

“Throwntogetherness”: a travelling conversation on the politics of childhood, education and what a teacher does

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Doreen Massey (2005) describes as “throwntogetherness” the moment where the fluid trajectories of individuals in movement come together. It describes a form of coalescence of people and things in a particular place for a particular moment, which passes and is never repeated. It is happenstance, unpredictable and, on occasion, magical. This paper was written in a process of “throwntogetherness” for three academics - a Swedish pedagogue from France, a Scottish geographer from California, and an Argentinian philosopher from Brazil – over two and a half weeks in Brazil.

It is not a simple coincidence that this encounter took place in Brazil, nor can it be considered as taking place in a nation; perhaps it may best be considered in this instance as encounters through the *topos* of cities – Rio de Janeiro, Campinas, São Carlos, and São Paulo in chronological order – between which these foreigners travelled through a couple of weeks in August 2015. All three authors live de-territorialized lives and here at this particular place – the generous lands of Brazil – they enjoyed the encouraging energy of thinking together at the interfaces, connections and overlappings between the politics of childhood, education, space, time, and what a teacher does. The crucible of the encounter – a *chora* if you will – was the 4th International Conference of Early Childhood Education, where each was invited as a keynote speaker on the topic of theoretical and methodological post-structuralism. The throwntogetherness also encompassed a unique, intensive and affirming space provided by hosts Professors Lígia Aquino, Gabriela Guarnieri de Campos Tebet, Anete Abramowicz, and Leticia Nascimento in their untiring promotion and nurturing of this encounter, and their willingness to share theirs and their wonderful students’ continuous work with questions of childhood, education and revolution. To them, is extended gratitude and friendship; they too were part of the throwntogetherness and are part of this text.

This written dialogue started just after the authors’ first meeting in Rio de Janeiro and continued mostly daily till Liselott and Stuart returned to France and California respectively. In a sense it was a way to continue togetherness in *chronos*. In *aion*, the authors still experience “throwntogetherness”, listening to each other, smiling in synchrony and enjoying the privileged event of a joyful thinking, i.e. of

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childhood, as a unique educational potency of sense. Hopefully, this conversation inspires consideration of other throwntogether encounters.

Walter:

Dear Liselott and Stuart, this message is extended with thankfulness for the days in Rio where you offered a taste of your research and thoughts... and maybe you would like to share a little more about them... I also read some of your papers (Aitken (2015; 2014; 2001; 1991; Olsson 2013; 2012) and kept wondering what we can think together, starting from them. One point of obvious connection has to do with a common interest in the political dimension of the relationships between childhood and education. Liselott, I was admiring the way you stressed the importance of really listening to children and taking them seriously, their questions, but also their way of creating words, constructing language, relating to themselves and to adults. We could say that your work is born from a sensitivity towards the ways in which children live: affirming a life, an ageless life with certain affects and potential. Your work expresses a way to approach attentively children's singularities and uniqueness and at the same time engaging children as a community. You have explored and presented this with inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari amongst others. In this sense it seems to me that your project "The Magic of Language" (Olsson 2012; 2013; Olsson & Theorell, 2014; Olsson, Dahlberg & Theorell, in press) carried with Swedish preschool children shows the epistemological but also political possibilities of new forms of education, where knowledge and formation are not the central concepts but what can be called a revolutionary pedagogy of the event. Am I reading you with the meaning that you intend? Does this reading make sense to you? What can you tell us in relation to this presentation? How would you present yourself and your main aim while researching childhood and education?

Stuart, I was impressed by your vivid presentation at Rio de Janeiro State University and the whole political implications for our relationship to space and the way we affirm a given space and are affected by it in our educational practices. I can see at least two directions in which your thinking can be explored to resonate with a politically interesting education of childhood: one with space as the theme: what kind of politics of space would be interesting to practice in educational institutions? How do we relate to space there and how do we stimulate or provoke a specific kind of relationship to space in children and teachers? Another dimension seems to emerge from your denouncement of unchildlike forms of life in working and abused children. For example, the problem of the stateless erased infants in Slovenia: in a sense, children without childhood (cf. Aitken 2016). What is the task of education in this case? I know children's rights are also one of your main worries. How can we affirm a more childlike life for children, avoiding the uninteresting implications of a classical formation paradigm in children's rights, i.e. an education that would try to form kids in the normative paradigm of the universal declaration which has shown itself not only ineffective but also politically uninteresting? Can you tell us a little about how do you think these relationships Stuart?

