Brief Remarks on the Strategic Experimentation of Belonging and the Instauring of Cosmicities in the Context of Art Education

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Abstract

This article considers the notion of belonging as an always incomplete and evolving journey integral to which is the gift of otherness; a journey that consists of a continuous mutation of self, others and world. This contrasts with the more fixed notion of 'belonging-to' that suggests prescribed identities affiliated to an established order, which can then invoke the negation of 'not belonging' and the subsequent violence of exclusion, marginalisation or dispossession that we witness almost endlessly. The negation of negation as manifested, perhaps unconsciously, in educational practices that need to respond empathetically to diverse pathways of learning, is central to this article. In this light perhaps in education we require a new declaration of rights, the right to have rights, that extends cartographies and obligations of belonging, in a world of increasing precarity. The article explores the notion of belonging in educational practices by articulating a series of scenarios in order to open up collective debate for possibilities in pedagogical practice.

Introduction

In this short article, I consider the notion of belonging, the central theme of the iJADE online conference in November 2022, as an always incomplete and evolving

journey integral to which is what I call the gift of otherness; a journey that consists of a continuous mutation of self, others and world. This contrasts with the more fixed notion of 'belonging-to' that suggests prescribed identities affiliated to an established order, which can then invoke the negation of 'not belonging' and the subsequent violence of exclusion, marginalisation or dispossession that we witness almost endlessly. I suggest that the negation of such negation as it may be manifested, perhaps unconsciously, in educational practices that need to respond empathetically to diverse pathways of learning that children and students travel, is central to this article. In this light perhaps in education we require a new declaration of rights, the right to have rights, that extends cartographies and obligations of belonging in a world of increasing precarity.

But what does 'belonging' mean in the context of educational practices or more specifically those of art education? Belongingness suggests a *feeling* of connectedness and acceptance, but implicit to this idea of belonging, as just mentioned, is 'that which does not belong', that which lies outside, that which is other or another. This suggests a state of constant indeterminacy. I argue that belonging is not to be conceived as relative to an already established order, community, etc., subject to what we might call regulatory controls, but is in fact created through on-going encounters with otherness, with uncertainty and difference, and therefore requires a constant *art* of making, unmaking and remaking. This suggests that belonging has to be conceived as a metastable process, never complete. A persistent problematic of practice. By this I mean that belonging is a process open to contingency and thus always subject to disruptions or events that need to be taken into account and which may offer new possibilities if we can respond effectively to them.

In educational practices, this implies a shift of emphasis from a notion of belonging that assumes established or prescribed 'identities' and boundaries (pedagogical, epistemological and ontological) to one that views educational practices more in terms of strategic experimentations in what the 'human' and a belonging can become. This raises the issue of what Rosi Braidotti (2013) terms the 'posthuman' and the as yet unknown that in educational settings is constituted by the multiplicity of diverse learning pathways and the capabilities and sensibilities of which they may become capable.

Such becoming, for both teacher and student, arises from the metastability of encounters with otherness and its problematic gift. What I am referring to here is being able to receive that which seems strange, that which suddenly emerges or which does not fit established patterns of practice/thought as a gift that can expand or transform such patterns. It is in this sense of a problematic that I want to think about the notion of belonging in educational practices by articulating a series of brief scenarios, the aim of which is to open up collective debate for possibilities in pedagogical practice.

Scenario 1: Pluralism and points of view

Recent studies in anthropology have explored the idea of a plural universe, a plurality of species, in which we humans are only one among many (Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2014), Strathern (2004), Holbraad & Pedersen (2017)). Such work follows in the footsteps of William James's notion of a multiverse. To belong to the human species is by implication also to belong to a plurality of other species. We

might say that we exist in one world of many worlds (Blaser & de la Cadena 2018), affected by and affecting others. This pluralistic understanding of belonging raises the issues of divergence, dissymmetry and difference. It also includes how emerging technologies, technological prostheses, modify and transform existence.

