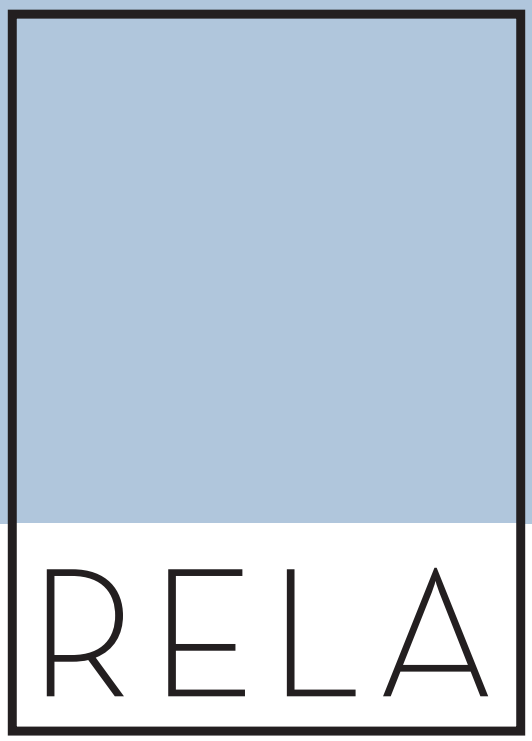
Adult education and the aesthetic experience



European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults

2019, Vol.10, No.2

RELA

European Journal for Research
on the Education and Learning of Adults

Volume 10, No. 2, June 2019

Linköping University Electronic Press
ISSN 2000-7426
www.rela.ep.liu.se

Editorial board

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults – RELA

VOLUME 10 NUMBER 2 JUNE 2019

Contents

Thematic papers

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol.10, No.2, 2019, pp. 117-121

Editorial: Adult Education and the Aesthetic Experience

Danny Wildemeersch
Leuven University, Belgium (danny.wildemeersch@kuleuven.be)

Aesthetics: a broad understanding

Over the last years the interest in the relationship between education and aesthetics has remarkably increased, both in theory and in practice. One could even argue that to a certain extent there is an 'aesthetic turn' in the way educational practices are conceived. In connection with this increased attention, the editors of RELA want to stimulate the reflection and dialogue on how aesthetics plays a role both in theory and in practices of adult education and learning. The concept of aesthetics is often connected with art practices. We are interested in that particular orientation. However, we choose to conceive of aesthetics in a broader sense. We are thereby inspired by Nikolas Kompridis (2014, p. XVI) for whom "aesthetic" or "aesthetics" is 'much more than a specialized inquiry into the nature of art, artworks or beauty, grounded in a sensuous, usually non-cognitive, mode of perception'. Aesthetic(s) in his view is something much wider in scope: 'it is about what we are able to see and hear and what we are unable to see and hear' (ibid. p. XVIII). This approach is very much inspired by Jacques Rancière who understands aesthetics as

> the distribution of the sensible'. To him, aesthetics refers to the 'order of the sensible', which is about the 'specific distribution of space and time, of the visible and the invisible, that create specific forms of "commonsense", regardless of the specific message such-and-such an act intends.' (Rancière, 2010, p. 141)

Hence, in this view, politics, as well as education and arts are aesthetic because they relate to (the questioning of) the order of 'what makes sense'. And therefore, changes in aesthetic regimes often are signals or symptoms of changes in the way we understand the social, cultural and political order (see also: Sitzia, 2018).

In a more concrete way, Paul Mecheril (2015) argues that 'cultural-aesthetic education' (kulturell-ästhetische Bildung) can neither be restricted to the knowledge of artworks, concerts and theatre plays, nor to the qualities of perception capacities. It rather relates to the processes through which aesthetic experiences are connected with overall conditions in which we live, including the question what is valuable to strive for. Another source of inspiration of such broad approach to aesthetics is John Dewey who, when researching the meaning of art in human

ISSN 2000-7426

DOI 10.3384/rela.2000-7426.relae18
www.rela.ep.liu.se

action, emphasizes not so much the outcome of artistic practices, but rather stresses the broad sensorial experiences that captivate the attention of human beings.

> In order to *understand* the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with the raw: in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd – the fire-engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth, the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts. (Dewey, 1934, p. 4-5)

Approaches to aesthetics in (adult) education

We see these broad ways of understanding 'aesthetics' also reflected in recent work on education in general and adult education in particular. Various authors signal the limitations of a cognitivist understanding of educational practices. They claim that education and learning indeed include all senses such as seeing, feeling, tasting and touching, rather than just thinking, memorizing and understanding. Therefore, one could claim that education and learning are *bodily* experiences. For Gert Biesta[1] (2017), education is the work of the head, of the hands and of the heart. It is about the way we engage in and with the world with all our senses. In a similar way, Richard Siegesmund (2013, p. 303) conceives of aesthetic education as a playful activity, 'an open and fluid imagining with delight as a possible outcome but can never be a goal'. Hence, such activity is purposeless. In the same vein, Gayatri Spivak (2012) emphasizes that aesthetics is 'a curriculum of ab-use'; or an activity that is deviant to utility.

Other authors, particularly the ones that relate to adult education emphasize the critical function of aesthetic education. Anne Harris (2014) analyses how economy and industry nowadays instrumentalize creativity in view of increased profit-making. In response, she develops an argument for a new 'aesthetic imaginery' in diverse educational contexts and art practices. Such imaginery is the result of slowing down the educational process. 'Slowing down doesn't in itself promise a better kind of education, or an increased opportunity for creative exploration and productive risk-taking, but it sets the condition for doing so' (Harris, 2014, p. 71). Other authors, like Jane McDonnell (2014) search to re-imagine the significance of art in the relationship between democracy and education. Still other authors like Ana Zarrelli and Elizabeth Tisdell (2016) conceive of aesthetic education as a tool to represent the ethical dimension in critical public pedagogy.

Concrete art experiences in adult education

In line with these varied orientations vis-à-vis aesthetics in general and aesthetics in adult education, there are also concrete art experiences worth being presented and analyzed. Artistic practices have long been popular in diverse forms of adult education. Raymond Williams (1989) has long been a concrete source of inspiration to aesthetic approaches in adult workers' education in the UK. Other orientations relate to the use of arts in literacy education. Paulo Freire (1972) was one of the first researchers in that field to experiment with images and drawings to support processes of 'reading the word and the world' with landworkers in Latin-America. Still today similar approaches are practiced in a wide variety of educational initiatives. In line with Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal developed his Theatre of the Oppressed (1975). There are many indications that his methods are still very much alive in adult education today. Also in community arts a broad mixture of aesthetic approaches are in use,

such as theatre workshops, community walks, street art, neighbourhood walking and mapping, but increasingly also the use of social media and practices of blogging (Gouthro, 2018; Right, 2018; Wildemeersch & Von Kotze, 2014). Also museum education is increasingly moving beyond traditional methods such as guided tours by arts experts (Clover, Sanford & Johnson, 2018). Furthermore peace education makes use of mixed media (Medosch, Vater & Zwerger, 2014). And even in vocational education and training there are initiatives that introduce creative and expressive methods, other than the traditional ways to transfer knowledge and skills (Bennett, Reid & Petocz, 2014; Tamboukou, 2017).

We have invited authors to contribute to this thematic issue on 'adult education and the aesthetic experience' with both theoretical and/or empirical contributions that refer to the above-mentioned variety of approaches regarding aesthetic experiences in adult education and learning. The general research question that guided this inquiry was the following: *How can the aesthetic experiences inspire adult education theory and practice?*

Several contributors have responded to our invitation. We have selected five papers that fit well into the concept of this thematic issue.

Contributions

The first paper is by the Italian trio Laura Formenti, Silvia Luraschi and Gaia del Negro. The title is 'Relational Aesthetics: a duoethnographic research on feminism'. In their contribution the authors reflect on the role of aesthetics in the development of a critical pedagogy for social justice in adult education. In their view, critical thinking and awareness are the result of relational and political processes. In the paper they investigate the responses by the three researchers to a photographic exhibition representing women in their everyday lives. The reflection comes about in a dialogic exploration of feminism in the authors' lives, triggered by the pictures in the exhibition. It results into a theoretical exploration of feminism, identity and education.

The second contribution named 'The feminist museum hack as an aesthetic practice of possibility', is by Darlene E. Clover and Sarah Williamson. The Canadian and British authors investigate how art in museums represents the traditional male dominance in wider society. The research is inspired by four 'hacks' by students in an ethnographic museum in Canada and an art gallery in England. The hacks are interventions whereby the students, with post-its, draw attention to the male bias in the representations. The collective reflection among the students is an exercise in making visible what remains hidden and stimulates self and social critique among the participants. The paper is both the report on the systematic investigation of aesthetic experiences and a contribution to the struggle for gender justice and change.

The third paper by Alexis Kokkos from Greece is titled 'The process of transformation: Kegan's view through the lens of a film by Wim Wenders'. The author departs from Kegan's constructive-developmental theory, explaining the evolution of human being's consciousnes in terms of developmental stages. The theory is also interlinked with Mezirow's theory of Perspective Transformation. On the basis of this theoretical framework, Kokkos draws insights from Wim Wenders' film 'Alice in the Cities' to explore important questions about consciousness development, e.g. whether it is a linear or a spiral process; or about the conditions of moving from one stage to another, and about the role of adult educators in fostering this consciousness development.

In the fourth paper, Astrid von Kotze from South-Africa, describes and analyses a practice of political and art education with working class women in her home country. The title of the paper is 'Making Beauty Necessary and Necessary Beautiful'. The article shows how the participants, through collective experiences, achieved a sense of catharsis that opened

perspectives to alternative ways of living and working. It draws on theory developed in practice by workers in the nineteen-eighties when they asserted their dignity and humanity as creative subjects and demonstrates how the women, some twenty-five years later, articulate a similar defiance. The article suggests that certain preconditions must be met before the process of conscientisation through creative work can achieve its objective of preparing participants for action: repoliticise art and education by building radically horizontal relationships; create a playful third space for experimentation and generating knowledge, and encourage improvisations that allow contradictions to emerge and be examined critically.

The fifth and final paper is by the Canadian scholar René Susa. It is a theoretical contribution titled 'Struggling with the recurring reduction of being to knowing: placing thin hope in aesthetic interventions'. The article problematizes the way we, modern subjects, currently exist in the world. It suggests that the common way in which we imagine solutions to our problems, is the very way, through which these problems are being created in the first place. The text pays particular attention to two problematic constitutive characteristics of the modern/Cartesian subject. First is the reductivist insistence on having our "being reduced to knowing" that results in having our relationship to the world mediated (exclusively) through knowledge. Second is our insistence on being able to see/sense/experience ourselves only as separate, presumably autonomous, individuals that ultimately ends up producing us as such. As such it is a plea to pay attention in adult education practices to consider the aesthetic experience as an intersubjective experience including all our senses rather than just a cognitive experience.

Notes

[1] Biesta speaks of 'citizenship as outcome', rather than of 'citizenship as status', whereby outcome refers to the result of an educational trajectory.

References

Bennett, D., Reid, A., & Petocz, P. (2014). Creative workers' views on cultural heritage and sustainability. *Journal of aesthetics & culture*, 6(1), 1-13, doi: 10.3402/jac.v6.24476

Biesta, G. (2017). *Letting art teach. Art education 'after' Joseph Beuys.* Arnhem: Artez.

Clover, D., Sanford, K., & Johnson, K. (2018) Museum and gallery pedagogic strategies for change. *International journal of lifelong education*, *37*(1), 1-3, doi: 10.1080/02601370.2017.1406547.

Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience.* New-York: Capricorn Books.

Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Gouthro, P. (2018). Creativity, the arts and transformative learning. In: M. Milana, S. Webb, J. Holford, R. Waller & P. Jarvis (Eds.), *The Palgrave international handbook on adult and lifelong learning,* pp. 1011-1026.

Harris, A. (2014). *The creative turn. Toward an aesthetic imaginery.* Rotterdam: Sense.

McDonnell, J. (2014). Reimagining the role of art in the relationship between democracy and education. *Educational philosophy and theory, 46*(1), pp.46-58.

Mecheril, P. (2015). Kulturell-Ästhetische Bildung. Migrationspädagogische Anmerkungen. *Kulturelle Bildung Online.* Retrieved March 28, 2018, from https://www.kubi-online.de

Medosch, A., Vater, S., & Zwerger, I. (Eds.). (2014). "Ästhetische Erziehung" im Digital Zeitalter. *Magazin (Erwachsenbildung.at), 22.*

Kompridis, N. (2014). Turning and returning: The aesthetic turn in political thought. In: N. Kompridis, (Ed.), *The aesthetic turn in political thought.* London: Bloomsbury Academic (pp. XIV-XXXVII).

Rancière, J. (2010). *Dissensus: On politics and aesthetics.* London: Continuum.

Right, R.R. (2018). Popular culture, adult learning and identity development. In: M. Milana, S. Webb, J. Holford, R. Waller & P. Jarvis (Eds.), *The Palgrave international handbook on adult and lifelong learning* (pp. 979-989).

Siegesmund, R. (2013). Art education and democratic citizenr. *International journal of art and design education, 32*(3), 300-308.

Sitzia, E. (2018) The ignorant art museum: Beyond meaning-making. *International journal of lifelong education*, *37*(1), 73-87, doi: 10.1080/02601370.2017.1373710.

Spivak, G.C. (2012). *An aesthetic education in the age of globalisation.* Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press.

Tamboukou, M. (2017). *Women workers' education. Life narratives and politics.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol.10, No.2, 2019, pp. 123-141

Relational aesthetics: A duoethnographic research on feminism

Laura Formenti
Università di Milano Bicocca, Italy (laura.formenti@unimib.it)

Silvia Luraschi
Università di Milano Bicocca, Italy (silvia.luraschi@unimib.it)

Gaia Del Negro
Università di Milano Bicocca, Italy (gaia.delnegro@unimib.it)

Abstract

This paper offers a frame to reflect on the role of aesthetics in the development of a critical pedagogy for social justice in adult education. Arts-based research and practice have the power to illuminate the participants' views, ideas, and feelings, as well as the systems of values that are embedded in their contexts. Critical thinking and awareness are the result of relational and political processes, triggered by experience and going beyond subjectivity. The authors aim at defining a pedagogical practical theory that celebrates complexity, opens possibilities, develops the new, and triggers deliberate action, rather than fostering specific behaviours or learning. The paper itself is a piece of that pedagogy, developed through a cooperative method of writing-as-inquiry (duoethnography), here triggered by a photographic exhibition and resulting in the dialogic exploration of feminism in the authors' lives. In this example, it is shown how individual voices can be juxtaposed to develop an open, transforming theory of feminism, identity, and education.

Keywords: Aesthetic experience; cooperative inquiry; duoethnography; feminism; systems theory

ISSN 2000-7426

DOI 10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9144
www.rela.ep.liu.se

Introduction

This paper is the provisional result of an ongoing dialogue among us, and involving many other learners. It is not meant to present a polished theory or accomplished practice, but to foster further dialogue. Our approach is centred on relationships as the fabric of learning: as adult educators and learners ourselves, we interpret education as the creation of dialogic spaces for enhancing critical consciousness about those issues which are relevant for our lives, individually and collectively, but often silenced. Critical pedagogy seeks for the transformation of the relationships, actions, and discourses we live by. In this respect, we share a common interest towards art as a fundamental human experience and a powerful trigger of learning. We use it extensively in our work in university, with professionals, and with distressed parents and disenfranchised subjects. We also use it to explore our theories, practices, and epistemologies: art illuminates, in fact, our mind frames and relationships to knowing. Art sustains a kind of knowing which is out of reach for the purposeful, rational mind.

In the last few years, we developed multiple conversations (from the Latin *cum* + *versari*, 'hanging around in the same space') around our pedagogy by sharing biographic and ethnographic narratives, artworks, poems, and readings. We visited exhibitions, read poetry and watched movies, among us and with others, as ways to develop our theories and practices of adult education. In this paper, we aim to build a provisional but satisfying theory of the relationship between aesthetic experience and adult learning.

A theory is satisfying when it addresses relevant issues in people's lives, not least the researcher. Besides, it appears beautiful, true, ethical, convincing, and useful. A good enough bunch of ideas that speak to our emotions, feelings, and values. Writing is, for us, a form of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) which sustains theorizing with the support of propositional knowing (Heron, 1996); however, we also consider acting, moving, imaging, and doing art as forms of theorization which are undervalued by academic culture. We use duoethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2013), a form of cooperative writing rooted in experience which combines personal memories, artefacts, field observation, and theoretical reflexivity. The researchers' biographic, aesthetic and embodied experience is the 'site', not the 'topic' (Norris, Sawyer & Lund, 2012, p. 11) of duoethnography: it is meant to illuminate cultural contexts, in the presence of the Other, and to be critical and transformative. So, we began to write together, walking a reflexive path of reciprocal unveiling, collaboration and critical friendship. This brought us to interrogate our established roles and identities, ideas and presuppositions, as women, intellectuals, and citizens. Our aim in this paper is to reflect on the building of a theory (in this case, about feminism) as an intimate and deeply relational process. This is a tenet of feminist research, as we will argue. In fact, we try here to bridge feminist ideas and methods, with a complex theory of transformation and learning.

We are not alone. Interestingly, aesthetic pedagogies and methodologies, using different media and languages (film, video, photography, electronic media, theatre, dance and artefacts) are expanding in social research (Leavy, 2015), narrative medicine (Charon, 2006; Launer, 2002), online pedagogy (Norris & Saudelli, 2018), and adult education for social justice (Clover, Sandford & Butterwick, 2013). Arts-based approaches are used to sustain perspective transformation (Formenti & West, 2016; 2018; Jarvis, 2012), critical thinking (Kokkos, 2013), and transformative learning (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Clover & Stalker, 2007; Hayes & Yorks, 2007; Lawrence, 2012), not least by implementing a feminist approach (Clover, Sanford, Bell & Johnson, 2016) and in the pursuit of wisdom (Fraser, 2018). All these different

approaches have in common a focus on presentational knowing (Heron, 1996; Kasl & Yorks, 2012) and abduction (Bateson, 1979): these are the privileged ways of knowing that we use when telling stories about our life experiences. Drawing, dancing, or playing a character, as well as enjoying a poem or a picture, can indeed illuminate how a subject – or a culture - makes sense of her world. But these approaches may differ greatly when it comes to their goals, values, ontology and epistemology, and how they address the relationship between subject and context, or among different subjectivities.

Our focus here is on the development of a satisfying theory, and its relationship with practice: there is a need, we argue, to justify and orient the use of art in education. In many contexts, this is not well received, or understood: art is still considered as an extra thing for adult education, too far from the mainstream of rational functional objectives. Learners themselves may react defensively, when invited to draw, dance, or play. They perceive it as childish, time-wasting, and only reserved for the talented. It might be accepted for therapeutic ends; the amazing success of art therapies could be due to both the need and the healing power of aesthetics in human life, but this specific purpose might conceal the wider and deeper meaning of it.

About being exposed to art, there is maybe less resistance, but other problems may arise, since we are only able to perceive what is somehow already expected, starting from our internalized structures, rooted in our biographies and milieus (Berger, 1972). Bourdieu (1987) highlighted the determinant role of education and social origins in accessing legitimate culture. Privilege favours the direct experience and enjoyment of art; upper class and educated people learn to perceive the qualities of an art object in appropriate ways, through the mastery of codes. Perception requires knowledge and reproduces cultural and social divides. Lack of knowledge about the code brings a feeling of exclusion, like 'a fish out of water', and brings to a fundamental inability to elaborate accepted secondary meaning. So, art museums, galleries, and concert halls seem to be there to confirm 'elitism, intellectualism, sexism and paternalism, that have legitimized and maintained hegemonic orders of social, cultural, political, aesthetic and epistemological power' (Clover, 2018, p. 89).

The aesthetic experience may reveal how our subjectivity is shaped by culture, by our webs of affiliation. And yet, with the multiplication of forms, cultures, and ways of doing art, especially after the Nineties, everybody can feel like a fish out of water, when exposed to a piece of art, an installation or a "situation". A mature person trying to decipher juvenile art, or a westerner coping with Arabic or Japanese poetry, or an academic exposed to rap music, have to recognize their lack of knowledge and – sometimes – deep puzzlement. Anybody who has been trained or initiated to "classic" art (music, dance, painting…), with its strong structures and expectations of performance, can feel shaken and disoriented, if not offended, by relational aesthetics, which is the dominant approach in art, after the surrealist revolution (Bourriaud, 1998/2010). The task of contemporary art is to interrogate what we know, how we know, and ultimately how we build what and who we are.

So, what is the meaning, for us, of doing or using art in our work as adult educators and researchers? Can we say, with Dewey (1938), that the aesthetic experience is educational *per se*? We agree with considering it a key to understand experience as a whole, since it weaves different dimensions: sensorial, imaginal, intellectual, and practical. Consciousness, as a perceived relation between doing and undoing, connects the production/perception of art with enjoyment, playfulness, an outgoing and incoming energy, the very base of experience itself (Dewey, 1934). This includes all expressive forms, besides recognized art: popular dance or music, street art, decoration, body practices. The interacting body – perception, movement, feelings - is the foundation of

all experiences. But which are the conditions for *learning*? Our thesis is that the aesthetic experience may be educational, even transformative for an adult, if – and only if - it develops through a specific process, a pedagogy where the *subjective and embodied* is weaved together with the *relational and dialogical* dimensions.

A systemic understanding

The relational is a conceptual and practical bridge to overcome binary thinking, connecting inside and outside, self and context, imagination and emancipation. We refer to systems and complexity theory, especially to Gregory Bateson's work (Bateson, 1972, 1979; Bateson & Bateson, 1987), in defining art as an aesthetic experience of complexity, an expression of cultural as well as subjective values embedded in the material qualities of aesthetical objects, and displaying a mix of consciousness and unconsciousness. As Bateson writes, 'for the attainment of grace, the reasons of the heart must be integrated with the reasons of the reason' (1972, p. 129). A compositional pedagogy aims to (re)connect different levels, dimensions, and manifestations of experience.

Among them, we put the body at the forefront: *aesthetics* comes from the Greek "aesthesis", meaning anything to do with the senses. Art is a sensorial event; we know the world through our senses, and arts speak to them, inviting us to see, hear, touch, feel. The body is intimately involved in language and philosophy (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), as well as religion, meditation and martial arts, on the basis of a body-mind unit. Thinking, feeling, perceiving, and imagining are the enactments of an embodied mind (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991). Humanization itself is a product of art and aesthetic experiences (Crowther, 2001). Our habitual embodiments are unconscious - like the taste of our own mouth (Feldenkrais, 1949) -, interactive, and differentiated.

Another relevant dimension of experience is knowing, and its biographical and social roots. Art is presentational knowing (Heron, 1996): it (re)presents some form, pattern, or rhythm - an organization of stimuli - to our senses. It does not explain. It does not "talk", but it shows, and we are "made to" react to the show, not in a passive way, but by bringing ourselves, our previous experience, our whole body, mind, and soul into this experience. Our imagination, the stories that we have heard, our interpretation of the context at hand are the fabric of presentational knowing, which nonetheless is deeply contextual: it changes if we are alone or in company, if we are happy or troubled. A piece of art, magically, transforms situationally in relation to all these diversities.

Our relationships to knowing are relationships with ourselves, other(s) and the world (Charlot, 1997; Del Negro, 2016, 2018), inscribed in (inter)subjective and societal dynamics. Knowing is embedded in our biographies and systems of affiliation (family, friends, work, etc.); it always comes with desires to be and to become, ideas about the world and one's place in it. As feminist studies have highlighted (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986), epistemology is gendered, and voice is shaped by previous experience and social structures. Whose and which voice will be heard, when male and rational are the standard – also in supposedly transformative education (Belenky & Stanton, 2000)? The aesthetic experience may reveal hidden processes of knowledge construction, entailing a whole - perceptive/emotional/cognitive – response. Our relationship with self, other, and the world is tacitly negotiated through the multiple dimensions of knowing (Del Negro, 2018).

The next paragraphs offer an example of an embodied dialogic pedagogy, whose participants are the researchers themselves. We started a duoethnographic dialogue, based on choosing photographs from an exhibition, telling stories triggered by them, and developing new ideas in dialogue, aimed at exploring difficult questions of awareness and authenticity, about feminism and identity. In the conclusions, we will draw some tenets of relational aesthetics as a pedagogy for adult education and learning.

A dialogic construction of knowledge: A duoethnography on feminism

Duoethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2013) is a collective form of autoethnography, a research method that started in the late Nineties and has developed since then as an independent stream in interpretative inquiry, as a critique to traditional ethnography and a way to bring the researcher's subjectivity into the picture. While in autoethnography the researcher's I (Ellis, 2004) is evoked to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011), in duoethnography the accent is on plurality and differences: it involves more researchers, writing in a collaborative way and responding to each other, hence multiplying their perspectives in order to build collective and critical knowledge from experience, not least emotional and embodied (Norris, Sawyer & Lund, 2012). Duoethnography is based on the principle that the differences between participants will illuminate their cultural contexts, thanks to the experience of otherness and critical friendship, the struggles and conflicts that may arise in interpretation, and the necessity of composition to achieve an agreed version of a final but open text which celebrates those differences. Dialogue is not only between researchers, but with objects and artefacts, such as photographs, music, fiction, poetry, etc.

So, we are different in age and expertise. We have commonalities, though: we are women, first generation in the university, speaking the same language, and deeply perturbed by recent events (Trump's elections in the US, the Weinstein affair, the Italian politics on family, migration, and women), and the revival of a public feminist discourse (as in the Me-Too movement). This is triggering discussions, self-disclosure, political activism, at many levels, and offers a possibility to foster renewed awareness of the many forms of oppression that a woman can experience. Do we feel oppressed, as women? This opened other questions: What is the role of feminism in adult learning and education? Is the experience of feminism, or feminist ideas and practices, conducive to transformation? Of which kind? And what is the role of art in it?

Speaking of feminism is not always easy or well received. Surprisingly, we discovered that it may produce annoyance in some audiences, as if the word 'feminism' could raise walls instead of dialogue. As an example, we recall a group conversation during a workshop that we organized at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Cinisello Balsamo, January 2018. The workshop, guided by colleagues and friends Darlene Clover, Kathy Sanford and Nancy Taber (Clover, Sanford, Taber & Williamson, 2018), was aimed at enhancing awareness of gender biases in the museum. Most participants – students, teachers, photographers, academics, educators – took a distance from defining themselves "a feminist". Answers to the question '*Are* you a feminist?' ranged from '*I do not call myself* a feminist, but...', to 'I do not *know* enough to answer', or even 'I *am certainly not*!'. We became insecure ourselves about using this word to state an identity, or a belonging. This feeling of uncertainty is good in adult learning, since words (propositional knowing) need to be de-constructed and contextualized within biographies (experiential knowing), to be appropriated or maybe

re-defined by the learning subject. The passage through aesthetic experience (presentational knowing) is considered by Heron (1996) as a necessary step between experience and proposition, if we were to build an embodied, satisfying and critical theory, which then opens possibilities to act differently (practical knowing). These four forms of knowing represent a tenet of cooperative inquiry and a basis for our dialogic pedagogy. In the case of feminism, the verb *to be* seems to create categories and raise walls, due to its ontological and essentialist presuppositions. Ironically, this happens in times when identity becomes so blurred and liquid, that we all seem to be more generally confused about who and what we are, or *can* be.

