



Aesthetic Education and the Phenomenology of Learning

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In recent years, a volume of scholarship has emerged in educational and social theory regarding the entwining of ‘accelerated’ cultures, the ideology of neoliberalism and the effects of these on idiomatic and historical practices within (Western) higher education (see as examples, Gibbs et al. 2015; Alhadeff-Jones 2017). This scholarship has concentrated on a number of ways in which the time, rhythms and temporality of life, and educational life in particular, have been transformed and often distorted by political and economic interventions, resulting in a profound change to the priorities and stated goals of higher educational institutions (see for example Gill 2009; Vostal 2014, 2016 exploring notions of the ‘accelerated academy’ and the ‘slow’ university movement). The globalised aspects of increased digitisation, accelerated flows of capital and data, and rates of privatization have seen many

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universities repositioned as sites of economic production for ‘knowledge economies’, characterised by new norms of accelerated work, consumerism, bureaucracy and efficiency. In terms of temporality, a common theme has been how objective measures of imposed time do damage to the various timescales or ‘heterochronicities’ of subjectively lived or experienced time inhabited by both teachers and learners. Other accounts have focused on the effect of neoliberalist tropes on the university and its relation to knowledge, as well as social aspects of the transformation of individual and collective interaction, and the nature of educational practices themselves.

Let us present some initial examples of these tendencies within contemporary higher education that are forms of diagnoses of some of the more pernicious effects of neoliberal ideology on the temporality of pedagogical spaces. In the literature, we can see accounts of how educational institutions have constructed temporal narratives that are ‘structured into hegemonic historical metanarratives of the elite that subordinate the narratives of marginalised students’ (Rossatto 2005: 30) through the compartmentalising of time and space ‘wherever small modules are produced, and where standard systems of measurement are deployed’ (Raunig 2013: 29). This is despite the fact that the university is simultaneously and idiomatically posited as ‘also a place of indivisible, endless, boundless modulating, a place of the appeal to modulate knowledge and the self’ (ibid.). As a more concrete example, a tendency to foreclose this state of potentiation through an emphasis on standardization is perhaps most simply exemplified through the use of the timed assessment, which Davidson (2017) claims ‘reflects the outmoded production model of learning that confuses standardization with high standards ... where it is no longer enough to think’ (107–108).

Bennett and Burke (2017) similarly assist this project of deconstructing normative assumptions relating to the conceptualisation of time within education, while Raunig (2013) contextualises this as part of the continued regimentation and subjection to discipline that learners undergo via the ‘fragmenting of the period of study, from the division of studies into multiple autonomous segments, through the compounded admission and knock-out exams, all the way to the striating of individual seminars, (which) make students permanently start over from

the beginning' (ibid.: 32). Gielen and De Bruyne (2012) rearticulate this hybridisation and fragmentation within the context of a 'made-to-measure' European arts education where 'the transfer of knowledge and the learning process are literally custom-made to fit models and competencies, which in turn are neatly divided into precisely calculated hours of contact - a well-calculated mediocrity' (2012: 3). These enforced compartmentalisations of learning tempo and duration suggest not only the accelerated academy and a lack of what Traenor (2007) described as 'a distressing lack of idle time... [little] time for meditation, prayer, idling, and creative absent-mindedness' but also, therefore, why 'many students do not reflect critically on their views of time; passively allowing their temporal subjectivities to be shaped detrimentally' (Rossatto 2005: 31).

Within the discipline of critical pedagogy, this same tendency is reframed as the construction of the future as being a 'pre-given', resulting in what Davidson (2017) theorises as a collision between the training of unique and singular individuals and processes of 'machine-like' standardisation, particularly vis-a-vis a trajectory of learning as automata (107–108) through both the mechanical repetition of the present and an assumption of inevitability. To follow this troubling account through to perhaps its logical end, Giroux (2014: 491) memorably describes educational institutions as becoming 'dead zones of the imagination', reducing them to 'anti-public spaces that wage an assault on critical thinking, civic literacy and historical memory', which continues what he previously described where an openness for potentiality and the transgression of norms are unobtainable, because 'the historical insights necessary for the development of a collective critical consciousness' are absent (Giroux 2011: 21).

As a counter-tendency however, other commentators see opportunities amidst the transformation of the temporality of pedagogical space for the potentiation of opposing strategies (Alhadeff-Jones 2017), whilst others adopt a necessary historicised corrective, pointing out that universities themselves have been both the producers and victims of acceleration and technological determinism (Vostal 2016). But amidst what has become admittedly a pessimistic landscape, one idea, central to what will follow in this essay, is the construction of a further

counter-tendency to neoliberalisation within institutions, through what can best be described as a 'suitable aesthetic education' (Spivak 2012). As an initial way of framing this, we can see a link with the alternative construction of learner futures. Founding educational institutions upon curricula that prepare students for an 'unknowable future' is, according to Eisner (2004: 6) unsound. Examples of how these unknown futures are currently named include nebulous notions of the 'knowledge' or 'gig-economy'. Eisner suggests that the best-prepared students are those enabled to deal effectively with the present. One way to do this is to use the arts as a regulative ideal for education, partly because of the potential for engagement with the perceptual and sensuous that may imaginatively inspire the individual to engage more independently with learning, and partly because 'the forms of thinking the arts stimulate and develop are far more appropriate for the real world we live in than the tightly right-angled boxes we employ in our schools in the name of school improvement' (Eisner 2002: 11). Similarly, Rautins and Ibrahim (2011) suggest that the 'arts are a kernel space in what we call a critical pedagogy of the imagination' (28), where the imagination is posited as a site for potentiation and the generation of possibilities, facilitating the idea that students can develop 'the capacity to reach beyond conventional ideology to engage in free, unpredictable and internalised thought' (27).

