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Editorial: Learning in times of crisis

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The COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world on an unprecedented scale, in spite of repeated early warnings (Waller et al, 2020), has made many of us aware of the fragility of health systems, economic systems, social systems and the effects on individual lives worldwide. Crises in general are said to be opportunities to reconsider what has been taken for granted for a long time. The pandemic will probably be looked back upon as a historic moment, 'one that could be seen either as an important turning point for humanity or as a huge missed opportunity, a milestone in the story of our deterioration and mismanagement of the planet' (Stanistreet et al, 2020, p. 627). However, turning crises into opportunities necessarily involves processes of learning on an individual and a collective level. In the last eighteen months we have witnessed how experts, politicians, civilians have been coping with unexpected challenges and a persisting uncertainty, while trying to control and overcome increasing death rates, economic disasters, psychological disorders. Scientists have done unprecedented efforts to successfully develop vaccines. Policy makers have installed innovative vaccination programs executed by large numbers of health workers and volunteers.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have turned into a massive learning experience on a global scale. This has inspired many of us to reflect on the nature of that learning. We have asked questions such as how do we learn? What do we learn? How do crises trigger learning – or hinder learning? And, what role does/can or even should adult and continuing education play in this? In spite of their relative absence from the public debate, (adult-)educationalists have already raised important questions and given answers. Many of them have pointed to the negative educational effects of this crisis for

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vulnerable groups, creating new inequalities or deepening existing class divides (Käpplinger & Lichte, 2020, Waller et al, 2020 and English & Mayo, 2021). Special attention has been paid to the discriminating effects of a long period of online learning, whereby students have dropped out of educational programs or have had great difficulties to stay in, due to the lack of suitable online study conditions. 'While some, educators and students, can teach/learn online from the comfort of their home, many others need to be relieved of their overcrowded spaces and attend to family livelihood concerns including "hidden economy" engagement' (English & Mayo, 2021, p. 120). Such reflections have inspired us to compose a thematic issue about how and what we learn, not only in COVID-19 times, but more generally in the context of disruptive societal crises such as financial crises, unemployment crises, health crises, environmental crises or crises in the life-course. We thereby wanted to pay specific attention to the learning and educational processes of adults in formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

Our starting point was that human learning processes are basically rooted in life experiences - both the sedimented and reflected summaries of one's overall life course, and the current experiences. In general, our daily lives are characterized by relatively strong routines that help to make life clear and obvious. This shapes a perception of the world that connects the understanding of the objective world, the relationships with other people and possible futures, as a reality that one can and often has to relate to. Early in life, most children acquire some kind of ontological security: a certainty about who they are, where and how they are grounded in their lived environment. This forms the basis for everyday life experiences, identity processes and a capacity for imagination.

This everyday life consciousness is often collectively supported through shared understanding and mutual identification. Crises then are situations that seriously, often all of a sudden, irritate this relatively certain conception of reality: changes in the objective world, in one's space for possible actions, in one's relationships. There are individual crises that "only" relate to personal life, such as a serious life-changing illness, a divorce or being made redundant in the world of work. But what interested us particularly are those sudden changes in societal conditions that also shake individual and micro-social relationships, the COVID-19 pandemic being a clear example: personal life planning became redundant from one day to the other, people getting unemployed suddenly, or having to work from home in combination with family care, schools being closed and, in certain countries people were not even allowed to leave their homes, apart from purchasing necessary supplies. These kinds of crises have indeed the potential to provide new insights, change routines, enhance utopias or develop new practices that would have been unimaginable before. Crises, thus, may elicit a process of recognition, integrating new knowledge, emotional commitment and notions of what it means for oneself, but also for a collective situation and life practices of humankind. Yet, it is far from evident that the people involved in crises learn anything. They may hope that "business as usual" is reinstalled as soon as possible. A crisis can be so emotionally overwhelming that all attention is concentrated on defense mechanisms. This could even feed into highly irrational and destructive social currents. Insights into these dynamics may help educators in the first place, but also different kinds of experts and policy makers to improve and broaden their repertoire of action.

The latest pervasive crisis is the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has two layers that are intertwined. Basically, the cause of the crisis is biological: a disease threat. The fact that an infectious virus creates a pandemic disease has to do with both its biological functioning and our lack of knowledge of it (infectiousness, long incubation period with unknown level of infection, an unknown diversity in disease course), but also with social conditions. Globalization has dramatically shortened the path from a Chinese food market

to the whole world. But apart from societal conditions that have facilitated the pandemic impact of this virus, the second layer of the crisis is the political handling of the threat in the form of drastic national lockdowns in large parts of the world – first, in China, then in the Asian neighboring countries, and finally in Europe and other parts of the world.

There is little doubt that the pandemic leaves strong experiences. Entire populations have become amateur epidemiologists. But that does not mean that the most important experience is about viruses. The Corona pandemic is perhaps more anxiety-provoking than many other infectious diseases by its novelty and by its very diverse disease-causing nature. Even at a low "pressure of infection" there is a basis for individual anxiety. Taken together, it creates an ontological insecurity, which enables a potential for projecting a wide range of (other) anxiety-provoking conditions on this disease - that is, a "condensation" of all possible anxiety potentials in relation to this virus. But what experience will the well-founded fear and perhaps more diffuse anxiety leave behind?

There is the peculiarity of a pandemic that the biological threat drastically affects the social: it is social life and the community that become dangerous. In order to control and block this threat, social life must be put under severe control. The nature of the crisis is primarily shaped politically by the definition of the Corona threat and the mitigation strategies used. Institutional and policy interventions have transformed a biological phenomenon into a crisis of social, economic and cultural nature and dimension. This nature of a threat intimately connected to social activity and its contagiousness has secured that also its anxiety-potential has affected everyone. Even though the political reactions have been quite diverse the experience of anxiety has been almost ubiquitous. When we compare with another crises in the relation to nature, the climate crisis, this seems quite different. Although not in the same way as in the COVID-19 pandemic, the ecological crisis, and particularly the crisis of global warming, is a threat arising from the conditions of nature and experienced through an interplay of scientific knowledge, political interpretation and popular opinion. Although there has also been spectacular events – flooding, typhoons, draught and forests burning - that have a lot of attention when they happen, and in spite of the fact that global warming is really a matter of everyday life, it seems that the reactions to these incidents remain passing – people must be reminded by activists in order to keep the awareness awake. The sudden emergence of crisis may give rise to new understandings of expertise and knowledge, and of the (un)controllability of living conditions. One can imagine that the political handling of the threat at national and international level will have an impact on the understanding of the (nation-)state's importance, and thus the crisis will leave quite different, but eventually also common experiences in different countries.

But while the pandemic has been able to label "science" primarily as a potential "cure" (vaccine), science in the climate context is sometimes considered rather as the creator of the crisis when documenting the necessity of uncomfortable and demanding new behavior, and undermining people's understanding of their own opportunities. The scientific documentation of global warming is far less tangible than the illness and death produced by the Corona crisis. It is partly prognostic, it cannot be seen immediately, it is relatively technical and abstract, and appears as a truth that must be accepted because of the credibility of the messenger ("the science") - and has therefore also more easily been the object of denial. Its emotional appeal is limited and its wide-ranging consequences are difficult to understand - for example, how migrant movements are the result of altered climatic conditions. 'Climate change is a pandemic in slow motion'[1]. However, recent floods and forest fires have now brought the experience of global warming close to everyone's livelihoods.

There is a long tradition in adult education, particularly in citizenship education, sustainability education, workers' education, literacy education, popular education, etc. of dealing with questions on how to enhance the awareness of people concerning major societal issues. Most of these approaches intend to make a connection between individual experiences and societal issues, or try to turn private concerns into public issues and into collective social utopias. Along with these traditions, approaches have been developed in the course of the twentieth century and beyond, that theorize the educational/learning processes related to the development of critical thinking. Various scholars have responded to our invitation to reflect on the role of adult education in connection with individual and collective crises. Below we present five papers that cover different kinds of crisis: unemployment, ageing, environmental and health crises. Two of them are empirical focusing on concrete cases. The other ones are theoretical contributions attempting to broaden and deepen existing concepts, while applying these to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for learning and education.

In 'Creating connections for expansive learning in crisis-laden times of long-term unemployment', Franziska Bonna has chosen the topic of long-term unemployment to explore the impacts and consequences of such highly crisis-ridden situations and their implications for not only the subjects' learning biographies, but also for adult learning and education. Her qualitative study, bringing subject theory (Holzkamp), biographical research (Schütze) and critical theory (Negt) into a conceptual encounter, asks for the existence as well as for the potential of utopian thinking for developing visions of the occupational future in (spite of) the situation of long-term unemployment. By this, Bonna identifies three types of such visions in her interview sample, eliciting the power mechanisms of Germany's neoliberal-driven labour market administration and their impacts on learning biographies as well as subtle traces of utopian thinking. The author argues for recognizing the relevance of these traces in their pivotal role for learning and for the aim of unfolding competencies in an individual and collective situation of societal rupture, calling for a critical-reflexive adult education.

The article on "Age Images and learning in late life. Coping with crisis experiences as a potential in long-life societies" by Claudia Kulmus discusses how experiences from coping with crises in individual life could form a learning potential for learning in and from a societal crises like the actual situation of COVID-19. She points out that the COVID-19 has a specific relation to age, adding a societal disruption to the individual experience of aging. The author presents a qualitative empirical study based on group discussions of elderly people's coping with the fact of aging. A grounded theory analysis of coping strategies shows the cultural structure of individual learning processes in relation to age images and the finiteness of life, and suggests that adult education can support these biographical learning processes. Kulmus discusses these results in relation to the present COVID-19 pandemic, in which also younger people experience the finiteness of life, and suggests that the learning in later life might form a potential for dealing with social crises, particularly in societies characterized by long lives.

The COVID-19 crisis has drawn to our attention that many educational efforts are needed to inform the wider public about the individual and collective risks and the necessary measures to deal with the crisis. Initiatives of 'public pedagogy' are not necessarily one-way operations from scientists and policy makers to the wider public. It is important to turn such dissemination strategies also into transactional processes, involving all stakeholders related to the issue. The vaccination campaigns that have been launched in many countries have shown that particular target groups cannot be reached unless proximity strategies are initiated, while considering the particular cultures and living-conditions of these groups. This is a central argument in Bengtsson and Van

Poeck's contribution 'What can we learn from COVID-19 as a form of public pedagogy'. In their paper they consider the Corona crisis as a large-scale, unplanned and unintended global experiment of public pedagogy.

Saskia Eschenbacher and Ted Fleming authored 'Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Crisis', exploring the concepts of experience and transformative learning for their role in facing times of crisis and disorientation. To this end, the authors draw upon the works by Oskar Negt, L.A. Paul and René Arcilla in order to shift attention to these conceptual approaches and to review their potential for the pedagogical tasks of adult learning and education. On the basis of their elaboration, the authors encourage a view on experience as a fertile basis for learning and on the understanding that a shared humanity and solidarity might be key to tackle today's existential crisis from the standpoint of adult learning and education.

Traditionally adult education literature theorizes learning in crisis situations with notions such as experiential learning, transformative learning and/or biographical learning. In his contribution 'Learning from the whirlpools of existence: Crisis and transformative processes as complex and rhythmic phenomena', Michel Alhadeff-Jones conceptualizes learning in crisis with the help of complexity theory (Edgar Morin) and his own understanding of rhythms that shape educational processes. In doing so, he problematizes, nuances and enriches classical approaches to transformative and biographical learning in the context of mitigation actions. The contribution concludes by emphasizing the importance of sustaining a critical awareness of the rhythms that shape educational processes in the everyday life, as they reveal the fluidity of ongoing power dynamics.

Notes

[1] Rob Wijnberg in 'De Correspondent'. https://decorrespondent.nl/11220/waarom-klimaatverandering-een-pandemie-in-slow-motion-is-en-wat-we-daarvan-kunnen-leren/287568600-7a1153b9

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Creating connections for expansive learning in crisis-laden times of long-term unemployment

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Abstract

This paper deals with the crises of long-term unemployment using subject theory, biographical research and critical theory as the framework. Based on narrative-biographical interviews with long-term unemployed people, I identify the factors and conditions that turn long-term unemployment into a crisis, arguing that expansive learning processes and the competence of utopian thinking are essential for creating visions of one's occupational future as well as (social) utopias, thus, being a way out of these crises. The findings of the data show that subjective crises in times of prolonged unemployment are not always caused by unemployment itself and that existing visions of the occupational future cannot always be pursued.

Keywords: Critical-reflexive adult education, expansive learning, long-term unemployment, social competences, utopian thinking

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Introduction

After years of what has been termed the 'economic miracle' and low rates of unemployment in Germany, mass unemployment was dominant in the 1980s and 1990s.[1] At the time, the research in German adult education on unemployment was broad. Besides psychological and sociological research on the consequences of unemployment, adult education focused on the self-perception of unemployed people (Peters, 1991), on the intended and unintended benefits of further education for this group (Meier, 1998) and on educational concepts (Epping et al., 2001). The last high point in German unemployment statistics was reached 2005. This was also the year when the fourth and final step of the German labour market policy reforms ('Hartz reforms') was implemented. Since these Hartz reforms, unemployed people have been divided into two groups and have been relegated to two different legal systems: Sozialgesetzbuch II ('Social Legislation Act II') and Sozialgesetzbuch III ('Social Legislation Act III')—SGB II and SGB III—each with different monetary benefits and educational interventions. The new labour market policy is conducted based on the slogan and practice of 'promoting and demanding' (*Fördern und Fordern*), aiming to reintegrate unemployed people as quickly as possible to reduce the unemployment rate.

Since these structural changes to German labour market policy, the number of unemployed people has continuously declined (before the COVID-19 pandemic). Comparing current rates of unemployment with other European countries, Germany remains along with the Netherlands and Czech Republic as being one of the countries with the lowest rates of unemployment, whereas Greece and Spain have the highest rates by far (cf. Eurostat, 2021). However, in Germany, the number of long-term unemployed has stagnated for years (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, Statistik/Arbeitsmarktberichterstattung, 2019, p. 6). This means that the proportion of long-term unemployed people has been increasing. Even though the structural problem of mass unemployment in Germany has decreased, long-term unemployment is still a problem and is linked to discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion (Butterwegge, 2015; Kronauer, 2007). Not only the long-term unemployed are affected by the Hartz reforms, but also further education, because, among other things, courses funded by the employment agency must be certified according to certain criteria. Therefore, unemployment under the conditions of the Hartz reforms is again receiving more attention in adult education research (Bonna, 2018; Hermeling, 2017; Teiwes-Kügler, 2017).

From a subject science theoretical, biographical and critical perspective, this contribution aims to discuss the link between the individual and social crisis of long-term unemployment, German labour market policy and learning processes. This is done with reference to a completed dissertation project in which the following questions were examined using a qualitative biographical research approach: 'What ideas do long-term unemployed people have of their occupational future?' 'How are these visions embedded in the political and societal conditions and in awareness of their own competences, experiences and biographical learning processes?' The main result is three types of visions of long-term unemployed people's occupational future. The dissertation and an article focusing on and presenting these future vision types have already been published (Bonna, 2018; 2017). In the current article, the focus is on the factors and conditions that turn long-term unemployment into a perceived crisis by those affected and on the way the experience of unemployment as a crisis affects the development and pursuit of ideas of the occupational future, including the related learning processes.

By way of introduction, I first discuss the significance of work and unemployment in a modern labour society and present the reformed German labour market policy. This is important for understanding the German context of the political and societal conditions of the empirical study under scrutiny and for the interpretation and analysis of the subjective and biographical viewpoint of long-term unemployed people. Second, I introduce the terms, utopia/utopian thinking and learning. I define these terms by referring to critical theory, the concept of social competences by Oskar Negt (2010) and the subject theory of learning by Klaus Holzkamp (1995). In a third step, I present the final results of my biographical research, which include three types of visions of the occupational future and a view of the crisis-laden conditions of long-term unemployment. The contribution ends with the conclusions for learning in the crisis of long-term unemployment.

The significance of work in a capitalist society in times of 'erosion crises'

In a capitalist industrialised labour society, work is primarily understood as gainful employment. Work serves to secure one's livelihood and finance leisure and consumption, which, in turn, is intended to secure the relations of production. Besides its economic function, work also has a psychosocial function. It enables social contacts, serves to structure time and space and conveys the feeling of social recognition and of being needed. Although voluntary work and care work have gained more attention and recognition and research also shows the meaningful, identity-creating and competence-building function that these forms of work have for the individual and society (Benedetti, 2015; Dehnbostel, 2007; Düx et al., 2009; Semmer & Meier, 2014), these forms of work still does not generate the social recognition that paid work does. Since the 1980s/1990s, the processes of individualisation, flexibilisation, the dissolution of boundaries between work, family and leisure on a spatial and temporal level, the decline of jobs and professions, the increase in atypical, precarious and discontinuous employment relationships and the increased risk of unemployment (in all social classes) have marked a crisis within the working society. The social philosopher Oskar Negt describes these changed working conditions (and the increasing mass unemployment of the 1980s and 1990s) that affect society as a whole as one of five current erosion crises of the capitalist society (Negt, 2010; Rasmussen, 2021). Erosion crises differ from general crises because of their impact on the individuals' physical, psychological and mental resources (Negt, 2002, p. 123). Negt compares erosion with Emil Durkheim's term 'anomy', which is characterised by the loss of familiar norms and disorientation, while new orientations for action are still missing. Erosion crises cause the critical conditions of isolation, fear, powerlessness and helplessness (Negt, 2002, p. 123). They affect many individuals and, hence, are collective crises, too. Negt's critique of the capitalist society of gainful employment and the associated superficial economic function of work is primarily directed at alienated work processes characterised by the exploitation, oppression and degradation of the human being into a workforce. Nevertheless, he also recognises in this concept work as 'a medium of self-liberation' (Negt, 2012, p. 3; translated by the author); he argues for a broadening of the concept of work, in which also other forms of work find social recognition, which he understands as 'living work' (*lebendige Arbeit*) (Negt, 1984; Salling Olesen, 2013). Living work serves self-production and self-realisation, promoting the perception of 'Mündigkeit' (empowerment) and helping in identity building. These are conditions with which future perspectives and motivation to participate in shaping the future and society can be developed (Negt, 2002, p. 429).

Long-term unemployment in times of changed labour market policy

One of the oldest and most well-known studies on long-term unemployed people in German-speaking countries is the *Marienthal-Studie* ('Marienthal study') from the early 1930s (Jahoda et al., 1986). Due to the unexpected shutdown of the local plant from one day to the other, the whole Austrian village of Marienthal was suddenly affected by unemployment. A research network visited, observed and interviewed the people living there. In order to gain a broad and deep insight into the impacts of the social rupture, multifaceted quantitative and qualitative methods were combined in that research, marking a milestone in social science studies. One of the main results of the Marienthal study is the identification of four types of attitudes towards the crisis of full unemployment: the unbroken, the resigned, the desperate and the apathetic (Jahoda et al., 1986, p. 73). The difference with today's situation is that phases of unemployment can affect all social classes, but mass unemployment is currently no longer a problem. However, long-term unemployment can be seen as a central problem in today's world because the number has stagnated in the last 15 years compared with the decreasing number of unemployed people in general. In addition to changes in the work society, Negt (2002) describes high unemployment as a central symptom of social erosion crises.

In Germany, people are considered long-term unemployed if they have been unemployed for a year or more. Around 90 percent of the long-term unemployed are assigned to the legal category SGB II; they receive basic income support to ensure their livelihood. In addition, basic benefits are given and include counselling services to reduce and end the need for assistance through integration into training or work. The promotion of continuing vocational training is not included in SGB II. Since the Hartz reforms, this has been regulated through the allocation of education vouchers in SGB III. Consequently, only unemployed persons who are assigned to SGB III, which does usually not include the long-term unemployed, are entitled to education vouchers, though education vouchers may also be awarded to the long-term unemployed in SGB II at the discretion of the employment agency.

The allocation of such vouchers is supposed to take place in a joint discussion between the unemployed person and the placement officer, in which the educational goal and duration of the envisaged continuing education are jointly determined. However, studies on these allocation processes show that the educational goal is often determined by the placement officer alone and that the unemployed have hardly any opportunities for codetermination (e.g., Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al., 2009). After receiving an education voucher, the unemployed person receiving benefits must independently search for a suitable continuing education offer. This is done via a digital course portal without further counselling support; therefore, it requires at least basic digital and literacy skills. It can be difficult to navigate a large number of continuing education providers and courses, especially for people who have never participated in continuing education before. In addition, the education voucher may only be redeemed for a continuing education activity that is certified and recognised by the Federal Employment Agency. This is a very obvious example of the concept of providing help (promoting), but also demanding that people take a large amount of responsibility for their future.

With the aim of rapid reintegration into gainful employment, since the Hartz reforms, the unemployed have been obliged to accept any job within so-called reasonable limits (*Zumutbarkeitsregelung*). This means that neither the once learned profession nor the qualifications of the respective unemployed person have to be necessarily taken into account when placing them in work. These regulations according to the parameters of reasonability very often force the unemployed to change their wishes, career plans and

life concepts – or even to lose sight of them altogether (Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al., 2008, p. 285ff.).

The new Hartz policy and the allocation of education vouchers have been strongly criticised in adult education because support (promoting) opportunities are unequally distributed and the demands require personal responsibility, flexibility and employability of the recipients of labour market policy benefits (e.g., Brödel, 2018; Reutter, 2009; Teiwes-Kügler, 2017). Subjectivity and self-determination are often not considered.

Against the backdrop of the capitalist understanding of work, the erosion of the work society and the incapacitating conditions of labour market policy, it is questionable not only whether and how the long-term unemployed develop, maintain and actively pursue visions of their occupational future, but also, how these conditions turn long-term unemployment into a crisis.

Utopias and utopian thinking as a space of possibilities to overcome crises

Questions directed at the visions of the occupational future of long-term unemployed people and at the conditions leading long-term unemployment to a subjectively perceived, but also collectively experienced crisis can be answered with a view to concepts of utopia. In this article, I present a philosophical-social understanding of utopia based in critical theory. Utopias, according to this, are visions that often arise in times of societal crises or societal transitions (Faulstich, 1990, p. 16). They consist of both a criticism of present social conditions and the wish for a better life and better life conditions in the future (Negt, 2002); consequently, they are alternative drafts of the existing social conditions. Utopias allow people to think about possibilities in the future and create hope for a life full of happiness and equity (Horkheimer, 1986, p. 189). Max Horkheimer defines utopias as ‘a dream of a real and equitable order of life’ (Horkheimer, 1930, p. 6; translated by the author). Thinking about the future is important because it allows us to escape from (crisis-laden) reality and to open up ideas of what might be possible. The aim of utopian thinking is to create an everyday consciousness of social structures and the possibilities they contain for the subject (Negt, 1984, p. 205). Thus, utopian thinking is a possibility for individual wishes and hopes, as well as for collective visions to create a better life and better society.

