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On Perspective

Introduction

The first ever Conference of the new ESREA Network, 'Interrogating Transformative Processes in Learning and Education', took place in 2014, in Athens, Greece. The Network's name was significant—distinct from the largely North American Transformative Learning Conference. It reflected a debate among the conveners, about its identity: there was Linden, along with Anna Laros from Germany, Alexis Kokkos from Greece and Michel Alhadeff-Jones from Switzerland. At times the debate was intense and even conflictual. Are 'transformative processes' worthy of study, and if so, do they provide a sufficient rationale for a new network? Was the European Network too closely linked to the North American Conferences and Jack Mezirow's work? Was there a danger that long standing, theoretically rich European perspectives on adult education and struggles for change and social justice, would be colonised by North America's arguably more individualistic perspectives? But the desire to further dialogue and collaboration between European and North American scholars was strong (Formenti and

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Dirkx 2014; Laros et al. 2107), and the new Network sought to bring different ways of seeing into play, including within Europe itself.

There is perhaps, we should add, a more pessimistic streak within European thinking about education. Pre-eminently represented by psychoanalysis, which constantly reminds us of how difficult change and self-transformation can be. This can sit awkwardly with the 'can do' cultural and educational optimism of some in North America. Maybe European history and thought are more influenced by the darker sides of human experience, shaped by the last century's barbaric wars and the recent rise of xenophobia and nationalism. Many Americans left Europe to leave old and destructive ways behind, however illusorily, given slavery and the treatment of indigenous peoples. The spirit of American exceptionalism, notwithstanding, remains strong. The idea that people can transform their lives on more of their own terms, still resonates, despite or because of the rise of the alt-right and the waning of American power. There can also be ignorance towards European perspectives on adult education as well as vice versa. Mezirow and his compatriots, in these terms, risk dismissal without being read.

When we began our present dialogue, the intention was to make use of North American ideas on perspective transformation, emanating from Mezirow and other scholars who have added greatly to his ideas; or those who have developed different perspectives on transformative learning. Our pilgrimage was similarly to encompass an engagement with various strands of European thinking. Like the rich German tradition of Bildung, in which the cultivation of self is a never-ending process of interrogation, critically assessing and contextualizing knowledge, and coming to see anew. If this is close to Mezirow, it is more philosophically grounded (Fuhr 2017). There is the French idea of *formation* (very similar to *formazione* in Italian), which, as noted, plays with a metaphor of forming, shaping as well as changing. The shaping and making of knowledgeable and enlightened subjects is an idea reaching back to Plato's paideia and ancient philosophical schools. It is an expression of philosophy as a way of life, an inquiry into self and the world, and even a therapy for the soul (Hadot 2002).

Linden's work has focused on auto/biographical processes in learning, education and struggles for self and human agency. He has dialogued over many years with the German sociologist and biographical researcher Peter Alheit. Alheit has been sceptical about transformative learning, at least when reduced to changes in mind set. Drawing on sociology, he argues that people experience contradictory imperatives in late modernity: they can seek to make their own lives, on more of their own terms, but never in conditions of their own choosing. They can be enmeshed in material constraints—of poverty, barely getting by, or structural forces like unemployment, or sudden illness and breakdowns in relationship, experienced as beyond their control. They may be constrained by classed or gendered perspectives, too, including the idea that education is not for them. Alheit and Dausien (2000) have coined the term *biographicity* as a struggle to compose a life, however minimally, on more of our own terms, in deeply contradictory contexts. Biographicity encompasses experience and reflexivity, and a potential for self-positioning. But it is a struggle against forces often beyond our individual control. This might be a more realistic, pessimistic and certainly contextual reading of struggles to change.

So, to meet with Jack Mezirow and his theory of transformative learning, and to engage with the key ideas of 'perspective transformation' and 'disorienting dilemmas'. We illuminate what these terms mean and celebrate their potential for inspiring adult education theory and practice. We are guided by the metaphoric spirit of 'perspective', emerging from the arts, opening ourselves to Mezirow's ideas, alongside those of other potential friends and guides. We begin by tracking the origins of 'perspective transformation', and its hidden assumptions, developed in Mezirow's research on adult returners at university. Reflection, for him, was an act of examining and assessing the validity of one's knowledge (Mezirow 2000). We digress, for a while, into epistemology, to highlight the cultural, embodied as well as embedded origins of the idea of 'perspective' as a visual, realist, and humanistic metaphor. However, this can be overly narrow, un-self-aware, and marginalise other ways of seeing.

