

**Juuso Tervo**

**Intimacy with a Stranger:  
Art, Education and the (Possible)  
Politics of Love**





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## **Editorial**

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Andrea Sabisch, Torsten Meyer, Heinrich Lüber, Eva Sturm

# **Kunstpädagogische Positionen**

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Herausgegeben von

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# **Intimacy with a Stranger: Art, Education and the (Possible) Politics of Love**



I'd like to start this paper by citing one of my favorite tracks by one of my favorite pop divas Beyoncé, that of *Halo* from 2008:

Remember those walls I built?  
Well, baby they're tumbling down  
And they didn't even put up a fight  
They didn't even make a sound  
I found a way to let you in  
But, I never really had a doubt  
Standing in the light of your halo  
I got my angel now

It's like I've been awakened  
Every rule I had you breakin'  
It's the risk that I'm taking  
I ain't never gonna shut you out!

Everywhere I'm looking now  
I'm surrounded by your embrace  
Baby, I can see your halo  
You know you're my saving grace  
You're everything I need and more  
It's written all over your face  
Baby, I can feel your halo  
Pray it won't fade away  
(Knowles, Tedder, & Bogart, 2008)

While this track is first and foremost a love song and intended to describe the sense of bliss that an affectionate relationship with one's true love feels like, I see that it (along with plethora of other love songs) offers intriguing analytics to approach the narrative of completion and building a sense of self that are deeply embedded in discourses concerning the social and societal tasks of art and education. After all, the idea that one surrenders to a transformative love (i.e. the walls that are tumbling down) that unites two previously separated beings comes very close to the transformative force of art and educa-

tion, at least how we as art educators tend to describe it. Here, I'm mainly referring to the connection between human development, art, and education, exemplified in passages such as this one from UNESCO from 2006:

Culture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual. Therefore, Arts Education is a universal human right, for all learners, including those who are often excluded from education, such as immigrants, cultural minority groups, and people with disabilities.

(UNESCO, 2006, p. 3)

The same argument, but in slightly different terms, can be found in National Art Education Association's (NAEA) slogans "Shaping Human Potential" and "You Gotta Have Art;" slogans that draw from the long tradition of humanist education in Europe and the United States. In these discourses, art is seen as a *natural* part of human condition (an argument put forward by writers like Ellen Dissanayake) that actualizes our potential for a *truly* human life. Since art is something that, as the argument goes, all humans have made everywhere at all times, our task as art educators is to connect our students to this *natural* activity. In this scheme, education plays a decisive role: it initiates the students not only to the world of art, but also to the very sense of self.

So, what does *love* have to do with this? Doesn't Beatles' famous maxim "All You Need Is Love" conflict with the idea that we need art and its education? Interestingly enough, it is apostle Paul in the Corinthians who may help us to negotiate this divide:

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only

in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

(Corinthians, 13:8-13, New Revised Standard Version, my emphasis)

For Paul, it is the tension between the finiteness of human lifespan (its prophesies, languages, and knowledge) and the infinity that follows its destructive completion (i.e. Pauline Messianism, “the partial that comes to an end,” the second coming of Christ) that, through a slight detour, offers an entry-way to the argument I will put forward throughout this paper: that is, that political, artistic, and educational thought that reduces our current practices into a narrative of future completion of a quasi-transcendental signifier (like *human*, *individual*, etc.) necessitates a similar plane of transcendental belonging that Paul assigns to *love as divine unity*: a mode of belonging that always comes and finds its common denominator. To put this shortly, everything comes back to the One (like in Neoplatonic Christian theology, to the transcendental God).

In our context, the completion of One denotes the completion of art education’s humanist project as the actualization of a proper human life through art and education. Throughout my (still forming) theoretical work, it is this specific narrative that I’ve tried to critically understand and it is one of the main reasons why I’m drawn into both love songs (even though it was never really my genre when I grew up) and religious texts (even though I’m not religious).

