

NOSTALGIA, DIALOGUE AND SILENCE: ON THE ETHICS OF CURRICULUM STUDIES

Inaugural lecture of Professor Petro du Preez

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Abstract

Ecological crises, advances in biogenetic research, imbalances within the economic systems, and an exponential growth of social divisions and exclusions have led to a global capitalist system that is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point. Within this uncertain and unstable context, humans need to rethink their own subjectivity in relation to that of others. This requires that we rethink how we speak and listen as relational, embedded and embodied beings. We can therefore not be comforted by pseudo-reassurances that promise “business as usual”. We need to collectively step out of our comfort zones and work towards a new language to express the social issues we are confronted with. To meaningfully contribute to revolutionary, emancipatory moments, we need to allow ourselves to withdraw in silence to look at ourselves through foreign eyes. Rethinking our subjectivity and arriving at a new language to voice the complexities we face in the 21st century requires an acute awareness of ethics.

With this in mind I will make three proposals. Firstly, I propose that curriculum scholars should think about how nostalgia, dialogue and silence could create a space for them to think of a new language to do justice to the ever changing times they find themselves in. Secondly, I propose that curriculum scholars should rethink their own subjectivity in relation to that of others and the ethical conditions that structure the reality of the field in the wake of the posthuman era. Thirdly, I propose that curriculum scholars should engage in collective scholarship to advance the field. This requires a profound understanding of engagement in meaningful dialogues and of how silences are performed during such dialogues. The question to guide my exploration of these proposals: How could nostalgia, dialogue and silence enable curriculum scholars to arrive at a new language to inform the ethics of Curriculum Studies as a way to advance the field? My wish is that each curriculum scholar participate in meaningful dialogues, that we embrace critical silences that we experience or are confronted with and that we reflect on our nostalgias as a means of arriving at a new language that can be used to bring about social transformation and do justice to the rapidly changing times we live in.

Honourable listeners

My wish for tonight is that each of you will demonstrate three qualities: the ability to listen calmly and not draw conclusions; the ability not always to let yourself and your culture intrude into your listening; and finally, not to expect a concrete result, such as some tables and charts at the end (cf. Nietzsche, 2016).

Introduction

I have chosen to commence this lecture by playing a song. Though written by Paul Simon over fifty years ago, it powerfully sketches the societal predicament that we humans face in the 21st century. For me the most powerful part of the song is in the third verse: “People talking without speaking, people hearing without listening, people writing songs that voices never share. And no one dared disturb the sound of silence”. I believe that we are living in an age where we long for a more stable society; one in which we are not alone, trapped in silence or in meaningless dialogue. In a borderless, nomadic age human beings are required to rethink their own subjectivity in relation to that of others (Braidotti, 2011). This requires that we rethink how we speak and listen as relational, embedded and embodied beings.

Commenting on the increase in the number of societal uncertainties, Žižek (2011), points out how ecological crises, advances in biogenetic research, imbalances within the economic systems, and an exponential growth in social divisions and exclusions have led to a global capitalist system that is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point. Within this uncertain and unstable context, human nature itself is rapidly changing (Žižek, 2013:31-32). We can, therefore, not be comforted by pseudo-reassurances that promise “business as usual”. We need to collectively step out of our comfort zones and begin to think about a new language to express the social issues we are confronted with. Therefore, the most important philosophical question for our time is: How can we imagine real alternatives to the existing political, economic and social order? (Žižek, 2013:139, 142)

Philosophers, such as Braidotti and Žižek, have argued that the failure of social transformation could be ascribed to the lack of a new vocabulary to do justice to the changing times we live in. A new language based on the ethical principles of posthumanism could assist us in expressing ourselves in relation to the nation and the world through a critical, dialogic questioning of hegemonic and troubling values and knowledges. I agree with Žižek (2013:138) who warns us not to engage in pseudo-activity – a mere reaction to a situation in the form of meaningless dialogue – but to allow ourselves to withdraw in silence to enable and prepare ourselves to meaningfully contribute to revolutionary, emancipatory moments (Žižek, 2013:138).

Next, I will briefly outline how I arrived at the topic of tonight’s lecture. In my PhD, I focused on dialogue as a facilitation strategy to engage with human rights in the curriculum (Du Preez, 2008). In hindsight, my proposal might have been somewhat naïve. However, what has become evident is how different types of nostalgia come to light when people engage in dialogues about sensitive and daunting societal matters. Dialogues, I see now, are not only about speaking and listening, but also about dealing with different forms of silences. I have come to realise that silences are as performative as dialogues and that this performativity is a potentially rich area of exploration for Curriculum Studies scholars.

