Art, Equality and Learning
Pedagogies Against the State

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In this book the notions of real learning and equality are approached as processes of becoming leading to the figuration of new worlds through local curations of learning and practice. Though its main theses are mainly grounded in the context of art practice and education they have a much wider application to other (perhaps all) contexts of learning through the notions of pedagogies against the state and pedagogies of the event. Learning is conceived as a political act rather than, for example, an incremental process of psychological or sociological development.

Most chapters of the book deal with a series of tensions between tradition and the new; between art in education and contemporary art; between ontologies of practice and epistemologies of assessment; between socio-cultural notions of difference and an egalitarian notion of the Same, between an ethics of reality, of established values, principles and practices and an ethics of the real; between the different ontological domains of the artist and the teacher which are brought together in the constituency of the artist-teacher, between knowledge and not-knowing, between knowledge and truth.

The intention is not to resolve such tensions as such attempted resolution will always be incomplete, rather they are discussed in the spirit of an imperative to decide what kind of future we want for pedagogical spaces of teaching and learning.

The text draws upon key ideas from the philosophical work of Alain Badiou, Judith Butler, Jacques Ranciere, Slavoj Zizek, Jacques Lacan and others and these are applied to pedagogical spaces in order to initiate a debate about teaching and learning. The book raises some important questions relating to subjectification, ethics, multiculturalism and the struggles inherent to the tensionalities of becoming an artist-teacher.

“Dennis Atkinson has written an important and compelling book to revision the teaching of art for the 21st century in our schools. This an absolute must read for art educators who continue to strive to make a transformative difference in public education. It is a remarkable achievement in foresight and leadership. Atkinson raises the most difficult questions concerning subjectification, ethics, multiculturalism, assessment and the tensions and benefits of becoming an artist educator.

He draws on the leading edge of contemporary cultural and artistic theory focusing on the writings of Butler, Lacan Badiou, Rancière as well as Bourriaud,Deleuze and Guattari,” Jan Jagodziński.

Dennis Atkinson

Originally from Yorkshire Dennis Atkinson completed his PhD at Southampton University in 1988. He taught in secondary schools in England from 1971-1988 when he was appointed lecturer in art and design education at Goldsmiths University of London. Since then he has directed a number of programmes including PGCE Secondary Art and Design (teacher education), MA Education: Culture Language and Identity and Doctoral programmes. He was appointed Professor of Art in Education in 2005 and Head of Department of Educational Studies from 2006-2009. He is currently Director of the Research Centre for The Arts and Learning in the Department of Educational Studies. He was the Principal Editor of The International Journal of Art and Design Education from 2002-2009 and is a member of the National Society for Education in Art and Design's Publications Board. Dennis has published regularly in a number of international academic journals since 1991 including The International Journal for Art and Design Education, The International Journal of Inclusive Education, Educational Philosophy and Theory, and has contributed chapters to a number of edited collections. He has published four books, Art in Education: Identity and Practice; Social and Critical Practice in Art Education, (with Paul Dash); Regulatory Practices in Education: A Lacanian Perspective, (with Tony Brown & Janice England,); Teaching Through Contemporary Art: A report on innovative practices in the classroom, (with Jeff Adams, Kelly Worwood, Paul Dash, Steve Herne, & Tara Page)

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DEDICATION

For Ethel and Harold
or else your hearts must bear the courage
of the changing of the guards.

Bob Dylan
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INTRODUCTION

...an event, in affecting a world, always has a local rearrangement of the transcendental of this world as its effect. (Badiou 2009, p. 222)

...for me, the event is the immanent principle of exceptions to becoming, or (in other words) Truths. (Badiou 2009, p. 385, my bracket)

Everyone has a capacity to think and to learn, to make and to act, to sense and to feel; these processes constitute something enduring about being and becoming. However, generally speaking, either consciously or unconsciously, we are encouraged or sometimes enforced to think, learn, act, feel and make in particular ways. We become subjected to particular ideologies and practices within which such processes are conceived, performed and regulated. But this is not a completely deterministic process, a closed circle; rather, it is always open to disruption so that possibilities for new modes of becoming come into appearance. This is the crux of Badiou’s notion of being and event which denotes an ongoing process of existence and change through which human subjects emerge. The notion of being and event signals a tensional dimension of becoming which is a fundamental theme of this book.

There are a number of tensions running through the book. These are: tensions between tradition and the new; tensions between art in education and contemporary art; tensions between ontologies of practice and epistemologies of assessment; tensions between the socio-cultural notion of difference and an egalitarian notion of the Same, tensions between an ethics of reality, of established values, principles and practices and an ethics of the real; tensions between the different ontological domains of the artist and the teacher which are brought together in the idea of the artist-teacher, tensions between knowledge and not-knowing, tensions between knowledge and truth. Though the book has a particular focus upon learning in art and education the discussion of pedagogies against the state, or pedagogies of the event, has a much wider application to other (perhaps all) fields of learning and its initiation.

Most chapters of the book deal with each of these tensional relations in turn but not in the sense of attempting to resolve them; their resolution is always incomplete, but rather in the sense of an imperative to decide what kind of future we want for pedagogical spaces of teaching and learning. The imperative outlined below is not for consensus, which in Ranciere’s use of the term would, ‘reduce politics to the police’, (Ranciere 2004, p. 83), but for a space of politics and dissensus in educational sites, where issues of equality confront established policing frameworks, a space of agonistic encounter in which a struggle for truth in Badiou’s sense of this term is engaged in the pursuit of learning. Within a space of dissensus there is a potential for new subjectivations and new pathways for learning, for new distributions of practice, of speaking about and viewing learning. A space of dissensus includes an excess, an exception that holds such potential. It is not simply a space of opinion but a political process within which established frameworks and orders, for example, of representation, practice, values and thought are confronted with the overlooked, the marginalised and the not-known. The latter does not relate to particular individual interests, but
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to a subjectivation to a truth that brings to light new forms of existence and a subsequent reconfiguration of the social space from the status quo ante.

The text draws upon key terms from particular philosophers that are then applied to pedagogical spaces in order to initiate a debate about teaching and learning. Though as I have already stated, the focal point is art education in a number of social locations, the intention is also to provide a discussion of pedagogical issues that are directly relevant to other educational sites and subject domains in which learning occurs.

THE GAP AND MAGRITTE

The painting entitled, La lunette d’approche, by Magritte is a powerful image for the central themes in this book which are concerned with developing pedagogical strategies in which real learning is viewed as a process of renewal; a process through which learners leap beyond themselves into new accommodations of learning and what it might mean to learn. This involves a pedagogy against the state, a pedagogy that maintains a constant surveillance of the markers that define learning in order to pass beyond them into an expanded conception and affect of learning, which is then leapfrogged into further conceptual and affective states. It is the gap depicted in the painting by Magritte that signifies the potential for renewal. It is this gap that concerned Lacan in much of his work; the gap in the symbolic created by the eruption of the Real which leads to a renewal of the symbolic order, but which is never complete.

In the painting we see the depiction of two open window frames through which we can see a blue, cloudy sky. Yet in between the frames where we would expect to see an uninterrupted view of the sky there is a black void. This visual rendering
of the symbolic (view through the windows) punctured by the Real (black void) can be considered on several levels and used to think about the rupturing of representation by the Real. Of course in order to think about such ruptures we remain in the symbolic but we are also affected by the disturbance of the Real to our modes of representation. Thus we see in the Magritte the significance of the black void in relation to the view through the windows, which function as metaphors for the symbolic. When the symbolic is broken or interrupted the void emerges, the painting depicts the void but from within the symbolic itself. This uncanny image throws us back against the limits of representation, against the framing of our world by our knowledge frameworks and ways of understanding as well as pointing towards the absent-presence of points of impossibility which hold a potential for new worlds to emerge.

These points of impossibility within social spaces may be evidenced by asylum seekers or ‘illegal’ immigrants who occupy gaps or voids in the social fabric. They are part of a social situation but given no recognition of existence as such except in terms of illegality or social pariahs. Such points also refer to radical breaks in knowledge formations as precipitated for example, by Hutton, Cantor, Schoenberg, Duchamp, Galileo and others. The purpose of this book is to consider local processes and curations of real learning as such points that lead to reconfigured states of learning.
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PEDAGOGIES AGAINST THE STATE

Initial Thoughts about Learning

INTRODUCTION

The idea of pedagogies against the state came to me through a mixture of experiences: thinking and reading, discussing and debating our current and recent situation in education and teacher education in England; whilst finding the philosophical writings of Badiou, Zizek, Lacan, Butler, Ranciere and others fruitful for trying to think again of pedagogies to initiate forms of teaching and learning that are required for our current and future social contexts.

In the last two decades teaching practices, curriculum content and teacher education in England have been subject as never before to centralised state control and intensive systems of regulation. During this period our social contexts have changed dramatically; population movements, sophisticated forms of global communication, increasing numbers of sites of conflict and cultural retrenchments as well as the very recent global economic crisis are all factors contributing to such change. It could be argued that the changes we have witnessed in education, which has become increasingly subjected to the hegemony of audit cultures, are a reactive but failing response to issues precipitated by social change. The notion of pedagogies against the state encapsulates for me a way of thinking about pedagogy, teaching and learning that enables a more effective and responsive approach to local ontological states of learning (and teaching) as well as the wider socio-political states in which the former take place. Thus the term ‘state’ is deliberately ambivalent in order to address local states of practice and political/ideological states of regulation.

Pedagogies against the state is a call for pedagogies that work against themselves, anti-pedagogies, in the sense that they cannot afford to become trapped within particular values and modes of practice, they cannot adopt totalitarian approaches to learning, in a world of increasing instability.

TWO ANECDOTES

I want to begin with two short anecdotes. The first relates to an early, but seminal, teaching experience, which I wrote about in a previous book (Atkinson 2003), and that I believe had a latent but lasting influence. Nearly forty years ago in the early 1970s I started out on a teaching career in Batley, Yorkshire, a couple of miles from where I grew up. The school, Batley Boys High, sat on an escarpment overlooking the town and the heavy-woollen mills similar to the one in which my father worked. On one side of the school was a select Grammar School for girls and on the other
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side a very prestigious boys Grammar School. We were hemmed in by an academic elite! My school consisted of nearly 1800 boys about 400 of whom were boys of varying ages newly arrived from India and Pakistan. The school employed a streaming system but these immigrant boys were placed together in what were termed ‘X’ classes at the ‘end’ of each year group up to the fourth year. This was because they spoke little English, although this skill developed as they grew and became more familiar with a second language. It was reasoned that they would learn more quickly if they were taught for most lessons by Guajarati or Urdu speaking teachers. However, for more practical lessons such as woodwork, metalwork, Physical Education and Art these classes were taught by the respective subject teachers. And so as an art teacher I was expected to teach art to these boys even though I did not speak or understand Guajarati or Urdu and they had very little English. All my training and education in art was grounded in Western traditions and so, rather naively, but having little other security on which to proceed, I got them involved in observational drawing. They also made block prints and lino prints as well as ceramic pieces, for example, but it was the drawings they made of plants and a variety of objects that completely baffled me in terms of how to respond.

These drawings were so different from western drawing practices in which I had been educated and so different from those made by other students, to whom I felt I could respond, that I seemed to have no secure ground on which to proceed. Their sense of proportion and composition did not conform, for example, to western projection or representational systems. They were highly decorative and rhythmical. I think that I failed to respond adequately to these drawings and to boys who made them. Because of barriers relating to language and other cultural practices, it was a case of trying to muddle through. In those days very few of these boys were even considered for the General Certificate of Education (16+) Examination. Their work was viewed with interest but not awarded serious attention within the institutional framework of formal examinations. In terms of identity, these students’ identities as learners appeared to be produced within two kinds of discourse; one in which their difference as students of art practice was acknowledged through a curious pedagogic voyeurism, and another in which their ability as art practitioners was unacknowledged and often marginalised. I was party to these discourses. Although at that time, as a newly qualified teacher, my thoughts on pedagogy were inchoate, my experiences with these Asian boys remain unforgettable and in a latent sense taught me something about the need to be able to respond effectively to the different ways in which people learn (see also Ann Taber 1978, 1981).

My second anecdote moves forward ten years to when I met Bill Brookes at the University of Southampton. Bill took me through my Masters and Doctoral studies over the next eight years. He was a remarkable and insightful teacher, a founder member and leading figure in the Association of Mathematics Teachers in the UK and well known in the world of mathematics education. Bill always argued that experience is something everyone has and everyone has the capacity for reflecting on his or her experience….and this can be developed by attending to lived experience and through the discipline of a critical awareness of the limitations and possibilities of natural language. I remember him saying: “Mistakes demonstrate a form of
thinking different from that which would have produced the right answer, and so mistakes can give rise to getting something else right.” This focussed on the requirement not to view and conceive action in relation to problems and solutions only through a particular, established lens which leads to a specific outcome, but to try to appreciate a variety of ways of interpreting and responding. I thought of this when teaching still-life drawing and responding to some students whose drawings did not fit my expectations with the comment, “Have you looked at this object carefully?” My comment seemed to assume a particular drawing form to which the student’s drawing did not correspond…and I wondered further how such comments unknowingly structured my understanding of students’ learning. Was I excluding other (equally) legitimate forms of expression?

In relation to this issue my friend Alex Moore drew my attention to a passage written by John Dewey in *Human Nature and Conduct* (2001: 223, 227).

> Ends arise as a function within action. They are not, as current theories too often imply, things lying outside activity at which the latter is directed. They are not ends or termini of action at all. They are terminals of deliberation, and so turning points in activity, [...] Even the most important among all the consequences of an act is not necessarily its aim.

The key point to emphasise here is the *immanence of learning*, that it is a process which should remain open to possibilities and potentials that arise within the action and practice of learning and not be tied to specified aims except, of course, becoming a more effective learner.

This book is concerned with issues of learner identities and practices that are implied in these two short anecdotes and with the plays and distributions of making, speaking, listening and viewing that form them.

In this chapter I present a philosophical sketch, based largely upon the writing of Alain Badiou, in which real learning is viewed as a movement into new ontological possibilities. A more detailed presentation and discussion of Badiou’s writings and their relevance for pedagogy and learning will follow in Chapter Two.

The idea of pedagogies against the state functions on a series of inter-related levels in that the term ‘state’ embraces local ontological states of learning, traditions of teaching and curriculum policy as well as wider political contexts within which educational practices are situated. A key concern of the chapter is that by viewing learning as an ontological shift opening up new possibilities for learners, an ethical imperative for pedagogy has to deal with expanding our grasp of what learning is.

