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It Is Impossible: The Teacher's Creative Response to the Covid-19 Emergency and Digitalized Teaching Strategies

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Abstract

My purpose is to investigate what happens to bodies/affects, arts-based education, entangled relationships, diffractive perspectives, and playful dramatizations during a pandemic crisis. The Covid-19 emergency was a tsunami that wiped away all my favored teaching tools. *It is impossible* I wrote to my study-leader when I had to adjust my creative teaching to digital frames. Still I did it, asking: *what if*? How did this experimentation transform my thinking, planning, and implementing teaching? The methodology I made use of is autoethnographic where data emerged by means of written or multimedia materials that were part of two collective writing projects.

Keywords

creativity, creative teaching, Covid-19, higher education, performance

Introduction and Background

> Dear teacher, we are a group of students at the study programme X and we are doing research on teachers' experiences during the digitalisation of teaching at our higher education institution, due to the Covid-19 emergency. We would like to invite you to a 1-hour interview about the strategies that you used. Thank you in advance.[1]

I am not ready. No way. Why are they using the past tense? I am (we are) in the middle of it. Every day I stand before a new challenge: how can I include the creative teaching tools—which I study and advocate for—in my digital teaching practice? What happens to bodies/affects/emotions (Gorton, 2007), arts-based educational methods (Chemi & Du, 2017), entangled muddy relationships (Haraway, 2016b), diffractive perspectives (Barad, 2007), and playful dramatizations (King, 2011)? This necessary digital tsunami seems to wipe away all my favored teaching tools. *It is impossible* I wrote to my study-leader. And still my own creativity tricks me: is it? Are you truly sure that you cannot bring the body to the screen? *What if* (Stanislavski, 2013) the body could cut through the digital dimension by means of low-tech solutions? How would my experimentation transform my way of thinking, planning, and implementing teaching? The teaching practice I had been trained for needed some rethinking. The most appropriate way to *go about* it (the etymological meaning of *method*) appeared to be an autoethnographic journey (Holman Jones et al., 2016). Autoethnographic data for the present contribution are based on written or multimedia (drawings, videos, dance) materials that emerged as part of two collective writing projects (CCRI collaborative writing April 29–July 1, 2020, Massive & microscopic May 18–June 7, 2020).[2] The dissemination style I make use of floats erratically among several linguistic registers: the warm autobiography, the scholarly, only-apparently-distanced report, the therapeutic diary, the factual description. The purpose here is to involve the reader in the emotional experience of having to cope, through dystopic—and at times toxic—scholarly practices, partly proper to the contemporary university (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001), partly brought about by the pandemic emergency in spring 2020. Like the Princes of Serendip in Walpole's fairy tale (Cammann, 1967), I was sent out in the world, looking for clues to understand and question my own teaching during the pandemic crisis. Like the princes, I have been surprised during my journey through metaphorical *loci* where I collected unexpected and appropriate knowledge. Creativity (Chemi et al., 2015; Harris, 2016) was not an option anymore, but the necessary response to crisis. Serendipitous findings awaited me. Just around the corner.

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First Corner: The Coffee Shop

The first 15 days of the Covid-19 lockdown in my country felt like an awakening to a new reality. On March 13, 2020, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced a full lockdown, which was to affect all educational institutions, including universities. I was about to enter the busiest period of intensive teaching of the whole semester, with classes lasting all day long (sometimes evenings too) for 3 weeks. The content of my classes is creativity, arts-based methods in education and educational research, the role of emotions in education, and several theoretical and methodological perspectives related to these topics. My teaching approach is creative, arts-based, sensory, dramaturgical, and narrative. The Covid-19 suspension of physical classes introduced more than a creative obstruction to my teaching plan: it was a disaster. It felt like a thorough obliteration of my groundwork, of the developed materials, and of the very foundation of my teaching philosophy. The shock woke me up, stronger than coffee. I acted/reacted stubbornly: this situation would *not* be allowed to mess with my creative intentions! I rolled up my sleeves and I started rethinking my teaching method within the frames of technological communication solutions. Here, I will describe what I actually did and I will sketch the main points of my autoethnographic investigation:

> My isolation is optimal. No young children in the house, large comfortable spaces, the woods as neighbours, a job I love, a lot of time for thinking and writing. Where does the anxiety come from? Teaching, the other activity that I love and enjoy preparing for, had to be redone, rethought. Digital forms had to facilitate the students' work. Not too bad. What's the big deal? The problem was the form and content of the teaching that had to be translated into and disseminated by digital forms. Teaching creativity, I take pride in taking my own medicine and actually teach creatively by including the body, the senses, aesthetic experiences, performance and performativity in the classroom. How was it possible to translate playful interactions to a flat screen? How to find an equivalent dramaturgy, which I carefully orchestrate by using progression and improvisation, based on the students' own emerging interests? (CCRI 290420)

My reflexive journaling investigates through flow writing and multimedia artifacts (drawings, dance, poetry, drama) my experience of teaching emerging as a consequence of opposite tensions: my (planned) intentions and what was actually possible in times of pandemic lockdown. My text above suggests that, apparently, what was bothering me was the fact of having to act quickly and not being fully aware of my strategies of adjustment. This recognition felt like an educational and creative problem. Practicing without reflecting, however effective, is not something I ever advocate for. In teaching future teachers, pedagogues, facilitators, and organizational consultants I take care to present a critical view on educational pragmatism, showing how misleading the slogan *learning-by-doing* can be. In the intention of John Dewey, who is credited for this catchphrase, the doing was never conceived to be separate from the reflection on/about the doing. As a matter of fact, Dewey (1944) never uttered this sentence, but actually recommended learning by doing and *undergoing*. This is what I take pride in teaching my students, too often seduced by the intuitive feeling of the slogan *learning-by-doing* that seems to advocate learning harvested through sensory and bodily experiences solely, rather than a non-dualistic combination of experiential and reflective processes. Blind practice, in Deweian terms, was not advisable. Still, this is what I felt I was doing. Was I being untrue to my pedagogical beliefs? Was I lying to my students? Was I living the gap between theory and practice, something that I disliked and addressed sarcastically, for instance, by performing the absurdist relationship between the characters Hands and Brain in the play *The teacher is dead, long live the teacher* (Chemi, 2018)? Was it at all possible to bridge the theory/practice gap? The Covid-19 situation let these latent obsessions emerge on the surface, so that they could be no longer ignored. They did not appertain to conceptual speculation anymore, but to an intimate, identity-related self-understanding.

Second Corner: The Park

Leaving the coffee shop, I decided to take a walk through a woodland environment (the park) and later to a watery environment (the pier), returning home again, but to a renewed home. The walk across the park emerged through a human-non-human interaction. My dog is a big part of my family. He is a small, mixed-breed with a strong personality (fox-hunting) and caring disposition (sofa-cuddling). He is my companion and significant other (Haraway, 2016a). I am his care-taker, playground buddy, and safe haven. Our bond is strong as our communication. His curious nature and intelligence make him trilingual, as are the other members of our family, even though his own means of expression draw basically from body language and a vast range of barking tones. The Covid-19 lockdown has been a wonderful time for him, having all the members of his family at home, accessible for ball-throwing or other kinds of pleasurable interactions. He fell very quickly into the new rhythms of this crowded daily routine. In particular, he has been very precise in remembering his afternoon walk, normally happening at the end of my intensive workday at the desk, in the middle of the afternoon. I enjoy this reminder, and it is a great way of taking a good break before the evening chores or more work. The specific walk in the park that I am going to narrate emerged as a vivid image, almost a movie script, and made me reconsider my position as a creative teacher in Covid times.

Two months into the lockdown, I felt as if I had been tumbled in a washing machine. Seasick. Wide awake. My companion helped me through it:

> Voice over: "She was coming to her body. Every day since the pandemic isolation had started, she took a walk in the woods. Her dog alongside her, she took the same route." Now she is at her desk, and we see her back view. Frontal close-up: black circles under her eyes. She is exhausted by a long day looking at the screen. The dog enters the room, approaches her, his eyes a silent request. "Let's go." She is tempted to continue writing. Her to-do list looks at her too. She takes a moment to breathe and makes a decision. "I can't do this anymore, let's go." The dog agrees cheerfully and quickly precedes her at the door. He is ready. She is ready too. Needy. Almost breathless (close up of face). Quickly she puts her old trainers on. They are dirty, worn-out, wonderfully comfortable. A light jacket to keep the Danish wind at bay, a cotton scarf. "Let's go, dog." She opens the door, shuts it behind her without locking it. Someone is at home. In these days there is always somebody at home. No need to lock up. In an almost hallucinatory state, she takes the steps she has taken a number of times before, but a new sense of urgency is with her now. Her steps are purposeful without haste, her back straight but relaxed. Her faithful trainers decide the pace, one, two, one, two, left, right, left, right. She breathes in and out. The sun is shining and almost warm. At least she can look at the blue sky—her eyes are unaccustomed to this after several grey winter months. It almost hurts her eyes. "I should have had my sunglasses on." The dog knows their way and leads her. She looks lost in her thoughts, but she is actually trying to empty her organism. She is taking in the smell of weed and grass. Not many flowers yet, but the soil is buzzing with life. In a little while, nature will explode; she enjoys her favourite moment of the year in this land. She looks up at the leaves on the trees. Her body relaxes step by step. They meet few pedestrians, a quick acknowledgement and off they go. They are almost at the edge of the road. They enter the woods. Sunshine filters through the trees in beams worthy of a theatre stage. Silence is interrupted only by the occasional bird. This is a haven from the wind and the trees rustle gently. Here the dog can walk free, and he is allowed to do so. Her body seems to react to the woods, becoming part of it. She wears clothes in neutral colours; she is almost part of the scenery without having decided to become so. Camera shifts from overall images to her perspective during the walk. A tiny smile appears on her lips, she takes a deep breath and looks up. They have been walking for 30 minutes (she checks the clock on her phone). Now she is ready again, they can walk back. Slowly, purposefully. No haste. (M&m 200520)

In Haraway's (2016a) manifesto for the companion species, the respectful and loving human/dog relationship is prescribed as such: "both dog and handler have to be able to take the initiative and to respond obediently to the other" (p. 154). My walk in the park emerged as an act of responsiveness, but also as a way of reclaiming spaces for creative unfolding for an exhausted body. Haraway (2016a) connects the human-non-human responsivity to creativity, even though she expresses it with a contradiction in terms: "the goal [of human/dog relationality] is the oxymoron of disciplined spontaneity" (p. 154). This is indeed the effect that the walk in the park, mediated by my responsive interaction with the dog, had on me. Surrendering to the necessity of taking a break from disciplined desk tasks and immersing myself in the sensual experience of nature made me look back at my disrupted creative classroom in a different way. I realized that, probably, my feeling uncomfortable with the process I had been through had nothing to do with blind practice or theory/practice gap, but rather was about allowing myself to use my creative intuition freely. Is freedom in today's academia even possible?

The vignette in the park tells the story of a body. A body that was disconnected and through a transformational experience starts to come to itself. The microscopic description of my everyday practice of walking with my dog-companion, immersed in nature during Covid-19 isolation, makes me aware of several consequences. Few images stand out in my retrospective reflection: the indecision on whether to stay put at the computer or leave everything and walk the dog, the unlocked door in lockdown period, the quality of walk, and the sensory experience in the woods. The vignette portraits my daily dilemma on whether to push myself a little more on the tasks that do not seem to become less, or leave the workstation to take a refreshing break. The eye-dialogue with my[3] dog speaks of this dilemma. Should I stay or should I go? During isolation, I happened to respond to this dilemma differently, more frequently deciding to take a well-deserved break. In "normal" times, I rather chose a self-punishing practice of sacrifice. During lockdown my body reclaimed its needs and I listened to it, paradoxically, getting out of a door that was kept unlocked when the whole global society was kept locked down. The bodily experience of walking in a purposeful but relaxed way is affecting my body and self-perception even now, after many weeks past. Is it really me, this woman who feels assertive and laid-back at the same time? I feel the sensory stimuli on my body so much that by the time I reach home I am relaxed by the pleasure. Stillness does wonders. Is there a lesson for myself? I can see at least two levels of application: a practical and a metaphorical one. The practical one is about including practices of sensory quality that can engage me in extended experiences of fulfillment. The metaphorical about work routines, my creativity, and the tasks of research and teaching. How would I organize my work, if it was a walk in the woods? Who is my dog? My shoes? The birds and trees in the wood? How do I keep the same quality of walk if I were to walk through my work tasks in the same way?