My scholarly work thus far has been concerned with reflecting on the directions that Curriculum Studies could take, especially in terms of its ethical dimension. I align myself with Cary (2007) who advocates an ethical thrust in Curriculum Studies. This partly involves distancing ourselves from the political concerns in curriculum and placing ethics at the centre of our attention. I am increasingly critical of the over-emphasis on the political dimension of Curriculum Studies to the detriment of the ethical dimension of the field which it too often debunks (Cary, 2007; Pinar, 2011). For me the ethical

dimension requires that curriculum scholars reflect on competing narratives and facilitate dialogues to better understand their innate differences.¹

Against this backdrop, I will start this presentation by outlining some premises about the current state of Curriculum Studies scholarship to situate my arguments:

1. In the wake of the posthuman era, curriculum scholars ought to circumvent theory fatigue which could impede the advancement of the field. Scholars are often inclined to be nostalgic about a static, phallogocentric version of Curriculum Studies. As a result, they try to restore obsolete conceptions of the field which prohibits the development of a new language to make sense of the changing times they find themselves in.
2. An ethical engagement with Curriculum Studies is necessary so that curriculum scholars can engage in the process of restructuring and redefining their own subjectivity through meaningful dialogues and critical silences to inform how they make sense of the field. Therefore, the curriculum scholar ought to rethink their subjectivity and the ethical conditions that structure the reality of Curriculum Studies as a field. This requires a cartographical reading of the present that is historically and theoretically informed as well as ethically inspired. A cartographic approach provides analytical tools for critical thought and creative theoretical alternatives.
3. To advance Curriculum Studies requires a collective scholarly and social discussion and engagement in public debates which cannot be determined by a single individual. Such discussions and robust engagement necessitate a profound understanding of the performance of dialogue and silence.

The question that underpins tonight's lecture is: How can nostalgia, dialogue and silence enable curriculum scholars to arrive at a new language to inform the ethics of Curriculum Studies as a way to advance the field? Next, I will briefly elaborate on the concept of nostalgia. Thereafter, I will say something about the performativity of dialogue and silence. I will conclude this lecture by making a few comments on the ethics of Curriculum Studies.

On nostalgia

The Greek etymological roots of the concept nostalgia are *nostos* (home or space) and *algia* (longing for another time). Nostalgia was first introduced as a medical and pathological condition in 1688 by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer (Davis, 1979). It was commonly associated with conditions such as melancholy and obsessive compulsive behaviour (Davis, 1979). The concept was gradually demedicalised and depsychologised in the 1950s, when it was assimilated into popular speech in the USA (Davis, 1979). It commonly became associated with a sentimental recall of emotions such as love, jealousy and fear in a passive, soothing fashion (Davis, 1979). This understanding of nostalgia moved the responsibility for its exploration from doctors to poets and philosophers (Boym, 2001).

Despite its changing etymological nature, nostalgia is still conceptualised in terms of a largely linear, one-dimensional understanding of time and a one-dimensional understanding of space. Here, time as an element of nostalgia is viewed as *chronos* (Gk.), which implies a sequential, quantitative understanding of time, and the space element of nostalgia is understood as *chōros* (Gk.), which refers to any space within the parameters of a border (a physical home in the literal sense of the word). However, later descriptions of nostalgia recognise the complex nature of nostalgia, especially the way

¹ Difference in this paper, is understood as an intra-dialogical engagement where people need to deal with the otherness and difference within themselves in the pursuit of becoming more receptive to the other and the differences imbedded in them (Kristeva, 1991). This requires a regeneration of the term to prevent it from being trapped in assimilationist rhetoric. For Malabou (2011), to regenerate difference is to change difference as a concept by ascribing new meaning to it, acknowledge its ability to receive meaning from a variety of sources, and to realise that the meaning ascribed to it can be annihilated at any moment in time.

time, space and movement coincide or intersect (Dlamini, 2010)². The notion of time cannot be based on *chronos*, but needs to be extended to *kairos* (Gk.). *Kairos* does not refer to sequential time counted in hours, minutes and seconds that tends to compartmentalise and schedule human existence (Slattery, 2006). Rather, *kairos* denotes a supreme moment, the birth of a new era, and is qualitative in nature. Similarly, space cannot be limited to *chōros*, but needs to be understood as *kenón* (Gk.) and *cháos* (Gk.), terms that refer to infinite space characterised by randomness and complex disorder.

The notions of time and space and the inherent movement they suggest give rise to two levels of irony in nostalgia. The first of these emanates from the element of time in nostalgia. This suggests that nostalgia is not only about the past (as Dlamini rightly suggests) but is also simultaneously about the present and the future. In effect, this conception explains why one could be nostalgic about the future. This level of nostalgia is important since it inevitably suggests that *kairos* time and *kenón* and *cháos* space make an understanding of nostalgia possible that surpasses its absolute and static roots. This journey of understanding is embedded in multidimensional change.³ The first layer of irony also leads to the second layer, which is captured in the ability of nostalgia to facilitate social change as opposed to stagnation⁴. The two levels of irony in nostalgia could be summarised as follows: (1) although it seems to be about the past, it is about the intersection of the past, present and future; and (2) although it hints at stagnation in traditional understandings of the word, it is essentially about social change. These levels of irony are important in that they enable us to distinguish between different forms of nostalgia. Based on Walder's (2010) suggestion that varieties of nostalgia are worth pursuing, I discuss two of these varieties or forms after outlining the link between nostalgia, memory and history.

Venturing into the field of nostalgia necessitates an exploration into its conceptual connection to theories of (collective) memory and history. For Walder (2010), nostalgia as theory penetrates the twilight zone between memory and history. Margalit (2002) argues that memory is often perceived as a common sense, emotional notion linked to myth and enchanted ideas, whereas history is more often connected with the (objective) 'truth' – the disenchanting ideas of the past – that warrant the label of science. In similar vein to Boym (2001), Margalit (2002) criticises an understanding of nostalgia that is confined to sentimentality.

