

# Studier i Pædagogisk Filosofi

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## Gender

Pædagogisk Filosofisk Forening

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# Claudia Schumann and Marie Hållander

## Shifting feminist politics in education

### Contemporary philosophical perspectives

The idea for this special issue developed during one of the yearly meetings of the *Nordic Educational Research Association* (NERA). A group of younger researchers interested in feminist and queer philosophical perspectives on education had gathered between the official network meetings and discussed the organizational division between a more narrowly defined philosophy of education, on the one hand, within the network of *The Nordic Society for Philosophy of Education* and on the other hand feminist philosophical perspectives within the networks *Gender and Education* and *Post-approaches to education*. It appeared to us that outspoken feminist and queer theoretical approaches were far more prevalent in the latter two networks whereas they were close to absent within the philosophical network. Furthermore, the fact that critical discussions of gender and sexuality in relation to education were generally perceived as important contemporary concerns was also reflected in the numbers of young researchers that the different networks attracted respectively.

As young researchers interested in feminist philosophy, we are reminded of Hannah Arendt's statement in 1964 (cf. Rebecca Adami's article in the present issue) when – in a rather ironic tone – she comments in an interview with Günter Gaus: "It is possible that one day a woman will be a philosopher". There is a long-standing and well-known feminist discussion around the implications for the discipline philosophy, including philosophy of education, having been dominated by male writers<sup>1</sup> and, we can add, white, heterosexual and bourgeois perspectives. In the light of the division between the networks at NERA, we wondered with Hannah Arendt whether the question of the possibility of feminist philosophy was still unanswered as of today. While many of us felt at home in the philosophical network as we appreciate the variety of traditions and the seriousness of philosophical engagement it allows for, at the same time, the relative absence of feminist perspectives left us feeling out of place and wondering whether we had to change networks in order to pursue our interests. However, the networks which provided a more obvious space for feminist and queer research and scholarship left us feeling out of place for other reasons.

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1 Schumann, C./ Adami, R., Feminism and Education. In: Stone, L. (Ed.): *Interdisciplinary Handbooks Philosophy* (in print).

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The majority of presentations in the *Gender and Education* network had a stronger focus on concrete empirical research questions, even if informed by feminist philosophy and theory. In the network *Post-approaches to education* more theory-driven papers were presented. Nevertheless, in our informal meeting in-between the networks, we discussed whether this left out many feminist philosophies which could not be neatly placed within the so-called “post-perspectives,” such as, for example, feminists inspired by phenomenological, post-colonial, pragmatist, Hegelian-Marxist, Wittgensteinian, and Arendtian traditions.

As a result of these reflections, we organized a session on “The politics of gender in education” during the NERA Conference 2017 within the network of philosophy of education, in this way insisting on a place for diverse feminist philosophical approaches to be explored *in* philosophy and *as* philosophy. Some of us had experienced that this is possible in the yearly meetings of the British group “Women in philosophy of education” supported by funding from the *Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain* (PESGB). This group had been formed on behalf of some female philosophers’ activism in order to contribute to countering the gender inequality. In Arendt’s spirit, they worked for turning her ironic remark “It is possible that one day a woman will be a philosopher” into a historical oddity. When we organized the symposium for NERA 2017, we were inspired by the British group’s work; we understood it as one step forward for us to create such important spaces within philosophy of education in a Nordic context as well.

The present special issue has emerged as a consequence of the NERA 2017 symposium. It is an attempt to be both witness and an active contribution to the shifting feminist politics within the field of philosophy of education and its consequences for thinking education. With specific emphasis on the political dimensions, preconditions and implications of questions of gender and sexuality in philosophy of education, we aim to take into account previous work within the field, raising topics such as ethics of care, relationality, and embodiment,<sup>2</sup> while at the same time extending the on-going discussions within the area. It was of special concern to us to bring into focus how the gendered and sexualized body becomes politicized in education by including post-colonial and queer philosophical perspectives and by moving beyond the binaries female/male, femininity/masculinity. In relation to the Nordic context, this special issue tries to put posthumanist and new materialist feminist perspectives in dialogue with other feminist approaches, in this way extending the work of authors like Hillevi Lenz-Taguchi<sup>3</sup> in the Nordic countries.

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2 Cf. for example: Todd, Sharon/ones, Rachel/ O’Donnell, Aislinn (2016): Shifting education’s philosophical imaginaries. Relations, affects, bodies, materialities, *Gender and Education*, Vol. 28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2015.1134860>; Griffiths, Morwenna/ Hoveid, Marit Honerod/ Todd, Sharon/ Winter, Christine (2015): Re-Imagining Relationships in Education. Ethics, Politics and Practices, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118944707>.

3 Cf. for example: Lenz-Taguchi, Hillevi (2017): “This Is Not a Photograph of a Fetus”. A Feminist Reconfiguration of the Concept of Posthumanism as the Ultrasound fetus image, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23/9, pp. 699-710, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417732644>.

The first article by Karin Gunnarsson and Simon Ceder explores the phenomenon of touch in educational practice from a posthumanist feminist perspective, arguing that touch is often pre-supposed without further theorization in educational research. By challenging a subject-centered, anthropocentric understanding, they develop a posthuman notion of touch as continuously present, with multiple orientations, and in relational intra-action. Gunnarsson and Ceder emphasize two particularly important aspects in the relation between touch, education and posthumanist feminism, namely, body and nature-culture, and also critically discuss some challenges that posthumanist feminism poses in general as well as in the specific case of theorizing the phenomenon of touch.

In a feminist perspective drawing on Hannah Arendt and Grace Jantzen, Lovisa Bergdahl's article investigates the 'language of crisis' employed in educational discourse. As a patriarchal invention rooted in a specific understanding of temporality, this language draws on images and metaphors related to war and violence, justifying politicians and reformers to "pull into schools with 'heavy artillery', initiating by force yet another far-reaching policy reform." Drawing on Hannah Arendt's notion of natality and birth, Bergdahl explores what a different root metaphor for a language of education could offer. Rather than a simple shift from the language of death and crisis in the West towards natality and birth, she suggests that it would allow addressing the tension *between* continuation and renewal, past and future, death (of the old) and birth (of the new).

In a similar vein to Lovisa Bergdahl's demonstration of the way in which the "language of crisis" can be transformed with Arendt and Jantzen, Aislinn O'Donnell sheds critical light on the prevalent language of "skills talk" and its consequences for educational practices with the help of alternative feminist materialist visions. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Isabelle Stengers, Susan Oyama and Elizabeth Grosz, O'Donnell seeks to counter the de-materialising turn to generic skills talk that has affected contemporary discourses and practices of education (and work) with a perspective which draws attention to what she calls, material thinking, a "pluralistic, emergent and attenuated approach to thinking." She privileges sustained engagement and intimacy with concrete subject matter to counter discourses of generic skills, and indeed the wider shift to algorithmic governance, and to retrieve a sense of the common world.

In Rebecca Adami's article, Hannah Arendt's thought also has a central place. The argument starts from the ambivalence in Hannah Arendt's and Simone de Beauvoir's positioning in relation to philosophy. Re-reading Arendt's political theory on appearance in the public through a feminist lens, she problematizes issues of representation and the possibility of political action. Drawing on Bonnie Honig's (1995) agonistic interpretation of Arendt as well as Clare Hemming's (2012) reflections on affective solidarity, Adami discusses "the impossibility for 'female' philosophers to ignore identity politics in the public reception of their work."

Continuing the question of what can appear in public and how, Marie Hållander's article gives a feminist and postcolonial critique of Giorgio Agamben's concept of "profanation". How do objects in educational situations that are profaned, that is, "placed on the

table” in order to be “played with,” become usable as public goods? And how do different bodies inhabit the public school? Hållander pushes earlier analyses by Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons further. While agreeing with their defence of the public school as a place for “free play” against maxims of productivity and effectiveness, she critically questions whether social and cultural aspects can equally be suspended; rather we live them, from within. With the help of Sara Ahmed, the article explores the act of profanation in cases of representations of social injustice and suffering in teaching.

In Claudia Schumann’s article, Sara Ahmed’s work is put into dialogue with the post-humanist feminist perspective, focusing on the respective understanding of critique. Her article takes as a point of departure the recurring experiences of happiness, relief, irritation and frustration while teaching on diversity in a Swedish school leadership program. These affective responses are related to the theoretical debate between different feminist perspectives which defend a more negative (paranoid) mode of critique on the one hand, or a more affirmative (reparative) one on the other. Rather than opening new binaries, Schumann argues that we should multiply our modes of critique in a Baradian, diffractive spirit.

The present issue, as indicated in the title, may be understood as a contribution to further shifting feminist politics in philosophy of education. Of course, this issue can by no means be understood as comprehensive or even representative of the vast amount of work that is being done in the field of feminist philosophy in all the different areas of educational research. Rather, we have collected contributions by a variety of researchers that position themselves in the field of philosophy of education and are in different ways inspired by feminist philosophers. We hope this issue will contribute to continuing and intensifying the feminist conversation both within the philosophical network and between and across the different networks, leading to a transformation and further possibilities for network-overlapping collaboration and dialogue.

# Simon Ceder och Karin Gunnarsson

## Som en hand på axeln

### Beröring som posthumanistiskt feministiskt fenomen

#### Abstract

[A Hand on the Shoulder: Touch as a Posthuman Feminist Phenomenon] With a posthuman feminist perspective, we explore touch as a phenomenon in the philosophy of education. Our argument is that touch is one of the prominent phenomena in educational contexts and therefore it requires closer theoretical investigation. In this article, we seek to challenge a 'subject centric' and 'anthropocentric' perspective, proposing a posthuman approach where touch is relationally intra-active and constantly present with multiple directions. Inspired by the methodological approach 'concept as method', we explore the phenomenon of touch through tracing-and-cartographing how it is used in educational texts. Two central aspects – body and 'natureculture' – appeared in the intersection of touch, education and posthuman feminism. Touch as an educational phenomenon is seen as active in highlighting everyday activities in educational practices, and pushing them to be questioned and disrupted. To conclude, we raise a few questions and discuss some challenges that emerged while working with touch as a posthuman feminist phenomenon.

#### Keywords

touch, posthumanism, feminism, intra-action, body, natureculture

## 1. Inledning

Beröring är ett centralt fenomen inom pedagogik, skola och undervisning. Exempelvis används beröring av pedagoger och lärare för att trösta, stärka eller förmana elever. Det kan ske i en mer organiserad form som kompismassage eller att klappa en bokhund inför lästräningen. Beröring sker tillsammans med pekskärmar, kläder, pennor, stolar och bänkar. Det finns i studiecirklar, på museum, kulturhus, vid teambuilding och i träningslokaler. Beröring är ett fenomen som beforskats inom en mängd olika discipliner samt med olika teoretiska ingångar och tillvägagångssätt.<sup>1</sup> Feministen bell hooks framhåller att "before words are spoken in the classroom, we come together as bodies"<sup>2</sup> men att vi är rädda för att erkänna denna beröringens närvaro i klassrum och andra pedagogiska praktiker. Vad bell hooks

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1 Se t.ex. Constance Classen (red.), *The book of touch*, (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Alberto Gallace & Charles Spence, *In touch with the future: the sense of touch from cognitive neuroscience to virtual reality*, (Oxford: Oxford university press, 2014).

2 bell hooks, *Teaching critical thinking: practical wisdom* (London: Routledge, 2010), s. 153.

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efterfrågar är att vi gör rum för beröring och det kunskapande som det innefattar. hooks avslutar med uppmaningen att "tracing the role played by touch in all our efforts to teach is a vital place of study: we need to know more".<sup>3</sup> I denna text tar vi oss an hooks uppmaning om att vi behöver veta mer om hur beröring inverkar i undervisning och lärande. Vi gör det med en ansats att utforska beröring som pedagogiskt fenomen med ett posthumanistiskt feministiskt perspektiv.

Utbildningsområdets bakgrund i en humanistiska bildningstraditioner har till stor del premierat tanke före kropp; subjekt före relation; kognition före sensibilitet.<sup>4</sup> Beröring som fenomen hanterar just de nedprioriterade aspekterna kropp, relation och sensibilitet, varför dessa inte fått någon central position inom utbildningsforskning. Pedagogikens humanistiska idétraditioner har dock blivit ifrågasatta av utbildningsteoretiker för att reducera vad det innebär att vara människa eller elev till något förutbestämt.<sup>5</sup>

En posthumanistisk analys fortsätter denna kritik men utmanar även det faktum att humanistiska teorier framförallt hanterar mellanmännsliga frågor. Vi argumenterar för att vi som pedagoger – lärare och forskare – tillsammans med posthumanistisk teori kan bli uppmärksamma på beröring som ett komplext fenomen och inte utgå från förgivettagna antropocentriska och subjektscentriska positioner av elevers och lärares handlingar. Lärare kan se klassrummet som en plats för processer av samskapande beröring snarare än en plats för individuella elever. Detta kan leda till att lärare får syn på nya pedagogiska beröringsfenomen som den tidigare inte noterat och uppmärksamma den mångfald av aktörer och göranden som inverkar i praktiken. Många pedagogiska filosofer och utbildningsteoretiker har hanterat humanismkritiken då den är oerhört ihoptrasslad med hela utbildningsprojektet och bildningstanken. Den post-antropocentriska poängen har dock inte varit särskilt framträdande inom utbildningsområdet, med undantag för exempelvis Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, Helena Pedersen och Affrica Taylor. Inom pedagogisk filosofi finns ett fåtal bidrag till denna diskussion, exempelvis John Weavers diskussion om bioteknologiska effekter på människan utifrån ett utbildningsperspektiv,<sup>6</sup> Simon Ceders posthumanistiska analys av teorier om pedagogisk relationalitet<sup>7</sup> samt bidragen i temanumret 'Ecologizing Philosophy of Education' i *Studies in Philosophy and Education*.<sup>8</sup>

3 hooks, s. 157.

4 Sharon Todd, "Between Body and Spirit: The Liminality of Pedagogical Relationships." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 48, nr. 2 (2014): 231-245, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12065>.

Richard Edwards, "The End of Lifelong Learning: A Post-Human Condition?" *Studies in the Education of Adults* 42, nr. 1 (March 2010): 5-17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2010.11661585>.

5 Gert Biesta, *Bortom lärandet: demokratisk utbildning för en mänsklig framtid* (Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2006); Sharon Todd, *Att lära av den andre: Levinas, psykoanalys och etiska möjligheter i utbildning och undervisning* (Lund, Studentlitteratur, 2008).

6 John Weaver, *Educating the posthuman: Biosciences, fiction, and curriculum studies* (Dordrecht: Sense, 2010).

7 Simon Ceder, *Cutting through water: Towards a new theory of educational relationality* (Diss. Lund: Lund University, 2015).

8 Ramsey Affifi, Sean Blenkinsop, Chloe Humphreys, and Clarence W. Joldersma. "Introduction to Ecologizing Philosophy of Education." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 36, nr. 3 (2017): 229-241, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-017-9574-3>.



Arbetet med beröring som pedagogisk-filosofiskt fenomen med utgångspunkt i en posthumanistisk teoribildning ger inga fasta svar eller lösningar utan utmanar oss till nya frågor och problem. Bland andra har filosofen Donna Haraway inspirerat oss till att utforska vad som skapas i beröring genom att fråga "which worldings and which sorts of temporalities and materialities erupt into this touch?"<sup>9</sup> Genom att närstudera fenomenet beröring, menar vi, ges möjlighet att uppmärksamma hur rörelse och tillblivelse är något ständigt pågående och skapar berörda och berörande kroppar med mening och sammanhang. Vi ser beröring som ett fenomen som fungerar både för att uppmärksamma vardagliga göranden i pedagogiska praktiker och innefattar en kraft att ifrågasätta och förskjuta dessa. Mer konkret bidrar vi med att förskjuta idén att beröring inom pedagogik enbart innefattar separata mänskliga subjekt. Det innefattar bland annat en strävan efter att tänka bortom dikotomier som privilegierar exempelvis människa framför djur eller subjekt framför relation. I denna artikel kommer vi att fokusera på två av den feministiska posthumanismens mest centrala tänkare, Karen Barad och Donna Haraway. Båda har väl utvecklade filosofiska resonemang med djup vetenskapsteoretisk och feministisk förståelse, men en annan orsak att vi valt just dessa är att de båda har skrivit om beröring. På vilket sätt posthumanism är feministisk och på vilket sätt Barads och Haraways tankar kan hjälpa oss i studerandet av beröring återkommer vi till nedan.

### Att studera beröring som posthumanistiskt fenomen

Med utgångspunkt i posthumanism förstås beröring i denna artikel som ett *materiellt-diskursivt fenomen* som ständigt görs och omskapas genom relationer och praktiker.<sup>10</sup> Beröring som fenomen blir ett görande eller ett verb och studeras i relation till de praktiker eller sammanhang som konstituerar det. För att undersöka detta fenomen antar vi i denna artikel en metod där vi arbetar med texter som på olika sätt behandlar och konstituerar beröring. Det är framförallt vetenskapliga texter som behandlar beröring inom pedagogiska sammanhang. Urvalet av dessa texter har gjorts utifrån en ansats att kartlägga en mångfald av hur beröring görs som pedagogiskt fenomen. Artikeln kopplar samman med och knyter an till forskning dels om beröring inom pedagogiska praktiker, dels posthumanistisk feministisk forskning inom pedagogik.

Utforskandet av fenomenet beröring har genomförts med inspiration från Hillevi Lenz Taguchis framskrivning av "begreppet som metod".<sup>11</sup> Lenz Taguchi arbetar med filosofen Gilles Deleuzes två begrepp spåra och kartografera. Tillsammans med dessa formar hon en metodologisk filosofisk hållning som innebär att arbeta med begrepp i en dubbel och sammanflätad rörelse. Denna dubbelhet innebär att samtidigt spåra "begreppets artikulations-

9 Donna Haraway & Nicholas Gane. "When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?" *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, nr. 7-8 (2006): 135-158, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406069228>.

10 Karen Barad, *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

11 Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, "The Concept as Method." *Cultural Studies <-> Critical Methodologies* 16, nr. 2 (2016): 213-223, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616634726>.

linjer och bestämmande stratifieringar” och att kartografera begreppets “läckor, brott och sprickor” för att omkonstituera och förskjuta begreppets “betydelser och materialiserande praktiker.”<sup>12</sup> Utifrån detta har vårt analytiska arbete haft fokus på mångfald och rörlighet snarare än att fånga en enhetlig mening av beröring. Det har inneburit att analysen syftar till att “beskriva den relationella implosionen av betydelser och materialitet inom ett fenomen och vilka effekter det får”<sup>13</sup> i pedagogiska sammanhang. Implosionen ger en rörelse där vi som forskare, de texter vi arbetar med och begreppet vi analyserar formar en forskningsapparat i ständig förändring.<sup>14</sup> Det formar ett föränderligt samskapande både av fenomenet och i relation till forskningsapparaturen. Att spåra-och-kartografera innebär att studera ett begrepps rörliga mångfald och rymd. Genom att sammankoppla texter med posthumanistisk teori har ett ytterligare analytiskt fokus varit att inter文enera med begrepp och texter för att på så vis förskjuta och omförhandla hur beröring görs.

Att genomföra forskning kan också ses som beröring. Vi blir berörda av texter, material, erfarenheter och genom vårt engagemang i dessa berör vi i vår tur dem tillbaka och vidare; intra-aktion och transformationer åt alla håll.<sup>15</sup> Det betyder att den etiska dimensionen av beröring även finns ständigt närvarande i vår forskningspraktik. Vi genomför urval av texter, citat och referenser inte objektivt utan ihopkopplat till våra antaganden och utgångspunkter. En feministisk posthumanistisk forskningspraktik ser vi kopplad till att vara medveten inför vilka perspektiv som reproduceras, vilka forskare som citeras och på vilket sätt kritik framförs. Vi har försökt att inte ställa perspektiv emot varandra på ett binärt sätt för att framställa det “andra” perspektivet som sämre än vårt föreslagna, annat än av rent retoriska eller argumentationsmässiga anledningar. Främst har vi respektfullt velat erbjuda en blick på vad det feministiska posthumanistiska perspektivet kan bidra med i förhållande till beröring.

Syftet med denna artikel är således att utforska beröring som pedagogisk-filosofiskt fenomen med ett posthumanistiskt feministiskt perspektiv. De frågor som guidar detta syfte är för det första hur beröring görs i pedagogiska sammanhang och för det andra vilka möjligheter och glapp som detta görande skapar tillsammans med posthumanistisk feminism. I den spårande-och-kartograferande analysen har två centrala aspekter framkommit som särskilt betydelsefulla i relationen mellan beröring, pedagogik och posthumanistisk feminism. Dessa aspekter – kropp och naturkultur – utgör också stommen i artikelns disposition. Vi inleder artikeln med en teoretisk situering och introduktion av posthumanistisk feminism. Därefter följer den spårande-och-kartograferande analysen av beröring i relation

12 Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, “Ultraljudsfosterbilden: en feministisk omkonfigurering av begreppet posthumanism,” I Bosse Bergstedt (red.) *Posthumanistisk pedagogik: teori, undervisning och forskningspraktik* (Malmö: Gleerups, 2017, kap 11, s. 167-189), s. 176.

13 Cecilia Åsberg, Martin Hultman & Francis Lee, “Möt den posthumanistiska utmaningen,” I Cecilia Åsberg, Martin Hultman & Francis Lee (red.) *Posthumanistiska nyckeltexter* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2012, kap. 3, s. 29-45), s. 35.

14 Lenz Taguchi, “Ultraljudsfosterbilden: en feministisk omkonfigurering av begreppet posthumanism,”

15 Karin Gunnarsson, “Responding with care: a careful critical approach within educational health promotion”. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology* (kommande).

till de två aspekterna kropp och naturkultur. Avslutningsvis lyfter vi ett antal frågor som uppstått i arbetet med begreppet beröring och posthumanistisk feminism i pedagogiska sammanhang.

## 2. Situering av posthumanism inom feministisk teori

I detta avsnitt ska vi situera och diskutera hur posthumanism fungerar som en teoretisk rörelse kopplad till en feministisk tankevärld. Vi vill dock poängtera att benämningen posthumanism även används inom ett bredare spektrum av cultural theory, filosofi, miljöforskning, kritiska djurstudier, teknik- och vetenskapsstudier och pedagogik.

Ett centralt tema hos ett flertal feministiska inriktningar har varit att utmana en individualistisk, atomistisk, androcentrisk världssyn för att presentera en teoretisk världssyn baserad på ett feministiskt tänkande. Deras ansats har förutom att synliggöra och kritisera de negativa konsekvenserna för kvinnor i ett patriarkat, även handlat om att skapa motbilder till en patriarkal struktur. Ett exempel på detta är Luce Irigarays teoretiserande utifrån bilder av moderskapet som en reaktion mot vad hon kallar det fallogocentriska språk som används inom psykoanalys, filosofi och samhälle.<sup>16</sup> Ett andra exempel är queerteoretikern Judith Butler och hennes framskrivning av performativitet och subversivitet som skapande kraft av världen, dess sociala rum och kroppar. Butler utmanar ett synsätt på makt som givna positioner och menar att det kan förändras genom aktivism, språk och handling.<sup>17</sup> Irigaray, Butler och andra har varit involverade i en kritik mot, och utveckling av, återkommande dikotomier såsom man/kvinna, aktiv/passiv, subjekt/objekt. I fallet med subjekt/objekt har dessa teoretiker inte nöjt sig med att förskjuta kvinnans position från objektets till subjektets. Istället har själva frågan om subjektets ontologisk prioritet ifrågasatts till förmån för mer relationella, performativa och komplexa antaganden.

Även om såväl Irigaray som Butler har studerat fenomenen både materiellt och diskursivt har ändå tyngdpunkten inom poststrukturellt feministiskt tänkande varit den språkliga dimensionen. Vidare hanterar sociokulturella eller konstruktivistiska feministiska teorier en mellanmänsklig dimension vilket medför att icke-mänskliga aspekter blir osynliggjorda eller nedprioriterade. En posthumanistisk feminism tar sin utgångspunkt i de viktiga bidrag tidigare feminister gjort men vill också innefatta ytterligare en starkt dominerande maktaspekt: människan själv.<sup>18</sup> I denna artikel synliggör vi denna aspekt under benämningen antropocentrism; strävan efter att överkomma denna position benämns post-antropocentrism. Den inom feminismen så centrala frågan om makt tar ofta sin utgångspunkt i ett perspektiv där enskilda individer agerar utifrån sina erfarenheter och subjektspositioner. Trots de poststrukturellistiska och feministiska antagandena om subjektets fluiditet och performativitet kvarstår subjektet ändå som många av dessa teoriers utgångspunkt, varför

16 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

17 Judith Butler, *Gender trouble. Feminism and the subversion of identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990).

18 Rosi Braidotti, *The posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); Karen Barad, *Meeting the universe halfway*.

vi väljer att kalla detta problem för subjektscentrism. För att sammanfatta positioneringen av posthumanism i feministisk idétradition så vill vi i detta sammanhang således lyfta två punkter som posthumanism arbetar med att överkomma: antropocentrism och subjektscentrism. Hur detta görs kommer att beskrivas i nästkommande avsnitt.

### Från interaktion till intra-aktion och relata

I denna artikel antar vi ett posthumanistiskt intra-aktivt perspektiv och arbetar med rörelse och relationer som ontologiska utgångspunkter. För att fördjupa resonemanget om beröring fokuserar detta avsnitt på begreppet intra-aktion då detta utmanar och ifrågasätter humanistiska förgivettaganden om vad som agerar inom ramen för beröring.

Det vi kallar kritiken mot subjektscentriska perspektiv innebär att vi efterfrågar förändrade synsätt inte främst på subjektet utan på frågan om aktörskap och agens. Beröring från ett subjektscentriskt perspektiv kan ses som interaktion: två mänskliga subjekt som agerar då de går in i beröring (ofta att den ena berör den andra) och sedan kommer de ur beröringen och är då något annorlunda i sin subjektivitet. I denna analys antas den ena parten ha lärt sig något av beröringen, eller ha förändrats så att den är mer mottaglig och motiverad för studier. Då antas beröringen ha fungerat framgångsrikt, och som ett medel eller specifik intention. Även om denna syn på interaktion innehåller intersubjektiva element är utgångspunkten fortfarande det enskilda subjektets tillblivelse. I denna artikel hämtar vi istället inspiration hos Barads förskjutning av interaktion till *intra-aktion*.<sup>19</sup> Det viktiga är inte enskilda subjektets handlingar, utan att subjektiviteten är ett fenomen som alltid uppstår som en effekt av relationer, eller intra-aktion, som består av såväl sociala som materiella delar.

Begreppet intra-aktion är en del av Karen Barads mer omfattande teoretiska system inom ramen för hennes teori *agentiell realism*. Vi hämtar inspiration i denna teori och från Barads framskrivning av 'thingification' i vår kritik mot subjektcentrismen. Bakgrunden till detta teoribygge beskriver Barad på följande sätt: "Liberal social theories and scientific theories alike owe much to the idea that the world is composed of individuals with separately attributable properties".<sup>20</sup> Denna kritik kommer ur en feministisk förståelse av världen och

19 Intra-aktion ligger nära många andra begrepp i posthumanistisk teoribildning där en central idé är att subjektet inte är utgångspunkt. Några exempel på närliggande, men inte synonyma, begrepp är monism (Baruch/Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*. (London: Penguin Books, 1996 [1677])); Rick Dolphijn & Iris van der Tuin, *New materialism. Interviews and cartographies*. (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 1996 [1677]), platt ontologi (Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive science and virtual philosophy*. (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2002)), rhizom och assemblage (Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*. London: Continuum, 2004 [1987]), generalized symmetry (Michel Callon, *The sociology of an actor network: The case of the electric vehicle*. In M. Callon, J. Law & A. Rip (Eds.), *Mapping the dynamics of science and technology: Sociology of science in the real world* (19-34). (London: Macmillan, 1986)), mangle (Edward Pickering, *The mangle of practice: Time, agency and science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), tiny ontology (Ian Bogost, *Alien phenomenology. Or, what it's like to be a thing*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012)), mesh (Timothy Morton, *The ecological thought*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010)), och aktör-nätverk (Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)).

20 Barad, *Posthumanist performativity*, s. 813.

Barads teoribygge kombinerar feministisk vetenskapsteori med sin akademiska bakgrund i teoretisk fysik. Här ser vi alltså hur posthumanism fortsätter att arbeta med feministiska frågor om makt, etik och privilegium där centriska positioner får ontologiskt och epistemologiskt företräde. Vi följer här Barads argumentation i kritiken mot det mänskliga subjektets förgivettagna position, men lika mycket är hennes kritik en vetenskapsteoretisk kritik av det vi tidigare refererade till som 'thingification':

"This account refuses the representationalist fixation on words and things and the problematic of the nature of their relationship, advocating instead a relationality between specific material (re)configurings of the world through which boundaries, properties, and meaning are differentially enacted (i.e., discursive practices, in my posthumanist sense) and specific material phenomena (i.e., differentiating patterns of mattering)."<sup>21</sup>

Problemet med separationen mellan språk och materialitet är att den materiella delen av fenomenets intra-aktioner har nedprioriterats jämfört med den språkliga. Meningsskapandet, språket, i vårt samhälle kopplas dessutom till en mänsklig uppfattning av vad världen är. Här föreslår Barad att vi istället bör utveckla ett post-antropocentriskt användande av mening som inkluderar materialitet och icke-mänskliga aspekter. Samtliga intra-aktioner skapar mening och/eller kunskap, dock inte på samma sätt som människan gör. Genom användandet av begreppet materiellt-diskursivt visar Barad att mening inte enbart är språkligt/diskursivt skapat av människan, utan även att materialitet ständigt skapar sig själv och annat meningsskapande. Karen Barad betraktar diskurser och materialitet som agentiella snitt ur världens ständigt pågående intra-aktioner. Effekten av ett snitt – t.ex. diskurser och materialiteter – benämns här *relata*. Utifrån intra-aktion kan en mängd agentiella snitt dras fast inte nödvändigtvis på samma sätt som människor eller forskare vanligtvis uppfattar världen. Gunnarsson förklarar att "aktörer eller fenomen inte existerar innan de möts utan blir till i mötet. Intra-aktion blir ett centralt begrepp för att beskriva hur diskurser och materialitet ömsesidigt och oundvikligt samskapar varandra".<sup>22</sup> Observera att diskurser och materialitet också blir till i denna samskapande process – intra-aktion innebär således *inte* att färdiga aktörer samarbetar och skapar något tillsammans. Vad menar Barad då egentligen är denna materialitet som är ständigt närvarande i intra-aktioner?

"Matter is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification; nor is it an uncontested ground for scientific, feminist, or Marxist theories. Matter is not a support, location, referent, or source of sustainability for discourse. Matter is not

21 Barad, *Meeting the universe halfway*, s. 139.

22 Karin Gunnarsson, *Med önskan om kontroll: figurationer av hälsa i skolors hälsofrämjande arbete*. (Diss. Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet, 2015), s. 57.

immutable or passive. It does not require the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete it. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity.”<sup>23</sup>

Utifrån ett posthumanistiskt perspektiv och Barads agentiella realism är beröring något direkt relationellt medan delarna av relationen kan härledas ur detta intra-agerande. De relata som är inblandade i beröring är alltså inte subjekt som finns till före beröringen, utan de är effekter av den intra-aktiva beröringen.

