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Borderless inclusion

TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHENOMENON OF INCLUSION WITHIN EDUCATION

A MOVABLE ØRESUND REGION

> Someone has said, a bridge is a human being who crosses the bridge.
> As I stand in Malmö's western harbour and look towards Amager
> is it a bridge that I see spanning the strait?
> After ten years, it still amazes me, the bridge,
> that it stands there and is so immensely huge.
> And wondrously beautiful, like a UFO.
> But is a bridge anything but like a construction?
> Were two hands stretched over the strait and united
> in a brotherly handshake?
> - Niklas Söderberg "Öresundsbron" (author's own translation, *OBS* 2010)

The Øresund Region, with the Øresund Bridge in its heart, has historically been a site for movements, transitions and meetings - people looking for new beginnings, and at times, a safe haven. It is a site for a chaotic celebration of identities; a celebration that characterizes the contemporary globalized world in which we live, with its multicultural society. The construction of the Øresund Bridge in 2000 has materialized enhanced opportunities for flexibility in the region[1], occasionally enabling rather fluid borders and identities, while at other times entailing the reservation of old borders, or the creation of new ones, thus implying a somewhat clearer separation. However, the region is certainly a site for *movability*. The following article presents the results of a recent study (Tynell 2016) within the field of Philosophy of Education, which aimed at discussing a central challenge, which is implied by such movability - the increasing need for considering the notion of inclusion within education.

Contemporary educational policy has seriously engaged with the question of inclusion, thus bringing about the development of various educational programmes, within the field of diversity education, aiming to set up the concept of diversity as an essential aspect of education (Prieto 2015). However, a central shift within contemporary educational theory, located within the field of democratic education, includes a wave of educational theorists[2] who radically criticize the intentions of such programmes, arguing that they are based on the idea of *integration* rather than *inclusion*. In order to understand the argument of this theoretical shift, the study examined the ideas of a central theorist calling for it - Gert Biesta. Biesta (2011) criticizes the diversity education programmes, and argues that they regard inclusion as something that can be reached once all members are assimilated to the norms of the existing order. Biesta wishes to understand inclusion as a sporadic process - the excluded/included individual doesn't exist prior to the process of inclusion, but is rather iteratively co-created through it. In a very crucial sense, according to Biesta, "one" cannot become her "own" uniqueness without the existence of the "other".

Now, it was precisely here, in the *separation* between individuals, that a tension in the theoretical shift described above was identified by the study. In understanding the included/excluded individuals as being iteratively co-created through the process of inclusion, this shift seems to focus a kind of interconnectivity of the "individuals". Biesta himself (2004) argues for the need for a theory of educational relations to depart from the idea of the relationality of the relations rather than of its constituents - an idea, which is however challenged by the theory's departure in separable subjects (cf. Ceder 2015). It is in the effort to move towards a more relational, ongoing and performative understanding of inclusion, that the ideas of this theoretical shift were found productive, and from where they were developed by the study, while attending to the tension that was identified within them. Let us take a closer look at the presumption of separation behind this theoretical shift, as suggested by the study, in order to better understand the tension and how the notion could be elaborated.

IT'S RAINING CATS AND DOGS

Haunting the presumption of separation between entities makes us return to the time when the idea of atomism is vitalized. The atomistic philosophy[3] is based on the idea that the origins of everything, and of any change, are material interactions of separable and indivisible units - atoms/individuals - within an infinite void (Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy 2011). Karen Barad (2003) tells us that the atomistic presumption that entities pre-exist their relations, affects "[a]n entangled web of scientific, social, ethical, and political practices, and our understanding of them" (p. 813). As Donna Haraway (2013) reminds us, evolutionary theories have always worked with what she calls "a particular kind of ontological furniture, namely, units, collectives and relations" (35:07). According to her, questions on development involve *auto-poietic* systems, that is, systems of re-production and selective competition, based on the logic of separable units/individuals, assembling collectives through kinship-based relations, which are relations that are not necessarily positive for the world's becoming (Haraway 2013).

