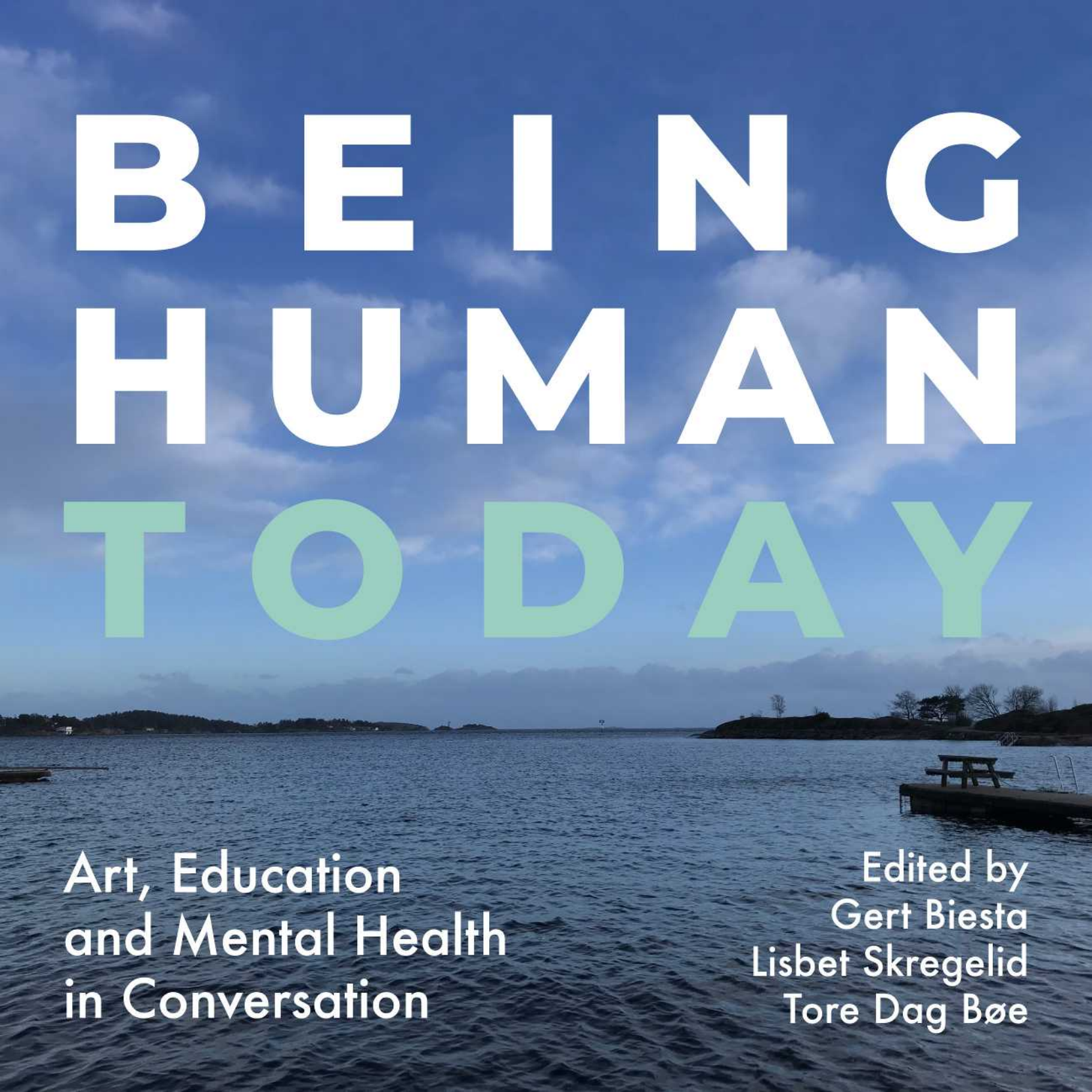
BEING
HUMAN
TODAY
Art, Education
and Mental Health
in Conversation
Edited by
Gert Biesta
Lisbet Skregelid
Tore Dag Bøe

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GERT BIESTA, LISBET SKREGELID AND TORE DAG BØE

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ENTRANCE

1

A CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION THAT DIDN'T TAKE PLACE

GERT BIESTA, LISBET SKREGELID
AND TORE DAG BØE

Preamble

This is a book that was never supposed to be written.

The background

When, in the summer of 2018, we, the editors of this book, started our 'slow conversations' in order to explore what the fields of education, mental health and the arts might have to say to each other, we concluded fairly soon that if we were going to make any of our reflections and insights public, we should not be doing so by producing another book. This was not just because we were acutely aware of the still-increasing number of books, chapters and articles being produced all over the

world, day in, day out. It was also because we felt that the theme upon which our conversations started to converge – the question as to what it means to be human, today, and what our fields of scholarship and practice may have to do with this question – needed a different, more multi-layered form, both in order to communicate the ideas and insights we were hoping to generate and in order to make differing ways of engagement with what we sought to express possible.

Quite early on, therefore, we decided on the idea of an exhibition where we would literally put the fruits from our conversations 'on display' and, in doing so, would also be putting ourselves on display. In addition to our own more scholarly contributions, we contacted a number of artists from different artistic disciplines so that there would be a range of different 'forms of practice' present, not just words and texts. We also had the ambition to take our project outside of the space of the university, which is why we settled upon an exhibition in Kunsthallen in downtown Kristiansand in southern Norway.[1] The exhibition itself was supposed to be our major event, but we also envisaged that we could produce a catalogue so as to document some aspects of what was going to be on display.

Our exhibition was scheduled for February 2021. And as with many other things that were supposed to be happening during that period, we had to cancel the event. For a moment, we considered the option of postponing the exhibition, but we concluded that the challenge as to what it means to be human today – or to try to be human today – includes facing up to the realities one encounters in the here and now, such as the reality of an exhibition that is not going to take place and envisage a different future than the one being anticipated. Whereas postponement would, in a sense, be a matter of deferring the present rather than engaging with it, a cancellation felt like taking the present seriously, thus 'freeing up the future', so we might say, and also freeing up ourselves.

While this book was, therefore, never intended to be written, we nonetheless wanted to capture some traces of what we had intended to do. If this book is anything at all, it is therefore best to be appreciated as a catalogue of an exhibition that didn't take place. A trace without an origin; an echo without a sound.

The theme

The fields of education, mental health and the arts can all be said to share a concern for human beings and for how they live their lives. Education partly appears at the start of life, so we might say. It is there to equip and prepare the new generation for

their life and is also there to encourage them to lead their *own* life and to live it well. This role doesn't necessarily stop at a particular age, as many people return to education at later stages in their life. This is called 'continuning education' or, in French, 'l'education permanente,' which is an infinitely better phrase than 'lifelong learning,' which nowadays more often than not just means the lifelong duty to keep updating one's skills and competences for the labour market.

The field of mental health, if such a label is actually appropriate, is there, so we might say, when life becomes a burden. Mental health work – we might call it 'therapy', but that's also not an entirely satisfactory term – in various ways seeks to provide support for trying to find bearable ways of living, being aware that existential questions and challenges are part of life, and can never be entirely resolved or overcome.

Unlike the fields of education and mental health, the arts don't stand in such a 'functional' relationship to life. Yet questions about life and living, the meaning of life, the mystery of life and the possibility and impossibility of asking such questions are never far removed from the arts. They are always around the corner and quite often at the very heart of art.

Education, mental health and the arts can therefore be said to share a common 'concern' – a concern, so we might say, for what it might mean to try to live one's life well. Or in simpler and more direct terms: a concern for what it might mean to try to be human, not just in a possible future, but first and foremost in the here and now. Being – human – today.

Compromised fields

While many who work in education, mental health and the arts do feel that their fields are fundamentally concerned with existential questions, that is, questions about how human beings try to exist, lead their lives and lead their lives well, individually and collectively, they also feel that their fields of practice are being compromised or run the risk of being compromised. In both education and mental health, there is a strong pressure to see questions about human existence as purely technical problems which in some way can be 'fixed' by powerful, effectively targeted, research-based interventions. Although some of such 'fixing' may be possible and may appear as successful from one perspective – measurable learning outcomes or measurable symptom relief – it clearly runs the risk of turning students and clients into objects,

that is, into things to be acted *upon*, rather than encountering them as fellow human beings, as contemporaries to act *with*.

Yet the turn towards the person or individual in education and mental health – which is often presented as the antidote to instrumental 'fixing' – is also not without problems. The main problem is that such strategies often just put individuals with their desires in the centre and forget to ask how such desires relate to the social, physical and natural world in which human beings live their life. Such worlds do not just support such lives but also pose limitations that need to be reckoned with, for example, as the ecological crisis has shown. In neo-liberal regimes that are all about the self, a 'reality check' is often absent, because it is just seen as limiting without raising the question of which limits should be respected and which limits might be overcome.

Compared to education and mental health, the arts are in a different position because they are not a 'helping profession', so to speak. But interestingly, the arts are nowadays often drawn upon in order to address questions about what it may mean to be human, and there is a real concern that along these lines the arts are quickly turned into an instrument for fixing problems, just as where education and mental health are being positioned.

Staging a conversation

The slow conversations that were supposed to culminate in the exhibition but instead have found a provisional endpoint in this book, all centred around the question of how the 'I' of each human being, to use a slightly awkward phrase, can actually still 'arrive' in the world today. In pondering this question, we have been looking for alternatives to either turning the 'I' into an object of educational, therapeutic or artistic interventions or to making the 'I' literally untouchable – in the centre of the universe but disconnected from everyone and everything. Through conversations amongst ourselves, reading and writing, and workshops and seminars in which we tried to involve anyone who shared an interest in these questions, we have tried to gain a clearer sense of the degree in which each of the fields we work in has been caught up in a similar problematic situation – either turning entirely 'technical' or entirely 'neo-liberal' – and we have been slowly trying to find our way 'out', both seeking for commonalities between our fields of practice and for what remains unique and distinctive about each of them.

We have done so by asking questions such as how the 'I' might be able to 'arrive' in the world; what it might mean to take a radical first-person perspective in all our endeavours, sticking with the phenomenon, that is, how something shows or gives itself, rather than trying to explain it from a third person, outsider perspective; to what extent living one's life is in one's own hand and to what extent life and the world are given to us; how the differences articulated in these questions might make a difference, in thinking and practice; and what this, in turn, might mean for our work as educators, mental health practitioners and artists, also wondering how 'clear' those categories still are.

The trouble and the joy

For a while, we were captivated by the title of a documentary about the life and work of the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, called *The Trouble with Being Human These Days*. The 'being human' stayed with us, because being human is indeed a matter of being, of existing, of trying to exist. But over time we began to see that even today being human is not just a matter of trouble – which isn't to deny how difficult it can be – but also a source of great joy. In our explorations – both our own conversations, meetings and writings and also our encounters with a range of artists – we have sought for trouble and joy and have probably encountered both.

If we have discovered anything at all in our searches, it is perhaps first and foremost that art, education and mental health as fields of practice and practices are there to encourage human beings to stay with the trouble of being human, rather than to think that such trouble is a problem that needs to be solved. To stay with the trouble is not the burden of life – although life can be burdensome as well – but is also the point of life, and therefore also the very source of the joy of being human, today.

An exhibition

We encourage the readers of this book to approach the materials brought together in this book as an exhibition. Rather than organizing the book in a number of sections, we have structured the book as a number of rooms where authors are grouped together with an artwork. You are currently at the entrance. At the exit, the authors provide some glimpses into the process that led to this book and will give you a

final goodbye. As with many exhibitions, there is an obvious 'routing' through the materials which can be seen as an expression of how the curators have engaged with what is put on display. But many contemporary exhibition spaces have a rather open architecture, which makes it possible for visitors to follow their own interest or curiosity, see what catches their eye, spend longer in some places than others, walk back, revisit, make connections or perceive oppositions. All of this is possible with this book as well, and we invite the readers to dwell in the different rooms at their own pace, as this will begin to reveal possibilities that lie well beyond the intentions of the authors and editors of this text. If the materials brought together in this book raise more questions than that they provide answers, then we just hope that readers will take these questions back to their respective fields of practice and scholarship so that the conversations that we try to stage in this book will continue in other places and spaces as well.

The imperative of the encounter

Perhaps it would have been nice or helpful for readers if we had been able to provide brief descriptions of what they will encounter in each of the rooms. But, as can be read in one of the chapters in Room 3, the tendency to want to explain a work of art runs the risk of destroying the very possibility of the work of art to speak. It tries to pre-empt the work of the spectator, so to speak, and, in doing so, draws the spectator into a rather problematic relationship with the artist or, in the case of texts, with the author. This is neither to suggest that nothing is happening in the rooms, nor that anything may be possible in the rooms. Rather than the naïve and in a sense neo-liberal idea of the spectator's freedom of interpretation, we are more interested in *the imperative of the encounter*. If there is any overarching theme in our attempts at bringing art, education and mental health into conversation, this may well be it.

Endnote

1. https://www.kristiansandkunsthall.no/english. Accessed 11 July 2023.

2

HOW TO BE A SELF, TODAY

GERT BIESTA

To say 'I' is to commence. […] To say 'I' is to disconnect myself from the others, the crowd, the company, the system.

(Lingis 2007: 38, 40)

On being a self

It could well be argued that one of the greatest challenges we face as human beings is the challenge of being a self. At some point in our childhood, we become aware of ourselves – or to be more precise: *I* become aware of myself – and from then onwards the challenge of being a self continues to pose itself, up to the point when our life comes to an end. It is important to note that what I am referring to here is the challenge of being *a* self, which should be distinguished from the question of being *one*self. Being *one*self is the question of identity. It is about *who* I am, what I identify with, and how others can identify me. The question of being *a* self is the question of *how* I am, that is, to put it briefly, about what I will do with myself. Being a self

is not a theoretical matter but a thoroughly *existential* one. It is about how I try to exist, how I try to lead my life, and how I try to go on in the face of everything that crosses my path, including my identity. Being a self, trying to be a self, is a thoroughly *first-person matter*. It is something *I* must do and no one else can do for me. Others can encourage me to be a self – and one could say that this encouragement is at the heart of the work of education (see, e.g., Benner 2015; Biesta 2020a, 2020b) – or they can distract me from trying to be a self, but the one and only thing they cannot do is be a self in my place. They cannot do the 'being-a-self' for me. In this regard being a self is similar to other first-person matters such as walking, eating and thinking. No one else can do my walking for me; no one else can do my eating for me; and no one else can do my thinking for me as long, that is, as it is *my* thinking.

One may wonder about the resources that go into the 'being a self', and I am inclined to say that there are many and that they are manifold. They are not only natural, biological, physical, chemical, neurological, atomic and sub-atomic but also cultural, historical social, political, relational, economic and so on. But while all this together may constitute an individual – even this unique, never-has-been-and-never-again-will-be individual; you or me – it does not constitute a self, because the self, to put it simply, is constituted by itself. The self, in other words, is the 'work of the self', as Winfried Böhm has put it (see Böhm 1997: 199). And this all comes down to or, with a slightly more accurate phrase, it all comes together in the moment when I utter the word 'I'. This is not the turning on of a switch; it is not jumping from 0 per cent 'I' to 100 per cent 'I'. It is a much more gradual, much more emerging and much more back-and-forth event, perhaps akin to slowly waking up in the morning, leaving one's dreams behind and entering the state of being awake. Or, for those who may have experienced it, it is akin to regaining consciousness after an accident or waking up from anaesthesia. In all cases, it takes a while before one fully has 'arrived', often with occasional relapses. It takes time to 'gather oneself', as the expression goes, but at some point, one is fairly certain of being 'back'.

Unlike what is suggested in some philosophical and everyday accounts, it is a mistake to assume that the 'I' is a kind of commando centre from which everything – the body, to begin with – is controlled (on this 'homunculus fallacy', see Kenny 1984, Chapter 9). It is much more instructive to read how Alfonso Lingis tries to answer the question 'How do *I* come to be here?' (Lingis 2007: 7, original emphasis). He writes:

> We awaken and, finding ourselves supported, stir and move, our movements assured of the continuing support of the ground. We find ourselves immersed in

> light and darkness; air; warmth and cold; and in the density of colors, tones and textures. Awakened sensibility maintains contact with this boundless reality. This sensibility is not recording a multiplicity of sense-data; it is the reassuring sense of the ground that extends indefinitely beneath and ahead […]. In enjoying the support and sustenance of the elements, sensibility intensifies into a sense of me being here. I feel myself in buoyant, fluid, or throbbing pleasure, in equanimity, composure, or apathy; and in boredom, melancholy, or anxiety. The I is an *I enjoy, I endure, I suffer.*
>
> (Lingis 2007: 7, original emphasis)

And also:

> Our bodies see and hear by moving among things and manipulating them. In the shapes and colors of things and in their density, elasticity, or fluidity, they perceive forces. In the sheen of the knife they see its hardness and sharpness; in the shuddering patches of dull light in the mud they see gummy suction; in the continuous dense gray of the concrete they perceive the solid support of the sidewalk down which we advance. Our eyes and hands catch on to a real or possible relationship between the force in the material thing and what that force can loosen, separate, or set into motion. I find myself in perceiving paths ahead that support my advance and a layout of things that yield to or resist my forces. I am where my bodily and affective forces are integrated, manipulate things, and confront obstacles. The sense of oneself that arises in a body in action is an *I can*.
>
> (Lingis 2007: 7–8, original emphasis)

Lingis provides many more shades of how we can account for how we come to be here – or put in the first person singular (which, by the way, is also the title of Lingis's book): how *I* come to be here. One important aspect of what he tries to articulate is the idea that we *find* ourselves (see above). Being a self is, in this sense, about establishing a relationship with oneself, and the mystery of it all is that the self doesn't precede this moment, but that it is more accurate to say that the self emerges from the 'act' of establishing this relationship. The word that is key here is the word 'I' – this strange utterance where the self refers to itself in a way that only the self is capable of doing. No one else can speak my 'I' for me. One point at which I may become aware of my self is – one point at which I may find myself, to use Lingis's phrase – when

I say 'no'. This can be an articulate and precise 'no', but also a more diffuse gesture of resistance, of not going with the course of events and the flow of action. This refusal, this no-saying, is a moment, and perhaps *the* moment, in which the 'I' comes into play. It is the moment where I begin to realize that I do not coincide with the course of events. This is why Lingis holds that 'to say "I" is to disconnect myself from the others, the crowd, the company, the system' (2007: 40) and why it is so that 'to say "I" is to commence' (38). And what one commences *with* when one says 'I' is precisely one's (attempt at) being a self.

Let's, for a moment, leave the exploration of how the question of being a self poses itself in the life of the child, and move 'fast forward' to how this question poses itself in adult life in order to get a sense of the significance of this question, that is, the significance of the question of the 'I'.

Rosa Parks and Adolf Eichmann: On meeting oneself

In a recent paper (Biesta 2020a), I discuss two iconic examples of the question of the 'I', one being the story of Rosa Parks and the other the story of Adolf Eichmann. Rosa Parks is famous because of the fact that she rejected the order from the driver of the bus she had boarded on 1 December 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, to give up her seat in the coloured section of the bus to a White passenger. Although Parks did comply with the message on the signs on the bus which read 'white forward, colored rear', she refused to obey the driver's authority to assign seats in the bus. This led to her arrest, which, in turn, triggered the so-called Montgomery Bus Boycott which lasted from 5 December 1955 until 20 December 1956, the day on which a federal ruling was implemented that declared that the Alabama and Montgomery laws on passenger segregation on buses were unconstitutional.

Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi SS-*Obersturmbannführer* who had been responsible for organizing and managing the logistics of the mass deportation of Jews and others to ghettos and extermination camps in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe during the Second World War, was convicted in 1961 by a special tribunal of the Jerusalem District Court on fifteen counts of crimes against humanity, war crimes, crimes against the Jewish people, and membership of a criminal organization, although he was not declared guilty of personally killing anyone. On 15 December 1961, Eichmann was sentenced to death by hanging. The appeal against the verdict was eventually denied, as was a request for clemency, and Eichmann was eventually executed on 1 June 1962. What made Eichmann's case famous (see, e.g., Arendt

1963) is the fact that he *did* admit arranging the mass deportation of Jews and others but denied responsibility for the consequences – their extermination – on the account that he was only following orders.

What makes the stories of Parks and Eichmann interesting and in a sense iconic has to do with the way in which the question of the self and, more specifically, the question of *being* a self figure in the two accounts. When Rosa Parks boarded the bus, she was entirely aware of the rules and regulations and the expectations placed upon her. Yet when she refused to give up her seat in the coloured section of the bus to a White person, it was not, as some have suggested, because she was tired and just wanted to sit, but, as she has put it, because she was 'tired of giving in' (Parks 1992: 116). In the very moment of her refusal to give up her seat she thus stepped forward as an 'I', she stepped forward as a self who no longer wanted to comply with a system discriminating against Black people. We can almost hear her say: '*I* no longer want to be part of this system', '*I* refuse to go with the flow', '*I* disconnect myself from the course of events'. And perhaps also: 'Right here and right now *I* begin a different course of action', 'Right here and right now *I* commence'. And while Parks stepped forward as an *I*, and thus made an attempt to exist as a self, fully aware of the consequences of her deed, Eichmann did the very opposite. When he was asked whether he was responsible for the death of the many people whose deportation he had arranged, he withdrew his 'I' from the scene by stating that he was only following orders. We can almost hear him say: 'I had nothing to do with this'. And even: 'My "I" had nothing to do with this'.

The stories of Parks and Eichmann show that the self is indeed the 'work of the self' or, to be slightly more precise, that being a self is something that only the self can do. The stories also show the key role that the little word 'I' plays in all this. Even if the word is not spoken, it is clear that what Parks signified by not giving up her seat is an 'I will not move', 'I will not obey', just as Eichmann articulated that '*I* was only following orders'. Another thing that becomes visible in the two stories is that the self is apparently both able to assert his or her 'I' and to withdraw it, and what is perhaps most remarkable about Eichmann is that he still had to use the word 'I' to deny the involvement of his 'I' in the situation. We should be mindful not to fall back on the idea that there is therefore an 'I' who is in control 'behind' the 'I' who acts, so to speak. In a strange way, all this is happening at the same time. The 'I' emerges and comes into the world – that is, is no longer just with itself – in the very moment that the 'I' speaks and, most specifically, that the 'I' says 'I'.

What makes the two accounts iconic, and perhaps a little extreme for grasping the everyday significance of the question of being a self, is the fact that they reveal

with so much force what can be at stake in being a self or withdrawing oneself from being a self. In both cases, it was not just their own self that was at stake; their being a self had crucial implications for the world and the existence of other selves in that world. The accounts show, in other words, that being a self is never just about the self but is about the self-in-the-world (which, in a sense, is rather obvious, as the world is the only place where the self can actually be a self, where the self can exist). We could add moral terms to this setup, and the first term that may come to mind is that of 'responsibility'. It is easy to say that Rosa Parks was responsible and Adolf Eichmann was irresponsible. But that is just a moral judgement after the event and, moreover, a moral judgement made from the outside – where we judge what Parks and Eichmann did or failed to do. It is perhaps more accurate to say that Rosa Parks took the responsibility and Adolf Eichmann didn't. In this subtle reformulation, something significant comes into view, namely that in both cases there was a responsibility waiting for Parks and for Eichmann, and while Parks said 'yes' to this responsibility – she took on the burden of what was to come with saying yes to it – Eichmann said no to it. He walked away from the responsibility he encountered.

I find this a more accurate way of bringing in the idea of responsibility. This is not just because it keeps us away from making moral judgements about Parks and Eichmann – something we should always be quite careful with because we cannot know for sure what we would have done had we found ourselves in their situation. It is also because it reminds me of the remarkable sentence in Zygmunt Bauman's book *Postmodern Ethics*, where he makes the observation that 'responsibility is the first reality of the self' (1993: 11). What Bauman expresses here is not the idea that human beings should be responsible, but rather that the question of the self – or to be more precise: the question of my self, the question of my 'I' – poses itself when we encounter a responsibility. What we do when we encounter a responsibility is, of course, entirely up to us. Or to put it in the first person singular: what I do when I encounter a responsibility is entirely up to me, but it cannot be denied that in this encounter I do not just encounter a responsibility, but I also encounter my self. And that is probably all we can say.

Holding myself in the world

Let's return, then, to the life of the child and the less clear, and, in a good sense, more messy and murky dynamics in which we begin to awaken to the fact of our own self; the dynamics in and through which we begin to 'find ourselves'. One aspect I wish to

highlight here is how, in the ebb and flow of our living body being in constant interaction with the world 'outside', we begin to realize that we are a 'source of power', that there is a force emanating from us towards the world. Later, much later, we may call this our agency, our interest, our intention, our striving, our desire, our willpower, and so on; but that comes later, once there is an 'I' who can be said to *have* agency or *be* agentic, to *have* an interest or *be* interested, and so on. For now, we slowly begin to realize that this force, emanating from us, from the inside, is acting upon a world 'out there'. The very realization of this possible difference – the difference between 'me' and 'world', 'inside' and 'outside', and 'immanence' and 'transcendence', is of course a crucial aspect of this 'dawning' of the self.

What interests me particularly here is the way in which my 'forces', if we can use that term for now, encounter 'the world'. Because sometimes my forces will resonate with the world, which can give us a sense of joy and a sense of power and, perhaps, even a sense of agency. But we may also find that our initiatives, to use a slightly more self-aware term, do not resonate with the world, but that the world resists where we would like to go or would like to take it. Yes, this is the dynamic of social and political interaction. But it is also the dynamic of our interaction with the material world. Encountering resistance is hugely significant for two reasons. On the one hand, it contributes to the realization that the force that is flowing emanates from *me*. It thus contributes to an awareness of self as different from the world. On the other hand, it contributes to a realization that the world 'out there' – but that very distinction between me and the world 'out there' is, of course, still in the making – is indeed 'out there', and not a fabrication or phantasy. It contributes, in other words, to the realization (note the word) that the world 'out there' is *real*.

Encountering resistance, as I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (see particularly Biesta 2017a, Chapter 1, 2017b), may generate a sense of frustration on the side of the self – and again this sense of frustration is a further contributing 'factor' to the dawning of the self, for example, because we may experience that it is *my* frustration, that *I am* frustrated. Out of this frustration, we may feel moved to push harder, to increase our force upon the world, so that its resistance gives way. This is, indeed, what is needed for our initiatives to arrive in the world, and for me to arrive in the world, but there is always the risk that if we are too forceful, if we push too hard, that we may destroy the very world in which we seek to arrive. But a move in the opposite direction is also not without problems. If the sense of frustration pulls us back, away from the world, we may never arrive in the world at all. The challenge of our existence, the existential challenge if one wishes, is therefore that of trying to hold oneself in the 'middle ground' between the possibility of world destruction – pushing

too hard – and self-destruction – withdrawing completely from the world. These possibilities always surround our existence; they cannot be resolved but are always on the horizon of our attempts at being a self, to which I can now add: being a self in and with the world (see, for more detail, Biesta 2017a, 2017b).

The self, then, is not a thing but a 'state of existence'. Being a self is not an achievement that comes to a conclusion – like 'from now on I am a self, and no one can take that away from me' – but is a truly lifelong 'balancing act', because it occurs in and with the world, not outside of it. And sometimes this requires that we go with the flow of the world; yet at other times it requires that we resist or, in the first person singular, that I say no. And of course, we can never know in advance what is the right thing to do, nor do we always know this after the event.

Rousseau's insight

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* ([1762] 1979) is a remarkable book in the history of modern education. Many have strong opinions about the book, and the book has been criticized particularly for an alleged child-centred view of education, with a far too powerful role for the educator in shielding the child from the world. Moreover, many have raised serious concerns about the difference between the education of the boy Emile and the girl Sofie. What I find valuable about the book is that Rousseau places the question of being a self at the heart of the educational discussion *and* understands that the challenge of being a self is not one of disconnecting oneself from the world, but of trying to remain standing, to use my own words, in light of all the force that we are exposed to. On the one hand, such forces come from the 'outside' – society that wants to tell us how we should live our life, how we should behave, what is good and what is bad, what is wrong and what is right, and so on. Such guidance, if it can come as guidance and not as something that is set in stone and non-negotiable, is of course helpful. It gives the child – and any newcomer for that matter – a degree of orientation. But it should never overpower the child because in that case it becomes impossible for the child to become a self, to 'achieve' its 'I'. That is why part of what Rousseau depicts as the task of the educator is to keep the forces from society at bay so that the child has a fair chance at meeting the world and arriving in the world.

What is interesting about Rousseau's line of thought, however, is that he is also aware of another danger, another threat to the child's opportunities for trying to be a self in and with the world, namely the chance that the forces from the 'inside' – Rousseau

refers to them as passions – take over and totally determine the child. That is why the educator in Rousseau's *Emile* is not just protecting Emile from the forces that arrive from the outside but also works hard to help Emile keep standing in relation to everything that emerges from the 'inside'. Characterizing this in terms of 'passions' is quite apt as it signals how those forces can take over the self and thus prevent the self from ever arriving in the world. Rousseau's pedagogy is therefore anything but a pedagogy of withdrawal from the world. But it is also not a pedagogy of just letting everything that emerges from the child to emerge. It is a truly existential pedagogy which understands that the task of education is that of giving the new generation a fair chance at their being a self, neither overwhelmed by what comes to them from the 'outside' nor determined by what emerges from the 'inside'.

The work of education, here, is a kind of 'double' work. On the one hand, it is about creating a distance – or perhaps we should say holding a distance – between the world and the child, not in order to denounce the world or suggest that the world doesn't exist, but in order to give the child time and space to come into a relationship with the world rather than be totally determined by it. On the other hand, it is about creating a distance or holding a distance between the child and itself or, to be more precise, between the self and all the forces that emerge from the 'inside', not to denounce those forces, as they are the forces that give the self the energy and drive to exist in the first place but, again, to allow the child to come into a relationship with these forces, to come into a relationship with 'its' passions rather than being ruled by them.

On being a self in the impulse society

The idea that a book published in 1762 might still speak to us today may sound a bit odd. Isn't it the case that over the past 250 years we have made huge advances in research and that is particularly not only due to developments in genetics and neuroscience but also the contributions from sociology and psychology, we now know much and much more about the human being than in the time of Rousseau? Well, perhaps we know more about the human being as a *thing*, as an object that can be investigated from the outside, and as a bio-neuro-socio-psychological phenomenon that we can observe or put through a scanner. But all this knowledge may contribute very little, if anything at all, to the existential challenges we face as human beings, particularly the challenge of trying to be a self in and with the world. It could even be argued that because of all the knowledge we have about ourselves from the

outside – knowledge that literally objectifies us – the challenge of trying to be a self in the face of all this has even become more urgent *and* more difficult.

One recent publication which actually makes a compelling case for the ongoing significance of Rousseau's insights is a book published in 2014 by Paul Roberts, with the interesting title *The Impulse Society*, and with the even more interesting sub-title *What Is Wrong with Getting What We Want?* or, in the American edition, *America in the Age of Instant Gratification*. (Roberts 2014). In this book, Roberts makes a compelling case that modern society has, to a large degree, become an impulse society, that is, a society that operates on the principle of 'instant gratification', that is, giving as many as possible what they say that they want, instantly gratifying their desires without asking whether these desires are the ones that should be fulfilled. And it is the forgetfulness about this latter question that causes problems. Roberts explains this, amongst other things, with the help of the distinction between 'needs' – the things that we need – and 'wants' – the things that we desire. He shows that about 70 per cent of the US economy actually focuses on 'discretionary consumption', that is on things that we do not really need but nonetheless want. This creates problems, not just because 'an economy reoriented to give us what we want […] isn't the best for delivering what we *need*' (Roberts 2014: 8, original emphasis) but also because it may be quite difficult to 'cope with an economic system that is almost too good at giving us what we want' (Roberts 2014: 2) – think, for example, of obesity as one of the 'outcomes' of such a setup.

This does, of course, raise the question of where our wants actually come from, which has something to do with the dynamics of contemporary capitalism. One of the characteristics of capitalism is that it needs to grow in order to sustain itself. For a long time, capitalism could do this through expansion in space, that is, through constantly opening up new markets. This strategy which started in the age of colonialism reached its limits when the economy became global and literally ran out of space. At that point, global capitalism discovered a different way to grow, namely by making money out of time, mainly through the logic of the stock market. As long as one could stay (just) ahead of others with buying and selling on this market, it was possible to make money out of time. But with ever-faster computer algorithms, this enterprise reached its limits as well. This was one of the main causes of the financial crisis of 2008 when capitalism literally ran out of time.

There was, however, one option left, and this has become the defining focus of contemporary capitalism. The best example of what has emerged here is probably Apple, where one can see that Apple doesn't sell mobile phones but actually sells the desire for a *new* mobile phone. It sells this desire for free but once it has arrived

'inside' us, we often find ourselves more than willing to exchange our hard-earned cash for the latest model. Contemporary capitalism, so we might say, is in the business of selling desires. As Roberts concludes, 'bit by bit, the consumer market place has effectively moved *inside* the self' (2014: 6, original emphasis), and what is genius about this turn is that it seems to allow for growth without limits, as 'only the bottomless appetites of the self [can] contain all the output of a maturing industrial capitalist economy which can never stop growing' (7) (although it does produce an awful amount of waste, of course, which has become increasingly difficult to 'hide').

In his book, Roberts shows that the logic of instant gratification has not just become the defining quality of contemporary capitalism, but actually has affected all dimensions of contemporary society. That is why we are not just suffering from an impulse *economy* but from an impulse *society*. And what is new in the impulse society is not that we have desires and that some of our desires are selfish but 'that the selfish reflexes of individuals have become the reflexes of an *entire society*' (Roberts 2014: 4, emphasis added). What is also worrying, and this is an important aspect of Roberts's analysis as well, is that 'the very institutions that once helped to temper the individual pursuit of quick, self-serving rewards' – and here Roberts mentions 'government, the media, academia, and especially business' but has surprisingly little to say about education – 'are themselves increasingly engaged in the same pursuit' (2014: 4).

When we read Roberts's analysis through the lens of Rousseau's *Emile*, we can see two things. On the one hand, Roberts makes visible that the forces from the 'outside', the forces from society, have not lessened since the end of the eighteenth century but have only intensified, and a lot of this has to do with the fact that there are huge financial interests 'invested' in these forces. The key message they convey is 'buy', 'buy' and 'buy more', or, in more general terms: 'desire', 'desire' and 'desire more'. It is, however, not just the intensification of the forces from the 'outside' and the fact that they are around 24/7, but also – and this is new – the way in which the force from the 'outside' has entered our 'inside' by stirring and fuelling our desires. This makes the challenge of being a self, of trying to remain standing as an 'I' when being pulled from the outside and pushed from the inside, even more difficult than it already was in the time of Rousseau. And we could also say that it makes the challenge of trying to be a self even more urgent because the forces we are exposed to benefit most – make the most money – if we forget ourselves and just pursue the desires produced by the impulse economy and the impulse society.

This is one of, and perhaps we could even say, the most urgent existential threats of our times. This is not just because it's forceful and omnipresent, but first and foremost because it threatens to undermine the very possibility for the self to exist, that is, to exist as (a) self.

Conclusion: For a good egoism

A simplistic version of this chapter could have started by saying that egoism is bad and that altruism is good. It could have started, in other words, with a moral judgement about egoism and altruism, highlighting that in our times people are too selfish and that this situation needs to be redressed. It could then, perhaps, have invoked Martha Nussbaum's (1997) suggestion that we need to infuse the school curriculum with the humanities in order to cultivate empathy, on the assumption that empathy is the gateway to altruism. It would have thus tasked education with the responsibility for addressing a major societal ill and would have pointed out that the only thing left to do is the effective implementation of the proposed course of action. While this line of thought may sound attractive it is, of course, precisely as said, that is, simplistic and not worthy of serious consideration (although many continue to be tempted by its alleged simplicity).

If we think that egoism is just about selfishness, that is, about making oneself and one's desires the sole criterion for one's actions, irrespective of their impact on others and on the world, then egoism is a problem. What I have tried to explore in this chapter is that there is perhaps another kind of egoism – we could provocatively call it a 'good' egoism – that is not about the self being the be all and end all of everything, but that understands the importance of the self 'gathering' itself, becoming an ego, so to speak, establishing itself as 'I', as a first person singular. This kind of egoism, this kind of concern for the 'I', is particularly important in a world that is more interested in us forgetting about ourselves, particularly because such self-forgetfulness is where money can be made. What the iconic cases of Rosa Parks and Adolf Eichmann reveal is that as human beings we have indeed the option to forget ourselves, to walk away from ourselves, to withdraw our 'I' from the scene. But we also have the option to insert our 'I' to say 'no', particularly where there is a pressure not to do so. The 'case' of Rosa Parks shows that this is possible. The 'case' of Adolf Eichmann in a sense shows that this is necessary, that we should never satisfy ourselves with just following orders.

Education is of course not able to resolve these issues because at the end of the day the self is nothing but the work of the self. But education has an important role to

play in creating a 'breathing space', a place of refuge, where we allow and encourage the new generation to come into a relationship with the forces surrounding them, the forces they find themselves in. Such work is interruptive, as it must interrupt the 'normal' flow of events where individuals just 'resonate' with all the forces inside and around them without encountering the question of whether such resonance is desirable or not. Such work creates suspension, that is, a slowing down of the 'normal' course of events so that the new generation has the time to come into a relationship with the forces inside and around them. And such work needs to provide sustenance, that is, support and nourishment whilst trying to hold the new generation in and with the world, in the hope that ultimately they will one day find the courage, the energy and the desire to hold themselves in the world.