These questions, affects, and perceptions, together with my reflexive journaling on them, shaped new perspectives. Coming to my senses after my immersion in the park made me see that what characterized my response to Covid-19

was not (necessarily) blind practice, but spontaneity. I had been so worried about being true to my teaching and to my students that I had forgotten about the role of spontaneous response in creative activities. Both reflection *and* action are fundamental to thinking new, appropriate solutions or questions. However, they seldom happen at the same time.

Stanislavski's (2013) *magic if* is one of the triggers of performers' creativity, who by asking themselves *what if?* envision alternative worlds. This tiny door into creative acts is extremely accessible; it does not require any creators' skills or knowledge; it exclusively demands a shift from what is known and done already. What if we went in a different, new, inappropriate, crazy, original, impossible direction? What would the consequences be? It is a task of imagination that opens up to unknown trajectories. For as much as it sounds appealing to the knowledge innovator, the shift into what is not yet known brings collateral effects: fear and anxiety escort creative actions, no matter how wished-for they are. My own fear was what made me react straightaway with a rejection: "it is impossible!" However, my curiosity ("what if?") took over and suspended any criticism, dismissal, and resistance. For a while. Precisely, for the time-span in which I was pressed to deliver creative solutions to digital teaching. Looking back retrospectively to this creative period, it felt exciting and filled with anxiety. Time pressure demanded a laser-sharp attention to the task, but once the task was fulfilled, this focused attention felt poorly creative, unreflective, and unsatisfying. A paradox, if compared to the students' brilliant evaluations. Once again, it was Haraway (2016a) who guided my sense-making:

> the task is to become coherent enough in an incoherent world to engage in a joint dance of being that breeds respect and response in the flesh, in the run, on the course. And then to remember how to live like that at every scale, with all partners. (p. 154)

How could I take my walk in the park further, in my reflections? How could this lead my scholarly agency in my situated context? How could/would this influence my being/becoming together with the Other?

Third Corner: The Pier

To answer these questions, my Covid-cartography drafted a new trajectory leading toward a large wharf: a manmade maritime structure with the function of facilitating docking and mooring. All maritime locations are chaotic, dynamic, busy. People come and go, travel, handle. Wharfs are places of goodbyes and homecomings. Within the wharf, piers stand out in the water, securing safe havens to voyagers. This *locus* perfectly symbolizes my affects during the Covid-19 lockdown. In particular, I need to go back to the park-vignette above and to the image of the unlocked door. In my "normal" practice, I balance research and teaching tasks making purposeful use of office time and homeworking. Requiring quiet, silence, and continuity to think-read-write for my research, I tend to exclusively dedicate myself to research tasks when I work from home. Whereas, my office time is an open-door period: colleagues are welcome to knock on my door, students are supervised, and meetings and administration are taken care of. I thrive in this clear division of experiences because it helps me protect my research time. The Covid-19 lockdown, though, blurred these areas into one indistinguishable porridge: my door was always open. Keeping one's door unlocked can emerge from feelings of trust and can generate feelings of relaxation. However, a door that is constantly ajar is a harbor full of interruptions or distractions, with its noise, wandering people, and countless activities. My lockdown door was always open. A busy harbor all day long. I was constantly reachable for office tasks. The pier of my silent research room was flooded, no mooring was possible for my reflections. This was exhausting and frustrating. Was this new? Not completely. The Covid lockdown was just a situation that offered an intense explosion of the dysfunctional tendencies already experienced in pre-Covid times in the contemporary university. New to me was the complete disappearance of a hiding place where it was possible to defend my research time. Moreover, the need of installing a permanent workstation at home made the fluidity between work/after-work even more ambiguous. According to Braidotti (2019), the "post-work fatigue" (p. 29) many experience, especially in knowledge-related tasks, is directly connected with the extent in which contemporary universities allow a new-liberal and capitalist economic model to rule. Quoting Berg and Seeberg (2016), Braidotti denounces the affective consequences that the managerial university—nothing but "a firm manufacturing knowledge products" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 26)—has on scholarly lives:

> the frantic pace and standardization of contemporary academic life, which are incompatible with the time for deep thought that scholarly research requires. [. . .] The stress in academia exceeds that of the general population and the working conditions are unappealing and counter-productive. The neo-liberal governance of universities means that the much-praised flexibility of hours results in academics working all the time [. . .]. The daily life of academics is threatened by expanding class sizes, pervasive technologies and excessive administration. (pp. 25–26)