However, utopian thinking requires a specific competence that must be learned. In parallel with and in criticism of the neoliberal-grounded debate on qualification, key qualification and competence, Negt has developed the concept of ‘social competences’ (1993, 2010). Social competences aim at an awareness of connections between individual interests and objective conditions and at critical political education (Negt, 2010; Rasmussen, 2021, p. 23; Zeuner, 2013). ‘Creating connections’ is understood by Negt as a meta-competence and as a learning process that is not about the acquisition of knowledge but about the development of a sociological way of thinking that allows an action-empowering process in the midst of a world with rapidly changing information (Dvorak et al., 2005, p. 6; Negt, 1969; Zeuner, 2009, p. 268) and through which people should find orientation in a society marked by erosion crises. This meta-competence is composed of the following six social competences: identity competence/competence of self-perception and perception of others, technical competence, ecological competence, historical competence, competence of social justice and economic competence.

All six social competences are related to each other and enable the subjects to think in contexts, as well as allowing for emancipation and ‘Mündigkeit’ (empowerment) (Zeuner, 2009, p. 275). Identity competence and historical competence are particularly

important for the current article and for the question of crises and visions of the occupational future of long-term unemployed people. Accordingly, I briefly discuss these two competences in more detail (for more in-depth information on the other four social competences, cf. Negt, 2010; Rasmussen, 2021; Zeuner, 2013).

Negt understands 'identity competence' as an enlightened way of dealing with threatened and broken identities in a changing society, in which the familiar structures that provide orientation in the family, the working environment and society have eroded (Negt, 2010, p. 223). Therefore, it is about understanding the fundamental social changes and how individuals can deal with them. Identity competence is also understood as the competence of self-perception and perception of others, which is needed to redevelop eroded individual and societal values. This shows a close relationship with the historical competence, which is also one of the six social competences and which consists of the ability to remember and the ability to create a utopia. Historical competence aims to create connections between the past, the present and the future and to develop awareness of one's own needs and interests, one's own social situation and the social situation of others (Dvorak et al., 2005). The past, present and future are closely linked but not always present in people's consciousness, or they are destroyed by crises such as unemployment and the associated experiences of individual helplessness and inability to act (Dvorak et al., 2005, p. 23).

From the perspective of milieu theory, it is assumed that the 'underprivileged' do not have the competence to anticipate the future (Vester et al., 2001); they probably also have good reasons for not trying to explore a future that might be uncertain because insecure jobs, precarious employment relationships, the constant risks of unemployment or long durations of unemployment lead to a feeling of helplessness instead of motivation. Peter Faulstich (2003) compares long-term unemployment with a wall, describing it as a barrier limiting all the possibilities of visions of the future and how to plan the future behind this wall. The subjective reasons for or against anticipating one's occupational future can be examined with the help of subject science learning theory (Holzkamp, 1995).

The subject science perspective: Learning between problem of action, anticipation and phenomenal biography

The past, present and future are also connected in the subject science theory of learning (Holzkamp, 1995). Similar to utopias, the starting point of learning, which is a specific form of action, is an existing 'problem of action' (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 187). This 'problem of action' is perceived as such by the subject when the possibilities of being able to dispose of one's own life circumstances or participation in social processes is limited. For Anke Grotlüschen (2015), the expansion of possibilities to act is not a perfection of the self or an increase in efficiency in the neoliberal sense; on the contrary, the improvement or expansion of living conditions follow a materialistic logic. It is about the distribution of conflicts in society: 'Therefore, extended influence on personal circumstances is always a question of poverty and wealth, of secure jobs and influence and of political codetermination' (Grotlüschen, 2015, p. 6).

Hence, if subjects encounter a so-called problem of action, they decide, according to Holzkamp, whether to enter a learning loop/learning activity or not. From the standpoint of the subject, this decision can be accompanied by the goal of increasing one's influence to act in the respective given social conditions and, consequently, also by the expansion of one's quality of life. In this sense, the decision for action and learning is justified 'expansively' (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 190; Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013, p. 123f.). On the

contrary, if the course of a learning loop is subjectively justified with the aim of averting a threat to the possibilities to act, the learning activity is grounded 'defensively' (Holzkamp, 1995; Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013, p. 123ff.). For example, when the contents of a promoted continuing vocational training are determined only by the interests of the employment agency and could cause money cuts in case of non-participation. Regardless of the subjective justification, the subject must anticipate whether and why the action or learning is worthwhile before making a decision. At the same time, the phenomenal biography represents an important criterion with which the subject reflects on its previous problems and goals and on which possibilities and obstacles were experienced as beneficial or inhibiting (Holzkamp, 1995, p. 336).

Both, the utopia-theoretical approach and subject science theory, argue that crises imply the potential to initiate learning processes and that visions of the future, especially utopias, can build a space of possibilities. This is not primarily a question of realising a concrete action, but of having, first of all, a vision of future possibilities, created by thoughts. These thoughts can contribute to perceive oneself as being able to act and to find a way out of powerlessness and current crises.

What visions of the occupational future long-term unemployed people have and to what extent long-term unemployment is perceived as a crisis will be explained below using the central results of the study.

Visions of the occupational future of the long-term unemployed – analysed by a biographical and subject science perspective

Both theoretical perspectives – concepts of utopia in critical theory and subject science theory – emphasise the connection between a present crisis or present problem of action, an utopia or anticipation of the future and reminders or experiences from the past. With this in mind, the study presented here draws on a biographical research method that allows the connection between the past, present and future to be examined.

The investigation of the visions of the occupational future of long-term unemployed people was carried out in an open biographical-narrative interview process (Schütze, 1983). Openness is a fundamental prerequisite for this interpretive research paradigm so as to give the interviewee space to tell whatever they consider to be relevant (Felden, 2012). From a subject science perspective as well, openness is vital to ascertain and analyse the standpoint of the subject towards social conditions and the assessment of one's options for action. Long-term unemployed people often have to justify their situation, they are repeatedly stigmatised as lazy and unmotivated and are also constantly forced by the labour market administration to participate in courses of further education or vocational education without being asked for own occupational interests and desires and are, thus, often kept without any possibility of codetermination. (Butterwegge, 2015; Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al., 2009; Teiwes-Kügler, 2017). Therefore, to avoid suggestive questions and questions that could create pressure, the interviews began by asking the interviewees to tell their life stories.

Sample

Nine long-term unemployed people aged between 19 and 58 were interviewed. At the time of the survey (2013–2014), they had not worked for between 2 and 15 years. It is important to note that six of the interviewees had completed a vocational training

(housekeeping (2x), cooking, bricklaying, dental assistant and road construction). Compared with the long-term unemployed in the general population, this is above average (Spermann, 2014). There were five female and four male interviewees. Three of the women were single parents, one woman's children were already grown up and had moved out.

With regard to the interpretation of the results, it is important to consider the possibilities for 'social inclusion' provided for the people interviewed. Social inclusion in this sense means that all of them had access to a social centre, offering education, gatherings and counselling for people in unemployment, or participated in courses for adult basic education or in debt counselling offers. In the sampling process, it was not possible to establish contact with long-term unemployed interviewees via the employment service, because the service could not or was not allowed to forward me to the respective employment service contact person. Therefore, snowball sampling was used by means of staff working in the educational and social institutions and offers mentioned above, which provided me with the necessary access to these places and to persons in long-term unemployment.

The names of the interview partners were anonymised through the use of pseudonyms. As the pseudonym, the first career aspiration or the first profession learned was chosen (e.g. Ms Dental Assistant). All sequences of the interviews presented in the following chapter are translated from German to English by me.

Three types of visions of the occupational future

The interviews were examined using a narrative analysis to find out about the interviewees' current and former visions of their future and to reconstruct the process structures of their life courses. Fritz Schütze (1983, p. 284) assumes that four process structures can be found in all life courses: biographical scheme of action, institutional process pattern, curves of suffering and processes of inner change; they differ in terms of the possibilities for action perceived in different phases of life. Similar to these process structures, in the empirical data set, three types of visions of the occupational future were identified as findings of the study: *individually self-determined visions*, *institutional-adapted visions* and *seemingly no visions of the occupational future* (in detail: Bonna, 2018, p. 209ff.). It is important to note that these types are not referring to the type of a person, but identify the type of visions of the occupational future. In general, all three types can evolve as dominant in different life stages of a person's biography. Therefore, changing processes of the vision types in the life course are likely to happen.

The *individually self-determined type* of visions of the occupational future is characterised by the concrete career aspirations that often arise in childhood or adolescence. These are frequently attributed to having had contact with an object of interest (e.g. cooking, baking, sewing). In addition, these visions can be associated with specific expectations of work, for example, that work should be meaningful or challenging. Not only are visions of the occupational future mentioned in the dataset, but also concrete plans are elaborated with regard to how these ideas and visions can be realised. For this, the subject reflects earlier experiences, as well as interests and competences. Life phases in which this type of vision of the occupational future is dominant are also associated with a self-perceived ability to act, which can be strengthened by experiences of overcoming obstacles:

> I finished secondary school and in the last three years of school I learned to cook. Back then, it was called housekeeping for boys. Then, I switched to baking. I knew how to bake

> because of my grandad [...], and I wanted to be a cook. The family was against it. But the teacher said that because I was the best she'd ever taught (…) and I already had the experience, I should get a proper qualification, and I made an appointment with my parents and made it clear to them that it really makes sense for me to do it. And then the family was all for it again. So I started the cookery apprenticeship. (Mr Cook, 146–153)

The example of Mr Cook is typical of a biographical phase of life in which ideas about the future are individually self-determined. Above all, the experience of convincing his parents of his career aspirations with the help of his teacher led to the realisation of this career aspiration and ability to act. This shows an expansively justified acting and learning (Holzkamp, 1995) and is also relevant for future occupational visions and decisions. This future oriented type is often found when the subject is in a phase of life in which the process structure (Schütze, 1983) of the biographical action scheme is dominant, which goes hand in hand with one's perceived ability to act.

The *institutional-adapted type* of vision of the occupational future, the second type, is similar to the individually self-determined one. The difference, however, is that obstacles to the realisation of career aspirations could not be overcome. Obstacles are created by external conditions, such as not being able to find an apprenticeship position in the desired occupation:

> Professionally, yes, I tried to become a baker. I liked baking a lot at home and tried to become a baker. But I didn't get a job and they advised me against it, so just to do *something* I chose an alternative profession ((laughs)) – bricklayer ((laughs)). (Mr Baker-Carpenter, 31–36)

In all cases in which this type of vision of the occupational future occurs in the life course, there are external circumstances and conditions – termed as 'discrepancy experiences' by Holzkamp (1995, p. 212ff.) – that are perceived and that generate an adjustment of occupational visions. This adjustment is based on a capitalistic and neoliberal norm orientation (social expectations to complete vocational training or to be gainfully employed), but also on an existential threat (being unable to support one's family). It is precisely this decisive criterion, the subjective reason for action, that can be used to determine whether we are dealing with individually self-determined or institutional-adapted ideas about one's occupational future. If the justifications are of an expansive nature and accompanied with the goal of increasing one's quality of life and one's (occupational) interests, this suggests an individually self-determined vision of the future. Defensively justified action, on the other hand, points to institutional-adapted visions of the occupational future to avert the threat to the possibilities of action and the quality of life.

The third type of vision of the occupational future – *seemingly no visions of the occupational future* – is distinct from the first two ones. Despite the interviewer's enquiries, there is no or hardly any access to the future. At first glance, the occupational future does not seem to have any subjective relevance here. A dominant feature of this type is the perception of not being able to influence one's own future. This goes hand in hand with the perceived lack of possibilities for action. Rather, action is perceived as being determined by external influences and conditions. This is typical for Schütze's process structure curve of suffering and follows the principle of being governed by external conditions. These external conditions appear as unexpected and unpredictable, so the future is equated with fate and does not appear to be organisable in a self-determined way (Schütze, 1983). In addition, external conditions such as the demands of the labour market administration as well as experiences of illnesses or of failure generate

fear of the future and self-doubt. The example of Mr Roadbuilder, who throughout the interview, when talking about the future at all, repeatedly emphasised that he was not capable of planning and shaping his future because he had not learned to do so, shows that, nevertheless, interests do exist:

> But working on engines and complicated things like that, that's something I find quite interesting, actually. Um, maybe that would be the point where I would say, yes, I could see myself doing that again. But I've never taken an engine apart or anything, let alone fiddled with it. Uh, I've never had anything to do with that. [...] So, what goes on in an engine, how it works, [...] how the power is generated, how a car is moved, by the engine. That's (…), I'm sure (I'm a bit dumber), but uh, I find it quite interesting, all these little parts, which are then put together, uh, what comes out of it. (Mr Roadbuilder, 447–460)

Mr Roadbuilder only talks about these interests at the end of the interview when asked by the interviewer. In his life, however, he does not pursue his interest in car engines because he does not have what he considers to be the necessary intelligence or general education. In another sequence of the interview, he attributes this to the fact that he attended a school for children with special needs.

Thus, this is an example of the type of having seemingly no ideas about one's occupational future. According to Holzkamp (1987), this future oriented type can also be interpreted as a subjectively and biographically based resistance to develop or identify visions of the occupational future, due to repeated experiences of failure regarding maintaining and expanding one's quality of life and the ability to act within the existing social conditions.

Future types cannot be assigned to cases in the sense of a stable, rigid pattern, but they change according to the dominant process structure, which, as Schütze (1983) has pointed out, transforms over the course of one's life. Future types are, just like the process structures of the life course, changeable and bound to the respective current life situation and the associated perceptions of self-determination and possibilities for action. The less a person perceives self-determined possibilities for action, the more likely it is that the future has no relevance in the respective situation, because the experiences of failure and of being governed by external conditions have occurred and occur repeatedly.

Crisis-laden conditions of long-term unemployment and utopian potential

In addition to the three types of visions of the occupational future, the biographical data material can be used to reconstruct what exactly causes long-term unemployment to become a crisis. This is exemplified in the article by two crisis-laden conditions or rather circumstances: the search for a job that makes people feel happy and the lack of social recognition.

The search for a job that promises happiness

In their (life) stories, almost all of the interviewees talk about their earliest career aspirations. However, only one person succeeded in realising these aspirations. Four people completed a training in a different profession. Especially the story of Mr Baker-Carpenter illustrates how years of searching for a job in one's desired occupation can turn into an individual crisis:

> I somehow never really found a job where I was really (...) happy and where I worked for a long time or would have wanted to ((deep breath)). I did it because you have to do something, but I never actually wanted the work ((laughs)). (Mr Baker-Carpenter, 55–58)

Mr Baker-Carpenter has been interested in baking and crafts since childhood. He was not able to complete training in either profession. Occupational adjustment processes already began with the alternative training he completed as a bricklayer and continued throughout his employment history. In the process, he frequently experienced physical and psychological health problems. To this day, Mr Baker-Carpenter holds on to his occupational aspirations (carpenter), but at the same time he perceives himself as incapable of acting:

> Um (7 s), for one thing I don't know what else I can do professionally somehow (2 s). Where or what I can do, who with or where, whatever, what I can do, I don't know (2 s). I'll have to see. (3 s) And uh (6 s), I've also got into the habit of planning only up to certain points, what happens after that, I wait and see. What I've learned or had to learn from being unemployed, lengthy planning (2 s), is just a high risk (2 s). Either financially or what the job centre would or wouldn't have from me ((laughs)), (2 s) is always one of those things. (Mr Baker-Carpenter, 335–342)

Thus, adapting to a performance-oriented labour market society while holding on to subjective interests in life and work may lead to an individual crisis (suffering curve), which is likely to manifest in the form of illnesses, among other things. What is particularly critical here (for the subjective perceived ability to act and for creating visions of the occupational future), is that the perceived failure is subjectivised. Although Mr Baker-Carpenter attributes his resignation regarding planning his future to the repressive conditions and demands of the labour market administration, he looks for alternative ways to maintain his quality of life and ability to act within the existing conditions to a certain extent and, yet, reproduces them at the same time. Holzkamp refers to this as 'restrictive agency' (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 354) as Mr Baker-Carpenter tries to simultaneously adapt to the performance-oriented expectations of a capitalist labour market society and to those of the labour market administration. In his narrative, he tentatively expresses criticism of the labour market administration, but criticism of social conditions is not voiced, nor are alternative concepts developed.

Both interview quotes show how much Mr Baker-Carpenter has tried to adapt to a performance-oriented (labour) society and how, over the years, he has increasingly lost his orientation and his subjectively perceived ability to act, thus, also his ability to plan his own occupational future.

At the time of the interview, Mr Baker-Carpenter can be seen as being in a progression curve of suffering (Schütze, 1985). Probably, the progression curve is dominant precisely because he is clinging on to his occupational ideas and desires (searching for a job that makes him feeling happy). Despite trying to adapt the ideas and desires under the terms of participation in gainful employment and, thus, in the labour market society, he has failed. For this reason, he has lost hope, he no longer actively follows this career aspiration and has stopped planning his occupational future in the longer term and pursuing it in a self-determined manner. He justifies this with his dependence on the labour market administration and the associated lack of opportunities for codetermination, as well as financial restrictions. In addition, he is no longer able to pursue any activity because of physical impairments attributed to being severely overweight and having back problems. He is officially registered as a person with impairment/disability. At the time of the interview, he was hoping that his application for a reduced earning capacity pension would be accepted so that he could be his 'own man'

and shape his life according to his ideas and health and pursue his craft and artistic interests in his private leisure time. He finds opportunities for this both at home and at the local social centre, offering education, gatherings and counselling for the unemployed and in general for the people living in the neighbourhood, which he visits regularly and where he takes part in various group activities (e.g. samba course, weekly breakfast).

Lack of social recognition

Sometimes, neither the occupation (job) itself nor the aim of pursuing gainful employment is highly relevant to the unemployed people interviewed. The crisis here is that care work, for example, is not perceived as valued and recognised. The stigmatisation of being lazy and living at the expense of society, which often goes hand in hand with long-term unemployment, also leads to a crisis-like experience.

For the interviewee, Ms German Army, the lack of social recognition is negatively encouraged by her former housing situation in a high-rise building in a so-called disadvantaged neighbourhood, which, in turn, leads to stigmatisation:

> Yes, I can say that, living in such a high-rise complex [...] and having lived with hundreds of people in ONE house, I lived there for 28 years, and you were socially labelled, you were labelled as the LOWEST. Even the one police operation, a young policeman in a house where I lived here, wherever in A-town talked to us in SUCH a shitty way, that's probably the lowest of the low, the people who live here. So, uh and I don't have that anymore, that feeling of being labelled LOWEST. It's just a MUCH more liberated feeling where I live now, that it's finally come true, that I got out of THERE. (Ms German Army, 652–663)

In the narrative of Ms German Army, there is an initial career aspiration that is not realised, yet, the many years of adjustment by taking on any kind of job and her current unemployment are not portrayed by her as problematic or even crisis-like. On the contrary, what has led to feeling stigmatised as worthless since years, even decades of, is her social status and that she, as a single mother of two children, has not found a way out. Her biography also includes multiple illnesses and impairments, which, from her point of view, have severely limited the possibilities of finding a job with which she could have chosen a different living environment and would have attained financial security for herself and her children. In contrast to Mr Baker-Carpenter, Ms German Army shows a much stronger everyday awareness of social structures:

> I am also very socially and interculturally minded, so that I can do something to ensure that we don't just watch poverty increase, but that we actually have to stick together so that we don't pull ourselves down completely. Politically, we are being dragged down as we NEVER have been before. [...] Poverty has never been as high as it is now in Germany. I also think about this. But we have to do something in the COMMUNITY so that we don't let ourselves get pushed around here. (Ms German Army, 95–105)

Ms German Army also talks about demonstrations she took part in, against unemployment and against discrimination of women in the workplace. This elicits a strong collective-oriented critique of the social conditions. However, in the dataset, no social utopias have emerged from this critique, or, perhaps, have not been told. Approaches to a critical examination of individual but also collective interests and social conditions are, yet, recognisable in her case.

Conclusions for learning and utopian thinking in the crisis of long-term unemployment

The biographical data material does not reveal any statements on social utopias in the sense of critical theory because it shows hardly any explicit criticism of current social conditions that could be a starting point for the development of utopias in the sense of alternative concepts to existing social conditions. However, multiple 'problems of action' (Holzkamp, 1995) are presented, stated as a subjectively perceived limited quality of life and a limited influence to social conditions – in other words, a lack of the ability to act. This limited ability to act is partly attributed to external conditions; yet, unsuccessful adaptive actions are often subjectivised by the interviewees, which means that they declare themselves as responsible for their failures. Considering this, also the interview situation needs to be taken into account. The interviews were conducted by me as a researcher and an academic in employment. This might have provoked the situation that the interviewees were reluctant to express (at least partly) the real amount of criticism towards their personal situation and / or the social conditions of modern society. More frequently, there were sequences of justifying their unemployment situation and how it came to this point, which rather illuminates the perceptions of stigmatisation and failure.

However, the data clearly reveals that, even if long-term unemployed, people do have ideas, interests and wishes about their occupational future. They try to maintain their interests, competences and professional identity through other forms of work (e.g., in the domestic family or voluntary sector) to protect and maintain their own possibilities for action under the respective conditions. This happens in different ways, for example, by dealing with one's own rights and duties as an unemployed person or by following one's own interests in private spaces.

Negt describes unemployment as 'an act of violence that attacks the physical and psychological integrity of those affected' (Negt, 1984, p. 8; translated by the author). Often, it is not the lack of a job or the exclusion from the labour market alone that causes the crisis. Rather, it is the many problems of action and mechanisms of exclusion, the lack of social recognition, stigmatisation, crises in the private and family sphere or crises due to illness. Especially, the type 'seemingly no idea of the occupational future' shows in what ways long-term unemployment can lead to a lack of (perceived) ability to act through these mechanisms and problems of action; in consequence, also a subjectively justified resistance[2] to planning one's future might be initiated. These are predominantly individual crises that manifest themselves in experiences of suffering; but less so crises that are seen as brought about by social conditions. One could suggest that this exemplifies the power of capitalism and neoliberalism, which is reflected in the actions of the subjects. It concerns the social devaluation and incapacitation of (long-term) unemployed people, who are stigmatised by neoliberal society and medial discourses as 'parasites' (Butterwegge, 2015, p. 240ff.) and are, thus, devalued as non-productive for the capitalist-based labour market society and disciplined by labour market policy measures. According to the findings of the data material, the majority of the long-term unemployed seem to have already internalised this without acting reflexively or opposing against it.