### Intra-aktiv naturkultur

Precis som Barad utvecklade Donna Haraway sin teoretiska position genom ett möte mellan naturvetenskap och feminism; i Haraways fall med bakgrund inom biologi. När Haraway ägnar sig åt relationer av olika slag – människa/teknik, människa/natur, människa/djur – gör hon det genom att implodera dessa relationer till en figuration som sedan studeras situerad i sin komplexa kontext. Relationer existerar alltså inte mellan förutbestämda entiteter, utan Haraway lägger stor vikt vid att visa att dessa figurationer i sig har samma ontologiska status som idag förgivettagna kategorier såsom människa, djur, osv. Här framkommer hur Haraways teoretiska förståelse är tätt sammanlänkad med Barads syn på intra-aktion och relata. Genom etablerandet av det imploderade begreppet *naturkultur* avser hon visa att natur och kultur är aspekter som är ständigt intra-agerande och att varje gång respektive del studeras separat är de en effekt av sin ursprungliga situering. Liksom Barads pågående intra-aktioner beskriver Haraway att naturkultur är relationell: “Relationship is multiform, at stake, unfinished, consequential”.<sup>24</sup>

Begreppet ‘naturkultur’ är Haraways sätt att visa att natur och kultur aldrig har varit separerade entiteter, utan alltid intra-aktiva aspekter av fenomen. Naturkultur är ett imploderat begrepp som påminner oss om att i forskningen inte godtyckligt repetera etablerade binärer när fenomenen i sig varken uppkommer ur binärparen eller yttrar sig genom dessa. En annan anledning till användandet av naturkultur och andra imploderade figurationer är att separationen mellan förgivettagna binärer oftast har uppstått ur mänskligt språk. Färgat av humanistiska antropocentriska idéer ger språket företräde till den mänskliga kulturen före den icke-mänskliga naturen.

Efter att ha ifrågasatt gränserna mellan människa-teknik respektive människa-natur ägnar Haraway sig i flera verk åt relationen människa-djur. I *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* utforskas människa-hundrelationer och i *When Species Meet* studeras de intra-aktioner som människor ingår i tillsammans med vargar, mikroorganismer, hönor och får. Att arbeta med djur som figurationer har väsentliga post-antropocentriska effekter menar Haraway:

23 Barad, Posthumanist performativity, s. 821.

24 Donna Haraway, *The companion species manifesto: dogs, people and significant otherness*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2003), s. 30.



“Living with animals, inhabiting their/our stories, trying to tell the truth about relationship, co-habiting an active history: that is the work of companion species, for whom “the relation” is the smallest possible unit for analysis. (...) All language swerves and trips; there is never direct meaning.”<sup>25</sup>

Att arbeta med djur och andra icke-mänskliga fenomen hjälper oss mänskliga forskare att förskjuta förgivettagna positioner och privilegier. Världen är inte stabil och avgränsad; i citatet ovan kallas historia för aktiv och språk ses som något som snubblar och virvlar. Haraway menar att skriva om djur handlar lika mycket om att skriva om intra-aktiva fenomen som naturkultur, samevolution och 'companion species'. Således, när hon pratar om en hund eller en människa ses dessa inte som separerade entiteter i en humanistisk mening, utan snarare som relata i pågående intra-aktioner. När ord såsom 'människa', 'elev', 'hund', 'hand' och så vidare används i denna artikel avses på liknande sätt inte dessa som fastlåsta entiteter utan som relata. Man kan säga att vi tillfälligt lånar denna begreppsliga position fast med påminnelsen om att det är ett temporalt grepp, ett agentiellt snitt, en situerad kunskap. Haraways påstående att relationen är analysens minsta beståndsdel går i linje med vår kritik av subjektscentriska positioner.

### Posthumanistisk beröring

Hur kan då beröring förstås utifrån ett posthumanistiskt feministiskt synsätt med fokus på intra-aktion? Karen Barad skriver följande om beröring baserat på hennes bakgrund inom teoretisk fysik:

“When electrons meet each other “halfway,” when they intra-act with one another, when they touch one another, whom or what do they touch? In addition to all the various iteratively reconfiguring ways that electrons, indeed all material “entities,” are entangled relations of becoming, there is also the fact that materiality “itself” is always already touched by and touching infinite configuring of other beings and other times.”<sup>26</sup>

I linje med Barad menar vi att det är viktigt att poängtera att sett utifrån begreppet intra-aktion är delarna av en relation inte mer verkliga än relationen i sig. Förutbestämda entiteter – subjekt, elev, bok – har aldrig en högre ontologisk giltighet än intra-aktioner eller relationer. Med Barads agentiella realism har intra-aktion respektive relata en liknande ontologisk prioritet då ontologin bygger på att den är flexibel och att verkligheten är ständigt intra-agerande. Såväl relata som intra-aktion har alltså en tillfällig ontologisk status. Detta möjliggör också direkt en post-antropocentrisk analys där beröring genererar olika relata: mänsklig, icke-mänsklig, diskursiv, materiell – oftast en blandning. För Donna Hara-

25 Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, s. 20.

26 Karen Barad, “On touching – The inhuman that therefore I am,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 23, nr. 3 (2012): 206-223, s. 215, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-1892943>.



way uppstår djur, människor och teknologi ur materiella-semiotiska intra-aktioner i världen. Hon beskriver beröringen på följande tydliga sätt: "They touch; therefore they are. It's about the action in contact zones".<sup>27</sup> Här ser vi hur positionen om intra-aktion kan bidra med fördjupning kring beröring. Beröring handlar alltså om intra-aktion i kontaktzoner snarare än om handlingar från enskilda människor/djur/teknologier. Respektive relata finns bara som en del ur beröringen. I nästa avsnitt spårar-och-kartograferar vi fenomenet beröring för att tillfälligt utforska den relationella implosion som detta fenomen både innefattar och blir till genom. Denna spårning sker dels i relation till posthumanistisk feminism, dels i relation till studier inom framförallt pedagogik som arbetar med beröring.

### 3. Beröring och kropp

I vårt spårande-och-kartograferande av beröring som pedagogiskt fenomen blir kropp en återkommande aspekt. Här vill vi därför utforska relationen beröring och kropp, hur kroppar blir till i och genom beröringar. Ett exempel på hur beröring sker och organiseras i skolsammanhang är genom kompismassage eller beröringsövningar.<sup>28</sup> Detta sker utifrån instruktioner om hur barn på en förskola eller elever i en klass på specifika sätt ska beröra varandra eller sig själva under stilla former, till exempel med lugn musik och tända ljus. Personal på skolor som arbetar regelbundet med kompismassage berättar om dess positiva effekter; barnen har blivit mer empatiska och mindre stressade. Det sägs också ha motverkat konflikter. Utifrån syftet med denna text att utforska hur beröring görs och vilka möjligheter och glapp som detta görande skapar kommer vi här att arbeta med dels exemplet kompismassage, dels texter som behandlar en så kallad 'rör-er diskurs'. Därutöver sammankopplar vi texter där beröring och materialitet får en framlyft position. Detta 'spårande-och-kartograferande' ställer frågor om gränser mellan olika kroppar, kroppars delar och helhet, och vad som sker i beröringen. Den kraft som tillskrivs människor i exempelvis kompismassagen kan här utmanas och förskjutas. Vad händer med kompismassagen om vi lägger samma vikt vid det som benämns sociala relationer och de relationer som samtidigt sker i form av kläder, mattor och platser? Eller när vi masserar vår egen axel?

#### Gränsdragningar mellan kroppar – kroppar som diskurs

De brittiska utbildningsfilosoferna Heather Piper och Ian Stronach arbetar i boken *Don't Touch: The Educational Story of a Panic* med poststrukturalistiska teorier och gör en kritisk analys av beröring i utbildningssammanhang.<sup>29</sup> Deras studie visar hur beröring formas i en dikotomi av antingen bra eller dålig, stödjande eller skadlig. Frågor som ofta ställs handlar

27 Donna Haraway, *When species meet* (Minnesota, MI: University of Minnesota press, 2008), s. 263.

28 <https://www.svd.se/kompismassage-ger-farre-konflikter-i-forskolan> (hämtad 171101); <https://www.folkhalsan.fi/barn/professionella/lilla-chilla/beroringsovningar/> (hämtad 171101); <http://www.beroring.se/beroring-i-skolan> (hämtad 171101).

29 Piper, Heather & Ian Stronach, *Don't touch!: The educational story of a panic*. (Routledge, 2008).

om vilken bakomliggande mening som finns hos den som berör någon annan, till exempel syftet med att en lärare kramar en elev. Denna syn på beröring skapar en 'rör ej-diskurs' med moraliska och disciplinerande effekter. Diskursen blir, enligt Piper och Stronach, del av social kontroll och själv-reglering som innebär övervakning av lärare. Utifrån denna diskurs begränsas beröring till att ske i organiserade former med specifika syften och avsikter, såsom kompismassage. Vid kompismassage ska läraren och en elevhandledning göra så att beröringen görs på ett sätt så eleverna är säkra och trygga.<sup>30</sup> För att skydda eleverna från en riskfylld och eventuellt sexualiserad beröring måste det ske under kontrollerade former. I en svensk kontext diskuterar pedagogerna Marie Öhman och Ann Quennerstedt<sup>31</sup> hur denna 'rör ej' diskurs påverkar och reglerar lärare och deras agerande inom ämnet idrott och hälsa. Den skapar en oro att anklagas för att beröra elever på felaktiga och kränkande sätt. Öhman och Quennerstedt argumenterar för att denna rör-ej diskurs måste utmanas och lyftas i till exempel lärarutbildning eftersom beröring är en viktig del av att ge omsorg till barn och unga och något som barn har rätt till.<sup>32</sup>

I linje med dessa poststrukturalistiskt influerade studier ser vi betydelsen av att peka på hur diskurser producerar reglering och kontroll av beröring av kroppar. Med fokus på diskurs utmanas beröring som det enskilda subjektets intentionella handlingar och blir del av diskursiva handlingsramar. Vi vill dock också peka på skillnaden mellan denna typ av analys av beröring och en posthumanistisk feministisk analys. Vid diskursanalys blir fokus för analysen att identifiera och kritisera sociala mönster. Trots en kritik mot dessa mönster menar vi att identifierandet riskerar att förstärka snarare än förändra. Här återskapas en logik om beröring som skadlig eller inte skadlig. Diskurser tillskrivs också en avgörande betydelse medan kroppen framstår som foglig och passiv.<sup>33</sup> Kropparna blir avskilda och enhetliga genom en invand subjektcentrisk uppfattning av världen. Karen Barad beskriver hur gränsdragningen eller isärhållandet mellan kroppar, mänskliga och icke-mänskliga, är formad av upprepningar av specifika performativ. Att till exempel betrakta huden som en avskiljande gräns av kroppen är ett historiskt, kulturellt och materiellt görande som format specifika kroppsliga figurationer. Det skapar också en dikotomi mellan den eller det som berör och den eller det som blir berörd.

Såsom vi diskuterat ovan sker i beröringen en intra-aktion av relata eller kroppar, såväl mänskliga som icke-mänskliga. Det innebär att den situation där läraren lägger sin hand på elevens axel formar kroppar genom avgränsningar genomförda utifrån respektive subjekts upplevelse av sin och andras kroppar som separata. Kroppar blir konstruktioner av materiella och diskursiva intra-aktioner, med andra ord materiella-diskursiva noder eller ansamlingar. Tillsammans med mening och materialitet blir kropp produktiv – något som

30 [www.beroring-i-skolan.se](http://www.beroring-i-skolan.se)

31 Marie Öhman & Anne Quennerstedt, "Questioning the no-touch discourse in physical education from a children's rights perspective," *Sport, Education and Society* 22, nr. 3 (2017): 305-320, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2015.1030384>.

32 *ibid.*

33 Jfr Gunnarsson, *Med önskan om kontroll*.

gör och görs genom intra-aktiva processer. Här innefattas såväl mänskliga kroppar som ting; såväl beröring mellan lärare och elev som beröring mellan matta och golv, penna och papper och så vidare är alla relata som blir till i denna intra-aktion.

Med ett posthumanistiskt perspektiv vill vi närma oss beröring utifrån en annan eller en ytterligare logik. Handlingen av en hand på en tröja på en axel sker genom en nod av multiriktade beröringar av olika slag. Att utgå från beröring som intra-aktion innebär att kroppar (mänskliga och icke-mänskliga), riktlinjer, idrottshallar, rädslor, omklädningsrum formas genom berörande intra-aktioner. Beröring blir en process och produkt i ett kollektiv av intra-aktiva aspekter snarare än en linjär rörelse från ett subjekt till ett annat. Det innebär en post-antropocentrisk utgångspunkt som inte startar i det mänskliga subjektet utan i intra-aktion och relationer.

### Föränderliga kroppar och klassrum

Med posthumanistiskt feministiska antaganden förstås kroppar vara i ständig förändring, ständigt blivande, genom vitala relationer och intra-aktioner. Detta sker genom en samtidig produktion och omvandling av materialitet och diskurs. Haraway beskriver detta som att "the body is always in-the-making; it is always a vital entanglement of heterogeneous scales, times, and kinds of beings webbed into fleshy presence, always a becoming, always constituted in relating."<sup>34</sup> I relationer blir kroppar ständigt till genom pågående intra-aktioner, samtidigt berörd och berörande, ständigt konstituerad i relationer. Tillsammans med de många lager av såväl liv och vitalitet som död och förgänglighet upplöses gränserna mellan biologi, maskin och teknologi. Här utmanas en stabiliserande ordning av biologiska och kulturella strukturer av kroppen genom att innefatta materialiteter och teknologier.<sup>35</sup>

Härnäst ska vi utforska två posthumanistiskt drivna studier som undersöker beröring genom att på detta sätt sammanväva kroppar och materialiteter i pedagogiska praktiker. Det första exemplet är en studie som utforskar beröring i klassrum och är genomförd av de amerikanska pedagogerna Alyssa D. Niccolini och Maya Pindyck.<sup>36</sup> Genom att tillföra saker som vanligtvis inte finns i skola och klassrum utforskar de vad dessa saker gör i rummen och hur de berör. Niccolini och Pindyck gör i studien en förskjutning från att förstå klassrummet som en disciplinerande plats styrd genom mänsklig intention och kontroll till att arbeta med klassrummet som en föränderlig deltagare som berör och berörs av de olika kroppar som samlas och möts där, såväl ting som elever och lärare. Med oväntade möten beskriver Niccolini och Pindyck hur sakerna utmanar och bråkar med beröring. Det innebär att beröring "disrupt the flow (often flat) feelings sustained by the repetition of particular classroom objects and their anticipated arrangements."<sup>37</sup> Ett ytterligare exempel är en studie

34 Donna Haraway, *When species meet*.

35 Donna Haraway, *Apor, cyborger och kvinnor: att återuppfinna naturen*. (Eslöv: Symposion, 2008).

36 Niccolini, Alyssa D. & Maya Pindyck, "Classroom acts: New materialisms and haptic encounters in an urban classroom." *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology* 6, nr. 2 (2015): 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.7577/rerm.1558>.

37 Niccolini & Pindyck, "Classroom acts," s. 15.

av Karin Gunnarsson.<sup>38</sup> Där används beröring som ett posthumanistiskt metodologiskt och analytiskt grepp för att undersöka olika versioner av omsorg i skolans hälsofrämjande arbete. Det ställer frågor om hur de manualer som används för att förebygga ohälsa berör och samtidigt berörs i relationer av klassrum, tid, elever och lärare. Dessutom, hur också forskaren blir del av detta, både berör den praktik som undersöks och blir berörd och därigenom omformad av den. Studien visar hur olika versioner av omsorg produceras i dessa kollektiv av beröringar. Gunnarsson skriver: "what takes place within the touch of the assignment, the researcher body and the classroom is not possible to control or predict, even though we put our trust into the manual and respond to the questions".<sup>39</sup> Tillsammans med manualen och genom att besvara dess många frågor formas en önskan om att kontrollera och förutsäga det hälsofrämjande arbetets effekter. Men vad som framkommer i studien är hur beröringen omformar såväl manual, som forskare och klassrum. Båda dessa studier förskjuter fokus från diskurser och språk till att också innefatta materialiteters göranden och inverkan i pedagogiska praktiker. De innefattar dock vissa begränsningar av antaganden om att entiteter och aktörer finns före mötet och tillförs till de pedagogiska praktikerna. Den posthumanistiska utmaningen kring fenomenet beröring är att undersöka själva beröringen, görandet utan att utgå från i förväg definierade aktörer. Detta är något som vi diskuterar vidare senare i artikeln.

### Att ta i hand och beröra sig annan

Vad utgör en kropp när den och dess gränser blir till genom relationella intra-aktioner i processer som både berör och berörs? Härnäst ska vi ytterligare diskutera hur kroppar ständigt är i tillblivelse med hjälp av Karen Barads antaganden om att *beröra sig själv annan*.<sup>40</sup> Med koppling till kvantfysik utforskar Barad hur beröring blir del av att skapa blivande och förändring. Barad visar hur elektroner intra-agerar och samskapar sig själva och andra i en oändlig mängd av möjliga beröringar. Det innebär att elektroner formar intra-aktioner som överskrider uppdelningen av delar och helhet, själv och annan. På liknande sätt beskriver Hillevi Lenz Taguchi hur "allt och alla i oändlighet (kan) överskrida 'sig själva' i sin självdifferentiering till något som vi ännu inte vet, men som vi kan bli medskapare av, med hjälp av vår egen och andra kroppars kraftfulla potentialiteter och kreativitet".<sup>41</sup> I och genom beröringar formas en oändlig skillnad, "ett skillnadsskapande i sig själv"<sup>42</sup> där materialitet och kroppar aldrig är fasta och beständiga. Självdifferentiering beskriver hur kroppar förändras i sig själva genom den mångfald av delar som de alltid innefattar. Kropp konstitueras av en rik mångfald som tillsammans formar oförutsägbara blivande. Samverkan, skillnad och olikhet är förutsättningar för överlevnad och existens.

38 Karin Gunnarsson, "Responding with care."

39 *ibid.*

40 Barad, "On touching– The inhuman that therefore I am".

41 Lenz Taguchi, "Ultraljudsfosterbilden: en feministisk omkonfigurering av begreppet posthumanism", s. 173.

42 *ibid.*

Utifrån dessa tankar ställer Barad frågan vad som sker när två händer rör varandra, vad innebär det att beröra en annan hand? Vad sker i förbindelsen mellan hud, värme, tryck, energi, oxytocin, nerver och neuroner? Hur nära är händerna – hur mäts närhet (att mäta är att beröra)? Om de två händerna tillhör en och samma kropp, vad händer då? Detta beskriver Barad som att "selftouching is an encounter with the infinite alterity of the self".<sup>43</sup> Liksom elektronernas rörelser är det oundvikligt att röra sig annan. Att beröra sin kropp utmanar tanken om att kroppen är en. Den kropp som artikuleras inom posthumanistiskt perspektiv är varken hel eller fragmenterad. Kroppen är alltid fler, alltid annan, ständigt i tillblivelse genom de beröringar som sker, med sig själv, med syre, med golv, med kläder. Att beröra sig själv innebär därmed "touching the strangers within".<sup>44</sup> Välkomna främlingen, uppmanar Barad, det är tillsammans med den som beröring formas. Att beröra och att bli berörd är inget oskyldigt eller neutralt utan alltid något riskfyllt. Denna risk innebär ett ansvar om att ständigt fråga vad som formas i beröringen, vad blir beröringens materiella-diskursiva effekter.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4. Beröring som naturkultur

I avsnittet ovan diskuterades kropp för att visa hur beröring kan ses relationellt och intra-aktivt snarare än subjektscentriskt. Detta innefattar aktörer som är såväl mänskliga som icke-mänskliga. Denna post-antropocentriska utgångspunkt går i linje med andra feministiska analyser som ifrågasätter privilegierade förgivettagna centriska positioner, vilket diskuterades i artikelns inledande teoretiska situering. Post-antropocentrism hör ihop med synen på människa och natur, men tankegångarna accentueras i samband med den relationell ontologi vi grundat oss på hittills i artikeln. Som diskuterats ovan har det post-antropocentriska perspektivet fått ett visst genomslag inom pedagogisk teori och metod, även när det gäller intra-aktion mellan människa och natur.<sup>46</sup> I detta avsnitt vill vi ytterligare betona det post-antropocentriska argumentet, då vi anser att icke-mänskliga aspekter fortfarande inte får tillräcklig prioritet i pedagogisk forskning och praktik. Fokus för diskussionen nedan kommer att kretsa kring Haraways begrepp naturkultur.<sup>47</sup> Som exempel på posthumanistisk feminism är Haraway intressant eftersom hon studerar fenomen med utgångspunkt i att ting, kroppar och språk uppkommer ur relationella eller berörande processer och praktiker. Vi vill först lyfta upp en av de få studier som har undersökt beröring

43 Barad, "On touching – The inhuman that therefore I am," s. 213.

44 Barad "On touching – The inhuman that therefore I am," s. 214.

45 Berörings ansvar och etiska implikationer återkommer vi till avslutningsvis i artikeln.

46 Se t.ex. Pauliina Rautio, "A super wild story": shared human-pigeon lives and the questions they beg," *Qualitative Inquiry* 23, nr. 9 (2017): 722–731, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417725353>; Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw & Filike Nxumalo, "Unruly raccoons and troubled educators: nature/culture divides in a childcare centre," *Environmental Humanities* 7 (2015): 151–168, <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3616380>; Mindy Blaise, "Fabricated childhoods: uncanny encounters with the more-than-human," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 37, nr. 5 (2016): 617–626, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1075697>.

47 Haraway, *When species meet*.

som fenomen med en posthumanistisk pedagogisk ansats, nämligen en studie om mat i förskolan utförd av den norska förskoleforskaren Nina Rossholt.<sup>48</sup> Med begreppet beröring diskuterar Rossholt hur pedagoger, bord, stolar, skedar och mat i samverkan skapar olika barn och olika beröringar. Beröring blir här hur deltagarna luktar, känner och tittar på spenatsoppa. Rossholt visar hur det formas såväl disciplinering och frigörelse genom dessa materiella beröringar. Genom att tänka tillsammans med Rossholts exempel och därigenom vidga resonemanget något framkommer hur beröring gör klassrummet till en plats där en mängd intra-aktioner pågår: rörelser, relationer och beröring. Det är när Rossholt betraktar och beskriver pedagoger, bord, skedar, mat etc. som dessa rycks ur sin intra-aktion och framträder som relata i deras avgränsade form. Vad vi kan betrakta i studien är alltså effekter ur pågående intra-aktioner i naturkultur. Exempelvis kan spenatsoppa ses som naturkultur då den samskapas av vad vi ofta ser som både natur- och kulturaspekter: näring, att gro, klorofyll, vitaminer, recept, jordbrukskultur och idén om spenatens välgörande egenskaper. Soppa som naturkultur-fenomen intra-agerar med barnen i nya intra-aktioner. Beröring av olika slag pågår här: barnens handgripliga kladdande med soppa, smakernas och lukternas beröring av sinnen, soppans beröring med magsäcken och förmedlandet av mättnadskänslor, och så vidare. Detta är ett exempel på hur naturkultur-begreppet kan bidra med en ytterligare analys. Vi menar att den utmanar subjektscentriska synsätt och kan ge en breddad syn på beröring i pedagogiska praktiker.

### Klappar och samevolution

Ett exempel på naturkultur-beröring i pedagogiska praktiker är användandet av hundar i utbildningssammanhang. Djur har under lång tid använts inom sjukvård, psykiatri och äldrevård då det har visat sig att patienter som klappar en hund får lugnare temperament och långsammare hjärtslag.<sup>49</sup> I skolans värld är högläsning ett exempel på aktivitet när elever kan bli stressade. I klassrum och bibliotek har tränade hundekipage bjudits in för att barn ska kunna träna högläsning under lugnare förhållanden och utan välvilliga men korrigerande kommentarer från lärare eller föräldrar. Barnet klappar hunden som kanske ligger i barnets knä och läser högt för den. Genom den fysiska kontakten blir både barn och hund lugna. Barnet kan fortsätta öva högläsning utan avbrott eftersom hunden inte korrigerar om barnet läser fel. Samtidigt blir barnet uppmuntrat av hunden som kommunicerar uppskattande när barnet läser. Bokhundspraktiken startade i Nordamerika och har sedan dess spridits till Sverige och andra länder.<sup>50</sup>

48 Nina Rossholt, "Food as Touch/Touching the Food: The body in-place and out-of-place in preschool," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44, nr. 3 (2012): 323-334, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00677.x>.

49 Sunny Lyn Nagengast, Mara Baun, Mary Megel & Michael J. Leibowitz, "The effects of the presence of a companion animal of physiological arousal and behavioral distress in children," *Journal of pediatric nursing* 12, (1998): 323-330, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0882-5963\(97\)80058-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0882-5963(97)80058-9).

50 Helene Ehriander, "Book dog and Astrid Lindgren: A project to promote reading children's literature," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 54, nr. 1 (2015): 61-65, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2016.0001>; Lori Friesen, "How a therapy dog may inspire student literacy engagement in the elementary language arts classroom," *LEARNING Landscapes* 3, nr. 1 (2009): 105-122; Lori Friesen, "The gifted child as cheetah: A unique animal-assisted



Bokhunden kan ses som såväl en biologisk natur-varelse som en kulturell varelse. Hundar kan till att börja med ses som en biologisk varelse/relata då den rent begreppsmässigt är en levande varelse som inte är industriellt skapad av människan. Samtidigt är bokhunden upplärd på en specifik kurs att ligga och agera på ett visst sätt, vilket är ett tydligt kulturellt element.<sup>51</sup>

I linje med idén om naturkultur menar Haraway: "There is no time or place in which genetics ends and environment begins".<sup>52</sup> Människa-hundrelationer såsom beröringen med bokhundarna bör därför inte ses som ett biologiskt fenomen när hundarna diskuteras och ett kulturellt fenomen när människorna diskuteras. Denna separation mellan artificiell kulturell utveckling och kulturell utveckling är alltför godtycklig. Istället bör hundarnas utveckling – och människans också – ses som naturkultur-evolution. Beröring med bokhundarna kan ses som intra-aktioner i naturkultur. Haraway diskuterar: "Co-constitutive companion species and co-evolution are the rule, not the exception".<sup>53</sup>

Människa-hund-kontakten utvecklades genom samevolution då hundens förfäder – något mer vargliga – började röra sig närmare människoläger och tigga mat och varna dem för andra rovdjur. Många generationer senare hade människan och hunden hittat ett stort antal samarbeten i form av jakt, vakt och numera även bokhund. Två slutsatser kan dras här. För det första är hunden genom samevolution med människan en art som biologiskt och kulturellt hör ihop med människan genom kontakt. Hunden som naturkulturvarelse fanns inte till som autonomt subjekt som vill ha beröring innan det finns människor. På liknande sätt fanns inte människans vilja att klappa en hund innan hunden fanns. Istället fanns andra typer av beröringsmekanismer som fyllde liknande behov såsom att söka sig till värme, föda och trygghet.

På temat om beröring ställer Haraway frågan "Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog?".<sup>54</sup> Med denna fråga framhåller Haraway hur beröring skapas samt vem eller vad beröring involverar. Donna Haraway menar att viljan till beröring varken finns hos hennes hund eller hos henne själv. Snarare uppstår beröring som en önskan i naturkultur-relationen. Viljan att söka kontakt med sin mänskliga partner uppstår ur hundens naturkultur, det vill säga ur intra-aktion av genetik, materialitet och uppfostran. På ett motsvarande sätt intra-agerar det mänskliga subjektets vilja att beröra hunden med hundens närvaro och den förmodat positiva erfarenheten beröringen har haft på människan. Med andra ord bör respektive subjekt alltid ses som relata som uppstått som effekt av beröring. Verklighet

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literacy program," *The Latham Letter*, 34 (2013) 6-10; Donita Massengill Shaw, "Man's best friend as a reading facilitator," *The Reading Teacher* 66 (2013): 365-371, <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.01136>.

51 Det kan vara värt att påpeka att även den mänskliga delen i bokhundsekipaget skulle kunna analyseras på ett liknande sätt. Även hen har gått bokhundskurs (kultur) och agerar utifrån sin samevolution (biologi) tillsammans med hunden.

52 Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, s. 32.

53 *ibid.*

54 Haraway, *When species meet*, s. 35.



formas i processer av intra-aktiv beröring där varje aktör/relata är en effekt av den föregående beröringen – aldrig en utgångspunkt.

### **Materialitet och beröring**

I ett experiment undersöktes hormonnivåer vid möten mellan hundar och människor; både hunden och människan gav positivt utslag på behaglighetshormon såsom oxytocin vid ögonkontakt på ett liknande sätt som uppvisades när de berörde varandra fysiskt.<sup>55</sup> Den effektfulla beröringen är alltså inte nödvändigtvis kontakt hud mot hud, utan kan också vara näthinna till näthinna; öga mot öga i naturkulturberöring. Beröringen finns intra-agerande mellan, bakom och före de inblandade relata. Synintrycket berör näthinnan som berör synapser som berör kroppens känslacentra som berör kroppsspråk som berör ett annat subjekts näthinna som berör synapser som berör denna kropps känslacentra som berör kroppsspråk och så vidare. Varje relata som här beskrivs som beröring blir också i sin tur berörd.

På liknande sätt kan vi analysera exemplet med kompismassage som pedagogisk praktik, vilket introducerades i avsnittet om beröring och kropp. Motiven till att använda sig av kompismassage liknar de argument som används kring bokhundspraktiken när det gäller att hantera stress, skapa avslappning med mera. De förväntade effekterna skrivs till viss del fram som subjektcentrerade såsom minskad stress för den som blir masserad. Vad som är intressant är att argumenten i många fall även är relationella och kollektiva. I linje med beröring som naturkultur är massage i klassrummet inte en linjär rörelse med det enskilda masserade barnet som slutresultat. Istället pågår beröring i händer, tröjor, axlar, hormoner, diskurser, andetag, avslappningsmusik, nervtrådar, hårstrån, dämpad belysning med mera. En elev som vilar överkroppen över skolbänken vid kompismassagen blir inte bara berörd av sin klasskompis utan också masserad mot bänken. Ett mottagande av beröring genom massage på axlarna är också att ge beröring till någons händer. Beröring som fenomen i pedagogiska praktiker formar naturkultur-vågor genom intra-aktiva kroppar.

## **5. Diskussion: beröringens utmaningar och frågor**

I vårt utforskande av begreppet beröring som pedagogiskt filosofiskt fenomen utifrån feministisk posthumanism har några utmaningar och frågor framträtt. Dessa frågor menar vi är viktiga att lyfta i relation till såväl forskning ur ett feministiskt posthumanistiskt perspektiv som till beröring som pedagogiskt fenomen. I detta avslutande avsnitt kommer dessa utmaningar och frågor att diskuteras.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Kuchinkas, *Chemistry of connection: How the oxytocin response can help you find trust, intimacy, and love*, (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2009); Miho Nagasawa, Shouhei Mitsui, Shiori En, Nobuyo Ohtani, Mitsuaki Ohta, Yasuo Sakuma, Tatsushi Onaka, Kazutaka Mogi & Takefumi Kikusui, "Oxytocin-gaze positive loop and the coevolution of human-dog bonds." *Science* 348, nr. 6232 (2015): 333-336, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1261022>.

