

## Reading the Global

comparative education at the end of an era

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*Publication date:*  
2009

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Carney, S. (2009). *Reading the Global: comparative education at the end of an era*. Paper presented at Annual Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Comparative Education Society, University of New England, Australia.

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## READING THE GLOBAL

*Comparative education at the end of an era*

As comparative educationalists, our attention flickers and we anguish about ourselves. We cannot make up our minds whether we are hygienic dissectors, like skilled fishmongers; agents of melioration – the politically alert plumbers of educational system improvement; or artistic empathisers, culturally-sensitive florists who examine the exotic in the world's educational gardens.

(Cowen, 2003a, p. 299)

### INTRODUCTION

Comparative education has never been more successful. University programs are expanding as are student numbers. International conferences are increasingly well-attended, and not only by the Anglo-American 'core'. Literature with an explicitly comparative agenda abounds. New journals are in the making. The commitment to policy science remains at the centre of the mission of comparative education as a discipline, making it 'valuable' and 'relevant' to a new generation of policy makers seeking urgent solutions to educational problems. And yet, comparative education has never had less to say.

For all its growth and vitality, I want to argue that comparative education, if I might generalize about what is obviously a highly diverse set of practices, is in danger of fading into irrelevance as its *episteme* (what Cowen has referred to as 'the display of a disciplinary form') fails to comprehend the fundamentally new *kosmos* (the 'specific global time-space social world') in which it is embedded (Cowen, 2003a, p. 301). At present, this disciplinary 'form' accommodates the diverse agendas of fishmongers, plumbers *and* florists, all of whom broadly agree on the ontological contours of the contemporary world. I want to argue that the consensus within comparative education research on the enlightenment values of truth, faith in progress and the primacy of the rational indivisible self are not only highly questionable but holding us back from obtaining even a glimpse into the 'real' that we evidently value.

Our field contains no shortage of scholars – young and old – bold enough to question the assumptions on which the discipline of comparative education rests. In this regard the writings of Robert Cowen have been a source of both inspiration

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and refuge for those reluctant to adopt what Maggie MacLure (2006a) has called the ‘closures of innocent knowing, clear vision and settled accounts’ of contemporary educational science (p. 225). These renegade voices are heard within our field but treated more as ornaments to our theoretical diversity and tolerance rather than as ‘clarion calls’ for a new comparative education<sup>1</sup>.

My aim in this chapter is to contribute to an ongoing discussion about the fitness of comparative education to address the ontological, epistemological, political and practical challenges facing a set of power/ knowledge interests determined to retain form as a discipline engaged in understanding a world that, I argue, defies meaningful comprehension via ‘Western culture’s triumphal stories of progress, reason and order’ (op.cit., 226). To do so I put forward one of many comparative educations (Cowen 2009d) and one that is necessarily incomplete.

To arrive at what is arguably an unsettling starting point for future research, I want to illustrate the ways in which the work of Robert Cowen enables us to locate and maneuver within the prevailing episteme of comparative education, in order to leave it far behind. My first move is to dislodge, but not entirely, the sacred place of the nation state in contemporary comparative education. I do this by elaborating a cross-national policy space – what I have called an educational ‘policyscape’ – in order to undercover new and fruitful units of analysis. My second move, though, uses this moderate innovation as an example of the continuing paralysis of our discipline. Turning to richer, more challenging post-positivist sources – notably the work of the social theorist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard, and the methodological writings of Maggie MacLure – I sketch out the contours of an ‘eduscape’ crafted out of the intersections between schools, their local communities and the global reference points that sustain them in order to bring to the surface what MacLure (2006b) refers to as education’s ‘other’; those things which ‘remain(s) unthought and unsaid in order that education can continue to identify itself as a project of progress and enlightenment’ (Macp., 730). This call is one response to what Cowen was envisaging through his appeal for new approaches to comparative education. Rather than an obscure strategy, I suggest that a productive exercise in ‘defamiliarisation’ is perhaps comparative education’s best chance to recalibrate itself for the challenges and uncertainties of the new millennium.

(ALMOST) BEYOND THE NATION STATE:  
GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL POLICYSCAPES AND COMPARISON

My particular purchase on comparative education and educational reform in general has come through the inspiring albeit diffuse literature on the globalization of modernity. Comparativists have become adept at acknowledging the importance of globalization in the field of education and have tended to focus on its economic

and political dimensions (Dale, 1999, 2000; Welch, 2001). Others are attuned to issues of identity formation and subjectivity (Alexander, 2000, Marginson and Mollis, 2001). More often than not ‘globalization’ is used as an imprecise substitute for sociological analyses of modernity and, for example, political critiques of (unequal) processes of internationalization.