Both Walder (2010) and Margalit (2002) perceive nostalgia as intertwined with memory. For Walder (2010), nostalgia can begin with desire (or enchanted ideas) but can also potentially lead to truth (or disenchanting history). Margalit (2002) sees nostalgia as an aspect of shared memory. Shared memory, unlike common memory, is not a mere combination of first-hand memory of people remembering a particular episode: it includes dialogue about deferred experience that calibrates different views or perspectives regarding common memory (Margalit, 2002). For Walder (2010), nostalgia is a complex form of representation of the past: one that is both pervasive and a source of understanding and creativity. He argues that amidst the culture of 'memory fatigue' in especially literary and cultural studies, nostalgia as a body of scholarship has received very little attention (Walder, 2010:4).

² Dlamini (2010:16) asserts that "nostalgia, 'a sentiment of loss and displacement', is an incurable condition of modernity ... [T]he irony about nostalgia is that, for all its fixation with the past, it is essentially about the present. It is about present anxieties refracted through the prism of the past.... [I]t is usually when people feel themselves adrift in a world seemingly out of control that they come down with nostalgia".

³ An understanding of time as *kairos* is described by scholars as follows: "'what happened once upon a time happens all the time' [Abraham Joshua Heschel], 'there is no such thing as the past because the past is still present' [William Faulkner], 'the present holds within itself the complete sum of existence, backwards and forwards, that whole amplitude of time which is eternity' [Alfred North Whitehead] and 'the true present is nothing else but the eternity that is immanent in time' [Jürgen Moltmann]:" (Slattery, 2006:85).

⁴ McLeod and Thomson (2009:8) explain that "... in times of rapid change we tend to assuage 'apprehension of the future by retrieving the worth of the past' ... and that this 'allows time for needed change to be assimilated while giving the appearance ... of meaningful links to the past'".

Jedlowski (as quoted in McLeod and Thomson, 2009:15) adds this: "... the past structures the present through its legacy, but it is the present that selects this legacy, preserving some aspects or forgetting others, and which constantly reformulates our image of this past by repeatedly recounting the story".

I will argue that we need to free nostalgia from the bonds of sentiment, stagnation and the one-dimensional truth. To do this we need to expand our understanding of nostalgia's core elements – space and time. In the act of unchaining the core elements of nostalgia, we are able to set it free from its etymological foundation – longing for a home – to enable new ways of understanding and perhaps even developing a new language to enable profound societal transformation. This might enable us to reconceptualise nostalgia as a progressive phenomenon with the potential to facilitate dialogues about difference as well as to make sense of the different forms of silence that often lurks in these dialogues.

Boym's (2001) distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia is helpful in exploring the concept of nostalgia. It should be noted that these two forms of nostalgia are not binary opposites – in reality they often overlap. For Boym (2001:xvii), restorative nostalgia is essentially about the restoration of origins and the inherent conspiracy in the act of restoration. The former could be described in terms of Booth's (1999) understanding of traditionalism and the latter in terms of culturalism. Culturalism denotes the act of preserving culture in traditionalist terms for the purpose of safeguarding conservative power interests (Booth, 1999). The notion of preserving culture through traditionalism denotes the act of reconstructing a lost home; thus the focus is on what divides us – home or *nostos* (culture) – and not on what we share, that is, the feeling of longing or *algia* (Boym, 2001). In safeguarding the interests of conservative power, the restorative nostalgic protects absolute truths embedded in traditional terms by using culturalist symbols retrieved from memory, even though these symbols are often misinterpreted (Boym, 2001). Restorative nostalgia relies on time as a one-directional, linear notion and space as a one-dimensional entity with clear boundaries. This conceptualisation leads to the absolutisation of the difference between the past, present and future as isolated entities. Boym (2001:49) states that for the restorative nostalgic, the past “is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot”.

To illustrate the workings of restorative nostalgia, it is worth contemplating how this form of nostalgia is performed in current discourses on decolonisation of the curriculum. Some scholars argue that decolonisation entails the process of replacing colonial knowledge with African knowledge (Jansen, 2017). This position, according to Le Grange (2016) is problematic in that it suggests that indigenous knowledges are not influenced by other knowledges. Others treat decolonisation as an add-on to existing curricula (Jansen, 2017). As an add-on module the infusion of different knowledges is not possible and might reinforce epistemic injustices. This position is often adopted by those who wish to maintain the hegemonic Western status quo (Heleta, 2016). Yet another school of thought proposes that decolonisation of the curriculum as a vehicle for the repatriation of occupied knowledge and society. Curriculum scholars who advocate these discourses, I would argue, are inclined to restore tradition to manage continuity with the past, and demonstrate how the symbolic nature of knowledge is used to inculcate certain cultural values and norms (Boym, 2001). The problem is that such a disposition assumes a linear conception of time, one-dimensional conceptions of space as well as torpid movement. Dlamini (2010:12) captures this dilemma in the following extract:

It is all too often taken for granted that the story of black South Africa is one long romance, starting in some golden age during which Africans lived in harmony with the land and each other, followed by the trials and tribulations of European conquest, segregation and apartheid, and ending in triumph with Nelson Mandela... In this romantic telling, there is a neat separation between a merry precolonial Africa, a miserable apartheid South Africa and a marvellous new South Africa in which everyone is living democratically ever after. That, alas, is not so. There are many South Africans for whom the past, the present and the future are not discrete wholes, with clear splits between them.