### Beröringens gränser

Först vill vi lyfta frågan om beröringens gränser. Vi har argumenterat för att beröring inte nödvändigtvis eller enbart kan ses som handlingar av mänskliga subjekt, utan som naturkulturell intra-aktion med tillblivande kroppar. Detta är ett sätt att arbeta med beröring som är mer flytande och relationellt, vilket gör det svårt att säga vad beröring är och vad beröring inte är. Vi ställer oss därför frågan: om beröring blir ett överskridande och gränslöst fenomen vad blir då dess analytiska kraft eller bäring? Posthumanistiskt perspektiv möjliggör ett ifrågasättande och uppluckrande av många förgivettagna gränser och uppdelningar, men det betyder inte att världen inte kan beskrivas. Snarare innebär det att aktörer och dess möjligheter att agera uppstår samtidigt som beröringen i sig, i en samtidighet som Barad beskriver som "cutting things together and apart".<sup>56</sup> Det gäller även i skapandet av forskning och forskningsprodukter. Ständigt befinner vi oss i det samtidiga myllret av att repetera och luckra upp mening, materia och relata; att ta isär tidigare forskning och sätta ihop en någorlunda förståelig produkt. Vi vill dock tillägga att utifrån den kritiska feministiska tradition vi verkar inom har tyngdpunkten bestått av att decentrera etablerade centriska positioner. Att se beröring utifrån posthumanism fyller framförallt funktionen av att frånga ett gängse synsätt på beröring, snarare än att göra en exakt gränsdragning kring vad vi definierar som beröring. Istället för att fokusera på vad beröring är ligger fokus mer på vad beröring gör. Om vi skulle försökt eftersträva ett fastlåsende av en feministisk posthumanistisk beröring skulle vi samtidigt riskera att denna gränsdragning implementerades på klassrumsempiri för att kunna fastställa vad i klassrummet som kan räknas som beröring eller ej. Vad vi vill uppnå med vårt synsätt på beröring som intra-aktion, kropp och naturkultur är att möjliggöra diskussioner och frågor om vad som avses med beröring och vad beröring gör och producerar i ett visst sammanhang. Vi ser beröringens kraft i att omfamna verklighetens komplexitet och ett ansvar för de gränser och uteslutningar som skapas. Här ser vi att beröring kan ge ett viktigt bidrag i utforskandet och förståelsen för pedagogiska praktiker.

### Den mänskliga faktorn

Nästa aspekt av att göra forskning med feministisk posthumanism och beröring är frågan om forskarens oundvikliga mänskliga position. I artikeln framhåller vi ett post-antropocentriskt förhållningssätt och lyfter fram viktiga icke-mänskliga aspekter av beröring. Vi visar också på den sköra gräns som det mänskliga är uppbyggt kring. Att skriva fram världen med ett mänskligt språk men samtidigt ta in icke-mänskliga aspekter är en av utmaningarna med posthumanistisk forskning. Människans perception och språk är formad efter att presentera särskilda entiteter och saknar till stor del en förmåga att uppfatta och formulera rörelse och blivande. Eftersom posthumanistisk teori utgår från att allt ständigt befinner sig i omformning är de entiteter som människans perception kan uppfatta och

<sup>56</sup> Barad, *Meeting the universe halfway*, s. 394.

som människans språk kan formulera enbart effekter av eller utsnitt/relata ur verkligheten. Vi vill lyfta detta på grund av de svårigheter som det innebär att skriva vetenskapliga texter med en posthumanistisk ansats; samma antropocentrism som kritiseras är också grundbulten i kritiken och en position som är svår (omöjlig?) att skriva sig ut ur. Ramsey Affifi hävdar till exempel att talet om antropocen – benämningen av den nuvarande geologiska tidsåldern – är strängt antropocentriskt och upptaget av människans suveräna förmåga att förändra och förstöra världen.<sup>57</sup> Denna mänskliga självupptagenhet benämner Affifi för 'antropoholic' eftersom människan är "addicted to a certain conception of unique and linear agency in the universe".<sup>58</sup> Avslutningsvis konstaterar Affifi att antropoholism är ett tillstånd som alla människor lider av mer eller mindre. Vi kan bara konstatera att detta gäller även konstruktionen av posthumanistisk forskning. Donna Haraway<sup>59</sup> menar att vi måste vara konstruktiva och kunna prata om världen. Dock måste vi göra detta medvetna om vad vår position som människa innebär. Som vi beskrev ovan i vår teoretiska situering har en medvetenhet om hegemoniska centriska positioner alltid varit en grundpelare i feministiska tankegångar. Med en posthumanistisk feminism tar vi ytterligare ett kliv i den riktningen genom att sätta fokus på antropocentrismen. Att analysera beröring utifrån ett posthumanistiskt perspektiv innebär alltså att ha en medvetenhet inför den antropocentrism som vi mänskliga forskare obönhörligen är del av.

### Beröringens ansvar

"In an important sense, in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather, what matter is: matter is condensations of response-ability. Touching is a matter of response. Each of "us" is constituted in response-ability. Each of "us" is constituted as responsible for the other, as being in touch with the other."<sup>60</sup>

Som vi diskuterat i artikeln är beröring inte en aktivitet subjekt går in i, utan snarare ett fenomen där kroppar och subjekt blir till. Att beröra betyder att vara "in touch" med den andre, vilket ungefär innebär att befinna sig i kontakt genom beröring. Att beröra är att redan vara i beröring. Att beröra är att redan bli berörd. Detta gör att ett posthumanistiskt feministiskt perspektiv erbjuder en specifik syn på etiskt ansvar – eller an-svar, att svara an – jämfört med mer subjektcentriska synsätt. Ansvar är ständigt närvarande och gör sig påmint genom de tillfälliga brotten ur beröring som upplevelsen av att vara ett självständigt subjekt kan ge. Det är också ur denna upplevelse av subjekt som det moraliska synsättet på beröring härrör när enskilda subjekt medvetet eller omedvetet har låtit det

57 Ramsey Affifi, "More-than-humanizing the Anthropocene," *The Trumpeter* 32, nr. 2 (2016): 155-175.

58 *ibid.*, s. 169.

59 Donna Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan@\_Meets\_ OncoMouse* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

60 Barad, "On touching – The inhuman that therefore I am," s. 215, kursiv i original.

etiska ansvaret utebli. Då kliver samhället in genom en moraliskt, politiskt eller juridiskt ansvarsutkrävande av en individ.

Filosofen Maria Puig de la Bellacasa arbetar med Haraways naturkultur-begrepp och posthumanistisk biopolitik och menar att "ethics here are not about individual rationalisation nor about a normative identification between the rational and the good"<sup>61</sup> Istället ser Puig de la Bellacasa och Barad den posthumanistiska etiken som något ständigt närvarande i alla relationer. Detta perspektiv säger inte emot den juridiska eller politiska diskursen, utan kan snarare tolkas som att det återskapar vad det innebär att vara ett politiskt subjekt. Ett subjekt är en effekt av pågående processer – en relata som i slutändan kan bli ställd inför ansvar för sina individuella handlingar. Det handlar också om rätten att inta rollen som subjekt/relata och beskriva sina upplevelser när den blivit berörd på ett icke efterfrågat sätt.

### Avslutningsvis

Att arbeta med begreppet beröring har skapat förutsättningar att utforska pedagogiska praktiker med relationer och göranden i fokus. Beröring är ett begrepp som vi menar innehåller överraskningar och potentialitet till att förstå pedagogik som rörelse och förändring. Med ett utforskande av de ständigt aktuella feministiska frågorna om identitet, kropp och makt kan beröring erbjuda alternativa frågor och svar samt omfamna den intimitet och komplexitet som detta innefattar. I pedagogiska praktiker blir beröring återkommande något linjärt, kausalt, subjektcentrerat, antropocentriskt. Genom att förskjuta förståelsen för fenomenet blir det istället något materiellt, diskursivt och affektivt. Det ger fenomenet potentialitet att utmana och förskjuta några av de förgivettaganden som återkommande blir aktiva i pedagogiska praktiker, såväl inom forskning som i skola. Vi hoppas att denna potential kan bistå och utmana fortsatta studier om beröring av såväl empirisk som teoretisk karaktär. Baserat på den teoretiska situering vi presenterade i det inledande avsnittet har vi också stött på och hanterat de komplexiteter som uppstår genom att arbeta med några av posthumanismens centrala antaganden.

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61 María Puig de la Bellacasa, "Ethical doings in naturecultures," *Ethics, Place and Environment: A Journal of Philosophy and Geography* 13, nr. 2 (2010): 152-169, s 155, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668791003778834>.

# Lovisa Bergdahl

## Crisis or Struggle?

### A Language of Natality as a Struggle for Education

#### **Abstract**

*Taking its point of departure in the connotations to war and violence inherent in what is here called the 'language of crisis' (Jantzen), the purpose of this article is to explore what it might mean to reassess the language of educational change and policy reform in the imagery of natality and birth (Arendt). If the task in a 'crisis' is to fight against the crisis, effectively and forcefully, the argument of the paper is that the root metaphors of natality and birth puts into play an imagery that makes possible a relational language for educational change and reform. If the language we use has performative consequences, the question explored is what a 'language of natality' can make possible as a language of struggle for education.*

#### **Keywords**

*natality, birth, mortality, policy reform, change*

## Introduction: The Language of Crisis

Education is in crisis, according to public discourse, and in many Western countries we regularly wake up to new alarms. In Swedish daily papers, to take an example, 'getting into teacher education demands less than a randomly answered university test'; 'results in math's are reaching a new low'; 'thirteen of nineteen schools fail in their work against bullying', and 'lack of discipline and order in schools' are only some the most recent headlines. Getting out of the current crises will be a 'battle', it continues, and if anything is going to change in the current situation we will have to 'fight bad results', 'declare war against the lack of order and discipline' and 'forcefully combat all kinds of discrimination'. As a direct consequence of this 'language of crisis', education is debated by well-nigh anyone: it is as if the 'crisis' has given a green light to politicians to initiate yet another reform and for a wide range of professionals – economists, communication strategists, neuropsychologists, journalists, just to mention a few – to discuss education without having neither theoretical nor professional knowledge about the field.

The 'language of crisis', however, concerns not only education and the article takes as its starting-point the idea that the concept of 'crisis' is part of a violent and masculine rhetoric that is being used in everyday socio-political discourse to draw attention to, and to make sense of, all kinds of different failures. In this sense, the article sees the 'langue of

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crisis' as part of a patriarchal framework and while it would be tempting to believe that the masculine rhetoric of 'crisis' has a recent origin, everyday discourse has been saturated by metaphors of violence, war, and death throughout Western history.<sup>1</sup> From modernity and onwards, however, as late philosopher Graze Jantzen has pointed out, such metaphors were given new proportions and since then a discourse on war and violence has been used even in relation to aspects of life where such metaphors should have no place.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence of this, we are 'fighting cancer', 'battling child abuse' and 'issuing war against homelessness' – even a good philosophical debate or discussion is often framed in terms of a 'battle', as in 'let the better argument win'.<sup>3</sup>

The way out of the crisis in education, the less alarmist voices say, is to focus more on the future and what the future can bring in terms of political stability, jobs and economic independence. What is needed, in other words, is a focus on what comes *after education* and the consequence of this, as scholars in philosophy of education have critically pointed out, is an undermining of education, reducing it into merely an instrument for safeguarding either the future of democracy and/or the future of the market.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the language of crisis works *against* education, reducing education to being about 'making a living' instead of also being about 'making a life' – a distinction used by Säfström and Månsson in order to illustrate how the marketization of schools has shifted the governing idea of education from being about critical thinking, community building, and emancipation to producing well-functioning workers for the job market.<sup>5</sup>

What I wish to highlight in the above, as a point of departure, is necessarily in broad brush strokes and quite programmatic: the 'language of crisis' used to motivate change and policy reform in education today draws on a whole arsenal (sic!) of images and metaphors related to war and violence that has devastating effects on education, both on structural and personal level. The assumption is that the 'language of crisis' legitimizes politicians to pull into schools with 'heavy artillery', initiating by force yet another far-reaching policy

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1 Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine. Towards a feminist philosophy of religion*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1998).

2 Grace Jantzen, "Flourishing: Towards and ethic of natality". *Feminist Theory*, (Vol. 2(2), 2001), 219-232, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14647000122229497>.

3 Jantzen, "Flourishing: Towards and ethic of natality", 228.

4 In recent years, a vast number of researchers in philosophy of education have been discussing the absurdity of a situation where, despite the fact that the future is more unpredictable than ever and clearly beyond our control, education keeps being motivated with precisely this: the future. A key text in this regard is Gert J.J. Biestas, *Beyond learning: democratic education for a human future*, Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006). For critique of the marketization of the school, see Gert J.J. Biesta, *Good education in an age of measurement: ethics, politics, democracy*, (London: Routledge, 2016); and Carl Anders Säfström and Niclas Månsson, "The Ontology of Learning, or Teaching the Non-Person to Learn" in *INTERACÇÕES*, (No. 37, 2015), pp. 66-82. For another powerful critique of the marketization of the school and for offering a now widely discussed counter image of what the school might become, drawing on the Greek notion of *scholè*, see Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons's *In Defence of the School: A Public Issue* (Leuven: E-ducation, Culture & Society Publishers, 2013).

5 Säfström & Månsson, "The Ontology of Learning, or Teaching the Non-Person to Learn", 74.



reform.<sup>6</sup> Given this background, the main purpose of the paper is to explore what it might mean to reassess the language for educational change and policy reform in the root metaphors of natality and birth, metaphors that seem to generate what this paper chooses to call a language of struggle for education. If the 'language of crisis' connotes to war and violence and generates an approach to educational reform where the main task is to *fight against* the current ills of education quickly, effectively, and forcefully, it is central to the argument that natality and birth can offer an approach to educational change and reform that involves a *struggle for* education.<sup>7</sup> There is much nuancing to be done here, but if the language we use has performative consequences and both reflects and impacts upon our material realities,<sup>8</sup> the more precise question is what a language of natality and birth can make possible as a language of struggle for education.<sup>9</sup>

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part offers a feminist philosophical context to the 'language of crisis', reading its focus on immortality and on the future as a patriarchal regime that has its roots in a linear understanding of time. Time is also what is in focus in Arendt's famous essay 'The Crisis in Education' and the second part of the paper explores what natality and birth, read as notions of time, can offer a language of struggle for education. It is suggested that they; a) interrupt death by interrupting both linear and cyclical time, and; b) alters the relationship between immortality and mortality. The argument is that 'the language of natality' puts into play an imaginary that makes possible a *relational language* for educational change and reform. The contribution of the paper is to show what this relationality involves and it is suggested that it not primarily offers a counter-image to 'the language crisis', but an approach to educational change and reform that acknowledges *both* continuation and change, *both* the old and the new, *both* the past and the future. Hence, the third part of the paper offers three aspects on how Arendt's thinking on natality and birth can make a difference to policy reform in education.

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6 It should perhaps be mentioned here that the last decade in Swedish education is being talked about as the most 'reform dense' period in recent history and that Swedish teachers are suffering from 'reform fatigue'.

7 I owe the playful distinction between crisis and struggle to Marie Hällander, PhD, one of the guest editors of this special issue. It might be worth pointing out that the discrepancy between 'fighting against' and 'struggling for' is a bit clearer in the Swedish and German languages than in the English language. Whereas a crisis [Sw. *kris*; Ge. *krise*] is often articulated in the negative and is expected to give rise to 'counter action' or 'defence', a struggle [Sw. *kamp*; Ge. *kämpfen*], by contrast, is usually articulated affirmatively, as a struggle *for* something. This is why the paper articulates the 'language of natality' as an affirmative struggle *for* education.

8 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. (New York: Routledge 1997).

9 Quite a lot of research has been done on Arendt's notion of natality, both within philosophy in general and in philosophy of education. In philosophy of education, see, for example; Mordechai Gordon, "Hannah Arendt on Authority: Conservatism in Education Reconsidered" in *Hannah Arendt and Education: Renewing our Common World* (edited by Mordechai Gordon), (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 2001); Natasha Levinson, "The Paradox of Natality", in *Hannah Arendt and Education: Renewing our Common World* (edited by Mordechai Gordon), (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 2001); Natasha Levinson, "A 'More General Crisis': Hannah Arendt, World-Alienation, and the Challenges of Teaching for the World As It Is", in *Teachers College Record* (Vol. 112, No 2, 2010), 464-487. In philosophy in general, see, among many; Grace Jantzen, *Violence to Eternity*, (edited by Jeremy Carrette and Morny Joy), (London: Routledge 2009); Grace Jantzen, "Flourishing: Towards and ethic of natality". *Feminist Theory*, (Vol. 2(2), 2001), 219-232; Patricia Bowen-Moore, *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*" (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).



## I. Feminist Philosophy and the ‘Language of Crisis’

According to feminist philosophers, the philosophical tradition of the West has been pre-occupied with death and violence already since Homer and Plato.<sup>10</sup> Paradoxically, however, the preoccupation with death is spurred on by its opposite, Grace Jantzen argues, that is, by an almost obsessive like focus on *avoiding death* and striving for immortality.<sup>11</sup> This focus on avoiding death and attaining immortality is related to the notion of time, and it has taken shape and form in a patriarchal order defined by an exaggerated focus on the ‘otherworldly’: either on life after death or on life before birth or, simply, life in other worlds. Luce Irigaray captures this ‘otherworldly’ focus in patriarchy, when she writes:

“The patriarchal order is based upon worlds of the beyond: worlds of before birth and especially of the afterlife, other planets to be discovered and exploited for survival, etc. It doesn’t appreciate the real value of the world we have and draws up its often bankrupt blueprints in the basis of hypothetical worlds.”<sup>12</sup>

Generally speaking then, Western discourse has generated an imaginary that in its obsessive focus on immortality and ‘worlds beyond’ disregards life in *this world* – life in the present, in the concrete and material *place* of the here and now – emphasizing instead the (ideal) future and trying to attain control over the future. This emphasis on the future and its simultaneous disregard for the present (as well as for place and materiality), feminist philosophers argue, has had devastating effects not only on the lives of women but also on the material and physical world more generally. One could in fact argue that there is a direct relationship between the exploitation of women’s physical bodies and the exploitation of the earth, suggesting, as pointed out by the Swedish journalist Björn Wiman in the Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* recently, that the exploitation of the world’s natural resources and the exploitation of the female body are two sides of the same coin.<sup>13</sup>

The patriarchal order with its focus on immortality and its dismissal of life in the present has ancient roots but it reaches its most disturbing peak in modernity, Jantzen argues, erupting in what she calls ‘a masculinist drive for mastery’.<sup>14</sup> This idea was meant to be the theme of a planned six-volume work on Western philosophy, *Death and the Displacement of Beauty*, but only the first volume was completed before she died. In one of her earlier books, *Becoming Divine*, she develops a feminist philosophy of religion and it is here that

10 Two of the most explicit thinkers in this regard are Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine. Towards a feminist philosophy of religion*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1998); and Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. (London: The Athlone Press. 1993).

11 Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine. Towards a feminist philosophy of religion*; Grace Jantzen, “Flourishing: Towards and ethic of natality”.

12 Luce Irigaray. *Je, tu, nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*. (London: Routledge. 1993), 27.

13 <https://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/kronikor/bjorn-wiman-den-nya-kvinnororelsen- visar-att-allt-kan-forandras-nar-man-minst-anar-det/> [accessed 2018-02-02].

14 Janzen, *Becoming Divine*, 129.

she describes the imaginary of modernity as a violent and 'death-dealing' habitus characterizing especially the twenty-first century. She writes:

"From militarization and death camp and genocide to exploitation and commodification and accumulation of wealth; from the construction of pleasure and desire to the development of terminator genes; from the violence on the streets to the heaven-obsessed hymnody of evangelical churches: preoccupation of death and the means of death and deathly combat is ubiquitous. It is a necrophilia so deeply part of the western habitus that it emerges at every turn."<sup>15</sup>

The striving for immortality and the disregard for life in the present in modernity also comes in a religious variant.<sup>16</sup> The focus on what in certain religious traditions was referred to as "eternal life" was in the advent of modernity transformed and inverted into a pietistic focus on living a vigorous life here and now, coming to the fore – in combination with the rise of the industrial, modern society – as a focus on productivity, prosperity and progress.<sup>17</sup> Heaven on earth was to be implemented in *this* life or, more precisely, *life in the present* was used as a means to reach the final goal, which was *the future*, or the life hereafter. There is not enough space to go into this religious variant in much detail here. The point I wish to make is simply that it seems as if the focus on the future and on immortality in modernity, or the urgency to escape mortality by focusing on controlling the future, in both its' secular and religious variants has led to its paradoxical opposite. In other words, it seems as if the unbridled focus in modernity on the (better) future and the (illusory) belief in the immortality of man has generated a crisis-driven and violent approach to the present, *onto which* man has sought to project an already thought-out and planned future. It is, simply put, as if a one-sided focus on immortality and the future, in both its secular and religious variants, has led to its opposite: the loss of a (real) future, replacing the arrival of the new and unforeseen with old projections.

In her article "Revolutionary Time: Revolt as Temporary Return", Fanny Söderbäck argues that time is 'the frame through which we are able to articulate both continuity and discontinuity' and she returns us to the classical distinction between linear and cyclical time.<sup>18</sup> Men, she argues, have often laid claim to *linear time*, taking upon themselves to subordinate nature and the body to culture and reason, whereas women have been relegated to the natural realm and to the body and, hence, women have been the bearers of *cyclical time*.<sup>19</sup> This classical distinction has been the basis for the division of labour throughout

15 Janzen, "Flourishing", 228.

16 See Janzen, *Becoming Divine* and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

17 Janzen, *Becoming Divine*, 137-141.

18 Fanny Söderbäck, "Revolutionary Time: Revolt as Temporary Return" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, (2012, vol. 37, no. 2, 301-324), 303, <https://doi.org/10.1086/661710>.

19 Fanny Söderbäck, "Revolutionary Time: Revolt as Temporary Return", 301.

modernity, and whereas it has associated men with a linear paradigm of progress and prosperity and to transcendence, culture, and reason, it has associated women with a cyclical paradigm of return and repetition and to immanence, nature, and body.<sup>20</sup> According to Söderbäck, both linear time and cyclical time belong to the regime of patriarchy, because, if linear time tends to *forget the past* and in this forgetfulness fails to ground us in history in a way that provides us with continuity – cyclical time tends only to *repeat the past* and, hence, does not allow for change. In this sense, Söderbäck writes, ‘neither linear time nor cyclical time carries true potential for liberation and change.’<sup>21</sup> What is needed by contrast, she concludes, is a notion of time that allows for *both* continuation *and* change. A temporal movement, she writes, ‘that neither forgets nor repeats the past, a model of time that allows us to redeem the past and the present without instrumentalizing them in the name of a future always already defined in advance’.<sup>22</sup>

Söderbäck finds resources for such a notion of time in Julia Kristeva’s work, but for our purposes here let us turn to Hannah Arendt and explore how time operates in her notions of natality and birth. If the ‘language of crisis’ according to feminist philosophy is characterized by both a violent approach to change and reform due to its obsession with the future and the linear-progressive paradigm, and by a violent approach to the world and life in the present due to its desire to escape mortality and create immortality – what can natality and birth offer as another way of speaking and thinking about educational reform? Let us in the following explore how Arendt’s notions, according to the reading that I do of her work here, a) interrupts death by interrupting both linear and cyclical time, and; b) alters the relationship between immortality and mortality.

## II. Arendt’s ‘Crisis’, Natality and Birth

In an article that takes issue with the notion of crisis, it might seem strange to foreground a text in which ‘the crisis’ appears already in the title. We should not be misled by the title, however, because Arendt begins her essay ‘The Crisis in Education’<sup>23</sup> by elaborating on the notion of ‘crisis’ itself. In fact, the crisis only turns into a disaster, she argues, if we let it prevent us from thinking and if we – instead of ‘running the risk of failure’<sup>24</sup> – respond to the questions it rises with a *fait accompli*, that is, ‘as though the new already existed’.<sup>25</sup> The main risk in a crisis, in other words, is that we pretend that change is already in place and that we respond to difficult questions with readymade answers.<sup>26</sup> Hence, ‘the crisis’ can create pos-

20 Fanny Söderbäck, “Revolutionary Time: Revolt as Temporary Return”, 303.

21 Fanny Söderbäck, “Revolutionary Time: Revolt as Temporary Return”, 308.

22 Fanny Söderbäck, “Revolutionary Time: Revolt as Temporary Return”, 304.

23 Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Education”. *Between Past and Future*. (New York: Penguin Books.1961/1993).

24 Arendt, “The Crisis”, 176.

25 Arendt, “The Crisis”, 176-177.

26 Arendt, “The Crisis”, 174.

sibilities for change if we do not pretend that the solutions are already there.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, educational reform is always about taking risks and about carefully navigating towards an unknown and unpredictable future.

### a. Natality and Birth: interrupting linear and cyclical time

Arendt's notion of *natality* is inspired by Saint Augustine and his idea that human beings, by virtue of being created *as new beginnings*, can themselves create new beginnings.<sup>28</sup> This ability to begin, she writes, 'is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man'.<sup>29</sup> and with this ability to begin, comes the possibility for changing the given course of things (as beginners). Hence, at the centre of the notion of natality lies a potentiality for initiating change that each of us brings to the world by virtue of our own birth.

In Arendt's thinking, our factual and physical birth into the world is used as a root metaphor for the notion of natality. In comparison to our physical birth, natality represents a second birth ultimately linked to our ability for speech and action in the polis.<sup>30</sup> With the capacity to begin comes the capacity for changing the given course of things (as beginners). Hence, at the centre of the notion of natality lies a potentiality for action that each of us brings to the world by virtue of our own birth, of being natal. It is this ability to insert new beginnings in the midst of an old world that 'looks like a miracle', Arendt writes, and saves the world from ruin.<sup>31</sup> She continues: 'The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality'<sup>32</sup> and because people are born, they can themselves 'give birth' and create newness.

What the notions of natality and birth suggest, is that if human beings were left to themselves, 'human affairs can only follow the law of mortality'.<sup>33</sup> But, because people are born, they can themselves 'give birth' and create new beginnings.<sup>34</sup> Hence, natality and birth has the capacity to interrupt linear time.<sup>35</sup> She writes:

27 Arendt, "The Crisis", 174.

28 Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1929/1996) but the inspiration is from Augustine's *City of God [De Civitate Dei]*, book XII Ch. 20 (Translated by Henry Bettenson, St. Ives: Clays Ltd, 2003).

29 Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Schocken Books 1948/2004), 616. I am using 'man' and 'him' here in an inclusive sense, as referring to mankind and to both men and women.

30 In two of her main political works, *The Human Condition* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, natality is discussed as a political concept although in 'The Crisis in Education' natality is also the essence of education. Hence, natality is central to both to her political and to her educational work, although she clearly argues that these two realms should strictly be kept apart. The paper acknowledges this inconsistency in her thinking but it neither seeks to resolve it nor explore it further.

31 Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1998), 246.

32 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247. It is important to point out in this context that 'the world' for Arendt does not refer to the natural world of trees and animals but to the traces of human words and deeds (speech and action) in the polis.

33 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246.

34 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246.

35 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246.

“The life span of man running towards death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin.”<sup>36</sup>

What is interesting about this well-known citation from Arendt’s *The Human Condition*, Adriana Cavarero points out, is that Arendt here reverses the linear lifespan that in Western metaphysics runs from birth to death, suggesting instead that the notion of natality as a political category offers us a pattern that runs from death to birth.<sup>37</sup> In other words, in beginning something new ruin and destruction is interrupted and renewal and restoration is moving towards us. Since death is the inevitable endpoint for everything and everyone that is alive (i.e. death is our ontological destiny), it is birth that Arendt takes as her central category for initiating change. By doing so, Cavarero argues, Arendt not only replaces one linear model with another linear model or simply substitutes birth to death as the preferred philosophical category – she actually also changes the pattern.<sup>38</sup> By making birth the horizon towards which life is heading, the pattern Arendt calls our attention to is that birth is more than the starting-point for simply another linear model of time, it is the starting-point, Cavarero writes, for ‘a journey whose itinerary is not yet identified’.<sup>39</sup> Hence, by reversing the perspective in this way, we (the old generation) are on a journey *together with* the new (the beginner and the beginnings) that cannot be foreseen or predicted.

Is it the case, then, that the interruption of linear time suggested above returns us to the cyclical model of time that was immensely popular in Antiquity? Birth and natality easily and naturally push us in this direction, Cavarero continues,<sup>40</sup> but in contrast to the natural circle that in Antiquity was used to symbolize immortal life and the living-on of successive generations, ‘man’s life span ... looks like a peculiar deviation’.<sup>41</sup>

If we return to Arendt’s work we see that what characterizes man’s life span is a ‘rectilinear movement’<sup>42</sup> – a geometrical pattern that neither moves forward according to a linear pattern from birth to death (linear time), nor according to a circular movement that moves from birth to death and back into rebirth. No, since natality is the capacity to begin and since man himself is a ‘beginning of a beginning’, as Arendt puts it,<sup>43</sup> – what characterizes the human condition is that man is *inserted* into time. ‘[I]t is this insertion’, Arendt writes, ‘which splits up the time continuum into forces which then, because they are focused on the particle or body that gives them their direction, begin fighting with each other and

36 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246.

37 Adriana Cavarero, *Inclinations. A Critique of Rectitude*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

38 Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 111.

39 Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 111.

40 Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 111.

41 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246 in Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 111.

42 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246.

43 Hannah Arendt, “Preface”. *Between Past and Future*. (New York: Penguin Books.1961/1993), 11.

acting upon man'.<sup>44</sup> What Arendt offers in her notions of natality and birth, then, according to Cavarero, is a notion of time that breaks with both the linear and the circular patterns. She writes:

“In other words, if we confront the ancient figure of the circle with natality instead of with mortality, beginning comes to the foreground and, by breaking down the circularity of natural movement, resoundingly interrupts it. Thus it is that the newborn breaks out of the circle, together with the human faculty that corresponds to it and that actualizes its disruptive force – namely, action.”<sup>45</sup>

The first aspect that the notions of natality and birth bring to the fore then, is that they make change possible by *interrupting* both linear and cyclical time. The possibility for beginning something new and interrupt the given course of things is what saves the world from the path that runs quickly and straight to ruin.

#### **b. Natality and Birth: *mortal man – immortal world***

Arendt's notions of natality and birth not only alters the relationship between death and birth and interrupts both linear and cyclical time, it also shifts mortality and immortality around. If modern life has come to build upon the (illusory) idea that the human can become immortal by leaving traces in the world (i.e. the emphasis on power, prosperity and progress in modernity), Arendt makes it clear that it is the opposite that is true: since we are born into a world that existed long before we made our entry into it and that will continue to exist long after we are gone, it is the world that is permanent and immortal and *not* the human being. However, natality and mortality should not be seen as exclusive to one another because mortality is 'the hallmark of human existence'.<sup>46</sup> In fact, it is only *as a mortal*, with the capacity for enacting freedom, that man can *create new beginnings*. What Arendt helps us see is thus that although we are born to begin, it is not man that is immortal and permanent but the world – it is the world that will over-live us and be passed on to the coming generation.