This is the point at which Negt's social competences can be linked. Although adult and continuing education can neither solve the structural problem of unemployment (Holzer, 2014, p. 39), nor end the erosion crisis of the labour society, adult education can enable people to develop social competences by means of critical reflection, thereby promoting a more critical approach to social and individual crises. This is not primarily about reintegration into the labour market, but about a critical rethinking and biographical reinterpretation of the connections (Negt) between individual interests and social

conditions. Thus, it aims at developing social competences that are not superficially oriented towards usability, qualification and employability, but towards enlightenment, 'Mündigkeit' (empowerment) and the strengthening of the subjective and collective identity of (long-term) unemployed people (Negt, 2002; Pongratz, 2010). Within the framework of the European Grundtvig project 'Political Participation through Societal Competences: Curriculum Development for Basic Political Education', a curriculum of all six societal competences has already been developed (e.g., Dvorak et al., 2005). Such critical-reflexive adult education promotes expansive learning processes by opening up spaces for criticism and for utopias, and, consequently, contributes to empower the perceived ability to act. The strong criticism of the labour market administration, lack of codetermination and stigmatisation that has become evident in the interviews clearly emphasises the viewpoint that there certainly is a potential for utopian thinking – even under the conditions of long-term unemployment.

Notes

[1] In the 1980s, the phenomenon of mass unemployment had been widely spread in many European countries and had been a key driver for social science studies on social exclusion (Castel, 2000; Kronauer, 2007).
[2] There exist a large body of knowledge on this kind of resistance, examined extensively by Daniela Holzer (2017) with regard to continuing education.

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Age images and learning in late life. Coping with crisis experiences as a potential in long-life societies

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Abstract

This paper discusses the potential that coping with ageing experiences in later life might have for dealing with the current Covid-19-pandemic. The paper is based on the results of a qualitative study on subjective ageing experiences and the respective coping strategies of older people. The study is based on subject-obnderlying social structures. (e.g. BMBF, 2010). A qualitative research design was developed using the method of group discussions. The data gathered in these discussions were evaluated based on the approach of grounded theory. The results of this study are discussed regarding the ways in which the coping strategies of the participants revealed the specific abilities of older people to manage crisis experiences. The findings offer new perspectives on improving current images of ageing.

Keywords: Active ageing, age images, crisis, finiteness, learning in later life

Introduction

Learning and crises can be examined critically in relation to developments in the physical world, such as those we are currently experiencing across the globe. The crisis caused by Covid-19 has proven to be relevant to education on various levels, and it has involved both individual and social learning processes. This crisis has affected a variety of dimensions, such as social institutions and socially institutionalised solidarity with regard to the health care system, the childcare system, and the care system; close social relationships, which normally offer support in individual crisis management, but have to

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be reduced now; and everyday life. During periods of shutdown, we need to change our routines. This situation, which has been politically addressed as primarily a health threat, permeates our individual and social existence.

However, the current situation can also be seen as an age-specific crisis. As human beings, we become aware of the anthropological condition of the finiteness of life and its effects. This can be experienced on an individual level as a crisis to which people must respond with individual learning processes. Older people are particularly affected by the pandemic and the risk of the end of life that it makes more concrete. They therefore need more protection but also need to deal with that age-specific danger. Based on this, a crisis regarding social images of ageing has emerged, which frames the individual's handling of finiteness. During pandemic, there has been the threat of the regression to negative images of ageing in which older people are ascribed a special role that ultimately promotes cultural exclusion (Kulmus, 2019; Kneale, 2012; Schmidt-Hertha, 2019; Walsh et al., 2017; Bursell, 2019). Furthermore, this crisis has revealed the fundamental structures of recognition on which these exclusionary tendencies are based, as well as the ways in which social structures are linked to anthropological conditions of existence, such as the finiteness of human life.

Therefore, this crisis has both required and enabled a change in the way we handle knowledge about our vulnerability, old age, and older people. The present study is based on an earlier empirical study on learning in late life. This previous study was conducted without considering the pandemic context. Nevertheless, its results revealed the general abilities of older people to deal with crisis experiences. It therefore allows for discussing the potential that these abilities offer, *not* to fall back into negative images of old age.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss what we can learn from older people during the present crisis instead of perpetuating images that disenfranchise and devalue them. I begin by presenting two theoretical approaches that framed the empirical study: learning as dealing with crisis experiences; and social images of ageing and the social structures that underlie them. I show that these approaches could be combined to explore the contextuality of learning in older age. I then present the results of the empirical study regarding coping strategies as a form of biographical learning that serves to maintain a good life even in facing individual and social disruptions in old age. Finally, I return to the context of the Covid 19 pandemic and discuss the current regression to outdated images of ageing. I also query the potential of the nonpandemic-related empirical results to be applied in dealing with the current crisis, with specific regard to the experiences of older people and general regard to social attitudes towards ageing.

Towards learning in late life: A qualitative empirical study

A qualitative empirical study was conducted to show how older people dealt with ageing and its relation to learning (Kulmus, 2018). In the study, two theoretical approaches were combined to connect theories of ageing and learning.

Theoretical approach 1: Biographical learning in continuity and crisis situations

The relationship between learning and crises has been addressed by several theorists of learning (Faulstich, 2013; Meyer-Drawe, 2012; Wagner, 1999). In different formulations, this relationship has been conceptualised as an occasion for learning: the relationship between continuum and moment (Faulstich, 2012; Kulmus, 2018); the relationship

between everyday life routines and ruptures in life (Wagner, 1999); the relationship between embodied, habitualised lifestyles and alienation experiences (Meyer-Drawe, 2012); the relationship between expectations and negations of the same (Buck, 1967); and the relationship between intended action and "suffering" the consequences of the action (Dewey, 1938).

These elaborate theories assume that the reasons for learning lie in confrontations with moments of experience, irritation, or the negation of expectations. With regard to biographical learning, the processing of critical life events, such as illness or the loss of a person, have been the subject of research (Nittel & Seltrecht, 2013). From this perspective, learning always presupposes the anticipation of the future, successful development, or growth (Dewey, 1938; Felden, 2018). The anticipation of successful development through learning is risky because the latter can fail, especially in learning late in life. Thus, because of the limitations of human life, the decrease in future prospects cannot be resolved by learning. Therefore, the question of how learning can nevertheless contribute to leading a "good life" has become even more relevant.

Little research has been conducted on learning and finiteness, especially from the perspectives of adult education and lifelong learning. However, a few studies have focused on that relationship of learning and finiteness. For example, Nittel and Seltrecht (2013) examined learning as a way of dealing with life-threatening illnesses. The phrase "learning in the face of death" implies finiteness as a perspective on learning. Nittel and Seltrecht described living with the disease and with the knowledge of its life-threatening nature as a deepened process of identity work that leads to a biographical redefinition. An early gerontological study by Kruse (1990) addressed the question of "borderline experiences". The study revealed that resignation as well as the realisation of possibilities could arise in the relationship between continuity of life and crisis-like moments and the ways in which they are managed. In a recent biographical analysis of the German composer Bach, Kruse (2014) showed that creativity and creation emerged in advanced age under the highest conditions of suffering.

Finally, an early study by Thomae (1989) showed interesting results. This study was focused on the experience of time in old age. The results showed that changes in the life course were continuous but not necessarily crisis-like. Moreover, in the participants' spontaneously expressed thoughts, finiteness did not appear to play a role. However, these findings could certainly be discussed further. In the study, categories such as the "belief in the finality of the situation" were mentioned by the participants, but they were not included by the researchers in the topic of finitude. However, the finding that the shortening of life perspectives was not necessarily experienced as a personal crisis should be taken seriously. Instead, it could be interpreted as a sign of mastery in dealing with the knowledge of finitude. Interestingly, the results also showed that in old age, changes in the perspective on time tended to be caused by social changes, not by the shortening of the lifetime perspective in general.

Contextualised and biographical learning theories have assumed that learning is an individual action framed by social structures (see Faulstich, 2013; Kondrup, 2010). Images of old age and ageing have been based on such frames. From different theoretical perspectives, the concepts of "cultures" (Amrhein, 2008), "narratives" (Himmelsbach, 2009), and "dispositives" (Denninger et al., 2014) of ageing have been used in describing the structures that shape concepts of ageing. In these approaches, "age images" has been used as an umbrella term (Kulmus, 2019; BMBF, 2010). Thus, this term can be understood as denoting the context of human learning in late life.

Theoretical approach 2: Societal age images and social recognition structures: No space for calm or deceleration

The discussion of images of old age has a long tradition in several disciplines, such as philosophy and history (Göckenjan, 2009). The empirical research, however, has been based mainly on psychological approaches to stereotypes of age (Staudinger, 2015). Core questions include whether positive or negative images of old age have causal effects, such as on mental capacity, well-being, objective or subjective states of health, mortality, and participation in adult education (BMFSFJ, 2010; Schmidt-Hertha, Formosa, & Fragoso 2019; Staudinger, 2015; Tippelt, 2009; Wurm & Huxhold, 2010). However, a simple differentiation of positive or negative age images is problematic because this polarity does not reflect reality. Instead, there have been many “grey area findings” (Schmitt & Kruse, 2005). Furthermore, such images have been based on cognitive attitudes or opinions, and it is not clear the extent to which the images or stereotypes guide actions in real-life situations (Lehr et al., 1979).

However, in recent years, the research on age images has broadened, and there has been a stronger focus on the societal structures that construct the invisible background of age images. This shift also concerns the understanding that some assumptions of ageing are scientifically untenable. Negative images are mainly based on what gerontology has referred to as biological age. Ageing involves processes of degradation on biological and cellular levels, which ultimately lead to death, which is threatening to many. Ageing has been described as a reduction in physical and mental abilities. It has long been clear, however, that the so-called adolescence-maximum hypothesis is not tenable and is methodologically problematic. Instead, mental performance and thus learning ability can be maintained in old age (Lehr, 2007). Naturalistic (i.e., deficient) attributions to old age from a purely biological perspective are not necessarily transferred to mental and social processes; therefore, they are not tenable.

In a countermovement, a discourse of active ageing has been identified, which has become dominant in recent years as both a reality and a programme. This discourse is based on empirical knowledge about today’s generation of older people, who have a much higher average life expectancy, good health, and a high level of education (Wahl, 2021). Moreover, because they retire relatively early, they still have a long phase of life ahead of them, which they can shape. However, the losses that accompany ageing are often ignored in this discourse, in which the focus is often on activity, especially productivity (Denninger et al., 2014).

This focus reflects the influence of the structure of modern work and performance societies, where recognition and dignity are based on ideas of performance and achievement in mainly work contexts (Denninger et al., 2014; Göckenjan, 2009). Honneth (2008), one of the most important authors in Germany regarding recognition theory, has argued that recognition is closely connected to gainful employment, which means that work, if it is not seen as a private autonomous activity, must be organised and structured in a certain way to be worthy of wages and social recognition. Work has to contribute to the social division of labour by the social exchange of individual performances. However, the labour market can no longer be considered only from the functionalist perspective of increasing economic efficiency. It must also perform the function of social integration (Honneth, 2008). According to Honneth (2008) with reference to Émile Durkheim, an organic solidarity then arises from the division of labour because the members of society know that they are related to each other in their respective contributions to the common prosperity.

This idea includes moral standards that are inherent in modern working societies, which include the following: first, a generalised obligation to contribute to the well-being

of all through one's own work and to develop one's own abilities to increase the general wealth; second, an expected return, that is, the right to economic independence through earning a wage (Honneth, 2008). These standards lead to the assumption that retirement is the end of gainful work, which is closely related to images of age in the discourse. The assumption of declining performance, which is at the core of negative age images, has been presumed to justify exclusion from the labour market, therefore creating a boundary in the life course. By crossing this boundary, older people are propelled into a "new" phase of life, in which they are ascribed the special status of "being old" without new standards and values that recognise their new status (deleted for anonymity).

Therefore, on the individual level, this phase of life is characterised by great freedom. However, it runs the risk of depriving older individuals of the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills. It does not allow for the appearance of constraints or disabilities without the withdrawal of social recognition. After retirement, people are "parked" in their special status as "old people". They are supposed to keep busy and healthy, so they do not burden the social system. However, the existing social structures do not offer them many opportunities for real, relevant social recognition in return (deleted for anonymity).

In this context, biographical learning as a way of dealing with crisis-like individual and social ageing experiences becomes relevant. The theory of biographical learning not only stresses the concept of crisis as a learning opportunity but also emphasises the social contextuality of learning: Biographical learning is considered to offer the possibility of meaningfully shaping one's own biography in the face of finitude, which, however, depends on the existing structural possibilities of leading a subjectively meaningful and participatory life (Alheit, 2010; Mikula & Lechner, 2014).

Research approach

Based on the theoretical background of learning as a way of dealing with fracture and crisis experiences on one hand and social structures of recognition on the other hand, a qualitative study on ageing and learning was conducted from 2013–2017 in Berlin, Germany (deleted for anonymity). The study addressed the question of how the ways in which older people deal with their ageing experience could be understood as learning and how social structures are addressed in this learning. "Age" was not determined chronologically but according to three dimensions: discontinuation of gainful employment as a crucial caesura in the life course; corporeality as a basic condition of human existence; and finiteness as a limitation in lifelong openness (in more detail: deleted for anonymity). The research questions were as follows: 1) How do older people subjectively experience their ageing and thus the limitation of their remaining lives? 2) Which ways of coping with these experiences do they develop? 3) How can their strategies for dealing with the limitations of ageing be understood as learning?

Research design: Group discussions in senior citizen centers

Group discussions were held with older people at senior citizens' meeting places in two districts of a big city (deleted for anonymity). Such meeting places offered low-threshold access to education and encounters, mainly through regular, ongoing events without binding participation. Nevertheless, the groups usually had a stable core of participants and thus were real groups, as recommended in the literature (Lamnek, 2005). This structured meeting place enabled open discussions about ageing without immediately activating a narrow understanding of learning among the participants. It also enabled

openness and momentum in the older people's conversations with one another about their subjective experiences of ageing in late life.

The sampling criteria were open because the study was not intended to conduct a systematic comparison according to predefined groups. In addition, access to the field was difficult because the topic of finiteness was sensitive. Therefore, the criteria for the selection of the institutions were as follows: 1) they explicitly addressed older people; 2) they were low-threshold meeting places (i.e., not educational institutions based on bourgeois ideas about learning); 3) they offered regular groups, such as acrylic painting, Qigong, and so on. The selection included groups that were willing to engage in group discussions, and a thematic spectrum was targeted: physical movement groups (i.e., Qigong and Tai Chi); creative groups (i.e., creative design and acrylic painting); and intellectual groups (i.e., philosophy group and computer course).

The following criteria were applied to the participants: predominantly in the post-professional phase of life, so they had experienced the caesura of retirement; age-mixed to avoid bias towards so-called "young" old people; and gender-mixed although educational institutions that typically addressed older people were attended by mainly women.

The group discussions, which took place in rooms at the senior citizen centres, lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. At the end of the group discussions, a two-page short questionnaire on social statistics was administered, which included questions about age, gender, education level, occupation, year of retirement, economic situation, and living arrangements. Because the group discussions were planned as conversations *among the participants* about their ageing experiences, the researcher rarely intervened. The discussions began with an initial question about the reasons they participated in the specific groups. During the conversation, according to the research questions, the topics of retirement, body, and finiteness, as well as ways of dealing with ageing, were introduced in infrequent and flexible follow-up questions through a few enquiry interventions in the flow of the conversation. The topics were openly addressed by the participants, and the initial question provoked detailed narratives and conversations.

The results shown in Table 1 were based on the empirical analysis of qualitative data collected during four group discussions with a total of 31 participants. These data were collected in 2013 and analysed from 2014–2016. The groups were heterogeneous in terms of age, life situation, and educational background, which yielded a wide spectrum of experiences.

Table 1: Overview of the Empirical Survey

Survey Locations: Senior Citizens' Centres	
Meeting and Learning Places with Several Offers of Events, Education and Come Togethers	
Method: Group Discussion (GD)	
Allows for Communication of Older People *with Each Other* about their Ageing Experiences	
Analysis Strategy	
Coding and Categorising Based on Grounded Theory Methodology	
Sample	
Group	**Participants**
Creative Handicrafts (GDK)	9 Women, Age 61 – 86
Qigong (GDQ)	4 Participants (3 Women, 1 Man), Age 68 – 72
Philosophical Café (GDP)	6 Participants (4 Women, 2 Men), Age 68 – 82
Acrylic Painting (GDA)	8 Women, Age 58 – 73

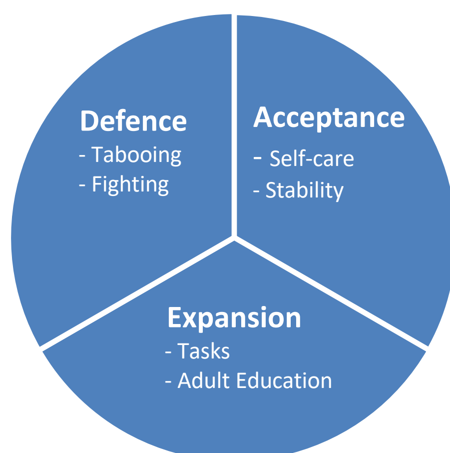
The group discussions were recorded and fully transcribed. In the evaluation, coding and categorising procedures were applied (Flick, 2011). According to the theoretical frameword, the focus of the evaluation was on reconstructing learning as a way of dealing with specific experiences of ageing. The results were also used to show that learning takes place biographically and socially contextualised activity in which age-specific experiences are processed (deleted for anonymity).

Results: Strategies for dealing with ageing and the knowledge of finiteness

Strategies for dealing with ageing were categorised (for a more detailed insights into the categorisation process: deleted for anonymity). Ageing was perceived as a creeping process. It could only be experienced in unexpected or crisis-like disruptions, which was emphasised by the participants as an irrevocable determination of ageing. *Knowledge* about a limited lifetime was accessible through reflection, which, in moments of crisis, gained practical importance in daily life. The participants' examples included not only life-threatening illnesses, such as cancer and stroke, but also positive experiences, such as the freedom gained in retirement.

The participants' strategies revealed considerable range and complexity in dealing with ageing and the knowledge of a limited lifetime. These strategies were categorised as defensive-fighting, accepting-integrating and expansive-transgressive (Kulmus, 2020).

Figure 1: Strategies for dealing with ageing and limited lifetime (own representation)



First, defensive strategies were identified:

- Taboo and denial: It is interesting that the question of finiteness was often initially rejected as irrelevant in the participants' lives. "This is not an issue for us" was usually the first reaction in the group discussions. During the discussion, however, topics could be interpreted as "finiteness-related". This taboo included, on one hand, anticipation of the views of "the others". The themes of death and dying were associated with decay, dependence, and stagnation and thus had negative connotations. The rejection of the theme also implied that the attribution was "typically" old and whining. However, it was a matter of not only "external presentation" as active but also not letting the difficult topic of death become predominant and threatening even to the participant. One participant expressed the importance of not letting oneself be overrun by uncontrollable experiences and dangers of ageing ("It must not become so dominant", GDA 867). Moreover, "speechlessness" was also evident in this defence. There was no culture of talking about dying, neither socially nor in the senior citizens' meeting places. Passages in the group discussions about finiteness were characterised by incomplete sentences, reflections, and the search for the right words (deleted for anonymity).
- Fighting against it: This strategy was initially aimed primarily at "fighting" ageing experiences as long as possible instead of accepting them ("Then I'll have to work with my inner laziness", GDQ 134). It was reconstructed, such as by referring to age-specific breaks, such as a stroke or a life-threatening cancer diagnosis. Such complications could certainly be countered by retreating. However, if the life perspective was still strong enough, such experiences were fought against ("I worked my way back up", GDK 657). The metaphor of "working" referred to the effort involved in not giving in to pain, retreat, or loneliness but to maintaining well-being and a "future perspective".

Accepting strategies were developed when taboos or resistance were no longer possible or experienced as meaningful. The "thematic subject matter" was ageing itself:

1. Self-care and defence against external expectations: This strategy was adopted when tabooing no longer worked because physical limitations and the "danger to life" became dominant and could no longer be "worked away". It was

necessary to give themselves space and treat themselves with consideration ("There is a danger that I would not wake up after the anaesthesia", GDK 204). It was considered important to accept such dangers not only rhetorically but also emotionally ("Make friends with the fact that you have lived your life", GDK 213). Such internal acceptance allowed freeing oneself from social requirements. For example, this acceptance could be extended to everyday life and escaping the work-related norm of a structured daily routine (Meyer, 2008).

2. Maintaining stability and control: This strategy was applied to structure everyday life to a much greater extent, but it also provided emotional stability in maintaining or regaining control over lifestyle. This was evident in the participants' explicit temporal structuring of days and weeks through binding dates that offered orientation ("Friday, we all appear here at ten o'clock, no chance of anyone missing, right?" GDH 77). However, this strategy included planning for dying and death. The subject of living wills and testamentary dispositions was introduced by the participants in the group discussions on the topic of finiteness. An attempt was made to counter the uncertainty of life, especially dying with the greatest possible control and thus also stability and security ("I *have* limited [my life, CK]", GDH 190).

Finally, some strategies thematically transcended the topic of ageing, which were categorised as expansion strategies. These strategies were more strongly characterised than the others by an orientation towards new topics, new tasks and an orientation towards the future.

3. Creating tasks and responsibility: This strategy could be described as topic- and future-oriented. In dealing with a limited lifetime, participants aimed to create new tasks and responsibilities even though they were no longer gainfully employed. They had chosen to spend their remaining years sensibly and enjoyably by developing sustainable perspectives on the future although it was limited. Their focus on issues other than old age was directed towards contact with "the world" and social responsibility. This strategy emphasised staying part of the world and helping to shape it. It also allowed for ensuring significance in the social structure and that one still had something to "give" (GDQ 291) and something to contribute, even in old age.
4. Further education and learning: This strategy was "world"-related because it entailed continuing to learn and develop personally. This was applied first to participation in educational opportunities, such as at senior citizens' meeting places, adult education centres, or senior citizens' universities. It was also applied to informal learning activities, such as visiting museums and reading newspapers. These were explicitly understood as further education and an opportunity to learn something new that one "has never done before" (GDQ 40). Moreover, biographical learning processes were explicitly mentioned, especially with regard to the everyday freedom of the ageing phase of life. The goal of further education was considered not only to learn new things but also to free oneself from the previous "having become", question oneself, and "get to know oneself in a completely different way" (GDQ 56).

Conclusion 1: Back to learning in dealing with experiences of disruption within framing social structures

These strategies revealed the productive processing of the ageing experience, which was countered by the threat of social exclusion and inertia at the end of life, thus by crisis-like experiences. The participants lived with ease and humour, creating necessary distance from the existential threat of (social and physical) death while maintaining their quality of life. Living in the face of an existential threat concerns not only enduring but also actively and joyfully shaping life. These strategies were the participants' ways of dealing with social and individual breaks in the continuity of life. They moved in different areas of tension between more resistant and more accepting ways of dealing with life, between more defensive coping and active shaping, and between more inward-looking attitudes towards one's and society's patterns of action, interpretation, behaviours, and activities, which were also visible to others (deleted for anonymity).

The strategies were utilised to gain control over the last phase of life and shape their remaining years in the face of structural and anthropological barriers. The participants maintained their claims to participation and development, and they presupposed a vision of a good life in old age, without, however, denying risks and disruptions in the continuity of the life experience. By acting as they did (e.g., finding new responsibilities, engaging in education, etc.), they also realised the vision of a life worth living. Hence, the participants succeeded not only in maintaining a perspective on the future despite the finitude of life but also in securing self-determination through responsibility and learning.