Such concerns abound within the field and have been given new life of late through the ongoing debate between the so-called universalist and culturalist schools of thought (e.g. Anderson-Levitt, 2003, Ramirez, 2003, Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe, 2006). For some, so-called ‘global’ reform movements speak to inherent and universal modes of being which are becoming more apparent as rapid processes of interconnectivity enable us to bring to life our collective human similarities. In other cases, scholars have attempted to situate global reform in history and context; seeking to explore the multitude of ways in which policy is understood, mediated, shaped and re-shaped. On the sidelines, and struggling for space within the educational *Zeitgeist*, are what might be broadly termed neo-Marxist approaches which view such movements as the work of ‘core’ nations and supra-national agencies with determined political agendas given easier passage by the break-down or compromising of state-level controls. Theoretical approaches that question or show some degree of skepticism towards the modernist assumptions of educational science have been accommodated within comparative education, but contained<sup>ii</sup>.

We all seem to agree that educational reform is on the march, that it is dismissive of national borders, and that it is homogenizing *some* aspects of the human experience. However, we are in much less agreement about how to explain this march, where, spatially, to ground our analyses, and what objects, in particular, to subject to scientific (or poetic?) gaze. Where, therefore, do we go from here?

Robert Cowen has written elegantly of the histories, highways and, occasionally, blind alleys of comparative education, all the time presenting diverse theoretical traditions as part of a trajectory of ideas going back (for practical purposes at least) to Jullien’s deductivist surveys. In recent years, though, his regular health-checks of our field have demanded that we think deeply about the aims and methods of our work. What do we know? What tools are at our disposal? Are they fit for the world(s) we wish to understand; perhaps change? More provokingly: does our set of disciplinary practices have anything worth saying in the new millennium?

Cowen’s work is notable in this regard for challenging us to celebrate the diversity of meanings and approaches within comparative education, and to use these in productive ways as we refashion our interpretive concepts to better ‘read’ the emerging global epoch. Rather than rehash these positions, he encourages us to seek out new terms with which to name and make sense of educational phenomena, new ways of defining educational spaces beyond the reliance on nation, educational system and school, and new categories of relations between these new objects. Conceptual work along these lines, he suggests, promises a number of approaches to comparative education better fitted to the future.

Where comparative education has struggled, cultural anthropology has flourished, especially in experimenting with new understandings of the nature of 'field' as physical locality. Cultural anthropologists such as Arjun Appadurai (1996), Akil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) have attuned us to the role of global processes in the de-territorialization of phenomena. For Appadurai (2000), globalization is understood as sets of 'flows' that are both rapid and disjunctive, leading to 'intensely local forms' of action that 'have contexts that are anything but local' (p. 6). Such flows empower subjects through the images and passions they ignite, but also contain them by, for example, the architecture and enclosures of the global economy. Scholars of education reform have built on this move to rethink the ways in which national governments are simultaneously 'de-centered' by international reform movements, and 'strengthened' by their new mandates in 'organizing the field of possibilities, and laying the boundaries for local policy' (Kamat, 2002, p. 116). This seems a highly fruitful way to acknowledge the persistence of the state as a major organizing category in comparative research and yet to comprehend some dimensions of its fundamentally new shape and function. To complicate matters, though, anthropologists draw our attention to the 'intensively managed fiction' of thinking in 'levels' from 'top' to 'bottom'. The instruments and techniques of contemporary governance may be wielded by national governments and their agencies (as far as we can see), but these are very much conditioned by and connected to transnational relations *across* levels (Ferguson, 2006, p. 10).

Appadurai's (1996) notion of 'scapes' as both imaginative and material worlds attempts to reflect the interconnectivity of phenomena in late modernity, and his notion of 'ideoscape' is particularly well-suited to capturing the power of global policy messages in the field of education. Grounded in an enlightenment worldview, an 'ideoscape' consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including '*freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation*, and the master term *democracy*' which serve to marshal together some of the core passions of high modernity into a coherent narrative and program of action (Appadurai, 1996, 36).

The notion of 'scape' as imaginative but also material space has not avoided critique, especially for its under-theorizing of power and the role of the state itself (Ong, 1999). It remains, however, one powerful basis on which to propose an educational 'ideoscape' – what I have termed a 'policyscape' – that might make manageable some essential elements of globalization as phenomenon (object and process) and provide the means with which to explore the spread of policy ideas and pedagogical practices across different national school systems. One corner stone of this 'policyscape' is the ideology of individualism and self-determination currently embedded in international education reforms. Policies and practices at the levels of *visions and values* (for example curricula that conceptualize learning in terms of individualized skills and competences), *management and organization* (policies of decentralization, choice, executive leadership etc), and *learning processes* (such as the contemporary fetish for child-centered pedagogy, classroom democracy and active learning) are changing quite fundamentally the character and fabric of education. Such policies and the meta-narrative that drives them must be

seen as transnational messages projected across educational spaces and translated in ways that resonate in particular contexts. They clearly aim to achieve different things in different contexts but are connected by an ideology that centers the individual in learning processes and dislodges the state from its historical position as provider and protector of education.