The Øresund Bridge. Photo: Johan Wessman, News Øresund

And now back to Biesta's account of inclusion, in which he draws on Jacques Rancière's idea of democracy. Joseph M. Spencer (2015) argues that Rancière, in his democratic idea of community of equals, approves positively the atomistic idea of pre-cosmic continuous parallel "rain" of individual atoms in the infinite void - each in its separate and unique orbit of truth - before the atomic swerve. In "The Ignorant Schoolmaster", Rancière argues that "[p]eople are united because they are people, that is to say, *distant* beings" (quoted in Spenser 2015:101, emphasis in original). As Spenser (2015) points out, Rancière criticizes solely that which comes after the atomic swerve, where the atoms aggregate to unities of sameness, and create what he calls the social order, which is according to him the situation" of inequality and exclusion. In the name of equality, he accounts for the existence of infinite equal and separable subjects, who are radically different from each other (cf. Spenser 2015). Counterproductively, the idea of entirely separate subjects challenges the sense of their interconnectivity - an interconnectivity that both Rancière and Biesta argue for - and generates an auto-poietic understanding of the process of inclusion.

UNRESTRICTING INCLUSION

In order to understand inclusion as engaging interrelated entities, without placing boundaries separating them from each other, departing from relationality rather than from separable educational subjects is crucial. The study suggested that the theoretical shift's departure from separable subjects could be explained by the aforementioned humanist perspective's presumption of separation of matter from meaning, and thus also of the different subjects from each other. The study considered therefore the possibility of finding an alternative theoretical inspiration, which could help generating another answer to the urgent questions of inequality and exclusions, than the one of *absolute* "otherness", in a

way that enables the understanding of inclusion as an ongoing, relational and performative event. A point of departure in a posthumanist perspective was suggested, as it offered a way of theoretically departing from the ongoing entanglement of matter and meaning - and thus also of "individuals" - in the world's iterative process of becoming. The following section will make an effort to outline this theoretical departure.

ALWAYS ALREADY ENTANGLED

Drawing on quantum physics, Barad (2003) speculates a relational ontology, which doesn't haunt "geometries of absolute exteriority or interiority" (p. 812). According to such an account matter and meaning are not separated but rather threaded through each other (ibid.). Rather than thinking individuals in terms of separate entities, acting and becoming through *inter*-actions with "other" individuals, Barad (2003; 2007) argues that "individuals", and their "otherness", are always already entangled, and are iteratively co-materialized of their *intra*-actions, thus making them inseparable. It is only within intra-actions that "entities" can be separated, which makes it a dynamic and relational kind of separation, enacted within and of a particular intra-action (Barad 2003; 2007).

As "entities" do not exist separately, the idea of ascribing them characters of agency as separable agents - even if such agency is understood as a relational act - is challenged (cf. Barad 2003; 2007). Rather than the narratives of auto-poietic evolutionary systems of re-production, Haraway (2013; 2015a; 2015b) purposes the idea of *sym-poietic becoming* - a becoming-together-with - "that kind of coming together but not fully assimilating, whereby two become less than two but more than one" (Haraway 2015a:262). It is a becoming which is ongoing, relational and performative, and which is based on affinities that are positive for the world's becoming (Haraway 2013; 2015a). According to such an account, it is the relation, which is "the smallest unit of being and of analysis" (Haraway 2008:165). Relationality, rather than relations, is the name of the game.

INFINITE MOVE-MENT

Once moved through each other, the posthumanist ideas presented above queer any atomistic relations between seemingly separable "entities", in ways, which indeed matter. The move created a pattern that enabled the development of the concept of *move-ment*, a concept that was found helpful in the elaboration of a posthumanist notion of inclusion. Move-ment is a concept, which offers a way of simultaneously thinking the world's ongoing entanglement of matter and meaning - *movement*, relational intra-actions that are appearing of the movement - *moves*, and performative sym-poiesis which is enacted of the moves - the iterative becoming-together-with of transient "entities", who are both *moving* and *being moved* by each "other". It is a concept that is productive for shifting the focus from separable entities as constituents of entanglements, in favour of dynamic and sym-poietic phenomena, *move-able* phenomena.