In very general terms we might argue that in the writings of Foucault (1977), Althusser (1984), Bourdieu (1990) and others we see the emergence, positioning and regulation of the subject according to the signifier; that is to say, according to established forms of signification and social practice. Here the subject is almost predetermined by the power of discourse and social practices in that they mark out a place for the subject. Butler (1997: 1–2) illustrates how the performance of normalising power processes, manifested in discourse and practice, become internalised to form a kind of psychic super-ego that precipitates a desire for subjection. From such theorisations of the subject we can say then that the production of the subject relies upon processes of representation or recognition.
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Under the influence of the writings of Foucault (1977, 1980) some of my earlier writing (Atkinson, 1995, 2002) explored the linguistic practices which are used by teachers and other educators and how these forms of language impact upon the identities of learners and teachers. The discourse of assessment practices became central to this work, discourses which are used by teachers and others to assess a learner’s ‘ability’. I was interested in how teaching and learning are actually constituted and performed as practices within the parameters of specific assessment discourses. This work was centrally concerned therefore with the idea of subjectivity, with how teachers and learners are formed as pedagogised subjects within educational practices and discourses. Here the subject is viewed not as someone who inherently possesses or lacks ability (teacher or learner), any more than he or she inherently possesses other identities relating, for example, to race, class or gender, but whose ability is conferred through established and accepted practices and values or socio-cultural norms.

In this work I was hinting at the production of pedagogised relations within the normalising discourses of educational assessment practices and how subjects of learner and teacher are produced through the parameters of the discourse. Such norms decide almost in advance which kind of subject is valued; to quote a phrase from Judith Butler (2005), “they create the viability of the subject, its ontological and epistemological parameters.” It is in those disturbances of practice, when we are confronted with the unexpected, when we encounter something which diverges from normalising structures (such as a ‘strange’ drawing or other activity set by a teacher) that we may be precipitated into questioning how the learner as a subject emerges (and how a teacher emerges). Through such pedagogical encounters we can learn the value of difference in that such encounters allow us to expand our understanding of practice and learning by witnessing how people act and conceive in different and legitimate ways that often do not subscribe to normalising frameworks.

If we impose the power of the norm when it appears no longer relevant to our changing social and cultural contexts and lived realities; when we fail to mourn outmoded or redundant practices and values (Atkinson 2006); then we effect a kind of violence upon difference. We might get a glimpse of this by looking at the imposition in schools of a National Curriculum and its inspection regime which, I believe was underpinned by an outmoded conception of teaching, learning and assessment. This model relied upon mechanistic and transmission approaches to teaching and learning that could not respond to rapidly changing socio-cultural realities. It was in effect a reactionary device trying to cope with a rapidly changing world. A new curriculum is now being introduced (since September 2008) which aims to give teachers more flexibility to determine the content and structure of the curriculum for which they are responsible. A similar normalising process has affected the process of teacher education which is structured according to a series of government ‘standards’ that prescribe the skills and knowledge required to become a good teacher.

Foucault’s later work moved from exploring the subject as an effect of discourse towards seeing the formation of the subject in relation to norms and it is in and through such relations that the self as a human process comes to be viewed as an act of poiesis, a creative and aesthetic process which incorporates a process of critique.
This critical position in relation to normalising frameworks provides a basis upon which we might begin to question the parameters of teaching and learning in which pedagogised subjects are produced. Such critical practice introduces a question of ethics in that the critique of normalising frameworks is, by implication, a critique of self; the self is organised/recognised and constituted within such frameworks. This critique, I would argue, is precipitated through disturbances in practice, and I think it is towards such disturbances that Judith Butler (2005) alludes when she comments:

> With the help of Foucault’s self-criticism, it may be possible to show that the question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility, [those sites] where we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgement: to someone else who is there to be addressed and whose address is there to be received. (pp. 21–22, my bracket.)

In pedagogic relations it is not uncommon to have experiences in which what happens cannot be understood within established frameworks when we assume ground to be “common” that is in fact not secure. Extending Foucault’s writing to this kind of situation where teachers begin to question how they respond to learners when the latter do not conform to established frameworks of understanding, suggests that teachers are in a sense putting themselves at risk, becoming unrecognised within the normalising frameworks that govern their practice. Is the teacher in such a situation risking his or her identity and professional standing by contravening the norms that govern ‘the scene of recognition’ anticipated by other professionals (inspectors etc) who want or need to feel reassured? Is the teacher in such situations indirectly asking the question who he or she is?

Consequently what kind of forms of address should a teacher as a reflective practitioner find appropriate in relation to such ‘insecure’ or ‘uncertain’ pedagogical relations? In such relations it does not seem appropriate to take a reflective or reflexive stance toward the self in terms of a current or future ontology but rather to ask the question: ‘Who are you?’ Bearing in mind the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of answering this question, it posits the notion that there is a subject in the pedagogic relation that the teacher probably does not or cannot fully comprehend. Here the relation to the other disrupts the self. If in a pedagogical relation the learner is fantasised through the norm, the Other of the norm, then the learner becomes a surrogate identity (he or she produces what the teacher expects). If the pedagogical encounter begins from the question ‘Who are you?’ then a different relation seems to emerge through the question, ‘How does the other learn?’

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In this chapter I want to explore a different idea of the subject from the writing of Badiou (2002, 2005a, 2005b), a subject which emerges through an event and subsequent truth procedure. I then want to relate these ideas to learning and pedagogy. I will consider real learning arising through an event which involves a movement
into a new or changed ontological state. Learning can thus be conceived as a problem of existence, an idea that resonates with Deleuze’s belief that the power of life is its “power to develop problems” (see Colebrook, 2002, p. 1). Pedagogy, in relation to such problems, can be conceived as pedagogy (or pedagogies) against the state as it attempts to embrace new ontological possibilities for the learner and teacher beyond established states of representation in order to expand our grasp of human learning, of what it is to learn, to produce new subjectivities and new learning communities. This suggests that immanent to pedagogy is a movement against itself. The ethical imperative for pedagogy is concerned with maximising the power of learning, it is not focussed on what we are and should be, that is to say on some transcendent position towards being, but upon the potentiality and ‘unknown’ of becoming.

A brief, perhaps over-sentimental interpretation of a video of a child painting provides a context of practice for the ideas on learning that the paper develops.

The notion of risk taking has often been put forward by art educators in order to promote creative and individual approaches to learning (see Swift and Steers, 1999). The idea of learners being encouraged to take risks in their specific learning context suggests a pedagogy that is not totally controlled by specified learning outcomes. It suggests a flexible teaching-learning space that attempts to accommodate unpredictable or unexpected directions in learning. Encouraging learners to take risks in their art practice, by implication, suggests that teachers themselves are also taking risks in that they have to be able to ‘let things happen’; they have to be able to facilitate these learning pathways without a clear sense of outcome. But how can we understand the idea of risk taking? Is it possible to provide a theoretical basis upon which to enhance our understanding of this concept that takes us beyond the prosaic idea of ‘taking a chance’ and thereby provide pedagogy with a more substantial theoretical underpinning of this concept? Some years ago I had a conversation with a leading gallery educator who expressed his extreme frustration whenever he heard the term ‘risk taking’ being used as a central aim of learning in school art education. For him this term had become no more than a romantic cliché. Here I go some way towards theorising the idea of risk taking through the notions of the ‘event’ and ‘truth procedure’. These are taken from the philosophical writings of Alain Badiou and they provide a way of thinking about risk taking that explores the dynamics of this process which can be applied fruitfully to practices of teaching and learning.

EARLY ENCOUNTERS: A VIDEO OF A CHILD PAINTING

I deploy the following story as an indicative cameo for thinking about learning, pedagogy and practice with which the rest of the book is concerned.

The story begins from a panoptic place, a place of surveillance in which all appears to be revealed before the viewer. It is a place at once visual and at the same time visualised according to a panoply of ways of seeing and, therefore, without question, a plethora of ways of meaning. It might be comprehended as a space of power where flows of power are complex and almost always invisible. It is certainly a place of inter-relation; inter-relations between a little boy and two adults but also
inter-relations between actions, as well as strategies and tactics that structure and lead action towards its distant horizon. It is a space of multiplicities, invisible inter-relations, not seen, but which are powerfully present between thinking, desiring, intuiting, hypothesising, responding and testing; a rich amalgam of physical, affective, psychic and social processes informing the pathways of becoming.

His story begins in the ground of practice where there is no separation between acting, thinking, reflecting, desiring or feeling. These categories do not exist in his space of practising; their function is to provide the security and even the subjectivity of the viewer’s gaze. He asks for red, then blue and then pink. Paint pots are handed to him one by one as he uses a brush to inscribe the large roll of paper with a series of lines and marks. His gaze is fascinated by the outcome of his actions, the painted arcs, twisting and sinusoidal lines. Painted marks denote an absence of immediately prior actions as well as perhaps a bleeding into a virtual future, all accompanied by attendant psychic and visceral processes. These lines simultaneously constitute relics and futures; they are traces of a disappearing and of a prescient forthcoming. Such marks and lines may suggest a meaning to the boy but when others focus upon their presence and form to suggest meaning then crucial moments of being disappear whilst, simultaneously, an existence is inscribed.

(This hints at a possible radical dilemma of assessment in art education where art practice is reduced to the predicative gaze of knowledge, of the signifying chain; it hints at the gap between a learner’s presentation and a teacher’s representation of the latter in an appropriate discourse. It also, more significantly, points to differences between the here and now ontologies of practice and the atemporal signifying chain of knowledge.)

But there are also sounds, voices; other signifiers that accompany painted configurations, noises to indicate a hissing wind followed by a series of stabbing actions that leave their traces in splodges of green paint followed by a soft murmuring, “footprints”. Again the presence of the mark suggests a significant absence.

In the next phase, (though there are no phases for the boy), curling and intersecting lines become entangled with spoken words, “a windmill” and the sounds of a howling purple storm. Repeated spitting sounds suggest an imagined ferocity emulated and adumbrated by an adult who supports the child’s visual and oral narrative, extending its possibilities: “Is it a storm? What’s happening, Luca?”

But the narrative changes; the focus is transformed. Luca makes a slow and deliberate red line as he pushes the brush to his left along the paper. He imagines a train. He pushes the brush along the red line and pulls it back repeatedly and finally to a collision point accompanied by a crashing sound, “Dead end.” He changes colour and describes in line, movement and sound a blue train going forwards and backwards along the same route. He terminates the return trajectory with a thick squiggle and accompanying sound. Then, “Here comes another train.” This time it’s green and it also crashes after making its journey. These hermeneutic and semiotic flows proceed fluently and undisturbed; they suffer no interruption, only the gentle background of adult support, curiosity and affirmation.

A period of deep concentration follows as Luca uses water to dilute the paint; he makes a zigzag line across the paper. He overlaps green with red and then makes a
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series of rotations leaving their corresponding loops in blue and red. Noticing paint on his finger tips he makes a finger-print, then another, and another. A transformation occurs; he paints his hand and fingers uttering the word “dinosaur”. He makes a handprint deliberately and carefully. A succession of hand-prints follow coupled with the obvious enjoyment of applying paint to his hand. Then he uses his hand as a template on the paper and traces around his fingers and palm with the brush; he removes his hand and fills in the outline.

His body then becomes the painted surface; Luca paints his hand and carefully describes a red line on the front of his forearm from his wrist to his elbow, the point where his jumper sleeve has been folded. There is something archaic and primeval in this application of paint to the body surface. He tries to make a print of hand and arm.

AN ETHICS OF PEDAGOGY

It is possible to offer a detailed analysis of Luca’s painting and construct a meaning of his practice. For instance, we might consider the representational and semiotic strategies employed by Luca that together constitute his painting practice and endow it with meaning. We can think of his painting as a temporal flow consisting of different narratives that include scenarios, plots and dénouements; and identify conceptualisations of movement, reversibility and termination. We can reflect upon the metaphoric and metonymic dimensions of his painting; and we might analyse the syntactical structure of the painted marks, their fusion with the voice. We could consider the dialogical relations, though minimal, between Luca and his caregivers and how Luca is able to extend his practice through such relations. We might pursue Luca’s control and orchestration of his practice as well as his direction and regulation of the adults supporting him, thus exploring the micro-politics of this space of practice. All these forms of enquiry and others can be undertaken legitimately in order to further an understanding of this child’s visual practice and its context of performance and production. Such enquiries further our understanding along established lines of thought and bodies of knowledge. That is to say, such enquiry presupposes or is predicated by established epistemological frameworks through which Luca’s painting practice can be understood. Such interpretations constitute a series of truth discourses in their search for meaning. To use a phrase from Ranciere, to which we will return, such enquiries are predicated upon particular distributions of the sensible, upon distributions of the visible and the speakable in which the child and his practices can be comprehended.

In this and subsequent chapters I will be concerned with such distributions in a number of sites: art practice, learning, pedagogy, ethics and theory. My aim is to consider the ways in which practices, pedagogies and their attendant visibilities and discourses, configure and reconfigure their subjects and objects. A key aim, embedded in the title of this book, is to confront particular demarcations of ‘art’, ‘learner’, ‘teacher/facilitator’, ‘pedagogy’, ‘assessment’, ‘ethics’, ‘subject’, in order to inspect how meanings attached to these terms are distributed and thereby invoke specific forms of recognition and value. For example, traditional knowledge and skills in art educational sites (observational drawing, painting, biographies of artists,) and
more contemporary art practices in such sites (participation, performance) produce what I have previously termed specific pedagogised identities. These emerge through the practices and discourses that educators initiate and with which learners engage. My point is to open up such demarcations and their respective forms of subjectivation in order to offer a way of thinking about pedagogy and learning which tries not to become trapped within accepted distributions (practices and discourses) in order to extend how we understand practice, pedagogy and learning.

The ethics of pedagogy with which I am working does not abandon traditional practices and skills but seeks to make room for local truth procedures of learning (Badiou, 2002). This means that the pedagogic encounter must avoid over ‘prescription’ or ‘inscription’ vis-à-vis tradition and, to use an oxymoron, anticipate unpredictability in learning. Here I want to make a distinction between normative learning comprising much of the daily learning, teaching and assessment processes and real learning involving a leap into a new space, where the event of learning precipitates a new order of becoming that has the potential to invoke new states of existence (Dewey 2001). This applies to both children/students and teachers. It is crucial to understand that the event is not the learning but that which happens to precipitate learning. That which is precipitated can be conceived in terms of a truth procedure that remains faithful to the event of learning.