The notion of an educational ‘policyscape’ is clearly worth pursuing, and if there is substance to such a conception, and in light of contemporary critiques of comparative education as positivist ‘science’, then surely it must be possible to explore phenomena not only in different types of countries but different levels of the educational systems within these ‘cases’. I have ventured to bring together three quite different on-going studies – an exploration of management reform in Danish universities, school curriculum reform in the west of China and community schooling in Nepal - and subject them to comparative analysis (Carney, 2009). But how can we bind together these wildly dissimilar dramas? I have argued that they can be seen as examples of what Cowen has called ‘transitologies’: societies in the midst of processes of ‘collapse and reconstruction’. In all three countries, education plays a critical role in ‘social processes of destroying the past and redefining the future’ (Cowen, 2000b, p. 338). Additionally, a focus on transitologies makes it (more) possible to unravel (partially at least) the complex educational codes, cultural norms and practices that give education its distinctiveness in different contexts.

For my purposes, the rapid transition to neo-liberal managerialism in consensual Danish higher education, learner-centered teaching in centrally-oriented Chinese schooling and lay school management in hierarchical and unequal Nepal promised not only insights into the nature of global reform movements in de-centered/ re-centred states, but an opportunity to engage in ‘big’ comparative education: work combining ‘an historical perspective and an emphasis on international political and economic and cultural relationships’ (p. 339). The resulting focus on rupture, conflict, tension and resistance promised something quite different from the assumptions of ‘equilibrium’ and ‘equilibrium theorizing’ on which much comparative education continues to rest (Cowen, 2000b, p. 339).

The component studies are part of an ongoing research program which has been presented elsewhere (Carney, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009; Carney and Bista 2009, Carney, Bista and Agergaard, 2007). Nevertheless, it is worth illustrating some of the insights that this conceptualization of education reform has made possible. Rather than attempt to unpack the endless criss-crossings of reform – what Noah Sobe calls the ‘reciprocal, reversible, and multiple vectors of movement and exchange’ – my aim in bringing the studies together is to present some of the lived consequences of these ‘entanglements’ (Sobe, 2008, 4).

A key point of departure has been to sketch out some of the elements of the global vision as it plays out in each site. Denmark, a so-called ‘knowledge-society’ with high levels of educational participation and achievement, is clearly quite different from war-ravaged Nepal where some 90% of the people struggle through the daily grind of poverty, and different again from schizophrenic China with its rapidly developing Eastern regions aligned to Western technological and

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cultural forms, and the rural and 'remote' regions which are home to the global development industry. Nevertheless, all three countries share a lust to connect to the global knowledge economy and have made intense efforts to orient their educational visions and systems to the needs of the 'market', the individualized learner and the empowered consumer. Notwithstanding the diversity of lived experiences in these three countries, national education systems are intent on 'benchmarking' their wares against the 'best practices' and 'accepted knowledge' of the global ideal. In Danish higher education this finds form as policies that evoke the signifiers of 'quality', 'elite' and 'world-class' which are legitimated via reference to European dreams and directives (for example, the European Union's Lisbon Declaration aimed at reshaping the region into the World's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy) and barely comprehended 'league tables' of university rankings. In Nepal, a context of persistent armed conflict and social upheaval has not limited the ambition of its education ministry with its aim that schools 'keep[ing] abreast of emerging, new knowledge and skills' in the 'global society' (MOES, 2006, 18-19). China's 'go global' mantra of life long-learning, advanced technological study and education for economic success hardly sets it apart from the two other cases (People's Daily, 2001). From the European Union and OECD, to the World Bank and WTO, education is on the move; being shaped and remade by a multitude of real and imagined agendas.

The ideology of individualism and self-determination on which the policyscape rests relies upon new actors as heroes of reform. Danish universities have overturned a history of participation and inclusion by reconstituting their highest decision-making bodies with a majority of members appointed (not elected) from outside the university. This new elite deals directly with an appointed (not elected) chief executive ('rector'). Students, in the words of the Minister, are valued as 'customers'. School management committees in Nepal now contain parents and excluded groups who with the help of World Bank wordsmiths are recast as 'stakeholders' and 'service-seekers' (World Bank, 2003). China, as always, manages to balance complexity and incoherence, symbol and sign. A new curriculum centers the student as unique learner and the teacher as facilitator but leaves implementation to far-flung local authorities who must interpret China's vision for 'glorious modernization' through the lens of aggressive market capitalism and authoritarian state socialism (MOE, 2001).

In order to manage the new spaces created by global reform, a range of pervasive techniques of administration have been deployed, what Michel Foucault calls 'technologies' of control (Foucault, 1978). Empowered Danish university boards are constrained by the detailed 'development contracts' they sign with their ministerial masters. Rectors do likewise with their boards. In an age of contracts, lecturers now find themselves signing 'learning contracts' with their students. Empowered 'community' schools in Nepal appear to have been recaptured by a centralist Ministry of Education through a plethora of advisory and regulatory committees which reinsert local officials and their performance targets into the mix. The Chinese case builds upon a new social contract between teacher and pupil, and insists that teachers realign their pedagogy away from the goal of group

socialization towards the self-actualization of the individual student-hero-consumer.

