First, I'd like to express my deep gratitude to Jorge Lucero and Laura Hetrick for this wonderful honor and inviting me to give this lecture. It really means a lot to me, as the article in question, “Studying in the Dark: Notes on Poetic Historiography for Art Education,” (Tervo, 2018) took me closer to the kind of educational darkness I’m discussing in the piece. I would also like to thank Tyson Lewis for initially asking me to write something for that special issue on Agambenian study.

But now, let's turn to the lecture itself.

The two terms placed in the heading, dis-appearence and re-turn – both cut in half and glued together by a dash – derive from a piece I was writing at the time when crafting the proposal for this talk. In that piece, a chapter in a book titled Arts – Ethics – Education (edited by Dennis Atkinson, Carl-Peter Buschkühle and Rafael Vella; a book that will be published later this year), I did a critical reading of a Greek term aphesis; a term used by art educators jan jagodzinski and Dennis Atkinson to theorize what one might call Deleuzian of ethics of art education without negation.

Instead of simply delivering that piece here (I'm happy to send it to anyone interested), I use this talk as an opportunity to further explore what could these concepts do in the intersection of historical and philosophical research in art education. To be clear, my point is not to offer these concepts as tools to be utilized (by myself, by others) in the future but rather to articulate something through them today.

What I'm about to deliver here belongs to my ongoing process of trying to think philosophical research in art education historically and historical research in art education philosophically. While acknowledging that philosophy and history are always intimately connected – or, as Michel de Certeau (1988) put it, “there is no historiography without an explicit or hidden philosophy of history.” (p. 137) – I see no point in fully conflating them into each other; rather, what I'm aiming at is to move through and stay within a terrain between them in which something might take place.

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So, just to give a preliminary definition for both of these terms:

By dis-appearence, I mean a disappearance from which something appears; perhaps something new, perhaps something that, at first, challenges the realm of appearances.

By re-turn, I mean a turn that does not simply return something that has been before (like an origin), but circles “back” into something – something new, perhaps – that sustains the idea of a linearly progressing time.
I initially ended up using these two concepts when trying to better understand the relation between educational authority and a releasement from it – through, for example, the force of aphesis that jagodzinski and Atkinson (drawing from Krzysztof Ziarek) link to art (aphesis means, among other things, releasement).

When exploring the uses of aphesis and its Latin translation remissio, I stumbled upon a passage from Quintilian’s classic text, *Institutio Oratoria*, published around 95 CE in which Quintilian explores the art of rhetoric. In Book 1, Quintilian writes:

> Still, all our pupils will require some relaxation [remissio], not merely because there is nothing in this world that can stand continued strain [continuum laborem] and even unthinking and inanimate objects are unable to maintain their strength, unless given intervals of rest, but because study depends on the good will [voluntate] of the student, a quality that cannot be secured by compulsion. (Butler, 1920, p. 57)

What I find fascinating about this passage is that for Quintilian, the true work of education – both from the perspective of the teacher and the student – always involves worklessness that eventually becomes part of the work. In other words, the absence of work conjures work, a suspension of teaching brings about a devotion to learn.

To utilize the concepts above, for Quintilian it is a dis-appearance of education from education that makes an education of a different degree appear; one where compulsion (that is, authority) turns into good will (that is, authorship). What is central to my argument is that through this dis-appearance Quintilian eventually returns to the authority he tries to shake off as the relaxation (remissio) from “continued strain” (labor) makes sure that the work of education is never over; that the students themselves take up the work in their worklessness – a worklessness that is not devoid of work, but inundated in a will to work. As such, the intervals of rest Quintilian discusses assign education a temporality irreducible to the moments of hard work. Elevated beyond such moments of compulsion and control, education works even when there appears to be no education at all. It has, in short, dis-appeared.

To take this argument a bit further – and central to my piece I’m referring to – it should be pointed out that aphesis (and its Latin translation remissio in Vulgate) appear in two intriguing passages in the New Testament; passages where Jesus makes claims concerning his divine mission on Earth:

> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness [ἀφεσις] of sins. (Matthew 26:28)

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release [ἀφεσιν] to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free [ἀφεσει] (Luke 4:18).