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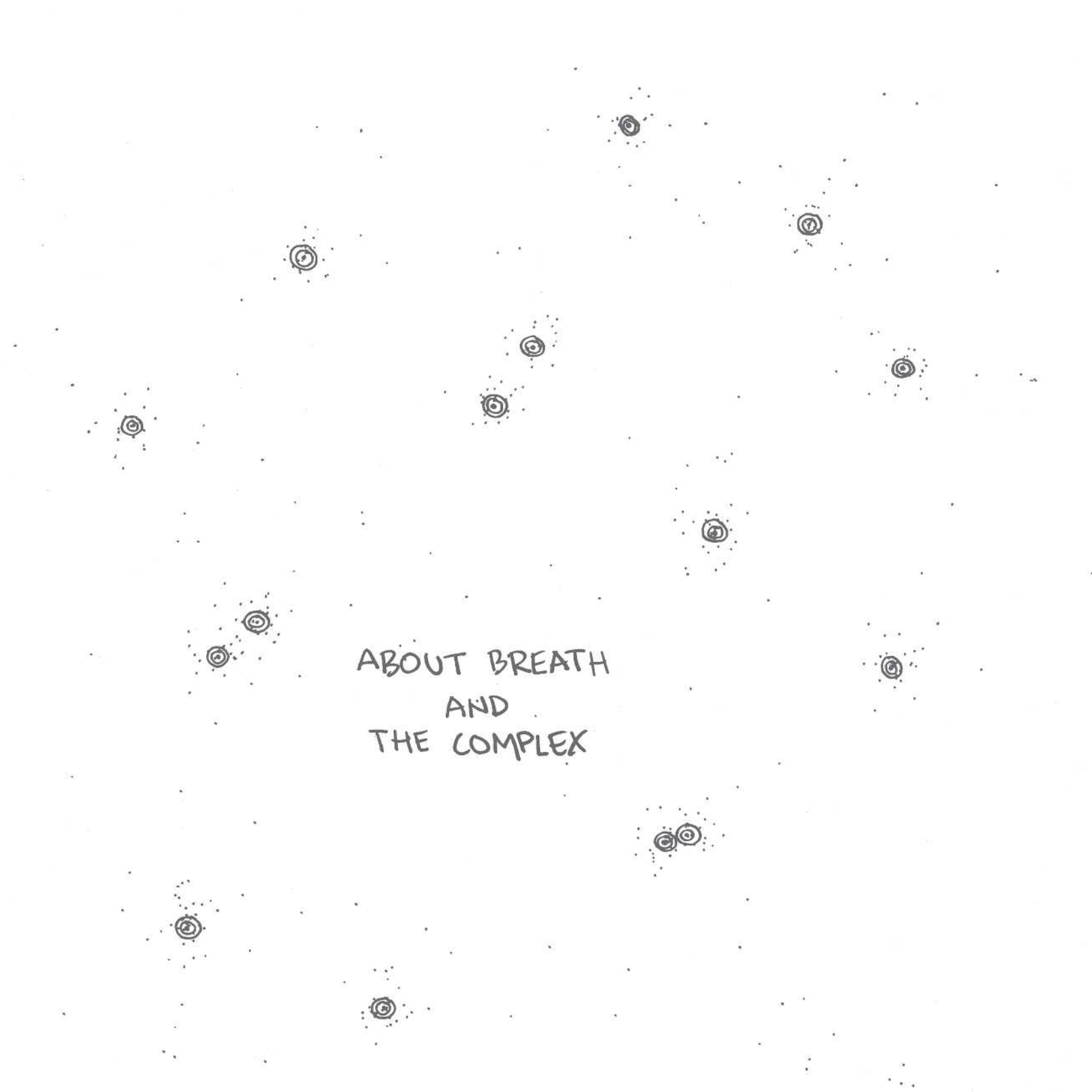
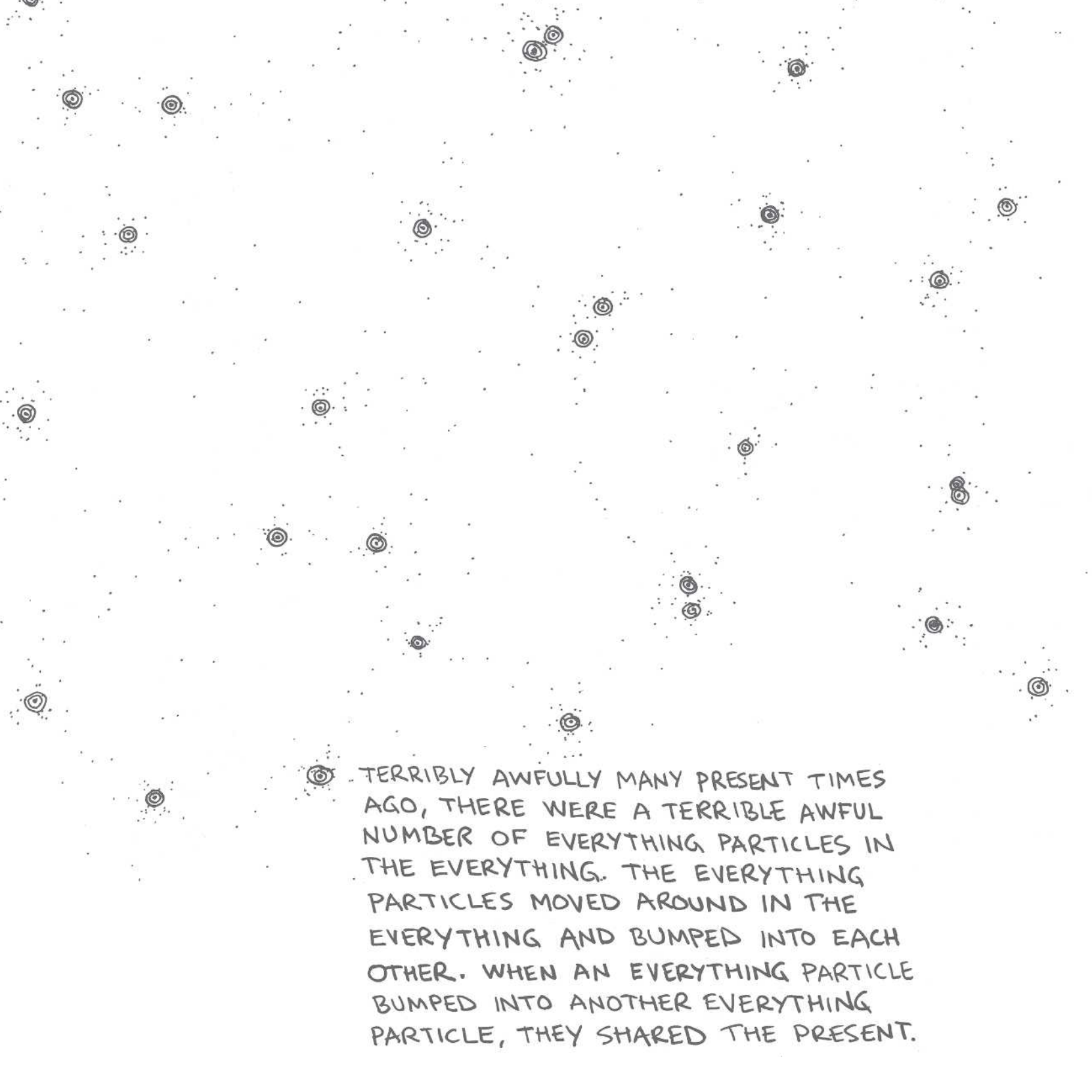
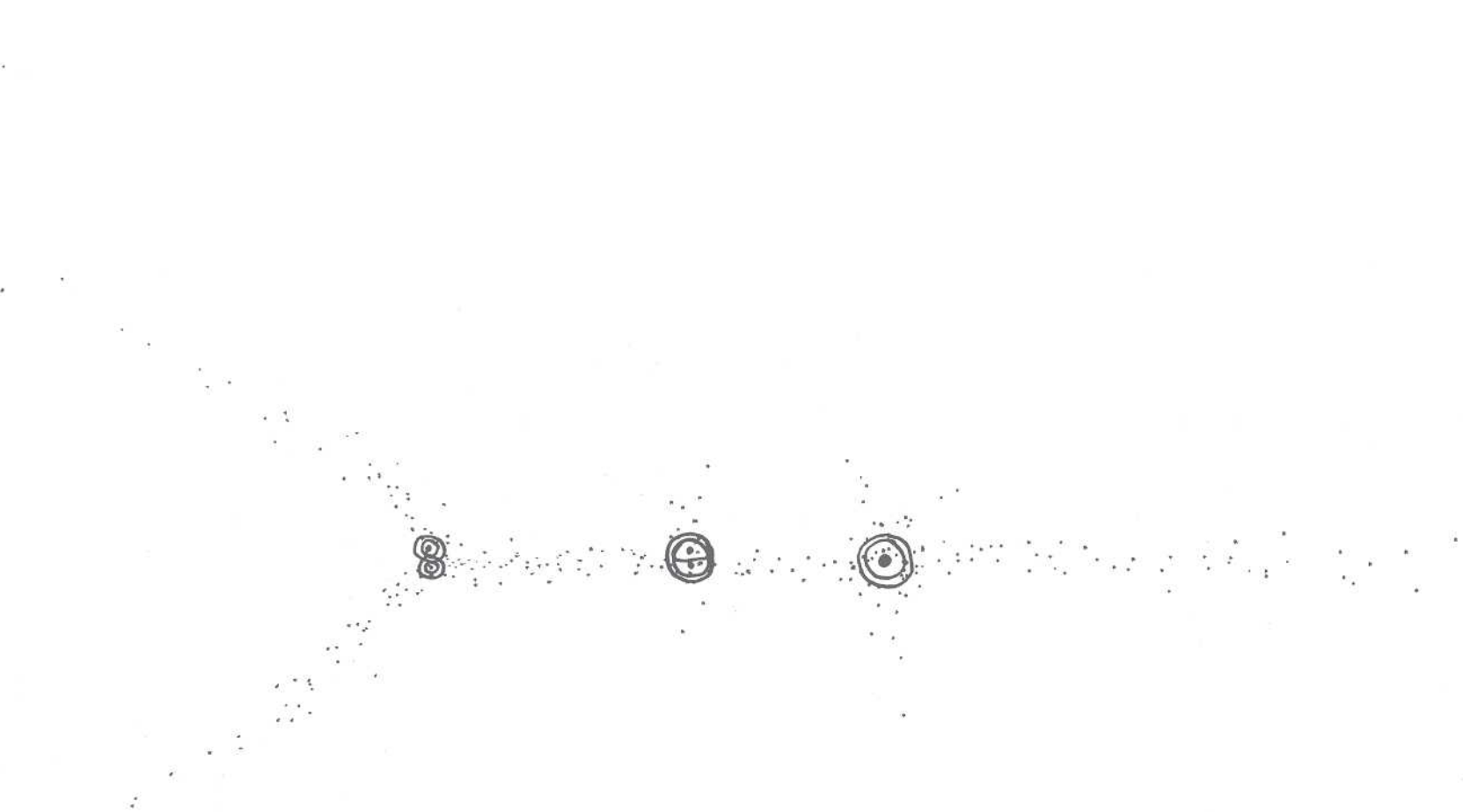
ROOM 1

ABOUT BREATH AND THE COMPLEX

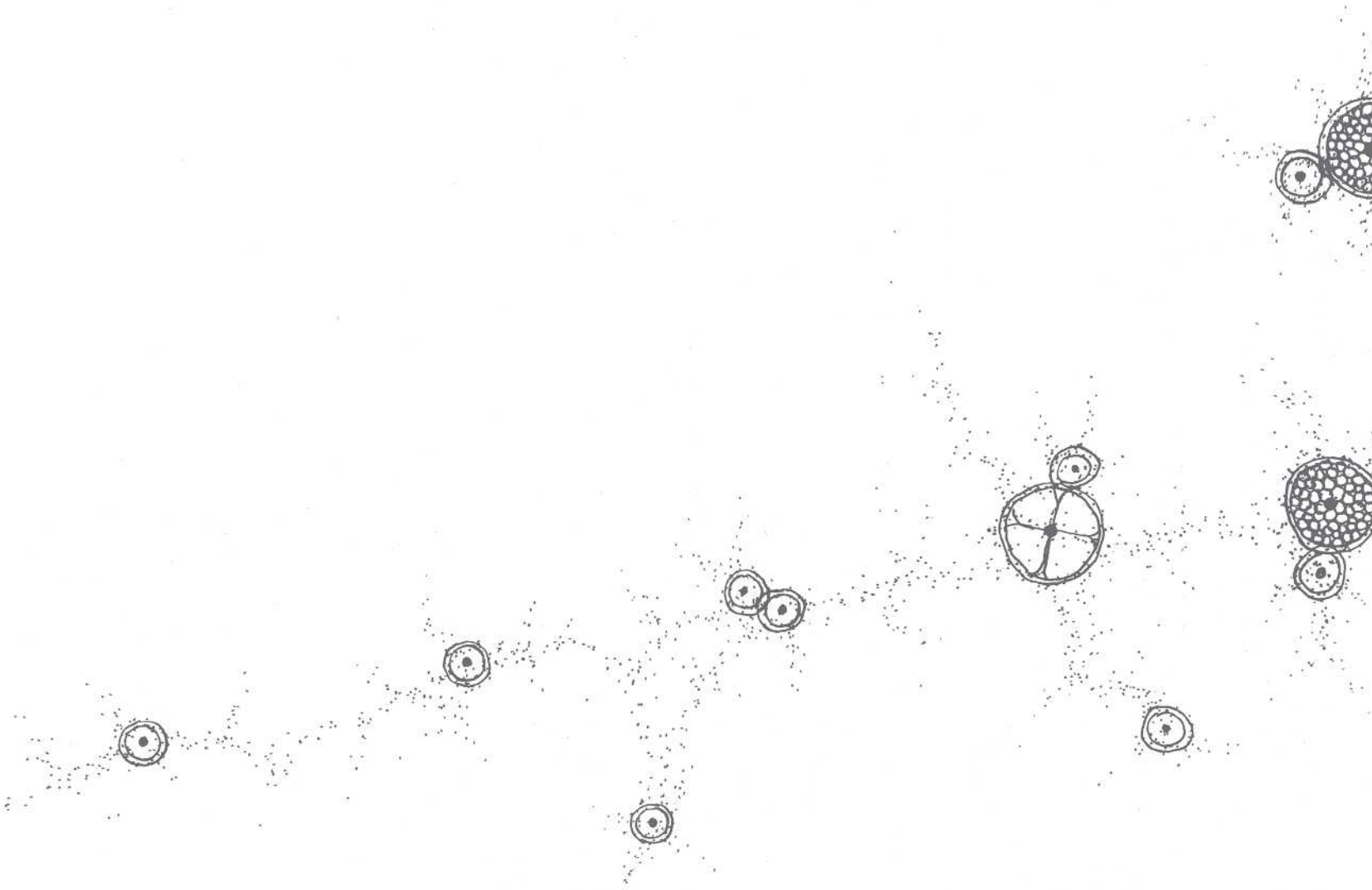
KURT JOHANNESSEN


ABOUT BREATH
AND
THE COMPLEX

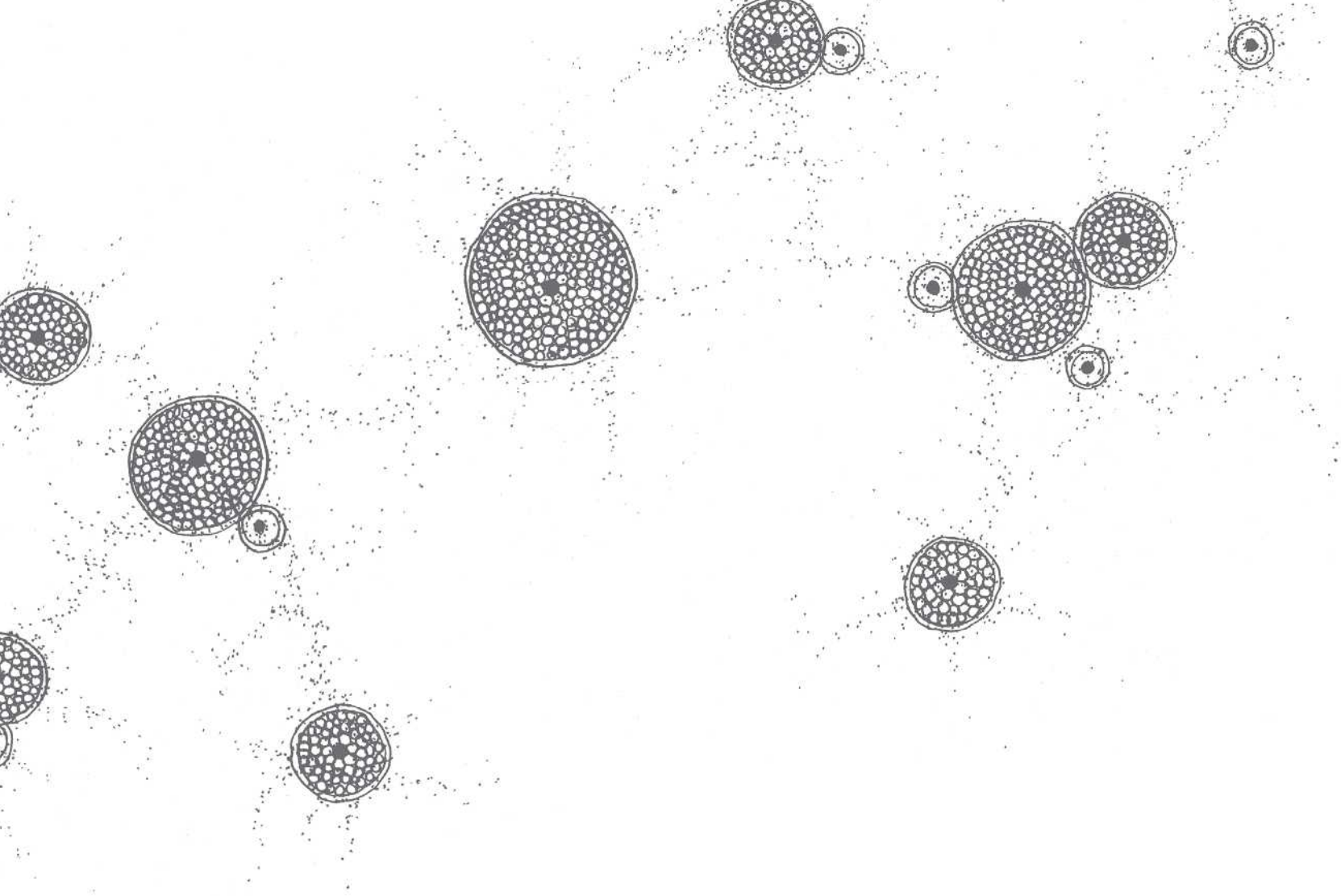

TERRIBLY AWFULLY MANY PRESENT TIMES AGO, THERE WERE A TERRIBLE AWFUL NUMBER OF EVERYTHING PARTICLES IN THE EVERYTHING. THE EVERYTHING PARTICLES MOVED AROUND IN THE EVERYTHING AND BUMPED INTO EACH OTHER. WHEN AN EVERYTHING PARTICLE BUMPED INTO ANOTHER EVERYTHING PARTICLE, THEY SHARED THE PRESENT.



A PAST PRESENT ALMOST HORRIBLY OUTRAGEOUSLY MANY PRESENT TIMES AGO, TWO EVERYTHING PARTICLES DECIDED TO SHARE THE PRESENT. THEY CLUMPED TOGETHER AND BECOME ONE. THEY BECOME A NEW ONE.

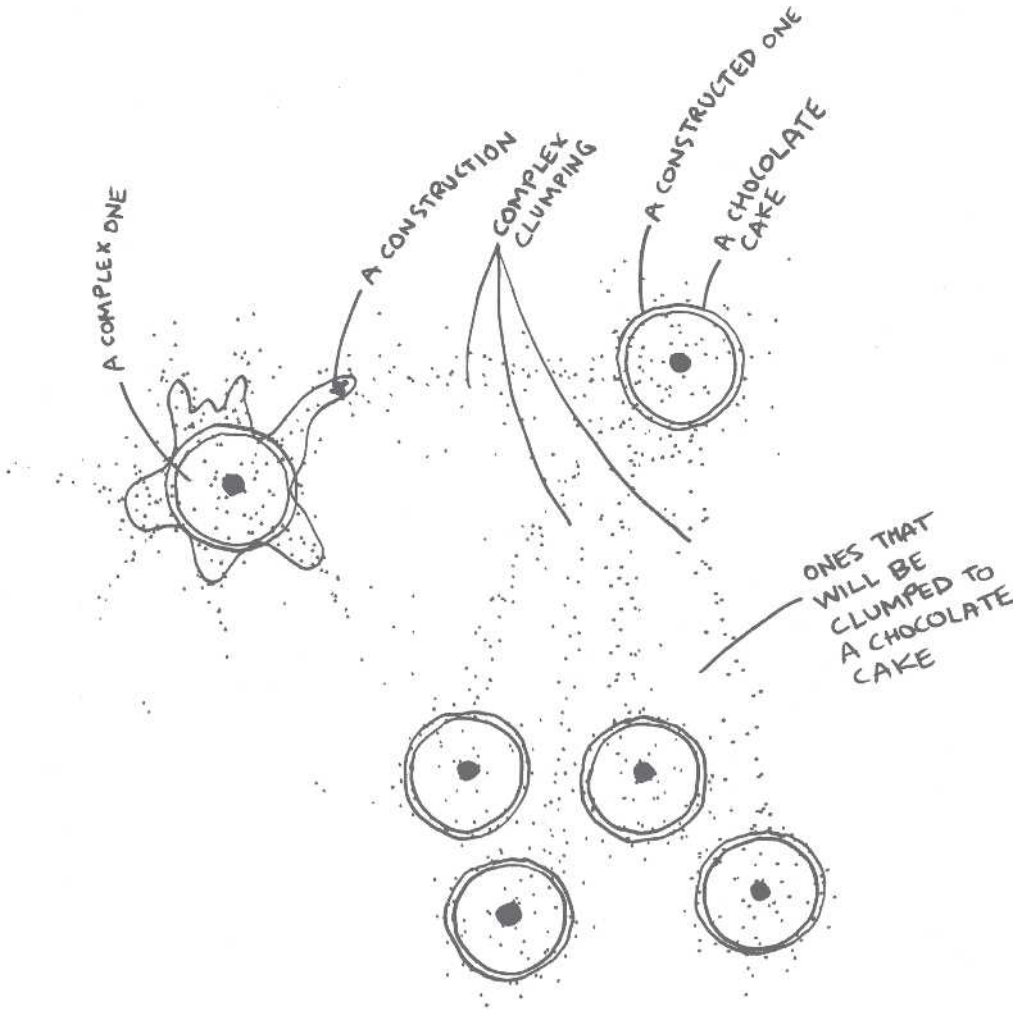


CLUMPING BECAME TERRIBLY POPULAR. EVERYONE WANTED TO CLUMP AND THE NEW ONES BECAME BIGGER AND BIGGER. THE NEW ONES BECAME BIGGER AND BIGGER AND MORE AND MORE COMPLEX.

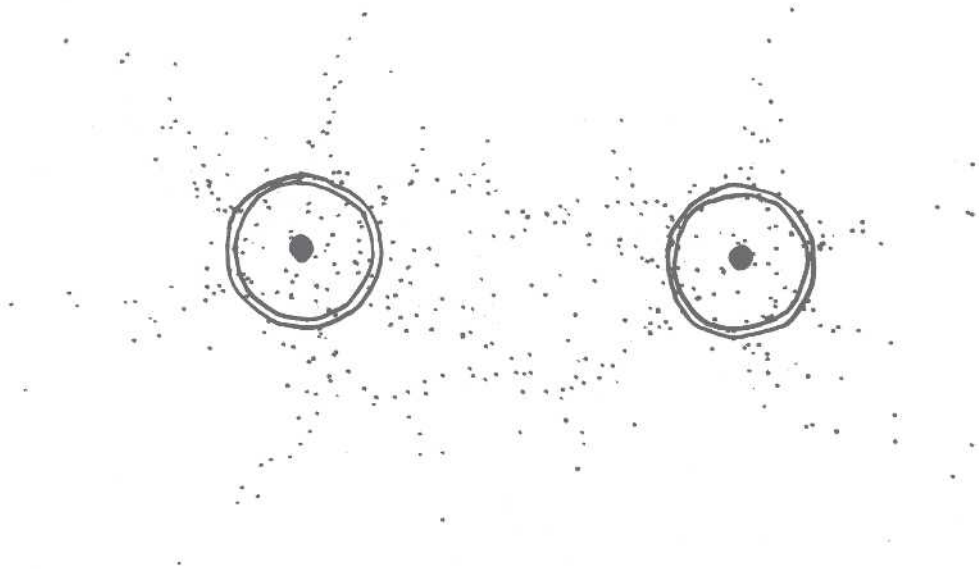


UNTIL ABOUT NOW, ALMOST TERRIBLY MANY NEW ONES HAVE BEEN CLUMPED TOGETHER IN DIVERSE, CREATIVE AND COMPLEX WAYS.

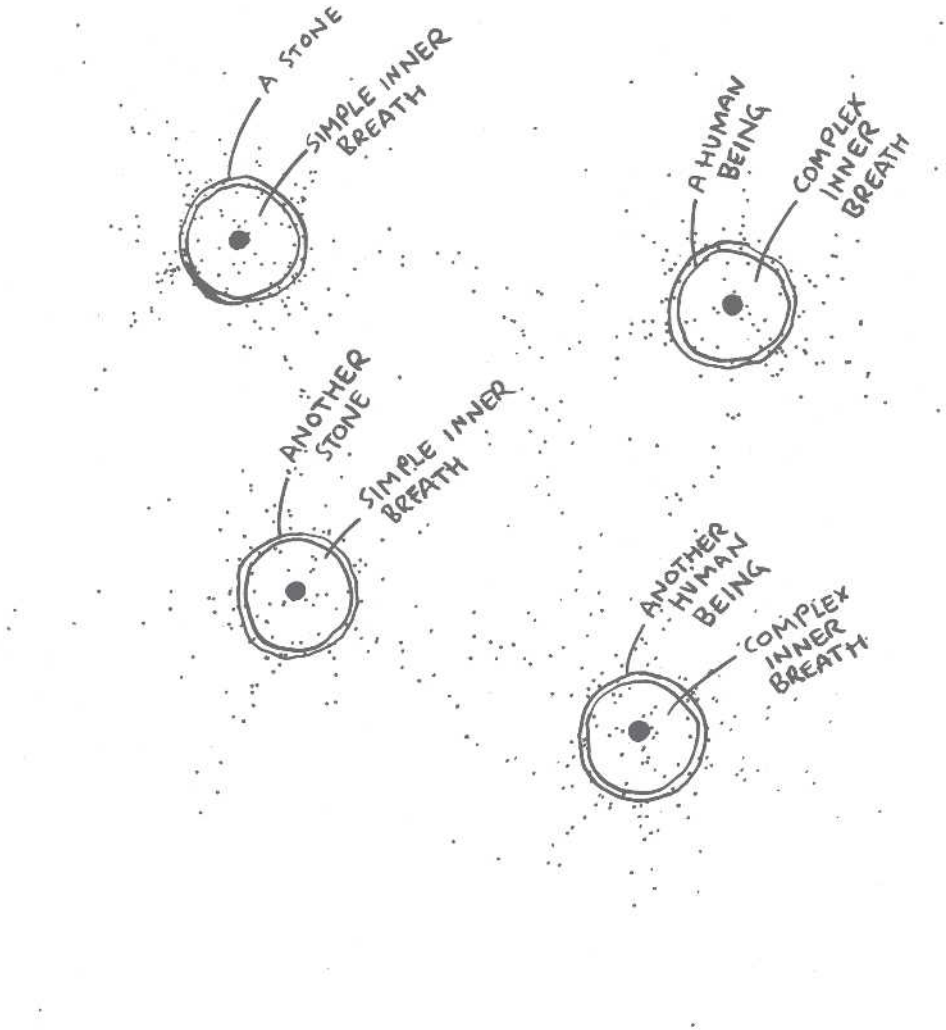
NOW SOME ONES CAN PERFORM COMPLEX CLUMPING. WE CALL THESE ONES COMPLEX ONES. WE CALL THESE ONES HUMAN BEINGS.



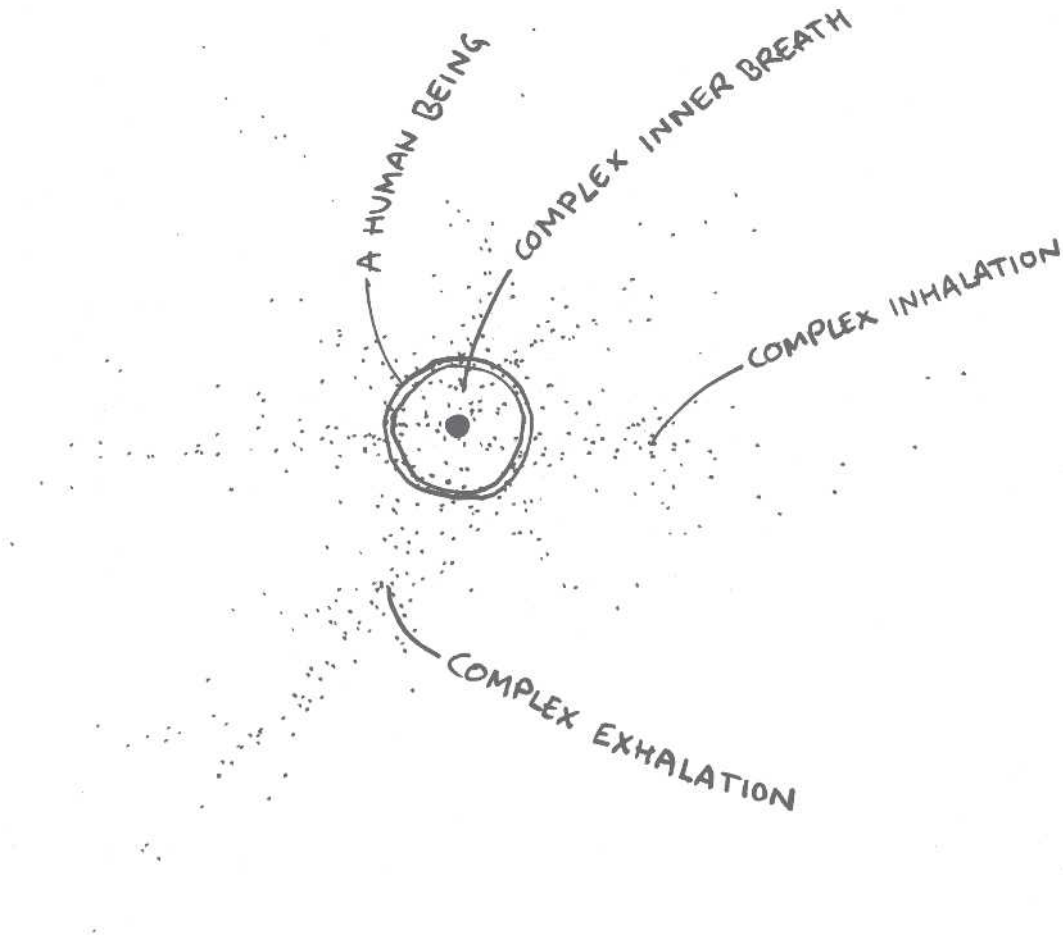
THE COMPLEX ONES CAN CONSTRUCT AND CLUMP CONSTRUCTED ONES. THEY CAN CONSTRUCT AND CLUMP WHAT WE CALL CHOCOLATE CAKES, REFRIGERATORS, NOSE CLIPS, WHOOPEE CUSHIONS, GAS MASKS, MOON ROCKETS AND MANY OTHER NEW ONES THAT HUMANS AND THE OTHER ONES CAN SHARE THE PRESENT WITH.



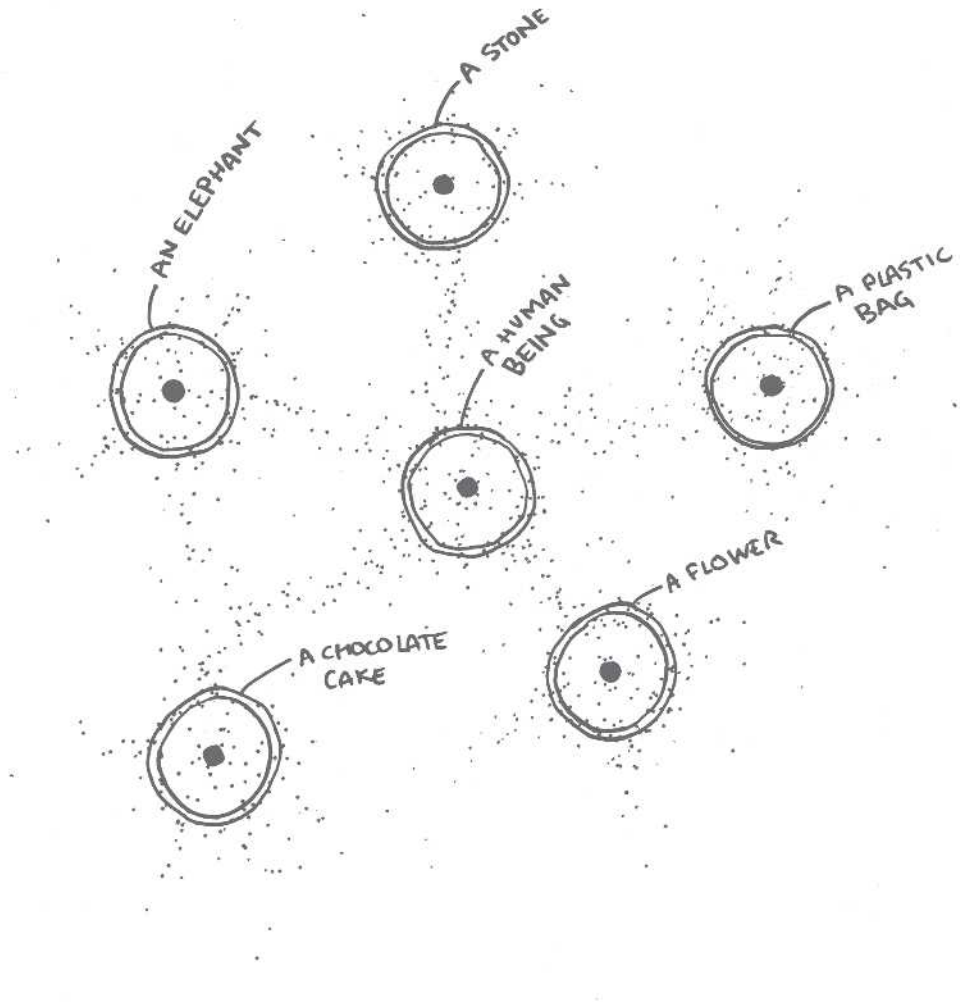
ALL ONES ARE TOGETHER IN THE EVERYTHING. WHEN TWO OR MORE ONES SHARE THE PRESENT, WE SAY THAT THEY BREATHE TOGETHER. SOME OF THAT WHICH ONE BREATHES OUT, ANOTHER ONE BREATHES IN. SOME OF THAT WHICH ANOTER ONE BREATHES OUT, ONE BREATHES IN. BREATHING CHANGES ONE AND ANOTHER ONE.



ALL ONES ALSO HAVE WHAT WE CALL INNER BREATH. INNER BREATH IS THE BREATH THAT IS BETWEEN THE VARIOUS EVERYTHING PARTICLES INSIDE ONE. THE MORE COMPLEX ONE IS, THE MORE COMPLEX ONE'S INNER BREATH IS.



HUMANS ARE COMPLEX ONES. COMPLEX ONES HAVE COMPLEX INHALATION, COMPLEX EXHALATION AND COMPLEX INNER BREATH.



HUMANS CANNOT ALWAYS DECIDE WHAT SURROUNDS THEM, BUT THEY CAN DECIDE HOW THEY BREATHE IN THAT WHICH SURROUNDS THEM. HUMANS CAN DECIDE WHAT AND HOW THEY BREATHE IN THAT WHICH SURROUNDS THEM.

3

THE ART OF RUNNING AND BEING [OR JUST RUNNING AND BEING?]

LISBET SKREGELID

FIGURE 3.1: Lisbet Skregelid, *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief* (2020–).

Before you start reading the following chapter, I want you to scan the QR code on page 35 with your mobile phone or log in to the following link: https://uiano.padlet.org/lisbetskregelid/gcem4e05l20go4na.

When exploring the content of the online platform that you encounter, consider what you see. Do you select any films? Do you scroll down to see how many films there are? Do you watch more films? Where does your mind go? Where does your heart go? Do you have any questions? Are any associations or memories aroused? How much time do you spend looking and listening before you go on to reading the text or doing something else?

About three times a week …

About three times a week, since March 2020 I have been running the same route for 30 minutes. Halfway I stop by the local beach and make a 30-second film from the same spot. The over 230 films I have up till now, the time of writing, are stored on Padlet, a digital platform for creating projects that can be shared. When uploading on Padlet for the first time, I chose the title suggested to me: *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief*. This title gives a hint about the ambivalence present in this ongoing project – which is the first research project in which I (as an academic) make use of arts-based methodologies, merging the roles of the artist, the researcher and the teacher.

In this text I (try to) draw attention to my routine of running, filming and uploading. I describe how the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as lockdowns and restrictions, has created a major disturbance and contributed to the need for a new rhythm, a new habit and balance in the overwhelming feeling of not having control. This repetitive activity has become not only a joyful but also a troubled need and desire in a tense and unpredictable life situation. This continuing praxis has made me dwell on questions about my own existence, as well as my educational ideas, teaching practice and research.

From exploring others' possible arrivals of the I from an art educational outsider researcher perspective, the running has turned this investigation towards myself, thereby studying the relevance of dissensus from a first-person perspective. The project brings my former and current calls for dissensus (Skregelid 2016, 2020a, 2021a) into dialogue with the quest for stabilizing the imbalance and uncertainty. In that way, my ideas of pedagogy of dissensus are questioned, stretched and extended.

In other contexts where I have written about the project (Skregelid 2021c), I have argued for this arts-based research perspective as a way of embodying and living

the concepts one makes use of. I have also brought in the terms dissensuality and affect as important perspectives in this research practice, as well as in education. In this text I will, to a larger extent, discuss the difficulties that appear when crossing disciplines – combining art, research and education, with my own life and living practice as a point of departure. Why is it important that I frame my running within a research context? What relevance does my running have for education? Maybe just running and being are enough?

Being human today disrupted

In March 2020, the most intrusive restrictions were imposed on the Norwegian people, as well as on the inhabitants of most countries, due to the pandemic. People experienced a dramatic lockdown with several limitations and a lack of social interaction.

My immediate response to the imposed strict restraints was to get out of the house. I cycled to the local beach Bertes. I needed to see the sea. I needed to breathe. The image in Figure 3.2 was taken before I had to quarantine, as I had just returned from a work-related trip to the United Kingdom. On the evening of 12 March, all those who had been abroad were told to quarantine for ten days. I was restricted to the house with my family. The kids could not go to school. We grown-ups could not go to work. We could not see our friends and family. We could not even go to the cottage. All the restrictions introduced by the authorities led to a new situation for us, as for all beings affected by the pandemic. The pandemic led to new actions and new ways of living. For me, the isolation initiated the running.

As soon as I got out of quarantine, I started running a route I had been running before, but now with a pause about halfway. I stopped where I had taken the first mentioned image – by the local beach, looking out at the sea view. I took my phone out of my pocket and started filming. I was standing as still as I possibly could. The art project *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief* (2020–) was now initiated.

The running and filming proceeded for some weeks without any particular reason other than the quest for having a kind of stability and routine in life.

As the days were uncontrollable and very much uncertain, I enjoyed having this kind of rhythm in my life. I was often running early in the morning before the rest of my family was out of bed. The films were first stored on my mobile phone for no particular reason. I just liked the procedure of this repetitive action, and I loved the sea view.

FIGURE 3.2: Lisbet Skregelid, Bertes, Kristiansand, Norway, 12 March 2020.

It was a research project on art education and sustainability (Illeris et al. 2022) that led to the use of Padlet. The ongoing pandemic demanded increased use of digital solutions, both in teaching and in collaborative research projects. I found this to be challenging but as I had to learn how to use Padlet, I grabbed the opportunity by making a test stream with the films from the running. I chose the title Padlet suggested to me when uploading the first film onto the platform. I found the title *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief* to be surprisingly suitable. The sea view was, in my eyes and probably in others', stunning. The mischief part represents not only all the pain in the act of running but also the trouble initiated by the pandemic and the troublesome questioning the project represented in my own calls for dissensus, as well as the questions concerning my calling for this research. I will get back to that.

The routine of running

So, what is the repetition and routine, and why do I need it? Why do I continue to run? Since March 2020, I have been running to the beach about two to three times a week, apart from the holidays. I still run during the holidays, but as I might be elsewhere than home and not running to the beach, I do not film. The films I upload on to Padlet need to be from the same spot. That is a rule I have made for myself.

The route is quite fixed, and the running occurs at about the same time. I start from my house – which is on the outskirts of the centre of Kristiansand, a city in the south of Norway. What I do before running is also rather repetitive. I am woken up by the alarm on my mobile phone. I get up, go downstairs and drink a glass of water before checking the temperature outside. When dressed I go out of the house. I run in intense heat and under pouring rain and freezing snow. Having the right outfit is important for my experience of running. Becoming too hot is rather unpleasant. Many people listen to music when running. I don't. I hear my own breath, my feet touching the ground and the sounds from the surroundings I am running in. When I close the door and run down the first few stairs by the front door, I try to leave my consciousness back home and just focus on the senses, the atmosphere, the nature and how I respond to that. The methodology of a/r/tography (Irwin 2012; LeBlanc and Irwin 2019), which I will return to, requires a sharpened focus on affective and intimate bodily moods. I try to be in the running only, feeling how the running affects me. I have to say it is really hard. I find myself thinking about my family. I think about my job at the university. I cannot just be bodily present and forget about things that are so immersed in my life. Still, it is the effect of moving my legs and my body (in general) in that particular context that leads to my continuing to run. Running has become part of my lifestyle. It is something I need to do, despite how uncomfortable and painful it is at times.

On my way to the beach, I run through an urban area. I pass houses, shops, a petrol station, sport centres and many building sites. During the two years of running, the building work has contributed to several obstacles, forcing me to change my route and actually making it slightly longer. It is strange and a bit worrying to witness the dramatic transformations in my neighbourhood. The few green spots are being transformed into fashionable apartments and playgrounds. The beach where I stop on my route is a really nice recreation area with sandy beaches and rocks. It has a harbour next to it, and the area is also a camping site during summer.

The films: Same but different

The films are visual and audible fragments from the running (small parts of the project), as they only reveal one place I pass on my route. Still, they stand out as strong evidence of my running. See Figures 3.3–3.7.

As of June 2023, I have over 400 films, as mentioned about 30 seconds each from the same spot looking out on the sea, stored on Padlet. What is seen on the screen of my phone and in the films on Padlet is very much the same most of the time. In December 2021, the image changed dramatically. I will return to the interruption that appeared in my view later. In the films *before* December 2021, the sea is covering about half of the image, and the sky covers the other half. There are some rocks on both sides. On the left you see a diving board and parts of a slide. On the horizon, you see some lights in the water. The blinking green and red lights are more visible in the dark, and when jet black those are the only things to be seen in the view. On the left side, on the horizon, you see some buildings. On the right side, there are trees and vegetation. During the summer there is a bathing raft floating in the water. Now and then, there is a boat, a plane or somebody swimming in the sea that can be seen or heard. More often there are birds in the sky. What also changes, of course, are the colours. Similar to the impressionistic paintings of a number of haystacks, the Rouen Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament by the French painter Claude Monet (1840–1926), the films show the same view in different colours brought about by the changing light and seasonal transformations of nature. Therefore, the films, like the paintings, are accentuating the effects of the passage of time. You see the water covered with ice during winter, and at other times it is very calm and tranquil. Sometimes the sea is immensely rough due to heavy wind.

The colours of the different elements within the frame affect other elements. If the sky is orange, the sea becomes orange too, but not if it is windy. The wind prevents reflection and turns the sea and sky into conflicting and contrasting elements. The lighter the breeze, the more the sky and sea merge and become one.

Unlike the impressionists, the *sound* is of importance in my project and the films from the beach. As already mentioned, I do not listen to music while I run. I pay attention to the sounds surrounding me and the sounds I make. This is especially notable when filming. I try to stay as calm and quiet as I can, but the soundtrack of my breathing is quite noticeable – at least when there is no wind blowing. Breathing also affects my body and especially my hands. I am trying to

FIGURE 3.3: Lisbet Skregelid, *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief* (2020–), Norway, 20 March 2020.

FIGURE 3.4: Lisbet Skregelid, *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief* (2020–), Norway, 5 October 2020.

FIGURE 3.5: Lisbet Skregelid, *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief* (2020–), Norway, 20 Feburary 2021.

FIGURE 3.6: Lisbet Skregelid, *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief* (2020–), Norway, 30 August 2021.

FIGURE 3.7: Lisbet Skregelid, *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief* (2020–), Norway, 28 October 2021 [my father's birthday].

keep my mobile phone and camera still, but all the films reveal slight movements. The soundtrack in the films is, just like the images, affected by the weather and what is happening around me. Sometimes the wind is so rough that you cannot hear anything but the sea hitting the rocks and sailboats' masts. People talking, birds singing and the sound of airplanes are also noises affecting the sound in the films.

One of the senses that is very much alerted when running is my sense of smelling. I pass a petrol station, and there I smell this mix of diesel, oil, grilled hot dogs and fresh bakery. That always takes me back to the summers of 1991, 1992 and 1994, when I worked at a petrol station in Stavanger. The scent from the municipality garden centre appears just after this and mixes with the smell of passing cars and sometimes from people smoking. When entering the beach, the scent from the sea touches me, and I tend to take some deep breaths when arriving at the spot for my filming. The clean air always feels good, no matter if it is raining or it is frigid. During the summer when the campsite is open, I sometimes enjoy the smell of fresh coffee. That makes me look forward to drinking my morning coffee when I get home.

Encountering people, animals, life (and death?)

When running I meet people. Sometimes very few, sometimes many. I meet people running and cycling, as well as people on their way to work or children on their way to school or kindergarten. I see people playing tennis and people running in circles at the old football stadium. I meet people working and people waiting for the bus. I meet small kids and old people. I meet campers cooking their food outside their caravans and tents. In the summer I meet people sunbathing. I meet people walking with their dogs. I have noticed quite a few people walk *three* dogs at a time. I meet some people nearly every time I am out running, like the girl about my age walking her boxer dog in the morning. We never say hi, but lately we have started to smile at each other. It took over a year for that to happen.

When I enter the beach, I sometimes get a bit worried. I know I have to make films, but how can I do it when there are people swimming in the water or jumping off the diving board that is in my view? My ethical concerns as an academic sometimes make me slightly move the mobile phone so that people cannot be seen. It is hard to conceal all their talking though, and sometimes within 30 seconds, they appear anyhow in the picture frame.