There are two important dimensions to this ethics of pedagogy, the first concerns the child or student as learner and relates to real learning viewed as a problem of existence involving movement into a new ontological state, so that the pedagogic requirement is to support these local processes. The second concerns the teacher-as-learner more directly and involves those teaching-learning encounters through which previously unrecognised or uncounted elements, that is to say, forms of learning and practice children develop, become appreciated whilst at the same time this process of appreciation or recognition makes visible to the teacher/facilitator the limits or parameters of his or her previous pedagogic situation. This process of revelation thus produces a modified pedagogic space for the teacher in which an expanded understanding of learning evolves. Put another way these pedagogic events relate to the real of the pedagogic situation, those forms of learning behaviour that disturb the teacher’s pedagogic parameters, the symbolic framework that constructs learning, sufficiently so as to change them and make visible forms of learning and learners previously not recognised as such.

Thus I am concerned more with opening up pedagogic spaces to the truth of learning encounters and events rather than analysing (normative) subjects of knowledge. I use the term ‘truth’ as it is found in the work of Alain Badiou in relation to a truth process that builds upon an event occurring in a particular situation (see Badiou, 2005b, pp. 43–51). This will be described in more detail in Chapter Two and discussed further in later chapters. I use the term ‘real’ from the Lacanian triad: imaginary, symbolic and Real. In Lacan the Real is that which lies beyond the symbolic, that is to say, beyond those forms of representation, such as language or image, through which we function and obtain meaning in our social networks and contexts. The Real hints at the gaps in the symbolic, it hints at those moments when our symbolic forms break down, when the symbolic order is punctured, when
our practices of representation are severely disrupted by something that happens. If we apply the Lacanian notion of the Real to the term ‘real learning’ this relates to situations when assimilated symbolic or representational schemas, which allow learning to proceed, break down due to an encounter that punctures established learning processes and in time this encounter precipitates new forms of learning. The Real of learning cannot in itself be signified, and in that sense it is an impossible encounter, but it can lead to a reforming of the symbolic, it is the Real of the encounter that establishes the possibility for new ways of thinking and acting.

We can see the truth of a learning encounter in Luca’s painting practice above, where, even at this micro level, as we observe the intensity and absorption of action, there is a clear insistence to follow the direction of the practice without any knowledge of outcomes but where outcomes leap into new forms of practice and enquiry. Here chance, perseverance and immanence are vital aspects of learning which lie in stark contrast to learning promoted by instrumentalist and transcendent pedagogies.

BEING AND EVENT

But where does the truth of Luca’s painting lie? How might we consider the idea of truth beyond a hermeneutics of practice? In order to consider these questions, which appear to insist upon passing beyond the limits of language, an idea of truth in relation to human action is required in contrast to notions of disclosure or adequation. Here Badiou’s (2005a) book Being and Event develops the notion that the truth of being emerges from an evental situation through which a subject (as learner) emerges. For Badiou truth is linked to the eruption of an event and its generic consequences, it is nothing to do with knowledge or meaning. Truth is not what knowledge produces; on the contrary, “it is what exceeds, in a given situation, the knowledge that accounts for the situation” (Leclercle, 1999, p. 8). In other words truth is what cannot be conceived in a particular situation according to existing knowledge, “a truth is a puncturing of such knowledge” (ibid, p. 8). We can comprehend this idea of truth as lying beyond meaning or as a void in current meaning. Badiou (2001) writes:

To be faithful to an event is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by thinking [...] ‘according to’ the event. And this, of course – since the event was excluded by all the regular laws of the situation – compels the subject to invent a new way of being and acting in the situation (pp. 41–42).

Whereas Badiou uses the notions of event and truth to describe major eruptions in the fields of politics, science, art and love, and without wishing to distort his philosophical endeavour, I think what he has to say has direct relevance and insight for local states of becoming, such as individual learning processes. In relation to education Badiou (2005c) remarks:

Education (save its oppressive or perverted expressions) has never meant anything but this: to arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them (p. 9).

For Badiou, “the ‘and’ of being and event names the space of the subject … the one who unfolds new structures of being and thus writes event into being.” (2005,
In other words, for Badiou a subject comes into being through the dynamics of an event and truth procedure that punctures and transforms knowledge. This book is concerned with how we might employ these ideas from Badiou to extend our understanding of local learning processes, what I refer to as local curations of learning.

In relation to Luca, our young painter, how might we comprehend the truth of his painting practice? Well, perhaps we can regard the sequence of painting in which Luca engages as a series of unpredictable learning events, that is to say a series of actions each containing points or moments of fracture, revelation and potential that precipitate a movement into a new way of functioning such that, as a learner, Luca emerges through the truth of a perseverance with the new possibilities opened up to him by the chance contingencies of a series of painting events. Here Badiou’s idea of an ‘evental truth’ can be employed to consider learning as a process of disturbance and a movement into a new ontological state. We can see this happening as Luca discovers new ways of ‘painting’ (he uses brush on paper to make different marks, he prints with his fingers, he paints his body, and so on) and their corresponding potentialities for further action and thought. The consequences of the event of these moments of potentiality, for this learner, in the practice of painting reconfigure what it is to paint and define new ontological states of learning.

The issue becomes more complex when we consider learning events or encounters from the learner’s ontological context and also from that of the teacher/facilitator. It is difficult to understand from an onlooker’s perspective how such an event happens for the learner and its level of significance for future learning. It is also difficult for the teacher or facilitator not to allow his or her knowledge-frame to structure this encounter and so interpret it from established forms of knowledge to form a closure of meaning. This sounds a little crazy, for how else are we to respond to and so understand a child’s learning encounter? Well, here again Badiou is interesting in terms of what he has to say about events and truth procedures.

Badiou describes the “state of a situation” in terms of those practices, knowledge, values and so on that constitute a particular context in which action occurs. In some respects this is similar to Bourdieu’s sociological conceptions of field and habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and Ranciere’s idea of the distribution of the sensible (Ranciere 1999), which consists of those particular dispositions, forms of understanding, beliefs, values and ways of functioning within a particular social context. For Badiou an event is something that occurs in a situation but is not of the situation, that is to say it has little meaning within the current make-up of the situation. The disruption that Duchamp’s ready-mades effected in the Western art world can be viewed as an event in the sense in which Badiou uses this term. Duchamp’s intervention happened within a specific historical context but it could not be understood through the established values, practices and knowledge that constituted the art world of the time. This was because the intervention was so radical that it undermined how art objects, the artist, skill, technique and the spectator were understood. That is to say it shattered those discourses and practices through which art at that time was understood. Truth procedures leading from this event and remaining faithful to it have continued to question how we understand art objects and practices. We could say then that the Duchamp event is
CHAPTER 1

still happening today. It is through following a truth procedure leading from an event that, for Badiou, a subject comes into existence. In the field of science Galileo’s work in mathematics and physics can be viewed as an event whose consequences gradually transformed the field of science. In politics the French Revolution is mentioned frequently by Badiou as an event that reconfigured the field of politics.

Although in speaking of Duchamp we are referring to a major disruption affecting a macro context I think it is profitable to apply the idea of a subject formed through the consequences of an event to processes of learning. For a child, or other learner, that which is presented through a learning encounter could, if seized, lead to new states of learning but, understandably, this seizing is often difficult without support or confidence. On the part of the teacher the learning encounter might consist of being confronted by a child’s work that he or she finds inexplicable due to his or her framework of understanding (see Moore 1999, pp. 87–92 and 101–110). In such instances this might lead to a puncturing of established frameworks and a subsequent expanded understanding. However, more commonly, such encounters, where what the learner produces seems at odds with teacher expectations, frequently lead to the child’s practice being conceived as lacking or mysterious in relation to the teacher’s pedagogical framework. I recall this happening to me on numerous occasions when needing to respond to children’s drawings and other art work composed of forms radically outside of my expectations.

The relations between expectation, appearance and meaning is expressed by Peirce (1958) in his well-known pragmaticist aphorism:

Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object (p. 124).

It is the severe disruption of our understanding of objects as conceived through their practical effects that suggests something close to Badiou’s notion of event, which has no meaning when viewed through current conceptions that are radically insufficient.

A second exemplar from previous writing (Atkinson 2002) can be used to illustrate these ideas on learning and truth. A few years ago I was interviewing a secondary school teacher in his art room when one of his examination students (16yrs) came in and asked to see him. This was at the time of the BSE crisis when thousands of cattle were being slaughtered around the country and their carcasses burnt in huge fires. It was an event which triggered an intense political and ethical debate. The student was carrying a cage made from wooden rails. She said that she had not made the cage but wanted to use it for her examination piece which would be displayed the following week. She intended to suspend a frozen cow’s heart from the top. The bottom would be covered with straw and a map of England. Then she asked her teacher if this would be all right and if he thought she might pass the examination. The teacher and I just looked at each other.

I am using this incident as a means of illustrating what I want to say about learning as an event. This concerns a relation between the real of practice and its inscription or perception by others (in this case a teacher) that precipitates ethical and pedagogical
questions that open up possibilities for expanding our comprehension of what learning ‘is’ or can become.

My direction then is to consider an ethics of pedagogy through which learners and their respective learning practices can emerge into existence. It is an ethics of the unknown of becoming rather than established forms of being. I am making a distinction therefore between an act of real learning involving a leap into a new ontological space, where the event of learning precipitates a new order of becoming, and normative learning as that which comprises much of the daily procedures of learning, teaching and assessment.

In relation to the *caged heart* then how might we comprehend this incident in relation to the notions of event and truth? Well, I think it is possible to see an answer in the pedagogical relation where a local event precipitated a flow of energy. The student was clearly in a situation where she was attempting to break new ground but was uncertain of its validity. Her teacher had introduced her to the work of Damian Hirst and Mark Wallinger in an earlier project relating to the portrayal of animals in art practice including the work of George Stubbs. But the key was the introduction to contemporary practice and how this allowed her to think and work in a particular way coupled with the teacher’s encouragement, which projected her into a highly creative flow that enabled this student to pursue and persevere with the truth of her ideas and her commitment to them. There seems to be an important ethical dimension to this relational process whereby the learner and teacher together persevere with their local but unpredictable journeys of learning and emerge through a deep sense of commitment and resolve.

I think these ideas on event and commitment can be usefully linked to another term used by Badiou, ‘that-which-is-not-yet’, from his little book, *Ethics* (2001), in order to develop these thoughts on pedagogy.

THAT WHICH IS NOT YET

The concept of “that which is not yet” has relevance for interrogating as well as theorising pedagogical spaces on a variety of levels. This notion concerns a transition from being to becoming and also involves the problematic of existence and recognition, all of which are constant issues in many kinds of educational sites (schools, universities, colleges, galleries, museums, community sites) involving practices of teaching and learning as well as curriculum policies, course content and assessment practices. We can think of “that which is not yet” as referring to forms of being that have no existence, that is to say, to being that does not count or is not yet valued. This might refer to emerging states of becoming but also to those forms of being that are often present but absent, that is to say where they have no existence, no recognition in the sense that they lie outside of dominant modes of understanding and value, or again, quoting Ranciere (1999), outside the current distributions of the sensible and their police orders.

Within teaching and learning contexts it is quite possible for there to be learners whose ontological status as learners is not recognised so their potential for becoming is constrained and therefore they have no (or marginal) existence within the pedagogical space. A glimpse of this situation can be perceived for instance when
students produce work that is mysterious or incomprehensible from the perspective of the pedagogical framework as formed by the discourses and practices of the curriculum that inform the teacher’s practice. It can also be witnessed when learners from other cultures enter into a pedagogic context that fails to support their previous existence and achievements as learners (see Moore, 1999).

Thus the idea of “that which is not yet” has at least two ethical implications for pedagogical sites:

1. It can be used to unpack the ontologies of learning. If we conceive of learning as a movement into a new ontological state, that is to say, where learning opens up new possibilities, new ways of seeing things, new ways of making sense of what is presented to us in our different modes of existence, then this movement involves, “that which is not yet”. Accepting such new states involves accepting new states of existence as learners. This idea would indicate a space of potential.

2. It can be deployed to consider the politics of existence in the pedagogic space particularly in relation to marginalised or obscure subjects. For instance, when a learner from outside of an indigenous culture enters its pedagogical institutions, though great effort is made to help, we often find a situation in which the institutional framework does not cater for the learner’s lifeworld, his or her cultural background or ways of understanding. In other words the learner’s existence is not recognised by the pedagogical context (and may never be) and so the learner occupies a position of “that which is not yet” within this specific context. Similarly within the dominant culture there are learners whose ways of understanding or strategies of learning are not recognised within the norms of pedagogic strategies employed by the teacher. For example, we know from the work of Bourdieu (1990), Bernstein (2000) and others, through the concepts of cultural capital and symbolic violence (Bourdieu) and the pedagogic device, recognition and realisation rules (Bernstein), that the curriculum content of the pedagogic space can be culturally biased so as to privilege those learners who have access to valued forms of knowledge (cultural capital). Thus many or some of those learners who do not have access might be viewed as “that which is not yet” within the pedagogical context of state education and sadly remain in this ontological vacuum. Again, the being of the outsider, the absent present, can be applied to the field of sexuality where, for instance, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual learners are not readily accommodated within the pedagogical framework. Such learners are therefore “that which is not yet”, they have limited existence within the pedagogical context (see Addison, 2007).

This important notion has therefore, direct relevance for reflecting upon the position of learners, how they are situated and produced, that is to say, how their pedagogised identities are formed. The first implication recognises a space of pure potential, and whilst this potential is implied in the second it designates pedagogical spaces in which such potential has to overcome powerful prejudices in order to emerge.

PEDAGOGIES AGAINST THE STATE

In order to embrace the idea of real learning as a movement into a new ontological state through following local truth procedures, and the ethical implications for the
pedagogic space of “that which is not yet”, I want to argue that what is required for pedagogy are pedagogies against the state. This notion requires some elaboration.

Essentially pedagogy against the state is a term which embraces both states of representation and encounters. States of representation affect our everyday lives as teachers or learners, because they refer to assimilated bodies of knowledge and practice. By implication therefore they refer to specific normalised subjectivities that are produced through these knowledges and practices, these states of representation. On the other hand an event of learning, a learning encounter or real learning, as described above, would involve a puncturing of these assimilations and their respective subjectivities and therefore demand a pedagogical practice commensurate to this ontological shift in learning. In other words if real learning is a problem of existence that involves a movement into a new ontological state, which includes the fracturing of established subjectivities, then pedagogy has to support this encounter with the real. Rather than being driven by assimilated objects or bodies of knowledge it has to try to accommodate learning encounters that precipitate new forms of learning. By implication pedagogy against the state suggests that pedagogy itself must pass beyond assimilated knowledge and practice in order to open up new pedagogies and new learning communities. It suggests an anti-pedagogy. In a sense representation controls thought and practice whereas events or encounters have the potential to open up new ways of conceiving and acting and in doing so lead to new, perhaps more emancipated subjectivities and learning communities.