Preserving culture through traditionalism entails the reconstruction of a lost home; thus the focus is on what divides us – home or *nostos* (culture) – and not on what we share, that is, the feeling of longing or *algia* (Boym, 2001).

Whereas restorative nostalgia focuses on what divides us, reflective nostalgia focuses on what we share: longing or *algia*. It is this characteristic that creates the paradoxical nature of nostalgia (Boym, 2001) and that, I would argue, creates the potential for nostalgia to unite us through respect for and understanding of difference. The meditative undertone of reflective nostalgia delays homecoming by disrupting absolute truths. Boym (2001:xviii) argues that, “[r]eflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols”. In this, we also see that reflective nostalgia imagines time and space as complex, detailed entities not to be reduced to linear, bounded entities. Nostalgia is both an ethical and a creative challenge, which “take[s] sensual delight in the texture of time not measurable by clocks and calendars” (Boym, 2001:49).

Decolonisation of the curriculum is conceptualised by scholars in three other ways. Firstly, it is conceptualised as inclusive knowledge. This view makes it possible to decentre dominant knowledges and to acknowledge the relationships between different knowledge systems. This is what Le Grange (2016) has described as relational accountability. Secondly, decolonisation of the curriculum could be described as a critical engagement with settled knowledge. In this approach new theories, perspectives, and methods are employed to see the same set of colonial problems differently. Jansen (2017:161) stated that “this conception of decolonisation is less concerned with either repositioning or replacing the existing curriculum than with empowering students to engage that knowledge by asking critical questions”. This empowerment could allow students to engage critically with the voices and knowledges of indigenous people to facilitate respectful representation in the curriculum (Le Grange, 2016). Should this not be done, as Mbembe (2016) has reminded us, the Western way of knowing will remain hegemonic and the skills students need to move the African content forward will continue to be absent (Heleta, 2016). Thirdly, decolonisation of the curriculum could be described as the process of Africans seeing themselves in relationship with other selves (Ngugi, 1981). Such a curriculum encompasses complex encounters with entangled knowledges that are not separated superficially between us and them but are based on interwoven knowledges embedded in the entangled lives of all earth-dwellers (Jansen, 2017). Le Grange (2016:9) supports this approach in his comment that “a decolonised curriculum is evidenced by a shift in subjectivity from the arrogant ‘I’ . . . to the humble ‘I’, to the ‘I’ that is embedded, embodied, extended and enacted”. These three discourses on the decolonisation of the curriculum create the opportunity for scholars to engage in dialogue, reflect on what they share (longing or *algia*) and delay homecoming by disrupting absolute truths. Nostalgia in this sense is both an ethical and a creative challenge. Reflective nostalgia enables praxis (reflection and action), demanding reflection on multiple social realities to facilitate the act of arriving at intersections of understanding competing narratives. Although competing narratives can never be understood in their entirety, we can arrive at moments of understanding through interaction. These moments could render possibilities of working conceptually towards a peaceful existence through acknowledging our shared interests (longing) and recognising our differences and specificity (homes).

Given the above, one could argue that the restorative nostalgic might be captured in passifying silences or meaningless dialogue; a mere pseudo-activity. Reflective nostalgics, on the contrary, might meditatively withdraw in silence to enable and prepare themselves to contribute meaningfully to revolutionary, emancipatory moments.

In the next section, I describe how dialogues and silences are often performed against the backdrop of restorative and reflective nostalgia.

On the performativity of dialogue and silence

New ideologies and redefined social relationships require different conceptualisations of social encounters and what constitutes common good. The visionary Freire noted a half a century ago that, “[O]ur advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of the most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also

becoming submerged in a new ‘culture of silence’” (Freire, 1996:15). (Post)conflict societies⁵, in particular, are faced with these challenges and dialogue is often proposed as a way to establish new relationships and to seek common good. For example, in South Africa there are constant pleas “to talk about the rain and the rainbow, the pain and the hope” (Jansen, 2011:1) as a way of mourning for and dealing with our ‘shared’ historical trauma, internalised brutality and mutual pain (Jansen, 2011:5-11). Whilst sharing this dialogic sentiment, I became all the more intrigued by silences that lurk within such dialogic encounters. It should be noted that I do not wish to position silence as the opposite of dialogue. In this regard, Watkin (2009), drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, explains that silence is not the opposite of language or speech; it is in fact primordial speech with its own significance and meaning. He adds that there is no linear movement from silence to speech as silence is heard in non-verbal expression.

Cultural norms and individual traits ascribe quite different meanings to the act of silence (Sifianou, 1997:64). For some ‘silence is golden’, a form of communication that speaks for itself, an indication of inner strength. For others it might indicate an absence of communication, a rather negative response indicating emptiness, fear or doubt; perhaps even an outer weakness.⁶ Silence is thus a pragmatic and discursive strategy used in particular situations and contexts (Jaworski, 1997:3).⁷ However conceptualised, silence does something and it does so in very particular ways. Foucault (1978:27) argues that “[t]here is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say ... There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses”.