Similarly, imaginative possibilities and correlative educational spaces represent a way in which 'voice, consciousness, community, pluralism and the human condition' can reconfigure the world around us (Rautins and Ibrahim 2011). Imagination is cultivated as a facilitated and explicitly humanist outcome of an aesthetic higher education, and one that engages with the receptive possibilities of art (see Clark and Jackson 2017). The role of an aesthetic education, we will claim, is inextricably linked to both temporal and spatial subjectivity and consciousness, and functions as a key form of the social imaginary. In what follows, we will explore how internal, external, and pedagogical time can be explored, with examples given of resistance drawn from arts training within the wider higher education sector, influenced by our own experiences of teaching and researching the Arts within universities and specialist arts Higher Education Institutions in the UK,¹

in order to understand what some (for example Wang 2010) suggest is the fundamental role of temporality in a transformative education.

In this chapter, we seek to explore these issues further, problematising temporality as a site of neoliberal performativity embedded in educational enactments of time and constructing a type of metanarrative that perhaps links and grounds attempts to critique this performativity, and from a phenomenological perspective. We will explore: acceleration and globalization and their manifestation within higher educational manifestations of time and space; phenomenological considerations of temporal and spatial consciousness and their idiomatic distortion under neoliberalism; the relation of the phenomenology of meaning-formation and aesthetic experience; an approach to aesthetic education that exposes and make visible neoliberal narratives, such as the cult of 'entrepreneurship', that are temporally suppressive and foreclosing; explore transgressive strategies within arts education, such as 'polylogical pedagogies' (Blake and Stearns 2015) that could provide a way of resisting and fracturing the temporal suppression of both learners and educators.

Phenomenological research in education is nothing new of course, but much research in this area tends to split into two distinct types of methodological category. The first category uses phenomenology primarily as a method for the capturing and qualitative analysis of the first-person experiences of learners and those working within education (see for example Langeveld 1983). But the second tendency, and the one to be adopted here, involves asking what phenomenological theory, seen as a discourse of philosophy proper, has to say about the foundational nature of certain types of educational experience.

As will be perhaps familiar, phenomenology studies the ways in which the world, objects and phenomena 'show up' in subjective experience, and attempts to isolate the essential or 'eidetic' aspects of all varieties of our experience via a process of 'phenomenological reduction', a method of bracketing that seeks to specify invariant features of a given modality of experience via a process of comparison.

And we can apply this same process to work towards a model of learning itself, seen as a process with its own temporality, and which moves from an initial motivation, or meaning-*intention*, through a

temporal process of meaning-*formation* itself, and ultimately to the production and consolidation of knowledge. The advantage of phenomenological methodology in this context is that it allows for strong normative claims to be made about the nature of learning per se, whatever the specific educational or learning context, and from both inside and outside institutional structures. This is in line with the central claims made within phenomenological thinking about the interlinkage between different aspects of our lived experience. Phenomenology, particularly in the late work of Husserl, theorises a concept of 'lifeworld' that is the overarching context or social milieu, which, at any given moment in history or location, connects the subjective, intersubjective and larger societal and cultural levels of human organisation. And we may speak of the levels which similarly intersect within learning and educational experience, where the personal learning history of an individual comes into contact, and often conflict with, larger societal structures imposed from above within educational institutions.

But as an initial exemplification all of these themes, which can be thought of as located at the intersection of the subjective and the cultural, let us examine some key aspects of the writing of Paul Virilio (2000, 2006, 2012). His work can be read as examining the coupling theories of speed, temporality and accelerationism with phenomenological thinking about the character of subjective experience. This author has written prolifically on the integration and transformation of a number of critical issues that originate in the work of the mid-century phenomenologists, most notably Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. In particular, Virilio's work can be read as an account of the effects of technological determinism on the individual, resulting in the alteration and transformation of core aspects of human 'being-in-the-world', including the phenomenality of human presence, the nature of our temporal and spatial experience, and the patterns and historicity of intersubjective and social exchange.

Of fundamental importance for our purposes is how Virilio analyses what phenomenology can teach us about the way that we *orient* ourselves in the world, both spatially and temporally. Fundamental to this is a sense in which both time and distance are *horizoned*. Briefly, our experience of the present is not like a temporal sequence of isolated

'nows' but has a type of windowing, temporal reach or stretch. Our experience of the present is subject to a process of ongoing temporalization in which the sense of 'just past' (or retention) is part of our experience of the present, which it informs and sustains. The present 'becomes' past, which in turn feeds back and furnishes the present with expectations about the future, which are called 'protentions'. And we can think of this sense of time consciousness as the most primitive form of the *historicity* of the individual, or the way that human subjects have an innate historical 'being' that is fundamental to the activity of consciousness. But where we get from the merely temporal to the genuinely historical is in terms of the second level of historicity, that of environment, culture and social grouping. This resides in the way that individual human subjects enter into historical communities, each with its own historicity; we experience history through the way we are defined by others and share common projects and goals in historical 'we-communities'.