The notion of pedagogy against the state must also include the political state within which education functions and which largely determines educational policies and practices. In this context therefore pedagogy against the state advocates a spirit of critique towards the wider political context that regulates practices of teaching and learning in schools.

In summary then pedagogies against the state have to contend with local ontological states, states of representational orders such as bodies of knowledge, and the political state in which government policies relating to education are formulated. This can be summarised as follows:

1. Pedagogies against the state relate to local ontological and epistemological states where real learning can be conceived as a movement against previous modes of understanding into new modes. They are pedagogies that attempt to accommodate the unpredictable, from being to becoming, a process that challenges the learner out of a complacency, a comfort zone. This is equally applicable to teachers or facilitators and their teaching or facilitating strategies.

2. State also relates to the context of state curriculum policy where it is all too easy to rely upon established traditions of teaching and learning, that is to say traditional epistemological frameworks that impose specific ontologies of learning which may be incommensurable with the social realities within which they function. This complacency often indicates a failure to mourn traditions that are obsolete but which are maintained by reactionary ideological and political forces (see Atkinson, 2006). It can also refer to underpinning pedagogical principles or theories of learning that are embedded within teaching practices, for instance, transmission-based pedagogies where teachers deliver knowledge and skills to
their pupils. This process denotes active teachers and passive learners. Pedagogies against the state signal a resistance to such complacency and failure to mourn as well as to transmission models of pedagogy. (I shall discuss the notion of mourning in relation to pedagogical practices in Chapter Three).

3. We must also use the idea of pedagogies against the state on a more overtly political level by interrogating the relationship between pedagogy and liberal democratic policies. Here we are concerned with pedagogies as forms of resistance to liberal democratic economics as the driving raison d’etre for state education. Badiou’s idea of politics is helpful here. He does not use the term politics to refer to the manoeuvres of political parties but to a process of thought-action that strikes out from normative or dominant ideological forces in order to create new possibilities for existence.

The ontological difference between “that which is” and “that which is not yet”, (from being to becoming) in learning is paralleled in the idea of pedagogies against the state which recognises the struggle of learning in local states of becoming as well as the political struggle for existence of learners who do not fit within dominant distributions and modes of learning, teaching and assessment as determined by institutional sites and their educational policies.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND A THIRD ‘EVENT’

In conclusion the key point is to emphasise the philosophical position for a pedagogical approach that places emphasis upon the truth event of learning which, by implication, as already intimated above, calls for pedagogies against the state; against prior states of learning as a movement into a new ontological space emerges; against the power of normalising teaching, curriculum, assessment methodologies that obscure ‘other’ forms of learning and teaching. Such forms can also be understood in the Deleuzian sense of ‘minor’ in relation to ‘major’ (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp. 291–309). That is to say, where a minor language or art form is not in a relation of inferiority to a dominant or standard form but where the minor produces difference or a “minor treatment of the standard” so as to effect a deterritorialisation of the standard. Or, in other words where the minor is not of inferior quality but marginalised by the current hegemony. Reading dominant forms through minor positions can undermine normalising perceptions of learning and teaching and so effect new insights into these processes. Such readings can decentre dominant conceptions and reveal their dissimulated social power or, put another way, the ‘lie’ that sustains their hegemony.

The idea of negotiated spaces is an important conception for the above remarks on learning. We negotiate existence every day and this largely conforms to established norms, customs, values and habits. In art practice we might view such negotiations relating to norms that govern traditional or common understandings of the artist, the art object, skill and technique. In some contemporary practices these traditional negotiations are frequently punctured so that, for example, artists and the public work together in quite different negotiated spaces that demand new ways of thinking about how we understand the artist, the art object, community and so on. These new
kinds of negotiations open up new ontological states, new subjectivities and new communities, and they have relevance for pedagogy in educational sites, where we might rethink teacher/facilitator and learner identities, as well as ideas about knowledge and skill.

In writing about learning and practice this book will also employ Ranciere’s terminology relating to *distributions* of the visible and the speakable in art and art educational sites. Whereas Badiou uses the notions of evental sites and truth to consider the emergence of the new, and Lacan the idea of the Real revealing gaps in the symbolic through which the new emerges, Ranciere considers the notions of politics, dissensus and the aesthetic which corrode the police orders and representational regimes respectively in order to reconfigure the distributions of the speakable and the visible. Thus a particular concern of the book is to look at how we can think about the emergence of new practices and subjectivities in the domain of art and art education as well as other educational sites, and it will employ some of the work of these thinkers and others, including Judith Butler, as investigative tools to structure and assist this concern.

In the next chapter I provide a more detailed overview of the theoretical framework of the book. I explore the theoretical tools which form the background of my thoughts and which allow purchase upon issues of pedagogy, learning, equality and subjectivity.

I conclude this opening chapter with a postscript describing a third ‘event,’ the *Bombing of Poems*, performed by the Casagrande art collective from Chile and led by Cristobal Bianchi, Julio Carrasco and Joaquin Prieto. Casagrande have devoted a number of years to developing a project of bombing cities with poems from a helicopter, cities that have experienced military bombings in the past, such as Santiago, Guernica, Dubrovnik and Warsaw. The actual performance consists of dropping over a hundred thousand bookmarks, containing poems, in the evening onto city squares where people are gathered. The poems are written by young poets from Chile and the host country and printed in the host language and Spanish. All this is done without any prior warning (except gaining permission from the respective authorities) and the performance is recorded by video cameras.

This act of bombing and subsequent experiences for people who witness the event has many dimensions that can be explored in depth. The contrast between the initial military action and the rain of poems can be conceived as a re-signification of the act of bombing, a poetic or art event that produces a multiplicity of affects amongst those old enough to have experienced the military bombing of their cities as well as those younger members of the community. The relations between history and memory interrupted by this event are complex. The bombing of poems is in a sense an affirmation of survival but equally provides a form of *detournement* (a rerouting) for remembrance in our current world, linking with recent and current acts of violence and destruction, and the need for rethinking an ethics of community. The bombing event and its subsequent multiplicity of affects, is close to Althusser’s idea of aleatory materialism, his theory of the encounter (2006 in Bourriaud), where the central issue is to explore how such encounters are captured, congeal and endure in new forms of existence.
Thus the ‘event’ of the bombing of poems is not the bombing itself but the multiplicity of unpredictable affects, or to employ a concept from Deleuze and Guattari (1988), the new lines of flight that are precipitated amongst members of each community and which have the potential from this experiential intensity for new possibilities for thought and action; for a becoming new.
How might we use this social event as a metaphor with which to think about local events of learning and their subsequent truth procedures within educational sites? What kind of interventions do facilitators or teachers need to initiate in order for real learning to proceed and what dispositions are required to formulate effective responses?

Returning to Luca – the practice of this young artist encapsulates the explorations of this book. As we observe his actions and expressions we detect a mixture of experimenting, uncertainty, perseverance, curiosity and contingencies that constitute unpredictable lines of flight and their local organisation in the struggles and enjoyment of learning. What kinds of pedagogies are required to facilitate such learning? I can answer this question by taking a quotation from Alain Badiou (2005) and then supplementing the term pedagogy. Badiou is writing about philosophy and states:

We do not fundamentally need a philosophy of the structure of things. We need a philosophy open to the irreducible singularity of what happens, a philosophy that can be fed and nourished by the surprise of the unexpected. Such a philosophy would then be a philosophy of the event (p. 41).

I think that this statement can be translated and applied with force to pedagogical processes:

We need pedagogies that are open to the irreducible singularity of what happens, pedagogies that can be fed and nourished by the surprise of the unexpected. Such pedagogies would then be pedagogies of the event, pedagogies against the state, within their respective functioning contexts.
CHAPTER 2

THEORIZING THE SUBJECT

A CURIOUS CONTRADICTION

In our everyday conversations and relations with others we treat individuals and ourselves as stable entities. We relate to each other as though we are responding to a particular person with a specific identity, even if we know them or even if we do not. We tend to assume a clear distinction between people and the world in which they live. Frequently we use language as though it was a transparent medium of communication in which we express clear meaning, epitomised by phrases such as, ‘do you see what I mean,’ or ‘I see what you mean.’ Frequently we regard vision as a ‘natural’ universal process in the sense that in our cultural settings we assume we see the world in a similar way. We suppose that knowledge is neutral and associated with ideas of human progress and development. However, just about all of these ‘everyday’ suppositions that facilitate social interaction have been the subject of detailed interrogation in the worlds of philosophy, sociology, art, science, anthropology, literary theory, cultural studies, psychoanalysis and other disciplines, concerned with trying to understand how the human subject is formed. Indeed the term ‘human subject’ is indicative of a shift from viewing people as free-thinking individuals functioning independently in society towards understanding them as subjects who are largely affected and regulated as subjects by their social contexts and conditions.

This chapter will explore some theoretical literature on subjectivity and try to illustrate its relevance for pedagogical contexts; this will include issues of ontological change with respect to learning and practice. My intention is to discuss theory in such a way as to show its usefulness for generating fresh insights into learning and pedagogical practices. For example, how does the philosophical work of Badiou or Ranciere help to generate new ways of thinking about pedagogical relations and processes?

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SOME THEORIES OF THE SUBJECT

I begin with a brief and selective sketch of how the human subject has been conceived by some seminal thinkers in order to establish a backcloth for the focus of this chapter. Descartes’ well known aphorism, ‘I think, therefore I am’ (cogito ergo sum) suggests a fusion or correspondence between thinking and being; it implies a rational, conscious subject, in control of his or her own thoughts through which the world is comprehended. This is the detached subject of natural science who is able to observe the world of phenomena from a transcendent position and attain understanding through the light of reason. Reason will equip an observer with the cognitive tools to discover the laws of nature. Vermeer illustrates the Cartesian subject beautifully.
CHAPTER 2

In the painting, The Geographer (1668–9), the subject peers over a map holding a pair of dividers, instruments with which to measure the world. The scene is brilliantly lit by light from an adjacent window, the light of reason. The subject is not measuring the ‘real world’ but through the devices of representation and logic he has the power to conceive the world and thereby order and control it (see Crary 1990, p. 45).

Of course this idea of the conscious, rational subject has been challenged or modified on numerous occasions since Descartes and Hall (1997) draws our attention to key turning points emerging in the work of Marx, Freud and Saussure which in turn have been extensively elaborated over time. Marx situated the subject as a production of historical and social process. Thus whilst the Cartesian subject generally speaking is deemed transcendent and ahistorical, the Marxist subject is deeply embedded and determined by historical processes. Freud introduced the idea of the unconscious which established a domain of human being that is not accessible to conscious rational thought processes. In a sense this challenged the omnipotence of the rational cogito and introduced the idea that there are domains beyond consciousness that form an important aspect of being such as repression, anxiety and desire which have to be factored into the human condition. Saussure was concerned with language and semiotics and he argued that meaning is not formed as a result of a direct relation between a word and designated object but that this relation is arbitrary. He believed that meaning instead emerged from relations between linguistic signs. The implication here is that whereas for Descartes language is akin to a transparent medium in which meaning is formed, for Saussure meaning is a production of relations between signs, in other words there is no direct relation of correspondence between a sign and its object, consequently there is always a gap between the world and how we describe or theorise it. In other words there is no necessary relation between reality and its symbolisation. The epistemological breaks formulated by these three people have since been developed extensively and have led to the general notion of a subject largely determined by language and social processes; a notion that is challenged by Alain Badiou as we shall see shortly.

In passing however, it is important that Descartes is not viewed entirely as a rational philosopher. Though he is regarded as the philosopher who proposed a separation between mind and body and emphasised that knowledge is developed through cognitive process, Rachel Jones (2009) makes the important point that Descartes placed considerable value upon that feeling of wonder we experience when we are confronted with something we find strange, when we encounter something that is inexplicable or surprising. Descartes writes in The Passions of the Soul:

When the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new or very different from what we formerly knew, or from what we supposed that it ought to be, that causes us to wonder and be surprised; and because that may happen before we in any way know whether this object is agreeable to us or is not so, it appears to me that wonder is the first of all the passions (reference in Irigaray, 1993, p. 73)

Jones develops the importance of wonder for Descartes as the passion accompanying the state of not-knowing and that for Descartes philosophy begins in wonder because
this passionate state is what precipitates a search for understanding. Equally I want to argue that this passionate state of wonder is fundamental for real learning and that it should be at the heart of any pedagogical relation. Zizek (1999) also draws attention to the subject of radical doubt that Descartes discusses which emerges through the loss of its ground in being (see McGowan 2010 p. 23). I will return to this aspect of Descartes’ thought and the ethical importance of wonder in the final chapter.

It could be argued that the work of Freud, Marx and Saussure ultimately presupposed a hermeneutics of truth whose source lies in either the unconscious, historical process or language structure. Freud enabled his patients through language to locate their difficulties in previous experiences that were buried in the unconscious, Marx located the subject as a product of history and social processes, Saussure located meaning as a product of linguistic codes and structures. In the second half of the twentieth century post-structural theory rejected such truth discourses in preference for a polyvalence of meaning and a rejection of ideas of origin or presence. This led to a critique of established certainties and ‘grand narratives’ such as the ‘human subject’, ‘history’ and ‘truth’. The investigation of language and meaning intensified. (Of course in rejecting the idea of truth discourses post-structuralism in fact established its own truth.)

FOUCAULT

Foucault describes the growth of institutional discourses and practices in asylums, prisons and schools, within which individuals are positioned and regulated as ‘subjects’, according to each institution’s regime of truth and power-knowledge relations. In this scenario subjects are constituted as such through specific practices and discourses, such as those proliferating within educational institutions, which produce learners and teachers as specific pedagogised subjects. We can witness this process of subjection for example in the deployment of assessment discourses. Such discourses construct teachers, learners and objects or products of learning within specific discursive and practice parameters that define ability and performance. We might say that within such parameters learners appear as such according to varying degrees of intensity or ability. To give a brief example which I have discussed elsewhere (Atkinson, 2002) and use often in my seminars: a group of teachers are asked to consider two drawings of the same chair and, although they admit they know nothing of the students who produced them or the context of production they feel they can say which is the more effective drawing. They all identify the same drawing as the most effective and proceed to use a series of terms to designate qualities in this drawing which make it so; ‘better use of line,’ ‘better perspective,’ ‘sits well on the paper,’ ‘moves you into the picture,’ ‘better balance,’ ‘better composition,’ and so on. Here a particular discourse of representation, rooted in a long historical tradition, is being used to elevate one drawing over another and by implication to suggest that the student who produced the better drawing is more able. In using this discourse these teachers are also confirming their identities as teachers, that is to say, they are constructing themselves as teachers through the discourse. It is possible to consider the ‘other’ drawing from different discourses as being an effective
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drawing but the hegemony of the particular representational discourse employed by these teachers prevents such consideration. We might say that within the chosen discourse employed by the teachers one drawing appears intensely (the better drawing) whilst the degree of appearance of the inferior drawing is less intense.

