Physical and Cultural Dimensions of Movement Related to Horizon

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A sailboat sails into the horizon.
A horse and rider ride off into the sunset.

Each of these images of horizon evoke romantic notions: mystery, intrigue, uncertainty of what can be found beyond that horizon. These images imply movement related to that horizon. These sailors and riders are moving toward an end in view. However, these images also evoke ends that are not truly ends. There is no true closure; if it is a film, images of horizon set-up the audience for a sequel. Such images give a sense of "beyond," of continuation, of a possibly but not certainly similar scene, not of behind, of breaking through a barrier into a probably different realm. The horizon invites us to imagine the possibilities, as it includes us in its domain. We do not need to break with ourselves to take part in the horizon, to continue in our vision.

But both can be seen from different vantage points: heights, distances, directions, times, through physical obstacles or in a clear path. Thus while horizon evokes a sense of beyond, it also includes the current and historical particulars from which the individual sees. Horizon, then, is a complex mix of particular vantage points and a sense of beyond, beyond those particulars.

This paper is about movement related to horizon, movement not away from or out of our current lives, but movement in and beyond. The focus on movement in relation to horizon comes from Gadamer's discussion of horizon,[1] as well as taking impetus from work on the cultural life of cities. With the emphasis on movement and beyond, the idea of "concentration of difference,"[2] (such as the kind that can be found in cities) will be used as an example of the possibility for opening up and extending horizons.

Horizon

Gadamer lays out the conceptual terrain of horizon: "The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."[3] Vantage point as a working concept can include physical dimensions such as those involved in watching the sun set into the horizon (distance, time, etc.). But vantage point also includes the beliefs, attitudes, and desires of the individual. And further, these intellectual dimensions of vantage point are informed by history, both personal and social: "Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past."[4] For we bring to each of our current perspectives a societal and personal history that gives us the vantage point from which we view life. This "range of vision" is our horizon.

Movement. "But," Gadamer writes, "now it is important to avoid the error of thinking that the horizon of the present consists of a fixed set of opinions and valuations."[5] As Gadamer says about our "horizon of the present," "We always find

ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished."[6] A horizon provides the space from which the light comes that can illuminate our understandings. This light is the various perspectives that can lengthen or broaden one's horizon. While Gadamer states at one point that a person can have no horizon,[7] I speak instead of such a person as one who has a horizon but engages in no movement related to that horizon, who throws no light on their present horizon. That is, no attempt is made to find the multiple perspectives that make-up and impact the individual's horizon. In this view, individuals may be considered as having a limited horizon when they cannot recognize that there are multiple perspectives on the same events; when they cannot see beyond their intimately created and developed perspectives; or when they are only able to identify a small number of influences on their views of the world.

Linking Physical to Mental/Intellectual Horizon. While the intellectual range of vision, the recognition of the multitude of perspectives within and beyond an individual's horizon, is important to education, the physical aspects of horizon have a very real impact on that intellectual horizon. The writing of one of my former students can provide a vivid depiction of the physical dimensions of horizon. This student wrote: "I'm from a town of 5 which was my family's ranch. My parents didn't get any newspapers or magazines and we didn't have a TV." I would feel comfortable claiming that this student, while she was living in this setting, had a limited horizon — a narrow "range of vision." If a horizon is everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point, then we can see that she does indeed have a horizon. But clearly, her horizon was bounded physically, perhaps even closed in the sense that she had an end-in-view that was literally a physical end. Thus, horizon can feel bounded physically. What is ultimately important for schools, though, is whether this physical limit is a representation of a cultural/intellectual limit in horizon. McCarty and others directly address this physical sense of a bounded horizon, linking physical borders with intellectual ones. Or in McCarty's terms, linking geographical region with cultural region:

> The image of geographical region naturally prompts frightened questions as well: "How can we break out without damaging our culture?" "If we do break out, haven't we left our own culture behind?" "Do we not, in breaking down, have to break the barriers which guarantee for our own culture its identity and integrity?" And "Do other cultures, perhaps those 'stronger' than our own, now have the opportunity to break in?"[8]

If such images of geographic region are seen as finite, as bordered, then one's horizon — one's range of vision — is limited physically. Thus we hear concerns about rupturing and breaking, about irruption of otherness. Contact with an "other," when that "other" appears to threaten finite and established borders, is scary. As McCarty writes, "the image of culture as finite, geographical region can also be an image of crosscultural fear."[9] When the physical/geographical horizon is seen as a finite region, it bounds the cultural and intellectual horizon as well. Gadamer describes these effects: "Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of '*situation*' by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision."[10] Situations that are perceived as constant and unchanging can delimit the movement related to horizon, the "throwing of light" of different perspectives on the situation.