Transformative Learning as a Theory and Community: A Compositional Reading

There is a connection between seeing and acting, theory and praxis, in Mezirow's philosophy of education. It makes his work incredibly fertile. His introduction to perspective transformation aims to foster richer, more coherent, satisfying and deliberative processes in the praxis of adult education. He is committed to action, to connecting theory and intervention, researchers and professionals. This is very visible in how the transformative learning community and its conferences have developed in the United States.

Perspective transformation inspires ways of acting which include feedback on self. The relationship is circular, a kind of experimental loop. To fully understand transformative learning, as a phenomenon, as both theory and practice, we must examine its political, social, psychological as well as practical effects. What we perceive is a huge, diverse, and growing literature, and the development of new practices, building on Mezirow's ideas (Taylor et al. 2012). The rapid evolution is rooted—surprisingly for us—in diversity rather than orthodoxy, fuelling discussion, struggle, internal and external critique, and intense debate. Most participants recognise tensions and the need to open issues to rich and lively dialogue (Taylor et al. 2012). This has happened inside the transformative learning community (if it is a community at all, given the diverse people and theories) and in its relationships to the wider educational world. Scholars like Stephen Brookfield, are part of the community and raise challenging questions about theory and practice. He insists that the task of adult education is to challenge dominant and oppressive ideologies and to create space for emancipatory practice, if transformative learning is to have any substance and meaning, beyond being an empty signifier (Brookfield 2000, 2010). This is far more social and ideological than individualistic.

More radically, outsiders question the very legitimacy of the term transformative learning. Michael Newman (2012), in his paper '*Calling Transformative Learning into Question: Some Mutinous Thoughts*' asked if we needed a category called 'transformative learning' at all, due both to its 'flaws', but also because it is tautological, only reiterating what

'good learning' is. This demonstrates how the theory has had a direct and indirect impact, positive and negative, and at points in-between. The flourishing of publications, conferences, and practices of transformative learning and education is evident and energising. Except the discussion has often been restricted to the Anglosphere, tending to exclude other cultures, language communities and continents. This might of course simply be a question of time, since in countries like Italy, there is a tendency to join the mainstream late in the day. But this is also how cultural colonization works, and it is a problem if 'new ideas' are introduced as superior mantras in the knowledge market, concerned with promoting authors and books rather than encouraging dialogue.

As Europeans, we are aware of different responses to transformative learning among European scholars and practitioners. Alexis Kokkos (2010, 2017) offers one European way of engaging with transformative learning, based on an analysis of papers written by European scholars. He is convinced that the power and potential of transformative learning can serve as a reinforcement of the worldwide network of those who care for an adult education that strives for human emancipation. Ironically, this argument can also be read as an 'American colonization' of the European academy, including the dominance of the English language!

Kokkos has generated many insights: there is a tendency in papers to use references to Mezirow but to neglect dozens of other scholars who developed his work. There is insufficient acknowledgement in Europe as well as the US of a plurality of strands and the evolution of theory (Tisdell 2012). A global appraisal of theory is underway, involving diverse scholars (see Cranton and Taylor 2012). But Kokkos suggests that specific concepts like perspective transformation, or disorienting dilemmas, are often integrated into other theoretical frameworks or approaches—on learning processes, social change, workplace learning, and so on—with insufficient grounding in the available transformative learning literature. The dominant trend in Europe is to avoid much engagement with 'the very nature and the applications of the transformative learning theory' (Kokkos 2012, p. 295). Avoidance encompasses, we add, the contributions of diverse women like Patricia Cranton, Libby Tisdell, Mary Field Belenky, Ann Stanton, Kathleen Taylor,

Victoria Marsick or Elizabeth Kasl. They have developed more relational, narrative and spiritual perspectives on transformative learning, building on Mezirow's inspiration.

Another important dimension often missing in European understanding is the legacy of American pragmatism. This emphasises the importance of constant experiment in a struggle to create better or more beautiful social forms. In seeking for instance to democratise organisations, we must experiment, tinker, change and try again. Constant experiment, learning from mistakes and deliberately seeking new information is fundamental to the process. The point of pragmatism is aesthetic: to increase beauty in the world. The well-lived life is a beautiful and creative composition (Brookfield 2016). This search for beauty in practice, in both social and personal forms, is often neglected in Europe in favour of more abstract philosophising. US colleagues have sought stronger links between academic and professional worlds, under the inspiration of pragmatism.