Rather than inserting aphesis/remissio into a Christian typology – in other words, that the truth of aphesis would be fundamentally Christian – I see that the Christian narrative of liberation from the Law through faith – particularly articulated in the epistles of the apostle Paul – offers yet another example of a dis-appearance that re-
turns to an authority embedded in historical progression of time; a time of no more and not yet, as Paul had it. From this perspective, the will to learn – acquired through a release from teaching – functions like Pauline faith according to which “we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law” (Gal. 2:16). Eventually, what such authority means in terms of time, history, and education can be articulated through Jesus’s words in John: “And you know the way to the place where I am going” (John 14:4).

The reason behind this short excursus in Institutio Oratoria and the Bible is that what I’m after in my current research is an approach to a thought of education devoid of good will and faith – a worklessness that re-turns to nothing and refuses to dis-appear. My problem with dis-appearances that re-turn to authority (like good will or faith) is that the difference they are after is often brought within an economy of sameness: that the present (e.g. Quintilian’s continuous strain) must be elevated with the help of what it is not (e.g. Quintilian’s rest) in order to constitute a place proper for it in the flow of time. The authority that re-turns is, then, the authority of progressing time; the authority of putting events in right order (hence knowing where Jesus and his followers are going after death). To re-turn to nothing and to refuse to dis-appear is, then, an attempt to put this temporal logic to task by halting its movement and seeing what else might take place in the present; to not necessarily know where to go.

But before further exploring what would this mean, I’d like to lay some ground to my argument by discussing the educational aspects of historical research – which, after all, was one of my main foci in the “Studying in the Dark.” Notably, both dis-appear and re-turn also resonate with historical research; especially with the notion that a research into the past helps to battle the ahistorical appearances of the present – appearances that may neglect the historical contingency of our understanding of the world. As art education historian Mary Ann Stankiewicz (2017) has explained the importance of historical research for the field, “an interpreted past enables us to make sense of the present, helps mold identity, and enriches understandings of the field” (p. 6).

As it is well known, the idea of “an interpreted past” that “makes sense of the present” is one of the most debated topics in the field of historical research – a debate too broad to be discussed here in detail. What I will do instead is to offer one approach to the intricacies of this debate through these two concepts (dis-appearence & re-turn); an approach that hopefully can put historical research itself in question.

What I’m aiming at here is that through a dis-appearence of the present, historians secure their professional authority by a way of a re-turn: they claim to make the present lose its appearance by turning our attention to something what this appearance lacks: the past. Indeed, historians often assign themselves the privilege of perceiving this curious absent-present past; they can, in other words, unearth the historical truth of the present. This dis-appearence makes a present of a different degree appear; a present that is historical in a sense that it belongs to a historical time – and, most importantly, to its
progression. Like Quintilian’s *remissio* opens the time of education beyond individual moments, a historicized present makes sure that there is always something beyond the appearance of the present: a past that drives history forward.

What I find both fascinating and troubling about historical research is the *difference* that the past (as both *absent-present* and *present-absent*) is expected to introduce in the present. Introducing such difference through historical research involves an educational dimension I’ve called *pedagogy of memory* in “Studying in the Dark”. Here, to remember is to re-turn: a pedagogy of memory stages a scene of history where the knowledge of the past – a difference introduced in the present – puts the past, the present, and the future in their right places in historical time. To draw from Michel de Certeau, one could say that historians *teach* by mastering the places of history they themselves write into the present; a writing that colonizes the distant land of the past. Such pedagogy of memory in which historian’s re-turn to the past (as the authority of progression) that makes the present dis-appear comes close to what philosopher Sarah Clift (2014) calls an “ethics of memory” where “remembering recuperates the past, . . . the subject resists an indeterminate future through recourse to it and . . . the more memory we possess of the past, the better equipped we will be to confront the challenges that lie ahead” (p. 4).