The above-mentioned relationship between routines and breaks and social recognition could be considered biographical learning aimed at continuity in the face of crisis-like fractures and disruptions. The findings also revealed that these individual experiences were related to social images of age and underlying social structures. The findings showed that although ageing experiences were personal, they were related to normative expectations that resulted from social images of age, such as the expectation of being active and productive in later life. Therefore, the ageing strategies of the participants in this study were not only individualised actions. They were also framed by underlying normative structures and responses to them (deleted for anonymity). Therefore, the findings of this study indicated the complexity of biographical learning and the enormous achievement of older people in a performance-based society. They are able to develop and maintain joy in life and different performance capacities as well as realistic and positive images of ageing.

Conclusion 2: The role of educational programmes in supporting biographical learning

The findings indicated that participation in educational programmes also played a crucial role. It allowed the participants to deal with topics other than their own ageing, thus helping to maintain their access to the world. However, education also allowed them to address the limitations that could no longer be ignored and thus deal with them reflexively. In these learning groups, the participants found help and support in coping with events, which restored their ability to act (deleted for anonymity). This also means that in an emancipatory adult education approach, negative social age images and underlying social structures (deleted for anonymity; Dyk, 2009) can be worked on. These findings indicate that the more self-reliant and autonomous older people are in their self-interpretation, the more self-assured and creative they can become in their alternatives and claims to opportunities for development and participation. In this regard, educational

offers can be of great use because they can enhance personal development and participation by enabling knowledge, critical thinking and sharing of experiences.

Both older people and the educational programmes they attend exemplify that lifelong learning is not only a programmatic claim but is realised by older people in a self-determined manner that is supported by educational institutions (Burjell, 2018; deleted for anonymity). During the Covid-19 pandemic, participation in adult education has been reduced because institutions have been closed and could not support older people anymore. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate the enormous potential of older people themselves to deal with disruption and accept responsibility, which could serve as a lesson for all ages during the pandemic.

The contribution of older people to dealing with crises

As the results of the above-mentioned empirical study have shown, older people develop an enormous ability to deal with crisis experiences, with age-specific irritations and ruptures in everyday life. Such ruptures and irritations became even more apparent during pandemic, both on a social and individual level: the existential threat of old age became more concrete due to the virus, which often leads to death especially among older people. Measures such as contact restrictions also limited those routines of everyday life that were associated with social contacts. These include family contacts, but also leisure or educational events, and even everyday activities and encounters, such as shopping or visiting cafés and restaurants, were restricted. In residential and nursing homes with actually very stable routines, there were also massive breaks in everyday routines.

The strategies developed in the ageing process, however, point to such a fundamental ability to cope with crisis experiences that they may also have potential for dealing with these escalations. This impression corresponds with current research studies that show an astonishing composure of the elderly themselves in the face of the pandemic (Horn & Schweppe, 2020; Lang, 2020). They are aware of their risk of infection, but also of the benefits of taking action. Instead of falling into fear and resigning, they rather take responsibility for their own and others' health (Lang, 2020). The empirical results on ageing strategies shown above make these descriptive findings understandable and explain them. They show the resistance to crises that people develop especially in late life, where social exclusion and finiteness become age-specific risks. Their coping with everyday experiences allows them for living contentedly and responsibly despite the restrictions caused by the pandemic.

The public discourse, however, is quite different, as much of it has been fearful, polarising and exclusionary. At the end of the first major lockdown phase in Germany and in the following weeks and months, it has become apparent that the existential issues of life finiteness and risk are relevant for all people. The pandemic has triggered ambivalent reactions that have ranged from mutual consideration and responsibility to extensive ignorance and even denial of the disease. During the Covid 19 pandemic, we have also become aware of the ambivalent views of older people on death and dying. On one hand, older people are considered to have a special need for protection because, according to the current knowledge, there is a statistically increased risk for them not only to contract the disease but also to die from it (RKI, 2021). However, they are considered at risk of not only succumbing to the disease but also spreading it unknowingly and unwillingly. Furthermore, they are presumed to be responsible for social and psychological burdens on younger people, who have now been called upon to show consideration and restraint. The discussion has moved between a paternalistic,

overbearing attitude and proposals for action on one hand and the revelation of the considerable willingness to discriminate and devalue on the other hand (Wahl, 2021). In Germany and many other countries, the response to the pandemic has included suggestions and guidelines that only older people should be locked at home for their own protection and that of all others so that the remaining members of society can continue their daily life routines as unaffected as possible. Other responses, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic, have been to reassure the public that the disease "only" affects old people and is therefore not a cause for concern for society because old people would die anyway (Strobel, 2020).

Despite the understanding of the many uncertainties and ambivalences associated with the current pandemic, a frightening phenomenon has emerged, which is not conducive to a "long-life society". This phenomenon has demonstrated that we still consider that older people are "the others". It also has shown how little confidence we have that these people, who have so much life experience, would act responsibly. The results of this study showed how productive older people can be in dealing with crisis experiences and how wisely they can translate the knowledge of transience, death, and dying into a new quality of life. The findings of the above-mentioned study suggest that older people could be role models in dealing with the pandemic instead of being paternalistically patronised as a risk group.

The current threat not only challenges individuals. It also presents a socio-cultural task that must be performed by both older and younger people, which requires not only short-term crisis management but also fundamental societal change. We need to think about how the acceptance of death and dying could be integrated into our culture and institutions, such as in care and hospice services in the health care system and in social practices, such as funerals, as well as in social discourse. In Germany, there has been some progress in initiatives such as hospice movements and patient orders, so death has returned to some degree to life (Schüle, 2012). The current generation of older people has an incredible wealth experience not only in life but also in dealing with existential threats such as war. They also have a high level of education, which could allow them to share these experiences in intergenerational exchanges and educational work. Older people could be effective role models in dealing with vulnerability, which may be more pronounced in old age but always exists, and which has recently been brought to the attention of all age groups. Bringing death back into our lives while emphasising the potential of older people in dealing with crisis experiences could also contribute to the development of recognition structures that are not primarily based on gainful employment. They could change the recognition of certain occupations in light of their contribution to social solidarity (Nierling, 2011). The contribution of older people to social and cultural development and crisis management could also lead to realistic but positive age images.

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What can we learn from COVID-19 as a form of public pedagogy?

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the corona-crisis as a large-scale, unplanned and unintended global experiment of 'public pedagogy'. An investigation is focused on touching upon emergent questions such as: What does our experience of the crisis brought about by the emergence of this specific virus tell us about our assumptions of learning and of public engagement with an issue as a form of public pedagogy? We bring into play transactional theory of teaching and learning, as well as Jan Masschelein's notion of pedagogical milieu of study and Timothy Morton's concept of hyperobject to conceptualize what we can learn from COVID-19 in terms of teaching and learning.

Keywords: Corona, hyperobject, public pedagogy, teaching, transactional didactic theory

Introduction

With the diffusion of COVID-19, we are facing a problem that suddenly and severely disturbs our customary ways of behaving. It calls into question many of our individual habits, but it also creates an impasse for a wide range of collective customs. The examples are countless. Schools close down as well as many working places, thereby disrupting the daily routines of the entire population. Our habitual ways of being mobile, consuming, washing hands, teaching, sneezing, spending the weekend, etc. are no longer possible or

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accepted. Hospitals have to adapt their way of working. Usual visits to loved ones are prohibited. As our changing environment increasingly emerges as a crisis that disturbs our habits, we are faced with the challenge of finding new ways of inhabiting the world. In such situations, 'learning' is often seen as a vital means to find a way out of the crisis. And indeed, every day we hear many people saying, for instance, 'that we should learn from what has happened in other countries' or that 'we will learn a lot from this' or that 'we need to learn to live together with the virus'. We also hear things such as 'this crisis will change us' and 'the world will no longer be the same afterward'. Accordingly, we as a public are turning towards 'learning' to make something out of the crisis we find ourselves in. What can we learn from the last couple of months for a future which we see as increasingly uncertain? What can we learn from COVID-19 as a form of public pedagogy?

This paper aims to investigate the Corona-crisis as a large-scale, unplanned and unintended global experiment of 'public pedagogy'. An investigation is focused on touching upon emergent questions rather than on providing or re-confirming existing notions of 'learning' and 'public pedagogy'. Accordingly, we engage with the question: What does our experience of the crisis brought about by the emergence of this specific virus tell us about our assumptions of learning and of public engagement with an issue as a form of public pedagogy?

Biesta (2012) argues for a conception of public pedagogy as the enactment of a concern for the public quality of human togetherness, giving shape to spaces and places that 'become public' and where freedom can appear. This is seen to involve educational work that supports the public quality of spaces and places and that is based on a degree strangeness rather than on commonality and common identity. In this paper, we investigate how the emergence of COVID-19 can be understood as something that calls into being a 'public of strangers' (Dewey, 1927) and how to understand this in terms of public pedagogy. Drawing on the insights of Dewey, Marres (2005, p. 47) explains how the specificity of the public rests on the particular way in which it is *implicated* in issues. In Dewey's account, a public consists of actors who are affected by particular actions or events while they do not have direct influence on them. As such, a public is *caught up* in assemblages of human and non-human actors that are *already* connecting people no matter how much they don't feel assembled by any common dome (Latour, 2005). The task of the public is thus, according to Marres (2005, p. 56), to take 'care of the serious trouble in which those who do not necessarily share a way of life are collectively implicated'. We will structure the infestation by framing the discussion of learning and teaching in the face of such problems by engaging with transactional didactical theory as well as bringing into play Jan Masschelein's notion of 'milieu of study' to conceptualize the public aspects of pedagogical engagement. In order to tease out the specific implications of the Coronavirus for our understanding of teaching and learning about it as part of a public pedagogy we will turn to Timothy Morton's notion of 'hyperobjects'.

Positioning: Transactional didactic theory and the notion of 'environing'

To ground our discussion of what we might 'learn' from the COVID-19 crisis, we turn to transactional theory of learning and teaching as it, at the core, emphasizes the educative potential of disturbances of habit and of business as usual. In this sense, it inspires us to conceive the massive disruption of habitual ways of being during the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for learning.

Transactional theory of learning and teaching (Östman et al. 2019a, 2019b) is grounded in the work of John Dewey, in particular his writings on experience and education (Dewey, 1938) and the notion of 'transaction' he developed together with Bentley (Dewey & Bentley, 1949). It perceives learning in terms of habit formation and transformation and as being triggered by the encounter of a problematic situation. Accordingly, an opportunity and need for learning emerges when habits become disturbed, that is when the learner encounters a problematic situation in which she cannot proceed habitually, applying, and committing to routine practices, knowledge, beliefs and values. Most of the time, people live their lives according to habituated ways of thinking and acting. The disturbance thereof induces an inquiry as a process guided by the need to reflexively engage with the situation leading up the disturbance as well as the quest for a way out of it. The disturbance is thus what makes us reflect.

An inquiry becomes necessary if we cannot easily overcome the disturbance of habit by slight modifications of our routine ways of doing and thinking. Such deeper disturbances of habits are problematic and present us with a crisis in the sense that cursory engagement with the disturbance does not immediately or easily allow for a reconciliation of habit and outcome. Instead, the disturbance emerges as a problematic situation that is not easily resolved but requires inquiry to create a refined or revised understanding of what the problem is and how it can be solved (Dewey, 1938). The concepts of problematic situation and inquiry have been used, for instance, to explain how students learn to understand scientific concepts, to gain insight in a language or to solve math exercises. In the case of COVID-19, however, we can say that the emergence and diffusion of the virus has caused a massive divergence of disruptions of habits. We are dealing here with a problematic situation that presents us with a macro-level crisis on a societal, even global scale. The required inquiry should therefore be conceptualized as a *public inquiry* that involves a collective, substantial transformation of habits through public experimentation with explanations of and solutions to problematic situations.

Before returning to what this could mean in terms of understanding COVID-19 as an experiment of public pedagogy, let's take a closer look at how habits, disturbances and inquiry are approached in transactional didactic theory (Östman et al., 2019a; 2019b). It understands a habit as a predisposition to think and act in a certain way in specific activities, which 'contains a specific way of coordinating with the surrounding world in relation to the purpose that governs the activity' (Östman et al., 2019a, p. 127). Further, a habit consists of two aspects: 1) a specific attentiveness and 2) coordination with the environment. To clarify, acting habitually is based on paying habitually attention towards *particular* objects in the world (cf., ibid) which inevitably involves neglect of other objects. Thus, the transactional didactic theory draws on Dewey's distinction between the concepts of 'environment' (those objects that are included in the attentiveness) and 'surroundings' (the totality of objects within reach in an activity) to introduce the dynamic, processual concept of *'environing'*. Environing takes shape through the selection of some and neglection of other objects out of the surroundings, as the process of learning a habit involves to habitually learn to 'stage a relevant environment and to intellectually reason and bodily act in relation to that environment in such a way that certain outcomes are created' (ibid., p. 128).

Grasping COVID19 as a trigger for a public inquiry requires insight in the very specific process of environing taking place. After all, there is something strange in the way the emergence of the virus disrupts habits as it does so, for the most part, by an intermediary that is not part of any intentional act of environing but seems to unpredictably and uncontrollably influence habits *and* environments from the surrounding. Both the virus particle as well as the virus (Corona) its types (SARS-COV-

2) and strains (S and L so far) remain elusive and can only be adumbrated through technological means such as microscopes (individual particle) as well as statistical modelling and mass testing. It seems that the virus is not only disturbing, for example, habits of aviation, healthcare, education, production of consumer groups, harvesting of seasonal vegetables, etc., but also the very act of *habitually constituting environments.* We cannot directly see/know where it is and whether we are infected by it. And yet, as we know about its existence and *potential* presence, it affects our environing (e.g. making us more attentive to someone who is coughing) and the way in which we coordinate with our surroundings (e.g. keeping 1,5m distance from other people, redesigning public space). The impossibility to directly observe/experience and to fully know and control it as a specific object is not to deny that there is an object such as the SARS-COV2 virus particle. Rather, the point is that habits and processes of inquiry are disrupted by objects in the surroundings that are not fully present. The virus can be seen to assemble an audience, a public, for inquiry from the surroundings, disrupting the habitually created environment. What becomes apparent according to this outlook is that the virus assembles a public without the virus nor the public being fully present to one another. As such, because of the specific, mediated way to disrupt habits and the uncertainty, unpredictability, uncontrollability emerging from the fact that the virus also severely disrupts habits of inquiry which may lead to conspiracy theories, heated discussions, polarization, confusion, paralysation, etc.

Against the background of this strangeness of how the virus disrupts habits and assembles a public, we engage with the question how inquiry as a process of learning can be conceived given that we cannot fully know nor control the virus despite the urgency with which we have to respond to the disturbance as a problematic situation. Here we ask ourselves the question: Can COVID-19 teach us something about public pedagogy?

What is to be interrogated is how we can understand the role of the *object* of inquiry in public pedagogic forms, that assembles and disrupts environments as well as the habitual coordination of people and things. In order to do so, we will turn to Jan Masschelein's notion of 'milieu of study' to expand on the role of the object of attentiveness in public pedagogy and teaching

Conceptual clarification: COVID-19 and Jan Masschelein's notion of 'milieu of study'

The notion of milieu of study enables us to highlight how the act of environing can be further conceptualized in the context of COVID-19. Masschelein's notion of "milieu of study" is particularly appealing as it sees the milieu to be key to public pedagogic forms. It is in his understanding the fostering of particular milieus that associates or brings together the world and people, makes them meet and brings them into the company of each other (Masschelein, 2019, p. 189).

Teaching and learning as an act of environing can be seen as to foster particular milieus, where we might say particular sites are created. Masschelein (2019, p. 188) reminds us here that these 'sites' are real, yet they 'are at once heterotopic and heterochronic in Michel Foucault's sense: being a real place without place (in the regular social order, a lieu sans lieu), being real time out of (regular) time (*temps hors temps*)'. The act of environing or creating a milieu in this sense is 'not to represent the world, but to present it and to create temporal and sensorial conditions for studying the world, for giving form to "objects/subjects" of study'. (Masschelein, 2019, p. 189). We might be tempted to read this act of creating temporal and sensorial conditions in idealist terms, meaning that the world, objects and subjects are brought into being only *by* and *in* the act

of giving forms by the teacher and students. Yet, we would like to propose a realist framing where it is in relation to unified, autonomous objects that milieus are brought into being (Harman, 2011). As Masschelein (ibid) highlights, the place of study is a gathering and assembly where one is to regard attentively and devote oneself to *something*. It is this *something* that brings about an 'us' (as a public) studying it carefully (with care and caring) and attentively as an object of study/inquiry. Thus, the creation of a milieu as environing can be seen as a *regarding* of something, where regarding as Masschelein highlights (ibid., p. 189) involves the consideration of something, paying attention to it and being concerned about it. Instead of being primarily about *re*-presentation environing is about 'presentation', something is made present, presented to a public.

Interpreting Masschelein's remarks, this presentation of something in a milieu involves a spatial and temporal aspect. It creates an assembly (site/place -> spatiality) as well as a time (common disposition towards a future). To return to the concept of inquiry, this presentation is not so much about efficiently finding solutions to problematic situations in the sense of realizing predetermined outcomes but rather about how to proceed from a disruption, where that disruption is interpreted as being the result of something speaking. Interpreting something speaking, we argue, relates to the creativity required in the process of more substantial habit transformation or transgression that inquiry involves. What Masschelein is seen to offer is a conception of the source of creativity, that, as we earlier stated, can be seen to remain in the surroundings, and the pedagogic act of making it present.

The thing speaking, in our case COVID-19, can be seen to bring about a milieu, or it is environing in the sense that it bends and brings into being environments gathering assemblies (places), bending times, and shattering projected futures. Taking Masschelein's remarks on pedagogical milieu further we might here consider COVID-19 as to situate thinking. The virus forces us to become attentive not only to itself as calling into being an assembly but also to those other things and people in the assembly. In its disruptive capacity it can be seen to force us to try to think what we are seeing and not see what we are thinking (cf. Masschelein, 2019) in the ripple and cascade effects of the disruptions of habits in environments. Maybe the virus is 'teaching' us something in the sense that is making us attentive to our vulnerability (Bengtsson 2019). Vulnerability can here be understood as relating to a loss of imagined ability to control a milieu. Any thoughts that we are in control of the virus or have the ability to control it are disrupted as what we are seeing is not corresponding to this thought. As Masschelein (2019, p. 195) can be interpreted to suggest, COVID-19 can be seen as something that forces us as a public to undo our protection (*déproteger*), acknowledging that we are more disposed and exposed to that which becomes present in the milieu. To be exposed and to undo our protection entails, as Masschelein (2019, p. 196) highlights, a lack of intention as well as a suspension of judgement. This exposition is an act of attentive waiting, we might say an attentive waiting of an assembly.

If we then consider the implication of the milieu for a public pedagogy, the Coronavirus also highlights that attention and habitual attentiveness is not only about presences but also absences. Exposure and vulnerability highlight exactly the non-permanence of things assembled. That something calling into presence a public as an assembly, speaks so to say also through absenting. Absenting of members of an assembled public by the Coronavirus might be one of the first things we paid attention to, such as the absence of traffic or airplanes in the sky. The portrayal of such disturbances and reconfigurations assemblies as problematic situations highlights an impossibility of retention given of an absenting. The special attentiveness that habit involves and the

possibility of disruption of habit point here towards a particular aspect of attention to things becoming present again. Habitual coordination of environment implies here the retention of things partaking in transaction, yet projects also this retention towards that what we might call the present as a form of "protention" (Held, 2007), a projected expectation of things to take part (remain present) again. Disruption and attentiveness are in this sense highlighting the absenting aspect of being assembled in a public. COVID-19 can be seen to be bending time and environments in the sense of disposing, dissolving and resolving milieus. The virus in this sense is bending the space of time (*Zeitraum*) of milieus, where *Zeitraum* in German refers to "location/duration" (a spatial construct of the time of something) and we might here speak of our location as public. In this sense the massive disruptions of habit caused by COVID-19 helps us to think that which we no longer see, as a form of special attentiveness towards things. It is also a thinking of a different "we" that is thinking, as the assembly is dis-located by the arrival of the virus. Thus, what we take as a core insight from our reading of Masschelein's notion of milieu is the attention for the importance of 'things' in processes and acts of environing. The latter, he shows, is not only relative to human habits and special attentiveness but it is also *some-thing* that brings the milieu into being, that assembles and disassembles a public in, or rather as, milieu. Furthermore, his emphasis on the pedagogical act of 'making things present' allows us to further conceptualize environing in a very specific, pedagogical way, i.e. as an act of organizing a specific attention to a thing, 'as lack of intention' and postponement of judgement.

It is here that we argue for moving beyond a mere process-oriented notion of environing and highlighting that *a priori* object or some-thing that precedes that process and at the same time is required for something to be made present. We turn here particularly to notion objects at play in the transactional notion of the process of environing that is involving an 'environment' (those objects that are included in the attentiveness) and 'surroundings' (the totality of objects within reach in an activity). In line with posthumanist approaches in education research we aim to account for objects and things as partaking in public pedagogy in a non-anthropocentric way, and to be specific to rethink how things are making themselves present without 'man being the measure of all things' (Snaza et al. 2014, p. 43). We turn here to an object-oriented perspective (Harman, 2011; Morton 2013) to account for how objects can be seen as to escape and disturb human efforts at environing, withdrawing and out of reach for activity and attentiveness yet still meddling with attentiveness and activity. Our object-oriented consideration of the Coronavirus is, hence, not concerned with the relationality of environment and surroundings as 'Corona' and its 'public' might emerge as part of practice and as a result of an 'agential cut' (Barad, 2007), but how humans/things/objects as members of a public are assembled by an imperative, yet, not fully present to another. Accordingly, to be in a and to engage with a public is not be in a relation but be a relatum confronted with the imperative of the public (cf. Harman, 2016).

Conceptual clarification: The Coronavirus as 'hyperobject' partaking in a public pedagogy

In the following we will turn to Morton's (2013) concept of hyperobject to conceptualize the specific status of COVID-19 as some-thing and how it assembles and appears to humans and other things partaking in an assembly. In particular we are going to explore how the characteristics of *viscosity*, *non-locality*, *temporal undulation*, *phasing* and

interobjectivity of an hyperobject can be seen as to fit COVID-19 as indicative of the Coronavirus and what that means for engaging with it as part of a public pedagogy.

