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Imaginations Beyond the Individual

Cultures, Bodies and Minds in the Focus of Art Education*

Abstract

This paper explores the limitations of traditional approaches to art education through a biocultural lens, emphasizing the intersection of individual subjectivity and cultural influences. It critiques the conventional understanding of the aesthetic subject as autonomous, suggesting that such a view fails to account for the dynamic interaction among body, mind, and the changing world. Drawing on influential aesthetic theories and the Austrian national curriculum, the study highlights how theoretical frameworks shape educational policies and practices. Through qualitative research on “Aesthetic Practice and the Critical Faculty”, the paper exposes gaps in traditional pedagogy and proposes a phenomenologically grounded, biocultural alternative. This shift aims to offer a more holistic understanding of the aesthetic subject, enriching art education practices.

Keywords

phenomenology, art education, aesthetic theory, Donna Haraway, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, enactivism

Introduction

In this article, I aim to explore the profound implications of the biocultural paradigm on the theory and practice of art education. Art education, in this context, is not merely a pedagogical endeavour but a philosophical approach as well, striving to grant access to the realms of art, culture, and their creative processes. Since the biocultural turn urges an amendment of traditional Western approaches to experience and creation that are central to the most influential aesthetic theories, it also challenges a widely established understanding of art education. Not only the thinking about, also the doing of art education thus become in need of revision.

The biocultural turn focuses on the correlated importance of biology and culture regarding the constitution of human beings. Understanding the human being as a biocultural being therefore means to recognize their dependence on natural dispositions and on cultural developments for becoming what they are. This change of perspective has severe consequences for a long-grown Western understanding of the subject. Donna Haraway’s introduction of the cyborg as the future human paradigmatically hints at the challenges – and even the provocations – that come along with a biocultural turn.

“The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense.” (Haraway 2016: 8)

* This paper was written as part of the research project “Aesthetic Practice and Critical Faculty” (T 835), funded by the Austrian

Science Fund within the Hertha-Firnberg programme.

As the cyborg represents a melting of natural dispositions and cultural, i.e., scientific, developments, it questions the idea of a given, sealed off, autonomous, independent subject. The cyborg has a body that is not given, but that is evolving, deeply shaped by the influence of culture. Haraway's version of the biocultural turn thus rejects all theories that depart from the unquestionable integrity of the human subject.¹

However, by shedding light on the ongoing process of becoming that has no given telos, the biocultural turn not only hints at the constitutive role of culture, socio-political context, history and evolution, but also at the great importance of the actual bodies and minds that are in the world.² Herein, a biocultural perspective focuses on both the restrictions of a merely subject-centred understanding as well as the restrictions of a culture-centred approach to being. Further, in terms of the cognitive sciences it questions the overall determining role of the mind and the exclusively determining role of the body at the same time.³

The theory of art education finds itself at a crossroads, navigating the intricate interplay between traditional Western conceptions of the individual and the realms of cultural theory. In the rich tapestry of aesthetic discourse, both on the continental and analytic fronts, there exists a prominent emphasis on the autonomous human being. These discussions delve into the subjective dimensions of creativity, perception, and production, focusing on the capabilities of independent agents. When talking about aesthetic experience, assessment or creation, they are mainly interested in what an independent agent can achieve (for historical insights, see Hume 1985 or Baumgarten 1988; for a comprehensive overview, refer to Laner 2021). In stark contrast, pertinent approaches within art history and cultural studies exhibit a distinct lack of interest in the individual's experiential encounters with artistic artefacts (as exemplified by Krauss 1986 or Read 2008). Their gaze is fixed upon the cultural significance and the role these artefacts play within specific historical and geopolitical contexts. Consequently, the domain of art education becomes a multifaceted and somewhat paradoxical field, striving to comprehend the aesthetic subject as both an active, self-aware creator and recipient, while also recognizing their immersion in formative (visual) cultures. This inherent ambiguity urges questions such as: How can the influence of visual culture be comprehended if the aesthetic subject is regarded as autonomous and independent? How can different opportunities of action be understood if visual culture is taken to be formative?

Taking the bio-cultural turn as a departing point for rethinking art education might bring about a promising perspective, since it pushes for understanding the aesthetic subject as a being with a specific body and mind who is exposed to a changing world. To expound that this is not a bagatelle and hints at many blind spots of traditional approaches, I will proceed in three steps:

Firstly, I will delve into the established understanding of aesthetics that underpins art education. Drawing on influential theories and the Austrian national curriculum, I aim to illustrate how theoretical choices ripple through the educational policies that, in turn, define the framework for practical work in the field.

