, and a proposition has the same sense whether it is true or false—Deleuze proposes an inner relation of sense and truth:

Truth and falsity do not concern a simple designation, rendered possible by a sense which remains indifferent to it. The relation between a proposition and what it designates must be established within sense itself: the nature of ideal sense is to point beyond itself towards the object designated. (DR, p. 154)

That is to say, sense does not belong to language alone, indifferent to its relation to things, but also does not lie in the things themselves, which are necessarily mute and meaningless without language: sense is not *about* things, it 'subsists in language, but it happens to things' (LS, p. 24). In this sense it is an 'effect' or 'pure event' at the surface in which language and things interact; it is at one and the same time what is happening and what is said, what would not have happened in the same way unless it had been said.

Here sense does not only make truth possible, it actually becomes true; a pure event is not something that can be identified and described in a true manner, for language takes part in bringing it about (Deleuze, 2006, p. 69). Truth is not a correspondence between linguistic sense and extra-linguistic reality—it is created in sense, in the event that happens in language but not only in it: ‘Sense is the genesis or the production of the true, and truth is only the empirical result of sense’ (DR, p. 154). Unlike the common image, according to which truth (and falsity) can make sense, for Deleuze sense makes truth (and not falsity). True sense, sense that creates truth, is an event in which language encounters things, in which language makes something of things and things make something of language: they interact to make sense.

As some Deleuze scholars have already shown (Lecerclé, 2002, p. 99; Roy, 2005, p. 102; Semetsky, 2007, p. 34), sense is not simply meaning—it is not even for someone to mean something for their words to make sense. Williams writes that sense ‘is closer to significance rather than meaning, that is to the way in which meaning matters or makes things matter’ (2008, p. 3); and Inna Semetsky explains that ‘events will make sense to us not if we understand them theoretically but when we experience in practice the very difference that makes each singular event significant’ (Semetsky, 2013, p. 216). Sense, therefore, expresses whatever is important and makes a difference in the world (Bolaños, 2006, p. 575). If things remain the same, if language and reality remain mutually indifferent, there is no sense. That is to say, contrary to the commonsensical belief that sense is meaning and meanings can be shared, for Deleuze not every meaningful linguistic utterance makes sense. In fact, most of what we say makes almost no sense: mundane, banal utterances like ‘this is a table, good morning Theaetitus’, to cite Deleuze’s examples, are perfectly understandable, but when uttered offhandedly in everyday speech, almost nothing happens: language and things pass by each other without leaving a trace. Such utterances are commonsensical, but they make very little sense.

Moreover, not all sense is necessarily meaningful or understandable in the ordinary, commonsensical way: a nonsense word, such as Lewis Carroll’s Snark, can make sense. It breaks the chain in which each word expresses or designates something different from itself because it denotes what it expresses and expresses what it denotes; it ‘says nothing, but at the same time it says the sense of what it says: it says its own sense’ (LS, p. 67). Interrupting ordinary linguistic relations, nonsense is effective in that it indicates an immediate self-presence, ‘the presence of an important kind of sense that can only operate through nonsense’ (Williams, 2008, p. 68). Sense, therefore, is not the opposite of nonsense, but rather posits ‘between sense and nonsense an original type of intrinsic relation, a mode of co-presence’ (LS, p. 68). As Kaustuv Roy (2005, p. 104) explains, this means that all words and utterances, not only Carrollian ‘portmanteau words’, must function ‘momentarily and paradoxically’ as simultaneously sense and nonsense.

The sense of the problem

What, then, does a linguistic utterance rich with sense whose encounter with reality is a true event, look like? Deleuze’s answer lies in the question, or rather in its form (DR, p. 121). This does not mean that all questions necessarily make much sense, only that some call for thinking and generate meaningful effects. For Deleuze, an utterance that makes sense asks something of the world, and creates a problem in it. The activity of thinking is the generation of true, meaningful problems, while stupidity has nothing to do with erring but rather with the formulation of false problems, namely trivial problems with no real interest (DR, p. 159; Deleuze, 1998, p. 15).