Viscosity relates to what Morton (2013, p. 27) calls the menacing nearness and stickiness of hyperobjects, highlighting that we are caught up in them and that this nearness is challenging our self-perception as autonomous subjects unaffected by the surroundings. Corona as a SARS-COV2 virus particle and as COVID-19 highlights this nearness as it is both in us (particle) and we are caught up in it (Coronavirus family´s genetic adaptation to Homo Sapiens as hosts). In this sense it troubles any understanding of surroundings and environment as if it would be two separate domains where an environment can be fully intentionally and controllably created out of the surroundings. In fact, as I cannot distance/isolate myself from the Coronavirus it is precisely menacing in the sense that it is too close. It is creating a milieu that is in this sense a non-place, where there are not distinct places, but an assembly that is too close for spatial differentiation. When Augé (1995, p. 103) speaks of the space as non-space neither creating singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude, we can see how the Coronavirus is creating a milieu where we recognize ourselves as a public (similitude) in seeming solitude. In contrast to Augé´s supermarket as the non-place of supermodernity, we might speak of the Coronavirus as the non-place of the Anthropocene. We find ourselves longing for the excesses of capitalist modernity captured and portrayed in Augé´s supermarket, yet, confronted with the limitations and restraints imposed by government regulations on being in 'public spaces'. The residue of the virus haunting these 'public spaces' shows that they were not truly ours and that we, being in these spaces as public, were not alone (similitude). Accordingly, we might say that we see that the non-place of public space of supermodernity is caught up '*in'* the Coronavirus as a *Zeitraum* (location/duration).

This relates clearly to the *non-locality* as a quality of the Coronavirus as a hyperobject. Morton (2013, p .47) highlights how hyperobjects cannot be understood as occupying a series of now points 'in' time or space but that they appear to be operating in a non-local and a-temporal sense. When we state above that we are caught up as an assembly in the *Zeitraum* of the Coronavirus we can read Morton's remarks on the non-locality to highlight how COVID-19 is in the act of environing not graspable or coordinable as it eludes a directed attentiveness to it as an object. We might use a microscope to pay attention to a particular virus particle but the notion of having 'located' is simply an abstraction as COVID-19 cannot be located but only be adumbrated using statistical means and spatialization of data aggregates. In this sense, the Coronavirus as a hyperobject violates notions of boundaries and locality as it is ignoring national borders but also demarcations of entities. It twists the notion of locality at the heart of our understanding of learning as it is both inside the environing learner (here) and the learner finds itself 'in' it (the surrounding). What might be the most menacing and terrifying aspect of COVID-19 is, again, its viscosity, or the inability to extract ourselves from it. It is menacing as we cannot locate it/ourselves, isolate it spatially and temporally. Its non-locality renders current attempts to coordinate with the environment through inquiry into the (spread of the) virus difficult. We might even say that it renders the idea of 'containment' of the virus problematic as containment hinges on the idea of being able to stabilizing locality as, literally, containment refers to keeping something within limits or in place.

The problematic aspect of the idea of containment relates to the fact that we cannot see the temporal and spatial beginning and end of the coronavirus as a hyperobject. When does COVID-19 end? Where is it? How can we know that it has truly ended or not being on the finger that I just put to my eye? When speaking of an end, we here speak of the

possibility for humans to apprehend the coronavirus spatially and temporally. As of writing the virus is a 'current' pandemic (as ascribed to SARS-COV-2 as a current form of the Coronavirus) in a medical, global sense, yet, the Coronavirus as a family of viruses is suggested to have been there tens of millions of years (Wertheim et al., 2013), much longer than humans have existed. The Coronavirus is in this perspective so massive (both spatially and temporally) that it can be seen as to *undulate time*, or to put it into our previous phrasing it bends the *Zeitraum* (location/duration) of other objects caught up with it. Disruption of habits caused 'currently' by COVID-19 can, from the perspective of the history of the virus, be seen as limited temporal effect of the Coronavirus that has been there all along human history (ca 200.000 years) and for a much longer time before that (a number of millions of years before the emergence of the family of *homo* and later *homo sapiens*). Thus, the difficulty for understanding the 'time' of learning and teaching in the face of the virus is to not think time and space as a container in which COVID-19 and learning takes place but to see how COVID-19 is a temporal undulating effect of the Coronavirus, that disrupts the assembly of a public of things and people caught up with it. Think here of how the Coronavirus like a swinging giant spider at the centre of a spiderweb produces disturbances among objects caught in the web. Yet, this causality can as Morton be read to be suggesting to not be located in a past as relating to a human experience of temporality. Given its temporal scale, the Coronavirus as a hyperobject can be seen as to operate at a higher dimensional scale than human modes of experience. The virus can be seen as to stage a milieu or surrounding from this higher dimension, where it is emerging through disturbances of our habitual ways of attentiveness to objects and coordination with them. It does so from a scale which is not equivalent to human experience of the 'present' as it is not becoming 'present' as a presence in our present (referring here to the human experience of temporality), creating troubling consequences for inquiry.

The hyperobject as experienced in a milieu gives an imperative in the disruptions of habits to handle it, yet, we do not have 'time' to learn about them before handling them. We have to handle them despite a lack of time to learn about them. Morton (2013, p.67), borrowing a technical vocabulary from the visual arts, calls this effect 'temporal foreshortening'. As when drawing in a two-dimensional representation of something three dimensional, we can conceive of a pedagogical milieu as a temporal foreshortening, where a four-dimensional object is apprehended and regarded by a human being that only has access to three dimensions of its being. To use a parallel metaphor, think of public inquiry as an attempt at three-dimensional environing a *tesseract* utilizing a technique of temporal foreshortening. It is creating a (human) three-dimensional perspective, like a two-dimensional visual representation of a three-dimensional object, yet, this time doing so by representing a four-dimensional object as three-dimensional object from a limited three-dimensional anthropocentric perspective called 'now/here'. This human perspective is limited in the sense of regarding the hyperobject's spatially and temporally, even when utilizing theory and technology for accounting of the qualities of the objects beyond mere experience. Think here of how we speak of first, second, and, currently, third wave of the Coronavirus. The metaphorical depiction of a wave is exactly a form of temporal foreshortening in public inquiry into the virus. The undulation of the experience of the virus, that is its wavy form is, a result of its temporal foreshortening through inquiry. The increase and decrease of confirmed infections at a given date is appealing to a notion wave that is potentially still to come and beyond the temporal horizon of inquiry. Yet, inquiry is like foreshortening a technique and not actual representation of that something. For example, we do not assume the Corona virus to have ceased to exist in between waves or even before the outbreak of COVID-19. Accordingly, public inquiry

into hyperobjects is forced to be adaptive to the temporal effects that are still to come and that cannot be captured in foreshortening through inquiry. Hence, in inquiry, the issue of 'imperative' is key, as such massively temporally distributed hyperobjects, as Morton (2013, p. 67) points out, exert downward causal pressure on shorter lived entities. Inquiry as a form of foreshortening does in this sense not end and there is the imperative for learning. We as humans find ourselves under the influence of massive objects that are not fully showing themselves. Yet, we find that these objects need to be addressed in what we call 'now'.

This influence, that is how these hyperobjects show themselves to us, can be described in terms of *phasing*. Morton (2013, p. 69) states that phasing is due to that hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that makes them impossible to see as a whole on a regular three-dimensional human-scale basis. We only see glimpses of these objects (e.g. virus particles categorized as SARS-COV-2), where they (the Coronavirus) remain within a phase space. We might here think of the example of a two dimensional being (a flatlander) encountering a three-dimensional object, such as a cube, only seeing shifting formations of that object, while we as three-dimensional beings would recognize it as a cube given that we have access to the third dimension. A phase space describes here the set of all possible states of a system (Morton, 2013, p. 71). The non-locality of a hyperobject, such as the Coronavirus, is due to that it, in relation to human experience, is so spatially and temporally large that it produces phasing (from our perspective).

Phasing suggests a rethinking of the pedagogical milieu and acts of environing as discussed in the previous sections. Phasing highlights how a public as assembled by the hyperobject is not a public to be defined by a shared *Zeitraum* (locality/duration) but that the earlier discussed bending of this *Zeitraum* is due to for example the partaking of higher dimensional entities occupying a higher dimensional phase space. What is partaking in a transaction is, in this sense, not reducible to intentional attempts at environing through the retention of things in transaction as specific attention. Hyperobjects, such as the Coronavirus, seem to come and go, but this retention and absenting is only relative to the phasing effect on a human experiencing them. In a pedagogical milieu, the public assembled by the virus (the imperative) is a public potentially not fully bound together by the same *Zeitraum*. That is to say, the crisis or disruption of habit is not taking place at a given time as referential to an external universal notion of time and space, but the disruption of habit and Corona crisis can be seen to be due to the phasing effects of the Coronavirus as a hyperobject. It did not 'emerge', in this sense, but can be seen to have already been there as part of a milieu, in its phasing bending the retention of things in human habitual attentiveness in environing and, as such, appearing 'to us'. In this sense, the phasing of hyperobjects keeps habit, as a form of specific attentiveness, from environing the object. The hyperobject in its phasing is evading attentiveness as it does not become present as a visually directed presence (we are not able to locate it spatially nor temporally in experience). Regarding, in Masschelein's terms (2019, p. 189), refers to the consideration of something, paying attention to it and being concerned about it. In the context of our conception of the Coronavirus as a hyperobject, we might say that learning as a transformation of habit can be seen to be initiated when we direct our attention to how the assembly of things/people entangled with the virus is translating the virus. To regard the virus is an attempt to pay attention to how the virus is translated in the disturbance of transactions in the assembly. Thus, the focus is not so much on a regarding of presence, for example the virus particle in magnification under the microscope, but rather oriented towards the larger hyperobject located in phase space. The habit formation of specific attentiveness is in this sense different from organizing a

predetermined attentiveness through direct observation and inquiry. It is not directed at environing objects from the surroundings given a projected *Zeitraum*, but to 'abstract' the virus as hyperobject without incorporating it into a *Zeitraum*. This involves a reversal of protention as a projected expectation of things to take part (remain present) again. Like the tesseract, the qualities of the Coronavirus have to be theoretically abstracted from disturbances in our experience. To utilize the spider web metaphor, the spider seems to be invisible, yet, we can become sensitive to its presence given our experience of disturbances in the net and other objects caught up in the net.

Being caught up in a net exemplifies the last discussed trait of the hyperobject, *interobjectivity*, where Morton highlights that the 'hyper-' of hyperobjects highlights something more general about what we might call the public or assembly in our discussion of public pedagogy. Morton's (2013, p. 86) point, as illustrated by hyperobjects such as the Coronavirus, is that it is not experienced directly but only through other entities in some shared sensual space. Accordingly, we might suggest that the 'public' in public pedagogy refers to this shared sensual space, and in that space assemblies are assembled by the imperative imposed by members/things. To utilize the notion of milieu, as provided by Masschelein, to characterize this public sensual space, we might conclude in the context of our discussion of the Coronavirus, that attentiveness to something presented to a public applied indirectly, that every act/process of environing is inevitably always only a *presentation* without full *presence* of thing presented/ing and the public. In the case of the hyperobject of the Coronavirus, that something presented is withdrawn and that the Coronavirus is only experienced in the form of a disruption of assembly or public.

Conclusion

If we are then to return to the question if COVID-19, and how we have approached it with the 'lenses' of Masschelein's 'milieu of study' and Morton's 'hyperobjects', can teach us something about public pedagogy – and, thus, teaching and learning – we believe that there are some crucial points to take into consideration in relation to the notions of 'environing' as well as 'inquiry' – two key elements of the above elaborated transactional didactical theory.

Against the background of our discussion of milieu of study and the virus as a hyperobject, we can now emphasize an understanding of 'environing' as a pedagogical act where things are made present ('presentation') in the full realization that there is always more than that which is/can be (directly) experienced and that this requires a specific attentiveness characterized by *openness* and *precariousness*. The way in which COVID-19 evades attentiveness as it does not become present directly highlights the importance of acknowledging that experiences of objects are not equivalent to or exhaustive of these objects. Due to its scale, being so spatially and temporally vast, the hyperobject of the coronavirus evades human experience. Environing – in line with a transactional perspective (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) – should thus not be understood as a purely intentional process where people (pedagogues) can fully determine in advance which objects from the surroundings will be foregrounded as part of an environment and which will be absented and remain in the background. Instead, what COVID-19 shows us, is that hyperobjects are partakers in processes of environing. By doing so, objects in the foreground/surroundings can disturb any human intentional act of environing.

Further, the impossibility to directly and fully experience hyperobjects poses some vital didactic challenges. Realizing that there is something beyond human experience,

after all, does not alter the fact that it is only through their experiences that humans have access to their surroundings. Furthermore, we all experience today how the virus' 'absenting presence' permeates and affects all our encounters. What does it then mean to didactically stage a 'relevant' environment if we cannot bodily act in relation to the object of concern, as the object can be seen to evade a direct relation to the learner´s experience? What does it mean, for instance in terms of required trust in experts or technologies, that hyperobjects can only be 'made present' with the help of intermediaries/translation tools? Which problems are caused by the inevitable incompleteness of knowledge and the absence of full control?

There is thus to a certain extent a tension between, on the one hand, human experience – i.e. of a disturbance of habits that causes a problematic situation – as a starting point for understanding learning and, on the other, the role of (hyper)objects as partakers in environing processes that outrange human experience and intention. This challenge put forward by COVID-19 allows us to specify what it means to learn through 'inquiry' into problematic situations. First, we emphasize that a public pedagogy focused on (hyper)objects of concern like the Coronavirus but also, for instance, climate change, biodiversity, etc. requires a *public* inquiry.

The transactional theory of teaching and learning can also be used – and has been used – to analyse and describe the transfer of clear-cut knowledge such as how students come to grip with certain scientific concepts. Problematic situations investigated there are often (individually) experienced disturbances which make it impossible to immediately (habitually) answer a teacher's question, find the solutions for exercises, anticipate implications, etc. as the concepts are not (yet) intelligible. The teacher, then, can intentionally stage a fruitful environment in order to help the student's inquiry to result in making the concepts intelligible. Our discussion of COVID-19, however, sharply draws attention to the limits of well-planned and controlled teaching of well-known content. It shows, as argued above, that the *object* of teaching cannot be reduced to the teaching *content* as we cannot fully and directly experience what is 'present' through what is intentionally 'presented'.

Our discussion of COVID-19 as a hyperobject is by us seen as to provide entry points for conceiving the public aspects of staging the public aspect of 'fruitful' educative environments that are to address COVID-19 as a problematic situation. The public aspect of environing, as a pedagogical act, refers to the earlier mentioned *openness* and *precariousness* of the presentation and direction of attention.

Openness refers here to the openness of the *Zeitraum* of that which is to be presented and towards that which is to be included in attention. The notion of *Zeitraum* suggests here in German the notion of something *bestehen* (remaining) and *geschehen* (happening). The openness of environing is in this sense paying attention to *geschehen* (happening) that is related to the *hetero*topic and *hetero*chronic aspect of staging environments as milieus of study. Letting objects of attention happen relates here to the publicness of the problem. The idea of paying attention to *geschehen* (things happening) can be seen to entail an active passivity that stands in contrast the idea of pre-determining, in advance, that which is environed and what that which is environed "is" as a content that is already contained. We argue the idea of existing in open view as central to the notion of public needs to be considering the viscosity of that openness, that is a threatening nearness of the public. Paying attention in the act of environing is as a passive activity also exposing and disposing the teacher and learner. It is in this exposition and disposition that we can open up towards that which is to be included in the act of environing. Letting things happen as disturbances or problematic situations is in this sense both metaphorically and literally contagious. Disturbances are contagious in the sense

that they relate to the openness of the learner as a member of a public. The viscosity of COVID-19 is understood as to pull the individual experience of disturbance into the public given its exposure to it.

Precariousness refers here to the fruitfulness of learning that is taking place as a form of habit formation. Fruitfulness and its precariousness are here depending on the heterotopic and heterochronic aspects of staging environments as milieus of study. To clarify, we argue that when acting habitually we are not paying attention to neither objects nor ourselves. We are not 'aware' and not paying attention, or not attentive to what is happening (*Geschehen*). Accordingly, when acting habitually we are not engaging with the heterotopic and heterochronic possibility of environing. Learning as paying attention to disturbances, as a form of either voluntary or involuntary suspension of protention, is in this sense also opening up us to what is happening. To put it in the terminology of Masschelein, openness of awareness relates to the exposition of the experiencing learner and world so that we are exposed to the heterotopic and heterochronic aspects of the public. The educative relevance of this staging of environment is not reducible to a singular *topos* or *chronos*, but exactly to be found in the exposition to the heterogeneity of experience. This heterogeneity of experience is engaging with, what we have above called, the imperative of the public. Public inquiry into COVID-19 can accordingly be seen as to engage with staging of the heterogeneity of environing. The 'public' aspect of inquiry refers here to the imperative and consequent acknowledgement of unknown heterogeneity (precariousness), the avoidance of subsuming heterogeneity to, for example, scientifically derived homogeneity.

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Toward a critical pedagogy of crisis

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Abstract

Crises in our society – climate, covid-19 and mass migration – seem to define not only the experience of learning but also the experience of living and even surviving that in turn have implications for adult learning. We explore the concept of experience and examine whether it plays a role in addressing the need for transformative learning. Our allies in this task are Oskar Negt from the Frankfurt School tradition, L. A. Paul from a philosophical tradition and René Arcilla. Negt is useful for rethinking the role of experience in pedagogy. Paul helps identify the not-knowing aspect of our current experience and our inability to imagine how decisions translate into one's way of living and being in the world. Arcilla emphasises the importance of keeping conversations going. Jack Mezirow's transformation theory (relying on Habermas) informs the understanding of adult learning and how we can transform our way of being and living while facing experiences of crises and disorientation.

Keywords: Crisis, edifying conversation, experience, transformative learning, transformative experience

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Introduction

Early in Melville's (1967) *Moby Dick,* Ishmael looks out over New York Harbour. He meets the moment, and indeed ours, with what he famously calls a 'damp, drizzly November in my soul' (p. 12). Extending his gaze towards the horizon he decides to launch out, to reach beyond the present and see the crisis as a possible new beginning. Ahab, the ship's captain, frighteningly and fearlessly imposes his agenda of revenge and rage on the crew. The hopelessness, the greed, the anger and pain – even the lack of knowledge about what is really happening – are well described by Melville. It is a particularly powerful story as Covid-19, mass migrations, racism and climate change have become current crises. Many are exhausted by the efforts required, and required again and again.

Our current crises are particularly challenging in *not-knowing* who we are (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020) and what our lives will become following these experiences. Is there a way back or forward? How do we think about a way out? Alanis Morissette (2014) says it best: 'The only way out is through'. If there is a way forward to a new normal, how can this new way of being and living be *imagined*? Will the experience of crisis lead to *transforming* who we are and what will be considered important and valued? What will be learnt? Under what circumstances is rational discourse possible?

When lives are lived, individually or collectively, with unproblematic notions of health and safety that become problematic through experiences of crisis, we are confronted with limits to what we thought we control: ourselves and our ways of living. These experiences may provide learning opportunities and call for transformation, 'rethinking deeply held, and often distorted beliefs, about who we are and our lifeworld' (Finnegan, 2019, p. 46).

Limit situations invite us to go beyond, to imagine and learn to identify hidden forces, submerged realities (*Moby Dick*) and overcome prescribed endings and closed solutions, to imagine, to reflect on present experiences and create breakthrough moments (Greene, 1973) that shatter sedimented thinking and challenge the ability to learn. In the current crisis, we imagine learning as offering transformative possibilities built through transformative conversations (Eschenbacher, 2020) to lift our drizzly Novembers.

What, if anything, can be learnt in a crisis? In a moment of crisis, where one may lose one's way in the world (Arcilla, 1995), where there is a sense of losing direction, there is a strong experienced need to find new directions, ones that may lead out of (or through) current disorientations. We may have lost what is taken for granted, including formerly unproblematic notions of health, freedom of movement, safety or (a sustainable) lifestyle. Crises today have individual, societal and even global dimensions. They leave people experiencing loss struggling to respond to feelings of having lost their way in the world. In needing to engage in a quest for new, transformed (self-)understandings, to find one's way again, and to navigate through crisis, the experience of *disrupture* provides a fragile ground on which to struggle with formerly unproblematic notions of health and ways of living together. Crises seem to demand action and may require that we short-circuit reflection, especially critical reflection. The challenge may be to bring about both self-transformation and social change – to think about new thoughts that may unsettle fixed positions personally and socially.

In working towards a critical pedagogy of crisis, it is appropriate to turn for a moment to Jürgen Habermas, on whom Mezirow relied for his critical theory of transformative learning. From his earliest work, Habermas (1954) shifted the traditional Marxist locus of crises from being an inevitable part of our current economic system (capitalism) to understanding capitalism as colonising the state and subverting its ability to bring the

economy under democratic control. Monetisation of the state and human relations, according to his crisis theory (1983), and the 'dependence of late capitalism on a very weak legitimation basis' have induced crises (1983, p. 38-39). The crises of the economic system lead to political destabilisation (Habermas, 1973, p. 195, 1975), and the 'monetization of the lifeworld' is a current social pathology (1987, p. 332). This encourages a re-think, a *redescription*, as Rorty calls it (Eschenbacher, 2019; Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020) and to acquire new knowledge and new frames of reference that may overcome *not-knowing*. A crisis suggests a turning point or at least a situation where normal frames of reference are disrupted or do not function as we wish, when new actions must be taken soon. Crisis and critical share the Greek root – κρίση, κρίσιμη, krinein - meaning the ability to discern.

We work towards the conclusion that crisis is best understood when it is both a personal and social experience. To work through (Morissette, 2014) the current situation and search for a critical pedagogy of crisis, we focus on experience as the starting point for learning. This connection with experience is the major ingredient in this search for critical pedagogy. Pedagogy, as used here is not the equivalent to learning. Pedagogy has deep connections with the idea that the theory and practices of education are contested and powerfully influenced by history. In line with Freire, pedagogy captures the notion that teaching and learning are political so that curricula, textbooks, assessments and language used may all empower or disempower learners. Pedagogy refers to the understanding that education is implicated in the ways that power is held and exercised unequally in society. It is easier to associate pedagogy with empowering learners and facilitating active citizens interested in social change and social justice. Experience is a key concept in adult learning theory – in transformation theory, self-directed and experiential learning, andragogy (Irish, 2019) and most crucially in the critical pedagogy of Freire (1972). This paper outlines concepts useful in moving towards a critical pedagogy of crises:

- Adult learning theory built on experience known as Mezirow's transformation theory – informed by the work of Habermas – that is particularly useful for understanding crisis as a motivation for learning and the complexity of thinking required in a new world;
- An exploration of Oskar Negt's concept of experience as dialectical;
- An introduction to the work of Laurie A. Paul on how challenging and difficult it is to imagine the transformed self and life offered by the rational decision-making of Mezirow and Negt;
- Important concepts from René Arcilla on the imperative of continuing conversation in light of the difficulty of imagining transformations when one has lost one's way in the world;
- We conclude with additional brief ideas gleaned by these authors on teaching for a critical pedagogy.

On experience: Negt (and Kluge), Paul, Arcilla and Mezirow

Oskar Negt (1971) studied philosophy and sociology with Horkheimer and Adorno at the Frankfurt School and is a prominent scholar at Leibniz University Hannover. Experience is central to his pedagogy and he has, with his colleague Alexander Kluge, a lifelong involvement in emancipatory worker education. Stollman (Kluge & Negt, 2014) writes

that 'the rallying cry for Negt and Kluge's work is no longer "Workers of the world, unite!" but rather "Experiences of the world, unite!"' (p. 464). We adapt this to our critical pedagogy of crisis: 'Crises of the world, unite!' It is the critical theory inspired by the ideas of Negt on experience and pedagogy that prompt this critical pedagogy.