To summarise, our individual experience of time is structured in the present moment as a window of past retentions and future protections, and this immediate experience is supplemented by a *horizon* of temporal experiences of recollection, memory, remembrance, and narratives concerning the nature of our social and collective historical past that we inherit through culture, and which relativise our temporal experience into other horizons of deep history (for an extensive account, see Carr 2014). And in an entirely similar fashion, the way we make sense of our immediate surroundings and its limits merges with a horizon of larger spatial orientation, which comprises the larger orbits of environment and habitat, and reaching ultimately to the whole of the planet itself, seen as the structural limit or ground of our spatial awareness.

And it is precisely these types of structures, familiar in phenomenological writing since their foundation in the work of Husserl, that interest Virilio, albeit in an updated technological context. In a series of volumes, Virilio (2000, 2006, 2012) provides an integrated account of time, space, and the subjective body and ego as seen in orientation with the world, suggesting that communicative technologies have made radical alterations to all of these. The experience of the world as changing in real time through accelerated media and digital communication

has replaced the historical space of immediate embodiment, as it is now possible to experience a simultaneity of presence anywhere, and at any time, resulting in a necessary compression of spatial distances and horizons. Bodies, due to the speed of communications and transportation mechanisms, are reduced to states of inertia, resulting in a similar suspension and compression of the possibilities of movement and embodiment. And our ideas of the social and historical that centred on the idea of common sociality and community, based around shared human presence, have similarly given way to a 'hypercentration' (Virilio's term) of contemporary individualism, a regress to a type of individual inertia caused by the ubiquitous technological availability of knowledge and information.

This methodology is indicative of the way the rest of this essay is structured. The core idea is that what we might term the phenomenology of learning is also structured, in terms of a particular type of horizoning process, which involves the formation of a meaning space involving both selection and potentiation, and which has a type of temporality of its own that is linked to individual and communal historicities. And in a similar vein to the above, we will see what happens to this space, and the learning and knowledge that supervenes from it, under the influence of accelerationism, globalisation and neoliberal capitalism. And crucially, we will also interrogate how an exemplification of this meaning space exists within art and aesthetic experience, highlighting the need for a suitable *aesthetic* education, constructed by various authors in a range of disciplines, from pedagogical to postcolonial theory, as a necessary antidote to the current tendencies within the UK higher education context towards increased processes of standardization, abstraction and instrumentality.

In addition, we will examine what phenomenological theory can tell us about both the idiomatic nature of learning per se, and its intrinsic temporality and horizoning. In doing so, we will adopt an approach derived from a non-exegetical integration of phenomenology with several other disciplines, including social constructivist educational theory, pragmatist philosophy and the newer disciplines of enacted or embodied cognition and psychology.

We take as axiomatic the idea that learning is fundamentally about the acquisition of knowledge through a learning process that involves the construction, for the individual learner, of *meaning*. Going further, we can posit that knowledge is constructed in a shared learning environment comprised of meaningful experiences and interaction with others, uses prior knowledge to make sense of new knowledge, and is based on how connections arise that join and connect cumulative and sedimented aspects of a learner's whole experience and social intersubjective exchange. We can condense this into saying that learning is formed against a backdrop of both an individual and communal *historicity* of all educational and learning experiences in general. For John Dewey (1916, 1998), and along the same lines, learning is a process comprising both an initial experience coupled with its subsequent consequences; consequences that feedback into the experience itself, and change its temporal character:

When an activity is continued into the undergoing of consequences, when the change made by action is reflected back into a change made in us, the mere flux of experience is loaded with significance. We learn something. (Dewey 1916: 139)

Husserl, in a similar vein, posits that thinking is a process of *meaning-intention* that results in knowledge or *meaning-fulfilment*. And meaning itself, for Husserl, is the co-created sense one makes of objects and phenomena through the interaction of the subject with its environment. Meaning is therefore *constructed* by the learner through experiences of phenomena, and the consequences derived from forming connections and interactions between these experiences.

But we will also stress in this essay that the word meaning here is meant in an extended sense. Meaning is not just something conceptual and propositional, it is not something that can be merely stated or articulated in language. All aspects of sensory *qualia*, our ability to form mental imagery, our feelings and emotions, and combinations of these can give rise to connections and interactions between past, present and future experience that are *intrinsically* meaningful to us, and are not in general either linguaform or conceptual (for more on this,

see Johnson 2006). As an example, the temporal experience of approaching the problem of successfully execution a set of choreographic instructions often involves 'solving' the sequence via the cumulative comparison of the effects of certain shifts in bodily equilibria and balance, and derived from an individual historicity of embodied knowledge. None of this can be articulated without loss through language: it must be shown and felt, and not just spoken.