Subsequently, I will dissect the repercussions of this entrenched understanding, scrutinizing it against the backdrop of findings from my qualitative survey on "Aesthetic Practice and the Critical Faculty". This critical analysis

will shed light on the limitations and unexplored terrain of more conventional approaches.

Finally, I will introduce an alternative perspective on aesthetics, one grounded in phenomenology and woven into the fabric of the biocultural approach. This fresh outlook holds the potential to reshape the landscape of art education, transcending the confines of tradition to embrace a more holistic and dynamic understanding of the aesthetic subject.

1. The Underpinnings of Art Education within Established Aesthetics

In this initial section, I will introduce key perspectives on art education and the prominent theories that have significantly shaped the prevailing Western outlook on this subject in form of a case study of the German-speaking discourse. To maintain focus and clarity, I will primarily concentrate on contemporary discussions within the European landscape, with a particular emphasis on the German-speaking region. This specificity serves as a foundation for the later discussion concerning the interplay between these theories and the educational policies in Austria. While my examination may appear to concentrate on a specific and localized discourse, the underlying logic I uncover extends beyond this singular example.

Conversations within the realm of art education are typically highly contextual, responding to the unique educational landscapes and policies of specific regions.⁴ However, it is noteworthy that these diverse discussions, despite their regional variations, rarely aspire to develop overarching theoretical frameworks. Instead, they frequently rely on established aesthetic theories as their guiding principles. Consequently, numerous approaches to art education in the Western world share, or at the very least draw inspiration from, theoretical foundations that align with some of the most widely recognized aesthetic paradigms in Western thought. Notably, sensualism, rationalism, idealism, pragmatism, critical theory, and phenomenology stand as five of the most influential theoretical frameworks that inform reflections within the realm of art education (for a comprehensive exploration, see Laner 2018). My concentration on the Austrian curriculum can thus be understood as a case study which follows specific traces in the discussions and practice of educational policy. The case chosen hereby allows for more general insights into the interplay between theoretical inheritance, political thinking and their consequences for educational practice.

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Theories that build upon the integrity and unity of the subject can be found in such influential approaches as René Descartes', Immanuel Kant's and G. W. F. Hegel's.

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The latter are often set aside in sociological etc. surveys which focus on the influence of culture exclusively.

3

At this, the biocultural turn is sympathetic with those theories of the embodied mind that also take into account the environment. Phenomenological and enactivist approaches

highlight the role of body, mind and environment when it comes to understanding the constitution of the subject. However, they do not focus on cultural developments that much. I will come back to speaking about phenomenology and enactivism in the concluding section of my paper.

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There are exceptions which try to develop approaches that go beyond specific educational prescriptions, situations or challenges. An interesting exception is Gayatri Spivak (2013) who thinks about art education globally.

1.1. Art Education and Aesthetics

In this section, I hint at the intersection of art education and aesthetics, navigating through the works of influential figures who have significantly influenced the discourse in Germany. Gunter Otto, one of the leading figures during the heyday of art education as an academic discipline in Germany who influenced the discourse over a period of around 40 years, refers to authors such as Alexander G. Baumgarten, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller or Theodor W. Adorno. Notably, Otto's later work introduces a captivating concept known as "aesthetic rationality" (Otto 1998: 69f.).⁵ Aesthetic rationality underlines that aesthetic experience is not only pleasurable but can also bring about knowledge. According to Otto it is "another kind of subjective strain caused by things and processes" (Otto 1998: 77). While acknowledging the condition of interacting with the visual world, it portrays the aesthetic subject as a distinct, self-aware participant who actively seeks individual engagement with art and culture.

On the opposing side of the academic spectrum, Gert Selle is not as generous in presenting his theoretical foundations.⁶ In speaking about subject-oriented art education, he focuses on the power of art regarding its effect on the sensual individual (see Selle 1998). Herein, he insists on the integrity of a somewhat sovereign aesthetic subject:

"You have to be very aware of one thing: [...] In the aesthetic field, you can only work with aesthetic subjects and as an aesthetic subject. I can adhere to this sentence. It seems to be true even within an openness of thought, beyond the border of outdated didactics." (Selle 2004: 32–33)

Parallel to Selle's viewpoint, Carl-Peter Buschkühle highlights the achievements of an individualized subject in focusing on "artistic thinking" (*künstlerisches Denken*) as the main aim of art education. Artistic thinking is regarded as the capacity to sensually relate to the world whilst critically engaging with it in an autonomous way. (Buschkühle 2004: 10) Buschkühle's theoretical framework includes idealist positions such as Friedrich Schiller's, but also postmodern approaches such as Jean-Francois Lyotard's (see Buschkühle 2021).