Modern life, however, according to Arendt, is characterized by the precise opposite of this: we have come to believe that we ourselves are immortal whereas the world will perish. The victory of the philosopher's exit *from* the world, seeking the experience of the eternal and unchanging over and above the concerns of a life in the polis has, since the myth of the cave in Plato's *The Republic*, come to prioritize *bios theoretikos* over *bios politikos* and *vita contemplativa* over *vita activa*.<sup>47</sup> The victory of the striving for the eternal and unchanging does not, however, only have philosophical roots. The fall of the Roman Empire demon-

44 Hannah Arendt, "Preface", 11.

45 Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 111-112.

46 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 18.

47 Arendt, *The Human Condition*.



strated the impermanence of the work of mortal hands and also did the Christian gospel's focus on eternal life for each individual contribute to making any striving for the permanence of the world futile and unnecessary.<sup>48</sup> Hence, modern life cultivates an indifference to the world despite its activism – a kind of *wordlessness* – given further emphasis, as we saw with Jantzen earlier, in the puritan idea of a good life being rewarded in the hereafter.<sup>49</sup>

What is important to note here is that whereas the 'language of crisis' is motivated by the idea that man is immortal but that *the world will perish* and that man, therefore, can use the world as a means to his own ends, the notion of natality builds on the insight that the world is immortal and that *man will perish*. In this sense, the notion of natality not only shifts mortality and immortality around, it also reminds us of the immortal and performative character of our words and deeds and the importance of language.<sup>50</sup> What natality rejects, then, is the anthropocentric belief that the world is a temporary arena we can use for our own purposes, reminding us that the world will over-live each human being's temporal existence.

The second idea that the notion of natality brings to the fore then is that it shifts mortality and immortality around, suggesting on the one hand that the world is immortal and that man will perish but on the other that although we are mortal, we are born to begin. Hence, we are neither born to die nor to (ab)use the world as a means to our own ends but to insert newness into the world.

### III. Rethinking Educational Policy Reform

Given that natality is about beginning, could it not be argued at this point that the many policy reforms that are enforced upon education today are 'new beginnings'? Could it not be argued, therefore, that the last decade in for example a country like Sweden – which has been the most reform dense decade in its modern history – generates more 'beginnings' than ever? We must not forget, however, that an increasing number of teachers today describe their situation in schools as being characterized by having no choice. In my job as a teacher educator, I meet both teachers and teacher students who express frustration over their job situation because, as they often put it, 'there is no room for doing anything beyond what we must do – there is no room for creativity.' The question is then, how can we tell an educational reform generated by the 'language of crisis' from one generated from 'the language of natality'? Or, more correctly: what might policy reforms in education have to acknowledge if they were not to foreclose the possibilities for creativity and change? Let us look at three aspects on how natality and birth can make a difference to policy reform in education.

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48 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 21.

49 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 16; 54.

50 See Butler, *Excitable Speech*.



### a. Educational reform as temporary interruption

According to Masschelein and Simons, education is the 'free time' for study that we insert between the sphere of the home and the agora (the public sphere) (e.g. the Greek idea of *scholè*).<sup>51</sup> The 'free time' of the school is thus the 'space-time' that makes it possible to break with linear time and although what is being taught at school is necessarily oriented towards the past, the school as 'free time' *between* the past and future suspends the pre-determination and one-sidedness that comes with both a conservative and a progressive approach where the former tends to focus only on the past and the latter only on the future.<sup>52</sup> The school, as Masschelein & Simons put it, makes free time possible:

"insofar as it succeeds in temporarily suspending or deferring the past and the future, thus creating a breach in linear time. Linear time is the time of cause and effect: 'You are this, so you have to do that', 'you can do this, so you go here', 'you will need this later in later in life, so this is the right choice and that is the proper subject matter. Breaking through this time and logic comes down to this: the school draws young people into the present tense ... and frees them both of the potential burden of their past and of the potential pressure of a mapped-out (or already lost) intended future."<sup>53</sup>

For our purposes here, the temporary suspension of the past and the future in school creates an important *break in time* that gives education back, so to speak, to the new generation. In breaking with linear time, the pre-determined purposes of the school, projected onto it through an already defined future (as in, saving the future, the economy, the planet, democracy etc.) are also broken with. Given the school's in-betweenness in time, 'between the past and the future' to speak with Arendt, education is neither about a conservative repetition of the past, nor about an unrestrained focus on the future and an anxious and death-driven invention of the new. Rather, education is about *temporarily interrupting time*, so as to make possible a space *in the present* for studying the world.

What educational reform needs to consider then, if it does not want to simply reproduce the violent logic of the crisis, is to take seriously both continuation and change. Hence, instead of only using education as a projection screen for implementing an already defined idea of the future, educational reform needs to take into its concern a respect for what is already there, navigating carefully between the past and the future *in the present*, protecting both the old and the new. This is the only way that the next generation of educational reformers can interrupt the disastrous crisis in education and truly create something new.

51 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence*.

52 For further elaboration on the one-sidedness of both the conservative and the progressive position, see Lovisa Bergdahl and Elisabet Langmann, "Time for Values: Responding Educationally to the Call from the Past", in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-017-9591-2>.

53 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence*, 36.

### b. Educational reform as relational consideration

Since the new (the child) is born into an old (pre-existing) world – a world that was there long before the new was born – the old needs to be protected from the damage (death) caused by the entry of the new, just as the new (birth) needs to be protected and cared for so that its newness is not destroyed (killed) by the old. In her advocating of this double responsibility, Arendt writes these much cited words:

“Education is ... where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.”<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the double gesture of the protection and care of *both* the new and the old comes together in education, and the tension between them is always a matter of risk and negotiation.

This leads us to the second aspect of ‘the crisis’ that Arendt draws our attention to in her essay on education which is that we tend to use education and our children as a tool for building a new world.<sup>55</sup> The relationship between the old world and the new generation is important here and although ‘[i]t is the very nature of the human condition that each new generation grows into an old world’, it cannot be the purpose of education to prepare the new generation for an old world.<sup>56</sup> Why not? Because this could only mean, and this is important, ‘that one wishes to strike from the newcomers’ hands their own chance at the new’.<sup>57</sup> In other words, if the purpose of education were only to socialize the new generation into the (old) orders of society, then the possibility for renewing the world would be lost. So what educational reform concerned with change must do, is to take responsibility for both ‘the life and development of the child *and* for the continuation of the world’.<sup>58</sup> This double responsibility for both the welcoming of the new (change) and the living-on of the old (continuation) constitutes a tension in which it is not only the mortal child that needs protection; the world, too, is in need of protection to keep it from being overrun by the new.<sup>59</sup>

The second task for everyone involved in educational reform, then, given the ‘language of natality’, is to make *relational considerations*, that is, to keep in tension the relatedness between birth and death, the old and the new, the immortal world and the mortal child, continuation and change. The work to be done, in other words, is relational work since

54 Arendt, “The Crisis”, 196.

55 Arendt, “The Crisis”, 176.

56 Arendt, “The Crisis”, 177.

57 Arendt, “The Crisis”, 177.

58 Arendt, “The Crisis”, 186 (emphasis added).

59 Arendt, “The Crisis”, 186. Let us remind ourselves again that ‘the word’ for Arendt is not the natural world but the traces of human words and deeds.

there *in birth* lies a potentiality *to kill* and where there *in death* lies a potentiality for *new life*. This suggests that birth and death are not worlds apart, as we are made to believe in the 'language of crisis', but that every new beginning necessarily contains an end, and that every end necessarily contains a new beginning. Hence, the temporary interruption of the new suggests that there is no space for the new beginnings unless the old yields, gives in, dies.

### c. Educational reform as risk and hope

The basic situation in which education takes place in the present, for Arendt, is that 'we are always educating for a world that is or is becoming out of joint'.<sup>60</sup> Because the world is made by mortal hands it risks wearing out; she writes, and therefore the fundamental task for every generation is to constantly set the world right anew.<sup>61</sup> Bringing newness into the world, then, does not sit easily with wanting to enforce change efficiently and smoothly. By contrast, it *takes time* and is *risky work*. In contrast to the 'language of crisis' that makes us believe that change can be achieved quickly and once and for all, the work of reform generated from the 'language of natality' demands continuous and constant navigation between different kinds of losses and gains in the knowledge that change always involves the necessary and ever-present risk of destruction.

And yet, the final point to make as to what the notion of natality can offer a language of struggle for education is hope. Arendt writes:

"Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope on only this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look."<sup>62</sup>

Hope in this context, then, is not wishful thinking. Nor is it hope in the 'fait accompli', that is, in what we can predict and already know the answer to. No, the only hope is the new, and to make the new over-live its insertion into the old, we have to refrain from 'killing it' with our already thought out answers and solutions *and* protect it from being overrun (by the old). This double gesture of distance and proximity is a gesture that, in contrast to control, takes a step back. It implies simply, as Natasha Levinson puts it, that '[t]he results of efforts are always uncertain'.<sup>63</sup> Hoping beyond certainty, then, as a way of initiating educational reform, is about a precarious navigating between a 'no longer' and a 'not yet': between what education can no longer be (identifying a need for change) and what it could become (formulating a vision). The bottom line of this hope is that we are not doomed to subject to a fixed order of things.

60 Arendt. "The Crisis", 192.

61 Arendt. "The Crisis", 192.

62 Arendt. "The Crisis", 192.

63 Natasha Levinson, "The Paradox of Natality: Teaching the Midst of Beleatedness". In *Hannah Arendt and Education: Renewing our Common World*, (Edited by Mordechai Gordon, Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 32.

## Conclusion: A Language of Natality for Education

The work required by the the kind of reform that has the struggle *for education* close at heart, is that it breaks with automatism and 'one-way-routes' and takes the necessary unpredictability that comes with birth and beginnings seriously. Hence, in contrast to a situation where educational reforms are powerfully and forcefully initiated, often motivated by a one-sided logic that leaves no room for thinking and nuancing, the notion of natality challenges us to think carefully about what needs to be changed, what needs to be preserved, when, why and how.

Drawing on natality and birth as root metaphors for educational reform, however, should not be understood as simply a way to create an oppositional imaginary to the 'language of crisis'. Rather, it has been the aim of this article to show that the 'language of natality' – as a language of struggle *for education* – calls for *a relationality in thinking and acting* that is foreclosed in the violent logic of the 'language of crisis'. This relationality – and this is the gist of the paper – needs to be taken into account when initiating educational change and reform if the new is to over-live the weight of the old.

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# Aislinn O'Donnell

## The Matter of Thinking

### Material Thinking and the Natural History of Humankind

#### Abstract

Contemporary educational policies have recently prioritised the development of generic, core, and transferable skills. This essay reflects on this tendency in the context of the 'algorithmic condition' and those discourses that tend toward an image of education that privileges dematerialised skills, practices, and knowledge. It argues that this turn towards dematerialisation is resonant with shifts in a number of different domains, including work, and explores some of the implications of this shift. Instead I suggest an approach to education that understands it as turning towards the world, loving the world, and creating a common world. In order to understand thinking and knowing as material practices, the concept of 'material thinking' is developed that refuses binaries of theory and practice, but that instead understands thinking, particularly in educational contexts, as material and a practice of thinking with something, and a turning towards the world. I draw upon the work of Susan Oyama, Elizabeth Grosz, Tim Ingold and Isabelle Stengers, and explore the example of Barbara McClintock's research as a cytogeneticist researching maize. Here I am particularly interested in the importance of deep engagement with a subject matter in terms of developing the skilfulness that is associated with what I am calling 'material thinking'. This allows us to think about education in a way that pays attention to the plurality of practices of material thinking that engage with the natural history of humankind, and the story of the world.

#### Key Words

Generic Skills; Material Thinking; Algorithm; Education; Arendt; Oyama.

## Matter without Materiality: The Algorithmic Turn

"Hypercapitalism is emancipating itself from its Western heritage and so-called 'values'. But this reveals a terrible panorama: capitalism without the heritage of humanism and the Enlightenment is a regime of pure, unlimited violence."<sup>1</sup>

What are the implications for life and for thought of the de-materialising turn of contemporary finance capitalism, the rise of soft surveillance and machine learning, and the empty language of audit cultures? Can generic and transferable skills be developed independent of any form of material practice? How can thinking come to more thoroughly involve the

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1 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, (2011) *After the Future* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), 31.

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kind of education of the senses that is born of engagement with a specific subject matter? Do today's accelerated temporalities leave sufficient time for living, sensing and thinking given the limitations of the capacity for experience of finite animals? Is this the dawn of a new era, not of Man as Machine, but Human as Algorithm? What might a re-envisioning of the humanities and sciences involve? In response to these questions, this essay reflects on one kind of thinking, material thinking, as a riposte to the prevalence of skills talk and the algorithmic condition. It is by no means the only kind of thinking that we might come to value, but it is one particularly concerned with the education of attention. Such an education involves turning towards the reality of the world in its particularity in such a way that it is committed to preserving the world, caring for it, and to its renewal; it is an education that can nourish us and help us to live. Turning towards the world by no means guarantees the cultivation of an ethical sensibility capable of attending to the other as other, but it may sensitise us to the fact that the other exists, and can surprise us, just as the world can surprise us, be it the low light in a small Scottish village, Ai Wei Wei's untitled black and white wallpaper depicting the flight of refugees alongside barbed wire and soldiers, or the writings of Raimond Gaita on the personal nature of ethics or on saintliness.

When I question the privileging of 'generic skills' in policies and discourses purportedly concerned with education, this is nothing new. I do so in order to also draw attention to the many varieties of skilfulness implicit in and necessary for practices of material thinking across a range of domains. The matter of thinking, and of education, come alive through loving attention, be it of research, teaching or study. Here I am concerned with retrieving the important idea that education is about turning towards the *world*, and the encounter *with* the world, not first and foremost about the self, even if the self is transformed through that encounter, as it inevitably is if we are moved in our educational experiences. The recent shift to the language of learning occludes the role of the teacher in illuminating the world, the person who helps students to see, read and love the world by exploring together its rich traditions and practices. Such illumination tends to arise through the steady encouragement by teachers of practices of attention, ostension, observation, and active receptivity, staying *with* something for long enough that it might disclose itself under a different light, and hopefully, for a student, coming to see what might seem quite ordinary or uninteresting otherwise in light of a teacher's love and enthusiasm, or at least to appreciate how these forms of love keep knowledges alive. Raimond Gaita, describing the effect on him of his teacher Martin Winkler, writes "As a human being he wanted, and as a teacher felt obliged, to share what he loved with his students, hoping that they would find it worthy of their love and that it would nourish in them a love of the world, as it had in him."<sup>2</sup> This love of the world can be, at least in part, cultivated through some of the practices of material thinking that I describe later in the text. It is certainly revealed through them.

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2 Raimond Gaita, Love and teaching: Renewing a common world, *Oxford Review of Education*, 38 (6), December 2012, 761-769. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2012.745046>.



In contrast to the love of the world, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi<sup>3</sup> says that we are witnessing a de-materialising turn across work and education that undermines the possibility of educating attention. This risks forgetting the world, that delicate and fragile shared achievement of understanding, knowledge, remembering, sensing, and indeed thinking that is renewed by and with each generation and the tendency towards de-materialisation is compounded by the pressures on time that fragment attention. Material thinking sees education as part of a loving encounter with the world and as a way of understanding and communicating what it means to come to know and to love something. Creating a common world means inviting diverse perspectives, artefacts, stories and knowledges to become manifest and shareable, that is public, in a context in which there are increasingly fewer 'public spaces' or matters of public concern, and little concern for inter-generational heritages.

With the rise of generic skills-talk, the difference between the student and the worker becomes more difficult to discern. Paolo Virno<sup>4</sup> claims that the new wage labourer must exemplify "habitual mobility, the ability to keep pace with extremely rapid conversions, adaptability in every enterprise, flexibility in moving from one group of rules to another, aptitude for both banal and omni-lateral linguistic interaction, command of the flow of information, and the ability to navigate among limited possible alternatives", in short, "the habit of developing no durable habits at all"<sup>5</sup>. Elements of this image have gravitated into global policy discourses in education and research with forms of information-talk and skills-talk that fail to pay attention to the question of education risking the precipitation of a new kind of procedural idealism when they intimate, through metaphor and image, that information and skills can exist without bodies, organisms, artefacts or matter.

The algorithmic turn, or the algorithmic condition, is not just one in which matter doesn't matter in the way that it used to; it is one that privileges anticipatory and pre-emptive logics that undo the presence required for educational attention and, with the rise of big data and machine learning, real time pedagogically tailored responses that make surprises if not impossible, then undesirable. Ben Williamson writes, "The notion of an algorithmic imaginary thus captures the Silicon Valley ideal of calculating, predicting and pre-empting human behaviours and social institutions through technical platforms that are increasingly automated and data-driven. The technocratic ideal of complete scientific calculability and technical objectivity associated with algorithmic practice underpins its approach."<sup>6</sup> This algorithmic turn arguably shares, at least in part, a conceptual register with those policy approaches and discourses that foreground the importance of core, generic and transferable skills because of their purported value in preparing students for unknowable futures, or perhaps more precisely, for unknowable forms of employment, labour and work. Both

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3 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *After the Future*. (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011).

4 Paolo Virno, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment" in *Radical Thought in Italy*. Eds. A. Negri and M. Hardt. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 13-36.

5 Virno, 14.

6 Ben Williamson (2016) "Silicon startup schools: technocracy, algorithmic imaginaries and venture philanthropy in corporate education reform", *Critical Studies in Education*, 5. DOI: 10.1080/17508487.2016.1186710

algorithmic culture and skills discourses share a temporal orientation towards the (unknowable) future, both fail to adequately attend to the matter or content of common concern, both aim for control, in different ways, in response to profound uncertainty, and neither is much concerned with the love of the world.

In saying this, I do not wish to argue that the acknowledgement of skills (and competences) is wholly unwelcome or that skills are peripheral to the educational endeavour. Nor do I think that machine learning cannot offer a re-imagining of what it means to know something. However, the reification of generic skills and pre-emptive practices of algorithmic governance, combined with the bracketing of the question of the purpose of *education*, risk subordinating the practice of education to the mere transmission of generic and transferable skills that are, crucially, uncoupled from any content, field or discipline. For them the matter of education is indifferent, just as the student *qua* subject becomes irrelevant. This shift from the language of education to the language of skills and learning can also be found in personalised learning models driven by data analytics. The value system underpinning this approach is premised on technical solutions to educational problems, evidenced by a turn to 'ed-tech' and even 'neuro-education'. Even if education involves skills, it is not equivalent to skills acquisition. Knowing, thinking and understanding in education all require intimacy with the subject matter; they are the practices through which we encounter our common world, the stories of the past, the wonders of the universe, and the natural history of humankind.

For Hannah Arendt, education is concerned with the preservation and the love of the world, that is, it is concerned with conserving the rich stories of the world and humankind. For this reason, education is always about the past, that is, the world, which educators introduce to the next generation, the newcomers to our common world. Teachers introduce the world to each generation through curricula that present matters of common concern in all their richness and complexity for shared study and understanding; her definition of education makes it clear that teachers are responsible for the world because they teach children about the world, saying 'This is our world'. In her 1958 text, *The Human Condition*<sup>7</sup>, she describes the ways in which images of process, algorithmic logics, formalism, and bureaucracy were already becoming privileged in contemporary life, just as in her essay 'The Crisis in Education', she criticised the loss of a sense of what education involves when life skills come to be privileged over learning something<sup>8</sup>. These two concerns are not unconnected. Arendt sees this as part of world-alienation and superfluosity, the designed obsolescence of things, and the atomic individualism that consumerist society was bringing in its wake. The loss of *homo faber* and of things built to last leads to the corrosion of public spaces - the space of the political, the undoing of our common world, and the loss of the sense of responsibility for the world. This sense of loss is intensified in an era of big data, machine learning and the automation of work. I do not raise these concerns in

7 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

8 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Essays in Political Thought*. (New York: Viking Press, 1961).

order to appeal to a nostalgic image of the human. I want to hold on to a variant of *homo faber* as the technological species but the image of *homo faber* that interests me is one that resists behavioural logics that reduce humans to a complex concatenation of data points, and that seek to intervene pre-emptively without allowing for the surprise of the educational encounter, equating education and learning with information processing or enhanced cognition, as we find in much 'ed-tech'. Materiality, matter, and bodies can easily be occluded or forgotten when bureaucratic and computational modalities of thinking over-code different and distinct fields of knowledge, including those that have both constituted and cultivated the subject matters that have occupied human thinking, life and practices over millennia. The co-imbrication of control, communication and information in the contemporary world serves to produce an image of 'disembodied' information and abstract and generic skills, which increasingly shapes social, political, economic and educational imaginaries.

Drawing attention instead to pluralistic and material practices of thinking in education encourages awareness of the ways in which humans, things and other organisms are embedded and entangled in relationships at multiple levels, from the bacteria that populate bodies to the retina's relationship with light waves, turning our attention to the world. This pluralistic, emergent and attenuated approach understands material thinking as both materially instantiated, in some form, and context-dependent, whether the matter of thought at play be the operations of symbolic logic, the solution of a mathematic equation, or the creation of a gesture in choreography. It does not seek to too swiftly sever the epistemological from the ontological. This prevents thinking from being too readily co-opted into the kind of formal and operational abstraction suggested by terms like 'generic' skills, which suggest that mastery and capacity is possible without the intimacy entailed in developing knowledge of and in a subject matter through practice in a concrete situation.

What, in any case, would skills that are uncoupled from context and content even look like? In a story called "The Great Swimmer" from Kafka's unpublished notebooks<sup>9</sup>, he writes,

"Hail the great swimmer! Hail the great swimmer!" the people shouted. I was coming from the Olympic Games in Antwerp, where I had just set a world record in swimming. I stood at the top of the steps outside the train station in my Hometown – where was it? – and looked down at the indiscernible throng in the dusk [...] "Honored guests! I have, admittedly, broken a world record. If, however, you were to ask me how I have achieved this, I could not answer adequately. Actually, I cannot even swim. I have always wanted to learn, but have never had the opportunity. How then did it come to be that I was sent by my country to the Olympic Games? This is, of course, also the question I ask of myself."<sup>10</sup>

Although at first glance the story of Kafka's swimmer seems absurd, arguably, it offers the consummate image for the wage labourer or student today. Across a range of human acti-

9 Franz Kafka, *Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Stories*. (London: Penguin, 1978).

10 Kafka, 314-16.

vities, the formal and empty language of generic, core or transferrable skills prevails, in short, skills that apparently can be achieved in abstraction from material practices or engagement in study.

## Bringing Thinking to Life

Understanding thinking as a material practice involves paying attention to both the *matter* of thinking and the ways in which thinking itself is *material*, for example, in philosophy, sound, film and metalwork. This is not the same as some of the other ways in which *thinking something* have been described. Gadamer described Martin Heidegger's pedagogical approach as he philosophised aloud in class, noting, "One need only recall the way Heidegger approached the lectern – the excited and almost angry seriousness with which his thought was ventured, the way he glanced askance at the window, his eyes only brushing over the audience, and the way his voice was pushed to its very limit in all of the excitement".<sup>11</sup> This exemplified thinking in action: thinking that was visible, palpable through the vibrations of the voice, following the concepts he created in speaking, as though simultaneously generating and tracking them. The thinking experience involves the most heightened and exhilarating feeling of being alive, says Hannah Arendt. She describes Heidegger's 'passionate thinking'<sup>12</sup> as the idea of having 'thought *something*' rather than 'thought *about something*'. Thinking *something*, she said, requires that *something* be de-sensed because the mind withdraws from the body to think.<sup>13</sup> This is not quite the same as *material* thinking, that is, the 'thinking *with something*' that also involves the education of attention and the senses.

Taking up a middle or common ground between 'thinking *something*' and 'thinking *about something*', the idea of 'thinking *with something*' can help draw attention to the qualitative and experiential differences that different kinds of thinking involve, and understanding thinking as a relational endeavour. Thinking is always material whether one engages in writing philosophy, making an artwork, building a cabinet, studying the *drosophila*, or editing a film. In his short essay, "What is the Creative Act",<sup>14</sup> Deleuze elaborates on the specificity (rather than generality) of ideas and the consequent ways in which each is manifested differently, depending on the expressive potential of their relevant different subject matters. He says of the case of philosophy, "Treating philosophy as the power to 'think about' seems to be giving it a great deal, but in fact it takes everything away from it. No one needs philosophy to think [...] If philosophy has to be used to think about something, it would have no reason to exist. If philosophy exists, it is because it has its own content".<sup>15</sup>

11 Hans Georg Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 66.

12 Hannah Arendt. "Martin Heidegger at 80" in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Murray, Michael (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

13 Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind* (London: Harcourt, 1971).

14 Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*. (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006).

15 Deleuze, 2006, 313.

Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari, the specific task of philosophy is to create concepts. He continues,

“No one has an idea in general. An idea – like the one who has the idea – is already dedicated to a particular field. Sometimes it is an idea in painting, or an idea in a novel, or an idea in philosophy or an idea in science. [...] Ideas have to be treated like potentials, already *engaged* in one mode of expression or another and inseparable from the mode of expression, such that I cannot say that I have an idea in general.”<sup>16</sup>

Thinking is material not because it needs something to think *about*, but because as a practice it is always already responsive to the different expressive potentials of the matter at hand. Subject matters also have different relational qualities that emerge in encounters of bodies, things, ideas and organisms, and through such encounters, different forms of material thinking and different kinds of ideas come to be worked through and manifested. If, as J.J. Gibson<sup>17</sup> suggests, we need the education of attention in our studies, so too do we need an education of the senses, understood comprehensively, of the kind that would allow for a deep encounter with our subject matter. For example, when the film director Andrei Tarkovsky<sup>18</sup> said that life's logic is poetic rather than scientific, he thought that the temporal nature of film and the possibilities of editing that this medium permits might communicate poetically something of undergoing of the sensed and felt elements of experiences: 'documentary precision' and 'mechanical accuracy', in his view, bring us no closer to reality. He elaborates on the careful process involved in making a film, and the obstacles one faces: “[o]ften the director himself is so determined to be portentous that he loses all sense of measure and will ignore the true meaning of a human action, turning it into a vessel for the idea he wants to emphasise. But one has to observe life at first hand, not to make do with the banalities of a hollow counterfeit constructed for the sake of acting and of screen expressiveness.”<sup>19</sup> Properly speaking then, the technical is itself creative: one needs to think about the distance of the camera, the long fixed shot, how one edits the temporalities of the piece, whether one allows the camera to linger on the face (Bergman), intersperse contemplative scenes of domestic interiors through the narrative (Ozu) or film photographs with a voice over (Chris Marker). Sensitivity to the matter of film and to film's potentials as a medium allows the director to develop his or her own individual style of expression, thought, temporality, materiality, and sensibility. Likewise, in the cases of forms of expression in poetry and literature – it makes a difference when a line runs into another stanza rather than retaining a sense of autonomy within a given verse, or one uses ellipses,

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16 Ibid, 312.

17 J.J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. (Sussex: Psychology Press, 1986).

18 Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).

19 Tarkovsky, 25.

or plays with syntax, as in the work of Beckett in *Ill Seen, Ill Said*.<sup>20</sup> “From where she lies she sees Venus rise. On. From where she lies when the skies are clear she sees Venus rise followed by the sun. Then she rails at the source of all life. On.”<sup>21</sup> The possibilities are many. Material practices and expressive manifestations differ in accordance with one’s concern, sensibility and depth of understanding or imagination: space, the archive, fossils, the conversation, the remnant, code, the genome, or oral histories with living beings, the stories of non-monumental everyday life.

Tim Ingold writes that “[...] it is a fallacy—and one that is found very frequently in archaeological writing—to suppose that objects are ever finished in this sense. For one thing, their forms are not imposed by the mind, but arise within the movement of the artisan’s engagement with the material; another, in the course of being used for one purpose, objects may undergo further modification that make them peculiarly apt for another.”<sup>22</sup> He suggests that like humans, objects have histories, and that we ought to acknowledge rather better the ways in which relationships and practical engagement with one’s surroundings are both formative and constitutive. The notion of a ‘blueprint’ model of design, by which an author or maker has an idea which then he or she realises, fails to comprehend the ways in which people wrestle with their subject matter and do not know how those engagements and tussles will end, unlike cases of generic skills talk where no resistance is offered by the world. Ingold describes the way in which learning occurs as guided rediscovery, showing, and the education of attention, noting that observation need not be that of the distanced spectator but “requires the observer to place himself or herself, in person, in a relation of active, perceptual engagement with the object of attention [...] There can be no observation without participation, no explanation without interpretation, no science without engagement.”<sup>23</sup> Careful listening, responsiveness and attention to the (subject) matter before each of us invites new ways (for us) of perceiving, sensing, understanding and thinking, and confounds the hylomorphism implicit in some constructivist conceptions of education. Becoming more concerned with the world and its stories, including one’s complex biography and perspective, is part of the practice of education and becoming educated, that is, loving the world. Like William Connolly<sup>24</sup> and Jane Bennett,<sup>25</sup> I am interested in a delicate, even irreverent, ethics of responsiveness and response-ability that is grounded in a relational ontology that invites curiosity and interest.

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20 Samuel Beckett, *Company/Ill Seen, Ill Said/Worstward Ho/Stirrings Still*. (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).

21 Beckett, 51.

22 Ingold, 2001, 263-4.

23 Ibid, 276.

24 William Connolly, *The Fragility of Things*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); William Connolly, *A World of Becoming*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

25 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: The Political Ecology of Things*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822391623>; Jane Bennett, “The Force of Things: Steps Toward an Ecology of Matter”, *Political Theory* 32, no.3 (2004): 347-372. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591703260853>.



## Apprenticeships in Thinking

As Tim Ingold<sup>26</sup> points out, “A skill like playing the cello, being a property of the organism established through practical experience in an environment, is every bit as ‘biological’ as walking on two feet”.<sup>27</sup> The practical experience is vital here. Even if some aspects of skills are transferable, whatever this may mean, they begin and are cultivated in some form of practice. Conceptualising skills as a form of material thinking is to say that skills involve thinking *with* something, attending to it in its particularity.