In this respect, the reason why I will use love songs as an integral part of my paper is that they function as an analytical strategy to push the narrative of completion to its extreme

and, most importantly, to point out the moments when the transformative force of love (or art, education, and politics) shows its excess, or in the words of Walter Benjamin, its *destructive character*. As for example the narrator in *Halo* who experiences the object of her love as “everything [she] need[s] and more,” the state of completion always involves an unknown character, a radical opening to the new. Isn’t this what we as art educators wish to achieve with our students? That is, that they open themselves to something that they didn’t even know existed and thus didn’t even know to look for? As Beyoncé asserts, we take a “risk” when we love (or learn) since the transformation it brings always involves a profound danger to the world as we know it.

So, how does this excess or destructive character help us to reread the need for art education, as articulated by UNESCO or NAEA? While this need seems to be ultimately tied to the future completion of humanness in all of us, the risk and danger of this very completion challenges us to establish a different approach to this unity: a new that does not have to be reducible to what preceded it, a unity that is something else than its mere parts. To take this argument further, love (and art, education, and politics) would not merely be a pathway to our true selves (that is, an affirmation of our particularity in a universal frame of belonging) but what Alain Badiou calls love’s “truth procedure” which is “the truth about Two: the truth that derives from difference as such” (Badiou, 2012, p. 38). From this perspective, the “love [that] never ends” would not be based on sameness (as Paul seems to have it) but on the very distance between two (or more) singularities (as lovers). The need for art education as an act of love would then be, a need without a clear beginning and end: a need that faces us with the very event of transformation that love, art, and education can put us through.

Here, we get to the passage from Giorgio Agamben that I’ve borrowed the title for this paper from:

### The Idea of Love

To live in an intimacy with a stranger, not in order to draw him closer or make him known, but rather to keep him strange, remote; unapparent – so unapparent that his name contains him entirely. And, even in discomfort, to be nothing else, day after day, than the ever open place, the unwaning light in which that one being, that thing, remains forever exposed and sealed off.

(Agamben, 1995, p. 61)

So, if we agree with Agamben that love denotes an intimacy with a stranger, an intimacy that puts us in a relation of infinite proximity and distance with ourselves and the thing we love (the “truth about two” in Badiou’s words); an intimacy that, as in Beyoncé’s *Halo*, is an all-encompassing embrace that nevertheless cannot be touched; what could this mean for us who are working with art, education and politics? And how does love work as an analytical category for us when talking about the need for art and its education today?

### Pedagogical Love

Today, to talk about love together with education may put us on the verge of a scandalous thought. While in everyday language, we might say that we love our teacher or we love our students, this discourse certainly has its limits: it is not the kind of love depicted in *Halo* and definitely not something that involves anything that lovers might do.

Nevertheless, we do know that historically these limits have been more or less fluid. In the Ancient Greece, *paiderastia* (“the love of boys”) was first and foremost a pedagogical relationship, in which love (*eros* in *erasthai*, in *paiderastia*) and leadership (*agein*, in *paidagagos*) between older man and a younger boy (*pais*, boy child as the common prefix in both of these words) were inseparable. While I’m not suggesting that this would be some kind of a genuine or original depiction of

education or love (the common danger of this kind of etymological examination), I see that it helps to set the ground for approaching the topic of intimacy (and its possible strangeness) in education.

Just to give a more recent example of the entwinement between love and education, let's look at Rufus Wainwright's song *Art Teacher* (2004; a song that many of my art educator friends seem to love), in which the narrator recounts her melancholic love to her former art teacher:

There I was in uniform  
Looking at the art teacher  
I was just a girl then;  
Never have I loved since then

He was not that much older than I was  
He had taken our class to the Metropolitan Museum  
He asked us what our favorite work of art was,  
But never could I tell it was him  
Oh, I wish I could tell him --  
Oh, I wish I could have told him

I looked at the Rubens and Rembrandts  
I liked the John Singer Sargents  
He told me he liked Turner  
Never have I turned since then  
No, never have I turned to any other man

All this having been said,  
I married an executive company head  
All this having been done, a Turner - I own one  
Here I am in this uniformish, pant-suit sort of thing,  
Thinking of the art teacher  
I was just a girl then;  
Never have I loved since then  
No, never have I loved any other man  
(Wainwright, 2004)

Here, we encounter quite a different narrative of love than we find from *Halo*. While the latter involves an ecstatic opening to the overwhelming light of love, Wainwright's song depicts a melancholic lack of the object of love, the art teacher. In contrast to the slogan "You Gotta Have Art," it is neither art nor education that the narrator seems to desire, but the art teacher who is, indeed, objectified as the narrator's favorite work of art. As art educators, this seems to get us off the hook: even though this song allows us to feel narcissistic enjoyment about the fact that someone is singing about us, we can also distance ourselves from the traumatic love that the narrator is stuck with. It's just a love song.