Kokkos' work also confirms that European scholars of adult education use a panoply of thinkers outside the 'field' of educational studies—such as Adorno, Althusser, Bakhtin, Bateson, Bourdieu, Foucault, Giroux, Gramsci, Habermas, Heron, Honneth, Horkheimer, Marx, Morin, and others—to build interpretations of adult education and learning. Auto/biographical narrative research can sit awkwardly in relation to some European theory; instead of using ready-made concepts to explain phenomena, such research tends towards creating deeper forms of interpretation of the particular, seeking a satisfying theory of a complex phenomenon, and then to enhance practice. The spirit of North American pragmatism fits well, in such terms, with our kind of research: we too look for manifestations of beauty (and its enemies) in everyday experience, at both a social and individual level.

Perspective Transformation in Mezirow's Work

In introducing his seminal book *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, Jack Mezirow (1991) listed four events that encouraged his interest in perspective change. All of them were biographically rooted:

his epistemological positioning—or relationship to knowing—was personal, self-aware, self-interrogating. There is no abstract theory, disconnected from the man and his values, or his engagement with the world. A theory becomes satisfying, beautiful and alive when it corresponds to lived experience, and has semantic power. And when such theory links, in turn, to others' experiences, in different spaces, we may then encounter a pattern that connects.

The first event for Mezirow was a personal crisis—a 'disorienting dilemma', as he later termed it. He painfully realised (after reading Freire and Illich) that being an adult educator, and orientated, as he thought himself to be, towards social action, does not automatically mean you are 'good' and free from negative assumptions. You may be overly 'righteous' in the way you interpret and act in your role. There is a risk, a side-effect of any educational act, of reinforcing existing social forms and power dynamics, without realizing it. The first step towards emancipation is for the educator, before and together with the learners' emancipation, to emancipate him/herself. *Medice, cura te ipsum*: Physician, heal thyself, as we might frame it; educators, educate yourselves.

Biographical experience can offer moments to discover a critical dimension missing in our practice. It is the moment when we learn that you need a new theory, as Mezirow saw it. If he was to facilitate community development and build serious dialogue and learning in various contexts, he had to be more aware of his own positioning and power. This discovery, he informs us, shook his 'meaning perspectives', or 'ways of observing the world' (Mezirow 1991). It provoked an 'absorbing process' of learning, continuing over a long period. His experience reveals the extent to which *knowing* is embodied and real. It is not a purely cognitive act, or the result of reified, rational thinking. Mezirow was also aware that transformative learning is no sudden revolution, conversion, or superficial change of label, but needs time, and can be painful. As human beings we constantly desire some equilibrium, and we struggle to keep our (previous) ideas, and ways of being, even when they become demonstrably false. We want things to stay as they are and not to trouble us unduly.

When I teach at university – says Laura – *I frequently meet this resistance. I still remember my first year and a student came to see me, she was irritated for her low mark: 'I come from the best school, and had the best evaluation, this is my first exam and I only got 18/30!'*
'Let's understand together what happened here… there was a question you did not answer to… Give your own definition of education and discuss it.'
'I know all the definitions. I have studied Comenius, Rousseau, Freire and don Milani. I can tell you for each their idea of education. But I do not have an idea of mine.'
'If you know all these definitions, it is not difficult. You only need to think.'
'You have no right to ask me to think,'
Teacher and student have different perspectives here, what I call 'sights' and 'postures'. The story shows how education can create monsters: students who are trained to give the right answer will oppose any proposal to 'simply think'.

Mezirow's second and third events were similarly personal. His wife decided to return to university and *her* struggles, as well as achievements, and changes in lifestyle and identity, pushed him to become more curious about adults who enter new worlds and struggle to perceive differently. He conducted research, at a national level, into women learners at university (Mezirow 1978). The research illuminated how women enter university with their own positioning more or less clear: they may have conventional attitudes, accepting common-sense definitions of university education; and they can take for granted that they do not know. Other learners are deeply engaged with disorienting dilemmas in their lives, and their choice of an academic programme is an implicit if tentative solution to problems. Third, they are already partly emancipated as well as intentional learners, looking for confirmation or a nuanced development of their perspective. Finally, there is a group who are similarly self-aware, and interest driven, but more open to transformation. The categorization offers a way of interpreting different positionings on entering university; and different ways of being and seeing in the academy. Learning may be active or passive, strategic or tactical, but always personal, bringing the imperative for institutions to be reflexive about students' positioning. Mezirow realised that adult education had to develop new categories and models to understand the processes of re-positioning necessary to (re)learn a context, as well as

the contents of education. Perspective transformation, from the beginning—if latently—located learners in a context, which included their subjective positioning and desires.