The pioneer figure of an approach called "aesthetic research" (*Ästhetische Forschung*) Helga Kämpf-Jansen also focuses on the ideal of an artistically acting, independent subject. For her, this means to use artistic practices as tools to engage with the world. Like her teacher, Gunter Otto, Kämpf-Jansen underlines the relationship between artistic and scientific ways of dealing with the world. She takes interest in psychodevelopmental theories such as Howard Gardner's or Daniel Goleman's (see Kämpf-Jansen 2001).

Contrary to the authors named so far, Franz Billmayer (2008) vehemently rejects the notion of approaching visual culture from an artistic perspective. Inspired by critical pedagogy he rather hints at the need to free the aesthetic subject from its entanglements with powerful mass media. Art education thus focuses on emancipation from the manipulative influences of visual culture. With a comparable aim of emancipating aesthetic subjects but proceeding in a different way critical art education does not primarily deal with mass media, but deconstructs the hegemonial logic at the heart of image politics (see Lüth & Mörsch 2014).

What Otto, Selle, Buschkühle, Kämpf-Jansen, Billmayer and Lüth & Mörsch share – regardless of the many points of difference – is the reference to an independent, self-conscious and upright aesthetic subject that is imagined as the

primary aim of art education. Herein they build on a widely shared conviction in Western aesthetics: rationalist and idealist thinkers like Alexander G. Baumgarten, Immanuel Kant or Friedrich Schiller stress that aesthetic forms of engagement come down to the given (Kant, Schiller)⁷ or partly acquirable (Baumgarten)⁸ ability of an autonomous subject to adequately respond to aesthetic objects or situations. Sensualist positions such as David Hume's (1985) share the conviction that aesthetic experience can be regarded as the capacity of an aesthetic subject. Although Hume highlights the process of becoming an aesthetic subject during aesthetic education, he does not consider the aesthetic subject as exposed to culture. What defines a subject as aesthetic remains constant, regardless of historical or geopolitical differences. Also, critical theory (Adorno 1973) sticks to the idea of an autonomous aesthetic subject which counteracts the people of the mass who are very strongly shaped by culture (see Horkheimer & Adorno 1988).

None of these approaches seriously considers the aesthetic subject as exposed to a changing world and visual culture. The aesthetic subject's body is perceived as sensitive but ultimately acting within the boundaries of its original disposition. It is seen as a defender against the influences of culture rather than a participant exposed to them. Accordingly, they refuse the – admittedly intimidating – thought that it might not be possible to train sovereign, fully emancipated and distanced critical subjects within the scope of art education. It seems that aesthetics and art education stick to the idea of the autonomously experiencing and producing subject to justify their position in science, society and educational policy.

Two takes on aesthetics that are also well received within the context of Western thinking, however, might allow for another perspective that might be more sympathetic with a biocultural turn: Pragmatist conceptions like the influential approach of John Dewey (2005) focus on the actual being in the world. The interrelatedness of body and mind is key to his thinking. Also, phenomenology highlights the necessity to regard the aesthetic subject as exposed to the world, responding to the actual situation it is in. I will come back to phenomenology when I think about an alternative approach in the final section.

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The term aesthetic rationality is also used by Martin Seel who can be seen as an important figure in the German speaking aesthetic discussion at the turn of the millennium. He is influenced by rationalism and phenomenology. See Seel 1985.

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Especially in the later work Selle refuses to join in the academic talk. Accordingly, he hardly refers to aesthetic theories but rather builds his approach on artistic attitudes such as the one of Joseph Beuys (see Selle 1998). In earlier writings (Selle 1981), however, the theoretical foundations are laid bare.

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Immanuel Kant (2001) hints at the overall sovereignty of the aesthetic subject when he

underlines the self-reflexivity of aesthetic experience. Friedrich Schiller (2009) herein follows Kant's path. Although he ultimately outlines the importance of aesthetic experience to found an aesthetic state, the concrete engagement with aesthetic objects is the business of a solipsistic subject referring to their natural abilities.