I, however, would still insist that *Art Teacher* provides useful narrative to talk about education as well. By lingering in her uniform, lingering in her impossible commitment, and lingering in her non-actualized potentiality to love, the narrator allows us to discuss both love and learning when they are still unfolding, that is, when they have started their work (they have created a fracture between the past and the future) without securing a clear point of completion.

Before going further with this thought, it is important to contextualize it vis-à-vis the historical tradition of pedagogical love that I already mentioned, that of, *paiderastia*. One of the most famous and intriguing discussions on love and education in the Greek Antiquity is Plato's *The Symposium* (the drinking party, what the term *symposium* actually means) that recounts various speeches on love by fellow partygoers, Socrates being one of them. The term that they are focusing on is *eros* (so, different than what Paul speaks about, which is *agape*), and it is here where we find Aristophanes' famous myth about the original state of human beings as spheres with two faces, four hands, four legs, etc. that Zeus split because their strength was threatening the Gods (leading humans to a situation where they're always looking for their other half). In terms of education, *The Symposium* offers not only a glimpse of a situation in which *paiderastia* sometimes took place (in *symposia*; other venues included *gymnasia*, where

physical activities in the nude were accompanied with education), but also involves an elaborate discussion on the pursuit of good life (*eudaimonia*) that, after all, is perhaps the *telos par excellence* of education as the development of self.

For my discussion here, it is this relationship between love and *eudaimonia* that we should keep in mind when talking about pedagogical love and its limits: that is, what is the right kind of education, what is the right kind of love. In *The Symposium*, Plato (speaking through the discussants) asserts that this right kind of love/education is love/education whose only goal is love/education itself; that is, love/education that cannot be reduced to its manifestations in singular activities or instrumental goals. This is most clearly expressed in Socrates' speech, which recounts his discussion with a wise woman Diotima, who states: "Love is the desire to possess the good always" (Plato, 2008, p. 43). Later she adds, "If the object of love is indeed everlasting possession of the good, as we have already agreed, it is immortality together with the good that must necessarily be desired. Hence it must follow that the object of love is also immortality." (p. 44) And, as we know, immortal and unchanging for Plato are ideal Forms that are distinguished from the material and perceptible world.

This is where love, education, and ethics come together. Let's look at how Diotima explains this connection:

"whenever someone starts to ascend from the things of this world through loving boys in the right way, and begins to discern that beauty, he is almost in reach of the goal. And the correct way for him to go, or be led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beautiful things in this world, and using these as steps, to climb ever upwards for the sake of that other beauty, going from one to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, and from beautiful bodies to beautiful practices, and from beautiful practices to beautiful kinds of knowledge, and from beautiful kinds of knowledge finally to that particular knowl-

edge which is knowledge solely of the beautiful itself, so that at last he may know what the beautiful itself really is. That is the life, my dear Socrates”, said the visitor from Mantinea [Diotima], “which most of all a human being should live, in the contemplation of beauty itself.” (pp. 49–50)

To live in the “contemplation of the beauty itself” by ascending from the “things of this world” to the abstract knowledge of eternal ideas means, for us, two things: firstly, that there is a clearly marked goal (*telos*) for love/education: a path from the particular to the universal, from the perceptible to the imperceptible, from the imperfect to perfect. Secondly, that this path, while having a specific *telos*, is never-ending: to live “in the contemplation” is to live in the irresolvable tension between time and eternity, between things of this world and the ideal Forms (this is, indeed, why Plato, in *Phaedo*, puts forward the idea that philosophy itself is a death rehearsal; that philosophers always have one foot in the grave since death is the only eternity allotted to mortals). It is this durative element of loving and learning that we ought to keep in mind when proceeding with my argument.

