

## **Art, Artists and Pedagogy: Philosophy and the Arts in Education (Naughton, Biesta, and Cole)**

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Review of

## *Art, Artists and Pedagogy: Philosophy and the Arts in Education*

by Christopher Naughton, Gert Biesta, and David R. Cole (Eds.). New York, NY: Routledge, 2018.

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*Art, Artists and Pedagogy* is a collection of fifteen chapters, seventeen authors, and three editors. We cannot do justice to each person individually, but we will try to provide an introductory sense of the whole before we look to the parts. The book attempts to create an encounter between Deleuzian educational theorists and Gert Biesta's philosophical work in education. One might go as far as to suggest that the book is essentially an experiment in mixing theory with philosophy within an educational discourse that increasingly shows a distinction between theory and philosophy without admitting it explicitly. The penultimate dialogue between Biesta and John Baldacchino is the only exception to this way of conceiving of the volume and its addition is exceptional in every sense, as we will show in our summary.

To "encounter" something implies to be *en contra*—to move against, to counter. This implication is the most promising aspect of the volume. The extent to which the book delivers on this promise is chiefly processed in first person by Biesta himself throughout the book. Some of the authors, such as David Lines, Jan Jagodzinski, John Roder, and Sean Sturm, contribute to this encounter as well, but Biesta's subjective presence in the book is felt as one might feel the narrator's voice in a novel. This is a fortunate voice, offering a clear melody in a cacophonous composition. The more assertive Deleuzian chapters appear to celebrate this struggle for attunement and often pit it moralistically against a vaguely unstylish status quo—and one wonders whether or not this would include Biesta. If it would, then that would contribute to the contrarian terms of encounter as well, but it is hard to tell amidst the tendency for Deleuzian discipleship.

What is most obviously uneven about the terms of this encounter is that Biesta's thought is delivered directly in first person whereas the Deleuzian commentary is asserted in third person and in translation (although the Deleuzian contributions rarely mention the issue of translation). Perhaps this explains our dual impression of the book: the Deleuzian claims are, on the one hand, over-determined and under-argued (by contrast to Biesta's more speculative narrative presence) and, on the other, in

need of reinforcement and support from original and primary sources (which Biesta often provides). The first side of this dual impression is, admittedly, somewhat negative. The second side, however, seems quite exciting in its capacity to bring together theorists and philosophers interested in education.

The thematic questions about art, artists, and pedagogy are probably better left to the descriptive details, outlined in some detail in what follows. For most of the remainder of this review, we will present a brief overview of the chapters in chronological order, setting the particulars in some contrast to our opening generalizations. We will then offer some concluding remarks, reiterating these early claims after the evidence has been more thoroughly surveyed.

In the introductory chapter, Christopher Naughton and David R. Cole, two of the three editors, write that the book is an “arts education text” (p. 1). They also refer to it as “philosophy applied to arts education” (p. 3). Thematically, they claim, “[t]he theme of the book is ‘arts education as philosophy’” (p. 1). The two “philosophical streams” or “intellectual perspectives” (p. 1) towards which they direct the reader’s attention are Gert Biesta’s later texts and the general works of Gilles Deleuze. They are hospitable and generous towards Biesta’s presence in the book, but they very much represent the Deleuzian stream and frame it on those terms.

In Chapter 2, Biesta, the third editor, offers his own introduction of sorts. He begins noting how education and the arts have been caught up in global capitalism, and advocates for an education at the service of humanity: “[W]hat education should be doing [is] serving humanity in its struggle for meaningful and peaceful coexistence within the boundaries of what the earth can sustain” (p. 11). Biesta sees that “[t]he educational significance for the arts, and perhaps the educational urgency of the arts, lies in art education *beyond* expressivism and creativity” (p. 12, italics original). The concern driving his claim is that “instrumental justifications for the arts in education” may bring about “the potential disappearance of art from art education” (p. 12). He continues by also warning against the inverse danger: “the potential disappearance of education from art education” (p. 12). These warnings are familiar to philosophers of education, to whom Biesta has presented them on different terms, but with similar methods of argumentation. It is good to see them at work in a dialogue with art education, albeit a dialogue that, as the two different introductions indicate, speaks in rather different tongues.

In Cole’s own chapter, he champions the value of a Deleuzian analysis of and encounter with art “to change the ways in which the arts are currently represented and practised in schools” (p. 21). Cole promotes Deleuze’s concepts such as “meat,” which he calls “a non-psychoanalytic rendering of the body” (p. 22), and “rhythm” that “can lead to non-equilibrium understandings of phenomena” (*sic*, p. 23). These are but two of the ways Cole applies Deleuzian ideas as a form of educational philosophy in arts practice and arts-based school practice. He later lists five more ways in which “Deleuze’s (2003) analysis ... could deepen and extend [arts-based] practice” (p. 27), and ends the chapter by making a brief connection between the aforementioned concept of “rhythm” and Biesta’s notion of “grown-up-ness.”