It is in the sense of what I call *convivial belonging* that we cannot simply conceive of belonging in human terms but also in non-human, inhuman, more-than-human or posthuman terms, in which the notion of 'we' is inclusive of the other species among which we cohabit. We humans, trees, animals, viruses, oceans, rivers mountains and so on. This would reverse anthropocentrism and engage with a bio-centrism and call upon a respective bio-ethics and politics. Perhaps a shift from human democracy to a *cosmocracy*, a concern for the whole. Such a pluralist universe means that what facilitates the problematic of belonging is not *identity* but *difference*, endlessly arising through encounters and inter-actions. Or put another way, it is the gaps or the interstices between identities from which new possibilities can emerge and evolve. This suggests that the human is always faced with otherness, with the inhuman, that which lies outside of what is currently conceived as human within its different contexts of living. Boundaries are therefore not fixed or stable in relation to identities, cultures or institutions, thereby unsettling concrete underpinnings and emphasising relationalities, convivialities, which in turn suggest vulnerabilities, potentialities, uncertainties and experimentations.

In very brief terms, the anthropologist Viveiros de Castro (1998) states that in South American indigenous cosmologies all beings, human and non-human are 'subjects' or 'persons', and to be a subject is to be able to take a *point of view* or a perspective. A point of view is not a position held by a subject because the point of view creates the subject. There are no points of view *onto* things, rather, things and beings *are* the points of view themselves. The ontological implications here are that rather than seeing things differently we see different things. He provides the now well-known illustrations from such cultures that what is blood to humans is maize beer for the Jaguar or what is a muddy waterhole to humans is a ceremonial house for tapirs (1998:470, 478,). An important consequence of this perspectivism is that there are no 'autonomous natural facts', for what we see as nature is viewed by other species as culture (a muddy waterhole ... a ceremonial house). We might say that the point of view creates a *cosmicity*. So rather than the western idea of multiculturalism that posits different representations of the world, that is to say the notion of cultural relativism, this south American perspectivism posits a *multinaturalism* of different worlds. A perspective then is deeply ontological emerging from a specific body-in-place, it is, 'an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a *habitus* (478)'.

Can we glean something of value for working with difference and divergence in pedagogic work from these brief comments on perspectivism and multinaturalism? Rather than thinking of a 'culturally responsive art education', we might want to consider the idea of a 'multi-natural art education' *vis-à-vis* different modes of existence, their manners and arts of becoming, their potentials and possibilities.

Perspectivism provides alternative conceptual tools to help us to develop new sensibilities, new ways of negating the negation of otherness and to challenge established values when necessary. It seems to require a permanent decolonising disposition to thought and practice as we encounter otherness, to pluralise our notions of practice and not the unquestioning deployment of established conceptual frameworks. If we try to award each practice full ontological legitimacy, its own nature, recognising its viability as a practice, as an alternative mode of

practice, and thus an alternative mode of belonging, this opens up what practice and its potential might be capable of. This suggests that each practice can be viewed as the instauration of a cosmicity and that pedagogic work is concerned with responding to diverse cosmicities. I will expand upon the idea of instauration in the work of Etienne Souriau below.

Scenario 2: Negative capability

The English poet John Keats developed the concept of 'negative capability' which refers to the artist's ability to live with and explore the uncertainties, contingencies and the unknown without prematurely resorting to an armour of preset attitudes or behaviours. We can contrast this disposition of being in uncertainty, its contingencies and interstices, to the security of established knowledge and practice. Negation in Keats' sense refers to the negation of the negation of contingency, in contrast to holding on to the security of established practices. For the artist, this negation of the negation of contingency and uncertainty and putting aside the armour of established practices and values, in effect demands the courage to suspend or dissolve the structures or sense of self, we might say the structures of belonging. The implications of such negations for the practice of art education are profound, highly paradoxical or antinomic, because while the artist embraces contingency and uncertainty and the negation of self, and by implication challenges the idea of belonging, we might argue that a key purpose of art education is for students to develop modes of practice that constitute and affirm existential identity, self and a sense of belonging. But is this really a paradox? Isn't the challenge of learning precisely concerned with responding effectively to encounters with contingency and uncertainty?