We are accustomed to thinking of questions and problems from the point of view of answers and solutions, namely to assume that a good question is one with a knowable answer, and that a problem properly formulated can find a satisfactory solution within the existing intellectual order. A question with no foreseeable answer is nonsensical; questions make sense as much as they take part in common sense. This presupposition lies at the heart of common sense education: such education assumes that the teacher possesses knowledge, and her role is not simply to pass it along but rather to ask the right questions so as to lead the students to the correct answers; the answers are already implicit in the questions, endowing them with sense. This is an inherently hierarchical view, in which the teachers are the only ones asking questions and making sense, as they know the answers in advance:

According to this infantile prejudice, the master sets a problem, our task is to solve it, and the result is accredited true or false by a powerful authority. It is also a social prejudice with the visible interest of maintaining us in an infantile state, which calls upon us to solve problems that come from elsewhere ... As if we would not remain slaves so long as we do not control the problems themselves, so long as we do not possess a right to the problems, to a participation in and management of the problems. (DR, p. 158)

Rather than assuming that a problem makes sense by virtue to its solution, Deleuze thinks sense lies in the problem itself. A problem that makes sense does not consist in the search for a solution, and does not disappear once one has been found: 'Even if the problem is concealed by its solution, it subsists nonetheless in the Idea which relates it to its conditions and organizes the genesis of the solutions' (LS, p. 54, see also p. 123).

The problem, therefore, cannot be resolved by any piece of information or knowledge item, for it ceaselessly generates more questions which call for new, different solutions. A problem that makes sense cannot find a simple solution in common or good sense, but problematizes common sense and good sense themselves—it challenges *doxa*, or self-evident beliefs and hierarchies. Thinking which starts off with such problems is thinking in constant movement no teacher can bring to a halt. It is problematic for teachers no less than to students, for laymen no less than to experts, and hence for the traditional hierarchies designed to maintain their power relations.

How to make sense in education? If sense is not common and cannot be communicated directly from teacher to student, in what sense can their encounter in which sense is made be educational? How can education make sense and generate thinking? And if education can make sense, can it avoid the hierarchies inherent in common sense?

The unregulated exercise of all the faculties

To understand how sense is related to education and thinking, let us return to the collaboration of cognitive faculties and introduce Deleuze's discussion of the deregulation of their commonsensical order. Since thought which conforms to *doxa* involves such collaboration, genuine thinking requires the disintegration of their commonsensical interrelations. A clear example is the Kantian experience of the sublime (Kant, 1987, §26): unlike judgments regarding the true, the good and the beautiful, which involve harmonious cooperation of the faculties, the feeling of the sublime results from 'discordant harmony' (DR, p. 146), one that does not obey common sense and opens the way for new kinds of experience and thinking (Deleuze, 2008, pp. 42–44). But Deleuze (DR, p. 138) finds the distinction between experiences which call for thinking and those that do not already in the *Republic*, where Socrates says that not every sensation 'invites thought', but only one in which sense 'gives no more vivid idea of anything in particular than of its opposite' (Plato, 1941, 523b). Such is the case with the sensations of thickness or hardness, which are always perceived together with their opposite—for what is thick or hard in relation to one thing is thin or soft in relation to another. Encountering such unity of opposites, Deleuze explains, can provoke thinking precisely because it is impossible to classify and recognize; the problem such encounter poses to the senses cannot be solved by cooperating with other faculties, and forces interaction of a totally different kind:

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter* ... its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition ... It is therefore ... imperceptible precisely from the point of view of recognition—in other words, from the point of view of an empirical exercise of the senses in which sensibility grasps only that which also could be grasped by other faculties, and is related within the context of a common sense to an object which also must be apprehended by other faculties. (DR, pp. 139–140; italics in original)

This is a perplexing encounter to which the sensible faculty is unable to react in the ordinary way, but for this very reason operates in an independent, unique manner which Deleuze calls 'transcendent' (DR, p. 143)—exceeding the empirical, commonsensical model of recognition.

In the encounter which provokes thinking, the thinker is necessarily passive and involuntary, for the faculty of will does not cooperate with sensibility. Something from the outside violently imposes

itself on the senses: it is 'an original violence inflicted upon thought; the claws of a strangeness or an enmity which alone would awaken thought from its natural stupor or eternal possibility: there is only involuntary thought ...' (DR, p. 139). As Jonathan Dronsfield puts it,

Thinking becomes no longer a natural capacity we all possess but an activity some of us are forced into doing by that which we do not recognize but sense; moreover sense in a way which differentiates the faculty of sensibility from all other faculties, indeed brings it into discord with them whilst at the same time confronting them with their own limits. (2012, p. 405)

That is to say, although the transcendent operation of sensibility cannot be translated to the language of other faculties and shared with them, it does not remain within the bounds of sensitivity alone. The problematic encounter of the senses with the outside awakens other faculties as well. In the absence of recognizable and communicable content, it is the violent shock caused by the encounter that passes through the faculties—from sensibility to memory, imagination and thought—igniting in each an independent activity unrestrained by the others:

Each faculty is unhinged, but what are the hinges if not the form of a common sense which causes all the faculties to function and converge? Each ... has broken the form of common sense which kept it within the empirical element of *doxa* ... Rather than all the faculties converging and contributing to a common project of recognising an object, we see divergent projects in which ... each faculty is in the presence of that which is its 'own'. Discord of the faculties, chain of force and fuse along which each confronts its limit, receiving from (or communicating to) the other only a violence which brings it face to face with its own element, as though with its disappearance or its perfection. (DR, p. 141)

Although they do not cooperate in a common sense, there is, therefore, a distinctly disharmonic connection between the faculties. The violence generating this connection is not aimed at mutual annihilation or limitation. In fact, the involuntary shock liberates the faculties, enabling each to operate in its own 'transcendent' manner: to sense what is only sensible, to remember what is only memorable, to imagine what is only imaginable, etc. (DR, p. 145).⁴

Unlike dogmatic thought which involves commonsensical cooperation of the faculties, therefore, *thinking* is precisely such an independent activity of the faculties—an activity following an experience of something in the world as a problem, as a sign demanding unique interpretation rather than an identifiable object (Bogue, 2004). To think is to differentiate—not only between things and events in the world but primarily between the cognitive faculties. Such thinking is not calculation or processing of existing data, nor reflection on pre-given concepts, but rather creative activity which brings something new into existence; an activity conditioned by passivity, by receptivity to the problem (Kohan, 2011, p. 347). Deleuze calls the problem that goes through the faculties, awakening thinking in each in turn, an 'Idea':

it will be necessary to reserve the name of Ideas not for pure *cogitanda* [objects of cognition] but rather for those instances which go from sensibility to thought and from thought to sensibility, capable of engendering in each case ... the limit- or transcendent-object of each faculty. (DR, p. 146)

Ideas provoke thought, but are in no way pure mental entities to be rationally reflected upon. They 'run throughout all the faculties and awaken them each in turn' (DR, p. 164), thereby driving each to its limit. Like Platonic ideas, Deleuzian Ideas must start with an encounter of the senses with the world, while they themselves transcend the realm of the sensible; and like Kantian ideas, they cannot be objects of knowledge but rather generators of thinking.

The sense of apprenticeship

The thinking awakened by an Idea is a revelatory process which Deleuze calls 'apprenticeship':

The exploration of Ideas and the elevation of each faculty to its transcendent exercise amounts to the same thing. These are two aspects of an essential apprenticeship [*apprentissage*] or process of *learning* [*apprendre*] ... an apprentice is someone who constitutes and occupies practical or speculative problems as such. Learning is the appropriate name for the subjective acts carried out when one is confronted with the objectivity of a problem (Idea), whereas knowledge designates only the generality of concepts or the calm possession of a rule enabling solutions. (DR, p. 164)

The famous example Deleuze gives for this process is learning to swim (DR, pp. 22, 23, 165). Swimming is not a matter of abstract, theoretical knowledge—the swimming teacher may describe or demonstrate movements, and the student may listen and practise them on land, but this will never amount to learning how to swim. The first encounter of the body with the sea water creates a problem: the senses experience shock, a unique mixture of coldness, wetness and loss of control; the world loses its ability to provide familiar representations, and the situation is experienced as radically different from everything else: ‘For this athlete who finds herself in a novel situation, there is literally no solid foundation under her feet, and the world that she has to face loses its reassuring power of familiar representations’ (Semetsky, 2013, p. 223; see also Semetsky, 2003, p. 19; Wallin, 2011, p. 298). Dealing with this problem does not require the cooperation of the faculties—this is not a question of understanding the exact condition of the water, of recalling previous knowledge or of creative imagination. The senses must confront the problem ‘on their own’, namely to respond and act in accordance with the movement of the waves. The sea itself does something to the apprentice, makes sense to her; the process of learning is not the acquisition of knowledge, but rather the discovery of the sea as an Idea. The sensed Idea, as a problem and a challenge demanding confrontation, can influence other faculties—to storm the imagination, to draw memories from the abyss, even to lead to lucid insights—but the activity of each faculty remains independent of the others and does not join forces with them to find a solution that would ‘drown’ the problem. Such transcendent activity of the faculties is clearly thinking in the Deleuzian sense; learning to swim, therefore, is an example of education for thinking.