Coming closer to our time, Plato’s words informed progressive pedagogies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and helped to form an understanding of education beyond instrumental needs (like training for alienated factory labor). While in the United States, we could turn to John Dewey’s writings on education (c.f. Garrison, 2004), it makes more sense to discuss the German educational reformer Gustav Wyneken in the German context, who drew directly from *The Symposium* in his conceptualization of pedagogical love as *Pädagogischer Eros*. Wyneken, who was influential for the German Youth Movement (and especially to young Walter Benjamin) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was the leader of the German Free School Movement (*Freie Schulgemeinde*), positioned love at the center of his education reform against the authoritative education (and culture in general) of the time. He saw that education was to

be removed from the private realm of nuclear families as well as from the state-led public institutions and set up a system of boarding schools where students worked closely with their teachers and lived close to the nature. His interest in *paiderastia* was not merely theoretical, which is the reason why he was forced to resign as the head of Wickersdorf Free School in 1920, due to allegations of having sexual relationship with male students. While it was unclear what actually happened there, these events had understandably a strong negative influence in Wyneken's work and reputation as an educational thinker and teacher.

In his book *Eros*, which he wrote to defend his ideas after the trial, Wyneken claimed,

To be loved by the man he admires, to follow this man, to belong to him, to be allowed to share his life ... the man who understands his longings, the man to whom he can give his love because he feels love radiating from him, the man who opens his heart to him, who shares his life with him, who becomes for him the symbol of a higher, godly life.

(Wyneken, 1921, in Maasen, 1991, p. 51)

The idea of “higher, godly life” was, for him, what distinguished *paiderastia* from ‘mere’ homosexuality: the pedagogical love denoted intimacy that ultimately exceeded the bodily togetherness and manifested itself in knowledge that we should pursue (following Plato). Love, in other words, was an initiation to the knowledge beyond the immediate experience and true pedagogical love was based on man’s “‘leadership’ (*Führerschaft*) [that] represented spiritual beauty and wisdom, while the ‘disciplines’ or ‘followers’ (*Jüngertum, Gefolgschaft*) emanated the beauty of youth” (Maasen, 1991, p. 51). Pedagogical love was, then, a unification of two forces: the knowledge of the teacher who had been already initiated to the world beyond this world and the youthful force of the student who represented the new, the future in which true

learning will always actualize itself. This is why he saw that the allegations towards his practices subjected a “supreme and sacred youth experience” to a “[b]ourgeois ignorance [that] habitually combines the sexual classification or derivation of paiderastia with a value judgment: it is abnormal, thus something pathological, and therefore a human deficiency” (Wyneken, 1921, in Maasen, 1991, p. 56).

So, how do Plato and Wyneken help us to grasp the strangeness of intimacy that I put forward earlier? And what could Wainwright’s *Art Teacher* bring into this discussion?

Here, we should be careful. It would be easy to reduce the “truth about Two” that Badiou puts forward or Agamben’s notion of the intimacy with a stranger into the difference between the physical and the metaphysical (a Platonic and theological move *par excellence*). To go back to *Art Teacher*, the painful contemplation of love that the narrator lingers in does not offer any ladders to the world of ideas nor does it lead to self-development (a path toward *eudaimonia*): her uniform has changed only slightly; she still cannot love any other man. Does this mean that there is nothing pedagogical about this love? While Plato would certainly discard her as love (and, subsequently, education) as deeply instrumental (being, as it is, targeted toward the teacher as an object of art and not toward his knowledge), I see that Wyneken’s point about “ignorance” that pathologizes all deviations from the bourgeois moral code forces us to rethink why and how *Art Teacher* would be merely a love song. Indeed, by removing the educational perspective from our reading, aren’t we neglecting a truth about two that is certainly not about transcendental knowledge (like in Plato’s ladders), but about the very intimacy (and its limits) between two people?