Whilst pervasive in their reach and scope, the empirical studies at the core of this policyscape suggest a heated process of resistance and contest. Academic staff in Danish universities have turned the discourse of ‘world-class’ on its head by reminding government that the institutions leading the international league tables command these positions by virtue of more generous funding systems and greater institutional autonomy. The global vision of the (relevant) knowledge-creating university has opened a legitimate space for Danish academics to learn about ‘best-practice’ abroad and to demand some of the structural features of such systems. For the first time in a generation we are seeing Danish students – as learners *and* consumers - active politically across university campuses. In Nepal, impoverished local communities have been lured into school decision-making positions in the name of equity, participation and social justice and, quite understandably, find it difficult to limit their demands to the realm of education. School management committees are becoming sites for much broader forms of protest and action, not all of which is necessarily ‘progressive’. In China, the call of history is strong and both teachers and students have heard the message of student-centeredness and self-determination as an opportunity to intensify processes of rote-learning, exam preparation and teacher authoritarianism; all in the service of social mobility within the emerging global (read: ‘Western’) economy.

Such complicated and contradictory trajectories should hardly be unexpected in contexts where reform emerges as a partially coordinated concert between global, national and local forces and which is invigorated by a diffuse set of passions and desires. Studies abound of the ways in which ill-defined or hasty initiatives fall flat. What is interesting here are the ways in which groups within each country find new resources, arguments and strategies with which to coordinate action against the very thing that appears to have enabled them (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Such comparative work, in its infancy for sure, suggests many exciting entry points for a revitalized ‘reading of the global’ (Cowen, 1996d, 2000b, 2006a). Unlike the ground-breaking Marxist analyses of the 70s, we are learning not only new things about the power of discourse to inspire, embolden and alienate educational life within states, but also gaining glimpses of the capacity of global communities, connected in some cases by imaginative regimes alone, to speak back with clarity and cohesion.

We are also learning that states, rather than being semi-fixed in the global super-structure, have different resources at their disposal, with their room(s) for maneuver being determined both by the nature of their engagement in these new regimes and the resources they can marshal to challenge them. I have argued elsewhere (Carney, 2009) that whilst Danish universities are responding forcefully to the new managerialism, their positions with a rationalized and disenchanting Western modernity provide little scope for alternative to the further ‘sacrifice of mankind to science’ (Weber, 1992, p. 192). Nepal, on the other hand appears to act strongly as it recalibrates global *liberal* messages and demands for equality and social justice through global *neo-liberal* educational ideology, retaining systems of



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hierarchy and centralism that resonate with key aspects of that country's experience. In China, administrators appear to believe that policies grounded (explicitly at least) in Western (democratic) reform pedagogy can be applied to the service of the economy and isolated from broader social and political struggles. Who would wager that economic and political reform in China can remain compartmentalized within these different life-worlds?

Such research is also enabling us to see that selves are works in progress and are being crafted by forces and with resources that stretch far beyond national borders or stable categories. The global policyscape invites new subject positions but leads to unpredictable sets of identity displays. Who would believe that a Danish university reform aimed at orienting the sector to the future needs of commerce would be challenged by industry lead bodies and employers who now find themselves in agreement with academic workers concerned about issues of basic research and intellectual freedom? Community schooling in Nepal was forced onto the Ministry by donors desperate to circumvent the state in order to reach an excluded populace, yet this initiative has strengthened community desire for a well-resourced and functioning state system of education within a clearly defined and stable nation. Chinese pedagogical reform, in part aimed at centering issues of local relevance into what has been a Han-chauvinist curriculum (Vickers, 2009) is being translated in classrooms as a call for more intense efforts to succeed in exams in order to join the emerging (Han) cosmopolitan elite.

Finally, notions of locality begin to take different form as the embodiment of practices that make possible certain de-territorialized identity displays. Locality in Denmark is emerging through the battle to retain a connection between democratic engagement and education and actors work towards this goal by aligning with international ideas, colleagues and social movements at least as much as they do with new groups within the borders of the country. In Nepal, locality becomes the battles within and around school management committees and communities that bring to surface historical inequalities between peoples, between the nation and the donor agencies that speak for it, and against the uncritical acceptance of Western visions of the 'good life'. For the Chinese actors in our story, locality emerges as deep and confusing conflicts between loyalty to certain elements of an idealized notion of what it means to be 'Chinese' and fascination with partially-grasped images of the Enlightenment subject. The result says less about 'the' Chinese in China and much more about what it means to be a late-modern educated person in a world full of contradiction.