Foucault’s later work saw discourse less in terms of power and subjection to institutional norms and more in terms of resistance, thereby providing opportunities for an aesthetic project of the self. There are implications of this later work for the construction of pedagogised subjects which dwells less on the production of surrogate identifications (more in line with subjection) and more on the development of learners and teachers as militant subjects. Foucault’s influence upon research into educational practices and discourses has been substantial over the last three decades producing a heavy industry of enquiry.

Judith Butler (1997) aligns Foucault’s work on power and subjection with psychoanalytic theory. She describes how the psyche is formed through a dissimulation of social norms that are taken in and constitute the psyche. The subject is not viewed as a preconstituted being who absorbs social norms from outside but as someone who comes into existence through the performance of such norms. For Butler this performative function produces not only the subject but also the ‘trajectory of its desire (ibid, p. 2).’ She demonstrates how this process of becoming a subject involves a series of passionate attachments for a subjection to particular norms and values. We might view the teacher’s assessment discourse above as manifesting a passionate attachment to specific norms and values relating to visual representation and through such attachments they constitute their subjectivity and the trajectory of their desires in the discursive practice of assessment.

To be dominated by a power external to oneself is a familiar and agonizing form that power takes. To find, however, that what “one” is, one’s very formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent upon that very power is quite another. We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and regulates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are (Butler 1997 pp. 1–2).

LACAN

The Freudian notion of the subject has been reworked extensively in the field of psychoanalysis in the work of Klein, Winnicot, Kristeva, Irigaray, Laplanche and others but perhaps the most significant reworking (which is not to deflect from the importance of others) is that developed by Jacques Lacan. For Lacan the constitution of the subject is not straightforward and involves a complex relation between lack, desire, drive and fantasy. In general terms for Lacan the subject-in-itself is a void in the sense that it lies beyond signification whilst in reality the subject is a subject
of language (the symbolic) and fantasy. The triad of imaginary, symbolic and Real plays an important part in Lacan’s formulation of the process of subjectivity. In The Mirror Phase (1977), Lacan describes the very young child in a state of uncoordinated being. On perceiving his image in a mirror or the gaze of the mother, (the mirror is in fact a metaphor), he identifies with its unity.

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives the term: namely the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image (Lacan, 1977, p. 2)

This process of identification, the assuming of an image (or representation), is simultaneously a process of alienation in that the child’s identity emerges from outside in the container of an image. Consequently this image can be viewed as a fantasy, an imaginary production through which the child secures identification. So the imaginary can be understood as the birth of fantasy. However, we might ask what facility allows the young child to take on identification; is there already a prior ‘agency’ or ‘consciousness’ that facilitates this transformation and if so why then does the child fall victim to the image if it already possesses some kind of discriminatory powers? Laplanche (in Butler 2005) appears to suggest that such identification arises through an overwhelming imposition of social positioning and relations which the child cannot ‘refuse’.

As the child becomes more involved with and embedded in the wider social world, for which it is predestined, so the symbolic order (the Other in Lacanian terminology) exerts its influence in that the symbolic is the domain from where the subject is viewed and given existence through the defiles of the signifier (see Easthope 2002, p. 147).

… a signifier is that which represents a subject for another signifier.

The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as a subject (Lacan, 1979, p. 207).

Zizek (1998, p. 74) provides an illustration of this point when referring to the medical chart that sits at the bottom of a hospital patient’s bed. The information on this chart does not represent the patient directly for other subjects, such as doctors and nurses but ‘primarily for other signifiers, for the symbolic network of medical knowledge,’ in which the information on the chart has to be inserted to obtain its meaning. A similar process occurs in relation to school reports where the comments do not represent the learner directly for teachers and parents but primarily for the symbolic network of disciplinary and pedagogic knowledge according to which the learner is positioned and appears as a pedagogised subject.

We can also ascertain a glimpse of this process of signification within which the subject is made manifest in Lacan’s (1979) description of the gaze.

I must to begin with insist on the following: in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture. This is the function found
at the heart of the institution of the subject of the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which – if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form – I am photo-graphed (p. 106).

Here the subject is pictured in the scopic field by the symbolic order of the gaze. That is to say the gaze for Lacan is similar to the symbolic. If we think of a perspectival image not only are we, as viewers, positioned before this image but we are also pictured by its gaze. That is to say we are constructed as particular kinds of viewing subjects by the perspectival gaze. We can transfer this idea to other kinds of visual spaces within which we are, in Lacan’s terminology, ‘photo-graphed.’ For example, take the sequencing of action and events in a film and how the way in which these are organised to effect a particular kind of viewing subject. A film depicting a fairly traditional linear temporal flow of events, such as *Shawshank Redemption* will produce a different viewing subject to a film in which the temporal flow is fragmented and where events are non-linear, such as *Pulp Fiction.* Similarly we can consider how teachers are constructed as viewing subjects when they respond to learners’ practices and try to determine how the pedagogic gaze is constructed. How does the pedagogic gaze anticipate particular pedagogised appearances of both teachers and learners? Different pedagogical gazes will in effect create different kinds of teachers and learners. For example, is the dominant pedagogic gaze informed by critical pedagogies, developmental psychology, cultural reproduction, social construction theory, socio-economic concerns; is it determined by adherence to particular attitudes or dispositions towards practice?

Although for Lacan the imaginary consists of a process of identification as the subject assumes an image, whilst the symbolic constitutes the domain of meaning, in both orders there is still something missing, something lacking which the subject continues to desire. The emergence of lack and desire occurs in early childhood when the child is separated from the union with the mother and the breast; this precipitates a sense of lack and a subsequent desire for this lost object, a desire which after separation takes the form of a representation of the imagined object. But this representation (of the breast) is itself lacking, that is to say the representation is not the object of desire but the *imagined object cause of desire* which Lacan terms *objet petit a.* This imagined object cause of desire occurs throughout life and we can view it functioning within discourses of identity such as nationalist or racist discourses in which purely *imagined identities* become objects of desire, frustration, anger or hatred. Equally we can consider the imagined object and desire functioning within pedagogical contexts particularly in contexts of assessment where learner identifications are produced within particular value systems that celebrate particular skills and practices that, as we have seen from Butler above, constitute the assessment gaze and the trajectory of its desire.

The imaginary and symbolic orders, are not all there is and it is through the gaps in our symbolic frames of reference that Lacan’s third order, the Real, persists. The interruption of the Real refers to moments when the symbolic is punctured, when it
ceases to function due to some event or happening that does not fit our frameworks of understanding. Subsequently this disturbance can effect a change in our symbolic order. I have applied this idea of the Real to an analysis of student teachers’ experiences of learning to teach, where they frequently experience moments of anxiety and disruption when their frameworks of understanding and practice become inoperable in their teaching situations (see Brown, Atkinson and England, 2006, pp. 61–04). The important point here is that the Real concerns gaps in our symbolic orders, it does not relate to a plentitude of existence beyond the symbolic.

In *The Parallax View* (2006 pp. 25–26, p. 390, note 21,) Zizek extends the Lacanian Real by describing what he terms the *parallax Real* which consists of the gap between two radically contrasting viewpoints on the ‘same thing.’ His reference point is Levi Strauss’s analysis of one of the Great Lakes tribes in which two subgroups, one superior to the other in the social structure of the tribe, produce radically different drawings of the ground plan of their village. Strauss’s explanation for this rests not upon cultural relativism whereby ‘the perception of social space depends on the observer’s group-belonging,’ but upon an irreconcilable social antagonism which cannot be addressed. Here the Real consists of the difference between these viewpoints. The drawings are different representations that mask the social antagonism which the groups could not come to terms with, an imbalance of relations. So we have the *actual* arrangement of the village and the two interpretations which are distorted due to social positioning. The Real is not the actual arrangement but the core of the social antagonism which distorts the groups’ interpretation of the actual arrangement. The Real is therefore a disavowed *Thing* which distorts these views of social reality, it is the very shift of perspective from one standpoint to another what we might term, after Zizek, the parallax gap.

The Real then is something which appears to exist beyond different interpretations but which in fact is simply this difference. This precipitates the illusion of the Real. The gap is not between noumena and phenomena as found in Kant, but rather the gap between representations themselves. It is this gap which intimates the existence of something substantial but which in fact is purely virtual.

This means that, ultimately, the status of the Real is purely parallactic and, as such, non-substantial: it has no substantial density in itself; it is just a gap between two points of perspective, perceptible only in the shift from one to another. The parallax Real is thus opposed to the standard (Lacanian) notion of the Real as that which “always returns to its place” – as that which remains the same in all possible (symbolic) universes: the parallax Real is, rather, that which accounts for the very multiplicity of appearances of the same underlying Real – it is not the hard core which persists as the Same, but the hard bone of contention which pulverises the sameness into the multitude of appearances. In a first move, the Real is the impossible hard core which we cannot confront directly, but only through the lenses of a multitude of symbolic fictions, virtual formations. In a second move, this very hard core is purely virtual, actually non-existent, an X which can be reconstructed only retroactively, from the multitude of symbolic formations which are “all that there actually is” (ibid., p. 26).
In the world of teacher education it is not uncommon for student teachers, who facilitate a learning situation and their tutors who observe the situation to hold quite different accounts of what happened. During the feedback period after the lesson often the student teacher has a different impression and view of events during the lesson to that of the tutor. On occasions these feedback sessions are quite contentious. Each individual notices different aspects of the ‘same’ lesson. This difference is not to be accounted for purely in terms of relativism but rather to a more fundamental ontological difference and its subsequent tensional points between each individual.

The Real therefore refers to a ‘structural impossibility,’ it does not lack existence but it is impossible from within the framework of the symbolic order, a little akin to the amorphous blob in Holbein’s The Ambassadors, which from the normal viewing position makes no sense, but when we regard the painting from the far right the blob emerges as a skull. McGowan (2010, p. 18) states that for Lacan every symbolic order, ‘structurally requires a point that exists within it and yet cannot be thought within the categories that the symbolic order itself lays down.’ This can be taken as a point of lack, the place of the Real, which I believe, as a point of ontological possibility but structural impossibility, provides a framework for pedagogical thinking and action. For example, in the world of children’s drawings it is frequently the case, as shown extensively by John Matthews (1999, 2003) and others that trying to understand how young children are using drawing or what a particular drawing means can be quite difficult and sometimes impossible from within our assimilated structures of interpretation and representation. Consequently such drawings can be easily dismissed as meaningless scribbles but from a different kind of structure and understanding of practice such drawings can begin to make sense and in doing so reveal the limitations of our original interpretational system. Here the Real attests to the puncture of symbolic frameworks of interpretation and, in pedagogical contexts, what has been excluded or obscured. However the crucial point is that in order for our symbolic frameworks to be disturbed so that a gap appears something has to happen. We do not simply transfer from one interpretational paradigm to another.

It is crucial not to fall into the trap of seeing the Real as a kind of excess that exists beyond the symbolic.

The Real is not the transcendent substantial reality which from outside disturbs the symbolic balance, but the immanent obstacle, stumbling block, of the symbolic order itself (Zizek 2008, p. 319).

This idea of an immanent stumbling block reminds me of a teaching-learning episode many years ago when I worked with a group of early year secondary students doing mathematics. One girl (12 years) who had recently arrived in England from North Africa (I forget the actual country) struggled with a simple division task in which she had to divide 18 sheep into three equal groups. In helping her words seemed of little use although she understood English. I resorted to eighteen bits of paper to try to facilitate the task, but with no success. Struggling to make headway I held up three fingers and asked her, ‘How many lots of three do you see?’ She replied ‘Three’. Her response made no sense to me so I asked again and I received the same answer. Then I asked her to show me and to my amazement she counted the three segments...
of each finger! In trying to help this girl my symbolic framework was totally inept; in a sense it reached its Real.

The Lacanian Real has been deeply influential upon Alain Badiou’s idea of the event and Slavoj Zizek’s idea of the act (2008, pp. 304–316). These concepts introduce a serious disturbance to theories of subjectivity that are grounded in the general notion of social construction. I will consider the work of Badiou in particular but also refer to Jacques Ranciere to illustrate their relevance to pedagogical practices. I begin with my reading of Badiou’s work on the subject, event and truth.

BADIOU

Badiou’s philosophical world is energised by a deep meditation on change and the new and I believe it has profound implications for considering pedagogical practices, particularly if we regard learning as a future-oriented process. My aim is to present a discussion of some key concepts that constitute the core of Badiou’s work and to show how they are helpful for developing pedagogical thinking. A crucial notion to bear in mind can be found in the title of the book *Being and Event* (2005a) in which the translator Oliver Feltham makes the point in his preface (ibid, p. xxxi) that the task is to ‘think being and event, not the being of an event or the event of being.’ This points to a disturbance of being in the form of an event in the immanence of practice, it signals a fracturing of being through an event which I argue constitutes real learning. This signifier ‘and’ represents the place of the subject, a subject in the process of change. Feltham remarks that the subject is ‘the one who unfolds new structures of being and thus writes the event into being’ (ibid, xxxi). The task of this book is to take these ideas of change and the new and apply them to the worlds of teaching and learning, in other words to contextualise these abstract ideas in pedagogical practice.

For Badiou the idea of multiplicity is primary it is what is before any kind of symbolisation and he terms this pre-symbolic multiplicity inconsistent multiplicity. Any attempt to provide an order upon such multiplicity is an operation which Badiou names ‘a count’ that produces a consistent multiplicity and all that can be presented as knowledge are the productions of such counts. To put this in more practical terms; what we refer to commonly as ‘the creative process’ is multiple and cannot be accessed in-itself but we try to comprehend this process through a series of discourses which, in Badiou’s terminology, consist of a series of ‘counts’ that is to say ways of ordering our thoughts about the creative process.