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Alexander G. Baumgarten (1988) does not take aesthetic experience to be a natural disposition. Rather, he is convinced that education and training is needed. Still, the ways in which aesthetic experience can be acquired are set rigidly and the aesthetic subject-to-be is regarded as highly autonomous.

1.2. Curricula Considering the Discourse

Not only the academic discussions about the focus and aim of art education are inspired by traditional Western aesthetics and its take on subjectivity and the body. Also, educational policies originate in response to the dominant discourse, since they are drafted by, or at least in cooperation with, professionals in the field. These professionals are often educated within academic settings that stick to canonical convictions.

I will shortly look at the Austrian National Curriculum for Grammar Schools (Lehrplan für die allgemeinbildenden höheren Schulen) in order to demonstrate the dominance of the idea of an autonomously experiencing and producing subject as outlined above. The curriculum for Art Education (Bildnerische Erziehung) highlights that art education in the grammar school aims at the “development of personal receptivity” as well as the “discovery of identity by ways of structurally engaging with one’s own personality” (BMUUK 2022). These passages clearly underline the focus on the education of a sovereign individual discovering their own identity. Classes in art education should therefore focus on the “self-experience bound to one’s distinct design activity” and “allow for a deepened relation to one’s personal capacity” (BMUUK 2022). With regard to the didactic setting this means that the “learning content” has to be processed “independently” (BMUUK 2022) by the students. The latter should be encouraged to work in a “self-organized way” (BMUUK 2022). They should “solve design tasks on their own” (BMUUK 2022). Every student is thus asked to develop their very own way of engaging with aesthetic objects and situations. At no point of the curriculum, it is put on record that such a highly subjective approach should be expanded or, even, counteracted with the need to understand the aesthetic subject as dynamically evolving and exposed to permanently changing circumstances which makes it impossible to ultimately discover one’s very own personality or identity.

On top of the things already stated, the curriculum further lists the “caring about the personal creative resources” (BMUUK 2022) as a central task of art education. Again, the focus is on the boundaries between the personal and the non-personal. The repeated insisting on identity, ownership, personality and self raises the question of how the aesthetic subject that is at the heart of educational policy relates to its surrounding, to the actual circumstances it is exposed to and to cultural developments.

The Austrian curriculum for art education is a framework curriculum which does not dictate the topics and the learning content to be dealt with in class. Rather, it outlines general ideas of the scope and the aims of the subject. As such it shapes the understanding of art education on a very basic level. By referring to a current research project, I want to hint at some issues arising in the practical field that question the idea underlined by the curriculum.

2. Impact of the Current Understanding of Art Education? An Empirical Comment

In a current project called “Aesthetic Practice and the Critical Faculty” I am looking at the ways 14-years-old students respond to images. The study brings some difficulties of the highly independent and autonomous aesthetic subject as referred to above to light. In this section I want to shortly introduce the project and discuss the findings so far.

The research design is as follows: 10 to 14 students from the same class of a grammar school or new secondary school form a focus group. This focus group is asked to look at three different images consecutively and talk about each of them. They are not answering questions from an interviewer, but are invited to freely utter their impressions, feelings and associations. The discussions are audio-recorded. Further, one of two present researchers observes reactions of the students on a non-verbal level and takes notes.

Up to now my team and I have conducted six interviews with focus groups from three different classes and two different schools. The findings of the study so far are remarkable, since they clearly hint at some blind spots of an established understanding of art education as introduced above. On the one hand the study shows that in all groups the students are rather responding to each other than to the image when talking about the latter. This suggests that they are not at all acting in terms of autonomous aesthetic subjects that are looking at the images independently.⁹ On the other hand the relation of body and mind, sensual and intellectual level of engagement turns out as highly problematic. On the verbal level students showed normalized responses whilst on the bodily level there was a greater variety of expressions to be found.

2.1. Individuals vs. Groups

First the study underlined that it is of utmost importance to consider the actual lifeworlds and the concrete social situation shaping the experiences of 14-years-old-students. Within the focus group discussions, the norms with which the students are acquainted turned out to be the strongest influence for their responses to the images. At some points of the discussions the orientation towards supra-individual norms even seemed to prohibit an actual engagement with the aesthetic object presented to them. During the interpretation of data, I found an orientation towards norms on three different levels:

- a) an orientation towards generally accepted social norms,
- b) an orientation towards the more specific norms of the peer-group,
- c) an orientation towards the norms of art and culture (as far as the students are acquainted with them, i.e., through art education).