Although such apprenticeship is not limited to formal educational situations, such situations are not necessarily counterproductive to thinking processes (Semetsky, 2013, p. 223). Ronald Bogue (2013, p. 22) argues that Deleuze’s attack on the orthodox image of the knowing teacher does not minimize the latter’s role, even in ordinary educational contexts. Deleuze writes that ‘Giving courses has been a major part of my life ... It’s like a research laboratory; you give courses on what you are investigating, not on what you know’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. 139; see also Semetsky, 2007, p. xxiv). According to Bogue (2013, pp. 25, 26), Deleuze’s teaching was perfectly consistent with his apprenticeship concept: he used the standard format of the lecture not to transfer information but as an encounter actively engaging all participants in the activity of thinking. Such lecture is a performance of thinking in action more than the teaching of a subject matter and what is learnt is not necessarily what is taught. The students may relate to the teacher’s messages in countless ways sometimes bearing little connection to the topic of the lecture. Even boredom can be fruitful, if it makes them drift into thinking. The problem or violent constraint in this case is not only the lecture’s content but also the need to stay put while the teacher’s voice resonates in the room. From this perspective, an academic lecture is not so different from a swimming lesson: in the lecture too, thinking is generated by the violent encounter of the student’s senses with a problem—in this case the inescapable voice of the teacher—which awakens imagination, memory, and other faculties into original, transcendent activity.

This does not mean that every lesson or lecture is evocative, or that it is easy to make students think. The point is that nothing in the world is problematic ‘in itself’, although every specific thing may be experienced as such. Common sense tells us to translate everything the senses encounter into the language of recognition, understandable to the other faculties—to understand and assimilate it to the existing order. The teachers’ role, therefore, is to act against common sense, namely to facilitate openness to problems by inspiring their students to experience the world as a question rather than attempt to recognize and know (Colebrook, 2008, p. 42; Wallin, 2011, p. 295). The teacher needs to make sense, namely be effective and make a difference, by shaking the students out of their indifference. The words of the Deleuzian teacher are part of the encounter awakening the activity of thinking in the apprentice or student; they do not communicate meanings but generate meaningful encounters—they make sense, or rather make the world make sense. When teaching makes sense, the student begins to think. To make sense the teacher cannot simply throw the student into the proverbial water: she must find the right words, the right gestures, to make the student experience the world as problematic and react forcefully by thinking. This does not mean the teacher can plan thinking processes in advance, for they are never necessary outcomes of previous causes: ‘We never know in advance how someone

will learn: by means of what loves someone becomes good at Latin, what encounters make them a philosopher, or in what dictionaries they learn to think' (DR, p. 165). The teacher can only attempt to make the world appear as a problem, a sign to be deciphered, but there is no guarantee the student will comply and become an apprentice, and that experience will actually make sense.

The important point, at any event, is that the problems that make sense are *for* the student but *in* the world, the world common sense represents as a unified whole shared by all. Hence, education that makes sense not only rejects the imperative to assimilate the knowledge and the students into the commonsensical order; it problematizes common sense itself. Such education, therefore, is always political in the Deleuzian sense in that it overturns the dogmatic image of thought and challenges stable meanings and identities which are the very foundation of the social order. It is not the content that makes such education political, but rather the event of problematization. Thus, a swimming lesson can be more political than a political education class. Everything from seawater to philosophical texts can be read disruptively and thereby deterritorialize the ordinary field of knowledge and shake the student out of her comfort zone, making her feel and think differently. The question, as Diana Masny reminds us, 'is no longer what a text means but rather how it works and what it produces' (2013, p. 76). The political dimension of such education rejects the politics of great revolutions and grand visions, which require acceptance of common sense. It is rather *micropolitical* (Semetsky, 2007, p. 3), remaining at the level of the incommensurable particular—the pure, original difference. Every common sense is inherently dogmatic and anti-political, and therefore the sense of the political is always a singular event and can never be made common.

Making sense in common

Yet, although education cannot make sense common, it can nevertheless make sense *in* common. The effect of the educational encounter is not necessarily momentary or isolated, for sense can indeed be communicated, resonate each time differently in a series of repetitions. Unlike the attainment of knowledge, a process in which the subject is required to accept certain facts as true and become incorporated into the order of which they are part, Deleuzian apprenticeship demands that the student react upon the world and make a difference in it. The knowledgeable may apply what she has learnt to the world, but the apprentice acts while learning and learns while acting; the Idea runs through her cognitive faculties, shattering their peaceful cooperation, and then bounces back to the world, affecting other people and problematizing other things. When the student learns to deal with a problem she passes it on, thereby generating new ones: an important aspect of learning is the ability to generate further problems—in terms of our previous example, to swim farther in stormier waters, thereby generating problems for the swimmer as well as for the teacher and others on shore. Such education involves an exchange of gestures, blows and sounds between the learner and the water, between the learner's different faculties, and between the learner and the teacher. Whenever one starts to think—at sea or on shore, at school or on the street—thinking is not contained in her mind, as it is not restricted to a single faculty, but necessarily affects the ways she acts and speaks, thereby also affecting others. When an Idea is transferred, it continues to make sense, to problematize the world of common sense in ever new ways.