One of the women I have met many times is Liv – who was my neighbour when I lived in a flat, close to where I live now, during the years 1998–2007. Liv's husband passed away soon after I moved, and now she has moved to a new house, still close to where I currently live and the beach. Liv goes to the beach to swim with some friends every morning from early spring to late autumn. When meeting her in spring 2020, she was on her own. Her friends were worried about the pandemic and did not want to go swimming. One day she asked me to take a photo of her with her mobile phone while swimming in the freezing water. She wanted to send the images to her friends, who were not there, to prove that she was not giving up on their common routine. Since then, I have met her both on her own and with her friends. They seem to enjoy being in the seawater and being in the company of each other.

My encounters with Liv have made me think about the name Liv and my own relations to it. My dad apparently wanted me to be named Liv. When I was born, he proudly told his siblings about his third child and first daughter and mentioned I was to be called Liv. I even have congratulatory cards from my uncles from when I was born, with greetings regarding the daughter Liv. There must have been some disagreement between my father and my mother about the name, as I

ended up with the name I have now. Liv means 'life'. My father's name, Leiv, has a pronunciation that is close to 'life' in English …

In autumn 2021, I noticed a guy with black clothes and long black hair at the beach. There were always a lot of crows surrounding him. Soon I saw the special connection he had with the crows. He was feeding them, and they were following his every footstep. If he was not there in the morning, the crows seemed to wait for him. With the mornings turning darker, I have to admit I got a bit worried about meeting this mysterious guy on my own. The feathers on the back of his bike's seat added to my anxiety. When I became aware that crows represent a warning of death, accidents or bad news in mythology, it did not help.

On 29 November 2021, I got a text from my colleague Monica saying, 'The crow man is on TV. He is a teacher'. I started searching for the programme, found it and saw how he was featured (NRK 2021). In the programme he is presented as a teacher aged 27: 'When not at school, he is hanging out with some different kind of friends.' His name is Ragnar. The reporter says he has always been fascinated by crows. He is interviewed close to 'my spot'. There are many crows around him. The reporter says that the bonding with the crows was initiated by the pandemic and, especially in the last year, the connection has become stronger. The crows now follow him and even wait for him when coming to the beach. The TV programme shows a video recording he made on his mobile phone of the crows sitting on the front deck of his car before he came out. He says he is surprised at how easily taught the crows are. He has taught them to queue for food. When whistling they appear immediately. When cycling to the school where he works as a teacher, the crows follow him. His pupils call him the crow whisperer. He says in the interview that he thinks the crows have a reputation they do not deserve. He continues, 'You must invest time to observe and experience them to understand how much respect not only these, but all animals ought to have'.

Dissensus disrupted and arrivals of I

Running my route and repeating the filming and uploading on Padlet has made me think about why I continue doing it. I have realized that I need time to be on my own. I need time for breathing, time for listening and feeling myself and what is around me. I think it is this slowing down and giving attention to myself, my senses and my

surroundings, mixed with the routine and rhythm, that makes me keep running, despite the mischief affecting not only my body but also my mind.

The COVID-19 pandemic initiated the running. COVID-19 and its consequences functioned as a disruption in life and made me relate to my local surroundings in new ways. The habit of running, filming and uploading made me realize my quest for stabilizing the unbalance and uncertainty, thereby causing some troublesome questioning myself. In the introduction, I mention how my own educational ideas have been tested throughout the two previous years. How has this happened and what are these ideas?

In my art educational research, I keep returning to the term *dissensus* by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Rancière (2009, 2010) sees art as dissensus, a rupture in what we can perceive with our senses. He also states that dissensus breaks with habitual forms of imagination and contributes to new ways of seeing, hearing and sensing. As I find the term to be productive in educational contexts, I have made (and still make) propositions for a pedagogy of dissensus (Skregelid 2020a, 2021a, forthcoming) – a pedagogy informed by characteristics of art that enable arrivals of the I, transformations and deterritorializations in the subject.

The way art can interrupt, the way art can cause doubt and possibly make us disagree, I find to be relevant for education. In my Ph.D. research and the associated books and articles, I have argued for the relations between dissensus and what I call *events of subjectivation* (2016) – that is, moments that possibly enable new ways of seeing, hearing, sensing and acting in the world. Acts or events of subjectivation free the subjects from dominant views of what a subject should be and how it should act in the world. According to Rancière (2009), political subjectivation makes new topographies possible. When students involved in my research projects were confronted with contemporary art, including art that disturbed their notions of what art could be, and new ways of encountering art, and when put in situations where different and contrasting views on art were expressed, I saw how changes and transformations could take place.

When dissensus and the characteristics of art are used as educational approaches, regular ways of teaching are challenged, and possible disruptions of the expected norms are offered. Risk-taking is central for both teachers and students. Rather than just valuing the final outcomes, the process and the way to the final product are reckoned to be important. The unforeseen knowledge that might appear is considered more interesting and important than pre-described learning outcomes. Equality and non-hierarchical dimensions of teaching are used

as points of departure. The pedagogy of dissensus might lead to resistance, changes in perceptions and attitudes, and changes and transformations in the subject.

Art education researcher Dennis Atkinson's (2011, 2018) and educational theorist Gert Biesta's (2006, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2021) perspectives on the subject and interruptive teaching have inspired my conceptualization of the pedagogy of dissensus. Both researchers argue for education that risks and offers resistance in order for the subject to exist. They also see the potentials in art to promote a subject-oriented education. Atkinson's and Biesta's arguments for an interruptive pedagogy have motivated my way of seeing dissensus as a premise for events of subjectivation, a premise for the existence of the subject and have supported my call for dissensus as something that can be initiated in education. It is our duty as educators to bring some disturbance into the lives of students. I agree with Biesta (2006) when he says, 'The responsibility for the educator is a responsibility for what is to come, without knowledge of what is to come' (148).

Earlier (Skregelid 2020a), I referred to Biesta's *questioning* of planning for subjectivation or letting dissensus be a quality for subject-oriented teaching (Biesta 2017a). In the book *The Rediscovery of Teaching*, Biesta (2017b) refers to Rancière and argues for teaching as dissensus in a similar way that I do – as an orientation towards the unforeseen, a teaching approach that interrupts the logic of ideas of child development and student growth. Biesta (2017b) also asks whether teaching as dissensus is 'asking the impossible' (83). How can you plan for the unforeseen? Still, he says that it is quite easy to *prevent* events of subjectivation. By not putting oneself at risk, there will not be any chance for questioning habits and norms. There would not be any chance for liberating oneself from the existing state of affairs.

In 2020, one could say dissensus was realized as COVID-19. The virus interrupted and made a major mischief in human existence, but still it sketched 'a new topography of the possible' by the way we had to relate to ourselves, each other and the surroundings. For me this disturbance initiated the maybe never-ending art-piece, research and art-educational project described in this chapter. The virus and its consequences have made me question my own calls for the initiation of dissensus, disruptions and uncertainty in education. Suddenly I have been affected by a major disturbance myself. The running and quest for routine have confronted my theories in a very physical and embodied way. I have started doubting both my educational ideas and teaching practice, realizing students probably need rhythm and routine just like myself. This was certainly not planned for.

In my previous research, I analyzed how dissensus and its initiation make events of subjectivation and arrivals of the I possible. Acknowledging the difficulties with identifying signs of transformations in how students perceive the world, I have pointed to events where this might happen. With this project I realize that subjectivation and arrivals of the I can only be communicated truly from a first-person perspective. In the article 'Dissensuality and affect in education', where I write more about my ideas being challenged, I say that I hope to 'demonstrate the relevance of being disturbed and being exposed to the educational ideas one advices' (Skregelid 2021c: 695). I have been put in what Biesta (2017a) calls the difficult 'middle ground' (65). By experiencing this resistance, *I* encounter the challenges, and therefore, according to Biesta, I encounter the world – that is, the place where our existence as human beings takes place. I will return to what Biesta (2021) calls 'world-centred education' and relate it to my project in the final discussion of this chapter.

From running and being to art to research

I have approached some exhibitions with my practice of running and filming. For the annual autumn exhibition in Oslo, *Høstutstillingen*, in 2021 I made an hour-lasting film of all the small ones. I also made a proposal to *Sørlandsutstillingen*, a local annual exhibition that includes art from the region where I live. Here I sent the QR code to my Padlet (Figure 3.1). I included a short project description in the proposals, but they were both turned down. Hence, my art was not included in any of these two exhibitions. I have approached both exhibitions with the QR code in 2022 and in 2023.

I have been reflecting on putting this digital and accessible artwork into an art space where hardly anyone visits. Is that a good idea? The possibility of reaching a wide range of people is significantly higher if I keep it online and continue to use the digital format when viewing the artwork. I plan to share it on social media platforms. In that way I will realize the democratic ambitions about bringing art to the people – in this case straight to their pockets, wherever they are. Will it then not be regarded as art? The artwork raises many issues about ownership, as well as possible plagiarism. When opening the artwork, I not only provide full access to my films (and my running and breathing) but also make it possible for others to download the films. Furthermore, I open up for people to keep an eye on my running. If I pause a few days, people might wonder if anything is wrong: Is Lisbet running today? Why is she

not?, they might wonder. Is this transformation of my personal project into an open-access work causing stress for myself? Time will show …

Since my project has not been accepted in the two mentioned exhibitions or in any exhibitions until now, it has so far been presented as a research project (Skregelid 2021c). When referring to it as a research project, I have made use of a/r/tography, which is an arts-based research methodology characterized by an artistic and exploratory approach to research that merges the roles of (a) the artist, (r) the researcher and (t) the teacher (Irwin 2012; LeBlanc and Irwin 2019). Canadian art educational researchers Stephanie Springgay, Rita Irwin and Sylvia Wilson Kind (2005) see lived inquiry as a common approach in a/r/tography. Living inquiry or living practice presupposes that the researcher puts themselves into the situation, rather than outside it. In that way it goes well with the intentions of this book, where the authors all try to be in the praxis. A/r/tography seems to fit this ambition quite well, as it requires research closely related to the lived life, as well as a sharpened focus on affective and intimate bodily moods.

Disruptive critical reflection?

When I teach my students about arts-based research, I tell them it is an area still being explored, but to call it research, what they do has to be related to how research is commonly acknowledged internationally. One source on that matter is the *Frascati Manual Guidelines for Collecting and Reporting Data on Research and Experimental Development* (2015) by The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The manual explains what is considered research, including arts-based research. In Norway, arts-based research has been included on equal terms as regular research since 1995. Arts-based methodologies often lean on phenomenology (Ricoeur et al. 1967) where the researcher brings in the person, the I, into the inquiry. I tell my students they have to be sensible about the phenomena they let themselves be immersed in. To be personal, close, inside, rather than distant, is of particular importance. Therefore, research questions are raised from a first-person perspective, and the art made is also derived from the artist-researcher's life and world. The artwork is always the focal point in arts-based research, and experimentation with form and content is the research process. However, different from just doing and presenting art in exhibitions, arts-based research is dependent on *reflection* on the artistic process. It has to reveal the methods used and the

context, as well as make the outcomes of the artistic research process visible and available to others by mapping the route the artist has taken. 'Artistic research must be self-reflective, self-critical as an outwardly-directed communication' (Hannula et al. 2005: 20).

The request for self-reflectiveness in arts-based research often causes difficulties for professional artists and students. I often hear them saying they find that it is so difficult leaving the first-person perspective to have this meta gaze on their very personal practice. They also find it difficult to communicate their practice, so it becomes transferable or reproducible, which are research criteria. Many say they just want to do their art and not force it into this academic frame. So why do we ask students within various programmes to do arts-based research?

My university is not an art academy; still, we insist on art practice as research. However, to call it arts-based research, we adapt to the formulations and standards mentioned above. When developing Ph.D. work on art-based research and making an application for getting it accepted, the University of Agder emphasizes the critical reflection part, maybe more than other institutions.

Reflection on arts-based research and how art becomes research brings me back to myself. How do my running and filming become research? Is it by writing about my route? Is it when I describe the films? Does the art become research when I analyze my own transformations? Why is it important that I frame my running within the domains of art and research (and education)? Why do I not just run? One obvious response to this is the commitment I have to the running and filming when I put it into the frame of arts-based research. I have made a kind of trap for myself that is hard to escape from. It will become even harder to stop the project if I make my Padlet page accessible to all. Another maybe more troublesome response to my own question are the potentialities for academic achievement in this project. I do not have to feel bad when taking time to run – as it is healthy and produces academic outcomes, such as articles and book chapters like this now being read. Most importantly, the continuing praxis of running, filming and uploading and reflections have made me dwell on questions about my own existence.

Everything is connected

While thinking about whether I should stop writing about my running and whether I should just run and be, my mind wanders to my dad repeatedly while running.

My dad left his own life, the world and us on 17 June 2013 after seven troubled months.

What has occupied my mind lately is this crow man and how he is connected to my dad. Especially after I saw the crow man on TV and got to know him a little, I have been thinking about the relations between the two people and pondering my own place in this collective. The crow man appeared to be a teacher, just like my dad, myself, my mother, my grandad, and other relatives. My father practised pedagogy that seems close to the pedagogy of dissensus, the pedagogy I call for. He has been a major inspiration for me as a teacher. He was not tied to the curriculum or the content of the books. He let the urgencies of the world and the concerns of the pupils lead his teaching. I have been thinking about how he entered the classroom in the mornings and the question he asked his pupils: 'What do you want to be taught today?'

In my own writings, I have questioned this idea of giving the students what they want and of getting what they desire. This is inspired by Biesta's (2021) criticism of the same. I do not think my dad left his mandate to teach by letting his pupils say what they wanted to be taught. He was in control; he was also considered a rather strict, but still warm and caring, teacher. I think he provided a space for the kids to be, to being a self. He cared for the pupils who had difficulties fitting into the system. Like the crow man caring for the crows, my dad also cared a lot for animals and nature. The first time I saw him crying was when his dog died. From being an eager hunter like his father and two brothers, in his last years, he shot to scare the deer and birds away. (He told me not to tell his brothers.) He loved gardening and grew his own vegetables. He made use of what nature offered him. He went for a walk in the forest or in his boat to fish and just be close to the sea. I inherited the boat he bought when I was 10 and he was my age. When he was the age I am now, he ran about every day. Why did he run?

The voice of my dad is my dad singing. My dad used to sing all eighteen verses of the old folk song 'Kråkevisa' ('The crow song'). The song is about a man going into the woods and seeing an enormous crow of about twenty pounds sitting in a meadow. He gets anxious and is worried about getting killed by the crow, so he finds a bow and arrow and kills it. Then he makes use of every remains of the corpse. The meat is used for Christmas food, the eyes are made into windows, and the skin is made into twelve pairs of shoes. The end verse says, 'And those who cannot use a crow like this […] He is not worthy of a crow'. Today we might call this sustainability or ecological awareness.

The other soundtrack of my dad also involves crows. It is the song 'Grisen står å hyler' ('The pig is screaming'), a text by Ragnar Hovland and sung by the Norwegian singer Odd Norstoga. My dad taught it to my nephew, who he looked after two days a week for 1.5 years till he started school. They sang it together all the time. At my brother's marriage a year after my father died, this song was sung by my uncle.

Memories and the arrival of the I in the world

In the text I say that my running has become my educational site. In a hectic life, my running is my space for breathing and being. It is a place and space where I think, feel, sense, and question my own educational ideas. Writing this text, it becomes clearer how important my memories are to how I am in the world and how I perceive the world. I can try to run away from bad memories, but they will always be there. I cannot control my memories; they hit unexpectedly. I think my running provides a relationship with myself.

Lately, Biesta (2017a, 2021) introduced the concept of world-centredness and a world-centred approach to education, calling this *real* educational work and education that deals with existential matters:

> The idea of world-centred education is first of all meant to highlight that educational questions are fundamentally *existential* questions, that is, questions about our existence 'in' and 'with' the world, natural and social, and not just our existence with ourselves. The world, in other words, is the one and only place where our existence takes place.
>
> (Biesta 2021: 90–91)

My running and my space for running, both the physical and the mental, constitute a vital part of my world, a place where I exist and where existential questions and memories appear. By running I let myself be affected by what I cannot expect or anticipate. When running I am in a state where I am attentive to the unintentional and unforeseen – for example, memories. People can share memories, but still, memories are a first-person matter. The same situation can be recalled in a range of different ways. Biesta (2021) has a section called 'Anamorphosis: Finding the Place Where One Can Be Found' (96) by the end of his book *World-Centred Education*.

Here he makes a difference between a place one is *in the centre* of the world and a place where one is *exposed to* the world, without controlling it. The way I am exposed unintentionally to my memories puts me out of control. My body running is vulnerable to what it encounters. My own staging three times a week of a place where I can 'be found' makes me aware of my responsibility for providing spaces like this for my own students.

I mentioned earlier in the text that something happened to the sea view in December 2021. I saw a note in the newspaper stating that the area around the diving board was to be closed. The small diving board was to be replaced by a diving tower of about ten metres. The first day I came to my place after this announcement, I saw metal fences put up to prevent the public from going near a large area surrounding the diving board. The next day I saw a boat and a graver blocking the sea view. The third day, on 16 December 2021, the boat was still there, and a man was cutting the concrete and the metal in it with a grinding machine. (See Figure 3.8.) The noise was terrible, and that, in addition to the boat and graver, made an enormous contrast to the stunning view seen in the rest of my films.

FIGURE 3.8: Lisbet Skregelid, *My Stunning Stream – Made with a Little Mischief* (2020–), Norway, 16 December 2021.

I have been listening to the song 'Running', by the Norwegian singer Ruben, a lot during the last year (not while running). I love the rhythm in it, and I connect with the lyrics:

> But don't stop running
> You're gonna feel the fire underneath your feet
> But don't stop running
> You can take the fight, you can take the heat
> When it's harder just believe
> I'm in every breath you breathe
> So don't stop running
> Don't stop running
> I hope you run further than me.

(Ruben 2021: n.pag.)

The disruption in my stunning view is now gone. The view that troubled me for three days in December 2021 is now back to normal; that means always changing views. I know new disruptions will come, as the municipality has announced that they will continue working on the diving tower in February 2022. I will continue running and filming. I might also approach more art exhibitions. And while continuing to write about my encounters with the world and my memories, I will continue to wonder whether running and being is enough.

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4

MENTAL HEALTH WORK: A DISASTROUS, SUPERFICIAL, WEAK PRACTICE OUT OF ORDER

TORE DAG BØE

Before I begin

When I read, there are some things – a word, a line, a phrase, an idea – that may strike me in a particular way and stick with me for some reason. Often, I do not know why. Reading for me often is a kind of search in hope for such events – some epiphany, that rearranges or confirms something in my world in ways that make my heart thump, make me stop and make my eyes leave the sheet of paper to let the words, the idea, work with me. I search for something from a page, or a screen, that strikes me, exalts me there and then and also sticks with me. These ideas, it seems, are often a bit peculiar, a bit awkward, in a way that interrupts the order of conventional ideas. The words, phrases and ideas join up as a kind of library, a kind of reservoir, that I bring with me.

In this chapter, I will make use of some ideas from my reservoir to suggest what may appear as perhaps a bit awkward proposition: mental health work should be a *disastrous, superficial, weak* practice *out of order*.

Human existence is disaster

One of these words and ideas that has stuck with me is the idea that human existence is (a) *disaster*. I found this idea in one of Emmanuel Levinas's (1985) books, *Ethics and Infinity*. Levinas picks up this way of putting it from his friend Maurice Blanchot (1986) and points out that the word 'disaster' etymologically means detached (dis-) from the stars (-aster). Levinas (1985) writes of this disaster as 'a piece of being which would be detached from its fixity of being, from its reference to a star' (50). To be human – to exist as a subject – is to be separated from the stars. Put another way: existing as a subject goes through an event in which I become separated from the stars and I discover myself through this detachment from the universe and other humans in that universe. This is at least the way I came to understand it, although when I have revisited both the sequence in Levinas's (1985) book and tried to trace the idea in Blanchot (1986), I am in doubt whether I have got the ideas from them right. Their philosophies and ideas are quite complicated. Still, I will go on based on my original fascination and incipient understanding. I think I have kept this word and idea – disaster – with me because there is something there that kind of fits with how I experience life – a kind of trouble and unsettlement present in my living, a constant discovery that I in a sense am alone (detached). I never coincide with what I enter or others that I approach. This aloneness is something other than loneliness (see also Rolf Sundet's chapter in this book). Loneliness can be combated through relationships and through being together. This existential aloneness, on the contrary, has its origin in proximity to the world and others in that world. Levinas (1998b) also writes about an 'abyss in proximity' (89) in relation to the other and even states that 'love […] is a relationship with what forever slips away' (1985: 67).

A hermeneutic disaster – Living in my world picture not in the world

What I have come to think of lately is that this separated-ness, this dis-aster, could be understood in (at least) two different ways. First, I thought of this as what I would call a *hermeneutic dis-aster*, which is about the abyss inserted between my consciousness about reality and reality itself. Our experience of the world and others around us always

involves some understanding, some interpretation and some representation of the world and others. If I take my experience (consciousness) of the world to be my sole relation to the world, then it will always go through some representation. Put another way, a veil of representation will always stand between me and the world and others in that world. In a sense I am exiled from the world to my world picture. A hermeneutic dis-aster.

I think this is what Derrida (2016) also points out regarding signs or texts when he mentions that for humans there is no relation to reality without the sign involved. The use of signs – with language as the most advanced and complex use of signs – implies that we identify 'this as that' – which, in turn, inevitably implies a deferral in humans' relations to reality. We relate to the world through generalizations in which the singularity of the real is lost. Again, a hermeneutic dis-aster, separated from the stars.

An ethical disaster – I differ, for the other

When pondering about these questions I suddenly got an idea that excited me. I came to think of another way of understanding human existence as a disaster. I discover myself as alone, but perhaps not as living in my own world picture. No, I discover myself as alone when a choice is cast upon me. This happens when another human being is approaching. This is something else than an aloneness 'caused' by my world picture. This is 'caused' by a choice imposed on me as I am 'singled out', as Biesta (2014: 21) phrases it. I am singled out when the world and the others approach me, and the guiding question shifts from 'what I might want from the world' to 'what the world is asking *from me*' (Biesta 2021: 91, original emphasis). This is not a matter of being alone in my own world picture, a hermeneutic disaster; it is about being alone when *made responsible*. What I propose could be called an *ethical dis-aster*.

Imagine you are walking alone in a landscape – step by step, according to your own intentions and according to your own view of the landscape. Then! Someone turns up! You suddenly wake up and become alert. You jerk, a rush of some kind goes through you, your heart beats. This person may want something from *you*. You are interrupted. You discover that you have to take a stand on the one that has turned up. This also means you also have to take a stand on your own footsteps and movements, no longer only from the point of view of your own intentions and view of the world but also from the point of view of the other. You can turn around or go on, look in the direction of the other or away, say something or remain silent. The world is suddenly no longer only yours. How you move on makes a difference not only in your world but also in the other's world. A choice has entered into your movements. You arrive as an I, both to the other and to yourself. This choice may matter and make a

difference for the other. In a sense you are put out of your world and have to re-enter the world, now as a world that you both enter. This 're-entering the world' inevitably also becomes a matter of how you (choose to) re-enter a world that is no longer only yours. This 're-entering' goes via a detachment. A dis-aster. An *ethical dis-aster*.

This is not the hermeneutic aloneness of our consciousness. It is an ethical aloneness. Biesta points to Zygmunt Bauman, who claims that only an individual can be responsible. In the moral relationship 'I and the Other are not exchangeable and thus cannot be "added up" to form a plural "we" […] [To be] in morally charged situations means being on our own' (Biesta 2004: 244). Alone for the other.

This discovery that I am left with a choice makes evident that I do not coincide with the world, and that I am not merely a result of various forces in the universe. This choice, this I, that enters the fabric of the world splits it – making a difference, an ethical difference. Without this disaster, no subject is born, and there would be no ethics to interrupt the order of the universe.

Disaster in the biblical myth of the fall

We could perhaps relate this idea of human existence as a disaster to the biblical myth of the fall. First, regarding the scene where Adam and Eve ate from 'the tree of knowledge' in the Garden of Eden (Bible 2000: Genesis 3), I suggest this aligns with the hermeneutical disaster. Adam and Eve ate and acquired knowledge about good and evil. This can be seen as the step when humans entered the domain of knowledge and a knowledge-mediated relation to the world. Man was expelled from the Garden of Eden and condemned to be an eternal foreigner on earth. There was no turning back to the Garden of Eden; there was no return from the exile in the knowledge-mediated relation to the world.

A second scene in the myth of the fall is found when Cain kills his brother Abel (Bible 2000: Genesis 4). This, I suggest, aligns with the ethical disaster. Cain was angry and jealous of his brother Abel and killed him. Afterwards, when God asked Cain 'Where is Abel?', Cain said he did not know and replied, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' With this question, according to Levinas (see Bauman 2000), the ethical subject is born. Ethical responsibility appears through the possibility, or the temptation, to reject responsibility vis-à-vis your fellow human being. With the question 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Cain exists through an act of detachment from the other, in the very same event as that of being called to responsibility for the other. Only through this detachment it, in turn, becomes possible to make an ethical choice and take responsibility. Paradoxically, the ethical subject is introduced here through the possibility of choosing *not* to take responsibility

for the other. I would add that this is not about ethics founded on the idea of autonomous rational choices of a subject that is there in the first place. It is about primordial ethics that begins with the appeal from the other, asking for your response and making you responsible. We are pulled into the world, subjected.

Disastrous existence and mental health

These ideas about human existence highlight some profound 'troubles of being human'. Perhaps such an angle to the challenges and troubles of being human may also help us understand the troubles and distress of people seeking help in various mental health services. Human struggles, distress, bewilderment, despair and pain might have to do with this human and existential step taken out of a mute co-living within the ecology of the world – both the *hermeneutical disaster* in which you are exiled in your own world picture and the *ethical disaster* that leaves you alone with the burden of choice imposed on you.

This (experience of) detachedness vis-à-vis the universe, the stars and others should perhaps be seen as a fundamental aspect of being human and, consequently, should not be overcome. This opens up a 'position' from which I can take *my own* steps in the world. If I fully coincided with my surroundings, I, in a sense, would cease to exist. Levinas (1998a) suggests that what we refer to as 'mental' may be precisely related to the way we are strangers on earth and that 'the mental' appears when I do not dare to enter the world: '[T]he "stranger on earth" […] the stateless or homeless person, who dares not enter. The interior of the mental is perhaps originally this. Not in the world, but in question' (129). What we speak of as mental is perhaps about (the experience of) not being in the world but being in question, questioning ourselves and being questioned by others. Could an aspect of mental health difficulties be about this human condition of constantly being in question?

When pondering the idea of disaster, as well as disaster related to mental health, I also came to think of some other ideas from my awkward library of words and phrases. Among these I want to make use of three additional ideas: the idea of the value of the *surface* and *the superficial* as the site for human lives and encounters, as suggested by Hannah Arendt (1978) and Alphonso Lingis (1994); the idea of the importance of *weakness* and that professional practice must be weak (as opposed to strong), as suggested by Gert Biesta (2009, 2014); and the idea of the ethical necessity to go *out of order*, as suggested by Arendt (1978).

Touch, detach, re-engage – The superficial event of being human

If human existence goes through an event of being detached from others, surroundings and the forces of the universe, then this existential disaster must have its origin in the encounter that we both detach from and re-engage in. It is here that I propose that the surface (and the superficial) becomes pivotal. Any encounter has its beginning and end at the surface, the only possible site for contact. It is only at the surface that we can see, hear, touch (and smell and taste for that matter) each other. It is only when meeting at this surface that we can move each other. Hence, human existence originates at the border, in the intersections between surfaces. Encounters, and existence, emerge from the contact that belongs to the surface and must be *superficial*. Any practice that is not attentive and sensitive to the surface will miss out on the very 'site' for the encounter and the existence it makes possible.

A practice weak enough to let subjects enter

I exist as a subject, my subject-ness is an event (Biesta 2014), and my existence happens as I encounter the world. For this event to happen, I have to be affectable, touchable, moveable and, in other words, *weak* (as opposed to immune, untouchable, immoveable and strong). Hence, *weakness* is a precondition for human existence.

A (too) strong professional practice will rule out the time and space for the existence of those involved, both the professional and the client. A strong professional practice does not ask for the weakness that makes it possible for me to be touched and moved by you (both for the professional and the client). A strong practice might end up with no subjects, with no one there.

Out of order – When reality demands a 'stop and think'

To be separated from the stars, disaster is about *not* being fixed within an order and a course of events. Existing as a human is about the possibility of stepping, or perhaps being brought, out of order. Without this out-of-order state, we cannot exist with a choice and the ability to make a difference in the order of things. A *practice* in which those involved are not able to step out of order will not have the ability to make a difference and invent a space for something new to happen. Further, the attention to the surface and the appearance of others at this surface comes with a 'claim' (Arendt 1978) or, according to Lingis (2014), an 'imperative'. The reality of the surfaces may tell us that something is not right. It may tell us to

pause and stop doing something, but it (perhaps) does not tell us what we should do. Instead, it demands our thinking.

Tom Andersen (2021), mental health practitioner and professor in social psychiatry, describes how his various steps as a professional were guided by what he refers to as an unease. This was an unease that kept intruding on his practice and told him to stop doing something. He describes the steps he took as a professional in terms of stopping to do what felt wrong, and then new ways of doing things emerged. This, I suggest, is in line with Arendt's idea that reality comes with a claim and demands you stop doing something, go out of order, withdraw to thinking and re-engage with something new.

Hopefully, the title of this chapter – 'Mental health work: A disastrous, superficial, weak practice out of order' – is beginning to make some kind of sense. I will elaborate on these ideas and relate them to mental health work. However, before that I will briefly discuss mental health practices and sketch out a variety of rationalities, forms and settings.

Mental health practices – Rationalities, forms and settings

Mental health practices are perhaps mostly thought of in terms of psychiatry, with doctors as core professionals and diagnose dependent medication as a key ingredient in the treatment, and/or psychotherapy, with psychologists as core professionals and some psychological rationale and an accompanying psychotherapeutic intervention/method as a key ingredient.

However, I want to point out that there is a much broader variety of practices within the mental health field than this mainstream notion. At the risk of simplification, three different modes of practice could be suggested: (1) technical-instrumental practices, (2) person-centred practices and (3) social-oriented practices.

Technical-instrumental practices

In a *technical-instrumental mental health practice*, the scheme is to identify a pathological state, mostly through the use of diagnosis, and give treatment in terms of the application of adequate methods/techniques. This could also be referred to as the *medical model*. Such practices operate within an evidence-based framework, where professional practice equals the administration of evidence-based procedures and interventions. In

such a practice, *fidelity*, the imperative that the professional should follow the treatment procedures, becomes a precondition for effective treatment, together with *compliance*, the imperative that the client/patient should follow the professional's instructions. The setting is the professional's institution: the hospital ward, the professional's office or the therapy room. The setting is often one-to-one practitioner–client meetings.

Person-centred practices

Second, there are *person-centred mental health practices*. This can be considered a response to technical-instrumental practices, as they have been criticized for turning clients into objects within the professional's administration of treatment procedures. In this person-centred practice, the person is focused, and practice is about acknowledging the person's potentialities, needs and aims and supporting the person in accomplishing them. Empowerment may be a key word. The setting here may also be the professional's institution, the therapy room or the practitioner's office. However, such practices may also take place in the client's own arenas, their home or some other place, according to the client's wishes.

Social-oriented practices

Third, there are *social-oriented mental health practices*. Such an approach could be seen as a reaction to how person-centred practices become individualistic and do not take the way we are always imbedded in, and interdependent within, social interplay properly into account. In social-oriented practices, dialogue, participation, inclusion and recognition within relations, social communities and society are regarded as key elements in recovery. The setting here is often network meetings or collaborative meetings facilitated by the practitioner together with the client and their families. The practice may also concern supporting the client in making use of various social arenas, such as school, working place, a daycare centre and organized activities. Practice may also be about supporting the client in making use of the rights and benefits they have as citizens in a (welfare) state.

Ethical hesitation – An example of disastrous, superficial, weak practice out of order

The title of this chapter, as well as the ideas presented, may seem like big words. However, they are all about concrete events in the lives of each of us and also about concrete instances found in mental health encounters. Where, and how, can this

happen in mental health? Here, I briefly present an example taken from a study by Lidbom and colleagues (including myself) (Lidbom and Bøe 2014). Lidbom and Bøe (2014) explored the interplay between inner and outer dialogues in network meetings. The practice explored is an example of what can be referred to as dialogical practices in mental health (Bøe et al. 2015; Ulland et al. 2014), and the meeting was organized according to the open dialogue approach (Seikkula 2002, 2011). Using the different modes of practice introduced earlier, I suggest that this practice is a social-oriented mental health practice. It operates both outside a technical-instrumental and a person-centred rationality. The social network of the client is mobilized and invited into the practice, and the dialogue itself is the modus operandi of the practice – with the aim of generating dialogue, not changing the persons.

Lidbom and Bøe (2014) analyzed sequences of meetings and explored both the outer dialogue, based on verbatim transcriptions of the meetings, and the inner dialogue, based on interviews with all participants soon after the meeting. A 16-year-old boy was invited to a network meeting together with his mother, and two practitioners were present. A bit into the conversation, the boy said that things were going much better at school. However, one of the therapists suspected that it was not going quite as well as he said. The boy talked a bit more than in the previous meetings. All the participants pointed out this sequence as important. The outer dialogue goes thus (Lidbom and Bøe 2014: 140):

> BOY: I am not so quiet. If I need something important, I ask my friends.
>
> THERAPIST 1: Yes, you can ask them if you need information on something important for you?
>
> BOY: Yes, I have become better at doing that.
>
> THERAPIST 2: So it's easier for you to ask now?

The inner dialogue of Therapist 2 goes thus:

> THERAPIST 2: He is talking more today. He is doing more to make friends. I have to ask in such a way that he does not feel pressure to tell us that he is failing in some way. I wonder whether he is doing what he says he does.

In turn, the therapist's outer dialogue goes, as we saw, like this:

Therapist 2: So it's easier for you to ask now?

I have been very fascinated by this sequence. I have thought of the practitioner's inner dialogue as a kind of ethical hesitation, an ethical 'holding back', in concern for the boy. I bring this sequence into this chapter as an opportunity to make some more reflections related to it, and I will come back to that below. For now, I will, a bit condensed, suggest that in the sequence, the practice is *superficial* because the practitioner seems attentive to what he senses is appearing in the meeting – in particular, the boy's appearance. The practice is *weak* because what the practitioner does is not about following specific (strong) professional procedures. The practice is *out of order* because the practitioner stops and withdraws from what is going on – the order of the conversation, as well as the order of professional procedures – to his own thinking and from that re-engages in the conversation.

I will now go on and make some more reflections linked to each of the ideas of superficial practice, weak practice and a practice out of order. I do this by picking from what I have read in Arendt, Biesta and Lingis and also linking to the sequence presented above.

The problem with depth-oriented approaches and the necessity for superficial practices

In his essay 'The intruder', Alphonso Lingis (1994) distinguishes between two modes in our relations to a human other: 'depth-perception of the other' and 'surface-sensitivity to the other' (23).

Regarding *depth-perception of the other*, perception of the colour and palpable surface of the other is seen as a surface that one has to see through to grasp some physiological and biological depth underneath it. This is a perception that requires understanding and concepts in order to reach what lies behind the 'movements […] grimaces and postures' (Lingis 1994: 24) of the other. This can be about not only the literal physiological and biological depth underneath the skin but also the creation of a psychological depth or cultural depth that is supposed to help us understand the truth behind what appears to us. This depth-perception jumps blindly over a more primordial event belonging to the surface: 'Perception, that seeing through that penetrates to apprehend the depths, does not see the suffering' (Lingis 1994: 30).

Lingis (1994) points out another more primordial mode than depth-perception and calls this *surface-sensitivity to the other*. In his expositions of surface-sensitivity to the other he directs our attention to what goes on at the surface, warning against the gaze of depth-perception that does not stop at the surface but just looks straight through and looks for something beneath. This gaze misses the surface, where an immediate imperative strikes us. The surface event affects us and asks something from us and, in that sense, is an ethical event:

> When someone […] turns up and faces us, his or her face says 'Here I am!' […] [and] afflicts my sensibility immediately. It is felt in my *eyes* whose direction is confounded, whose focus softens […] lose sight of its objectives and turn down in a recoil of respect […]. It is felt in my *voice* that is in command of its own order and speaks to command, but which falters, hesitates, and loses its coherence before the nonresponse and the silence of the other. […] The surface of the other, as surfaces of susceptibility and suffering […] troubles my exploring, manipulating and expressive *hand*.
>
> (Lingis 1994: 30, emphasis added)

Surface-sensitivity to the other affects our eyes, voice and hands and interrupts the direction of our gaze, the command in our voice and the expressiveness of our hand. The other that turns up with a 'Here I am!' makes us lose sight of our objectives, makes our eyes turn down 'in a recoil of respect' and makes our voice hesitate. Lingis does not only contest some professional or scientific attitude towards the other. No, he points out how the way we engage in the world with intention (in the sense that we make meaning of what we encounter and act based on that meaning) is interrupted. The other who turns up induces a shift in 'the sensitivity in my hands, in my voice and in my eyes, which finds itself no longer moved by my own imperative but by the movements of abandon and vulnerability' (Lingis 1994: 31).

Interestingly, Lingis (1994) explicates the difference between depth-perception and surface-sensitivity to the other with reference to 'recognition'. He paradoxically says that when another human being appears, to recognize them should *not* be to 're-*cognize*' them. This would mean to make the relation into a matter of cognition in which we recode the other to an instance of a category. However, he sticks with the concept of recognition and suggests a significance that is, in fact, contrary to its etymology:

> To recognize what makes its appearance is not to re-cognize, to re-code […] it is to respond to the singular apparition. The 'Wow, it's you!' with which one responds is an exclamation that […] responds with a surge of sensuality and with a greeting that is laughter or weeping, blessing, or cursing.
>
> (Lingis 1994: 66–67)

Such recognition belongs to the *surface*, not any understanding of the depth behind it found through explanations of the other.

Practice – Attending and responding at the surface

The description of depth-perception is in line with how we tend to see human beings as acting based on their established understanding (knowledge) of something. A strong professionality in mental health practices can be precisely characterized by such a gaze looking behind the appearance and surface of the other. Such a gaze looks for problematic, or pathological, states in some underlying structures that are there according to the theoretical framework of the professionals. This also coincides with a gaze that categorizes, and diagnoses, to choose the right evidence-based treatment to intervene with.

In line with Lingis (1994) and his idea of surface-sensitivity, we could perhaps speculate if not the therapist in the example from the study of Lidbom and Bøe (2014) is 'arrested in his intentions'. Seeing and hearing the boy (face, gestures, demeanour, voice) leaves him with worry related to the course of events in the meeting. The therapist could be inclined to pursue an agenda of 'revealing the truth' about the boy's life (at school) and intervene with, in Lingis's (1994) words, a 'commanding voice'. However, the therapist's voice, again in Lingis's words, 'falters, hesitates, loses its coherence', troubled in his 'exploring, manipulating and expressive hands' (30). The therapist's focus is displaced; it is no longer about finding the truth behind the words but about how to go on in the actual encounter in ways that uphold the dialogue that the boy now has dared to enter and that prevent the dialogue from collapsing.

The problem with strong practices and the necessity of weak practices

> One has to accept that 'it' [ca] (the other, or whatever 'it' may be) is stronger than I am, for something to happen. I have to lack a certain strength, I have

> to lack it enough, for something to happen. If I were stronger than the other, or stronger than what happens, nothing would happen. There has to be weakness.
>
> (Derrida 2001: 64 cited in Biesta 2014: n.pag.)

With this quote from Derrida, Biesta (2014) opens his book *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. I like the quote very much. According to Biesta (2009), the prevailing view of education is that educational practice should be secure and effective, with a strong connection between input and outcomes. Educational effectiveness is put at the centre of a strong practice, with a strong language. Educational practice and professionality are based on 'what works' (Biesta 2009: 354). Biesta questions such strong educational rationalities, institutions and professionality and points out that education should not be reduced to effective learning and qualification. What he refers to as subjectification should also be a fundamental aspect of education. Subjectification has to do with the 'emergence' of human subjectivity (Biesta 2009: 354) and operates in a different realm than learning.

Biesta suggests that in order to be a process that contributes to human subjectivity, educational practice must be weak. A weak practice operates in an existential realm. It is only in the realm of existence that 'the human subject can manifest itself in its uniqueness' (Biesta 2009: 355). This uniqueness, this singularity of the subject, cannot be 'forced' or 'produced' (Biesta 2009: 361) in any strong practice. Biesta (2017) points out the 'site' for this existential realm – in which there has to be weakness for the subject to arrive – as 'the difficult middle ground'. The difficult middle ground, as I understand Biesta, is about how the world is a place where your intentions and actions will always be met by resistance in terms of others' intentions and actions. This means that, for this middle ground to be sustained and kept open, the subjects entering it have to be willing to put their intentions and actions at stake and let them be questioned. Only in this way can time and space also be given to others in the same middle ground.

I understand the weakness that Biesta proposes as two-sided. *Professional practice should be weak* so that there is time and space open for the subjectiveness, uniqueness and responsibility of the actual persons meeting. However, weakness is also about how the *persons must be weak*. If they were not weak, they would not be affected; nothing would happen to them: 'I have to lack a certain strength' (Derrida 2001: 64 cited in Biesta 2014: n.pag.).

Practice – Singled out through weak dialogues

Mental health practices based on *technical-instrumental rationality* (see above) may lack weakness in such a way that they do not offer any place for the subject. This practice is strong in the sense that its effectiveness is dependent on the professional's fidelity and the clients' compliance with the procedures. However, the *person-centred* approach to mental health may also lack this necessary weakness, only now from the side of the person because a person-centred approach may imply empowering the clients' world-views, their desires, intentions and actions. The person's world-view is asked for, reinforced and made both the starting and end points for the helping initiatives. As a consequence, the middle ground in which one can meet and exist is no longer there. Might it be that the *socio-oriented* approach to mental health also has the same problem? The answer might be yes if the practice is taken as the project of coping with and adapting to the rational and (strong) social structures, roles, expectations and tasks of the established order of society and social arenas (school, education, work, culture, political order and so on).

In dialogical practices and, in particular, the open dialogue approach (Seikkula and Arnkil 2006, 2013), some characteristics can be found that make the practice weak, in line with Biesta's ideas. The aim of the practice is to generate dialogue and to open up for all voices present. Practice aims at facilitating space for all who are present to speak, and speak about what they find important. The professional's responsibility is to ensure that all persons are responded to. The guidelines for practice are not instructive, in the sense that they say what should be said or done in the meeting. In this sense, practice could be characterized as weak. Practitioners are left to find ways to respond. According to the open dialogue approach, there should be no preplanning before meetings. Practitioners should tolerate uncertainty. As I see it, these guidelines mean that the practitioner should not take control of the dialogue. Their task is neither to understand and act on that understanding nor to define a specific problem or suggest specific solutions (other than to facilitate further dialogue and new meetings).