As a cumulative, self-corrective process, this pedagogy of memory commits the past to the future in order to govern the progress of historical time.

This desire to create order by mastering knowledge of the past for the sake of the future perhaps also explains why historians are often so eager to claim all seemingly new things as mere repetitions of the old – that, for example, art educators have argued for something equivalent to what’s nowadays called STEAM already in the late 19th century. According to art educator Mary Hafeli (2009), such repetition is to be avoided not simply because of its seeming redundancy, but also because it hinders the professional development of the field by neglecting previous scholarship (Hafeli calls this “scholarly oblivion” and “institutional amnesia” in art education research in her piece “Forget this Article”). While I do concur that it’s important to look at what our colleagues have done in the past, historians’ desire to overcome repetition in the name of a more cohesive development of the field – an amazingly widespread argument among art education historians – points precisely to the kind of ethics of memory Clift discusses: that the past rescues the present for the sake of the future; that memory is an essential component in historical progression. From this perspective, the repressed truth (to evoke Freud here) of Hafeli’s sarcastic title “Forget this Article” can be understood an authoritarian demand to “Never Forget;” with all its nationalistic connotations.

What re-turns through this demand is, then, an authority grounded on a *genuinely new* knowledge – knowledge produced by historians – that, like good will for Quintilian, keeps history on the move in a *right way*. This is why, quoting from de Certeau (1995), “there is no history but that which has been ‘revised and corrected’” (p. 234).

So, if a pedagogy of memory introduces a difference in the present by making the present dis-appear through a recourse to the past, then the “interpreted past” that “makes sense of the present” that Stankiewicz calls for can be seen as a practice of sense-making in which every word, thing, and thought has its right place in the flow of
historical time. This puts forward an understanding of historians as educators standing firmly by the gates of historical knowledge that, upon entered, cure the dwellers of the present from the diseases of ignorance.

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But this is not the whole story. Haven’t art educators always battled with knowledge; or, to be more precise, battled with the reduction of knowledge connected to learning and teaching into one type of knowing, doing, and making? Despite the fact that the inclusion of visual arts in schools has been always connected to hegemonic hierarchies of knowledge (that is, knowing through art complements other school subjects) art’s contested relation to other forms of knowing, making, and doing means that the history it writes does not necessarily have to re-turn to the sameness it elevates (or completes) – just as the past does not necessarily have to complement the present in the name of a better future.

So, what to say about pedagogy of memory in the face of those other forms of knowing, doing, and making accredited to art? Dustin Garnet (2017) has argued for artful ways of “historying” the past, pointing to the multiplicity of meanings emerging from artistic practice. While applauding Garnet’s work, what I have in mind is not an introduction of a new method for historical research – a method that, upon conjuring a disappearance of present historiographies, would make another kind of history emerge – but rather to explore how artful, or as I have called them, poetic historiographies may resist the re-turn to authority that historians so eagerly practice. In other words, rather than trying to come up with new uses of the past in the present or, alternatively, new uses for art in historical research, I see that both art and history may challenge educational thought that re-turns to an authority grounded on cumulative progression – whether historical time, psychological development, etc.

That said, what I’m trying to articulate here is something similar to what Maurice Blanchot (2010) writes about writing, which, for him, is

admittedly a kind of work, but one that is entirely lacking in reason, that demands nothing, cannot be justified, and cannot be crowned by any recompense. Writing: a singular exigency (call it bizarre) which is more ethical than aesthetic, since it responds to a prescription without obligation or sanction. (pp. 26-27)