Of course, in the fields of epistemology and cognitive science where a good deal of criticism has been levelled at the idea that knowledge can and must be ‘abstract’, this is hardly unfamiliar territory. Francisco Varela argued that “proper units of knowledge are primarily *concrete*, embodied, incorporated, lived” when he explained his enactive approach to cognition that emerges from practical engagement with the world.<sup>28</sup> We might in turn think about other ways of understanding knowledge by re-imagining traditions of thinking. Refusing the split between the arts, humanities and human sciences, on the one side, and the natural sciences on the other, Tim Ingold states “[...] there can be no absolute division of method and objective between studying the lives and works of humans and of nonhumans. Why, then, should the participatory and interpretative approaches of the arts and humanities be limited to the study of human subjects? And why, conversely, should the observational and explanatory approaches of science be limited to the domain of nonhuman “nature”? Why, indeed, should these approaches be separated at all?”<sup>29</sup>

Philosophers like Gilbert Simondon<sup>30</sup> and Jane Bennett have questioned the value and validity of hylomorphic approaches to thinking about matter by which (active) form shapes (passive) matter. Today in the wake of *homo bureaucaticans*, and in the context of the algorithmic condition, some of the images and discourses that accompany the concepts of ‘transferable’ or ‘generic’ skills’ seem to imply that skills can be not only uncoupled from material practices, but even developed without any subject matter, operating effectively regardless of context, or any content. Practices of thinking in different fields involve acts of discovery and creation. Bennett prefers, she says, those encounters with creative materiality that anyone who is intimate with *things* experiences. She includes in her list artisans, mechanics, cooks, builders and cleaners, though we could readily extend that list to the

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26 Tim Ingold, “Beyond biology and culture. The meaning of evolution in a relational world”. *Social Anthropology* 12, 2004: 209-221. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0964028204000291>; Ingold, T. (2011) *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge; Tim Ingold ‘From Complementarity to Obviation: On Dissolving the Boundaries between Social and Biological Anthropology, Archaeology, and Psychology’ in Oyama, S., Griffiths, P.E., & Gray, R.D. (Eds.) *Cycles of Contingency: Developmental Systems and Evolution*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 255-280; Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. (London: Routledge, 2000).

27 Ingold, 2004, 216.

28 Francisco Varela, “The Reenchantment of the Concrete” in *Incorporations*, eds. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, (New York: Zone Books; 1992); Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson & Eleanor Rosch (1991), *The Embodied Mind*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

29 Ingold, 2001, 274.

30 Gilbert Simondon, *L'Individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*. (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 1995).

'things' of the humanities and the sciences more broadly. The intimacy of the relation of metalworkers with their material allowed them to discover the 'polycrystalline structure' of non-organic matter. Through a tacit knowledge of their 'protean activeness', metals could be worked with and upon. This image of creative materiality can be extended beyond the examples offered by Bennett in order to follow the inter-play of practitioners in any field with the material with which they are in dialogue. One can witness skilfulness in the practice of the cytogeneticist, skilfulness that is embodied, embedded, emergent and contextual, as described so well by Evelyn Fox Keller<sup>31</sup> in her biography of Barbara McClintock. By *seeing* material practices of thinking in action, one grasps the immanent process through which each question or intervention opens up different possibilities for understanding and action. Skills cannot exist in a realm that is divorced from the exercise and practice of specific, embedded and embodied activities. Oyama, Ingold, Grosz and Fox Keller invite us to begin to dismantle a nature/culture divide or a gene/organism divide that abstracts certain entities in order to give them causative power, as though they could exist beyond the material world with which they co-evolve.

In Susan Oyama's work in developmental biology, we can find an analogous set of concerns about 'info-talk' from those we encounter in those kinds of 'skills-talk' that promote generic context-independent and content-indifferent skills, and that are indifferent to both the knower and the known. When she<sup>32</sup> describes her worries about the 'de-substantialisation' of her field of knowledge – developmental biology, she takes issue first and foremost with the way in which the language of genetics appears to be able to do without materiality. The following quote illustrates this tendency, "Genetic information is said to be weightless and independent of its material substrate; for evolutionary biologist G.C. Williams it dwells in a "codical domain" separate from the physical one".<sup>33</sup> So too, Richard Dawkins<sup>34</sup> claimed that "life is just bytes and bytes and bytes of digital information",<sup>35</sup> "[...] a river of information, not a river of bones and tissues: a river of abstract instructions for building bodies, not a river of solid bodies themselves. The information passes through bodies and affects them, but it is not affected by them on its way through."<sup>36</sup> This is not meant to offer a metaphor for life, but is meant to be taken quite literally. Oyama calls this kind of talk 'info-talk' whereby information's power seems to stem from (a magical) abstract immate-

31 Evelyn Fox Keller, *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock*. (New York: Henry Holt, 1984).

32 Susan Oyama, *Evolution's Eye: A System's View of the Biology-Culture Divide*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000a); Susan Oyama, *The Ontogeny of Information: Developmental Systems and Evolution*. (2nd ed.). (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000b); Susan Oyama, Paul E. Griffiths, & Russell D. Gray. (Eds.), *Cycles of Contingency: Developmental Systems and Evolution*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001); Susan Oyama "Compromising Positions: The minding of matter" in Anouk Berberousse, Michel Morange & Thomas Pradeu (Eds.) *Mapping the Future of Biology*. (Netherlands: Springer, 2009).

33 Oyama, 2009, 27.

34 Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype: The Gene as the Unit of Selection*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

35 Oyama, 2009, 36.

36 Ibid, 41.

riality. She argues that information is deified in the work of people like Dawkins and Daniel Dennett,<sup>37</sup> saying that, “The sprawlingly heterogeneous usage of information has only been touched on here, and part of my point is that the search for a one-size-fits-all organizational principle is misconceived”.<sup>38</sup> She notes that “[r]hetorically making matter disappear also encourages neglect of the histories and concrete arrangements – time and space – that generate biological marvels, and makes it harder to communicate them effectively.”<sup>39</sup>

Oyama says, “Our cognitive and ethical responsibilities are based on our *response-ability*, our capacity to know and to do, our active involvement in knowledge and reflection”.<sup>40</sup> Irresponsible approaches might include making ungrounded claims and statements, blithe indifference to evidence, or refusing to look at alternative arguments in a field like philosophy. It is not only those working in the sciences who must respond to and think with their subject matter. Those of us engaged in study, research and practice in the arts and humanities will be familiar with the experience of resistance and ambiguity of the material with which we are dealing. Much as we might *like* to make an argument or offer a particular interpretation, the material can be recalcitrant; it won't be forced into a position it doesn't 'like'. We undertake careful processes of writing, reading, and of editing. We work to develop ideas, interpretations and arguments. We try to frame in a way that is generous and faithful to the subject matter. We try to ensure some kind of continuity or resonance between different elements, even in forms of experimental writing or philosophy. We seek ways for heterogeneous elements to communicate in installation and film. This is a matter of co-construction and interaction that also involves an ethical dimension.

Isabelle Stengers,<sup>41</sup> Susan Oyama and Elizabeth Grosz<sup>42</sup> offer alternative visions that are born of different ways of thinking about method and understanding in the sciences and the humanities and drawn from careful descriptions of practices. Rather than policing disciplinary boundaries, these thinkers are critical of dominant descriptions of the practice of research and thought in these domains. Their insights are particularly useful as we reflect on what it is that we *do* in the humanities, the arts, and the sciences. Of value are sustained engagement, the cultivation of responsiveness, the capacity for judgement and the kind of creative attention that slowly emerges through deep, loving and intimate familiarity with a subject matter. The kind of skilfulness involved in these practices of 'material thinking' cannot be taught in abstraction from content nor is it readily transferable to other domains. Rather, the sustained interplay and dynamic relation with subject matter is part of an immanent process of thought that is attentive to and faithful to the *matter* of thought.

37 Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

38 Oyama, 2009, 42.

39 Ibid, 43.

40 Ibid, 149.

41 Isabelle Stengers, *Invention of Modern Science*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Isabelle Stengers, *Power and Invention: Situating Science*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

42 Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics and Art*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

When Oyama argues against reductionist conceptions of genes as sole causal factors or drivers of evolution in favour of a nuanced, context-driven constructivist model of evolution, she argues that this is more faithful to the complex and material development of living beings, whilst Grosz's turn to Darwinian sexual selection allows her to frame the pursuit of understanding in the sciences and humanities in a language that is non-instrumental. Just as the bird cannot justify its song, it is absurd to ask humans to justify the many forms of expression and interest that are constitutive of *homo sapiens* as a linguistic, cultural, social, artistic, creative form of life, even if, as Nietzsche notes, man is an indeterminate animal.

Although Oyama's writings are concerned with information in the context of genetics and developmental biology, her thoughts are instructive for those of us concerned by the de-materialising turn in skills talk and its implications for education. "[I]nformation is not some mysterious stuff, capable of being transmitted from one place to another, translated, accumulated, and stored; rather it goes out of kinds of relations. For Gregory Bateson<sup>43</sup> information is a difference that makes a difference. This invites questions: a difference in what (what are you paying attention to?), about what (what matters?), for whom (who is asking, who is affected?). Asking these questions leads us to focus on the knower, a knower who always has a particular history, social location and point of view".<sup>44</sup> Oyama claims that scientific knowledge has been habitually disembodied and the use of the passive voice erases the context specificity of the knower, including her cares, interests, perspectives, worries and power relations, such that we place no value on even the romance of discovery described by Whitehead.<sup>45</sup> This also reveals the politics of knowledge; questions of method or legitimacy can become framed in such a manner so authoritative that no dissent is brooked, which then forecloses other ways of understanding and describing pathways to knowledge and understanding. She states her own position clearly. Speaking of biology, she asks that rather than seeking timeless truths, we might come to "appreciate *particular* perspectives as vehicles for empathy, investigation, and change [..]"<sup>46</sup>

## Material Thinking: The Matter of Thought

It is not the case that the humanities have a somehow separate and special vocation from the sciences, even if they have had a tendency to make a *tabula rasa* of their forbearers, forgetting the human is also animal, a living organism, part of a long evolutionary lineage, co-emergent with multiple forms of life and matter, co-constituted by and with the technologies that change human capabilities, and inheritor of rich cultural traditions, beliefs and practices. So too have the natural sciences their own blindspots which is why Stengers

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43 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972); Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1979).

44 Oyama, 2000a, 147.

45 Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*. (New York: The Free Press, 1967).

46 Oyama, 2000a, 149.

asks scientists to allow themselves to be “confronted with the manifold richness that they have for so long given themselves the right to forget. From now on, they will be faced with the problem that some have wanted to reserve for the human sciences – whether it be to elevate or to diminish them – the necessary dialogue with pre-existing knowledges concerning situations familiar to everyone. No more than the sciences of society can the sciences of nature forget the social and historical roots that create the familiarity necessary for the theoretical modelising of a concrete situation.”<sup>47</sup> This she describes as a poetic listening to nature, using ‘poetic’ in its etymological sense. This emphasis on the concrete situation is important; the form of engagement is determined by the concrete materiality of the situation so it is important to consider the kinds of reasons that are offered for decisions made to bracket, suspend or ignore aspects of that situation, such as the weather, or the soil.

Whatever subject matter we have come to love – and this is surely the hope of the educator that someone will not only come to learn something, but to love something – we will feel an affinity with the words of Shirley Strum when she says “to understand them I take the risk of loving them, that is of being transformed by them”. Strum speaks of her baboons in a way that is at odds with those conventional scientific discourses that emphasise the importance of neutrality, a particular form of objectivity, or that demand replicable methodology. In this spirit of loving attention, Stengers notes how “McClintock tracked down the singularity of the genetic material of the corn she was studying, she defined it with precision and relentlessness [...]”<sup>48</sup> She names her “intense jubilation”, her empathy, which enabled her to descend ‘into’ the cells she was examining”, allowing her to *understand* in “the most intimate sense of the term”.<sup>49</sup> McClintock laughed when her corn surprised her: for her, corn was capable of reacting.

Evelyn Fox Keller observes that “the research readily takes on the appearance of a conversation: the riposte has all the unexpectedness and charm that one finds in the response of an intelligent interlocutor.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, McClintock herself says, “If only we were content to let the material speak”.<sup>51</sup> When we are open to listening to the material then we can learn through encounter, surprise, study, attention, and experience to ask the right questions. Stengers reflects on this saying, “But from the moment she chose to no longer make use of corn but to learn ‘with’ it...”<sup>52</sup> This is part of what education involves: the task of any practitioner is to come to learn *with* and think *with* the material, be it navigating archives, a body in a yoga posture, the feel of a grain of wood or the genesis of a philosophical concept. As Stengers describes corn’s entangled histories, “its reproduction, its development, ... its growth in the fields where it experiences the sun, the cold, predatory insects and so on”, she says quite firmly, “Indeed scientists should not accumulate ‘neutral’ observations

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47 Stengers, 2000, 46.

48 Fox Keller, 112.

49 Ibid, 115.

50 Ibid, 124.

51 Ibid, 126

52 Stengers, 1997, 129.

about corn, but learn from it which questions to ask it, because like every historical being, corn is a singular being. And to say 'corn' is already to say too much ... (ibid, 127). What is special, for her, about the science of evolution is that it precludes the power to judge *a priori*, as it discovers the need to put to work a more and more subtle practice of storytelling. McClintock's descriptions of her own practice of coming to learn about her corn helps us to gain insight into the practical efforts of what it means to come to know something. Her stories communicate the vitality of a patient relation of ethical and creative attention that values the kind of understanding that can only emerge through sustained and careful observation. It is an exercise that shows what it means to come to love the world, and that values the world simply because it is, it exists.

Elizabeth Grosz also resists the invocation of instrumental language to justify the existence of the humanities though she also wonders what intellectual revolution would need to occur such that they might be re-imagined "to make man, and the various forms of man, one among many living things, and one force among many, rather than the aim and destination of all knowledges [...]".<sup>53</sup> In seeking out the 'inhuman' in the humanities, and the affinities between humans and other sentient beings (and for Bennett this also would include inorganic matter like chemical compounds to basalt or tin cans), she refuses to justify their existence by appealing to their utility, however worthy, in cultivating character, citizenship or competence. The expressiveness of diverse forms of life, as described in the writings of Darwin, leads her to ask: What if the borderline between the humanities and sciences were to become less secure, more open, more interactive without being reductionist on either side?

What if we were to become better attuned to the eroticism of language, the sensuality it invites, be it in birdsong or poetry, and the pleasures it creates? Darwin's writings on sexual selection show how he clearly distinguished sexual selection from natural selection. Tool-making, seduction, language, decoration, love, curiosity, and pleasure are not specific to the human species, and if we allow ourselves to reflect on these areas of common endeavour and experience, we might come to dismantle the abyss of separation between the human and the animal. Engagement in these activities is part of what it is to be a living human being, just as the bird sings or the beaver builds a dam. To attend properly to the stories of all beings, animate and inanimate, requires an apprenticeship in material thinking.

## In Conversation with Matter

In both the sciences and the humanities, we develop skilfulness through engagement and conversation with our subject matter. Thinking *with* something undoes the notion that thinking only takes place in the Cartesian, or even computational, mind. Material thinking demands a dialogical, rigorous and sensitive disposition and a skilfulness that needs

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53 Grosz, 13.



something 'other' than itself. The language of probing, enquiry and investigation seems, sometimes, to rather better communicate this. Richard Sennett's comments in *The Craftsman*<sup>54</sup> are useful in this respect. Although he focuses on the making of concrete things, his insights are also important for those domains such as the humanities that are sometimes wrongly construed as 'immaterial', as only 'theory'. These disciplines and fields also involve a relation to the world and are usually manifested in material forms such as texts, archives, film or voice. He asks "[w]hat the process of making concrete things reveals to us about ourselves", adding "[l]earning from things requires us to care about the qualities of cloth or the right way to poach fish [..]".<sup>55</sup> Sennett's sense of what it is to do something well involves a fidelity to the 'thing itself' and requires "skill, commitment and judgement".<sup>56</sup> If "every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking",<sup>57</sup> as Sennett argues, it might help to begin to re-conceive the practice of subjects in the humanities and sciences in terms of the material knowing and thinking of craftsmanship, not in terms of a pre-conceived end product, but rather by attending to the sensitive manner in which a craftsman works with his or her material. Sennett makes the following arguments in respect of his understanding of skills. "[F]irst all skills, even the most abstract, begin as bodily practices; second; that technical understanding develops through the powers of the imagination".<sup>58</sup> The process of learning involves learning from the resistance and ambiguity of the given material, and the facility to improvise develops over time. He argues against any simplification and rationalisation of skills, such as a teacher's manual; because we are complex organisms, manuals simply cannot capture the elements and relations at play.

What if we were to tell the stories of the matter of our subjects and why they matter, as teachers, students, and researchers, detailing the subtle practices of storytelling that they demand? We could communicate practices of thinking responsive and in dialogue with their material, the need for deep attention in study in these areas, and the tension of this with the direction of contemporary life and its world-alienation. We might tell of our reservations about the meaningfulness and relevance of much of the *a priori* skills language that abounds, our refusal to subordinate educational aims to the short-term objectives of business, and resist servicing dominant discourses by re-framing our research within an instrumental rationale. We could refuse to apologise, and ask how we might retrieve a sense of our world and the natural history of humankind, a history far richer than the caricature of *homo economicus*. We could ask what possibilities are offered to a human life to explore the world, becoming attuned to the human as a being in becoming, a human who is natural, historical, cultural, linguistic, expressive, desiring, creative and sensual. When we witness the expressiveness and lack of utility of so much of nature, why do we feel compel-

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54 Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

55 Sennett, 8.

56 Ibid, 9.

57 Ibid, 9.

58 Ibid, 10.

led to impoverish our understanding of human existence, and tie it to key performance indicators? Why do we feel we need to justify life? Cultivating skilfulness in material thinking returns us to the rich materiality of the world and to practices of education that allows us to singularise each of our existences with all the exuberant superfluity of life, and come to both conserve and love the world.

# Rebecca Adami

## In a Man's words

### – the politics of female representation in the public

#### Abstract

*What one decides fit for appearance through writing and speech bears a political significance that risk being distorted through both language, reception in the public, and through calls for gendered representations. How can work of female philosophers be interpreted as a concern for the world from that of having to respond to a male-dominated discourse through which speech becomes trapped into what one might represent as 'other'? In this paper, I explore the public reception of two female thinkers who question, in different ways, the dominant notion of the author or philosopher as a male subject; what kind of limitations does the relative notion of 'female' pose political action, and how can privilege constitute a hindrance to feminist solidarity?*

#### Key words

*female representation, philosophy, Hannah Arendt, political action, feminism, solidarity, privilege*

Hannah Arendt:

– It is entirely possible that a woman will one day be a philosopher....

Male interviewer:

– I consider you to be a philosopher...

Hannah Arendt:

– Well, I can't help that, but in my opinion I am not. In my opinion I have said good-bye to philosophy once and for all."<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction – the philosopher

The underrepresentation of female philosophers has been researched through different lenses that attempt to describe the dissonance that 'female' pose within a male-centred discourse.<sup>2</sup> Challenging the notion of student as male in classical works such as Rousseau's

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1 Hannah Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 2.

2 Vera Tripoli, "Intuition, Gender and the under-Representation of Women in Philosophy," *Rivista Di Estetica* 58 (2015): 136-46. doi.org/10.4000/estetica.439.

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*Émile or On Education*<sup>3</sup> (in which Sophie is reduced to a future partner for Émile) Mary Wollstonecraft responded in 1792 with a call for women's rights through her decisive work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*<sup>4</sup> in which she opposes Rousseau's proposal of a girl's education. "Not only was she (Wollstonecraft) female and so likely to notice Sophie – as generations of male commentators have not – but also, she was herself far from fitting Rousseau's ideal of a submissive"<sup>5</sup> woman, as she was a best-selling author and intellectual. Wollstonecraft's *edutopia* for women in society, developed in recent work in philosophy of education<sup>6</sup> raise questions concerning what kind of educational relationships that enable social justice and gender equality.

Regardless of present day efforts toward such calls in academia, the continuous problem of female students dropping out at introductory levels in philosophy studies has been raised and critically discussed in terms of feelings of 'belonging', 'comfort', and 'confidence' in the philosophy classroom<sup>7</sup>.

"Entrance into intellectual discussions is a hard-won battle for women" according to feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, who explained her refusal of sharing personal details in an interview 1993, stating that "reference to biographical material is one way in which women's credibility is challenged".<sup>8</sup> She has throughout her work exposed the male-gendered language traditionally used in philosophy. As 'female' in higher education reading philosophical work, one might react to the (excluding) use of the noun 'him' and 'his' in classical work, and to the individual generally being referred to as 'he' and how 'man' or 'men' are supposed to be inclusive of 'everyone'.

From this, I initially wanted to scrutinize through feminist thinkers such as Irigaray, the belief that being 'othered' leads to a rejection of the self that then might be imbedded in one's writing. One way to explore this would be through the notion of schizophrenia as a metaphor for the ways in which the 'female' subject may struggle to express herself without simultaneously inhabiting the public reception, carrying the critic within. This initial interest evolved into a more political concern – of identity, representation, and the possibility for political action – of female representation in a man's words.<sup>9</sup>

3 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education* (USA: Basic Books, 1979).

4 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Boston: Peter Edes, 1792).

5 Morwenna Griffiths, "Educational Relationships: Rousseau, Wollstonecraft and Social Justice," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 341. doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12068.

6 Griffiths, "Educational Relationships: Rousseau, Wollstonecraft and Social Justice"; Rebecca Adami and Claudia Schumann, "Feminism and Philosophy of Education," in *Philosophy: Education*, ed. Bryan Warnick and Lynda Stone, Philosophy Series (Farmington Hills: Macmillan, 2017).

7 Morgan Thompson et al., "Why Do Women Leave Philosophy? Surveying Students at the Introductory Level," *Philosophers' Imprint* 16 (2016).

8 "Luce Irigaray", by Sarah K. Donovan, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/irigaray/>.

9 In a man's words is a paraphrasing of James Brown song "It's a man's world". In an interview on CNN from 1988 when he has just been bailed from alleged abuse of his wife he does not answer any of the female interviewer's questions regarding the assault. He instead continues talking about his new album, his latest hit. Tuning (apparently stoned) on the lyrics "it's a man's world", these words receive a rather different connotation in a situation of a man

There is an inherent paradox in this exploration, that of naming the 'otherness' I seek to problematize. Then, is it only the privilege of a few not to be concerned with 'otherness', hence of not naming that which is nonetheless felt by unjust social practices? Battling with this tension between gendering as acknowledging, and of acknowledging a work in its own right, without the author having to be a representative of difference, I build on Hannah Arendt's notion of political action precisely for her defiance of identity politics.

In the paper, I aim at problematizing the limitations that calls for representations place on women in academia while being 'othered', and how this 'othering' risk distancing one from identifying as 'woman' when asked to respond to 'women issues'. I will do this through a critical interpretation of interview extracts with two philosophers, an analysis building on the notion of *affective dissonance* that according to Clare Hemmings<sup>10</sup> may lead to engagement with, or rejection of, feminist theory.

We might decide that questions of gender are not relevant in any given task of writing and speech, but the significance of representation often seem to be in the interpreter's gaze, in the readers' interest, or in the audience that listen. The influence of Hannah Arendt and Simone de Beauvoir, through their respective work on the conditions of political action and freedom, continues to inspire contemporary philosophical perspectives, although they themselves rejected the label of 'philosopher' in order to place greater emphasis on the political dimensions of the writing, and for Beauvoir on the literal. "Deferring the position of 'the philosopher' to Sartre, Beauvoir explicitly claims she is a literary author."<sup>11</sup>

Whereas Arendt has been criticised by contemporary feminist thinkers for ignoring 'women issues' in her work, Beauvoir places the specific conditions of the 'other' sex at the centre for such a theoretical investigation. When interviewed about their work, however, it is not their concern for the world that is placed in the foreground initially by the male interviewers, but them as representatives of female emancipation.

The problem I seek to address is the double-edged sword of acknowledging political speech, work, and deeds of women while simultaneously forcing women to represent 'femininity' and an identity as 'woman'.

## You say philosophy is generally considered a masculine occupation

For Hannah Arendt, appearance and the public are interrelated; the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses need to be transformed, de-privati-

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apparently refusing to respond of violence against women – and getting away with it. (James Brown was released immediately as the charges were dropped, and "released" from further questions on the subject as the interviewer follows up, "all women love you, why do you think that is?" hence not having to respond to allegedly assaulting his wife with a lead pipe and firing a gun at a car she was in).

10 Clare Hemmings, "Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation," *Feminist Theory* 13, no. 2 (2012): 147-61. doi.org/10.1177/1464700112442643.

11 Nathalie Nya, "The Question of Influence: Sartre and Beauvoir", *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 6, no. 11 (n.d.): 1304. doi.org/10.17265/2159-5836/2016.11.005.

zed, de-individualized into a shape that fits these experiences for public appearance; and the most current of such transformations (of desire, thoughts and pleasure), according to Arendt, occurs through storytelling and artistic expression that transpose individual experiences.<sup>12</sup>

The relational quality of political acts restricts the political significance, weight and force of some people's narratives. To 'act', in the etymology of the word from Greek and Latin, according to Arendt, "contains two interrelated words": to begin and to bear. "Here it seems as though each action were divided into two parts, the beginning made by a single person and the achievement in which many join by 'bearing' and 'finishing' the enterprise, by seeing it through."<sup>13</sup>

How some narratives are received and viewed as more trustworthy, or regarded as more objective and given more epistemic weight as evidence in research (and politics) is in my view a continuous struggle of power and voice. I have elsewhere explored the critique in legal theory of the use of narratives in courts dealing with human rights claims,<sup>14</sup> where testimonies of women and children (for different reasons) have historically and traditionally been given less weight as 'evidence' to actually influence historical accounts, and the application of law. For Arendt law is a necessary precondition to politics, and her concern is for equal participation in both, hence her conceptualization of politics focus the process, and not the outcome of such actions.<sup>15</sup>

In my reading, the legitimacy and political weight of narratives are disclosed by their reception in the public. As Arendt states: "The disclosure of the 'who' through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt."<sup>16</sup> The agent tends to be disclosed together with the act, and action only appears in its full glory in the public.<sup>17</sup> A life lived only in the public, according to Arendt, becomes "rather shallow", and hence the hiding place of the private is a condition for a deep commitment in the public, to have a space where thoughts can be developed through privacy. "Privacy was like the other, the dark and hidden side of the public realm, and while to be political meant to attain the highest possibility of human existence, to have no private place of one's own (like a slave) meant to be no longer human."<sup>18</sup> Arendt's distinction between public and private has been levelled against her as not being fruitful for feminist claims for rights and justice – as closely connected to the private.

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12 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 50.

13 Arendt, 189.

14 Adami, "The Critical Potential of Using Counter Narratives in Human Rights Education," in *Critical Human Rights, Citizenship, and Democracy Education: Entanglements and Regenerations*, ed. Michalinos Zembylas and André Keet (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

15 Jerome Kohn, "Taking Politics Seriously," *Harvard Law Review* 119, no. 2 (n.d.): 639-45.

16 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

17 Arendt, 180.

18 Arendt, 64.



Instead of seeing the division of private and public as a reason for not engaging with Arendt in feminist theory, Bonnie Honig<sup>19</sup> argues that this distinction offers a possibility to develop an agonistic and performative politics through which to augment and amend what is deemed to be politics. Since Arendt, according to Honig, opposed “attempts to conceive of politics as expressive of shared (community) identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, or nationality”,<sup>20</sup> her political account provides an opportunity to develop a feminist politics not built on shared identity, but on constant negotiation of what feminist politics and identity could entail – when not viewed as essentializing.

Honig proposes that agonistic politics creates new relations, in both the public and the private realm. In my reading of Arendt, the web of relations is in the public, so in a generous reading we can see that politics in the public can amend relations in the private realm – for example through new legislation on rights in the private realm – but political contestations occur, in my reading of Arendt, only in the public.

I appreciate Honig's development of agonistic politics, while not sharing her reading that in order to pursue agonistic politics we need to resist the public/private distinction. What we need to resist is rather any argument that issues traditionally confined to the private realm could not become political when voiced and received in the public.<sup>21</sup>

Mary G. Dietz summarizes the feminist critique of Arendt's private/public distinction in *Feminist Receptions of Hannah Arendt*, stating that “Even those feminists who do not share the analytical presuppositions of difference feminism often find it necessary to acknowledge that Arendt's distinction of public/private is ‘historically invidious’, ‘astounding’ in its ‘denial of the women's issue’, or at least inappropriately viewed as a ‘preferred state of affairs.’”<sup>22</sup> Arendt is in this sense read as placing ‘woman’ in the non-political private realm, hence ignoring the political relevance of ‘women issues’, and in addition reifying this division so as to keep ‘women’ in the private realm.

According to Dietz, it is rather by re-discovering how Arendt genders bodily work in relation to producing work that allows us to explore her concept of action as a space to reclaim issues that have traditionally not been regarded as of political weight. In my reading of Arendt, she explores the human condition in relation to three distinctions of activities: bodily labour, manufacture and action, without gendering the private/public distinction,

19 *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, Re-Reading the Canon, 99-2088461-8 (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1995). doi.org/10.2307/2082622.

20 Honig, 149.

21 The hashtag #metoo is a current example of how what has been silenced in the private realm (such as sexual abuse) when voiced in the public were given a political weight that demands political action. In my understanding, there is no contradiction between political recognition of ‘women issues’ in the public and Arendt's distinction. When second-generation feminists claimed that the private realm is political, this is exactly what they did – in my interpretation: they voiced what had been labelled ‘women issues’ in the public, thus negotiating what had been legislated and not, through politics.

22 Mary G. Dietz, “Feminist Receptions of Hannah Arendt,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 29.

hence such a distinction does not have to be seen “as a key to problems of exclusion and to the historical condition of women in particular.”<sup>23</sup>

Arendt problematizes the conditions for action through a historical lens on how action has been related to property owning, to the head of household, and to those who, by privilege, are freed from labour. Through this kind of historicizing, Arendt (re-)introduces the concept of political action, that “philosophers had failed to place at the center stage”<sup>24</sup> of politics. By doing so, Arendt explores the conditions, rather than the ends of political action, as based on plurality and equality.

If we read Arendt’s distinction of human activities purely as a description of a human condition (that she traces throughout history) without any normative judgement for a ‘preferred political theory’ we may appreciate how she is observing and describing, rather than proposing preferred conditions for political action. In my reading, Arendt’s description does not reject arguments that issues related to oppression and power in the private realm can become political concerns in the public. Nonetheless, Arendt’s division implies that such forms of oppression will gain political weight when voiced in the public. In my interpretation of her political theory, Arendt does not exclude ‘women’ from the political realm since, for one thing, she opposes static labels such as ‘woman’, and additionally does not define the public as a ‘male’ domain.

Arendt’s presumed silence in relation to explicitly mentioning gender can be read as excluding ‘women issues’ from a concept of politics, or as challenging the reification of such exclusion by defying to name the discriminatory structure of the public as historically dominated by white men from privileged backgrounds.

### **Je n’ai jamais souffert**<sup>25</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir acknowledges in *The Second Sex* the social, economic and cultural conditions that limit female emancipation. Woman, according to Beauvoir, is the category of ‘other’ – that constitutes the subject as male. Her work has been read as feminist existentialism due to her description of the conditions that limit women’s exercise of individual freedom.

I find a similarity in Beauvoir’s distinction between *transcendence* and *immanence* with Arendt’s public/private distinction. However, in Beauvoir’s writing, the gendered analysis is what builds this distinction, whereas in Arendt’s writing, the distinction of public/private is a way to examine the conditions for political action. The distinction between transcendence and immanence allows us to see how men have been privileged by expressing transcendence through projects, whereas women have been forced into a repetitive and uncreative life of immanence. Evidently, in contrast to Arendt, Beauvoir described the con-

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23 Dietz, 29.

24 Kohn, “Taking Politics Seriously,” 640.

25 Beauvoir’s words, in English: ‘I never suffered’.

ditions that create sexual difference and limit women's individual freedom as obstacles to economic independence.