Interestingly enough, the narrator in *Art Teacher* has a parallel character in *The Symposium*: Alcibiades, Socrates’ young and beautiful follower who rushes in to the drinking party just after Socrates is done with his speech. When he sees that Socrates is present, he sparks into an intense and drunken rant (mixed with love and hatred) concerning Socrates’ seeming

arrogance towards his feelings. While Alcibiades highly praises Socrates throughout his speech, it becomes clear that his anger and disappointment toward Socrates stems from the fact that Socrates has not responded to his love and admiration in the way that he wanted and imagined (for example, by having sex with him). He warns Agathon, one of the guests who is also seemingly fond of Socrates:

I am not the only one he has treated like this.  
Charmides, son of Glaucon, and Euthydemus, son  
of Diocles have suffered similarly, and so have many  
others. They have been deceived into thinking that he  
was their lover, but then have found that they were in  
love with him instead. So what I say to you, Agathon,  
is: don't you too be deceived by this man and like the  
fool in the proverb have to learn by your own bitter  
experience. Learn from us and beware.

(Plato, 2008, p. 62)

While Alcibiades' speech is often considered as an example of how Socrates himself embraced Platonic love (that is, confirming his commitment to the higher form of eros that he talks about), I see that it also represents a deep entanglement of love and education in which the very force of love/education is not reduced to a transcendental One as the true modality of its fulfillment. Like in *Art Teacher*, it is the time, not the goal, of love and learning that is at stake. The place where Alcibiades' anxiety leads to (again, as *agein* in *paidagogos* implies) is the very relation-as-difference itself: it disrupts the loving/learning subject (the walls that are tumbling down in *Halo*) as well as the very telos of her/his love/education. This opens up a temporality for love and learning that resists a future completion. Like in *Art Teacher* where the past and the present painfully coincide ("Oh, I wish I could tell him; Oh, I wish I could have told him"), loving/learning are halted to the very moment of their unfolding, which assigns them duration beyond linear progression and actualization of predetermined goals. From

this perspective, the “supreme and sacred youth experience” that Wyneken describes (in a deep commitment to Plato) can be understood as an experience of eros and education without clearly delineated goals. Thus, it is the very force of the experience as such that truly matters (even though his own writing hints the opposite: after all, he does talk about a genuine leadership toward a “higher, godly life;” again, due to his commitment to Plato).

In terms of intimacy and its strangeness, what I’m suggesting is that pedagogical love (depicted in *Art Teacher* as well as in Alcibiades’ speech) can offer us an example of a timeless time of love and learning without having to reside to a transcendental otherness as the genuine form of intimacy and belonging (as we find from Paul). This opens up a more secular approach to Plato’s ethical claims concerning a life committed to contemplation: to love and to learn is to occupy the event of transformation in which the One becomes Two (in contrast to Spice Girls’ famous line, “two become one”).

Going back to Badiou, his claim that “all love suggests a new experience of truth about what is to be two and not one” (Badiou, 2012, p. 39) involves this temporal aspect as well. For him, a great part of the “truth” of love is exactly its ability to introduce eternity within time: “love remains powerful, subjectively powerful: one of those rare experiences where, on the basis of chance inscribed in a moment, you attempt a declaration of eternity” (p. 48). Moreover, this is “hard work, namely a construction of eternity within time, of the experience of the Two, point by point” (p. 80). This *hard work* is not about participating in or belonging to some universal realm of truth (i.e. actualizing our humanness through art, love, or education) but rather consists of singular manifestations of this eternity between the Two (for Badiou, to say “I love you” is an example of this manifestation in speech).

So, what would this hard work of love mean for art educators? Even though my examples point to that direction, I’m not saying that we should push our students to a state of melancholic love that the narrator in *Art Teacher* and Alcibiades are experi-

encing or, alternatively, form erotic bonds with them (at least in the way that our bourgeois imaginary easily understands it). Rather than providing clear answers or educational programs, I see that this hard work of love forces us to keep the question of learning radically open. This is particularly important in times when student-centered learning has turned from a radical alternative into a form of neoliberal authoritarianism (a turn that, in Foucault's terms, is a turn from a disciplinary society to a society of control) that uses the indeterminate time of love and learning as part of the individualization and precarization of self-development.

