

A LA RENCONTREE DU VISAGE EUROPEEN - LIBRES PASSAGES

Only the absolute stranger can teach us

E. Levinas

We play our role in innumerable recitals

Our only certainty is in the script

W. Shapp

Why gather the life histories of immigrants and represent them with photographs? Distant and foreign topics arouse curiosity and yet transport us to another world, putting us in contact with other forms of thought that widen our perspective.

Personal histories then become narratives: we evolve our mode of thought by and listening and reflecting on. Elemental commonalities found in life stories penetrate our being and amplify our understanding of ourselves.

There is a reciprocal revelation that comes from both the writing of the story and the reading of it; from both the listener and the teller.

Personal stories of immigrants help us to understand cultural diversity and to understand what immigrants encounter in host cities and the difficulties they have to adapt to.

The narrative of others acts as a mirror for ourselves as well. Each persona we meet reveals us another aspect of empathy and brings to the surface our many identities. Identities change by incidental and cultural impact and that situate themselves in time and space. Identity itself is not a stable object, an immutable essence, but a matter of "self-construction" through the telling of one's own story.

Jerome Bruner says that the activity of reflecting can be considered the principle that builds consciousness. It is the ability to turn to the past, to modify the present in the light of the past and also to modify the past in the light of the present.

Representing life histories by images provides another form of telling one's own life story, making these stories and their world accessible and universal to a greater audience.

Globalization hasn't cancelled differences; on the contrary these differences must remain "visible" to be accepted as a value for our multicultural society. Cultural diversity is not something to be eliminated or to be considered fearful.

Particulars in life stories can both mirror and highlight differences. Stereotypes are overcome and prejudices are combated. Narrative research through writing accompanied

by a visual research through photography build a sense of individual identity. It's an action-research, that stimulates community and social bonds while gathers element for reflection. From an intercultural perspective, it is important to create mutual acknowledgement, without losing personal identity.

Telling stories is a human need fused with the desire to know others as well as to understand ourselves better. The capacity survives cultures and generations. Culture itself is a narrative work. Often people use life histories to overcome differences and mistrusts. The tale brings the other closer, transcending ethnic and cultural peculiarities.

The project that Laura and I have carried out sought to break through several barriers.

I am a narrative researcher and she is a photographer. We came from different backgrounds; we met people from the entire world. We faced an interesting challenge to understand and be understood beyond the different languages. Photography and writing proved to be a good companions.

Our work was a success: mixing up people from different cultures was positive and the cooperation even auspicious.

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