Based on Alain Badiou’s *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2002), I have identified six ways in which silences are performed. To understand how I arrived at this point, it is necessary to briefly outline Badiou’s thinking on ethics. For Badiou (2002:viii-ix) human action is divided into two separate but overlapping realms: the ordinary realm of approved knowledges that is structured in accordance to those who dominate and govern and that signals “the state of the situation”; and the exceptional realm of singular innovations or truths constituted by a truth procedure that succeeds and evades the domination of the state of a situation and paves the way for an ethic of truth. Firstly, it should be noted that in the ordinary realm of approved knowledges a situation is not merely a set, but it also consists of the network of relations that sustains a set. Secondly, the realm of the exceptional awakens when subjects initiate and maintain particular innovations (or truths) from within the realm of the ordinary. This is referred to as an event. An event is both situated, in that it is related to a specific situation, and supplementary, in that it is detached from all the rules of the situation. Such an event ruptures the ordinary realm and sets a truth procedure going. Badiou (2002:41-42) describes this process as follows: “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 ... compels the subject to invent a new way of being and acting in the situation”. This process could only be maintained through faithful “subjects who ‘bear’ its [the event’s] trajectory” (Badiou, 2002:ix); that is, people who reveal fidelity, perseverance and encouragement through selfless devotion to resist anything that could beset a truth (Badiou, 2002:x-xi, 43). It is exactly this fidelity to the truth and perseverance to maintain the truth of the event that Badiou (2002:xi) describes as the ethical, “the single imperative: ‘Keep going!’ ...”. This powerful truth

⁵ (Post)conflict societies refers to contexts where national conflict was the status quo, followed by some kind of violent or non-violent revolution, that resulted in a holistic reconceptualisation of that society in terms of new political and economic ideologies and/or the redefinition of social relationships.

⁶ Derrida questions the uncritical coupling of linguistic expression with responsible behaviour and silence with irresponsible behaviour that is too often the case in the Western world (Pirovolakis, 2010).

⁷ Nicholas Burbules (2004:xxiv) states that “[s]ilence can be voluntary and self-imposed, or it can be the result of external pressures and constraints; silence can be expressive, or it can be empty, unreadable; silence can be temporary, situational, or it can represent a consistent, even pathological pattern; silence can signify withdrawal from a conversation, or it can be an indicator of attentive, thoughtful listening”.

is described as “the multiple, internal to the situation, that the fidelity constructs, bit by bit; it is what the fidelity gathers together and produces” (Badiou, 2002:68).

To illustrate Badiou’s ideas, I outline how the decolonisation of curriculum discourses have unfolded in South Africa. The #Fall movements and protests that currently pervade the South African higher education landscape are a reflection of how students and academics are using their agency to think, reflect, and act on controversial matters and contradictory spaces encountered in higher education (Du Preez, Simmonds, and Chetty, 2017). One common way in which the protesters have challenged the structure of higher education during the various #Fall movements, as they have pointed out, is by asserting that nothing in higher education has changed since apartheid. The protesters question the Eurocentric and phallogocentric nature of the curriculum. The #Fall movement challenged the ordinary realm of approved knowledge that is structured at the behest of those who dominate and govern. For Badiou (2002:ix), “[i]n the ordinary situation, the domination of its state is effectively absolute ... It is precisely this indetermination that ensures conformity or obedience from the ... members of the situation”. The process of entering the realm of truth or the exceptional requires singular innovations in order to evade domination: this signifies the event (Badiou, 2002:viii-ix). The protests were aimed at evading domination and at bringing a new truth into being. This was possible because of “subjects who maintained a resilient fidelity to the consequences of an event that took place in a situation but was not of it” (Badiou, 2002:x). The event, i.e. the protests against the hegemony of colonial and phallogocentric knowledge, is both situated because it was linked to a situation, and supplementary because it was detached from the rules of the situation (Badiou, 2002:68).

Under the imperative of ‘keep going!’ – the continuation of fidelity to the event and the truth embedded in it – ethics unites resources of discernment, courage and moderation (Badiou, 2002:91). Discernment serves to remind a subject not to be under any delusions concerning the event; courage teaches the subject not to give up, and moderation warns the subject not to get carried away in totalitarian extremes (Badiou, 2002:91). However, Badiou (2002:91) also warns that “Evil is possible only through an encounter with the Good”. This Evil, emanating from the Good, Badiou states could manifest in three forms. The first of these is referred to as simulacrum and is signified by the confusion of a mere likeness of an event to the real event (Badiou, 2002:72-77). The second evil, betrayal, occurs when a difficult fidelity is abandoned as a result of temptation or fatigue (Badiou, 2002:78-80). The third evil concerns the unnameable; the situation in which the power of a truth is forced or imposed as a result of arrogance and in so doing brings about the objectification and totalisation of truth (Badiou, 2002:80-87). Badiou (2002:91) summarises these forms of evil as follows: “... the simulacrum (to be the terrorising follower of a false event); betrayal (to give up on a truth in the name of one’s interest); and the forcing of the unnameable, or disaster (to believe in the total power of a truth)”.

I now elaborate on how six forms of silences may be performed. These are: discerning silences and silences of simulacrum; courageous silences and silences of betrayal; and silences of moderation and unnameable silences.

Discerning silences are performed when a person has to ‘think through’ or nostalgically reflect on a particular event or situation – whether from the past, the present or the future. It entails the act of thinking beyond the situation and making a judgment about it. I suspect that often in (post)conflict dialogues about sensitive matters people need to ‘think through’ historical trauma, internalised brutality and hurtful memories. The performance of such silences is imperative for the healing process and making judgments about experiences of the past, present and future in a non-linear way. This form of silence is healthy as it could prepare people to engage in meaningful dialogues about the complex intersection between the past, present and future.