This approach to comparative education is inspired very much by a discontent with the scientific logic that still dominates much of the discipline, and the use of a post-structuralist repertoire of concepts, especially Foucault's understanding of genealogy and of governmentality, aimed to break away from the modernist certainly of so much comparative thinking, and to destabilize if not de-centre the (static) nation state and coherent subject on which most comparative education remains based. The ultimate aim of the program of research was to begin a mapping of the contours of the world in a global age. No small task but one inspired by Hardt and Negri's (2000) notion of the coming 'Empire' of the

multitude. Drawing on the work of Foucault and especially that of Deleuze and Guattari, Hardt and Negri attempt to understand contemporary society in historical terms; not only as transitions and continuities, but explosive breaks and realignments. Whilst recognizing the emergence of a system of global power, this is one based less on the ambitions and will of nation-states and more on abstract, global and universalizing norms. For Hardt and Negri power is omnipresent, dispersed, deeply penetrative and beyond the control of the 'metropolitan centers' that facilitated the spread of modernity and capitalism. And this is where the possibility for action resides, for whilst new and deep-running discourses find favor with policy makers, carrying agencies and implementation bodies, global 'subjects' are increasingly able to draw upon a multitude of resources to contest and mediate external reforms. Ultimately, globalization provides not only deeper interconnectivities between people and places, but the means by which the 'de-centered empire' of global capital can be challenged and ultimately dismantled by the coordinated voices of the 'multitude'.

Hardt and Negri have been dismissed on many grounds. For some, *Empire* is politically naïve; understating the continued importance, albeit in a new configuration, of the nation-state and its collusion with global capital and state-based military power. It over-reaches itself when celebrating the impending victory of the 'multitude' who will come together to expose and over-turn the same political interventions that have disempowered them as late modern subjects (see Balakrishnan, 2003 for a review). However, their analysis of the complexity and inter-connectivity of systems of governance, the unmanageable flow of information, communication and dissent, and the in-built contradictions of advanced capitalism provide one potentially powerful framework with which reconstruct our field and understanding of educational phenomena. That would seem a noble task for a revitalized comparative education. An immediate question, though, is whether such an approach really provides new tools and concepts with which to read the emerging global world or, rather, is just an innovative step within the framework of modernity to better understand interconnected social action which, on closer observation, defies systematic dissection.

(WELL) BEYOND THE NATION STATE:  
INTERCONNECTIVITY, INCOHERENCE AND A BRAVE NEW WORLD FOR  
COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

As long as research continues to work for, or collapse into, resolution, reconciliation, mastery or innocence, it colludes with the closure-seeking appetites of bureaucratic reason, with its punitive mission of transparency, standardization and certainty (MacLure 2006b, pp. 741-2).

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In responding to Hardt and Negri's call, the study of policyscapes attempts to prioritize unpredictability, multiplicity and rupture. It illustrates the ways in which state power is being reconfigured under conditions of globalization, how new identities emerge from hybrid circumstances, and how locality can be mapped when the tropes of 'field', 'place' and 'space' are being redefined. Notwithstanding its ambitious reach, such a project retains a strong link to a modernist heritage of the 'real' and a Marxist logic of production where humans 'act[ing] upon and transform[ing] the material world into commodities with surplus value (Luke and Luke 1990, p. 77). What if, as Baudrillard (2001) insists, capitalism is plagued by 'the contradiction between a virtually unlimited productivity and the need to dispose of the product' (p. 41)? Inspired by analyses of symbolic exchange (notably gift exchange) in earlier societies, Baudrillard argues that 'objects' were once 'inseparable from the concrete relation in which (they are) exchanged' and were thus part of a 'transferral pact' between persons. Rather than 'use value' or 'economic exchange value', such objects carried 'symbolic exchange value' (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 64). Such symbolic exchange value is in 'fundamental opposition to both economic exchange-value and the economy of the sign, for it rests upon an order of culture which is radically other to the ideologies of scarcity, need, wealth and function which legitimate capitalist exchange' (Gane, 2004, p. 134). This understanding formed the basis of a critique of consumer society where objects were understood as requiring signification into order to be consumed. As the commodity transforms into a sign, it enters into 'a "series" in which it becomes immersed within the endless stream of signs'. The separation of signifier and signified leads to a 'proliferation' of signs and the 'violence' of the image which 'entails the eclipse – even death – of the real' (Norris, 2006, p. 468).

Baudrillard elaborates a genealogy of simulation via stages or phases in the transformation of the sign from its earliest mirroring of 'basic reality', through the Enlightenment goal of the 'textual duplication of the real' – in effect 'perverting' a notion of basic reality - to the rise of modernity and 'technicist rationality' with the production of 'goods', 'subjects', 'selves' and 'desires'. The various inscriptions of the self that characterized 19<sup>th</sup> century social science bear 'no resemblance to the familiar, to the visibly "real" of bodily surfaces' and leads us, finally, to the pure simulacrum: 'a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity'. Ultimately, we are left with 'floating intertextual sets of fragmented, and ultimately non-rational signs' (pp. 80-82). Such an analysis leaves us with a very different lens through which to 'read the global':

(the) effacement of all forms of differentiation constitutes *the* (original emphasis) most violent assault on the symbolic order, for here all differences and alterities are attacked by the 'transversalism' of Western culture. And in this respect, the fractal is the most 'advanced' stage of Western development, for it destroys the enchanted forms of reciprocity that enable symbolic exchange, and with this all forms of otherness which pose a threat to itself. The result of this process, Baudrillard argues, is that Western culture

systematically removes everything other to itself from the World, and in the process consigns us to the 'hell of the same'.

