

Voices Trying to Reach Out

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In contrast to the individualistic view of voice seen in performativity-oriented education, Paul Standish claims that conversion is enabled by the criteria provided by convention. The exchange of voice is, thus, not one way and that 'the role of texts and teachers both present to [an individual] some possibility of becoming and offering the example of a next self to which she might aspire'. Therefore, it is necessary to address not only students' voice but also teachers' voice regarding the issue of voice in education. Accordingly, individual finds herself not decisively but continually and 'through the vocabularies and the possibilities of confrontation that a good curriculum provides' and she must achieve self-reliance 'through processes of initiation into, and aversion from, cultural practice'. This point discussed by Standish, with no doubt, offers a critical perspective to overcome the problems caused by the sole students' voice. Yet, the process of conversion based on convention should be further explored especially concerning the situation when an individual gains her voice and transforms oneself whilst she is averse to the conventions. This paper attempts to illustrate the process of conversion based on convention especially concerning the situation when an individual gains her voice and transforms oneself whilst she is averse to the conventions.

INTRODUCTION

Paul Standish criticises that it is not sufficient to emphasise the importance of individual's voice to resist the danger of conformity pressed on an individual, and claims that the previous arguments on students' voice in education do not sufficiently present how the education respecting individual's voice can consist, especially regarding the relationship between individuals and the community, in turn pointing out the problem that may be caused by a mere emphasis of individual's voice by performativity-oriented education. He claims that connecting individual's voice with 'an unmediated discovery through education' (Standish, 2004, p. 104) may deny possibilities of learning and limits what is learned and how to learn.

In contrast to the individualistic view of voice seen in performativity-oriented education, Standish addresses that conversion is enabled by the criteria provided by convention (ibid.). He develops this argument along the line of thought of 'finding as founding' (p. 101) explored by Emerson and Cavell. According to Standish, the exchange of voice is not one way and that 'the role of texts and teachers both present to [an individual] some possibility of becoming and offering the example of a next self to which she might aspire' (ibid.). Therefore, it is necessary to address not only students' voice but also teachers' voice regarding the issue of voice in education. Accordingly, Standish draws attention the process of encounter between an individual and her surroundings. An individual finds herself not decisively but continually and 'through the vocabularies and the possibilities of confrontation that a good curriculum provides' and she must achieve self-reliance 'through processes of initiation into, and aversion from, cultural practice' (ibid.). This point discussed by Standish, with no doubt, offers a critical perspective to

overcome the problems caused by the sole students' voice. Accordingly, this essay attempts to illustrate the process of conversion based on convention especially concerning the situation when an individual gains her voice and transforms oneself whilst she is averse to the conventions.

First, it briefly explores the story of the film, *Still Walking*. Second, it analyses one specific scene from the same film in which the main character, Ryota is combative towards his father. When he raises his voice against his father, it seems that Ryota's voice is not properly heard by his father and others. Although his voice appears to be unreachable to others directly and immediately for a long period of time, Ryota's emotion has been received by others, especially by his father, in the end. Ryota became to be able to communicate something—over time—through the process of aversion.

STILL WALKING

Still Walking is a Japanese film written and directed by Hirokazu Koreeda in 2008. At the end of summer, Ryota goes home to his parents for the annual gathering with his recently married wife, Yukari, and their son, Atsushi. Yukari is a widow and Atsushi is a son from Yukari's previous marriage. The gathering is held every year to commemorate the death of Junpei, the family's oldest son and Ryota's elder brother. It seems that Junpei was a good son and his parents are so proud of him, believing that he could have been a physician like his father, if he were alive. Ryota is reluctant to visit his parents for several reasons including the following: First, he does not get along with his difficult father. Second, he feels that his parents compare him to his dead brother, Junpei. Third, because of the previous two reasons, he has a nagging inferiority complex when compared with Junpei.