The orientation towards norms was twofold. On the one hand it was a positive kind of orientation, especially regarding the more specific norms of the peer group. Here, the individual judgments are prescribed by what is internalized as the perspective of the group. On the other hand, it was a negative kind of orientation, especially regarding the norms of others which are regarded as unfamiliar or strange and which do not allow for identification.

Within the discussion of focus group 1 the positive norms that shape the shared response of the peer group were displayed evidently. When talking about one of the images many students underlined that they were reminded

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Here it is important to note that the curriculum analysed above strongly refers to learning outcomes of individuals but hardly describes the actual situation of learning in school which naturally consists in learning in and as a community. In this sense, it can be questioned whether the curriculum can be taken literally and whether the strong focus on

the individual needs to be relativized anyway when applied in the practical field. I'd like to thank the reviewer for highlighting this – I'd like to call it – “challenging” situation when talking about the relation of curriculum and the practical field where the curriculum can merely serve as an approximative norm.

of videogames. They compared the aesthetics of the image to the “tapes with images which describe the game”. The man portrayed was called a “gangster” and the image was described as looking “familiar”, both in terms of aesthetics and content. Based on this connection to their lifeworld the image was qualified as “more interesting than the other [images]”.

Based on the discussions it becomes clear that the perspective on the image is very much shaped by the lifeworld of the 14-years-old adolescents (videogames). The context “gaming” is immediately tied in. At the same time the aesthetic and representational norms from this field serve as a shared basis for the responses of the students. Many students show a very positive reaction to image No. 2. They take interest in it. Based on their gaming experiences and on their knowledge of films, music videos and TV-shows they are acquainted with the aesthetics, the references and the symbols presented. Accordingly, they can read the image easily. Drawing on the norms of their lifeworld students differentiate between an informed, experienced and an inexperienced view. One student stated: “I wouldn’t show this image to a three-years-old child, because he [the man presented in the image] acts as if he was a criminal. And three-years-old children are not that.” Reacting to the objections of the fellow students that the image looked “cool”, the speaker underlines: “It looks cool, but not; well, we are older and understand, how, what it is. Other kids think that they are cool and imitate.” The orientation towards the familiar norms of the peer group also has a very interesting gender-specific aspect as the comment of a female student during the discussions of focus group 2 indicates: “If I were a boy I would find it so cool.” In this case the response is linked with the gender role which underlines a positive orientation towards the lived norms of the peer group.

Regarding the influence of unfamiliar norms which do not allow for identification I want to refer to some sections from the discussion of focus group 3. The responses expose an attitude that could be parallelized with institutional critique. The students stress the difference between images that they would hang up on their walls and images that could be displayed in the museum. One student stresses that the image does not qualify for hanging at home: “Well, as it looks, I would rather not hang up this image. Maybe in the museum.” Other students underline this by stating “This image could be displayed in the Museum of Art History” and “I would rather give this to a museum”, since it looked “museum-y”, meaning “old-fashioned”.

The positive as well as the negative orientation towards norms underline that students respond to images very much based on shared knowledge, convictions and attitudes. Also, when it comes to emotions like feeling depressed or cheered-up it turned out to be of utmost importance in all six focus groups to find a position that is line with the peer group. The individual experience and the personal receptivity as outlined in section 1 seem to be totally absent when students discuss their response to the images with each other. Of course, the dynamic of the group¹⁰ should not be left unconsidered; still, also on the level of content, not only on the level of performance most of the students underlined the great importance of the present as well absent groups for expressing the experience of an aesthetic object like an image.

2.2. *Bodies vs. Minds*

Up to this point I have only referred to verbal responses. I will now go on to consider the relation of verbal and bodily responses based on the discussions of the focus groups and the observational notes taken in the field.

To find out more about the relation of speech and response, of articulating and engaging with the image material, of verbal fixation and sensual opening to the situation is one central aim of the research project. Within the groups verbal descriptions turned out to have a channelling effect. Accordingly, they can act as a barrier. Especially when students started to take over other's wording and phrasing, the limiting function of verbalization became manifest. Those aspects of the images which were highlighted through verbal descriptions were negotiated by many members of the focus groups. Verbalization set up points of reference that made it possible to communally focus on specific aspects, such as "make-up", "flashy make-up", "too much" or "bad make-up", "hair" or "man – woman" in regarding one of the images.