Can this radical notion of negative capability be squared with 'art education'? To answer this question, Georges Canguilhem's notion of normativity seems important. For Canguilhem (1991), normativity does not simply denote *existing* social structures, rules and standards, accepted modes of behaviour, moral codes and values that function as principles or guidelines to live by. Rather it concerns, 'the individual's *reassertion* of his or her power to act, judge and decide', in other words, the power to generate new norms in answer to life's contingent events. For me, this relates to the idea of art practice as the instauration of new cosmicities which I will come to, because instauration relates very much to the practice of repetition, of making possible what was not previously possible, what was unable to be accomplished previously (see Lawlor. 2011).

Scenario 3: Artist-teacher narratives and emerging cosmicities

On the ground artist-teacher narratives and conversations, their pedagogies, their arts of practice *matter*, because their difference and divergence can make other worlds appear along with their possibilities and potentials, they invoke a *pragmatics of the suddenly possible* (Buck-Morss 2013). The importance of such artist-teacher narrations and their inventive capacities for artefactualising ideas, visions and propositions, from the collective authority of their experiences of practice is that they extend or multiply the domain of pedagogic practice. Such conversations are in

effect a constant instauring of practice as they discuss concerns, visions and questions that may open up new possibilities for practice, they constitute a becoming-making of practice within a pedagogy of taking care that can change the cartographies of practice and modes of subjectivation.

Scenario 4: Art practice: instauring cosmicities: the problematic gift of otherness

> When a teacher feels that what she is doing is important, that it is not only a transmission of useful knowledge, [. . .] she indeed participates to what may be called a cosmic adventure, because the manner the children will experience new possibilities, feelings and ideas, or stubbornly keep to their abstractions, to their judgement about what matters and what does not, is indeed a cosmic stake (Isabelle Stengers 2006).

If we accept that difference is what we have in common, then the pedagogical task of working with and responding to difference can be viewed as a cosmic adventure paralleled with the adventure of belonging. In his book, *The Different Modes of Existence*, Etienne Souriau (2015a) was concerned with an 'existential pluralism', a plurimodality of manners of being, or a plurimodality of *arts of existing*. Souriau was particularly concerned with those more precarious, less confident or marginalised existences and their unrealised possibilities or potentials. David Lapoujarde (2021):4) sums up the key theme of Souriau's text: 'we can only reach being through the manners in which it is given', or through *its particular art of being*. This deep concern for the plurimodality of *manners* or *arts of being* I find useful for reflecting upon pedagogical practice and the different modes of existence involved, but I can only provide here a very brief synopsis of some key concepts from *Modes*. For Souriau, a mode is not an existence but a *manner of making* a being exist, it is rather like a gesture that instaurates it. (Lapoujarde 2021:5). Souriau's different modes of existence posits a pluriverse, a plurality of arts of existing. But this does not imply a world of individual, discrete or independent beings but rather a world of modes of existence-in-relation, which has implications for practices of convivial belonging, whose components are constantly interacting and evolving in parallel with their environments. Souriau's interest in those precarious modes of existence, modes that are not recognised or marginalised (2015a: 103), suggests a strong ethical and political dimension, a concern for rights. In the context of this article, we might reflect upon the notion of a pedagogy of rights.

A chief concern for Souriau is the process of *'the work to be made'*, which he chooses to exemplify in what some might think a rather outdated practice, a lump of clay being worked on by a sculptor. By illustrating the dynamic of the work-to-be-made through sculpting clay Souriau is not describing a *project*, a process informed by a pre-constituted plan, he is proposing an unplanned *journey*. It is not a case of a work to be made according to a model. It is not a realisation of potential through the creativity of an inspired artist. It is more of a co-respondence, a co-responding of the *to-be-made* and *the made*. Nothing (artist or work) is given in advance, everything emerges along the journey.

A crucial part to be played along this journey is the role of what Souriau calls the virtuals, a term taken up much later by Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari. We can perhaps liken the virtual mode of existence to a cloud of potentials, 'a number

of sketches or starts (2015a: 156)'. Their nature is to be incomplete, awaiting an art that can make them exist otherwise in a different mode. We might consider the practice of making a painting, is it not the case that such practice relies upon such clouds of potentials, they are immanent to such practice, they nourish it by opening up possibilities for practice. By acknowledging the 'presence/absence' of the virtuals all reality becomes incomplete in that it is always in between modes, it is not 'in' beings but 'between' them.