In order to develop the contemporary notion of inclusion within the field of democratic education, in a way that more clearly emphasizes movability, transformation and relationality, the study employed a diffractive reading methodology[4]. In this manner, the contemporary notion of inclusion and ideas within posthumanist theory, were read *through* each other, while paying close attention to re-configurations emerging of this movement, which could contribute to such an elaboration.
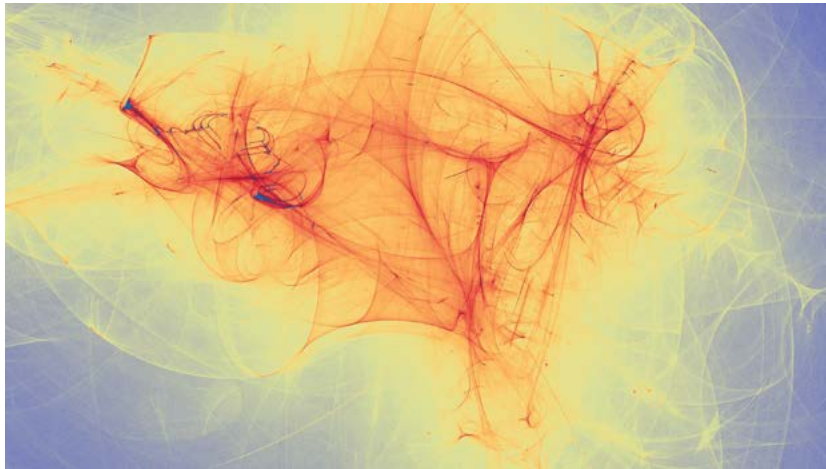
"Streak". Photo: Hans Rohmann, Pixabay

THE OTHER THAT THEREFORE I AM
Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Biesta (2013) elaborates his idea according to which one's identity is transient and is iteratively constructed through interactions.

> *[W]e cannot act in isolation*. If I were to begin something but no one would respond /.../ *I* would not appear in the world. But if I begin something and others do take up my beginnings, I *do* come into the world, and in precisely this moment I *am* free. (Biesta 2013: 106, emphasis in original)

The actors are necessarily separable, as one starts an action whereas the other responds to it. Biesta (2013) explains that since it is precisely "otherness" which enables one's becoming, trying to erase plurality would mean depriving one's own possibility for the re-configuration of oneself. Crucially, it is not just a call for any collective whatsoever, but rather for a specific kind of plurality, based on radical and exterior otherness.

In order to tell us how one can exist "together-in-plurality", Biesta (2013) takes us on an Arendtian journey, in which we learn about the differences between exclusive narratives of tourism - regimes of explicit homogeneity where the other is a stranger and shall stay that; integrative narratives of empathy - normalizing colonial attempts to assimilate the other; and lastly, inclusive narratives of visiting, that is, "being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not" (Arendt 1977:241, in Biesta 2013:116). Since the idea of tourism is explicitly erasing plurality, Biesta focuses his critique mainly against

the empathy narratives, whose exclusion is more implicit. By assuming that "one" can really understand the "other", one denies "both the situatedness of one's own seeing and thinking and that of the other's" (Biesta 2013:116), thus implicitly erasing plurality. The idea behind the narrative of visiting is understanding that the world looks different to someone else (Biesta 2013), that is, not understanding how the "other" sees the world, but rather understanding that she sees it very differently.

Regarding the existence of absolute differences as the very condition for the ongoing process of becoming is crucial in Biesta's understanding of inclusion. The "other" is not the same as the "self", but is rather an absolute "other", in her very unique way, which is precisely that which makes the "self" be in "her" very unique way, in a kind of interactive becoming (Biesta 2013:114); it is *the other that therefore I am*.

Such individuals may certainly be heterogeneous and transient. However, informed by the notion of move-ment, becoming "together-in-plurality" implies auto-poietic interactions between separable subjects, which, as stated before, challenges the relatioanlity and co-creativeness of the process, thus allowing ideas of re-production to continue circulating (cf. Haraway 2013).

THE OTHER THAT (~~THEREFORE~~) I AM
The idea that change cannot come out of sameness seems reasonable, but does that necessarily mean that the solution lies in finding "otherness" radically outside the "self"? What if we always already exist together, in fact, we never existed separably? What if we are rather entangled and the other is therefore never radically "outside", and in fact, is never really (an) "other"? In order to examine those questions, the study turned to nondualistic readings of symbolic structures within Jewish mysticism *Kabbalah*.