The therapist in the example from Lidbom and Bøe (2014) study (presented above) engages in a practice according to these guidelines and ideas or, rather, within the space the guidelines and ideas offer. If I am to speculate a bit further, the therapist is left with uncertainty; he, and no one else, is left with the challenge of how to respond. The response is not about resolving this uncertainty but rather upholding it. It is about not falling for the temptation to know, to establish the truth. He notices that the boy was speaking more than in previous meetings.

That makes an impression on him, and he senses this as both valuable and fragile. He wants to find a way to respond that would make the boy want to stay in the dialogue, say more and listen more. He wants to prevent him from stepping out of the dialogue. The weakness of the practice allows the practitioner to have a weakness for the boy.

The problem with order and the necessity of going out of order

As presented earlier, Lingis writes about surfaces in relation to others in ethical terms. He also speaks of 'imperative surfaces' (Lingis 2014: 167). In a similar vein, Arendt (1978) points out the primacy of the surface in ethical terms when she says that reality comes with a claim. In her book *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt (1978) describes, with reference to her well-known reports on the trial against Adolf Eichmann, what set off the explorations of the book:

> [Conventionality] protect[s] us against reality, that is, the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence. […] Eichmann knew of no such claim at all. It was this absence of thinking [and absence of any] inclination to *stop* and think – that awakened my interest.
>
> (4)

In this book, she offers a profound critique of the way western science and philosophy is caught up in what she calls a metaphysical fallacy. The (fallacious) metaphysical idea is that, as she puts it, 'true being' is found beneath 'mere appearance' (Arendt 1978: 23). Following this metaphysical prejudice, the surface is not given any attention, other than something that should be cleared away. It is this she identifies as a metaphysical fallacy: 'Our habitual standards of judgment – so firmly rooted in metaphysical assumptions and prejudices, according to which the essential lies beneath the surface and the surface is "superficial" – are wrong' (Arendt 1978: 30).

Arendt (1978) asks rhetorically, 'Since we live in an appearing world, is it not much more plausible that the relevant and the meaningful in this world of ours should be located precisely on the surface?' (27). She points out how humans are extraordinary as species, not because of their depth or underlying qualities but as a result of their extraordinary variation and differentiation at the surface: 'Outside shapes are infinitely varied and highly differentiated. […] It is precisely this [variety in self-display] that reaches its climax in the human species' (30).

Overlooking the surface is not only fallacious but also, more importantly, ethically dangerous. Attention to the surface is an ethical necessity and a protection against evil. The appearance of reality comes with a (ethical) claim. In line with Lingis, Arendt warns against the perception that sees through the surface. Quite harshly, she points out the problem with the scientific interest in what is behind the surface:

> The scientist […] cuts open the visible body to look at its interior […] by means of all sorts of sophisticated equipment that deprives them of the exterior properties through which they show themselves to our natural senses. […] The guiding notion (is) that appearances must have grounds that are not appearances. […] [E]fforts to find something beyond appearances have always ended with rather violent invectives against mere appearances.
>
> (Arendt 1978: 24)

The way I read Arendt, she establishes the surface with the vast variety and diversity of appearances at the surface as the primary site of human living. A crucial non-violent imperative is found here. However, she goes on and introduces another step. This step, as I understand her, she does for ethical and political reasons. Arendt (1978) writes about the human possibility and necessity to '*stop and think*' (4). She highlights this possibility, ability and necessity to stop and think as necessary to protect from evil. This stop, and the accompanying withdrawal to thinking, is always *out of order*, Arendt says.

To stop and think means to withdraw from the surface. A distance between yourself and the world is inserted. To stop and think creates a rupture in the continuance, flow and order of things. Stopping to think is always 'out of order' when seen from the perspective of 'the unbroken continuity of our business in the world of appearances [where] the chain of "nows" rolls on relentlessly' (Arendt 1978 [Part II]: 13). To prevent evil, we must attend to the surface and be open to the claims that it may impose on us. At the same time, this should be done with a readiness to stop, withdraw to thinking and re-enter in ways that may change the order of things.

As I understand it, this thinking, in Arendt's sense, is a person's ethical or political response to some problem or danger that is sensed and makes it necessary to stop and question what is going on. It is important to note that Arendt (1978) distinguishes between thinking and cognition. Cognition is precisely not out of

order; it 'serves knowledge and is […] guided by practical needs and aims' (78). Conversely, thinking is 'out of order' and 'interrupts any doing, any ordinary activities, no matter what they happen to be' (78).

Practice – Touch, detach, think, re-engage

In line with Arendt, we could perhaps say that the therapist in the study of Lidbom and Bøe (2014) is attentive to appearances at the surfaces – that is, what actually happens and is displayed in front of him. He is affected by the reality of the boy's appearance. The boy's presence – his face, gestures, voice – comes with a claim. This makes the practitioner stop, withdraw and think before finding a way to respond. However, and I think this an important distinction that Arendt helps us to do, it seems this was not primarily the sort of thinking that concerns 'consulting' some professional knowledge or methodological procedures – which, in Arendt's terminology, would be cognition. The practitioner has an inner dialogue with himself related to the various aspects of what has happened in the conversation up until that point. He struggles with the question of how to go in based on an imperative that could perhaps be articulated in this way: 'How can I respond to what the boy says in a way that takes care of him and makes him want to stay in the conversation?'

Before I stop

I started off with how the idea that human existence is (a) disaster had made an impression on me and stuck with me. The current text is personal, not in the sense that it is about me but in the sense that these are questions that attract me, matter to me and emotionally engage me. This perhaps also makes the text risky. Would this be of any interest to others? It is, therefore, written hesitantly.

My hope is that I, in some way or another, point in the direction of something that might open up a practice in which we may ourselves arrive as I's in the world, in a world that is not only our own making. My hope is that mental health practice may invent time and space for the arrival of the I for those involved. For this to happen, practice has to start with an encounter that is superficial and belongs to the surface. It is dependent on a weak-enough professionality, with weak-enough subjects and with the possibility to go out of order. This also demands leaving the domain established by third-person theories and

accompanying procedures regulating mental health practice and instructing those involved.

My fear is that although this current chapter starts off from my hope of honouring some reality outside of our pictures of the world, it ends with the opposite: reinforcing some picture of the world, in this case, the world picture created in this text. I end up betraying the reality that I want to honour. A doubt sneaks in: might it be that my enthusiasm for the idea of human existence as disaster is only a fascination for it as a neat and provoking idea, a new picture of something, rather than it pointing at something in the world that is there and happens in its own right? My writing, instead of being out of order, has turned into a well-ordered set of ideas that fit into the formula of the title of the chapter. Perhaps this is the dilemma of any saying: being in the trouble between the ethical disaster of saying and the hermeneutic disaster of the said.

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5

'SIT DOWN AND LISTEN – STAND UP AND TALK': CLASSROOM LIFE AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

DAG NOME

Introduction

Beyond qualification, the purpose of education has been articulated as two interwoven processes called socialization and subjectification (Biesta 2010), or cultivation and emancipation, if you like. Socialization or cultivation implies the ability to find one's place in society – in other words, to fit in – by getting access to as many cultural 'tools' as possible (Biesta 2021). Subjectification or emancipation implies the ability to individually make a difference and insert unforeseen newness into society (Arendt 1998). Hence, subjectification occurs when one somehow refuses to fit in. To simplify, socialization is accepting the 'we', while subjectification is awakening the 'I'.

I will argue that both these qualities are needed to be fully educated. There is no 'I' without a 'we'. The most obvious example is how I need to accept the use of a common language to make my individual voice heard.

How these two processes evolve during education could be empirically investigated through an analysis of classroom dialogues and the didactic structures of teaching (Willbergh and Aasebø 2019). The evolution could also be investigated through phenomenological inquiries into the physical embodiment of teachers and pupils, the architectural structure of the classroom and how the physical embodiment of teachers and pupils are interwoven with these architectural structures. In this chapter, such an inquiry is presented. The question I ask is how the physical postures of teachers and pupils in school reveal some of the complex processes of cultivation and emancipation in education, the acceptance of the 'we' and the awakening of the 'I'.

This inquiry involves reflections on Hannah Arendt's (2006) philosophy on education, with which she develops what I will refer to as an ontology of education. Besides Arendt, I will refer to phenomenological reflections done by Erwin Straus (1952), David Levin (1982) and F. J. J. Buytendijk (1974) on the significance of human postures, especially uprightness.

The whole idea of exploring the physical postures of teachers and pupils in the classroom as a way to study the process of cultivation and emancipation implies the assumption that the ability to be both part of a 'we' and be emancipated as an 'I', hence to be fully educated, rests on our bodily appearance in this world, a basic assumption in phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1945).

The procedure

A phenomenological inquiry is based on the first-person perspective. The phenomenon can only be investigated through how they occur and are perceived by me, my body, my senses and my emotions (Zahavi 2018). A phenomenon is always a part of my lifeworld and can never be observed from the outside, so to speak. I am always involved and entangled in the phenomenon I study. Hence, the phenomenon is always observed from the inside.

Still, the aim is to systematically suspend my preconception of the phenomenon to get closer to how it speaks for itself. Hence, the aim is to make tentative generalized descriptions of the phenomenon that overreaches my personal experiences (Dahlberg et al. 2008). Such descriptions require a dialogue involving

theoretical concepts and other researchers who have studied the phenomenon based on their own lived experiences. In this inquiry, I have even added a few pieces of artwork to the text to underline my observations.

My inquiry starts with my experiences as a teacher for 30 years, from primary school to higher education. In addition, I have supervised teacher-students for a decade, which has given me insight into how students verbalize their experiences with the same phenomenon. This is also included in the inquiry. Finally, as teachers we also have, in the depth of our lifeworld, our own vivid experiences as pupils present. Hence, when I write about the teacher standing and gesturing, it is primarily myself and partly my students I write about. When I write about pupils sitting on chairs behind desks, it is with my own experiences as a starting point.

The first step of these inquiries is a closer look at my theoretical dialogue partners, Hannah Arendt's (2006) philosophy on education, and Erwin Straus (1952), David Levin (1982), and F. J. J. Buytendijk's (1974) phenomenological reflections on the significance of the upright human posture.

The significance of human uprightness

When we talk, we often use metaphors based on our bodily experiences to express existential dimensions of our human lives (Lakoff and Johnson 2008). Many of these metaphors refer to our outright posture.

Taking responsibility can be expressed as *standing up for someone or something*. *To make a stand* is to reveal your point of view to the world. To *rise to the occasion* is to give what it takes to deal with difficulties. Hence, the upright posture seems to have a deeper meaning for human existence than purely being a physical experience.

Human uprightness is an evolutionary puzzle (Lindholm 2012). Several hypotheses have been put forward regarding what purpose human uprightness once had as an adjustment to nature for our earliest ancestors. It has been difficult arguing for any of the hypotheses since the disadvantages of standing on two feet are so obvious.

We could, in fact, look at human uprightness as not a matter of natural behaviour at all but as the most significant unnatural thing that characterizes humans. To raise up is obviously a way of opposing gravity and, hence, the logic of nature. That is why uprightness takes some effort to achieve. To stand up is not nature unfolding itself. It is rather a matter of opposing the forces of nature, even if it is

made possible, thanks to the very same natural forces. Hence, German American phenomenologist and neurologist Erwin Straus (1952) calls the upright posture 'man's natural opposition to nature' (536). Due to our upright posture, our hands are liberated, which makes it possible to create tools and, therefore, all our cultural artefacts and conventions.

One could say man as a species is defined by its upright posture, and for a child, the process of standing up is one of the most significant parts of the process of becoming human. Unlike other biological processes in early childhood, the ability to stand up is not something that occurs spontaneously. It must be conquered (Straus 1952). Dutch phenomenologist F. J. J. Buytendijk (1974) states that human uprightness is an act of the will. We stand because we want to stand and because our human environment invites us to do so. When this happens in every small child's biography, one could say that it is an initiation to the community of humans and, hence, an entrance to the social and political world.

Uprightness not only includes us in the social world of humans but is also an emancipatory act. We can refer to it as *the awakening of the 'I'*. Straus points out the concurrence between the time when children can stand firmly and when they start using the pronoun 'I' about themselves.

The fact that uprightness and the use of the pronoun 'I' entail emancipation happen, according to Straus, because it creates a distance between the individual human and the rest of the world: distance to the ground, distance to objects, and distance to fellow men. Straus (1952: 537) writes, 'In using the word "I," I oppose myself to everyone else'.

Distance to the ground highlights, on the one hand, the constant risk of falling and thereby losing our human posture and, hence, our self. On the other hand, standing up is so demanding that we somehow miss the effortless life on the ground. Hence, in our language, we not only possess words for the moral importance of standing up and the correspondingly negative expressions of falling but also have words for relaxing that bring us closer to the ground, like *lying down* or *leaning back* (Straus 1952). When we want to avoid attention, we are *lying low* or *going below the radar*.

The distance to objects caused by standing up is, according to Straus (1952), what makes the production of tools both possible and necessary. However, more interesting is how uprightness creates distance between the individual and fellow men. Straus points out that bodies with a horizontal posture in their spine inevitably cross their paths since the spine is always directed towards objects and other surrounding bodies. Bodies with a vertical spine, however, are directed towards the open space above, never to cross each other's paths (Straus 1952: 539).

To stand is to stand alone in sovereignty. This could be seen in the way kings, emperors and dictators have been pictured and sculptured throughout history, where 'the strict upright posture expresses austerity, inaccessibility, decisiveness, domination, majesty, mercilessness or unapproachable remoteness, as in catatonic symmetry' (Straus 1952: 539).

For humans to meet each other is an act of will. In addition to gaze, words and gestures, to meet demands some kind of intentional modification of uprightness. Depending on cultural preferences, we kneel, bow, nod our head or bend our knees to show respect or give space for others. Even leaning slightly forward or backward can be used as cultural gesture of greeting or as a token of compassion, respect, and even intimacy.

Other phenomenologists have expressed how uprightness gives every human a base for an ethical and moral existence. As already mentioned, with standing up comes the fear of falling both literally and metaphorically. American phenomenologist David Levin (1982) writes,

> The ethical notions of uprightness and fallenness, together with the psychological correlates, pride, and guilt, are existential understand [*sic*], grounded in the child's experiencing of the step-by-step learning involving the ability to stand up and walk forward without losing a basic balance, stumbling and falling.
>
> (294)

The fear of falling is visible in the gestures of a small child that stands for the first time. Their whole body is focused on this one thing – to remain standing. To stand implies resisting the forces that work on the body or defeating gravity, as previously mentioned. To explore the world that is now made available, the child needs to let these forces take hold of the body. Just as gestures of greeting demand a slight deviation from equilibrium, so does the act of walking.

Picture a child standing firmly on his two feet. They cannot get anywhere in this world without leaning slightly forward and allowing themselves to fall or letting gravity work for a split second, so to speak. Hence, taking that first step is another act of the will, and if you have observed a child doing this for the first time, you have seen how they are invited or enticed to do so by their entire social and physical environment.

The child who takes the first steps needs to risk the upright posture and the state of equilibrium and deliberately fall for a split second. Then, just at the right

moment, they set one foot forward and push back to regain uprightness. According to Straus (1952: 542), 'Human gait is in fact a continuously arrested falling'. This could be seen as a micro experience of disappearing and reappearing, arriving in the world and leaving the world, submitting to nature and pushing away from it.

Standing up as a physical experience is a process of opposing the forces of nature by means of the same nature. It is strongly related to the experience of being both part of the human society and being singled out as an 'I', unlike all others. The upright posture is an important part of the human way of being in the world. Standing up is also related to both the fear of falling and the yearning for lying down and resting. In both cases, we disappear, and getting up after a fall and rising from bed in the morning are experiences of reappearing.

Where do such reflections leave the phenomenon of childhood and education? If to be educated is to be emancipated and awake the 'I' (Biesta 2021), then it is of interest how teachers and pupils are bodily present in the classroom. The art of teaching needs to relate to the physical bodies of both the teacher and the pupils. However, before I reflect on such a connection, I will, in the following, use Hannah Arendt's educational thinking as a way to express what can be termed the ontology of childhood and schools.

Arendt's philosophy of education

In her essay 'The crisis of education', Hannah Arendt (2006) makes a distinction between the political and private spheres and states that children need to grow and develop within the shelter of family life or the private sphere and, hence, be protected from the rights and responsibilities in the political sphere. This statement needs to be seen in the light of one of her most important concepts – *natality* (or being a newborn in the world), as well as the concept of *human action*.

Arendt describes human action as the only things we do in freedom and, hence, the things we do that make us human. She distinguishes between action and two other forms of human activity: work and labour, which are things we are determined to do based on external demands from nature or society (Arendt 1998).

However, by our *actions*, we can put into this world something that is new and unseen and cannot be predicted. Arendt (1998) writes,

> The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And

> this again is possible only because each man is unique so that with each birth, something uniquely new comes into the world.
>
> (178)

Hence, the world is somehow recreated by every new-born, and natality is the ability to act as if history does not exist. With every new-born, the world starts all over again every single time. However, natality or new-born does not refer to physical birth. Arendt (1998: 176) writes, 'With word and deed, we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance'. In her essay on the crisis on education, this second birth, the birth of a political being, must be interpreted as being educated, or what I have referred to as subjectification or the awakening of the 'I'.

According to Arendt (2006: 181), 'Childhood is a temporary stage, as preparation for adulthood'. Children are still in the process of becoming human. This way of perceiving childhood sounds highly controversial in the present educational discourse, as it did at the time she wrote her essay. Based on the UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child, every modern curriculum denotes children as competent agents with the right to participate in decision-making, thereby implying they have a voice in all aspects of public life (Verhellen 2000). Consequently, Arendt's idea of childhood birthed a perception of schools that differs from today's mainstream ideas of democratic education.

Schools should be, according to Arendt, a link between the private and public spheres: schools 'represent the world, although it is not yet actually the world' (Arendt 2006: 185). Schools are still a place for protection from both public life and the private sphere. A school creates an autonomous space in between both.

In school, children meet teachers, whose task is to display and explain the world to them. Anne O'Byrne (2005) interprets Arendt as follows:

> If the elementary school teacher is in the process of introducing her pupils to the world, she must share with them the somewhat sheltered place of the school. Still, she must stand, as it were, at its edge, in the place where she can gesture towards the public world, describing it as 'our world'.
>
> (398)

To stand at the edge of the school, pointing towards 'our world' implies that teachers need to be representatives of the world and take responsibility for it as they face the children. Arendt (2006: 186) writes, 'In education this responsibility for the world takes the form of authority'. In other words, the natural authority that is otherwise absent in postmodern society must still be a living reality in the sheltered space called a school, but only if it is embedded in responsibility for the world that the teachers represent.

If teachers, by taking responsibility for the world as it is, are to become authorities in schools, two things need to be done with the content and form of teaching, according to Arendt. First, schools need to be conservative, and second, the progressive idea of child-centred education needs to be problematized.

Conservatism is again an unexpected term for an educational philosopher in the tradition of critical theory (Nome 2021). Hence, Arendt (2006: 189) states, 'In politics this conservative attitude – which accept the world as it is, striving only to preserve the status quo – only lead [*sic*] to destruction'. Consequently, other radical educational thinkers, such as Paulo Freire (2018), would turn the school into a revolutionary workshop where the ability to reshape the world is being practised by students and teachers together. However, since education, according to Arendt, does not belong to politics but exists as an autonomous space between the political and the private spheres, conservatism is possible and even needed for the following reason: the child whose task is to reshape and renew the world needs to do so in absolute freedom when the time comes, which implies that the progressive teacher who foresees this needs to restrain themselves to make this happen. Arendt (2006) writes,

> We destroy everything if we so try to control the new, that we, the old, can dictate how it will look […] Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world.
>
> (189)

As an implication of the school as conservative, Arendt seems to strongly oppose the progressive idea of child-centred education. She raises a strong argument against the tendency to shape the content and forms in school based on children's lives, interests and experiences.

According to Arendt, there are two reasons for this. First, the teacher cannot be an authority who takes responsibility for the world, unless the content and forms in

school primarily come from the teacher's own lived experience. It is impossible to point towards the old world and call it 'our world' if the child's world is at the centre of attention. Second, it is not easy to make school an autonomous space outside both the private and political spheres if the social demands of the private sphere or the political sphere's economic needs dictate what is going on there. Children need to be introduced to something unfamiliar in school. To teach is to somehow hand over a gift that neither the child nor society has asked for (Nome 2021).

The school needs to be what Biesta (2021) calls *world-centred*, not child-centred. To do so, the teacher needs to take the anachronistic role of authority, and the school needs to stay conservative in form and content. Schools need to be both world-centred and *teacher-centred*. However, the teacher can only be in the centre if they show and make the children aware that certain things matter, that something is worth paying attention to in this world (Vlieghe 2018). Arendt (2006: 193) calls it the teacher's love for the world – a world that is worth standing up for.

Inquiry 1: To teach is to stand up for the world

I am standing in front of the class. Most eyes are on me. Some faces display curiosity; a few even look excited. I start talking about today's topic in natural sciences – birds. I point toward a sketch I have drawn on the blackboard. I pick up the textbook and let it rest open in my hand while I start walking. I talk about the life of the sparrow. When I come to the most important parts, I start to talk rhythmically – to – the – pulse – of – my – steps. I stop, put the book down and lean slightly forward, lifting my shoulders and making a round space with the palms of my hands in front of my face when I tell how fragile and vulnerable the new-born sparrow is. Then I lean slightly backward and stretch out my arms in astonishment when I tell how surprisingly it is that the small body of the sparrow has a higher temperature than the human body. I turn my back to the class and write some basic facts on the blackboard, hoping that at least some of the pupils take notes.

To teach is, according to Arendt, to take responsibility for the world. As I have stated, taking responsibility could be metaphorically expressed as standing up for something. Let us examine this quite literally. Consider the posture of the teacher. The typical image of a classroom is the teacher standing and the class sitting in front of the teacher. Hence, it is not coincidental that Anne O'Byrne (2005), in the previous quote, refers to the way teachers act in schools as follows: 'She [the teacher] must

stand, as it were, at its edge, in the place where she can gesture towards the public world, describing it as "our world'" (398).

To stand and to gesture, or point, towards something worth paying attention to in the world is what teachers do (Prange 2012). Our cultural images of teachers at work are often a person standing or walking around while talking, gesturing, displaying and pointing at pictures and artefacts. In front of the teacher are desks and chairs, with students sitting quietly and listening or taking notes. The desks and chairs are organized in specific ways that give the room a certain architectural style – in straight rows, circles, or amphis.

The way classrooms are organized, and the fact that the teacher is standing and the pupils are sitting, can be explained as a way to uphold control and discipline (Foucault 1999). It can also be seen as a basic image of childhood as Arendt (2006) does, and hence, a basic image of schools as cultural institutions. The teacher is standing as a representative and responsible adult for the world they inhabit and display for the pupils. The pupils are sitting down on chairs or benches as aspiring representatives and responsible persons.

There are other social arenas where standing in front of groups of people sitting down occurs as a symbol of being a representative and responsible person. The most obvious one is the priest and the congregation, where the priest standing up takes the role of the representative for the divine and the congregation is the group that collectively receives the divine through the representative person standing in front of them. A beautiful example of this relation is displayed in Adolph Tidemand's painting *Haugianerne* from 1852 (Figure 5.1). The light from above, representing the divine, is received by the congregation through the words of the man standing on the chair.

The implications involved in how priests or teachers are standing up could also be investigated with support from Straus's reflections on the significance of the upright posture and how it is linked to the human 'I'. By standing up, the teacher displays autonomy and sovereignty, but standing and walking around the room also include a lot of small but significant gestures of moral and emotional engagement that modify the sovereignty (Straus 1952). Teachers can lean forward and bend their spine to show compassion or curiosity. They can lean back with open arms if they are surprised or overwhelmed. In both cases, they modify their uprightness in ways that respond to and involve the pupils sitting in front of them emotionally.

To understand the positions of a pupil in school or a member of a religious congregation that witnesses and is engaged by a teacher or a priest standing and gesturing, it could also be useful to take a closer look at the phenomenon of sitting.

FIGURE 5.1: Adolph Tidemand, *Haugianerne*, 1848. Oil on canvas. 98.8 × 123.2 cm. Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo. Free licence.

Inquiry 2: The phenomenology of sitting down

It's the first day of school. I am waiting in line outside my classroom for the first time. One by one we are called upon to enter the classroom. When it's my turn, the teacher takes my hand and leads me to a desk and a chair by the window. My name is written on a sheet of paper on the desktop. I sit down, and the rest of the class find their seats. The teacher stands in front of us and tells all about the classroom rules. I just love every one of them, especially the one about our desks and chairs. I am not allowed to sit anywhere else, and no one beside me is allowed to sit right here. I know at that moment, that as long as I am sitting here, the rest of

the class are seated just like me and the teacher is standing in front of us enforcing the rules, I am safe. I am taken care of.

Although sitting in western culture has been called 'the new smoking' due to the multitude of health problems caused by sitting down in schools and workplaces (Baddeley et al. 2016), sitting down has a specific cultural impact, and it might have certain existential dimensions as well. We all have experienced sitting in cultural devices called *chairs* from the time we were infants. Sitting is a central part of our lifeworld.

If standing up is the basic human posture of autonomy, subjectification and individual moral responsibility, sitting down could be seen as a way of suspending these qualities. As Straus (1952) points out, it is the vertical spine in uprightness that gives space for these experiences. While sitting, we still keep our spine upright, but our autonomy and individuality are somehow on hold. The possibility of modifications of uprightness, such as kneeling, bowing, or bending our knees to show respect or give space for others (Straus 1952), is reduced while sitting. The reason for this is that we lean back and trust the chair to hold us, and the chair is a static device. It does not bow or kneel.

The chair is a cultural artefact with specific affordances. Wherever a chair is put out for me, there is a place for me in the community. In the theatre, there is a numbered seat reserved just for me, and the number is printed on my ticket. In the classroom every pupil knows there is a chair and a desk waiting for them. To accept a seat, or to conquer a seat, seems to imply accepting or conquering a position in society. Seating is social positioning. It is obvious when it involves cultural seating devices (such as thrones or replacement benches), but the same applies to seating in a classroom. When a child enters a school for the first time, they are assigned a seat and a desk that define them as a pupil for years to come.

There are several historical examples of how different seats in the classroom were assigned to different social classes (Kielland 1886). The closer to the teacher you were seated, the higher your social rank. In other examples boys and girls were seated differently as an indication of social gender differences, as shown in the painting *Die Dorfschule* (1848) by Albert Anker (Figure 5.2). Only boys had desks and were seated facing the teacher.

Hence, to be seated is to accept a social position and, consequently, to some extent suspend my autonomy and individual sovereignty. As I lean back and sit down, I give up my position as a singled-out individual, and I can join the community of peers as an anonymous contributor to the common task of this specific community.

FIGURE 5.2: Albert Anker, *Die Dorfschule*, 1848. Oil on canvas. 104 × 175.5 cm. Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel. Free licence.

In short, standing up could be interpreted as a gesture of individuality and autonomy, and sitting down as a gesture of collective engagement in the community, in a position assigned to me. One of the more curious expressions of these differences is the children's game 'Musical Chair'. The participants walk around a circle of chairs while the music is playing. The point of the game is to quickly find a place to sit in the circle of chairs once the music stops. There is always one chair short, and the one left standing must leave the game. He has lost his place in the community. By playing this simple game, children experience the cultural importance of sitting down, trusting the chair to be there to support them and give them access to the community of peers. Hence, it is a playful way of dealing with the fear of being left standing outside the community.

As a pupil in school, sitting down on the chair reserved just for you is to take part in a community of peers, a community you trust and that allows you to be an anonymous contributor to its common goal. The only one standing and hence displaying their subjectivity, or 'I', is the teacher, the responsible representative of the world. However, every pupil knows that from time to time, they can be called

upon to rise up, come forward and contribute individually. Sitting down in the classroom suspends the individual autonomous subject, or the 'I' of the student, but whenever they are called upon, they need to be ready to stand up and display their 'I' for the world.

Conclusion

Beyond qualification, teaching provides possibilities for both socialization and subjectification to be cultivated as well-functioning parts of the large 'we' in society and to be emancipated as the 'I', which makes room for newness in society. My inquiry demonstrates that these two interwoven qualities can be seen as present in the way sitting and standing are ritualized in a classroom. Teaching done through sitting and standing is a ritualization with at least three dimensions.

First, it is a ritualization that recreates vital existential experiences from early childhood. To stand firmly without assistance is one of the first and most prominent experiences of autonomy and is therefore linked to the first verbal expression of the word 'I' in a child's biography (Straus 1952). As a pupil, this prominent experience is recreated in school through the ritual of teaching. Education ends with students who rise up and walk firmly out of school, as often seen in different graduation ceremonies. Education is basically an encouragement to stand up and walk. Hence, to be finally educated is, according to Arendt (2006), to be ready to undertake responsibility for the world or, as we say metaphorically, to stand up for the world.

Second, teaching done through the way sitting and standing are organized is, according to Arendt (2006), also a ritualization of a basic relationship between generations. Those representing the world as it is are standing and gesturing towards the word they represent and, hence, take full responsibility. Responsibility is physically present in the upright posture of the teacher.

Those who will be ready to renew the world when their time comes are sitting down – temporarily suspending their subjectivity, or 'what is new and revolutionary in every child' (Arendt 2006: 189). However, the art of standing up is exercised ritualistically during lessons, as if pupils are constantly being made aware of their future task to raise up and fulfil what Arendt (2006) calls their ontological purpose. School is a rehearsal in growing-up-ness.

Third, the architecture of a classroom, where there is a seat and a desk assigned to everyone, symbolizes collective unity. Hence, the basis for the rehearsal in growing-up-ness, or the awakening of the 'I', is the security of the 'we'. To be seated

in a classroom is to be socially positioned in a group of peers, and this seating arrangement makes teaching, first of all, a collective experience, with the teacher's authority at the centre of it all. This idea is not fully aligned with the contemporary pedagogical ideal of child-centred democratic education. Maybe my inquiry into the physical embodiment of teachers and pupils is a reminder of some basic conservative elements in schools that are worth paying attention to. It shows what might be at stake in a contemporary school discourse.

Teaching is not necessarily about putting the child and their lifeworld in the centre of attention but putting the world in the centre, the world the teacher represents, loves and shows responsibility for. Hence, it is consequently the teacher's lifeworld that is at the centre of attention. This comes to one's attention by examining who is standing and who is sitting in the classroom.

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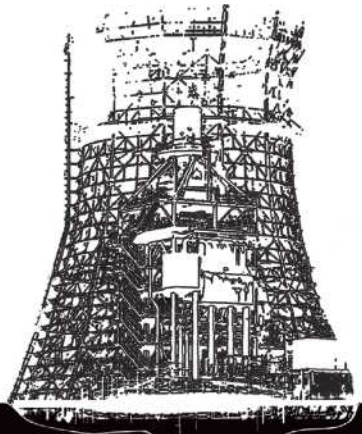
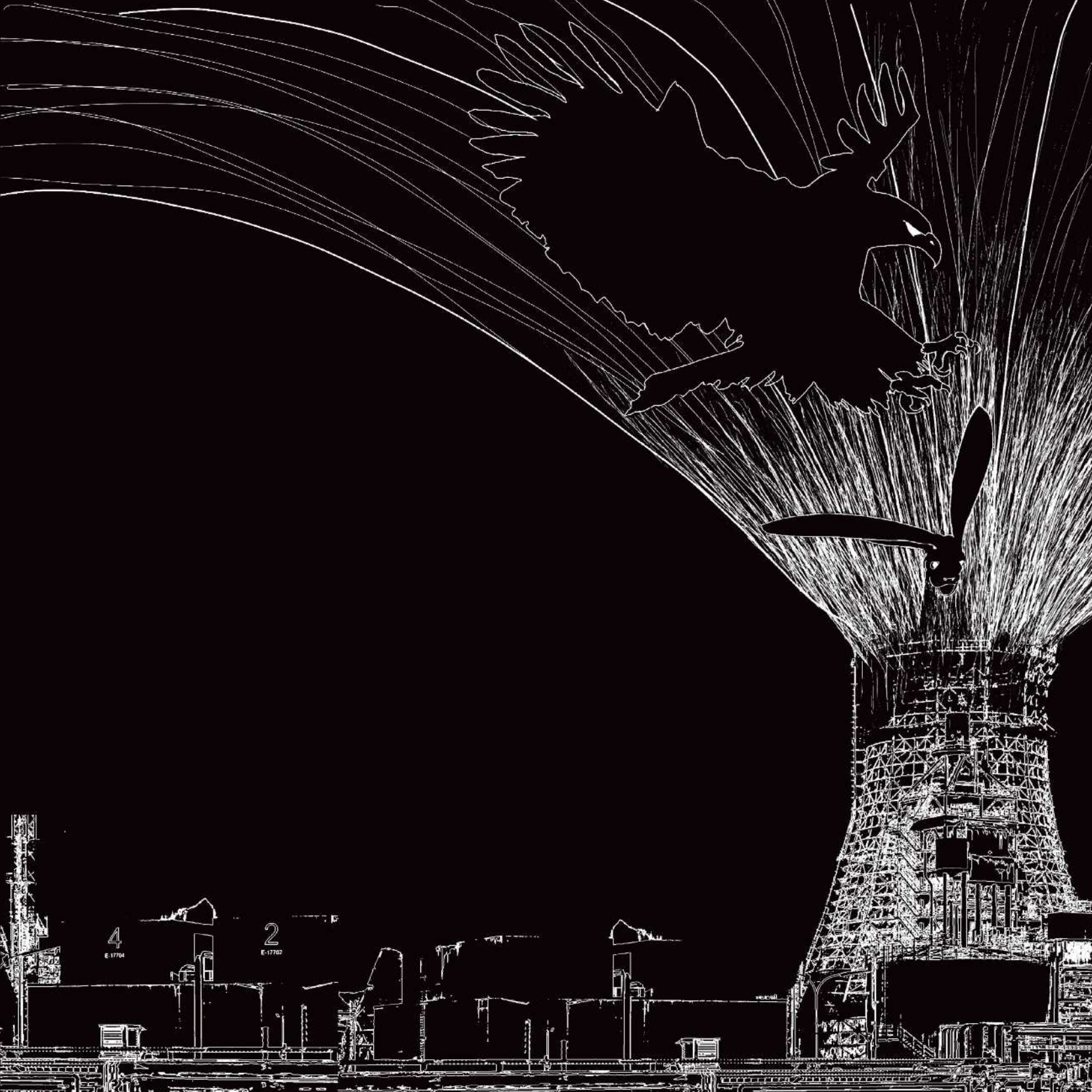
ROOM 2

ONE FOR SORROW

HELEN ERIKSEN

For those driven away from their lives in the crises of war and weather.

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6

IN SEARCH OF NEW BEGINNINGS: ON POETRY AND HOPE

SIGURD TENNINGEN

According to Spinoza's (2000) definition, love is 'nothing but pleasure with the accompaniment idea of an external cause' (Part III, proposition 13, scholium). Ever since I encountered this phrase some fifteen years ago, I have been carrying it with me. What struck me then, and what I still find so appealing about it, is its rationalist simplicity – which, of course, yields to Spinoza's 'geometrical' mode of philosophy. A masterpiece of seventeenth-century Enlightenment thought, the most striking feature of *Ethics* is its array of definitions, axioms, propositions, demonstrations and corollaries. Starting from basic definitions and propositions, Spinoza rigorously develops his theory of affects. However, far from confining itself to 'psychology' or 'emotions' in a narrow sense, Spinoza's theory is crucial to both his ethical thinking and epistemology, thus placing affects and emotions at the very core of his rationalist system.

The topic of this essay is neither geometry nor love but rather an attempt to draw a connection between poetry and hope. As a work of language striving for

new sensations and interruptions of the habitual, poetry is always a search for new beginnings. Derived from the Greek word *ποίησις* ('creation'), one might even say that poetry encapsulates the idea of 'natality', which Hannah Arendt identifies both as a precondition for action and as commitment towards the other. However, instead of getting ahead of ourselves, I would like to start by asking a very simple question: is poetry an expression of hope? And if so, whose hope does it express? That of the poet? The reader? Of language as such? In some respects, it certainly is. I mean, how are we to perceive the many poems of fighting and resistance that blossom in periods of war and disaster if not as expressions of hope? And what about religious poetry or poetry of love? Even more modest poems fumbling with everyday experiences are often anticipating the desired outcome of a future event. However, poetry does not limit itself to articulating abstract emotions and sensations; it also generates these affects in me as a reader. Thus, poems may also be seen as catalysts, 'prime movers' that enable us to access these deep emotions of love, joy and hope.

Still, treating poetry as an expression of hope will quickly lead us into a series of paradoxes and troubles. First, how can we attribute hope to poems of merciless despair? Such a reading not only seems to be missing the point but can even be considered offensive to the poems (or poets) considered. I mean, what 'hope' could possibly be expressed in the most despairing poems of Paul Celan or Sylvia Plath, both of whom were masters in giving the sense of despair an almost universal expression? Second, how can we be sure that our idea of the poem is an adequate one? Instead of seeing literature as a continuation of our own concerns (thus contributing to the larger 'solutionism' where art, education and mental health practices are being mobilized as responses to various crises and threats), we should start by asking ourselves what the poem asks from us. Methodically, this means we should approach poetry in much the same manner as we meet newcomers – that is, in an attentive attempt at a 'close reading' of their wishes and desires.

Being human today tends to demand a strong capacity to cultivate hope. When orientating ourselves in the world, we cannot but acknowledge that some of the most important foundations of our existence are under attack. Just to name some of the most obvious challenges: on an ecological level, the planet's ecosystem is believed to be at a tipping point, threatening to spin into a destructive trajectory with little to no hope of recovery. On a political level, the liberal western democracies are moving fast towards an aggressive surveillance capitalism fuelled by our ever-increasing dependency on modern media technologies. However, lending our subjectivity to the big data corporations not only exposes us to unwanted attention

from the authorities. One might also argue that it narrows down the possibilities of subjectification and becoming (what this book refers to as an 'arrival of the I'). And as the current war in Ukraine has made clear, the Russian invasion is not only a disaster for the present population in the region. It also threatens to escalate into a full-range nuclear Armageddon wiping out the human condition of natality which Arendt (1998: 9) considers 'the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting'.

Truth content and poetic form

Faced with these concerns, it seems more adequate to feel fear and sorrow than hope and joy when orientating ourselves in the world. However, what is fear and what is sorrow? Again, we might turn to *Ethics* for clean-cut definitions: while Spinoza (2000) holds *laetitia* ('joy') to be 'man's passage from a less to a greater perfection', *tristitia* ('sorrow') is considered 'man's passage from a greater to a less perfection' (Part III, proposition 11, scholium). The simplicity of these definitions reveals a symmetry foreign to modern thought, where the idea of language as a transparent medium for exposing axiomatic truths has been thoroughly questioned, not least by poets. Reading *Ethics* in the wake of 150 years of poetic modernism highlights a linguistic optimism in Spinoza's geometrical reasoning. Moving on in the Spinozist catalogue of affects, we learn that *spes* ('hope') is 'an inconstant pleasure which has arisen from the image of a thing that is future or past, about whose outcome we are in doubt' (Spinoza 2000: Part III, proposition 18, scholium 2). Compared with joy and sorrow, this definition is far more complex. Not only is hope an inconstant emotion prone to doubt and instability, but it is also subject to the temporal dimensions of the past and the future. Furthermore, hope is generated by *imagine rei* ('the image of a thing'), which again ties it to the imagination.

What separates hope from the more immediate affects of joy and sorrow, then, is a whole set of conditions that involves not only an anticipation of the future but also the mediation of a given 'thing' in and through the imagination. At least to me, this is part of the link between poetry and hope, where the possibility (or lack thereof) of an imagined future resides. An illuminating example of this can be found in Nadezhda Mandelstam's (1983) book *Hope against Hope* – which was written in memory of her late husband, the great Russian poet Osip Mandelstam. The story not only resonates with the threatening figure of the present autocrat in the Kremlin but also says something crucial, I think, about poetry, hope and resistance.

In the book, Nadezhda (a name that means 'hope' in Russian, providing a pun in the title) recounts the years of terror and despair under Stalin's rule that led up to Osip's imprisonment and death in a Soviet prison camp in 1938. Before his arrest, Mandelstam had tried to compose an ode to Stalin in order to clear the air with the authorities. Working on the poem, however, he was so paralyzed with fear that he had to change all his writing habits to overcome his inner obstacles. For instance, he would not allow any eating at the dinner table he used for work, thus forcing Nadezhda to take her meals at the windowsill. Often while writing, he would suddenly jump up and begin cursing himself. As Nadezhda recalls, he would then pace through the room mumbling to himself, as if he were under the direct command of Stalin's 'Evil Spirit'.

In the end, he was able to produce an ode which Nadezhda labels 'an artificially conceived poem' (1983: 200). Readers familiar with the standard eulogizing poems of the genre will easily recognize the canonical features of the poem: the father figure, the warrior, the wise ruler who leads humanity into a future where he both shapes and divines. These are the opening lines of the poem's first stanza, translated from Russian by Greogy Freidin:

> Were I to take up the charcoal for the sake of supreme praise—
> For the sake of the eternal joy of drawing—
> I would divide the air into clever angles
> Both carefully and anxiously.
> To make the present echo in his features
> (My art bordering on audacity),
> I would speak about him who has shifted the world's axis.
>
> (Mandelstam cited in Coetzee 1991: 74)

More chilling and uncanny than glorifying, this stale piece of official poetry does not live up to the vividness and clarity of Mandelstam's other writings. Far from expressing the joy produced by 'man's passage from a less to a greater perfection' (Spinoza 2000), the poem portrays the fantasies of absolute power.[1] Commenting on her husband's agony, Nadezhda Mandelstam writes that a 'poet's understanding of reality comes to him together with his verse, which always contains some element of anticipation of the future' (1983: 198).

I believe that poetry and hope merge in anticipation of the future through the medium of the verse. Surely, it is not a prophetic ability of the poet but rather a

question of expressing a specific 'truth content' (to borrow an expression from Adorno) in poetic form. Truth in art is not so much a question of stating the right propositions or articulating logically consistent syllogisms. Instead, what we should look for in an artwork is a kind of anticipation of that which does not yet exist – or in more elegiac modes, what has ceased to exist. Contrary to the truths of philosophy and reflexive reasoning, truth content in art remains non-propositional or even 'negative'.[2] The role of the reader, then, is to extract and unfold this truth content into an emotional state, which can then be the starting point for more conceptual thinking. To pursue this line of thought further, I will now move on to reading a short poem by the Norwegian writer Tor Ulven. As we shall see, what is expressed in a poem is not stated in a propositional manner. Instead, it reveals itself as the inner content of the poetic form.