An interesting example of this neoliberal appropriation of love and learning is a report titled “A land of people who love to learn” by the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra (2015) that proposes ten theses for rethinking the Finnish educational system. The tenth thesis is titled “Love cannot be measured but it can be seen,” in which they write,

New education is centred [sic] around the learner and his/her experiences. Love may not be easily quantifiable, but it is perceptible. The learner’s experience is the key indicator of success at all levels of education, from early childhood to adult education. All assessments must primarily be carried out from the perspective of the learner, not the teacher or the administration. It is the director’s task to create conditions in which learners will be able to identify their passions and strengths and find ways to use them. He or she coaches and serves a community of learners in which everyone learns from each other. Openness, listening to feedback and the inclusion of learners are essential in creating such a community. Learners are the heart of the community. Learning goals will be set together with the learners.

(Sitra, 2015, p. 14)

Positioning learners' passions, personal strengths, and individual experiences into the center of education blurs the boundary between life and education in a similar way as immaterial labor blurs the boundary between life and work. The intimacy of loving and learning is nothing but a survival strategy in a world where the risks of global capital are dispersed in the lives of individualized workers and consumers. Here, love becomes a form of self-control: a relation to oneself that requires self-knowledge, self-reflectivity, and continuous self-adjustment. To live one's life in the contemplation of the beautiful (as Plato suggested) becomes a series of projects that comprise the practice of control we call lifelong learning.

## **Love Without Limits, Politics Without a Program**

So, how to talk about this eternal time of love and education without falling back to the neoliberal mantra? How does it connect to the notion of *possible* (in parentheses) politics? In order to answer these questions, let's look at another love song, this time by one of the most famous disco groups of all time, Chic, and their song "At Last I Am Free" from their second studio album *C'est Chic* from 1978:

At last I am free  
I can hardly see in front of me  
I can hardly see in front of me  
At last I am free  
I can hardly see in front of me  
I can hardly see in front of me

I'm lonely, please listen to what I say  
I can't go on livin' life this way  
I've tried and I've tried, oh to make you see  
You call this love, all this lyin', my friend, it just can't be  
(Edwards & Rodgers, 1978)

Here, the narrator's freedom (as the outcome of some sort of an emancipation) is not tied to a liberating *ability* that leads her to a better future (as neoliberal flexibility has it), but, on the contrary, to inability: she can "hardly see" in front her; nothing seems to follow the actualization of her agency except murky darkness. Nevertheless, *she is free*. While it would be easy to read this song as narrative of giving up (that is, going back to the lover who has clearly treated the narrator badly; a failure of her agency), I see that it is the moment of blindness that helps us to approach the hard work of love that Badiou discusses apart from neoliberal flexibility. Indeed, it is work that seems to lead her nowhere; that is, one kind of non-pedagogy, non-agein. Indeed, what differentiates *At Last I Am Free* from *Halo* and *Art Teacher* is that it lacks a clearly marked object of love/desire that would provide a liberating sense of completion. Here, it is the excess of love (what Beyoncé described as "everything she wants and more) that takes up the central place in the narrative.

Philosopher and critical theorist Lauren Berlant addresses this issue in her short piece on intimacy when she asks, "[w]hat happens to the energy of attachment when it has no designated place? To the glances, gestures, encounters, collaborations, or fantasies that have no canon?" (Berlant, 1998, p. 285) In terms of the argument that I've been constructing throughout this paper, what we have here is an approach to love, attachment and, eventually, politics and education in which the tense of the narrative is in the present; in its very particularity. For example, while Unesco's claim that arts education is a "universal human right" because it leads to "the full development of the individual" may work well in our advocacy work for arts education in general, it also designates a specific temporality for our work: always toward the actualization of the One (the individual) in the Many (humans) in the future. It is true that this statement leaves the idea of a fully developed individual contested. Following Jacques Rancière (2004), having a universal Law (in this case, the idea of human rights) never prevents its contestation: on the contrary, since it is *always* ex-

clusionary, politics proper rises from the simultaneous appearance of the universal and its fundamental contingency (this is what Rancière calls *dissensus*). For him, politics is also an act in which the present is at stake.