Our discussion raised a desire to understand better, and curiosity about our own identity, hidden theories, and curricula. So, we decided to start a new collective study by attending an exhibition of women photographers, titled *The Other View: Italian Women Photographers 1965-2015 from Donata Pizzi's Collection* (Perna, 2016). An amazing experience: these pieces of art, created by women and representing evolution in time, through generations and contexts, triggered reflexivity. Each of us chose a photograph from the exhibition and started to write. 'What do you see?' is a simple and powerful question, when it comes to art (Formenti & West, 2018), since the 'what' reveals the 'how', that is the perspectives of meaning orienting our perception. 'The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe' (Berger, 1972, p. 8). So, by answering the question we started a path of investigation about our experiences, theories and epistemologies.

The description of a photograph became a way to narrate ourselves, exploring the meanings and dilemmas raised by it. Narration is only the starting point of our methodology: we use reflexive writing as a research method (Luraschi, 2016) to share representations and reciprocity to develop a local critical theory. We took feminism as a dilemmatic, not granted object. So, we exchanged short narrative texts, poems, and pictures for some months, and then discussed them, as we would do in a group or workshop on similar topics. A tenet of duoethnography is that voices 'bracket in' (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 15), to recognize that authors bring their personal epistemology into the study, and to avoid bracketing out subjectivity. This is why, in the following, our voices are visible and differentiated, to leap in the end to a 'communal yet critical conversation' (p. 18), as a dialogic frame.

Laura: biographic memory and being a silent witness

Photo 1: Liliana Barchiesi, *In the occupied house at Famagosta Street*, Milan, 1974. Barchiesi, an activist and independent photojournalist since the early Seventies, chronicled the changing world of women: street protests for divorce and abortion, workers unions and women groups, the role of women in the family, the need of housing. She now works on gender stereotypes, not least of migrant women (Perna, 2016, p. 182). See also https://www.storiadidonne.it/

I instinctively chose a photo by Liliana Barchiesi (Photo 1): *In the occupied house at Famagosta Street*, Milan 1974 (Perna, 2016, p. 90; see Photo 1). It displays a white and quite bare room with a round clothed table in the middle, and an enigmatic lady in the corner. I feel cold and warm. I see white and black. Basic features, no glamour. It is an occupied house: in the Seventies, working class families allied with students, women, migrants from the South, to claim their right to housing. New buildings were built, in the suburbs of Milano: they simply took them. An illegal act, justified by need. I always feel a privileged person, when I think that millions of people do not have a roof over their heads.

So, these bare spaces, still smelling the new paint, suddenly became lively with people, children, and the smell of food: onion and garlic, tomato and frying oil, the smells of migration. Smells of poverty: at seven, I met two new schoolmates from Puglia, girls who barely spoke Italian, and ate bread with garlic and tomato for lunch. My first contact with migration.

I see in this image poverty and hospitality: in the middle of the table, beverages for a host, or maybe a group of activists. I had a fantasy about a couple, maybe from Sicily or Naples, migrants in search of a good life. Care and dignity: someone put a cloth and welcoming bottles on the table. Why do I imagine a woman behind this gesture? And who is the woman in the picture? Surely, not a squatter. She wears fashionable but severe clothes and shoes. She looks in the camera. She says to me:

> Do you see? You have to see this, and think. I want you to know and reflect on what is happening here, and what it means. I am in the picture because I cannot claim a neutral presence. You cannot. We are involved in this.

Presentational knowing is powerful: I feel compelled by this photograph. The woman is my alter ego speaking to me. She tells a story of rights and struggles. Occupiers are not loved in the society of private property and privileges. Not in the Seventies, not now. They may be arrested, fined, put in jails. Or tolerated for a while, until the property does not complain. A critical reflection on basic rights, and how they might be claimed, was in the agenda of adult educators in the Sixties and Seventies (Formenti & West, 2018). In the Seventies, occupation was a political act; these subjects self-organized to make their voices heard in the streets. They took space. By collaborating with each other, they invented a new way of doing politics, bottom-up, and feminists were at the forefront, inventing new ways of doing as 'unexpected subjects' (Lonzi, 1970/2010, p. 18).

Photo 2: Me and my brother playing in the street, 1969.

Many relevant dilemmas of mine were evoked by looking at the photo and writing the story. I re-connected with my life in the Seventies (see Photo 2), as the child of a working-class family that was climbing the social ladder. As a part of this, I was educated in times when most women were not, and mass education was still on the build. Becoming an academic meant disconnection, however, from my family and social origins. I never felt as a child of working-class parents. Besides, I was too young and did not participate to the social struggles of the Seventies, but I am grateful, as a citizen and a woman, for the results they brought, in terms of rights and justice. Knowing and remembering is important, especially in the present times of neoliberalism and fundamentalism. I feel like a witness, as the woman in the photo: inside the picture, yet sometimes separated from *the real thing*.

When I wrote my first comment to the photo, I was unable to see the link between me and the ones who are struggling (still now, and more than ever), the ones who are crushed by the system. They do not have my privileges. Be they women, or migrants, or undereducated people. I am a silent witness. I feel ambivalent towards feminism: the ones who claim *to be* feminists, do not necessarily behave or think like one. And too

often they are, ironically, the ones who need it less. I vaguely feel that I do not deserve *to be* a feminist, but I might *act* as one.

Silvia: body matters and identity struggles

Photo 3: Agnese De Donato, *One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*, 1970. De Donato, a journalist and photographer born in Bari ("when, not even under threat I will tell you"), lived, worked and died (2017) in Rome; she took part in the creation of the feminist magazine Effe (1973), working as an editor and cover designer, and picturing the struggles of the feminist movement.

I chose a photo by Agnese De Donato (see Photo 3): *One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*, 1970 (Perna, 2016, p. 94). Its title is a quote from Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949): by calling women 'the second sex', de Beauvoir means that man is considered to be the standard, so women are defined in relation to men. The quote calls attention to a difference between nature and culture, sex and gender, being and becoming. The way women are thought of – as naturally endowed of some features, and consequently treated in society, affects their becoming: they are taught to be in certain ways. The image shows a contrast between two women: one dressed in white in the background, the other dressed in black (not wearing a bra and partially showing her breast) in the foreground, with a raised fist. The former represents a contrast, indeed, between two characters, the bride and the prostitute, both of them serving male needs; the latter represents the feminist movement, that was fighting in those years to build new ways of living and to create spaces of freedom and independence from men (especially father and/or husband).

The image also (re)presents the battle for divorce in Italy and the opposition to the catholic world. In Italy, the right to divorce was a major social and political theme of late 1960s and early 1970s. The law was first proposed in 1965 by socialist deputy Loris Fortuna, and finally approved in 1969 when a parliamentary coalition defeated, after

harsh public battles, the Christian democratic party and the right party by 325 to 283 votes.

The disciplining of women bodies to become "sex objects" (Valenti, 2016) has shaped the imagination of both men and women, as documented by Lorella Zanardo's work *Women's bodies* that shows how women bodies are sexualized in the Italian television (http://www.ilcorpodelledonne.net/english-version/). Looking beautiful was – and is - a real issue in many women's lives. This brings women to compete and to hide their emotions (Verhaeghe, 2012).

Women's freedom and power have changed since the Seventies, but patriarchal ideas, including stereotypical binaries (Women's Bookstore, 1987/2017; 1990), are still present in our society and in the mainstream of education. My dilemmas emerge from recognizing my own socialization and participation to the patriarchal game of "command and obey", and to the social norm that women must "behave decently" and "cover themselves sufficiently", hiding their (sinful) bodies – to other people and avoiding to "provoke" men. During my divorce, a feminist lawyer helped me to become more aware of psychological violence I suffered from my husband and, in the past, from my relatives. She worked in an anti-violence centre and invited me to visit an installation.

Photo 4: *Com'eri vestita? (What were you wearing?),* Milan, March 2018. Survivor Art Installation created at the University of Arkansas in 2013 by Jen Brockman and Mary Wyandt-Hiebert, and inspired by Mary Simmerling's poem "What I Was Wearing" (https://sapec.ku.edu/what-were-you-wearing). It was displayed in different Italian cities in 2018, by anti-violence centers and local municipalities.

In March 2018, I visited the installation *Com'eri vestita?* (see Photo 4) organized in Milano by the anti-violence centre *Cerchi d'Acqua* at the House of Rights, a public space of the city municipality where citizens may consult to claim their rights and signal discrimination. Walking through the exhibit, I got a glimpse of the horrors lived by women who are sexually assaulted, written in their own words: *'I was wearing my pyjamas. I just wanted to sleep and maybe have beautiful dreams…',* a note said next to a corresponding outfit. The design of the exhibit was simple, and that added to its impact. The clothing on display was just normal: pyjamas, t-shirts, or jeans. Women's pain is emphasized when someone implies that they could have avoided attack if they only had made different wardrobe choices: *'My girlfriend asked me: maybe you*

provoked him!?'. The exhibit also challenges the stereotype of attackers as anonymous strangers. Those women were victimized by friends, colleagues, and family members.
What struck me more, was the ordinariness of this exhibition. Just normal. Aesthetic experience, triggered by what we call presentational knowing, is powerful: it brings to light emotions, questions, personal resonances, and critical positioning. This provocative role is especially true for contemporary art, since one of its main features is the transformation of ordinary objects in extra-ordinary relational events (Bourriaud, 1998/2002).

Gaia: the relationship to knowing beside the single individual

Photo 5: Gabriella Mercadini, *The women's house in Governo Vecchio Street. Editorial staff of "Woman Daily"*, Rome 1979. An activist photojournalist, Mercadini began to work as freelancer in 1968, documenting workers' and students' movements and women activism. She developed a parallel research on art and museums, as with the project *L'art et/est celui qui le regarde*. She witnessed marginalization and struggles with her projects in ghetto camps, in factories and with immigrant women. She died in Rome in 2012 (Perna, 2016, p. 196).

I chose a photograph by Gabriella Mercadini (see Photo 5): *The women's house in Governo Vecchio,* 1979 (Perna, 2016, p. 89). In the picture, twelve women of different ages are sitting in a semicircle among and on top of piles of newspapers. Three older women are standing. All of them seem to wear flowery skirts and dresses, apart from one who wears trousers. Several are smiling, one laughing. The photo apparently interrupted an editorial meeting. I was struck by the relaxed informal atmosphere, transgressing my imagination of how editorial work is (or should be) conducted. In fact, I visited the headquarters of Mondadori, a big publishing house in Milan, for an interview, and I got quite a different impression of a traditional and stiff atmosphere.

There are no desks or chairs in the photo and women are sitting naturally on the product of their own work. *Quotidiano Donna* (Woman Daily) was first published in Rome on 6 May 1978 as a politically autonomous supplement of Workers' Daily, to become self-managed from December 1978. The newspaper was a direct expression of women's collectives and made a claim for anti-authoritarian communication. The group in the picture, however, looks up to the woman on the left. Who is she? What kind of leadership does she exert?

The picture evoked in me a fantasy of the group of peers being led with care, and knowledge shared and personal, even embodied, whilst in our culture personal life, body and emotion are usually severed from rational thinking (Belenky et al., 1986). The term "emotional" in Italy is still used in ordinary language to signal some weakness, much often in women. Italian feminism challenged this way of thinking in the 1970s, as women not only invented alternative forms of organisation and peer-to-peer relationships, and new practices of self-consciousness groups, but they reflected, wrote and theorised on this, in order to develop a relational philosophy of difference.

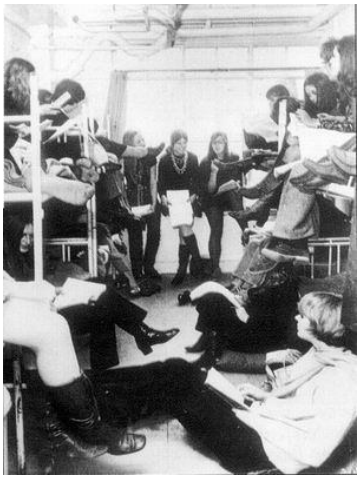


Photo 6: Libreria delle donne (Women Bookstore), Milano: past and present. http://www.libreriadelledonne.it

I visited and participated to the activities of the Women Bookstore (1987, 1990) in Milano (see Photo 6), a historical site of the feminist struggles in the Seventies, when women invented their own pedagogy, a mix of self-narration, critical inquiry, and entrustment (Scarparo, 2005): women of different backgrounds met regularly to share

their stories, to learn from each other about their experience of exclusion and oppression (as we are doing right now), and to build their relational subjectivities in a way that transcended the single individual's story.

In the years when the collective struggles for fundamental rights led to reforms and laws which changed the Italian society, women were engaged in re-signifying their relationship with culture, by founding bookshops, magazines, and documentation centres about women history – so called her-story –, and produced new perspectives in the arts. However, I became myself aware of how much class, education, physical and psychological constraints excluded, and still exclude, many women (hooks, 2000).

Going back to my photograph, I dream of myself sitting on the floor – embodied thinking -, wearing gowns – feminine, beautiful, colourful, handmade –, and discussing and writing with other women. In my youth, despite my parents being lefties, feminism was not talked about. In pursuing an education, I left my working-class migrant family behind me. The models I was exposed to were mostly masculine: men writers, journalists, historians. Women are told they don't know (Solnit, 2014) and often tell this to each other. Why does this still happen? What made *me* look up to those in power, often men? How can I learn to relate to knowing without feeling inadequate and oppressing others?

We/Us, and feminism as a form of action

When our images and texts started to circulate among us, we realised how different they were and started to explore our perspectives of meaning. Laura wrote in an e-mail: 'I see the two of you in your writing'. What does it mean? After many years of biographical research and cooperative inquiry, we got acquainted with the idea that personal experience and reflexivity are powerful leverages for learning, but this methodology creates a different context, more collective, relational, and disruptive. The innovative practices of feminist groups in the Seventies were the historical roots of this way of doing: it was groups of women, workers, artists, activists, and only later academics, in fact, who started to develop practices that taught us what it means to *think* and *act* like a feminist.

Paraphrasing Mezirow (2000), who wrote on 'thinking like an adult', we use thinking and acting to qualify feminism as a transformative way of knowing instead of a fixed identity, and to overcome some limits of Mezirow's theory, which appears overly rational and not enough relational. Art was very helpful indeed: as the highest form of communication about human dilemmas, it shows that certain disorientating dilemmas cannot be *solved* by simply analysing them; they may *dis-solve*, however, when they are performed, embodied, shared, and transformed by action. Transformation of a deeper kind is here at stake (Formenti & West, 2018), entailing a political as well as epistemological and ethical engagement.

Our auto-ethno-aesthetic inquiry plotted an ongoing path of learning, compelling us to act as unexpected subjects (Lonzi, 1970/2010), using our voices, taking space, and claiming difference; but also developing more intimacy, reciprocal care, and recognition, or maybe *entrustment*, as defined by members of the Women's Bookstore in Milano in the early Eighties: a relationship where trust emerges from the recognition of differences and disparities among women, instead of a generic claim for equality. This is how a relational, deeply aesthetic *Us* is formed.

As researchers and adult educators, we became more aware, in the process, that we are part of the picture: as Laura tells in her story, it is impossible to be neutral. So, we

feel more compelled than ever to bear witness and disrupt all normalized, objectifying and standardized methods, taking a personal, ethically engaged position, and creating a pedagogy inspired by biographical awareness and art to celebrate and connect (our) limits and hopes, needs and desires, oppression and freedom, beyond the negative-compensative attitude dominating the adult education discourse. Do we feel oppressed, as women, as South Europeans, as first-generation students/scholars? Yes, sometimes. And we know that, when we do not feel like this, it does not mean that we *are* not. Dis-attention, anesthetization, sanitization are problems of our times, especially in the academy. This study, then, enhanced our consciousness, our desire to see more and better, and to act in order to open possibilities.

By working together with this method over more than one year, we witnessed its power in our (and others') lives. Photographs triggered biographical memories and brought light to what had been forgotten.

This experience built in us a new commitment to act and to think "like a feminist", rather than define ourselves as such. Briefly, we learned how to bring feminism to our lives, as a way of acting, after years of anesthetized (literally: deprived of aesthetics) intellectual and academic discourse. The photographs and written stories evoked perceptions, struggles, joy, conflict, informality, creativity, puzzlement, anger, the power of a free body, and the desire to express emotions and relationships in public. Maybe this will enable the reader to answer 'as coparticipant and active witness' (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 21), and start new conversations beyond our study. This is another fundamental tenet of duoethnography.

Learning from feminists

An aesthetic relational pedagogy acknowledges the messiness, freedom, and beautiful disorder of people informally occupying spaces, maybe sitting on the floor, and acting in unexpected ways. The relationship with knowing does not need to be stiff and authoritarian, as Gaia suggested in her story. Body matters. Its celebration in Silvia's images and words, against a patriarchal/masculine idea of "statuesque perfection", challenges academic disembodiment and dis-enchantment (Formenti & Luraschi, 2017). People are educated to ignore their embodied wisdom (Tisdell, 2003), as an emerging literature on wisdom in adult education has addressed (Fraser, 2018). How does it connect to feminism? There seems to be a gap between authors who follow spiritual versus critical threads (Formenti & West, 2018). How can we compose them? Can we? This is an open question for further inquiry.

In our exploration, feminist pedagogy stands out. In feminist groups, ideas were circulated horizontally, and leaders like Luisa Muraro or Carla Lonzi in Italy addressed the issues and paradoxes of a "relational leadership", in theory and practice. The former wrote:

> If I position myself within the mother's genealogy, if I measure myself in terms of a relationship with another woman, if I place maternal authority above established power—if I create a new symbolic—then it is another world, in the more practical and realistic sense. This is what many already practice (Muraro, 1991, quoted and translated by Scarparo, 2005, p. 36).

Lonzi (1970/2010) was disturbed by common "manly" ways to interpret and play leadership. Her whole work features the longing for authentic relationships, based on reciprocity and radical interrogation, which seems to be necessary in the pursuit of self-

transformation. Her radical coherence brought her to multiple and painful withdrawals from established roles and relationships. From her biography (Zapperi, 2017) we learn that she left her profession as an innovative, experimental and engaged art critic - an inauthentic role, in her consideration, as based on observing and objectifying the artist's work - to embrace feminism as a practice of subjectivation. In 1970, she founded *Rivolta Femminile* (Female Revolt), a separatist group, enacting a polemic withdrawal from man's dominated politics. Later, she gave up her leading role to contrast the assumption that her power and knowledge could be used to promote women artists. She became very critical of the whole art system and its values, and beyond. Her need for authentic relationships invested also her private life:

> Since the woman is dialogue, paradise for her is being able to carry on such dialogue with somebody. [...] Women feel very strongly everything that happens to every being [...] while men are induced to ignore these bonds, precisely because they need to feel that they are sole protagonists. [...] The images men have of themselves are outside the relation, while women see themselves within it. Hence the latter are pretty aware of their need for the other, while the former [...] only see their own growth. (Lonzi, 1980, quoted and translated in Melandri, 2010, p. 44).

These words come from the book *Vai pure* (Feel free to go): the chronicle of a four-day conversation with her partner, artist Pietro Consagra, that led to the sharp and painful acknowledgment of their unyieldingly different perspectives and expectations from each other, conducive to their definitive separation. Lonzi could not accept that the artist – "the man" – put his art/himself before life, love, and relationship.

We are learning from feminists, although we oppose radicalism as not helpful in composing polarities and overcoming binaries, of men and women, inside and outside, object and subject. We are looking for a composition, and in this regard our conversation was both academic and deeply personal, embodied and intellectual. It prompted us to look better for the unexpected in our lives, as Gaia who started to recover the stories of women in her family, in search of family myths (Cavarero, 1995). She wrote to us, in an e-mail exchange:

> only in the process of curating a collection of Mezirow's essays (Mezirow, 2016), I discovered that his wife Edee's thriving upon returning to education had such an influence on his theory of transformation! What made me blind to her place in this genealogy?

The role of women in the history of adult education is too often silenced. Internal and external blinders reinforce our dis-attention, nurtured by the values and relationships of patriarchy, as a system of enduring ideas and practices which glorify paternal figures and create heroes, gurus, and followers.

So, we are gradually building a new awareness about our own construction of feminism, and ourselves as women, through our biographies. We did not construct ourselves as *feminists,* as it happened for other women in history. A social identity builds up by interacting, by participating to webs of affiliation. In the Seventies, women became feminist through collective engagement with other women and entrustment, which raised self-consciousness (Scarparo, 2005). The relationship between political and personal was very strong and explicit in those years. For us, instead, feminism entered into our lives in a more academic and intellectual way. The issue, here, is not self-categorization – being or not 'a feminist' - but learning. How do you learn about feminism and how do you become one? *Acting*, as well as *thinking* as a feminist are here at stake.

Aesthetical pedagogy as a performance of possibilities: The power of dialogue

Our project of founding an aesthetical pedagogy combines the experience of art with embodied relationships, writing-as-inquiry, and critical thinking. These are fundamental ingredients, all together, in enacting and plotting paths of transformative learning.
Meeting with art has the power to 'shake us out of our mind sets and offer moments of truth' (Formenti & West, 2018, p. 226); it balances the excess of rationality, individualism, and what Bateson called 'conscious purpose' (1972, pp. 426-447); it overcomes binary discourse by juxtaposing the opposites, without looking for an ultimate truth, master story, or mono-logic perfect idea. Dia-logic and dia-lectic discourse can be enhanced by a piece of art.

An image, a photograph in this case, acts in our lives as an "evocative object" (Bollas, 2009), revealing as well as performing an ongoing unconscious dialogue of self, other, and the world. The artist's perspective awakens and questions ours. So, the search for an authentic, embodied relationship with a piece of art can open possibilities, and start a path of formation and transformation. However, this happens more easily when the dilemmas, hints, memories, questions that are raised become part of a generative conversation.

We see our conversations, based on differences and the will to understand, as a performance of possibilities (Madison, 2012), a way of doing that inspires education not by offering models, instructions, but by triggering movement, creation, and change.

One could argue that a relationship can also happen with a text or with ourselves, reflexively, but we are not totally convinced. When dialogue entails the materiality of the encounter, an aesthetical meeting of bodies and objects in a concrete context, here-and-now, something happens beyond consciousness. Performativity – doing by dialoguing – triggers new subterranean paths of learning. The presence of the Other intrigues, bothers, attracts and defies us. Moreover, a trans-individual mind – *Us* – is created, having agency of its own.

Dialoguing is the best way to reveal oppression and power as intrinsic to social life and human relations, and to question them, at least in the small space of a conversation. We often interpret emancipation as a big leap, such as moving away from an oppressive context or relationship which does not allow an adult – a woman - to think and behave freely or authentically. However, emancipation starts silently, by little steps, and needs ongoing conversations, long-term engagement, resistance and resilience. We need to emancipate from the dominance of abstraction, conscious purpose, and the cognitive over the body and imagination: a form itself of oppression, if a less visible one. Most theories and practices of education systematically ignore the body and senses, the role of emotions and feelings, and the play of unconscious processes in human lives and learning. The aesthetic experience – contemplating a photograph, writing a poem, walking in the woods - enacts knowing in context, that is relational, embodied, and socially constructed, contrasting the hegemonic discourse of adult learning which celebrates awareness, reflection, and agency, over uncertainty, reflexivity, and vulnerability.

Besides, many contemporary artists are strongly subjective, sometimes autobiographical, in their work, but also relational, thought provoking, and socially active. And yet, people go to art exhibitions, enjoy what is displayed, and their life goes on, unchanged. Art itself has no power, until it raises questions and provokes answers. In order to reawaken our systemic wisdom, we need to be questioned more deeply and (re)connect the polarities of binary thinking in a very concrete way.

To be transformative, the aesthetic *experience* has to be exposed to other perspectives within a dialogic context. This is a fundamental tenet of an aesthetic relational pedagogy for adult learning. An adult person is constantly called to (re)position and (re)frame her ideas and actions, in relation to previous, present, and future contexts, and within a dynamic world of (changing) relationships with objects, artefacts, spaces, with the environment, oneself, and the other. We fiercely defend ourselves from learning, as well as from taking responsibility and risks, or leaving our comfort zone. Consciousness, then, is but the first step towards freedom and agency (Freire, 1972). Further steps are needed to lead to a wider sense of self and collective change, maybe through uncomfortable questions and alternative ways of acting and seeing.

We chronicled in this paper how performing a duoethnographic conversation about art, identity, and feminism led us to such a kind of learning. As Spry (2011) wrote:

> Performative autoethnography views the personal as inherently political, focused on bodies-in-context as a co-performative agent in interpreting knowledge, and holds aesthetic craft of research as an ethical imperative or representation… [For me] it has been about dropping down out of the personal and individual to find painful and comforting connection with others in sociocultural contexts of loss and hope (Spry, 2011, p. 498).

The personal *is* political, and vice versa. A transformation seems to be possible only if enacted in the public sphere (Alexander, 2013), through the implementation of disruptive practices and spaces of collective discussion. Performative autoethnography, as a method of inquiry, is firstly self-reflexive and self-subversive, rather than interested in "giving voice" or "helping" others, but it may be, hopefully, contagious in provoking cascade effects when we teach or facilitate cooperative inquiry. Giroux (2001) defines this kind of project as public pedagogy: a creative process of critical learning beyond the sterilizing confines of normative educational discourse.

References

Alexander, B.K. (2013). Teaching autoethnography and autoethnographic pedagogy. In S. Holmes Jones, T.E. Adams, & C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of autoethnography* (pp. 538-556). Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine books.

Bateson, G. (1979). *Mind and nature. A necessary unity*. New York: Bantam Books.

Bateson, G., & Bateson, M.C. (1987). *Angels fear: Towards an epistemology of the sacred*. New York: Macmillan publishing Co.

Beauvoir, (de) S. (1949). *The second sex*. London: Vintage, 1997.

Belenky, M.F., Clinchy, B.M., Goldberger, N.R., & Tarule, J.M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing*. NY: basic books.

Belenky, M.F., & Stanton, A. V. (2000). Inequality, development, and connected knowing. In J. Mezirow, & Associates (Eds.), Learning as transformation. Critical perspectives on a theory in progress (pp. 71-102). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: BBC & Penguin books.

Bollas, C. (2009). *The evocative object world*. Oxford: Routledge – Taylor & Francis.

Bourdieu, P. (1987). *Distinction*. London: Routledge.

Bourriaud, N. (1998/2010). *Relational aesthetics*. (Transl. by S. Pleasance & F. Woods). Milano: Postmediabooks.