When Ryota and his family arrives at his parents' house, Ryota's sister, Chinami, is already there with her husband and her daughter. They prepare lunch together and indulge in chatting over childhood memories of Junpei, Atsushi and Chinami. Although the gathering, with lots of home-made dishes and cheerful chatting, seems to be a happy one in the beginning, it gradually becomes clear that the voices of each family member do not reach each other because of the anxiety and empty feelings which occupy them. For instance, the father, a retired physician, does not and cannot join in the family circle of conversation and secludes himself in his old office although he has no work to do there anymore. Whilst pretending to be authoritative, he is isolated and it seems that his only anchorage is his past occupation. Chinami's husband appears to be superficially buttering everyone up. Chinami insists that she and her family will move into her parents' house to take care of her old parents, but her main interest seems to be making her own life more convenient. Her mother, perhaps knowing her daughter's intention, half-listens to Chinami's plan and lives in the memories of her first son. Yukari feels that Ryota's mother unwelcomes her and takes her frustration on Ryota. Ryota feels frustrated with his parents.

A VOICE GOING NOWHERE

There were several moments in which Ryota's frustration increases, for instance, when Yoshio Imai comes to visit them in the afternoon. Junpei lost his life when he tried to save Yoshio in the sea fifteen years ago. After Yoshio left his house in the afternoon, his father says in disgust,

‘why did my son save him, that useless piece of trash’. Ryota responds to his father, ‘don’t call him ‘useless’ and ‘trash’ in front of children’. Yet, his father continues, ‘there’s no point in him being alive’. Chinami responds to him and says, ‘didn’t you hear that he was apologising for being alive?’ Then, she continues, ‘is it Osamu Dazai, the novelist who was apologising like him?’ Then the mother says, ‘No, it’s the comedian, Sanpei Hayashiya, keeping saying “sorry, sorry...”’. Others laugh. Ryota, being a little upset, says strongly, ‘we are not talking about the novelist or the comedian. Stop comparing one’s life to others. Yoshio is doing the best he can. Things do not always work out as you want. However, you can not sit in judgment and call others “useless” and “trash”, father’. Ryota raises his voice against his father criticising his father’s attitude not only toward Yoshio but also toward himself. Ryota sees himself in Yoshio. However, his father seems like he is not listening to Ryota. His voice seems to be unreachable to his father.

A VOICE STILL TRYING TO REACH OUT

Although Ryota’s voice does not reach his father directly, there are gradual changes among the attitudes of Ryota and his father toward the end of the film. After the dinner, their neighbour calls the father for help for her sick mother. The father tells the neighbour that he cannot do anything for her. When the ambulance arrived at the neighbour’s house, Ryota and his father go outside and Ryota sees his father being very disappointed and losing his pride because he could not do anything at all as a long-retired physician. Ryota looks silently at his father. Through the event after the neighbour’s telephone call, the father seems to realise the ineffectuality of his present self. The experience of witnessing the moment of his father’s redundancy also changes Ryota’s feeling towards his father—he comes to have a sort of sympathetic feeling towards his father. In the next morning, Ryota, his father and Atsushi go to the beach. His father tells Ryota they should go out to watch a football match together with Atsushi someday. Their attitudes to each other become softer than ever before. The father may not understand why Ryota was very angry at him at the visit of Yoshio in the way Ryota experiences until the end if at all. Moreover, Ryota and his father never realise their plan to attend a football match before the death of the father. Therefore, there remains the feeling of ‘being late’ or ‘failing to catch the right moment to do the right thing’ in Ryota—the living one.

Going back to the question posed at the beginning of this essay, ‘how does this film explore the idea of conversion based on convention?’, the relationship between Ryota and his father tells us that a voice for the conversion may not reach others on the side of convention directly at the right moment. Yet, the feeling of ‘being late’ which is discussed above shows that human transformation is not something that an individual may discover an apparent meaning of, in the moment of the event, but is a gradual and continuous process in which an individual keeps reflecting upon it throughout her life consciously and subconsciously.

REFERENCES

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