But to return to our main theme, the most prescient definition of the phenomenological process of meaning-formation is, for us, given by Niklas Luhmann. Again, following Husserl, Luhmann thinks that meaning relates directly to an initial intentionality (there is a 'such and such' in the field of consciousness), and that this, as a consequence, necessarily creates a *horizon of possibilities* in what we will call a *meaning space*:

The phenomenon of meaning appears as a surplus of references to other possibilities of experience and action. Something stands in the focal point, at the center of intention, and all else is indicated marginally as the horizon of a 'and so forth' of experience and action. In this form, everything that is intended holds open to the world as a whole, thus guaranteeing the actuality of the world in the form of accessibility. (Luhmann 1995: 60)

Meaning, in this phenomenological reading, is something that operates at any time in the gap between the actual and the possible, hesitating between the two, in the process of meaning-fulfilment. We can also see how this process generally possesses *factual*, *temporal*, and *social* dimensions. Let us give an account of these, applied in an educational context. The first dimension, that of the factual, refers to the finition of the process of meaning-formation; something is established in the meaning space, ending the state of meaning-formation. The temporal aspect of meaning, in an educational sense, can be interpreted dually as the inherent temporality needed to navigate meaning-formation in the present, a process with its own rhythms, coupled with a recourse to a deeper temporality, namely that of the historicity of total individual learning experience. The social dimension refers to the essentially intersubjective

aspect of meaning-formation; the fact that all meaning construction is subject to the contingent approval of the social other.

We want to stress here how this meaning space, as described above, is inherently *dynamic* and has its own shifting temporal character, which has to be negotiated by an individual with reference to their own unique past. And we will suggest later that this it is precisely the dynamic, temporal and uniquely individuated nature of meaning-formation that is ossified and foreclosed through neoliberal systems of education that focus on standardisation, measurement and economic quantification. The 'surplus' of potential inherent in any meaning space is unquantifiable and ungeneralisable due to its subjective character, with the effect that the temporal and social aspects of meaning-formation are bracketed in favour of its factual dimension, which resulting damage to the process seen as a whole.

The central claim we will make in this section is that it is possible to connect the phenomenological model of meaning-formation given earlier to related and entirely congruent ideas contained within the discipline of aesthetics, especially regarding the accounts given in the discipline of the phenomenology of the aesthetic experience of artworks. A secondary motivation is that, despite this, accounts of the progressive nature of art and aesthetic education often proceed without reference to these internal debates within aesthetics and philosophy of art, and again, what we offer is a type of meta-narrative that might link these approaches together. The key point we will make is that a consideration of the philosophical literature on aesthetics gives us a way to connect the phenomenology of meaning-formation with the nature of aesthetic experience, something that motivates and grounds the assertion that arts education can be afforded a progressive societal value. By way of an introduction to this, let us recap some important and pertinent themes in aesthetics, particularly those emerging from pragmatist and phenomenological aesthetics, together with critical theory, and couple these with an account of the important theme in the literature of 'aesthetic negativity'.

For Dewey, art is an exemplary form of meaning-making, a kind of condensation and exemplification of the processes of meaning-intention and fulfilment. And it is precisely this capacity of art that motivates

Dewey's linkage of art and aesthetic education with the educational process per se. The experience of art is therefore not simply one modality of experience, but epitomises experience in its most general form: in aesthetic experience, we reveal experience as such. Why is this exactly? And why is this relevant to a discussion of 'aesthetic education'? In Dewey's pragmatist thinking, the reception of art, rather like a temporal and individual educational process, involves the making of intrinsically meaningful and transverse connections between form, expression, communication, sensory *qualia*, images, emotions, value and purpose and is therefore 'charged with meanings' and is a 'union of the precarious within the settled'. Art becomes a microcosm of a theory of meaning recast as a 'matter of relations and connections grounded in everyday organism-environment coupling or interaction' (Johnson 2006: 265). Recall that the meaning of something is its relations, actual and potential, to other qualities, events and experiences, a connection to past and future experiences and actions. And the key point is that this notion of the equivocation between depotentiation and potentiation, or between selection and further possibility that is characteristic of general experience is *exemplified* in aesthetic experience. And it is this openness to possibility that simultaneously therefore becomes a condition for a suitable 'aesthetic education', an openness that is becoming increasingly threatened within contemporary educational institutions. In the conclusion to this essay, we will examine how accelerationist tendencies within neoliberal higher education have fundamentally reduced the temporal experience of meaning-formation and learning that are exemplified in aesthetic experience, and hence in aesthetic education itself.

But to preface this, let us look more fully at the phenomenology of the reception of art. In aesthetic experience, what an artwork presents to us is not in general instantly accessible to us; the encounter with it implicates a search for meaning in the work that begins a processual cycle encompassing both the initial encounter and its subsequent consequences. Furthermore, this a process that equally typifies, in pragmatist thinking, the temporality of a typical learning experience. As Dewey remarks:

A thing is more significantly what it makes possible than what it immediately is... an intellectual sign is not taken immediately, but is referred to something that may come in consequence of it. (Dewey 1998: 105)

We can now see that there is an exemplification in aesthetic experience of the actual-possible duality implicated in all acts of meaning-formation, as we defined it earlier. And this pragmatist assertion about art resonates with similar views in aesthetics deriving from critical theory, particularly regarding the capacity of art to generate what has been called 'aesthetic negativity'. The foundation for this negativity can be explained in simple terms by virtue of the essential duplicity of art; the fact that an artwork, by being art at all, manifests an 'as such' quality. It is always potentially something other than it appears to be, and this 'transcendence' or potential to be other, in particular its potential for renewed historical evaluation and interpretation, means what art *is* can never be reduced to simply its material support or object of immanence, and is an operator of collective encounters and historicity. Seen this way, art is:

Essentially predicated of a world, a world of spectators, of a historicity of sense, and of a corporeal, personal and collective existence. That is the content, the idea, or the sense of the work of art including everything it motivates, permits, and promotes; the reality proper to what is said about it, and what only supervenes from it: ideas, but also sensations, emotions, acts, encounters, worlds. (Sepp 2010: 60)

And it is this supervenance in particular that concerns us here. The habitual processes of recognition or repetition of the everyday are contrasted in artworks and the aesthetic experiences that they occasion via the *processural* negation of the automatic. The aesthetic is differentiated from the non-aesthetic via this processuality, which contains a logic of its own that undermines conventional attempts at iterative understanding (see Menke 1999). Although aesthetic experience must start with these processes of identification, or initial decisions as to an artworks 'meaning', aesthetic negativity equates with the way that it is an experience of the negation or the subversion of our attempts at

understanding. Or to put it in concise terms, aesthetic experience negates the *automaticity* that is the hallmark of non-aesthetic experience.

We understand and inhabit the world around us through the constant application of habits and norms. We can cast this type of 'automatic understanding' semiotically as the non-processural and unproblematic binding of the two sides of the representative sign, (the Saussurian signifier and signified), by means of networks of codified contiguity. This is the immediate matching in everyday or non-aesthetic experience between material (sounds, gestures, marks on a surface) and immaterial content or meaning. We see a red light, a signifier, and interpret this through learning and experience as an instruction to stop (the meaning, or signified). But in contrast, aesthetic experience involves an interminable 'vacillation' between the two poles of the sign. When we experience modernist artworks, our attempts at understanding them are confronted with an initial asignifying materiality that must be given a reading in order to make sense, via the selection in the material of meaning-related signifiers. In Menke's terms: 'For the question concerning aesthetic signifiers, the primordial fact is that signifiers are produced by an operation of selection on a given material, in view of the meaning to be represented' (ibid.: 53). Note that there is an implicit assumption at work here: that the starting point for an aesthetic experience is an unavoidable attempt at *meaning-formation* as described in the terms presented earlier. And the problem with artworks and their specific aesthetic framing is that no definitive rules or conventions can be established vis-à-vis the appropriate selection of signifiers in the material, so that:

In the realm of art, the signifier oscillates between the two poles, which in automatic understanding are firmly linked: those of material and meaning. Since the signifier cannot be definitively identified, but is lost in endless hesitation, aesthetic experience breaks the bridge joining the two sides of semiotic representation. (ibid.: 54)

Aesthetic experience is the processural enactment of this vacillation or oscillation within the meaning space(s) generated by an artwork. We see in aesthetic experience a self-subversion or sequential deferral of the

usual attempts at signifier formation. This aesthetic deferral manifests itself in three different ways. First, effectuated signifiers that are already automatically selected ‘counter-effectuate’ themselves, leading to a potentiation of material as yet unselected in the meaning space. Second, there is a disruption to contexts that usually provide criteria for settling non-aesthetic disruptions of meaning. Third, aesthetic experience, ‘frames’, or quotes non-aesthetic contextual assumptions from the outside, with the result that these contextual assumptions become ambiguous, and signifiers acquire ‘an unsublatable indeterminacy’ (ibid.: 60).

For example, and to make this all perhaps a little less abstract, let us apply this to an attempt to form an ‘articulating reading’ of say, a modernist painting. Once a different series of features in the painting—such as contextually or historically familiar forms—are identified as potentially significant or meaning-bearing, then the selection operation automatically undermines itself. This is because the act of making the selection necessarily *excludes* other forms and other connections between forms that are left over the selection: ‘aesthetic experience makes its signifieds significant’ (Luhmann 2000; Notes to §1). The attempt at the isolation of signifying features relevant to meaning causes its own opposite: the attempt at depotentiation only leads to renewed potentiation. This is just a distillation of the process of horizoning and selection-potentiation that we described previously, in a condensed and ceaseless form: aesthetic experience *exemplifies* the ‘openness’ and lack of foreclosure in the passage from meaning-intention to meaning-formation *as such*. And to return the discussion now to education, we can see that it is precisely this lack of foreclosure that makes aesthetic experience, and its implicit temporality, into a type of critical counter-model to neoliberalised systems of education.²

We can also radicalise this account of aesthetic autonomy, or the uniqueness of art vis-a-vis other domains of human activity as indefinite meaning-deferral, in terms of its implications for educational, and indeed all other rational discourses. This model of the aesthetic has a potential ubiquity of application, including to all other forms of non-aesthetic understanding. It is also precisely this reason that we propose that so many authors, including Dewey himself, coupled with the

work on arts education to be examined in the next section, see in aesthetic education a way out of the impasses of abstraction, automation and standardisation. The deferral of automatic meaning-formation in aesthetic experience does not foreclose its temporal and social aspects, seen as a general process. Instead, aesthetic experience provides a model for how automatic and habitual norms of experience and understanding can be undermined. This, of course, gives art a type of political and ethical importance, and arguably also explains why it is simultaneously under threat within academic curricula, a question to which we now turn in the next section.