Liselott:

Dear Walter, first of all we are the ones to thank you for these wonderful days of simultaneous pleasure and intellectual work! I very much like the way you describe the work that I have engaged in and I do think that the common point for the three of us is the politics of childhood and early childhood education. For me, and maybe because I am originally a preschool teacher, the politics of childhood and early childhood education take place in everyday events and in each tiny little gesture of a classroom. So, it is that what is often considered a ‘molar politics’ - thought to be taking place on a large-scale level of national or global initiatives – is actually lived and ‘felt’ immediately by the actors in the field. For instance, teachers had - before anyone had named current governing as ‘neoliberal’- experienced with their bodies and minds what was going on and what was about to hit them. Moreover, teachers developed strategies to escape that kind of governing; for instance, through discussing and collectively analyzing the underlying logic and also through forcing some of the externally imposed ‘instruments’ (such as evaluation forms, quality assessment standards, reports of ‘productivity’ etc.) to obey the teachers own logic, or simply, as you said Stuart, just ‘ducking’ and letting it pass while continuing with teaching and learning in every day life in the classroom. So this can be understood as a certain kind of quest and battle for being able to continue to live one’s own sense-production and meaningfulness of life in school despite the immense pressure coming from external governing. You know, my experience of this field is that its actors, children as well as teachers, are constantly underestimated. Preschool teachers - as I know the profession - are often very analytical and strong-willed people who take matters in own hands, so to speak. By politeness they do not reveal in front of their ‘oppressors’ (to use a Freirean expression) that they already clearly see, understand, and take measures to avoid being trapped within any domesticating attempts (to use a not so Freirean reasoning).

Now, I would like to develop the Deleuzian/Guattarian (1980) idea of a ‘micro-politics’ a little bit, in relation to this. The point with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of macro- and micro politics, as I understand it, is that any attempt to rationally govern somebody or something never really functions well. There is always something that escapes. Even though they clearly admit that we are segmented, positioned, and sometimes deeply stuck within ‘structure’, there are forces that forego and that are simultaneously at work here. They describe these forces as ‘flows or quanta of belief and desire’. All governing concerns the adjustment of segments or positions to these flows of belief and desire and this more a question of ‘hit and miss’ than rational and effective governing. So, in this respect, the attempts of neoliberal governing to tame, predict, supervise, control and evaluate according to pre-determined standards never really functions; people continue to do what they find most relevant anyway. In relation to the experiences that I describe above, it seems that it is this dysfunction in the system of governing that is being used and activated by teachers in a politics that is simultaneously of a micro and macro character. Connecting to our experiences and following Deleuze and Guattari, we should not see the micro and the macro as separated, they are both at work at the same time in every situation. Neither should we distribute the micro and the macro according to scale or numbers (it is not because children are shorter than adults that they are more connected to a micro-politics) it rather concerns, what you Walter call, the

‘revolutionary’ (although I am not sure that ‘revolution’ is the best term as it is so frequently connected to ‘consciousness-raising’ and that is clearly not at stake here, given the foregoing forces of belief and desire as well as the actors’ rapid analysis and measure-taking). It concerns that which is capable of escaping structure, position or segmentation and it is always this - the ‘micro-political’ - ‘that makes it or brakes it’. As described above, in the contexts that I have been working, this has been used by teachers and researchers to escape neoliberal governing and also in relation to the role of the teacher. The idea of ‘hit and miss’ has helped teachers to neither over-estimate nor being intimidated by the power normally described to the teacher. The work that has been done in the classroom has concerned the possibility to ‘latch on to’ children’s flows of belief and desire rather than trying to tame them. Just as we as researchers have been able to approach practice through trying to ‘latch on to’ what is already flowing through it.

Now, what complicates the current situation is, as Brian Massumi (2003) states, the fact that neoliberal governing has changed face and no longer tries to govern only through externally imposed rules, but rather through modulating the very flows of belief and desire. As I said in the presentation, this has been expressed in how neoliberal governing ‘hi-jacked’ words like ‘the competent child’, ‘creativity’ and ‘flexibility’. In this respect one could say that when we try to ‘latch on to’ flows of belief and desires we are actually operating within neoliberal governing, maybe even running its errands?

But what are the alternatives? According to Hardt and Negri, (2002) all attempts to resist governing through delivering consciousness-raising critique is condemned to be fighting ‘remnants of past enemies’. If committing oneself only to delivering critique of the way neoliberalism operates we will always be ‘one step behind’ engaged in *re* action rather than *action*, in *re* production rather than *production*. What do you think of this? Please, help me navigate here with your thoughts.