However, Rancière does not help us to dig deeper into the undetermined duration of blindness that the narrator in *At Last I Am Free* points to. After all, her freedom constitutes neither continuity nor discontinuity in the sense that Rancière frames the difference between police and politics: her emancipation extends the time during which the attachment to what is or to what has been loses its “canon” (in Berlant’s terms) and its energy has nowhere to go (in Rancière, this event could be claimed as dis-identification, but only retrospectively). As in *Art Teacher*, this freedom *lingers* but without an object that could give it a specific form or name.

In a conversation with Michael Hardt published in *nomorepot-lucks* magazine, Berlant further elaborates her take on love in a way that helps us to draw some connections between different points that I’ve discussed earlier:

I often talk about love as one of the few places where people actually admit they want to become different. And so it’s like change without trauma, but it’s not change without instability. It’s change without guarantees, without knowing what the other side of it is, because it’s entering into relationality.

(Davis & Sarlin, 2011, para. 7)

Coming close to Badiou, both Berlant and Hardt argue that love has the power to disrupt sovereignty that is based on the power of One and that this disruption also reconfigures our relation to time. As Hardt puts it, “we always lose ourselves in love, but we lose ourselves in love in the way that has a duration, and is not simply rupture” (para. 5). In a seeming contrast to Unesco’s statement, Berlant talks about a need for a “political pedagogy that deals with incoherence” in which “the taking up of a position won’t be so that an individual can

be coherent, intentional, agentive, and encounter themselves through their object, but that there would be a way that situational clarity can be produced without negating the incoherence of the subject” (para. 16).

Let’s halt for a moment and see what we as art educators could take away from this. Firstly, what we have here is an understanding of politics that resists its reduction to linear time or to a clear program (that is, that politics has a clear beginning and a clear end). Politics, in other words, becomes a word for a transformation that happens *in time and occupies it*: it does not divide or constitute historical epochs (like the traditional idea of revolution has it), but introduces a radical contingency on our belonging in the present. Here, the One does not precede the Many (like the “prime mover” in Greek thought or God in Christianity) nor it is the outcome of the Many (like in Hobbes and other social contract theories), but rather the One becomes exposed to its inherent Many-ness (similar argument can be found from Karen Barad’s [2003] work on the ontology of physics and what she calls “*intra-actions*”).

Secondly, if we treat education as a political practice (which I suggest that we do), then the “*training in one’s own incoherence*” (para. 16) that Berlant discusses would mean that it is the event of learning *as such* that occupies the central role in educational thought; an event that cannot be reduced to its outcomes more than to a clearly defined origin. This is what Dennis Atkinson (2012) calls the *truth of learning* as an attempt to pay attention to the very immanence of pedagogy. Like with Badiou’s truth of Two, this immanence is not about individual or the social (both as quasi-metaphysical concepts that always come down to One), but about the Many. One could say, then, that taking the Many as the starting point for education and politics is a gesture of love akin to an intimacy with a stranger that Agamben suggests. This love is *blind* in a similar way than the narrator of *At Last I Am Free* experiences her freedom: rather than actualizing an agency that connects us to a predetermined way of acting in the world (canons, in Berlant’s words), it points to the multiplicity of forces that might not yet have a name.

While it may sound mystical to talk about the truth of learning and its event-ness, I wish to underline that, in the end, there is nothing mystical about it. *The force of learning takes place anyway.* As art educators, it is far too easy for us to think that our gesture of love is about handing down a freedom to our students, whether this was done in the name of individual self-expression (that is, letting students actualize their allegedly innate freedom) or social reconstruction (that is, empowering them to participate in the society as free individuals). This means that the force of learning becomes part of our narrative and our sense of self. Read through the theoretical framework I've put forward in this paper, a gesture of love as the truth of education would be something quite different: it would be about aligning ourselves with moments of transformation when the truth of One is called into question and the contingency of the present is graspable.

This is the reason why I decided to use the term *possible politics* (and put possible in parentheses) in the title of this paper. Contra Plato, I'm not giving suggestions on how to love (or learn) in a lasting way, but, following Berlant, embody and extend the very incoherence that education so often tries to annihilate. So, we're talking about possibilities; about sensing those events of transformation but not solidifying them as clearly marked paths toward a future.