The word play of the Hebrew words *ain* (אין) and *ani* (אני) was found helpful for the reading of *otherness*[5]. Rabbi Rami Shapiro (2014) tells us that whereas both words consist of the same Hebrew letters - *aleph* (א), *yod* (י), *nun* (נ), albeit in different order, they have seemingly different meanings, ain meaning "nothingness", and ani meaning the "self", which manifests the entanglement of "self" and "nothingness": "Reality is the dance of off and on, *Ain* and *Ani*. You yourself are this dance. You are constantly spinning from *Ain* to *Ani* to *Ain* again over and over and over" (Shapiro 2014, emphasis in original).

Interestingly, *ain-sof* (אין-סוף), which literally means "infinity", is often used within Kabbalah as the infinite and performative entanglement of God, the world and humanity, all co-evolving (cf. The New Kabbalah n.d.; cf. Shapiro 2014). Ain-sof is nothing and everything, hidden and revealed, creator and created, ani and ain - the nondual, entangled and dynamic unity of the world's infinite possibilities and impossibilities, which are iteratively "reconfigured and reconfiguring with each intra-action" (Barad 2010:268, footnote 12); a unity which doesn't imply the erasure of differences, but rather their entanglement (cf. Valabregue-Perry 2012; The New Kabbalah n.d.) as infinite

im/possibilities. In a very important sense, ain-sof is the infinite play of ain/ani, the "otherness" that is threaded through the world (cf. Barad 2012b; The New Kabbalah n.d.; Valabregue-Perry 2012).

Rather than an absolute exterior matter connecting different worlds, "otherness" is understood to be materialized within moves, so that move-able "entities", which are always "made up of all possible histories of virtual intra-actions with all Others" (Barad 2012b:15), are iteratively co-created - some possibilities for becomings being enacted, while others remain yet hidden. And does that not mean that we neither are tourists nor visitors, in an *outside* place? That we are rather always in-visitors, even in "our own identity"? What if instead of visiting, we talk about *move-ing*, which we always already do, and which doesn't have any "direction" from, towards or between subjects? Where "one" is always already "on the move", always moving and being moved of the infinite im/possibilities for co-becomings, which are neither totally "exterior" nor totally "interior"?

"Fractal". Ralf Kunze, Pixabay

The infinite play of ani/ain is not a dualistic inside-outside play, but rather an un/doing of any kind of "identity", even an heterogeneous and fluid one; an entangled and lively play of the infinite "plurality" of im/possibilities that emerge of the ain-sof. Crucially, the ain (the "other") and ani (the "self"), are always already threaded through "each other", through the iterative dance of self/other, inside/outside, matter/meaning, and of im/possibilities. "We" are of this infinite flickering dance; ani/ain are inseparable, always already entangled of the ain-sof; always already threaded through the infinite im/possibilities for move-able human and nonhuman co-becomings; through *the other that (~~therefore~~) I am*.

UNRESTRAINED MOVE-ABILITY

Biesta's (2011) notion of inclusion implies that inclusion is an ongoing process, which takes place whenever certain "others" are excluded, which is also precisely the places where they are "created". It is a thorough argument, which indeed matters. However, the departure in separable and active subjects, as argued in the study, counteract the idea of relationality, and also of co-creation (sym-poiesis) rather than re-production (auto-poiesis) - both crucially being ideas which Biesta's theory seems to call for.

In an urgent manner, the re-configuration of otherness as im/possibilities, moved the idea of the separation between individuals, and thus of auto-poiesis, which is materialized of the contemporary notion of inclusion. The re-configuration contributed to the development of a posthumanist notion of inclusion - *move-ability*, as an ongoing, relational and performative phenomenon. In order to manifest this elaboration, the following paragraph presents a piece of the diffractive reading performed in the study[6].