EFFECTS OF ETHNIC INSULATION ON DEVELOPING MOVEMENT RELATED TO HORIZON

This lack of movement related to horizon seems to be seen most clearly in the United States in white individuals who are ethnically insulated. Using my university as an example, both the statistics and the beliefs of students demonstrate the level of their ethnic insularity. At Montana State University, 95% of the state and of the university is white, with the majority of students coming from small towns and rural areas. As of 1993, 47 of the 56 counties in the state had fewer than six people per square mile, with no cities having a population of 100,000 or more. Further, there are a number of still-operating one- and two-room schools, and nearly 10% of the state's teachers teach in schools of fewer than 100 students. My students have provided a number of descriptions of how this ethnic insulation appears to them: "We don't have racism here because we don't have any minorities." "I've never seen a Black person or a Mexican. But I learned about Blacks by reading *Huckleberry Finn*."

Students in such a setting who are white and who have literally had no contact with diversity are in what Helms describes as the "contact" level of awareness.[11] They often believe, as Tatum writes, that they and their views are not "white," but are simply "normal."[12] They may have unchallenged, and deeply entrenched, beliefs about race, ethnicity, and about "other" people in general. These students have not had the opportunity to learn about or discuss in public forum the multitude of perspectives that have informed their views. Fried discusses the difficulty in dealing with these attitudes:

> The issue becomes particularly acute in the presence of culturally encapsulated Anglo-Americans, who, because of the dominance of their perspective in the United States, often do not realize that their values, perceptions, and behavior are shaped by Anglo-American culture: They simply see themselves as "normal," and others as "culturally diverse."[13]

When presented with ideas from "others," from those outside the physically or culturally bounded horizon, individuals in these situations will very likely feel a sense of personal loss. Their knowledge and beliefs are challenged by a different perspective, placing that very sense of knowing into question. Their sense of control over not only themselves but their whole community, tradition, and future is challenged. For many in these situations, Lehman writes, "Loss of power or of one's self-image, caused by information presented through a different perspective, [results] in a dramatic emotional upheaval."[14] Kimball and Garrison describe these effects in a concept that they call "hermeneutic listening":

> interacting with others different from us can interrupt our habitual, unreflective, "normal" ways of believing, valuing and acting. Giving up or suspending prejudices is difficult, maybe even dangerous, because it disturbs our very identities and alters how we relate with others.[15]

THE CITY: CONCENTRATION OF DIFFERENCE

What kind of physical setting, then, encourages movement related to cultural/intellectual horizon without the physical limitations felt by many individuals? Drawing from critiques of community and studies of city, a horizon of understanding can be extended. From earlier descriptions here, we see that a visual image of a horizon includes a vantage point within the horizon itself. One cannot see beyond without some vantage point from which to view. As Greene describes, (from Arendt):

those present on a common ground have different locations on that ground; and each one "sees or hears from a different position." An object — a classroom, a neighborhood street, a field of flowers — shows itself differently when encountered by a variety of spectators.[16]

An ideal setting for encountering "a variety of spectators" is a setting in which there exist, there literally are, "a variety of spectators." Drawing from urban postmodernist writers, especially Young,[17] Sennett,[18] and Wilson,[19] a positive account of the city as "concentration of difference" will provide the conceptual layout of a setting which encourages movement related to horizon.

The city is the natural home of difference.[20]

Not only is the city a place where difference is found, it is a place where there is a purposeful "concentration of difference"[21] which requires movement related to horizon. Its differences in people, buildings, and ideas are thrust into a concentration of difference. The city, as Wilson describes, "dislocates established frontiers and forces apparent opposites together in thought."[22] People do not and cannot understand each other from each others' positions. They are constantly "confronted with the perspective of the 'other.'"[23] Writers such as Sennett, Wilson and Patton[24] term the dwellers in the places where there is concentration of difference "strangers": "we overhear snatches of conversation in restaurants or on the street, if we live in apartments we are exposed to the sounds and occasional sights of others going about their daily lives. What we see are fragmentary glimpses, snapshots of the lives of others."[25]

The perception of others as strangers is key to the discussion here. Wilson describes that "what distinguishes great city life from rural existence is that we constantly brush against strangers; we observe bits of the 'stories' men and women carry with them, but never learn their conclusions."[26] With uncompleted stories, we come back again to the notions of beyond and movement related to horizons. In the city, continues Wilson, "life ceases to form itself into epic or narrative, becoming instead a short story."[27] With such non-bounded stories, we feel that there is more, a continuation, a beyond. Young portrays this feeling: "Dwelling in the city means always having a sense of beyond, that there is much human life beyond my experience going on in or near these spaces, and I can never grasp the city as a whole."[28] Sennett continues the discussion of the sense of beyond in cities: "There is no single or unchanging vantage point in the city, no single point where the urbanite says to himself, 'if I stand just *there* I will see it all.' Instead, the eye is swept down one tunnel-like street and then swerves to another."[29] In describing the Piazza del Popolo in Rome, Sennett describes how even the physical architecture leads to movement related to horizon:

The charged experience of the Piazza del Popolo comes from how perspective creates movement in the city, turning the person in its web of streets outside the sufficiencies of his or her own perception, searching for where to go next, aware that no single point of view gives a pilgrim the answer.[30]

The city has "powers to disorient and to deny us our catharsis. This is the urban conscience of the eye."[31] This is a concentration of difference that "entails restless movement."[32]

But people who have a real or perceived physical or culturally bounded horizon want the "dream of community," of conformity, of sameness, of catharsis.[33] The city

as a place of differences and disorientation "is troubling for people seeking assurances, seeking certainties. And yet they, like the rest of us, keep experiencing attacks on what is familiar, what James Clifford calls "the irruption of otherness, the unexpected."[34] As discussed earlier here, the idea of horizon as bounded and finite often is felt as comfortable, as unchallenging, as safe. The goal in extending horizon, though, is not to keep horizon as rigid, not to dream of wholeness or conformity. Rather, the city and feeling described here is more aptly described by Margaret Mead as a "'confrontation point', a place of discovery, where new residents and particularly the young can engage in a wide variety of new and enriching experiences."[35] As Kerdeman writes, "Persons who understand 'culturally' are grounded but not rigid. They are both positioned and potentiated by others."[36] The change, movement, and difference that some see as disturbing and troubling, a person who is moving in relation to horizon will more likely see as part of the horizon itself.

Flaneur. The concept and life of a *flaneur* can perhaps extend our horizon of understanding regarding concentration of difference. Historically, in literature, "the flaneur was represented as an archetypal occupant and observer of the public sphere in the rapidly changing and growing great cities of the nineteenth-century Europe."[37] The flaneur was most-often associated with the rapidly developing city of Paris. The flaneur was described as a man who walked the streets of the city, "as a loiterer, a fritterer away of time."[38]. Flaneurs were idlers or artists, taking in "the multifarious sights of the astonishing new urban spectacle constituted their raw material."[39] Lechte gives a clear description of the significance of the flaneur: "Walking in the city signified being away from home — read: being away from the familiar and being exposed to difference and the unfamiliar."[40] De Certeau describes further how the concentration of difference in the city is seen in "Walking in the City."[41] In comparing walking in the city with the space of an idiolect, again the importance of concentration of difference emerges. While an idiolect is "an absolutely singular appropriation of space," the city involves

> random distributions of all kinds, distributions which *are* people walking in the city. For de Certeau, although he does not say so directly, this is the aleatory, "noise" dimension of the city ("noise" to be understood as difference and otherness, as Michel Serres has shown) — its life blood in fact. Without noise in this sense the system of the city will die.[42]

Even the concept of the flaneur, in fact, can only exist in the city — "could exist only in the great city, the metropolis, since provincial towns would afford too restricted a stage for his strolling and too narrow a field for his observations."[43] Like the lead character in the Italian movie "Caro Diario" who takes the viewers on a "walk in the city" on his moped, a flaneur, a "stranger" in a city observes much, tries to take in much, but ultimately remains disengaged from the "others" that he (and we through the camera lens) encounters. He, and we, see a concentration of difference during a single excursion, a concentration of difference that could not be seen outside of this setting.

The concept of the flaneur, as aptly pointed out by Wilson,[44] could only apply to the men of the time. I would add that it could only apply as well to people who had the luxury of time or resources that would allow for the leisurely walk in the city. But be it in concept only or in reality, the flaneur entails all of the important concepts

related to the extension of horizon. For the flaneur, in current times, man or woman can exist only in a large city, only within concentration of difference. And the flaneur's very being implies movement related to horizon, both physical movement with walking in the city, and cultural movement, observing difference and including new sites of vantage points from which to extend the horizon, the range of vision.