From Content to Context

Laura sees a correspondence between Mezirow's four groups of learners (Mezirow 1978) and the four existential postures identified by Marie Christine Josso (2001). She engaged with groups of professionals in biographical workshops over many years at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. She invited them to examine their life experience in relation to learning, identity and education. Their written stories, analysed by the group, considered relationships to knowing, as a result of complex influences like social determinants, cultural roots, relational experience, unconscious and inner struggles, etc. They found four main existential positions of the learner in relation to knowing and learning: a conventional passive position (in French: *attente*); an active problem-solving position (*refuge*); a self-centred intentional position (*intentionnalité*); and a playful position of surrender (*lâcher-prise*).

What is entailed in both Mezirow's and Josso's findings is a shift in focus from content, abilities, and competence—towards attitudes, assumptions, self-positioning, and even identities. This is fundamental to learning and thinking 'like an adult' (Mezirow 2000). In other words, we move from content to context. We can consider the notion of 'perspective transformation' as a step towards a complex, context sensitive theory of learning, where adults (tend to) position themselves in varying ways to the contents of learning, and to learning itself, and towards educators, groups, and whole institutions. And for that matter, to perspectives of meaning, which can be hidden or latent in any educational encounter, whether on a course, in a research interview, or a less formal conversation.

Laura (Formenti 2017) has related Josso's existential positions to a systemic perspective. Educator-and-learner are engaged circularly in a dance of dynamic positioning. Each subjective position is the result of interaction, entailing a corresponding counter-position [counter-transference,

in psychoanalytic language] of the educator. This raises the issue of what kind of relationships are established in adult education? What relationship to knowing is sustained by the interplay of good enough positioning? How does the position of the teacher influence the position of the student, and vice versa? And how does the context contribute to or shape the dance? These questions encourage us to think about our own perspectives on education: as profoundly relational, interactive, interdependent and auto/biographical. Mezirow may be too individualistic in such terms.

The conventional relationship in the academy is based on the passive learner who mirrors a very active and powerful educator/teacher; the two confirm—together—a traditional linear relationship in diverse contexts and organizations, where verticality and communication-as-transmission are the rule. The relationship to knowing is vertical, formal, and the learner is in a certain sense subjugated.

The position of refuge, the second in Josso's taxonomy, entails a coach or a problem solver taking charge of guidance as well as processes of resolution and/or technical learning; it requires a quality of relationship where the learner becomes more active, yet also obedient and even objectified, while the relationship to knowing is instrumental. The third position is based on self-awareness and intentionality, which are strongly valued in contemporary adult education (think about andragogy, client centred learning, etc.). It requires more of the listening educator, someone able and willing to recognize the learner's values and interests in a potential dance of desire and freedom. In a certain sense, a 'good enough' parental figure who encourages playfulness. But playfulness is a step forward from intentionality: the adult who knows his/her interests and only follows conscious purpose can get stuck in learning; maybe she is too content with what she finds and is insufficiently challenged to go further. This is where the fourth position (*lâcher-prise* literally meaning releasing one's grip, letting go) comes into play: learning to learn when exiting a comfort zone, finding new creative expressions of self, necessitating deeper change in our relationship to knowing. The awareness of interdependence also brings greater openness, reciprocity and surrender. There is shared playfulness and recognition of vulnerability too. These are deeply interpersonal, often unconsciously challenging processes.

Such a perspective is at the heart of Linden's work on adult learner motivation, in the potentially transitional space of a university; a space pregnant with possibilities for self-negotiation but also riddled with doubt and defensiveness. A space where we can feel understood and legitimate in the eyes of significant others like a teacher or respected fellow student; or feel misrecognised and bereft. Changing qualities of relationships are essential to any wholehearted play in learning; or in claiming space to dance with new partners and ideas, thus creating new possibilities for self. The dance or play can take the form of new relationships with fictional characters in literature, or a body of theory, which, through processes of projective identification, speak to us at a deep psychological and existential level, offering resources of hope in struggles to transform. But it can be a hard-won victory with much pain, loss and failure, alongside beauty, in the struggle (West 1996).

Such illumination suggests two possible shifts in theory. The first is from categorisation to positioning. Taxonomies are always problematic: how can we 'diagnose' someone as being passive or intentional? Nobody is like this, without context. So, an individual is not 'a specific kind' of learner but takes a position in the present, shaped by her previous story as well as imagined future. The second is from individualism to relationalism, combining the subjective view of each actor with a relational appreciation of what transpires in the learning process. We then require a more contextual analysis of institutions and classrooms: what kind of organization, roles, gestures, rituals, discourses, perspectives as well as relational qualities are in play? How might they evolve, in the interests of transformative experience (as against the rote learning of passing tests or achieving, pre-defined outcomes?). This is a central issue across our book.