I tend to think, maybe a bit naively, but anyway: even if it’s true that we are operating side - by - side neoliberal governing, I wonder if there is not an ontological and epistemological divider between the ‘soft’ neoliberal governing and the attempts of ‘latching on to’ children’s and practice flows of desire. I am not sure here, but it seems to me that ‘soft’ governing always comes paired with an underlying or openly expressed ‘rigid’ agenda. Be creative, be flexible, be competent, but only as a means of attaining this specific goal or producing this particular outcome.

Big kisses to you both and may the discussion flourish!

Stuart:

Liselott and I were discussing over lunch the problem of critiquing a step behind capitalism, and I was struck by how this closely relates to feminist Meaghan Morris’ (1992) use of Deleuze’s (1989) *Cinema 2* and its focus on face, faces, facial and visage (see also Deleuze 1986). If we think of capitalism’s chimera/visage, it is constantly shifting. This is the nature of what some call capitalism in search of crises. It continually shifts and when it is near crises (e.g. 2008) the neoliberal state gets scared and bails it out. But we do so at excessive cost to those who now are burdened with the risk (us, or more clearly, lower income people but also those of us with

middle-incomes). The face keeps changing and therefore seems as if it is one-step ahead of us, but it is just chimera, and another visage presents itself. Is it possible to get in step with or ahead of neo-liberal capitalism? Perhaps not, because, as Žižek (2006, 2008) points out, we are it; the big Other is also who we are. We cannot destroy or critique it without destroying/critiquing ourselves. The Deleuzian I/not I (Aitken 2007). Through assemblages we create smoothings and striations and smoothings and striations. A good example of this is the rise of the new sociology of childhood (Qvotrup 1994; James et al., 1998) right after the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (UNCRC). As liberatory as those events seemed I no longer see those works as smoothings but as problematic striations. Perhaps it is better to see them as beginning as smoothings and transforming to striations. As Liselott notes, our best efforts get hijacked by neoliberal capitalism, but perhaps there is more culpability here for us as academics. By focusing on children’s participation as opposed to protection, the focus of both the UNCRC and the new sociology of childhood were on children as ‘beings’ rather than ‘becoming adult’ and as such their politics was recognized. Children and childhood became a worthy political category in and of itself (Qvotrup’s ‘childhood matters’). Almost immediately, this may be critiqued as problematic because it positions children in very specific ways (agents, active participants, responsible etc.) that are easily appropriated by neo-liberal agendas. The neo-liberal subject is an active, monadic agent who takes responsibility for herself. Kirsi Kallio and Jouni Häkli (2011a & b, 2013) have demonstrated well that children in Finland who become involved with the state’s articulation of the UNCRC do not represent well all children, but the state assumes that they do; the participation of children once more becomes something akin to tokenism or, worse, the creation of the new generation of politicians who look just like the old ones (becoming-the-same).

With these kinds of practices, the state/corporation can now divest itself of responsibility (for education, health, housing, work), and place those pressures squarely on the shoulders of those least able to bear them. The Slovenian erasure is a classic and ultimate example of the state diverting responsibility by creating a population to which they owe nothing; Agamben’s (1995, 2001) states of exception. Moreover, the new sociology of childhood/UNCRC proclamations of what a child now is forecloses on what a child might become. There is a problematic tension between being, becoming-the-same, and becoming-other.

In some ways, then, I must part company with Hardt and Negri (2002) and Liselott’s comments because I think critique is important, even if it is hind-sight. We can never be one-step behind because we are always simultaneously becoming. We do not reside within the belly of the beast, we are the beast, and it all leaks and moves forwards and backwards in fits and starts. So, the question for me resides with affects. Neo-liberal capitalism exists and we are part of it, so what does it do and what do we do? What are politics? What are children’s politics? To date, I’ve stuck with understanding the contexts of spatial frames as they relate to foreclosing upon the political. So when those frames are dismantled children get to fulfil their potential/capacities in different ways, ones that we cannot, nor should, imagine. What would have happened if the young Adolf Hitler had been enabled as an artist, if the institutional frame of the art school had not foreclosed upon his potential?

In focusing on spatial frames, I always return to Henri Lefebvre's (1991, 1996) production of space, and his earlier piece on the rights to the city (read space). Children have a right to change space and by so doing they change themselves. Scale, too, is a spatial frame that is produced. The micromacromolarmolecular always happens at the same place and time, but the affects may appear distant. What does that mean? In making a critique of a statement like "Think Globally, Act Locally" do we not create something new? Does not the idea of distance affects change our perspective? Are we not taking a different line of flight?

Not only must I think of affects, I must think in terms of what assemblages do. And most child assemblages involve adults in relational ways. Another problem with the UNCRC's individualistic thinking is that it posited children as monadic beings, but we are all relationally flitting in and out of assemblages, one of which is our little swedishbrazilianscottishfrenchamericanargentinan assemblage.