It could be assumed that Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* based on the basis of her own experiences as a woman; however, in an interview in 1959 with her it becomes clear that her work was not based solely on her own experiences; rather the contrary, she says.

In the following I will discuss extracts from interviews with Arendt and Beauvoir, noting how both male interviewers, with the questions they pose, in a sense force Arendt and Beauvoir to represent, or deny their female sex, when presenting them as exceptions, as being female thinkers.

“Interviewer:

– Do you think a woman can make as through a commitment as a man to a work of artistic or ideological creation?

Beauvoir:

– *Of course.*

– You may be the exception, but do you think in general, it is as easy for a woman? Is it just as possible?

– *It depends. If a woman has a true vocation, a real desire to write or sculpt, like the late Germaine Richer, or to paint, she will do it as well as a man.*

– The portrait you have painted of the feminine condition is not quite so rosy for women. Have you suffered from being a woman?

– *Never, as I explain in my memoirs. That is why people were mistaken if they took *The Second Sex* to be militant. I didn't even touch upon the issue until, from speaking to other women, I learned of their experiences and realized there was a particularly feminine misfortune. But I didn't personally suffer as I studied what I wanted, without difficulty, and I never met with hostility among my colleagues, since left-wing intellectuals are the most open and liberal with regard to relations between men and women. I never suffered.”<sup>26</sup>*

The writing of *The Second Sex* – the most influential book on feminism – was initially, according to Beauvoir, a theoretical investigation based on the description of other women's experiences. The interviewer reifies the image of her as an exception, and not like other women: “You may be the exception” he says, but can other women make a living of art or writing, that is the question. Beauvoir, being recognized in the public as a thinker, is asked by the male interviewer to represent “women” but at the same time to deny her sex, as an exception to other “women”.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Simone de Beauvoir, 1959, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFRTI\\_9CbFU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFRTI_9CbFU), accessed 13 November 2017, 16:00-17:17.

## I am afraid I have to protest

Although Arendt's political theory is not in any way related to female emancipation, extracts from an interview in 1964 demonstrates how these issues nonetheless influenced how she was perceived in the public as a result of the questions posed about female emancipation, on being a "female" philosopher, and of philosophy being a "masculine" occupation. In the interview, Arendt receives the first question regarding her sex.

"Male interviewer:

– Hannah Arendt, you are the first lady to be portrayed in this series. The first lady with a profession some might regard as a masculine one. You are a philosopher. Please allow me to place my first question. In spite of the recognition and respect you have received, do you see your role among philosophers as unusual or peculiar because you are a woman?

Hannah Arendt:

– *I am afraid I have to protest. I do not belong to the circle of philosophers. My profession, if one can even speak of it at all, is political theory. I neither feel like a philosopher, nor do I believe that I have been accepted in the circle of philosophers, as you so kindly suppose. But to speak of the other question that you raised in your opening remarks: you say philosophy is generally thought to be a masculine occupation. It does not have to remain a masculine occupation! It is entirely possible that a woman will one day be a philosopher...*"

– I consider you to be a philosopher...

– *Well, I can't help that, but in my opinion I am not. In my opinion I have said good-bye to philosophy once and for all. As you know, I studied philosophy, but that does not mean that I stayed with it.*"<sup>27</sup>

Instead of defending her work, Arendt has to respond to questions about being a woman *and* a philosopher. Arendt is asked here to respond to identity politics, a response that few white, western, heteronormative men are asked to make. However, if one is in any way 'othered', one will most probably have had to respond to the question of representation of 'otherness' before discussing one's work, contribution, or literary expression.

Arendt questions a call for representation of 'otherness' in the interview. She declares, first of all, that she does not define herself as a philosopher; she is a political theoretician. Secondly, being a philosopher, because at that point it is seen as a male profession, does not mean that a woman will not be a philosopher in the future. (She also questions defining philosophy and political thinking as a profession – for her this is *vitae active*). The interviewer persists: "I consider you to be a philosopher". "I can't help that", responds Arendt.

Both Arendt's and Beauvoir's denial that they share a "female experience", combined with the male interviewer's insistence on defining them as "female" while at the same time identifying them as "exceptions" to other women reifies both the 'philosopher' or 'writer' as male and them as rare exceptions.

27 Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus," 1-2.

Representations of 'otherness' may be inhibiting, through notions of suffering, and there might be a need to relationally create a discursive space for an already emancipated, already voiced 'female' subject in the public, a political position taken through a strong articulated sense of self that both Arendt and Beauvoir seem to speak from, but which they take on, not based on a shared 'female' experience.

"Male interviewer:

– Now, let us turn to the question of woman's emancipation. Has this been a problem for you?

Arendt:

– Yes, of course; there is always the problem as such. (...) The problem itself played no role for me personally. To put it very simply, I have always done what I liked to do."<sup>28</sup>

In the interview, Arendt acknowledges the problem of female emancipation while saying that she herself did not relate to the problem in decisions of what she wanted to pursue. She seems reluctant here to define herself as 'woman' or to discuss separatist women's movements. The impossibility for 'female' philosophers to ignore identity politics in the public reception of their work is a paradox of political action – *she* decides what is fit for appearance, but is nonetheless received as gendered.

Arendt recognises in *The Human Condition*<sup>29</sup> that action through speech, as distinguished from manufacture, tends to disclose the subject, while at the same time limiting the possibilities of that disclosure since it is through a web of relations that our actions are received and where our selves are exposed.

"The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a 'character' in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us."<sup>30</sup>

Even in this quote from Arendt, the vocabulary is gendered, which may lead (feminist) receptions of the writing astray. The impossibility for female writers of not mentioning what is implicitly there? In my reading, exposing ourselves through words demands greater courage of women (especially marginalised women) as the interpretation of words is dependent on a validation of narratives that risk creating a sense of homelessness of 'the other' in the public, or a demand to represent 'difference' as a collective identity trait.<sup>31</sup>

28 Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus," 2-3.

29 Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

30 Arendt, 181.

31 See further Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen, the Life of a Jewess* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997). Rebecca Adami, "Paideia and Cosmopolitan Education: On Subjectification, Politics and Justice," *Studier i Paedagogisk Fiosofi* 4, no. 2 (2015): 68-80 doi.org/10.7146/spf.v4i2.22419; Rebecca Adami, "Human

## I try to describe it

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir succeeds where phenomenologist had failed, argues Margery Simons,<sup>32</sup> in defining a political philosophy as she “locates her critique on the margins of culture” by “privileging female voices.”<sup>33</sup> Beauvoir describes a gendered structure that keeps women from leading a political life, which is addressed in the following extracts from the interview as ‘a feminist revolt’. This interpretation stresses the feminist political discourse her work generated, but without acknowledging how Beauvoir extends existential phenomenology through the originality of her subject – that of describing a feminine condition.

“Male interviewer:

– In *The Second Sex*, you revolt against the current feminine condition?

De Beauvoir:

– *I don't exactly revolt, I think...*

– You protest...

– *Yes, but it is not even really a protest, I try to describe it. Because I think it is good to become aware of what is. I think a protest would be in vain, since currently, neither men nor women can just transform things with a magic wand. Women's issues are tied to matters of work, the workforce and unemployment, and by extension, to needs, scarcity, and wealth, etc.*<sup>34</sup>

When describing the female condition, however, Beauvoir became more ‘militant’ as she received endless letters from women who had read her work and who shared their individual experiences of this condition. Through the French *Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes* (MLF) Beauvoir pushed later for a law on sexism to be recognised as discrimination against women, and for abortion rights in France.

How is it that one of our most well-known western feminists did not initially identify herself as being part of a feminist revolt against patriarchal structures? Beauvoir's description of the condition of women in *The Second Sex* gives us an opportunity to explore the structures that prevent women from taking on ‘women's issues’ and from identifying as ‘feminist’.

In order to problematize the reception of Arendt's and Beauvoir's work, and themselves as “women” in male-dominated philosophy, I will in the following employ a critical reading of their stance through the notion of class privilege, exploring resistances to feminist theory

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Rights For More Than One Voice: Re-Thinking Political Space Beyond the Local/Global Divide,” *Ethics & Global Politics* 7, no. 4 (2014): 163-80 doi.org/10.3402/egp.v7.24454 .

32 Simons, *Beauvoir and the Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism*.

33 Simons, 103.

34 Interview with Simone de Beauvoir 1959, accessed 13 November 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFRTI\\_9CbFU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFRTI_9CbFU) 14:00-15:00.



and of identifying as feminist, with the concept of *affective dissonance*, explored by the postmodern contemporary thinker Clare Hemmings.

### **The dissonance between my sense of self and the possibilities for its expression**

When encountering feminist theory, Clare Hemmings found herself opposed to the very idea that she was oppressed because of her sex; hence she refused initially to engage herself as a feminist. "I was a strong, self-reliant intellectual, equal to any boy or man and would not be told that my chances in life were any less than theirs."<sup>35</sup> Since feminist theory tells us that there are structures that limit people's possibilities due to gender – for women from a privileged class- and racial background, those experiences of oppression may not be felt as immediate – this may create opposition to identification with feminism.

When one's experiences, due to privilege blindness, do not immediately confirm descriptions of unequal conditions (for example sex), feminist theory becomes *the* immediate image of stating one's inferiority. As Hemmings elicits, "I simply would not accept there was something that needed changing, and my rage at the very thought found feminism as an object, since the social world could not be its object."<sup>36</sup> It is through these feelings of anger, that acknowledging inequality stems, through which acts of feminist solidarity can spring. With the notions of *affective dissonance* and *affective solidarity* Hemmings explores the dissonance and the feelings of rage and irritation that feminism may arouse. These feelings of dissonance are what might create a spark that can lead to a re-evaluation of one's ontological standpoint.

In the interview with Simone de Beauvoir, she was asked if *The Second Sex* is a revolt against patriarchal structures. She said: "No, it is a description of a condition I became aware of after having listened to other women's stories of oppression". As she stated later in the interview, "people are mistaken if they read *The Second Sex* as feminist militant"; it did not arise from any personal struggle, it developed as a theoretical investigation into the situation of women who lived different lives than herself. As an intellectual at the prestigious University of Paris, and with a bourgeois background, Beauvoir did not maintain a life of necessity, labouring in the private realm, but led what Arendt describes as *vita activa*. This privileged academic position (historically granted exclusively to men) risked placing the call to solidarity with feminism as merely a burden of 'female' representation – hers was initially a theoretical investigation, not a feminist revolt.

There is a large section of contemporary feminist theory that builds on the notion of 'empathy' as a premise for ethical and moral responsibility across difference. This notion has connotations of the asymmetric power relations of privileged people's call for empathy with the marginalised. As privilege may leave us rather unempathetic with others, Hem-

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35 Hemmings, "Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation," 150.

36 Hemmings, 150.

mings wants to move away from empathy and instead build on notions of solidarity that may stem from a range of feelings that disrupts one's perception that the conditions of society enable equity. She wants to explore the possibility that rage and frustration open in the confrontation of feminist theory with our view of the world and the social conditions in it.

For someone whose freedom and possibilities have not (seemingly) been immediately affected by gender, feminist critique may arise images of 'aggressiveness' to be rejected in order to rather stay ignorant of those who are not privileged enough to be able to resist the social pressure of subordination. In the words of Hemmings: "My indignation (...) arose precisely because I did not see a difference between ontological and epistemological possibilities."<sup>37</sup>

In my reading, the *affective dissonance* that engaging with feminist critique may arise can be the very reason for someone identifying primarily as a 'philosopher' or 'political theorist' to defy such explanations. As theories that address inequality and injustice risk arising feelings of discomfort, rage, and guilt – that may lead to solidarity – these threaten the very notion of the traditional Cartesian philosopher or researcher (as objective, value-free, and un-affected by the conditions he is 'discovering' – rather than *producing*). It is hence when we acknowledge academia as a site of knowledge production that the privilege of staying gender-blind becomes a choice of resisting calls for solidarity by keeping epistemological assumptions intact. The *affective distance* that theoretical investigations of the conditions of politics may seem to demand, can nevertheless reveal gendered inequalities, or propose utopian conceptualizations from which political action can spur.

According to Hemmings, rage can, but does not have to, lead to solidarity. There needs to be some kind of affective dissonance for the politics of solidarity to emerge. In her own experience, "rage here marked me as marvellously privileged in class and race terms, as well as fortunate in my family support, and remarkably un-empathetic in my orientations towards others."<sup>38</sup> What had caused this rage? Hemmings describes how she became aware of a dissonance between her sense of self – as free, equal, and with the same opportunities in life as men – and the world as an effect of her affective response, first when confronting feminist theory and then when confronting her world view with these new lenses. How we view the world and ourselves in it, our ontological premises, is according to Hemmings, closer to our epistemic premises, what we hold as knowledge, since in a certain way, they premise each other.

The dissonance between her sense of self and the felt rage she felt led to a de-naturalization of her view of the world, from a harmonious to a critical relationship. Affective dissonance resulted for Hemmings in a feminist identity, but it can also result in a rejection of feminism – a rejection of new epistemological assumptions in order to keep ontological premises intact. Building on Hemmings distinction between 'womanhood' and

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37 Hemmings, 150.

38 Hemmings, 150.

'feminism' as critical for understanding "what motivates gendered change"<sup>39</sup> there is also a profound difference between on the one hand calls to represent 'womanhood' and on the other being received as a 'woman' through words that may reinforce or question prejudice against women.

### Concluding discussion – When will it concern us?

"When she finally said something, it either led to the conversation dying out and being replaced by an uncanny silence, or that the writers, probably in order to demonstrate how independent and sophisticated they were, did not take any notice of what she said but simply continued talking."<sup>40</sup>

I have been concerned here with the reception of speech and written work as political action in the public. Leading a political life (*vita activa*) means, amongst other things, to lead a public life, which demands courage to expose oneself through the spoken and written. The narrator, speaker or author cannot determine the response her or his words and actions will provoke.

When a prominent woman is presented in the public as 'an exception', and also, in contrast when she is presented as 'representing all women', the political significance of 'her' words and 'her' deeds becomes either a questioning of female political agency or a reduction of women's voice to 'one'.

By responding to a male-gendered public, 'woman' runs the risk of representing a social category which has been defined in prejudiced terms, or to defy such identification, which may lead to an alienation of her sex, as 'other'. Reluctance towards, or avoidance of, feminist critique as "bringing in gender" disregards how both language and the public reception of words and deeds may already be gendered. Walking into a room with portraits of former male presidents on the walls is walking into a highly-gendered room. History has already been re-told through gendered male lenses (*history*). Acknowledging this is not bringing gender into the scene; it is making explicit discriminatory practices of silencing 'the other' in dominating discourses of history, philosophy, and politics.

Arendt's description of the conditions for leading a political life when read together with Beauvoir's description of the gendered conditions that prevent women from leading a political life as economically independent individuals, offers us a path toward real emancipation in the broadest sense of political agency. In order to reach this emancipative potential of their work – regardless of one's own (situated) experiences – one needs to critically elucidate how privileged experiences can make a successful woman negate a feminist position rather than embracing feminist solidarity. To do so, one needs to engage feminist critical contributions that expose privilege (Hemmings) and disempowering descriptions by

39 Hemmings, 147.

40 Alan Bennett, *The Uncommon Reader* (Profile Books Ltd, 2008), 54.

the west of non-western women,<sup>41</sup> as the process of subjectification of women risks being distorted by disempowering descriptions of social categories. By definition, these categories may generate 'schizophrenic' feelings of self in the private realm. Politicized in the presence of others, women as 'othered' persist in activities that reject, challenge or re-claim identities in the public.

From such explorations, we find the public a scene for constant negotiations: agonistic politics in Honig's reading of Arendt, or a space where dissonance in Hemming's argument may spur acts of feminist solidarity. Personal experiences that are re-shaped in public may hence disrupt dominant discourses, but how words are received is dependent on the relational web that acknowledges action in terms of political significance.

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41 Adami, "Counter Narratives as Political Contestation: Universality, Particularity and Uniqueness," *The Equal Rights Review* 15 (2015): 13-24; The Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001).

# Marie Hållander

## Inhabiting a Place in the Common

### Profanation and Biopolitics in Teaching

#### Abstract

This article considers the common and shared world in teaching, by reference to the concept of profanation in relation to biopolitics. "To profane", means to treat something (or someone) as worldly and as something "that can be played with". The act of profanation has implications for how objects that are "put on the table" can be regarded in teaching and how these "objects" can become public goods. But what happens when things that are used in teaching are representations of social injustice and suffering? This article will give a critique of the idea of profanation, specifically discussing when teaching deals with social injustice and representations of suffering.

#### Keywords

Public education; The common; Biopolitics; Social injustice; Representations of suffering; Giorgio Agamben; Sara Ahmed.

## Introduction

When I think about what feminist politics in education involves, I think of how different bodies inhabit a place in education and in teaching; concerns that involve different aspects, such as the body, social class, gender, sexuality, ability, emotions and affects. But feminist politics also involves different kinds of educational institutions, such as kindergartens, primary schools, high schools and universities, as well as different political systems wherein these institutions work. Teaching that takes place in these institutions concerns different actions, such as the students and the teachers attending to the objects and to what is "put on the table" in front of them.<sup>1</sup> Teaching involves inter-generational acts, between an older generation and the young, and can be related to the creation of a shared world, to the common and the public.<sup>2</sup> Or rather, it involves actions that could have the aim of creating, or appealing to, the *common*.

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1 Jan Masschelein & Maarten Simons, *In Defence of the School: A Public Issue* (Leuven: E-ducation, Culture & Society Publisher, 2013); Johannes Rytzler, "Teaching as Attention Formation: A Relational Approach to Teaching and Attention," 2017, <http://mdh.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:1066806>.

2 See for example: Klaus Mollenhauer, *Forgotten Connections: On Culture and Upbringing*, trans. Norm Friesen (London: Routledge, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315883007>.

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In recent research within educational philosophy, the public/private aspects of teaching have been discussed. For example, Masschelein and Simons have argued in defence of the public school,<sup>3</sup> and Bergdahl and Langmann have discussed how teaching can be regarded as a public as well as a private space.<sup>4</sup> In this article I will further discuss the common and shared world in teaching and in education by examining how different bodies as well as objects inhabit educational situations differently. I will do so both normatively and critically, and more specifically, by discussing the concept of *profanation* in relation to *biopolitics*, drawing on Giorgio Agamben. The act of profanation, which has also been discussed within philosophy of education, has implications for the understanding of the common as well as for how objects that are “put on the table” can be regarded in teaching.<sup>5</sup> These implications have educational possibilities, but – and this is the question that I will come back to throughout the article – how can the act of profanation in teaching be understood in relation to education as a part of the political, of biopolitics, and to social injustice and to representations of suffering? To answer this, I will make feminist readings of these concepts of profanation in relation to biopolitics and teaching, drawing on works by Giorgio Agamben, Sara Ahmed, Ken Chen and Alexander G. Weheliye, who have done some important work towards understanding power relations, biopolitics and social injustice.

In the article I will first introduce the term “profanation” and discuss it in relation to education and biopolitics and then come to some core questions where I no longer think the act of profanation is possible – or rather, I question it in relation to ideas of what it means to inhabit a place in the common and in relation to social justice. At the end of the article I will develop my critique by taking two different paths, first, referring to Weheliye’s critique of biopolitics, and second, referring to Chen and Ahmed’s understanding of poetry and representations of violence and suffering, as well as different ways to encounter these kinds of representations of suffering.<sup>6</sup> The article discusses the act of representing something (an object, a historical event, an educational matter or a text/picture in teaching) and, as well as, it reflects on how bodies with flesh, bones and emotions – that is, students and teachers – take their place in educational institutions.

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3 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*.

4 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Lovisa Bergdahl & Elisabet Langmann, “Where Are You? Giving Voice to the Teacher by Reclaiming the Private/Public Distinction,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 51, no. 2 (May 1, 2017): 461-75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12244>.

5 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*.

6 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203700372>; Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham; Duke University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822376491>; Ken Chen, “Authenticity Obsession, or Conceptualism as Minstrel Show,” Asian American Writers’ Workshop, 2015, <http://aaww.org/authenticity-obsession/>.



## To profane

The term *profanation* comes from religious language, in which one can be said to profane that which is *sacred*. Profanation means to treat something (or someone) as worldly and as something “that can be played with”. It is an act that *separates* the thing from its context and makes it free.<sup>7</sup> For Agamben, this concept has religious implications but it also has implications for how to understand politics, capitalism and consumption, and it has something to say in relation to education.<sup>8</sup> Agamben writes: “Sacred and religious were the things that in some way belonged to the gods. As such, they were removed from the free use and the commerce of men...”.<sup>9</sup> Through the act of profanation, that which is sacred becomes *useable*. For example, in the act of sacrifice there will be a part of the flesh that becomes free – free to use and free to eat. There is a line between *using* and *profaning*, Agamben writes. For example, one can regard a profane time or a profane thing as decoupled from its otherwise normal use.<sup>10</sup> It is made available to those who would otherwise not usually have access to the thing.

As an example, Agamben relates the term “profanation” to play and how a child who plays with ancient or old things does not care about their former use or that they are sacred, but finds a new use for the things:

“Children, who play with whatever old thing falls into their hands, make toys out of things that also belong to the spheres of economics, war, law, and other activities that we are used to thinking of as serious. All of a sudden, a car, a firearm, or a legal contract becomes a toy.”<sup>11</sup>

Another example by Agamben is the cat that plays with yarn, and how the yarn, for the cat, has another meaning than its original one. To profane things is to treat them as a *total means*. They become useable outside of their original sphere. The same goes for museums (which can be rooms, buildings, or whole cities), which are, as Agamben writes, “separate dimensions to which what was once – but is no longer”.<sup>12</sup> The things in a museum are not there to be *used* anymore, but to be observed or looked at. They have been separated from their ordinary area and use.

Profanation has a function in religious life, but as Agamben shows, it also has meaning in relation to such diverse topics as play, museums, and – Agamben’s area of interest – to (bio)politics. The connection is made by how profanation should be understood in relation to the *common*, to the public:

7 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

8 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*.

9 Agamben, *Profanations*, 75.

10 Agamben, *Profanations*, 74.

11 Agamben, *Profanations*, 76.

12 Agamben, *Profanations*, 74.

“Profanation, however, neutralizes what it profanes. Once profaned, that which was unavailable and separate loses its aura and is returned to use. Both are political operations: the first guarantees the exercise of power by carrying it back to a sacred model; the second deactivates the apparatuses of power and returns to common use the spaces that power had seized.”<sup>13</sup>

Agamben reminds us how it was through the act of profanation that the “free man” in ancient Greek and Roman worlds got access to that which was considered to be sacred. It was made free and available to be played with. Here, profanation and the common intersect, and this is where education also has a role, since it is the very place where these actions of profanation can take place, something that I will discuss further below.

### Education as free time

In Masschelein and Simons' *In Defence of the School*, they begin in antiquity and from there they try to pinpoint what the public school can be as an ideal.<sup>14</sup> They write that the idea of the school is based on the idea of *free time*, which is the most common translation of the word *Schole*, namely, free time to study and to practise:

“In other words, the school provided free time, that is, non-productive time, to those who by their birth and their place in society (their ‘position’) had no right to claim it. Or, put differently still, what the school did was to establish a time and space that was in a sense detached from the time and space of both society (Greek: *polis*) and the household (Greek: *oikos*). It was also an egalitarian time and therefore the invention of the school can be described as the democratization of free time.”<sup>15</sup>

The idea of free time was that the school could be a place that offered knowledge and experience to the public.<sup>16</sup> The students who attended the school were able to leave behind the roles, identities and work associated with their life outside the school; in other words, they could be suspended from their other life. Masschelein and Simons write:

“The school is the time and space where students can let go of all kinds of sociological, economic, familial and culture-related rules and expectations. In other words, giving form to the school – making school – has to do with a kind of suspension of the weight of these rules. A

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13 Agamben, *Profanations*, 77.

14 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*.

15 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*, 28.

16 I would like to thank the reviewers of this article who reminded me that a form of public and compulsory education may have been introduced in some cities in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, which could have challenged the existing power structure during that time. Doubtless, education also had from its very beginning a reproductive function, but at the same time it was complex and surely had its own explicitly or subtly violent modes of exclusion, discrimination and power politics.

suspension, for instance, of the rules that dictate or explain why someone – and his or her whole family or group – falls on a certain rung of the social ladder.”<sup>17</sup>

As part of the suspension from the second – other – life, people inhabited the school as *students*. It is a category that has certain connotations – as a subject created and open to transformation. But also, as argued by Masschelein and Simon as well as by Tyson Lewis, the student is in school *to study*.<sup>18</sup> The suspension means that the roles that exist in other areas, such as in the home, are no longer valid – students do not attend school as daughters or sons, or as carriers of class, gender or specific origins (which of course can be questioned and something that I will come back to). This suspension is limited in time (during school time) and is something students come in and out of during the day and during the school year.

It is in relation to this free separated time that the act of profanation also has a function. It is in this separated time that students, through the act of profanation, make objects and things available and public. In relation to educational theory, Masschelein and Simons write that the idea of profanation stands in relation to what it means to make something available, to make it a public or common good, in teaching. They discuss it in relation to play (which goes back to the understanding of the Latin word for school, *ludus*, which also means “game” or “play”), and to what is put on the table in front of the students. They write:

“...something (a text, an action) is being offered up and simultaneously becomes separated from its function and significance in social order; something that appears in and of itself, as an object of study or practice, regardless of its appropriate use (in the home, or in society, outside the school). When something becomes an object of study or practice, it means that it demands our attention; it invites us to explore it and engage it, regardless of how it can be put to use.”<sup>19</sup>

The idea of profanation and the understanding of *use* stand in relation to Masschelein and Simons’ idea of the public school, and also to the idea of teaching. That is, how “to put something on the table”, in front of our gaze, our hearing and our hands, can be regarded as something central for teaching. Masschelein and Simons, also drawing on Agamben, regard this action of profanation as a way to create free time (for study).

### Free time, for whom?

The act of profanation, as well as the separation, contributes to the possibility of free time. Masschelein and Simon’s book wants to defend the public school, as the title clearly states:

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17 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*, 35.

18 See also: Tyson E. Lewis, *On Study: Giorgio Agamben and Educational Potentiality* (New York: Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203069622>.

19 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*, 40.

*In Defence of the School: A Public Issue.* It is a defence of a public school that in past years has undergone some serious changes and demands related to marketization, alienation and corruption as well as criticism for reproducing the class system or for failing to produce graduates that are employable and effective in other areas of life.<sup>20</sup> The idea of education as a separate time, a free time which *separates* students from their other life (outside school), can be related to Agamben's idea and argument concerning how profanation works in relation to the *common*. Through actions of profanation, the things at hand become available, free to use, and they become public goods. What we can see from Masschelein and Simons' argument is that the ideas of profanation and suspension have a bearing on a theory on what education can be, as an ideal, of what to think and strive for. There is something important in this, especially when relating it to the otherwise productive life, for example, jobs that I have had, working-class jobs, like working in kitchens or factories, or as a care assistant for the elderly, where free time is *non-existent*. Rather the opposite, as the Swedish poet Emil Boss' poems speak of in *Acceleration*, or the writers in the book *Lösa förbindelser*, on the working conditions for the commercial employees, how every hour can be counted and clocked, every movement (with both left hand and right hand) can be maximized.<sup>21</sup> But even if this is an important aspect to highlight, entering education is not done beyond our bodies (with our social class, gender, sexuality, abilities, emotions and affects) but rather through them. Masschelein and Simons also refer to this reproduction of social injustice, but they argue that:

“the ever-present attempts at co-optation and corruption occur precisely to tame the distinct and radical potential that is unique to the scholastic itself. From its inception in the Greek city states, school time has been time in which ‘capital’ (knowledge, skills, culture) is expropriated, released as a common good for public use, thus existing independent of talent, ability and income.”<sup>22</sup>

In relation to this idea of entering school beyond social class, and existing independent of talent, ability and income, I think of two different things.

First, I think of my own experience in an educational situation, during my three years of studying to become a chef in Borås, Sweden, during the 1990s. Inhabiting a place in that school and in that classroom is slightly different from other institutionalized situations, since it involves a restaurant and, more specifically for me, since I chose the restaurant and not the servant path, the restaurant kitchen, which was at the school and also involved working in different restaurant kitchen, as internships. It involved the very practice of profanation, as we handled food: meat, vegetables, and fish and so on. It was food that in

20 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*, 15-16.

21 Emil Boss, *Acceleration: Dikt* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Lejd, 2017); Jenny Wrangborg, *Lösa förbindelser: om kampen för fasta förhållanden i handeln* (Stockholm: Leopard, 2017).

22 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*, 16.

some contexts could be considered sacred but in the kitchen was not. In the educational kitchen, we could experiment with the food but also learn traditional dishes. Inhabiting a place in that situation was for me a very gendered and class-based experience (of becoming a female chef in a male dominated occupation), but it could also be sexualized and racialized and involve different aspects, such as ability or different skills (being quick or slow, the handcraft of slicing, preparing, cleaning and so forth). The idea of the possibility of inhabiting an educational institution and teaching beyond the sociological categories overlook the fact that educational institutions are the very central part and base where class and gender are created and reproduced. The educational practice was *free* in the sense that we focused on what was put in front of us, but at the same time we were shaped into social beings and workers.

Second, and in line with what I have explored elsewhere, testimonies that witness historical injustice – different parts of and stories from history that speak of sexism, slavery, colonial and social injustice, class and racist violence – can be regarded as something *impossible*.<sup>23</sup> They are stories that speak of that which is difficult, and they present ethical, political, and epistemological challenges. One therefore has to ask, can *everything that is put on the table* be used and profaned and be regarded as *pure means*? Can testimonies be explored and involved in whatever way they can be used? If not, which other ways are possible?

In a discussion on the public matter of the school, Bergdahl and Langmann go back to Arendt's understanding of how the public (*polis*) is separated both from the private realm of the home and from the impersonal sphere of the social. Rather, it is a "sphere that people come together in a particular way to deliberate on things held in common".<sup>24</sup> Bergdahl and Langmann argue, drawing on feminist philosophers such as Irigaray, that the school is neither a private nor public sphere but includes aspects of both.<sup>25</sup> To extend their critique on what to inhabit the common world could mean, I will discuss different aspects in relation to *profanation*. First, I will deepen the understanding of biopolitics in relation to education as well as to profanation, and after that I will discuss recent critiques of understandings of biopolitics, drawing on Weheliye's black feminism. Second, I will draw on Chen and Ahmed's different readings of representations of sufferings, where I discuss what it means to represent something in relation to teaching, as well as in relation to emotions. At the end of the article I will come back to what the act of profanation and what inhabiting a place in the public can include.

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23 Hållander, Marie, *Det omöjliga vittnande: Om vittnesmålets pedagogiska möjligheter* (Malmö: Eskaton, 2017).