A Therapeutic Learning?

Mezirow refers to a fourth biographical event that shaped his ideas: when working for a while with Roger Gould (Mezirow 1991), a psychiatrist. Gould sought to build connections between education and psychotherapy, using a 'therapeutic learning programme' aimed to enable learners to overcome constraints to learning, developed in earlier stages

of their lives. One of the most promising aspects of this was the potential re-connection between the present and past, conscious and unconscious process, cognition and emotion, learning and healing. Changes of perspective can be painful, scary, even terrifying. As we note later, many scholars are seeking to connect transformative learning theory to psychoanalysis, or depth psychology, to develop a more satisfying theory of emotion, embodied and shaping cognition. The word transformation might suggest an inner, deeper, psychic change, or soul work; and of changed relationships to self, others and otherness, including cognition.

Mezirow well understood that our meaning perspectives are often distorted or stuck. The distortions can be due to defence mechanisms. Linden takes his understanding of this from psychoanalysis, which has to do with either a more defensive orientation of self to the other and wider world, or a relative openness, both forged in early relationships (see Chapter 5). The defences include omniscience (I already know), or omnipotence (I can cope), which masks a fear of exposure, vulnerability or being found out and feeling ashamed. Laura draws on cybernetics and systems theory, namely von Foerster's notion of the observer as 'double blind' or unaware of what he/she cannot see, and also unaware of the blindness. 'Normal' perception is not conscious of its own dynamics. Hence, while education and therapy are not the same, both entail struggles, trauma, existential dilemmas and disorientation, before meaningful change is possible.

Transformative learning brings learners and educators to recognise their place and potential authorship in deeper change processes; and the need for new forms of knowledge and care in struggles to perceive differently. When an adult learner is living a transformation, emotional support is essential, as is recognition of the struggle. A good enough learning or transitional space, in the language of Donald Winnicott (1971) is required to play with the potential of a new idea, or to embrace a critical re-examination of assumptions, in manageable ways. It is not clear however whether Mezirow was keen to ask educators to develop counselling skills or care attitudes. It is significant that he speaks about Gould's project, and later engages somewhat minimally in a dialogue with John Dirkx (2006) about soul work, i.e. the unconscious and inner life, and even the role of the spiritual in adult learning.

Dirkx questions what he sees to be a continuing assumption that cognition is the fundamental vehicle in transformation. Drawing on Jung's depth psychology, he prefers to describe the process as soul work: as deeply defended ways of being in the world (maybe donning the persona of omnipotence, for example) which are then challenged by other parts of the psyche, in good educational encounters. Like the character called trickster, who pricks at pomposity and reveals aspects, maybe unwanted, of who we are, to ourselves as well as others. Within this Jungian perspective, there is a dynamic of individuation in play, a struggle to integrate split off or unwanted parts of ourselves, but we may actively resist the process.

A Practical Theory and Its Developments

Mezirow's theory was formulated for adult educators (Mezirow 1991). An educator himself, he wanted to highlight those learning conditions which build and sustain better educational practice. He claimed that education required a good integrated theory to avoid the tendency of educators to be glued to hidden assumptions, whether behaviourist or functionalist, shaped by naïve psychology or the tyrannies of common sense. The penchant for ideology and a preacher's attitude are, in fact, quite common in education. But a good enough educational theory must address our need for meaning, i.e. how we build, validate and reframe our ideas, and often defend against doing so. Humans not only develop a rationale for their experience; they learn how to do so. Interpretation is fundamental in learning.

Mezirow was pushed by experience to question the conditions for 'good enough' interpretation, or to compose a 'satisfying theory'; one able to sustain deliberate and deliberative action. Interpretation is not separable from praxis, it is a practice itself. Transformation of perspective becomes a process of transforming our ways of interpreting experience, and of making new meaning. Mezirow's relationship to theory was pragmatic. He sought to explain learning that worked, or made sense of complexity, and evoked desirable change. He was not interested so much in extending 'an existing intellectual theory or tradition' (1991, p. xiv);

rather in fostering theory to evoke better or more beautiful human action. His approach brought together different concepts, from varying backgrounds, probably irritating those scholars who look for flaws or incoherence. But they can miss the point, or the bigger picture: of celebrating what works educationally and is beautiful in its illuminate power.