A situation (or world) consists of a presented multiplicity; it is a multiple which is composed of an infinity of elements each one of which is itself a multiple (ibid, p. 25). It can be viewed as an open set, a set with an infinite number of elements. It consists of all there is in a particular situation such as a classroom, a riot, a work of art, a sports event, a school curriculum, a supermarket, and so on. Each situation has a structuring principle which determines what belongs and what does not, or what appears and what does not. A further illustration to clarify inconsistent from consistent multiplicity may help with reference to Rothenberg (2010, p. 32). Imagine you are standing on a vast rubbish tip where it is impossible to distinguish anything at
all and this continues on and on in all directions, if you remove yourself then there
is now no reference point or means of orientation, no up, down, backward or forward,
no point from which to determine relations between things. This void resembles
Badiou’s inconsistent or pure multiplicity. Once a point of orientation is added then
structures, relations, positions, identities and differences can develop. This would be
analogous to Badiou’s consistent multiplicity. We can think of this as the difference
between pure being and existence which implies a being there in a particular world.

The state of a situation is a term Badiou employs to refer to the structuring
principle that determines a particular world. Badiou calls this the transcendental of a
world in his most recent book, Logics of Worlds (2009). It is concerned with the way
in which elements appear (or do not) and are organised or regulated in a situation.
Thus it constitutes a controlling device which defines the contents of a world. For
example, in educational practices the state of a situation or transcendental can be
viewed as the overarching principles and strategies that organise learners, teachers,
inspectors, the curriculum, assessment practices, examinations and so on. It is
therefore concerned with how such parts and the space of Education are configured.
There are always within a situation parts that are inexistent, that are present but not
recognised. Thus the state (transcendental) is not concerned with elements or
individuals as such but with parts or categories or groupings and it exerts a particular
order to these groupings according to the dominant group or ideology. As Hallward
(2003, p. 97), suggests, in order to derive a clear view of the ‘intrinsic’ presented
elements or individuals in a situation, if this is indeed possible, then the place to
begin is with the state’s classificatory or grouping procedures of representation.

As well as referring to the classificatory use of the term state, ‘state’ also refers
to the local ontological positions and relations of those present in a situation and this
will include those recognised by established representational and regulatory processes
as well as those who are not (indiscernible, excluded elements), or are in some way
marginalised by such processes. It is these indiscernible elements, from the point
of view of the structuring order (frameworks of knowledge and practice, regulatory
devices) that constitute a potential for rupture and change. For example, in political
contexts the indiscernible might refer to those excluded elements (asylum seekers,
immigrants, migrants, travellers and homeless, those who have fallen from view
or who are overlooked) who are present in a situation but are excluded or not
recognised by the state of a situation. In a sense they constitute a void in the
situation. I have already alluded in Chapter One to indiscernible or marginalised
elements in educational contexts such as learners from other cultures whose ways
of learning may not be recognised by dominant pedagogical orders (see also Moore
1999).

An event for Badiou is something that happens in a situation but cannot be
understood according to the current knowledge of a situation. Events tend to occur
in places of indiscernibility; such places are in the situation but not counted as part
of a situation.

The event is a category of that-which-is-not-being-qua-being inasmuch as its
structure forms a point of impossibility for the discourse of ontology (Feltham
An event is a site that has implications for the logics of appearance of its world (Ibid., p. 107).

The event involves an encounter; something has to happen which fractures our current ontological state; this is close to Lacan’s encounter with the Real. The event disrupts our modes of representation. Badiou (2001) writes:

To be faithful to an event is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by thinking... the situation ‘according to’ the event. And this, of course – since the event was excluded by all the regular laws of the situation – compels the subject to invent a new way of being and acting in the situation (p. 42).

A truth procedure follows from the interruption of an event and is reliant on a subject who becomes a subject through maintaining a fidelity to the radical consequences of the event: ‘A truth bores a hole in knowledge’ (Badiou 2005a, p. 525). For Badiou truth always transcends or is in excess of knowledge which is reliant upon veracity. The idea of truth is related to the idea of being truthful to something and this truth process denotes a process of subjectivization which in other terms can be viewed as a ‘commitment to.’ According to Hallward (ibid, p. xxvi) ‘I am, because I am (or we are) struggling (for a new society, a new art, a new scientific order, etc.).’ This idea of an ontological struggle is central to Badiou’s idea of subject, which arises only in moments of such struggle where we can be carried beyond our normal range of responses.

A truth is solely constituted by rupturing with the order which supports it, never as an effect of that order. I have named this type of rupture which opens up truths ‘the event’ (Badiou 2005a, p. xii).

The idea of the subject for Badiou involves a mysterious temporality within which the subject is in a situation but because it emerges through a truth procedure subsequent to an event, it is equally not part of a situation as structured by the state. This temporality, as mentioned earlier, is encapsulated in the idea of being and event. For Badiou then a subject is ‘a militant of truth,’ where the idea of militant is concerned with someone who opens up a new fields of enquiry (2005, p. xiii), it indicates a reconfiguring of local situations and life-worlds.

It is important, I believe, to acknowledge that the relation of event and truth has to involve an engaged subject, someone who believes in and is therefore able to perceive the event and its subsequent truth in their local situation and which leads to a reconfiguration of this space. Thus the event-truth relation is immanent to the functioning space of an engaged subject.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

In a short essay entitled Philosophy and its Desire (2005b, pp. 29–42) Badiou provides a brief overview of philosophical work during the 20th century, more expansive and complex accounts can be found in Being and Event (2005a) Logics of Worlds (2009) and The Century (2007). For Badiou, ‘philosophy is something like a logical
revolt,’ whereby, ‘it pits thought against injustice’ (2005b p. 29). This notion of ‘logical revolt’ is homologous in many ways to Badiou’s idea of the subject, who emerges through the epiphany of an event-truth procedure, a form of revolt, into a transformed situation. He outlines three philosophical orientations that he believes have dominated 20th Century philosophy. The first is hermeneutics (Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricouer) whose grounding concept is interpretation and is concerned with the search for how things (texts, actions, communications,) become meaningful within social contexts. The second is the analytic orientation whose origins lie in the Vienna Circle (Wittgenstein, Carnap) and which is concerned with what can be determined as meaningful according to agreed rules and conventions and what therefore cannot. The third is the postmodern or post-structural orientation (Derrida, Lyotard) which aims to deconstruct what are often termed ‘grand narratives’; those major conceptions, such as history, the historical subject, progress, humanity, and truth which are now redundant in a world of difference and a plurality of languages, thought and cultures that are unable to be totalised.

Badiou suggests that common to all three philosophical orientations are two major driving concerns. The first is that the classical idea of truth is now untenable. Hermeneutics replaces a search for truth with an inquiry into how things become meaningful. The analytic orientation considers the relation between utterances and legitimating rules, in Wittgenstein’s case, how specific language-games generate meaning through the use of language generated by particular forms of life. The post-structural orientation abandons the idea of universal truth for a polyvalence of meaning according to life-world contexts and the impossibility of achieving essentialist ideas of truth due to the endless play of signification which prevents any final resting place for truth.

The second major concern, almost implicit in the first, is the belief that language is the fundamental process through which meaning is formed, regulated and determined. For Badiou the 20th century moved from a philosophy once concerned with truth in earlier periods to one which is concerned with language and meaning. These two concerns, truth and language, will precipitate serious reactions in Badiou’s philosophical work which I will discuss and, more specifically, they are taken to task in his distinction between truth and knowledge and in his theorisation of the subject.

Badiou is seeking a reassessment of the idea of truth which he believes cannot be produced by a philosophy whose priority lies with a meditation on language and meaning. For him truth is a process of interruption, it is not associated with the idea of linguistic relativism, but with a singular-universal relation. It is also linked with a notion of the subject that maintains some sense of agency but not the sense assumed by the idea of an autonomous self-reflecting individual.

Everyone knows that the singular is always, in the final analysis, the true centre of any decision which counts, and that all truth is first presented in the form of the absolutely singular – as can be seen in scientific invention, artistic creation, political innovation or the encounter that comprises love. In every place where, in some way a truth is pronounced on existence, it is founded on a singularity (2005b, p. 40).
And further, already mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, in our precarious and crisis-ridden world, he argues that:

We do not fundamentally need a philosophy of the structure of things. We need a philosophy open to the irreducible singularity of what happens, a philosophy that can be fed and nourished by the surprise of the unexpected. Such a philosophy would then be a philosophy of the event (ibid, p. 41).

So he is arguing for a philosophical project based upon the unpredictability of an event combined with conceptual rigour and reason. Together a new theory of the subject is possible emerging from the contingency of the event that precipitates a subject of a truth procedure.

Badiou cannot accept, for example, the general social constructivist argument that the subject is a production of social or historical processes because such a view excludes the idea that, ‘it must be possible to think, in a world, what does not appear within that world (2009, p. 122)’. Put another way, constructivist theories of the subject fail to take into account the event and truth. Badiou puts this in the form of what he terms the materialist dialectic:

There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths (ibid, p. 4).

He is fundamentally opposed to theories of the subject which rely entirely upon established bodies of knowledge and practice or categories of thought, established ideas concerning identity, established codes of moral conduct. In other words he is opposed to theories of the subject that rely upon the bounds of human knowledge. His opposition, generally speaking, stems from his idea that the subject is constituted both within a situation and its knowledge frameworks and practices but also beyond these frameworks in fidelity to a truth procedure following an event which has the potential to transform or reconfigure the existing frameworks of knowledge and practice. There is something about the subject which can be considered as that-which-is-not-yet (see Ethics, 2001) as though it occupies a strange temporality, suggested by the title of Being and Event. Equally in believing that truth exceeds knowledge Badiou opposes social constructivist theory that emphasises language over being or meaning over truth (see Coward and Ellis 1977).

Truth, subject and event are all aspects of a single process: a truth comes into being through the subjects who proclaim it and, in doing so, constitute themselves as subjects in their fidelity to the event (Hallward 2003, p. xxvi)

This is the crux of Badiou’s position vis a vis his rejection of the constructivist position of language as the fundamental ground of the subject as declared, for example, by the notion of the discursive subject. In such theory the subject is always already subjected to an existing structure, or count, or a version of resistance to it and this fails to account for the possibility of events and truths, as formulated by Badiou, and thus for a notion of the subject as an exception, as ‘a local configuration of a generic procedure through which a truth is sustained (2005a, p. 429).’

The turn to ontology provides philosophy with an opportunity for a more creative exploration of being and those processes that effect the emergence of the new
which in turn transform ontological (and epistemological) coordinates. In order to
do this Badiou suggests that there are four domains of knowledge and practice each
possessing their distinctive forms of enquiry and upon which philosophy depends,
as its conditions, for reflecting upon how conceptual, ethical and practical change
happens. These domains or conditions of knowledge are: politics, art, science and
love. His philosophical project is therefore to consider how the radically new emerges
in relation to each domain.

In passing, Easthope’s (2002, p. 150) point that Derrida’s (often viewed as a post-
structural philosopher) opposition to the notion of subjects with predicates does
have some correspondence with Badiou’s notion of subject even if not being fully
commensurate. Here the argument is that if we presuppose a particular idea of
the subject then we are assuming a particular epistemology and ontology which, by
implication, establishes a fixed idea of the subject. This suggests that, ‘you have
closed off the horizon of what it might mean to be human (ibid., p. 150).’ Applied to
pedagogical contexts we might raise similar issues, for example, what might it
mean to be a teacher or learner, to teach or to learn? What predicates of teachers
and learners are presupposed by particular pedagogies?

The idea of excess is important, that which is present but not yet available or
apparent but which, nevertheless, functions as an attractor to pass into a new space
which is beyond the limits of current knowledge. We will see how this point is homo-
logous to Badiou’s idea of the relation between being and event and in
pedagogical terms the idea of real learning where a learner passes beyond his or
her current limits of practice and comprehension into a new ontological
framework for learning. The idea of excess is homologous to Badiou’s theory of
the subject whereby the subject is conceived as existing within a particular situation
but also in excess of the situation as it becomes constituted through a truth procedure
which is indiscernible according to the existing knowledge of a situation.

CHANGE AND SOCIAL ORDERS

Badiou is concerned with issues of belonging and inclusion implicit to which is the
notion of excess and these ideas can be applied to social contexts. Thus for example
(Norris 2009, p. 7) we can consider the relational position of excluded or marginalised
groups (asylum seekers, travellers, migrants,) to the existing state or institutional
frameworks of liberal democracies which broadcast their belief in equality, inclusion,
social justice, human rights. The gap or deficit between the liberal democratic mani-
festo and marginalised or excluded groups forms the potential for a politics of radical
democracy to emerge because, in a manner of speaking, it is within this gap that
those on the margins may be able to challenge the existing social order. Put in another
way it is at such points that the excess to the prevailing order might challenge the
latter and this could then lead to a transformation of the social order itself. Within
liberal democratic educational contexts and their agendas concerning ‘every child
matters,’ or ‘no child left behind’ we might ask, are all learners really included and
supported in such agendas or are there still some who are left on the margins?

Badiou terms such points the eventual site in that this is the location where events
occur quite unpredictably and whose consequences could radically transform the
pre-existing social ontology. In a political context, when Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama, refused to vacate her seat for a white passenger, she precipitated the Montgomery Bus Boycott and fuelled public resistance as part of the Civil Rights Movement against racial segregation. Though she was not the first to take such action, in her particular case her action sparked public resistance that led to social change through the Civil Rights movement, whose truth is still in process.

Badiou’s terms of inconsistent multiplicity and consistent multiplicity are relevant here (2005a p. 25). As described earlier, inconsistent multiplicity refers to being, meaning simply all that there is, all that exists, without imposing any kind of order. Consistent multiplicity arises when inconsistent multiplicity is given some form of order, or in Badiou’s terminology, a count-for-one. Thus ontological orders are consistent multiplicities in that they establish particular frameworks for existence, they allow particular ‘beings’ to appear and establish degrees of appearance, but the important point is that even within such frameworks there is always an excess of inconsistent multiplicity, in other words an excess of that which lies beyond, which is not recognised or fails to appear as existing within particular ontological frameworks. These points of excess, or void points, can be viewed as potential evental sites where events precipitate local truth procedures. Thus truth is that which exceeds the knowledge of a given situation.

A classroom, a sports audience, a shopping centre, and so on, can be viewed as a consistent multiplicity. They become such through the structuring devices (practices, discourses, rituals) that constitute each site and facilitate particular kinds of appearing from intense appearing to non-appearance. Here I am thinking of the kinds of discourses and practices that are employed within pedagogical sites: classrooms, art galleries, museums, art schools, universities, through which both teachers/facilitators and learners are recognised and in which they appear, in various degrees, or become visible as facilitators or learners.