In the last two sections we examined both the phenomenology of meaning-formation, and how it is connected to the phenomenology of aesthetic experience. In this section we will look at two related issues. Firstly, we investigate how neoliberalism has idiomatically implicated the narrowing, contraction and ultimate ossification of 'open' spaces of meaning-formation, learning processes, and eventually knowledge-production per se, as described within the pragmatist and phenomenological methodology developed earlier. Secondly, we see how this process has led to several different types of *defence* within recent literature of both the necessity of a university education providing the means to maintain the openness of meaning spaces, including maintaining the potential within their horizons for instrumental critique and critical thinking, but also in terms of a renewed focus on the value of liberal arts or 'aesthetic education'. What we offer here is a way of linking all of these tendencies together in a phenomenological reading. But to commence with the former question, we can now ask how both neoliberal and accelerationist tropes within higher education have essentially *truncated* experiences of meaning-formation and learning, or how the essential horizons accompanying any act of meaning formation, which have their own modes of temporality, have begun to be foreclosed. Let us isolate a number of aspects of this process.

Firstly, we can say that neoliberalised educational structures have implicated and necessitated the reduction or truncation of the tripartite structure of meaning-formation, described earlier as factual, temporal *and* social, to a reductionist focus on solely its *factual* aspects. Higher education has become viewed primarily as an essentialist form

of knowledge exchange between ‘provider’ and student that is intended to service a community of consumers of a product, that prepares them, post-graduation, for a state of immediate economic productivity.

This has led inevitably to processes of instrumentalisation and abstraction taking hold within higher education, that tend to reduce or foreclose the significance, and the temporal investigation by a learner of the *surplus* of possibilities in any given meaning situation and meaning space. Abstraction is of course necessary; it is the goal idiomatically of a specifically natural-scientific process of knowledge formation, but in relation to other modes of thinking, becomes an ‘anatomised epitome of just and only those traits which are of indicative and instrumental import’ (Dewey 1998: 106). Abstraction can be seen as one of the ultimate goals of meaning-formation, but is not in itself ever coextensive with all of its crucial aspects, each with its own temporal singularity, implicated in the individual process of meaning-intention and meaning formation. Self-evidently, processes of over-generalised abstraction do a type of damage to the way that these temporal processes, as is often claimed in critical pedagogy, most successfully begin with reference to a learner’s unique historicity or temporal horizon of prior meaning-formation. The tendency therefore is to reduce higher educational exchange as if it were modelled solely on conceptual and propositional theories of meaning and truth, which in turn are founded on models of abstraction and generalisation (see Johnson 2006). Several recent authors have followed up this particular variety of foreclosure within the neoliberal university, speaking of the ‘emphasis on the actuality, without the need for potential’ (Biesta 2017a: 18).

Similarly, the essential instrumentality of educational exchange posited here reduces what some authors, with obvious reference to the work of Emmanuel Levinas, see as the importance of a suitable ‘time for other’, which we can see as a further truncation or foreclosure of another aspect of the meaning-formation model explained earlier, namely a reduction of its essentially *social* aspects. The social and intersubjective aspects of learning within a community of fellow learners are undermined, leading to a type of cult of individualism (Biesta 2017a: 18). The phenomenon of instrumentality also doubles as a particularly pernicious effect of the pre-emptive threat experienced by the

student-as-consumer due to the presence of an ongoing debt burden. Students are forced into a type of 'double bind' whereby in order to succeed, they feel that they need to essentialise their learning experience as a type of protection of their investment in higher education. In arts training in particular, this has led to a reducing of curricula to vocational and specialist training, at the expense of otherwise necessary contextual or pedagogical instruction that places arts practice within a contemporary critical and political frame.³

In drawing some initial conclusions therefore, we can claim that neoliberalist traits are not just inimical to idiomatic and historically evolved varieties of higher educational practice, but meaning formation and learning per se, as articulated in our pragmatist and phenomenological model. This also happens because the idiomatic 'surplus' within any given meaning space, as we have seen earlier, is resistant to generalisation, is unique and subjectively singular, and rests on a foundation of historicity derived from an individual learner. This same surplus aspect of meaning formation cannot be quantified or generalised, or ascribed a monetary value, and therefore is ignored or elided within instrumentalised systems of consumer-driven higher education.

But this is not all we can say here. These same processes have led to several other types of further foreclosure within students that have become naturalised within neoliberal economies, such as a fundamental reduction in the importance and necessity ascribed to private study time, in favour of a reified view of the primacy of contact hours. This forecloses the necessary temporality of negotiating meaning within an individuated field of both actuality and possibility. This perhaps has an origin in economic fundamentalism, given that it resembles the logic of the *securitisation* of financial products, whereby packages of an asset are split off from the whole, and auctioned separately for their economic value. This is especially prescient, given the time of writing, given the proposed introduction by the UK government of contracted and shortened university degree courses.⁴

But to continue now to the second major aim of this section, we can propose a foundation for the motivation within much recent literature that positions an aesthetic and liberal arts education as a useful and vital corrective to all of these neoliberal educational tendencies.

For example, several recent authors have constructed models, based on historical precedents, for an appropriately updated and contemporary 'aesthetic education' that comes in several different versions, and is often posited as being transferable to other disciplines.