Butterwick, S., & Lawrence, R.L. (2009). Creating alternative realities: Arts-based approaches to transformative learning. In J. Mezirow, E.W. Taylor, & Associates (Eds.), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education* (pp. 35-45). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cavarero, A. (1995). *In spite of Plato. A feminist rewriting of ancient philosophy*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis.
Charlot, B. (1997). *Du rapport au savoir. Éléments pour une théorie*. Paris: Anthropos.
Charon, R. (2006). *Narrative medicine: Honoring the stories of illness*. New York, NY: Oxford university press.
Clover, D.E. (2018). Critical adult education and the art gallery museum. *International journal of lifelong education*, 37(1), 88-102, doi: 10.1080/02601370.2017.1397785.
Clover, D.E, Sanford K., Bell, L., & Johnson, K. (2016) (Eds.). *Adult education, museums and art galleries: Animating social, cultural and institutional change* (pp. 165–176). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
Clover, D.E., Sanford, K., & Butterwick, S. (2013) (Eds.). *Aesthetic practice and adult education*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis.
Clover, D., Sanford, K., Taber, N., & Williamson, S. (2018). Feminist interrogations and creative teaching in art galleries and museums. In R. McGray, & V. Woloshyn (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 37th CASAE/ACEEA Annual Conference* (pp. 36-41). Canadian Association for Studies in Adult Education (CASAE).
Clover, D.E., & Stalker, J. (2007) (Eds.). *The arts and social justice: Re-crafting adult education and community cultural leadership*. Leicester, UK: NIACE.
Crowther, P. (2001). *Art and embodiment: From aesthetics to self-consciousness*. Oxford Scholarship Online.
Del Negro, G. (2016). Searching together for our embedded theories. In R. Evans (Ed.), *Before, beside and after (beyond) the biographical narrative* (pp. 463-478). Duisburg: nisaba verlag.
Del Negro, G. (2018). *An auto/biographical, cooperative study of our relationships to knowing*. Canterbury Christ church university. Unpublished PhD Thesis.
Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Minton, Balch & Company.
Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Kappa Delta Pì.
Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner, A. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *FQS forum qualitative sozialforschun, 12*(1). doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589
Feldenkrais, M. (1949). *Body and mature behavior: A study of anxiety, sex, gravitation and learning*. New York: International university press.
Formenti, L., & Luraschi, S. (2017). How do you breathe? Duoethnography as a means to re-embody research in the academy. In A. Voss & S. Wilson (Eds.) *Re-enchanting the academy* (pp. 305-324). Auckland-Seattle: Rubedo Press.
Formenti, L., & West, L. (2016) (Eds.). *Stories that make a difference. Exploring the collective, social and political potential of narratives in adult education research*. Lecce: Pensa Multimedia.
Formenti, L., & West, L. (2018). *Transforming perspectives in lifelong learning and adult education: A dialogue*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Fraser, W. (2018). *Seeking wisdom in adult teaching and learning*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Giroux, H.A. (2001). Cultural studies as performative politics. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical methodologies*, 1, 5-23.
Hayes, S., & Yorks, L. (2007). Lesson from the lessons learned: Arts change the world when… In S. Hayes & L. Yorks (Eds.), *Arts and societal learning*. New directions for adult and continuing Education, no. 116 (pp. 89-98). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition.* London: Sage.
hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody. Passionate politics*. London: Pluto press.
Jarvis, C. (2012). Fiction, film and transformative learning. In E.W. Taylor, P. Cranton, & Associates (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 486-502). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Kasl, E. & Yorks, L. (2012). Learning to be what we know: The pivotal role of presentational knowing in transformative learning. In E.W. Taylor, P. Cranton, & Associates (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 503-519). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Kokkos, A. (2013). The use of aesthetic experience in unearthing critical thinking. In P. Mayo (Ed.), *Learning with adults: A reader*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
Lakoff, G.,& Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*. New York: Basic Book.
Launer, J. (2002). *Narrative based primary care: A practical guide*. Oxford: Radcliffe medical press.

Lawrence, R.L. (2012). Transformative learning through creative expression. Getting out of our heads. In E.W. Taylor, P. Cranton, & Associates (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 471-485). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Leavy, P. (2015). *Method meets art. Arts-based research practice* (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Lonzi, C. (1970/2010). *Let's spit on Hegel*. (transl. V. Newman). New York, NY: Secunda. Retrieved October 10, 2018, from http://blogue.nt2.uqam.ca/hit/files/2012/12/Lets-Spit-on-Hegel-Carla-Lonzi.pdf.

Luraschi, S. (2016). Traversing a story. A reflexive exploration of the role of a researcher. In R. Evans (Ed.), *Before, beside and after (beyond) the biographical narrative* (pp. 491-504). Duisburg: nisaba verlag.

Madison, D.S. (2012). *Critical ethnography. Methods, ethics, and performance* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Sage.

Melandri, L. (2010). Autonomy and the need for love: Carla Lonzi, *Vai pure*. (Transl. V. Latronico), *May Revue*, 4, 73–77. Retrieved October 18, 2018, from http://www.spacestudios.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Autonomy-and-the-Need-for-Love_Lea-Melandri.pdf

Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow, & Ass. (Eds.). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-34). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (2016) (Eds.) *La teoria dell'apprendimento trasformativo. Imparare a pensare come un adulto*. (Edited by F. Cappa & G. Del Negro). Milano: Raffaello Cortina.

Norris, J., & Saudelli M.G. (2018). Heating up online learning: Insights from a collaboration employing arts based research/pedagogy for an adult education, online, community outreach undergraduate course. *Social Sciences*, 2018, 7, 104. DOI:10.3390/socsci7070104

Norris, J, Sawyer, R.D, & Lund, D. (2012). *Duoethnography: Dialogic methods for social, health, and educational research*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Perna, R. (2016) (Ed). *L'altro sguardo. Fotografe italiane 1965-2015*. Milano: Silvana Editoriale.

Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E.A. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 959-978). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.

Sawyer, R.D., & Norris, J. (2013). *Duoethnography*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Scarparo, S. (2005). In the name of the mother. Sexual difference and the practice of 'entrustment'. *Cultural studies review*, 11(2), 36–48. Retrieved October 21, 2018 from http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/csrj/index

Solnit, R. (2014). *Men explain things to me*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.

Spry, T. (2011). Performative autoethnography: Critical embodiments and possibilities. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 497-511). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tisdell, E.J. (2003). *Exploring spirituality and culture in adult and higher education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Valenti, J. (2016). *Sex object. A memoir*. New York: HarperCollins.

Varela F., Thompson E., & Rosch E. (1991). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. Cambridge, MA: Mit Press.

Verhaeghe, P. (2012). *What about me? The struggle for identity in a market-based society*. (Transl. J. Hedley-Prole). London: Scribe.

Women's Bookstore (1987/2017). *Don't think you have any rights.* London: Silver Press.

Women's Bookstore (1990). *Sexual difference: A theory of social-symbolic practice* (Transl. P. Cicogna, & T. de Lauretis). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Zapperi, G. (2017). *Carla Lonzi. Un'arte della vita.* Roma: DeriveApprodi.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol.10, No.2, 2019, pp. 143-159

The Feminist Museum Hack as an aesthetic practice of possibility

Darlene E. Clover
University of Victoria, Canada (clover@uvic.ca)

Sarah Williamson
University of Huddersfield, UK (s.m.williamson@hud.ac.uk)

Abstract

This article outlines the central components, foundations and key activities of the Feminist Museum Hack, an investigative, pedagogical, analytical and interventionist tool we have designed to explore patriarchal assumptions behind the language, images and stragecrafting (positioning, lighting) of museums and art galleries. We also share findings from a study of student and community participants who employed the Hack in a museum in Canada and an art gallery in England. While differences existed due to institutional genres, findings showed participants' ability to see and to reimagine absences, objectification, fragmentation, and double-standards and apply these to the world beyond the institution's walls. As a form of pedagogy of possibility, the Hack encourages critique, just ire and the imagination. As it hones visual literacy skills it emboldens participants to challenge the authority of the museum narratives and to engage in creative practices of agency and activism.

Keywords: Aesthetic pedagogies; feminism; hacking; museum

Introduction

Museums and art galleries, as ubiquitous cultural features of the global landscape, render visible the relationship between education and aesthetics. Visitors to these institutions learn through aesthetic experiences with art and beauty. They also learn from interactions with other objects and sensory stimuli 'not typically considered elicitors of aesthetic experience' (Latham, 2007, p. 47). Together, these pedagogical elements are what Whitehead (2009) calls "practices of representation" - amalgamations of artworks,

ISSN 2000-7426

DOI 10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9142
www.rela.ep.liu.se

images, displays, artefacts, dioramas, stage crafting (positioning) and explanatory texts specifically designed to shape knowledge and understandings of everything from innovation to history, culture to science. Hall (2013) and Cramer and Witcomb (2018) add that museum and art gallery representations also shape identity -- who we were, 'who we are and who we should be' (Hall, 2013, p. 127). While visitors can (and do) interpret different meanings from the representations they encounter, the authoritative aura of the scripto-visuals, what Steeds (2014) calls 'plays of force', both consciously and unconsciously influence what we see and therefore, assume to be "true" in terms of culture, society, ourselves, and "the other" (e.g. Bergsdóttir, 2016; Hall, 2013; Porter 1991).

The questions for us as feminist adult educators are: What "truth" are we seeing or able to see in terms of gender through aesthetic experiences in museums and art galleries? What 'is privileged within [this] regime of specularity?' (Rogoff, 2013, p. 15). Whose stories go untold and what are the implications of seeing this? Over decades, feminist studies have shown the patriarchal nature of museum and art gallery representations, a powerful "epistemology of mastery" that places men at the centre of the world's story - those who matter - and women and others at its periphery - those who do not. Not seeing oneself at all, or consistently as lesser, has an impact on both subjectivity and one's sense of agency (Bergsdóttir, 2016; Cramer & Witcomb, 2018; Code, 2003; English & Irving, 2015; Macedo, 2015; Pollock, 1988). This is what Ulrich and Raza (2015) would call an "unsatisfying condition" with profoundly negative implications. However, they also remind us that unsatisfying conditions can be catalysts for imagination and thus possibility. Any practice of power can be met with resistance if the conditions are created to do so and the unsatisfying gendered conditions of museums and art galleries presented for us an opportunity to operationalise pedagogically the analytical practices of feminist cultural scholars through a new feminist curriculum. We call this the *Feminist Museum Hack,* an aesthetic pedagogy of possibility that encourages visual literacy in the form of oppositional seeing, thinking and acting against the backdrop of patriarchal narratives that hide in plain sight in art galleries and museums.

In this article, we do two things. One is we introduce the *Feminist Museum Hack* as an embodied, analytical, pedagogical, and interventionist practice we have designed to interrogate intentionally, critically, and creatively problematic representations and to encourage direct agency and dissent. We therefore begin with a discussion of representation as aesthetic knowledge construction, meaning and identity making followed by how feminists conceptualise "possibly" in pedagogy. We then outline elements of feminist discourse analysis, visual methodologies and critical literacies and how they inform the Hack's central strategies. Our second aim in this paper is to share findings from a study of four hacks with 65 male and female adult education and teacher education[1] and 19 female community members in an ethnographic museum in Canada and a public art gallery in England. We found substantive similarities in outcomes across the two countries and the seeds of a critical feminist consciousness. We argue the significance of the *Feminist Museum Hack* as an aesthetic pedagogy of possibility to render visible that which wishes to remain hidden, to stimulate self and social critique and act as a practice of creative resistance and imagination. As a result, the Hack is our contribution as feminist adult educators to the struggle for gender justice and change and our response to calls by adult educators Borg and Mayo (2010, p. 37) to use the opportunities museums and art galleries offer 'not only for "ideology critique"… but also for struggling collectively' as educators to see the world differently in order to change it.[2]

Representation, Knowledge Construction and Identity Making

To understand why we focus on museums and art galleries as spaces for critical self, social and pedagogical exploration, it is important to conceptualise their power. The global landscape is literally peppered with thousands of these institutions and they are frequented by ever increasing numbers of adults (e.g. Hannay, 2018). The International Council of Museums reminds us that their practices of acquiring, conserving, and exhibiting is primarily 'for the purposes of education' (in Gosselin & Livingston, 2016, p. 4). This focus on education gives them authenticity and authority 'to tell stories and the unassailable cast of those stories' (Whitehead, 2009, p. 44). Studies in fact show that visitors believe museums' narratives to be inclusive, accurate, factual, and agenda-free accounts of history, creatively and innovation and this too shores up their authority and thus power to influence how we see and make sense of the world (e.g. Gordon-Walker, 2018; Gosselin et al., 2016; Janes, 2015).

Although a number of adult education activities take place in most museums and art galleries, the central educational vehicle is their exhibitions. Steeds (2014) positions exhibitions as 'plays of force', ideal mediums designed to influence the public's knowledge of history, art, society, culture and people (p. 29). Inseparable from exhibition knowledge construction is "the practice of representation", the combinations of artworks, dioramas, images, artefacts, and explanatory texts all carefully choreographed to not only shape and produce but also mobilise our understandings of reality (Hall, 2013; Whitehead, 2009). Representations thus, are not simply 'the results of perception, learning and reasoning; they are processes of perception, learning and reasoning' (Whitehead, 2009, p. 9). Representations do not simply disseminate knowledge, they actively construct it. For Hall (2013), representation is the most powerful discursive pedagogical force we have today due to its extraordinary ability to cement and naturalise notions of common sense and "truth" as well as fix identity - our sense of not only ourselves but also, "the other" (Cramer et al., 2018; Gordon-Walker, 2018; Hall 2013).

Feminist cultural theorists Carson and Pajaczkowska (2001) argue that the power of representation lies in "the seen" because, as our most powerful sense, 'what we see is considered evidence, truth and factual' (p. 1). Sight establishes particular relations to reality that are enhanced through the context 'in which a visual is considered' (p. 1) such as the authoritative context of museums and art galleries. Although Porter (1991) argues that the adult visitor is not simply 'a passive recipient of authoritarian discourse' (p. 105), scholars such as Mirzeoff (2013), Hall (2013), Whitehead (2009) and Cramer and Witcomb (2018) have reason for concern vis-à-vis the power of their visualising to encourage adults to 'see what they are being taught to see and to remain blind to what they are being taught to ignore' (Cramer et al., 2018, p. 2). What they are being taught to ignore is what Carson and Pajaczkowska (2001) call the "unseen" and feminist adult educators such as Bierema (2003) call 'the hidden curriculum' (p. 4). For Rose (2001), this is a 'scopic regime [of] how we see, are able to see, allowed to see or made to see' (p. 6) and it has important implications for women and gender.

Feminist cultural theorists have asked critical questions about these "scopic regimes" and their relationship to gender inequality and oppression. Specifically, "whose" and "what" singular point of view is being visually constructed? (e.g. Gosselin et al, 2016; Pollock, 1988; Rose, 2001). They also challenge museums and art galleries as comprehensive, accurate, and objective because representations as never neutral. Analyses have uncovered narratives and visuals steeped in patriarchy, although these powerful "epistemology of mastery" are seldom straightforwardly visible (Bergsdóttir, 2016; Code, 2003; Haraway, 2013). In their early studies of art exhibitions Porter (1996)

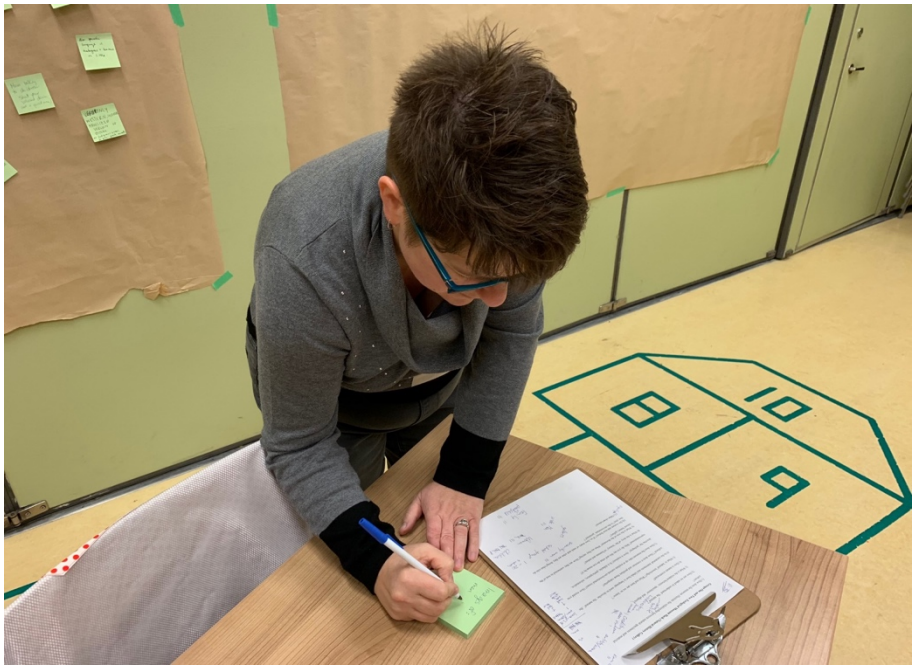
and Pollock (1988) found façades of neutrality and common sense that worked to conceal the real story being told - a story of men as the masters (artists) and women the objects of their gaze. In much more recent studies these hidden naturalisations of gender remain. On the whole, in the Canadian military museums… men are represented as white masculine military heroes (the protectors) and women as white feminine civilian wives and mothers (the protected) (Clover, Taber & Sanford, 2018, p. 19). Levin's (2010) studies pick up on this in their critique of how representations in museums construct whiteness, particularly in the form of white male power and privilege. These imperial practices of visuality allow privilege to re-enforce itself as normative thus legitimising racist assumptions and practices (Mirzoeff, 2013). Normalisation also creates binaries laden with value judgements of superiority and inferiority. Porter (1988) illustrated the gendered angle of this in her study of dioramas of domestic life as the women who laboured below stairs were made peripheral to the central narrative signifying amongst other things, the 'naturalness' of the social stratification of class (Haraway, 2013).

Bates (2018) theorises practices that perpetuate sexism and inter-sectionalities of race and class as a persistent dripping that 'seeps into our collective consciousness' (p. 25) and we would argue this is what exhibitions do. Although difficult to perceive, there exist persistent visualisations of objectification, misrepresentation, and stereotyping that work to diminish people's understandings of their own subjectivity and value (Macedo, 2015; Riley, Evans & Mackiewicz, 2016). Bates challenges us to become activists in response to these types of insidious invisibilities. Haraway (2013), Riley et al (2016) and Carson et al (2001) theorise this as taking back the power of vision to unframe and reframe, to un-see and see a new that which does not wish to be unfamed nor seen. Feminist educators call this "rendering visible" and they focus on practices of power and how they control women's lives and identities (e.g. English et al., 2015; Manicom & Walters, 2012). Feminist educators such as Jarvis (1999) suggest that we use diverse experiences and curricula to generate 'knowledge and insights into the processes which might constrain women's construction of their subjectivities' (p. 112). Feminist strategies of possibility include both resisting social and cultural constraints and imagining alternatives. Manicom and Walters (2012) take this further, framing 'pedagogies of possibility' as grounded firmly in the imagination, 'that which might become thinkable and actionable when prevailing relations of power are made visible, when understandings shake loose from normative perspectives and generate new knowledge and possibilities for engagement' (p. 4). Our challenge was to conceive what this would this look like if operationalised in the aesthetic experience of the scripto-visuals of museums and art galleries? Our response is the *Feminist Museum Hack*, an aesthetic pedagogy of possibility aimed to interrogate representations and encourage a radical oppositional capacity to see, to (re)imagine and to practise active dissent.

The Feminist Museum Hack

In the Oxford Dictionary, to hack means to enter without authorisation or authority. For us, it means explicitly 'to make [our] presence felt, seen and heard' in ways not normally granted permission (Arendt, 1970, p. 29). In a *Feminist Museum Hack*, participants (students and community groups) work together in pairs or small groups, moving through the galleries using a series of questions. One form of questioning gives basic quantitative direction: Count how many artworks are by women. Count how many stories are about women.

Figure 1: Tallying Inequality



As "woman" is not a homogeneous category but laced with inter-sections such as race and class, Hack questions ask participants to focus on/count "which" women's stories are being told. Central to the Hack is also a series of qualitative questions, adapted and modified to fit varied museum genres (e.g. art, textile/fashion, industry, doll, war, ethnographic/historical). Questions are open-ended to encourage what Wilson MacKay and Monteverde (2003, p. 41) refer to as "dialogic looking", multiple ways of seeing and interpreting representations to generate active conversation (e.g. Look around the gallery. What attracts your attention and how does it do it?). However, these questions are also "intentional" because feminist adult educators remind us we must design intentional political learning agendas if we want to contribute to transformation (Clover et al., 2018; English & Irving, 2015; Manicom et al., 2012). In other words, questions "intentionally" invite participants to "see" and by doing so, aim to encourage the capacity to see/understand/think in opposition and dissent, a skill that can extend to the world beyond the institutional walls. For despite legacies of sexism, colonialism, racism and classism, a consistent finding across both countries when we invite participants to share their impressions of these institutions before we commence to Hack, is uncritical, affective reflections on artworks or memories of childhood visits. Hooper-Greenhill (1992) reminds us these institutions are seldom 'subjected to any rigorous form of critical analysis' by the general public and we ourselves when we began this work frequently (and sometimes still do) have failed to see what was right before our eyes (p. 3). The maintenance of gendered power relations is not only pervasive, it is shrewd.

To design the *Feminist Museum Hack*, we drew from discourse analysis, that is, the focus on 'groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking' (Rose, 2001 p. 136). Critical discourse analysis is concerned with reading "text" as political, as a system of meaning caught up in cultural formations linked to socially defined practices that can carry privilege, assign value, and produce subjects and thus, can never be considered neutral (Rogers, 2011). Critical discourse analysis also encourages us to pay attention to the other "language" or discourse

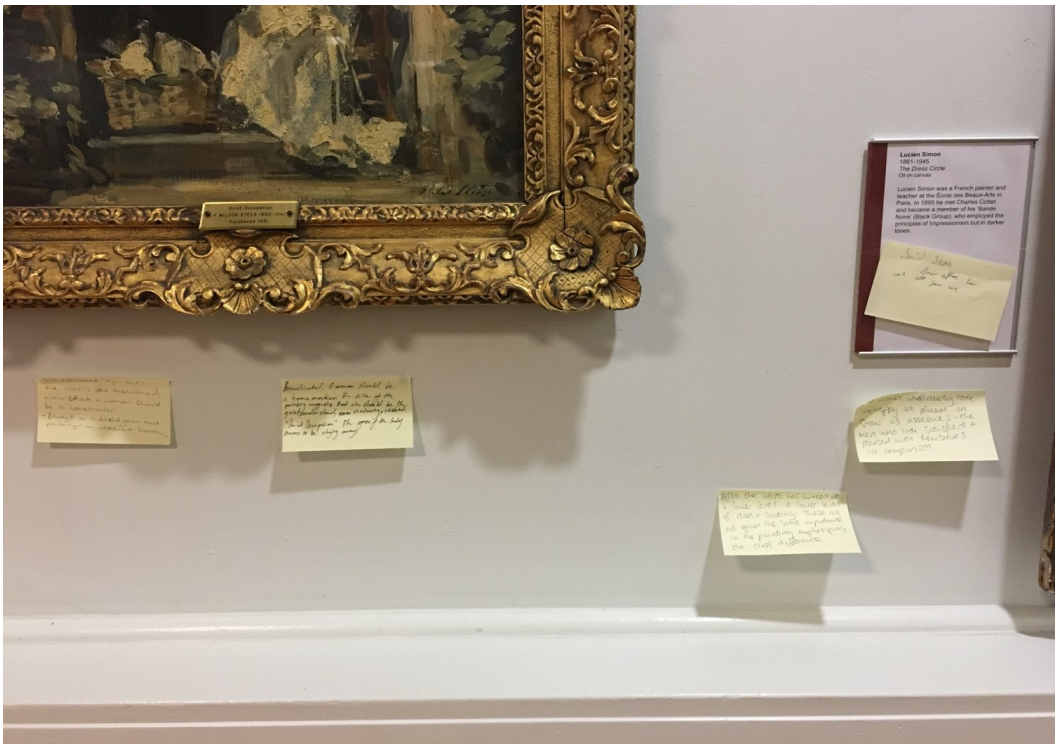
of the institution - its stagecrafting and engulfing for these too tell a story. Feminist critical discourse analysis sharpens this as it allows the Hack to function as 'a practice of analytical resistance concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology' (Lazar, 2010, p. 5). Explanatory texts, curatorial statements, labels, and positioning, are all "read" for how they 'sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women' (p. 6). We would ask, for example: How are women artists and/or their works described in the labels? This encourages reading 'not only what is being said, but what is left out; not only what is present in the text, but what is absent' (Rogers, 2011, p. 15; see also Porter, 1991).

As knowledge is also constructed visually, the *Hack* draws from critical visual discourse analysis and methodologies. Images too are imbued with 'principles of inclusion and exclusion' that must be decoded for the hierarchies and differences they naturalise (Fyfe & Law 1988, p. 1). Feminist visual analytical practices are approaches that ask us to think 'about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging' (Rose, 2001, p. 3). Specifically, we queried how "authoritative visuality" works to envision masculinities and femininities as "truth"? An example *Hack* question is: How do women (and men) appear in a painting or diorama?

> Being physically in a gallery, a space that privileges some experiences over others, and critiquing this, [can be seen] as a form of dissent. It's a way of opening up the debate about whose stories deserve to be told - and whose faces seen. (Proctor, 2018, p. 1)

Direct agency and dissent are practised through the Hack using post-it notes. Guided by the open-ended questions, participants write comments or questions on brightly coloured post-it notes and place these beside an artwork, over an existing label or a display case. Almost instantly, the orderly, authoritative gallery space becomes a chaotic, visual collage of interrogation, critique, question and challenge.

Figure 2: Collage of post-it notes



These are always noticed by visitors and we will return to this. We also incorporate other creative and arts-based practices because learning visual literacy must go beyond analytics to include actual art making and the imagination, the subversive thing Mohanty (2012) believes we can have. One art form that lends itself well to the *Hack* is poetry because its 'political task is a visionary one, the work of making way for new worlds' (Fisher, 2009, p. 984). Poems make comparatives between exhibitions, or take the form of Haiku, such as this derived from the exact title of an exhibition (in italics) (Canada):

> *Men, animals and machines*
> Yet only labouring women seen
> Write erasure; Write power

A second aesthetic practice is collage from "found" and ready-made images and texts. Collage is an inclusive form of art-making, that has a history as a practice of challenge, subversion and a strategy of criticism through a 'provocative spirit' (Frances, 2009, p. 15). It allows thinking and realisations to emerge through making, offering a visual alternative of cognitive and emotional expression. It can be a galvanising critical practice 'of jarring people into thinking and seeing' (Leavy, 2015, p. 235) and also, argues Vaughn (2005, p. 27), a 'borderlands epistemology' for feminist and postcolonial enquiry.

Research questions and study methods

In 2016 we were awarded a major research grant to create the *Feminist Museum Hack* as a pedagogic-methodology. Like other feminist and arts-based methods the *Hack* involves the systematic use of aesthetic practices to create experiences and to bring people together and to examine and understand those experiences through aesthetic practice (Knowles &

Cole, 2008). In other words, the pedagogical experience and ways of seeing are also sources of data.

Participants were sixty-five male and female adult and teacher education Master and PhD students and 19 female community members in Canada who took part in four hacks in an ethnographic museum in Canada and an art gallery in England. The study was shaped by questions that aimed to uncover the Hack's aesthetic pedagogical value:

1) What different types of textual and visual readings did the Hack allow?
2) How was the experiential nature of the Hack embodied, narrated and visualised?
3) What transformations of consciousness did it excite?
4) What were the implications for participants of this learning to see differently?
5) What elements make the Hack a pedagogy of possibility?