Language, action, natality

A major figure of Scandinavian post-war literature, Tor Ulven (1953–95) is generally perceived as a dark and pessimistic poet who centred on motifs of death and disappearance. Like Sylvia Plath and Paul Celan, he was not unfamiliar with sorrow and despair. Also, like them, he tragically ended up taking his own life at the age of 42. Before committing suicide, Ulven spent several years in self-imposed isolation in his apartment in a suburb north of Oslo. Reflecting on this situation later in life, Ulven (2013) looked back at it as an experience that allowed him to 'read a terrible number of books'. Being indeed an exceptionally well-read writer and at the same time standing outside the academic orthodoxies of his time, his work bears the mark of a highly original and rather idiosyncratic imagination. Owing a lot to the philosophical pessimism of nineteenth-century thinkers such as Schopenhauer and Leopardi, many of Ulven's texts harbour the wish to escape individual consciousness and subjectivity. Often in search of liminal experiences, his work has been interpreted as an investigation into the posthumous condition, which he sardonically refers to as 'the darkness at the other end of the tunnel' (Ulven 2013b: 433).

In his only published interview, conducted in 1993 when he was in the midst of a poetic raptus that resulted in a series of genuinely innovative books, Ulven stated that he is 'principally interested in writing unpleasant books; books that trouble the reader, afflict him' (Ulven cited in Hagen and Schram Hoel 2013: n.pag.). At the same time, his work expresses a strong sensation of sympathy and relief when confronted with death. Does this mean that Ulven himself saw hope in death and

finality? Well, it surely depends on what we mean by hope, but I think it would be unwise to exclude the possibility. If we return to Spinoza's definition of hope as an inconstant pleasure arising from the image of an unknown future or past event, we may find the following poem by Ulven to be an expression of hope in the face of finality and death:

> Come sit
> with me
> my dear,
>
> tell me
> about the time
> when I no longer
> exist.

(Ulven 2013a: 191)[3]

What a strange scene! Someone (let us refer to it as 'the poetic I') asks the beloved one to sit by their side and talk about the future in which they are no longer present. While the first stanza signals a tenderness towards the beloved one, the second transforms this tenderness into a caring curiosity for an unknown future. When faced with its own death, the poetic I does not flee into despair or aggressive self-subsistence (which seems to be the inner law of all horrendous aggression and imperial warfare). Instead, it opens itself up to a time when it will no longer play a part.

When faced with the finality of the self, the poetic I turns to the future of the beloved one. As such, the poem echoes the ethical position developed by Arendt in her discussion of natality. Picking up on Augustine's distinction between *inititum* ('the beginning of man') and *principium* ('the beginning of the world'), Arendt stresses the fundamental meaning of that which is shared between all humans: the world as a common middle ground. To Arendt, this distinction between the individual and the common precisely underlines the ethical commitment towards the beginning of the other. As the poem suggests, every beginning is also a beginning in language, as language itself is seen to be the other side of all action that transcends mere production or work: 'This revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them – that is, in sheer human togetherness' (Arendt 1998: 180).

Furthermore, the hope expressed in the poem is not aimed at any specific outcome or goal. It is not a hope for anything; it does not conform to the formula of a wish. Instead, the poem expresses what we might call an 'intransitive' hope – that is, a hope not having or containing any direct object. Commenting on Spinoza's (2000) understanding of hope in *The Ethics*, Deleuze (2007) focuses exactly on this kind of intransitivity. Contrary to ideas, Deleuze (2007) says that hope should not be regarded as a secondary expression of a primary affect. While ideas are 'a mode of thought defined by its representational character' (expressing something outside themselves), affects are a mode of thought 'which doesn't represent anything' (Deleuze 2007: n.pag.). Deleuze (2007) goes on to say that there is 'an idea of the loved thing, to be sure, there is also an idea of something hoped for, but hope as such or love as such represents nothing, strictly nothing' (n.pag.). To me, this non-transitive modality of hope comes close to pointing out the truth content expressed in the poem. As Nadezhda Mandelstam writes, a true poem always 'contains some element of anticipation of the future' (1993: 198). Returning to our initial question of whether poetry should be considered an expression of hope, we may want to 'conclude' by affirming the assumption, at least when it comes to a poem such as Ulven's. Reading it in the light of the current disasters and sufferings in Ukraine and elsewhere, we could even answer by rephrasing it into a proposition: *the poem hopes*.

Notes

1. South African novelist and Nobel Prize laureate J. M. Coetzee even goes as far as saying that the ode *expresses the madness* of Stalin. In an article commenting the ode, he writes that the

> task in reading Mandelstam's ode should not, then, be a task of searching it for an ineffable sincerity or insincerity, but of searching for the nature of its madness and, more importantly, for signs of reflection within the ode upon the ode's own madness.
>
> (Coetzee 1991: 74)

2. As Gerhard Richter has pointed out in an essay on the non-propositional truth content in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, what Adorno

> wishes for in the work of art as well as in philosophy is […] a mimesis of what does not yet exist, the negative traces of a futurity that can be neither predicted nor programmed in advance but that nevertheless inscribe themselves into the art work

> and into the philosophy that enters a relation with that artwork, as a nonidentical and negatively charged otherness.
>
> (Richter 2006: 129)

3. My translation. Ulven's (2013a) Norwegian original, which was first published in his book *Søppelsolen. Memorabilia* in 1989, reads as follows: 'Sitt hos meg/ kjære, fortell// om den tiden/ da jeg ikke// finnes mer.'

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7

BEING HELPFUL: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF TRYING AND ITS COMPANIONS

ROLF SUNDET

Draw a distinction.

(Spencer-Brown 1979: 1)

Introducing the first-person perspective

In this text the dominating voice is my voice. I am speaking and writing from the position of the 'I' that I am. There are no pretentious acts of being something or someone else than I am. There is to be no objective, impartial perspective here, and no modifying statement that reduces my experience to the perspective of others. The material here is first-person accounts, with imbedded external perspectives and

third-person accounts and I, the author, am this first person. From the perspective of research methodology, this text belongs to the field of autoethnography.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is concerned with personal stories. It is a research method that allows the researcher to be the informant and to both bring forth something never previously encountered and compare his or her experiences with others within the same experiential domain of life. Often, autoethnography is directed at experiences that have been profound and emotionally disturbing and/or moving for the researcher/informant (Grant and Radcliffe 2015). Alvesson (2003) describes autoethnography as highly person-personalized texts with a strong inward-looking element.

What is then central is the personal experience of the researcher, where the data consist of the researcher's experiences (McLeod 2011). A central tenet of this research method can be formulated in the following manner: 'The central aim of an autoethnography study is not to provide a reflective, analytic account of some aspect of experience, but to allow the reader or audience to enter the experience itself' (McLeod 2011: 209). It is important how evocative the study is and how well it conveys emotions. Stated differently, what can the meeting with the research and its descriptions evoke in the reader and what is brought forth due to this process? One aspect of this making of certain realities is that what is brought forth may have the power to subvert taken-for-granted descriptions and perspectives and to transform aspects of people's lives that are experienced as oppressive and unjust. Especially sensations and emotions, as dispositions for action (Maturana 1988; Anjum 2016) give rise to a transformative power.

Although evoking sensations and emotional responses is a central part of autoethnography, human experiences are certainly more than sensations and emotions. Thoughts, images, words, sentences, stories and memories are just as much part of my direct experience of myself and the world I live in. Sensations and emotions, as dispositions for actions, can trigger stories and explanations that bring new and possibly subversive perspectives to the fore. Although life is more than the words we use, we cannot escape language with its possibility for different utterances and stories that can help us attend to that world. Words and utterances are part of life and thus bring life forth in a multitude of manners. The intertwining and entangling of words and sensations, utterances and emotions, become a generative spiral that together brings forth reality in its many diverse manifestations.

Lingis (2007) produces beautiful, invigorating, frightening, evocative first-person descriptions or reports that resonate with my experiences. To use his words: 'contentious and maybe, above all, (t)he sense of oneself that arises in a body in action is an *I can*' (Lingis 2007: 7–8, original emphasis). In the following, this 'I can' is not about success, about doing something to perfection, or as a necessary result. Here the 'I can' is about trying; I *can* try. It is about trying to do the best one can, trying to succeed, whatever that means, trying to reach a goal, and trying to do any task or action in a manner that fits with what I want and judge to be appropriate and best. In the words of one of the young informants in a qualitative study: 'No one can fully understand another person. But the way they (therapists) try, that is the only thing they do […] I see that they *really try* to understand; in that way, they show me they care' (Bøe 2021: 221, original emphasis).

The argument in this chapter is that I do become a responsible and ethically acting person, not in my successes in reaching a goal, realizing an ideal or fulfilling an ethical principle. It is in my trying that my ethics and my responsibility emerge and show themselves. Success, a goal reached, a best practice realized, my own personal values actualized in practice, depend upon so much more than me. They depend on each of us being and working together. It depends on the land, environment, country, culture, system, neighbourhood, family and kin that I am part of and live in. There are predicaments, constraints, and events that are beyond my control, but there are also goals and actions that can be successfully reached and realized only in collaboration with others. Maybe most of the things in our life are things we need to do together in order to fulfil what we want, and also to be helped to respond to the constraints and demands reality places on us.

The actions and trying addressed here are in the domain of psychotherapy and mental health work. This is not primarily about what good, effective or correct psychotherapy and mental health work are, but the experience of being embedded in a field of experience and life practices where trying is central. Not only trying to be helpful but also trying to create a text that is just as much a performance, as a report of experiences and practices of helpfulness. What can it evoke in you, dear reader, just as much as giving you a meaningful story?

My work

For most of my life I have worked in mental health services, for 35 years as a psychologist. My contact with therapeutic work now is through being a supervisor in that field.

In my therapeutic work, I have found that (the experience of) trying is at the core; trying to be helpful, to be therapeutic, professional, personal, effective and more. At the same time, I have been aware that trying too hard could be experienced by others as me being invasive, paternalistic, dominating, inattentive and more. My trying then could lead to diverse consequences both for the other and me. Consequence comes from the Latin *sequi*, to follow, pointing towards some serial order, which again could be experienced as a causal relationship. Trying then is about what could or would follow from what I do, how I respond to the other and what follows from this, within the therapeutic context. This chapter will investigate and reflect upon my own experiences of trying to be helpful and therapeutic, with a special focus on causation. This special focus is necessitated by my experience that in my living and trying what I do has consequences, and what others do has consequences for me and others, including the environment I live in, the animate and inanimate objects that inhabit this environment and all it contains. I experience my world and life as causal. The material investigated here is my own personal experiences and account of trying to be a helpful therapist and it must therefore be classified under the methodological approach of autoethnography. At the same time, the story part of this text inevitably suggests a third-person account. In this way, the text in itself must be seen as a hybrid or something between a first-person and a third-person account.

Explanation and understanding, predictions and interpretations, difference in itself and ethics

Bøe et al. (2015) refer to Levinas (1996), who points out that language is commonly seen as hermeneutic, in the sense that we understand and make meaning through language, and expressive, in the sense that the speaker also presents him or herself through language. However, Levinas asks whether the ethical dimension is not then forgotten, in the sense of responsibility towards the other as the addressee, which is where all speaking begins. In this way, the ethics of Levinas places the other and alterity at the centre. In meeting the other person 'there is absolute foreignness of an unassumable alterity […] (and) (r)esponsibility for the other does not amount to a thought going back to an *a priori* idea, previously given to the "I think" and rediscovered by the "I think"' (Levinas 2006: 148). This is an ethics of singularity, beyond principles and pre-prepared descriptions and knowledge.

This points towards a situation where whatever perspective I have for my accounts, a first- or third-person perspective, the ethical dimension does not suggest these perspectives, but rather what could be named a first-person question.

It concerns what is asked of me, not as a generalized entity with an approximate identity, described in either a first- or third-person perspective, but as the actual subject that I am. What matters is that I come forth, respond, and act as Rolf, the actual living subject that I am. For me this is how I understand the concept of subjectification and the term 'the arrival of the "I"' given in the work of Gert Biesta (2022: vii).

> *She came to the session and said she had fallen in love with me. I responded as I was trained and interpreted it as 'transference'. Her response was anger. She told me, in a harsh tone, that she had come to me to get to know her feelings. When I told her that these were something else than she experienced them as, I disqualified and diminished her feelings, which she strongly objected to and refused to accept. Her message was that I simply had to take her feelings seriously.*

In this situation, I was knocked out of the world of psychological theories and into a very personal choice. Could I, Rolf, be a psychotherapist that worked together with a person and patient of mine who was in love with me, and where transference or another description was irrelevant; the only relevance was that I was I. I took the personal and risky choice of saying yes, and I have never regretted it, because she opened up the possibility for me to be me. Experientially and existentially this was one of those moments where the term 'the arrival of the I' gives meaning to me. It also opened up areas of dialogue that could not have taken place if I had contentiously chosen the general path, seeing her feelings just as an example of transference. Instead, a new meaning was created.

Language, in the expressive sense, and hermeneutics as meaning-making, although distinct, go hand in hand (Bøe 2021). When these are seen in the context of research, they are most often connected to qualitative methods and establishing understanding through interpretation (McLeod 2011). This can be positioned in contrast to quantitative methods in the sense that the two approaches use different kinds of data: words and numbers (Biesta 2020). The aggregation of numerical data through statistical methods and procedures provides explanations and predictions. Explanations and predictions are the domain of quantitative research and understanding and interpretations are the domain of qualitative research. At first glance, numbers and words seem to belong to two different incommensurable worlds, but one can argue for communality between these two perspectives or 'research paradigms'. This can be seen when we contrast these two domains

and the ethics of Levinas. In both qualitative and quantitative research, we are looking for similarities in order to aggregate them and classify them into classes of approximate identities. As stated earlier, this can be done from both a first- and a third-person perspective.

By approximate identities I mean that elements are grouped on the basis of similarities, while differences between elements are either downgraded or not taken into account. Here, differences are a matter of degree and always secondary and as effects of similarities classified as generalizations or approximate identities. These groups or classes of approximate identities become our generalized knowledge: our knowledge at the group level and of the group. For instance, a psychiatric diagnosis of depression means that people who show similarities in mood and in other aspects can be judged to be similar enough to warrant membership in an approximate identity group named depression. The following supports this: 'There are variations between humans, but there also is a relatively uniform human nature. This means that investigations that work on large groups of humans will probably work for random individuals' (Kennair et al. 2002: 9).

The ethics of Levinas points another way, to alterity, otherness, and difference. In contrast with Kennair et al. (2002), this can be stated in the following manner: 'plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live' (Arendt 1998: 8) and 'each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world' (Arendt 1998: 178). For these authors, and others such as Gilles Deleuze (1994), difference is the pivotal point, not similarities and identities. It may be that from a philosophical point of view, it is not appropriate to bring together the perspectives of Levinas, Arendt and Deleuze. From my point of view as a practising therapist, however, it strengthens my resolve to attend to the individual person in psychotherapy as foreign, unique and different.

Deleuze (1994) in particular provides me with another approach to the difference that is helpful in this resolve. He talks about the difference in itself. I do not pretend to know what Deleuze means by this, but what is interesting is that it evokes thoughts in me that make a difference the primary start and end point for everything. In an approximate identity there are differences, just as in a randomized controlled trial there are outliers that are cancelled out. For me, in opposition to this view, any person, any patient, or any colleague, parent or other persons relevant to me and my patient are primarily differences in themselves (Deleuze 1994). We could omit the differences and only consider the similarities, but that

would be to reduce the persons to approximate identities, to generalizations. What I have learned as a practitioner is that generalizations only exist in texts, not in the real world, although they are certainly part of this reality as precisely that: parts of texts.

What comes into my office is not a generalization, but a unique, irreplaceable subject (Biesta 2013), as Hannah Arendt states in the quote above on plurality. Every person's uniqueness emerges from and is dependent upon relationships with other persons, not to mention relations to the environment, geography, landscape, town, neighbourhoods and all the animate and inanimate objects that we meet on our life's journey. This means that what we do when we create a generalization, or what I have come to call an approximate identity, is to take away all these relationships, situations, events and contexts. All these provide opportunities for each of us to be a difference, and through that also make a difference in the world: to matter as those that we are and are becoming in this life journey. An example is my predicament in meeting a patient who had fallen in love with me. What would it mean for practice and research if the difference in itself was always the last thing or aspect I related to and followed? Let me give another example from psychotherapy practice and research.

Psychotherapy and outcome: An example of an alternative third-person description

In the field of psychotherapy practice and research, there is a debate about what works in therapy. One version is that what works are theory-specific therapy packages that can be given a manualized form which therapists should follow in order to achieve the desired outcome. Such theory-specific methods have an approximate identity that grows out of theoretical ingredients that have some common or similar idea as their basis. In cognitive therapy, for instance, thinking and cognition would have to be upheld both as an explanation of the causes of problems and as the healing elements. Such a method of identical theory specification could then be compared with methods which were specified by other theoretical ideas, such as unconscious conflict or lack of emotional affirmation. Difference arises here as a result of juxtaposing and comparing two methods that each has its theory-specific identity. Difference is thus a side effect of comparing two identities. This is a question of establishing differential effects between two or more theory-specific methods with different approximate

identities. The randomized control trial is clearly the best way of establishing such differential effects of different therapy method identities.

Now there is a problem. Comparisons, especially using meta-analysis (Wampold and Imel 2015), in fact show few or no differences in outcome between theory-specific methods. This has led to another version of what works in psychotherapy. This is the 'common factor' hypothesis, often called the 'Do-do bird' effect. Taken from Alice in Wonderland, it says: 'Everybody has won and so all must have prizes' (Duncan and Miller 2000: 56). Here it is stated that there are similarities across theory-specific methods, and it is these similarities across the methods that make therapy work. Here we could say that it is not approximate identities on the level of a theory-specific method that are operative, but approximate identities on the level of the qualities, skills and actions of the therapist. These similarities are then grouped together into 'factors', which again are approximate identities at a higher descriptive level.

Both theory-specific methods and common factors are based on the idea that what works in psychotherapy are similar actions, either identified on the level of theory or principles and factors (Bertelsen and Bøe 2016). Even when we expand what works into what works for whom, it is still expressed in these approximate identities on these different levels. The theory-specific method and the common factors need to be fitted to the actual person in therapy, but it is still these methods or factors that are administered in different ways. Similarities are still the rule and differences arise in comparisons. For each person the principles of the theory-specific therapy have to be fitted and formed in a particular way, but it still confirms theory specification as what gives a result, and the same applies to common factors. The therapeutic alliance is still regarded as what works, although it is given a form that fits the unique person in therapy.

What if that which makes a difference is not principles and factors, but difference in itself, whatever that is and means (Deleuze 1994)? Let me look at the common factor hypothesis and its effects, not as a result of something similar and common, but as a result of difference in itself. The common factor hypothesis arose from results that showed cases of measured success of outcomes, and the assumption that these outcomes were the result of a similarity with events that could be classified as examples of the therapeutic alliance or empathy. As stated earlier, this means that although there are differences in what is classified, these are excluded or at least placed in the background, just seen as unimportant varieties within an approximate identity, i.e. the theoretical principle or common factor. What if, at the actual level of practice, in the present moment of the actions performed, it

is the difference in itself that is decisive and operative? Although we can always find something that brings things into membership of a class, an approximate identity, it is the idiosyncratic, singular, specific action of the therapist, how the approximate identity is realized as a singular and unique event, as a difference in itself that becomes decisive in helping the person. On this basis, what is helpful is what is experienced as unique and singular in the present moment and will not necessarily arise in the same form again. Here we can see the alternative third-person description that therapy works because the relationship between patient and therapist is at each point in therapy a unique, reciprocal event where the decisive part is that the therapy can be a difference in itself for the other that is helpful in the present moment and is a response to what the patient does or presents as a difference in itself to the therapist.

Bertelsen and Bøe (2016) give a beautiful example of a young man who, when questioned about what works, stated that his psychologist was the best in the world. When asked what made him the best, he replied that he was 'quirky'. Is 'quirkiness' a new common factor or part of a known one? If one is focused on something that is similar to other experiences, one could maybe say that this is a part of the therapeutic relationship that could be called genuineness or maybe empathy (Norcross and Wampold 2018). Again, this would be at the price of reducing an idiosyncratic and singular event and relationship into something similar, and the account of a one-time relationship with one-time events would be lost, giving the impression that it was the similarity with other such events that was decisive. The result would be that the 'quirkiness' of being quirky would be lost. Difference in itself means here quirkiness as a singular event and aspect of what the therapist does, not to be found in any other situation or relationship. It is the differentness as a singularity that makes a difference here and not any similarity understood as something that can be classified into a class, concept, or, as I have called them here, approximate identities.

Why is this important? It is important because the centrality of generalized knowledge building on similarities creates the illusion that what works for the many will work for the one. The alternative suggestion here is that the reality of the situation is that both within a theory-specific method and the common factors perspective, it is the difference in itself that is decisive. This reveals itself in the therapist's ability and skill in making the theory-specific and common factors fit the client and her or his uniqueness. Further, we actually have situations where some of these different ways of realizing approximate identities do not work, but they also include the possibility of bringing forth something new, radically new

and different in the sense of the quirkiness that Bertelsen and Bøe report on. This means that it is the variety of ways that therapy is realized that is what makes it work, and in the example from Bertelsen and Bøe example, the best therapist in the world is best because he is never quirky in the same manner.

The third-person descriptive level that centralizes similarities or approximate identities does not give a helpful account of what actually happens in therapy. Third-person descriptions can therefore only suggest practices, but in actual practice what works must be made or created together with the client. What helps us is always to search for and address the difference in itself. At the same time, such differences enable the creation of new approximate identities; any attending and pointing out something as new does this on the basis of difference as difference in itself. Creatively, this new, previously unknown element can be named and then compared with other approximate identities with the effect of making the unknown 'known'. In this comparison, difference becomes secondary, and we are locked into our new description of the world or aspect of the world. This is why looking at knowledge as something similar and known becomes a problem. On the assumption that the world is always richer than, and transcends, our descriptions of it, difference in itself will either force us to attend to the real as that which we do not know, or retreat into the illusion of being the masters of the universe: we already know it all.

Psychotherapy is about the reality of people's everyday life, always revealing forth something never met before. Psychotherapy will therefore always have a component of not knowing what to do, where 'stuckness', for instance, is where we are closest to the predicament and reality of the client, and where new differences in themselves must be searched out, attended to, or created in a way that makes a difference in the specific situation and predicament of the person in need of help (McLeod and Sundet 2020). Standardization, theory-specific formulations and the establishing of common factors are therefore a starting point for therapy, but always under the constraint of the responses of the client to what we do. It is in meeting such constraints that difference in itself, not similarities, must be searched for and attended to. For me, this is made clear in the following experience as a therapist.

A day at the office

I look at my watch. It is five minutes to nine. In five minutes the family will be here. A feeling comes over me. What if they don't arrive. I could just sit here. Maybe do some administrative work instead of entering their world. The feeling

is not one of dread, but almost. The telephone rings and my colleague in reception simply states that the family is here. So they came, I sigh, so they came. I start walking towards reception. I am at the end of the corridor; I can see them, girl, boy, mother and father, looking at me. Mother smiling, father with a stern, but pleasant face, the girl a bit shy, the boy tense. At this moment the feeling close to dread evaporates and is gone. In an instant an arising attentiveness that making me feel that I am leaving my world and entering theirs, a sort of extreme alertness takes hold of my body, together with a growing excitement about what will happen and where will we go today. I say, 'Hello, how was your journey here today?' gesturing and inviting them to follow me towards the therapy room. With my hand I invite them to sit down and I serve the traditional tea or coffee as we always do in our team. My extreme awareness brings the boy's tension and apprehensiveness to my attention and I hear myself asking him, without thinking: 'How did your football match end on Sunday?' He lifts his face and looks at me, then at his father. His father replies, 'He scored one goal and assisted another'. 'Wow!', I say as the boy's face changes from tense to something I feel is pride. I hear myself say, 'Great', and before I manage to continue the girl says: 'I got a new doll', smiling at me. Again a 'wow' from my lips and the words: 'Two goals and one doll, things are happening in this family'. Both boy and girl look proud, and then hear their mother say, 'Yes, a lot of things are happening, many good things and there are changes, small, but important. I don't really know how to describe these small changes, but overall things are better, although there is still a lot of quarrelling between the children and I think my husband and I have a thing or two to talk about'.

Again I get the feeling of rising tensions when meeting the face of the father and an almost rumbling sensation in my stomach. I hear myself say, 'Although there are all these changes, I get this feeling that what the two of you need to talk about could be stressful. Am I on the right track when I feel and think this?' The parents look at each other, father sighing, mother looking apprehensive, and I get the sinking feeling of moving into difficult territory, territory that still is wordless, but full of small tensions, questions, images and, feelings, and I know I need to start asking some questions in order to find my way in this field of tensions. I hear my inner voice telling me: 'Isn't this what John Shotter says therapy is all about? How to move on?' Right now I do not know how to move on, so I move on by attending again to the boy and girl, saying; 'Two goals and a doll, what does this say about this family, this family where there are also tensions and trouble sometimes'. The father smiles, looks at me, then at his

children and says: 'Yes, this will be hard work for a psychologist, but if he scores some goals, he might get a reward. Would that be a doll?' Everybody laughs -we are on our way.

Causation

Why do I do what I am doing here? Why does the boy react as he does and the mother and father speak and comment as they do? Something leads to something else; I cannot escape it, it grabs hold of me, making me attend, respond, act. Something leads to something else, there are causes here, and they are real. It is real because I sense and experience the intensity of it all, something that affects my body. It takes up residence in me, possesses me, it scares me. It is foreign and I know I cannot escape taking part in it.

Over the years I have come to realize that whatever position I take on explanations and predictions or understanding through interpretations, at best, they are 'a memory bank' that can give suggestions for practice, especially in moments of being stuck and experiencing detrimental developments or results. It is here, in my stuckness and not knowing what to do, that stepping back from what is happening announces its entry. I am no longer in what John Shotter names 'withness'; instead I take residence in what he calls 'aboutness' (Shotter 2010: vii). An inner dialogue becomes more directed at what I should or could do now. I am activating my 'memory bank' of third-person accounts filled with approximate identities from other situations, persons, theories, narratives and memories. The problem here is that this 'memory bank' of explanations and predictions, interpretations and understandings was originally made from a vantage point outside the actual therapeutic relationship that I am part of.

Traditional accounts of causation are connected to explanation and prediction. As stated earlier, this is the notion that by having some generalized knowledge, one can predict what will happen. In the therapeutic context this would mean that from a starting point like a diagnosis, I should be able to predict what kind of method would be helpful, and choose a method before I start the treatment. Both in my own practice and meeting patients who have tried treatment with other therapists, this is a rule with an extremely high number of exceptions, so many that there are, from a research point of view, good reasons to state that this is not a good rule. One alternative to causal explanations, referred to above, is to gain an understanding of the other and her or his actions, predicament and suffering. This is done through

making an interpretation of the other's experiences and the factors and reasons for or meanings of his or her state and actions. Often such interpretations are based on a theory about the phenomenon to be understood. In my example of meeting the family, a central experience is that I have trouble making such interpretations in the present moment of our therapeutic work. Instead, I am drawn into experiencing the family, myself and our relationship in the present moment more as bodily events involving sensations, points of attention and perceptions than as reflective cognitions, clear inner verbalizations and explanations.

However, I think about my practice, over the years the idea has taken hold of me that I need to look at causation, at the fact that something leads to something else. Especially in the atmosphere of contemporary evidence-based practices, the need for something else has arisen (Sundet 2021). This is not so much an intellectual and cognitively oriented endeavour; it is emotional in the sense that I feel compelled, almost like an obsession, drawn and unable to let go of the idea. Like the American cavalry officer John Dunbar in the film *Dancing with Wolves*, I am drawn towards befriending and becoming part of the life of something I experience as foreign and potentially dangerous. I must become part of it, participate for real, just as much as understanding from a distance. I must let myself arrive as the 'I' I am.

Dispositionalism

Rani Lill Anjum states: 'science deals with causation' (2016: 426), and causation is a basic feature of reality. Mumford and Anjum (2014) suggest a dispositional ontology where 'particular causes and effects are genuinely connected rather than merely conjoined' (Anjum 2016: 426). In any situation or event, there are inherent features that 'have a natural tendency towards certain effects and sometimes these produce effects, other times they don't. In dispositional ontology there is no necessity of effect, given a cause. Causes tend to have effects' (426). The core idea is that dispositions as real causal powers exist and they can 'contribute to or counteract a certain effect' (426), and causes are not about perfect regularities. A dispositional view of 'a cause is something that tends towards its effect with stronger or weaker intensities' (426). Causes are real dispositions, not statistical regularities.

Dispositionalism holds the idea that causation is more complex and context-sensitive than the traditional view connected to randomized controlled designs. Causation involves tendencies towards an outcome, rather than a guarantee of

an outcome (Anjum 2016). This especially concerns the relationship between generalized knowledge on the group level and how to translate this to a single case. Randomized controlled trials

> (are) saying little about the essence of complex and context-sensitive causation, and how this relates to single instances. In this sense, translating probabilities from large groups to individuals is failing to utilize and harness the richness of causal processes that can be understood from single instances.
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> (Kerry et al. 2012: 1010)

A randomized controlled trial can be seen as a method that builds on a frequency theory of causation. Dispositionalism, on the other hand, supports a singularity view of causation which allows for the appearance of a cause a single time under the sky of eternity. In practical psychotherapeutic work, we therefore need to attend to and identify, or at least investigate, actual events, aspects, things, factors and more as possible dispositions that can lead to an effect and are unique in the above singularity sense. Within this approach, randomized controlled trials only indicate and point out areas of causation on the group level, and in actual practice such areas of causation must be translated into actualities that alone or together with other dispositions give rise to effects.

Therapeutic work

In my work as a therapist I have felt a need for a manner of thinking that supports therapy as a sequential event where we move from a past present moment into a new or following present moment, meeting possible future present moments through our anticipations (Deleuze 1994; Roberts 2005; Bøe et al. 2014). Inherent is thinking about causes as being related to as many as possible aspects of life and living that influence the state and actions of the persons in need of help. Such an account also needs to make room for my qualitative experiences of causes both as actual and as intensities that could be on the verge of being actualized, and at the same time as something that does not necessitate an effect. The world of therapy, in my everyday experience, is not of a kind where approximate identities lead with necessity to the same effect, and where certainty follows from how we account for causation in the practice of therapy based on such approximate identities. What I need in order to

accommodate my experiential world as a therapist is an account of causation without determinism. My candidate here is thus dispositionalism and its singularity view of causation (Anjum 2020). With this, the naming of difference in itself, foreignness and the unique that is a central part of this chapter are brought into contact with the concept of causation.

Another day at the office

The father is leaning towards me, I feel his anger in my body when his words and tone of voice hit me: 'I'll tell you what you need to concentrate on if you are going to be any help for us and not like those other shitheads at the outpatient clinic who were just forcing us to tell stories about the past and our son's failures, not focusing on what's important. We have to stop the bullying at school, you've got to get him help with maths and tell his maths teacher to behave like a normal person and not like an idiot - and on top of that we're so worn out that both me and my wife need a break so you have to call our doctor and convince him that we're in serious trouble due to this terrible situation we're in. You need to get us on sick leave or everything will break down. No more talking, we need some action'. The message is clear. The force of all the aspects of life that have accumulated clears a way for feelings and sensations of reluctance and questioning. I suddenly know that I have to act or I will lose this family, and my words are clear and precise: 'We need to make a plan of action to clear this up. I need your help to make a list of all those aspects, things, events and situations and experiences you've met and had, because my experience is that all those things come together and create the crisis you're in now, but first, is there anything I need to attend to right away?' 'Call our doctor now' is the answer from the father. I pick up the phone and ask: 'What's his number?'

There is not one single cause here, but a series of aspects and events that reveals a clear effect on the verge of being actualized: a family in crisis and possible break-down. Experientially, every aspect is like being hit by some force through tone of voice, bodily expressions and the meaning of the words. Again, it is not one single thing, but the totality of the 'event package' that confronts me and the tendencies or disposition that I have experienced as reluctance to act and inner pressure to ask questions are transformed into a clear experience of what to do. The thought that breaks through, taking in the situation and looking at it from a distance both in the

present moment, makes me act. We need to attend to and act on all these aspects that confront the family, and I need help from them to make a plan that might make change possible. At the same time, from experience, I also know that in a crisis one needs to attend immediately in the session to whatever is most pressing for the family – here to call the doctor – because in a crisis any relief increases tolerance for the other aspects. I cannot do everything at once, and I know that all I can do is to try to make an impact in this crisis that might be helpful. Trying, then, is at the core of my actions, not knowing for certain where it will lead us, although I am certain that I must try. I also need to make it clear to the family that this is not something I can do alone. I need advice, support and feedback from them to ensure that what I contribute is helpful, and also to know what I cannot or should not do. This is collaborative work. It is a dance between being in 'withness' and understanding from a distance through 'aboutness'; it is dancing with dispositions, all the time involving trying; trying out different ways of thinking, speaking, doing and acting around and around in growing ellipses of development and movement into a future.

The present moment, small and big things, and people's uniqueness

By underlining theory as a memory bank with suggestions for practice, the self-evident but still necessary point is that therapy always takes place in the present moment. What is my experience of the present moment in therapy? I act in the moment with an anticipation of helpfulness in the future, that is, the next present moment. In the next present moment, I get a response to my action that either confirms or disconfirms my anticipation. Disconfirmation confirms the past, the last present moment, as not helpful, and a new response arises with new anticipations. This anticipation can have its source in my memory bank.

This is a third-person description of an experiential moment that happens within a few seconds (Stern 2004). Here actions and responses are 'small things' (a facial movement, a word, tone of voice) (Bøe et al. 2018). This is where psychotherapeutic collaboration shows its 'effects'. When there is stuckness, the quality of the processes changes from an immediate response to the other, to a conversation about what is happening. This is reflection as distancing meta-communication (Bateson 1973; McLeod 2018), where we look at what is happening. Here the themes might be 'big things' like 'our relationship', or 'are there tasks here that could be useful'. At the same time, there are always 'small things' happening in each present moment

within these 'bigger things' that the conversations are about (Topor et al. 2018; Skatvedt 2021). Small things are the differences in themselves in actions and responses that make common factors work.

My experience from therapy is that what is helpful or non-helpful, 'small' and/or 'big things', is decided by the actual unique persons involved, including me. We have commonalities and meeting points through being human beings and because we share culture and language (Smedslund 2012), but what is helpful or not will always be coloured both by our uniqueness and by the fact that we are the birthplace of the new: thoughts, ideas, actions, perspectives as dispositions and possible singular causes. This means that (the experience of) trying is central to doing therapy. I am never certain. I should never be certain (Nissen-Lie et al. 2010). Everything is tentative, all I can do is try out and try to be helpful, certainly using our common knowledge base, at the same time knowing that I might always be confronted with the new, the not-met-before, difference in itself. This is where I get my understanding of what it means to be 'at stake' (Biesta 2022: vii). It is in my trying, as when confronted with the demand of not understanding a real feeling, love, as something else than what it is. I show myself as I am and what I am becoming in my meeting with and response to the other. This is where the dimension of ethics takes over and where scientific knowledge, theory, explanations and interpretations fall short and all I can do is act in my anticipation, always running the risk of being wrong, unhelpful or at worst a cause of suffering. Trying, then, should always be accompanied by worries about my trying to be helpful. In this way we are also within the realm of the ethical as our obligation to meet the other as the foreigner, the difference in itself, which she or he is for us.

Closure

Maybe the central problem in psychotherapy, to use the words of Wittgenstein, is 'the craving for generality' (Wittgenstein 1958 cited in Moi 2017: 1), and those of us who have experienced other cravings, such as for cigarettes, sugar or food, know how difficult it is to not respond to this craving. The question certainly also becomes: Is this need for an alternative concept of causality part of a craving? Maybe cravings give us directions in our thinking and doing, and what this text tries to point out through causes as dispositions is a craving for individuality that is open towards the radically new, the foreign, that which has never been met before. It is beyond any description and places us in a real relationship in a

real world where our responses and acts matter. This means that as a therapist I am both constrained by and dependent upon the other's individuality as a radical alterity. It is at this point I again feel I am in the middle of ethics, and therefore, all description, understanding of causation, and any other things must give way to taking seriously the responsibility for the other and trying to respond in a manner that confirms the other as unique. Here the answer to the question of my acting responsibly and helpful lies in the other's answer and response to my response. Cravings, then, must be combated if they are cravings for certainty and security by turning the other into a generalization, but should be cherished if they support the risky business of trying to relate to the other as unique.

A simple, maybe banal and trivial conclusion, then, is that there is a gap between life lived and life talked or written about, although talking about and writing about is part of our lived life. A gap can be understood as a difference. The realization that has become clearer in writing this chapter is that this gap is there prior to anything that it divides. What it divides or distinguishes is not given as a ready-made approximate identity, rather difference in itself is an opportunity to create such identities and in this the identity is also a new difference that can be given as a multitude of identities, generalizations or names. Second, the gap, difference in itself, demands to be attended to in an ethical manner: to take the other as such difference, foreign, as something unknown. Third, this gap has implications for training in and practice of therapy. You can prepare yourself, be qualified and get to know the field of psychotherapy, its theories and described practices and you can practice this in specially designed training situations, role plays and other structured and simulated situations of actual therapy. The current heightened awareness of the necessity of training oneself and bettering oneself as a therapist through deliberate practices testifies to this (Miller et al. 2018), but in the end you have to jump. To jump into the actual lived situation of psychotherapy, experiencing your aloneness (Sundet 2021), be attentive and act as best you can, trying to do a good job, whatever that means in the particular situation you are in. As teachers, supervisors and researchers, we need to make this aloneness explicit for our students while reminding them that aloneness does not means loneliness. Togetherness and collaboration are the comfort of lived life in therapy for both therapist and clients. Fourth and finally, the gap between research and theory on the one hand and lived and experienced practice on the other testifies to the difficulty of making a first-person account of psychotherapy, in the actual writing or telling that is drawn out of the experience of doing therapy and into the distance of third-person accounts in an attempt to relate, be attentive and understand. At

the same time, I experience this writing or telling as a first-person account of telling and writing. So again, all I can do is to try to be both in it and outside of it in my moving ahead as a therapist, as a person, knowing that we are in the infinite regress of 'turtles all the way down'.

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8

WHAT MIGHT KEEP A TEACHER GOING? REFLECTIONS ON MEANING AND PERSISTENCE IN THE LIFE OF TEACHERS

ASLAUG KRISTIANSEN

Introduction

During the dialogue between education, art and mental health I got the following question: 'You have been a teacher for a long time. People could be interested in knowing what keeps you going.' This chapter is an attempt to reflect on and respond to this question.

My reflections have a departure in the reading and re-reading of a unique handwritten teacher memory book that came into my custody more than ten years ago. The book has the character of being a wandering book since it 'travelled' or wandered for more than 50 years among a group of 23 classmates who graduated from a Norwegian teacher education college in 1949. After a classmate wrote an

epistle about themselves and their professional life, the book was forwarded to the next classmate on the mailing list. On average, each person received the book about four times during their professional life. The various contributions offer interesting glimpses into the joys and troubles in the life of the group of teachers. The book also contains discussions that have the character of threads that weave themselves in and out of the texts through the years. They may disappear for a period and suddenly reappear when a person picks up the thread again.

The reading of the various narratives in the book and the themes discussed brought me closer to the question: What could keep a teacher going? What factors could be of importance, and what sources can provide energy and inspiration to carry on?

Any teacher generation will be influenced by their teacher education programme and the period's general Zeitgeist, although a collective narrative will have a different resonance in each individual student. In 1949, the Second World War had just ended, and it was a rebuilding period. The war had delayed the students' education. A couple of them had been in prison due to illegal work. The dean of teacher education – Håkon Wergeland – had participated in the teacher resistance movement and refused to use Nazi-infected ideology in the teaching (Halvorsen 1999: 45). It is rather obvious that the war experiences were part of their horizon. The newly qualified teachers were supposed to take part in rebuilding a democratic and peaceful Norway.

A collective orientation will differ among different generations of teachers. Even so, can there still be some touchpoints that are recognizable across generations? Could the teachers' descriptions of joys and troubles in their profession tell us about what is at stake regarding sources of joy and motivation for remaining in work? After studying the text in the book, my response to the question is yes, I think so. There are dimensions that resonate across generations, considering the more existential dimensions of the teachers' work. The reading and re-reading of the book helped me to discover significant themes and shed some light on where I was in relation to the question.

About the *Book of Wandering*

The book has the dimensions of an A4 sheet and contains 320 beautiful handwritten pages. The first contributions in the books are from June 1949. The student-teachers and teacher-students were about to finish a two-year teacher programme with specialization in the English language. They decided to keep in touch after graduation by letting a rather big book wander between them. In the book, they could tell a

FIGURE 8.1: The *Book of Wandering*.

little about themselves and their professional teacher life. The first pages of the book contain names and a mailing list, practical suggestions about how to forward the book and guidelines for what the first contribution should contain – namely, a short self-biography and some reflections on the future and their professional life. The writing style in the first contributions is serious and sober.

