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CRITICAL POSTHUMANISM, NEW MATERIALISMS AND THE AFFECTIVE TURN FOR SOCIALLY JUST PEDAGOGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

V. Bozalek (Guest editor)

Director of Teaching and Learning

University of the Western Cape

Cape Town, South Africa

e-mail: vbozalek@uwc.ac.za

M. Zembylas (Guest editor)

Associate Professor: Curriculum Studies

Open University of Cyprus & University of the Free State

e-mail: m.zembylas@ouc.ac.cy

ABSTRACT

Critical posthumanism, new/feminist materialisms and the affective turn have a great deal in common with each other, and can be seen as similar perspectives with slightly different emphases in each framework, all focusing on: relational ontologies; a critique of dualisms; and engagements with matter and the non-human. Feminist thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Elizabeth Grosz, Nancy Tuana, Vicky Kirby, Jane Bennett, and Stacey Alaimo, amongst others, have been identified both as critical posthumanists and new/feminist materialists, and have also contributed to ideas about the affective turn. Many of these scholars have been influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari and their notions of monism and vitalism, and have moved beyond the centrality of discourse and cartesian dualisms to incorporate a vision of human/nonhuman, body/mind, subject/object, nature/culture, matter/ meaning, continuity/discontinuity, beginning/returning and creation/renewal (Barad 2007) in their work.

Keywords: critical posthumanism, new materialisms, the affective turn, socially just pedagogies

Posthumanism builds on the epistemological and political foundations of anti-humanism, postcolonialism, post-anthropocentrism, anti-racism and material feminisms (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Blagaard and Van der Tuin 2014; Coole and Frost 2010; Dolphijn and Van der Tuin 2012; Nayar 2014; Wolfe 2014). Critical posthumanism, in particular, embraces a critical view of a disembedded liberal humanism, with its assumptions of a society with equally placed

autonomous agents and rational scientific control over others (Adams 2014; Donovan and Adams 2007).

New materialist feminisms have built on the linguistic turn which focused exclusively on discursive practices at the expense of the material world, developing an ‘embedded and embodied’ (Braidotti 2002, 2) material-discursive philosophy of difference and being in the world. Prominent theorists who have developed and written about new feminist materialisms are philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2002; 2006; 2011; 2013), and natural scientists and feminist theorists Karen Barad (2007; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2014) and Donna Haraway (1988; 1997; 2003; 2008). New feminist materialists have moved beyond a critical deconstruction and critique to alternative enactments of becoming, where power is not only seen as limiting but also as affirmative (Braidotti 2013). New/feminist materialisms have expanded Haraway’s ideas on situated knowledges, critiquing universalist disembodied ‘God’s eye’ views of the world, paving the way for ethical accountability in local and grounded knowledges. Rather than seeing epistemology, ontology and ethics as separate, new materialisms consider them as co-implicated and entangled – Barad (2007) refers to her notion of agential realism as an ethico-onto-epistemological framework. Difference is celebrated as productive rather than seen as alterity. Matter is seen as vital and vibrant and as having agency and as being ‘mutually constituted’ with the discursive (Bennett 2010; Lenz Taguchi 2013; Phillips and Larson 2013).

The ‘affective turn’ (Clough 2007) in the humanities and social sciences has developed some of the most innovative and productive theoretical ideas in recent years, bringing together psychoanalytically informed theories of subjectivity and subjection, theories of the body and embodiment, and political theories and critical analysis. The affective turn marks ‘critical theory’s turn to affect’ (2007, 2), as Patricia Clough writes, ‘at a time when critical theory is facing the analytic challenges of ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter/terrorism’ (ibid.). Although there are clearly different approaches in the affective turn that range from psychoanalysis, post-Deleuzian perspectives, theories of the body and embodiment to affective politics, there is a substantial turn to the intersections of the social, cultural and political with the psychic and the unconscious. The affective turn, then, marks a shift in thought in critical theory through an exploration of the complex interrelations of discursive practices, the human body, social and cultural forces, and individually-experienced but historically situated emotions and affects.