L.A. Paul (2016) is Professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science at Yale. She rethinks the idea of undergoing a transformative experience from a philosophical perspective. She provides a different perspective on the experience of crisis and is concerned with decision-making in the light of epistemic gaps, the 'not-knowing' in our current situation (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2020). She identifies an inability to imagine how decisions will translate into one's way of being and living in the world. She is a philosopher of experience. We put Paul's (2016) work in conversation with Arcilla (1995) and Mezirow's (1991) version of transformative learning. Though the theory of transformative learning has evolved since Mezirow's version and now includes various possible routes to transformation (Stuckey, Taylor, & Cranton, 2014), our exploration relies on Mezirow's version.

René Arcilla (1995) is a Professor of Educational Philosophy at New York University with an interest in the philosophy of education, liberal learning, existentialism, and modernism. Asking 'Why Aren't Philosophers and Educators Speaking to Each Other?' (Arcilla, 2002), he makes space for this dialogue. We work with Arcilla's notion of conversational edification, as a means to developing one's selfhood through conversation with others as a practice that is both philosophical and educational. Arcilla's work allows us to build a bridge between these two practices in the face of crisis and disorientation. Conversational edification allows us to enter a conversation where we can seek to understand ourselves and develop selfhood.

Jack Mezirow's (1991) work on transformative learning re-envisions adult learning in the light of crisis and disorientation. His theory of transformation (1978, 2012) is concerned with transformative change and has shaped the discourse on adult learning by adding a critical, emancipatory lens. His notion of transformative learning is concerned with developing selfhood and personal growth alongside social action. Mezirow is unwilling to favour one over the other. This tension is inherent in his theory and continues to provokes critique. It is a *theory in progress* (Mezirow and Associates, 2000).

Oskar Negt: Experience and learning

Negt works collaboratively with Kluge and his main interests include work as a source of identity and dignity, critical pedagogy for adults and schools, and politics. He (2008) is one of the few critical theorists who explicitly addresses worker (adult) education (Langston, 2020). Negt's traditional Marxist views on the instrumentality of work and the alienation of workers are balanced by an appreciation of the positive role that work plays in social recognition and workers' identities. How workers experience work is his starting point for learning. The experience of workers (learners) (Kluge & Negt, 2014) is infused with the contradictions and crises of capitalist society and acts as a source of 'resistance to capitalism' (p. 31). His concept of exemplary learning sets out how to work with experience by bringing a *sociological imagination* to bear to understanding these issues and fostering social action.

Habermas appointed Negt as his assistant at the Frankfurt School in 1962. Habermas identifies new stages of individual and social development that involve new levels of learning. This learning brings new problem situations, risks and burdens. Habermas (1974), in a prescient moment, asserts that:

> as natural scientific medicine brings a few diseases under control, there arises a consciousness of contingency in relation to all illness….Suffering from the contingencies of an uncontrolled process gains a new quality to the extent that we believe ourselves capable of rationally intervening in it. The suffering is then the negative of a new need… (p. 164)

Though we face new crises, the experience of crises is not new. Different places in the world may identify different crises in their regions. Habermas (1995), in a moment of typical idealism, asserts that the world faced the crises of the twentieth century with 'enlightened perplexity' (p. ZB4). However, he soon reverted to a more mundane confidence when he wrote about 'learning from catastrophe?' as part of coping with the damage done to social cohesion by 'dismantling of the welfare state' and 'superpowers gone wild' (Habermas, 2001, p. 47).

The problems, dilemmas, experiences, pain and inability to mourn of many in this Covid era are disorientations and dislocations that may prompt learning. They may also allow us to build a critical understanding of how society is structured and in whose interests it operates in crisis. These experiences of ordinary people form the core concept of Negt's pedagogy. This integrates well with the varying but parallel trajectories of both Habermas and Honneth. All are interested in social justice, reason, truth and democracy. All agree that philosophy aims at the 'practical transformation of the existing social conditions' (Habermas, 1981, p. 469). All offer a vision of the world as it might be. 'Democracy is the only politically conceived social order that has to be learned, over and over, every day, into old age' as a 'process of education and learning' (Kluge & Negt, 2014, p. 452).

Learning utilises prior experience to construe new or revised interpretations of experience that in turn guide action. Experience may prompt a questioning of what has been taken for granted. As disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow) or perplexity (Dewey, 1966, p. 150; Habermas, 1995, p. ZB4) are the beginning of learning, we suggest that crises today form a motivation for learning. Crises are disorienting dilemmas. As the horizon of meanings available to people may be distorted and the range of meanings available is too often infused with, for example, conspiracy theories and resistance to the knowledge of scientific enquiry, there is a distortion in the lifeworld that complicates thinking through these issues.

The lifeworld is a pool of intuitive knowledge about the objective, social and intersubjective world inhabited by people. It is employed, usually without thinking, to establish and sustain interactions. Habermas (1987, p. 126) considers the knowledge stored in the lifeworld to be deeply sedimented and normally unproblematic in everyday life. However, once the lifeworld becomes problematic, it loses its role as a background certainty. It becomes subject to discursive examination that is a challenge for the ability to critique this shared lifeworld that requires change (1987, p. 126). It seems that the lifeworld is in crisis (Mezirow, 1991, p. 69).

The experience of crisis is not just an individual experience as the 'public domain of the jointly inhabited interior of our lifeworld is at once inside and outside' (Habermas, 2008, p. 14). The inside/outside dichotomy is misleading and even in the most personal moments our consciousness thrives on the 'impulses it receives from the cultural network of public, symbolically expressed, and intersubjectively shared categories, thoughts and meanings' (Habermas, 2008, p. 15). The personal and the lifeworld are dialectically interconnected. It is difficult to imagine a stronger statement than this of the false dichotomy of individual and social, and this idea now informs this pedagogy of crisis. The personal is indeed political; the political is also personal and learning from experience necessarily involves making these connections. Learning requires an ability to perceive

the world in this connected way. Transformation theory does not have a good record of acknowledging this critical insight (Fleming, 2021). It is this insight (borrowed from Hegel and worked through by Habermas, Honneth and Negt) that, overall, moves this project towards critical pedagogy.

Peter Alheit (2021) provides an example of this connection. Quoting Erving Goffman's 1977 study, he illustrates how gendered social rules influence individual actions and are thus reproduced across generations. According to Goffman, male/female intimate relations are normally of an older/taller man and younger/smaller woman. These are the personal choices of many. These are social and cultural constructs that are difficult to change and that act behind the backs of the people concerned. Here 'the "social" breaks into the self-referential self-description of the psychic system, as it were, without being conceptually integrated' (Alheit, 2021, p. 85). The tacit knowledge of how to act as gendered people operates powerfully because it does so precognitively as 'experience knowledge from countless interaction situations and becomes effective to a certain extent in the background' of our actions. It is experienced as beyond question and even natural (Alheit, 2021, p. 86). This tacit knowledge is only available where disruptions occur and where some event forces the participants to reflect. Crises provide such disruptions. This understanding that the lifeworld needs to be transformed is a shorthand way of indicating that questions about whether change is individual or social may miss the point that the answer is yes – both need to be transformed, and a change in either leads to a change in the other.

Negt is under no illusion about the difficulties of such learning in these times and believes that 'the ability of the emancipatory left to effect transformative change is now very low' (Pohl & Hufer, 2016, p. 206). Kluge's recent book title captures this difficulty and says political and social change is like slow and powerful *Drilling through hard boards* (Kluge, 2017). Pedagogy in crises is about learning how to think for one's self in a world where fake news, conspiracy theories and rejection of scientific knowledge often dominate and undermine public discourse. This critical pedagogy of crises is an exciting possibility, but Negt is aware that 'drilling through' sounds even more challenging than 'working through'.

Negt offers a new understanding of experience that transcends that of Dewey (Illeris, 2002), for whom experience is firstly in *continuity* with previous experience. In search of meaning we modify/integrate new experiences with previous experiences. Secondly, experience is created by and in *interaction* with the broader social environment (Dewey, 1963, p. 43). Learning involves 'that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience' (Dewey, 1966, p. 76). The increase in meaning 'corresponds to the increased perception of the connections and continuities of the activities in which we are engaged' (Dewey, 1966, p. 76-77). Learning involves becoming aware of these *interactions* and *continuities*.

Relying on Hegel, Negt goes further and asserts that these continuities and interactions are dialectical. This alters our understanding of learning. Learning is not just an adaptation or integration of experience; the process is dialectical. One's individual experience cannot be properly understood unless it is seen as being in a dialectical relationship with broader social conditions alongside one's previous experience. This reframes Honneth's (2014) understanding of how the political and personal are connected. The political is personal, and they are dialectically connected. This reconfiguring of how one's individual problems are dialectically connected with broader social issues is significant. It makes understanding the nature of one's problem or dilemmas and the search for solutions more complex than understood by Mezirow (1991).

Indeed, without the dialectical dimension, this relationship is misconstrued. The experience of crises is dialectically connected to previous experience. One cannot speak properly of individual experience unless it is connected to broader social issues. It is difficult to speak of crises as individual or social. They are both. To work for the dialectical nature of experience is exactly what Maxine Greene proposed when she wrote about learning how things are connected: 'the self can never be actualized through solely private experiences, no matter how extraordinary these experiences might be' (Greene, 1986, p. 74).

Negt (1971) goes beyond the learning of skills and competences and understands 'workers existence as a social problem' (p. 4). Individual crises are also social problems. His idea of learning involves workers analysing and interpreting their social situation to understand the causes of their current situation and to inform actions to change it. Negt develops a pedagogy of worker education and a teaching manual. His pedagogy (and social theory) is grounded in the experiences of workers.

Negt's pedagogy involves exercising learners' sociological imagination so that both their lived experiences and the possibilities that may emerge are (re)imagined. What he calls exemplary learning is connected to the interests of learners; connects the experiences of learners with broader social issues and is relevant for emancipation (Negt, 1971, p. 97). This is a rare excursion into adult learning theory and practice by a Frankfurt School scholar.

Learning is not just accumulating knowledge; it is a collective journey of self-determination that includes taking political and emancipatory actions. Negt supports a curriculum or list of competences that are essential for exemplary learning. The topics taught by Negt (2010) include these six competences: identity competence; historical competence; social justice competence; technological competence; ecological competence and economic competence (p. 218-234). This links learners' individual experiences (of injustices) with broader social issues and explores the interconnections to see how individual experiences and structural issues are connected dialectically. Zeuner (2013) refers to this as meta-learning, and it underpins the six competences (p. 148). Along with dialectical thinking, this is fundamentally important for *exemplary learning* (Negt, 1993, p. 661). This is also part of the process of our proposed understanding of learning in a critical pedagogy.

A pedagogy of crises involves thinking independently, dialectically, systemically, with sociological imagination, utilising critical reflection and democratic participation. Negt (1973) describes adult learning as an analysis that brings into awareness the historical development of how learners' interests are defined for them and how relationships of power are experienced, such that they can discover through learning the roles they play in society and through study identify options, including actions, that will change their unjust reality. This pushes learning theory into social and political arenas, and this Negt-inspired critical pedagogy of crises provides a framework for an historical and material interpretation of subjectivity as produced by the capitalist system as well as a source for a new social order that will be just and caring (Kluge & Negt, 2014).

Negt and Kluge (1993) assert that experience is the most important thing that workers actually produce (p. xlviii). Illeris (2002) states this best: 'The working class can break through the distortion of immediate experiences, experience the structural conditions for their experiential development, and then fight to change these conditions' (p. 152). When we understand how experience is influenced by social structures, there is then the possibility of what Maxine Greene (1995) calls breaking-through the inertia of convention when people 'are enabled to explain their "shocks" and reach beyond' (p. 39). Such a pedagogy, Greene continues, 'offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of

discovery; it offers light' (p. 133). These moments can help transcend limits and engage one's sociological imagination in the process of exemplary learning and social transformation (Negt, 1971; Negt & Kluge, 1993).
These ideas are not new to adult educators such as Olesen (1989), Wildemeersch (1992) and Illeris (2002). Olesen (1989), quoting Negt, sees 'experience as a collective process because when we experience as individuals we also do so through a socially structured consciousness' (p. 8) or again 'the socialized individual cannot experience individually' (p. 68). The individual is always multiple, or as Brecht calls it, 'the self is always plural' or dividual (cited in Kluge & Negt, 2014, p. 45). These connections are made to extend the links between the central role of experience in any learning and our critical pedagogy of crises.

Both Negt and Paul place experience at the centre of their work and are concerned with transformation but Paul offers an alternative point of view that allows us to explore more thoroughly the experience of crisis in a learning situation.

L.A. Paul on transformative experience

We make sense of what life throws at us as we 'shape a coherent meaning out of the raw material of our outer and inner experiencing' (Kegan, 2000, p. 52). We still need to know more about what makes the experience of a crisis a potential prompt for learning. Paul's (2016) work is useful here as she refers to transformative experiences that epistemically *and* personally alter our meaning making. It is like Kegan's 'metaprocess that affects the very terms of our meaning-constructing' (Kegan, 2000, p. 52). Transformative experiences confront us with the basic unknowability of our subjective futures in a context where new and dramatic changes are emerging, and transformative decision-making draws out the consequences of that epistemic fact. In an important sense, when facing a transformative choice, we lack the knowledge needed to have authority and control over who we will become when choosing how to act (Paul, 2016, p. 110). It seems as if experiences may indeed be *transformative* and confront us with an *unknowability* of subjective and collective futures regarding transformative choices. Paul is an important break on the confidence invested in rational thinking through future possibilities, as outlined by Negt (and by Mezirow).

Can we learn from such experiences? They might teach us to humble ourselves, facing the limits of established ways of making decisions for ourselves – individually and collectively – by weighing arguments rationally while being forced to accept an epistemic deficit. The new emerging identity, a consequence of significant change, is not knowable before it emerges. This experience leads us to wonder how to handle crises regarding experiences that may change us, asking, 'Will you be able to recast what life throws, and has thrown, at you in your own terms?' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 99). What does this mean for learners?

Experiences force us to make decisions that we may yet be unable to make. This provides both an opportunity and a necessity to learn transformatively (e.g. Mezirow, 1991, 2012). Is the theory of transformative learning useful for understanding this? Yes and no. Yes, as this theory captures the phenomenon of transformation as adults learn in the light of existential crises and disorienting dilemmas, often in ways that have been unimaginable before. Disorienting dilemmas are crises. No, as this only partly addresses the transformative experiences we are currently facing. It does not adequately answer the question of how to make transformative decisions: In this specific case, we experience a process of transformation that will change us epistemically and personally. It does not

allow decisions to be made by weighing arguments rationally because of the lack of relevant knowledge available as part of the process of thinking through. How can we choose a future when formerly taken-for-granted ways of being are questioned, and the future remains largely unknown. Paul continues: ‘Just at the point where we must decide how to navigate from the present to the future using our first personal perspective, we are confronted by the impossibility of assigning subjective values to future outcomes’ (2016, p. 108).

Mezirow's highly rational version of transformative learning promotes discourse based on weighing arguments to make informed decisions. What if we cannot make informed decisions because we simply cannot weigh arguments and assess their viability because it is impossible to know future outcomes?

> [T]he problem is that when you face a transformative choice, that is, a choice of whether to undergo an epistemically and personally transformative experience, you cannot rationally make this choice based on what you think the transformative experience will be like. That is, you cannot rationally choose to have the experience, nor can you rationally choose to avoid it, to the extent that your choice is based on your assessments of what the experience would be like and what this would imply about the subjective value of your future lived experience. (Paul, 2016, p. 18-19)

Paul (2016) sharpens our perspective on the limits of (transformative) learning theory facing these kinds of crises:

> You can't navigate these decisions by stepping back, rationally evaluating your different subjective possibilities, and then choosing the act that maximizes the expected subjective values of your future lived experience. (…) Instead, you grope forward in deep subjective ignorance of what your future conscious life will be like. (p. 110)

Having to grope forward having lost one's way in the world is of concern. Finding possible ways forward is at the heart of transformative learning theory. It involves challenging and critical questioning and assessing the integrity of deeply held assumptions about how learners ‘relate to the world around them' (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. xi). Mezirow’s *perspective transformation* (Mezirow, 1991) involves doing *exactly* what Paul (2016) says is impossible: to step back and become aware of formerly unproblematic assumptions that provide grounds for one's way of being and living.

Through engaging in a critical process of reflecting and ultimately changing one's assumptive clusters, adults develop and grow towards a more inclusive and integrative perspective providing grounds for making decisions and living one's life. It can best be described as an ‘epiphanic, or apocalyptic, cognitive event - a shift in the tectonic plates of one's assumptive clusters’ (Brookfield, 2000, p. 139). An experience of disrupture (Alheit, 2021) is the starting point for learning: '*When our meaning perspectives are questioned, the coherence-producing mechanism of our minds is interrupted* (emphasis in original). We are no longer able to interpret the situation based on our previous experiences' (Mälkki, 2019, p. 64). The road to transformation in the light of these disruptive experiences is rational discourse, according to Mezirow (1991), who relies on Habermas (1987) for these ideas. Rational discourse

> is that specialized use of dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief. This involves assessing reasons advanced by weighing the supporting evidence and arguments and by examining alternative perspectives. Reflective discourse involves a critical assessment of assumption. (Mezirow, 2012, p. 78)

Mezirow names several conditions that need to be met to realise discourse, such as accurate and complete information and the ability to weigh evidence objectively. It is exactly these preconditions for discourse that cannot be met, according to Paul, when choices are faced in a crisis.
When one's experience is of having lost one's way and current self-understanding is under question, the need to find oneself and one's way in the world again becomes a major concern. Paul (2016) argues that there are possible ways through:

> you must choose to have or to avoid transformative experiences based largely on revelation: you decide whether you want to discover how your life will unfold given the new type of experience. If you choose to undergo a transformative experience and its outcomes, you choose the experience for the sake of discovery itself, even if this entails a future that involves stress, suffering, or pain. (p. 129)
>
> Or, in a nutshell, 'the best response to this situation is to choose based on whether we want to discover who we'll become' (Paul, 2016, p. 4).

It seems as if answers can be found only after having lived through disruptive experiences. These are what Paul (2016) calls *transformative experiences* because they are 'both epistemically and personally transformative. Having a transformative experience teaches you something new, something that you could not have known before having the experience, while also changing you as a person' (p. 3).

What would it mean, then, to undergo a transformative experience? You know that 'undergoing the experience will change what it is like for you to live your life, and perhaps even change what it is like to *be* you, deeply and fundamentally' (Paul, 2016, p. 3). Learning, especially learning with a promised deadly outcome (as Paul calls it), is risky, and outcomes are not guaranteed. The key to our critical pedagogy of crisis is the experience of crisis itself and how it is worked through by learners. Knowing what we now know, one wonders why anyone will start a transformative journey.

René V. Arcilla on making the conversations last

In searching for a more satisfying answer, we turn to René V. Arcilla (1995) who articulates how edifying conversations (Rorty) can be undertaken that are rational, aim at self-understanding and build on experience. Transformative learning offers another dimension to this process, where the learner's way of being and knowing, 'the form itself [is] at risk of change (and not just change but increased capacity)' (Kegan, 2000, p. 49). We recall the previous discussion prompted by Alheit and Goffman, where self is not an isolated (from the social context) entity. This idea of self-formation remains central when 'we choose to become the kind of person - without knowing what that will be like - that these experiences will make us into' (Paul, 2016, p. 123). It allows us to take responsibility for our own learning, essentially *owning* it. Only by owning it, we can recast what life presents and has thrown at us (Arcilla, 1995). This kind of learning is multi-layered; it holds the tension between being dangerous, terrifying and liberating at the same time. Radical questioning, according to Bernstein (2016), may be

> *terrifying* because it means giving up the familiar banisters and guidelines that we normally accept in orienting our lives; *dangerous* because, when such questioning is truly radical, it seems to leave us with nothing; *liberating* (emphases in original) because it frees us from illusions and enables us to confront our subjectivity and inwardness without illusions. (p. 121)

Why and when would it make sense to engage in this kind of (learning) process? What opportunities do transformative choices hold? Why should one learn transformatively, having already lost one's way in the world? Arcilla (1995) responds: 'What motivates your efforts to learn is the desire for self-knowledge. Yet what if the others to whom you turn have no way of directly revealing you to yourself; what if they are equally searching for themselves?' (p. 6). Bernstein's *nothing* becomes *something* through the process of discovering who we will become, as a possibility and necessity of learning.

Transformative experiences provide us with opportunities to understand that 'the various self-conceptions you take for granted do not form a coherent whole' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 6). They provide the fragile ground for searching for a new (self-)understanding. As we have seen earlier, Covid-19, systematic racism and violence alongside climate change hold two dimensions at their heart: an individual *and* a societal, global dimension. All of these crises, as different as they might be in different places, reflect what Mezirow (1978) describes as distinctive elements and prerequisites for a *transformation learner* who 'comes to identify her personal problem as a common one and a public issue' (p. 15). It is this connection that allows the learner to progress and bridge the divide between individual and social learning. Personal projects of self-actualisation and development as well as social action are possible outcomes of Mezirow's transformative learning. To categorise issues as either individual or social and to see learning as also divided in this way may be a false dichotomy. The desire to return to normal, as many desire in the present crisis, may hinder or foreclose transformative change.

When transformative learning theory places such an emphasis on rational discourse, as Mezirow did, we ask, where can we go from here? Can Mezirow's notion of rational discourse be sustained when, as we have just seen, it lacks important features that would provide the kind of context for engaging in a constructive way with transformative experiences and decisions? Mezirow's theory already omits the dialectic nature of experience. We might also have to add another dimension to transformative learning. It needs a different kind of dialogue, one that is less concerned with exchanging arguments and dedicated to providing a safe (enough) space for adults to struggle constructively with transformative experiences. If we cannot engage in a dialogue that requires us to step back from our experiences and weigh arguments about how to proceed from where we are, we need to extend transformative learning theory as we presently know it.

We suggest adding a different kind of dialogue, one that has been introduced as *transformative conversation* (Eschenbacher, 2020). It holds many of the same features as Arcilla's (1995) notion of *edifying conversation* and adds a transformative dimension to it. Instead of attempting to arrive at a tentative consensus, as Mezirow (1991, 2012) suggests through rational discourse, Arcilla proposes a different pathway, highlighting a different, important dimension. As adults are in need of

> each other to help them rediscover a sense of self-direction which they must nevertheless claim for themselves. Hence they have recourse to conversation, to an exploratory, associative, open-ended, tolerant exchange of intimations free from the demand that it issue in conclusions binding on all. (Arcilla, 1995, p. 7)

The idea of *edification* is closely tied to autobiography and becomes especially helpful for individuals struggling with the kinds of transformative decisions that force them to choose whether they want to discover who they will become *after* the transformative experience.