After the students have turned the image around and looked at it, a vivid discussion about gender and sex ensued very quickly in this focus group. Interestingly, also in the other focus groups the aspect of gender and the conceptual guiding motives man – woman had a strong channelling function. The question whether the person in the image was a man or a woman (one group even introduced the term transgender) was central. Also, the issue of too much or bad make-up was at the heart of the discussions in all six groups. The verbal fixation came along with a cut of other dimensions of the image: the expression, symbolic elements in the image or the style. The searching after and findings of words and concepts which are key for a verbal response seems to channel the sensual engagement to those aspects which can be grasped verbally and can be negotiated within the familiar discourse. Many dimensions of experience which are hardly verbalizable do not become subjects of response.

Speech can thus be regarded as a challenge to art education, since it seems to have a channelling character when it comes to a multifaceted engagement with aesthetic artefacts. The observation in the field underlined that: many students changed their postures and bodily expression as soon as they started to speak about the images. Accordingly, the way the students respond to the images by way of verbal expression does not seem in line with their sensual experience.

The findings of my study so far furnish a fit occasion for rethinking the current thinking about and doing of art education, since they suggest that the concentration on a sovereign, autonomous aesthetic subject that is capable of clearly expressing their bodily involvement ignores the way students deal with aesthetic objects. Instead of freely and independently engaging with images and other cultural artefacts, they very much negotiate judgments within a social situation that shapes their experience. And rather than being able to communicate their involvement by first taking a distance, they seem to be not capable to fully integrate their verbal and bodily expressions.

3. The Biocultural Turn: Setting the Stage for Another Way of Thinking and Doing Art Education?

With the challenges listed in mind, I want to come back to the biocultural turn in this last section. A revised understanding of the interrelatedness of biology and culture might allow for a change of perspective on experience and responding that is fruitful especially for the discourse and practice of art education, since it reframes the subject as an evolving body-mind that is exposed to a changing world.

Donna Haraway, which has already been introduced as an important author in the introductory part of this paper, hints at the critical impact which a biocultural theory of being has for Western accounts of subjectivity:

“[T]he cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the ‘West’s’ escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self-untied at last from all dependency, a man in space.” (Haraway 2016: 8)

According to Haraway, the understanding of the human being has to be freed from the restrictions of traditional Western thinking which focuses on an independent individual. The Western idea of subjectivity as it is criticized here rejects situatedness, concreteness, determination and exposure to the world.¹¹ Being aware of itself, the Western subject can ultimately exist on its own, thinking its own thoughts, imagining its own images. For Haraway such an understanding neglects the fact that the subject is a being somewhere and sometime.¹² As places are diverse, and times are changing developments do affect the subject as a being in a very specific manner. Evolution, no matter whether in a biological, cultural or technological sense, is real. So are cultural changes. For Vivian Sobchack, considering such developments and changes not as secondary, but as primary to being, is linked with the need to overcome long-grown dualistic concepts. Abandoning a dualistic order does not mean to simply bring together formerly opposed elements; it is a more complex operation that embraces “both an *oppositional tension* and a *dynamic connection*” (Sobchack 2006: 18) of seemingly contradictory concepts. This indicates that after the biocultural turn biology and culture, body and mind, me and the others cannot just be regarded as harmoniously connected. Rather, they must be considered regarding a complex, constitutional interplay of multiple shaping forces. Going even one step further, with her agential realism Karen Barad (2007) highlights the entanglement of biology, nature – in terms of matter – and culture. For her, also matter must be considered as a shaping force within the complex interactions that make some entities appear as beings and others as non-beings.

Already phenomenological authors like Maurice Merleau-Ponty have called attention to the interplay of such forces. In his later work, he introduces the term “chiasm” (Merleau-Ponty 1968b: 130ff.) which hints at the exposure of the subject to the world as well as to others whilst highlighting the specificity of the places and moments where and when they are confronted with each other in different constellations. In the early works (Merleau-Ponty 1967; Merleau-Ponty 1968a; Merleau-Ponty 2012), Merleau-Ponty underlines the need to reframe the subject as a bodily-sensual being in the world. Ultimately, this critical approach is bound to a revised understanding of the role and the process of learning: Firstly, being exposed to the world and others, a subject never stops to learn in terms of to change and evolve.