This leads me to a few final words about art (a topic that I have not yet discussed). While I abstain myself from positioning art at the center of the aforementioned promise of love and its possible politics (after all, that's what we art educators often love to do; that is, argue that art provides an exit from the problems we've identified), I think it's important to map some possible directions where this investigation might lead us (again, keeping with the theme of pedagogy as an act of leading).

When talking about incoherence and unpredictability in relation to art, I see that we are approaching perplexing grounds. True: in a world where project-based practices, risk analyses, and pre-determined outcomes are the rule, it is empowering to think

that we have a realm of activity that grants us an “uncertain leap” to the “unknown” as Pascal Gielen and Paul De Bruyne (Gielen & De Bruyne, 2012, p. 9) describe the radical potential of art in the neoliberal realm. But again, this unknown and uncertain character is also deeply connected to the very culture it seems to oppose, that of, the fluid and flexible global capital. This means that the celebration of art’s open-endedness easily turns into a way to “enjoy our symptom” (as Slavoj Žižek puts it), that is, to perform the very uncertainty of our precarious labor, aestheticize it, and turn it into a lifestyle from which creativity and innovations emerge. As Hito Steyerl writes,

[w]hy and for whom is contemporary art so attractive? One guess: the production of art presents a mirror image of postdemocratic forms of hypercapitalism that look set to become the dominant political post-Cold War paradigm. It seems unpredictable, unaccountable, brilliant, mercurial, moody, guided by inspiration and genius. Just as any oligarch aspiring to dictatorship might want to see himself.

(Steyerl, 2011, p. 32)

How, then, to imagine art as a gesture of love akin to what I’ve discussed in terms of education and politics? Since art has historically played an important role in constructing intimacies with power, education, and capital, this question is one of the crucial issues we ought to tackle as art educators today. Art as a leap to the unknown is not enough in itself, since it merely replicates the kind of algorithmic love and intimacy that pluralizes our attachments without changing their canons (as Spotify’s or Tinder’s recommendations show us). Keeping with Berlant and Hardt, to rethink art’s love and intimacy requires attachment and commitment with the unknown that art always works with; an attachment akin to an intimacy with a stranger. The time of art would be the time of waiting without an end; waiting that intensifies the present without the help of a future redemption.

As an art educator, I'm entitled to give an example of an artwork that somehow manifests what I'm trying to say. In order to respond to this task, I will leave you with a passage from one of my favorite books on intimacy (and favorites books in general), Maurice Blanchot's *Awaiting Oblivion* (*L'Attende l'oubli*):

To wait, only to wait. Unfamiliar waiting, equal in all its moments, as is space in all its points; similar to space, exerting the same continuous pressure, not exerting it. Solitary waiting that was within us and has now passed to the outside, waiting for ourselves without ourselves, forcing us to wait outside our own waiting, leaving us nothing more to await. At first, intimacy; at first, the ignorance of intimacy; at first, instants unaware of each other existing side by side, touching and unconcerned with each other.

(Blanchot, 1999, p. 14)

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## **Juuso Tervo**

Juuso Tervo works as a university lecturer and the director of University-Wide Art Studies at Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Finland. His research and writing combine historical, philosophical, and political inquiries in art and education, drawing from fields such as literary theory, poetics, theology, philosophy of education, and philosophy of history. He received his PhD in Arts Administration, Education and Policy from The Ohio State University in 2014, and in 2015 he was granted the Elliot Eisner Doctoral Research Award in Art Education for his doctoral dissertation “*Corrosive Subjetcifications: Theorizing Radical Politics of Art Education in the intersection of Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben*” by the National Art Education Association (NAEA). In 2018, he was the recipient of NAEA’s Manuel Barkan Memorial Award for his article “Always the New: Paradigms and the Inherent Futurity of Art Education Historiography” published in *Studies in Art Education* in 2017. Currently, his two main areas of research are art education historiography and transdisciplinary arts-based education, both in theory and practice.

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