Devoid of reason and justification, poetic historiography as art education – or art education as poetic historiography – would find its shape from a sense of time more layered than compartmentalized, less constructive than deconstructive. Here, poetics is not to be reduced to a kind of autonomous l’art pour l’art, in which art constitutes a realm of its own, forcefully separating itself from what it is not; in short, constantly re-establishing itself a place proper. Drawing from Michel de Certeau, it is such endless production of proper places that historiography – and, I would add, art education as well as poetry – ought to put to task if one wishes to tackle authoritarian demands like “Never Forget;” – demands that, as I see them, are based on a kind of horoscopic belief in an originary and authoritative moment one must constantly re-turn to in order to claim authorship over one’s own life.
In this sense, I'm searching for a poetics of educational thought – via art, via historiography – that challenges the kind of dis-appearance of education from education that, like in Quintilian, re-turns to an authority manifested in a will to learn – a will akin to Pauline faith – so prevalent today in calls for an all-encompassing lifelong learning. To search such poetics is to resist a pedagogy of memory in which remembrance paves the way to the future – a pedagogy intimately connected to the practice that historians like Hafeli so fervently criticize, that is, of jumping into every new bandwagon. In both cases, to teach and learn is to break out from the continuous strain of the present; to negate its seeming darkness with the light of new knowledge. In this respect, I'm searching for a poetics of educational thought whose worklessness halts authoritative continuities; or, to borrow from Brian McGrath (2013), “Reading poetry exposes one to a language that does not know what it means.” (p. 2)

How, then, to understand such worklessness that, as I put it before, re-turns to nothing and refuses to dis-appear? I wish to emphasize I'm not arguing for a negation of memory – that the only way to battle the demand to “Never Forget” would be to simply forget. Instead, it means to search for a temporality of education and its historicity not based on cumulation (which, fundamentally, is an additive process, as the Latin *cumulus* [to heap up, to amass...] denotes), but a *coming-together* of times in a radically contingent present. Such coming-together could be articulated along similar lines as what poet H.D. wrote about her experiences of psychoanalysis by Freud himself: “It was not that he [Freud] conjured up the past and invoked the future. It was a present that was in the past or a past that was in the future.” (Doolittle, 2012, p. 9) In other words, the past offers no way out from the present, but stays with it, as a gap in its intelligibility.

This opens up a possibility for remembrance without direct use, a memory devoid of a proper place; a pedagogy of memory that operates not in the transcendental realm of continually progressing time, but participates in shaping our experience of it. If, in linear history, the only thing that doesn’t change is time itself, I see that it is poetics that may change time, together with history and education.

I will end this paper with a short proposal that, like the terms dis-appearance and re-turn, is but an approximation of a work to come. This proposal is yet another naming, or renaming, of what I called poetic historiography in “Studying in the Dark,” that, today, I'm suggesting to call a *history without a home*.

Here, having no home does not mean that one would be home everywhere – the kind of cosmopolitan dream argued by Kant (1963), for whom “it might be possible to have a history with a definite natural plan for creatures who have no plan of their own” (para. 2). Neither is it an attempt to constitute an alternative figure to replace the homesick historian who constantly re-turns to the homely grounds of transcendental authority based on linear time; in other words, a *homeless* figure that would exoticize homelessness or, as some Deleuzians are so keen of doing, nomadism in their search for a more affective relation to the knowledge they seek, produce, and deconstruct. For me, such
figures are easily caught up in the play of differences, where the Other merely elevates (*Aufheben*) the Same; where the Other is reduced into a distorted mirror through which one can recognize oneself.

What I have in mind is a pedagogy of memory that does not lead us back *home* to the assumed origin of the image that memory portrays (e.g. an originary event), but rather teaches through its own "unappropriability" (Agamben, 1993, p. xvii), that is, through the past’s fundamental resistance to reading and writing; a kind of poetics of Relation discussed by Édouard Glissant (1997), for whom “The poet knows that he has absolutely lost the thing he always remembers, the thing he leaves behind.” (p. 40)

Granted, such history does not provide a coherent image of the field for the sake of its future development – a kind of sharp image in the mirror of self-reflection. I don’t even know if such writing can be called history at all. Nevertheless, I see it involves a thought of education in which the past and the present do not eventually re-turn to the Same; where the difference that art, education, or historiography introduce in the present resonates with the otherness that the present already contains. To remember is, then, to put time itself to task, to stand joyfully in the point of no re-turn.

**References**