One source of data was post-it notes themselves as they contained a wealth of seeing, thinking, feeling. Secondly, we recorded manually aspects of the *Hack* debriefing discussions. These sessions functioned like feminist focus groups where participants shared their findings, explored commonalities and divergences, and discussed and debated the implications of their findings and the Hack experience (e.g. Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2015). We also kept notes of our observations of the participants as well as photographic records because it was clear that meaning was arising and being demonstrated from their physical engagement with objects and works in the galleries. Fourth, we analysed the visual collages and ideas in the poems to understand how participants were further visualising and narrating their experiences of the Hack as an aesthetic pedagogy of possibility. As arts-based researchers such as Knowles and Cole (2008) remind us, images and poetry convey multiple messages of complex understandings and sense-making of an experience. Finally, we undertook open-ended interviews with 20 participants which we audio recorded and transcribed. These open-ended interviews allowed yet another way for participants to reflect upon the Hack experience.

Data analysis including various stages and means. We met after the Hacks to discuss and share our own observations. We each read the transcripts and other sources of data individually to identify and label using a process of *a priori* or emergent coding. We came together face-to-face, at conferences and through email to develop clusters of themes and ideas. Our field notes were hand-written and not coded but we each referred to them regularly for reflections on for example, body language and visitor interactions.

What the data shows

Objectification and Fragmentation

Objectification theory argues that being looked at, particularly the power dynamics of men looking at women - the male gaze - is a powerful mechanism by which women learn to understand themselves, and in particular, their bodies and their value (e.g. Riley et al., 2016). Significantly, women 'learn to understand their bodies as objects [they engage] in self-monitoring in anticipation of how men will judge their appearance' (p. 95). One of the first ways the Hack operates as a pedagogy of possibility is by operationalising objectification theory, that is, bringing the theory to life. In other words, as participants moved through the galleries looking at the images and texts through a feminist "oppositional gaze" they systemically unmasked a series of diverse practices of

objectification never seen before, and then discussed the implications of this with their peers.

One moment of seeing came as both a shout across the gallery floor and a query on a post-it note: 'Why are all these women in bits?' A pair had begun to notice a regularity in images in the art gallery where women were illustrated as a series of body parts although men as they noted, seemed to remain whole. The implications of this pervasive practice of objectification were captured on a post-it note by a Canadian participant: 'Woman as "object" is story-less, nameless, history-less.' In a debriefing, she talked about growing up feeling shame about her body and dousing herself in make-up. Others felt encouraged to share other stories of the negative impact idealised sexualised images had on sisters or friends. Observations and stories such as these are important in and of themselves, but what made the Hack into a stronger space of possibility was that they became entangled in a broader gendered debate taking place outside the gallery that manifested itself in the Hack.

A few days before the Hack a tabloid newspaper in England had shown a photograph of two key female political leaders - Nicola Sturgeon and Theresa May - sitting together in skirts with the headline 'Never mind Brexit, who won Legs-it'. One of the male participants pasted this comment beside a fragmented image of a woman's legs. When asked to read it aloud, he did so assuming the group would find it 'all just good fun.' But he underestimated how upsetting the findings were for many women participants who voiced the seriousness of sexualised objectification and challenged his notion of humour.

Building on this, history is most often recounted by the victors who present their narratives as factual and thus, true. This practice became apparent to one participant in Canada who wrote: 'I finally found a woman. A white woman in a pin-up calendar with her bottom pointed up. Great!' In the debriefing, a male participant casually suggested 'pin up calendars are just a fact of history so why should the museum apologise for having one?' This was met with a chorus of challenges from the women who challenged "fact" and the museum's sense of social responsibility as a public site of history: 'History is not neutral, so why is this museum pretending?' The challenges to both the "legsit" and "fact" comments illustrate how the Hack empowered women to speak up about something that normally, as one Canadian woman noted, she would never have done: 'I think to say something so many times but I just don't. But I was not going to let this one pass, not after what I have been seeing [in this museum].'

Relationality

Relationality is the practice of bringing diverse things together to tell a story. Ranciere (2009) cautions, however, that relationality can create problematic ways of understanding and therefore, as educators need to disrupt the correspondences. This disruptive ability came out in the Hack data in two distinct ways. Firstly, participants in both countries decoded the unequal way women artists were described in the explanatory labels as this comment from England illustrates: 'Why does the description of her painting <u>not</u> describe anything about her painting, but only frame the artist as someone's daughter, sister or wife? This was of course, not an isolated incident but rather, occurred repeatedly: 'Female artists, every single one of them, is introduced in context of who the men are in their life.' Conversely, descriptions of male artists "never begin with 'son of' of 'husband to'…men are great artists in their own right.' (England post-it note). If men were described relationally, as one participant noted sarcastically in the debriefing, 'it was to link them to other "great" men' (participant's emphasis). Participants also noticed how frequently

women's roles in society were restricted to what Lowenthal (1998, p. 49) called 'bearing and birthing the men.' 'Just a wife and mother?' asked an English post-it note. 'It's a good thing she gave birth to an important man or she wouldn't be this museum', an exasperated response to the only mention of a woman, after metres of nothing, in Canada.

The second can be described as "relational" thinking, that is, how we are made to make "relations" or connections where in fact, they do not exist. This is captured poignantly in a post-it note conversation between two participants in Canada:

A: There are no women in this exhibition
B: I saw a woman
A: Really?
B: Well, there was a tea service and a lacy fan
A: You saw those as a woman?

How and what we see is conditioned by what we expect to see because of normalisations making feminised objects equal seeing women even when they are not there. Equally interesting is this format of writing a dialogue on the post-it notes which was consistent in both countries. This is an example of "dialogic looking", whereby 'viewers consciously articulate questions that arise while they look' (Wilson MacKay & Monteverde, 2003, p. 42). Reading this conversation aloud to larger group as we debriefed the Hack, sparked further conversations: 'It is unbelievable to me how [things like] this have pacified me all these years. I thought I was part of history [in this museum] but in fact, I never was, none of us is [to all the women]. We are just lace and pottery.' Relationality also raised concerns about "common sense" in terms of 'what we are just to absorb as the way things were' (Canadian debriefing comment). Together we explored how 'common sense is itself ideologically and discursively constructed; the obvious and the natural are not givers of meaning' (Porter, 1991, p. 105). They are produced and re-produced and we are all to often complicit in this game.

Seeing invisibility and feeling absence

Aesthetic experiences teach us to see and not to see and to feel and to not feel often in equal measure. Moreover, if we give meaning to something by representing it, as Hall (2013, p. 13) argues, 'then what does it mean, or rather what does it teach us, when something is either faint or not represented at all? If culture is about feelings, attachments and emotions then how does one "feel" when they are invisible or absent?' While invisibility and absence are similar, *Hack* participants unearthed how they were not always the same. Invisibility can be something there, but faint or indistinct. This was highlighted in three ways. Firstly, in this English post-it-note conversation:

E: Oooh! It is Mary Martin
O: Who?
E: Exactly

Even when a woman artist's work is shown in the gallery, she is still like to be "faint" in the minds of the audience. Moreover, as noted above, there will be little written about her work on the labels that render her less faint. Pollock (1988) reminded us we have been taught well by these institutions that 'creativity is an exclusive masculine prerogative and that as a consequence, the term artist automatically refers to man' (p. 29). A second instance of invisibility comes in the form of stage crafting in Canada:

> The diorama of the woman's 'boudoir' was poorly lighted, dusky and maybe a bit suggestive. You had to look down and it was hard to see it. Next door the display of the man's red military uniform was elevated and very brightly lighted. I asked myself is this intentional? Maybe or maybe not but it screamed double standard. It sent a signal to my brain that said "this is important and this is not." (Debriefing session comment) (Pollock, 1988, p. 29)

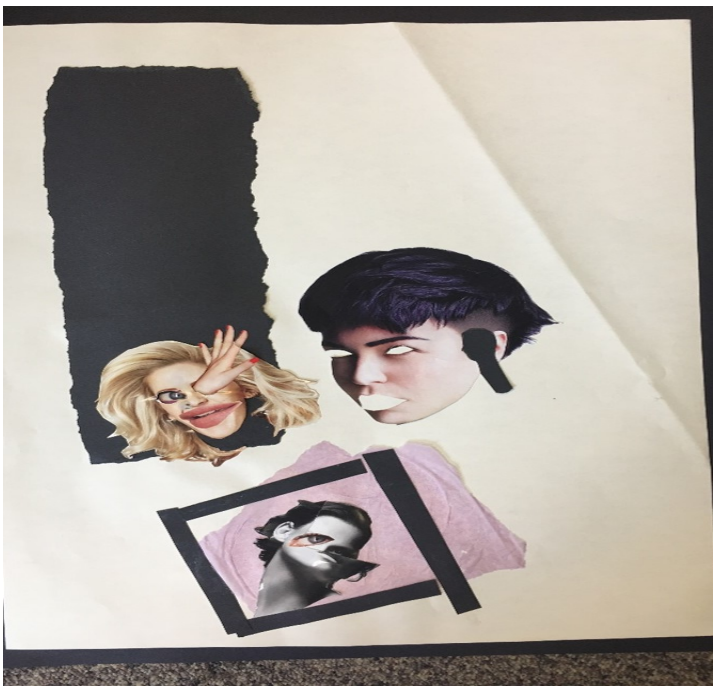
Absence is total erasure but as Sartre (1963) reminded us, absence reveals reality, the reality of what is not present - the "unseen". The Hack provided tangible evidence of the absent, and this absence was experienced. In England, with deep sadness, a participant said 'There are no black women or Asian women to be seen. As a young non-white woman, where's my positioning in the gallery?'. Although they were far fewer as the gender bias was so palpable, this comment highlights an intersectionality of gender and race and how it is deeply felt. Later this participant used visualising through collage as a means explain 'that anger more than I can.'

Performing masculinity and femininity

When Berger (1972, p. 47) wrote, 'men act and women appear' (p. 47) he was drawing attention to the power of male performativity and agency. Just how deeply and frequently masculinities and femininities were being performed in the institutions astonished the Hack participants. In particular, what was being picked up was captured with precision in this Canadian post-it note comment: 'It is fascinating just how often men are made out to be the heroes in their own stories in this place! Who writes this stuff!?' (post-it note).

Indeed, heroism was, inevitably enough, noted again and again by participants. Stories and images were noted as 'vigorously masculine', as they unearthed repetitive tales of the 'genius innovator who makes world.' These stood in marked contrast to how women were displayed: 'Domesticated. A woman should be a homemaker. The title of the painting suggests that she should be quiet, understanding, nurturing, obedient: "Quiet Occupation"' (Post-it note comment, England). Others noted how often the gaze of women in portraits was 'diminutive', 'shy', or 'submissive.' There is "always an indirect gaze that portrays an obedient subordinance", stated a participant in England. A collage powerfully portrayed this through the cutting out and removal of women's eyes, thus removing their ability and any 'right to "see"'.

Figure 3: 'No right to see' (collage title, Huddersfield)



In discussions participants drew from their post-it notes to explain how the masculine and feminine representations were teaching them to believe 'women were weak, bidding creatures' (England) and to see men as 'muscularity [with the] right to dominate and control the world, including women' (Canada). The intersectionality of gender and class was also illuminated in observations, much like Porter (1991), of domestic women staff missing from the domestic portrayals, albeit the middle and upper class women featured were primarily engaged in "feminine" occupations of embroidery or genteel rituals of toilette. On this latter, a number of participants queried: 'What else did women do besides sit around in pretty clothes?' (England); 'Did women in the past do anything besides dress pretty?' (Canada). Debriefings focussed on how "disempowering" it was to see women either dismissed 'if they are in my class', one woman noted, or simply confined to doing "nothing". This raised the topic of the women's movement (including suffrage) and this was significant as many participants had not aligned themselves with the women's movement, nor feminism which one participant had queried before the *Hack* as 'really outdated and not really very necessary, right?'.

Just Ire

> What did I get from the *Hack*? White, able-bodied, heterosexual men "made" Canada. Indigenous people were just "here" so they don't count. No one was gay and by the way, women don't count either unless half-naked in a calendar for the purpose of titillating. That about sums it up. Shame on this museum. (Canadian debriefing comment)

One of the findings of this study was that the Hack has the ability to induce "anger" and while this can be a problem it is also a possibility. In Canada, for example, two visitors reading the post-it notes became extremely agitated and accused the students of 'defacing and disrespecting' the museum. They questioned upon what authority they were pasting their own thoughts and messages. In England, the gallery attendant queried why the

comments were 'not about art' but rather 'just political statements'. Students have also been subject to racist diatribes by visitors who laude colonial histories of male discovery and conquest: 'Those "Indians" have done nothing but benefit from "us"; "Women never took the risks like men to discover Canada and that is why they aren't in the museum.'

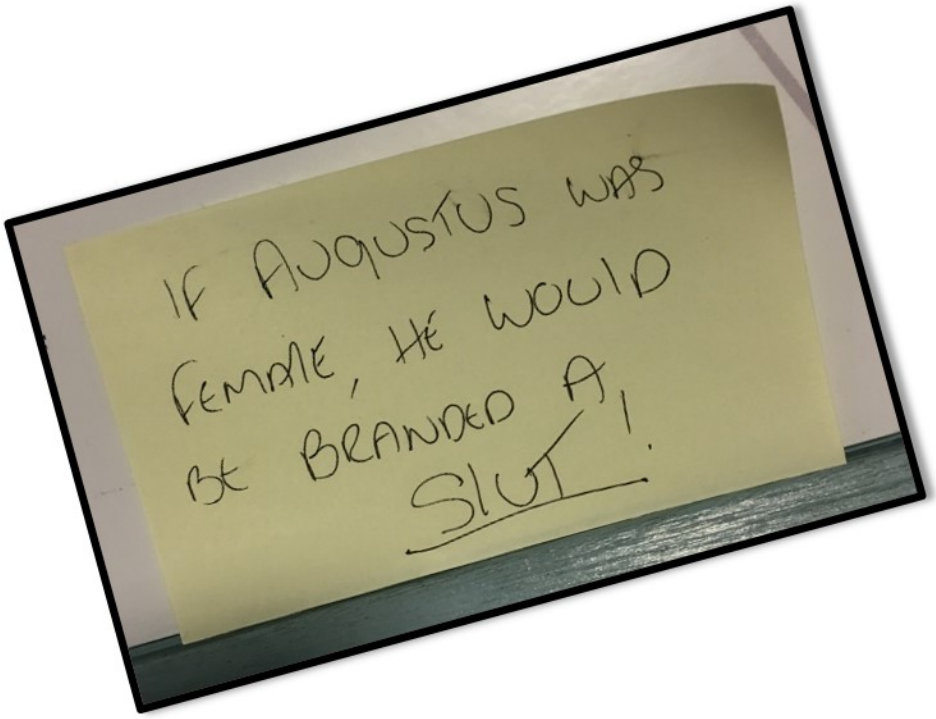
Problematically, these encounters are deeply unsettling for those who are subject to their hostility (and ignorance). However, they provide two concrete examples of somewhat abstract realities. The first is an insight in the "disciplinary power" of these institutions and their ability to instil in the public a great faith that does not enjoy being tested. The second is the types of racial and gendered assumptions these adult educators will face working in institutions and communities. Hack debriefings in Canada provided a space to discuss not only what happened, but also, pedagogical strategies that could respond. A pedagogy of possibility must give people the tools to deal with anger, sexism and racism (Manicom et al., 2012).

We were also often uplifted by other visitors who do appreciate our interventions. For example, a woman in England said, as she watched us removing the post it notes following a Hack: 'Oh, you are not taking those down? They have added so much to my visit.'

An even more positive sense of possibility was the high degree of what Freire (2004, p. 14) called 'just ire' or 'legitimate rage' we witnessed as the new realisations began to dawn, as the multiple misrepresentations, objectifications and absences began to emerge in institutions participants had trusted to be truthful and inclusive. Every Hack, we watch participants begin tentatively and then start literally to stomp from one display or diorama to next, gesticulate vigorously to companions, race up to us with comments, and scribble furiously onto the post-it notes. In England, numerous participants in the interviews spoke of being 'really infuriated' by 'the gender injustice' they had never seen before. In Canada, anger was manifest all over the post-it notes. For example, 'Damn you this is just male-centred colonialism. The land <u>was</u> 'settled'; it was carefully developed long before White, male Europeans arrived. Put <u>that</u> in your curatorial statement!' In an era of reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples in Canada, anger at stories that continue to suggest colonisers were 'a civilising presence' and continue to 'whitewash (literally) historical injustices' bodes well for their future as adult educators. As Freire (2004) argued, anger itself may not produce change but it is where hope lies.

Building on this amidst the anger and critique were wonderful moments of humour and laughter, as sarcasm and irony reigned and we poked fun at the clear ideological biases being unmasked. This too was deeply empowering, for as Hannah Arendt (1970) reminded us, 'the greatest enemy of authority… is contempt, and the surest way to undermine it is laughter' (p. 40).

Figure 4: Participant post-it note comment (England)



Transformation and the radical imagination

Cultivating an aesthetic imagination requires paying attention to what is right in front of us, and developing an understanding of what it is that we see. Cultivating a radical aesthetic imagination, to borrow from Haiven and Khasnabish (2014), is the ability to see through the present order, and we make common cause with others through encounters with the unexpected. We can argue that all of the findings by the participants of the Hack in terms of what they encountered were truly "unexpected". As one Canadian participant noted, 'it just went on and on and I never would have believed it before the Hack. We never expected to see this. We never expected to feel so angry but now I do, I am going to have do something about it.' As this comment suggests, for all the participants the Hack was a truly eye-opening experience and they could not believe they had never seen before what had become so clear. Further, in the interviews, participants used words such as 'powerful', 'thought-provoking', 'gripping' and particularly 'empowering' to describe the aesthetic experiences of the Hack. For some, new ways of seeing focussed on the institution: 'This is just patriarchy. Now you see it, now you don't and no museum will ever fool me again' (Canadian post-it note). For others, it was themselves and best articulated in the reflections of a male participant:

> Then: When I walked into the gallery I was a male, white, straight artist [who] hadn't recognised my privilege as much as I should.
>
> Now: I will start to look at art now on other levels. The social contexts of class, race, gender, sexuality are a very important aspect of art and art education (English comment).

Rose (2001) reminds us that the power of interpreting images is not that there will be a single truth, but that we become accountable to what we have learnt. As a pedagogy of possibility, the Hack gives participants new lenses of accountability as they call both the institution and themselves to account. Ranciere (2009) called this a form of emancipation

and he argued that it begins when we come to understand that "viewing" can not only transform how we see structures of domination and subjugation but instil in us a sense of power to act. But new revelations about ones' own privilege do not come without a certain amount of discomfort, and this we witnessed in some of the male participants. Disruptions to their power, whether they realised they had it or not meant they struggled, sometimes by saying the women 'were too combative' or 'well, that is just the way it is'. Possibility, however, is having to engage with our habitual ways of seeing, thinking, knowing and being in the world and to listen to those who question these seemed certainties.

Engaging possibility

The intelligence of adults to discern ideologies should never be underestimated, and it is most certainly not in the *Feminist Museum Hack*. But what we and other feminist cultural theorists and adult educators know is that patriarchal assumptions are embedded deeply in the fabric of our language, our histories, our visual representations. Museums provide perfect places to explore this, as they visualise and narrate epistemologies of mastery. Hiding these in plain sight influences how we see and know the world, and our sense of agency as women and 'the other'.

What we see from the findings is how the Hack ignites new ways of seeing and thinking. As participants engage more actively with their visual and discourse powers of analysis, they 'create, read, and respond to visual images' and this "visual" literacy givens them critical insights into the practices of meaning making in these major institutions (and how it goes beyond them) (Holloway, 2012, p. 150). As a pedagogy of possibility, the *Hack* disrupts the masculine gaze and unsettles its pretentions to common sense about whose artworks, stories, and experiences matter. As a pedagogy of possibility, the Hack enables the revelation of relations of power and calls into the question the storied and visualised assumptions that lurk in their shadows. Indeed, when 'feminism and museums collide' (Ashton, 2017, p. 43) we have the possibility to hone an oppositional gaze and radical imagination and to awaken just ire and relational thinking. We see and feel fragmentation, we name and re-name subjectivity. The Hack is also about the possibility of new transformational arenas, turning passive spaces of ideological absorption into active sites of embodied enquiry and resistance. It is a practice of hope, an aesthetic way to recognise possibility and, returning to Sartre (1963, p. 94), to imagine 'the presence of the future as that which is lacking.' Finally, findings show how the *Feminist Museum Hack* stimulates the imagination, and the imagination acts as a form of thinking the possible. This a significant for teachers and adult educators who will enter the political pedagogical struggle for gender justice and change.

Acknowledgements

This research is supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canada.

Notes

[1] In Canada adult education is the term used. In England they use 'teacher education'.
[2] A version of this paper was published in Andragoška spoznanja in 2018. This paper is extended and altered to share empirical data from a study of Hacks with students and community groups in Huddersfield and Victoria.

References

Ashton, J. (2017). *Feminisms and museums*. Edinburgh: MuseumsEtc.
Arendt, H. (1970). *On violence*. London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
Bates, L. (2018). *Misogynation*. London: Simon and Shuster.
Berger J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin.
Bergsdóttir, A. (2016). Museums and feminist matters: Considerations of a feminist museology. *Nordic journal of feminist and gender research, 24*(2), 126-139.
Bierema, L. (2003). The role of gender consciousness in challenging patriarchy. *International journal for lifelong education, 22*, 3-12.
Borg, C., & Mayo, P. (2010). Museums: Adult education as cultural politics. In E. Taylor, & M. Parrish (Eds), Adult education in cultural institutions: Aquariums, libraries, museums, parks and zoos. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 27, 35-44.
Carson, F., & Pajaczkowska, C. (Eds.). (2001). *Feminist visual culture*. New York: Routledge.
Clover, D.E., Taber, N.; & Sanford, K. (2018). Dripping pink and blue: Seeing the unseen of patriarchy through the Feminist Museum Hack. *Andragoška spoznanja, 24*(3), 11-28.
Code, L. (2003). *Ecological thinking: The politics of epistemic location*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Cramer, L., & Witcomb, A. (2018). Hidden from view? an analysis of the integration of women's history and women's voices in Australia's social history exhibitions. *International journal of heritage studies, 25*(2), 128-142.
English, L., & Irving, C. (2015). *Feminism in community: Adult education for transformation*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishing.
Fisher, T. (2009). Outside the republic: A visionary political poetics. *Textual practice*, *23*, 975–986. doi:10.1080/09502360903361600.
Forgan, S. (2005). Building the museum: Knowledge, conflict, and the power of place. *Isis, 96*, 572-585.
Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of indignation*. Boulder: CO: Paradigm.
Frances M. (2009). Collage and cut-ups. *Personal construct theory & practice*, *6*, 15-20.
Fyfe G., & Law J. (1988). *Picturing power: visual depiction and social relations*. London: Routledge.
Gordon-Walker, C. (2018). *Exhibiting nation: Multi-cultural nationalism (and its limits) in Canada's museums*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
Gosselin, V., & Livingstone, P. (2016). *Museums and the past: Constructing historical consciousness*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
Hall, S. (2013). Introduction. In S. Hall, J. Evans, & S. Nixon (Eds.), *Representation* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
Haiven, M., & Khasnabish, A. (2014). *The radical imagination*. London: Zed Books.
Hannay, C. (2018, September 15). Canadians visiting museums, galleries more than ever, survey shows. *Globe and Mail*. Retrieved Mars 20, 2019, from https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-canadians-visiting-museums-galleries-more-than-ever-survey-shows/
Haraway, D. (2013). The persistence of vision. In N. Mirzoeff (Ed.), *The visual culture reader*, (3rd ed., pp. 356-362). London: Routledge.
Hesse-Biber, S & Leavy, P. (2007). *Feminist research practice*. London: Sage Publications.
Holloway, S. (2012). Visual literacies and multiliteracies: An ecology arts-based pedagogical model. *Language and literacy*, *14*(3), 150-168.
Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1992). *Museums and the shaping of knowledge*. London: Routledge.
Janes, R. (2009). *Museums in a troubled world.* Milton Park, Abingdon, USA: Routledge.
Knowles, J., & Cole, A. (2008). Arts-informed research. In J. Knowles, & A. Cole (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research* (pp. 55-70). Thousand Oaks: CA: SAGE.
Latham, K.F. (2007). The poetry of the museum: A holistic model of numinous museum experiences. *Museum management and curatorship*, *22*(3), 247-263.
Lazar, M. (Ed). (2005). *Feminist critical discourse analysis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Leavy, P. (2015). *Art meets method: Arts-based research practice* (2nd ed.). London: Guilford press.
Levin, A. (2010). *Gender, sexuality and museums*. London: Routledge.
Lowenthal, D. (1998). *The heritage crusade and the spoils of history*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.
Macedo, A.G. (2015). Visual literacy narratives of dissent: Unframing women and representation. *Journal of romantic studies, 15*, 83-98.
Manicom, L,. & Walters, S. (Eds.). (2012). *Feminist popular education in transnational debates: Building pedagogies of possibility*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mirzoeff, N. (Ed.). (2013), *The visual culture reader* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
Mohanty, C. (2012). Forward. In L. Manicom, & S. Walters (Eds.), *Feminist popular education in transnational debates: Building pedagogies of possibility* (pp. i-iii). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Pollock, G. (1988). *Vision and difference: Feminism, femininity and the histories of art*. London, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
Porter, G. (1991). Partial truths. In G. Kavanagh (Ed.), *Museum languages: Objects and texts* (pp. 101-118). Leicester: Leicester university press.
Porter, G. (1988). Putting your house in order: Representations of women and domestic life. In R. Lumley (Ed.), *The museum time machine: Putting cultures on display* (pp. 101-125). London: Routledge.
Porter, G. (1996). Seeing through solidarity: A feminist perspective on museums. In S. Macdonald, & G. Fyfe (Eds.), *Theorizing museums: Representing identity and diversity in a changing world* (pp. 105-126). Oxford: Blackwell publishers/The sociological review.
Proctor, A. (2018, April 18). *Museums are hiding their imperial pasts – which is why my tours are needed*. Retrieved Mars 20, 2019, from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/23/museums-imperialist-pasts-uncomfortable-art-tours-slavery-colonialism
Ranciere, J. (2009). *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso.
Riley, S., Evans, A., & Mackiewicz, A. (2016). It's just between girls: Negotiating the postfeminist gaze in women's 'looking talk'. *Feminism and psychology*, *26*(1), 94-113.
Rogers, R. (Ed.) (2011). *An introduction to critical discourse in education* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
Rogoff, I. (2013). Studying visual culture. In N. Mirzoeff (Ed.), *The visual culture reader* (3rd Ed., pp. 14-26). London: Routledge.
Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies*. London: Sage.
Sartre, J. (1963). *Search for a method*. New York: Knopf.
Steeds, L. (Ed.). (2014). *Exhibition*. London: Whitechapel Gallery.
Ulrich Obrist, H., & Raza, A. (2015). *Ways of curating*. New York: Penguin random house.
Vaughn, K. (2005). Pieced together: Collage as an artist's method for interdisciplinary research. *International journal of qualitative methods*, *4*(1), 27-52.
Whitehead, C. (2009). *Museums and the construction of disciplines: Art and archaeology in nineteenth-century Britain*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co.
Wilson MacKay, S., & Monteverde, S. (2003). Dialogic looking: Beyond the mediated experience. *Art education*, *56*, 40-45.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol.10, No.2, 2019, pp. 161-170

The process of transformation: Kegan's view through the lens of a film by Wenders

Alexis Kokkos
Hellenic Open University, Greece (kokkosalexis@gmail.com)

Abstract

The aim of this paper is the exploration of Kegan's constructive-developmental theory through the analysis of the behavior of an agent within Wenders's film Alice in the Cities, which is used as a case study. In the first part, we will approach Kegan's ideas regarding the evolution of human beings' consciousness as they move through five progressively more complex orders of consciousness. We will also approach the connections of Kegan's perspective to Mezirow's Transformation Theory. Then, we will draw insights from the film in order to expand the exploration of some crucial issues of Kegan's theory, such as: How is a person's consciousness developed? Are there signs, when a person is situated in a certain order of consciousness, that he/she has the potential to move toward a next one? Which might be the adult educator's role in assisting the learners' evolutionary process? Finally, in the last section, some limitations of Kegan's perspective will be critically discussed.