PURPOSE OF THE SPECIAL EDITION

This special edition considers how such frameworks as the affective turn, critical

posthumanism, and new feminist materialisms might provide fresh ways of thinking about and enacting *socially just pedagogies* in higher education. Currently in higher education where gross inequalities continue to affect pedagogical practices in South Africa and other geopolitical contexts, there is a need to consider new theories which call into question commonplace humanist assumptions, so prevalent in the imaginings of socially just higher education pedagogies. While a number of writers and researchers have considered critical posthumanism, new materialisms and the affective turn for other educational sectors (see for example Childers 2013; 2014; Davies 2014a and b; Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010; Lenz Taguchi 2010; 2012; 2013; Lenz Taguchi and Palmer 2013; Myers 2014; Sellers 2013; Taylor 2013) few scholars have dealt specifically with higher education (Jackson and Mazzei 2012; Semetsky and Masny 2013; Zabrodska, Linnell, Laws and Davies 2011), with even less visibility in the area of socially just pedagogies from these perspectives with a few exceptions (see for example Goodley 2007; Goodley and Roets 2008; Madriaga and Goodley 2010 which deal more with disabilities and higher education).

This special edition provides a space to re-imagine socially just pedagogies from the perspectives of critical posthumanism, new materialisms and the affective turn, thus questioning taken-for-granted humanist assumptions, such as interpretivism and assumed localisation of agency as existing within and being possessed by humans. In particular, the authors of this special issue address the following questions:

- How do we make sense of ‘socially just pedagogies’ in higher education in light of the above theoretical developments and how would a socially just pedagogy work from these perspectives?
- What new avenues of exploration do these theoretical approaches provide for doing, and thinking differently about socially just higher education pedagogies?
- What potentialities for re-imagining research methodologies and practices for socially just pedagogies are afforded by critical posthumanism, new materialisms and the affective turn?
- How does breaking binaries and dualisms such as between research and teaching allow questions to be asked about current forms and open up ways of being and doing differently in socially just pedagogies?
- How do ethical, ontological, epistemological, and affective configurations in these theoretical perspectives impact on socially just pedagogies?

The articles in this collection shed light on the sorts of questions posed above, challenging the reader again with tensions troubling higher education scholars in South Africa and beyond, and exploring some insightful possibilities of responding to such tensions. The authors of these articles do not pretend to have better or ‘final’ answers to these questions. However, they follow provocative lines of thinking that complicate the issues and enrich our perspectives. Most importantly, they highlight the impact that the theories of critical posthumanism, new materialisms and the affective turn have in the field of higher education.

Vivienne Bozalek, Abdullah Bayat, Siddique Motala, Veronica Mitchell, and Daniela Gachago write an evocative article which emerges from their relationship with Theo Combrinck, a colleague who died unexpectedly in 2014. The authors intra-act with Theo’s vibrant presence as they consider socially just pedagogies. Theo’s work and activism lives on through memories, audio recordings and different forms of texts written by him, all representing his views of socially just pedagogy. The article talks about the intra-actions with Theo’s ideas and the entanglements with the perspectives of posthumanism and diffraction to illustrate how the collaborative energy of co-constituted relationships contribute an affective response towards developing socially just pedagogies.

Brenda Leibowitz discusses what socially just pedagogies in higher education might mean within a framework that acknowledges socio-materialist and post-human ontologies. Leibowitz uses data from interviews with lecturers in two higher education institutions in South Africa, one historically advantaged and one historically disadvantaged. The use of a socio-materialist and post-human framework to ‘read’ the data shows the intra-actions, comprising discourses on teaching and learning, the space, materials, artefacts and time. Understanding teaching and learning through these terms, argues Leibowitz, has important implications for understanding socially just pedagogies in higher education.