(Gane, 2004, p. 139)

Whilst often misread by social 'scientists' to suggest that we are destined to an unavoidable future of disillusionment and disconnect, Baudrillard suggests that science and rationality remain at risk from the symbolic order with its irrationality, mysticism and magic precisely because it is of another order to scientific rationality and value exchange. Here, processes of 'seduction' - 'a black magic for the deviation of all truths, an exaltation of the malicious use of signs' (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 2) - provide the best chances of undermining the march of instrumentalist Western modernity. Through the 'celebration of appearance rather than the pursuit of meaning' and via the 'preservation rather than disenchantment of that which remains secret' can we engage actively in challenging the Western order of value.

Building on Luke and Luke's (1990) example in relation to school knowledge, education in the era of global consumption can be understood as a set of 'commoditised signs, the relationship of which to the "real" is contingent on appeals to a meta-narrative' (p. 87). Where earlier I suggested a shift from static and bounded notions of the state to ones that explored its porous (albeit still traceable) contours, perhaps we need to seek out the residual fragments of states in the face of what Baudrillard calls 'hyper-reality'; those endless simulations of a supposed 'real'. Where earlier I suggested that we reject understandings of the self that are based on coherence, rationality and indivisibility and, instead, look for those multiple and contradictory acts of meaning making that enable selves to make sense of complexity, perhaps we need to look more deeply into the realm of seduction where actors dance (and stagger) between the incompatible worlds of instrumental value and reason, with its threat of disenchantment, and those of symbolic exchange where actors engage in meaning making through the 'light manipulation of appearances' (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 10). Rather than seek out new manifestations of locality by re-inscribing political battles in different (yet still knowable physical) spaces, perhaps the urgent task ahead is to explore and celebrate the ghosts of imagined places and to try to comprehend what these tell us about other people's experiences of education in an era of global modernity.

Finding meta-narratives in the current era may not be an easy or desirable task. I have argued earlier in this chapter that the foundations of this narrative are the ideologies (or what we might now call myths) of individualism and self-determination. Perhaps this is only one way to read the world; one that seems obvious to the modern individual driven by a 'will to know' and a fear of the 'hell of the same'. Perhaps the pace and nature of world(s) of disenchantment and the disappearing realm(s) of the symbolic described by Baudrillard are simply lived and read differently:

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...modernity is not, for Baudrillard, strictly a unilinear process of regression from an enchanted world (characterized by symbolic exchange) to a disenchanted fourth-order of value, but a process whereby symbolic forms, though reduced to a subordinate position within contemporary culture, continue to *haunt* (italics added) this world in the form of its other...

(Gane, 2004, p. 139)

#### EXPLORING MODERNITY'S 'OTHER' - COMPARATIVELY

Perhaps a revitalized comparative education might explore this 'other' as a necessary part of 'reading the global'. In an extension of, but also departure from, the 'policyscape' outlined here, my colleague Ulla Ambrosius Madsen and I are exploring what we term an 'eduscape' constructed around young people's experience of globalization and its relation(s) to schooling in Denmark, Korea and Zambia<sup>iii</sup>. An important part of this work is methodological. How, for example, does one read and act in the world as a young girl in forgotten urban Zambia? What about as a young man in ambitious, but insecure Korea? And what does it mean to be a young Dane, surveying the world from the heights of a school system seen in self-referential terms as the Global ideal itself? These three 'cases' have nothing in common within a construction of comparative education aimed at rigorous analysis and generalization across similar cases. What they do share, though, as do *all* cases, is a complex, submerged drama between the forces of modernity as progress, order and hope and its 'other' as entanglement, disruption and recalcitrance.

Building on the writing of Maggie MacLure, we have resisted the urge to build 'hierarchies, frameworks, abstractions or other methodological crows' nests from which to look down from a distance on the details' of educational life (MacLure, 2006a, p. 733). We argue that educational research must acknowledge and address its 'clarity-and closure-seeking tendencies'. It must look not only at the usual objects of educational ethnography (e.g. physical space, teacher, pupil, text and content) but those things that are deliberately marginalized, avoided or trivialized so that the 'science' of educational research can remain loyal to the enlightenment ideals of truth, coherence and progress. That is no easy task when:

Qualitative method, despite aspirations to openness, nuance and multiplicity, still frequently ends up working for closure. It is, we are, still nostalgic for reconciliation of difference and troubled by ethnographic guilt; still wanting innocent knowledge; still working behind our backs for direct access to the real world behind the fabrications of writing; still undone by appeals and alarms from the 'real' worlds – of experience, relevance, common sense, suffering, ethics, emancipation and empathy.