Walter:

There are some nice elements in what you both say, really. Liselott, I love the way you make us focus on the perspective of the teacher and how you point out a kind of priority of what happens in the classroom. I also love the way you value teachers in these moments where nobody else seems to. As you say, it seems teachers and children are only underestimated. That seems to me a crucial point for education: what can emerge from a practice that not only nobody cares about but nobody values or really expects anything from its actors and participants. From both of your interventions, the political dimension appears so clear, more as a problem than something clear, because if we take the micro/macro distinction and some implications of the way Deleuze and Guattari have thought of them, both domains interrelate and a world of thinking emerges (cf, Deleuze & Guattari, 1980).

Concerning the term 'revolution', let me defend it a little. Of course it is always difficult with these words that have been so extensively used that they seem to be tired, and I share your doubt about whether we should continue with them or just renew our vocabulary. But let us try a little more with the idea of revolution. There is a nice reference from Guattari, coming from his time in Brazil. Let me quote it because of its significance:

We have to try and think a little about the meaning of revolution. This term is now so broken and worn out, and has been dragged through so many places, that it's necessary to go back to a basic, albeit elementary, definition. A revolution is something of the nature of a process, a change that makes it impossible to go back to the same point . . . a repetition that changes something, a repetition that brings about the irreversible. A process that produces history, taking us away from a repetition of the same attitudes and the same significances. Therefore, by definition, a revolution cannot be programmed, because what is programmed is always the *déjà-là*. Revolutions, like history, always bring surprises. By nature they are always unpredictable. That doesn't prevent one from working for revolution, as long as one understands 'working for revolution' as working for the unpredictable. (GUATTARI, 2008, p. 258).

It's beautiful, isn't it? I like this idea of a change that makes it impossible to go back to the same, an irreversible changing repetition. As Guattari says, revolutions

cannot be programmed as unpredictable but there is a kind of preparation we can foster in terms of expecting the unexpected. Immediately and unconsciously Heraclitus fragment 18 comes to my mind: “If you do not expect the unexpected you will not find it for there is no encounter, no way to it” (DK 22 B 18). So this idea of actively expecting the unexpected seems to me very meaningful and educational. Maybe the revolution in education has to do with the attitude towards children or, in your words, Liselott, we must precisely “latch on” attentively to children instead of trying to form them and also - in a parallel way - “latch on” to teachers - as you seem to be doing - instead of trying to form them. This idea, Stuart, relates to your so important stress on affect. I am thinking in terms of a revolutionary pedagogy of affects, where affects are practiced in a non-capitalist and non-consumerist ways, if this is possible for capitalist subjects as we all are, crossed by capitalistic micro and molecular lines of desire. Is it possible to go through a neoliberal capitalist affective life in education? How to prepare (for) it? How do we work towards it without programming it?

All this has to do with the problem we have been discussing, the dilemma about critic and creativity/creator, seeing the former to be only reactive and the latter being co-opted by the system. In a sense, this goes back to the issue of “what is philosophy?” or “what does it mean to think?” And we can see it, for example, in Foucault’s conception of philosophy as criticism (cf, for example, “Introduction” to 1984; 1981) and Deleuze & Guattari approach as creation (1991), and let me introduce here a “new” (old!) form of thinking, acting as that of Zapatismo. Have you read Thomas Nail’s *Returning to Revolution. Deleuze, Guattari and Zapatismo* (2012)? It seems like in the Zapatist movement we can find lots of inspiration in terms of thinking a revolutionary politics and a revolutionary politics in education in terms of non-capitalistic ways of thinking and being, a sort of molecular revolution. From the beginning of their movement the Zapatist have made it clear that they do not aim to take The Power as in traditional revolutions but to change the way we exercise power. Zapatist autonomous communities seem to be good examples of horizontal and non consumer forms of affective relationships; different assemblages that the ones we are used to share in our contexts. Have you heard about the recent Zapatist school in Chiapas? One of its most interesting dimensions is that what they call school is a practical introduction to their form of life, a kind of invitation to share their way of being in the world. It is a school of life, which means a school of affects, of time and space. I wonder how you feel and think in relation to all these moves and motives. I’ve been taken by your ideas and made some connections. How do you connect with these inspirations? Are they at all meaningful?