Keywords: aesthetic experience; consciousness; object; subject

Kegan's theoretical perspective

Robert Kegan's constructive-developmental approach (Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000) describes the way in which human beings gradually construct their understanding of reality. He argues that this process is developed in five stages or orders of consciousness throughout a person's life course. Each one of these stages is characterized by a growing maturity and integrity regarding the way we make sense. Each qualitative movement from one stage to the next requires a whole mental structure that had been

ISSN 2000-7426

DOI 10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9140
www.rela.ep.liu.se

experienced as *subject,* in the sense that we come to know everything through the subjectivity of our needs, interests and wishes (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman & Felix, 2011) and shifts it so that it becomes seen as an *object*, meaning we become objective towards our assumptions, reflect upon them, see what is true and exercise control over them.

The first order of consciousness roughly covers the time period from the second to the sixth year of life. Within this stage, we perceive reality through imaginatively constructed lenses. Our thinking tends to be 'fantastic and illogical, our feelings impulsive and fluid' (Kegan, 1982, p. 29). In other words, we are not able to construct a logical relation between cause and effect, and we are attached to whatever is present at the moment.

During the second stage, which is common to adolescents, we develop a sense of who we are and what we want. We organize our desires as things that persist through time. In the 'social-cognitive' domain we are shortsighted self–oriented and we manipulate others to achieve our own goals (Kegan, 1994). Our challenge to develop further involves not to be mostly concerned with our own desires, but to take into consideration the expectations and needs of others.

During the third stage (the end of the teenage years and beyond), we make commitments to communities of people and/or ideas. Our sense of self, our assumptions and values derive from our relation with the others and they are constructed in terms of their respective points of view. We subordinate our individual interests to the shared norms, expectations and demands of the community to which we belong (peer group, family, social group, etc.). Our challenge at this stage takes the form of resisting codependency and establishing independent ways of making meaning and behaving.

At the fourth stage, we have the capacity to take responsibility of our internal authority and make human relationships a part of our world. We can elaborate circumstances and expectations of others synthetically, and – in the light of our value system – (re)define our behavior in a functional way, toward our emancipation. In other words, we see ourselves as the author of our inner psychological life.

Finally, at the fifth stage, which according to Kegan (1994) is rarely reached, individuals are less likely to see the world in terms of dichotomies. They deal well with managing the tension of opposites (Berger, 2013). They recognize the partiality that is inherent in any system of beliefs and they have the capacity to make holistic sense of their experience and hold on to multiple systems of thinking.

A crucial component of Kegan's view is his understanding regarding the texture of the changes that occur across the constructive-developmental process (Kegan, 2000). In each stage, there is change in *what* we know – that is further learning of informative sort – but also change in *how* we know. The latter does not only provide new information, but causes a reconstruction of our preexisting frame of mind or an epistemological paradigm shift. According to Kegan (2000) only this sort of learning is transformational and leads the individual to a next order of consciousness.

Another core point of Kegan's theory concerns the very process within each stage of development. Actually, there is a continuous process of misbalancing and restoring the balance, a formation and reformation of our frame of mind, a setting and resetting of the distinctions between what is subject and what is object (Lahey et al., 2011). Hence, while we move from one order of consciousness to the next, we are placed in a fully transitional state where we may experience both orders at the same time. Also, we eventually tend toward the next order but we may also regress, finding ourselves embedded in the norms of the previous one. This spiral and dialectical process has been eloquently described by Lahey et al. in the *Guide to the Subject-Object-Interview*

(2011). This Guide identifies twentyone possible distinctions in the on-going evolution of subject–object relations. For instance, passing from stage 3 to 4 involves four distinctions: 3 (4), where the person is situated mainly at the 3rd stage but there are indications in the behaviour demonstrating that she is beginning to move towards the 4th stage; 3/4, when this tendency is reinforced; 4/3 when the person behaves mostly according to the characteristics of the 4th stage and less according to those of the 3rd; 4 (3), when the person seems ready to move to the 4th stage, however some inner forces still hold her back.

The connections of Kegan's view to transformation theory

The Transformation Theory was introduced by Jack Mezirow in 1978 and, since then, it has become the basic point of reference for the development of the transformative learning theoretical framework. The basic idea, which is prominent throughout Mezirow's work (inter alia 1981, 1991, 1994, 2000) is that people usually find themselves in a system of habits of mind through which they interpret reality, without being able to judge the true value it has for their lives. In adulthood, however, they might realize that this system is dysfunctional, as it contains distorted or incomplete assumptions. Therefore, adults need support in order to critically re-evaluate their assumptions and transform them, giving vital meaning to their experiences.

Mezirow claimed (inter alia 1985, 1991, 1997) that there are four types of learning; the last two of them are those where the transformational process occurs. The first type involves the elaboration of an existing point of view. It is a process during which we improve or change a specific assumption we have embraced, without questioning the broader system of our mental habits in which this assumption is embedded. The second type of learning refers to adopting a new point of view, which is nevertheless compatible and consistent with those that have been already embraced. Therefore, it is a process in which we gain more information, but without transforming our way of making sense. The third type constitutes a radical transformation of a point of view, while the fourth type is the transformation of one or more habits of mind. In the latter, we transform not only what we know, but also the way in which we perceive reality and learn from our experiences.

By comparing Mezirow's view to Kegan's theory, we realize that there are some differences, but also important points of convergence.

Their major difference is that, according to Kegan, transformational learning is not explicitly the province of adulthood, while Mezirow claims that transformative learning can occur only during this stage of the life span. Hence, the epistemological shifts which are identified by Mezirow as the third and fourth type of learning correspond to Kegan's model only regarding the transition from the third to the fourth order of consciousness.

On the other hand, a crucial point of convergence between the two theories is that mental transformation is about changing the *form* of the meaning-making system. Hence, transformative learning does not refer to just any kind of learning but to the sort which incites deep changes to our frame of reference and let us 'know in a different way' (Taylor & Elias, 2012, p. 151).

Another significant commonality between the two perspectives concerns the capacities that are required from a learner in order to move from the socialized to the self-authoring mind (according to Kegan's conceptualization) or to transform certain points of view or habits of mind (according to Mezirow's conceptualization). Both

theorists claim that this shift demands a specific order of mental functioning which is characterized by a capacity of abstract, critical mode of thinking. More specifically, Kegan (1994) argues that the person might create the ability to integrate her various values, beliefs, ideals, convictions and interpersonal states into a complex system of organizing experience. She might view them as parts of a whole upon which she can think critically and act. Mezirow (2000), in his turn, states that the transformational process is open-ended and includes a meaningful, holistic exploration and (re)organization of perceptions and feelings through critical reflection:

> Learners may be helped to explore all aspects of a frame of reference: its genealogy, power allocation, internal logic, uses, affective and intuitive dimensions, advantages, and disadvantages […] The learner can look at the same experience from a variety of points of view and see the concepts and feelings depend on the perspective through which they occur. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 29)

Kegan's perspective meets transformation theory

If we consider the total of the dimensions which have been stated regarding the components of Kegan's theory and the points of convergence and divergence with Mezirow's view, we can arguably claim that Kegan provides a significant contribution to the development of Transformation Theory. He broadens the concept of transformational learning and explores the whole spectrum of radical changes which occur within the person's consciousness during the life span. Moreover, he contributes to a better understanding of the trembles and alterations which emerge within each stage of development. Hence, his approach strengthens the understanding of the learners current meaning-forming and their actual capacities to transform it. Thus, an adult educator becomes able to examine the fit between learners' abilities and her demands made upon them. Kegan is indeed careful at this point. He underlines that adult educators need to understand where precisely 'the student is' (Kegan, 2000, p. 61) and how costly the transformational project may seem to her, so that not to create designs that 'get out too far ahead of the learner' (Kegan, 2000, p. 66). Also, he points out another gentle differentiation from Mezirow's work, stating that although the latter's suggestion concerning the enhancement of a student's ability toward self-authority is an appropriate transformational aim, adult educators should however discern 'how rapidly or gradually this shift in authority should optimally take place for that student, which is a function of how far he or she is along this particular bridge' (Kegan, 2000, p.66).

The contribution of aesthetic experience

The role of aesthetic experience – a notion understood as systematic exploration of a work of art – might have a significant impact in unearthing insights on a learning issue whose content is related to the meaning that could be drawn from the work of art at hand. Aristotle (335 B.C./1999), Dewey (1934/1980), Gardner (1990), Adorno (1986), Greene (2000), Castoriadis (2008) are among the scholars who have argued that our contact with great art may trigger a large spectrum of emotions and reflections, and create dialogue with our inner thoughts, desires, fears and hopes that are normally hidden under a decoy of conventional meanings. What is more, Nussbaum (1990) and Halliwell (1998) argue that works of art with high aesthetic value can be sources of insightful ideas and can help us to comprehend phenomena in a holistic manner. Hence,

art may complement philosophical or scientific thought which, due to its abstract nature, is limited in terms of expressing in an emotionally accurate way both the complexity of each situation and the wealth and truth of human existence, in general.

Kegan himself seems to share this conception. In his major works *The Evolving Self* (1982) and *In Over our Heads* (1994) he approaches, through the exploration of poems by T.S. Eliot, M. Stewart Hammond and R. Masten, as well as novels by H. Hemingway and J. Joyce, the underlying ideas, intuitions and feelings that are articulated during the shift from previous to present stance of human beings' beliefs and values. Moreover, he includes in his contribution to Mezirow and Associates' (2000) volume extended references to Ibsen's *Doll's House (Nora)* in an effort to show how the heroine is reaching a new set of insights regarding her assumptions, where they came from, how and why she had been unawarely identified with them, and how she starts exercising control over them.

Furthermore, a number of important philosophers and theorists of education and art (e.g. Eisner, 2002; Marcuse, 1978; Perkins, 1994) have revealed that it is not only the content (the meaning) of a work of art but also its morphological elements that, in correlation to it, may have an impact on triggering critical reflection. [Indicatively, elements of the morphological structure in a film are the narration, the role of music and the sound design, the camera's frame and placement, the choice of scenery, the handling of colour, the symbols, etc. Respectively, in a literary text, components of the morphological structure are the narration point of view, the time period, the space, the expressive means; in paintings, the colour, the shape, the lines; in music the rhythm, the melody, the tempo, etc.]. In another paper (Kokkos, 2017) I have claimed that the interplay between the content and the morphological structure of an important work of art offers the learners an opportunity to obtain a holistic approach toward it, and come to its thorough comprehension.

For those reasons, I take Wim Wenders's film *Alice in the Cities* (filmed in 1974) as a case study, and I will explore its spiritual content in relation to its structure, in order to expand the treatment of some crucial issues of Kegan's theoretical framework, such as: How a person's consciousness is developed? Which is the evidence? Is it a linear or spiral process? Are there signs that while a person is situated in a certain order of consciousness he or she has the potential to move toward a next one? Which are the challenges and the obstacles?

Even though the film explores the transformations that occur in the consciousness of a young man and a young girl, due to space constraints, in what follows I will focus only on the man's transformative experiences.

The significant works of art have a multidimensional texture and are open to a variety of interpretations. Hence, I believe my ideas, which will be presented in the following section contain only a part of the possible 'readings' and function mostly as open questions.

A case study: Alice in the cities

First part. In the first scene of the film there is an airplane, like a dot, flying very high, in a hazy horizon, symbolizing possibly a psychic journey toward the unknown. After that the camera captures Philip by the sea, sitting under a dock (symbol of a 'shelter'?). He is a German intellectual, a journalist touring the U.S.A. on an assignment from his magazine to write a representation of America. In his 'shelter', he is happily mumbling a rock song which reveals his cultural references. His appearance and his clothes show

that he is a relaxed wanderer in the style of the 'left intellectuals/easy riders' of the 70's. Furthermore, we will soon realize that he is pointedly critical of the commercial culture which is, as he states – and as the film shows –infiltrated in the whole American 'scene'. He takes photographs consecutively, in an attempt to portray this scene, but, as he explains, they 'never show what you've really seen'. Thus, Philip is incapable to capture the American reality, and simultaneously he is paralyzed by his writing assignment. He hasn't even begun writing his paper, while he has already reached the deadline set by his agency.

In the first part of the film, Philip pointlessly drifts through American cities. Almost all the scenes are nocturnal; the lighting is obscure, often hazy, betraying his psychic stagnation and dissolution. The city sounds – car horns, trains and trucks passing by – are very intense, inciting unawaringly a feeling of anxiety and continuous movement. The scenes begin and end in slow rhythm ('fade in', 'fade out'), suggesting wandering as well. In the background, a musical pattern played by an electric guitar is repeated monotonously from time to time, reproducing the feeling of being trapped.

One night, Philip stays at a small hotel room. From the window one can see enormous advertisements with the words 'SKYWAY', 'FREE' (an ironic comment on the 'American Dream' perhaps). Inside the room, in a dominating position in the centre, is a television set. Philip falls asleep watching TV-series and in the morning, when the film he is watching is continuously interrupted by commercials, like an "angry adolescent" he smashes the television set to the floor.

At some point, Philip reaches New York and visits his (ex?) girlfriend. He begins to tell her his impressions from his trip. When she attempts to tell him something, he doesn't listen, he continues speaking. He starts taking his clothes off to make love to her. She refuses, explaining to him that she cannot relate to a person who is so self-centred.

Here the first part of the film ends. In Kegan's (1994, pp. 30-31) terms, Philip, regarding the 'logical-cognitive' domain of his order of consciousness, can reason deductively – critically, and he is also subordinated to the norms of a certain ideology. These are characteristics of the 3rd order. However, in the 'interpersonal-affective' and the 'social-cognitive' domain, he is mostly in the 2nd order: He is a narcissist, not aware of shared feelings; he constructs himself only in terms of his own point of view, without being interested in maintaining mutual relationships.

Second part. Philip is ready to fly back to Europe. A young mother asks him to watch her 10 year old daughter Alice for a little while, and then she disappears. Philip will have to handle this situation. He knows nothing about Alice, apart from the fact that she has a ticket to Amsterdam on the same flight he does, and that, as she tells him, her grandmother lives in Wuppertal, but she doesn't know the address.

Philip decides to take up on the adventure and travel with her. As a matter of fact, during the next days, he spends his last money with Alice in search of her grandmother's house.

In Kegan's (1994) terms, Philip in the child's company moves toward the 3rd order of consciousness concerning all of its domains: He meets the demands of another person. The norms of his 'progressive' ideology take primacy over himself so that he takes on responsibilities which are related to his conception about the social bonds of the commonwealth. So, he takes care of the abandoned child, avoiding handing her over to the police.

This evolution in Philip's perception, apart from the narration, is evident in the film from a number of morphological elements. Now, the montage doesn't fade in and fade out; the plot evolves faster; the scenes are brighter; the sounds are less 'annoying'; the

advertisements on the streets are scarce and television disappears. The European cities are friendlier. Alice expresses this feeling: 'I find Amsterdam much prettier than New York'… Only the musical background remains unchanged, implying that there are some sides of Philip's immunity that prevent the completion of his transition to the 3rd order.

Indeed, Philip's shift does not occur without internal resistances and regressions. He often seems to be subordinated to a romanticized duty of protection rather than construct willingly an essential interpersonal relationship. Sometimes his new role tires him, he doesn't feel comfortable and there seems to be a mismatch between his free ridership and the way in which he now experiences his present order of consciousness. For instance, he says to Alice: 'Because of you I' m running around in circles', and 'Do you think I'm crazy about driving little girls around?' However, these reactions of his emerge among others which reveal his new capacity for empathy and his disposition to construct a relationship with her. A typical example which shows that he experiences both orders at the same time is when Alice asks him to tell her a bed time story. 'I don't know any stories' is his first blunt reaction. When he sees her disappointment, he changes and begins to tell her a story he improvises that moment with increasing feeling to it.

Their relationship however does go through a serious turmoil, when it is proven impossible to find the grandmother and Alice admits she had given him false information. Then Philip decides to hand the girl over to the police and return to his free ridership behavior, showing his retreat to an order of consciousness where he tends to behave on behalf of his own goals.

After that, he returns to his 'roots' – to a rock concert where he seems satisfied. During the concert though it is worth noticing one detail: Next to Philip there is a girl Alice's age, which he looks at with sympathy. It is as Wenders poses the question 'What could he be thinking…'.

Third part. After the concert, Philip returns to the hotel. Alice is waiting for him there, after escaping from the police. Philip welcomes her, almost relieved, and they begin searching again for the grandmother. Gradually, it is more and more obvious that the whole experience he had with Alice has brought him to the edge of moving toward a next order of consciousness. First he moved away from the relationship with her, then looked at it and decided to reframe it in more complex and functional way. He is now able to replace his idealized approach to take care of her with a new conception of love and closeness. He decides self-consciously to maintain bounds to her and he is authentically committed to this relationship. He seems to be regulating his conflicting values and desires between the free ridership and the task to take care of Alice. In Kegan's terms (1994), he makes a generalization across these values and subordinates them under a larger perspective that he creates. He does not simply adjust his thinking regarding his contact with Alice. He goes through a qualitative inner shift so that his relationship with her derives from a deeper, integral set of convictions. Now it seems as if he enjoys her company. He shares his thoughts with her. He carefully pays attention to her needs, he cares if she is tired, if she is hungry, and he responds in a functional way. She in return reciprocates, e.g. 'When do you want me to wake you up?' They find ways to co-exist and have fun: they bathe in the river; they exercise; Philip – who does not give up on some of his habits – has a fleeting love affair with a woman, but that does not disturb his relationship with Alice who sleeps peacefully in the room next door. The degree of closeness increases. Each one brings the other's point of view into the process of constructing his/her point of view. Symbolically, Alice takes his photograph, and when they look at the printed photo together her face reflects on the imprinting of his.

At some point, Alice's mother is found in Munich and Alice prepares to go by train to meet her. Philip says goodbye to Alice at the station and he is sad because he doesn't have money to travel with her. Then Alice gives him a – very precious to her – 100 dollar bill. In the train, during their new journey, she asks him what his future plans were. 'To finish this story' is his open-ended answer. In the last scene, the two of them embrace and look at the landscape from the open window of the train as it runs through the country side. Symbolisms are dominant: The route, unlike the airplane of the first scene, is specific and 'down to earth'. The train runs next to a river, which marks the flow that cannot turn back. Finally, the camera rises and records an increasingly broader view of the world. We see the river unreeling to the end of the horizon and, for the first time, the melody of the original musical pattern is enriched, becomes more integrated and is performed by a variety of musical instruments.

Reflections

Through the exploration of Wenders's film we may revisit Kegan's theory and draw some insights. A first one is that the development of human beings' consciousness seems to be an extremely complex and dialectical process. During each transformational transition, elements of two orders of consciousness may co-exist. Indeed, it is likely that the 'logical-cognitive' domain of a certain order of consciousness co-exists with the 'socio-cognitive' or 'intrapersonal-affective' domain of the next one and vice versa. Furthermore, the developmental process is not linear. It is quite likely for a person who remains for a long period of time in a certain order of consciousness, to regress to the previous order several times, until stabilizing in the first. Another insight is that it seems that within each stage of development the person experiences a large range of dilemmas, challenges, regressions and urges. Hence, following Kegan (2000), it becomes important, from the point of view of adult educators, that we may be extremely attentive regarding where exactly our learners are situated on the 'bridge'; which are their abilities to move on; which texture of challenge and support may we offer them and which the impact of the surrounding environment might be.

However, even though offering a strong understanding of human development, Kegan's approach also has some inherent limitations. The typology of a series of qualitatively identified and recognizable stages of consciousness cannot indisputably match all the particular forms of human situations that may arise in life or in the creative imagination of an artist. This is because, in each occasion, the behavior of each human being is unique and extremely complex and it has obscure dimensions which seem impossible to decrypt completely. Often, human situations do not have the 'pure' form that has been described in theory and cannot be classified into a pre-defined shape. For example, although we can reasonably believe that, in his relationship with Alice, Philip adopts a stance corresponding to the fourth stage of Kegan's model, there are dimensions of his behavior that are controversial and inscrutable: Does he accompany Alice to the train only because he has developed a relationship with her? Is he perhaps willing to flirt with her mother, the photo of whom he admired while wandering around with Alice? Wisely enough, Wenders leaves the issue 'open': Philip's future plans are 'to finish the story'. Further on, will the qualitative characteristics of the way Philip now relates to Alice extend to other relations of his?

Consequently, the aesthetic experience of Wenders' film probably seems to justify the criticism on Kegan's theory and other relevant developmental theories (e.g. by Piaget

and Erikson) as regards the universalist claim in them that the stages they suggest illustrate that 'this is typically how it can be' (Illeris, 2017, p. 146).
In addition, Kegan's approach is subject to the limitations of any theoretical abstractive view. Its generalized nature fails to represent the particular ways in which each person experiences sufferings, ambivalences, immunity, stuckness, agony, anger, passion, empathy, affection, love and, finally, the difficulty or release of transformation. We have seen though how, through the exploration of the film, aesthetic experience may capture the shades of the unique wealth of a human situation and provide us with triggers that deepen and broaden the way we make sense beyond the one-dimensional cognitive approach.

Ultimately, the use of art has the potential to make the understanding of a theoretical view - in this case, Kegan's perspective - more integral.

Within the literature of emancipatory learning, humans often attempt to be conceived through the exploration of authentic life stories. This method has undoubtedly a significant strength, given that it is based on the concrete experience and on the reflection upon it. Nevertheless, the navigation in human narrations that are included in significant works of literature, theatre, poetry or cinema may offer an alternative way of making sense of the processes of whole person's development, as they are expressed within the field of partnering, parenting, intercultural relationships, learning, working life, social life, citizenship and so on. For these reasons, the aesthetic experience, in concert to Kegan's meaningful theoretical framework, may lead to a further understanding of human existence.

References

Adorno, T. (1986). *Aesthetic theory*. New York, N.Y.: Kegan and Paul.

Aristotle. (335 B.C./1999). *Poetics* (Trans. Halliwell, S.) Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard university press.

Berger, J. (2013). *A summary of the constructive – Developmental theory of Robert Kegan*. Retrieved May 18, 2016, from http://wiki.canterbury.ac.nz/download/attachments/6358104/berger+on+kegan+narrative.doc?version=1.

Castoriadis, K. (2008). *Window onto the chaos*. Athens: Ypsilon.

Dewey, J. (1934/1980). *Art as experience*. New York, N.Y.: Milton, Balch & company.

Eisner, E. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven & London: Yale university press.

Gardner, H. (1990). *Art education and human development.* Los Angeles, CA: The getty education institute for arts.

Greene, M. (2000). *Releasing the imagination. essays on education, the arts and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Halliwell, S. (1998). *Aristotle's poetics*. London: Duckworth.

Illeris, K. (2017). *How we learn: learning and non-learning in school and beyond*. New York: Routledge.

Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard university press.

Kegan, R. (1994). *In over our heads*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard university press.

Kegan, R. (2000). What form transforms? In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 35-70). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kokkos, A. (2017). The contribution of aesthetic experience in transformative learning and bildung. In A. Laros, T. Fuhr & E.W. Taylor (Eds.), *Transformative learning meets bildung: An international exchange* (pp. 331-340). Rotterdam, AW: Sense Publishers.

Lahey, L., Souvaine, E., Kegan, R., Goodman, R. & Felix, S. (2011). *A guide to the subject-object interview: Its administration and interpretation*. Cambridge, MA: Minds at work.

Marcuse, H. (1978). *The aesthetic dimension*. Boston, MA: Beacon press.

Mezirow, J. (1981). A critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult education*, *32*(1), 3-27.

Mezirow, J. (1985). A critical theory of self-directed learning. *New directions for continuing education, 25*, 17-30.
Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, MA: Jossey-Bass.
Mezirow, J. (1994). Understanding transformation theory. *Adult education quarterly*, *44*(4), 222-232.
Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, *74*, 5 – 12.
Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-34). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
Nussbaum, M. (1990). *Love's knowledge: Essays on philosophy and literature*. New York: Oxford university press.
Perkins, D. (1994). *The intelligent eye*. Los Angeles, CA: Harvard graduate school of education.
Taylor, K. & Elias, D. (2012). Transformative learning: A developmental perspective. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *The handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 147-161). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol.10, No.2, 2019, pp. 171-184

Making beauty necessary and necessity beautiful

Astrid von Kotze
University of the Western Cape, South Africa (astridvonkotze@gmail.com)

> Find a way to make beauty necessary; find a way to make necessity beautiful. (Anne Michaels, 1997, p. 44)

Abstract

The article shows how unemployed working-class women in South Africa, through collective aesthetic experiences, achieved a sense of catharsis that strengthened the resolve to work towards creating alternatives. The text is based on a series of popular education workshops that were recorded in sound and images, and interviews with individual emerging artists. It draws on theory developed in practice by workers in the nineteen-eighties when they asserted their dignity and humanity as creative subjects and demonstrates how the women, some twenty-five years later, articulate a similar defiance. The article suggests that certain preconditions must be met before the process of conscientisation through creative work can achieve its objective of preparing participants for action: repoliticise art and education by building radically horizontal relationships; create a playful third space for experimentation and generating knowledge, and encourage improvisations that allow contradictions to emerge and be examined critically.

Keywords: aesthetics; conscientisation; popular education; workshop theatre

Living precariously

Imagine the following picture: the bottom quarter of the page is dominated by a police station with a long line of stick figures next to the entrance. The building is constructed of corrugated paper and painted a dirty greenish colour. Above this is a row of houses painted pink and green into which the artist has mixed some black to make it look dirty and shabby, and above that is a large cordoned off square marked with a cross (X) and labelled 'crime scene'. Even more stick figures are assembled around this square, and as the artist explained in the presentation of her picture, 'This is a crime scene and all this

ISSN 2000-7426

DOI 10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9143
www.rela.ep.liu.se

are the busy bees –cause if there's somebody dying there is always people standing around….'.

It is a picture of Delft, entitled "Where I come from", painted by a woman who participated in a "Women's Health" course. Delft is one of South Africa's first mixed race townships, established in 1989 as 'an integrated service land project' for "coloured" and "black" people. It is notorious for its high crime rate, substandard schools, lack of jobs, and numerous government-built housing projects. Life in Delft is characterised by violence of any kind, high rates of TB infection (exacerbated by the cramped unhealthy living conditions) depression, gang warfare and drugs peddled increasingly by young boys in exchange for gifts and money. Some 150000 people live here – some in tin-shacks, in Blikkiesdorp, under threat of being moved again to make way for airport runway extensions.