Firstly, we can suggest that the aesthetic capacity for potentiation and the resistance of foreclosure has revealed itself in many specific strategies within arts educational practice, such as the ubiquitous employment of self-reflective writing, and the use of journals or learning diaries. But generally these are poorly employed, and actually do little to position the individual in a transformative process, promoting instead a type of internalisation and inwardness much more related to the neoliberal social imagery, rather than a genuine integration and reconnection of prior experience and historicity. Instead, more closely related to what we argue for here, is the *Currere*, a writing method of autobiographical exploration developed by Pinar in the 1970s for educators and students that enables the incorporation of such individual experience and its temporal stretch within the curriculum (Jung 2016). Wang (2010) applies this method within teacher education as a way of enacting a transformative educational process through the way in which it enables the connection between knowledge and experience formatively constructed at school, autobiographical histories, and critical incidents, and to understand the importance of the temporality of this sequence. The *Currere* intersects across these, and involves 'identifying the disintegration of the self; seeking a way to reverse this process through connecting the preconscious or inner world; and ... emphasizing the importance and primacy of an individual's awareness and capacity to engage in the integration process' (Jung 2016: 28).

A further example of this tendency includes the work of Orr and Shreeve (2017), which investigates the notion of aesthetic 'ambiguity' or 'vagueness' within arts pedagogy and curricula. Exploring the 'stickiness' of art and design education, the authors isolate ambiguity and uncertainty as key elements of what makes arts education distinctive; summarising it as being messy, uncertain, embedded with unseen values, elastic, embodied and enacted, and troublesome and challenging, in a manner similar to that of the argument of Gielen and De Bruyne (2012). However, we would contend that the frame for this

‘stickiness’ itself tends to reproduce a certain conservative economic rationality, whereby the assumption of vocational employment is seen as an end in itself, with aesthetic vagueness serving only as a vehicle to its facilitation. This leads to another type of instrumentality, where a being-for-employment replaces the more authentic value of a being-in-itself. This variety of aesthetic education traps the arts in a value-exchange relationship, ignoring the dominant politic that is simply reproduced within the class or studio. Gunn (2016) counters this tendency with an opposition to an aesthetic education motivated by the socio-economic, generalist agendas of the creative industries; the reproduction and contradiction contained there rests on the student becoming the proprietor of commodity (see Močnik 1999), in this case in terms of the arts becoming a normalised ambiguity rather than a transgressive strategy. More promising is the version of aesthetic uncertainty promised by Gielen and De Bruyne (2012), where the arts education genuinely reflects the idea that ‘capitalism doesn’t know how to deal with the immeasurability of the educational process’ (9), and that a ‘good art education values uncertainty more than certainty’ offering eight different forms of this uncertainty ranging from ‘escaping forward’ to ‘dismasurement’.

This comparison of various strategies for a ‘suitable’ aesthetic education of course reflects a wider problem about aesthetic *valorisation* more generally (see Rautins and Ibrahim 2011; Eisner 2002). Much of this discussion problematises: the performative reproduction of structural oppression maintained within artistic artifacts; the cultural conventions of their consumption, and the educational practices that continue to reproduce their exponents through the distribution of ‘acceptable’ knowledge. This contemporary problem can be traced back to the historicity of aesthetic education itself, which through Dewey, can be traced back to various projects of the Enlightenment. Aesthetic education, as foregrounded by Dewey, understands art not as a leisure activity, or social gilding, but in relation to how consummatory experiences have transformative power in human life (Väkevä 2012: 102) The dominance, however, of the fine arts within aesthetic education replicates an ‘epistemological colonialism’ (Bradley 2012). Both Väkevä and Bradley expand on this, observing that isolation and

compartmentalisation is a trap whereby the fine arts are privileged, held up as some kind of extraordinary material, or manifestation of the pinnacle of human endeavour. Most defences against the reduction in recent times of, in particular, music education, focus on the peculiarity of the experience the arts can provoke. In many ways, music and the fine arts in this context generate something similar to a 'salvation' pedagogy, where the sole purpose of the arts-based educator is to correct the presumed deficit of either the individual or society through exposure to 'great works of art'. Further to this, Bradley deconstructs colonial aspects of aesthetic education, in particular the inside/outside dichotomies embedded within valuations assigned to works of art. This inside/outside partition leads to the prohibitive injunction that 'indigenous expressions could not be considered art' (2012: 418) and even 'synergistic' approaches, that are designed to unify arts-based educators, foreclose possibilities of genuine differences in perspective that may co-exist (420).

Similarly, multicultural music education may follow a traditional aesthetic education, using a 'common elements' approach, reducing socio-cultural context via the portrayal of music as stand-alone pieces, 'to be learned for their own sake' leading to an exoticism within the curriculum, coupled with the centrism of the European canon through implicit comparison of experience (Bradley 2012: 425). As a way of navigating this, Bradley suggests certain questions music educators must always ask, including 'what aspects of the status quo do our philosophical assumptions and actions in music education replicate? How instead might those processes help students understand who they are in the world in ways that break down barriers of race, gender, and class, and resist heterosexism and ableism' (429). This requires attentiveness not just to the art itself but to the students and their role in knowledge production, in what Bradley describes, recalling Freire, as an 'epistemological curiosity'. So, when Spivak describes the vital need for a 'suitable aesthetic education' (2012) these are some of the tensions that need to be foregrounded and navigated, in particular by those who invoke the arts and their performativity as an assumed good. In particular, this requires a 'letting go' of what is known, not attempting to create new theories of arts education, but to shine 'new light on the

interconnections between art, artists and pedagogy' (Biesta 2017b: 156) This suitable aesthetic education then is necessarily polylogical, engaging with how the arts 'produce sensation, and to thus extend the levels by and through which art can penetrate subjectivity' (Cole 2017: 26).