Inclusion is not something one does for others, but it is neither something, which other "active agents" can do "themselves", that is, auto-poietically. It is rather an agential phenomenon, which always already happens of the move-ment of non/human move-able co-becomings. In that way, inclusion shall not be understood as the condition of integrating additional human-beings into the existing order, based on a wish to maintain sameness and homogeneity. Neither can it be understood as an auto-poietic sporadic process of mobilizing fluid positions in society, and thus as the inter-ruption of the existing order, in the name of equality between separable (human) "individuals", based on a wish to maintain heterogeneity, fantasizing otherness as an absolute "exterior matter". Inclusion shall rather be understood as an ongoing, relational and performative phenomenon, of which *intra-ruptions* are enacted, wherein *move-able* human and nonhuman "entities" iteratively and sym-poietically dis/appear (in the in/determinate play of inclusion/exclusion). Crucially, separability exists solely within such moves. As long as we limit our efforts to include the ones who are recognized as being excluded, we merely move within the existing order. However, we can neither limit our efforts to allow the separability of individuals in the name of "their" right for "their" "absolute otherness", for their "unique" and flexible (human) becomings, as we then merely mobilize positions rather than interrupting their incitement; we need to be able to imagine another kind of inclusion, which "is not something you have toward some kind of demand made on you by the world or by an ethical system or by a political commitment /…/ not something you just respond to, as if it's there already" (Haraway 2015a:257), but rather a *move-ability* to - or rather of - the infinite im/possibilities for move-able non/human co-becomings, which pays careful attention to affinities that can make a positive change for the world's iterative becoming. Move-ability is thus the ongoing sym-poietic performance of moving and being moved by "the stranger threaded through oneself and through all being and non/being" (Barad 2012a:217); it is the "cultivation through which we render each other capable, that cultivation of the capacity to respond" (Haraway 2015a:256-257). Inclusion in its posthumanist account shall be understood as move-ability, which is an ongoing, relational and performative phenomenon (cf. Barad 2007).

In order to take the notion of move-ability seriously, without falling back on categorical presumptions of separable positions/identities, as fluid as those might be, new educational approaches are needed. The study suggested a *wonderworlding* educational approach. It is an approach which seriously engages in an ongoing sym-poietic storytelling (cf. Haraway 2015a) - an invitational storytelling of which move-able, queer and sym-poietic non/human co-becomings appear - while always being attentive to what emerges, but pressingly, also to what could yet emerge, and how all of this comes to matter in the world's iterative becoming. It is about remembering that inclusion is not first about a meeting, and then an ethics that is attached to it, but that those are intimately entangled, and that it really matters which stories we are co-telling, but also which ones we are not.

LIMITLESS EPILOGUE

In his poem "Öresundsbron", which opens this article, Niklas Söderberg (in my translation) wonders:

> Now, one shall however remember that bridges are built from three directions.
> From both sides and from the middle.
> A bridge is a human being who crosses the bridge.
> Somewhere halfway across, "rolig" and "hygge" switch their meaning.
> Or maybe not.

And I wonder - is the Øresund Bridge a construction unifying different hands? Does it really connect seemingly different sides in their point of intersection? Are "Swedes", "Danes", "immigrants", and "refugees" - separable in any mattering sense? Perhaps the notion of move-ability can help us re-think the idea of the bridge, in a way that opens up for more movability, transformation and relationality - for the people, meanings and matters, who are moving and being moved of it.

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NOTES

1. On the changes in cross border migration over the Øresund Strait after the opening of the Øresund Bridge, see for example Wichmann Matthiessen (2005).

2. For some additional examples of theorists calling for this theoretical shift, see Todd (2003), Prieto (2015), and Säfström (2011).

3. Pre-Socratic cosmologists Leucippus and Democritus (5th cent. BCE) are regarded as the first atomists in the ancient Greek tradition (Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy 2011).

4. The diffractive reading methodology was developed by Barad (2007) as an elaboration of Haraway's (1992) distinction between diffraction and reflection. Rather than a critic of separated ideas, it aims at "reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge" (Barad, 2007:30), thus effecting all the involved theories/fields.

5. Barad and Rabbi Fern Feldman diffracted the word play ain/ani in relation to Rabbi Itamar Schwarz' text about cycles of being and nothingness, and to quantum physics ideas on vacuum fluctuations. This nondualistic reading of ani/ain enacted a productive re-configuration in the reading of otherness in Biesta's theory, wherefore this word play was chosen for the reading in the study.

6. The diffractive reading of the notion of inclusion consisted of several ideas - a passage in which Biesta's (2011) central ideas regarding his notion of inclusion within education are manifested, the study's developed concept of move-ment, and the re-configuration of im/possibilities rather than otherness, together with Barad's (2012a; 2014) and Haraway's (2011; 2015a) posthumanist ideas - all read through one another.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Picture on page 84 by Rupert Kittinger-Sereinig, Pixabay