Silences of simulacrum are, knowingly or unknowingly, performed when discerning silences are confused with disconcerting, passifying silences. This confusion is typified by a mere likeness of an event with the real event (Badiou, 2002). This manifests when one engages in meaningless debates

without allowing oneself to withdraw in silence; i.e. “a critical participation to silence” (Žižek, 2013:138). Not critically participating in silence prevents one from preparing for true activity that can meaningfully contribute to a real event. This form of silence could negate the process of transforming the status quo through reflective, dialogical engagements (Freire, 1996). It could even paralyse people (MacLure, Holmes, Jones and MacRae, 2007).

Courageous silences, a form of moral courage, are strategically performed by reflective nostalgics when a person perseveres in building up a strong opposing argument to be expressed at a later stage. It is an act of remaining true to one’s argument and protecting it so that it can be expressed at the right time and/or space (Willig, 2012). For Badiou (2002:x) courageous silence describes the loyal determination of those “subjects who maintained a resilient fidelity to the consequences of an event that took place in a situation but was not of it”.

A large proportion of South Africans, especially white South Africans, have taken the position of ‘politically correct’ behaviour and often refrain from critical dialogues in fear of coming across as politically incorrect. This behaviour could be described as negative politeness⁸. Sifianou (1997:74) states that “in societies where negative politeness prevails, silence could be better understood as a means of safeguarding personal territory”. Safeguarding personal territory is akin to what Badiou (2002:91) referred to as acting in one’s own interest, i.e. betraying the truth. In addition, the act of silence in a (post)conflict society might also be the result of evading further degradation, reliving past despair and suffering (Duffy, 2009:61). Hence, betraying the truth procedure that has led to the event.

Silence as moderation in (post)conflict contexts was echoed by Mandela (2000) when he nostalgically reflected on his time in prison: “It is never my custom to use words lightly. If twenty-seven years in prison have done anything to us, it was to use the silence of solitude to make us understand how precious words are and how real speech is in its impact on the way people live and die”. This form of silence is performed in situations where subjects need to eliminate and lessen extremes to facilitate reasonableness in the wake of new beginnings. It is essentially reflective and facilitates meaningful dialogues.

Unforgivable silences refers to remaining quiet when one should have spoken out (Willig, 2012). Unforgivable, unnameable silences are not only harmful, but affect one’s freedom of speech later (Willig, 2012). Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn describes this unforgivable silence in *The Gulag Archipelago* (1978:178) as follows: “In keeping silent about evil, in burying it so deep within us that no sign of it appears on the surface, we are implanting it, and it will rise up a thousand fold in the future. When we neither punish nor reproach evildoers, we are not simply protecting their trivial old age, we are thereby ripping the foundations of justice from beneath new generations”. Unforgivable, unnameable silences inhibit and prevent us from engaging in meaningful, reflective dialogues.

Let us for the moment consider the following scenario as a way to make sense of the performativity of these silences: In many of my classroom dialogues and also during two curriculum-making process at our institution (one dealing with diversity and the other with decolonisation), I was confronted with silences. These silences could be the result of individuals’ culture or personality traits, or could be context specific (Sifianou, 1997). Given South Africa’s history of severe discrimination and systemic oppression, and that diversity is perceived as a ‘sensitive issue’ at the institution, I led the discussions with care only to find silence as rebuff. In a negative sense, these silences could be perceived of as a resistance to critically participate in dialogues about societal matters such as the debate on decolonisation; as a means of safeguarding personal territory; or as harmful silence that can hurt others and prevent reflective dialogues to take place. Negative, passifying silences could divide us and imprison us in feelings of vulnerability, guilt, fear, aggression and melancholia. This could prevent us from focusing on what we share. Focussing on what we share is an imperative starting point for an

⁸ Žižek (2013:84) adds that “the discourse of political correctness hides extreme violence”.

ethics of wisdom (Braidotti, 2018). This form of ethics requires that Curriculum Studies scholarship become spaces where alternatives to the existing status quo can be imagined and dialogued. In addition, it has the potential to “produce social horizons of hope and sustainable futures” and uphold subject-formations that refuse to comply with hegemonic values and norms (Braidotti, 2018:223).⁹

Thus, in a positive sense, these silences could signify self-reflective individuals who, in relation to and in interaction with others, think through an event or situation to heal experiences of the past, present or future. Secondly, the silences could be a sign of courageous individuals who are striving to build a strong opposing argument to be expressed later; or thirdly they could signal the act of moderation that could facilitate reasonableness in the wake of new beginnings. These forms of silence are not performed in an either/or manner. Individuals could perform different silences at the same time, which could have an influence on the way in which they formulate arguments or refuse to formulate and voice arguments during dialogic encounters.

Dialogue and silence becomes the vehicle to capture and express reflective nostalgia. Our nostalgias (however different) can become the stimuli for dialogue (Du Preez, 2008) and meaningful silence. These stimuli might elicit immediate responses in terms of our shared longing and our divided homes, but they also have sufficient subtlety to spur ongoing thought (Jansen, 2011). When our narratives and our nostalgias are ‘desilenced’ through dialogue and our silences are used in constructive ways, we are able to disrupt our ways of knowing and begin finding intersections of understanding.