Secondly, learning cannot be understood as a self-controlled and autonomous action if the learner is regarded as a situated being exposed to the world which is both shaped and shaping. Merleau-Ponty's discussion of learning to dance is revealing in this respect. Here, the body is taken to be as explicitly exposed to a situation which brings along "affordances" (Gibson 1977), i.e., which invites the body to respond to the concrete situation it is in with the means of movement. Generally, "the subject's surrounding and current task bring relevant motor skills 'online' making them available for the subject to use in perception and action" (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 52). Subjects do not simply have available the skills which they have acquired through processes of learning. Rather, the concrete situation, the actual place and time, the constellation at hand opens diverse possibilities of action. Merleau-Ponty's understanding of this limitation of the sovereign freedom to act of an allegedly autonomous subject is taken up by enactivist¹³ approaches. Generally, those enactivist accounts which are in line with phenomenological thinking very much focus on cognition as embodied and situated (see Gallagher 2005). They claim that processes of learning involve both body and mind and are situated, i.e., have to take into account the learning environment (see Gallagher & Lindgren 2015, Gallagher 2018).

Coming back to Merleau-Ponty, a related thinking can be found in his phenomenological dealing with acquiring skills and performing skills.¹⁴ In the case of learning to dance, however, the body builds upon already acquired motor skills – like walking or running –, transforming them into something else (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 147f.). In this process of "motor grasping of motor signification", the body draws upon "already acquired movements (such as walking and running)" (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 144). Yet, sometimes, as in the case of dance, the body "brings forth a new core of signification" (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 147) through gestures that are necessary for life, such as walking. In doing so, it acquires new motor habits by "playing upon these first gestures and passing from their literal to their figurative sense" (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 147–148).

Phenomenological and enactivist authors cannot be simply filed as biocultural approaches. Still, they share a row of convictions. And they enthusiastically agree about the need to question a Western understanding of sovereign

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Such a critique of Western subjectivity is certainly not reserved for the biocultural discourse. Within the Western history of ideas, phenomenological, poststructuralist, post-modern or postcolonial authors have questioned the idea of a sovereign subject ever since the middle of the last century at the latest.

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Already in early feminist thinking, situatedness is a central argument for criticizing the Western thinking about subjectivity as ultimately male. Simone de Beauvoir (2010) introduces the term "situation" claiming that subjects are gendered bodies in the world.

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In philosophy and cognitive science, there is a range of different approaches considered

enactivist. By speaking of enactivism I am referring to accounts that focus on the actual entanglement of the living body, the mind and the environment. I am not referring to accounts that concentrate on the more abstract idea that cognition is an active engagement with the world without explicitly thematizing the role of the living body in this context.

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Other than Hubert L. Dreyfus (1987) who has developed a very influential and broadly discussed model of skill-acquisition and who is inspired by phenomenology as well, Merleau-Ponty and enactivist approaches claim that the situation is key when it comes to performing skilled actions.

subjectivity and autonomous agency. I tried to highlight some of the intersections without exploring their differences. This is because I am convinced that it is necessary to constellate approaches to respond to the needs of a theory that is challenged by an actual practice such as art education. While biocultural approaches like Haraway's, Sobchack's or Barad's claim that there is a growing need to consider the cultural and technological developments as primary to the being of the subject, phenomenological and enactivist theories like Merleau-Ponty's and Gallagher's have a deep interest in the very concrete processes of learning. One could say that biocultural approaches underline the importance of considering the bigger coherences whilst phenomenological and enactivist approaches focus on the smaller coherences. Each of them loses sight of some aspects that are crucial when trying to face the challenges that the theory and practice of art education faces today. Finally, I therefore try to present a reflection about the consequences of integrating biocultural and phenomenological/enactivist thoughts for art education as a direction of impact for now.

For learning in schools in general and for art education in specific, this means that students must be regarded as situated subjects who are bearers of a concrete cultural history and who do not simply dispose of the skills they have acquired. Students who are trained to regard and read images in a certain way, for instance, cannot be expected to have their regarding skills ready at hand no matter what they have inherited in terms of culturally established ways of regarding and what they are actually afforded by the concrete situation of regarding.

Such a shift of perspective that I would like to describe as a phenomenologically inspired biocultural approach responds to the challenges I listed above as follows: It faces the challenge of the orientation towards different norms by taking the subject as an exposed being who responds to the affordances of a concrete situation based on acquired skills and knowledge. Norms are openly recognized as shaping forces of experience. Still, they are not regarded as determining, since different situations call for diverse performances. As a consequence, teachers do not only have to take care of opening up spaces for training skills, but also provide various situations for actual performance. Herein, it is crucial to bear the shift in understanding the acting subject in mind: Subjects are not independent, and they are not freely disposing of their capabilities, they are entangled with culture, situation and others. The shift of perspective I suggest here also faces the challenge of the problematic relation of speech and sensual experience, since it openly calls for multiple ways of expressing and reflecting experiences. Merleau-Ponty's account of dance suggests that movements and gestures also "speak" in terms that they are a means of communicating. For art education this means that experiences of aesthetic objects and situations should be expressed on different levels¹⁵ and not be restricted to verbal utterances to strengthen the understanding of the interrelatedness of body and mind.