The picture resembles the other 25 women's paintings with their focus on basic housing units, red zones of gangsterism and drug dealings, of 'gunshots banging' – described in previous poems constructed by the women in the room as 'very bad places' where 'people must be aware of a lot of danger: be careful!' But they are also described as places of 'nostalgia and hardship' – and in the small areas of blue or green amongst the grey, the women have depicted the 'goodness, possibilities'. These are their homes and communities and much of their daily lives is invested into changing the places into more peaceful, harmonious, beautiful neighbourhoods deserving of their love and identity. The spots of light colour indicate how they wish the world to change, believing that another world is possible.

Any discussion of aesthetics and education must be prefaced by a brief explanation of the context. For the majority population, life in South Africa has become ever more precarious as day-to-day living is characterised by inadequate nutritional intake, insufficient access to decent health care, a lack of real choices as short-term coping strategies take priority over longer-term planning and as further crises and emergencies are the only predictable future. The subjects of this text belong to what Standing (2015) has called the precariat: people who do mainly unremunerated work, who network with people who may hear of casual paid jobs and wait and hope for those jobs to come along. Carpenter and Mojab (2017, p. 131) differentiate between three different groups of citizens and the women populating this text belong to the first group: 'the everywoman or everyman, the poor, oppressed and marginalized' who are the 'catalysts of history and progress'. Most of them belong to a woman's organisation, formed some 10 years ago. They meet on a weekly basis, for a variety of community projects. They are community mobilisers, and apart from the shared belief in a better life and often a strong faith, sociality, mutual support and learning are the important glue that holds them together and allows them to take action for change.

Regular sessions run by the Popular Education Programme Education are part of all their projects, and many of the women express how their weekly learning sessions are welcome interruptions in what is otherwise a fairly drab stressful existence, and how much they have grown in insights and confidence useful and necessary for their emergent local leadership roles. I have been a full-time activist with the Popular Education Programme since its inception, with a background of experimental theatre, extensive cultural work in labour unions, and academia. I have worked with most of the women since 2011, co-constructing curricula, sharing stories and laughing together.

The painting session was the culmination of a 10-week intergenerational popular education course on Women's Health, attended by up to 40 women. Environmental health, or the lack of it, framed the course and kept the focus on collective, community health as the precondition for individual wellbeing. It was a residential weekend filled

with a morning of art-making, followed by lots of theatre exercises towards the making of short plays to be performed at the annual sponsored "16 days of activism" (against violence on women). Previously, as part of the focus on community health, the participants had written two poems: one focused on their place of residence, and the other on an imaginary place they would like to go to or create. Two years before, some of the women had workshopped, rehearsed and performed a play on domestic violence. Both the art session and the theatre work form the aesthetic experience-base of this text, and I will draw on them extensively to show how dialogical education and aesthetics can contribute towards making life more beautiful, and how they fuel the hope necessary for action for change.

In the following, I begin with a brief reference to the aesthetic praxis of theatre and cultural work in South Africa. I then describe the potentially cathartic value of the aesthetic, particularly with regards to managing trauma. A thick description of the workshop play entitled "Maria and Marius" serves as an illustration of the intersection between epistemological and ontological experience. I probe the relation between material social-economic phenomena and the women's experience of oppression and violence and how this produces a deeper consciousness of the relation between knowing and being. A brief differentiation between "transformative learning" and "conscientisation" leads to the suggestion that only conscientisation is clearly linked to action. I conclude by postulating some "conditions" that must be met before the action component of praxis can be realised.

Aesthetic praxis of popular education, here, now

Pondering the aesthetic praxis of theatre as intervention, participation or simply aesthetic experience, Sting (2017) cites a South African colleague who had objected to the Eurocentric perspective that is quick to think in binaries, such as aesthetics vs politics, pedagogy vs art: 'I hate your Western binary views', s/he had said. Rather, s/he suggested, 'questions of power should be foregrounded as these determine how hierarchies of value are established and maintained'. Sting refers to Rancière's (2008) critique of contemporary art for reproducing top-down power relations of production, and proposing that the audience should be freed from their passive stance. I would argue that the top-down approach has been much challenged by practices in the South where bottom-up participatory processes of creation and artistic production constitute a well rooted praxis. Rancière's forest of things and signs as the space for exploring and creating has been part of the counter-narrative in radical education practices since the anti-apartheid days. Collective workshop productions in which all participants are co- producers have a long tradition and Augusto Boal's forum theatre (1995) that invites audiences to re-work a script and performance, is experiencing a big revival. In South Africa, theatre has been a social art both in the aesthetic production process rooted in socio-political experience and engagement, and in the pedagogic / activist intention and context of performance. (von Kotze, 1988; 2017) The social and the aesthetic cannot be separated as the one constitutes and reflects the other.

Theorizing culture in South Africa is no easy task – 'aesthetic theorists, trained (only) in European theory have created false impressions', as Sitas (2016, p.156) laments. He takes issue with writers whose understanding of ordinary peoples' 'active cultural formations as imposed culture, ignores grassroots creativity and self-determination of people and workers in defending their dignity and controlling their conditions of life'. Manji (2018, p. 3), reflecting on culture, power and resistance in Africa, reminds us how

> the process of dehumanization required a systematic and institutionalized attempt to destroy existing cultures, languages, histories and capacities to produce, organize, tell stories, invent, love, make music, sing songs, make poetry, create art – all things that make a people human. This was carried out by local and European enslavers and slave owners and all those who profited from the trade in humans, not least the emerging European capitalist class.

Grassroots creativity and self-determination of people defending their dignity and taking control of their lives showed clearly that

> culture is not a mere artefact or expression of aesthetics, custom or tradition. It is a means by which people assert their opposition to domination, a means to proclaim and invent their humanity, a means to assert agency and the capacity to make history. (ibid., p.5)

Performances have always had social purpose - so much so that Achebe is reported to have called art for art's sake just another 'piece of deodorized dog shit' (Achebe, 1975, p. 19). There is a deep understanding of how colonialism established and reproduced its power through attempts to eradicate, undermine, denigrate local cultures, and while much state- sponsored arts and culture reproduced imported plays, novels and aesthetic criteria, working class and Black artists, poets and performers have used cultural expressions as a way to reassert their humanity.

In recent history, culture had a clear resistance and liberation function, a means by which people asserted agency and claimed their opposition to domination. In the eighties, workers responded to the conditions of oppression (both cultural and socio-political) with what Sitas called 'defensive combinations' (Sitas, 2016, p. 81). He has pointed to the tension in the early worker plays where the expression of khala (crying) was both pain, lament, and grievance, complaint; both redemption and resistance. In 1986, workers preparing a talk for the trade union federations education congress (Qabula, A., Hltashwayo, M., & Malange, N.,1986, p. 59) articulated their theoretical stand clearly. Their practical, creative work had already been testimony to and illustration of this theory, making this true praxis, in the Freirean (2005) sense. They referred to an Angolan poet who described the misery of exploitation and poverty but concluded 'and yet…. they sing!' and then announced their intention, despite the difficulties, 'to control for the first time our productive and creative power'. The reason?

> Because, even if we are culturally deprived as workers, we demand of ourselves the commitment to build a better world, and because we cannot abdicate, hand over the responsibility of this world to others. There are too many intellectuals, teachers, politicians and bosses ever ready to civilize us and reap all the harvest for themselves.

Since then, the workers cultural movement in South Africa took a nose dive – but there are recently attempts to revive the cultural struggle on many fronts. For the last four years, I have been making plays with unemployed workers, performing in streets, homes, community halls and churches. While all the plays have clear pedagogical and political purpose, they are also expressions of the makers' desire to be heard / seen as creative beings, expressions of the 'despite' or 'and yet' uttered in response to ongoing exploitation and oppression. Rich (2006) has defined the aesthetic 'not as a privileged and sequestered rendering of human suffering, but as news of an awareness, a resistance, which totalising systems want to quell: art reaching into us for what's still passionate, still unintimidated, still unquenched.'

In the workshops that form the basis of this text, there were examples of such defensive combinations: the attempts to portray living conditions accurately as the living hell they are, in tension with highlighting the positive aspects of communities, and thus

reclaiming decent peoples' dignity, the hope in and opportunities for a better future this will allow. When the women chose to present their artwork, one by one, they regained some of the dignity that is so undermined by their socio-economic environments and oppressive relations. They reasserted their humanity despite inhumane conditions and asserted their capacity to imagine alternatives.

The aesthetic as trauma management

Art has the capacity to remind us of something that is often kept hidden, almost invisible (that spot of blue in the pictures the women painted). It can pose alternatives to the common-sense depiction of the everyday. Asked what it had been like to make art the women said 'I felt I was back at school in the art classes having fun!', 'I was in a happy space', or 'It was good because you are letting yourself loose and enjoying everything'. Engaging with the aesthetic: making marks, expressing emotions through creativity was recognized by the women as a kind of trauma management. They felt release: 'Art is good because it makes a change inside you, not to dwell in the negative.' They articulated the sense of freedom that came with escaping the everyday, they spoke about getting lost in the moment: 'The crisis of everyday life went away because I used my hands, I painted with my fingers. I rubbed the blue onto the page!' They appreciated the opportunity to escape into another, happier reality: 'I used my hands to put the greenery onto the page because that is where I want to be.' One acknowledged how the aesthetic offers another language for communicating and reaching out: 'You do it from your inside. Emotions are important. You learn to speak them through art.' Another commented that some women who never speak had expressed themselves: 'they speak through their art.' Art was experienced as something you do to make you happy and any initial hesitations about not being able to do it gave way to the joy of doing it, of 'making a mess and feeling happy'.

One woman explained that her picture made her feel 'captured in a way that made me think', another outlined how in the act of art-making 'the three times came together: there was a transformation from the past, predicting the future. I felt I was evolving into the future.' Rich (2006) has described this as the forgotten future:

> A still uncreated site whose moral architecture is funded not on ownership and dispossession, the subjection of women, outcast and tribe, but on the continuous redefining of freedom – that word now held under house arrest by the rhetoric of the 'free' market. This on-going future, written-off over and over, is still within view. All over the world its paths are being rediscovered and reinvented.

When the women presented their pictures (and previously their poems) to each other they enabled a getting-in-touch-with forgotten or lost landscapes but with a focus on the bit of colour in between the bleak; they evoked the colours and scents, the movements and sounds of lost pasts – richly sensory experiences. There was a lot of spontaneous story-telling and thick descriptions of past experiences in response to pictures of Bokmakieriestraat or the crime scene in Delft. The often cautious distrustful hesitation with each other arising from self-blame or deep feelings of deficits, made way to identifying ugliness as existential contextual commonalities.

Greene (2005, p. 79) has outlined the process of art-making as creating impulses that point to alternatives. This, she suggested, was the importance of the imagination: to reach beyond what is, towards the not-yet:

> When it comes to decisions of what we ought to do, there is always a space between the 'is' and the 'should.' It is the space of hesitancy, perhaps, of imagining what might follow after, a space of reflection, of consideration. If we ponder in the light of 'I' and 'Thou', there is bound to be a kind of breathlessness, a straining to reach across a space in order to transcend. And if we try, above all, to move ourselves and those we teach towards a dialogue that may lead to understanding and perhaps to resolution, we may have to break through spaces of silence in order to communicate, to come authentically 'face to face.'

The story-telling lead to imagining other futures: women expressed how they wanted for their grandchildren what they had had as children. The pictures awoke the longing and also triggered imagining the possibility of that other reality, one in which relationships were close and kind. It seemed a moment of healing, of catharsis, had been reached when suddenly one woman began to hum, then sing, and one by one they picked up the tune and burst into singing and harmonising. They were songs of believing in miracles, songs of free spirits rising, songs of beauty and freedom. There was laughter, a lightness of being and being together that we had not experienced before. The songs gathered the past in the present, towards the future, and the individual into the collective. The magic of creating art had momentarily transformed their reality. As hands crafted images they became aware of their ability to make something colourful and beautiful, and when heart and head, emotions and thinking helped to articulate the process there was a sense of wholeness.

The potentially cathartic value of the aesthetic has a long history particularly associated with African music. Strong rhythms, drums, singing, dance are part of any collective rituals as much as healing ceremonies performed by traditional healers (sangomas) and they offer cathartic as much as aesthetic experiences. Having made their mark on a page as a way of asserting their presence and agency, the women depicted their everyday living conditions and then literally breathed a sigh of relief, and, in a moment of restauration, cleansing, found their voices.

But radical feminist popular education wants to pay attention to the material relations in which we live, in tension with the ruling ideas that continue to maintain domination. What about the importance of participants relating their daily experiences to the history of the country, to global capitalism, to the way the world is organised so that their class, race and gender relations keep them "down"? Carpenter and Mojab (2017, p. 30) have explained that understanding dialectically means to see something 'through the lens of its historical emergence, to see the way in which it appears in daily life, and to seek out an explanation of why it appears the way it does in order to understand the essence of the contradictions that form social phenomena.' Beyond setting up creative aesthetic processes, I also saw my role as educator to support critical questioning so that participants would see how everyone and everything is connected. Herein would lie the possibility of action for social change.

Aesthetic experiences and (critical) education

Clover and Sanford (2013, p. 7) have written that contributors to a book on lifelong learning, the arts and community engagement all believe

> in the potential of aesthetic and creative practices and methodologies to advance the common good, promote human and cultural development and change, reinvigorate research and society and provide a space and opportunity for adult learners, students or community members to creatively and critically engage with and reimagine the world as a better, fairer and more healthy and sustainable place.

Similarly, Irani (2018) writing about grassroots leadership development in Afghanistan suggests that

> (T)theatre as a method of engagement and leadership development allows analytical and aesthetic faculties to work together so that individuals can rehearse and remember the complex weave needed to make a new social order — not simply one group being allowed to dominate the other. In such a space, artists and culture workers can offer hope, build agency, and create a space where dialogue can occur, new possibilities are imagined, and actions are initiated toward change.

One illustration of this belief, hope-building and agency is the play "Maria and Marius", workshopped and performed collectively with women from Delft, in 2016. The story-line emerged through personal narratives and improvisations over 4 months; it was turned into a basic script which formed the guideline for performances, but much of it remained improvised in response to specific audiences or fluctuating performers. The process involved weekly meetings attended by anything of up to 30 women (and sometimes a man). We established a pattern: beginning with checking in and catching up chats in small groups, we did a series of physical exercises followed by the introduction of a theme for the day which generally arose from the check-ins: tales of violence, concerns about drug and gang-related action, worries about children became the starting point for often silent enactments. Improvisations were unpacked and the dialogue turned into a critical investigation of the visible and invisible forces behind conflicts, teasing out hidden interests, but also collusion and culpability. For example, 3 women improvised a scene in which a drug-deal is negotiated outside a home, while 2 women observe through the window (an empty picture frame). The drug-deal goes wrong, one man is shot, the others run. The injured drags himself to the door of the house and asks for help – yet the women will not open the door. Questions arose: Is this a common occurrence? What happens when people deny their humanity by not helping others? We ask questions about relationships and power between inside and outside a home, amongst women and between women and men, young and old etc.

Most of the women in the room had personally experienced situations of violence frequently, but remained silent about them. There was acknowledgement of others' traumas as familiar and the women supported one another with a hug, a squeeze of the others hand etc, but rather than recycling the hurt through endless sharing of familiar stories, participants made the connection between their individual, personal stories and the broader socio-economic, political conditions which are considered normal for Delft. They shifted from asking 'what happened?' to 'why does it happen?' They confronted difficult claims that they themselves were to blame for violent incidents, and questions about their own collusion by not speaking out.

We often worked in silence exploring the language of bodies, and experimented with whispering, soft murmuring etc.. We analysed how silence might be both the refusal to speak, or a fearful response to threats. We explored new normalities and forms of interaction – and this new tension-of-silence, and the menacing effect it can have, later formed the basis of a scene in the play that portrayed the threatening and brutal behaviour of husbands towards wives while claiming they act out of love.

Creating a body sculpture is a way of externalizing a feeling, a relationship, a value. A body sculpture becomes a visual representation of what is generally invisible or unnoticed. This makes it available to investigation, analysis – it becomes a code (in the Freirean, 2005, sense) for creating meaning, together. When the body sculpture comes to life and begins to speak as performer-participants relate to each other, power dynamics are enacted that explain why and how domination is exercised. For example, the

individual man comes to be understood not so much as a singular being but a representative of men – a symbol of the power bestowed on men through patriarchy. Confronting domination therefore, requires more than simply altering the relations between a man and a woman – change needs to go further in a society that is deeply hierarchical and patriarchal. The women reached this conclusion through experimentation, searching, questioning, proposing.

The spectator-participants in the group or in a performance can become creators of altered images and relations: they can transform the sculpture into one that has a totally different message. This process of creating a new expression of an attitude, a relationship, engages spectators as agents (what Boal called spec-actors) as they produce meaning and then transform meaning through physically manipulating the "clay" bodies into a different arrangement. The emerging subject is created in and through the process of shaping, it does not pre-exist the procedure. All participants are active co-producers releasing their own creativity and imagination. The educator / facilitator in this process guides and directs by making suggestions – or simply observes and gives feed-back, at the end. In an action-learning-cycle there comes a point when new information must be found to deepen the exploration, when it can re-kindle the thinking and analysis. The educator/facilitator functions as a resource person, asking questions, drawing attention to aspects of the image or sequence, offering new perspectives from the position of oversight due to the greater distance to the process. There may be the temptation to intervene, to direct, but vanguardism is not welcome in a group that works collectively, self-directing and dialoguing.

Workshops were illustrations of how 'Race, gender, income, sexuality, physical ability, immigration status, language - intersect and overlap within an individual's life experience, and also within structures of power'. (Klein, 2017, p. 99-100) They were also examples of conscientisation: the process through which participants developed a critical understanding of their being-in-the-world and in relation to each other and others. In dialogue the women articulated how the material conditions in Delft and beyond have to change alongside the interpersonal relations in the home. However, feeling powerless to address the material, social, economic shifts and transformations needed they focused on what they *could* change: relations of caretaking and reciprocity in the home and amongst friends and family, recognising the interdependence and potential joy that comes from mutual respect. These changes were shown in the play; interestingly, these changes also took place within the participants' own lives. Now, two years after the fictional reality and the everyday came together, the new power dynamics and relations first rehearsed in workshops, are still in place.

Transformative learning or conscientisation?

Crowther and Lucio-Villegas (2012, p. 66) remind us that at community level the ability of adult education to transform global capitalism is doubtful. However, it can

> begin to turn people into critical and active agents who are less easily managed or manipulated and it provides an opportunity to make visible alternative values and visions which animate people. It also develops networks and relationships based on shared interests rather than commodified relations.

Clover (2012, p. 65) shows how creativity and imagination in quilt-making have turned artworks into permanent visual stories and counter-narratives of struggle and despair, power and hope. The women who co-created and performed Maria and Marius and drew

pictures that speak about their lives, drawing attention to the socio-economic pressures that produce violence and abuse, refused to accept the conditions that reduce them to objects, in many different ways. By collectively producing knowledge that contradicts lived experience, by telling other stories than those that have become normalised, familiar, they protested and refused. All of these processes are clearly educational and O'Sullivan, Morrell and O'Connor (2012, p. 164) would define this process 'transformative learning':

> Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

The Delft theatre workshops as much as the art session went through a process of transformative learning as the women examined the assumptions on which they had previously based their interpretations of negative experiences. As they discovered contradictions and tensions between the sense they had made of experiences of abuse and violence, and the commonality of their experiences, they shifted from blaming themselves for failed relationships towards naming domestic violence and abuse as symptomatic of the larger systems of oppression. In other words, recognising their assumptions as false they corrected their view of abuse as a social ill. They began to point fingers at the structural forces they identified as to blame – or in Newmans terms: they defined the enemy. (Newman, 1994) They tested their theory by exploring how men, too, suffer under the system of patriarchy, and analysed the relations between patriarchy, capitalism, poverty and social disintegration. This, I would contend, signalled a process of critical consciousness: in the play they exposed social and political contradictions, and then set out to suggest alternative ways of relating that might prefigure a shift in larger social structures.

It seems to me that while the theory of transformative learning speaks primarily about the self and explores personal consciousness that may lead to altered individual action as a result of visions of alternative approaches to living, it rarely addresses systemic change: altering the material base that is held in place by particular relations of power and interest. Radical education and conscientisation aim to go further.

Newman (2014) has usefully differentiated between conscientisation (à la Freire, 2005) and transformative learning. He suggested that conscientisation has affinities with transformative learning, and that it is aimed at the poor and the dispossessed. In other words, transformative learning is part of popular education. However, he is critical of transformative learning because transformative learning, as it is described in the literature, has a confessional element that is absent from conscientisation. The learner is encouraged to go in search of her or his false assumptions. S/he may emerge with new insights on the basis of which s/he corrects those assumptions and emerges with a new worldview, which, in turn, may lead to changing her/his behaviour. However, Newman (2014, p. 5) asserts, 'conscientisation is about mobilising learners to struggle against oppressive forces, and it encourages them to examine the ways those forces have worked upon them. The learners are not to blame. The oppressors are'. This clearly echoes Freire (2005): he called conscientisation the ability to intervene in reality in order to change it. Similarly, Boal (1995, p. 245) demanded that the Theatre of the Oppressed should be the

initiator of changes the culmination of which is not the aesthetic phenomenon but real life.

From conscientisation to action

For education that creates the conditions for aesthetic experiences to be truly radical, then, it must go beyond individual transformation and include action that does not target individual oppressors but rather the structures and relations of power and systems that keep oppressions in place. You cannot change relations by simply telling stories about them and making people aware of them. It requires larger, collective action. Dismantling old and building new structures is either attempted through revolutions, or a painstaking, slow process that requires revolutionary patience – the ability to struggle on.

Theatre – like art – can be an effective means for educating for change. However, for this to happen, certain preconditions that prefigure the desired reality must be met. For a start, we need to consciously re-politicise art and education, foreground power and relations.

A first essential step is to create and enact horizontal rather than vertical relationships. Facilitator/educators are co- participants in subject to subject relations that counter the competitive individualist hierarchical structure of most education. Resisting 'the dominant ethos of separation and acting on the basis of radical interdependence instead' (Escobar, 2018), creative theatre or art-based workshops are structured along radically democratic lines, where each participant has an equal voice in decision-making while being called to account, and is responsible for the whole while making way for others. The collective process must attempt to express the will of the group – rather than the voice of one. Throughout the Delft project, participants controlled the content and the form of the production, determined the representation of themselves and their stories. This is consistent with the principles of both popular education and theatre, which demands a democratic process that models respect, equality, and inclusion and implements good listening, conflict resolution, and consensual decision making. It is also the basis for what Freire (2005) called dialogue. When the process of experiencing and then practicing radical direct democracy is then taken into everyday life, workshops have functioned as a rehearsal for the every-day.

Secondly, particularly in the context of violent disruptions, the process of workshops necessitates the creation of a playful space. Butterwick and Selman (2003, p. 20) have outlined how in effective popular theatre processes, a space is created where groups and individuals can afford to work on dangerous issues. They suggest this space is similar to what Bhabha called a third space – a space of possibilities, of playful reality, of imagination, analysis, creation and enactment that allows new stories, characters to emerge. Boal (1995, p. 20) called this an aesthetic space, claiming it possesses gnoseological (i.e. Knowledge-enhancing) properties, that is, properties which stimulate knowledge and discovery, cognition and recognition. In the ninety-sixties and seventies in South Africa, Fugard and his players, Workshop 71, and Junction Ave Theatre Company all experimented with learning from and with each other in the processes of collective workshops of play-making.

Third, both play-making and picture-painting can initiate unexpected moments of making tensions and contradictions visible and showing up connections. Improvisations invite participants to try out new perspectives and angles and new vistas and unforeseen interpretations emerge. The process is dynamic as the messages evolve rather than being transmitted, declared. Often, participants express surprise at the associations they are

beginning to see: links between their personal troubles and those of others within particular dynamics of context; connections between the power and interest of those in positions of leadership and authority, and their own. Further, ordering scenes or marks on a page can be empowering in the sense that the collective creates a coherent narrative that makes some sense of what is otherwise messy and conflictual. Participants are the agents of sense-making and change-producing as they dissect bits into cognate sequences, images into larger pictures that tell a story. What was too large, too confusing, too overwhelming before is becoming ordered – people can observe themselves creating new orders, new connections, new sense through their actions.

Fourth, collective efforts and journeys happen in social movements. They emerge from the labour of rigorous mobilising and organising. Beyond critical analytical consciousness, collective action requires organisational skills. We must remember to nourish our collective processes, even as we fight to address our own personal needs and the pains of our loved ones. (Sangtin, Kisan, Mazdoor & Sangathan 2018, p. 9). Social movements build relations of solidarity knowing that

> it is only through these thick collective efforts and journeys that we can find the insights and courage to identify the next turns and halts in our ever-unfolding journey. It is only these collective energies that can give us the strength to fulfil the responsibility of turning our desire for justice into a hunger for justice. (Sangtin Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan 2018, cited in Nagar, 2018, p 17-18)

Aesthetic processes working on various levels of consciousness beyond the rational are a powerful way of organising and mobilising collective struggles. As the Romero Theatre Troupe (Walsh, 2016, p. 128) experienced:

> Through the art of storytelling and theatre, we have discovered solidarity. This kind of relationship with the audience represents the power of organic theatre and its potential as a tool for a revitalized labour movement for economic justice. Inspiring people to become involved in the labour movement today involves at some point making them feel as if they are part of a larger story. Theatre accomplishes this in a profound way.

In this process, popular education can play an important role as experiences in the eighties have shown us. When the worker cultural movement in Natal committed to making and performing plays, poetry, art, music they did so in order to strengthen the resistance movement. The Dunlop play, the Sarmcol Play were stories of strikes created to draw attention to the workers struggles, and mobilise support for their campaigns. Other plays, like Security, Mr Ishariot Mpimpi (von Kotze, 1988) educated about the need for working class solidarity both in the struggle of workers, and in the larger anti-apartheid struggle. All these plays emerged from strong trade unions, that is, organisations – and they were accountable to the membership of those movements / organisations, because the creative work was seen to be part of the struggle. Their aim was to draw attention to injustices and exploitation as conditions of working-class life.

Plays produced recently within social movement groupings and performed on picket lines or as part of protest actions described, analysed, drew attention to some detail of a campaign and struggle, similar to stories of strikes performed by workers in the eighties. Plays can ignite, they can light fires and illicit strong affective responses both in the makers/ performers and in the audience because the process appeals to the senses and emotions. Participants of a performance event engage with hands heart and head all at the same time: they act, they feel and they reason. For example, a recent play that informs about the ongoing history of struggles against evictions and so-called development and provides crucial data on the laws that protect people, is one strategy in the long struggle

for more systemic change. Like others this play had specific (educational) goals and targets particular issues; it arises out of strong organisation and is just one tool in the ongoing challenge to the status-quo. A play like this may live on because it becomes part of the history and lore of the housing struggle – and maybe it will also live on because of its creative aesthetic appeal that makes it memorable.

Conclusion

In 1969, writing about *Art and Revolution* John Berger (1969, p. 154) warned: 'If we now chose to live in the world *as it is*, we must deny every purpose and every value which, as social beings, we have inherited.' Importantly, he reminds us how our imagination, our hopes and beliefs in an alternative future, our visions have to be grounded in clear values. Working beyond words, artistic processes can generate images, sounds, feelings that express and clarify those values. But sometimes, the imagination needs to be fertilized (von Kotze, 2012, p.111), enriched with ideas and words, images and values that are allowed to break down slowly and mix into one, until they become the compost that feeds the imagination. This process is similar to the one of building solidarity: a slow, careful letting-go while listening mutually and forging-a-new collective vision. One more role for educators / facilitators is this, then: initiating improvisations, drawing questions from stories told, requesting images and illustrations of problematic issues, introducing objects, symbols as the starting point for experimentation – and feeding in examples of how others have worked around such problems, how others have generated ideas, towards making a mutually satisfying collectively owned vision.