In sum, reflective nostalgia can assist curriculum scholars in: dealing with matters of identity and trauma, rewriting bitter histories, historicising the present and idealising the future (Walder, 2010). In engaging in this pursuit, we would do well to heed Walder’s (2010) warning that there is a fine line between sentimentality or melancholy, and critique or release, and that we should always be aware of the politics of representability when fragments of history are dealt with through nostalgia.

So what does all of this mean for Curriculum Studies, especially the ethics of Curriculum Studies?

On the ethics of Curriculum Studies

In the wake of the posthuman era, Curriculum Studies as a scholarly domain is still being criticised for its inability to “move on; discover and invent new worlds and new ideas” (Morrison, 2004:487). In essence, this plea for innovation and boundary piercing in Curriculum Studies requires that scholars in the field articulate and explore new visions and imaginations. Firstly, this requires that Curriculum Studies scholars ask questions about *what could be possible*, and do not limit themselves to asking *what is* or *what was* the situation. Greene (2007:561) describes this process as bringing “an ‘as-if’ into being, to look through the windows of the actual to what might be and what ought to be”. Secondly, it requires that we see both vision and imagination as creative triggers that can spawn innovation and invention of new ways of doing and thinking. I would argue that a collaborative interrogation of the ethics of Curriculum Studies is one way in which new ideas, to ultimately advance the field, could be developed.

In Curriculum Studies, ethics are all the more important given that global mobility, neo-liberalism and the emerging scientific revolution have brought along a situation where communities seem to suffer from vulnerability, guilt, fear, violence and melancholia which results in people resorting to restorative nostalgia. This could be ascribed to the static authority of the past that casts a shadow on the present. I believe that the free market ideology that marks the postmodern era, has given rise to a situation where Curriculum Studies research has come dangerously close to being little more than a data-mining exercise. Research in this field might have “entered a zombified landscape of repetition without difference and lingering melancholy” (Braidotti, 2013:5). Curriculum scholars appear to suffer from

⁹ This form of affirmative ethics should not be separated from epistemology as such separation could perpetuate epistemic violence. Epistemology and ethics should, therefore, be perceived of as intrinsically coupled. When epistemology is based on the ethics of social justice and respect for diversity, it could prevent that individuals from focusing on what divides them, and rather focus on differences within (Braidotti, 2011).

theory fatigue in as far as they endlessly repeat hegemonic, universal theories from the global north (Braidotti, 2013). This hinders the development of situated theoretical perspectives through the development of a new language to do justice to the changing times we live in. This is partly the result of the tendency of scholars to be caught up in the static authority of the past that casts a shadow on the present (Braidotti, 2013). In other words, it seems that many curriculum scholars in South Africa fail to advance the field by engaging with the present and discursive nature of the field. I propose that each and every curriculum scholar be held accountable for the advancement of the field. This could mean that they would challenge hegemonic ways of knowing and doing to become conceptually accountable for the advancement of the field (Braidotti, 2013). This form of accountability is not only political, ontological, epistemological and methodological in nature, but also ethical.

Curriculum scholars, situated in (post)conflict societies working towards better understandings of differences, ought to carefully consider the view of ethics they adopt since this inevitably colours societal discourses and often makes its way into the official curricula. Therefore, our conception of ethics can divide us and focus on what we share. Badiou (2002), in assessing the validity of the ethical turn (Gillespie, 2001), criticises the current state of ethical affairs as an ethical ideology stemming from liberal-humanism. He argues that such ethical ideology does not enable us ‘to name and strive for a Good’, because it does little but reinforce the divide between different political groups in society (Badiou, 2002:30). The ethical turn in philosophy is a counter movement in postmodernist philosophy that expresses a concern with the debunking of ethics. The ethical turn also stresses aesthetic expression in relation to ethics. Applied to curriculum, the ethical turn focuses on the debunking of ethics in education and aims to put the spotlight on ethics in curriculum discourses in an attempt to address questions of (amongst other things) competing narratives (Cary, 2007; Pinar, 2011). Cary (2007) emphasises that research into curriculum spaces should reflect an ethical turn since this will enable curriculum scholars to rethink and act upon the strategic language they use to express “*the way we know what we know*” (134–135, emphasis in original).

The ethical turn that has emerged in Curriculum Studies scholarship enables us to step back from the political concerns in curriculum and to place ethics at the centre of our concern (Cary, 2007). Some might argue that the political nature of the curriculum cannot receive secondary attention (especially in the historic-political context of South Africa and other (post)conflict societies). However, Jansen (2009) argues that although critical theory has assisted us to understand the political nature of curriculum, it has not adequately assisted us to engage in reconciliatory discourses in (post)conflict societies. He argues that critical theory tends to divide society because it necessitates that proponents take sides (Jansen, 2009). For this reason, he argues against discourses that ‘Other’ and that repudiate the narratives that constitute our knowing and being (Jansen, 2011). Thus, to place ethics at the core in Curriculum Studies necessitates that we increase our epistemological awareness and positioning through sharing autobiographical journeys through, for example, reflective nostalgia. In doing so we can study the “discourses that frame our knowing and the way we know Others” (Cary, 2007:138). Placing ethics at the centre of curriculum theorising allows Curriculum Studies to become, “a historical event, changing over time as we participate in it, engage in its study and act in response to it” (Pinar, 2010:177).