This leads us to suggest further polylogical pedagogies, which derive from a general evolution of the dialogic relationship promoted in critiques of monological educational structures, which can be derived from an aesthetic education. Monological forms of education persist within what has been described in critical pedagogy as manifesting in the relationship between student and teacher, whereby the student is an 'empty vessel' to be filled with the knowledge of the teacher, functioning as a typical mechanism of governmentality and systemic oppression. Critical approaches to education that utilise critical pedagogies can lead to increased critical consciousness of both student and teacher, but institutional structures (for example the 'lesson', the 'classroom', or as we saw above, the 'timed assessment') still 'trap' students and teachers through 'required intra-actions' (Hickey-Moody and Kipling 2015: 62).

Polylogical pedagogies are arrived at through various positionalities, including feminism and new materialism. The first suggests ways of noticing rather than ignoring ethical, political, cultural dimensions and instead understanding embodied polylogical social practices that go beyond the personal, for example by identifying ethnic, racial, class, gender, and religious orientations, and as a counter to the relativism of identity politics, leading to questions of how a sense of self informs what is maintained 'inside' and what is left 'outside' (Royster and Kirsch 2012: 94–95). And new materialist approaches relocate that which is inside and that which is outside to the extent that the other becomes neither excluded or removed (Blake and Stearns 2015: 80). This is suggested as an evolution of Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed' into a 'pedagogy of possession', where teaching is founded on openness to both the social other and difference. In other words 'that which is inside yet radically other can be nurtured through which this other... is not ejected or rejected, but rather embraced as a condition of both positive existence and resistance' (80). For example, by decentering the concept of the teacher as an affecting body, replaced

instead with students and teachers as parts of material networks that intra-act (Hickey-Moody and Kipling 2015: 77), the teacher as designer of the original frame is required to negotiate the inside-outside nexus more explicitly; pedagogy as a polylogical social practice is, within the arts, a ground for exploration. Polylogical pedagogies therefore develop and maintain a 'cultural humility' (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia 1998).

A 'suitable' aesthetic education then is, in contravention of the processes of abstraction and generalisation described earlier, a preservation of the indistinct, individuated and horizoned space of potential. Spivak (2012) identifies in arts education, particularly through the preservation and reproduction of the indigenous literary arts, a mechanism for the preservation- against globalised capitalism and its accelerated flows of information, capital and data- of the phenomenology of the feeling and emotive subject, coupled with the possibility for new potentialities of critical thinking, that lie beyond the reach of financial logic. This is done by negotiating further the idea of 'double binds', for example the incommensurability of being a learner and a consumer that we described earlier.

In addition, Louis Menand (2010) has described, within what he terms the contemporary 'marketplace of ideas', how the surplus of meaning hidden in a political situation can reveal the contingency of the status quo, and offer possibilities for its transgressive alteration. And this claim is similar to those made by others, including Martha Nussbaum (2010), who claims that because of the difficulty in quantifying easily the role the arts and humanities play in people's lives, their contribution becomes elided or even dangerously hidden. Wendy Brown (2015) similarly theorises in detail how the health of the liberal arts is co-extensive with the health of democracy in itself. What we want to suggest in closing is that it is arguable that in all of these various types of defence, we can see a common thread or intersection which links to the earlier material: in all cases there is a resistance to the reduction and foreclosure of all of the aspects of the essential processes of dynamic meaning-formation, and involving all of its facets, including the historical, temporal and social.

Notes

1. Specialist Arts Higher Education Institutions mean, in a UK context, a conservatoire, drama or art school, with small numbers of students, which generally offer vocational training in one or two art forms only. Students are accepted via a highly competitive audition process, and curriculum is delivered by practitioners who, in the main, occupy hybrid or portfolio careers themselves as artists, actors, and musicians, whilst also teaching.
2. It is precisely here that the argument resembles numerous other accounts in European philosophy, namely: the celebrated ‘horizoning’ of meaning [*Sinn*] in Husserl; the ‘defamiliarization’ [*ostranenie*] inherent in art, particularly the estrangement of the word in modernist poetry (Viktor Shklovsky); the concept in Luhmann’s work of a ‘unity of difference(s)’; some passages in Deleuze (1969: 116): ‘it [the production of sense [*sens*]] makes of the product something of a producer at the same time as it is produced’. What unites all the accounts is the co-extensivity of a type of selection with its own opposite.
3. Of particular relevance here is the proliferation of varieties of ‘entrepreneurial’ training, both for arts students and others, which is seen a solution to a situation of student precarity. Elsewhere, we have critiqued this approach, arguing that the term ‘entrepreneur’ manifests itself with neoliberalised higher education as a kind of elaborate construction with opposing and contradictory features that confuse the ahistorical with the historical, and the universal with a particular—see Clark and Jackson (2018).
4. In the England, the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 outlined the apparent need for accelerated, two year degree programmes that provided the same volume of teaching as would be found in a traditional three year programme, by teaching occurring throughout the year rather than confined to terms or semesters. These two year programmes are suggested to save the individual student £5500 in course fees and enable them to enter work a year earlier. The government consultation on this closed in February 2018. The rhetoric surrounding this proposal focuses on the learner starting and finishing as quickly as possible to enable entry to the workplace, therefore reducing both the debt of the student and the loan from the taxpayer.

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