Liselott:

Dear friends,

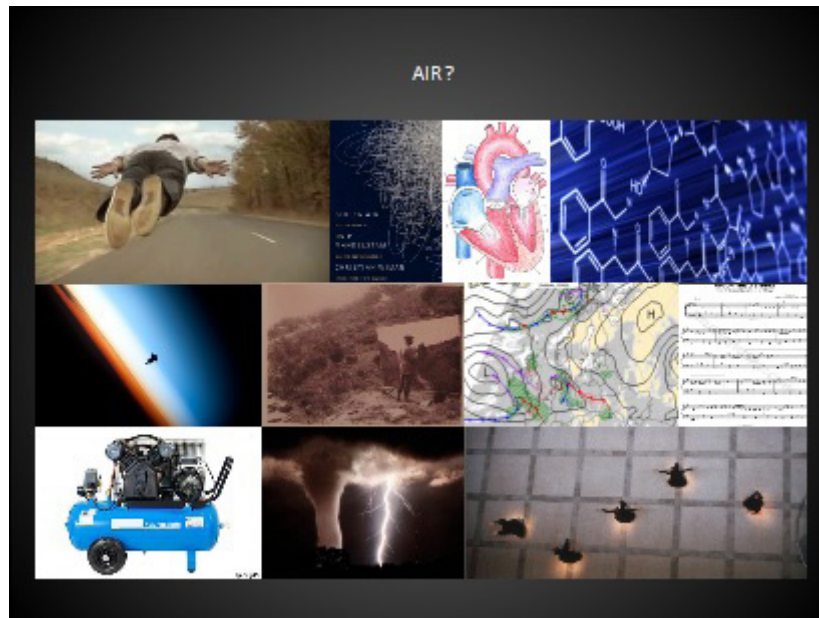
Stuart, I think that you have drawn up a very important line for continuing our collaborative work through insisting on affect. In fact, it seems that we need a certain kind of devaluation of consciousness in favor of an ‘embodied logic’. It also seems to me that it is through the Spinozian lens (!) of ‘yet not knowing what a body can do’ that your revitalization of revolution works Walter. Those certainly are beautiful phrases by Guattari: working for revolution as working for the unpredictable... The

unpredictable seems to happen when the grasping on to consciousness is *exhausted*, as one of your colleagues so eloquently described it yesterday. It seems that it is when all attempts of trying, all vain efforts to get a grip on the situation, to master what happens, have been exhausted, that affect can circulate and engage the body in encounters with other bodies and forces, possibly provoking the extension of bodily potential. Now, I will again talk about this from my context and my interest in pedagogical practice. What does this mean for teachers' and researchers' collaborative work with children in the classroom? Does it imply to let go of all efforts, just hang around and wait for bodily potential to extend itself? Does 'latching on to' children's desires imply simply 'following them and their interests' waiting for something to happen? Rhetorical questions of course, as I do not believe so. This line of thinking seems to harbour an understanding of desire and affect as 'spontanéisme', a romanticized image of the child and an idea of pedagogy as 'anything goes'. In my experiences making place for desire and affect to circulate in a pedagogical situation demands a lot of preparation. In our latest article (Olsson, Dahlberg & Theorell, in press) we have referred to Brian Massumi and Erin Manning by the following quote that I want to share with you:

We wanted at all costs to avoid the voluntaristic connotations often carried by words like "improvisation," "emergence," and "invention". There would be no question of just "letting things flow," as if simply un-constraining interaction were sufficient to enable something "creative" to happen. In our experience, unconstrained interaction rarely yields worthwhile effects. Its results typically lack rigor, intensity, and interest for those not directly involved, and as a consequence are low on follow-on effects. Effects cannot occur in the absence of a cause. The question is what manner of causation is to be activated; simple or complex; functionally proscribed or catalyzing of variation; lineal or relational (co-casual)' (Manning & Massumi, 2014).

This seems to me to insist upon what you are talking about, Walter, as *actively* expecting the unpredictable. It is also close to what you bring forward Stuart in terms of necessary critique. I agree with you that it is not of value to try to separate or make a sharp distinction between critique and creativity. But I believe that the question is when, where, why, who and how to engage in these? From my experiences and in the context of the collaborative work between children, teachers and researchers you cannot afford to engage solely in critique. Children's time in preschool demand of teachers and researchers to continuously navigate a delicate equilibrium of both critique and creativity. You need as teachers and researchers to engage in a certain wariness of those blockages and power formations that you so rightfully point out Stuart, we are all a part of and producing. But you also need to 'open up' the situation through lifting off the ontological and epistemological lid that suffocates desire and affect and make possible the creation of alternative ways of thinking, talking and acting. Yes, a child's assemblage involves adults. Therefore we need to 'align' ourselves with children, but we also need to offer them possibilities to proceed with their desires through making it possible for them to connect to us and to the world. It is here that teachers need to engage in preparation, maybe a bit paradoxically, *even more* than what is needed when following a predetermined curriculum.