Briefly, this was my life in a nutshell. No wonder, that the feeling of exhaustion was so deep. Understandable is also my immediate reaction to the Covid emergency: giving focused—and under-reflected—attention to creating a digital alternative to classes that integrate the arts, body, and playfulness in their teaching. Reflection could wait. And it did. Thinking time imposed itself during my lockdown by means of scheduled collaborative writings. Finally, I could

make sense of all the haste. In my journaling, I look at what surprised me:

> I surprise myself by being a more responsive creative teacher than I thought. I am braver and more creative. This pandemic has demanded of me to rethink my teaching in digital forms. This had to be done fast because my classes were all scheduled to be held in the middle of the Danish lockdown. Previously, I had been avoiding the digital solutions, even the blended learning one, in favour of valuing the bodily, sensory, kinaesthetic experiences. A clear counter-tendency in the neoliberal university that sees in digitalised forms and MOOCs a good platform for growth and income. Having a more philosophical vision of university that is closer to its etymological source—the *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, the community of teachers and scholars—I also tend to reject the excitement for digital teaching, where dialogue, embodied communication and relational creativity are sacrificed. Instead, my own Covid experience and the students' feedback tell me that, in spite of my dislike, I am pretty good at finding creative solutions to digital teaching. In this situation I did not hesitate in applying my agency and I did not refuse any task. On the contrary, to each class I found the appropriate solution. Even when my first reaction was "it is *impossible* to digitalise *this* class!," my creative little devil responded with an " . . . is it really?" leaving me with a number of obstructions to remove from my path. Apparently, this has been successful, providing an exciting and rich learning experience for the students. For my part, I never enjoyed teaching more. It was like preparing the presents for Christmas. The secrecy, the anticipation of the other's surprise, the ritual of placing the present in the right place under the Christmas tree, the wait for unwrapping, the joy for the other's joy. However, for me this will always be a support to physical exchange and presence. (M&m, 230520)

In this journaling, I retrospectively notice several elements that I can carry forward in my practice. First of all, I am struck by the dispositional traits that I purposefully trigger as a "looking more affirmatively" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 37) at alternative educational approaches: my tenacity in difficult tasks and the feeling of urgency in creating something original and appropriate to the needs of my context. My response, though, was more aimed at satisfying the demands of the university leadership than at the pedagogical needs of the students. The direct link to the students, by means of shared co-presence in the same room where improvisational changes of directions are easily performed, was cut out by the lack of time and by the abrupt jump into digital platform. However, this responsive process taught me that what I mostly appreciate and enjoy is the poetic element: the opportunity to develop metaphors for the students (and myself), mental images that can open up to critical reflections, by engaging sensory responses. Even though the sense-making implied in these metaphors is individual and linked to the individual's life-experiences, the shared metaphors are more about "us" and relationships. As in the present text, in my teaching I build poetic analogies that stimulate sensory and affective responses. These become the unique language that the class shares and thinks with. The gap between what is said (content) and the metaphor (image) is a creative playground for critical thinking, inasmuch that the students cannot take the content for granted. Equally as gratifying as the positive reactions of the students are the puzzled reactions, sign of a cognitive challenge to a new way of thinking. Serendipitous sensory processes always bring unexpected gifts, provided that one stays with the process, and trusts one's own capacity for navigating through it. As a teacher, my role is to shape challenging metaphors, to invite the students to this different experience and to be available before their (puzzled or excited) reactions. The associative style—in the classroom, as in these pages—emerges from a process that is intuitive, sensory, fluid. This was made possible through digital media, but as a sort of *as if* added to the—already associative—metaphorical communication. An extra make-believe level was added to the—already layered—sensory metaphors.