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Andrea Sabisch (2018) describes the case of a bodily engagement with a graphic novel. Her study shows that such a bodily engagement is

by no way solipsistic, but can be easily shared within an experiential community.

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Iris Laner

Imaginacije onkraj pojedinca

Kulture, tijela i umovi u središtu likovnog obrazovanja

Sažetak

Članak kroz biokulturnu leću istražuje granice tradicionalnih pristupa likovnom obrazovanju, naglašavajući sjecište individualne subjektivnosti i kulturnoga utjecaja. Kritizira konvencionalno razumijevanje estetičkog subjekta kao autonomnog i predlaže da takvo gledište ne uspijeva objasniti dinamičko međudjelovanje tijela, uma i mijenjajućega svijeta. Polazeći od utjecajnih estetičkih teorija i austrijskog nacionalnog kurikula, istraživanje ističe kako teorijski okviri oblikuju obrazovne politike i prakse. Kroz kvalitativno istraživanje »O praksi i kritičkoj moći«, članak iskazuje praznine u tradicionalnoj pedagogiji i predlaže alternativu temeljnu na fenomenologiji i biokulturnom pristupu. Ovaj pomak smjera ponuditi cjelovitije razumijevanje estetičkog subjekta i na taj način obogatiti obrazovne prakse.

Ključne riječi

fenomenologija, likovno obrazovanje, estetička teorija, Donna Haraway, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, enaktivizam

Iris Laner

Imaginationen jenseits des Individuums

Kulturen, Körper und Geist im Fokus der Kunstpädagogik

Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit untersucht die Einschränkungen traditioneller Ansätze der Kunstpädagogik durch ein biokulturelles Objektiv, indem sie die Schnittstelle zwischen individueller Subjektivität und kulturellen Einflüssen unterstreicht. Sie übt Kritik an der herkömmlichen Auffassung des ästhetischen Subjekts als autonom und legt dar, dass ein solcher Blickwinkel es verfehlt, die dynamische Wechselwirkung zwischen Körper, Geist und der sich wandelnden Welt zu erläutern. Unter Rückgriff auf tonangebende ästhetische Theorien und den österreichischen nationalen Lehrplan beleuchtet die Studie, wie theoretische Rahmenbedingungen der Gestaltung bildungspolitischer Maßnahmen und Praktiken ein besonderes Gepräge verleihen. Durch qualitative Forschung zu „Ästhetischer Praxis und Kritikfähigkeit“ legt das Paper die Lücken traditioneller Pädagogik offen und entwirft eine phänomenologisch untermauerte, biokulturelle Alternative. Dieser Paradigmenwechsel zielt darauf ab, das ästhetische Subjekt in einem ganzheitlicheren Verständnis zu erfassen und somit die kunstpädagogische Praxis zu veredeln.

Schlüsselwörter

Phänomenologie, Kunstbildung, ästhetische Theorie, Donna Haraway, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Enaktivismus

Iris Laner

Des imaginaires au-delà de l'individu

Cultures, corps et esprit au cœur de l'enseignement artistique

Résumé

Cet article examine les limites des approches traditionnelles de l'enseignement artistique à travers une perspective bioculturelle, en mettant l'accent sur l'intersection entre la subjectivité individuelle et les influences culturelles. Il critique la conception conventionnelle du sujet esthétique comme entité autonome, en soulignant que cette vision ne tient pas compte de l'interaction dynamique entre le corps, l'esprit et un monde en perpétuel changement. En s'appuyant sur des théories esthétiques influentes ainsi que sur le programme scolaire national autrichien, l'étude montre comment les cadres théoriques façonnent les politiques et pratiques éducatives. À travers une recherche qualitative intitulée « Pratique esthétique et faculté critique », l'article met en lumière les lacunes de la pédagogie traditionnelle et propose une alternative bioculturelle fondée sur la phénoménologie. Ce changement de perspective vise à offrir une compréhension plus holistique du sujet esthétique, enrichissant ainsi les pratiques en enseignement artistique.

Mots-clés

phénoménologie, enseignement artistique, théorie artistique, Donna Haraway, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, éenactivisme