Mezirow therefore provides a starting point for a diverse dialogue across difference. Ideas about perspective transformations have evolved, to include soul work, for instance. We return to this in Chapter 7. And to the spiritual dimensions of transformation, including the praxis of pilgrimage (Tisdell 2017; see Chapter 10); or to complexity and the temporal aspects of life and transformation (Alhadeff-Jones 2016), or critical theory (Chapter 4), or the role of art and the aesthetic (Chapter 9). We return to dialogue with such ideas and people, including psychoanalysis, in subsequent chapters. But first, we explore the idea of perspective itself.

Perspective: A Visual Metaphor

A basic assumption in transformative learning theory is that learning is rooted in observing and interpreting experience, and the engagement with new and challenging frames of reference. Struggles over meaning depend on the individual learner's perspective, while learning becomes a kind of collision of ways of seeing, or perspectives. But the question is begged as to what we mean by 'perspective'? And how individualistic existing and new ways of seeing might be. We note that perspective is a western invention, a particular form of representation and of thinking about the place of the observer in the process. Perspectives are deeply cultural: most obviously in the pre-Copernican world, with God and a divinely ordained 'order' at its core. Bauman's pre-modern period involved a gamekeeper operating within a social ethic of things being best when not interfered with, and the world perceived as 'a divine chain of being and has its rightful and useful place.' The post-Copernican, post-Reformation perspective puts the observer more at the centre, looking at the scene, and creating new versions of it, as a gardener.

There is now a power to determine and shape what is real. Culture is there when reifying the power of observation and scientific precision, alongside celebrating tidiness and perceptions of ordered beauty.

Perspective in the Renaissance, came to be regarded as a standard form of art (and thinking) devoted to the creation of realistic and believable scenes. In its most technical form, it was born early in 1400, when Filippo Brunelleschi—an architect and engineer living in Florence—designed a famous experiment that changed the course of the artistic Renaissance; and, according to certain historians, the intellectual perspectives of the western world (De Santillana 1959; Edgerton 1975). When we fix a single point of view, all the parallel lines appear to converge at some point in the distance, and all objects in the scene seem to follow the same rule. Brunelleschi was struck by this coherence and the feeling of plausibility produced by this way of drawing. So, he invented a device to demonstrate his insight, offering a standard systematic way to reproduce the identical experience, many times over—and in compelling form, for the proceeding centuries.

The experiment was simple (Fig. 3.1): he drew a very detailed copy—so exact as to fool the eye—of the Florentine Baptistery viewed from the portal of the Duomo. He drilled a small hole in the panel, to constrain the eye looking through it, to compare the drawing with the real building. They corresponded. The invention was immediately adopted by others, probably because some intuition of its potential power already existed, if not yet with the rigour and imagination required for precision. Human kind received a model to represent depth and reality, in bi-dimensional space. The observer became part of the philosophical invention. Perspective became a metaphor to represent human knowledge and how to improve ways of knowing.

None of which was achieved overnight, by a solitary person. History suggests that the Ancient Greeks—and later the Romans, in Pompeii—knew how to represent depth, to give plausibility to their paintings. But the idea of representation in the Middle Ages was more symbolic, metaphorical, less realistic. Brunelleschi, the architect, was fond of Rome, like many of his contemporaries; in a sense he understood that perspective was invented by civilizations using linear geometry to build their temples, as well as categorical language and rigorous thinking to develop

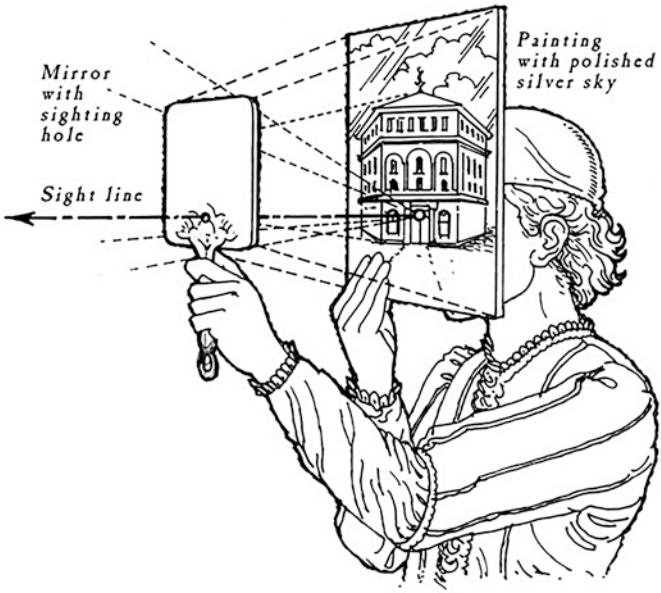

Fig. 3.1 Filippo Brunelleschi's experiment. https://maitaly.wordpress.com/

philosophy. Greece and Rome laid the foundations of a particular system of thought. Other cultures thought in and through different kinds of metaphor, including of the sacred.