As an example, I can bring one of the activities that I had planned for the undergraduate program in pedagogical innovation: a playful dramatization with the purpose of engaging the students in creative-critical reflections on pragmatist and constructivist pedagogies. This approach is inspired by Heathcote's "mantle of the expert" (Heathcote & Herbert, 1985), where the teacher pretends to be in character and builds a fictive world in the classroom. Another inspiration is Katie King's (2011) "networked reenactments" that allow for "*flexible knowledges*" (p. 1, italics in text) to emerge in networked (relational) and emergent (serendipitous) ways. The dramatized activity I had planned brings to conclusion a class where creative approaches to educational design and philosophy are investigated and discussed. As a last activity, I introduce the news of a dreadful murder. Something frightful has happened: someone has killed learning. The students are urged to step in as skilled investigators of this appalling massacre: who did it? What is the circumstantial evidence? What can be done to prevent such murders in the future? As work package, they receive a briefcase containing several materials: photos of murder-sites (pictures from educational situations), earlier investigation reports (articles by the theorists in focus), methodological guides to investigations (cartoons or models on creative processes). Before the Covid lockdown, this "briefcase" consisted of digital and paper artifacts that were distributed to the students as small surprises during group-work, whereas in distance teaching all the materials were made accessible at once and in digital form. The "mantle of the expert" approach had also to be revised digitally and my playful pretense had to be conveyed by means of PowerPoint instructions with my voiceover. The murder-fiction was kept coherent throughout the activity, in the language, in the

tone and even in the final requirement: a police report on the murder case, modeled on a mock-up text taken from the Danish police department website. The students loved it and, exceptionally, took time to send me their positive feedback in emails. Their police reports are brilliant: fun, clever, critical, and creative. It has been a huge pleasure to read them and imagine all the fun they had in the process and in communicating with me and each other through this enactment. However, the digital layer added an extra fictive level: the class (students and teacher) was acting *as if* it was in the physical classroom, playing a game *as if* the students were police investigators. Even though the re-enacted murder investigation was meant to be a "diffractive methodology" (Barad, 2007, pp. 89–90), which would bring reflections that were not representative or mirror-like, but rather complex and puzzling, technology—rather than adding a productive layer of complexity—blurred the poetic elements. The digital distance seemed to soften the dramaturgical power of the dramatized task, making the fictive involvement more easily accessible as just "play." This brought two consequences: on one hand, participation in the task was smoother, and on the other hand, the task was less unwieldy or even provocative. The disruption of known models of response that I had carefully planned by means of dramaturgical tools ended up being "just a game." Again, on one hand, this positively influenced the students' ability and willingness to participate in the task, and on the other hand, the digital distance tamed the dramatization into a playful form that was (too) easy to step in to.

The feeling of having "delivered" good teaching, but of having lost the critical-creative power of the synchronous-physical class bothered me. This, together with the feeling of academic fatigue, characterized the wharf I had been sailing to. How could I navigate further, from this point of departure? How could the new awareness reshape my scholarly agency in my situated context? How could/would this influence my being/becoming together with the technological-Other?

Last Corner: Back Home to a New Home

"Dear teacher, we have been very happy with today's task, so many thanks for it! It was fun, exciting and will definitely not be forgotten."[4] I am pleased. Exhausted. Intrigued. My journey, originally envisioned as a well-planned slow-paced stroll, ended up being a serendipitous adventure fed by strong awakening coffee and dangerous seafaring. Merit of a world pandemic crisis: the macroscopic that influences the microscopic. The implications of this journey constitute the learning harvested in my autoethnographic investigation. Far from being a journey that reached its end, this feels more like a new beginning, which at the same time is a homecoming. The frantic pace of contemporary university had forced its grasp on my scholarly life long before Covid-19 imposed a (more) hectic dimension to my teaching tasks and teaching/research balance. The dramaturgy of my response to this crisis performs my journey as an Aristotelian comedy: a story that starts with a tragic event (a crisis, a break) and ends well by means of *anagnorisis* (Ancient Greek for "recognition"), a state of achieved acknowledgment. From my immediate response that categorically refused any solution, I moved toward a professional and personal change through a process of *peripeteia* (Ancient Greek for "turning upside-down"). The peripety I experienced during the Covid-19 emergency had definite characteristics manifested as: the lack of the time necessary to develop creatively, exhaustion, the presence of human and non-human significant others, willingness and commitment to creativity, the reclaiming of creative spaces, and passion for the poetic.

