Daring the Meaning, or Cyberspace that Matters. Criticism-Creativity and Online Education

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Criticism and creativity: an ability to challenge and problematize meaning of the experienced external and internal sensations including experience of emotions; to become surprised; to generate and conjure new meaning, which is new forms of thinking, feeling and acting, and to continually dare it.

How to promote an achievement of such skill by students?

Which pedagogical practices to use?

Which pedagogical practices to use in online educational context?

Psychological constructionist account of the brain basis of emotion – the conceptual act model (Lindquist et al., 2012; Barrett et al., 2014);

The Deleuzian and Guattarian (1987; 2009) philosophical accounts of affect, concept and stratum.

In this presentation:

I briefly discuss the aforementioned theories and present the results of the theoretical experiment in which they become combined together.

Then, I discuss how those theories alone and when experimentally brought together influence the way I approach criticism and creativity, and can set off pedagogical practices which then can hopefully result in critical-creative abilities among students.

Finally, by posing questions related to content, teaching methods, learning activities, software and hardware, and their combinations in online education, and by addressing and problematizing concepts and phenomena of immersion and DFI-digital facial image, I will seek to reflect on how these particular pedagogical undertakings can be actualized in online context, and on the possibilities online environment offers to promote criticism and creativity among students.

A psychological constructionist account of the brain basis of emotion – the conceptual act model is a neuroscientific theory that concerns the processing of external and internal sensations by the brain. According to this theory, to make meaning of the experienced external and internal sensations (including experience of emotions*) is to create a situated conceptualization that is to link external and internal sensations with accumulated knowledge. The theory suggests that the past experience and existing conceptual knowledge play important role in meaning making process. Conceptual knowledge, which one has, is thought about as being able to add new features to and modify incoming sensorial input yet, a given experience can also have an influence on conceptual knowledge. Importantly, this theory problematizes the dualism of cognition and affectivity, and undermines the conviction of the separation between thinking, feeling and acting in the brain. A creation of a situated conceptualization that is meaning making process entails tight interconnection between thinking, feeling and doing. Finally, mental causation is said to be probabilistic, namely, it cannot be easily foretold how process of meaning making will proceed and develop.

*Briefly, this means that an experienced internal sensation may or may not be conceptualized as an emotion. It depends on how external and internal sensations and conceptual knowledge become linked in the brain. Furthermore, if an internal sensation becomes conceptualized as an emotion then how this emotion becomes conceptualized (whether it is conceptualized as fear or anger or joy, etc.) again depends on how external and internal sensations and conceptual knowledge become linked in the brain (Lindquist et al., 2012; Barrett et al., 2014).

The Deleuzian and Guattarian concepts:

Affect that is sensory becoming can be comprehended, among its other possible readings, as a moment of deterritorialization, indetermination, indiscernibility, suspension, hesitation, surprise, wonder, and lack of meaning.

Concept that is conceptual becoming might be approached as a creation of new meaning and novel sense concomitantly embodying in itself, so to say, a desire for a constant movement engendering forever rejuvenating meaning and sense.

Affect (sensory becoming) can be read as laying ground for concept (conceptual becoming) and securing that conceptual becoming happens and it does not cease to happen (i.e., meaning is always on the move; never finished and complete). As such conceptual becoming should be interconnected with sensory becoming.

Stratum can be read as a habitual and customary meaning. Stratum is an ambivalent concept as on the one hand, it seems to contradict criticism and creativity yet, on the other hand, it can support one in enduring and sustaining an experienced indetermination of affect and novelty of concept. Deleuze and Guattari seem to suggest that the frequency of the experienced affects/sensory becomings (lack of sense) and concepts/conceptual becomings (new meaning and sense) should fit one's pace.

Theoretical Experiment

Situated conceptualization as the Deleuzian/Guattarian affect/sensory and concept/conceptual becoming, and stratum:

- it may not be easily anticipated how external and internal sensations will become conceptualized. This indicates a rather unpredictable 'nature' of the embodied and embedded subject;

- the brain and so the subject is able to generate new meaning of given sensations, i.e., to create a new combination of external and internal sensations (and actions), and as such create a new conceptual knowledge for a given category that incorporates properties, relations, rules, objects, settings, actions, words, events or internal states related to that category thus, able to think, feel and act differently;

- once a given input leads to a confusion of the brain (and the subject), such confusion can facilitate a creation of a novel meaning for a given external and/or internal input;

- new meaning can be continually engendered;

- final meaning can be postponed and/or perhaps never reached;

- the brain might be seen not only as being able to produce novel sense, but also postpone creating a final meaning of a given sensation;

- the role the experience may play in meaning making process:
difficulties of creating new meaning of given sensations, of challenging and changing the existing conceptual knowledge;
it can be predicted how certain external and internal sensations will become conceptualized;

- for the subject to endure and sustain an occurring and experienced lack of meaning and novel sense, and to remain open to indetermination and novelty sometimes it has to think in the customarily ways.