If we consider the event of Duchamp (which is not the individual but the singularity of the practice and its subsequent consequences), we might say that what happened was part of a historical situation in the world of art practice but it was not at the time recognised as belonging to the situation. Thus the Duchamp event seems to occur in a void space, a space of excess within a situation. And the consequences of the Duchamp event, its truth procedure faithful to the event, followed under the name and various developments of conceptual art.

My intention in this book is to apply these ideas from Badiou to pedagogical contexts and to try to consider events of learning which, within the localised situations of learners, arise but then leap beyond into a new ontological state of learning. I have already provided some examples of this leap in the preceding chapter.

THE OBSTACLE OF AUDIT

One major obstacle to trying to think in this way about pedagogical processes is the devastating effect of management, audit and inspection discourses and practices which can only function and make sense within established bodies of knowledge and practices. This point is echoed by many educators; for example, in a recent
interview Jon Thompson speaking about the reasons why teaching in art schools in the UK has changed dramatically for the worse states:

I’d have to say that it is the mechanisms of academic surveillance and control that have completely destroyed what was best in it. There is no trust any more between the different levels. They call it quality control, but really it’s a form of policing (Interview with Jon Thompson, in Reardon 2009 p. 342).

He insists that the really beneficial experience between the artist and the art student in art schools is severely curtailed nowadays due to the exponential increase in bureaucracy and the documentation required for surveillance bodies. The pernicious problem with audit and control is that it tends to predicate what practice is or should be and that is corrosive because it perpetuates a kind of consensus, whereas art practice, if it means anything, is much more concerned with dissensus, with negation and renewal. The suffocating effect of audit highlighted by Thompson is no stranger to the context of school art education and other subject disciplines.

How then can we configure the relation between being and event? How is it possible for events, in Badiou’s terms, to occur without acknowledging some prior established ontological ground from which they emerge? How is it possible to think pedagogically about how thought can surpass and then redefine its ontological parameters? Is it possible to develop pedagogies around such ideas: pedagogies against the state or pedagogies of the event? Again Thompson in the same interview provides a very brief hint:

Art is about chance-taking; about holding certainty at bay long enough to discover something. You have to feel that you are risking something when you start a work. It may be a miniscule risk, but still a risk. You’re trying to do something that you haven’t quite managed to do before, or you haven’t tried before… an idea, a move that you don’t know is viable. The only way that you can ever know whether it is a sound move is by carrying it through to completion (ibid., p. 349).

This quote from Thompson takes us back to the student with the caged heart in the preceding chapter and her desire to persevere with her idea without knowing if it was viable. His comment also resonates with the painting practice of Luca as he experiments and ‘plays’ with the medium of paint as well as using paint for a variety of narrative and expressive functions. In both practices there is an element of risk and experimentation, a state of not-knowing coupled with a perseverance to act. In many ways I suspect that Thompson, without wishing to misrepresent him, in aligning art as chance-taking and risk resonates with Badiou’s ideas on truth.

SUBJECTIVIZATION AND LEARNING

For Badiou subjectivization emerges from the consequences of an event, which is not part of a situation nor its epistemic framework, but it is also connected to the situation as it were before the event and its subsequent truth process. Thus subjectivization involves both the temporality of a present situation as well as the
temporality of the future, that-which-is-not-yet (for that which will always have been).
This is a bit tricky, but important. Badiou refers to Lacan’s writing on the subject in terms of a future anterior (see Hallward, note 57, p. 375).

What is realised in my history is not the definite past of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming (Lacan 1977, p. 86).

This describes the process of subjectivization neither in terms of past events since they do not exist nor in terms of a distillation of past events in the present, but as an endless open process in which the subject interprets his or her past through the future of becoming, which in turn retrospectively changes the past.

This is a bit like a learner in a real learning process persevering with a line of enquiry without knowing where it is going but which when undertaken eventually changes the horizon of the learner and her situation as well as the view of the past situation of the learner. It is the event of learning and a subsequent perseverance with its line of enquiry, its line of flight, which constitutes the subject in the future anterior. To repeat, the subject is neither a production of the past, nor, a distillation of the past in the present but a retrospective view of the past from the future of becoming.

We might see the intervention of real learning as bringing into light the limitations of current ‘ways of thinking’ (epistemological frameworks) and, through a process of testing out, experimenting, risking, keeping faith with an unclear pathway, gradually transforming the learner’s horizon. The subject is thus a combination of persistence and chance that leads to testing new encounters and insights. For example, drawing may become a new process for a learner as a consequence of an event in a drawing process that transforms the learner’s comprehension and practice. This would involve a process of testing and experimenting as a consequence of a disturbance through which new possibilities for drawing emerge over a period of time. The disturbance or event, out of the blue, might occur, for example, when the learner is confronted with a ‘problem of representation’ which her current skills, ways of conceiving, cannot resolve and this disturbance results in a determined perseverance to find a resolution, which in turn projects the learner-as-subject and the situation of drawing into a transformed ontological state.

A LOCAL EVENT OF LEARNING

Although Badiou refers to radical events that have major impact upon their domains (Schoenberg, Cantor, Galileo) I believe his work has relevance for more localised or shall we say less prominent spaces (but not for the learner) of learning where an event is an event of real learning through which a subject-as-learner emerges and is transformed, even though for others beyond this local space this particular local event is not an event and would not be considered as an event by Badiou. Thus Real learning is akin to a wager combined with a rigorous and determined perseverance even though outcomes are uncertain. Badiou’s notion of subject seems to indicate a difference between what we might term ordinary individuals and subjects, which is
a distinction between existence, defined by a counted presence in a situation, and
inexistence which is that strange temporality consequent to an event-truth process
through which a subject (real learner) emerges.

Perhaps a brief account of what I mean by a local event, truth and subjectivization
in a classroom situation would help here. Some years ago I was observing a student
teacher introduce a lesson on portraits to a class of 14 year old students. I was
positioned away from and behind the student so as not to be too conspicuous.
He had prepared a range of visual aids from different historical periods. During
his introduction he became very uncertain and seemed to ‘lose the plot’, he was
noticeably disturbed, and I thought he might not be able to proceed. However his
students continued to listen politely and made no attempt to take advantage. He
managed to retrieve his composure to continue and the students began their paintings.
Immediately after his introduction to the lesson he approached me and apologised
for his introduction but I couldn’t fathom what had occurred.

What happened for this student teacher was a real disturbance which, in retrospect,
had a significant effect upon his future teaching. To be brief, although he had made
great efforts to plan his lesson by providing good visual aids, when he was in the
process of introducing these to his class he realised that all his images were portraits
of white ‘western’ people whilst half of his class consisted of black pupils from the
UK and other parts of the world. For this student teacher this disturbing event had a
dramatic effect upon his future teaching. It could be argued of course that he should
have made provision for the cultural or racial mix of his class when preparing his
lesson; this class was not new to him. But the crucial point is that, for this teacher
in this particular context, this unanticipated event and its consequences, which were
grasped by the student teacher, triggered an intervention to which he remained faithful
and so changed his approach to future teaching. In Badiou’s terminology he followed
a truth procedure becoming a subject that led to a new ontological state of practice.
It is this activity of grasping the unpredictable event and following its consequences
through a series of inquiries, questions and decisions that brings about a new situation.
Of course it is often the case that such interventions and subsequent enquiries fail.
But for this student in his momentary state of uncertainty, this temporary ontological
vacuum, the event laid bare the existing parameters of his teaching, as though he
could see the limitations of his teaching and then take action to create a more
effective practice.

This purely contingent event precipitated radical effects upon the teacher; the event
opened a gap in his pedagogical situation which forced him to reconfigure his
future teaching. In this teaching situation the event revealed the inexistent (the black
pupils) who were absent (unintentionally) within the ideological parameters of
‘teaching portraits,’ as the student prepared his lesson; in these particular epistemo-
logical parameters black people did not exist. On one level the student’s practice saw
these pupils but on another it did not recognise them. There was no intention to
exclude these learners when planning his lesson but within his symbolic framing of
‘portraits’ they were excluded. We might argue that the direct universal consequence
of this pedagogic event for this student-teacher was that learners are neither black
nor white.
Here, in this brief classroom incident, we might see the distinction between the ‘state of a situation’ for the student teacher, his established knowledge frameworks and procedures which form a consistent multiplicity, and the ‘being of a situation’ which contains elements, inexistent, that are not part of these frameworks and which therefore form an excess that has the potential to constitute an evental site.

The interesting point about this incident and for teaching and learning generally is the difference in the ontologies of action, before, during and after the event; before in the existing situation, during the disruptive force of the event and after in the truth procedure leading to a new situation and a new subject. The teacher’s framing of being in a classroom that creates or imposes a consistent multiplicity of existence brought about by structuring devices such as pedagogy, curriculum frameworks, assessment and examination discourses and so on, is punctured by the inconsistent multiplicity or excess that lies beyond such framing and leads to a new distribution of existence.

I think it is useful therefore, with the risk of perversion, to take Badiou’s idea of a truth event and apply it to less exceptional (but not for those involved) happenings in the context of teaching and learning. If real learning can be viewed as a problem of existence then these ideas of truth, event and subjectivation seem insightful for thinking about the relation between law and desire in learning processes. How is it possible to adopt a pedagogy of the event in order to encourage and support a subject of truth in learning? A pedagogy of the event is concerned with moving beyond the law (state) of a situation, precipitated by a desire for new states of existence; a desire of learning is a desire for new states of existence.

TRUTH, SUBTRACTIVE ONTOLOGY AND EXCESSIVE SUBJECT

A truth is a concrete process that starts by an upheaval (an encounter, general revolt, a surprising new invention) and develops a fidelity to the novelty thus experimented. A truth is the subjective development of that which is at once both new and universal. New: that which is unforeseen by the order of creation. Universal: that which can interest, rightly, every human individual according to his pure humanity (which I call generic humanity). To become a subject (and not remain a simple human animal) is to participate in the coming into being of a universal novelty. That requires effort, endurance, sometimes self-denial. (Badiou 2002)

Badiou’s ideas of event and truth can be viewed in relation to a subtractive ontology and an excessive subject. His concern with such spaces of ‘immanent exception’ (Hallward 2003, p. 162) is with the way in which they precipitate change. The term subtractive ontology designates that which is present in a situation but is not counted, the excluded element or indiscernible which is there but not recognised. Badiou’s approach to philosophy centres on this element which has the potential to disrupt or negate the existing ontological and epistemological structures and reconfigure them. The term subtraction is commensurate with negation and so Badiou’s philosophical enterprise is concerned with the negation of existing ontological orders through that which is not counted in a situation but which has the potential to disrupt the existing
count, forms of recognition or parameters of appearance. If we return to the drawings of a chair discussed earlier, the drawing that was completely ignored by the pedagogical discourse could be said not to exist within such discourse, or to have a minimal level of appearance. In order for this drawing to gain more recognition and value then the logic of appearance governing the discourse would have to be transformed which in a sense would mean a transformation in how drawing as a practice is understood.

The notion of excessive subject springs out of a subtractive ontology in that the subject, in Badiou’s theory, is more than that already established within existing social frameworks, more than what appears in such frameworks. In a local context, such as the one described above concerning the painting lesson, we can interpret the disruption to the student teacher’s situation as an event that led to a truth process in which the student saw the limitations of his practice and was able to move into a new subject position in excess of his previous ontological state. For Badiou, ‘truths have no substantial existence (2009, p. 5),’ but they do have finite subject points. So Badiou works with an idea of truth relating to the notion of excess. Badiou’s book, *Logics of Worlds* is based upon the key premise already mentioned: ‘There are bodies and there are languages except that there are truths,’ and it is in the key term ‘except’ that the excess of truth from existing knowledge is signified.

**APPEARANCE AND TRANSCENDENTAL**

In *Logics of Worlds* Badiou provides a detailed and complex discussion of the notion of appearing. The idea of appearance is governed by a transcendental which establishes a logic of recognition of objects in a world and, by implication, what cannot be recognised or has minimal recognition. For Badiou appearance is a category of existence.

It is crucial to remember that existence is not as such a category of being, but a category of appearing; a being only exists according to its being-there. And this existence is that of a degree of existence, situated between inexistence and absolute existence. Existence is both a logical and intensive concept (ibid., p. 269).

A transcendental represents a framing device according to which a world is organised and which allows certain things to appear in degrees of appearance. So, for example, we might consider assessment criteria, which will be discussed in Chapter Six, as constituting the transcendental of the world of assessment practice so that work that is being assessed is attributed certain degrees of appearance. In other words the parameters of assessment allow certain objects and subjects to appear whilst others may register only very weakly within these parameters. Equally we might consider a world of practice such as art, science or mathematics within which certain forms of behaviour or procedure establish the parameters of each world. For example, the world of art practice, according to Wright (2008) consists of three major assumptions, the artist, the object and the spectator. In mathematics the world of Euclidean geometry allows certain procedures and objects to appear according to specific logics.
To summarise then, for Badiou a truth is concerned with something that happens, it is rooted in practice. The terms subject and truth are indicative of the same process, they are inter-changeable with each other:

Every truth pushes the subject into the realm of the untried, and for that reason, “tries” (is the trial) of the subject. Or again: every subject “believes something without knowing why (Hallward 2003, p. xxv).”

Truth for Badiou is infinite, it is enduring and cannot be totalised but it can be manifested through local instances in which people emerge as subjects (subject points). Truth surpasses knowledge; it is a local process in a situation which establishes its own conditions of verification as it proceeds. Truth produces its own integrity. Hallward (ibid, p. 154) makes the point that although we make the truth it is, ‘precisely as something that exceeds our knowing.’ A truth procedure, as we have already stated, emerges from an indiscernible element in a situation, something happens and simultaneously reveals the limits of the existing situation as well as a hint of the inconsistency on which the situation exists. My account of the student teacher taking a lesson on portrait painting was given to demonstrate these points.

TRUTH AND PEDAGOGY

If we subscribe to Badiou’s idea on truth then the truth of pedagogy cannot be situated entirely within pedagogical discourses that advocate social and cultural reproduction, the idea that learners need to be inducted into valued and established forms of knowledge and practice before they ‘can think for themselves.’ Nor can it be situated entirely within a critical paradigm that provides learners with critical facilities to interrogate their social, cultural and political worlds (hooks (1994), Giroux & McLaren (1989), Friere (1972), Apple (1990)). In art educational sites the development of visual cultures has developed this critical perspective (see Duncum (2006), Freedman (2003)). Each of these two approaches to pedagogy would not fit with Badiou’s idea of truth because they are already situated within existing knowledge frameworks; reproductive and critical.