(MacLure , 2006b, p. 730)

Rather than contribute further to the process of incremental and incomplete understanding and, ultimately, worldly disenchantment, MacLure (2006b) suggests we adopt a 'mobile and ambivalent commitment to the knowledge projects of modernity' (p. 742); bringing to the surface aspects of 'otherness' which might 'disrupt' the discourse of closure 'so thoroughly as to prevent it from being itself' (Jones, 1994, c.f. MacLure, 2006b, p. 731). One reading of 'the Other' might be achieved through the lens of the baroque which has come to stand for 'an entangled, confounded vision that resists the god's-eye perspective and the clarity of scientism':

A baroque method would resist clarity, mastery and the single point of view, be radically uncertain about scale, boundaries and coherence...and honour the obligation to get entangled in the details and decorations, rather than rise above them (MacLure, 2006b, p. 731).

Such an approach would resist the search for stable categories and, instead, 'recognize shifting topographies and oscillations of scale. The 'global', then, might be read through the 'smallest particulars of practices and institutions', as well as through the massive canvasses we assume are necessary for the task. Indeed, a baroque method would dwell on the 'complexity of the specific' and look for 'the intricate entanglements of global and local, representation and reality, sensual and intellectual, particular and general, and so on' (p. 734).

A baroque method would also celebrate the 'recalcitrance of the object' which leads ultimately to a destabilization of the clear distinctions between object and subject and a loss of mastery of both. Here, the object glares back at the researcher, defying closure and destroying interpretative depth. Rather than being aimed at new understandings or categories for analysis, which would then subject the object to new processes of closure and control, such a focus would aim to create a 'shared entanglement' and what MacLure calls an 'ontological panic' (p. 734).

A baroque method would also accept a 'faulty, compromised access to truth, reality or other people'. Not only would it accept 'things dimly glimpsed or half-heard', it would acknowledge that they are 'tinged with the theatricality of performance and tainted by the guilty pleasures of the spectator'. A baroque form of representation would therefore 'have more in common with the magic lantern show than the camera obscura, recognizing its own irremediable entrapment within the phantasmagoria of ideology.' (p. 736).

Finally, a turn to the baroque could evoke the spirit of the European *wunderkammern* with its collections of objects that spanned and celebrated the profane, the humanistic and the scientific, as well as the ancient, the gothic and the (emerging) modern. A 'baroque dislocation of space in miniature', such cabinets of wonder could be regained by bringing to writing events, settings and processes that captured incompatibility, complexity and incoherence. The 'profusion of strange

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and incommensurable objects' defies analytical closure and creates, instead, 'a kind of exhilaration of the senses' which sets 'perception, cognition and imagination in motion. Learning, fascination, enchantment and seduction are caught up in each other' (p. 737).

Rather than base our comparative study of globalization and schooling in Denmark, Korea and Zambia on three self-contained case studies, we have ventured into these geographical places with an understanding that they can no longer be seen only as national narratives about the challenges of riding the crests and troughs of globalization. Globalization is understood more as being the violent spread not only of modernity and its lust for rationality, control and closure, but the surfacing of – indeed the impossibility of suppressing – its ugly, awkward and frivolous other. We have, it seems, two ways to deal with the approaching new epoch: to find new units of analysis, processes of subjectivisation and manifestations of locality - for example via the construction of 'policyscapes' which aim to recalibrate comparative research within a modernist logic – or, as an urgent alternative, to resist the urge for neat categorizes, smooth progressions and lines by celebrating openings, ruptures and entanglements as partial manifestations of modernity's inability to (completely) rid the world of wonder, contradiction, confusion, pain, dislocation and passion. The 'eduscape' being elaborated here is one such attempt. What, then, might this look like?

Rather than locate the three cases in some notion of a 'global' world, we have sought to uncover aspects of the global as they occur in the minutia of daily life. For example, Madsen has shown powerfully the ways in which the Danish compulsory school seeks to embrace 'cultural openness' by welcoming immigrants (who then become stigmatized by their apparent inability to follow the norms of progressive pedagogy) and Greenlanders (with their persistent displays of what their teachers call 'backwardness') and by embracing Africa (especially through field trips) as a world of humility, collective social purpose and purity: the enchanted world lost to the white 'tribes' of the North (Madsen, 2009a). In the process, we learn something about how Danish education is reading the global and very much more about how the global has changed what it means to be Danish. Perhaps we are seeing desperate attempts to pastoralize non-conformity and ignorance because the intensification of modernity (not least through processes of globalization) is bringing to the surface the inconsistencies and contradictions of 'Danishness' as a meaningful category. Perhaps Danish teachers are lamenting the loss of (national) innocence precisely because global processes of complexity and chaos are bringing home the impossibility of comprehending entangled contemporary life in this small corner of Europe.