I think it is important for curriculum theorising in South Africa and other (post)conflict societies not to become a battlefield for equality, restoring and reinventing history. Instead, we need to resort to silence and reflect on our differences and specificity so we can arrive at intersections of understanding one another in the context of our ethical responsibilities towards one another. Reflective nostalgia is important here since it enables us to position ourselves epistemologically and to transcend the isolated spaces often associated with traditional curriculum theorising.

Drawing on Braidotti (2011, 2013), I would argue that a new posthuman ethics cannot be characterised by individualism that privileges the self and disdains multiple others. What is needed is not only a break

up of “the fantasy of unity, totality and one-ness, but also the master narratives of primordial loss, incommensurable lack and irreparable separation” (Braidotti, 2013:100). A new posthuman ethics (Braidotti, 2013:100–101)

... expresses the affirmative, ethical dimension of becoming posthuman as a gesture of collective self-styling. It actualizes a community that is not bound negatively by shared vulnerability, the guilt of unpayable ontological debts, but rather by the compassionate acknowledgment of their interdependence with multiple others.

For Braidotti (2013), a posthuman subject’s intersubjective relationality signifies an ethics based on interconnectivity between the self and others that is based on a collaborative morality.

The ethics of Curriculum Studies assumes a specific role for the curriculum scholar. It necessitates that curriculum scholars acknowledge that they are interrelational “carriers of troubled knowledge” (Jansen, 2009:258). It is important to reflect on our nostalgias – the memory-bearers of our knowledge – in an honest manner and face the contradictions these often present. This epistemological positioning will put us in, “a stronger – and more intellectually honest – position to deal with the many contingencies, arguments and agendas” (Hepburn, 2003:244). The process of epistemological positioning necessitates a process of self-reflexivity “about and within nostalgia” so as to open up negotiation between the present and the past and discover how it shapes the self in relation to others (Walder, 2010:9).

Posthuman ethics is characterised by its drive to transcend negativity and its aim to combine ethical values and the well-being of the larger community. Affirmative and innovative creativity is required in Curriculum Studies scholarship to develop a radical epistemology that goes hand in hand with ethics. It is not a temporal project toward a future, but addresses past minoritarian memories in tandem with monolithic majoritarian pasts “to evince that we have always been confronted with the capacity for posthuman ethical interactions in relation to dominance and difference” (MacCormack, 2018:346).

Apart from the specific disposition required by curriculum scholars, there needs to be a clear vision of the purpose of the field to create spaces where complex intersections between the past, present and future could be dealt with. Here, reflective nostalgia is a useful means of making a curriculum seek intersections since it might assist us to recognise our mutual pain, deal with the knowledge streams that filter our messages about the past and the future, deal with the political language we are exposed to, deal with the reasons for inequality (such as poverty) and, in essence, deal with the wrongdoings of the past (cf. Jansen, 2011).

Concluding remarks

This lecture was based on three premises. One, that we need a new language to do justice to the changing times we live in through stepping out of the static authority of the past and developing situated theoretical perspectives that would enable the advancement of Curriculum Studies. Two, that curriculum scholars should rethink their own subjectivity and the ethical conditions that structure the reality of the field. Three, that a profound understanding of the performance of dialogue and silence be developed to facilitate the process of collective scholarly engagement with the field. These premises led me to the question: How could nostalgia, dialogue and silence enable curriculum scholars to arrive at a new language to inform the ethics of Curriculum Studies as a way to advance the field? In responding to this question, I would like to make five observations.

Firstly, when we think about ethics in Curriculum Studies, nostalgia, dialogue and silence stand out as way in which curriculum scholars could arrive at a new language to inform the ethical dimension of the field. This language is a vital means to advance Curriculum Studies which can very easily become moribund as a result of scholars experiencing theory fatigue.

Secondly, as I have shown in this lecture, nostalgia, dialogue and silence cuts through our being and ways of thinking and knowing in an increasingly complex, relational world in which new forms of subjectivity should be negotiated. When brought in dialogue with Curriculum Studies, these concepts open up the possibility for curriculum scholars to intersubjectively relate to one another to arrive at a collaborative morality to advance the field.

Thirdly, the context in which ethics in Curriculum Studies are conceptualised is not fixed, but are fluid. To therefore conceptualise the ethics of Curriculum Studies in terms of the fixed ethics of human rights for example, might be problematic in a posthuman context. What is needed for an ethics of Curriculum Studies, is a collaborative morality, based on the ethics of wisdom. As I have argued, this form of ethics requires that Curriculum Studies scholarship become spaces where alternatives to the existing status quo could be imagined and dialogued.

Fourthly, it should be acknowledged that the curriculum scholar as nomadic, posthuman subject is immersed and immanent to a local and global curriculum network that requires critical dialogic engagement. In this context, the curriculum scholar is embedded, embodied and situated within the local and the global in which dominant values and norms of Curriculum Studies ought to be negotiated.

Fifthly, when theory fatigue means that hegemonic, universal theories from the global north are endlessly repeated, the development of situated theoretical perspectives to advance the field from the perspective of the global south, could be curbed. This is partly the result of the tendency of scholars to be caught up in the static authority of the past that casts a shadow on the present. It is thus necessary that curriculum scholars engage with the present and discursive nature of the field.

Finally, my wish tonight is that every scholar participate in meaningful dialogue, that we embrace critical silences, that we experience or are confronted by and reflect on our nostalgias as a means of arriving at a new language. In so doing, we can bring about social transformation to do justice to the rapidly changing times we live in.

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