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Review of Jean-François Lyotard: *Pedagogies of Affect*. By Kirsten Locke (2022)

Springer Nature, Switzerland, 66 pp. eBook ISBN: 978-3-030-97491-6, Softcover ISBN 978-3-030-97489-3 (Softcover €39.99)

‘Can you conceive of a *communication volontaire*?’

How to translate this question? It was asked of the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard during an interview in late 1978. Guided by the translator Roger McKeon I opted for ‘self-directed communication’, yet there is also something else, something profoundly liberatory about the sense of ‘voluntarism’ in the French. Lyotard’s response echoes this something else, something more, when describing the approach taken to courses at the University of Paris VIII, Vincennes, held in the evenings to allow workers and non-traditional students to attend:

It seems to me that I am very much in favor of self-directed communication, since that is what I do, three hours a week at Vincennes. They give me the floor and for three hours I declare everything I think. The important thing is that the conveyance of these messages, be they linguistic or plastic or whatever, is always accompanied by the language game clause. That is all I ask. In other words, basically, that the theorist or politician know that they speak like an artist, that they do it like an artist. I don’t know whether it’s possible, but I believe that it’s an issue which is now being raised. (Lyotard, 2022, p. 160)

It’s important to explain that this approach is not a magisterial ‘holding forth’ exemplified by the didactic architecture of the lecture theatre—Vincennes was one of the first French higher education establishments to eschew the conventions of hierarchy and to encourage flat-level teaching—but rather to emphasize the openness of the extemporary act of

philosophizing. It is an openness which necessitates both a certain vulnerability on the part of the self-directed communicator, and demands an acknowledgement of the framing—the rhetorical devices and the set of references within which an utterance takes place, their properties and uses—the language game, as he names it here, or the ‘phrase regimen’ as it will be termed in the later work, *The Differend* (1988).

Kirsten Locke is well aware of the complexity and importance of her subject, which is ably addressed in this short book: *Jean-François Lyotard: Pedagogies of Affect*. Published in the SpringerBriefs on Key Thinkers in Education series, which aims to provide ‘a concise introduction to the life and work of a key thinker in education’ (ii), it fulfils and exceeds this remit whilst retaining the svelteness demanded of the format. It is gratifying to see a renewed interest in the work of Lyotard within education studies, one which, as Locke herself details, has too often been overshadowed by an emphasis on *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984). As a volume which deals explicitly with issues of knowledge, its transfer and transformation within a changing post-industrial world, its relevance doubtless remains but the implications of Lyotard’s work for the area extend beyond this single ‘report’. Locke’s book joins *Inhuman Educations* by Derek Ford (2021) and recent journal articles, in particular those published in *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (Sarikartal, 2020; Zembylas, 2019; Locke 2017), as testimony to a notable shift towards Lyotard’s other work, specifically that which deals with affect.

Locke identifies a particular pedagogical approach in Lyotard’s activities and is able to trace a thread through seemingly disparate aspects of Lyotard’s life and work. She draws not only on his philosophy and teaching but also on his early political activism, his engagement with art, and later writings on affect and the sublime. This thread, followed through five chapters, is an openness to possibilities and a resistance to overdetermination,

to the insistence on efficiency, to gain time, to evade or eradicate uncertainty. It is the same openness with which this review began, the voluntary acts of communication which have a potential to lead elsewhere than to that which is already determined. An openness which is at the heart of Locke's book in chapter three 'Infancy and Childhood in Education: Lyotard's Pedagogies of the Possible', where a listening to that which cannot be directly voiced is key.