Our work is also trying to destabilize the accepted objects of field study and, rather than turn these into new (dominating) categories of analysis, leave them hanging in partially understood spaces. How, can and should we, for example, make sense of the Zambian school boy who, when given money to buy school books which he claimed were essential to his future, spent the money on a fashionable (but now empty) backpack, wearing this about the school with a mixture of apparent triumph and defeat? What about the figure of a newly

appointed school library ‘monitor’ who says that he never dared to dream that he might reach such organizational heights and seems unconcerned that the school has no books. How can and should we make sense of Korean high school students who, on the back of 14 hour school days, fall asleep at their desks in great numbers, and what do we make of teachers who ignore this? Surely it is too neat to follow the suggestions of ministries and their university allies who claim that such exhaustion is a physical consequence of intractable policy/political dilemmas. Young Koreans themselves despair that the futures they are being programmed for are at best shadows of the imagined ones inscribed in global youth culture.

So many of the ‘performances’ and ‘half-truths’ encountered in the exploration of this ‘eduscape’ defy, or should defy, dissection by the tools of rational educational science. How, for example does one begin to decipher coherent codes from a ‘careers day’ in Lusaka where employment ‘consultants’ praise the glory of god, capitalism and chastity to young Zambians who long for one meal per day, sanctuary from the depravity of sexual violence in the classroom and home, and know, with all the strength of reason that they will never find meaningful employment on the basis of schooled knowledge or credentials? Is the ethical task to unpack this kaleidoscope and seek to improve matters, or to let it illustrate some of the fraying ends of a distorted modernity in the hope that educational colonizers, missionaries and entrepreneurs will think twice before their next passionate embrace?

An approach inspired by the baroque might also aim to present in all their wonder the mixed, congested and marvelous complexity of schools as they express the entanglements of globalized modernity. How should we treat the Korean school assembly with its mix of martial music, deference to state, roaming ‘year teachers’ checking hair and skirt lengths juxtaposed against its lust to be the ‘global’ school which materializes as computer-mediated classes in (American) English, paintings of Swiss landscapes and early European pedagogical reformers and posters of the Eifel Tower? What of the Zambian school assembly that brings together a Christian missionary zeal to heal and forgive the obscenity of Western (now Chinese) exploitation and the ravages of HIV/AIDS inflicted on pupils - in many cases by the teachers themselves - with the certainties of a development narrative that here, in this place in particular, human capital theory will deliver us? What of the Danish assembly that brings together a sea of national flags, ‘folk enlightenment’ songs, a commitment to cultural diversity and a compulsory (Christian) church service? So many seductions with which to ‘re-engineer’ (or fabricate?) the next comparative education.

#### (A NECESSARILY BRIEF) CONCLUSION

Ring the bells that still can ring.  
 Forget your perfect offering.  
 There is a crack, a crack, in everything.  
 That’s how the light gets in (Cohen, 1992)



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MacLure's writing must be understood in the context of the continued disciplining of British education policy and research, and thus on one level as very local call to arrest the madness of commodification, bureaucracy and audit that is destroying the university in that country. Nevertheless, the totalizing tendencies of modern educational science can be felt much further afield. Within comparative education we continue to search for meaning through new workings of an enlightenment ideal that is both hard to find and nail down, and even harder to reproduce. It is, for most of us, our rationale to understand the world and leave it a better place, and we think that we can do this through the comparative study of educational systems, persons and places. Or at least that is what we proclaim. We can, as our next step, try to re-engage with our shared intellectual histories and methodological tools and continue the task of instrumental improvement: both of our understanding of the world – the '*kosmos*' in Cowen's terms - and of its actors and subjects. We can also take our search in other directions. Contrary to the cries of those who despair of the vagaries of so-called 'post-modernism', both routes are charged with ethics and a commitment to engage in and with 'the world'.

For Baudrillard (1996), processes of theoretical and empirical analysis threaten a further disenchantment of the world. Interpretative strategies must therefore 'make enigmatic what is clear, render unintelligible what is only too intelligible, make the event itself totally unreadable' (p. 104). Rather than deliberate acts of intellectual terrorism, the aim here is lofty: the re-enchantment of a world bought to its knees by rationality. Thus, and in line with the logic of the gift:

The absolute rule is to give back more than you were given. Never less, always more. The absolute rule of thought is to give back the world as it was given to us – unintelligible. And, if possible, to render it a little more unintelligible (p. 105).

What a point of departure for a refashioned comparative education!

#### NOTES

<sup>i</sup> The ideas introduced here take their point of departure in the analysis of the use of post-structuralism in comparative education outlined by Peter Ninnes and Gregory Burnett, to which Cowen and others responded, in *Comparative Education* (vol. 39, No. 3, August 2003).

<sup>ii</sup> An example might be the important critique of transfer paradigms and their modeling logic currently popular in Anglo-American comparative education (Sobe, 2008).

<sup>iii</sup> Madsen has conducted a number of major ethnographies of schooling in rural Denmark, urban Zambia (Lusaka) and inner city South Korea (Seoul), which are currently being brought together as a major study of globalization, schooling and youth (see Madsen, 2009a, b & c for early versions of this work).

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