Souriau is not describing a process initiated by an artist, this journey has no pilot or conductor. It is not a case of a project emerging through trial and error but something much more vertiginous. At each moment, the process of the work-to-be-made is precarious and so is the being of the artist. The different facets of both the work-to-be-made and the work, more or less complete, constitute the problematic of what he calls *instauration*. It is as relevant to all practices, including pedagogic practice, as it is to the practice of the artist. Souriau ([2015b](2015b) 231-2) writes:

> To instaur is to follow a path. We determine the being to come in exploring its path. In blooming, the being demands its own existence. In all of this, the agent must yield before the work's own will, must work out what it is it wills, and must renounce himself/herself for the sake of this autonomous being, which s/he seeks to promote in accordance with its own right to existence nothing is more important in all forms of creation than this renunciation of the creative subject with respect to the work to-be-made.

The work-to-be-made installs a constant questioning. It does not provide the artist with directions (nor does the artist have a clear plan); Souriau ([2015b](2015b):232) puts it this way:

> For let us not forget that the work's effect upon the [artist]never takes the appearance of a revelation. The work-to-be-made never says to us: "Here is what I am, here is what I should be, a model you have only to copy." Rather, it is a mute dialogue in which the work seems enigmatically, almost ironically to say: "And what are you going to do now? With what actions are you going to promote or deteriorate me?"

We might say that instaurative acts produce a new cosmicity of practice. In philosophy, the conceptual frameworks developed by Plato, Descartes, Kant, Deleuze, de Castro, Arendt, Stengers, Haraway and Butler instaur different cosmicities. Similarly, we can say that artists instaurate different cosmicities through their gradual unfolding of practice. The cosmicities of Jackson Pollock, Barbara Hepworth, Yayoi Kusama, Frank Bowling or Oscar Murillo are not the same. This process of instauration can also be conceived in children's drawing and other students' art practices, in the gradual establishment of new organisations and relations of practice that open up new worlds of practice, new cosmicities.

The translation of the French 'instauration' by the English 'institution' obscures an important difference between creation and instauration. Lawlor. ([2011](2011)) draws attention to this difference whereby the modern use of instauration refers to the establishment of an institution. However, in Latin *instauratio* and *instaurare* suggest restoration, recommencement and resumption of something that was unable to be completed or brought to fruition the first time. What is important here is that

instaurare suggests a complex dynamism across/between modes and their different arts of existence (actual, virtual, sensible and material) involving artist and work and the cloud of possibilities (virtuals) that emerge and disappear continually. Art practice we might say is that process in which the painter, performer or sculptor devotes herself to the emerging possibilities of her being; and the objects, materials and multi-modal opportunities that are instaured in each practice open up multiple directions (virtuals) for her being to become, some of which endure while others recede. The process of making is constantly under the threat of failure as each move is a process of experimentation while simultaneously the work questions the maker; each phase of the practice can be seen as a proposition of existence (2015b: 229).

To repeat, there is no plan involved, no template to follow, but an on-going journey that engages a co-responding of artist and work on different levels of existence. A co-respondence in which the work and the artist each make the other exist, they institute or instaurate each other, and with every new episode of practice emerge new co-respondences. This has important implications for pedagogic practice both in relation to children's and students processes of instauration (of the becoming of practice and the becoming of self, which are indissoluble), but also to those of a teacher as these processes lead to the instauration of new cosmicities of practice. To undermine, marginalise or deprive a mode of existence is to deny its nature and act as though it has no reality, no legitimacy. Such neglect resonates with the scandalous lack of SEN provision in the United Kingdom. Here, the notions of ontological pluralism and *perspectivism*, discussed earlier become important. In this light, the anti-ableist programme of NSEAD and the work of Claire Penketh and the team should also be mentioned in relation to the struggle for the democratising of neuro-diverse cosmicities as an insurrectional mode of pedagogic demands (that is to say the right to have rights and the power this then bestows).

