
OUTLINES - CRITICAL PRACTICE STUDIES

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Editorial: Why is Outlines – Critical Practice Studies so Critical?

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This editorial points back to the papers published in volume 18. It also announces the transfer of the position of main editor of Outlines – critical practice studies.

One of the papers in vol. 18 relates directly to what is foundational to Outlines - critical practice studies: The encouragement of critique. For this reason it has been given some extensive attention here. Raffnsøe (2017) wrote: What is critique? Critical turns in the age of criticism.

Being Critical

Is critique just a matter of being obsessed with finding faults in other people's work? Does critique mirror a habit of suspicion? Or does it mainly serve personal interest, assertiveness and self-affirmation? And is critique given by academic cult-members who consider themselves privileged and more insightful than the authors whose work they criticize? Such questions are important to a journal, which at its core is "critical". I assume that such agendas might indeed be the case. Critique might serve other purposes than the explicit one - in Outlines and everywhere else, where critique might be voiced. Indeed, critique can turn into caricatures and take the shape of a bitter, self-indulgent arrogance, that tends to delimit itself (and oneself) from the part of the academic world, it criticizes. But that was not the point of critique, Raffnsøe argues, when Kant developed his critical philosophy. Kant developed a critique of critique. To Kant, critique ought to show interest in the purpose beneath (or above) what is criticized, and thus has a much more generative and constructive character. Affirmative, in Raffnsøe's words.

Raffnsøe takes us back to Kant, and even further back to antiquity where critique was used to make distinctions, evaluate and reach decisions. *Krisis* (med.) could denote a turning point in illness, and *kritik* was thus also understood as the medical intervention in the

krisis. Raffnsøe also leads the reader beyond the work of Kant, to Habermas and to his own field of expertise, the work of Foucault.

Can Critique be Protective and Developmental?

According to Raffnsøe, Kant offered us new understandings of critique in the sense that critique should not only examine whether knowledge was "reasonable" or beyond reason - it should also examine itself, self-critically, in order to prevent critique from becoming just as speculative as the knowledge it critiqued, or even turn despotic. Through self-critical introspection, critique should focus on its own genuine purpose, and this, Kant suggested, ought not only to consist in making distinctions between reason and unreason, but rather critique were to act as an affirmative companion and catalyzer of the project criticized.

Following Raffnsøe, Kant maintained that one virtue of critique lies in the act of constraining knowledge from what is speculative and beyond the valid. In so doing, knowledge is protected, but let alone this is quite a conservative move, tendentially destructive and thus a bit of a spoilsport. However, constraining does not only delimit valid from invalid speculations, it equally (given that the critique is accepted) tends to promote continued discoveries and developments under the reduced set of possibilities. Seen in this light, critique can act as a divider of variability that tendentially promotes the production of novelties (Valsiner, 2013). Constraining not only blocks, but also promotes the construction of knowledge, as well as construction of the knowledgeable self. Such critical dialogues can, Kant argued, promote goal-generativity of the knowledgeable, in that it directs attention from "what is" (and what is not) to attention of "what if" and "what ought to". As far as I understand Raffnsøe, such shifts signify a change in attention from being attentive to pure reason to being attentive to practical reasoning and aesthetic judgment; a change, where critique not only delimits reason but is concerned with having an influence. When approached from this angle, critique is not at all a remote, self-indulgent and suspicious affair, nor is it only a (critical) comment to what already is. Rather, here critique embraces what could be and is thus a truly interested developmental companion, or as Schlegel writes "a creator" (Schlegel in Raffnsøe, 2017, p.45), "re-creating and rewriting what it characterizes and evaluates in the light of what it already seems to be on the verge of realizing" (Raffnsøe, 2017, p. 45).

Indeed a promising idea that offers clear guidelines to constructive (or affirmative) critique. But in order to follow such line of thought, the *purpose* of the works to be critiqued ought to be visible or detectable to the reader. This is, to my experience, far from always the case, as purpose often is considered irrelevant or even challenging the validity of the research and results. When purposes are black boxed or the author makes a virtue out of the "Let-the-data-speak-for-themselves" argument, critique has little support to act affirmative, as it otherwise could or would.