Another approach, which has some correspondence with Badiou’s writing on truth, relates to the pursuit of the truth of learning by which learners take on board and ‘personalise’ or ‘subjectivise’ the content of learning in novel ways through exploration and an immanent critical practice. This may lead to new subjects (in contrast to surrogate subjects), new ontological orientations to learning and the fracturing of traditional values and skills. Here the truth of learning is not attained through existing forms of knowledge or practice (reproductive or critical) but through a fracturing of these and the forming or reconfiguring of knowledge and practice in local contexts. If we remain ensconced within a reproductive regime then we may fail to support and facilitate alternative learning practices that remain obscure from the perspective of this regime.

In this approach to pedagogy a new ‘count for one’ has the potential to emerge for a learner within his/her world in a newly extended situation where ‘old’ or previous objects of learning are transformed retrospectively and involve a new function in
the newly perceived and conceived situation. Similarly, for the teacher, previous pedagogical objects, ‘learner,’ ‘ability,’ ‘assessment,’ can be transformed in a new functioning context where they are perceived and conceived differently and have a new function because pedagogy itself is transformed.

RANCIERE, PEDAGOGY AND EQUALITY

In the final section of this chapter I turn to the work of Jacques Ranciere that is concerned with pedagogy and the idea of equality; this work has important implications for conceiving pedagogic subjects and programmes. There are some similarities between Ranciere’s work on politics and Badiou’s notions of truth and subjectivization, particularly in relation to the ideas of the excluded element, the indiscernible within a situation or what Ranciere terms ‘that part of no part’. For Badiou these elements form the place of the evental site whilst for Ranciere (1999) they constitute a place of politics as he understands this term, they locate a wrong which has the potential for dissensus and political action. Before I discuss Ranciere’s writing on pedagogy and equality I will give a brief outline of key concepts that run throughout his work.

His general emancipatory project is concerned with disrupting the distribution of the sensible within social sites whereby particular groups or individuals are marginalised, have suffered a wrong or have no place from which to speak. They are held in their place by the ‘police’ order of the distribution of the sensible. Ranciere (2004) uses the term distribution of the sensible to refer to a ‘system of divisions and boundaries that define among other things what is visible and audible in a particular aesthetico-political regime (ibid, p. 1)’. A distribution of the sensible is concerned with the organisation and legitimating of ways of doing, saying and seeing in particular social contexts. With this notion he is seeking to explore the ways in which social communities are formatted; how this formatting regulates and defines social spaces and positions; who is able to participate within this particular formatting and who is not; what parts individuals play according to the format of particular communities. The term formatting, although not used by Ranciere, indicates that the distribution of the sensible possesses an aesthetic dimension. He argues that there is an aesthetics at the core of politics (ibid, p. 13) and he is employing this term to suggest a particular circumscription of space and time of the visible and the invisible that determines the place and issues of politics as a form of experience (ibid, p. 13). Thus for Ranciere the distribution of the sensible concerns the particular formatting of the visible and the discursive spaces in a community and who has a legitimate position prescribed and inscribed by such formatting.

This enquiry is close to the work of Foucault and his concepts of regulation, surveillance, normalisation and power. The police order consists of a specific organisation of the distribution of the sensible, which establishes social groupings, positions and functions; immanent to this distribution is an aesthetic division between that which is recognised and that which is not in the forms of the visible, discursive, affective, and so on. The police order thus determines which bodies and groupings are visible or invisible, it establishes a coefficient of visibility.
The police is, essentially, the law, which, generally implicit, defines a party’s share or lack of it. But to define this, one must first define the configuration of the perceptible in which one or the other is inscribed. The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another is noise (Ranciere 1999, p. 29).

Ranciere uses the term ‘politics’ not to refer to more conventional understandings of the manoeuvrings of political parties; the continuous bickering and posturing between government and opposition. For Ranciere politics refers to a challenge, driven by an issue of equality, and levelled against the established police orders of identification and classification, it is a process of emancipation, a process of subjectivization (according to a particular cause or identity) in which subjects confront the police order. Politics happens through specific actions, under the banner of equality, which attempt to reconfigure the distribution of the sensible (see Ranciere, 2004, p. 90) but political subjects are always on the margins of a distribution. This is because once a specific distribution of the sensible is established it invokes a policing of its order and so any challenge to this order in the form of the political will exist in the margins. Politics is therefore driven by a state of dissensus in contrast to the consensus of the police order. As a practice politics is relational and interventionary.

Politics in its strict sense never presupposes a reified subject (learner/teacher) or predefined group of individuals such as the proletariat, the poor, or minorities. On the contrary, the only possible subject of politics is the people or the demos, i.e. the supplementary part of every account of the population. Those who have no name, who remain invisible and inaudible, can only penetrate the police order via a mode of subjectivization that transforms the aesthetic coordinates of the community by implementing the universal presupposition of politics: we are all equal (2004 p. 3, my bracket).

For Ranciere the term ‘democracy’ precisely defines these intermittent and random acts of subjectivization to a specific cause through which a challenge to the police order brings about a reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible. In some ways this seems close to Badiou’s notion of a truth procedure leading from an event which changes the organisation of a world or situation.

In his pedagogical work, particularly in The Ignorant Schoolmaster (1991), the notion of equality forms a pivotal premise for pedagogical action. In this book Ranciere presents a disruption of traditional didactic relations between teacher and learner or between learners themselves that assumes an inequality of intelligence. He describes how Joseph Jacotot, a nineteenth century teacher developed a method of teaching that did not depend upon explication but upon heuristic principles and the axiom of equality of intelligence. He had experienced what might be termed progressive approaches to pedagogy whilst teaching in universities in France but when exiled after the restoration of the monarchy in the 1820s he took a teaching
post at the University of Leuven. His experience in this post could be described as a personal epiphany. He had no Flemish and his students spoke very little French. He gave them a bilingual edition of Fenelon’s _Telemaque_ and asked an interpreter to inform the students to read the book, referring constantly to the translation and reviewing what they had learned, and then to write an essay in French on what they thought of the book. He was astounded at the level of student’s work and the subsequent realisation that although he had done no teaching because he did not speak his students’ language nevertheless they had learned to read and write French. Hence the ignorant schoolmaster had somehow been able to facilitate students’ learning.

Ranciere does not view the relation of education to emancipation as one in which the latter is achieved through the acquisition of knowledge, a position which implicitly assumes inequality, where inequality is reduced as people become critically aware of the ways in which social realities are structured. (Indeed he is highly critical of social theorists who take on the mantle of ‘educating the lower classes’). Rather, he begins from an assumption of equality, an equality of intelligence, and then to try to verify it, a verification which he finds to be manifested in the Flemish students’ ability to learn French where he found that there was no link between teaching and the possession of knowledge. Here, as Pelletier (2009) argues the traditional notion of inequality upon which educational systems and pedagogical relations are established in order to remedy should not be grounded in the transfer of knowledge:

but by establishing a relationship of equality between master and students, between the one who demands that intelligence manifest itself and the other who develops his or her own intellect (ibid, p. 142–3).

Ranciere highlights a difficult issue regarding the function of the teacher if students, as Jacotot shows, are able to learn without having to rely upon the teacher’s explication of knowledge. Does our traditional understanding of the pedagogic relation perpetuate inequality? Does it maintain that epistemological distance between teacher and learner assumed in the idea if inequality?

...the pedagogic myth...divides the world into two. More specifically, it divides intelligence into two. It says there is an inferior intelligence and a superior intelligence (Ranciere 1987, p. 16, quoted in Pelletier p. 143).

The student thus tends to rely upon explication and this for Jacotot and for Ranciere creates the ‘stultifying effect’ of pedagogy (Pelletier 2009, p. 17). In contrast to this supposition of inequality in the pedagogical relation Jacotot (Ranciere) believes that we should begin from an equality of intelligence and then consider strategies for action and support in relation to this assumption. But this should not be seen as advocating a particular pedagogical method, rather as an approach to learning and teaching in which ontologies of learning (teaching) are materialised and legitimised and where a redistribution of knowledge, knowledge practices and discourses facilitates a more equal pedagogical enterprise in the sense that Pelletier (ibid., p. 148) terms, ‘performatively subjectification.’ This refers to Ranciere’s notion of politics as a disruption of the existing police order of education and pedagogy, whereby those learning practices which are not recognised, not represented, ‘come into light’, are ‘performed’
and thereby legitimated and in doing so reconfigure the distributions of knowledge practices, pedagogised subjects, assessment practices and so on.

In other words this is an issue of trying to detect how equality is denied by current structures and how, in contrast, inequality is legitimised. Thus we need to consider carefully how pedagogised subjects are formatted according to existing categories in which learners (teachers), for example, are construed as able, weak or under-achieving; how hierarchies of knowledge locate and position learners; that notions such as ‘inclusion’ (every child matters) are interrogated in relation to their ‘inclusive parameters’ and thus consequently what such parameters exclude due to their existing formatting of subjectivities and knowledge. It is hard to concede that current educational institutions such as schools and universities (as well as other educational sites) presuppose and perpetuate inequality in their pedagogical methods whilst simultaneously arguing passionately for equality (every child matters, no child left behind).

These concerns reflect the positing and positioning of presence: who is visible, who is able to speak, who is valued, and, in contrast, who is not, within contexts of educational policy, learning and teaching. Thus the notion of ‘performative subjectification’ indicates the coming to light of a particular individual or group according to a previously invisible or marginalised subjectivity, the performance of which then transforms the distribution of the sensible of a specific (pedagogical) community to embrace a more egalitarian (but never complete) distribution. Ranciere advocates the axiom of the equality of intelligence so that consequently everyone has the potential or equal capacity to perform a redistribution of the sensible in his or her worlds. Alternative distributions of the sensible are always possible.

Barbour (2010) discusses the similarities and differences between Badiou and Ranciere in their respective approaches to equality and politics and makes the intriguing suggestion that Badiou’s description of political action, which is close to Ranciere, could be legitimately applied to pedagogical programmes:

Organised in anticipation of surprises, diagonal to representations, experimenting with lacunae, accounting for infinite singularities, politics (pedagogy) is an active thought that is both subtle and dogged (Badiou 2005d, p. 77, my bracket).

As Barbour argues, a similar approach to pedagogic action could generate the possibility for real learning, the pursuit of truths through disruptions, uncertainties and eventual redistributions of learning.

If we take on board these ideas from Ranciere concerning the distribution of the sensible, police order and politics we can apply them productively to the world of education, teaching and learning. We can use these concepts as tools to interrogate the discursive formatting of teaching and learning and how this makes us construe these practices in specific ways, how this formatting makes visible such practices and how it ‘policing’ them. The idea of equality brings into play that which does not fit such formatting, that which according to the system has little meaning but which, through political action, or in Pelletier’s terms, ‘performative subjectification’, achieves recognition within a reconfigured formatting. If we follow Ranciere and view pedagogy, (in its widest sense as a productive social practice), through his conceptual analyses of the social, then we must accept the incompleteness of teaching
and learning and, by implication, their constant renewal or reconfiguration. In practical terms we have to accept that we do not know what teaching and learning are and that the multiplicity of these social practices are always more than we ever comprehend.

SUMMARY

Foucault’s work on subjection and power provides an incisive implement to expose social hegemonies, regulation and subjection in educational practices. His conceptions of surveillance or panoptic devices, normalisation and power-knowledge are useful tools to interrogate how pedagogised subjects are produced and controlled within educational policies, curriculum discourses and assessment practices. Butler demonstrates how these hegemonies and norms become internalised through persistent performance which in turn precipitates passionate attachments whose affect produces not only the subject but the trajectory of its desire. The subject is viewed as a fusion of social, psychic and affective forces but emphasis is placed upon the social distribution, integration and regulation of norms.

Lacan and Zizek both view the subject as a void, a point of lack which generates processes of desire and fantasy that structure the social reality and so create a framework through which we experience social reality as meaningful. So here the subject becomes a subject through plays of signification that produce ideological framings which appear ‘natural’ but which never actually complete the subject. For Lacan the subject is always lacking and constantly seeks the lost object, the object cause of desire. Putting this into a pedagogical contexts, the hole in being, theorised by Lacan, emerges when the symbolic framing fails to provide a stable or convincing picture of reality, as may be the case, for example, when our understanding of learning and practice is disrupted, when it fails to explain or comprehend a learner’s practice. Here the Real of the pedagogical relation interrupts the imaginary-symbolic framing of this relation and may lead to a more refined reframing or, alternatively, it may revert to a reactionary or perverse pedagogical position.

Badiou views the subject more in terms of excess, as a consequence of an event and perseverance with a truth process. This is not based on a fundamental lack inherent to the subject but a void in relation to knowledge, which has deep implications for teaching and learning in the sense of producing surrogate or militant learners and teachers. So for Badiou the subject emerges from a hole in knowledge, the state of a situation, which brings about a changed ontological status whereas for Lacan the subject is produced through an ontological lack, a hole in being. For Badiou the subject does not exist until after the event (which lies outside of established knowledge and representation), it is simultaneous in Badiou with the forcing or the fidelity to the truth of the event.

Badiou’s event leads to questions of existence, that is to say who is included within signifiers such as ‘citizen’, ‘learner’, teacher’, and thus who may be excluded or ‘in-existent’. This can be applied creatively to pedagogical contexts to consider their transcendental structures and how these exert particular forms and degrees of appearance of pedagogised subjects and practices. Lacan’s triad when applied to
social contexts of learning and teaching, can help us to see the effect of the Real of the signifier and its non-substantial ideological basis as constituting the frame through which we experience the world as consistent and meaningful (Zizek 1989 p. 123).

Ranciere’s conceptions of the distribution of the sensible, police, dissensus and equality equally provide us with theoretical tools for exploring the organisational frameworks and practices of educational sites and how these might be disrupted so as to develop more emancipatory paradigms of learning. However the notion of emancipation employed by Ranciere is not concerned with someone acting to emancipate another person, which presupposes an inequality in the pedagogical relation, but rather in terms of learning as self-emancipation by paying attention to what and how one learns. Ranciere is not proposing a particular pedagogical method, indeed his writings on education are opposed to such an idea, he is instead giving priority to supporting local processes of learning through which learners appear and are recognised as learners.

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In the remaining chapters of this book I will endeavour to apply these theoretical discussions on subjectivation, truth and equality to a series of issues in educational contexts that are concerned with practice, assessment, identity, culture and ethics. Though these issues are often unpacked and explored in the context of art in education I believe that they are relevant to wider fields of teaching and learning within all educational sites.