As the years go by, the tone becomes more relaxed, friendly and warmer. Over the years, they also gather for some anniversaries, the last one in 1994. The last contribution in the book is dated 7 September 1998. One of the classmates quotes some lines from a poem by the Norwegian novelist Tarjei Vesaas. Below is an excerpt:

Like leaves
are you and I
fast trembling
quickly gone.
Come

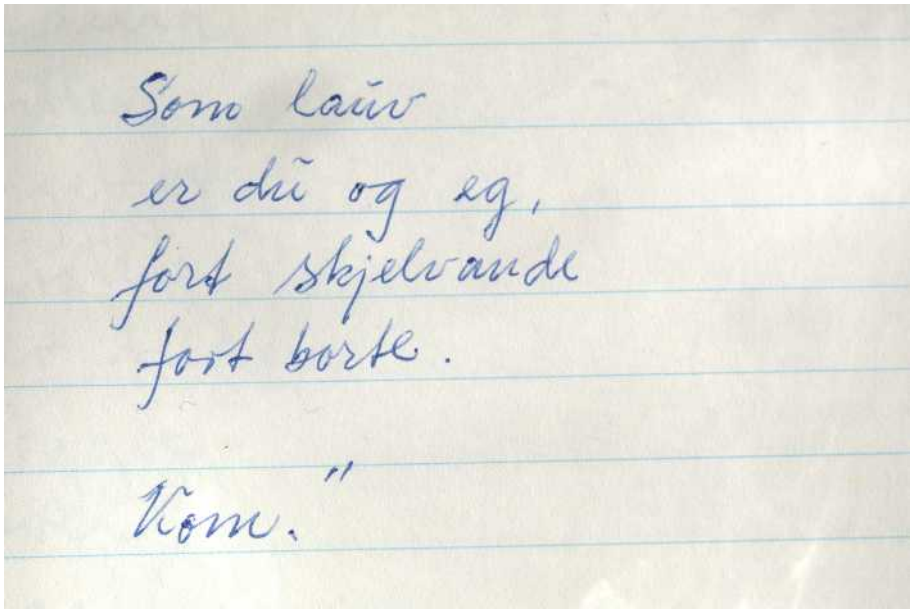

FIGURE 8.2: Some handwritten lines from the poem by Tarjei Vesaas in the *Book of Wandering*.

A postwar generation of teachers and some aspects of a collective background orientation

In 1949, according to Telhaug et al. (2004), primary school teachers were prominent in their local communities. They provided leadership in a range of settings, as chairmen of local banks, mayors, mediation officers and spiritual advisors. Many of them were idealists and felt a calling to a profession dedicated to imparting knowledge and instilling enlightened views in the young. They had high ideals and were committed to causes (Telhaug et al. 2004: 145–46).

As far back as 1814, when Norway enacted its independent constitution, the school was part of a nation-building project that lasted until the 1990s (Løvlie 2021). These ideas were supported by the Social Democratic government, which established the political order from the 1930s until the early 1970s. Telhaug et al. (2004) write,

> When they (a Social Democratic government) took over, in Norway there was already established a school system based on a national curriculum and the idea of nation building continued. The national culture was seen as a foundation for democratic values and civic spirit, but after the Second World War national values had to be placed on an equal footing with supranational and universal values.
>
> (142)

I suppose that the prominent status of a teacher and the awareness of the great task ahead must have left its mark on young teachers. This serious task is also underlined by the two first greetings in the book. They were written by the dean of the teaching education college, Håkon Wergeland, and the students' pedagogical theory teacher, Wilhem Aarek. At the end of Wergeland's greetings, he writes,

> And then I wish that your learning will never be completed, your qualifications never absolutely and that you never become stiffened in the routine, but always on the march forward, further forward, and higher up, always young in your faith, hope and love. I've tried to show you where the sources in life and teaching are that never get dry. May you be successful in building a more enlightened, richer, and stronger Norway for the years to come. May God bless you all in this task.[1]
>
> Your friend,
> Håkon Wergeland

Wilhelm Aarek writes,

> You enter the working life in a time when […] our schools are waiting for educational renewal. The public school has not yet found its final form […] In this time of innovation, we are now relying on you as future educators […] It is a better school that is the goal, a school that is better adapted to children and a school that, to a greater extent, is protecting our democratic society […] May it go well for you as human beings and as teachers. Take the light from whatever edge it may come and follow it wherever it may lead you.

By reading the various contributions in the *Book of Wandering*, it is apparent that Aarek's teaching in pedagogical theory extended a strong influence on the students

and became a particular source of inspiration. Sayings from his teaching are repeated and discussed. In general, his pedagogy is referred to as innovative and open-minded. For instance, he emphasized that the pupil should be at the centre of the teacher's attention. Some years later, a teacher writes in the book:

> I know that all of you who sat by Aarek's feet went out as his disciples and to the best of their ability tried to realize these high goals […] The ideals are not as easy to transform into practice – for instance, the ideal of 'kind firmness' [*vennlig fasthet*].

I find it reasonable to believe that Aarek was able to direct the teacher-students' gaze towards certain ideals. For some, the ideals helped to establish some points of orientation and drivers that the individuals could stand on, both personally and professionally. The ideals and values could serve as a kind of echo, a faint reminder of what was valuable and important. Here, we encounter the first theme or topic devoted to attention among the teachers: the challenge of finding a motto or some values that could create a base and give direction to the practice of teaching. In addition to the effort to find a motto, two other themes will be presented that seem to be highly appreciated and could be characterized as driving forces or motivation factors – namely, professional renewal and the relationship with pupils, colleagues and family.

The significance of finding a motto and a point of orientation

Bjørn Utneskar[2] writes the first student contribution in the book. He presents the following motto: *Troskap mot kongen* ('Devotion and faithfulness to the king'). According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.), 'a motto is a short sentence or phrase that expresses a belief or purpose'. At the very start of his teacher career, Utneskar takes a position and wants to see his English teaching from a larger and nation-building perspective – namely, as faithful service to a king. However, he presents his motto with great humility since he is unsure if he is capable of meeting the requirements of the teacher role. Only the future, he writes, can show if he is able to do so.

The next contributor, Per Dalen, presents the following motto: *Skulen av livet, i livet, for livet* ('The school from [?] life, in life and for life'). He tells that he was a theology student but chose to become a teacher because he was interested in the life between people. Another writes that his pedagogical vision is based on what they learned at the teacher education college – namely, to trust human beings: 'If one is not able to do so, our teacher's work is hopeless.' Jan Vetre also writes that

his vision is inspired from what they learned from pedagogical theory – namely, that each human being is unique and that a school class consists of different individuals with different needs and learning abilities. Anne Lehsen follows up on this humanistic and existential thread. She thinks that it is significant to be conscious of how one wishes to live one's life and find qualities to build on. She states that, so far, she has fallen short in this dimension, but she will continue to search.

However, not all classmates will embark on this existential quest to establish a point of orientation. Harald Olsen writes that he will not 'submit to a motto'. Signe Karlsen writes that she has no basic pedagogical view, nor will she acquire one. She was studying to become a gymnastics and handicraft teacher; hence, there was no need 'to think more about these pedagogical subtleties'.

The above quotes introduce various reflections. One reflection is whether the pursuit and establishment of a motto only lead to educational 'sneaky talk', as Signe Karlsen above suggests, without any relevance to real life in the classroom. Another approach is to appreciate the discussion since it contributes to counteracting a 'technification' of teaching and brings into existence questions of values, meaning and persistence. For me, this approach resonates with my own thinking about the teaching profession that normative aspects are interwoven along various dimensions. A third reflection is related to having a motto or a basic vision for the professional life. On the one hand, it could be considered a burden and perceived as something imposed by others. On the other hand, a motto can act as an orientation point, an anchor to hold on to. It could also enable one to lift the gaze from a pragmatic and narrow day-to-day perspective and consider teaching from a wider or broader perspective, including a future one. By acting as an anchor, a motto can provide stability and cohesion. In addition, some fundamental ideals and values might create a basis for perseverance and resistance. They provide the possibility of a stand, a way of holding oneself and by this avoid being swallowed up by a stream of events and make a mark in the world (see Biesta's chapter in this book 'How to be a self, today').

On the one hand, developing a point of orientation can both help to clarify a professional and personal identity and prove to be a basis for meaning and persistence. On the other hand, from a more negative perspective, high values and ideals can be experienced as rather painful if they become impossible to realize, leading to self-doubt and critical self-investigation. (I will come back to this.) There is an ambivalence connected to the discussion about having a motto or high ideals. The following two themes seem more purely joyful, and they

appear to be important driving forces for the maintenance of job satisfaction and encouragement.

The significance of professional renewal

Renewal, academic update and experiences of professional enlivenment take various forms and contrast with stagnation and decay. In their early careers, many of the young teachers had to move to new places and schools because of a squeezed labour market. The move could have provided new challenges, new ideas and qualifications. Later in their careers, most of the teachers became permanent residents.

Professional update often takes the form of further education, either in the form of an in-depth study of the subject of English or by studying other subjects. A couple travels abroad to study; both express great joy because of the changes and the possibility to learn more. 'After being in torpor for 13 years after finishing the teacher education college', one of the teachers writes, 'starting to study history felt like waking up again'. A couple of the female teachers appreciated the push that leaders at their school gave them to apply for a new and interesting position and to further their studies. A by-effect of the various initiatives could be changes in work tasks and career improvements.

A small number seem to have gone through their careers without showing much interest in taking courses or getting involved in further studies. This can be interpreted as an expression of stagnation and a mental standstill. However, other interpretations may also be relevant. A teacher's experience is that not one day is equal to the other and every morning something unexpected can happen. These small and large 'tremors' call for creativity and improvisation to varying degrees of innovation. The daily interaction with students and colleagues could be demanding but represents latent sources of renewal.

From the reading so far, I learnt that to maintain engagement, various forms of renewal are of vital importance for keeping, but the actual sources may vary from person to person. Nevertheless, to realize renewal, there must be conditions that allow this to happen and, further, conditions that support it. They could be in the form of different courses and educational programmes. However, I also think of the spaces that the teacher experiences in the classroom for unfolding creativity, experiments and improvisation. If these everyday spaces steadily reduce, the teacher's autonomy is becoming increasingly weakened. Consequently, the teacher is no longer an actor, is reduced to 'a piece' and is hindered from 'using themselves'

in the teaching. Thus, an important dimension of being a teacher is gone, and the demise will influence a teacher's motivation to carry on with the work.

The significance of communion

In the various contributions, the importance of community appears as a central 'driving force' and as a source of perseverance. With great pleasure the teachers write about engagements, marriages, children being born and about buying their first apartment. Through the life demonstrated, family relationships appear to be stable, and no one writes about divorces. When they experience challenging days at work or health issues, the men underline the importance of support from their spouses. In one of the late contributions, a man reflects on this support from the 'home base': 'Imagine what a privilege that many of us men have had during all these years in terms of coming home to dinner on the table every day.' I do not think the female teachers share this experience. Most of the female teachers worked at home for a period when the children were small. However, most of the female teachers seem to start teaching again when their children were older. Towards the end of her career, Ruth Berg Hansen reflects on being a woman and a teacher and on her career opportunities. She writes in the book:

> There are so many of us girls who are sorry that we haven't 'done better' than to remain an ordinary teacher, but don't despair! What couldn't we have driven it to if we had a 'wife' to provide for our daily well-being?

It might well be that also for the female teachers, the spouse was an important supporter, but they do not write about it.

In addition to the fact that the home, at least for the men, is described as a supportive base, both men and women highlight the importance of student contacts and cooperation with good colleagues. Many statements illustrate this. For example, a teacher writes that he has started a new job, stating that it is incredibly tiring, but that 'a good help in the effort is that the students have been so nice to work with'. Another writes, 'If the pupils trust you and participate in the communication, it can be very pleasant the classroom. When good conversations arise, they create a good tone in the teaching'. A teacher who has become a principal complains of much administrative obligations. He misses contact with the children: 'I feel renewed after every teaching session I spend in the classroom.' Maria Svare has also become a principal. The support from the school administration has meant a lot to her.

Even so, she writes, '[I]t is the students who gave life to all of it.' Towards the end of her career, one of his classmates is working in higher education. As retirement age approaches, she writes, '[I]t is the contact and collaboration with students I'm going to miss the most.' Several also highlight the importance of cooperation with good colleagues. Looking back, a teacher writes that her colleagues are 'a source of great happiness and meaning in the working years'. Another colleague who had to quit earlier because of illness, partly due to difficult work conditions and what he describes as 'delusional politicians', writes, 'Good collegial conditions, as well as decent pupils and benevolent parents, nevertheless made it possible to find joy in the working days'.

A community can serve as a base for safety and support. However, the community is also an important source of feedback, not only on the experience of being valued and recognized but also regarding being corrected. On some of the last pages of the book, Margrete Vollen writes a slightly sad text. After the last school reform in 1989, she felt her power diminish, and she lost her glow and spirit. She chose an early retirement. Now she works as a volunteer in elderly care, reading literature, singing and reading poems for the old people. She writes, 'The work is incredibly rewarding. The old people really appreciate what I do. So does the management. I didn't always feel valued when I was working in school.'

Margrete Vollen touches upon one basic function a communion can give: the importance of recognition. Another teacher writes that in his home he experienced recognition of himself as a person, while in the professional community, where he was in the role of a teacher, it was different. The community as a base for persistence might become optimal when one experiences recognition both as a professional and as a person. I note that the 'support agents' highlighted are not politicians, either the king or the state that some of these teachers had a vision to serve, but the various everyday face-to-face relationships. Later in their careers, school politicians and other state and government representatives are portrayed by many as problematic figures who create unrest and impose problematic changes that are hard to accept.

On meaning and persistence

A teacher who keeps going will draw inspiration and support from multiple sources. The individual will also emphasize the importance of these sources differently. In the following, I shall return to the importance of finding a personal purpose or a

mission that could serve as an anchor and critical point of orientation in professional life. In today's teacher education, the theme is not as emphasized as was the case after the Second World War. I like to think that extreme circumstances, such as war experiences, could reveal something of importance about human life, aspects that are more or less in the shadow and not so clearly articulated on more peaceful and calm days. The psychiatrist Viktor Frankl unfolds some of his learning from the war in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* ([1959] 2006). Here, he emphasizes the importance of having a personal purpose and a faith in the future. Based on experiences from the senseless suffering in the concentration camps during the Second World War, he underlines the importance for a human being to retain faith in the future and for something to live for. He writes, 'The prisoner who had lost faith in the future – his future – was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay' (Frankl [1959] 2006: 74).

Having faith in the future is closely related to the acquisition of 'a spiritual hold', which adds an inner strength to carry on. Under such extreme conditions, it is easy to look to the past and be occupied with retrospective thoughts. However it means, Frankl ([1959] 2006: 71–72) writes, that one 'is robbing the present of its reality'; that is, it becomes easy to overlook the opportunities to make something positive of camp life, opportunities which really did exist. Moreover, he writes that a fundamental change in the attitude towards life is necessary. What really matters is not what we expect from life, but rather what life expects from us. Frankl ([1959] 2006: 77) continues, 'We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, instead to think of ourselves as those who were being asked by life – daily and hourly. Our answer must consist […] in right action and in right conduct.'

There are two aspects that I draw from Frankl's description of meaning: the importance of having faith in the future and, thus, a spiritual hold and of intervening and acting in the here-and-now situation and being willing to take the responsibility in terms of trying to find the right response to life. According to Frankl, 'life' means something very real and concrete – for instance, life in the here and now. He thinks that a situation is distinguished by its uniqueness: 'No situation repeats itself, and each situation calls for a different response' (Frankl [1959] 2006: 77).

Transferred to the context of this chapter, establishing a motto or some point of orientation contributes to creating a way of holding oneself and, as such, contributes to and supports a form of stability and cohesion in life. Concurrently, there must be a sensibility to the here-and-now situation, considering the ability to act and respond to the actual challenges. Responsibility, according to the

philosopher Martin Buber (1978: 16), is to be able to respond to what happens to one regarding what is seen, heard and felt in the present situation. According to Gert Biesta (2006), what makes humans unique, singular beings is of an ethical 'nature': 'What constitutes our subjectivity, what constitutes us in our subjectivity is the way in which we – you and I as singular beings – respond' (Biesta 2006: 70). I think Frankl seems to suggest that a loss of meaning is a condition in which a person is no longer capable of being open and responding to what is reaching out in the situation. Subjectivity, understood as responsiveness, is in danger of being lost, and the person is in danger of losing themselves. According to Buber (1963) being responsible and being able to respond expresses an entrance into life. It creates 'a living connection'. The soul becomes dry and barren if we do 'not day by day, offer these small meetings that we are due to them' (Buber 1963: 49, translation added). To be responsible and to answer is a humanizing moment found not above but in life and participation (Buber 1978). In the former quote, we also get a link to what was previously mentioned as another source of meaning and persistence: interaction and daily meetings with pupils and colleagues.

To conclude so far, sources that help a teacher keep going are both oriented towards the future as having a motto and seeking professional renewal and updating and towards the here-and-now situation, such as meetings with students and colleagues. What then could weed the teachers out, make some frustrated and others angry? Here, of course, there are individual variations. However, there are a couple of aspects that several comments upon that could be worth presenting.

The teachers' reflections towards the end of their careers

There are two discussions or lines of comments I would like to present in the following. The first is about having a motto. As already mentioned, it is a discussion that proceeds like a red thread throughout the book but provides some interesting comments towards the end of the teachers' careers. The second is discussions and comments related to curriculum revisions underway during a career.

Reflections on previous ideals and mottoes

The comments can be sorted into two groups. A couple of the teachers feel a heavy burden of shortcomings and blame themselves for not being able to realize the ideals. The largest

group adopts a more pragmatic attitude. Everyday school experiences have taught them that the ideals must be adapted, modified and, in some cases, translated into new ones.

Hans Sette represents the first group. When reflecting back on his teacher career, he had a bad feeling. He thinks he was not up to standard as a teacher or later as a principal because he failed to translate the ideals into practical action. Another writes, 'I mourn that I have not succeeded in giving the youth a Christian pattern of life when they were leaving the school at the end of the spring semester.'

In the more pragmatic group, one teacher writes that he thinks it is embarrassing to re-read the solemn words that he wrote in his first contribution to the book. He adds, 'Now he's following the clock, gaining experiences, and finding his own system.' Several follow the same path. Katrine Moen refers to their former teacher Aarek, who said that one should build on the interests of the kids, but what about when they are only interested in football? Another again writes that it is tough to teach in school. He had to forget what he had learned in the teacher education and introduce military discipline. Then things got better. 'If we are going to keep our health and self-respect for a long time', another teacher writes, 'we must find both the characteristics of the lamb and the lion in ourselves'. Arne Dal is one of the few teachers who throughout his whole career expressed scepticism towards what he calls 'burdensome declarations' and 'airy ideals and values'. In several comments he pointed to the problematic aspects of translating 'fine theories' into practical teaching. Nevertheless, towards the end of his career, he writes that there are some valuable knowledge and skills embedded in the attitudes that teachers convey in words and deeds. He concludes with a few lines from a poem by Alexander Kielland, who writes about his teacher:

> Sørensen [the teacher] cared about us
> That's all.
> But it was the best.

Resistance to the implementation of curriculum reforms

The second discussion is on the teachers' responses to various curriculum revisions. To my surprise, many of these very idealistic teachers feel uneasy and act reluctantly towards the curriculum reforms, especially from the 1970s onwards. The reforms started in the 1960s. Seven years of compulsory schooling were extended to nine years with organizational differentiation, including both obligatory and optional courses. In the 1970s a new curriculum was presented, emphasizing student active forms of learning, promoting problem-solving and project organized ways of teaching and

so on (Kirke-og undervisningsdepartementet 1974). The reform encountered resistance, and I shall briefly refer to a selection of statements.

Arne Dal refers to the curriculum reforms of the 1970s and 1980s as unsuccessfully, noting they were developed by desktop educators who desired a star on their collar. Knut Askedal admits that he is an old fogey and writes that he is greatly concerned about the new progressive ideas and methods in schoolwork. Sara Skarseng chooses to close her eyes and ears for 'most of all new inventions. I neither can nor will keep up with everything'. She adds that she wishes ordinary teachers were allowed to decide more when it comes to school and teaching. 'It wasn't the students who tore me out', writes another, 'but all the new ideas from the school politicians'. Olav Storeng feels helpless about the knowledge expected in the new curriculum, and another points out that there are now so many strange and new things that he 'has begun to get a strong feeling of that he is not able to be a teacher anymore'. Tor Kverne is anxious about the introduction of new plans because he fears that it will 'deprive the teachers the living contact with the living life and the rising generation'. In a couple of contributions at the beginning of the 1990s, two teachers express concern about the growing influence of economists and about an accelerating technical development that calls for a strengthening of schools' focus on value and attitude development.

The teachers' resistance and unwillingness to move with what happens may be related to different motifs and reflections. Some could characterize their responses as conservative, as stubbornness and 'closed mindedness' or as not being willing to revise their own position (Kvernbekk 2021: 5). Some responses may have nostalgic overtones (Goodson et al. 2006) or be based on the feeling of being out of sync with what is going on (Courtney 2017). In general, the responses may express a concern that some basic ideas and values are being left out or overlooked. The teachers' resistance to the curriculum reforms takes various forms, from more passive expressions (such as overhearing and not taking notice) to more active forms (such as insisting and pointing to weaknesses and discussing what is considered missing). The resistance has the character of a pushback, but their resistance is not so hard that it destroys the world in which their existence takes place. Teachers' resistance during the Second World War was of a completely different character and was a response to the attempt to introduce Nazi ideology into the school curriculum. This resistance and refusal led to the arrest of many teachers (Simonsen 2020). Here, the resistance occurs inside the frames of the system. The teachers continue their work even though they push back on something they experience as being imposed on them from outside.

More thorough studies are needed to further discuss the basis for teachers' resistance. It is interesting to note that they are the same teachers who wrote warmly about the importance of renewal and further studies. Based on my understanding, there are two possibly decisive factors: the changes are not in line with what they themselves think is important and the changes are imposed from the outside. As a political requirement, it can be perceived as if their autonomy and self-determination are weakened. When changes are managed 'from within' through the teachers' own participation and choices, changes appear to be a balance between being open and having mastery and control. Basic values can still be preserved, and there is no immediate threat of losing oneself.

What might keep a teacher going? How the narratives brought me closer to the question

The *Book of Wandering* contains teachers' own stories about themselves and about life as a teacher through 50 years. I read the book as an evolving narrative in which the various elements provide the teachers' lives with a sense of meaning and coherence (Taylor 1989) and with joys and troubles. Through the reading, I became aware of dimensions appreciated by many of the teachers. I could recognize and support several of these, such as the importance of academic renewal and positive interactions and dialogues with students, colleagues and other partners. In addition, the importance of having a motto and a professional value basis is emphasized, but this is also problematized.

When reading the book, I noticed a dimension that I did not recognize, nor could I say I have experienced: the importance that teachers in the book attach to the content of their teacher education. For me, the content of my teacher education is not as important as it is for them. For them the education constitutes a common horizon of knowledge and values that the classmates constantly refer to and which also has a kind of collective identifying function. This is how the *Book of Wandering* also becomes a 'remembrance book'. In an article about remembering, Mona Levin (2008) writes that a collective identity emerges from the presence of the past into the present. She continues, 'The Jewish attitude to remembering […] it is identity confirming. Often it can be a burden to remember so much, but it is also a way to identify culture' (Levin 2008: 101). By looking back, a collective identity is strengthened, but the identity unfolds itself in the present. It becomes a base for understanding the many challenges of everyday life, as well as a base for resistance.

My own education started in the middle of the 1970s. It was a time of strong ideological and political refractions. Telhaug et al. (2004) write about the 1970s as a time when 'the classic social democratic order, with hindsight, an "age of innocence", was confronted with a new Zeitgeist, a radical departure' (Telhaug et al. 2004: 148). My first year of study was at a two-year teacher education college. Here, the ideological and political disagreements manifested themselves in the form of marked polarizations between many left radical students, a few conservatives and some even fewer placed in between. Here I was – torn between two strong fractions. Many of the teachers belonged to the postwar generation, and many were still influenced by a humanistic *Geisteswissenschaftliche* tradition that was looked upon as rather old-fashioned. Everyday school life was characterized by loud discussions, and few attempted to build bridges between the camps. My in-between position contributed to the fact that I had to find my own way. Consequently, the atmosphere was very different from what one of the teachers in the *Book of Wandering* describes about his teacher education: it 'provided a spiritual ballast that gave a direction for life after education'. I enjoyed the teaching of the history of educational ideas, but few others did. Since I never felt entirely 'at home' with either the 'progressives' or 'conservatives', I slowly found my own way.

Conversely, several of the other aspects that the teachers write about, I could recognize quite well as vital driving forces. For instance, the positive description the teachers give about academic renewal and development. After finishing at the teacher education college, I continued my studies. In the reading I discovered pedagogical and ethical thinkers that became sources of great inspiration. Their thinking helped me to develop some basic assumptions and a kind of spiritual hold (to use a phrase from Frankl) that became a basis for thinking, resisting and acting. The assumptions function both as an anchor and as a compass.

Another factor I have noticed is what two of the female teachers in the *Book of Wandering* write about leaders and teachers who encouraged them to take further studies and apply to a higher position. Leaders invested their trust in the female teachers' capacities. This is an act of great encouragement and trust. I have been lucky to have accomplished similar experiences. Throughout my study time and particular early work years, there have been more established teachers and colleagues who have invested faith in me and encouraged me to further my studies or get involved with different tasks. I continue to think back on these good people with great joy and gratitude. Their encouragement and care mean so much.

I have been fascinated by what Frankl and Buber have written about life and the demands of the concrete situation. If one keeps one's face primarily turned to

the past, it becomes more difficult to intervene in the specific situation here and now. Significant drivers in my history are memories of meetings with good people and inspiring conversations. Nevertheless, I think that the test when it comes to keeping going in the daily connections is the ability to be open and listen to the demands of the situation. I think this might be a source of constant renewal and persistence. Martin Buber (1963) describes participation and everyday encounters with people, animals and nature as 'living connections'. The soul becomes dry and barren if we do not 'day by day, offer these small meetings that we are due to them' (Buber 1963: 49, my translation).

The reading of the *Book of Wandering* also made me even more aware of the importance of distance or a space to express individuality. Biesta uses the phrase 'the arrival of the I' as an act of subjectification (Biesta 2010). Teacher work can be interpreted as constant arrivals by the teacher as a professional and as a person. I think it is a crucial condition for teachers if they are to continue experiencing the teaching profession as meaningful to have a space and be given autonomy to unfold their creativity and professionalism rooted in trust and recognition not only from students and colleagues but also from society.

Notes

1. All the quotes from the *Book of Wandering* are translated by the author.
2. All the names are fictive.

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ROOM 3

SKIN IN THE GAME

JO RAVN ABUSLAND

I was looking through a book about forestry in the south of Norway, when I came across a picture of some very big, old pine trees. They were called Haugeteddan, it means a cluster of trees on burial mounds, in this case a total of 24 mounds in Sordal, all from pre-Christian times. Traditionally these trees were considered to be holy, people would give drink offerings to them and dry branches or other material from the trees were never removed from the grounds. The trees were protected by law in 1937. A law that could only be revoked by the Norwegian Ministry of Education.

I decided to go and see them. A lot of the smaller pines there were marked, with orange neon spray, to be taken down. And to my surprise also one of the bigger trees, suggested to be around 500 years old was marked to be taken down. Trees help each other out by sharing nutrients, so if all but one tree is taken down, the single tree left might also die. This left a big impression on me. If trees that were protected by law could be taken down, then what could happen to trees that weren't protected?

FIGURE A3.1: *Marked to be taken down*, 2020. T-shirt with neon spray, size varies. Photo by Jo Ravn Abusland.

The tree we have in the city coat of arms in Kristiansand, was originally commissioned by the king as a spruce in 1643. But over 200 years later, in 1909, people thought it might fit better to have a pine tree. The sand ground where the city is built used to be filled with pine trees. And one of these trees was a gathering point, in the city centre, next to the cathedral, the so called 'city pine'. It was decided with only one vote not in favour, that the tree from now on was a pine. But the shape was kept unchanged in the coat of arms. It doesn't really look like a spruce, nor a pine, but we all accept it as a pine. I, as a trans man, can personally draw a parallel to the first of July 2016 when we, in Norway, got the law of changing your legal gender marker without having to have your reproductional organs removed. Being able to be recognized as the gender you are without having to do any altering of your body.

FIGURE A3.2: *Pine 1909 - today's date (spruce 1643–1909)*. Tapestry, 137 × 246 cm. In the collection of Sørlandssamlingen/Kunstsilo. Photo by Kristiansand Kunsthall.

FIGURE A3.3: 'Bispestolen', chair made out of the branches of the old city pine, found reproduction of drawing of the old city pine in frame. The chair was borrowed from Kristiansand Cathedral and later included in the collection of the Vest-Agder Museum. Photo by Kristiansand Kunsthall.

In 1951 some students planted a new tree, in the same spot as the old tree, between Kristiansand Public Library and Kristiansand Cathedral. To most people this tree is more or less invisible next to the bigger linden trees in the park. It has had some difficulties, lost its top a few times, due to big loads of snow. This gives it a bit of character and a bent shape. Looking to other cultures, outside of Europe, pine trees are in some places seen as a symbol of inner strength, adaptability and longevity. In creating bonsai trees some branches might even be broken and left to dry out in order to give the tree the beauty that lies in imperfection.

The laws for protecting trees are not as good these days, as they were in the time when the trees in Sordal were protected. But I made a request for the Kristiansand City Council to protect it.

The answer I got was that it was too 'snål', a Norwegian word that can be translated to weird. The tree couldn't be considered a nice specimen because of its crooked trunk and lack of green branches on one of its sides. It wasn't situated in a nice enough spot and it was a bit overshadowed by taller trees. They suggested that a new tree could be planted, in a better spot, with better conditions so that it could grow tall and straight.

With the risk of crossing the line from personal to private I want to share something that I think is important to talk about, but something that is also connected to shame for me. I guess I have a bit of a competitive spirit. In a way I feel I shouldn't reveal too much of this, but at the same time I think this is the only way for me to leave a bit of this behind and grow as a human being.

FIGURE A3.4: *Skin in the Game and In Your Own Skin*, 2021. Risograph prints A3. Photo by Jo Ravn Abusland.

Growing up trans and queer, it was hard for me to connect with people, as I always was read as something I wasn't. This made me turn to nature to find some connection. Looking at trees, flowers and animals. Looking at the way the crows would fly, to predict if it would be a good day at school, or if I needed to be alert because there would be bullying.

At school I tried not to stand out, tried not to be seen going home from school, in order to avoid getting buried in the snow or yelled at. The lessons were the only time I could relax from *the Others*. I tried telling some adults that I didn't have any friends, and that I was being bullied, but I was never heard. I just got told that other people are worse off. So, I stopped trying to get help, I tried to be invisible instead. And because I was never seen, you can say that I succeeded in being invisible. But at the same time, when I was seen, I was seen as someone else. Or bullied by grownups and other children for not acting like a girl and dressing accordingly. So, I conformed and tried not to stand out.

FIGURE A3.5: *Habitus*, detail, 2021. Found T-shirt and photo of found T-shirt transferred to replica of found T-shirt. In the collection of Bomuldsfabriken Kunsthall. Photo by Jo Ravn Abusland.

Growing up queer you can't really rely on family or friends to be there when you come out to them. There is always a risk of losing people. I have only lost a few, but I know people from this city that have been kicked out of their own families. In the US people tell young kids that they should pack a bag with their most important belongings and place it by the front door when they come out to their parents. Just in case it gets violent or they get kicked out and need to run.

I think we should be more aware that families consist of different people, we're not all the same, we can have different opinions, and we should have more discussions on issues that are difficult. We should be welcoming differences and try to understand where they come from. But of course, then we need the tools to be able to do so.

Today queer kids can find an online community. But it is still with a lot of skin in the game, and risking it all, that trans people come out. The joy of being in your own skin and taking up some space in the world, being visible, being connected

to other people, being human, is all worth it if you have the privilege and support system to do so. I hope we can find ways to bridge the gaps between people and different ways of being and belonging in the world.

You might wonder what happened to the trees in Sordal. After seeing them for the first time I started calling people, sending e-mails and text-messages to everyone I could think of that could have some influence on this issue. And I didn't really expect anything to happen as it already was Friday night. But Monday morning I woke up to my phone ringing, and a voice telling me: 'Well, then we will just let them be'.

The mayor of Kristiansand and one of the students, that planted the (now unofficial) tree in 1951, have planted a new official city pine in a sunnier park.

The story of the unofficial city pine has become known, and the tree is no longer invisible. We will have to see if we, as a community, will be able to protect it. The town arborist working for the municipality of Kristiansand has promised that nothing will harm it on his watch.

The chair made out of the branches of the original pine is now included in the Vest-Agder Museum collection.

And on the 1th of January 2021 gender identity and gender expression was included in the Norwegian law against hate speech and discrimination.

FIGURE A3.6: The official city pine. Photo by Jo Ravn Abusland.

9

TOUCHED BY THE SIGHT OF HANDS TOUCHING YARN TOUCHING HANDS

MONICA KLUNGLAND

Introduction

The material for this chapter was created in a teaching situation for arts and crafts in a Norwegian primary school. The tension between the acquisition of useful skills and emphasis on the child's opportunities to express themselves has reverberated into argumentation for the relevance of the subject of arts and crafts through the 130 years the subject has been taught in Norway. During the last two decades, an economic emphasis on the acquisition of useful skills and the labour market's need for creativity has been emphasized to a greater extent. This has led to an individually centred education policy with predefined and measurable competencies (Briseid 2009; Pedersen 2011; Slagstad 2018).

As a contribution to less individualistic and less human-centred art education, I propose to move the focus away from skills and production of original objects, asking instead for other possibilities or potentials for the subject of arts and crafts

in education (Klungland 2021). I argue that in creative work with materials, we are created as ethically and aesthetically responsible people, which is a far more urgent need for the world than the economic justifications that put pressure on arts and crafts in education.

The empirical material for the analysis in this chapter is taken from my own recent Ph.D. dissertation, which consists of micro-ethnographic fieldwork during an outdoor weaving project with 22 seventh-grade students and their teaching staff. Three action cameras were used to create data material during the fieldwork. The cameras were attached to the chest of two volunteer students in addition to carrying a camera myself. In this chapter, stills from produced film material from this outdoor weaving project will be presented and awareness is directed towards how one of the students, 12-year-old Liam, explored with materials. Liam was the focus because he quietly chose to work all alone and weave a room with a seat. This event is of interest precisely because the boy's fellowship with the materials became so prominent.

When Liam put an action camera on his own chest, my gaze as a researcher was turned. The attention was turned towards how his hands touched the yarn and how the yarn touched his hands. Through the changed camera perspective, I got a direct look into Liam's encounter with the materials and the response required. I was touched by this view, which led me to the question examined in this chapter: 'Whose "I" arrived with these hands touching yarn touching hands?'

In the end, this returned gaze led to a liberating understanding of what the subject of arts and crafts can bring to education. I have arrived with an expanded understanding of possibilities and potentials other than acquisitions of skills, development of creativity and production of personal and original expressions. I came to a confident recognition that the greatest potentials are found in the doing, in the action itself, no matter what kind of materials or techniques are worked with. Strangely, this had to do with how my gaze was turned and how I had to face my own data material in a different way.

Making with materials as existing-in-dialogue

Biesta (2021) has proposed in a wonderful way the potentials of arts to be not curricula-centred or child-centred but world-centred. He argues that for an 'I' to arrive, some distance must be created, established and maintained. One must take a step back, deal with the situation and return with a response. I make use of

Biesta's (2017) ideas about the potentials in the *doing of art* in my exploration of *whose I arrived:*

> Encountering the reality of paint, stone, wood, metal, sound, bodies, including one's own body, encountering resistance, in order to explore possibilities, meet limits and limitations, and out of this create forms, establish forms, and find forms that make existing-in-dialogue possible, that is what I see in the doing of art.
>
> (66)

This quote from Biesta was the starting point for my exploration of Liam's making with materials. If making with materials in arts and crafts is not about the acquisition of skills, the development of creativity or the production of original objects but about the possibilities of existing as a subject in dialogue (Biesta 2017a), my question as a researcher was how to explore this existence and how to write about it. I was looking for places and moments for Liam's existence as a subject in dialogue with materials, and I studied the film material with this in mind.

A break with the practice of teaching-as-usual

Before the weaving project, I had the opportunity to participate in seventh-grade classes in arts and crafts just to observe and get to know the students who had agreed to take part in my research. I would describe the teaching situations as quite ordinary. One of the tasks for the students was to paint a self-portrait. To do so, they used an introduction to face proportions from a textbook in drawing and a mirror. The pupils sat by their desks, and most of them worked well. The first picture in this essay (Figure 9.1) shows the equipment and materials and how Liam painted himself. I consider his painting good, and I think Liam was pleased with the result as well. I mention this kind of teaching situation as ordinary. I can recognize my own practice as a former teacher. It was made very clear to the students what they were going to learn and what the result should be. The object produced could reveal the extent to which the goal has been reached. As a teacher, one strives to master the expectations that lie in curriculum documents, and this forms 'the practice of teaching-as-usual' (Davies 2006: 432). There are so many expectations to deal with. In the end, those expectations give form to the subject of arts and crafts, and the subject adjusts to the politician's economic emphasis on serving the market's need for competence and creativity.

FIGURE 9.1: Liam's self-portrait made in an ordinary educational situation, Norway. Photo by Monica Klungland, 2018. CC BY NC.

After participating in ordinary teaching for a few weeks, I had the opportunity to invite the students to participate in my exploration of which potentials can exist in creative work with materials. The students, their teachers and I went into the nearby woods with a lot of yarn. The task for the pupils was to pick up a ball of yarn, tie a knot around a tree and start moving around. Within a few minutes, the place changed. As the students were moving around with a yarn, a web emerged between the trees. This was another form of teaching practice, compared to the practice of teaching-as-usual (Davies 2006). Liam moved around with some of his classmates. There were four to five boys between the same trees. After a short while, Liam stopped moving and exclaimed in an enthusiastic tone, 'We can do whatever we want!' (Figure 9.2). A break that contrasted with the normal school day was created.

FIGURE 9.2: 'We can do whatever we want!' Norway. Photo: Monica Klungland, still image from research material, 2018. CC BY NC.

The break observed and interpreted from a third-person perspective

After this first day in the woods, I looked through the film material for moments for the students to exist as a subject in dialogue (Biesta 2017a). My role in the situation was to be a researcher who viewed and interpreted from a 'third-person perspective' (Biesta 2017b). In my analysis, I made a stopping point at the statement from Liam. I saw it as a break or disturbance that was created when the teaching was no longer as expected. My interpretation was that this aroused a sense of freedom in Liam. In my interpretation, I decided to look upon this situation as the moment when Liam established contact with his own desires (Biesta 2017a, 2017b). The next step in my exploration was to find out how he tried out the possibilities and limitations in an experimental way. Liam continued with the other boys. They talked eagerly together about what they were doing. One of the boys suggested that they could make a

football goal. It led to laughter and was rejected because it would probably not be strong enough. They continued to move between the trees with skeins of yarn in their hands, and a wall of yarn gradually grew. Later, they told me that they had no plan to make a wall in advance. They stayed in the same place because they enjoyed chatting together. They agreed to make a wall when they saw all that yarn in the same place.

At the end of the first day out in the forest, I asked the pupils what kinds of materials they preferred. Liam's answer was clear. He wanted me to bring more balls of cut fabric. In my source for Liam's existence in dialogue, I connect the different qualities of the materials to possibilities and limitations, the concept of resistance and to questions of what is desired (Biesta 2017b: 16). If one wants to weave a dense wall, thin and smooth yarn will not work well, even if strong. Could stripes of cut fabric be suitable for a dense wall and, at the same time, strong enough for a wall?

Some weeks later when we went out in the woods, Liam started right away with his favourite yarn. The film shows how he made a wall, moving back and forth and back and forth. At one moment something strange happened. He walked a short distance away from the wall before running and throwing himself at it (Figure 9.3).

FIGURE 9.3: He threw himself against the woven wall, Norway. Photo by Monica Klungland. Still image from research material, 2018. CC BY NC.

He did this more times. My interpretation of this view was that he tried the weight of his own body against the wall. He encountered the reality of the wall with his own body and desires (Biesta 2017a: 66). One could even say that he encountered his own body. The wall was dense and strong. As expected from a researcher, I interpreted the situation from my third-person perspective (Biesta 2017b), reading data material together with theory, and I ended up writing that Liam had created a form that made his existence in dialogue possible (Klungland 2021).

After Liam's encounter with the wall, he left the place for a moment. He disappeared from the film. After a short while, he was back with a new ball of yarn, the same kind, just another colour. He crawled on his knees, back and forth between two trees (Figure 9.4). At this moment I brought him a camera and asked him what he was making. He answered, 'I don't know. Maybe I might be making a seat?' I understood that this would mean that he tried out several possibilities. If the wall could bear the weight of his own body, could this kind of material also be used for a seat?

FIGURE 9.4: He crawled on his knees, back and forth between two trees, Norway. Photo by Monica Klungland. Still image from research material, 2018. CC BY NC.

Filmed from Liam's position and observed from his own point of view

Liam took the camera I brought to him and attached it to his chest. He had actively offered to film and thus made himself vulnerable to the researcher's gaze. He had made himself available for the researcher's observations, interest in what he did and questions about what he made. My question to Liam about what he made led to a disturbance in Liam's movements with the yarn. The question also revealed my role as a distant observer watching Liam's movements in search of answers. At the same time, the question showed my expectations of Liam, and his answer can be understood as a student's attempt to adapt and master the teacher's expectations (Davies 2006).

Through the changed camera perspective, I got a direct look into Liam's encounter with the materials and the response this required. From Liam's first-person perspective, I saw how no one but Liam could answer what the yarn demanded of him (Biesta 2017b: 11). From this moment the yarn entered the scene in a different way. By giving Liam a camera, the yarn arrived in the film material in another way. One could even say that the earth or the world arrived at this shift in perspective. The boy was no longer in the centre.

I saw how Liam's hands moved quickly and guided the yarn around and around the yellow cross-weave, making it denser and denser (Figure 9.5). The skein of yarn was moved from one hand to the other and passed around the other threads. The pictures led me close to the fellowship of the hands with weaving materials. My attention shifted away from the question of what he was making, away from what he was thinking and desiring, and towards what the yellow yarn did with the movements of Liam's hands (Figure 9.6). The movements became rhythmic and repetitive. The yarn made his hands gentle and caring. The yarn rolled in his hands and changed from one to the other as it moved over and under and around (Klungland 2021).

This view led me to see how the physical touch of the yarn evoked Liam's existence in dialogue with materials. Through my observation from a third-person perspective, I had interpreted how this different teaching situation allowed Liam to follow his desires and explore opportunities and also how it required something of him and entailed limitations.

Through the possibility of observing Liam's first-person perspective, I could see how his enthusiasm for being able to do what he wants arose in dialogue with the weaving materials and forest environment. I got to see how it was in Liam's actions

FIGURE 9.5: Yarn responding to moving hands, Norway. Photo by Monica Klungland. Still image from research material, 2018. CC BY NC.

FIGURE 9.6: Hands responding to moving yarn, Norway. Photo by Monica Klungland. Still image from research material, 2018. CC BY NC.

with materials that a room with a seat was realized. As a result of Liam's dialogue with materials, he could sit down and rest in a seat he had made in a room that was his own. The making of a room gave room for Liam's existence in dialogue (Biesta 2017a), and the camera's location gave the researcher an experience of this from his first-person perspective.

