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In education and pedagogy, learning is often emphasised as the major factor. While there is no doubt that learning is important, education should be acknowledged as encompassing much broader issues. Education connects and commits to the world, and it helps the world make sense for a person. Often, it is understood that education is a process of socialization to society. If that is only the case, it fails. As Gert Biesta (2012) points out, society-centered education makes one ask whose society it would be that we educate people to socialize in. Is it the society we currently live in or is it possibly some future society that is impossible to know? Because the needs of societies are inevitably erratic, unequal, and impatient, education should be grounded in more persistent values.

In my thesis, I started by questioning the meaning of teaching and learning as I had understood it. It soon occurred to me as a process of being in the world and becoming something different through encountering with another person. In this educational process, it was not just me teaching something to the other person I was working with. On the contrary, we were both part of change—becoming or unbecoming through institutional, educational and social engagements that tied us together. With this thought in this thesis, I aim to challenge art educational constructivist-cognitive notions of learning and becoming educated.

My thesis explores an artistic and art-educational project grounded in the collaborative art practice with a person with autism. The majority of collected material, and most of the theoretical conversations, focus on the complexity of the encounters between my research partner, Thomas, an adult man with autism, and me. I worked for two years with Thomas, exploring the possibilities of varying modes of

‘dialogue’ and non-verbal and non-cognitive interaction through collaborative artistic work—mainly repeated and shared painting and drawing sessions. During these sessions, I started to pay attention to my own actions and reactions, such as hopes and fantasies, frustrations and defences. Affects and emotions that were not planned or predicted had to be acknowledged as much as my pedagogical responsibility. I then perceived education to be something that balances in-between ambitious ethical goals and the hidden affects and defences.

In this thesis, I ask how a collaborative art practice can be described, discussed and interpreted visually—in this case with video material—when the collaborative art practice aims to maintain an ethical relationship with the Other. By the Other, I mean the radical alterity, the otherness in myself as much as in the other person. The Other as radically ‘Other,’ therefore, always remains strange, a valuable part of being with others. It is not to solve or to understand the other, but to value the difference and the different way of being. Consequently, the other’s otherness has nothing to do with a person’s abilities or characteristics, such as autism.

The ethical relationship to the Other is essential for educational approaches. According to Emmanuel Levinas (2009, 98), an ethical encountering is always undemocratic and asymmetrical. Levinas emphasises that ethics cannot be related to one’s own experiences, because the ‘Other’ is always more than my subjectivity can comprehend. In Western society, there seems to be an idea that when one gets to know a person, s/he would act more ethically towards her/him. According to Levinas (2008, 51), getting to know each other better does not lead to a better sense of ethics. The ‘Other’ can never be understood, and trying only leads me to understand the ‘Other’ from my own point of view based on how I live my life. Levinas states that previous experiences are not helpful when drawing conclusions on how to act in a present moment.

The phenomenon that I discuss in this thesis, ‘being-aside’, stems from Jean-Luc Nancy’s notions. Being-aside means being next to one another, which includes togetherness, when knowing that the other is alongside me, without feeling the pressure of shared identities that comes from shared togetherness. It brings the opportunity to be alone while being together. That is how I would characterise not only the togetherness with Thomas, but also most of the moments of existing; of human togetherness. Each of us occupies a space, but we do not often interact in any significant way. Thomas and I sat next to each other, working silently, not quite being together with each other, but being aside each other. This form of working was a form of togetherness, a form of contact that allowed our singular ways of being.

Thomas and I started to become we through working together, through giving space to one another, by appreciation, by listening, by touching and tickling one another. We learned to find a rhythm of tactile working and tacit communication. We needed to find our own way to communicate, how to be with and be distinct from one another. The aim of our working process together was not to establish any kind of hegemony between the two of us. Being-aside included complexity, conflicts and cracks, moments of miscommunication. The aim was rather to create a condition where our activities, whether singular or done together, would appear open and uncovered.

According to Levinas, the ethical relationship to the 'Other' is always more complex than just a face-to-face relationship of two. Levinas's notion of the 'Third' ensures that ethics is always political, and the Third helps to see ethics in a larger context. (Lingis 1981, xxxv; Simmons 1999, 83; Wallenius 1992, 213.) This notion of the 'Third' enabled me to critically review my practices with Thomas. Without it, I could have thought that being-aside is all there is, just the two of us in a 'bubble' of togetherness and distinctness. Thomas's and my being-aside fascinated and held us in a grasp, like the embrace of lovers, as Levinas calls the face-to-face relation, and it would be convenient and interesting enough to remain in that space. However, the ethics of the 'Third' required me to step outside of our togetherness and to look carefully and critically at the politics of our being-aside. The 'Third' came into existence through reflecting upon my experience, through criticising my own behaviour, through the philosophies and theories that I have explored, through looking back and through (un)becoming educated.