24 Bergdahl & Langmann, "Where Are You?", 465."container-title:"Journal of Philosophy of Education", "page": "461-475", "volume": "51", "issue": "2", "source": "Wiley Online Library", "abstract": "In a time of cultural pluralism and legitimation crisis (Habermas

25 Bergdahl & Langmann, 473."container-title:"Journal of Philosophy of Education", "page": "461-475", "volume": "51", "issue": "2", "source": "Wiley Online Library", "abstract": "In a time of cultural pluralism and legitimation crisis (Habermas

## Biopolitics and education

The connection between the state and educational systems differs depending on which educational system we are talking about. The educational idea can be formulated through the idea of freedom, but education can also be used by different leaders and states to control the people; the control has also been apparent with bodily punishments or/and with the exclusion of different minorities or the working class from education. In relation to the capitalist society, Tyson Lewis writes that the current capitalist society has implications for our educational systems, where “[t]he subject is captured as a resource of the world; his or her choices become nothing more than reflexes of the needs of the world to replicate itself”.<sup>26</sup> The control over people’s lives takes different forms, and education and pedagogies do not fall outside the biopolitical but are instead at the very centre of it.

To achieve a deeper understanding of profanation and why Agamben writes about it, one has to relate it to the understanding of the political, an understanding that also has implications for education in relation to how states shape bodies and institutions. Agamben develops his ideas about the political in different books, and a term that is central to understanding his philosophy is biopolitics. It is a term that works at the intersection of politics and biology, or rather, it is a way to see how politics controls life as well as death. Among other books, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* reveals and problematizes the fundamental relationship between political sovereignty and naked life (*la nuda vita*) and how this relationship is fundamental to how subjects in the different nations are able to appear in the public life or how they are left outside of it.<sup>27</sup>

According to Agamben, states become sovereign by controlling both *zoe* and *bios*, both the “living, naked life” and the “qualified life” in, for example, politics, which means that states have the opportunity to become sovereign through differential acts and by placing subjects within as well as outside the law.<sup>28</sup> An extreme form of biopolitics was found in Nazi Germany, with its extermination camps, but the governance can also be applied to the control of other states (and in Sweden we have numerous examples of this from recent history, including forced sterilization of groups and class and racial decisions on schooling (or rather non-schooling) of some children by classifying non-normative sexualities as diseases etc. States control, but as I also would like to include other actors of power such as owners of capital, the living and bare life (*zoe*) through different decisions. This means subjects have different opportunities to enter the qualifying life, and thus appear as subjects,

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26 Lewis, *On Study*, 7.

27 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 1998).

28 *Homo Sacer* is a figure in Roman law, where the holy and sacred character of the law is bound to human life. It says: “The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that “if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide.” Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 71. It is a double bind where the person can be killed and have in that sense no legal rights. The person being counted as *homo sacer* is at the same time inside the law as well as outside the law.



since this discussion about biopolitics is ultimately about subjectivity. Agamben writes in *What is an apparatus?*:

“What defines the apparatuses that we have to deal with in the current phase of capitalism is that they no longer act as much through the production of a subject as through the processes of what can be called desubjectification.”<sup>29</sup>

Agamben connects desubjectivity with several different historical and contemporary subjects, such as the historical figure of homo sacer in Roman law, or with the Muselmänner in Auschwitz.<sup>30</sup> But one can also make connections to refugees who do not have access and legal rights in the context in which they are located because they are outside states and laws. In a further reading, desubjectivity can also be made in relation to those who lack voice or who are unable to influence their lives, whose choice only means, in the Swedish poet Stig Sjödin’s words: “den stora favören att få välja / där val ej fanns” (“the great favor of choosing / where there was no choice”).<sup>31</sup> Agamben’s investigation of these figures (homo sacer, naked life, qualified life, etc.) shows how political sovereignty is also based on ruling out and enclosing, as well as controlling people’s lives. It is through these exclusions and inclusions that states become sovereign: they are the ones that have the opportunity to suspend the law and impose a state of exception.<sup>32</sup>

## Biopolitics and profanation

At the very end of the essay *Profanation*, Agamben writes: “The profanation of the unprofanable is the political task of the coming generation.”<sup>33</sup> The concept of profanation can be regarded as a political concept, and I regard Agamben’s work on profanation as a reflection of this state of capitalism and biopolitics: is it possible to think of actions that create spaces and times that do not exclude people?<sup>34</sup> Are there actions that make things, and also people, a part of the common or that can be related to a common future?

Agamben writes that the state that the western world today is in of capitalism (as a religion, drawing on Walter Benjamin’s fragment “Capitalism as Religion”) has the function of trying to find that which is *unprofanable*. This idea is different from – opposite to – the idea of the child playing with toys or the cat playing with yarn. The logic of capitalism is different, since its aim is to create spaces and places that are not profanable; rather, capitalism and consumption aim at creating spaces that are no longer separated: capitalism “realizes

29 Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?* And Other Essays (Stanford University Press, 2009), 70.

30 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

31 Stig Sjödin & Erling Öhrnell, *Sotfragment : Dikter* (Göteborg: Lindelöv, 1996), 34.

32 Giorgio Agamben, *Undantagstillståndet*, trans. Sven-Olov Wallenstein, Site Edition (Lund: Propexus, 2005).

33 Agamben, *Profanations*, 92.

34 Agamben, *Profanations*, 83.

a pure form of separation, to the point that there is nothing left to separate".<sup>35</sup> There are no longer sacred days and weekdays: every day is open to work, exploitation and maximization of profit. Agamben continues: "If to profane means to return to common use that which has removed to the sphere of the sacred, the capitalist religion in its extreme phase aims creating something absolutely unprofanable."<sup>36</sup> Consumption is something that does not belong to the present, he writes, but to the past or the future. It belongs to our memory or to our anticipation. The call for profanation can, through this lens, be regarded as a way to open up the capitalist system, to see how it works and what its problems are.

## Black feminism and biopolitics

Weheliye's book *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* gives a critique of how researchers and philosophers such as Agamben and Foucault do not include race as a fundamental part of biopolitics. Weheliye argues that there is a need for a reconceptualization of race, subjectivity and humanity to Agamben's and Foucault's considerations of racism vis-à-vis biopolitics since they have been too vague, or rather, that the concepts of Foucault and Agamben have been "deemed transposable to a variety of spatiotemporal contexts because the authors do not speak from an explicitly racialized system ... which lends their ideas more credibility and, once again, displaces minority discourse".<sup>37</sup> He argues that race should in fact be placed at the very centre of the understanding of the argument of biopolitics. In this vein, Weheliye argues

"that black studies and other formations of critical ethnic studies provide crucial viewpoints, often overlooked or actively neglected in bare life and biopolitics discourse, in the production of racialization as an object of knowledge, especially in its interfacing with political violence and (de)humanization."<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, he stresses that race should be placed at the front and centre in considerations of political violence.<sup>39</sup> Bracketing the different bodies that are present in education does not make the bodies into one uniform being, in the coming community, rather, it neglects them. It puts them, once again, into the minority discourse – in the margins and in the footnotes.

What I want to say with Weheliye's critique of how biopolitics is understood and used is that the argument also has bearings on the understanding of the idea about what the public school could mean. Displacing the gendered experience or the racialized and so

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35 Agamben, *Profanations*, 81.

36 Agamben, *Profanations*, 82.

37 Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 13.

38 Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus* 13.

39 Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus* 13.

forth, understanding of the public school as a place where students can leave their social backgrounds, once again puts the gendered, different class-based and racialized experience in the margins and footnotes.

Regarding the act of profanation through the different aspects that I have discussed here, that is, in relation to biopolitics and desubjectivity, in relation to the capitalist system and in relation to how understandings of the biopolitical have marginalized race as a fundamental part of how it functions in different states, I will here try to rethink and develop what inhabiting a place in the common can mean. I will do so by shifting from profanation towards Ahmed's and Chen's critique on representations of social injustice.

### Regardless, of what?

Ken Chen, in his article "Authenticity Obsession, or Conceptualism as Minstrel Show", discusses various poetic performances that deal with colonial and racist violence and how they balance between a poetic testimony, on the one hand, and an exposure on the other.<sup>40</sup> For example, Chen discusses conceptual poetry in the US and, more specifically, Kenneth Goldsmith's poetry. Goldsmith is a poet who created a reading of Michael Brown's autopsy protocol. The shooting of Michael Brown, an 18-year-old black man, occurred on August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, a northern suburb of St. Louis. In relation to this poetic act, which used the autopsy protocol of Brown's body, Chen asks whether there is a line that separates a "poetic testimony" from one that expropriates and exploits already vulnerable bodies:

"What is the ethically responsible way to show the occult photographs of lynchings [...]? How can one present such images of sublime horror without either simple-mindedly reenacting their violence or disenchanting them into clichés? How can one gaze on the memento mori of colonial horror without staring with the gaze of Medusa? What is the line separating one writer as a poet of witness and another as a poet of expropriation [...]?"<sup>41</sup>

In terms similar to Chen's, I ask where the line is between a teaching built on witnessing, on the one hand, and an education that expropriates the bodies of others, on the other hand. As I see it, it is in relation to these questions that Masschelein and Simons' development of Agamben's notion of profanation must be problematized. Can testimonies, the material that is placed on the table, be profaned, and can we "explore it and engage it, regardless of how it can be put to use"?<sup>42</sup> Where is the line between use and abuse? The questions are rhetorical and not possible to answer. In relation to this, however, Ahmed's understanding of emotions, related to historical stories of suffering, are fruitful to read.

40 Chen, "Authenticity Obsession, or Conceptualism as Minstrel Show."

41 Chen, 2015.

42 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*, 35.

Through a Marxist analysis of the *wound* and *suffering*, Ahmed writes about how the wounds and testimonies are parts of the global market. Sensational stories and testimonies can turn pain into a form of media spectacle, which, as well as giving rise to sorrow or anger and the like, can likewise be met with laughter. Testimonies about suffering and wounds (and Ahmed is specifically speaking of testimonies that are marketed through various aid organizations) tend to become global and thus are a part of a global economy: the testimonies can be honoured and fetishized. Commodity fetishism transforms the *subjective*, abstract aspects of economic value into *objective*, real things that people believe have intrinsic value. According to Ahmed, this fetishism is also a central part of the testimony culture, where aid organizations can use personal stories to raise money. Ahmed writes that “the differentiation between forms of pain and suffering in stories that are told, and between those that are told and those that are not told, is a crucial mechanism for the distribution of power”.<sup>43</sup> These boundaries also mean that the stories of suffering are relational: the witnesses stand in relation to different nations, movements and subjects. As an example, Ahmed mentions an aid organization’s stories of war, where the stories were not aimed at those actually suffering from the blasts of mines but rather at those reached by the testimony – at those asked to give money. The “value” of the testimony and human response to it is created through a circulation in the global economy. Based on this analysis of the emotions that people are asked to feel in response to the testimony, Ahmed believes that emotions are not something we have, but rather that they are something that creates an inside and an outside, establish boundaries between them.<sup>44</sup> Ahmed’s reading of different historical wounds, in relation to emotions, highlights how the past, as well as the present, is *not* one homogeneous entity. It is full of different bodies and histories, wounds, and different power relations and it stands in relation to different nations, movements and subjects.

Ahmed does *not* here speak in terms of profaning stories, *nor* does she speak of the line between use and abuse, but rather about how to read historical wounds, through oneself. Ahmed writes in relation to Fiona’s testimony; on how Fiona, an Aboriginal in Australia, was taken from her mother:

“It is not just me facing this, and it is certainly not about me. And yet, I am ‘in it’, which means I am not ‘not in it’. Here I am, already placed and located in worlds, already shaped by my

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<sup>43</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Ahmed experiences different feelings such as love, hate, pain, shame and shows how they create boundaries. She is not interested in what they are, but rather what they do, politically and technically. And she argues for how they are sticky, and how they connect, and disconnect, for example through “the love of the nation”, “the hate of the others”. Emotions can have a function of determining the relational form that takes place, it is possible to say, through Ahmed, that this also applies to other emotions, such as hatred and love. The feelings are aimed at someone, or against something – and thus determine how and in what way the relationship will take place.

proximity to some bodies and not to others. If I am here, then I am there: the stories of the document are shaped by the land I had been thought to think of as my own.<sup>45</sup>

Through Ahmed, and this is my point of view, I learn how there are other ways to encounter stories of suffering than through the idea that they can be used or misused. Rather, the reading or the encounter of injustice can include knowledge of how I am in it, a part of it, of history, and at the same time, not 'not' in it. The reading, Ahmed writes, is not about her feelings, or about her, or how she can *use it*. Rather, the knowledge of this history is a form of involvement which is not easy or obvious knowledge, rather the opposite, since it also includes knowledge about oneself and one's own history. These encounters, readings of representations of suffering, can also be a part of what it means to inhabit the public. Regarding the act of profanation through this lens, dealing with questions of social injustice, racism and representations of suffering, as with Brown's autopsy protocol, and as with Fiona's testimony and Ahmed's reading, puts the understanding of *use* in another light. It puts it in a more ethical as well as political light.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

At the very beginning of *The Coming Community*, Agamben writes: "The coming being is whatever being."<sup>47</sup> The *whatever being* is related to a *singularity, such as it is*. It is a being that is not related to a concept: "being red, being French, being Muslim, but only in its being *such as it is*".<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the ideal of inhabiting the common is, for Agamben, a state where we have the possibility of entering the common beyond our social categories.

Agamben's understanding of profanation is different from what Ahmed talks about with fetishism. Agamben is speaking of different aspects and things, such as a toy, or a museum, and Ahmed is speaking of historical wounds, such as the loss of a child because of racism in Australia. On the other hand, both of them are giving a Marxian critique of the capitalist system of creating injustice, but where Agamben, as well as Masschelein and Simons, tries to think of a future and a school beyond social class and gender, Ahmed, as well as Chen and Weheliye, instead puts these social categories at the centre – since the opposite, again, puts these experience in the footnotes and in the margins. And even if Masschelein and Simons do not deny that schools are a part of reproducing an elite as well as a working class, they put the ideal of the scholastic school at the centre. As I have shown in this article, this argument has some problems, especially regarding social injustice and cases of historical wounds.

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45 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, 36.

46 See also: Hållander, *Det omöjliga vittnandet*.

47 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Theory Out of Bounds, 99-1970768-6; [1] (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

48 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 1.

Educational institutions are a part of shaping students into social beings. Through the understanding of education in connection to biopolitics, I argue that bodies (with their different aspects of social class, gender, sexuality, ability, emotions and affects) do not exist beyond their own bodies, but through them and, perhaps, *because* of their own bodies. They do not “let go of all kinds of sociological, economic, familial and culture-related rules and expectations”,<sup>49</sup> but rather live them, from within.

Education as free time, suspended from the other time that is productive, is, however something that is important to highlight, not only because it tries to defend the public, common school, but also because it can highlight the *other language* that does not speak of free time, but rather about competition, maximization and production. And, even if I am sympathetic towards Masschelein and Simons’ defence of the public school, I disagree with that there exist a possibility of inhabiting schools beyond our social ladder and social being. An education that is free from productivity and effectiveness is something different from being free from social and cultural aspects. Let’s not put these aspects in the footnotes any longer.

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49 Masschelein & Simons, *In Defence of the School*, 35.



# Claudia Schumann

## On Happiness and Critique

### From *Bouquet V* to 'possible elsewheres'

#### Abstract

The paper explores the relationship of happiness and critique. It is a reflection on a decade of being trained in and practicing philosophical critique. It is a reflection on experiences I had during teaching on social justice, inclusion and diversity; and it is a reflection on the on-going debate on negative vs. affirmative forms of critique within feminist philosophy. It is also an exercise in imagining a transformation of our critical practices, where the embrace of more affirmative (rather than destructive-negative) modes of critique does not entail overlooking or turning a blind eye to the barriers that unjustly restrain some movements and allow for others' privileges to persist. I suggest that a diffractive approach to critique would allow for joyfully interchanging and alternating appropriate modes of debunking, of being the killjoy against sedimentations that weigh some of us down, with other modes of critique which allow us to augment and lift up examples of already on-going structural change.

#### Keywords

Feminism, paranoid reading, affirmative critique, diffraction, Sara Ahmed, whiteness, social justice education

"I am not interested in critique. In my opinion, critique is over-rated, over-emphasized, and over-utilized, [...]. Critique is all too often not a deconstructive practice [...], but a destructive practice meant to dismiss, to turn aside, to put someone or something down—another scholar, another feminist, a discipline, an approach, et cetera. So this is a practice of negativity that I think is about subtraction, distancing and othering."<sup>1</sup>

"It is not the time to be over it, if it is not over."<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The last sentence in Sara Ahmed's *On being included* reads: "don't look over it, if you can't get over it."<sup>3</sup> It is this sentence that this essay struggles with; as a reflection on a decade of

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1 Karen Barad, Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, "Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers. Interview with Karen Barad," in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/ohp.11515701.0001.001>.

2 Sara Ahmed, *On being included. Racism and diversity in institutional life* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2012), 181. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822395324>.

3 *Ibid.*, 187.

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being trained in and practicing philosophical critique, as a reflection on experiences I had during teaching on social justice, inclusion and diversity, and as a reflection on the on-going debate on negative vs. affirmative forms of critique within feminist philosophy. It is also an exercise in imagining a transformation of our critical practices where the embrace of more affirmative (rather than destructive-negative) modes of critique does not entail overlooking or turning a blind eye to the barriers that unjustly restrain some movements and allow for others' privilege to persist.

In the beginning of the essay I explore an example from my own teaching practice within the school leader program at Stockholm University. In my lectures and workshops on diversity work in schools I choose to start from a problematization rather than a celebration of existing pre-conceptions and examples of successful diversity work in Swedish schools. The emotional responses to the negative-critical approach I choose in these lectures, both my own and the school leaders' moments of discomfort, satisfaction, frustration and happiness, serve as an entry point into understanding and motivating why the debate within feminist philosophy between proponents of affirmative and negative modes of critique is not just of theoretical, but also of highly practical, pedagogical interest.

## 2. Starting with *Bouquet V*

It is Sara Ahmed's *On being included* and some other supplementary texts which I use as a springboard for my lectures and workshops on diversity work in schools when teaching in one of the mandatory programs for Swedish school leaders. Often I start the lectures with a reproduction of Willem de Rooij's *Bouquet V* (2010), an artwork which is part of a series of bouquets exploring different social and political concepts; *Bouquet V* being concerned with the concept of diversity.<sup>4</sup> The artist's instructions to a florist are to arrange 95 different flowers in a cylindrical vase. Each flower is only allowed to occur once and should be distinguishable from the other flowers through their size, color, or texture. The florist in charge of arranging the flower bouquet is supposed to avoid any hierarchy in terms of colors or through forming a visual center, instead having each and every flower be visible in its own right. From the challenge of arranging such a flower bouquet we then enter a joint discussion of the challenges of living up to the ideal of social diversity and justice in school, negotiating the tensions between uniqueness and unity, the center and the periphery, of norms and margins, of the individual and the collective, of representation and visibility, of developing non-hierarchical structures and so on. Following this initial exploration, I introduce the concept of intersectionality and how different forms of persistent structural discrimination continue to be shown in sociological research on schools, discussing social class and cultural capital, gender equality and sexism, ethnicity, cultural background, religion, ableism, ageism, sexuality, homophobia and transphobia. With the help of readings

4 Cf. <http://www.galeriebuchholz.de/exhibitions/de-rooij-2010/>

of Ahmed's texts, we later problematize the idea of diversity as a performance indicator in Swedish schools, the limits and potential pitfalls of thinking with identity categories (even if in an intersectional understanding), the consequences of diversity's being embodied, and the necessity for making diversity more challenging by using "other words alongside this word, stickier words [...] like 'racism', 'whiteness' and 'inequality'."<sup>5</sup>

Each time I teach in these courses, I get happily surprised at the way in which the engagement with a philosophical text sparks a lively discussion regarding rather practical challenges of diversity work which the school leaders' experience as urgent and pressing issues in their ordinary, everyday pedagogical routines. Each time I teach these courses, some moments of discomfort and happiness, within the audience, within me, and between all of us, repeat themselves. Reliably, two or three of the audience members will come up to me after the respective session and express their surprise and gratitude for the lecture daring to explicitly address and name issues such as racism and whiteness norms that they have been struggling with during their own education and also meet in their present educational work. Often this is paired with an expression of this being the "first time" they encounter a serious critical discussion of these issues within their formal education. As a lecturer, of course, these reactions leave me with a mixture of happiness and satisfaction of having been able to address someone's needs, of having been able to 'do' something for them that they experience as valuable, but it also leaves me with a feeling of irritation, frustration, disbelief and anger at the fact that some of my students have gone through a good decade of higher education and years of teaching practice having been deprived of knowledge which they not only have a right to, but which is of vital importance for their own as well as their students' well-being. Reliably, at least one audience member, who is privileged regarding the larger part of the categories we discuss, will express their astonishment at the fact that they never saw a problem or even noticed that women and trans people, people of color, non-heteronormative sexualities, non-able-bodied, non-Christian characters are still notoriously absent from Swedish school books. Reliably, also, some school leaders express their irritation with the apparent lack of appreciation for the positive work that they are already practicing. This happens mostly during the earlier phases of the sessions, in the moment when I choose to start with Ahmed's critique of the potential pitfalls of diversity instead of celebrating achievements of diversity and anti-discrimination work in schools.

How do I defend this decision to first problematize the happy flower bouquet vision of diversity instead of simply embracing it and going straight towards presenting practical strategies which have proven successful or could be enhanced to better the present situation in education and beyond? Why do I select as a main reading in preparation for the seminars Ahmed's negative-critical analyses of the tendency of diversity documents becoming a replacement for actual transformative practice on the ground? Why do I feel

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5 Sara Ahmed, "Embodying diversity: Problems and paradoxes for black feminists," in *Race Ethnicity and Education* 12, no. 1 (2009): 44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320802650931>.

this is a necessary disclaimer before any lecture on practical strategies of diversity work? And why do I, repeatedly, doubt whether this really is the best way to go about things?

It is these reflections after the lectures and workshops which steer the interest in the theoretical debate within feminist theory around different modes of critique; in particular, the debate between those writers who express frustration with so-called negative (or paranoid) critique and call for more affirmative (or reparative) forms instead, and others, who like Ahmed herself, insist on the persistent urgency of feminists (and others) practicing negative critique. When exploring the different approaches to critique, I want to take into account my own (sometimes very palpable bodily) exhaustion with the prevalence of certain forms of negative critique within academia ("our students find themselves so well-trained in critique that they can spit out a critique with the push of a button"<sup>6</sup>). Furthermore, I also want to reflect on which kind of reactions and emotional responses are produced in these specific situations of teaching diversity with Swedish school leaders, and to which extent these have potential practical consequences which can transform diversity work in schools.

### 3. From negativity and paranoia to affirmation and reparation

Before I turn to a closer exploration of my reasons for again and again choosing Ahmed's negative-critical problematization of diversity as an entry in my teaching, I want to spell out some of the reasons that I again and again consider as very strong and very valid counterarguments against this approach. After many years of reading, writing, and practicing in a theoretical framework that is situated within a negative-critical tradition, the idea of affirmative critique as advocated by Rosi Braidotti and many others seems to hold a high promise not just in potentially better motivating students, but it also has a strong personal appeal for my own living and thinking with a critical practice. Rather than trying to do justice to the many different variations of affirmative critique that have been suggested, my intention here is merely to capture the promise and motivation that connects these different approaches and has made them attractive as well as bothersome challenges to the way I have been practicing critique. In this spirit, I think it is helpful to start by considering the distinction between paranoid and reparative modes of reading as prominently developed in the early 1990's by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her article "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You."<sup>7</sup> Sedgwick's distinction between paranoid and reparative modes of critique can roughly be mapped onto the more recent debate between negative vs. affirmative critique, and the article gives a very convincing, entertaining, joyful, and acute analysis of

6 Barad et al., *Matter feels, converses, suffers*, 48.

7 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and reparative reading, or, you're so paranoid, you probably think this essay is about you," in *Touching Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123-151. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822384786-005>.

the "paranoid character" of critical habits equally prevalent in Marxist, deconstructive, psychoanalytic, feminist and queer traditions.

Following Paul Ricoeur's notion of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," Sedgwick uses the notion of paranoia to describe, or better to diagnose, a form of critical practice that since Marx, Freud and Nietzsche is concerned with false consciousness and deciphering hidden truths, which anticipates the future in a way that is resistant to surprise and understands its object of critique (its enemy) through mimicry, and understands knowledge as having to do with exposure, demystification and "*unveiling hidden violence*."<sup>8</sup> The paranoid mode of critique is not only aiming at a theory which in its strong predictive and explanatory claims tries to preemptively safeguard against surprises (bad or good), but it also excludes potential alternative interpretations and futures through its fixation on negative affects and their avoidance.

Sedgwick's central point is not admonish the critic to abandon the paranoid mode, but she wants to remind us of other possible modes of reading which produce other effects, most prominently what she, following psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, calls a 'reparative' mode:

"Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters and creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did."<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that Sedgwick's critique of the limits of the paranoid mode of critique and her plea to recall other possibilities should not be understood as a call for abandoning the critique of structural power or as opening a binary contrast of paranoid and reparative forms of critique. As Heather Love emphasizes, "what the essay argues, and what it performs, is the impossibility of choosing between them."<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, Robyn Wiegman has read the "reparative turn"<sup>11</sup> in queer feminist theory following Sedgwick's essay "not as an alternative to critique but as a means to compensate for its increasingly damaged authority."<sup>12</sup> She connects this damaged authority of critique to the growing insecurity amongst in particular left-oriented critical theorists about the potential of scholarly know-

8 Sedgwick, "Paranoid reading," 140.

9 Ibid., 146.

10 Heather Love, "Truth and consequences. On paranoid reading and reparative reading," *Criticism* 52, no. 2 (2011), 239. <https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2010.0022>.

11 Robyn Wiegman, "The times we're in: Queer feminist criticism and the reparative 'turn,'" *Feminist Theory* 15, no. 1 (2014), 4-25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700113513081a>.

12 Wiegman, "The times we're in," 7.

ledge to lead to social transformation and provide society with an idea of “what to do.”<sup>13</sup> The reparative mode is thus understood as a way to break with the internal logic of paranoia, about remembering that “it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise”<sup>14</sup> and “about learning how to build small worlds of sustenance that cultivate a different present and future for the losses that one has suffered.”<sup>15</sup> This discussion following Sedgwick’s essay has been working out rather carefully that paranoid and reparative reading should be understood as different but inter-related impulses that each in their turn open different possibilities for critique, rather than figuring as two mutually exclusive modes or strategies between which we need to decide or where one should replace the other once and for all. It is useful to keep these points in mind when we now turn to the debate between proponents of negative and affirmative critique respectively, a debate which has received some prominence in educational research and which parallels the discussion on paranoia and reparation following Sedgwick’s essay in queer cultural studies in important ways.

One of the main points of concern in these debates is with the backward-looking orientation of approaches employing the modus of critique that is called negative. As educational theorist Dorthe Staunæs writes:

“Many critical analyses regard contemporary tendencies as negative. They are retrospectively oriented and sometimes influenced by a certain sense of resentment for the present and longing for a *retropia*; an utopia of what once (never) was. The danger of this way of conducting critique is that it only reflects or you could say mirror what is already there. What this methodology allows us to see is what we already see, but now in a reversed version.”<sup>16</sup>

Instead of creatively producing different and new ideas and outlooks, negative critique reproduces that which we already know, that which is already existing, even if it points towards its negative impacts and consequences. Instead of focusing on describing the problematic marginalization and forms of repression in present power structures, affirmative critique analyzes present “*tendencies* with the purpose of reconfiguring the world;”<sup>17</sup> it is “curious”<sup>18</sup> and points out “what could be different.”<sup>19</sup> Importantly, Staunæs also stresses that affirmative critique is not about discarding a critical analysis of power but affirmative critique is a necessary “supplement”<sup>20</sup> which still confronts power “norm-critically;”<sup>21</sup> however, it is “not a matter of judging or voting for or against,” but in Haraway’s spirit it is

13 Ibid.

14 Sedgwick, *Paranoid reading*, 145.

15 Wiegman, “The times we’re in,” 11.

16 Dorthe Staunæs, “Notes on inventive methodologies and affirmative critiques of an affective edu-future,” *Research in Education* 0, no. 0 (2016): 5.

17 Staunæs, “Notes on inventive methodologies,” 6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034523716664580>.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.



a matter of "producing possible 'elsewheres.'"<sup>22</sup> In this way, Staunæs follows Foucault's call for a suspension of judgment when he reflects on how to properly analyze the nexus between power and knowledge in his famous essay "What is Critique?" and writes, "there is no case made here for the attribution of legitimacy, no assigning points of error and illusion."<sup>23</sup> She also follows Brian Massumi who describes the choice between 'debunking' and 'fostering' as a "strategic question"<sup>24</sup> and as a "question of *dosage*."<sup>25</sup> The logic behind the choice of which mode to apply is rather straightforward: "It is simply that when you are busy critiquing you are less busy augmenting."<sup>26</sup> Negative critique fixates on and thus reproduces its object of critique, rather than positively focusing on and augmenting alternatives which we can already decipher in the presence or imagine in a possible future. As network theorist Bruno Latour in his polemic essay "Why has critique run out of steam?" holds against conventional critical theory, the transformative power of critique lies not so much in its getting "matters of fact" right, but in engaging creatively and in a careful and cautious manner with "matters of concern."<sup>27</sup> The task and the strength of the critic is then redefined by him as follows: "The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naive believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather."<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Latour himself is not so careful in his treatment of those traditions he criticizes and tends to contrast "debunking" with "assembling" in a manner that itself comes rather close to 'debunking,' not dissimilar to the kind of revelatory, negative form of critique he describes as problematic.

In the interest of not reproducing this kind of dismissive technique, operating by creating dichotomous oppositions to that which we criticize, I think it is more fruitful to follow Staunæs and other educational thinkers which promote a less polemic and a more varied and fine-grained picture of how we can think different modes of critique. Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, for example, agrees with Rosi Braidotti that "feminisms need to move away from the logic of negativity built into the Hegelian-Marxist dialectics of consciousness in critical theory [...] as well as in the central notion of lack in psychoanalysis," as this logic will "always require experiences of material, discursive or sexual oppression, marginality, injury or trauma, as a condition of resistance, counteraction and overturning."<sup>29</sup> The form of "diffractive analysis," however, which Lenz Taguchi suggests as an alternative, building on Karen Barad (2007) and Donna Haraway (1997), implies moving "from identifying bodies as

22 Ibid.

23 Michel Foucault, "What is critique?," in *The Politics of Truth* (Cambridge, MA and London: semiotext(e), 1997), 60.

24 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the virtual. Movement, affect, sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 14. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822383574>

25 Massumi, *Parables*, 12.

26 Ibid.

27 Bruno Latour, "Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004), 225-248. <https://doi.org/10.1086/421123>

28 Latour, *Why has critique*, 246.

29 Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, "A diffractive and Deleuzian approach to analyzing interview data," *Feminist Theory* 13, no. 3 (2012), 269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700112456001>.

separate entities with distinct border to think in terms of entanglements and interdependencies in processes of ongoing co-constitutive co-existence of different kinds of bodies" as well as "thinking as a process of co-constitution, investigating the entanglement of ideas and other materialities in ways that reflexive methodologies do not."<sup>30</sup> The gesture here is still motivating diffractive modes of critique in relation to that which was left out in earlier forms of critique (e.g. the activeness of matter and its involvement in the co-constituting rather than just passive instruments); "that which has been considered passive and minor is now seen as active and forceful in its into-activities with other bodies."<sup>31</sup> Yet, the gesture nevertheless construes these as complementary forms, and not necessarily as a radically new method to fully replace negative or reflexive modes of critique. In line with Barad and Haraway, Lenz Taguchi's understanding of diffractive analysis extends beyond the reflexive mode and focuses on difference in a positive sense, on the way in which differences come to matter and become productive and effective in the world, without the (patriarchal, colonial) gesture of trying to assimilate, eradicate or sublimate differences in a Hegelian dialectic. Furthermore, the turn to the material does not minimize the question of responsibility, but it is "simultaneously about *intervention* and *invention*; *responsibility* and *ethics*."<sup>32</sup> So, when looking at how affirmative critique and diffraction as a mode of analysis are put into practice in educational research, in the best cases the extension of researchers' focus on lifting the importance of our embodiment as well as on the active involvement of materiality in the respective phenomena or events studied, should lead to an actual deepening of the critique, to developing critique that cuts deeper and develops further transformation than more traditional radical critiques; it should inspire a critique that goes more "minoritarian" (Deleuze) and develops even more challenging, more dangerous analyses.