Most references use the word 'discovery'—or 're-discovery'—when referring to the story of perspective (Derksen 1999). Invention would be a better word since it is not 'out there', but culturally inside us. Technical ability, mathematical knowledge and philosophical background are also required. This invention changed the representation of the world forever: it was taken up immediately by Masaccio (in 1427) to create 'The Holy Trinity', a huge fresco in Santa Maria Novella, another famous church in Florence. The holy figures are represented as real people, in a false room, with a vault ceiling painted to match the architecture of the church, hence creating the illusion of a real 3-dimensional space. It is easy to imagine the awe felt by spectators, when seeing Christ himself, God, and even a skeleton representing Adam, before their eyes, as 'real'.

Later, Alberti codified the method into a handbook (*De Pictura*, On Painting, 1435, dedicated to Filippo himself), so that artists who followed were encouraged to adopt the new perspective, or consciously resist it, for centuries. Perspective is key to any drawing or painting, in the tradition of western art and art training, while the public of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reacted negatively to art not following such rules. Perspective became a dominant practice and worldview; it contains both a stance on the meaning of art as well as an epistemological orientation. But what kind of knowledge is produced? What does it mean to reproduce 'reality'? What kind of observer is implicated in this form of knowing? It remains deeply cultural and has tended to exclude other ways of seeing. We may now be becoming more conscious of this and the colonising damage it can do.

The transformation of the socio-cultural context where Brunelleschi was living, what we call the Renaissance, began in the late 1200s (Cimabue and Giotto are key figures). It continued for at least 250 years: conventionally ending around 1550, when Michelangelo and Raphael brought it to its zenith. In painting, there was an imperative to give an Earthly or realistic setting for sacred figures: Giotto, Duccio da Boninsegna, Piero della Francesca painted saints and characters from the Bible as real people, even if their environment was not so literal. What kind of buildings, squares, rooms and furniture however might best surround those thick, monumental, fleshy bodies? The problem of verisimilitude—corresponding to *verum* or lifelikeness—of people and their surroundings was being raised.

In those 250 years, Italy was replete with paintings, mostly in churches, to provoke and sustain the popular imagination. What is now achieved through watching movies, television programmes and websites, was achieved then by going to church and fantasising about paintings, which were so attractive in their colours and evocative in the stories told. They were in a sense more real than real, and were drawn, using the right proportions and rules, to make them 'true', creating sensations, feelings, emotions, and enforcing conscious and unconscious reactions. A new narrative, collective theory of the world, and a method to create it, were forged. We should add that there were also images and frightening representations of Hell, and of a punishing God, to sustain

obedience to religious prescription and order. Imagery is often used to subjugate rather than liberate. Like the statues of the old American Confederacy and of former slave owners, used to convey the power and 'truth' of great men; and to stifle other stories, especially from the margins. As we write these sentences, we hear that statues of Columbus are being demolished in some communities in North America. We wonder if this iconoclasm can be potentially transformative? Maybe Western art represented more than was rationally understood, such as imperialist presumption and the denigration of the other.

Why have we made such a digression on the birth of perspective? Following Gregory Bateson, people 'think in stories', or through processes of 'abduction' (1979, pp. 157–159). Ideas are connected by wider and looser patterns than implied in rational and linear theories. Meanings have their roots in bodies, in the connotation of words, in the unconscious patterns ruling our language and culture. To know the origin of perspective puts the metaphor in a new light, leading us to question or become more aware of its limits.

We are so used to linear perspective as a representational system. We live in a culture that systematically draws on linear stories and takes for granted their meaning. *Prospicere* in Latin means 'to look ahead' and we are so used to thinking in a language of windows to offer the overview, if we stick our heads out. So, perspective, in the view of Erwin Panofsky (1991) is a kind of 'will to form', a pattern to connect the social, cognitive, psychological and technical practices of our culture, rendering it into an integrated coherent whole (or a manicured garden?). And yet, Panofsky warns, each epoch or culture has its own perceptual pattern or model. The 'panoptic' perspective, typical of modernity, goes beyond the mere technique of reproduction. It is a way of conceiving space, and the human beings who inhabit it. In the Renaissance, the relationship was symbolized by the eye, or better, a point of view. The Observer was invited to rule the space, to give order to objects, which in turn gave to the Observer power; here are the roots of modernity: *Homo faber suae fortunae;* man is the maker of his fortune. Space becomes rational, while universal mathematical rules govern it, with potentially no limit to our capacity to understand and tame our world.