As a result, although thought-provoking education has been described hitherto in terms of teacher–student or master–apprentice relations, this does not mean it necessarily involves a hierarchical relationship in which Ideas or sense flow top-down: Deleuze insists that 'We learn nothing from those who say: "Do as I do". Our only teachers are those who tell us to "do with me" ...' (DR, p. 23). Learning is therefore always a mutual process in which the teacher also constantly learns from the student. The traditional teacher and student roles are undermined and become dynamic: despite their relative rarity, thought-inspiring encounters are not the exclusive province of educated, knowable people. Everyone can become a teacher and awaken thinking in others, even against their will. Similarly, there are no prerequisites for becoming a student and starting to think—the Deleuzian thinker is a genuine lay man, or even an idiot like Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996, p. 62) or Melville's Bartleby (Deleuze, 1997), a child who assumes nothing in advance, unlike the Cartesian subject who thinks

naturally like everyone else. To be sure, idiotism is not merely the learner's condition at the beginning of the road, but her mode of existence: learning constantly transforms her, lets her become different from herself, without ever making her an expert with a privileged position in a commonsensical order.

Conclusion

Education for thinking focused on problem solving and unsettling the hierarchical relations between teachers and students has become prevalent in contemporary education (Rhoder & French, 2012; Siegel, 1988). Semetsky (2003, 2007) has written extensively on the close relations between Deleuze and John Dewey, the father of these trends in modern education, but we can see that Deleuzian education which makes sense and awakens thinking is very different from the mainstream of contemporary education for thinking and that the kind of connections it creates among thinkers-learners is very different from the 'communities of inquiry' commonly referred to in discussions of education for thinking (Lipman, 2003). The kind of thinking on which contemporary education for thinking focuses is almost exclusively rational-argumentative, based on the *disjunctive* logic of the excluded third, rather than on Deleuze's *conjunctive* logic which acknowledges the plurality of differences (Semetsky, 2013, p. 220), and consequently understands thinking as the independent activity of various faculties. Thus, while communities of inquiry are designed to exchange ideas in democratic deliberation to solve a common problem (Semetsky, 2007, p. 10), Deleuze speaks of violent encounters between learners, of involuntary interactions which force them into thinking processes which not only fail to constitute cooperation between thinker but disassemble each of them into a plurality of independent faculties. The links formed in Deleuzian education are temporary, and do not consolidate around a single point such as collaborative work or mutual support. Teachers and students who awaken thinking in each other may have little in common, not even the same problems:

In place of a dialog of perfect equals, there is a contact with others through the way we converge and diverge according to disjunctive syntheses, that is according to the way things we lack and things in excess of us draw us together. (Williams, 2008, p. 166)

This is not a community of preserving or transmitting common sense, but rather an assemblage that makes sense.

Deleuzian education for thinking is therefore counter-commonsensical in a twofold sense: it is all about generating and disseminating political problems of the existing common sense, but does not produce an alternative common sense, a new self-evident order of knowledge and hierarchies. When people make sense and make each other think they act as teachers, but not as knowledgeable experts: they are good teachers because they are lay, idiot teachers. 'There's something of the renaissance in this comprehensiveness and the free-ranging quality of Deleuze's thought,' Williams writes. 'The world will not be left to specialists, regulated by markets and protected by deliberate impoverishment of social and political thought' (2008, p. 126). Thus, by rejecting common sense, Deleuzian education serves the most radical political functions common sense should have served in traditional educational thought: challenge hierarchies and their naturalized, self-evidential nature.

Notes

1. See my [reference will be given upon acceptance].
2. Deleuze points to Plato's dialog *Theaetetus* as one of the earliest expressions of commonsensical thought.
3. Deleuze does not ascribe this theory of sense to a specific philosopher. Williams (2004, pp. 127–129) argues that critiques of this view have already been formulated in 'traditional' analytic philosophy before Deleuze, who therefore attacks a kind of a strawman. Be that as it may, Deleuze's critique is helpful in understanding his own concept of sense.
4. This does not mean that each faculty has a predetermined, 'natural' mode of operation—there are infinite ways to sense that which is only sensible, to imagine that which is only imaginable, etc. Similarly, the faculties Deleuze writes about are by no means the only ones, and countless unique others may be discovered (DR, p. 143).

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