#### 4. Returning the feminist killjoy

In 2008 Sara Ahmed wrote a noticed response in the *European Journal of Women's Studies* that opened a critical questioning of some of the "founding gestures" of new materialism.<sup>33</sup> She particularly took issue with new materialists' "routinization of the gesture towards feminist anti-biologism or constructionism,"<sup>34</sup> constructing the claim for offering something new through a call for a return to biology, a return to matter which, according to Ahmed, only functioned through "a forgetting as well as a caricature."<sup>35</sup> For her, a tendency to caricature rather than critically engage with feminism's history goes against the politics behind how to distribute our critical attention as feminist philosophers. How

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30 Ibid., 271.

31 Ibid., 278.

32 Ibid., 278.

33 Sara Ahmed, "Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the 'New Materialism,'" *European Journal of Women Studies* 15, no.1 (2008), 23-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506807084854>

34 Ibid., 25.

35 Ibid., 36.

carefully do we engage with feminism's history? How much attention and care do texts by male philosophers receive?<sup>36</sup> Another problematic she points out in new materialists' claim to newness, is the omission of historical materialism, which "does not haunt this emergent field even in its absence."<sup>37</sup> An anecdote from last year's NERA conference in Copenhagen (2017) comes to my mind here. I attended a panel on an upcoming book project on new materialist research methodologies. In the question section after the presentations, the different participants of the panel were asked to outline how their respective projects related to questions of 'political economy.' The first answer from one of the panelists was 'I am not familiar with the concept'. While the other panelists later on developed some quite interesting answers as to how the question of political economy would be addressed in their respective project, this first answer struck me quite uncomfortably. What is the state of social research and scholarship if currently active members of the community are unfamiliar with the concept of political economy or find it laughable enough to dismiss it as a joke?

In this kind of context, Ahmed's work tends to figure as the kind of feminist killjoy which she has spent ample time motivating and defending as one of the key figures for an important and necessary feminist critique of happiness.<sup>38</sup> According to Ahmed, keeping categories such as gender and race in place as critical analytical categories will never be considered as laughably outdated by those who experience the effects of structural oppression in their everyday lives:

"In giving up these terms, we give up more than the terms: we give up on a certain kind of intervention into the world. [...] The very tendency to 'look over' how everyday and institutional worlds involve restrictions and blockages is how those restrictions and blockages are reproduced. It is not the time to be over it, if it is not over. It is not even the time to get over it. Social categories are sediments: they go all the way down, and they weigh some of us down."<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, when Ahmed defends the figure of the feminist killjoy as a necessary critique of happiness, she – amongst many other aspects – also positions this critical figure against Rosi Braidotti's call for a more affirmative rather than negative critical practice in feminist theory:

"Rosi Braidotti has suggested that the focus on negativity has become a problem within feminism. She offers a rather bleak reading of bleakness: 'I actively yearn for a more joyful and empowering concept of desire and for a political economy that foregrounds positivity, not gloom'. The call for affirmation rather than negativity in her work involves an explicit

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36 Cf. *Ibid.*, 30.

37 *Ibid.*, 32.

38 Sara Ahmed, *The promise of happiness* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822392781>.

39 Ahmed, *On being included*, 181.

turn to happiness. As she argues: 'I consider happiness a political issue, as are well-being, self-confidence and a sense of empowerment. These are fundamentally ethical concerns. [...] The feminist movement has played the historical role of placing these items at the centre of the social and political agenda: happiness as a fundamental human right and hence a political question'. My desire is to revitalize the feminist critique of happiness as a human right and as the appropriate language for politics. To revitalize the critique of happiness is to be willing to be proximate to unhappiness."<sup>40</sup>

I would like to consider Ahmed's figure of the feminist killjoy in relation to the debate between affirmative and negative critique; namely, that sometimes there are things more important than happiness.

Holding on to certain forms of negative critique (such as in relation to political economy or historical materialism; or in more traditional critiques of sexism and racism) might be worthwhile even if they do not promise or guarantee to make us (the scholar, the researcher, or their audience) happy. In her 2010 *The promise of happiness*, Ahmed motivates the figure of the feminist killjoy both from the liberal feminist criticism of many ideas of happiness actually being instrumental in the oppression of women, as well as from the black feminist critique of these ideals of happiness as a "political myth"<sup>41</sup> which reserves happiness and its approximation for white women, imagining black women as always already falling on the unhappy side of life for lack of the pre-conditions that would make a happy life possible. Interestingly, Ahmed ascribes education a central place in the construction of these ideals of happiness. Education, as an "orientation device,"<sup>42</sup> has since Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* attempted at orienting women to understand their happiness in supporting and aligning themselves with the happiness of others. It has been feminists' critique of these educationally enforced ideals or women finding their happiness in pleasing their parents, their husbands, their children, that from Mary Wollstonecraft onwards have been considered "troublesome" since they pose an immediate threat towards the happiness of others. Ahmed positively takes up feminism's "history of making trouble"<sup>43</sup> through its violation of "the fragile conditions of peace"<sup>44</sup> not only for its destruction of false and oppressive ideals, but also in its opening for broader, other images. The construction of women's happiness, as for example in Rousseau, was often related to a "renunciation of desire."<sup>45</sup> The feminist critique of happiness thus could have a freeing effect, by allowing women to dream of following their desire beyond narrow visions of happiness, beyond what would make them the 'good girl' in they eyes of others, beyond what would first and foremost serve others' happiness.

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40 Ahmed, *The promise of happiness*, 87.

41 Ibid., 79.

42 Ibid., 54.

43 Ibid., 60.

44 Ibid., 61.

45 Ibid., 63.

Yet, it is not that feminism's promise of happiness that Ahmed is interested in or even convinced of; (as when she writes, "making women happy is not the point of feminism."<sup>46</sup>) Rather, it is a re-appraisal of the critical practice of "consciousness-raising"<sup>47</sup> that remains Ahmed's main point of interest:

"Feminist consciousness can thus be thought of as consciousness of the violence and power that are concealed under the languages of civility and love, rather than simply consciousness of gender as a site of restriction of possibility."<sup>48</sup>

It is through the dismantling of the misleading, false, and oppressive ideals of happiness, so Ahmed, that it is possible to counter a pervasive logic of misunderstanding the "angry black woman" or the "feminist killjoy" as the source of the problem, as someone causing trouble because they are angry, rather than as someone who is angry because there is a problem:

"Your anger is a judgment that something is wrong. But in being heard as angry, your speech is read as motivated by anger. Your anger is read as unattributed, as if you are against x because you are angry rather than being angry because you are against x."<sup>49</sup>

This kind of logic falls into place when "an oppressed person does not smile or show signs of being happy, then he or she is read as being negative: as angry, hostile, unhappy, and so on,"<sup>50</sup> and it is particularly vicious for the "angry black woman" who may "even kill feminist joy, for example, by pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics."<sup>51</sup> Rather than drawing attention to and being read as a call to address and transform the structural inequalities and oppressions they name, the killjoy is attributed with an individual, angry personality that unpleasantly destroys the otherwise good mood of the situation.

## 5. Instead of a conclusion: Sediments that go all the way down

Returning to the debate between affirmative and negative critique, it is interesting to see how Ahmed connects her insights from her study of diversity work in higher education institutions with the recent critique of more traditional forms of feminist and post-colonial critique in *On being included* (2012). Ahmed here defends traditional terrains of critical practices, such as situated knowledges' understanding of providing a more adequate account of the world by pointing to the ways in which racism and sexism develop as structural problems, and claims that her phenomenological approach can show "how a critique of the

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46 Ibid., 78.

47 Ibid., 53.

48 Ibid., 86.

49 Ibid., 68.

50 Ibid., 66.

51 Ibid., 67.

ontological basis of categories does not mean that the categories themselves disappear."<sup>52</sup> She argues that the new materialist claim to re-doing our ontology covers over rather than transforms the inequalities of our practices in a similar way as in her research some institutions understood diversity work as changing the "perception of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of the organization."<sup>53</sup> She cautions that:

"To proceed as if the categories *do not matter* because they *should not matter* would be to fail to show how the categories continue to ground social existence. [...] The very idea that we are beyond race, that we can see beyond race, or that we are 'over race' is how racism is reproduced it is how racism is *looked over*. [...] At the very moment of 'overing,' a category is redone."<sup>54</sup>

The difficulty of not blaming those who continue pointing at the problem as the ones causing (or at least perpetuating) the problem, then poses itself for these internal feminist debates. In Ahmed's view, those that are painted as holding on to "dated"<sup>55</sup> forms of criticism, to social categories which new ontologies can reveal as without good grounding, might be the ones that are angry because they continue to experience a problem, because they continued to be weighed down by certain inequalities and categories more heavily than others, rather than being those that continue to experience a problem because they decide to remain angry.

In a rather refreshing engagement with these criticisms of new materialism, Peta Hinton and Xin Liu develop an approach which openly embraces this problematic as a charge to be taken seriously, rather than defensively negated: "'Yes, new materialism contains a white optics'. 'Yes, it might generate, or generate *as*, a white episteme'. One only has to look at the new materialist canon and its genealogical informants for evidence of this – Braidotti, Barad, DeLanda, Deleuze, just to name a few."<sup>56</sup> However, Hinton and Liu suggest that new materialism's "perverse ontology" makes abandonment "im/possible," i.e. it embraces the paradox of abandoning and refusing to abandon at the same time,<sup>57</sup> whereas the critics of new materialist critique do not admit in equal manner to their own forms of abandonment and omission. To this, I would like to return once more with Ahmed that there is something worrisome in stylizing difference as something that "just *was* or even *is*,"<sup>58</sup> that "the desire for Deleuze, which is not necessarily Deleuzian [...] can be questioned in part because it allows scholars to by-pass certain political questions and categories; it might be 'desirable'

52 Ahmed, *On being included*, 182.

53 Ibid., 184.

54 Ibid., 182 f.

55 Ibid., 181.

56 Peta Hinton and Xin Liu, "The im/possibility of abandonment in new materialist ontologies," *Australian Feminist Studies* 30, no. 84 (2015), 130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2015.1046304>.

57 Cf. Ibid., 141.

58 Salla Tuori and Salla Peltonen, "Feminist politics. An Interview with Sara Ahmed," *NORA - Nordic Journal of Women's Studies* 15, no. 4 (2007), 259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08038740701691941>



for some to talk more about becoming molecular than about whiteness, for instance."<sup>59</sup> Instead she highlights the importance of structural distributions and inequalities, which require scholarly attention, understanding and the tracing of their historical development so as "not to take the social categories as given but to track how they come into being as effects of processes."<sup>60</sup> I am thinking of Clare Hemmings' self-critical engagement with the opposition between paranoia and reparation:

"Is it accidental, I wonder, that I find myself most drawn to thinking through affect rather than critique at a point when it is institutionally harder and harder to sustain a paranoid position invested in (my own) marginality? That I turn to memory and fantasy intellectually and invest heavily in a body that feels good (running-yoga-rest; running-yoga-rest) at the same time that I am recognized by an elite institution as a professor? And indeed that I am not the only one thus drawn to a move away from paranoia at precisely the moment when it would be absurd to keep on insisting on constraining structures (while taking a nice long period of research leave)? To what or whom is reparation being made here? To the institutions one previously critiqued? To the misguided earlier self mired in paranoia?"<sup>61</sup>

This is what Ahmed means when she writes that: "Social categories are sediments: they go all the way down, and they weigh some of us down."<sup>62</sup> For some, critique is optional, for others it is not; and we can wonder with Hemmings how to think about the line between the charge of paranoia and the weight of the actual constraint some bodies (in certain contexts, times, places) experience more than others, and how this connects to the different critical impulses (negativity, paranoia, affirmation, reparation) that urge different bodies to produce different kind of scholarship and research at different times and places.

In many ways, the impulses from affirmative critique seem to hold promise for addressing the challenges of diversity work in schools in a different, more productive manner. Rather than reproducing problematic categories and boundaries, we think beyond human-non-human and address the world shaping and co-creating surprising new and different realities. With Ahmed, however, one also feels obliged to caution against these promises of happiness. In a reality where basic issues of recognition and representation in school leadership itself, in the power hierarchies within schools, regarding personnel and staff as well as students, regarding the teaching material and curricula, remain under-theorized and are not taken into adequate account, embracing affirmative critique can too easily lead to a comfortable silencing of issues that still need addressing and clear naming. I have been trying to argue in this paper that we need not think of affirmative and negative critique as two binaries; opposed and mutually exclusive alternatives. Instead, and in a more dif-

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59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 260.

61 Clare Hemmings, "The materials of reparation," *Feminist Theory* 15, no. 1 (2014), 29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700113513082>.

62 Ahmed, *On being included*, 181.

fractive spirit, we should multiply different modes of critique and employ them in their overlapping and intersecting characters. In this way, we might achieve multiple ways of engaging with different forms of critique of persistent oppression and marginalization in schools which can lead to a thorough transformation of current practice. A diffractive approach to critique would allow for joyfully interchanging and alternating appropriate modes of debunking, of being the killjoy against sedimentations that weigh some of us down, with other modes of critique which allow us to augment and lift up positive examples of emancipatory and liberating diversity practice which illustrates creative and already on-going structural change.

# Anmeldelse

**Tone Kvernbekk**  
***Evidence-based Practice in Education.***  
***Functions of evidence and causal presuppositions.***  
**New York: Routledge, 2016**

Lige siden David Hargreaves i 1996 afholdt sin omdiskurerede Teacher Training Agency (TTA) forelæsning, hvor han opfordrede til, at uddannelsessystemet burde indrettes med den evidensbaserede medicin som forbillede, har der internationalt eksisteret en intens debat om evidensforskningens og i særdeleshed randomiserede kontrollerede forsøgs (RCT) rolle i pædagogik og uddannelse. Også i Danmark har debatten været og er fortsat intens. Selv om tanken og udførelsen af evidensbaseret forskning stadig vinder indpas, eksisterer der fortsat en strid om, hvilken rolle evidensforskning har i pædagogik og uddannelse, og om den overhovedet har eller burde have en?

Den norske professor i videnskabsfilosofi og pædagogisk filosofi Tone Kvernbekk har med bogen "Evidence-based Practice in Education: Functions of evidence and causal presuppositions" bidraget til debatten om evidensens rolle og funktion i en evidensbaseret praksis (EBP) og i uddannelsesfeltet generelt. Kvernbekk formår, via sin avancerede forståelse for et ofte udskældt kausalitetsbegreb, nøgternt at skrive sig ind mellem to betændte polariseringer i pædagogikken. På den ene side dem, som hilser evidensen velkommen på grund af dens evne til at belyse simple, regelmæssige (kausale) sammenhænge, repræsenteret af blandt andre David Hargreaves,<sup>1</sup> og på den anden side de, der ikke accepterer kausaliteten i pædagogikken, da de mener og definerer kausalitet ud fra, at mennesker ikke besidder samme (kausal)strukturer som fysiske objekter, repræsenteret af blandt andre Gert Biesta.<sup>2</sup> Igennem sin brug af en videnskabsteoretisk realismeorienteret systemteori, der skelner mellem åbne og lukkede systemer og et pluralistisk kausalitetsbegreb, fremskriver Kvernbekk mulighederne for at skabe en mellemvej mellem disse to polariseringer. Kvernbekks videnskabsteoretiske realisme tillader hende på fin vis at fremvise, hvorledes evidens og kausalitet i pædagogik og uddannelse ikke behøver at være et *enten-eller*, men i stedet kan og bør være et *både-og*. Som Kvernbekk skriver, så er hun "a critical friend to EBP";<sup>3</sup> selvom jeg tænker,

at mange evidens fortalere mest vil opfatte Kvernbekk som "kritisk" og mindre som ven.

Ved at åbne for en realismeorienteret systemteori og et probabilistisk, pluralistisk kausalitetsbegreb – primært hentet med inspiration fra den engelske kausalteoretiker og filosof Nancy Cartwright – opnår Kvernbekk, for mig at se, tre afgørende mål i bogen:

For det første formår Kvernbekk at sætte videnskabelig viden på den rette plads, såvel i forhold til videnskabelig videns relation til politiske beslutninger som med hensyn til den videnskabelige videns forhold til pædagogisk praksis. Med hjælp fra Stephen Toulmins argumentationsmodel viser Kvernbekk overbevisende, hvordan videnskabelig viden ikke bør/kan fungere som det grundlæggende beslutningsgrundlag eller fundament for pædagogiske handlinger, men i stedet som en indirekte rygdækning (*backing*), der står ligeværdigt ved siden af praktikerens egne erfaringer. Dermed rykker Kvernbekk ved manges hidtidige forståelse for/af evidensens rolle i pædagogisk praksis, idet hun fjerner den som det primære *datagrundlag* (data) for praktikerens konklusioner (conclusions) og handlingsgrundlag. Populært sagt gør hun evidensens forhold til praksis indirekte. Kvernbekks brug af Toulmins argumentationsmodel er på mange måder gennemført, idet Kvernbekk med denne model formår at illustrere det komplekse forhold, der eksisterer mellem videnskabelig viden og pædagogisk praksis, hvortil Kvernbekk overbevisende viser, hvorledes *garantier* (warrants) om, hvad der virker, kræver stor forståelse for de kontekstuelle *kvalifikationer/styrkemarkører* (qualifiers) og *indsigelse* (rebuttals), der eksisterer i den givne kontekst. Dog er jeg i tvivl om, hvorvidt argumentationsteorien med sin vægt på logisk konsistens faktisk er den bedste til at beskrive den komplekse plurale empiriske og kausale verden, som Kvernbekk fremskriver i bogen. Med Pierre Bourdieus ord, hentet fra Karl Marx, tror jeg, at man skal passe på med at forveksle "the things of logic for the logic of things".<sup>4</sup>

For det andet, og i forbindelse med ovenstående, formår Kvernbekk at stille RCT-forskningen og effektstørrelse-studier, som eksempelvis John Hatties, i et korrekt indirekte forhold til pædagogisk praksis. Kontroversielt, men overbevisende, lykkes det Kvernbekk at omvende læserens forståelsen af RCT-studiers generaliserbarhed og ekstern validitet. En blandt flere pointer som Kvernbekk henter fra Cartwrights kausalitetsfilosofi. Kvernbekk viser med sin pluralistiske kausalteori, modsat evidens fortalernes holdning hertil, at RCT kun giver en meget snæver kausalforståelse, idet RCT er udført i kon-

1 David Hargreaves, "Teaching as a research-based profession: Possibilities and prospects," *The Teacher Training Agency Annual Lecture 1996*, (1996): 5.

2 Gert Biesta, "Why 'What Works' Won't Work: Evidence-based Practice and the Democratic Deficit in Educational Research", *Educational Theory* 57, no. 1 (2007): 8-10.

3 Tone Kvernbekk, *Evidence-based Practice in Education* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 3.

4 Pierre Bourdieu, "Men and Machines," in *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Towards an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologies*, ed. K. Knorr-Cetina & A.V. Cicourel (Boston: Routledge, 1981), 305.

trollerede lukkede forhold/systemer med velafgrænsede kausalstrukturer, som yderst sjældent stemmer overens med de åbne forhold/ (endogene) systemer og kausalstrukturer som hverdagens pædagogiske kontekst udfolder sig i. Dermed formår Kvernebeck nøgternt at vise, at der er stor forskel på forholdet mellem, hvad der virkede *der*, og hvad der potentielt vil virke *her*. Kvernebeck fremstiller også det asymmetriske forhold, der eksisterer mellem at *jagte* årsager og *anvende* dem. Man bør give Kvernebeck stor cadeau for koncist og med hjælp fra Cartwright at illustrere, at forholdet mellem 'what worked' 'what works' og 'what will work' ikke blot handler om grammatiske petitesser;

Sidst, men ikke mindst, formår Kvernebeck at vise, hvorledes verden og mennesker sagtens kan fremstå som åbne (kontingente) og unikke, selvom forståelsen for kausalitet indføres i pædagogikken. Jeg vil overordnet argumentere for, at Kvernebeck med sit kausalitetsbegreb imødekommer begge de lejre, hun kritiserer. Hvorvidt hendes tilgang til evidens accepteres af disse to lejre er én ting, men hendes evne til at bygge bro henover disse er beundringsværdig.

Selvom Kvernebeck med sin realisme forsøger at bygge bro mellem to lejre, og selvom jeg både finder analyserne af kausalitet som kernen i EBP og analyserne af evidens-teoretikeren John Hatties effektstørrelsesstudier adækvate – ud fra det ofte oversete faktum, at Hattie stedsvis skriver, at effektstørrelser "giver den bedste evidens til at føre til vigtige kausalforklaringer"<sup>5</sup> og "the fundamental word in meta-analysis, *effect size*, implies causation"<sup>6</sup> – så er det åbenlyst, at Kvernebeck i en dansk sammenhæng vil møde modstand i forhold til at tilskrive Hattie og evidensforskningen en kausalitetsfortolkning. Dette skyldes, at der i en dansk kontekst har været en større kamp, fra blandt andre Niels Egelund og Lars Qvortrup, for at vise, at Hatties studier<sup>8</sup> og kvantitativ forskning generelt set ikke har noget med kausalitet at gøre.<sup>9</sup> Man kan i en dansk kontekst muligvis tale om, at evidensbevægelsen

eksisterer i en mere perplekse form, end dén Kvernebeck optegner i bogen, i og med at dele af den danske evidensbevægelse dels vil tillade RCT-studier, samtidig med, at de ikke ønsker at tale om kausalitet i pædagogikken. Jeg tillader mig dog alligevel at håbe, at den danske evidensbevægelse og dens kritikere tager Kvernebecks bidrag til efterretning. Det vil kunne (op)løse mange spændinger.

Bogen er fra evidenskritikernes side af blevet beskyldt for at repræsentere en simpel ontologisk model for kausalitet.<sup>10</sup> Dog er det min bedste overbevisning, at denne beskyldning bygger på en forhatet og fejlagtig læsning af Kvernebecks pluralistiske kausalitetsbegreb, der samtidig ender med at levere et opgør med størstedelen af al hidtidig kausalitetsfilosofi. Kritikken misforstår, at pluralistisk kausalitet ikke blot handler om, at man har syn for flere faktorer end det monokausale forhold mellem X og Y, men faktisk er åben over for og accepterer alle veldokumenterede kausalteorier, der afdækker forskelligartede empiriske fænomener, hvorfor Kvernebecks ontologiske model potentielt set også er åben over for og kan beskrive kritikernes ideer om, hvordan pædagogiske fænomener opfører sig kausalt. Kvernebeck argumenterer koncist for sit pluralistiske standpunkt ved at fremhæve at: "all causal theories have well-known counter-examples, a large number of different entities can serve as causal relata, and the causal relation is equally manifold. Thus, it stands to reason that EBP [evidence-based practice] should presuppose and employ different causal concepts and theories".<sup>11</sup>

At det er muligt og givetvis fair at anklage det pluralistiske udgangspunkt for at være abstrakt, ubeslutsomt og for rummeligt i retningen af 'everything goes', det kan jeg forstå, men simpelt er det næppe, tværtimod. Kritikken rammer kritikere selv, idet de låser sig fast på, at den pædagogiske verden kun lader sig kausalt beskrive på én måde. Med deres monistiske kausalitetsteori begrænser kritikere så at sige fænomenstrukturen i pædagogikken. Dette er for mig at se simpelt og en tækningsmåde som Kvernebecks bidrag kan løse op for. Uagtet ovenstående kritikpunkt, mener jeg stadig, at en af bogens vigtigste erkendelser er: "that the stability required for reliable reproduction of Y resides mainly in the underlying causal system, not in the causal X–Y relation itself".<sup>12</sup>

Kvernebecks kausalitetsteoretiske modeller skaber på alle måder gode muligheder for kritisk og konstruktivt at lade sig anvende i forhold til at analysere såvel de internationale som nordiske evidensbevægelser. Kvernebecks

5 John Hattie, *Synlig læring – for lærere* (Frederikshavn: Dafolo, 2013), 300.

6 John Hattie, *Visible Learning – A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-analysis Relating to Achievement* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 237.

7 Niels Egelund & Lars Qvortrup, "For til den danske udgave" in *Synlig læring – for lærere*, ed. John Hattie (Frederikshavn: Dafolo, 2013), 13.

8 Lars Qvortrup, "Baggrund for og diskussioner af Visible Learning med særligt henblik på lærings- og vidensbegrebet," *Paideia* 9 (2015), 25.

9 Lars Qvortrup, "Undervisning er udøvelse af professionel dømmekraft," in *Evidens og dømmekraft. Når evidens møder den pædagogiske praksis*, ed. Claus Holm & Hanne Balsby Thingholm (Frederikshavn: Dafolo, 2017), 163.

10 Thomas Aastrup Rømer, "Pædagogik og kausalitet" in *Uren pædagogik* 3, ed. Thomas A. Rømer, Lene Tanggaard, Svend Brinkmann (Aarhus: Klim, 2017), 77.

11 Kvernebeck, *Evidence-based Practice in Education*, 178.

12 Kvernebeck, *Evidence-based Practice in Education*, 112.

fremstilling af de forskellige kausalitetsteorier trækker oftest på fiktive og tænke eksempler på, hvordan de givne kausalteorier udfolder sig. Det kunne have været interessant og opløftende, hvis Kvernbekk havde benyttet lejligheden til at vise, hvordan de forskellige kausalitetsteorier arbejder empirisk i den pædagogiske forskning og praksis, som sideløber til Cartwright og Hardies<sup>13</sup> illustrative empiriske eksempler. Hvis Kvernbekk havde gået mere empirisk til værks, tror jeg, Kvernbekk ville opdage, at det ikke er tilfældet, at den interventionistiske kausalitetsteori "is the theory that best elucidates the structure of EBP".<sup>14</sup> Selvom dette er et beundringsværdigt ideal for evidensbevægelsen, fylder det utroligt lidt i den danske evidensbevægelse.<sup>15</sup>

I gennem hele bogen forsvaret Kvernbekk overordnet set evidensstanken og til dels evidensbevægelsen *ipso facto*, men med Kvernbekks begreber om åbne systemer, en ultra pluralistisk kausalitetsforståelse og begrebsliggøre af en ontologisk stærk kontingent verden, gør det, for mig at se, besværligt fuldstændigt at acceptere evidensbegrebets anatomi, så længe begrebet simpelt konnoterer til 'what works'-terminen. I min læsning af Kvernbekk er jeg i tvivl om, hvor langt hun faktisk vil følge evidensbevægelsens nuværende diskurs, idet det kommer til at fremstå som om, at troen på, at forskningen kan oplyse om 'hvad der virker', i de fleste tilfælde og i særdeleshed på individniveau, vil ende med at levere falske profetier. Som Kvernbekk skriver: "Specific and detailed individual results are next to impossible to predict".<sup>16</sup> Yderligere skriver Kvernbekk om den pædagogiske kontekst: "If the educational context changes or the students change, the proposed course of action might not work any more; and given the open, complex, and holistic nature of educational practice it seems more reasonable to assume that it will change".<sup>17</sup> Med disse indsigelser mod fremtidige pædagogiske forudsigelser, bliver det for mig at se svært samtidig at acceptere den anvendelsesorienterede del af evidensstanken. I den forbindelse finder jeg også, at Kvernbekks forsvar for den nuværende 'what works'-tankegang og -diskurs, medfører, at Kvernbekk stedsvis retter en uberettiget kritik mod Biestas pointe om, at pædagogisk forskning maksimalt kan oplyse om, 'hvad der virkede' engang. Jeg finder, at Kvernbekk, i sin iver efter at kritisere Biesta, overser, at Biesta med denne

udtalelse faktisk deler den samme respekt for den probabilistiske, åbne og pluralistiske verdenen som Kvernbekk selv. Uagtet af dette, er jeg dog mestendels og overordnet enig i Kvernbekks kritiske stillingtagen til Biestas "kausal"-filosofi.

I den mere nørdede afdeling fremstår det, for mig, som om Kvernbekk ikke fuldt ud formår præcist at fremlægge forholdet mellem Cartwrights strukturelle kausalligning,<sup>18</sup> kausalkagemodel og John Mackies INUS-betingelser<sup>19</sup> for kausalitet. Det fremstår uklart, om Kvernbekk mener, at det kun er ledet  $b(i)x(i)$  i Cartwrights kausalligning, der repræsenterer Mackies INUS-betingelser,<sup>20</sup> i så fald skal man huske på, at også leddene  $z(i)$  og  $u(i)$  ligeledes repræsenterer årsager, der fungerer som INUS-betingelser. Dette har for mig at se stor betydning for forståelsen af, hvor kompleks den pædagogiske verden *de facto* er.

Uafhængigt af ovenstående kritikpunkter leverer Kvernbekk i nordiske pædagogiske og filosofiske sammenhænge et savnet værk, som alternativ til de nuværende lejre i evidensdebatten. Jeg kan varmt anbefale bogen til alle med interesse for evidensdiskussionen. Kvernbekk leverer overordnet set en flot og præcis læsning af Nancy Cartwrights kausalfilosofi, som giver et åndehul i en ofte intens og kontrær evidensdebat. Kvernbekks pædagogiske formidlingsstil med en flydende progression og klare omend fiktive eksempler, som baggrund for bogens argumentation, gør det til en sand fornøjelse at læse.

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13 Nancy Cartwright & Jeremy Hardie, *Evidence-based Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

14 Kvernbekk, *Evidence-based Practice in Education*, 74.

15 Mikkel Holding Vembye & Hans Siggaard Jensen, "Hvorfor pædagogisk evidensforskning i sin nuværende form ikke er til megen hjælp", *Nordic Studies in Education* (indsendt).

16 Kvernbekk, *Evidence-based Practice in Education*, 117.

17 Kvernbekk, *Evidence-based Practice in Education*, 100.

18 Cartwrights ligning:

$$y(i)c = a_1 + a_2 y_0(i) + a_3 b(i)x(i) + a_4 z(i) + u(i)$$

19 INUS står for: "[a] cause is (...) an *insufficient* but *necessary* part of a condition which is itself *unnecessary* but *sufficient* for the result". Se John Mackie, "Causes and Conditions", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (1965), 245.

20 Se Kvernbekk, *Evidence-based Practice in Education*, 136 for dette argument.



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