Let me try to give a concrete example. When, for instance, discovering that children are interested in a specific phenomena, say air, teachers and researchers need to study this phenomena from a range of different perspectives: air in biology, air in physics, air as source of life, air in poetry, in music, in technology...



All these preparations serve, not in order to give erudite lectures to children through transmission of set content knowledge, but rather so as to make teachers and researchers more sensitive to the particular ways that the children are constructing the problematic. Moreover, this serves so as to help teachers and researchers to create the very places and materials that will be offered as an invitation to children, a gift to children, expressed through a context where they can continue constructing the problem. Guattari describes in *Lignes de fuite* (2011) how difficult such classroom work is as desire often is sub-ordered a ‘system of semiotic capitalism’ where everything is about the ordering of time, work-rhythm, decontextualized tasks and limitations to move and express oneself, aesthetically, corporeally, visually. So this is tremendously difficult work where you are never sure where you will end up, and where maybe the only thing we can do is to try to ‘tweak’ power formations, blockages and ‘semiotic capitalism’ towards a more complex, catalyzing and relational logic? What do you think about this, is this possible, how would that work in your respective contexts?

I did not know of the Zapatist school Walter, it certainly sounds interesting, not the least the idea of school as a time-space for Life. Maybe this is the ‘forgotten motive’ for education at all?

Stuart:

I have not heard those words from Guattari on revolution, they are beautiful and stimulating. It reminds me of the need to take important steps and to let go of the outcome. It is the importance of accepting the outcome of revolution as

unpredictable, and how true that is of Walter Benjamin's conception of revolutionary play and Cindi Katz's (2011) notion of counter-topographies. I am not as engaged in the education literature as you two, and yet I think there are important parallels with how we relate to children in general. The important point in education, I would aver, is to let go of the frames (institutional, pedagogic, spatial) that we, as adults, think are important. But I think also there are times for the 'teacher as sage', for the wisdom and experience to be passed on to students who listen actively, but who are not in control of message or content. Maybe?

Returning to the notion of the unpredictable, I am drawn also to Ernesto Laclau's (1990) notion of 'dislocation' and Michel de Certeau's (1994) ideas around 'surprise'. These two concepts intrigue me because they are inherently spatial. De Certeau talks about spatial stories, from the ground and local, and as different from looking down from above; his ideas come from walking around Manhattan rather than looking down from the World Trade Center (when it existed). And as we walk, as we take on the visage of the flaneur, we must encounter difference with surprise and in a good way. It is perhaps like the three of us coming together to take walks through Rio and through our own personal intellectual journeys that come together here. Doreen Massey (2005) calls this 'throwtogetherness'. Each of us has different journeys that bring us together at this moment in this place. Henri Bergson's notions about intuition and memory apply here also. So, as an assemblage I suppose, our throwtogetherness is the culmination, for now, of three journeys through a myriad of different places, people and intellectual traditions. And the act of coming together, of this throwtogetherness, is an unpredictable happenstance. Nobody, least of all we three, saw it coming. So, let me offer this as a spatiality that ties in with the ideas of unpredictable revolutionary play that I think Walter is alluding to. There is no doubt in my mind that we are playing here and none of us knows what will come of this machinic (never really likes that term) assemblage. And so it is with children, that combines with a virtuality and intensity, which I think we as adults lose too often. But in this space there is enchantment, there is childlike wonder, there is hope and there is potential. Three lines of flight coalescing and connecting.

Teachers in the neo-liberal context of instrumental testing and exams are harried and pursued by administrators and policy makers who want only numbers that make them, their school, their country look good. We lose the child and the teacher to an instrumental system that, in its attempt to create the cosmopolitan citizen ready to take on the shifting demands and machinations of our globalized economies, dampens spirits, creativity and imagination. And even with all the signs pointing to the doom of the system – from the fall of the Chilean and Swedish attempts at privatization to Dianne Ravitch's (2013) proclamations against 'No Child Left Behind' in the USA, a system she originally created – the engineers (Bill Gates, the ALEX system) continue pushing on unabated as if their instrumentality was succeeding. And the sad critique is that it does succeed in creating a lot of money for the third party software engineers and Corporations who are stepping in to take over national education systems as the state recedes and gives up their responsibilities. Sometimes I really miss the state. I want to hear more about the Zapatista school, and how that particular 'state' is moving forward.