If we wish to build that other future not simply as a denial or reversal of what *is* but embracing the interests of all people and the planet, we need to draw inspiration from various sources. Grassroots environmental activists and women who act wisely when taking care of the new generation by instilling respect and the insight that we need to complement each other, build solidarity, live in harmony with nature, are such sources, as are writers, artists, musicians who have the ability to transcend the mundane, explain and lay bare connections, or transport us into visionary dreaming. This process requires sustained energy and time fuelled by continuous critical dialogue, analysis and questioning. It cannot be a solitary process but it happens when people work together, in solidarity. Solidarity is a process requiring give-and-take in an ongoing negotiation of defining and nurturing common purpose. Popular education, inspired by art and theatre, writing and music so that critical analysis is forged with flights of the imagination can produce moments of openings when alternatives appear as real possibilities, and hope sustains the struggle.

Binaries of 'either … or' are not helpful. In isiZulu the word for culture and cultivating is the same: ukulima: growing, nurturing something. Refusing to separate art from life, Brecht (1976, p. 309) suggested in a poem: Canalising a river / Grafting a fruit tree / Educating a person / Transforming a state / These are instances of fruitful criticism/ And at the same time instances of art.' The educational component inherent in making and appreciating art is part of its value, part of making necessity beautiful especially when it appears a burden that drags people down. Athos in Michaels (1997) novel collected plants and made precise renderings of them with watercolours, before separating out the edible ones they used for supper. The important lesson was: look carefully; record what you see. Find a way to make beauty necessary.

Acknowledgment

The support of the NIHSS (National Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, South Africa) during the research and work towards this paper is gratefully acknowledged.

References

Achebe, C. (1975). *Morning yet on creation day*. Michigan: Heinemann Educational.

Berger, J. (1969). *Art and revolution. Ernst Neizvestny and the role of the artist in the USSR*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Boal, A. (1995). *The rainbow of desire*. New York: Routledge.

Brecht, B. (1976). On the critical attitude. In J. Willet, & R. Manheim (Eds.), *Plays, poetry and prose 1913-1956* (pp. 309). London: Eyre Methuen Ltd.

Butterwick, S., & Selman, J. (2003). Deep listening in a feminist popular theatre project: Upsetting the position of audience in participatory education. *Adult Education Quarterly, 54*(1), 7-22.

Carpenter, S., & Mojab, S. (2017). *Revolutionary learning. Marxism, feminism and knowledge.* London: Pluto Press.

Clover, D. (2012). Aesthetics, society and social movement learning. In B.L. Hall, D. Clover, J. Crowther, & E. Scandrett (Eds.), *Learning and Education for a better world: The role of social movements* (pp. 87-100). Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers.

Clover, D., & Sanford, K. (2013). Introduction. In D. Clover, & K. Sanford (Eds.), *Lifelong learning, the arts and community cultural engagement in the contemporary university. International perspectives* (pp. 1-14). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Crowther, J., & Lucio-Villegas, L. (2012). Reconnecting intellect and feeling: Marx, Gramsci, Williams and the Educators role. In B.L. Hall, D. Clover, J. Crowther, & E. Scandrett (Eds.), *Learning and Education for a better world: The role of social movements* (pp. 57-69). Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers.

Escobar, A. (2018). 'Farewell to development,' interview by Allen White. *Great transition initiative.* Retrieved February 10, 2018, from http://greattransition.org/publication/farewell-to-development

Freire, P. (2005). *Education for critical consciousness.* New York: Continuum international publishing group.

Greene, M. (2005). Teaching in a moment of crisis: The spaces of imagination. *The new educator, 1*(2), 77-80.

Irani, K. (2018). *Unafraid of uncertainty: Developing grassroots leaders using theatre in Afghanistan.* Retrieved August 21, 2018, from https://intersections.ilamembers.org/member-benefit-access/interface/grassroots-leadership/interface-grassroots-leadership-kayhan-irani

Klein, N. (2017). *No is not enough: Resisting Trumps shock politics and winning the world we need.* Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Manji, F. (2018). *Culture, power and resistance. Reflections on the ideas of Amilcar Cabral. The guardian.* Retrieved August 15, 2018, from https://www.tni.org/stateofpower2017

Michaels, A. (1997). *Fugitive pieces.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Nagar, R. (2018). *Hungry translations: The world through radical vulnerability. The 2017 Antipode RGS-IBG Lecture.* Retrieved June 5, 2018, from https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12399

Newman, M. (1994). *Defining the enemy: Adult education in social action*. Paddington: Stewart Victor publishing.

Newman, M. (2014). Transformative learning: Mutinous thoughts revisited. *Adult education quarterly, 64*(4), 345-355.

O'Sullivan, E., Morrell, A., & O'Connor, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Expanding the boundaries of transformative learning. Essays on theory and praxis.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.

Rancière, J. (2008). Aesthetic separation, aesthetic community: Scenes from the aesthetic regime of art. *Art and research. A journal of ides, context and methods, 2*(1). Retrieved September 27, 2018, from http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/ranciere.html

Qabula, A., Hltashwayo, M., & Malange, N. (1986). *Black Mamba rising. South African worker poets in struggle.* Durban: Culture and working life publications.

Rich, A. (2006, November 18). Legislators of the world. *The guardian*. Retrieved October 10, 2018, from https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/nov/18/featuresreviews.guardianreview15

Sitas, A. (2016). *The flight of the Gwala-Gwala bird*. Cape Town: SAHO.
Standing, G. (2015, November 27). A revolt is coming for cloud labor. *Huffpost*. Retrieved February 12, 2017, from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/cloud-labor-revolt_b_8392452.html
Sting,W. (2017). *Aesthetische Praxis des Theaters als Invention, participation oder einfach nur aesthetische Erfahrung? Kulturelle Bildung Online*. Retrieved August 12, 2018, https://www.kubi-online.de/artikel/aestethetische-praxis-des-theaters-intervention-partizipation-oder-einfach-nur-aesthetische
Von Kotze, A. (1988). *Organise and act. The natal workers theatre movement 1983-87.* Durban: Culture and working life publications.
Von Kotze, A. (2012). Composting the imagination in popular education. In B.L. Hall, D. Clover, J. Crowther, & E. Scandrett (Eds.), *Learning and Education for a better world: The role of social movements* (pp. 101-113). Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense publishers.
Von Kotze, A. (2017). Street theatre for solidarity: possibilities and limitations. In A. von Kotze & S. Walters (Eds.), *Forging solidarity. Popular education at work* (pp. 127-139). Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers.
Walsh, J. (2016). Denvers Romero theater troupe: Welcoming working-class voices in higher education and revitalizing class-based activism through organic theater. *Labor studies journal, 41*(1), 114–134.

European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol.10, No.2, 2019, pp. 185-199

Struggling with the reccuring reduction of being to knowing: placing thin hope in aesthetic interventions

Rene Susa
University of British Columbia, Canada (rene.susa@ubc.ca)

Abstract

This article explores how aesthetic gestures, experiences, interventions might help us make visible certain problematic, enduring, and historically contingent aspects of the troubling ways of being in which we, modern/Cartesian subjects exist in the world. The article does not seek to ultimately suggest some pedagogical strategies or approaches that will help us deconstruct/dismantle these problematic aspects. Instead, it proposes that the common way in which we imagine solutions to our problems, is the very way, through which these problems are being created in the first place. The text pays particular attention to two problematic constitutive characteristics of the modern/Cartesian subject. First is the reductivist insistence on having our being reduced to knowing (Andreotti, 2016) that results in having our relationship to the world mediated (exclusively) through knowledge. Second is our insistence on being able to see/sense/experience ourselves only as separate, presumably autonomous, individuals that ultimately ends up producing us as such..

Keywords: aesthetic; being; knowing; modern subject; separability

Introduction

In order to make the arguments, presented in this article, somewhat easier to digest – though their taste might still remain bitter, I wish to begin by laying bare some of the basic assumptions that guide my work. I hope that in doing so, I can make explicit why I do not believe that the kinds of (institutionalized) education/schooling and educational research that dominate the field today can help us engage in particularly meaningful/sensible/useful ways with the challenges of multifaceted forms of systemic, historically inherited violences and injustices that we incur not just on each other, but also

ISSN 2000-7426

DOI 10.3384/rela.2000-7426.rela9141
www.rela.ep.liu.se

at the world at large. That we are pedagogically and existentially seriously ill-equipped to deal with our own (collective) shadow may be considered my first assumption.

Such disparate indicators as climate change denial (Norgaard, 2011), continuous over-depletion of natural resources (Meadows & Randers, 2012), accelerated human-induced extinction of species (Dirzo, Young, Galetti, Ceballos, Isaac & Collen, 2014), increasing levels of narcissism and individualism (Kernberg, 1985; Lasch, 1991), rising nationalism, ethno-centrism and popular elections of post-truth leaders across the globe (Peters, 2018) suggest that, if anything, we seem to be getting worse at it. The levels of destruction and violence that we – humans as a species in general, and the Western(ized) world in particular, have incurred on each other and the planet in the 20th century (perhaps the last we were able to observe in whole) are unprecedented in our history. There seems to be very little, if any, evidence to suggest that a reverse trend may be emerging.

My second assumption is that one of the main reasons for our incapacity to deal with the (self)destructive side of our behaviour lies predominantly not in a lack of knowledge and understanding, but in our unwillingness to do so. There are of course always some inevitable skeletons in the closet, but at least in general, we are already well aware of the vast range of harmful behaviour and harmful desires that we exhibit and inhabit.

My third assumption is that because we are trying to live up to the idealized standards of humanity, we are also trying to live up to an idealized standard of our selves. In so doing, we deploy a broad range of (discursive) strategies that protect our idealized-self-image and guard us against facing 'difficult knowledge' (Britzman, 1998). Thus, in my opinion, one the main pedagogical challenges of this moment in time (provided that time is linear) is not how we can learn more, but how to bypass, trick, interrupt and otherwise disrupt the defensive mechanisms that we have built around ourselves that prevent us from sensing ourselves as what we are – (human) beings of this world.

In this article I explore how aesthetic gestures, experiences, interventions might help us to at least encounter certain aspects of our (collective) shadow and the defences that we have set-up to protect it. The idea here is not to ultimately suggest some kind of pedagogical strategies or approaches that will make us "better people". Instead, I propose that the common way in which we imagine solutions to our problems is the very way through which these problems are being created in the first place. In this, I pay particular attention to two problematic constitutive characteristics of the modern/Cartesian subject: the reductivist insistence on having our being reduced to knowing (Andreotti, 2016) that results in having our relationship to the world mediated (exclusively) through knowledge; and, our insistence on being able to see/sense/experience ourselves only as separate, presumably autonomous, individuals. As these two traits seem to exert such an extremely powerful and restrictive grip on the ways we can see and sense ourselves, I deploy the notion of "thin hope" in the transformative and interruptive potential of aesthetic gestures, experiences and interventions. By thin hope I mean hope that lies not in our deliberate or wilful capacity to change ourselves, but rather in the power of that which exceeds (and at the same time inhabits) ourselves to intervene in ways that change us at the core of our being in spite of our conscious and unconscious refusal to do so. This resonates with Caputo's (2013) 'weak theology of perhaps' that places hope not in what is (present and known), but in the radical opening of the unknown, the unknowable and the yet to come.

The aesthetic of the not necessarily beautiful

The plural meanings, appropriateness and usefulness of the term "aesthetic" have been subject to long-standing and heated debates in various fields of arts, humanities and social sciences. A majority of these debates have converged around the deconstructivist, postmodernist turn that challenges modernist, universalist notions of aesthetics (and beauty) and instead proposes that our notions of the aesthetic are always already socially, culturally, politically and historically situated (Bourdieu, 1987; Eagleton, 1990; Foster, 1983; Shusterman, 1997). Critical scholars in arts education, such as Tavin (2007), have argued that the discourse of 'aesthetic experience in art education serves specific social and political interests while simultaneously masking those experiences' (Tavin, 2007, p. 43). For Tavin, our discourse of aesthetics today is still irrevocably tied to the development of 18th century modern, autonomous, self-determining bourgeois subject that is the only kind of subject that is perceived as being fully human. This subject's full humanity is realized through an embodiment of culturally specific, socialized forms of appreciation, in other words the modern subject is seen as capable of experiencing the world aesthetically. Far from being a neutral term, the aesthetic is thus seen as ideologically, politically and historically laden with modernist, enlightenment-based hierarchies of value and worth that – at least for Tavin (2007), remain 'indelible' (Tavin, 2007, p. 43) despite the '*ad nauseam'* attempts at 'critique and redevelopment of aesthetics' (Tavin, 2007, p. 43). Somewhat expectedly, Tavin proposes that discourse of aesthetics should be replaced with a postmodern discourse of representation that makes visible the inevitable political and historical contingency of aesthetics. While I certainly agree with the need for a deconstruction of any presumably universal signifiers, such as aesthetics, in this article I wish to propose a different engagement with the aesthetic that does not necessarily map onto either side of modern/postmodern debate. Rather than being interested in the aesthetic content, I try to explore the performative and educational potential of the aesthetic experience. I am thus not interested in what may or may not be considered aesthetic, but rather in what the aesthetic may (or may not) do.

For this reason, I propose a rather "thin" or tentative conceptualization of the aesthetic merely as that (an object, a gesture, an experience) which holds a possibility (and an intention) to interrupt our normalized expectations and codifications about the world and ourselves. An important aspect of this interruption is that it acts upon us involuntarily, pre-cognitively, and as such transforms – at least temporarily, the way we experience our being in the world. Such a notion of the aesthetic has little to do with questions of beauty, taste, or sensorial pleasure and their socio-cultural or political constructions, but more with questions related to the boundaries of our perceptive, cognitive, imaginative, affective and relational capabilities that we have been socialized into (Andreotti, 2016). More specifically, I am interested in exploring how an aesthetic engagement or an aesthetic experience might help us discover and map these boundaries and what lies beyond the limits of what we would usually consider desirable, intelligible, relevant, true, and ultimately, possible. As such the aesthetic does not need to be related to any particular notion of beauty, nor does it have to involve an inquiry into any given art-piece. However, this criterion does ask of it to open a crack in the ways we see and sense ourselves in the world. In that sense a particular work of art might serve as the necessary stimulus for the interruption of our normalized modes of thinking, sensing and being (see, for example, Todd (2015) on the work of Abramović), however, in this conceptualization the aesthetic is not necessarily art-bound, or art-related, though it may be so.

This notion of the aesthetic resonates with (but also goes beyond) Kompridis's (2014) and Rancière's (2004) proposition that the aesthetic is that which is responsible for the 'distribution or partition of the "sensible" – what is given to sense to make sense of, but also what already makes sense, what appears as already (unquestionably) intelligible' (Kompridis, 2014, p. xvii). As Rancière (2004, 2010) in his works focuses predominantly on the role of the aesthetic in the political realm, I do not engage with his work in this text directly, as I am more interested in exploring the existential (rather than primordially political) openings/transformations that can be provoked through aesthetic interventions, for which Kompridis's (2013) analysis of the metafictional novel *The Lives of Animals* provides a much better starting ground. Still, much like Rancière, Kompridis (2014) elsewhere seems primarily interested in how by re-thinking the aesthetic we may expand the realm of what is possible in the political sphere: 'each time modern theorists run up against the limits of extant modes of thinking about the possibilities of political life and the impediments to their realization, they turn to the aesthetic' Kompridis, 2014, p. xvi). In this I read Kompridis (and Rancière) as suggesting a problematic theory of change that proposes an expansion of what is considered sensible/thinkable that would in turn lead to an expansion of political possibilities that could then lead to an expansion of ontological possibilities – a change in ways of being. This reflects a common understanding of how change is enacted, especially in education, where more and better (critical) knowledge is usually considered necessary (and sufficient) for inducing a change in attitudes, dispositions and behaviour that would in turn translate to more profound personal (and social) transformation (Andreotti, Stein, Sutherland, Pashby, Suša & Amsler, 2018). Such a conceptualization of change takes little or no account of unconscious projections, attachments and addictions that prevent us from disinvesting from (harmful) undesirable desires.

Thinking, being and struggling with insistence on intelligibility

Although Kompridis makes use of the aesthetic mostly as a tool for expansion of thinkable/political possibilities that converge broadly along the lines of a Hegelian/Arendtian goal of politics as a tool for achieving 'freedom of subjectivity […] freedom to change how things are, to change ourselves by changing the circumstances in which we find ourselves – a change in conditions of possibility and intelligibility' (Kompridis, 2014, xiv), he does offer examples of how the aesthetic can be also used to expand different kinds of existential/ontological possibilities that are not necessarily grounded in a primary need for expanded knowledge. This is arguably most visible in his analysis (Kompridis, 2013) of the role of the fictional character Elizabeth Costello from J. M. Coetzee's (1999) metafictional novel *The Lives of Animals* that is 'calling on us to become receptive to what we have heretofore been unreceptive', which means 'becoming answerable to a call to change our lives' (Kompridis, 2014, xxx).[1] In this novel the character Costello is grappling with an existential problem of how to continue living (well) in face of the omnipresent violence and suffering that humans inflicts upon animals (and other humans), a violence that seems to go unnoticed or is brushed aside by a vast majority of people. Her capacity to see, coupled with her incapacity to turn away, to pretend not to see, is pushing her into an existential crisis, where she begins to doubt her sanity and where those around her cannot relate to her concerns.

> It's that I no longer know where I am. I seem to move around perfectly easily among people, to have perfectly normal relations with them. Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of them are participants in a crime of stupefying proportions? Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad! Yet every day I see the evidences. The very people I suspect produce the evidence, exhibit it, offer it to me. Corpses. Fragments of corpses that they have bought for money. […] Calm down, I tell myself, you are making a mountain out of a molehill. This is life. Everyone else comes to terms with it, why can't you? *Why can't you?* (Coetzee, 1999/2016, p. 69).

Kompridis (2013) argues that Costello finds it impossible to make herself intelligible to others in ways that would unsettle this normalization of violence that she can now longer turn away from, can no longer remain 'wilfully ignorant' (Tuana, 2006, p.11) about. In some ways the example of Costello's struggle can be used to discuss the many layers of complexity and the multiple paradoxes involved in trying to speak across onto-epistemic divides, but she tries to do so using the language and grammar of the same onto-epistemology that she is trying to deconstruct. She tries to make herself heard and acknowledged, to have what she sees validated also by others, but the language (of philosophical argumentation and academic discourse) betrays her, her propositions being ridiculed and dismissed by others as ramblings of an old woman. What deepens her crisis is that she is seemingly caught between two equally terrifying propositions – either she is right (and the world is mad), or the world is right (and she is mad). Not being able to imagine beyond such dichotomies and not being able to maintain calmness in inhabiting a paradoxical position, she is desperate for some sort of external validation, she needs to know how things are. And again, it is precisely Costello's focus on knowledge/thinking that is the source of so much of her frustration, although she intuitively, perhaps unconsciously gestures towards the problem. The following excerpt from Coetzee (1999/2016), used also by Kompridis (2013) in his analysis, can hopefully help illustrate the problem somewhat clearer:

> The particular horror of the death camps, the horror that convinces us that what went on there was a crime against humanity, is not that despite a humanity shared with their victims, the killers treated them like lice. That is too abstract. The horror is that the killers *refused to think themselves into* the place of their victims, as did everyone else. They said, 'It is they in those cattle-cars rattling past.' They did not say, 'How would it be if it were I in that cattle-car? They did not say, 'It is I who am in that cattle-car?' They said, 'It must be the dead who are being burnt today, making the air stink and falling in ash on my cabbages.' They did not say, 'How would it be if I were burning?' They did not say, 'I am burning. I am falling in ash.' In other words, they closed their hearts. (Coetzee, 1999/2016, p. 34, italics added)

When Costello suggests that the guards in the death camps 'refused to think themselves into the place of their victims' (ibid.) and when she emphasizes what they said, or did not say (rather than what the felt/sensed/embodied), her words resonate with the Cartesian maxim of being reduced to knowing (I think therefore I am) and its accompanying logocentric fantasy (I say therefore it is) (Ahenakew, 2016; Andreotti, 2016; Mika, Andreotti, Cooper, Ahenakew & Silva, forthcoming). However, what she proposes that the guards should say – 'It is I who am in that cattle-car. […] I am burning. I am falling in ash.' (Coetzee, 1999/2016, p. 34), does seem to gesture towards a possibility of a different way of imagining one's self or being. One that is not (completely) bound by the notion of separability that together with sequentiality and determinacy represents one of the three ontological pillars of Enlightenment-based modern world (Silva, 2016). In other words, it sounds as if Costello is aware of the need to move beyond the notion of the body-encapsulated-self, but proposes that we can think ourselves into a different way of

being, rather than exploring (also) the more humbling notion of a need to be changed (by the world) in our way of being first, since we, the presumed autonomous individuals, are seemingly neither willing nor capable of letting go of our insistence on separability. To be pushed towards 'being otherwise' (Andreotti, 2016) by whatever (externally inflicted) crisis or existential interruption seems to be a much more realistic expectation (and even that is a highly contentious one) than waiting for us to be *willing* to change ourselves. Only once we are forced to exist in the world differently, only in extreme situations, when insistence on separability is no longer an option, might we (perhaps) be able also to think (and act) differently. I can, however, provide no guarantee nor proof that this is possible in any conventional sense of the word.

To those of us that have been socialized in the modern/Cartesian mode of being reduced to knowing (Andreotti, 2016; Mika, 2012; Mika et al., forthcoming) it may be very difficult (perhaps impossible) to imagine how a different way of being may be invoked, without (unconsciously) attempting to think/plan/project/imagine our way towards it. Namely, there is an (insurmountable) ontological difference between merely, hypothetically, imagining 'How would it be if I were burning?' and actually sensing another person's pain (of being burned). We may not be able to imagine what that might feel like, because we have been socialized away from inhabiting such sensibilities, or even away from allowing to entertain the possibility of such sensibilities to exist, but would embodying such a sensibility not lead to a profoundly different disposition toward the pain of others? Towards the pain that we ourselves are inflicting? Again, such an ontological shift may not be possible, and certainly is not possible within the framework of what we usually consider to be available roster of existential possibilities. However, there is always the option of more being available than what we can imagine, and, consequentially, allow to exist in our limited construction of what the world is.

Very helpful in extending the range of what we usually consider possible, is Mika et al. (forthcoming) article *The ontological differences between wording and worlding the world*. In this paper, the authors propose a distinction between two onto-metaphysical orientations: 'one that reduces being to discursive practices, which [they] call "wording the world"; and another that manifests being as co-constitutive of a worlded world, where language is one amongst other inter-woven entities, which [they] call "worlding the world"' (Mika et al, forthcoming, p. 1). The first draws its lineage from the long roots of the modern/colonial grammar that can be traced at least as far as Plato and his contention that it is 'through the permanence of the Form that things attain their identity' (Mika et al., forthcoming, p. 6). Mika et al. refer to this as 'metaphysics of presence' where 'the world is experienced by humans *as if it is* fragmented and atomistic, and where each thing in the world is perceived as highly evident and possessing static characteristics' (ibid., italics added). Within this onto-metaphysical orientation, 'language is mobilized in service to this fixity; it is used to describe and represent with truth the nature of things in the world' (ibid.). Language is thus mobilized to lock-down existential possibilities, even in attempts that attempt to deconstruct dominant forms of representation and replace them with marginalized ones. Only that, which is languageable, and therefore thinkable/intelligible, is allowed to exist.

Thus, unlike what is assumed by most theories of the Post (post-modern, post-colonial, post-structuralist), we can neither think, talk nor deconstruct our way out of this onto-metaphysical entrapment, because its totality sets the boundaries of legibility, intelligibility, relevance and existence. Sousa Santos (2007) refers to this problematic mode of modern Western thinking-cum-existing as 'abyssal thinking' that:

> consists of a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones. The division is such that 'the other side of the line' vanishes as reality becomes non-existent, and is indeed produced as non-existent. [...] What most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line. To the extent that it prevails, this side of the line only prevails by exhausting the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only non-existence, invisibility, non−dialectical absence (Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 45).

In other words, the metaphysics of presence requires an erasure of that which is absent for itself to remain present, to continue existing. Similarly to Santos, Ahenakew (2016) argues that we cannot (perhaps should not) make the absent/invisible into present/visible (as that would re-trap the absent in the metaphysics of presence and produce other kinds of erasure), but we can make the absent 'noticeably absent so that it can be remembered and missed' (Santos, Ahenakew, 2016, p. 333).

In contrast to metaphysics of presence, to 'wording the world', Mika et al. (forthcoming) position the onto-metaphysical orientation of 'worlding the world', based on Maori philosophy of language 'that *is* and expresses the worlding of the world' (Mika et al. forthcoming, p. 9, italics added). They use Te reo Māori (the Maori language) as an example of a language that, in spite of being grafted into non-Indigenous institutions (Ahenakew, 2016) and having suffered by translations into the metaphysics of presence (as the only legible option in academia), still 'overwhelmingly reveals the complex and interrelated nature of all things within and beyond perception' (Mika et al., forthcoming, p. 9). In Maori language, the language itself is a manifestation of the entanglement of all "things" visible and invisible, of fullness and emptiness, and that is in stark contrast with the Western/modern notion of separability. As such language is seen as having (living) agency, like everything else, it is not merely a "human invention", but is co-constituted and constitutive of both humans and everything else in the world.

I can only speculate through rare glimpses in the cracks what an embodiment of such an entangled relationship with everything might feel like as a *lived experience*, what it might be like to inhabit a world that is alive in its totality, what it might be like not to be an "I" in the sense that is familiar to me, and where what I would consider "me" is also somehow within everything else. The little of what does seem clear, is that this really does require what Denise Silva (2016) calls 'the end of the world as we know it' (Silva 2016, p. 58), or rather the end of the way in which we were taught to know (and relate to) the world. I wonder what kind of other profoundly disturbing realizations such a way of being might entail. I wonder, how disturbed Costello would be, if she sensed and felt the full extent of the depth of the cut that we have created between ourselves and the world. Would she be able to bear it? Would she still believe that we have lost our humanity or would she maybe feel that humanity is not necessarily something that we should hold in very high esteem? Given that we came here last and left such a horrific imprint, perhaps it is time to for us reconsider what it means/is to be human and what kind of attributes we usually associate with humanity.

Shuddering and de-idealizing humanity

It seems fair to assume that any attempt at interrupting our normalized ways of being in the world, of disturbing our carefully crafted innocent self-image(s), of uncovering harmful desires that we know we have and those we do not even know we do, is bound to shake us up. It is hardly surprising that engaging with such 'difficult knowledge' (Britzman, 1998) is something we would in general prefer not to do. Here is where an

aesthetic experience/intervention might be of help. It might be of help, because it can catch us "off guard", it can provoke us into surfacing that within us that we would prefer to keep stored away. In this part of the paper I use the example of Sharon Todd's (2015) discussion of Marina Abramović's (in)famous performance *Rhythm 0* to explore both the potential and the risks involved in such interventions.