The overall question for this chapter is as follows: 'Whose "I" arrived and how?' All this writing about Liam was to say something about places and moments for his existence as a subject in dialogue with materials (Biesta 2017a). In my practice-as-usual (Davies 2006) as a researcher, I observed from a distance and interpreted what I saw in the best way I could. In some way all this writing is not about Liam at all but me as a researcher and how my 'I' arrived through the sight of Liam's hands touching yarn.

Whose 'I' arrived and how?

The methodical choice of using an action camera, together with Biesta's (2017b) emphasis on the first-person perspective, has revealed how possible places and moments of existence as a subject can be linked to moments of touch. Biesta (2017a) states that the movement towards existence as a subject is about being emotionally touched in the face of art events:

> But the arts also 'work' in the domain of the heart – art, doing art, encountering art, can also touch us, can enthuse us, can move us, and we can come to care for art, can come to love art, and through this can come to care for and love the world.
>
> (81)

The pictures from Liam's own camera brought me, as a researcher, close to both Liam's encounter with yarn and my own gaze at the situation. As a researcher, I had to face what Liam's film showed me. A different point of view changed what could be observed and led to a different understanding of Liam's existence with the yarn. At the same time, the question of the arrival of the 'I' turned. Until that moment my role as participating observer and analytical researcher was not in question. I did as expected of me in such a role. However, I was disturbed by the shift in perspective, and this challenged me regarding how I had observed Liam until then. The different perspectives became important for what could be

observed, thus invoking the researcher's own existence as a subject. I was touched by the sight of Liam's hands touching the yarn, and thus, my possibility for existence as a subject was called for.

Concerning Levinas, Biesta (2017b: 11–13) explains human subjectivity and emphasizes that this does not emerge in any theory but from a first-person perspective. As a researcher, I was touched by the rhythmic movements of Liam's hands with a yarn. The questions were no longer about what he was doing and what he was making. The beauty of how his hands touched the yarn and how the yarn touched his hands, along with the disruption of my positioning as a researcher, created a necessary distance for the arrival of my own 'I'.

I started this chapter by writing about the tensions in teaching the subject of arts and crafts. Today's expectations for the subject are that pupils should develop both skills for craftsmanship and creativity for personal and original expressions (Brænne 2009, 2011; Lutnæs 2011). Like other school subjects, arts and crafts is committed to serving the economic demands of knowledge and the ability to apply knowledge as Norwegian society's most important competitive force in a global society (Kunnskapsdepartementet 2016). As a teacher and researcher, the sight of Liam's hands touching and being touched by yarn has let me arrive at a place where I see the greatest possibilities and potentials in making with materials just in the making or doing, in the action here and now. The values of arts and crafts in education lie in the student's encounters with the materials and the response this requires. The subject of arts and crafts is traditionally rich and diverse. It should continue to be so, because in hands that touch and are touched by materials lie opportunities for existence as a subject in dialogue (Biesta 2017a).

In the same way, an 'I' can arrive at a researcher's encounter and touch with her own data material. Through my view of Liam's hand touching and being touched by yarn and my recognition of the value in the doing with materials, I have dared to say no to a multitude of demands for the subject of arts and crafts. I have come to understand that I can put away the weighty demands of personal and original expressions and the development of creativity. I have arrived at a point where I confidently state that sometimes it is perfectly okay just to do crafts. An ordinary teaching situation, such as that described earlier, can also be best. However, we must not forget the power that lies in the possibility of exploration, experimentation and play. By putting ourselves in open-ended situations where we must act without prescribed norms, by breaking with the ordinary, our own position can be moved as we are challenged to respond ethically and aesthetically in the face of a material and social world.

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10

OTHERWISE IN LIFE: THOUGHTS ON A MINIMALIST PSYCHOTHERAPY

BÅRD BERTELSEN

The exhibition space, the classroom and the therapist's office – three sites where the issue of how to be a human being is at stake, albeit in different ways. Each vibrant with practices capable of addressing – exposing – human-ness at its most malleable, most vulnerable. As such, it is a triangle of practice domains constituting a community of shared destiny. In neo-liberal ideology, each is bestowed with the hope of contributing to the production of collective happiness and prosperity. But in another sense, this triangle is – to paraphrase a term from Lingis (1994) – a community of fields that have nothing in common. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) propose that the primary purpose of art is to engage our perception to produce affect. Biesta (2017) suggests that the primary educational task is to arouse in another human being the desire for wanting to exist in a grown-up way, that is, to be in the world without destroying it – and without destroying oneself. His stance reflects a reorientation of educative purpose, away from the task of producing specific learning outcomes in the student, and towards the task of raising questions about emancipation, freedom and existence. Neither art nor

education need necessarily be productive towards goodness (however that should ultimately be defined) but are practices of exposition, of orientation. Rather, the question of goodness is activated as the spectator or student is invited to consider what they are exposed to: 'look, this is ×. What will you do with it?'

In this text, I try to look for a way to understand psychotherapy as a practice that is similarly open to the world of which it is part, and that concerns itself with opening that world for people who struggle with finding ways to exist in it. My exploration moves in three broad steps. First, I locate contemporary psychotherapy in a historical developmental trajectory concerned with finding scientific solutions to mental health issues. Second, using ideas from philosophers like Martin Heidegger, Harry Frankfurt and Judith Butler, as well as existentialist psychiatrist Leston Havens, I argue for a different understanding that takes psychotherapy to be not primarily a reparative practice, but a supportive one where the goal is to continually invite persons whose lives are in distress to be in, or come into, a relationship with their own life. Finally, as an example of what such a practice might look like, I briefly describe a minimalist psychotherapy service that I took part in over a ten-year period. This service, I suggest, can help illuminate the precarious nature of psychotherapy itself and that keeping a professional practice impressionable to those who make use of it adds to its potential for being of value.

The idea of psychotherapy as a science-based practice

In 1890, William James foreshadowed the rise of modern scientific psychology when he wrote that:

> Within a few years what one may call a microscopic psychology has arisen […] eliminating uncertainty by operating on a large scale and taking statistical means. […] There is little of the grand style about these new prism, pendulum, and chronograph-philosophers. They mean business, not chivalry.
>
> ([1890] 2007: 192)

From nineteenth-century concerns about nervousness, through the growth of psychology as an academic discipline and an applied curative technology, this concern has grown to embrace the public diffusion of an analytic understanding of the human self and the spread of therapy and counselling. During the period between the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, our ideas of what it is, and takes, to be a person, changed (Rose 1999). Hendrick suggests that this, among other things, involved a reconstruction of childhood along 'scientific' lines, which was part of a more comprehensive movement towards enveloping human development in a sheath of experts and expertise (Hendrick 2015: 41). Turmel (2008) argues that the passion for normalcy and standardization that emerged during this time materialized in three distinct forms of normalcy: normal as healthy, normal as average and normal as acceptable. 'Normal as healthy' refers to the absence of illness or disease, 'normal as average' to conforming to typical physical and mental qualities, and 'normal as acceptable' to following socially favoured forms of conduct. Although certainly encompassing more than just the ideal of normalcy, the current definition of mental health offered by the World Health Organization (WHO) bears an echo of this:

> Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. Mental health is fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living and enjoy life.
>
> (2018: n.pag.)

In contemporary public debate, science-based psychotherapy and other forms of mental health work and clinical practices are often highlighted as what is needed to raise the level and quality of mental health in our societies. According to the American Psychological Association (APA 2020: n.pag.), what happens in psychotherapy is that:

> Psychologists help people of all ages live happier, healthier, and more productive lives. In psychotherapy, psychologists apply scientifically validated procedures to help people develop healthier, more effective habits. […] Psychotherapy is a collaborative treatment based on the relationship between an individual and a psychologist. Grounded in dialogue, it provides a supportive environment that allows you to talk openly with someone who's objective, neutral, and non-judgmental. You and your psychologist will work together to identify and change the thought and behavior patterns that are keeping you from feeling your best. By the time you're done, you will not only have solved the problem that brought you in, but you will have learned new skills so you can better cope with whatever challenges arise in the future.

As citizens of 'the Therapeutic Society', it certainly makes sense to assume that we all, at least to some degree and at certain moments during our lives, will consider orienting towards the enterprise of psychotherapy and the possibility of its usefulness. Who would *not*, at least at some point in their life, wish to be able to identify and change the thought and behaviour patterns that keep them from feeling their best? And who would refuse the chance not only to solve these problems but in addition learn new skills so as to be able to better cope with whatever challenges will arise in the future? Still, critical thinkers have problematized this cultural trend as a symptom of a general tendency to pathologize the human condition itself (Smail 2005; Watson 2019). As Katie Wright argues in her book, *The Rise of the Therapeutic Society: Psychological Knowledge & the Contradictions of Cultural Change* (2011), the contemporary privileging of psychological discourses and the prominence of counselling as a remedial life strategy are emblematic manifestations of the therapeutic society. Analyses of the influence of psychology and the growth of counselling sometimes point to the detrimental effects of this cultural shift, which is also described as involving a shift from reticence and self-reliance to emotional expressiveness and help-seeking (see, e.g., Furedi 2004). In this respect, the growth of therapeutic culture has been frequently interpreted as fostering cultural decline and permitting new forms of social control (Wright 2008).

The comfort of feeling at home with ourselves

As a social institution, psychotherapy irrevocably promulgates the values held by the larger society (Frank 1974: 120). Thus, the rise of therapeutics puts the issues of what it means to live a good life today at stake, irrespective of one's personal perspective on this development. In fact, it seems impossible to imagine a form of psychotherapy that does not engage with issues like happiness, effectiveness or mental healthiness, in some normative manner. When therapists are trained, we are often instructed in specific models for practice, many of which are based on solid scientific work. The model is typically described in a manual outlining the basic theoretical assumptions that constitute its logical foundation, as well as giving a detailed description of how a typical treatment is to be conducted – sometimes down to what should be the topic of specific sessions, perhaps even providing phrases for the therapist to vocalize. In general, the teaching of such models to therapists follows a strict formulaic curriculum, affording successful students with a certificate stating that they are officially approved as practitioners of this particular method. Increasingly, both government

organs and service user organizations expect and demand that treatments be based on sound evidence as to their effectiveness, and that professionals have the proper certificates.

Although many psychologists certainly 'apply scientifically validated procedures to help people develop healthier, more effective habits' (as stated in the quote from the American Psychological Association (2020) cited earlier), it is possible to imagine the purpose of psychotherapy to engage with questions of how to live well in other ways too. For instance, Heidegger's idea of human living as 'dwelling' has been important for inviting a different language about what being human involves. According to Heidegger, to dwell is to remain in place and to be situated in a specific relationship with existence, a relationship which is characterized by nurturing, enabling the world to be as it is. 'The basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve' (Heidegger 1971: 150–51). Seeing being as dwelling blurs the normative impetus of what it really means to realize one's abilities, to cope with the normal stresses of life or to work productively (i.e. to have 'mental health' in the way the WHO (2018) defines it). To dwell is not necessarily something one manages (poorly or well), and, thus, not something that we can easily find scientifically validated procedures to help people develop, and that psychotherapists can apply. This invites us to consider living more as an ethical question than as a question of skill.

On the difference between a scientific and what we might call an existential perspective on living, the philosopher Harry Frankfurt writes:

> When we seek to understand the world of nature, we do so at least partly in the hope that this will enable us to live within it more comfortably. To the extent that we know our way around our environment, we feel more at home in the world. In our attempts to settle questions concerning how to live, on the other hand, what we are hoping for is the more intimate comfort of feeling at home with ourselves.
>
> (2004: 5)

This, I believe, points to something that is often ignored in the psychotherapy discourse: the kind of understandings that the natural sciences are constructed to equip us with are what we might call 'manipulative' understandings. They are also, importantly, understandings of what is *not* me, or what is not 'I'. In the field of mental health, they are understandings that might, even greatly and importantly can, help us, as a society and as individuals, better deal with the kinds of people about whom we generate a particular set of knowledge. However, this kind of outsider knowledge does

not necessarily provide much help in making the other – the patient, client or person – feel at home. Mental health work differs from manipulative practice in that what it seeks to make happen is not necessarily an alteration of something that already exists, or the transportation of people from one state to another, but the coming into existence of something that is always in a state of becoming, of being not-yet realized. Understood thus, the task of therapeutic practice is to provide a space – a relational space as well as a physical one – where the other can be in, or come into, a relationship with their own life – their experiences, aspirations, relationships, hopes, fears. In this sense, the 'therapeutic' is not primarily a set of procedures for manipulation. It is rather a gesture to help illuminate the person's everyday world, and their dwelling in it, meant to enable them to live within it more comfortably.

Precarious life

Understood in this way, the ultimate normative goal in the therapeutic encounter is to assist a person to face the conditions of their own existence and figure out how to move forward. According to the existentialist psychiatrist Leston Havens (1989), 'to be moribund psychologically is to lack imaginative freedom, to lose a living connectedness, to see the future as apart from present and past'. Accordingly, the driving force of mental health work needs to be a passion for fashioning 'a life that can be lived' (Havens 1994: 148). In a therapist, this passion needs to go beyond simply getting things right, like finding a proper diagnosis, performing the right treatment, establishing rapport and providing the patient with sound explanations, or achieving specific results. In an important sense, mental health work is always concerned with human existence in a much more literal sense, a sense that such intellectual exercises do not touch upon; humans are the only living species on Earth capable of willingly declining their own continued existence. Many philosophers, like Nietzsche, Camus or Cioran, note that the capacity for suicide is a mark of what *human* freedom is about: only humans can choose their own death. But we are also alone in being equipped with the capacity for choosing to live. This makes the issue of 'a liveable life' into something much more serious than a question of 'quality of life', or a political question of making the world a better place. It is also always a very specific and, in principle, dichotomous absolute question of being or not being.

The philosopher Judith Butler suggests thinking of, and relating to, the precariousness of life as one way of countering the individualizing tendencies of modern ways of relating to the subject (e.g. Butler 2004, 2005, 2009). By the term

precariousness, Butler refers to the fact that life requires that different social and economic conditions be met for it to be sustained *as* a life. Thus, the observation of precariousness implies that life is lived socially; a life is, in some sense, always in the hands of someone else. To live a life is to be exposed – to these facts and to these others constituting the reality that we face, and that we are thrown into, knowing some things and not others, some people but not others. A big part of this precariousness involves being encroached upon by others' dependency on us. This intersubjective field that is part of what defines our precariousness does not only consist of close relationships – friends and loved ones, enemies and competitors. It is filled with a chaotic ebb and flow of people who are strangers to us, and with whom we may share vary few traits in common. Precariousness is thus not a quality that individuals acquire, or a faculty that develops over time, it is suggested as a fact of life. Each of us was conceived by someone else and born into someone's (apprehensive) hands. Precisely because the survival of an individual cannot be taken for granted, life depends on the care of others.

Being therapeutic can thus be taken as a question of translating one's recognition of the precariousness of the life of the other into actions that make it possible for the other to construct a liveable existence for themselves (Havens 1994: 182). According to Havens (1986: vi), 'the goals sought in therapy are "to find the other," to confirm and develop a presence, to manage social forces impinging from inside and outside', an ambition that implies 'a normative ideal or goal of psychic health', which Havens characterizes as 'the capacity to be alone with another, personal freedom or self-possession, and liberation from the need either to invade or be invaded'. In this way, Havens concludes, 'psychotherapy introduces to personal experience what the concept of democracy introduces to political experience: opposition to tyranny' (1986: vi). Here, the project of therapy is concerned with nothing more (but nothing less) than to help others live a life as best as they can – to be at home with themselves.

As such an existential engagement, the *form* that mental health work takes is contained in the verbs *being and staying*. The therapeutic power of being and staying in this way is not the power of instruction, suggestion, surgery or injection; nor is it the power of interpretation. As Havens points out, to exert that power would be to use being and staying 'like a Trojan horse – to use it in the service of some preformed conception of the patient's needs. *Being and staying is the goal in itself*' (Havens 1973: 299, original emphasis). This means being with whatever one can find of the other, not deciding beforehand what in the other is to be considered sick and what is to be considered healthy. The relationship between the therapist and the person seeking help must be established as a space where desires and

aspirations can be expressed and related to, a place where the person can engage with reality as an 'I' and develop a relationship to the facts of their own subjective existence. 'Then the psyche, self, soul […] for all its elusiveness, its subjectivity, its being at once subject and object […] does in fact make reality' (Havens 1993: 57).

A minimalist psychotherapy

To highlight how these issues are at stake in mental health practices, I will rely on my own experience from running a minimalist mental health service consisting of single-session work in a walk-in clinic offering consultative mental health services within the bounds of child and youth mental health care. This practice took place as a ten-year project that I ran together with a psychologist colleague (Bertelsen et al. 2015; Odden and Bertelsen 2015). The practice existed alongside, and originated from, the mental health mainstream mode of hospital-based, outpatient mental health services, a form of work where standardized texts occupy a central role in service provision (e.g. as referrals, standard letters, symptom checklists and self-completion forms, templates for making assessments, etc.). In this mainstream way of orchestrating dialogues, young people and their caregivers are met through a predetermined sequence of standardized interviews and checklists, the purposes of which are to accomplish a comprehensive professional assessment of the patient's presenting problems, a preliminary interdisciplinary diagnosis and a treatment plan, all within a fixed timeframe. When my colleague and I first initiated the walk-in practice, it was formulated as a way of resisting, or sidestepping, this way of receiving people in distress. Simultaneously, it was an 'archaeological' experiment aiming to excavate some of the alternative potentials imminent to the encounter between therapist and person(s) in distress.

The foundational assumption upon which this project was founded was that mental health services are not simply a set of technologies developed to respond to and ameliorate naturally occurring states and phenomena. It is instead, as Frank and Frank (1993) have argued, a set of culture-specific practices developed to collectively deal with certain frequently recurring subjective experiences and interpersonal phenomena. There are other ways to understand these experiences and phenomena than to see them as something that demands the care of a psychotherapist (historically, what today is considered mental illness has been understood in a plethora of ways, see, e.g., Foucault 2013). But today, seeing a psychologist or other mental health professional when experiencing emotional or relational distress is a common, and publicly sanctioned, thing to do.

However, at the particular mental health clinic for children and young people where my colleague and I worked, there were long waiting lists, and close to half of referrals were rejected based on the letter of referral alone (a situation far from rare in Norwegian mental health care). Although it must be assumed that all referrals to the clinic were initiated as responses to someone's despair, one could say, with Butler, that in terms of precariousness, the institutional response to these referrals – understood as cries for help formulated in bureaucratic jargon – in half of the cases was to ignore or refuse the mental health clinic's prospective role in the precarity of the troubles of living that was described, concluding that those lives did not warrant a closer look from professionals.

Frustrated by the ever-increasing stream of formal documents, standard letters and impenetrable diagnostic codes that referrals would be coated in, we had the idea of establishing a frame for therapeutic practice that involved stripping us as professionals of all the paraphernalia that we had at our immediate daily disposal to help us perform a specific version of professionalism. These we sometimes experienced as a long sequence of hurdles installed between us and the realities of living for the persons we were meant to serve. We wanted to see what would happen if we were to remove our practice from as many of those formulaic props as possible while remaining true to the *ethos* of providing child and youth mental health services. In this way, we hoped to discover what the 'basic' form of our practice could be. Via a series of coincidences, we ended up setting up the practice one day every other week in a physical therapist's office at a municipality centre for family services in the small town of Tvedestrand, at the eastern end of Agder county in South Norway.

To introduce the service to the local environment of other professionals, relevant institutions (like schools, daycare centres, child protection and school psychology services), and to the general public, our strategy was to simply announce that we would be present at this location, by mandate of being clinical psychologists specializing in child, youth and family psychology, working for the hospital-based outpatient clinic for child and youth mental health. We would receive anyone who had a concern or issue that they wanted to speak to such people about – be they parents, teachers, child protection caseworkers, grandparents, young people or anyone else. Apart from adhering to the basic legal regulations for professional psychological practice – that is, that health personnel cannot consult with children below the age of 16 without their parents' consent, and that we were obliged to report any concern for the safe care of children to parents or child protection services, we sought to strip away all the formal constraints of practice – letters of referral written in incomprehensible language by other professionals, assessment procedures

and diagnostics, and all the interdisciplinary meetings and discussions that would usually happen backstage to the 'case' in between sessions. But what we held on to was that beneath all this there was a purpose or *telos*. We remained firmly in the role of psychologists, but we sought to continually discover what that role could be by exposing ourselves to being addressed by whoever would come to see us.

To strip away everything but the material and intersubjective practice of psychotherapy itself, we limited contact to 60 minutes, with no referral or information to us beforehand, and no further follow-up. The idea was in a sense to 're-invent' psychotherapy – not in any grand sense, 'to the World', but for us – starting simply with the notion that psychotherapy is possible and that it involves at least one person whose life is in distress, another person who assumes the task of making contact with this life, and a certain amount of time for the two to engage in a dialogue. Within the 60-minute timeframe we created, whatever happened, happened. It could not be undone, repaired or clarified in the next session (and a next session, and so on). If it was to be said or done, now was always the time.

According to Butler, we address others when we speak, but we also come to exist in the moment of being addressed (Butler 2004). At the most basic, this experiment with the form of psychotherapy attempted to reformulate, or better, to formulate once again, what mental health practice as a conversational and intersubjective event could mean. Just as much as it represented an intention to make psychological services more accessible to the public, it was an experiment to see what this particular mental health practice, and us as its practitioners, would become when we opened it up so that we could be addressed by all those who, for some reason or other, decided to make use of it. Bereaving ourselves of the protective walls of bureaucracy and time delays provided by postage and waiting lists, it represented an attempt at embracing precariousness as a moral frame for the practice, joining us as humans. Thus, more than a method, the practice was a *form* of addressing and of being addressed.

Butler writes that

> what binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avert or avoid; this impingement by the other's address constitutes us first and foremost against our will or, perhaps put more appropriately, prior to the formation of our will.
>
> (2004: 130)

On this view, moral authority is not about finding out what we really think is right and then standing by it, defending it against others' arguments and making it constitutive of who and what we are ('I am a psychologist', 'I think my practice is better than yours'). Standing our moral ground, we risk missing the situation of being addressed. In the address, we are met with a demand that comes from elsewhere,

> By which our obligations are articulated and pressed upon us. Indeed, this conception of what is morally binding is not one that I give myself; it does not proceed from my autonomy or my reflexivity. It comes to me from elsewhere, unbidden, unexpected, and unplanned. In fact, it tends to ruin my plans, and if my plans are ruined, that may well be the sign that something is morally binding upon me.
>
> (Butler 2004: 130)

Thus, just as much as it was an honest attempt at providing useful services to troubled humans, this practice required us to engage with important questions that we had not been able to articulate or address before: what does it mean, or could it mean, to speak as a therapist? When I do so, who is the speaker and what is it that is spoken? Genealogically, what are the structures (of power, of materials) within which the speech emerges? Who is spoken to? How can the relationship between therapist and client as speaking subjects be thought? Under which conditions can a client speak? These might seem like unnecessary questions, perhaps even futile. But only if we assume mental health to be a fixed entity, and the 'therapeutic relationship' to be a realm external to subjective experience and activity – a force working on its own, an energy already there, waiting to be uncovered and capitalized upon (for further exploration of alternative understandings of the therapeutic relationship, see Bertelsen and Bøe 2016). If, however, we approach therapy as a radically open phenomenon, then these questions are part of what must continually and repeatedly be figured out.

Much of the inspiration for this practice came, for my part, from reading Jacques Rancière's (1991) book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. There, Rancière articulates the idea that it is possible to teach what one doesn't know by asking questions: 'What do you see?'; 'What do you think about it?'; 'What do you make of it?' Adopting these questions as a form of conversational 'manual', we thought that this might open a path to conversations that would invite people to relate to their own lives in new ways. As a therapist, I tried to concentrate on picking up on the other's beginnings, let whatever I perceived resonate with as much of my own life – professional or not – and with the histories of people I had met, read, or

heard about, and offer it back in return as a kind of question: 'this is what I picked up on, and this is what impression that leaves with me – what do you make of that?'

Coda

In the book *The First Person Singular*, Lingis (2007) writes about how, beneath our statements and conversational lines, beneath the worries that we articulate and the opinions that we state, there is the possibility of an 'I', 'a secret solitary word' that the other has put on themselves:

> 'For my part, I think […],' you say. 'I will do it.' Beneath the 'I' that simply designates the one now putting forth the utterance is 'I am a mother,' 'I am a dancer,' 'I am an adventurer,' that secret and solitary word you have put on yourself. When I address you, I do have a sense of the inner resonance and force of that word.
>
> (72)

The project of basing as much as possible of therapeutic actions on scientific evidence is, one could say, built on the idea that there is a universal grammar to life and that therapeutic services need to spell out its contents in this grammar. But, as Richard Rorty observes, 'The world does not speak. […] It cannot propose a language' (Rorty 1989: 6). Hence, in a sense, any spelling of life is a misspelling. Frank and Frank (1993) argue that what is addressed in psychotherapy is not so much common specific conditions or mental illnesses, but primarily the sense of demoralization that come upon us if we no longer feel at home in the world or with ourselves. Thus, like in the exhibition space and the classroom, the therapist's office (or any other venue where mental health work is being done) is a site where the issue of how to be human cannot be answered once and for all, but is perpetually at stake in the form of a question.

In some sense, the psychotherapeutic project shares with education and art that they are ways of inviting individual humans to engage with the general question of how to live life well. But while art and education are both largely phenomena that will appear in any life (at least in parts of the world where education is compulsory and the making and exhibiting of art is not politically restricted) and as such are part of what living a life inevitably entails (sometimes even part of what makes a life seem unliveable), therapy comes into consideration precisely when life seems to not add up, or when one or several persons start doubting how and if to go on as 'I's. And just as the lives of the

people who seek therapeutic services are precarious in the sense that any life is what it has become from being exposed to the reality of the material, political and relational dependencies that constitute it, so the therapist and the therapy continually become in response to being addressed from the elsewhere of each individual client and the institutional structures within which the therapy happens. Often, what transpires is not what scientific evidence or professional guidelines predict. Just as otherwise in life.

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11

WHEN I TEACH

GERT BIESTA

If I could say it in words there would be no reason to paint.

Edward Hopper

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Introduction

In much of what I have written I have tried to write *about* education (see particularly Biesta 2006, 2010, 2014, 2017, 2021a). This work is, I think, important, because so much that is written about education is actually not about education but about something else (such as learning or development to name two prominent 'para-educational' discourses). I have tried to make the educational case for

education by suggesting that philosophy of education asks philosophical questions about education, psychology of education asks psychological questions, sociology of education asks sociological questions, anthropology of education asks anthropological questions about education, but that no one seems to be asking *educational* questions about education (see Biesta 2011, 2018; Biesta and Säfström 2011). Some have ridiculed this suggestion by arguing that the idea that one can ask educational questions about education is 'as nonsensical' as the suggestion that one can ask 'cookery questions about cooking' (see for this comment Biesta 2011). I have persisted, however, on the basis of the belief that if we are unable to articulate what is *educational* about a particular setting, situation or action, we are actually unable to identify education as an object of study. We then would have nothing to ask questions about, be they philosophical, psychological, sociological, anthropological or educational for that matter.

While all this work is potentially important, I do not just exist as someone who writes *about* education; I am first of all an educator myself, which raises the interesting question of how what I write about education relates to what I do as an educator. I am open to the suggestion that my writing is just a sublimation, that is, an 'ideal' version of how I would like to exist as an educator, and therefore more a form of wishful thinking than a truthful account of my practice. I am also open to the suggestion that my writing tries to give words to the aspirations I have about my teaching, but without the claim that I am already 'there' or will ever manage to fully arrive 'there'. And perhaps my writing about education is also an ongoing dialogue I have with myself in which I try to give words to what I'm doing, what I experience, what I discover and what I encounter *when I teach*.

In this chapter, I want to try to write about my own teaching practice, that is, my own work as an educator and, in a sense, my own existence as an educator – or at least my *attempts* at existing as an educator (my 'trying', to relate it to Rolf Sundret's chapter in this book). I will do this through an account of three 'episodes' from my teaching career. One refers to my first attempts at being a teacher by teaching physics to student radiographers. A second refers to a remarkable event that occurred in a course I taught for doctoral students. The third refers to a programme I developed and taught in which we took assessment out. I will tie these episodes together with some experiences from my work as a supervisor, mainly of doctoral projects. In all this, I will suggest, the 'issue' that keeps coming back and that strongly orients everything I do (or refrain from doing) is about the arrival of the student's 'I'. There is not much more than this – yet, as I will seek to argue, this is also everything. I preface the chapter with some reflections about the

very possibility to say anything at all about one's own teaching and how this relates to the intriguing question of the efficacy of teaching.

An impossible ambition?

Is it possible to say anything meaningful about one's own teaching? In one sense we could say that the only one who *really* knows what is going on is the one who is teaching. Teaching, after all, is not behaviour that just needs to be observed from the outside; teaching is a form of intentional action, and such intentions, plus all the considerations that go 'into' such intentions, occur on the 'inside' of the one who is teaching. They can be made explicit, they can be shared with colleagues or students, but they can also remain hidden from them and only be known, therefore, by the one who is teaching – as a kind of secret.

But then: can we really know our intentions? Can we really be sure about them? Isn't there a risk that what we claim to know about our intentions – for example that we want 'the best for our students' – is actually a form of wishful thinking, that is, an account of how we would like our intentions to be rather than how they actually are? Could it be the case, then, that there is a 'public' or even 'sanitized' version of our teaching intentions and another version, which is perhaps messier and darker? And how much are our intentions actually *our* intentions? In what way do we 'possess' our intentions? How much are we in control of our intentions? And how much are our intentions in control of our actions, if such an expression makes sense? After all, in my own teaching many things seem to happen by sheer luck. I hear myself saying things, I see myself doing things, or refraining from doing things, and am often utterly surprised. Where did that come from? A lot of what occurs in my teaching is, in this sense, 'beyond' my intentions. It is given to me, from somewhere, which even begins to raise the question of to what extent I can actually call my teaching *my* teaching.

Yet even if it were possible to say anything meaningful about one's teaching, there is also the question – which is perhaps the more urgent and difficult one – whether it is *wise* to say anything about one's teaching and, more specifically, about one's teaching intentions, about one's 'teacherly inside', so to speak. The hesitation here has something to do with what we might call the 'efficacy' of one's teaching. As teachers we want our teaching to have efficacy; we want our teaching to make a difference. And we actually know that our teaching can have efficacy and can make a difference. But we also know that teaching has no causal power, and that

it is not an intervention that will generate particular effects. Such language – of interventions and effects – is a misrepresentation of what is really going on between teachers and students, and it is a scandal that such language has become so prominent in contemporary education (and that so much money and time are spent on finding out which interventions apparently 'work').

The scandal is that the very question as to which interventions produce the desired effects actually removes students from the educational equation and replaces them with 'intervenable objects'. But the fact that students are always there as subjects is undeniable. After all, students can always stick their fingers in their ears, sing 'lalala', and say quite bluntly: 'I won't learn from you' (Kohl 1993). So, if teaching is to have any efficacy at all, it should not intervene upon objects but appeal to subjects. And here we enter the paradoxical 'terrain' of teaching because to appeal to someone is a 'gesture' that does two things at the same time: it seeks a *response* from the student, so we might say, and in this sense *doesn't leave the student free*. Yet it wishes this response to be *the student's* response, and in that sense, it *has to leave the student free*.

To call the gesture of teaching 'paradoxical' contains an echo of Immanuel Kant's idea of the educational paradox, which he phrased as the question 'How do I cultivate freedom through coercion?' ('Wie kultiviere ich die Freiheit bei dem Zwange?') (see for a detailed discussion Giessinger 2011), although the very metaphor of education as cultivation runs the risk of reducing teaching to work 'on' an object – or, in the context of cultivation, 'on' a living organism – rather than that it is enacted as an encounter between subjects. The educational encounter is not just any encounter between subjects. Teacher and student occupy different 'positions' in the educational encounter, which makes it fundamentally different from, say, friends having a chat over a cup of coffee. I teach *because* I have intentions, ambitions and hopes for my students, and without these, I would no longer be teaching. And students are also 'there' with expectations and anticipations. They are not there just to have a good time or a nice conversation, but expect something from the teacher, first and foremost something that they themselves do not (yet) have. (On the 'gifts' of teaching, see Biesta 2021b.)

The particular predicament of the teacher is probably quite close to the predicament of the artist (and, in a sense, also that of the therapist; see particularly the contributions by Bård Bertelsen and Tore Dag Bøe in this book). This is first of all because artists across all artistic disciplines in some way want to have an 'impact' on their potential audience, but in most cases do not want to prescribe or control what this impact should be and how their audience should respond.

They are, in other words, not indifferent about their potential audience, just as teachers are not indifferent about their students, but in appealing to their audience they care for *their audience's* response, if any, not for the audience to just generate a pre-programmed and pre-determined response. Or in simple terms: artists want to *evoke* responses, but don't want to *enforce* them, in the very same way as teachers – at least those who care about the 'I' of their students and the possibility for the 'I' of their students to 'arrive' – want to evoke but not enforce.

But the comparison with artists and their artworks is also illuminating because for every artist it is the artwork *itself* that matters, which also means that it is the artwork *itself* – the painting, the sculpture, the performance, the dance, the song, the poem, the acting – that should do the evocative work, not the artist's explanation of what the artwork is supposed to express and definitely not the artist's explanation of what the artwork is supposed to evoke. After all, if such a shortcut were possible, there would be no point in the artwork itself. This also means – and I think that this is significant for what I am trying to hint at in this chapter – that when artists begin to explain the intentions behind their artwork, that is, when they begin to disclose what they hope or intend that their artwork will evoke, they begin to undermine the very possibility for the artwork to evoke anything at all. They begin to undermine, in other words, the very *efficacy* of the artwork.

To put it bluntly then: for the artwork to have such efficacy, artists need to remain silent about their intentions. They need to keep the secret rather than share it. And perhaps they even need to stay silent about the fact that they are keeping this secret. A double secrecy, perhaps? Does that make the artist insincere? Does it make the artwork into a trick? I am inclined to say no, not least because artists should care about their artworks and generally *do* care. Yet it is, of course, a tremendously fine line we are encountering here, because sincerity is extremely difficult to judge and the judgement will ultimately lie with the audience, not with the artist. But it does suggest that for the very sake of the artwork and its efficacy, there is something that cannot and should not be shared, but needs to remain with and needs to be carried by the artist.

At this point, I only wish to suggest that all this is also relevant for teachers and their teaching in that in any teaching that is interested in and orientated towards the 'arrival' of the 'I' of the student, there is something that needs to remain with the teacher, something that cannot be shared – not now and also not later. Does this begin to suggest that trying to say anything at all about one's own teaching is indeed an impossible ambition? I will return to this below, but will now turn to three short episodes from my (own) teaching.

‘If you understand it, you don’t have to learn it!’

My first foray into teaching occurred when I was in my 20s. Unlike the many teachers who enter the profession after a proper teacher education programme often, but not always, combined with a proper education in the subject they teach, I had an opportunity to just start teaching, moreover in a subject area, physics, I had relatively little knowledge of. The teaching took place in a programme for student radiographers which, at the time, was regulated by the Ministry of Health, not the Ministry of Education. Because of this, anyone who was a qualified radiographer, which I was, was eligible to teach without any additional teaching qualifications, although once I had started my teaching, I did follow a two-year part-time programme for teachers of student radiographers. One challenge I faced, which is not uncommon for teachers, is that of just staying ahead enough of my students in order to be able to teach them, which was already hard work. But at the very same time, I had to deepen and broaden my understanding of physics itself, a subject I had not been very successful in at secondary school.

I tend to think that I became a rather good teacher of physics because of the fact that I had to build up my knowledge and understanding of physics from scratch, so to speak, that is from the most basic and simple insights I had. This made it easier for me, I think, to connect to those students who had great difficulty grasping what the physics lessons were about. Unlike most of my teachers in secondary school – who all seemed to be rather good at physics and therefore struggled to connect with students like me who often had no clue what their teachers were on about – I was able to find a very basic ‘common ground’ with many of my students and could build up their understanding in little steps up to where I hoped they would end up. The steps I myself had to take ‘downwards’ in order to build up my own understanding were, in other words, the steps I could take ‘upwards’ again with my students.

This also meant, I think, that, almost intuitively, I was always working on my students’ understanding. I wanted them to become ‘at home’ in the areas of physics we were exploring, rather than just being able to remember and reproduce particular statements or formulas or ideas. Over time I increasingly felt that rather than teaching physics I was actually teaching a language, where my ambition for my students was that they would become able to ‘speak physics’, become fluent in it, and develop an ability to navigate the language of physics. From time to time, I captured this by saying to my students that if you understand something you don’t have to learn it – a false opposition, of course, that nonetheless makes sense. I only

discovered much later that all this also had something to do with an interesting observation made by Aristotle, which is that if you understand something you are able to teach it to someone else (see Benner 2020). This not only means that teaching is the ultimate 'test' of one's understanding but perhaps also that trying to teach is a way to come to (an) understanding.

I also discovered much later that the particular difficulty I had encountered in secondary school was perfectly captured by Kierkegaard's idea of 'double truth giving' (see Biesta 2021b), highlighting that teaching is not just about giving students 'the truth' but also and at the very same time giving them the conditions under which something can be recognized as truth, to begin with. And while my teachers in secondary school were probably quite good at giving their students the truth about physics, they were not that good at helping students like me to enter the sphere within which such truths could be recognized by me as truth – or in more general language: where what they were conveying to me would begin to make sense. My own work in going 'downwards' to a point where I could let students enter the 'frame' within which the truths of physics can begin to 'make sense', in order then to take my students all the way 'up', was, in hindsight, precisely a way in which teaching as double truth giving can be done.

In one sense, everything I did in the early years of my teaching career was quite 'normal', so to say. I wanted my students to do well in my subject, not just in passing exams but in really gaining an understanding of the subject. I was, therefore, interested in how the physics I was teaching could become *their* physics so that they could pursue their own journey in, through and particularly *with* physics, so to speak. Perhaps, then, in what at one level will look rather 'normal' and probably is rather 'normal', I was interested in my students' arrival. What made it relatively 'safe' for me is that I had the security of a rather 'precise' subject area so that it was relatively easy to focus on the subject matter itself. What also helped was the fact that my teaching took place in a vocational education programme. This meant that I didn't have to convince my students of the importance of my subject, as it mattered directly for the career they had chosen to pursue.

While all this was, as said, rather 'normal' – nothing to write home about – I did derive a great amount of joy from this start of my teaching career (and I am still tremendously grateful to the person who saw a potential teacher in me when this was, at least from my perspective, far from obvious). What I took with me from this early stage was a preference for (some might call it an obsession with) precision in my teaching, most likely because teaching physics needs to be done with much precision. I also took with me an interest in what might be called the

'art of sequencing', that is, figuring out which steps to take and in what order to take such steps when trying to bring students from 'A' to 'B'. This is, I think, also visible in my writing, which I tend to see as a form of teaching anyway, and I hear fairly regularly that readers like the clarity of my writing. I only once had a reviewer of one of my books who complained that my writing was too clear and who urged me to decrease the degree of clarity. Apart from the question of whether it would actually be possible for me to do so – I don't think that writing is just a technique one can change at will – there is also the question of what the apparent clarity of writing does with the reader. Might it be the case that the apparent clarity of writing gives the lazy reader a false sense of security? Is there, perhaps, a very particular appeal to the reader? Should a reader perhaps be more concerned when a text appears entirely clear than when it appears difficult or obscure? Enough said. Let's move to the second vignette.

Adopting a concept: The limits of understanding and limiting understanding

About 25 years later, with a significant amount of teaching in further and higher education 'under my belt', I found myself in a two-week intensive course with about twenty doctoral students at a university in North America. It is fair to say that in the meantime my writing career had taken off as well, and after working for a significant period of time on the ideas of other scholars – Dewey and Derrida were two authors to which I had devoted a significant part of my scholarship – I slowly began to pursue themes and issues that I would see much more as my 'own', rather than derived from reflections on other people's work (although I have to say that the encounter with Derrida has left a permanent deposit in my thinking).

One theme that emerged in my writing and became an important and influential thread was the critique of the prominence of the language of learning in educational research, policy and practice. Where initially my concerns were mainly focused on what we might call the *discourse* of learning (see, e.g., Biesta 2004, 2013), making the point that the language of learning is a rather poor if not empty language where it concerns education, I became increasingly concerned about the underlying 'logic' of learning. The point here, to put it briefly, is that learning denotes a gesture that goes from the self to the world, in such a way that the self seeks to gain something from the world – knowledge, understanding, skill and so on. Central in the gesture of the logic of learning is the question of how I can gain knowledge and understanding of

the world outside of me, which means, amongst other things, that I come 'before' the world, both in time and in terms of order of priority.

While I am happy to concede that this is one way in which we as human beings – or perhaps I should say: as human organisms (on this see also Biesta 2020a) – can relate to the world 'outside' of us, which includes the natural world and the social world, I do not think that this is the only or for that matter the most basic or most important way in which we can be 'in' and 'with' the world. For that reason, I would resist the idea that we can characterize human beings as learning beings, and even more so, that we can characterize what is distinctive about human beings in terms of their apparent ability to learn. After all, animals and machines can learn as well, but what is perhaps distinctively human is the ability to say no, including the ability to say no to learning and no to the demand to learn (on this, see particularly Biesta 2013). In light of all of this, I have become increasingly interested in an altogether different gesture, one that doesn't go from me to the world but goes in the opposite direction, from the world to me. This is about how the world addresses me, speaks to me, appeals to me, gives itself to me, asks something of me, teaches me. Here I do not appear *before* the world, but it rather is the world that calls me into being, so to speak.

The significance of this different gesture became clear to me – I might almost say: revealed itself to me – through a rather lucky and unexpected event. In the course I taught it would be rather common to present the students with readings and spend time together to understand what the readings are about, in order then to invite the students to choose from the readings and explore connections for their own doctoral research projects. This particular course was about seven key educational concepts, and when I was writing the outline for the course, I found myself typing that I would be inviting the students to adopt one of the concepts. Why the word 'adopt' appeared on the screen of my laptop is not entirely clear. Perhaps I was just looking for a slightly more formal word than 'choose' or 'select', but when the word was there, I suddenly thought 'Wouldn't it be interesting if I would literally ask the students to adopt one of the concepts?'