Walter:

Dear friends, I think we are arriving to some interesting lines, and problematic spaces of thinking. I think, with you Liselott, that it needs a lot of preparation and stimulus from a teacher so that something interesting can emerge. I like the words you describe concerning what a teacher does: “prepare”, “be sensitive to the ways children...”, “create places and materials that will be offered as an invitation...”, “a gift to children...”. These sorts of practices together with Stuart’s claim, “to let go of the frames (institutional, pedagogic, spatial) that we, as adults, think are important.” I am not so sure about the “teacher as sage” issue; especially what does it mean to be a sage, or what does a sage do?

Let me also share with you an example, this time around the very notion of time. You know the word ‘school’ comes from a Greek word, *schole*, which means free time, leisure. J. Rancière (1988) and J. Masschelein & Simon (2013), among others, have shown how school was not born as a place to learn but as a place for a free experience of time, free from the pressures of the labor market that continuously ask for the outcomes and products of that experience. Today the market is in school and school is in the market: every single moment needs to be useful for another moment in the future, inside or outside school. I’ve told you about this project of philosophical experiences in schools with children and adults and teacher education where work with in Duque de Caxias, in the suburbs of Rio, didn’t I? Well, more and more I see that our work, what we prepare, our sensitivity, the gift we offer to children is a certain experience of time, to slow down (to say it with Masschelein). The teachers tell it all the time to us: what the experience of philosophy gives them is the opportunity to experience another time, to lose themselves in time, to enter a time with no past, present and future but just present. And this aionic, non-chronological experience of time is also the experience of play, joy, art, Liselott, to say it with Deleuze, so that we all children and adults can be sensitive to the *devenir enfant* that can be circulating in the school space. I like to suggest that all this is a childhood of education instead of the education of childhood, a new beginning for education. We can relate this to the Zapatist movement, which for us is like a childhood of politics, a new beginning for a horizontal and affirmative exercise of power. The Zapatist “system” of education seems to be affirming not only “democratic” (such a difficult word) political practices but also another logic of space and time, a sort of forms of life with nonconsumerist and non-capitalistic relationships among people; in short, another world, actual, not merely possible. I also love, Stuart, your elaboration about ‘throwntogetherness’ and journeys that bring people together. This act of coming together and the unpredictable happenstance that can emerge. I feel here a wonderful path to think about what an educator does. It makes me remember Simón Rodríguez (2001a), the Socrates of Caracas, who was a tireless voyager provoking encounters. Is this not a nice image for a teacher? Someone who prepares herself through travelling (in all sorts of way) to the unpredictable happenstance of ‘throwntogetherness’? Someone who plays and offers her joyfulness and attentiveness while playing so that she open herself to the intensity of the newcomers in new forms of ‘throwntogetherness’? Is education a space of enchantment, of childlike wonder, hope and potential, as Stuart phrased it? Could this be a form

of actualizing Liselott's claim for "preparation", "being sensitive to the ways children...", "creating places and materials" as invitations or gift to children, specially the gift of a certain experience of time and space? Am I travelling too far?

Liselott:

Dearests. Beautifully put Walter! Yes, the teacher as a traveler is a wonderful idea! I remember how we together with teachers and with inspiration from the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy have talked about two different approaches to working with pedagogical documentation: either as a stationary, that is, somebody who will treat the pedagogical documentation as an account of what really took place in a chronological order, or, as a traveler, voyageur or flaneur as you said Stuart, that is, somebody who will interrupt both truth claims and chronology in pedagogical documentations. This traveler (never alone though, always in cooperation with others) will go for a hunt for the sense being produced in the events visualized through documentations. The traveler will want to look at documentation not retrospectively, but prospectively. The travelling teacher will use documentation as a catalyst for new universes to come. Yes, 'time is of the essence', but in a different way than how it is used as a torture tool within neoliberal and capitalist governing. I very much like your writings on, Aion, Walter, wouldn't you like to develop this a bit? I also like Rancière's and Masschelein's reclaiming school's originary motives: 'free time', or as you say 'slowed down time', but I think that it must be paired with a notion of sense and content in pedagogical practice in order to not fall back on to a romanticized image of the child and the school. I am extremely fond of Deleuze's writings in *Logique du sens* (1969) where he introduces a forth dimension in language and the way language relates to events: that of sense. So, normally we express linguistic propositions of the event through commentary, interpretation or reflection. All of these close the event down within truth claims, placed in the designated object, the manifesting subject and the reflection upon conditions for truth. Adding sense as continuous production on the border of linguistic propositions and the 'state of affairs' (whatever that means...) makes it possible to see truth as a proportional effect of the sense production at stake. This, I believe, is one of the most important ideas for any educational situation or any pedagogy interested in a 'listening and latching on to' children's desires. Because it can make us avoid judging children's solutions to problems and answers to questions departing from already set sense and taken for granted truth. It invites us to instead engage in a curiosity of how children - departing from the very sense-production at stake - will *construct* problems and *formulate* questions. I very much like how you describe 'throwntogetherness' Stuart, this connects again to the question of affect, a devaluation of consciousness and a bodily logic. Really there is so little that we master, most of the time we are 'thrown together' in unexpected situations and still in an educational situation we owe to children some kind of action and arrangement so that children together with us can make Life in preschool meaningful in whatever shifting and transforming ways that might happen. Is this what we are talking about through our conversations: the necessity of letting go and still persevere? Kisses to you both!

