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'Sustainable Cultural Practice' and 'Cultural Resilience'

Tradition and Transformation in the Age of the Anthropocene

Human actors significantly shape and influence the world in which they live through cultural practices. However, they are also reciprocally intertwined with the human, non-human and more/other-than-human actors in their environment and therefore must be thought of as highly dependent on and influenced by these relations. From an educational and cultural science perspective, this assumption is much more than just a commonplace term from cultural anthropology, for it offers two important insights: One is, that we have to overcome mere anthropocentric world views and start thinking and acting on a more planetary level and therefore in network relations (Clemens, 2016; Gabrys, 2018; Haraway, 2016; Latour, 2005; Spivak, 2012). The other is that the world's condition in this present phase of the so-called Anthropocene (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2013/2000) is, to a large extent, fundamentally yet to be conceived as the effect of human-cultural practices, which is why humans owe a special responsibility to planet Earth.

Without losing sight of the first insight, it is this second assumption we would like to focus on in this short paper. And in this respect, it is of particular importance to initially understand that practices themselves have to be taken into account as culturally organized (Schäfer, 2016), historically situated and contingent (Schäfer & Wimmer, 2004), and that they are therefore reciprocally linked to processes of tradition and change. It in turn follows that the cultural realities they generate cannot be described as static, but as being constantly in an ongoing process of figuration (e.g., Elias, 1986). Thus, it becomes clear, that cultural realities are in fact always determined by two constitutive aspects: tradition or tradition making – as a mechanism of cultural stabilization – and change – as a (more or less) continuous alteration of cultural figurations (Klepacki, 2020).

Another crucial insight is that cultural change has been experiencing a great acceleration for some time (McNeill & Engelke, 2016) and today occurs in a historically condensed and intensified way. This kind of significant and accelerated cultural change can be captured by the concept of transformation (Ervin, 2016; Kubik, 2015; Nicolaides & Eschenbacher, 2022, p. 5). The concrete phenomena that are grasped by this term are quite diverse, “multifaceted”, and taken into account by very different scientific disciplines, but yet somehow linked to each other (Nicolaides & Eschenbacher, 2022, p. 5). Interestingly, this accelerated type of cultural change – currently fueled by social, political, economic and ecological dynamics such as digitization, the rapidly advancing climate change, the ongoing globalization of markets as well as lifestyles, and so forth – is experienced by many people in two very different ways. On the one hand, transformation is a perceived necessity (e.g., eco-economic transformation etc.) – a challenge to be overcome – in order to secure people’s and the planet’s future. On the other hand, the need for cultural change is often perceived by many as a coercion or even threat, for example, when it comes to personal constraints for a more sustainable and socially just life. Thus, the intensified transformation of culture can accordingly be understood as a double core aspect of life in the Anthropocene: A necessary task and a coercion at the same time.

Cultural transformation thus obviously has two directions of action, both of which result in the questioning of previous routines and certainties (Düllo, 2011, p. 28). These are, however, experienced differently by different actors. On the one hand as the opening of possibilities for the present and the future and, on the other hand, as a destabilization of established patterns and practices that goes hand in hand with fears about the present and the future. It is therefore hardly surprising that in our time – often described as an “era of chronic emergency” (Jagodzinski, 2020, p. 2) – “the *phenomenon of transformation*” (Nicolaides & Eschenbacher, 2022, p. 4) and its consequences often become the subject of intense and affectively loaded discussions and negotiations (Slaby & von Scheve, 2019; Klepacki, 2023).

Given this diagnosis of the times, the question arises as to what consequences emerge from these assumptions for educational (science) contexts and concerns. And the answer to this question is simple and complex at the same time. From an educational science perspective both aspects of transformation are interesting and relevant in a theoretical-systematic as well as in a historical and a qualitative-empirical respect. The core question emerging from the aforementioned assumptions is about (the conditions of the possibility of) a change and/or maintenance of self-world-relations in an individual as well as collective respect. And in this context, educational theories that focus on the processes and possibilities of intergenerational transmission and transformation of cultural forms of knowledge and skills, as well as on the facilitation of meaningful indeterminacy (Jörissen & Marotzki, 2009) and the transformation of habitually structured forms of practice (Rosenberg, 2011) appear particularly significant.

A further – and maybe even more important – question results from the fact that it can be assumed that the initiation, the realization and the overcoming of the effects of transformation require specific attitudes as well as specific forms of perception and practices that allow the transformation of lifestyles, economic forms, political forms, etcetera, in such a way that future-oriented forms of practice can be achieved, and future-opening horizons of possibilities of human existence can be explored. Against this background educational science has to ask, how the effects of transformation, which break into reality as “brute facts” (Helsper, 2014, p. 229) and thus confront people with a pressure to change, can be dealt with in a positive way.

At this point, the theoretical concepts of a) sustainable cultural practice and b) cultural resilience (Birkeland et al., 2018; Brown, 2015; Jörissen & Klepacki, 2021; Jörissen, Unterberg & Klepacki, 2023; Meireis & Rippl, 2020; Rampp et al., 2019) can contribute – in the sense of a thought-proposal – to provide analytical perspectives appropriate to the subject matter on the question of a) enabling future preservation or (b) the enabling of a positive-reflexive-critical dealing with horizons of indeterminacy and the reflexive-critical processing of practical “(im)possibilities of the effective execution of participation in and shaping of cultural present and future” (Jörissen & Klepacki, 2021, p. 62).

What seems particularly important in this context is the fact that active participation in cultural transformation is crucial for both the initiation of sustainable cultural practice and the formation of cultural resilience. Transformation cannot begin in itself (Klepacki & Klepacki, 2018), but only in *something*, namely what is ever present in cultural patterns, forms, practices, and shapes in a specific historical present. However, because people are themselves entangled in these cultural realities, the question of the practical possibility of positioning people in relation to cultural forms – in which they are interwoven and which they reactivate and transform through their practice – appears to be a central aspect of enabling both sustainable cultural practice and cultural resilience.

Against the background of these theoretical assumptions, the question of how people as cultural actors can productively cope with cultural transformations, and at the same time actively participate in cultural transformation processes has to be further investigated – in particular by means of reconstructive qualitative research that will help to identify and describe necessary changes in attitudes, orientations and competencies, including their interconnectedness with the cultural patterns that render them possible in the first place. Assuming that these changes – from an aesthetic point of view – in essence have to “star[t] with cultural forms of perception and knowledge, and consequently [have] to seek a way that is centered in cultural expression of any form” (Jörissen, Unterberg & Klepacki, 2023, p. 2), and that Cultural, Aesthetic and Arts Education can potentially “act as an agent of *perceptual change* based upon the [...] resources of cultural and artistic expression” (ibid., p. 3), this newly founded *In-*

ternational Journal of Research in Cultural, Aesthetic, and Arts Education has the potential to make, amongst others, an important contribution to the scientific discourse on cultural transformation and cultural sustainability respectively cultural resilience, by taking up the questions only briefly touched in this paper, expanding on them and going beyond in a global perspective.

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