I begin, however, by drawing on Gert Biesta's (2015) suggestion that education should be about opening ourselves towards 'being taught' (Biesta, 2015, p. 53) by the world, a process that is very different from merely 'learning from' (Biesta, 2015, p. 53) the world. Biesta proposes that the main difference between these two approaches is that in learning from the world the learners remain in control of the learning process, they can choose what they will or will not learn by bringing what they learn 'within their own circle of understanding, within their own construction' (Biesta, 2015, p. 53), while in the process of being taught, they have no such choice. In contrast to 'learning from' the process of 'being taught by' is considerably more challenging as it interrupts/violates the perceived entitlement to autonomy/separability of the subject. Such an experience is not necessarily (or at all) pleasant, but it can be profoundly transformative. As Biesta (2015) says, when we talk of:

> experiences that *really* taught [us] something—we more often than not refer to experiences where someone showed us something or made us realize something that really entered our being from the outside. Such teachings often provide insights about ourselves and our ways of doing and being—insights that we were not aware of or rather did not want to be aware of. They are inconvenient truths or, in the words of Deborah Britzman, cases of 'difficult knowledge' (Biesta, 2015, p. 53).

These inconvenient truths about ourselves and the ways we relate to each other and to the world could be considered alongside Kompridis's (2013) proposition that we should work on addressing our '*failures of receptivity*' (Kompridis, 2013, p. 20), our failed attempts at answering the other's need for acknowledgment, particularly when we should respond to something that is voiced in unfamiliar way – that is in ways that disturb how perceive ourselves and the world around us. Thus, rather than facing the full complexity of what it means being part of the world, to assume responsibility for being of this world and for all inevitable messiness of the human and more-than-human relations, we often choose to turn away from such difficult teachings. Unwilling to face that which we cannot control and that which we *do not want to* (rather than simply cannot) see and feel, we retreat within the comfortable boundaries of the already known, already felt, already sensed, already lived.

Todd (2015) writes of this unwillingness to face ourselves and our shadow as 'avoidance of shuddering' (Todd, 2015, p. 53). Drawing on the work of Martin Buber (1923/1958), Todd (2015) suggests that the discomfort and dis-ease that we experience 'as beings who are both part of the world and yet who seem to experience the world as separate' (Todd, 2015, p. 53), 'the sheer sense of being overwhelmed in facing the extent of our entanglements with others and with the enormity of our task within a world that seems so outside the frames of our own bodies and thoughts' (Todd, 2015, p. 53) makes us shudder at the depth of perceived alienation that we experience between ourselves (or what we call our self(s) and the world). In other words, for Todd, the avoidance of shuddering refers to our unwillingness to deal with the fears, despair and sheer overwhelmingness of realizing that we *are* part of the world. The enormity of the task of facing the world (and ourselves in it) as it is – here and now, makes us persevere in our denial of accepting the responsibility for the 'enmeshment of self with world' (Todd, 2015, p. 54), makes us persevere in our upkeep of 'illusions of […] separateness and

isolation of our existence' (ibid.). Rather than facing the implications of what it actually means to be part of the world, we might instead choose to 'convince ourselves that the world cannot affect me, so separate am I from it, or that I cannot affect the world since it is only my existence that matters. These various responses seem to suffice until one day, as Buber suggests, they don't[.]' (Todd, 2015, p. 54).

According to Todd (2015), our constitutive denial of the fact of our embeddedness in the world helps us shift our attention away from living in the present and instead orients us towards 'living our dreams of the future' (p. 54). In relation to education, this means that 'education operates within a constructed ideal of humanity defined in relation to the culture and society of which it is part' (ibid.). In contemporary Western societies this ideal of humanity is exemplified by the image of the white, male, liberal, rational, compassionate, tolerant, benevolent, modern subject (Wynter, 2003). In order for this idealization to be maintained, for the socializing function of education 'which is always dependent upon a future-oriented outlook' (p. 55) to continue through various forms of institutionalized schooling, certain less salutary facets of humanity have to denied as *inhuman(e)*, ignored or seen as pertaining (exclusively) to the societies of Others – those deemed not fully human (Bhabha, 1994). Our languages (though perhaps not all of them) overwhelmingly associate the Western, Enlightenment-based notion of humanity and human(e) behaviour with exclusively positive attributes, contributing to the upkeep of the idealized fantasy of what it means to be human(e). The following excerpt from the Merriam Webster dictionary (n. d.) may serve as an example:

> Definition of humane
> 1: marked by compassion, sympathy, or consideration for humans or animals humane prison guards a more humane way of treating farm animals
> 2: characterized by or tending to broad humanistic culture: humanistic humane studies
>
> Synonyms
> beneficent, benevolent, benignant, compassionate, good-hearted, kind, kindhearted, kindly, softhearted, sympathetic, tender, tenderhearted, warmhearted
>
> Antonyms
> atrocious, barbaric, barbarous, bestial, brutal, brute, brutish, callous, cold-blooded, cruel, fiendish, hard-hearted, heartless, inhuman, inhumane, insensate, sadistic, savage, truculent, uncompassionate, unfeeling, unkind, unkindly, unsympathetic, vicious, wanton

Although it may be considered inaccurate or even misleading to equate human with humane, I propose this intervention here with the purpose of making visible defensive responses that seek to protect the fantasy image of "good" humanity. As an example of how such protective mechanisms operate, one can observe that in this particular dictionary entry the antonym of humane is not merely inhumane, but also *inhuman*. Inhuman is joined by other telling words such barbaric, brute and savage that have a long and continuous history of being used as descriptors for various groups of racialized Others. Anger, rage, violence, hatred, viciousness etc. are apparently seen as affective states that have no place in a carefully manicured and idealized notion of humanity as (merely) good-, kind-, soft-, tender- and warm- hearted. This primordial dismissal of violence (in its various forms) as essentially inhuman, lies at the heart of our (collective) unwillingness and incapacity to face-up to the whole of what we are and of what we will consequentially continue to be. As Todd (2015) argues via Levinas (1974/1998), it is only

by facing the humanness of violence that we can admit the very possibility of nonviolence into our lives. When theorizing systemic violence, we often turn to historical examples of large-scale atrocities that were committed either in the name of particular (radicalized) political ideologies, religious stances, or charismatic influence of genocidal leaders(hip). While such analyses provide extremely important insights into how different forms of (gender, racial, religious, sexual, ableist) violence get (re)produced through socially, culturally, legally and politically sanctioned mechanisms, the emphasis on systemic analysis may prevent us from also considering how we ourselves are implicated in the continuation of these different forms of violence – explicitly and implicitly and how we *all* hold the potential to bring out the worst of what humanity can do.

Experiments in social psychology, such as Philip Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiment (Zimbardo, 2011), the Milgram Yale experiments (Milgram, 1974/2009, see also Doliński, Grzyb, Folwarczny, Grzybała, Krzyszycha, Martynowska & Trojanowski, 2017) and artistic interventions, such as Marina Abramović's *Rhythm 0* (Abramović, Vettese, Di Pietrantonio, Daneri, Hegvi & Sanzio, 2009; Todd, 2015), clearly demonstrate that, under certain conditions, "normal" people can quickly resort to acts of unimaginable violence. Unlike Zimbardo's and Milgram's experiments where participants were specifically instructed to assume roles of punitive figures (prison guards, electric shock administrators), Abramović gave no instructions to the visitors of her *Rhytm 0* performance. She simply stood, fully clothed in the Neapolitan gallery for a period of six hours. The room in which she stood contained a table that held seventy-two objects including a flower, feather boa, knife, razor and loaded pistol. (Todd, 2015, p. 56). 'The idea was how far you can be vulnerable and how far the public can go and do things with you, on your own body' (Abramović et al. 2009, in Todd, 2015, p. 56). Although the first few hours passed relatively peacefully, unprovoked violence towards Abramović began to emerge and escalate quickly. By the end of the performance, Abramović's clothes were cut off with razors, water was spilled onto her, she was stabbed with thorns and cut, various acts of sexual violation were performed on her and a gun was pointed at her head. The experiment in vulnerability and humility ended in violence and hostility. As Abramović (in Todd, 2015) puts it: 'The experience I drew from this piece was that in your own performances you can go very far, but if you leave decisions to the public, you can be killed' (p. 57). Todd (2015) sums up the pedagogical significance of what transpired during *Rhythm 0* in the following lines:

> This piece should not be read as a cautionary tale of what happens when one shows one's vulnerability (don't be vulnerable, or else!); rather it reveals the complete unwillingness to face the rawness of violence as "human". As a pedagogical space, what Abramović's "experiment" shows is that the transformation of the self as a responsible subject can only come about by recognizing the dark sides of humanity as a beginning for creating change (Todd, 2015, p. 57).

Abramović undertook considerable personal risk when she decided to mount this experiment, and it seems disrespectful to dismiss its teachings as merely a cautionary tale against showing vulnerability as Todd suggests, or as something that has no pedagogical value for "us" – the members of idealized humanity that could never do such a thing to someone else. The question here is not merely what kind of harm and violence are we all potentially capable of doing, but also what kind of harm and violence do we *already* participate in – yet refuse to acknowledge, examine or act upon.

Lisa Taylor (2013) reports on her pedagogical experiments in engaging students in exploring their entanglements with the multiple forms of ongoing colonial violence, and offers an analysis of 'psychic challenges involved in students' adopting perspectives that

radically shift (neo)imperial relations of power/knowledge, that de-centre and implicate them in relation to the planetary South' (p. 59). Similarly to Biesta, she employs Britzman's (1998) notion of 'difficult knowledge' to explore what kind of strategies of resistance learners deploy to avoid facing up to difficult knowledge that interrupts the learner's position of epistemic and ontological privilege. The surrender of this privilege is personally challenging, as it involves both an abandonment of the safety of inhabiting a known world and of a known self (Ellsworth, 2005, as cited in Taylor, 2013):

> [i]n order to learn something new, as in previously unthought, we must lose that part of ourselves whose identity depends on not thinking that thought … that depends on not being the kind of person who entertains such thoughts or understands such thoughts (Ellsworth, 2005, as cited in Taylor, 2013, p. 59).

Ellsworth here suggests an inversion of the usual theory of change where a change in knowledge leads to a change in being. Instead she proposes that a change in being – 'not being the kind of person who entertains such thoughts' *precedes* a change in knowledge, or more precisely precedes the possibility of previously unthinkable and unimaginable to become thinkable and imaginable. Of course, this does not apply to all kinds of knowledge or thought processes – we can learn new things and think new thoughts that do not require any change in our way of being. However, as internally diverse as such knowledge and thinking may be, it is likely not going to be deeply, ontologically different from what we already know. It will merely be an addition of more of the same. It will not make us exist in the world differently, it will not change us in ways that make us 'shudder' (Todd, 2015). It is only when we let go of our assumptions and projections about who and what we are (of our self-image), and surrender the desire for the rewards that are accessed through those constructions, that we can begin to imagine, think and sense 'otherwise' (Andreotti, 2016).

Resistance to difficult knowledge as point of departure, rather than closure

In her article *Against the tide*, Taylor (2013) suggests that instead of trying to repress or morally condemn resistance against facing difficult knowledge that implicates us in a widespread global matrix of violent, unjust, (neo)imperial / (neo)colonial power relations, we should instead consider resistance as an inevitable component, indeed an indicator of engagement with difficult knowledge. As such, resistance should not be considered as a point of closure, but as a point of departure. Further, Taylor (2013) identifies several 'D's of resistance: discursive strategies that learners deploy in order to avoid facing difficult knowledge. She lists denial, discreditation/ doubt, defensiveness, demand of attention, despair, distraction, domination, disconnection, conDemnation, distancing/ divestment/ detachment, deflection and personalization (Taylor, 2013, p. 62) as examples of such strategies. There is arguably a lot we can potentially learn about ourselves and our relations with others and the world, if we can take a step back and observe our resistance strategies from a distance, rather than simply embody them.[2] However, in order for that to happen, we have to either allow or simply not have any other choice, but to let the world "teach us". Biesta (2018) also writes of the importance of resistance in the process of being taught. For Biesta if we exist as subjects in the world this means that we invariably exist '*in dialogue* with the world' (p. 15, italics original), our existence is not about 'what we have – our skills, our competencies, the things we have gathered and learned – nor about who we are' (Biesta, 2018, p. 15). Rather, it is about 'what we do and about what we refrain from doing. It is […] not about *who* we are, but about *how* we are

or, more realistically, how we are trying to be' (Biesta, 2018, p. 15). And, because the existence of others places restrictions on our desires, being a subject does not mean that we can simply do what we want to do. Thus, we are required to 'try to exist *in dialogue* with what and who is other – in the world without occupying the centre of the world' (Biesta, 2018, p. 15). As the existence of other compels us to de-centre, the encounter with the world is experienced as resistance against unbound fulfilment of our desires. Biesta's use of resistance is different from the way Taylor (2013) uses the term. For Taylor it is the subject that deploys various strategies of resistance to safeguard themselves against facing difficult knowledge. For Biesta (2018) it is the world (or others) that offer resistance against the subject's desires being met unconditionally (or at all). However, in both cases, resistance is pedagogically relevant because it points to different sets of boundaries. In Taylor's example resistance points to the subject's boundaries of what they are willing to learn/imagine, in Biesta's case the world/others sets external boundaries on what we can legitimately will/desire. Biesta argues that the experience of dialogue – that is, an encounter with others, above all teaches us that the world is *real* and that in this world we *'are not alone'* (p. 16, italics original). Upon realizing this, Biesta suggests that the subject essentially has three choices on how to respond to this realization.

In the first scenario our frustrations against having our desires met push us 'harder and harder to make our intentions and ambitions real' (Biesta, 2018, p. 16), which runs the danger of disrespecting the integrity of the encounter. In the extreme, this can results in 'the destruction of what we encounter, the destruction of what offers resistance. […] thus we end up in the destruction of the very world we seek to exist.' (ibid.). Historically, various kinds of genocide may be considered as examples of extreme examples of destruction of what offers resistance. Moving away from the extremes we can argue that in more common educational settings, we can still witness more or less violent dismissal of what learners refuse to face (i.e. the limits to our-selves that the world is showing us) that can lead to verbal, physical or other kinds of attack against (often racialized) others, whose existence reminds of the fact that world is not '*our* construction' (Biesta, 2018, p. 16, italics original). Of Taylor's resistance strategies denial, discreditation/doubt, defensiveness, demand of attention, domination, disconnection, conDemnation, deflection and personalization could be considered as broadly indicative of such a stance.

The second option is for Biesta an inversion of the first. Overwhelmed by frustration of resistance, we resort to withdrawal from the world. 'We abandon our initiatives and ambitions because we feel that is too difficult, not worth the effort, too frustrating, and so on, to pursue them' (Biesta, 2018, p. 16). This seems to resonate deeply with Todd's notion of avoidance of 'shuddering'. Again, the list of Taylor's resistance strategies can provide some examples of potential indicators of such a stance, such as despair, disconnection, distancing, divestment and detachment.

The third option for Biesta is to try to stay away from these two extremes and try to exist as a subject in dialogue, where dialogue is not understood as conversation, but as an 'existential form, a way of existing in the world – not withdrawing from it – without putting ourselves in the centre of the world but leaving space for the world to exist as well – hence existing *with* the world' (p. 16, italics original). For Biesta in this kind of a dialogue there is never a winner since 'trying to exist in dialogue – is precisely where winning is not an option; it is rather and ongoing, lifelong challenge. It is the challenge to exist with what and who is other; it is the challenge to exist as a subject in the world' (ibid.), to 'exist in a grown-up way' (p. 17). By existing in a grown-up way Biesta means to exist in a way of being where we try to give an answer 'to the question of which of our

desires are the desires we ought to have, which of our desires *are desirable*' (p. 17, italics original).

Resonating with Todd's (2015) exploration of the transformative and educational potential of Abramović's artistic performance for showing us how easily we can overstep the boundaries of idealized humanity, Biesta (2018) writes of the performative aspect of art, of 'encountering the doing of art' (p. 17), where art is seen as an 'ongoing and never-ending exploration of what it might mean to exist in and with the world', 'to be – here – now', to explore 'the encounter with what and who is other' (ibid.). This brings us back to the initially proposed notion of the aesthetic as the experience of the interruption of our normalized codifications about the world and about our role in it. While not necessarily art-bound (as it is questionable what may or may not be considered art) an intervention of the aesthetic into our normalized existence can help us dislodge some of the assumptions and perhaps can help us work through some of our resistance against difficult knowledge.

Still a long way from home

Unfortunately, neither dislodging normalized assumptions and projections (including de-idealizing humanity) as proposed by Todd, facing and overcoming discursive strategies of resistance against difficult knowledge (Taylor), or Biesta's seeking of answers to the question of 'which of our desires are *desirable*' and perceiving art as 'the never-ending exploration of what it might *mean* to exist in and with the world' (italics added) is ultimately how an embodiment of a different way of being may come about. All of the listed propositions can help us have better, deeper discussions that can be very relevant, but they cannot make us feel/sense ourselves in (relation to) the world differently. I am also inclined to believe that the authors themselves might perhaps feel that way too. The same goes for this text. As Mika et al. (forthcoming) argue 'our attempts to deconstruct [the modern grammar and its] tendencies are mostly futile because our own intelligibility is dependent on the grammar and the intellectual, affective and performative economies the grammar itself sustains and is sustained by' (p. 7). Therefore, if this text is at least somewhat intelligible, it must have failed to engender anything that would be significantly onto-epistemically different.

While my intention in writing it was not to propose that there is something specific that we can do about our current predicament, that there is something important and new that we need to know first and that this text might somehow show that "thing", or that we can write in ways that really change something in the way we experience/inhabit our selves, it was nevertheless motivated by a desire to somehow *make* sense, rather than to *sense* sense of what is going on. Most likely, life will feel and be lived no differently before the first and after the last line of this text. Indeed, it would be too much to expect of a text anyhow.

I do wonder, though, what happened for the visitors of Abramović's performance, as that was an event with minimal or no verbal input. Was there something that changed for the visitors and for her too – at least for a few moments? Was it a glimpse of what it feels like to be completely vulnerable to each other that was so unbearable that it resulted in even more violence? Or was it simply a maddening release of what we (un)knowingly suppress daily? Whatever it may have been, it was not something to turn away from. We desperately need to develop stamina for facing both that what we do not want to face, but also that what we cannot know that we may encounter. It seems very difficult to resist the urge of translating the unknowable into knowable (in a way this text is probably an

attempt at just that), but it is only by dislodging the will to know that the unknowable and unexpected may (or not) happen to us.
If, however, that does happen one day, that we are somehow hit by something that profoundly transforms the way we sense ourselves in (relation to) the world, that breaks down our imagined separability, then maybe the thoughts in this text could be of some further use. Until then, they are perhaps no more than a reminder that something else *has always been* possible.

Notes

[1] The character of Elizabeth Costello is used by J.M.Coetzee's as his alter ego..
[2] One such pedagogical tool that can help us observe our resistance strategies is the pedagogical metaphor of the "bus" that is being developed by the Gesturing towards decolonial futures collective (n.d.). The metaphor seeks to destabilize the need for coherence and unity of the self with the purpose of lowering defenses that we develop in order to protect our self-image. The collective proposes that by imaging ourselves as a bus full of known and unknown passengers, riding on several different decks on the bus, we can learn how to observe the behavior of different passengers on our "bus", without judgment.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by Mitacs through the Mitacs Accelerate Program.

References

Abramović, M., Vettese, A., Di Pietrantonio, G., Daneri, A., Hegvi, L., & Sanzio, S. R. (2009). *Marina Abramović*. Milano: Charta.
Ahenakew, C. (2016). Grafting indigenous ways of knowing onto non-indigenous ways of being: The (underestimated) challenges of a decolonial imagination. *International review of qualitative research,* 9(3), 323-340.
Andreotti, V. (2016). The educational challenges of imagining the world differently. *Canadian journal of development studies/revue canadienne d'études du développement,* 37(1), 101-112.
Andreotti, V., Stein, S., Sutherland, A., Pashby, K., Suša, R., & Amsler, S. (2018). Mobilising different conversations about global justice in education: Toward alternative futures in uncertain times. *Policy & practice: A development education review,* 26, 9-41.
Bhabha, H. (1994). *Location of culture.* London: Routledge.
Biesta, G. (2015). *Beautiful risk of education*. London: Routledge.
Biesta, G. (2018). What if? Art education beyond expression and creativity. In C. Naughton, G. Biesta, & D. R. Cole (Eds.), *Art, artists and pedagogy* (pp. 29-38). London: Routledge.
Bourdieu, P. (1987). The historical genesis of a pure aesthetic. *The journal of aesthetics and art criticism,* 46(1), 201-210.
Britzman, D. P. (1998). *Lost subjects, contested objects: Toward a psychoanalytic inquiry of learning*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
Buber, M. (1923/1958*). I and thou.* (R. G. Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: Charles Scribner and Sons.
Caputo, J. D. (2013). *The insistence of God: A theology of perhaps.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Coetzee, J. M. (2016). *The li ves of animals*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1999)
Dirzo, R., Young, H. S., Galetti, M., Ceballos, G., Isaac, N. J., & Collen, B. (2014). Defaunation in the anthropocene. *Science,* 345(6195), 401-406.
Doliński, D., Grzyb, T., Folwarczny, M., Grzybała, P., Krzyszycha, K., Martynowska, K., & Trojanowski, J. (2017). Would you deliver an electric shock in 2015? Obedience in the

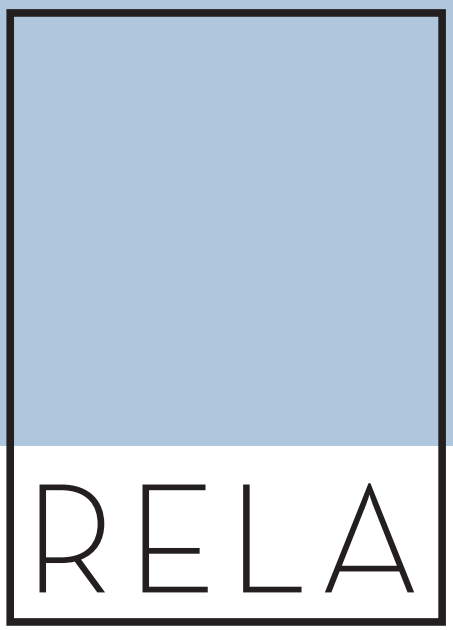
experimental paradigm developed by Stanley Milgram in the 50 years following the original studies. *Social psychological and personality science,* 8(8), 927-933.
Eagleton, T. (1990). *The ideology of the aesthetic*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.
Ellsworth, E. (2005). *Places of learning: Media, architecture, pedagogy*. New York:
Routledge.
Foster, H. (1983). Postmodernism: A preface. In H. Foster (Ed.), *The anti-aesthetic: Essays on postmodern culture* (pp. ix-xvi). Seattle, WA: Bay Press.
Gesturing towards decolonial futures collective (n.d.). *A/r/t/cart/ography #4: the bus*. Retrieved November 4, 2018, from https://decolonialfutures.net/portfolio/the-bus/
Humane [Def. 1]. (n.d.). *Merriam-Webster Online*. In Merriam-Webster. Retrieved November 2, 2018, from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humane
Kernberg, O. F. (1985). *Borderline conditions and pathological narcissism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
Kolbert, E. (2014). The sixth extinction: An unnatural history. New York, NY: A&C Black.
Kompridis, N. (2013). Recognition and receptivity: Forms of normative response in the lives of the animals we are. *New literary history,* 44(1), 1-24.
Kompridis, N. (2014). Introduction. Turning and returning: The aesthetic turn in political thought. In N. Kompridis (Ed.), *The aesthetic turn in political thought* (pp. xiv-xxxvii). London: Bloomsbury academic.
Lasch, C. (1979/1991). *The culture of narcissism: American life in an age of diminishing expectations*. New York, NY: WW Norton & company.
Levinas, E. (1974/1998). *Otherwise than being, or beyond essence*. (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne university press.
Meadows, D., & Randers, J. (2012). *The limits to growth: The 30-year update*. London: Routledge.
Mika, C. T. H. (2012). Overcoming 'being' in favour of knowledge: The fixing effect of 'mātauranga'. *Educational philosophy and theory, 44*(10), 1080-1092.
Mika, C. T. H., Andreotti, V., Cooper, G., Ahenakew, C., Silva, D. (forthcoming). The ontological differences between wording and worlding the world. *Critical discourse studies.*
Milgram, S. (1974/2009). *Obedience to authority: An experimental view*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial modern classics.
Norgaard, K. M. (2011). *Living in denial: Climate change, emotions, and everyday life.* Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
Peters, M. A. (2018). Education in a post-truth world. In M. A. Peters, S. Rider, M. Hyvönen, M., & T. Besley (Eds.), *Post-truth, fake news* (pp. 145-150). Singapore: Springer.
Rancière, J. (2004). *The politics of aesthetics. The distribution of the sensible*. London: Continuum.
Rancière, J. (2010). *Dissensus: On politics and aesthetics*. London: Continuum.
Shusterman, R. (1997). The end of aesthetic experience. *Journal of aesthetics and art criticism, 55*(1), 29-42.
Sousa Santos, B.D. (2007). Beyond abyssal thinking: From global lines to ecologies of knowledges. *Review (Fernand Braudel center)* XXX(1), 45-89.
Silva, D. (2016). On Difference without Separability. In J. Volz, & J. Rebouças (Eds.), *Incerteza Viva/ Living uncertainty: 32ª Bienal de São Paulo, exhibition catalogue* (pp. 57-65). São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.
Tavin, K. (2007). Eyes wide shut: The use and uselessness of the discourse of aesthetics in art education. *ArteEducation*, 60(2), 40-45.
Taylor, L. K. (2013). Against the tide: Working with and against the affective flows of resistance in social and global justice Learning. *Critical literacy: Theories & practices*, 7(2), 58-68.
Todd, S. (2015). Creating transformative spaces in education: Facing humanity, facing violence. *Philosophical inquiry in education, 23*(1), 53-61.
Tuana, N. (2006). The speculum of ignorance: The women's health movement and epistemologies of ignorance. *Hypatia,* 21(3), 1-19.
Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument. *CR: The new centennial review,* 3(3), 257-337.
Zimbardo, P. (2007). *The Lucifer effect: How good people turn evil*. New York, NY: Random House.

Aims & Scope

The European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults (RELA) is a refereed academic journal creating a forum for the publication of critical research on adult education and learning. It has a particular focus on issues at stake for adult education and learning in Europe, as these emerge in connection with wider international and transnational dynamics and trends. Such a forum is important at a time when local and regional explorations of issues are often difficult to foreground across language barriers. As academic and policy debate is increasingly carried out in the English language, this masks the richness of research knowledge, responses and trends from diverse traditions and foci. The journal thus attempts to be linguistically 'open access'. Whilst creating a forum for international and transnational debate, contributions are particularly welcome from authors in Europe and other locations where English is not the first language.

RELA invites original, scholarly articles that discuss the education and learning of adults from different academic disciplines, perspectives and traditions. It encourages diversity in theoretical and methodological approach and submissions from non-English speakers. All published contributions in RELA are subjected to a rigorous peer review process based on two moments of selection: an initial editorial screening and a double-blind review by at least two anonymous referees. Clarity and conciseness of thought are crucial requirements for publication.

RELA is published on behalf of the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA).



www.rela.ep.liu.se

www.esrea.org

ISSN 2000-7426