Stuart:

Liselott brings us to a crux, and perhaps a good place of convergence. I use the term convergence (rather than ending) as an allusion to the joining of lines of flight in this journey with no beginning and no end. The question of how we make life more meaningful for children is perhaps our headiest goal, but perhaps also it is another of those outcomes about which we have to let go. We have no control of the meaning children garner from life's experiences but we do, as Liselott correctly points out, have a huge responsibility for doing the footwork in a good, caring and responsible way. We show up in the classroom or research site with our passions, energies and preparedness, and whatever meanings transpire from events is really not something we control. We show up with knowledge about air, cities, pedagogy, mirrors, space, and a willingness to let go of all that we think we know. For me, it is important to show up and jettison my theories, research questions and philosophical deliberations (and my inadequacies) in favor of being willing to make a connection, to make friends with young people as active participants in their own meaning making. And most of all, how do I divest myself of actions and framings that might foreclose upon the possibility of the political. How am I judgmental or exclusionary? How am I focused more on my inward tirades and less an outward connection? I am almost falling back on Kierkegaard or Francis of Assisi here and searching for something spiritual; a Spinozian nature/god oneness.

I have had a very good night's sleep and feel alive and connected this morning, and looking forward to our meeting in Sao Carlos. I am also sensing that I know very little; and that I am open to surprise and dislocation. Is this what I want for the children with whom I connect? A sense of wonder, enchantment and engagement with life rather than the pressures foisted upon them from a neoliberal structure that not only forecloses political potential but sucks out life and passion in the name of efficiency and rationality.

See you soon.

Walter:

Last but not least, kisses to you both for such tremendous inspiration. Very nicely put, Stuart: “open to surprise and dislocation” (...) “to a sense of wonder, enchantment and engagement with life”. Can we find there a childlike politics for teaching we are looking for? Or as you put it, Liselott, the teacher as a traveler, voyageur or flaneur, as Stuart also says... your words make me remember an inspiring dissertation by Cristina Cammarano (2012) and it also transports me in time to Simón Rodríguez, the “Socrates of Caracas” (Rodríguez 2001b) who travelled all over the Andian South America at the first part of the nineteenth century inventing a “popular school” (Kohan 2015b), i.e. a school based on equality, hospitality and openness to the dispossessed, the excluded. Rodríguez also worked with the etymology of school connecting *schole* to the Latin translation of it, *otium*, showing how those who make a deal (In his Spanish, “*negocio*”, coming from the Latin *neg-otium*) out of school really deny the very form of school (Rodríguez, 2001a) as *schole*. Rodríguez also thinks the teacher needs to move herself as a condition of teaching

(Rodríguez, 2001a), inventing not only how to teach but also herself as a teacher: for such attentiveness is at the same time his support and practice, in order to, to put in your words Liselott, “interrupt both truth claims and chronology”.

And this takes us back to time and *aion*, a word I love and have discussed in a couple of dialogues with my friend David Kennedy (Kennedy & Kohan, 2008; 2014; see also Kohan 2014), which is a non-chronological time but “duration of human life” (Liddell & Scott, 1966), the time of experience, or as Heraclitus suggests in frag. 52, time of childhood, of a child, childing, playing: a childlike time. *Aion* is not the time of school as institution but of school as *schole*; not the time that passes (in our watches, for example), but the time that happens to us (in our bodies), that touches us, an affection of time that suspends chronological time. A time of thinking together, of togetherness just as we are experiencing it so beautifully, and if you allow me, the time of a teacher when she “forgets” the curriculum and just, as you might say Liselott, attends prospectively to the pedagogical documentation. Let her travel where the experience of childhood takes her, the places where the *devenir enfant* that inhabits school as *schole*, free time, circulates. Yes, can I put it this way? *Aion* is the time of an attentive teacher bodily engaged in the experience of *schole* with children of all ages, letting herself travel where that experience takes her together with the children traveler.

Thank you so much, dear Liselott and Stuart, for this experience of togetherness, travel, chora, connection, topos, *schole*, *aion*, philosophy and education

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