During the time we worked together I learned a lot about Thomas and how to work together. Most of this knowledge I gained by sharing time with Thomas. However, I was also informed through other people. For example, I was told how to behave with Thomas: how to speak to him, how to ask questions, what kind of activities he likes, what he means when he says something or does something. I found out very soon what different worlds these two learning perspectives offered, and I was not sure how helpful it was to get this advice beforehand. I knew that working face-to-face, in a Levinasian sense, required an attitude that aims to destroy the pre-notions and pre-definitions of the other. Letting go of that kind of knowledge, however, was a demanding process. Applied to other educational contexts, pre-definitions typically narrow students so that they are a part of the teacher's totalised world, not the students' own, infinite, world. If the aim is to socialize the student to the society, these kinds of definitions might ease the socialization process and help everyday planning. However, if education aims to connect to the world, more open, ethical, and dialogical approaches are needed.

The mission of socialization brings out other questions about education—its grounding and its aims. I believe that to socialize into the society is more helpful for the normative society than it is for the individual her/himself. Within the autism spectrum, normality is often referred to as a region of ‘neuronormalcy’. The presumption is that each human being will try to enter the realm of neuronormalcy to have a fully human life. People whose behaviour differs from the norm are often considered ‘problematic’. In my research, the different kind of behaviour is understood as a problem for the surrounding society, not a ‘problem’ of the person with autism.

The critique of normative society stems from disability studies and from the politics of ableism. It is an attempt to theorise about the ways in which disabled people have to live in an ableist society, which is the normative society formed and shaped by abled people. Disability studies offer an alternative to the medical model of disability, where disabilities are perceived as being potentially treatable via various treatments and therapies. In disability studies, disability is recognised as a cultural identity comparable with other minority identities. (Davis 2006, xv-xviii.) More recently, disability theories have embraced an affirmation model. The affirmative model redefines the ideology that emphasises tragedy and impairment. It directly challenges the presumption of personal tragedy and the determinations based on the values of non-disabled people. (Swain & French 2000, 570-573.) Non-disabled people often assume that disabled people constantly lack something significant and that they would want to be so called ‘normal’. However, this is rarely voiced by disabled persons themselves, who often consider the disability to be a major part of their identity.

Another theoretical foundation in the thesis is a phenomenological approach. Embodiment and touch, for example, became important phenomena in the thesis. They played a significant role in part because language was not used much between Thomas and I and because painting itself is an embodied medium. I understand a body to be much more than just a physical and material extension of the mind. In Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, the body-subject is not just a subject in the world, but is essentially a subject from the world (Värri 2004, 46-47). Merleau-Ponty clarifies how all embodied beings are firmly part of the flesh of the world as organic, continuously moving and thinking beings. The world comes into being in time and space through the moving and sensing body. Through the senses, people are the same flesh as the world: in the world and from the world. (Merleau-Ponty 2006, 19.)

With the help of testimonies of people with autism, I was able to see Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological and natural attitude regarding the organic body from a broader perspective, and therefore to view phenomenological assumptions with suspicion. My phenomenological research engagement was tested and reshaped when encountering

with different embodied experiences. According to phenomenological thinking, perceiving persons do not analyse or calculate their perceptions. Instead, they trust that their perceptions constitute their embodied relationship to the world. This statement stands in contrast to many testimonies of people with autism that I studied in the thesis. Many statements clarified how difficult the body is to recognise not to mention to trust the body and its perceptions. This means that a knowing person does not automatically have a knowing body.

Other recent literature on, and writings by, people with autism address the matter of communication. Because of the altered perceptions of sensory input, social interests can take different forms, some that the ableist society cannot recognise. Different modes of social behaviour cause issues with communication. While communication might be limited, there are many narrations from people with autism who have connected with other people through writing, typing or drawing with the help of different devices and technology.

I video recorded all of our working events. The video material was my research data along with my diary notes, it was a material for remembering and writing with, and most importantly it was the visual research method to interpret and express my thoughts through editing. Choosing from the extensive video material meant also choosing what and how to write about and to represent the 'Other', and also what not to write and not to choose to show. The video work you just saw, is not a documentary as such made for purposes of the research project; rather, it is part of an engaged interpretation of what happened. My relationship to our embodied collaboration changed when working with the moving images with an editing program. In front of the screen, I confronted my own vulnerability, exposed and injurious. Through editing, I came to face our embodied collaboration as an engaged and objectified gaze. I was able to rearrange, repeat, delete and extend, as well as shorten the time. The medium offered the possibility to view our collaboration differently, from a distance. It also offered a great deal of freedom when re-conceptualising our encounter. Most importantly, I found the video a suitable way to contemplate my pedagogical desires and educational fantasies through visual expression.

Research that is based on a visual arts practice is a relatively new way of researching. There are a wide variety of visions and different notions about arts-based methods, and many different names for these methods. With my research project, I wanted to expand the idea of using art practice in a way that differs from those that seek the nature of art making itself. The art, practiced as a part of the pedagogical research project, is a practice that strives for a more plural understanding of my own behaviour and self-reflectivity, and especially for understanding my encounter with another

person in an art pedagogical context. Instead of focusing on art making as such, I offered myself as an instrument to the research project. This means that I brought myself, my subjectivity, education, and culture, and my notions of the world, to the research project.

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