Opening Spaces for Movement Related to Horizon in the Classroom

How do we provide the atmosphere that recreates for students the concepts involved in the city as described here and by theorists? Greene suggests that we search to find or create "spaces" that will enable us to have open conversation about diversity. She writes that classrooms can become "spaces where they [people] can come together to establish a 'sphere of freedom,' involving them in their plurality."[45] Garrison echoes this creation of spaces, as he writes that "One role for conversation may not be communication at all; rather it may be to open up public spaces for possible subsequent communication and action."[46] Within such public spaces, students can enter into what Strike calls "critical conversations," which will help students to learn about other cultures, other perspectives, and to place their own perspective into realistic placement within the extended horizon. He writes that critical conversations "may help people to question their embeddedness in some tradition or community in a way that reduces the dominance of their outlook by accidents of birth or social circumstance."[47] Creating such public spaces for critical conversation helps to open our imagination to the possibilities within society. Buchmann writes that "Conversations therefore broaden one's conceptual repertoire and moral imagination."[48] Students will be open to discussion and dialogue, to the "spaces where they can take initiatives and uncover humanizing possibilities."[49]

Conclusion

What we gain in movement related to horizon is the extension of our range of vision, the incorporation of differences into our own horizon. We feel the sense of beyond and we move toward including that beyond into our horizon. Gadamer writes that

> the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving.[50]

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1. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).

2. Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).

3. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

4. Ibid, 306.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid, 301.

7. Ibid, 302.

8. Luise Prior McCarty, "Out of Isolation: Philosophy, Hermeneutics, Multiculturalism," in *Philosophy of Education 1993*, ed. Audrey Thompson (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1994), 58.

9. Ibid.

10. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

11. Janet E. Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research and Practice* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1990).

12. Beverly D. Tatum, *Teaching White Students About Racism: The Search for White Allies and the Restoration of Hope*. (Paper presented at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 1994).

13. Jane Fried, "Bridging Emotion and Intellect: Classroom Diversity in Process," *College Teaching* 41, no. 4 (1983): 123.

14. P.R. Lehman, "The Emotional Challenge of Ethnic Studies Classes," *College Teaching* 4, no. 4 (1993): 134.

15. Stephanie Kimball and James W. Garrison, *Hermeneutic Listening and Multicultural Conversations* (Paper presented at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 1994), 2.

16. Maxine Greene, "The Passions of Pluralism: Multiculturalism and the Expanding Community," *Educational Researcher* 13-18 (1993): 13. From Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

17. Iris M. Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990).

18. Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*.

19. Elizabeth Wilson, "The Invisible Flaneur," in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces,* ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995): 59-79.

20. Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*, 78.

21. This is Sennett's term.

22. Wilson, "The Invisible Flaneur," 75.

23. Jana R. Noel, "Multicultural Teacher Education: From Awareness Through Emotions to Action," *Journal of Teacher Education* 46, no. 4 (1985): 267-73.

24. Paul Patton, "Imaginary Cities: Images of Postmodernity," in Watson and Gibson, *Postmodern Cities and Spaces,* 112-21.

25. Patton, "Imaginary Cities," 117. From J. Raban, *Soft City* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974).

26. Wilson, "The Invisible Flaneur," 73.

27. Ibid.

28. Young, "The Ideal of Community," 318.

29. Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye*, 158.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid, 236.

32. Ibid, 158.

33. Lynda Stone, "Disavowing Community," in *Philosophy of Education 1992*, ed. H.A. Alexander (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1993), 93-101. Young and Stone each describe community and the desire for conformity.

34. Greene, "The Passions of Pluralism," in *The Predicament of Culture,* ed. James Clifford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,1988), 13-14.

35. From published interviews with Margaret Mead.

36. Deborah Kerdeman, "The Boundaries of Multicultural Education," in *Philosophy of Education 1993*, ed. Audrey Thompson (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1994), 65.

37. Wilson, "The Invisible Flaneur," 61. Much description of the flaneur historically comes from Charles Baudelaire, *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies by Charles Baudelaire* (London: Halden, 1955).

38. Ibid, 62.

39. Ibid. Wilson also makes the point that throughout history, the flaneur must only be male, for only males had the liberty to walk on the streets while still remaining "respectable."

40. John Lechte, "(Not) Belonging in Postmodern Space," in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces,* 103.

41. M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

42. Lechte, "(Not) Belonging in Postmodern Space," 105.

43. Wilson, "The Invisible Flaneur," 62.

44. Ibid.

45. Greene, "The Passions of Pluralism," 3. Also Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988). "Sphere of freedom" is from Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 30.

46. James W. Garrison, "Conversation as a Romance of Reason: A Response to Buchmann," (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the South Atlantic Philosophy of Education Society, Greenville, SC, 1991), 1.

47. Kenneth A. Strike, "Discourse Ethics and Restructuring," in *Philosophy of Education 1994*, ed. Michael S. Katz (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1995), 12-13.

48. Margret Buchmann, "Reason and Romance in Argument and Conversation," (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the South Atlantic Philosophy of Education Society, Greenville, SC, 1991): 10.

49. Ibid, 13.

50. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 304.