Arcilla's (1995) notion of *edifying conversation* seems to address many of the requirements for making these transformative choices: 'As we edify ourselves in response to events that befall us (…) we develop our ability to weave contingent but consistent

stories of the course of our own lives' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 100). Arcilla (1995) continues: ‘the hope of agreement is never lost as long as the conversation lasts’ (p. 74). Moreover, following Rorty’s conversational conception of reason, Arcilla outlines more interesting and productive ways of speaking about ourselves. The task of reasonable conversations is to edify ourselves – to have conversational edification. It may be that Arcilla, in a way that is profoundly significant for this fragmented moment in history, has argued successfully for an anti-antagonistic conversation adding to his Rorty-inspired edifying conversation.

Translating his idea of *edifying conversation* into the debate about transformative learning (Eschenbacher, 2020) leaves us with a new direction for the theory itself. This provides sufficient space for a Habermasian notion of discourse where we have access to necessary information and possible outcomes, *as well as* a notion of transformative conversations where we lack epistemic access and cannot perceive possible outcomes, as the future remains unknown. Building on our own common vulnerabilities and the many things about which we are unsure (especially in a crisis), we can take the risky step of leaving home and experiencing how ‘we are all strangers to ourselves, together cast into an unfamiliar *unheimlich* home’ (p. 151). The concept of *transformative edifications* we suggest is redefined as *transformative conversations* (Eschenbacher, 2020).

Implications for teaching a critical pedagogy of crises

Previously, we identified some implications for teaching, as it is a challenge to discuss pedagogy without discussing teaching. According to Negt, a curriculum of competencies and exemplary learning are practical ways in which a pedagogy of crises may be made real in learning environments. Negt (and Kluge) systematically present materials and suggestions as to how their ideas might be utilised in learning situations (Kluge & Negt, 2014; Negt & Kluge, 1993). They use science fiction and a range of innovative materials to support and enhance the critical intelligence of learners (Negt & Kluge, 1993, p. 106). Negt’s contribution to understanding adult learning also includes the concepts of exemplary learning and societal competencies. Negt (1971) builds on the interdisciplinary method of C. Wright Mills that illuminates ‘structural relationships between individual life histories, immediate interests, wishes, hopes and historical events’ (p. 28). As we navigate crises, these connections are the connective tissue of learning.

When learning is discussed in times of crisis, whether thinking of struggling with a global pandemic, racism or climate change, we benefit from extending transformative learning by adding this further conversational format. In edifying conversations, learners can engage as fellow conversationalists 'in questioning themselves before taking things for granted, in order to receive their being at a loss as a present' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 2). It is an attitude that invites adult learners to adopt a certain attitude, one where answers about how to best tackle transformative experiences can remain unknown and outcomes remain unclear. It also allows us – pushing our idea through – to choose that we want to discover the adult learners *we will become* by undergoing transformative experiences.

All the allies in this exploration are interested in pedagogy and the implications of their ideas for teaching. Using science fiction, satire, fragments of literature, film and documentaries Negt alongside Paul encourages dangerous thoughts of critical intelligence. Kluge and Negt (2014) collect a visual archive of pedagogical methods for facilitating the exploration of how things could be different (p. 260). Kluge’s book title names this pedagogy: *Learning processes with a deadly outcome* (Kluge, 1996). In this way, they are remarkably in step with previous Frankfurt School members and yet

surprisingly different too. Paul (2016, p. 1), for example, adds an imaginative pedagogy when she asks her readers to 'imagine becoming a vampire' as her introduction to her study of transformative experiences. Her methodology is every bit as unusual as Negt and Kluge.

Arcilla's (1995) notion of (liberal) learning is inspired by several aspects Oakeshott (1989, p. 41) identified as distinctive, as an 'invitation to disentangle oneself, for a time, from the urgencies of the here and now and to listen to the conversation in which human beings forever seek to understand themselves'. Arcilla (1995) suggests *joining* the conversation instead of just listening to it. But what is it that makes the idea to join so attractive? It 'is the recognition that your sense of yourself leaves something to be desired' (Arcilla, 1995, p. 3) – especially in times of crisis and disorientation.

Conclusion

A critical pedagogy of crises continues to evolve as does the task of making further links and connections, whether through Negt, Paul, Arcilla or others, so that a fuller and more satisfying iteration of a theory of learning might unfold to meet the increasingly challenging learning dilemmas faced by individuals, communities and society. There is urgency in the task and risk. It may be that not-knowing becomes the new normal, and the pursuit of rational certainty emerging from rational discourse or conversations may not be entirely possible.

As rational conversations are the domain of critical theory (Habermas) and transformative learning (Mezirow), one may also have to attend to the challenges of this pedagogic task. In addition, as experience is the ground on which learning theory builds, there is another challenge that involves understanding that experience is a more fertile basis for learning. The dialectical nature of experience allows us to view a current emphasis on subjectivity as in need of further elaboration. The philosophical objections of Paul or the power of continuing transformative conversations of Arcilla may provide ideas that could sustain learning in crises that are not just ahead but already part of our experience. This is the state of this search that is attempting to move towards a critical pedagogy of crises.

It may be the case that we can imagine ourselves (metaphorically) standing on the *Pequod* in *Moby Dick.* In that moment, like the crew, we know very little. We gather what knowledge and learning we can and together process it with edifying conversations as much as with rational discourse so that together social action, real change, and real transformations are not only possible but pursued relentlessly but with anti-antagonistic solidarity. What can be offered in contrast to this solidarity? We do know that Ahab alone can do nothing, or very little.

Ishmael in *Moby Dick* spends a night sharing a bed with Queequeg, a cannibal (p. 28), but in the morning, following their conversations, he thinks this man is 'worth unusual regarding' (p. 34). When a short while later Queequeg is prevented from boarding the ship because he is not a Christian, Ishmael speaks on his behalf saying he is a Christian and belongs to the same Church 'to which you and I, … and all of us, and every mother's son and soul of us belong; the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world; we all belong to that;…in that we all join hands'(p. 83).

It may be a shared humanity and solidarity that will be the basis for working through our current existential crises; however, they are named and experienced. In the end, Ishmael is in an untenable position, left alone, the only survivor of the entire adventure. He alone survives to tell the terrible and tragic tale. A lone survivor is not tenable. Or, in

the words of Kurantowicz, Olesen and Wildemeersch (2014), 'a human being is a human being is a human being is a human being' (p. 145).

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Learning from the whirlpools of existence: Crises and transformative processes as complex and rhythmic phenomena

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to problematize and enrich the use of the concept of crisis in adult education to theorize further its contribution to the study of transformative processes. This paper discusses first the implications inherent in the adoption of event-based and processual approaches to crises. It seeks then to nuance and problematize the ways in which the relationships between crisis, learning and (trans)formative processes are conceived in adult education, especially through transformative learning theory and biographical approaches. The reflection highlights the difficulty of capturing the fluidity of learning and (trans)formative dynamics. Inspired by Edgar Morin's paradigm of complexity and illustrated by examples taken from the COVID-19 pandemic, three principles are defined to help conceiving what structures, regulates and reorganizes such dynamics. The contribution concludes by emphasizing the importance of developing a critical awareness of the rhythms that shape educational processes.

Keywords: Adult education, crisis, transformation, complexity, rhythm, COVID-19

Learning from the whirlpools of experience

Every crisis leaves traces that appear both through the regressions and the advances that emerge from it. In many regards, when we refer to the lessons learned and the transformations associated with the experience of a crisis, we are referring to its most striking effects, what emerges from it. However, from an educational perspective, the

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experience of a crisis cannot be reduced to the explicit marks it leaves. The outcome of a crisis depends indeed on all the activities deployed to contain, regulate, and transcend it, before, during and after the occurrence of a specific perturbation. These activities manifest themselves through processes that express the evolution of tensions (e.g., dilemmas, psychological distress, social conflicts) whose effects over time eventually lead to the emergence of specific transformations.

As the river carves its bed, the experience of a crisis leaves deep traces. If, retrospectively, the erosion caused by the continuous flow of water demonstrates the transforming power of a river, it does not, however, reveal the whirlpools that agitate it. It may be the same with the experience of a crisis. The resulting traces give an account of the significant changes in which it participates, whereas the everyday learning experiences that contribute to it tend to fade in the memories that we can keep of it. Their fluidity thus appears to be repressed in a form of "rhythmic unconscious" (Alhadeff-Jones, 2020). However, the recognition of these whirlpools of experience also carries significant learning opportunities. These swirls refer to our everyday experiences of change. They manifest the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and social dynamics that (trans)form individuals and collectives, day after day. More fundamentally, the study of these whirlpools may open up possibilities to interpret the ways in which forms of influence, power, and constraint unfold both, in crisis situations and in normal times, on a daily basis and over the long term (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017; Michon, 2005).

Beyond the metaphor, referring to the fluidity inherent to a crisis remains however problematic. It raises questions about the ways we interpret how people, collectives, and organizations experience or display ever-changing and inconsistent behaviours, fluctuations in the way they find and maintain themselves in equilibrium, and how variations affect the way they evolve throughout their existence. From an educational perspective, the opportunity provided by the current pandemic questions how to comprehend the (trans)formative effects of a crisis as they unfold, and how to study learning and transformational processes that seem to escape a sense of predictability, consistency and clarity. Between order and disorder, understanding the educational dimensions inherent in the experience of crises requires therefore the elaboration of a conceptual framework that embraces the complexity of such phenomena.

Reconsidering the meanings of the concept of crisis in adult education

The term "crisis" has been ubiquitous in everyday language far before the pandemic of COVID-19 started. Its recurrence is likely a marker of modernity (Béjin & Morin, 1976; Kjaer & Olsen, 2016; Koselleck & Richter, 2006). As the French sociologist and philosopher Edgar Morin reminded us in 1976, there is no field that is not haunted by the idea of crisis. However, through its generalization, the term has also been emptied of its meaning:

> Originally, *Krisis* meant decision: it is the decisive moment in the evolution of an uncertain process that allows for the diagnosis. Today, crisis means indecision. It is the moment when, at the same time as a disturbance occurs, uncertainties arise... The word is now used to name the unnamable; it refers to a double gap: a gap in our knowledge (at the very heart of the term crisis); a gap in the social reality itself where the "crisis" appears. (Morin, 1976, p.149, my translation).

Thus, for Morin, the key problem is to determine 'how to clarify [*éclairer*] the concept of crisis? [and] How to make it enlightening [*éclairant*]?' (Ibid.) In educational sciences, the

use of the concept of crisis presents a threefold interest. First, it raises questions about our conceptions of change and the ways we define the nature of the subjects and objects that are altered by it. Accordingly, the first part of this paper is going to discuss the relevance and the implications inherent to the adoption of a processual approach to study crises in adult education. Referring to the concept of crisis also leads to questioning how we interpret the discontinuities that disrupt the life course and the relationships they have with ongoing learning and (trans)formative processes. The second part of this paper will thus present a succinct overview of existing theories in adult education to position their current contributions and limitations when it comes to interpret the relationships between crises, learning and transformation. Finally, the experience of a crisis also reveals the fluidity of learning and (trans)formative dynamics, as they unfold over time. Studying the relations between crises and educational processes raises therefore questions regarding the principles based on which we can interpret such phenomena. The third part of this article is going to develop more extensively this problematic by addressing three questions: How to conceive what structures learning and (trans)formative processes, taking into consideration both the fluidity and the rigidity they may display in a context of crisis? How to conceive the ways such processes unfold through time, considering both the fluctuations and steadiness they may exhibit? How to envision the movement through which learning and (trans)formative processes evolve, considering both the constancy and the variability that may characterize their development?

Event-based and processual approaches to crisis

Crisis phenomena can be considered in two distinct ways (Roux-Dufort, 2000, p.18). On the one hand, the crisis can be considered as an event. In doing so, it tends to be confused with the incident that triggered it, which is considered to be brutal, punctual, surprising, unpredictable and improbable. Conceived in this way, the crisis is characterized by the rapidity of its development, the compression of the time for decision-making and the confusion of the circumstances associated with it. An event-based approach to crises therefore tends to favour a study of the facts considered a posteriori, favouring a reactive posture, rather than an approach based on anticipation and prevention (ibid.) On the other hand, the crisis can also be understood as a process. From this point of view, it is envisioned through a progression in its intensity and visibility, allowing for different stages (e.g., precursory signs, triggering, amplification, resolution). As Roux-Dufort (2000, p.18, my translation) points out, this approach allows:

> … the possibility of predicting the crisis or tracing its genealogy and the dynamics of its occurrence. In this sense, it moves away from the mere analysis of symptoms and opens up broader avenues of investigation for learning about crises.

A processual approach thus suggests that a crisis should be conceived as the product of cumulative and potentially detectable dysfunctions or tensions, the dynamics of which may suddenly appear out of control. Similarly, it refers to the complexity of the systems within which the crisis unfolds, insofar as the large number of interacting elements and the multitude of their interrelationships contribute to making the emergence of a crisis inevitable, even if it remains unlikely and unpredictable. A processual approach to crises thus leads to a systemic, complexivist and multidimensional conception. It leads to focus our attention prior to the triggering event, on the conditions that favoured its emergence, while at the same time questioning the dynamics that allowed it to unfold (Roux-Dufort,

2000, p.22). In so doing, it allows the experience of the crisis to be situated in a timeframe that also makes it possible to contemplate the unfolding of learning and (trans)formative processes.

Adopting such a conception of the crisis is not self-evident, however. The opposition between an event-based conception and a processual conception of change may appear as a simple theoretical alternative. However, as Jullien (2011) develops it in his reflection on "silent transformations", this duality in fact refers to a more fundamental ontological posture that determines the way in which we conceive not only change, but also and above all the nature of the entities whose transformations we study (e.g., the knowledge, the learning subject, the community). Where an event-based approach assumes the existence of stable entities that would be disrupted by the events that affect them, a processual approach suggests considering them from the point of view of the ongoing dynamics that animate them (Rescher, 2000). A processual approach to adult education thus emphasizes the study of the active and changing aspects that make up educational phenomena, rather than what constitutes their substance. From this perspective, the learning subjects, knowledge, and skills, as well as the organizational arrangements and frameworks involved in education, should be conceived primarily in terms of the (ordered) processes and (disordered) dynamics from which they emerge and in which they participate, rather than in terms of the forms of equilibrium and stability that would characterize them in the course of their evolution (Alhadeff-Jones, 2018).

Crisis, learning and (trans)formative processes

A crisis has at least three properties that make it particularly interesting from the point of view of learning and (trans)formation: it refers to a process that manifests itself in stages, before and after the triggering event; it brings together different systems, actors and issues that are sometimes heterogeneous from one another; and finally, it invalidates traditional response patterns by confronting the actors with the limits of their ways of perceiving, interpreting and evaluating the events they face (Roux-Dufort, 2000, p.45). To the extent that it escapes all regularity and does not fit into the mould shaped by previous events, the experience of a crisis positions the individuals and communities that face it in a kind of vacuum that can be lived as a threat and/or an opportunity. The crisis thus confronts individuals and institutions with the need to rediscover or restore meaning to the actions undertaken. To the extent that the crisis confronts a collapse of reference points, it proves to be liberating and favours the generation of ideas that in normal times would be considered unacceptable, but which under the impact of the disruption, take on their full meaning (Roux-Dufort, 2000, p. 46).

The experience of a crisis can lead to two outcomes, one regressive, the other progressive (Morin, 1976, p. 160-161). On the one hand, the crisis involves a potential for regression, which is characterized by the loss of complexity and flexibility of the system: the richest qualities and the freedoms acquired disappear, while the most primitive or rigid structures are consolidated. From a learning perspective, the crisis can be experienced as so exceptional that it does not appear as an opportunity for change. The stupefaction it provokes constitutes such a threat that it prevents the development of the lucidity necessary to distance oneself from it in order to recognize new solutions. Similarly, the rarity of the situation and the uniqueness of its manifestations give the feeling that it is not possible to draw on past experience to deal with it. These uncertainties activate individual and collective defence mechanisms that are too important to allow new learning to emerge (Barus-Michel, Giust-Desprairies, & Ridel, 1996; Roux-Dufort,

2000). On the other hand, the crisis can also lead to progress that manifests itself through the acquisition of new qualities or properties that contribute to the complexification of the system (Morin, 1976, p. 161). From this point of view, the experience of crisis mobilizes processes of reconfiguration that lead to more or less profound disorganizations and reorganizations that participate in a transformative, even evolutionary process. Thus, crises represent both learning opportunities likely to lead to (trans)formative effects, while at the same time inducing constraints that considerably reduce their (trans)formative potential. In order to understand and nuance the relationship between crisis experiences, learning processes and their transformative potential, it seems relevant at this stage to distinguish three levels of learning, as highlighted in several change and educational theories. Once this distinction is established, two referentials will be discussed in a more specific way (transformative learning theory and biographical approaches in adult education), to further problematize the ways in which the relationship between crises and transformational processes is accounted for in educational theory.

Three levels of learning

At a first level, the experience of the crisis refers to behavioural changes that occur progressively and contribute to modifying the routines and ways of functioning within a system, according to the experience acquired. “First-order learning” (Bateson, 1973), “single-loop learning” (Argyris & Schön, 1978), or “instrumental learning” (Mezirow, 1991), refer to relatively superficial changes aimed at finding solutions to problems encountered, while remaining in conformity with pre-established goals. In a crisis context, it is thus a matter of learning to regulate some of its effects, without questioning the norms and values that determine the context of action. This type of learning thus makes it possible to maintain the status quo while adjusting to changes in the environment. As Roux-Dufort (2000, p.57) points out, while it allows certain short-term perturbations to be regulated, this type of learning has a number of limitations. By reducing the experience of a crisis to an exceptional event whose only purpose is to manage its negative effects, the learning undertaken does not allow for the consideration of new frameworks of reflection, in order to respond to the imbalances and tensions experienced. By not questioning the conditions that led to the emergence of the crisis, this type of learning cannot resolve the discomfort and sense of collapse associated with sudden change and the deployment of tensions accumulated over time.

A second level of learning occurs when individuals or groups change their frames of reference or the assumptions from which they interpret their experiences. This type of learning refers rather to a discontinuity based on the questioning of the assumptions and hypotheses that have guided action until then. This is referred to as “second-order learning” (Bateson, 1973), “double-loop learning” (Argyris & Schön, 1978), or “communicational learning” (Mezirow, 1991), as it relates to the meanings of the actions undertaken. From this point of view, the crisis, the antagonisms and the dilemmas it brings with it, raise consciousness and provoke a process of elaboration that has the effect of making explicit the “meaning perspectives” (ibid.) from which individuals and institutions define the norms, values and basic principles that guide their actions. For Roux-Dufort (2000, pp.57-58), this type of learning expresses the irreversible process of questioning initiated by the crisis. In the long term, however, it can prove problematic insofar as it forces actors to reposition themselves, in a reactive manner, under the pressure of a critical situation, and not necessarily by virtue of a vision or a desire for change.

Finally, a third level of learning can be distinguished. It involves the ability to distance oneself from the consciousness-raising process described above. Referred to as "third-order learning" (Bateson, 1973), "triple-loop learning" (Tosey, Visser & Saunders, 2011) or "emancipatory learning" (Mezirow, 1991), it is based on the understanding and transformation of the assumptions from which we make sense of our experience. Through an in-depth inquiry, one actively seeks to question the frames of reference and paradigms that limit the actions undertaken and the ways of thinking and feeling about them. At this level, the effects of a crisis have repercussions on identity and on the way, one defines the meaning of one's own existence. This type of learning refers to a different understanding of the crisis which lies in what it reveals. At the individual level, it can, for example, be based on an in-depth analysis of the biographical processes (Dominicé, 2000) that account for the responses produced in a crisis situation, and the interpretative frameworks that they reveal (Mezirow, 1991). This type of learning requires an awareness of the dialectical and chaotic nature of crisis phenomena. It involves, for instance, moving beyond binary interpretative frameworks (e.g., positive/negative, external/internal, production/destruction) and engaging in an active search for meaning. This is particularly difficult insofar as it confronts individuals to tensions generated by the awareness of the limits, obstacles and sacrifices that must be made in order to overcome one's own assumptions and to recognize the inevitability of the doubt and anxiety from which the learning process must draw (Roux-Dufort, 2000, p.58).

Crises and adulthood: Contributions and limits of transformation theories

When it comes to conceiving the articulation between different types of learning and understanding the transformative role inherent in episodes of crisis experienced throughout existence, two types of contribution regularly appear in the adult education literature: those that refer to transformative learning theory and those that are inscribed in the tradition of life histories and biographical research. These two frames of reference have contributed significantly to the development of research on transformative processes in adulthood. Nevertheless, they present certain limitations that need to be addressed to better understand the complexity of the relationship between crisis, learning and (trans)formation.

By distinguishing different types of learning (instrumental, communicational and emancipatory) involved in a transformational journey, by specifying some of the conditions required for transformation to occur (e.g., dialogue, critical reflection), and by modelling the phases constituting a transformational process, transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) offers a particularly appropriate conceptual framework for understanding the relationships between disruptive experiences, crises, and transformative processes (Alhadeff-Jones & Kokkos, 2011). However, this theory suffers from several limitations. First, it does not explicitly refer to the concept of crisis, favouring instead the notion of "disorienting dilemma". In so doing, it does not fully account for the extreme implications that characterize sometimes the events that mark out existence, and in particular the intense emotional, social, and political dimensions revealed by crises. Moreover, insofar as it locates the origin of a transformative process in the discontinuity introduced by the experience of a dilemma, this theory does not problematize the dynamics that precede the appearance of a disturbing event that may determine the responses it triggers. Moreover, the theory of transformative learning lacks a conceptual apparatus for describing the temporal complexity in which the phenomena of crisis and (trans)formation are embedded (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017, 2019a). The

understanding of transformation processes is thus based on a divide between, on the one hand, an event-based approach to change, emphasizing lived discontinuities, and, on the other hand, the recognition of the role played by processes inscribed in a continuum (e.g., dialogue, critical reflection). The whole process is apprehended through a relatively ordered developmental sequence that supposedly transcends a given context (Nohl, 2015), but does not explain according to which principles the ebbs and flows between stages of transformation may evolve through time.

Contributions from the field of life histories and biographical research offer an alternative frame of reference for considering the relationships between crisis, transformative processes, and adulthood. Taking personal history into account appears to be a determining factor in understanding phenomena of crisis and transition in adulthood. Boutinet (1998) thus suggests integrating the crisis phenomenon (whether it is of internal or external origin for the subject) into a broader process of transition, envisioned as '[a]n intermediary area of experiences, full of instability and trial and error' (Boutinet, 1998, p.58, my translation). The crisis thus refers to a transitional process of passage, which depends on the age range in which it is lived (e.g., young adulthood, mid-life, retirement), the type of experience to which it refers (e.g., professional, relational, etc.), its duration and its rhythm, and the means used to manage it. It thus implies:

> … a mourning to be lived which assimilates it to an experience of liminality: a threshold is to be crossed, an initiation is in the process of taking place which makes it possible to give up a certain former state to allow the accession to a new psychological status by a transition to be managed towards new attachments... (Boutinet, 1998, p.59, my translation).