Input for Pedagogical Practices

- there are limits on predicting the outcomes of the meaning making process (i.e., manners of thinking, feeling and acting);

- it might be difficult to challenge students' existing conceptual frameworks;

- it may be possible to map and determine (and as such eventually diversify) students' patterns of conceptualization;

- it is crucial to support students in generating new meanings of external and internal sensations (to help them think, feel and act differently) that is in creating new combinations of external and internal sensations (and actions) and by doing so producing new conceptual knowledges for given categories;

- students should experience a moment of surprise, wonder and lack of meaning in order to be able to generate new meaning of given sensations;

- surprise/wonder/lack of meaning and new meaning should be intertwined in order to secure the fluctuations and movement of meaning. By securing intertwinement of lack of and new meaning, "an educator may hope to activate thinking, feeling and acting that are always on the move, never finished, never taken for granted, and never believed to be final, the only one or finite in their righteousness and certainty" (Just 2016, 300);

- intertwinement of lack of, new and habitual meaning. Too much of wonder/lack of meaning and new meaning may be unsustainable. Pedagogical practices should mind and secure students' endurability and sustainability.

Immersion

- deep mental involvement in something;

- engagement, reverie and subsidence;

- the screen is an entrance gate: *the rabbit-hole;*

- the screen enables full attention and frames perception;

- landscapes: interactive, unfamiliar, highly diverse with many 'turns and twists;'

- sense of presence;

- immersion: 'twists and turns,' interaction, engagement, attention and (self-) curiosity.

Immersion *Praxis*

To actualize the pedagogical practices online, perhaps, it is worthy trying to create/generate/stimulate immersion. This means, design and combine content, teaching methods, learning activities, software and hardware in such way as to engender immersion.

Try to map students' patterns of conceptualization.

Secure students' endurability and sustainability.

Content, teaching methods, learning activities, software and hardware (and their combinations), which – in relation to the topics and issues that are planned to be addressed in a given class or/and programme – are able to engender sense of presence (as in VR, if possible), interactive, changeable, unknown, unfamiliar territory full of twists and turns (i.e., transformations, becomings, metamorphoses) that keep one engaged, attentive, (self-) curious, surprised, lacking/finding/loosing/finding the meaning thus, ultimately critical and creative. Content, teaching methods, learning activities, software and hardware that will help determining students' patterns of conceptualization, and will support them in dealing with either a lack of sense or new (sometimes unexpected) meaning of the self or of whatever there is that they experience. The latter is especially crucial as apparently too much of indetermination and too much of novelty might be unsustainable, namely, it might be too much to take.

Immersion *Praxis*

Could content, teaching methods, learning activities, software and hardware be designed and combined in such way that they will engender a *Wonderland*?

Why a *Wonderland*? To me *Wonderland*, as imagined by Lewis Carroll, is:

- the interactive: *"'Why is a raven like a writing-desk?'"*

- unknown territory: *"'What sort of people live about here?' 'In that direction,' the Cat said, waving its right paw round, 'lives a Hatter; and in that direction,' waving the other paw, 'lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they're both mad.'"*

- full of twists and turns: *"'it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.'"*

- that keeps Alice engaged: *"'-so long as I get somewhere,' Alice added as an explanation. 'oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough.'"*

- surprised: *"'How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another!'"*

- (self-) curious: *"'Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!'"*

- and in a constant search for meaning: *"'Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin,' thought Alice, 'but a grin without a cat!'"*

Immersion *Praxis*

Can we then think about and imagine content, teaching methods, learning activities, software and hardware that can create *Wonderlands* for different topics/issues in various academic fields? *Wonderlands* that will also help determining students' patterns of conceptualization in order to ultimately diversify them. *Wonderlands* but with an 'epistemic rest' that is moments when the familiar, the recognizable, the habitual comes to the fore so that students can experience, endure and welcome instants of indetermination and a new (never final) meaning?

So, Do bats eat cats?