Laura remembers the slow careful preparation of drawings, at school, with very precise, delicate lines, to be cancelled out later. Her first tentative sketches of simple objects like a cube, or a pyramid, led, at the age of fifteen, to the representation of an Old Roman Villa. How proud she was! An embodied experience, repeated in time (repetition is a core business in learning), and her frequent exposure to images was not only an initiation into art (as content), but an experience of deuterolearning, as Bateson defines the unconscious learning of forms, structures, meaning and contexts. A hidden curriculum, we could call it. Western art conveys the idea that the knower must take a position and define a horizon every time s/he is set to describe the 'real'. Yet this opens space, ironically, for the projection of our own cultural presuppositions, to the neglect of others.

All of which is relevant to composing any theory of transformative learning, since we are obliged to use words, and words never escape their relationship to metaphor, culture, context and bodies. In fact, our language is shaped by metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), while our theories can be understood as stories connecting metaphors through unconscious processes of abduction; and in the encounter between our data and the concepts we use. Following Lakoff and Johnson, all metaphors are related to embodied experience (1999), and new ones emerge when artists or academics perceive a difference between what they experience and what is claimed to be 'true'. Moreover, the perception of difference is based on action; perspective is an embodied practice, enacting a world: when we position ourselves as observers, in a certain sense, we bend reality to desire.

These reflections on the origins of perspective—as rule, practice and worldview—compel us towards deeper reflexivity in our relationship to knowing and the role of visual metaphors. It encourages new awareness that metaphor is far from neutral, and that we may be unconscious about our assumptions and projections. Perspective brings with it epistemological and ontological assumptions, and, potentially, a colonising story (especially in the Western world with its global reach, over two centuries and more). A solitary, privileged observer can be master of all surveyed, and can mould it in his or her own image. Gombrich (1982) asserts that the original reason for the new perspective was to give reality

and credibility to sacred events. But we can also read it as a de-sacralisation of religion, by bringing a concept of total 'truth' to bear, one that challenges the basic story itself and casts, in effect, the other as ignorant.

Berger (1972) highlights how the themes of money, power and possessions were communicated in Western art, beyond formal appearance. This is an old story: of Kings, Popes and later merchants buying and commissioning art to celebrate their power. Realism can create properties seemingly life like, you can almost touch them; and can also embody social oppression, and the enforcement of power as well as a particular world view. Perspective, as a new metaphor, provokes many dilemmas: 'reality' versus representation; subjectivity versus objectivity; freedom versus power; one world view versus many others. It can represent, in the transformative learning community, a kind of cognitive conversion, (mimicking perhaps the spiritual of earlier times), with new lives forged in the light of reason. But maybe the process is more contextual, auto/biographical, psychic, relational, narrative, conflictual and even transcendental, as well as cognitive, when we engage with the stories learners themselves tell.

A Footnote

When we look at a piece of art, we may see different things. This happens with any object, but art seems to have an especial power to raise dilemmas. In the first metalogue, Linden shared his view of the Pietà, and told a story of an encounter with the transcendental. Laura told a different story, about material and emergent qualities of an object. Our ways of seeing are different, but they illuminate common dilemmas in our culture, and show how subjectivity *and* objectivity, the spiritual *and* material, transcendence *and* immanence are composed in art. You need both to make a chef d'oeuvre. Art is about material things, the quality of gesture, the matter you use, *and* it is about meaning, *ideas*, differences that make a difference (Bateson 1979), which are incorporated into the work. It also needs imagination, energy, passion; and an observer, who enters a relationship with it, through the body. We observe with the whole body, not only with our eyes. We need to

enlarge our grasp of knowledge, to overcome the idea of a final, finished perspective, above and beyond all others.

In a sense, we *are* our perspective (in Bateson's terms: our own metaphor, 1977): some people see objects as mere material things. They use perception to capture the inherent qualities of the object. They measure, compare, evaluate. Others are enchanted by objects because they experience them as alive and do so even more when ceasing to separate them from the process of observation. We need a kind of dialogue between object, process and different observers. Objects depend on our sight as well as our in-sight. If we create a dialogue with an object—'If you come with generosity and the desire to understand the other', says Linden in the metalogue—a stronger even transcendental spirit can emerge. Spirit does not exist in the world of Pleroma. It exists in the world of Creatures, where things are moved and become accessible beyond their obvious materiality, and are pregnant with many potential, even conflicting meanings, rather than a singular perspective.