Veronica Mitchell focuses on how the obstetrics curriculum can be changed into a socially just practice through the use of drawings as a pedagogic device to elicit affect. Generally, as in most medical education, the obstetrics curriculum tends to ignore and obfuscate affect in its focus on scientific, evidence-based practice in an attempt to comply with professional accreditation. The urgent need for students to express how they are affected by and affect their clinical experiences of birthing in public health facilities, often in contexts of abuse, neglect and disrespect towards women in labour, becomes apparent in Mitchell’s article. These experiences, which are usually obfuscated in the curriculum, are allowed to come to the fore through art-in-the-making, where students and research participants who are educators in the obstetrics curriculum are given the opportunity to express affect through the agency of the

material.

Delphi Carstens explores how Deleuzoguattarian schizoanalysis, intersecting with critical posthumanism, the affective turn and the new materialisms, might assist higher education to develop socially and environmentally-just pedagogies that are relevant to the contemporary crisis of the Anthropocene. Carstens discusses the ethical, ontological, epistemological and affective implications of these theoretical perspectives, arguing that it has become increasingly necessary for higher education to keep abreast with the accelerated pace of Anthropocene developments and the reality of environmental (and possibly human) extinction.

Karin Murriss uses Barad's ideas to analyze a series of photos she 'made' of the Cecil Rhodes's statue before it was removed from the University of Cape Town's campus. Murriss takes on a critical posthumanist perspective to further theorize the ontological implications of decolonization moves such as this one and discusses the implications for the project of social justice at the higher education sector. Her article shows how acknowledging the entanglement of the discursive with the material can actually open up possibilities of thinking about decolonisation differently.

Daniela Gachago utilizes ideas from new materialism to show the in-depth entanglements of a student, her digital story and the audience in and across space and time. Gachago shows how digital storytellers are both composer and composed, constituting new subjectivities and creating openings for ethical and responsible engagement with the power of stories in the context of socially just pedagogies. Her compelling analysis of a case study of digital storytelling is a powerful example of how theoretical ideas can enrich the practice of social justice teaching in higher education.

Dirk Postma's article alludes to the reactions of South African student-led protest movements such as #Rhodesmustfall and #Feesmustfall to multiple forms of exclusion from participation in higher education, as forms of injustice during the period of late capitalism. He posits that posthumanism can provide a fruitful lens for a socially just pedagogy in higher education through its attention to *becoming* of humans, non-humans and the earth. Postma provides an overview of some important features of posthumanism in the first half of the article – such as subjectification, powers, becoming, desire and affect. He then moves onto explicate a posthuman ethics and its imbrication with socially just pedagogies, in terms of the enhancing of affects, increasing intensities and becoming-minoritarian, through for example, connecting multiplications of assemblages and associations. Postma peppers his discussion of a socially just posthuman pedagogy with a number of examples, helping the reader to imagine how these may be practised in higher education classrooms.

Chantelle Gray van Heerden brings together the collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as feminists such as Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz and Patricia MacCormack who have engaged with Deleuze and Guattari in their work, to re-imagine socially just pedagogies from an anarchist position. Her article provides some ideas of how a socially just feminist pedagogical praxis might be able to escape processes of subjectivisation that produce subservient, State-enslaved citizens through education. She proposes that this might be possible through the creation of a new praxis through the enactment of emerging events, such as the #Rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall movements which represent forms of direct action or an active micropolitics in South African higher education. The importance of both reconceptualising both the content and form of higher education, with a simultaneous consciousness of neoliberalism and its effects on the sector, is necessary for materialising socially just pedagogies.

All in all, the contributions in this special issue provide alternative perspectives to humanist understanding of socially just pedagogies through considering the entangled connections of the linguistic, social, political and biological. These contributions appreciate the South African as well as the international dimensions of the tensions and challenges documented in relation to socially just pedagogies in higher education, in an effort to contribute to an emerging discourse that takes into account the localities as well as the realities of global forces. Finally, these contributions offer critical commentary on how theoretical developments on the affective turn, critical posthumanism and/or new material feminisms may develop complex, enriched and nuanced understandings of socially just pedagogies in higher education in South Africa and beyond.

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