DFI-Digital Facial Image

DFI, "digitally generated close-up image of a face" able to engender an affective response in a viewer (Hansen 2003, 206).

In an encounter with the DFI the body becomes affected (the ability to become affected is the body's potential to collaborate with the information).

Importantly, affectivity springs to life precisely during an encounter, "the crucial element is neither image nor body alone, but the dynamical interaction between them" (Hansen 2003, 208).

An image of a face, above other images, plays crucial role with regard to affectivity given it is a "rich source for meaning and the precondition of communication" (Hansen 2003, 208).

Yet, with the DFI a face, is *sensu stricto* a digital one, fundamentally heterogeneous from a 'real' one (Hansen 2003, 208).

As such, it affects the body of the viewer, and it affects the body precisely because it [DFI] presents "radical heterogeneity to already developed human perceptual capacities" (Stern (1985) in Hansen 2003, 209).

By affecting the body, the DFI allows the body a new experience, "opens embodied experience to that which does not conform to already contracted bodily habits" and "attune[s] the body to a stimulus that is novel" (Hansen 2003, 207; 209). Importantly, this affection/affectivity "introduces the power of creativity into the sensorimotor body" (Ibid., 208).

DFI-Digital Facial Image

The contact between the digital and the corporeal is established through affectivity. The more different and alien an image is (or becomes, as the initial indiscernibility might be beneficial to affectivity); the less it is "*of* the same 'reality' as we are;" the odder the interaction between a viewer and an image is; the more a viewer's senses are challenged, the more intense becomes affectivity.

Affective response of a viewer: affect and concept; sensory and conceptual becoming.

An encounter with a radical difference embodied by the DFI results in indetermination, indiscernibility, surprise, and wonder (affect), but also in a new meaning (concept) concerning e.g., the self (irrelevance and unimportance of the viewer) or connection/interaction with the other (can one ever connect and/or comprehend/feel the other?). In this sense, I approach the DFI as able to generate criticism and creativity in a viewer.

DFI-Digital Facial Image *Praxis*

Could the DFI be used in online teaching and learning?

What kinds of the DFI (in terms of software, hardware and the content/interaction/expression) can be useful for pedagogical practices (in various academic fields) that strive to make students wonder and generate a new meaning of the experienced external and internal sensations?

How to incorporate and, so to say, combine the DFI with online teaching methods, learning activities and content so that students will learn to welcome surprise and lack of meaning; will accept, but also attempt to generate a new one, and ultimately will be able to sustain and endure the experienced indetermination and novelty?

Since, the pedagogical practices, which can hopefully lead to criticism and creativity, ought to help determining students' patterns of conceptualization in order to ultimately diversify them, the DFI and the ways in which it is combined with online teaching methods/learning activities/content should also aim at that.

DFI-Digital Facial Image *Praxis*

Could the inspiration come again from the landscapes of the *Wonderland* – to me, a blueprint for meaning-challenging interactions, and a territory of the radically different yet, affirmatively positive forms of embodiment?

Imagine:

After a pre-recorded lecture, an encounter with the DFI who like the *White Rabbit* does not seem to notice or care about you, but who is with you nonetheless, and who leads though without really leading you. This DFI shows you hidden passages, possibilities, throws you gloves so you can learn to swim in the pool of your own tears and even win an everybody-winning Caucus-race, or leaves you in a room where you realize that "'there's no room to grow up any more.'" The DFI remains indifferent, but interesting; magnetic – you do not want to run away, to the contrary, you want to open the doors, which the DFI is passing by, and if you are too small or too large there will be ways to reflect, measure and play with your own size.

Or imagine, the *Hatter*-like DFI, just after an online seminar, accidently freezing time so that little-sustaining-one-habits are engendered (only to push the meaning forward): "'It's always six o'clock now.' A bright idea came into Alice's head. 'Is that the reason so many tea-things are put out here?' she asked. 'Yes, that's it,' said the Hatter with a sigh, 'it's always tea-time and we've no time to wash the things between whiles.' 'Then you keep moving round, I suppose?' said Alice. 'Exactly so,' said the Hatter, 'as the things get used up.' 'But what happens when you come to the beginning again?' Alice ventured to ask. 'Suppose we change the subject,' the March Hare interrupted (...)."

Or the DFI who, just before an online meeting with a tutor, wants to know you concomitantly appreciating that you may possibly not know *you* yourself: ""Who am I then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else.""

So, what happens when you come to the beginning again?

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