Scenario 5: Instauring pedagogies of taking care

An important challenge of pedagogic work therefore is to support the evolving instauration of new arts of becoming and belonging for each student in the immediacy of their respective practices whose potential may be waiting to be unfolded and legitimated and which then opens new dimensions of practice, for both student and teacher. A perpetual paradox of art education concerns what appears to be an antinomy at the heart of its institutionalisation, a term that denotes embedded practices, norms, procedures and guidelines. Such institutionalisation is anathema to the radicality, the rupturing force or the otherness of art practice. The institutionalising of practice tends to invoke forms of regulation and control such as curriculum guidelines, assessment apparatuses, standards, competences and modes of audit that affect both teachers and students. The radical immediacy of art practice, on the other hand, concerns the instauring of new worlds and their potentials, it involves a journey of risking and advancing towards new ground, not with formulating according to established modes of practice and their objects. While we cannot de-institutionalise art education, it remains within institutional contexts, we may be able to *de-school* its practices, in the sense of being vigilant towards established modes of pedagogic practice that may dispossess 'other' pathways of practice and their potential cosmicities that do not accord with established

orders. Such vigilance allows pedagogic work itself to expand and instaurate new cosmicities and their potentials.

Art practice today is far more transversal in that it is composed of events and practices often not considered as art. New technologies and practices facilitate new transformations, hybridisations, a future pregnant with potential. When this reality and its ever-changing dynamic of new instaurations and their cosmic potential is considered in relation to art in education it begs the question of institutionalisation mentioned above. It projects art in education itself into this dynamic in which institutionalisation needs to be sensitive and flexible to new instaurational forces. Such a move raises some sensitive issues relating to notions of skill, technique and practice itself as well as the issues of assessment, competences and standards. This transversality of art practice raises the issue of appropriate or commensurate pedagogies for art in education. Perhaps we may need to consider the notion of *pagan pedagogies* with which I will conclude but which requires much greater elaboration.

Scenario 6: Pagan pedagogies

Etymologically, the term 'pagan' derives from the Latin *pagus* referring to a place outside the city or to those who lived beyond the city who, while not being citizens, were still subject to its laws. In more modern religious terms, it refers to those holding beliefs outside of established religions. For the purpose of this article, paganism then can refer to that which exists beyond, the outside, to multiplicity and diversity, whose presence may effect new possibilities for established practices.

Pagan Pedagogies emerge from the outside of established or controlled practices/curriculums and may have the potential to transform institutionalised pedagogies and instaur or institute new modes of pedagogical work. I have already mentioned the importance of plural artist-teacher narratives that may facilitate new directions and possibilities for practice. Pagan pedagogies recognise the importance of *instituting, of instauration.* While acknowledging the necessity for social institutions they infer their incompleteness. The ideas of a pluriverse, of multiple ontologies, imply the notion of 'more', of on-going and evolving modes of practice and existence. In educational or art educational terms, we might argue that no amount of competences, standards, guidelines, principles can exhaust the multifariousness of worlds as manifested in art practice and, hopefully, in art education. We therefore require pagan pedagogies or a pagan approach to pedagogy that acknowledges differences, divergence and multiplicity to respond effectively to the 'always more' but not only by negating the negation of otherness and thereby confirming its existential legitimacy. Pagan pedagogies have to take care in responding to the diversity and divergence of practices but they also need to take care of our pedagogical frameworks of understanding which are also never complete or all-embracing. This refers to what we might call our *pedagogical indetermination* when faced with the task of responding to the divergence and unpredictability of practices. Pagan pedagogies therefore reflect a speculative pragmatism, a pragmatism of the suddenly possible, experimenting with and supporting differences and their potentials in their divergent journeys of the-work-to-be-made, as well opening themselves to the always incomplete pedagogic work to be made. This challenge would then be to work constantly at our 'metaphysical indetermination' in the

presence of, or encounters with, difference and its potential. If pedagogic work is not entirely predictable but is faced at times with moments of unknowingness, where we can become undone from our established modes of thought and practice, then our experiences of such work are never totally categorical but must be expressed speculatively or hypothetically. To move around a classroom or studio trying to respond to the diversity and divergence of modes of expression and their potentials requires an openness to them as well as to our modes of reception. This is the task of pagan pedagogies, pedagogies of taking care of the divergence we face and acknowledging the possible fallibility of our modes of reception and therefore our metaphysical indetermination.

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