My autoethnographic journey made me aware of the dysfunctional pairing of lack of time for creative tasks and academic fatigue—as opposed to academic joy and pleasure, investigated in Riddle et al. (2017). Time to be creative is a tricky topic in creativity studies. On one hand, it is necessary to spend time in tasks that often require a sense of psychological freedom, positive affects, and a perceived sense of freedom or autonomy, to engage motivational dispositions that can make a creator experience "the sheer pleasure and enjoyment of the task" (Hennessey, 2010, p. 343). On the other hand, time pressure seems to boost more original, riskier and better ideas (Sawyer, 2011), and negative affect can, in specific circumstances, motivate creators to solve the problems at hand (Hennessey, 2010). In education, time constraints are mentioned "as the number one prohibitor of creativity in schools" (Harris, 2016, p. 33) and related to practices of exhaustion (workload) and to damaging affects, such as "demoralization and apathy" (Harris, 2016, p. 33). There I was, with my brutal workload, obliged to deliver creative solutions under time pressure and psychological stress. I did it, but it was not enjoyable. It was not optimal. It was not to be repeated. Student voices were silent and silenced by a fast-paced problem-solving attitude relying on a number of assumptions about the students' pedagogical and relational needs. My own educational design, as the present narrative, excluded the students' agency: solutions had to be found quickly for the student's own good. The students' gain was equaled to "delivery" of teaching as it was promised in the original programs. Even though I bought into the frenzy of "doing as promised," I still tried to build dialogic and creative spaces in the digital platforms. I built a raft when the scholarly estate was flooded and sailing, and this raft helped me—and my organization—to come to *terra firma*. We were saved, we reached our target. However, the raft is not the boat.[5] Solutions to crisis situations cannot be mistaken for the most appropriate response, even when the

target is reached. The navigation that a cruise-ship can offer is nothing in comparison to the route of the raft. Even though they both reach land, their seafaring is very different. Given that the new frames were introduced and made explicit to the students, as inclusive higher education pedagogy expects, the students' voices came in the background. What is the place of the students in the raft metaphor? At the moment, I see them hanging on the sides of the raft, still the prey of stormy waters, while the teachers, safer in the middle of the raft, take a comforted breath in the belief that this is a successful rescue. The risk at the moment is that managerial administrations will take over the steering and only consider the (seemingly) positive achievements reached during Covid-crisis adjustments, neglecting the soft, "warm" (Chemi, 2020, p. 54) or "subtle" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 158) experiences and skills, or the necessary messiness of the relational agency. These are the dimensions that make creativity possible and critical.

Reclaiming pleasure in creative-critical scholarly work becomes an act of (political) resistance that opposes the logic of "delivery" and accountability. Reclaiming time/space to be creative-critical is an act of activism that "will necessarily take place within and across the territory that has been colonized by the audit society, yet at the same time will require a rethinking of the edges of those territories, moving into the borderlands" (Honan, 2017, p. 15). These borderlands, plateaus that are both cores and peripheries at the same time, cannot but be extended communities that embrace the other human and non-human. It is only apparently a paradox that my immersion in nature and own bodily needs was what helped me approach a different understanding of the digital activity. In post-human worlds, it is only possible to be critical-creative *together*. Sense-making happens in affirmative collaboration across species (human-dog) and in entangled relationships with matter (photos, bodies), discourses (dramatized fiction), and technologies (computer). Matter and metaphor, "material discursive practices" (Barad, 2007, p. 146), merge in my own oxymoronic neologism: *matterphors*, matter and poetic metaphor entangled in one messy relationship. *Matterphors* will lead even more systematically the way in which I design educational programs. Sustainable change will be secured by means of the creative potential of combining the poetic with the bodily and the metaphoric with the conceptual. Only in this togetherness "we" can turn a crisis into a critical-creative possibility: the microscopic can affirmatively influence the macroscopic.

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Notes

1. Fictionalized version of a number of students' email communications in the lockdown period beginning April 16, 2020. The correspondence is fictionalized for stylistic reasons and kept anonymous for ethical reasons.
2. The reflexive journaling collected from these collaborative writing initiatives will be quoted respectively as CCRI and M&m, both followed by the date of writing. Direct quotes from the reflexive journaling have been slightly modified but exclusively for linguistic clarity.
3. This pronoun does not indicate one-way possession (I own the dog), but rather reciprocal kinship: the dog and I are "oddkin" (Haraway, 2016b, p. 2) to each other in affective and mutual becoming.
4. Students' email communication on March 24, 2020, my translation from Danish.
5. Acknowledges to my collaborating artist, theater director Pierangelo Savarese Pompa, whose metaphor I here borrow.

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