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Becoming Planetary as a Challenge for Education – on the Entanglement of Nature, Culture, and Society

Understanding *becoming planetary* as a practice means, amongst others, testing aesthetic medial representations of the world or the planet as a basis for figures of political thought: As early as 1997, Spivak points out that “The globe is on our computers [...] No one lives there” (Spivak, 1999, p. 44). She discusses why computational methods representing the earth or planet as a self-contained entity are inherently problematic. Jennifer Gabrys picks up on this line of argument by identifying ‘being planetary’ as a practice of computational representations, arguing that “[r]ather than bringing the Earth into view as a total object, as is often discussed through the figure of Earthrise, the planetary remains that which cannot be fixed or settled. The planetary resists representation” (Gabrys, 2018, para. 7). From the perspective of educational science, this can be linked to the idea of a new form of subjectivation that programmatically conceives the planetary as something that “is the difference, distance, and duration with, within, and against which it might be possible to think differently about being human and becoming collective” and “to re-imagine the subject as planetary” (Gabrys, 2018, para. 7). This position also joins the call for changing everyday practice, such as the practice of science, by questioning the interplay of categorizations like nature, culture, and society. It can evoke new interrelationships and it opens up new fields of research and societal practice, which tackle social inequalities – such as racially coded constructions of difference – with an approach that challenges power regarding the entanglement between human beings and the “more than human”. This approach provokes, for example, educational science to disrupt the Eurocentric perspective of the relationality between the self and the world based on the binary opposition between either nature and the environment, as well as it challenges the idea of a strong, sovereign individual.

Rather, in the post-digital age, nature, culture, and their interpenetration can be reassessed and discussed as a common legacy of humankind. The philosopher and biologist Andreas Weber suggests rethinking this complex as “indigeneity”, which, in

a postcolonial or decolonial reading, can also be understood as a matter of “unlearning” (Spivak, 2012) of Eurocentric relationalities between the self and the world. In an interview, Weber explained that he situates human beings within the network of life, and that *indigenality* means recognizing oneself as being an active part of a meaningful whole and acting in such a way that one’s own quality of life enhances that of the whole. He cautions against distinguishing, on one side, between the human, human culture, mind, and language, and on the other, that which belongs to nature. This separation, according to Weber, interviewed by Miller (2019), can no longer be upheld. The kind of current situations that Weber calls *western relationalities* can be understood as relations of domination.

We aim to examine the violence that people inflict on one another (global conflicts), on nature (species extinction and environmental destruction), and on themselves (coercion, oppression, exploitation, alienation). In this perspective, the concept of the Anthropocene can be made operational beyond a mere critique of the destructive ecological impact of industrialization, which it is often limited to. The critique must be extended to all societal and cultural spheres that are driven by the notion of continuous “progress” and humankind’s “evolution” based on exploitative relations. In her philosophical analysis of new forms of protest, Eva von Redecker proposes the notions of “nurturing” as opposed to “dominating”, of “regeneration” rather than “exhaustion”, and of “participation” instead of “exploitation” (von Redecker, 2020), illustrating the connection to the mediality of planetary thought and action: What the Anthropocene calls for is not new ways of thinking, but new ways of practicing knowledge. In the Anthropocene, media play a crucial role in defining the epistemological framework that allows us to understand, simulate, and respond to phenomena like climate change (Schröckel & Stürmer, 2016); media are possibly forming the beginning of a new critical lens through which one questions power regimes and reflects on new planetary relations between the self and the world.

Therefore, we need an interdisciplinary approach to current questions of sustainability in connection with dynamics of social transformation, such as digitalization and cultural pluralization, based on theories of becoming planetary. Across disciplines, scholars will be collaborating internationally on the topic of the planetary and are jointly developing planetary research methods. These methods also offer ways to examine the societal responsibility of educational processes and dynamics of cultural transformation based on aesthetic forms of reflection.

This methodological development understands itself as a practice that challenges globalization, following Spivak’s re-imagining of the planet and drawing attention to the planetary as a way of grasping the subject and ‘collective responsibility.’ The objective is threefold: First, exploring the dimension of the planetary as a challenge for education and culture; second, exploring digitalization as a dynamic of cultural trans-

formation and medial representations; third, exploring and developing a responsive relationship of being in and being part of the biosphere.

By re-imagining the planetary, the subject is also re-imagined. In other words, the designations of planets have consequences for the designations of subjects and communities. Far from a total force, absolute ground, or artifact of natural science, the planetary is more of an indeterminate condition and set of relations that sparks new encounters with collective inhabitations that do not turn into ‘multi-cultural liberalism’, or into the usual designations of environmentalism. Both the universal subject and the globe are undone in this planetary proposal (Gabrys, 2018, para. 10).

In short, it is about discourses on how the planetary dimension – understood as a new/critical relationality also beyond Eurocentric epistemologies – of nature, culture, and society can transform everyday thinking and action. The following questions are central to this inquiry:

- How does the planetary dimension impact the education of the young generation?
- How does this dimension transform issues that are discussed on a local or transnational level?
- What new aspects are revealed when the glocal is reconceptualized through the planetary dimension? What role do digital/media representations play in these processes?
- How are cultural perception and emotionality affected by digital transformation?
- How do people’s relationships to what they understand as “nature” – that surrounds and permeates them – change, and how does this affect behavioral changes?

When addressing these questions, their intersections with the modalities of the world of machines, robotics, artificial intelligence, and genetics must also be considered. In this context, media representations and artistic interventions help to initiate a transgressive mode of understanding. Uncertainty is not only constitutive of educational processes (Jörissen, 2015; Allert et al., 2018), but, seen from the perspective of educational science, also points to the possibility and necessity of negotiating established norms in media representations of space, language, and images. For

admittedly, thinking planetarily is more than only viewing organisms as indicators of whether stabilizing measures should be taken, and regulations should be passed. Rather, in this perspective, organisms themselves are subjects of planetary politics, articulating relevant aspects that digital information and communication technologies can make perceivable. The planet becomes ‘artificially sentient’ (Hanusch et al., 2021, pp. 33–34).

Consider, for example, how nature is represented: Which images, ideas, and photographs are selected to illustrate what “we” associate with nature? Romantic ideas about nature show it to be a nurturing entity that carries humans in a friendly way. Nowadays nature is seen from two different perspectives: nature threatens humans, e.g., catastrophes caused by climate change (powerful tsunamis engulfing coastlines, huge

expanses of habitation wiped out by unstoppable forest fires and earthquakes devastating vast cities); or, on the flipside, nature is understood as something to protect and preserve, something vulnerable (plastic and oil polluting the sea, CO₂ poisoning the air and chemical contamination of soil). This paradox is also found in pedagogical notions of concern or care, such as of the pedagogical idea or concept of domination and preservation – to care and protect, but simultaneously to discipline. New Materialism breaks away from the optimization and sovereignty of making oneself available, and sets out to overcome this figure in favor of an understanding of entanglement. “At the same time, it is not a human designation of the planet, but rather an unsettling of how subjects are partitioned and formed, against universal and colonial figurations” (Gabrys, 2018, para. 23).

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