Drawing on Karen Barad’s work in Chapter 4, Mary Ann Hunter suggests that “we might reconfigure the artists’ contribution as a necessary interruption, that diffracts the always already shifting relations that exist in the school environment to co-generate new knowledge” (p. 34). Hunter argues that there has been an increasing lack of attention to the value of artist residency programmes despite how “arts curriculum offers one of the rare mandated opportunities . . . to acknowledge a human urge for certainty while fostering the capacities to live without it” (p. 39). The addition of Barad brings more

complexity to the encounter of the book, but seems representative of the literature that Deleuzian scholars most often consult.

Christopher Naughton's chapter introduces Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of art in *What is Philosophy?* (1994) and the implication he draws from it "to re-envisage art and the possibility of re-invigorating arts practice in education" (p. 50). His chapter relies on related concepts such as percept, affect, blocs of sensation and, like Cole's earlier solo contribution, ends by briefly connecting his sense of a "process that arrives before being produced as artwork" as a potential a source of legitimacy for Biesta ("legitimizes the change or interruption that Biesta sees as key to the education process," p. 50). It is difficult to understand why Biesta's work is in need of legitimization in this respect, but the connection is made in a salutary and generative spirit.

In Chapter 6, David Lines "explores improvised jazz as a pedagogy of improvisation" (p. 53). Improvised jazz, or free jazz, for Lines, is "an open and experimental way of approaching, playing, listening, and thinking ... [where] there is a deliberate blurring of normal 'dialogical' lines of musical communication" (p. 53). Drawing on Biesta's (2017) notions of "grown-up" and "infantile," Lines claims that his pedagogy of improvisation is grown-up "wherever the creative process is kept open, and where a movement with the outside is sustained" (p. 56), and it "offers hope in an educational climate that ... is laden with normative conditions and codes" (p. 58). As one reaches this point in the book, the relative absence of jazz musicians, bands, albums, or instruments gives a striking impression of the growing absence of artworks in the book. One suspects this may be the Deleuzian point but cannot be too sure, since Deleuzians seem to celebrate these Gnostic qualities where not knowing is itself a form of knowing that only those who celebrate not knowing seem to know anything about.

Nico de Vos's chapter argues for an increased role for dancing and moving together in school curricula through a notion of "bodily connectedness in motion" (p. 61). He draws on the works of Jean-François Lyotard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Luc Nancy, a somewhat refreshing departure from Deleuze but a difficult one to situate within the book's trademark dialectic. Nonetheless, the final point is very much in concert with the Deleuzian emphasis on relations: de Vos proposes "a relational philosophy of the human being, or a differential relational philosophy" (p. 62) to understand intercorporeality and its relevance for education.

Cole re-emerges, this time with Margaret Somerville, in the following chapter proposing "ways to transform Australian educational curriculum at the intersection of Western and Aboriginal understandings of coming to know the world" (p. 71). They make the following suggestion:

[The] flat ontology of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), supplemented and combined with the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1929) ... has the greatest possibility for reinvigorating and reforming the Australian curriculum to fully take into account the onto-epistemology of Aboriginal Australians. (p. 76)

One is tempted to suggest directly taking a more full and literal account of the "onto-epistemology" of actual Aboriginal Australians as an alternative route to the more circuitous, Western one proposed if that is the intended purpose.

Starting his chapter with a brief reinterpretation of Biesta's work through a Lacanian presupposition, Jan Jagodzinski frames the educational task away from the emancipation model, and instead suggests one that is framed by the Anthropocene that "grapple[s] with the fictionalized potentials of post-anthropological and post-ontological ... imageries" (p. 84). Jagodzinski calls for "an

education in design and art to orient students to such [imageries]" (p. 93) to question "the precarious state of our species" (p. 90). Unlike previous chapters, jagodzinski seems to speak directly to the dialogic terms under which the book is introduced and provides a more dialectical style of argumentation. The repeated appeals to the "post" do raise questions of what (or where) the absent "pre" might be, but on the whole, this chapter seems to accomplish the book's opening intentions the best.