I had friends who had adopted a child, and one thing that struck me in the stories they had told me is that after a lengthy vetting process, it can stay quiet for a time until suddenly, usually at the end of the day, they get a phone call that there is a child for them and that they have to say 'yes' or 'no' to let this child into their life, and in most case a 'yes' means that the child will arrive the following morning. With adoption there is, therefore, little to choose, and little to have control over. You either say 'yes' to this child that you know little about; you say 'yes' to the possibilities and 'yes' to the risk,

and with that 'yes' you commit yourself to care for this child, and thus commit yourself to this child. All this suggests an altogether different experience and an altogether different gesture than the one where the world is just there as an object of your learning and understanding, where you are, in a sense, in control, and the world needs to follow.

So I did ask my students whether they were willing to each adopt one of the concepts, not in order to learn about the concept or try to understand it, but to let the concept into their life, and live with it – and in this particular course, I invited to students to let a concept into their life and live with it for the two weeks of the course, where I just said that at the end of it, we could share some experiences about what had happened. Most students were up to the challenge and since I wanted to highlight that to adopt is to really open yourself to what will arrive, with little choice, this was not about them choosing a concept, but about a concept arriving with them – one could even say a concept choosing them. So, I had written the concepts on pieces of paper which I had folded up and had left on a table after the first session for them to pick up and take with them.

There is much to say about what the students reported back after two weeks (for more detail, see Biesta 2015). While I had emphasized that their task was not to present an understanding of the concept and even less so an account of what they had learned about the concept, it was interesting to see that some students came back with exactly that. For me this mainly showed how prominent the focus on learning and understanding in educational settings is, and how difficult it is, therefore, for students to envisage another identity than the identity of the 'learner' whose task it is to learn and understand.

Perhaps the most remarkable, but also the most significant account came from a student who, before picking up one of the pieces of paper, was quite keen *not* to get one particular concept but, when she picked up 'her' piece of paper and opened it she found the very concept that she would never have chosen. Not sure about what to do with it, she put the piece of paper in her backpack and left it there, probably quite adamant that she was not going to engage with this concept. But it was interesting that the concept didn't let the student off the hook that easily. The student recounted that she could literally feel the concept sitting there deep down in the backpack. And when she went to bed in the evening, she was very aware that the concept was still in the backpack downstairs. The concept was, in some sense, calling her.

There is much more to say about this remarkable event, although it may also speak for itself. What it made visible for me – and hopefully also for some of the students in the course – is that our focus on our own choices, our own 'eagerness' to learn and gain an understanding of the world outside of us, may actually prevent

the world from speaking to us, may block, or at least suppress what the world may be trying to say to us or ask from us, which also means that it may blind us from what the world is trying to give to us. To put it in this way is not to discredit learning and understanding, but is to highlight the importance of a different direction and different gesture, one that doesn't go from me to the world, but one that goes from the world to me, and in a sense begins to reveal, first of all to me, how my 'me' may matter in the world rather than just for me, that is, for my 'own' learning or my 'own' understanding or my 'own' development.

What happened in and around this course was significant for my own teaching in a number of ways. It, first of all, strengthened my belief that learning – if such a thing exists – is only one existential possibility amongst many, that is, one of the ways in which we as human beings can and do exist 'in' and 'with' the world, and that there is no reason to assume that education should only be about this very particular possibility. It strengthened my belief, in other words, that as a teacher I should try to open up many more existential possibilities for my students, particularly those that go beyond learning and understanding but work with the opposite gesture so that the world can in some way address the student rather than only be there as the student's object.

What the course also helped me to see with much more clarity is that as a teacher I always stand in a triadic relationship of teacher, student and world, where my main work is not to control the student or ask students to pay attention to me, but where there is the ongoing effort to point students towards the world so that the world can do its 'teacherly' work, so to speak. It helped me to see, in other words, that education has to be world-centred, and it gave me more courage to try to find more ways in which I could indeed put the world in the centre of my teaching, particularly so that students might be able to 'arrive' in the world in response to the appeal they may find there.

And with all that, I am also saying that much was given to me during this remarkable course.

No assessment: Anaesthetics, addiction and the triadic relationship

The third episode I briefly want to mention is about the programme I developed with colleagues in which we took out all assessments. Again, I would say that this was not

premeditated, but more the coming together of opportunities, events and insights, that allowed us to design this particular programme. We found, so one might say, a kind of loophole and although I do not entirely remember what prompted us to leave assessment out of the programme – there was partly the question of whether this programme actually needed assessment but also the excitement to see what might happen if there was no assessment – we ended up with a programme without assessment. Some of our colleagues wondered whether it was possible to have meaningful education without assessment. Some of our colleagues even questioned whether it should be possible to have such a programme, but we nonetheless moved ahead.

The main reason why I want to mention this programme and the wonderful time we had together on it in the context of this chapter is the effect it had on the students who, in a sense, were not just surprised that there was not going to be any assessment, but perhaps also a little shocked or 'interrupted'. I perceived a degree of unfamiliarity and also uncertainty with the students, not just in more explicit questions about how the students would know whether they had been successful or not, but also in more implicit, off-hand kind of questions, such as in the 'but you are still going to give us feedback, won't you?' type of questions. If I remember it correctly, I never responded to those questions in a direct manner, but in most cases tried to redirect the question – or more precisely: tried to distract the student – by responding with a slightly different point, a counter question or, sometimes, with gentle silence.

Why? I think because there is something deeply problematic in some ways in which assessment is enacted, namely there where the teacher steps in as the judge of the quality of what the student puts 'on the table'. In that very moment, one could say that the triadic relationship of education collapses into a dyadic relationship of power and subjection, where the teacher becomes the powerful assessor, and the student becomes the one who is subjected to the assessment of the teacher. Putting it in these words, not just shows how complicated, problematic, and perhaps we could even say how unhealthy such enactments of assessment are. It also shows how uneducational assessment can become, precisely when the triadic relationship collapses into a dyadic relationship.

This also matters for the 'I' of the student, because in this particular enactment of assessment we ask the student – in a sense we demand from the student – that they hand over their 'I'. Subjection rather than subjectification (on the latter term, see Biesta 2020b). Seeing it in this light, one would assume that all students would immediately resist to take part in such an assessment 'regime'. Yet the fact that students found it uncomfortable and difficult to proceed without assessment shows, perhaps, how much particular forms of education have resulted in an 'addiction'

to particular regimes of assessment, where the damage that such regimes do – damage to the 'I' of the student – can no longer be perceived or felt. Do these observations sound extreme?

Perhaps they do, but I think that they are nonetheless true, and that part of what I experienced in this course, particularly when students wondered about how they would know whether they had been successful or not, or when they indicated that they might be able to let go of assessment but not of their teachers' feedback, speaks to these observations. They speak to the question of whether education can encourage students to be subjects, first of all of their own studying, or whether education, when it comes to assessment, necessarily has to undermine this possibility. They speak to the question, as I have put it elsewhere (Biesta 2022), whether education can work on the side of 'aesthetics', of keeping students awake, or can all too easily fall into 'anaesthetic' modes of operation. Taking assessment out thus was an attempt at keeping students 'awake', out of a concern for the arrival of their 'I' – the arrival of their 'I' in this course and, of course, beyond this course as well.

The point of taking assessment out was not, as so often is said when critical questions about the role of assessment are made, to suggest that anything and everything students come up with is 'fine', for example because it is what they come up with, what they want to express, what they want to reveal about themselves and their identity. Such a way of thinking, which I would characterize as a problematic form of child-centred or student-centred education, is, in my view, uneducational at its core because it suggests to students that nothing matters, that nothing is at stake, that there are no limits and no boundaries, that there is no world to take into account, and that it is all just about them. What happens here is uneducational because it collapses a triadic relationship into a monadic relationship which, of course, is not a relationship at all.

The whole point of taking a particular, dyadic enactment of assessment out of this programme was to ensure that any assessment that takes place, any 'reality check' that occurs, is precisely that, that is, a check against the world rather than against the teacher if that formulation makes sense. It was to ensure that any 'check' of what students bring to the table always remains within a triadic relationship where the work of the teacher is to turn the student to the world and ask the student to assess how what they put on the table has value in (relation to) the world. This idea is not new – it played a role in Montessori's idea of 'autocorrection' of the material – but easily forgotten, perhaps because it's not just students who have become addicted to particular enactments of assessment, but teachers and education systems as well.

Of that whereof one cannot speak: Supervision

Because most of my teaching takes place in the context of higher education and the university, a significant part of it is enacted in the form of doctoral supervision. Such teaching is special for a number of reasons. One is the length of the endeavour as most of the doctoral supervision I have been involved in lasted anywhere between four and ten years. This not only shows the kind of investment on behalf of doctoral students who set out on such a trajectory. It also raises all kinds of interesting questions about what it takes to sustain an educational relationship over such a long period of time. This is at the very least a significant 'chunk' of time of the life of the student. But it is also a significant chunk of time of my life as a teacher. And as a result, many things can happen.

There is of course a 'sanitized' version of doing a doctorate and being supervised on the trajectory. And there are forms of doing a doctorate which take this sanitized version as reality. Doing a doctorate is conducting a piece of research, where research is about formulating a question, collecting and analyzing the data, writing a couple of publications about it, putting it together in a thesis, and getting it either examined (the approach in many English-speaking worlds) or presenting it at a public defence (the approach in many continental countries). The 'Ph.D. by publications' is a particular manifestation of this 'story', as it presents the doctoral project as just becoming part of the academic production line, where the 'test' – the assessment, so we might say – lies in the fact whether one can get one's work published in 'high ranking' journals. (And all the quotation marks here are intended to indicate the doubts I have about what is going on.)

As a supervisor, I do see it as my responsibility to provide my students with all the guidance they need to successfully work towards a thesis that is ready for the exam or the defence, but as an educator I know that supervision is full of educational dynamics, of which the arrival of the student's 'I' in the world, both the academic world and the world at large', is a major part. I think that I can do the 'technical' part of supervision generally well, but what makes teaching-as-supervision interesting and difficult is the fact that it is also a profoundly educational trajectory, and rightly so I would say. This means that the 'work' – which is not production but a risk – in relation to the arrival of the student's 'I' is at the heart of supervisory processes. This is partly very joyful, but can also be tremendously difficult, particularly when students don't manage to let their 'I' arrive, either in the particular academic context in which doctorates take place or in life more generally, and the distinction between both is not always clear.

But here is the question of how wise it is to say much about my own considerations and intentions, my own trying, my own efforts, returns, because I do know that some of the things I do or refrain from doing in supervision relationships will lose their efficacy when fully disclosed – and even saying this is, in a sense, already not entirely wise, as future (or former) students may want to try to find out whether this is about them. Perhaps this is not a problem where the whole question of the arrival or presence of the student's 'I' has become part of the supervisory conversation itself. And this does happen, for example with the student who as a visual artist was very able to exist 'in space' but had difficult to exist 'in time', whereas the latter is crucial for writing, which is always a process of sequencing, or putting bits and pieces in a temporal order. We are still figuring out what can help with this transition, but giving words to the issue, and sharing these words, has been a moment of insight.

Some other students' insights about how some of the difficulties of the doctoral project had something to do with their ability to 'arrive' have been shared over time, yet often more 'on reflection', that is looking backwards at successful trajectories and turning points, than whilst in the middle of the process. Perhaps most difficult have been the trajectories where students, presumably because they couldn't see any other options at the time, kept throwing their 'I' back to me – 'You are the expert, you are the supervisor, you should tell me what to do'. While these are entirely legitimate expectations at one level, with regard to the question of the 'I' we are ultimately only our own experts.

Conclusion: When I teach

In this chapter, I have tried to give an account of my teaching. Whether this was a wise thing to do, is a judgement I am happy to leave to the reader.

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EXIT

12

CODA

THE AUTHORS

As the title of this book suggests, the book exhibits a conversation between the different fields of art, education and mental health. However, a 'field' is inhabited by persons, and the conversation is also an exhibition of us taking part in this conversation as persons. Being in conversation means responding to each other. A conversation requires real *living persons* to be there and respond. We respond not only with *ideas* that the conversation evokes but also with the *engagement* and *feelings* evoked and, perhaps most importantly, with our *ethical concern*. Our ethical concern is perhaps both the spark that makes us engage in dialogue in the first place and what keeps the dialogue alive as a respons(i/a)ble conversation.

As a coda to this book, we invited ourselves to give a 'response' to the conversations we have had together over the last few years, each being free to decide what to pick up on. Being in conversation (probably) has touched us, challenged us, affected us, excited us, troubled us, delighted us and more. Perhaps traces of such an abundance of aspects of any dialogue may be found in the pieces that follow. Lastly, perhaps we should have kept a sheet open for you, the reader, to join the conversation with the responses evoked in you, being in conversation with this book.

Being human today

GERT BIESTA

Having been in a slow conversation for almost four years, I have become even more convinced about the importance of the 'today'. It may be nice to dream about the future and about one's future 'humanness' – which may, of course, never arrive. It can be soothing to reminisce about the past, particularly when it feels as if being human was easier then than now. However, the question of one's 'humanness' – and even more so the question of *my* 'humanness', of *my* attempts at being human – is only real in the here and now. This is not in order to forget the past or to deny that our actions have real consequences but to acknowledge that the question as to what needs to be done is a question for *today*. The 'today' of today is in many respects radically different from what the world looked like even four years ago. Some dramatic events have captured attention: a pandemic that is still ongoing, an attack on the US Capitol and a war in Ukraine that has only just begun at the time of writing these words. However, while such 'drama' manages to *capture* our attention – we are literally caught by it – it is much more difficult to remain attentive to what is less visible, less extreme, less interruptive and less 'in our face', such as the everyday erosion of democracy, the almost imperceptible rise of authoritarianism or the convenient neglect of the fragility of ecosystems. Art can help with staying awake, becoming attentive to what is closest to us and therefore often the most difficult to perceive. For such attentiveness, we not only need a certain openness towards the world, a degree of world uncertainty but also need a certain openness towards ourselves and even *of* ourselves. This is why the German educationalist Klaus Mollenhauer has argued that education should never strive for self-certainty but rather for a degree of self-*un*certainty – in German, *Selbstungewissheit*. After all, it is only when we manage to remain uncertain about ourselves that there is a chance that we can be 'touched' and can remain attentive, particularly to what is smallest and closest. I no longer believe that 'mental health' and 'therapy' are appropriate words to use. Therapy sounds too interventionist and too much like a cure, and mental health sounds too mental and too individualistic. I do not immediately have an alternative and so will stick to Hannah Arendt's wonderful phrase 'trying to be at home in the world' for now. This phrase captures the existential challenge – the challenge of being human *today* – quite well because the world is precisely the place where we can no longer rely on the comforts of our home. If we can manage to be there, and if art, education and mental health (for now, 'under erasure') can help us in trying to be there and stay there, they may once more become crucial for the never-ending challenge of being human – *today*.

Community

JO RAVN ABUSLAND

What does 'being human today' mean in a world with war? Why are neighbours fighting? Many conflicts get stuck because people will try to convince others that their views are the only right views and that people have to change in order to fit this way of being. If we look at nature and the diversity we find there, we can see that monoculture is not sustainable in the long run, and not the direction we want to take. A group is stronger with diversity.

Maybe we lack the 'tool' V. F. Cordova talks about in *How It Is* (Dean et al. 2007: 60), she says we lack 'the need to concentrate, not on similarities, but on differences. It is by contrasting notions that one learns about the distinction between the self and the Other. Those differences are what make the Other an Other.' Further, she says that we should not ignore these differences but acknowledge them. They are different and equally valid ways of being.

The real conflict now is failing to acknowledge this, and not being able to see past one's own matrix. This way we may not even be fully aware of the consequences of the way we are forcing others to be. Being aware of the matrixes of the demanding others might make it easier to understand why someone is putting restrictions on your humanity. The big question will be as V. F. Cordova asks: 'Will exposing the source of that worldview, of the matrix, make the user of a specific matrix aware of who he is?' (66). In nature, there is no singularity, except for perhaps black holes. Every action has a consequence. We could try to identify our impact on the world and listen to others in order to find our blind spots. We should all be able to be part of a community and at the same time be allowed to be a whole human.

Afterthoughts

TORE DAG BØE

When reflecting on our conversations, one thing that comes through as pivotal is the question of the subject or as Gert has phrased it: 'the arrival of the "I"'. The question of this 'I', and its arrival, is not the question of who we are: our personality, our qualities and our abilities (or whatever vocabulary we want to use). It is not about how we are *formed*, even if we include the whole range of bio-neuro-social-cultural-historical

causes and conditions, nor is it about *our experiences*. Perhaps the 'I' is better thought of as an *event* – a happening which makes me arrive because I must respond. In this response, I arrive. I must arrive to respond.

In our conversations, we have discovered a common concern that this subject is ruled out of the frameworks for professional practice and science. Science becomes 'zombie science', as Gert suggested, 'with no one there'. Professional practice may also become 'zombie practice' that does not ask for any 'I'.

A quote from Böhm that Gert shared with us struck me by the way it addressed these questions. I like this quote a great deal, and I think it is because it introduces a surprising, inverted way to think about the person and professional practice (in Böhm's case educational practice as 'Bildung'):

> Bildung is neither about the organic unfolding of talents, nor about the insertion of knowledge into human beings from the outside – the former is called development, the latter learning or instruction. Bildung is neither about the way in which self-sufficient individuals pursue their natural inclinations, nor about restrictive ways of making human beings part of society – the former is called (blind) self-realisation, the latter socialisation or schooling. Bildung is actually not at all such a one-dimensional process, but is the eminently complicated dialectical process of the human being's meeting with the world in such a way that the human individual denounces his natural self-centredness, frees himself from being caught up in his sensual world of experience, engages himself with the world and, in submitting himself to his particular vocation to world service, finds himself as a person who gathers himself in space and time and reclaims himself, as it were, at a higher level.
>
> (Böhm 2016: 163–64, our translation)

Practice, then – in education and I think also in mental health – differs not only from 'instruction' and 'insertion of knowledge' but also from facilitating the person's 'development' and 'unfolding of talents'. This has helped me discover that there might be a problem not only related to technique-based interventions but also associated with the so-called person-centred mental health care: because a practice that asks for, recognizes and strengthens the world-view and intentions of the single-person risks ending up with each person living in their own world. A common world to arrive in is lost.

Our conversations have searched for forms of practice that actually ask for the 'I'. The guiding question for professional practice perhaps becomes 'How can I take steps that also invent space for others to take their steps into the same space?' And

it must be *my* steps, *my* movement, *my* voice that enters the practice. At the same time – and this is the fascinating peculiarity of it to me – this arrival happens as a response determined by something *other* than me and hence involves, according to Böhm, a 'denouncement of self-centred-ness' and a state of freeing ourselves from 'being caught up in our sensual world of experience'. My chapter in this book is an attempt, with the help of Hannah Arendt and Alphonso Lingis, to think of this 'arrival of the I' as a very concrete and bodily happening belonging to the reality of our lives moving, sensing and responding at the surfaces and not some postulated 'higher' or 'deeper' realities.

Afterthoughts

ROLF SUNDET

One of the most challenging experiences of being part of this project has been to try to get a grip on the expression 'the arrival of the I'. (I am still not sure I have a grip on it.) The first time I heard that expression, I thought it was 'the arrival of the eye'. *A funny expression* was my first thought. What could it mean? Can an eye arrive? For a long time, I have had an interest in modern developmental psychology not so much because of its theories and research findings but mostly because of its descriptions and accounts of the infant as an active, resourceful and evolving 'entity' present in relationships from the moment of birth and probably also before that moment. One concept, though, has stuck with me: amodal perception – the idea that in the present moment of action in and response to the world, the infant experiences the world as a perceptual unity or at least that there is a spontaneous transfer between the different senses. The infant is, for instance, able to recognize by sight something experienced through touch but not seen originally. The misunderstanding that 'the arrival of the eye' elicited was the thought that this must mean that the real is received not only as sight but as a holistic phenomenon where the different senses are aspects of this whole.

'The arrival of the I' points to a completely different domain than the experiential and phenomenal. The dominance and intrusiveness of the phenomenal and experiential domains lie, for me, exactly in the unity of my perceptual experience of the world. I am locked into this wholeness. My first-person experience seems inescapable because of the holistic qualities of amodal perception. 'The arrival of the I' points out of this holistic experience and into the domain of responses and actions. For me, 'the arrival of the I' is about me participating in the world, about me being a human in my contemporary

predicament and the difference that I can make and how I can matter in that world. For me, this is outside descriptions; outside theory, science and research findings; outside narratives and the telling of my life. It is simply me and my living, possibly mattering both as something important and the opposite, as something destructive, in that life. 'The arrival of the I' is me accepting my aloneness in being response-able and also knowing that I do not need to be lonely in this living. I am also the other's other, and as such, I can share and participate with this 'other', arriving response-able as best I can. What participating in this project has given me is that this is trying to be ethical.

The writing on the wall

BÅRD BERTELSEN

At the time when this project formed, in the autumn of 2017, I had recently started research for my Ph.D. after having worked as a clinical psychologist in child and youth mental health care for more than fifteen years. I entered the conversation of this group, trying to break from mental health as a bureaucratic ontology. Linguistically, I experienced the concepts of both psychiatry and its various opposites – critical or 'anti'-psychiatries – to be of limited pragmatic value in my everyday encounters with people as a therapist. Materially, I was finding computer software, standardized procedures and the ever-increasing pressure to 'produce' to push the therapeutic task of joining with people in despair over having lost their footing in life further away.

The statement that became the first heading for the collaboration that developed into this group (or the group that developed into this collaboration; I am unsure of the exact logical sequence, if there is one), 'The Trouble with Being Human These Days', struck me when I heard it as a simple yet precise pinpointing of these concerns. The mental health field consists of nothing but attempts to address and respond to the troubles of human existence. At the same time, although our knowledge about mental health seems to grow ever more refined and our standardized treatment procedures seem to get more fine-tuned and fool-proof, the trouble remains. Sometimes it seems – at least that is how it has sometimes been for me – that this knowledge and these procedures, and what we do with them, are sometimes part of what contributes to the sense that being human is troublesome.

A shared sense of such trouble was one of the things that kept the four-year project of the group behind this publication going. The three fields of art, education and mental health are all tuned to address the troubles of human existence: gaining

perspective, sorting out how to be and what to do, and finding footing in a sometimes chaotic and always possibly meaningless existence. In the midst of this, this project was both highly innovative and strikingly mundane. The fact that the phrase that came to work as one of the group's credos was picked up from a poster hanging on Aslaug Kristiansen's office door is itself a nice illustration of this, I believe.

To me, taking part in the joint work leading up first to the exhibition we planned to organize (a task to which most of us came utterly unqualified) and later to this book reminds me of how Simone Weil writes about the educative purpose of solving a geometrical problem – a task she claims is even more valuable if the student has 'no aptitude or natural taste' for it. 'It does not even matter', she writes, 'whether we succeed in finding the solution or understanding the proof, although it is important to try really hard to do so. Never in any case whatever is a genuine effort of the attention wasted' (Weil [1951] 2010: 32). What could be more beautiful than spending years genuinely turning one's attention to the trouble with being human these days? What could be more terrifying than actually coming up with a solution?

An afterthought

KURT JOHANNESSEN

We are here on this beautiful planet together. We are here and we share our existence with all life and matter. In the past, we made up stories about ruling over our surroundings. We thought everything existed for us. Slowly we have come to realize that we are one among many life forms that live here. We are in the middle of this process now. Through creativity and wisdom, we can find solutions which are good for us and everything around us.

Being human today

LISBET SKREGELID

It is 12 March 2022 today.

It is a sunny but crisp and windy day. I started the anniversary day running to my spot by the sea and adding film number 256 to *My Stunning Stream – Made*

with a Little Mischief (Skregelid 2020). Since then, I have been working in the garden most of the day. Yellow and blue crocuses have emerged here and there. I have also put my dad's tomato seeds in the soil. Inside, of course. I do that every year in March. I have repeated this activity since I came across a range of tomato seeds in different envelopes in his house. These were found when we cleared what used to be my childhood home before selling it in 2013. He had named the tomatoes after some of his close relatives, who were also very much interested in growing tomatoes. One envelope had his sister's name 'Ragnhild' on it (appeared to be big red tomatoes). Another envelope had the name of his brother-in-law, 'John' (the dark red, plum-shaped ones). My dad had always provided me with 20–30-centimetre tomato plants ready to put outside in my garden. For nine years now, I have done all of the processing myself. Every year, I enjoy seeing the ancestors of my dad's tomatoes transforming from small dry seeds into light green sprouts a couple of weeks after and then into tasty multi-coloured tomatoes in late summer/autumn. This magic surprises and puzzles me every year. From August to November, my family has more tomatoes than we can eat ourselves. I always take care of some of the seeds. These are carefully placed on paper towels that are put into envelopes …

As I work in the garden and think of my upcoming tomatoes, I remember an upcoming deadline. By Monday (in two days), I need to have a call for papers on 'Art and Crisis' ready for the publisher.

I hear the news as I enter the front door. The world is in my living room, calling for my attention and action. The war is in my house. 'Russia refuses any kind of conversation with NATO as long as the alliance provides Ukraine with weapons.'

I turn the TV off, grab my MacBook Pro and start to write these words on being human today.

A brief reflection on being human today

MONICA KLUNGLAND

For four years, I have been in conversation with a group of researchers from my own field of art and art education, education and mental health. It is a group of pleasant and polite people. I have been listened to and taken care of. At the same time, I have felt challenged. It has not been easy to understand the dialogue,

position myself in the group, make up my mind about the themes discussed and arrive as an 'I' in this group of wise people from different fields. Although it has been difficult, there have always been touching moments when something is at stake. Something has been vibrating in the conversation, touching upon exactly how I felt it was to be part of the talk. Just in these moments, when I struggled to position myself and make up my opinions on the themes discussed, my own existence as a subject was at stake.

Being human in conversation is the goal we share in our three fields. Both the trouble and joy of being human are about conversation. It is difficult to be in conversation, yet at the same time, conversation can prepare the ground for everything fun.

Our conversation in the three fields has lasted for about four years, and during these years, the world has changed. Our planned exhibition couldn't take place because of the pandemic and the global lockdown. Nowadays, different countries in Europe are part of a conflict and are witnessing a war in Ukraine. Long-working diplomats in the Council of Europa ask themselves what has gone wrong. How could being in conversation about peace for years end up in a terrible war? And how is the conversation to continue when the conflict has escalated to the worst imaginable state? Among the reactions from the West is the boycott of art and culture in and from Russia. When Russian Igor Shaytanov (2022), producer of the Tromsø International Film Festival, was asked about his opinion on this boycott, he acknowledged that the situation is complicated and there is no easy answer. However, he pointed out that artists work to improve humanism and reminded us that the most important thing is to remember what it means to be a human being and fight for it every single second.

To fight every single second for what it means to be a human being, we cannot give up on conversation. Conversation can take different forms. Art is conversation. Art historian Nicolas Bourriaud (2007) states that art is an activity that consists of producing connections to the world. He also defines the artist as one who shows something and declares the act of showing as sufficient to define the artist. Education should also show something and point in a direction. The overall goal of education in Norway is to equip students for living their lives together and participating in work and communities (Opplæringslova 1998: §1-1). To do that, you need to be in conversation. Art can bring us into conversation with each other and with the world. Art education should take inspiration from contemporary art and facilitate activities about possibilities for conversations and connections to the world.

Coda: Interruption

SIGURD TENNINGEN

Throughout our 'slow conversations', I have come to realize that what I have long held to be a vital force of subjectification in the arts – that is, the 'arrival of the I' accompanying the aesthetic experience – is also highly relevant to practices within the fields of both education and mental health. It is not so much a question of experiencing something new and yet unheard of (which borders on the capitalist logic of sensationalism and *neophilia*), as it is a genuine interruption of the habitual. As such, the aesthetic event is a violent attack on the anaesthetization that underlies the current capitalist mode of production, commodification and consumption. Fundamentally numerical as it is, capitalist logic aims at producing a homogenous and 'empty' time where there is no need for disruptions. Instead, disruptions are considered threats to the homogenous time of accumulation, which always strives to profit something for someone at the expense of our ability to feel, think and imagine. Of course, this numerical mode of production (and consumption) also goes for the academic world, where quantitative reasoning (evidence-based research) and numerical measurement (testing) seem to have conquered almost every aspect of both teaching and publishing. Opposed to this logic of serialization, the aesthetic experience offers a singular event powerful enough to withstand homogenous time: *it interrupts*. This goes beyond the arts. In fact, what our conversations have made succinctly clear to me is that the aesthetic interruption of the habitual should not only be considered the *sine qua non* of teaching and therapy. Rather, it lies at the very heart of what is at stake when we talk about being human today – that is, living our lives in societies where subjectification is often thought of as obsolete and merely unproductive disruptions of business as usual.

One for sorrow

HELEN ERIKSEN

This text is inspired by my magpie friends, my seasonal hungry neighbours in Oslo.

One for sorrow

Outside, a magpie turns its head to get a better look at me. My mind grasps her eye. What is she looking at? Who am I to her? She sees the world differently. Her eye is

different eye to a dog, or the worm or the microbe in my gut. We exchange glances for a while before she decides to fly off for no apparent reason. Is she flying because she has lost interest in the situation or is she frightened or did something I am unaware of catch her attention? I doubt I will ever know. 'I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am'.

Your reading eye is reflecting, analyzing the connection of these words, you are judging my thought and in that judgement you raise doubt! I fear your doubt upon these sentences.

Two for joy

My mind flies back to my piebald feathered visitor – did she take off because she doubted me, my intentions? In the great exodus from the Ukraine, humans are leaving their precious things behind them but taking their pets with them. Cats, dogs and hamsters are forcibly migrating from the conflict of another species. Those without a relationship with a pet can never understand that bond. It is one of joy, of connection, of safety but also of dependence. Perhaps, this is what I understand as being human today. Being human today is being in a state of ambivalence and longing for those connections to nature that we capture in our domesticity. Being human is to be intimately entangled with other beings and things and ultimately unable to doubt our own position and good intentions within that knot of connections.

One for sorrow,
Two for joy,
Three for a girl,
Four for a boy,
Five for silver,
Six for gold,
Seven for a secret never to be told.

Being human in education today: Some reflections after the dialogue

DAG NOME

One of the concerns I had as I entered the dialogue between education, art and mental health was my struggle with the dominating discourse in the early childhood education field about *early intervention*. This discourse has led to a huge market for standardized learning technologies for young children aimed at optimizing their learning outcomes.

This discourse is, on the one hand, linked to new frontiers in neuroscience, which gives the educational field a technocratic language where the aim is to create as many synaptic connections as possible. On the other hand, it is linked to an economic rationale where early intervention using standardized learning technologies ensures high economic output for society in the long run.

So why do I struggle with this? Both rationales contain the risk of dehumanizing children. They are at risk of being reduced to merely a technological device and an economical investment in future outcomes for society.

In addition, the dominant discourse about early intervention tends to dehumanize early childhood educators as well. The whole idea behind standardizing the procedures is to minimize the human factor since the procedures are based on manuals that reduce the need for professional and ethical judgement.

Many of these learning programmes have their origins in special education. Hence, they were originally developed as tools to fix or cure specific learning or developmental disabilities. When these programmes are transformed into general educational practices, we risk adding therapeutic elements to ordinary work in schools and kindergartens. To put it bluntly, can a normal childhood end up as a condition that needs a cure?

From the dialogue with representatives from the mental health field, I have learned that the same questions and concerns are being raised among them. They are also worried about the consequences of standardizing therapy by trusting evidence-based manuals, even when there often are actual things to cure. Hence, there are challenges in being, or remaining, human in both education and mental health services.

The dialogue between education, art and mental health has raised an urge in me to promote the human factor in education. *The human factor* can easily be seen as a negative term, often linked to poor and undocumented quality. We don't want any human factor in the production of milk. We want the quality to be the same regardless of who is operating the machines. However, in education, the human factor is vital. I like to describe it as the subjectivity, or the 'I', of the teacher.

So, what does that mean? When and how can the subjectivity, or the 'I' of the teacher, be present? From my own experience, it is the moment I felt that it mattered that it was in fact *me* standing there. It is the moment that I felt irreplaceable, not because I had made myself irreplaceable but because the children inflicted irreplaceability upon me. As teachers, we should be aware of one important premise in teaching: despite all the gadgets, digital devices and manual-based programmes you bring to the table, it is *you* the children are looking for. It is as if they ask, 'Who are you, bringing all these gadgets, devices and manuals into the room?'

In early childhood education, the discourse about early intervention promotes the idea that it is the magic of devices, gadgets and manuals alone that does the trick. They are all evidence-based and proven to be effective. However, the dialogue has clarified for me that being human in education today requires questioning the scientific reasoning behind claims like 'evidence-based' and 'effectiveness', refusing to dehumanize children by using a technical, economic language about their life and development and sometimes even resisting using imposed manual-based learning technologies if they go against the professional and ethical judgment of the situation.

Being human in education today: Epilogue

ASLAUG KRISTIANSEN

It has been four years since we started with what we called 'a slow conversation'. The participants in the conversation came from the fields of art, mental health and education. These conversations form part of the background of this book. At the beginning of the conversations, each of us presented what we were concerned about. After some time, some phrases that aroused a common resonance across the three fields emerged. The first one was formulated by Gert Biesta – namely, 'the arrival of the I'. The other one was a statement by Zygmunt Bauman – 'The Trouble with Being Human These Days' – written on a movie poster advertising a documentary film about Bauman by Bartek Dziadosz. This is a big poster hanging on my office door and that can be read by anyone passing by.

A lot has happened in the world since we started four years ago. The COVID-19 pandemic has had consequences none of us had ever imagined. As this chapter is being written, a war is ongoing in Ukraine, resulting in large crowds on the run. This is a horrific event that only a few could have ever imagined. If we had started the conversation today, our concerns might have been different. However, I guess we would have stuck to those two sentences. My interpretation from the perspective of education regarding the phrase 'the arrival of the I' is that it reflects a process of subjectification that allows students to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting (Biesta 2010: 21). However, this process does not happen in a vacuum. It relies on the quality of human interaction and how others respond to the individual. This leads to the second quote – 'The Trouble with Being Human These Days' – and common concern in our three fields on how to practice humanity and being able to respond.

Today, the poster has been taken down from the door. The doors and the entire hallway of the university have been subject to decoration. The Bauman quotation is no longer a daily reminder. Despite this, his words and experiences are more relevant than ever before. The pandemic and now the war in Ukraine are both events where reality has taken us by surprise. The events and interruptions they create in our daily lives constitute a wake-up call. They evoke a shaking sense of reflection on human life, what it is to be a human being and what the horrible events ask from us and our fields of practice. Hence, even though the poster is gone, and the reminder no longer has its place, life is a constant reminder that something is invariably at stake and will challenge our three disciplines, forming the basis of new conversations.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Bård Bertelsen is an associate professor of psychology and clinical psychologist specializing in child and youth psychology and family psychology. As a clinician, his main interest has been working with individuals and families in marginal positions vis-à-vis education, healthcare and social service systems. His research concentrates on articulating existential issues at stake in therapeutic work and other forms of social and welfare services, and exploring work processes associated with such services as social phenomena. For his Ph.D., he conducted an ethnographic study of parenthood in high-conflict divorce situations, starting from participant observation in a multi-family therapy group for parents and children experiencing troubles with parental collaboration after divorce.

Gert Biesta: at the time of publication, Gert Biesta (www.gertbiesta.com) is a professor of public education at the Centre for Public Education and Pedagogy at Maynooth University, Ireland, and professor of educational theory and pedagogy in the Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh, UK. From 2018 until 2022, he was visiting professor (Professor II) at the University of Agder, Norway. The current book is the outcome of the work done with colleagues during this time. Gert Biesta's work focuses on the theory of education and the philosophy of educational and social research, with a particular interest in teaching, teachers, curriculum, education policy, arts education and religious education. His latest monograph, *World-Centred Education: A View for the Present* was published by Routledge in 2021.

Tore Dag Bøe is a professor of mental health work in the Department of Psychosocial Health at the University of Agder, Norway. He has many years of experience in mental health services as a mental health worker. In his doctoral work, he investigated processes of change in mental health based on interviews with adolescents, their families and therapists involved. His research interests include phenomenological, ethical and dialogical approaches to mental health. In recent years, he has written a number of books, book chapters and articles on the ethical and dialogical aspects of mental health work, and also on methodological questions related to qualitative research in mental health. In his work, he is seeking to develop new forms of practice and new ways of understanding the field of mental health, based on phenomenological, social and ethical perspectives.

Monica Klungland is an associate professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Visual Arts and Drama at the University of Agder, Norway. She is trained as a teacher and has taught the youngest children in primary school for many years. She is now teaching arts and crafts in teacher education and in early childhood teacher education. Klungland is engaged in connections between children's play and contemporary art, relationships between arts and crafts, relational and interdisciplinary artistic approaches, and the aesthetic dimension in education. Her artistic work is linked to relational aspects of textile craftsmanship. In her recent Ph.D. thesis, she explores an outdoor, experimental weaving project together with primary school pupils, and proposes a material-collective approach to teaching arts and crafts. Her research includes how new-materialist and posthuman theoretical perspectives can contribute to the development of art education. Klungland argues in her book chapters and articles to emphasize the collective aspects of children's creative processes.

Aslaug Kristiansen is a professor of education at the University of Agder, Norway. Her main areas of interest are ethics, dialogue, teacher's work and qualifications, and interdisciplinary cooperation. In recent years, she has been involved in projects that focus on the teaching of democratic thinking and values in schools and in teacher education. Her Ph.D. is a theoretical study of trust and trusting relationships in an educational setting.

Dag Øystein Nome works as an associate professor of education at the University of Agder, Norway. He is lecturing at the master's program in pedagogy and in different teacher education programmes. He has also extensive experience from

practising in schools and kindergartens. In recent years, he has written a number of articles and book chapters on play, education, childhood and kindergarten with both researchers and the field of practice as a target group. He has written textbooks used in the kindergarten teacher education programme in Norway. His Ph.D. from 2017 deals with child–child relationships during play among toddlers. His latest publications: 'Toddlers as ignorant citizens: An explorative study of conflicts and negotiations involving toys in kindergarten', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 2022, 23:1; 'Teaching as love for the world and love for the child: The critical potential of Waldorf education in the light of Hannah Arendt', *Research on Steiner Education*, 2021, 12:Special issue.

Sigurd Tenningen is an associate professor of literature at the Department of Nordic and Media Studies at the University of Agder, Norway. His research interests comprise modern literature, visual art and aesthetic theory. He also works as a curator and has written several books of fiction and collections of essays on art and literature. His latest publication to date is *Game of Life: Feltkommentar* (Lord Jim Publishing, 2020) in which he and co-author Jan Freuchen investigates intersections between public art, creative capitalism and urban development. In 2019, Tenningen defended his Ph.D. thesis on the 'archaeological imagination' in the works of Norwegian writer Tor Ulven. At the University of Agder, Tenningen is co-leader of the research group SENSUS COMMUNIS – Literature, Aesthetics, Nature. He works as a critic and is a regular contributor to literary magazines and newspapers.

Lisbet Skregelid is a professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Visual Arts and Drama at the University of Agder, Norway. Here she leads the research group Art and Young People. She is engaged in questions regarding why art matters in society in general and in education in particular. Her research interests are within the expanded field of art education, and she has many years of praxis experience in this context. In her Ph.D. thesis, she investigated secondary school pupils' encounters with contemporary art exhibitions over a period of three years in partnership with art museum and schools. In recent years, she has had extensive collaborations with artists in both teaching and research. Skregelid has written a number of books, book chapters and articles where she makes calls for arts-based approaches to education and what she calls pedagogy of dissensus. In her latest research, Skregelid's own art practice is the point of departure for discussing art educational issues.

Rolf Sundet is a specialist in clinical psychology and professor emeritus at the Faculty of Health and Social Science, University of South-Eastern Norway. He has published books, book chapters and articles nationally and internationally. His research interests are psychotherapy as making, how to include service user feedback as conversational tools and how to develop collaborative relations with individuals and families. In addition, a theoretical project is on an alternative understanding of causation individually and the current knowledge situation. His Ph.D. was on the use of Routine Outcome Monitoring and helpful practices within family therapy.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Jo Ravn Abusland is a visual artist based in Kristiansand in the south of Norway. He has a diploma from the Art Academy of Bergen (Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design University of Bergen) and Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weissensee (the sculpture department). Other studies include art history, humanistic informatics and Spanish language and Latin-American studies at the University of Bergen, Norway. His conceptual work is a result of a mix of an intuitive process, research and interactions with his surroundings. The subjects of interest are mostly concerning identity, belonging and otherness. Plants and nature are almost always part of the projects as nature is his greatest inspiration and teacher. He is part of the collective work Skeiv kopp (Queer Cups) together with Pia Eikaas and Kristine Wessel. Skeiv kopp is a generous art project where cups made in ceramics are dedicated to queer role models and are given as gifts to people to have in their homes. See also https://www.instagram.com/skeivkopp/ and http://joravn.no/.

Helen Eriksen is an independent visual artist and educator. She is currently a research associate at the University of Agder, Norway. Her doctoral project is entitled 'Moments of pluralist proximity in postcolonial Scandinavia'. Her art and research practice focuses on developing artist practice in socially engaged art projects. She is a founder member of Tenthaus Art Collective which explores the artist's role in society generally and in education specifically.

Kurt Johannessen works with performance, books, video, drawing, graphics and installation. He has performed in Europe, Asia and America since the early 1980s.

His performance often has a poetic and minimalist expression. He exhibited in several places in Norway, including the Bergen Art Museum and Kunstnernes Hus (2007) and Kunstnerforbundet (2016). He works with text and publishes his own artist books. The text works are often short visual, poetic and sometimes contain humour. He has produced more than 120 books. Since 2013, many of his books (About Something/Om-noko) have been the basis for a series of performance lectures. These books are at the crossroads of philosophy/visual art/poetry/science.

BEING HUMAN TODAY

'*Being Human Today* is a highly innovative exploration of the common human experience of becoming an I, joining the world, and recognizing the I of others – not only once, but in a constantly evolving process. The reader is guided through different rooms, as in an art exhibition, featuring authors, and artists, from different disciplines giving words to each other successively, as in a conversation. In this way, readers from any discipline are guaranteed to see what it is to be human today in a new perspective.'

– Dag Gjerløw Aasland, University of Agder, Norway

This collection stages conversations between art, education and mental health around the question of what it means to be human today. Moving beyond the suggestion that this requires 'strong' educational or therapeutic interventions or can be resolved by means of individual expression, the chapters explore new possibilities for 'the arrival of I' – for the humanizing work of art, education and mental health in the world today.

Gert Biesta is professor of educational theory and pedagogy in the Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

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