New Editor of Outlines - Critical Practice Studies

Having edited Outlines - Critical Practice Studies for the past four years it time for Outlines to be handed over to a new, fresh Editor. Together with the editorial crew and the secretaries, it has been an unforgettable pleasure to publish papers and special issues, which critically investigate and contribute to the ongoing developmental relations between practices and conceptualizations. We have included papers where ideas were consolidated and thorough as well as "young" papers which outlined ideas with the potential to find a

more thorough form in the time to come. This has been a foundational choice and aim of Outlines.

Both theoretically and thematically the horizons have been wide. Drawing on a diverse range of traditions such as discourse analysis, critical psychology, dialogicality, socio-cultural psychology and cultural psychology amongst others, authors have contributed critically to the development of theory (Engestrøm, 2014), theoretical conceptualizations such as dialogue (Heikkila & Seppänen, 2014) and conflict (Kostulski & Kloetzer, 2014), experience (Jóhannsdóttir & Roth, 2014), identity (Morasso & Zittoun, 2014), memory (de Laurent) and learning (Nasciutti, Veresov & de Aragão, 2016) through investigating particular social practices, such as education (Magalhães, M. C. C. , 2016), migration (Mathiesen, 2015), therapy (Soursa, 2015), medicine (Thorgaard, 2014) and health care practices (Aagaard & Borg, 2018). Readers may find inspiration in specific themes and issues, but they are also able to read across the contributions and develop a general critical methodology behind and across the presented variability.

Back to Vol. 18 (1)

The other papers in vol. 18 (1) are no exception to the general trend of the journal: They are relevant, thought-provoking and constructive.

In Bergset's (2017) *School Involvement: Refugee Parents' Narrated Contribution to their Children's Education while Resettled in Norway*, the author investigates the belief, that refugee parents are less involved in their children's education. As "parental involvement" is a culturally constructed understanding, Bergset scrutinizes the literature within the field and discovers quite a narrow and rigid view on what seems to count as "involvement in children's education". Such involvement seems to presuppose that the persons involved already have experience with western institutionalized education. This is of course far from the case amongst refugees. When Bergset investigates the parental involvement in education amongst refugees settled in Norway, she discovers a plentitude of attempts to act in order to improve their children's education, yet many of these deviate from the usual format of possible types of involvement, e.g. by inviting the headmaster to an informal dinner at home to talk things over. Interestingly, to a certain degree the Norwegian professionals also deviate from the standardized format, by e.g. accepting such dinner invitation. This double and interdependent deviation from western standards seems to be an excellent opportunity to develop new and more suitable standards.

In Oute and Huniche's article (2017) *Who Gets Involved with What? A Discourse Analysis of Gender and Caregiving in Everyday Family Life with Depression*, we are taken beyond the mere symptoms of depression and their treatment and into the lives of the depressed persons and their relatives, their changing interaction and care for each other. Through interviews and ethnographic studies the authors demonstrate how offering psychiatric care is weaved into their present and changing understandings of their depressed spouse or relative. Following other discourse analyses related to psychiatric disorders, they argue that the diagnosis of depression is gendered and associated with feminine traits (dependence, lack of power and will, lack of autonomy and emotional sensibility). The authors find that "feminization" of both husbands and wives takes place as they become depressed, and that this shapes the care-responses towards them. On this basis the authors recommend further investigations of the developmental dynamics during psychiatric care for relatives.

In Wittek, Solbrekke and Helstad's (2017) "You Learn How to Write from Doing the Writing, But You also Learn the Subject and the Ways of Reasoning", the authors investigate processes in writing and teaching to write. Based on a critique of a cognitivist conceptualization of learning – and learning to write – they position themselves within a tradition of *academic literacies* that takes inspiration from socio-cultural historical psychology and in particular from the work of Vygotsky. Within this theoretical perspective they set up an educational frame in which writing is part of the students collaboration and trajectories of motivated learning. Students evaluated the collaborative processes of sharing and discussing drafts as well as their continued reflectivity on the writing process through competent teachers very productive, in which they appropriated the "tool" of writing as a personal way of thinking, learning and acting.

These are all great papers, go back and have a read through them, if you have missed out on them so far.

Without the team of competent editors, as well as the student-secretaries, Mark Bauer and Anne Marie Kristensen, there would have been no Outlines-Critical Practice studies. I am very happy to entrust the position as main editor to Eduardo Vianna, LaGuardia Community College, NY.

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