The recourse to life histories thus constitutes a precious means to describe and interpret the role played by the experiences of crisis as they relate to phenomena of transition and transformation, throughout the existence. By making explicit the historical framework on which transformation may unfold (e.g., Alheit, Bron-Wojciechowska, Brugger, & Dominicé, 1995; Delory-Momberger, 2003; Dominicé, 2000; Pineau, 2000; West, Alheit, Andersen, & Merrill, 2007), biographical research undertaken in the field of adult education involves narrative processes that privilege the enunciation of experiences lived as singular or critical: epiphanies, ruptures, crises, bifurcations, transitions, etc. (Baudouin, 2014; Galvani, 2019; Lesourd, 2009). However, this type of approach has its own limitations. For example, by placing the emphasis on events, intense moments, or ordeals experienced, the work done using life narratives tends to neglect the role played by the recurring experience of everyday phenomena of low amplitude (e.g., microaggressions). The plot that organizes life narratives tends to ignore or minimize the description of routines, habits and the phenomena of accumulation or saturation that constitute the banality of everyday life (Alhadeff-Jones, 2020). Finally, by emphasizing the discontinuities of existence and the unique character of each successive period of life (e.g., childhood, adolescence, entry into adulthood), autobiographical writings do not always make it possible to enunciate in a systematic way what tends to be repeated in the transitions lived and in the recurring crises experienced at the different stages of one's existence.

The fluidity of (trans)formative processes revealed in a crisis

The experience of a crisis is characterized by a progression of disorders, instabilities and contingencies that increase uncertainties and make its effects unpredictable (Morin, 1976, p.156). In this sense, one of the fundamental characteristics of crises lies in the fact that

they reveal the fluidity of the phenomena that constitute them. From an educational point of view, this feature is crucial to recognize, insofar as it refers to the uncertain, unstable, changing, and hard to grasp dimension that characterizes the various states experienced, as well as the flexibility and plasticity of the learning and (trans)formative processes that unfold over time. The experience of a crisis thus highlights the uncertainties, ambivalences, ambiguities, but also the tensions and conflicts which, in a complementary and contradictory way, stimulate and hinder the learning processes experienced, both individually and collectively. It reveals a fluidity that can be found at all levels: when seeking solutions to re-establish a form of normality, when questioning the meanings, norms and values that guide our actions, or when challenging the foundations that ground "meaning perspectives" (Mezirow, 1991), in order to engage in more fundamental transformations. Between the relative superficiality of learning that aims to establish a process of normalization and the emergence of deeper processes of change that can be experienced as regenerative, the effects of a crisis reveal the fluctuations and oscillations that characterize the dynamics of (trans)formation.

Envisioning the experience of a crisis through the fluidity it reveals may constitute a desirable aim from an educational perspective. For the subjects who experience them, it remains however often problematic. Being confronted to instability and inconsistency may lead people to experience feelings of disbelief, insecurity, anxiety, fear, and even violence and brutality, that may be perceived – consciously or not – as threatening for the integrity of the self, or for the cohesion of the collective (Barus-Michel, Giust-Desprairies & Ridel, 1996, p.36). As suggested by Kaës (1979), what seems crucial to overcome and learn from a crisis remains the capacity to create a symbolic space, and use discourses and exchanges as means to contain, elaborate, represent, and conceive the tensions and dynamics involved. For the researcher and the practitioner, it is not straightforward neither to be dealing with people coping with a crisis, or recollecting memories associated to it. Beyond the subjective implications it may involve (Barus-Michel, Giust-Desprairies & Ridel, 1996), it raises theoretical questions about the conceptual bases on which to describe and interpret the "flow" that is constitutive of the experience of a crisis, as well as the "fluxes" through which its tensions unfold. Many contributions in human sciences may provide frameworks to proceed (e.g., Marxian or Freudian theories). In order to embrace the complexity of crises and the multiple facets involved in individual and collective transformations, the reflection conducted in the following sections refers specifically to Morin's (1976) theory of crises; a contribution that is embedded in his paradigm of complexity (Morin, 2008) and that provides us with transdisciplinary principles highlighting and formalizing the complex dynamics inherent to crises and their effects, independently of the theories used to interpret their specific origins or manifestations.

Conceiving the complexity of learning and (trans)formative processes

According to Morin's (1976) contribution, in order to conceive of crisis, it is first necessary to go beyond the notions of disturbance, ordeal, and rupture of equilibrium, and to consider society and its constituents as systems capable of having crises. To do this, Morin favours three principles of analysis inspired by complexity theories: the first is systemic, the second cybernetic, the third negentropic. The following sections explore successively these three levels of analysis, seeking to establish some of the issues they raise from the perspective of learning and (trans)formation, and illustrating them with examples drawn from the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Systemic approach and antagonisms

As Morin reminds us, the idea of system refers to a whole organized by the interrelation of its constituents:

> For there to be a system, there must be the preservation of difference, that is, the preservation of forces safeguarding at least something fundamental in the originality of the elements or objects or interrelations, thus the preservation, counterbalanced, neutralized or virtuality, of forces of exclusion, dissociation, repulsion. (Morin, 1976, p.150)

In this perspective, any organized system (e.g., a person, a collective, an institution, a society), rests on equilibriums that involve both complementarities and antagonistic forces. Two postulates are thus proposed: (1) The complex unity of the system both creates and represses antagonisms; (2) systemic complementarities are inseparable from antagonisms. And Morin specifies: 'These antagonisms remain either virtual, or more or less controlled, or even ... more or less controlling. They erupt when there is a crisis, and they make a crisis when they are in eruption.' (Morin, 1976, p.151).

The crisis as a revealing of the antagonisms that structure learning and (trans)formative processes

Analysing the complementarities and antagonisms revealed by the experience of a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, makes it possible to apprehend and grasp the polarities, oppositions, contradictions, paradoxes, tensions, conflicts, but also the ambivalences, hesitations, and dilemmas through which processes of change, learning and (trans)formation unfold. At the behavioural and instrumental level, the experience of the pandemic confronts people on a daily basis with decisions that are made in the midst of doubt and that manifest hesitations and tensions that evolve as they acquire new knowledge. Having to choose whether to wear a mask, under what conditions to send one's children to school, or whether to trust official policies: these are all situations to be resolved on a daily basis that involve decision-making and learning about oneself, others, and the world. When we consider the frames of reference mobilized to make sense of the situations we experience, we are also exposed to tensions that challenge the norms, values, principles, and interests that guide our actions. This is the case, for example, when it comes to accommodating the education of one's children and maintaining one's professional activities at home, or at a macro level, when a government has to balance the contradictory requirements of economic recovery and sanitary measures. If these questions are discussed and reflected upon, they can lead to positions that open the way to second-order learning that can affect the meaning we give to our actions. The experience of the crisis also brings to the fore deeper ambivalences and tensions, particularly concerning the position to adopt regarding the long-term effects of the crisis and the means used to deal with it. On a personal level, dilemmas may arise between the need to reorganize one's daily life and the desire to reorient one's personal or professional life. On a collective level, the crisis also reveals oppositions and ambivalences between two postures: one that favours adjusting the way existing systems operate (health, work, commerce, transportation, etc.) and the other that aspires to more radical transformations. Thus, third-order learning appears virtually in a tension between the search for balance and normalization on the one hand, and the opportunity for openness and transformation on the other.

The fluidity of learning and the patterns that organize it over time

The identification of antagonisms and tensions in crisis situations leads us to consider how learning and (trans)formative processes evolve through fluctuations between states, behaviours, beliefs, or postures. Adopting Morin's systemic view suggests that such phenomena are neither totally ordered nor fully disordered. Rather, the presence of complementarities and antagonisms reveals differentiated sets of tensions that organize people's experiences. Such patterns may for instance refer to antagonistic embodied experiences (e.g., immobility vs mobility; healthy vs unhealthy), conflicting psychological states or dispositions (e.g., well-being vs suffering, high vs low self-confidence, trust vs scepticism), contradictory ideological values (e.g., liberal vs conservative), or differentiated social status (e.g., single vs in a relation, autonomous vs dependant, expert vs novice, employed vs unemployed). The adoption of Morin's systemic perspective suggests one to explore which patterns are revealed by people's experience of a crisis, and how people relate to them over time. From an educational perspective, the fluctuation that comes with the alternation between different states may be critical to explore and question. It opens the possibility to envision the fluidity of the life course through the recurring dialogical tensions that are constitutive of the fabric of one's existence (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017, 2020, 2021b; Bachelard, 1950). Beyond the crisis that may reveal them, the recurrence of such dualities in one's life may appear as a marker that shapes learning processes and the singular flow of one's own development. Thus, the recognition and the description of such patterns may appear as critical. They may lead people to develop the capacity to interpret and eventually influence how they relate to the meaningful tensions and antagonisms that organize the course of their personal and professional lives, beyond specific perturbations.

Cybernetic approach and regulatory mechanisms

To explain for instance how a thermostat maintains the temperature of a room stable, a cybernetic view focuses on the regulating processes (positive or negative feedback) that allow a system to be maintained in equilibrium (homeostasis) based on the antagonisms at play (e.g., heat vs cold). As Morin (1976, p.151, my translation) states:

> When we consider systems of cybernetic complexity ... the machine, the cell, the society, that is, with regulating feedbacks, we find that the organization itself elicits and uses antagonistic behaviours and effects from certain constituents. This means that there is also organizational antagonism.

The regulation of a system is therefore based on the antagonistic action of one or more elements on other elements of the system, as soon as these elements vary beyond a zone of tolerance, threatening the stability, the homeostasis, or even the integrity of the system: 'Thus antagonism does not only bring about the dislocation of the system, it can also contribute to its stability and regularity.' (Morin, 1976, p.152, my translation).

The crisis as a revealing of the mechanisms that regulate learning and (trans)formative processes

In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, regulatory processes involving negative (inhibition) or positive (reinforcement) feedbacks are omnipresent both, at the individual level (e.g., rituals or defence mechanisms inhibiting the anxiety felt) and at the level of

the collective, including social regulatory strategies (e.g., minimizing risks of exposure, increasing treatment capacities), political measures (e.g., reducing expressions of dissent, strengthening policies), or economic policies (e.g., saving resources, providing financial support or stimulus). The ways in which these regulatory mechanisms unfold reveal how learning processes evolve through cycles. First, the efforts made individually and collectively to cope with the perturbations caused by the crisis rely on schemes that belong to the repositories of known responses (e.g., denial, confinement) and are inscribed in specific antagonisms (e.g., confronting vs avoiding a threat, closure vs opening). Initially applied indiscriminately, they are progressively reproduced and adjusted, based on resources available, knowledge acquired and experimentations. From a behavioural perspective for instance, preventions strategies have eventually been developed through the experimentation, ritualization, and appropriation of simple gestures (e.g., wearing a mask, washing hands, keeping distance, opening windows, respecting quarantine). To be implemented during periods long enough to be effective, such measures have also required people to assimilate, from a cognitive point of view, the counter-intuitive and non-linear feature that characterizes the periodic progression of the contagion process (i.e., latency period between the moment of contamination and the appearance of symptoms, logarithmic increase of cases during this same period). Since the beginning of the pandemic, the repeated attempts to control the peaks of the contagion have led people to perceive successive "waves" of contamination. Both practically and symbolically, each new wave has proved to be a potential source of second-order learning, related to the meaning of this crisis in our lives and the questions it raises. If the first wave revealed in Europe, for example, the lack of anticipation of policies, the weaknesses of health systems and supply chains, and the importance of certain professions located on the "front line", the following waves have led to questioning the tolerance of populations with regard to the measures of constraint that have been imposed on them (in relation to their capacity to subsist, their family, work, consumption and travel habits, etc.), opening the way to a re-examination of the meanings attributed for instance to our ways of living. As the awareness of the successive attempts to regulate the crisis grows, the experience of the cycles of the pandemic questions, more fundamentally, how people learn to regulate the balance between preserving habits, knowledge, and beliefs, and initiating new ways of perceiving and giving meaning to their recurring experiences. At the epistemic level, it challenges for instance the way in which institutions regulate, on the one hand, the search for technical solutions (e.g., prevention tools, vaccines, treatments) and, on the other hand, the responses to be provided on a human level (e.g., in terms of meanings, norms and values).

Learning processes and the regulations around which they are organized in time

By emphasizing the role played by regulatory mechanisms, the cybernetic point of view leads to an examination of the nature of the fluctuations through which individuals and collectives maintain themselves in equilibrium or fail to do so. Regulatory processes rely on antagonisms that display specific patterns. These define the individual and collective strategies implemented to cope with the uncertainty of the crisis. Their evolution reveals a second kind of fluctuation that determines how learning and (trans)formative processes unfold through time. Such fluctuations appear through the repetition of loops, cycles, returns, or alternances through which the crisis is experienced. Considering the repetitive nature of these processes suggests – among other – that we pay attention to the features that characterize their recurrence before, during and after the crisis. From an educational

perspective, studying the phenomena of repetition associated with a crisis is heuristic. First, it leads to question how the crisis relates to previous learning experiences and, more specifically, to existing modalities of regulation that may be re-enacted to cope with it (e.g., feelings, thoughts, behaviours, strategies, that may be reproduced, in a functional or dysfunctional way) (Barus-Michel, Giust-Desprairies, & Ridel, 1996). Second, it brings us to pay attention to the modalities of regulation themselves and the way they influence the possibilities to learn from them. For instance, each person may experience the reproduction of everyday routines involved in the management of a crisis at a particular pace. For those in the "front lines" (e.g., health workers), the experience of the crisis may seem like an overwhelming shock or an exhausting race, letting limited room for processing one's experience to avoid its traumatic impact. For those experiencing it from the far, it may seem like a slow-motion process letting more time for self-reflection and dialogue. Such heterogeneous experiences regarding the possibility to regulate the tensions inherent to the crisis, and the repetitive activities it involves, also raise challenges in order to make the experience educationally beneficial for all. Thus, it raises additional questions: How the pace of the crisis is experienced (e.g., feeling of urgency versus boredom)? What are the disparities observed in the ways people relate to the regulation of their activities (e.g., availability or lack of resources to cope with regulatory measures)? Who has the power to influence the frequency or the tempo through which regulatory measures are implemented? How much it can be regulated, and how does it impact the meanings people associate with the overall situation?

Negentropic approach, reorganization processes and emergences

Like a fire turns wood into ashes, entropy refers to the natural tendency of an organized system to evolve irreversibly towards dispersion and disorder. In the reverse way, the negentropic level of analysis refers, in Morin's thinking (1976), to the study of the conditions required for a system to be able to reorganize itself continuously, or even to develop its complexity over time. In this perspective, the antagonisms present within a system (e.g., organism, family, institution) allow for the regulation of its processes (cybernetic principle), while at the same time carrying the risk of its disintegration, to the extent that the more they unfold, the more they contribute to the dispersion of the system's elements (e.g., radicalization). Morin thus reminds us that any organization maintains itself either by remaining immobile (fixed and static system), or by mobilizing energy that makes it possible to compensate for and control the forces of opposition and dissociation (antagonisms) that cause the system to tend towards dispersion. The negentropic analysis therefore concerns the modalities of transformation and evolution of an organized system, as well as the resources available to sustain it over time, and to inscribe it in a history that fluctuates between regression and reorganization. From a negentropic point of view, two features seem particularly critical to consider: the change of state that takes place at the crossing of a specific threshold (liminality) and the irreversible nature of such an emergence.

The crisis as a revealing of emergences that reorganize learning and (trans)formative processes

With regard to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, a negentropic reading of the crisis questions the irreversibility of both its harmful and destructive consequences, and its (re)generative and constructive effects. Accordingly, phenomena of regression may

appear as consequences of regulatory processes that favour the accumulation of deleterious factors (e.g., vulnerability, stress, isolation, inactivity, fatigue, poverty, insecurity, scepticism, inequalities) that may lead to breaking points. Conversely, progress may appear when regulatory processes participate in phenomena of concentration, accumulation, or regrouping (e.g., emotional, intellectual, social, financial resources) that facilitate the (re)organization and the emergence of new configurations of feelings, thoughts, actions, or interactions. Such experiences involve learning of different magnitudes (e.g., first, second or third-order learning). On an individual level, they appear for instance through changes and realizations caused by the experience of an acute or chronic illness, by the loss of a loved one, of a job, or by the confrontation with an unexpected situation of psychological, social and/or economic vulnerability. On a collective level, such emergences appear when realizing the significant failures or successes demonstrated by institutions in their attempt to control the effects of the pandemic (e.g., confinement and restriction of mobility, prolonged closure of schools, generalization of home-schooling and remote work, halting of air traffic, development of new vaccine technologies). The liminality of these experiences appears through their uniqueness and the ways they may be experienced as “first times”. Such phenomena trigger the emergence of new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting to cope with them. These experiences can be observed or lived as signs of regressions, but they can also be interpreted as opportunities, insofar as they reveal openings to transform the existing order of things and benefit from enough resources to proceed. The COVID-19 pandemic is thus characterized by new thresholds that redefine among others : everyday behaviours (e.g., norms of distancing related to social interactions, time spent at home, tolerance to news lower or higher levels of workload); the understanding of the severity of the situation (e.g., epidemiological criteria defining the extent of the pandemic); or the transformations implemented in order to cope with it (e.g., change of professional status, family reconfiguration, exceptional allocation of resources, new legislative framework, technological advances). As the crisis progresses – or recedes – it thus reveals traces whose recognition, formalization and normalization reflect its irreversible and negentropic character.

The reorganization and reconfigurations of learning processes

A negentropic reading of the crisis approaches it from the point of view of (re)organization processes and the irreversibility of the history in which it is embedded. Thus, the cumulative effects associated with the reproduction of experiences involving antagonisms, tensions and the way they are (or fail to be) regulated, may contribute as much to threatening the integrity of the system (e.g., due to the depletion of resources, the radicalization of implemented measures, or their rigidity) as to allowing the emergence of new properties contributing to its renewal (e.g., by accelerating awareness, the diffusion of information, exchanges or collaborations). From an educational perspective, these phenomena participate in the reorganization of ways of thinking, feeling, acting, or collaborating, at the individual and collective levels. As the crisis unfolds, these reconfigurations become conscious through moments that may be interpreted as thresholds and that determine how people experience the irreversibility of the changes taking place. Negentropic processes thus refer to a third kind of fluctuation that characterizes learning and (trans)formative processes. Through the reconfigurations they produce, they reorganize and eventually regenerate the patterns and the repetitive dimensions through which learning and (trans)formative processes evolve, in the

everyday life and throughout the lifespan. In adult education theory, such phenomena have been conceived mainly as third-order changes: transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), *kairos* (Galvani, 2019), ordeal (Baudouin, 2014) or epiphany (Lesourd, 2009), for instance. To fully comprehend their discontinuous and irreversible features, it seems necessary to pay attention to the successive variations that build-up and eventually lead to the threshold of a transformation. Whether abruptly or incrementally, the experience of a crisis is characterized by specific effects of saturation that influence the ways people feel, think, act, or interact with each other. They may concern the environment (e.g., amount of CO_2 released in the atmosphere), physiological processes (e.g., tiredness), psychological mechanisms (e.g., attention) or social phenomena (e.g., inequalities). From an educational perspective, paying attention to experiences of saturation and reconfiguration raises questions about the ways people and collectives learn to perceive and interpret, not only major disruptions, but also incremental changes whose manifestations are not obvious in normal times. It also questions the way people learn to sustain an awareness of such changes, despite weak signals or mechanisms of habituation.

Studying and accompanying the flow of (trans)formative processes

The position adopted in this paper goes beyond an event-based reading of crises and (trans)formative processes to explore more systematically the ongoing flows of activity (e.g., ways of feeling, thinking, acting, or interacting) that unfold in everyday life, before and after periods of disturbance. It should contribute to reinforce a scientific and social imaginary that envisions moments of rupture and crisis as "transitional" experiences (Kaës, 1979) that belong to the course of any adult life (Boutinet, 1998) and that are characterized by fluctuating states that need to be represented, understood, anticipated, contained, and accompanied. Inspired by Morin's contribution, the three principles proposed to study crisis phenomena lead to a conception of the complexity of learning and (trans)formative processes based on how they are structured (complementarities and antagonisms), how they are regulated (inhibition and reinforcement mechanisms), and how they are reorganized (liminality and emergences). Based on such principles, researchers, educators and learners may reflect on the experience of a crisis – and more broadly on any (trans)formative processes – as they unfold, by exploring more systematically: (a) the recurring tensions (embodied, psychological, social, ideological, etc.) that shape people, collectives, and organizations' activities, the polarities and the patterns they manifest, and the preponderance of specific forms of antagonisms organizing successive periods of their everyday life and existence; (b) the modalities of regulation implemented to moderate or reinforce such tensions through time, the resources they require, and the nature of the loops, cycles or alternances through which regulatory measures and actions are repeated or reproduced (their frequency, their pace, etc.); (c) the incremental variations or the weak signals, whose effects of saturation may eventually lead to the emergence of thresholds that determine more significant and visible reconfigurations in people, collectives and organizations' development.

Toward a rhythmic theory of crisis and transformation

Referring to Morin's contribution provides us with core principles to explore further the relationships between crises, learning and (trans)formations. Doing so, it provides theoretical grounds to reconsider what Alheit (1992, cited in West, Alheit, Andersen, &

Merrill, 2007, p.66) refers to as “biographicity”, that is the ability to reconfigure the meaning of one’s lifeworld in such a way that self-reflexive activities begin to shape the way one relates to a given social context. What is at stake from an educational perspective remains the integration of what we may learn from reflecting on crises – whether past, present, or anticipated – into the “normalcy” of the everyday life. Based on the contribution developed in this paper, increasing one’s capacity to make purposeful life choices may rely on how people develop the ability to individually and collectively regulate and critically reflect on the rhythms through which transformational processes shape and constrain their lives. Insofar as it immediately refers to a critical tension between order and movement, substance and flow, the concept of rhythm appears indeed critical to consider the fluidity of the everyday life and the lifespan more broadly (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017; Bachelard, 1950; Pineau, 2000). Such an approach requires the elaboration of a theory of crises, as much as it may require the development of a “rhythmic intelligence” (Alhadeff-Jones, 2021a) based on the capacity, individual and collective, to know, understand and represent the *rhuthmoi* (Michon, 2005), that is, the moving forms or ways of flowing, inherent to any organized, observed, experienced or disputed phenomenon. The contribution made in this paper may therefore appear as a starting point for broader inquiry, going beyond complexity theories, and relating among others to current scientific developments around rhythm theories and rhythmanalysis (e.g., Michon, 2005, 2021; Sauvanet, 2000). Exploring such resources in education (e.g., Alhadeff-Jones, 2017; 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2021b) may constitute a strategic move to develop further theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions, focusing on the continuous and discontinuous aspects of adult life and lifelong education.

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