In Chapter 10, Robyn Ann Ewing and John Nicholas Saunders rely on the transformative power of the arts conceived "as critical, quality pedagogy" to make a case for arts education. They assert that "[m]aking art through drama and literary texts" enable children "to develop communicative, collaborative and problem solving skills and help them become resilient and productive individuals" (p. 104). There is no mention of Deleuze and Guattari, and like some other contributors to the book, Ewing and Saunders also briefly mention Biesta's "grown-up-ness" and "the middle ground," but overall, this is a hard argument to situate in some rather triumphalist rhetoric about art.

Julianne Moss and Anne-Marie Morrissey's contribution also stands out in terms of taking up Biesta's work alongside theoretical work from the field of visual culture. Their focus is on the production of authentic teaching assessments in Australian graduate teacher education programs, particularly around questions of identity and subjectivity.

Jessie L. Beier and Jason J. Wallin criticize, directly and indirectly, those who have yet to accept and understand Deleuzian provocations, claiming that "most pedagogical inquiries seem to be situated in a readymade field of possible, if not definitive, response" (p. 115). Their aim, therefore, "is to not only challenge and disrupt educational approaches that have been stuck ..., but to tabulate the educational task as something that is capable of producing more livable futures for both the human and non-human entities" (p. 118). They set out to make this grand departure by thinking with Deleuze's visionary potential of cinema, which in turn "mobilizes operations of [Biesta's] interruption, suspension, sustenance, and metamorphosis" (p. 124). These claims are reasonable in their own right, but unpersuasive without more examples, and it is increasingly difficult to understand why Deleuze has such an apparent monopoly on their deployment.

In Chapter 13, John Roder and Sean Sturm ask, "[W]hat would Gilles Deleuze, the arch-emancipator, say about Biesta's reading of the educational task – and our suggestive re-reading of it?" (p. 129). Through contrasting two events, these authors attempt to define "a genuine interruption in Biesta's sense" and to exemplify the significance of "letting go" with an "affective composition" (p. 135). This is a welcome thought experiment that fits well in the book's framing, but it does seem rather celebratory and anti-philosophical to set-up Deleuze as an "arch-emancipator" casting judgement over Biesta's work. Furthermore, one would expect the emancipated to be more cautious disciples of anyone, including Deleuze.

In the most dialogic chapter of the book, written in the form of an interview, Biesta converses with Baldacchino. Baldacchino's contribution to the conversation and to the book is noteworthy. His view on "the connection(s) between ... education and the arts" (p. 143), which stems from his own artistic practice, is "the paradox of unlearning" (p. 138) that recognizes "art's aporia," or "[the] inherent plurality of dispositions in art's nature" (p. 139). For Baldacchino, "[t]o unlearn has no 'how'" because "unlearning reasserts a willed form of forgetfulness" that "cannot be taught as a way of relearning" (p. 142). He refers to this approach as "a mannerist pedagogy," drawing on the mannerists of visual art and architecture, present in works by "artists who do not seek progression," and "their art suspends the

meaning of past, present, and future” (p. 144). These ideas emerge directly from the work of a studio teacher and artist in dialogue with a philosopher, resulting in a deeply pedagogical encounter.

Comparing the experience of walking through the museum to that of reading the chapters, Biesta begins the final chapter on an understandably cautious note, commenting on how the contributors “portray thinkers and thoughts, writers and writing” (p. 148), and clarifying how his concepts have been taken up by them. He first does so by reasserting “teaching as interruption” or “the interruption of desires”; in other words, as that which brings “a question ... [one] carr[ies] with oneself throughout one’s life” (p. 149). For him, education is not seen “as a process” or “a matter of development” to reach an outcome; rather, his term “grown-up-ness” is about something that “remains ... ahead of us, always at stake and always in question” (p. 150). This is surely, and justly, a corrective reading to the usage of the concept in previous chapters. There are other notes on similar concepts. In the end, while Biesta notes the degree to which the contributors “she[d] new light on the interconnections between art, artists and pedagogy and have sought to find the educational and the educative in these possibilities” (p. 156), he evaluates their work in the context of his own work, which, considering the introductory terms, seems reasonable. The final two chapters relieve the overdetermined sense of the Deleuzian focus of the book, but they also call that aspect of the book into question.

As we have shown, this book was conceived as an encounter between Biesta and Deleuze, suggesting that they are “two overlapping and yet at times distinct philosophical positions” (Naughton, p. x). Whatever the merits of that encounter may be, the book did not seem to enact it, with a few notable exceptions. Nonetheless, those interested in Deleuzian theories of art, advocacy for the arts in education, and the pedagogical philosophy of Gert Biesta will surely benefit from reading this collection. On the question of whether theory and philosophy can show a mutual appreciation of education, it seems worthwhile to see this edited book as a step in the right direction. On the questions of art, however, that step is far less certain.

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