The unsurprising attraction of the Lyotardian concept of 'childhood' is rightly qualified as distinct from a naively romanticised view of early years, pointing to Lyotard's insistence that the unfettered ability to receive is not limited to a particular developmental stage. Some, myself included, have avoided the use of the term 'childhood' to translate '*enfance*' for fear of such overdetermination, preferring instead the cognate 'infancy'. Within the context in which Locke is writing, however, there is a poignancy to the conception of childhood which would be lost or obfuscated in using 'infancy', a term whose arcane tone enacts a certain distancing. 'Infancy' would seem inappropriate for the discussions which arise from the short but evocative text 'Spaceship', for example, written by Lyotard as a foreword for Michael A. Peters' 1995 collection *Education and the Postmodern Condition*. Instead, Locke deftly employs both terms, aligned either to Freudian (infancy) or aesthetic (childhood) inflections identified in Lyotard's usage, whilst making it clear that the two are entwined within the discussion of that to which the adult is closed.

It is that which 'touches', which has the capacity to affect, and consequently the capacity to destabilize assumptions surrounding knowledge and the means of proceeding. Locke writes that we should "celebrate the sense of childhood within us as the most enticing dimension to what it truly means to be 'educated'" (p. 30). In doing so we not only refuse to be constrained by that which we think we know but resist the discourse of mastery to listen to that which we cannot know. It is not as simple as listening to children,

however, not even listening to others regardless of age, but rather of being prepared to be affected by events which may have no discernible origin or message—that is the radicality of '*communication volontaire*'.

It is not by chance that listening is the analogy that is reached for in evoking this openness to affect: music, or more specifically 'musical pedagogy' figures as a pertinent example for Locke. It forms the focus of her fourth chapter, one in which the pedagogies of affect become demonstrable through discussions of gesture, breath and sonorous matter. But even here it would be wrong to take music too literally, or narrowly aligned to the acoustic, as the role of the inaudible is central: it is the "power that is unable to be grasped or captured and is, instead, simply felt" (p. 43). As with other chapters, careful consideration is given to the means by which Lyotard writes these thoughts. In this case the fable—an imaginary tale told for the benefit of a 'lesson'—alerts us to the means by which conventions are often accepted without question, whether the narrative of the Western European artistic canon or its attendant systems of classification. What is lost in such categorisation is the gesture of the work of art, its disruption of chronological time and the inherent possibility that "something will occur" (p. 45).

The implications for education, of this challenge which Lyotard lays down, are more explicitly articulated in the final chapter, where Locke's argument is both at its most persuasive and honest. Honest, in an awareness of the significance and radicality of what is being asked and the consequences for all involved, including the notions of education itself—she terms this the "re-evaluation of what is *educational* about education" (p. 63). We are shown how Lyotard's long and detailed study of the sublime pushes beyond the usual reach of educational research, which stays within the well-trodden ground of *The Postmodern Condition*, to a reconsideration of the realm of sensorial experience. In contrast

to Kant's concern for the overwhelmingly large and powerful we are led by Lyotard to that sensation which, as Locke poetically describes, "could be as miniscule as an emergent bead of perspiration on the surface of the skin; a catch of breath in fright" (p. 58). This is not without an awareness of the anxiety that can accompany ventures into the unknown, and the responsibility which accompanies a teacher and student's task to learn together reciprocally in a process of continuous renewal. It is such a renewal that this short book brings to fixed, outdated notions of Lyotard's work, re-evaluating the possibilities of his philosophy for education. Or, more accurately, his continual activities of philosophizing.

Following a comment from Derrida, Locke sees the trace or shadow of Lyotard's early political activism in all his attempts to disseminate and question knowledge, but one which comes from the margins, opposing all dogmatic, doctrinal imposition. The shadow of Lyotard's activism makes apparent the thread by which Locke guides us through this book, working "outside of the mainstream dominant discourse" (p. 8) and in relation to a "position of marginality and vulnerability" (p. 9). The reader is led through many examples of Lyotard's pedagogy with particular attention to that which Locke terms pedagogies of affect, as evidence of a praxis which proceeds without knowing, to question without expectation of final answers. To stay alive to the possibilities of childhood and infancy which make the struggle worthwhile. Elegantly written, this short book will challenge, provoke and potentially delight the readers who maintain an openness to its possibilities, and the revaluation of Lyotard it offers for educational studies.

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