

Affirmative critique and strange race-things: Experimenting with art-ing as analysis

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Abstract

The focus of this article is affirmative critique, its ontological grounding, and a record of an attempt to perform an affirmative critical analysis with documented strange race-things. It is inspired by the debate on limitations of Enlightened critical practice, and writings on a proposed alternative; affirmative critique (Braidotti, 2011, 2013). Grounded in an ontology of difference, affirmative critique suggests to affirm and create other ways of speaking and living to 'push power a little' (Bunz, Kaiser, & Thiele, 2017a, p. 16). Further, it is argued that this might be a more transformative mode than the traditional Enlightened critique informing decades of multitudes of politics, perspectives and practices offered to work against how race is stubbornly becoming in unjust ways. The affirmative critical analysis performed is an experimentation with a print of a photographic image; an art-ing with data.

Keywords: Affirmative critique, race, analysis, art-ing

A quest for different modes of critique

A growing debate on how critique can be re-thought *and* the current ontological and methodological reorientation in the humanities and social sciences (Lather, 2013; St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016; Vannini, 2015), have inspired me to be curious of how to figure critical practice otherwise in early childhood education research. Critique has historically been an important aspect of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, in public discourse, this dimension has become both marginalized and a buzzword, and critique or criticality has become less visible in academic practices the last years (Denzin, 2017; Kaiser, Thiele, & Bunz, 2014). Latour (2004) argues that traditional modes of critique in academic discourse has 'run out of steam', and that tools used by academics interested in contributing to social justice should be replaced. This debate then concerning critical research, is engaged in how to continue performing critique in ways more adjusted to contemporary conditions.

The urge to continue to make critique productive is something Latour shares with other contemporary thinkers (Braidotti, 2013; Bunz, Kaiser, & Thiele, 2017b; Denzin, 2017; MacLure, 2015). Many whom, like the scholars in this special issue, work from an understanding of ontology as processual and self-organizing. Although complicated and sometimes even contradictory, Bunz, Kaiser and Thiele (2017a) argue that giving up on critique is not an option when being is understood as immanent, entangled and processual. Rather, such an ontology calls for 'critique as intervention'

(p. 12), that is a critique that affirms *and* creates other ways of speaking and living to ‘push power a little’ (p. 16). Whereas in traditional modes of critique oppositional tactics, reactive dialectics, representational strategies and an outsider position in relation to the phenomena under critical consideration are the dominant practices (Bunz et al., 2017a; Rai, 2012), such an ‘affirmative critique’ instead privileges creativity, inventiveness and experimenting (Braidotti, 2011, 2013). It is in conjunction with the debate on re-thinking critique in research practices, and current work experimenting with how methodology can be practiced when the nature of being is rethought, that this article unfolds.

In what follows then, I attempt to practice affirmative critique to transgress “strange things happening”. The strange things engaged with are *race-things* performing themselves in problematic and unjust ways despite a multitude of historical knowledge, laws, politics, practices and theories created to work against such events. The paper focuses particularly on affirmative critique as an *analytical optic* when analyzing data. That is, I try to figure critical *analysis* otherwise with an example of data from a study concerning early childhood education and the performance of ethical professional practice in a diverse society (Andersen, 2015). The data is a photographic image documenting affective encounters or race-things habitually coming into being with me (a “white” woman and a former preschool teacher) when passing a place by car. To activate something else to emerge from and with these encounters, to actively nurture surprises and work generatively (Koro-Ljungberg, 2012) with this piece of data, *art-ing* is performed as an active way of producing and practicing subjectivity differently. A record of the art-ing is presented towards the end of the paper after folding out an argument for approaching race from a different ontological ground than a phenomenological or a social constructionist, and after laying out how an ontology of difference effects how critique might be performed.

Strange times and strange race-things

Braidotti (2002) wrote once of ‘strange times’. I suggest her below description of things happening in such times makes more perceivable a worldly condition in need of pushing critical work further:

These are strange times, and strange things are happening. Times of ever-expanding, yet spasmodic, waves of change, which engender the simultaneous occurrence of contradictory effects. Times of fast-moving changes which do not wipe out the brutality of power-relations, but in many ways intensify them and bring them to the point of implosion (2002, p. 1)

Braidotti’s words connects to the contemporary conditions Bunz et.al (2017a) are pointing to, when they write of ‘a planet in critical economic, ecological, symbolic, socio-political, intra-species condition’ (p. 12). In such strange times, they argue, a classical performance of critique that investigates what seem to be the boundaries of a status quo for then to come up with a better political project has ‘lost traction’ (p. 12). For example, despite numerous anti-racist and anti-discriminating politics worldwide suggesting how societies can become more equal and just, discriminatory racial power-relations are expanding in monstrous ways. This condition then, I argue, might have something to gain from a mode of critique with ‘no “better” or “final” solution in view’ (p. 12).

Also, Braidotti’s depiction of ‘strange times’ encourages engaging with how strange unjust *race-things* are happening in contemporary times across multiple power-producing fields. It also encourages me to involve with research studying complex race-processes in a Nordic region; for example work arguing that the Nordic countries have not questioned a Nordic version of eurocentrism (Schough, 2008), but rather positioned themselves as untouched by the legacy of colonialism (Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni, & Tuori, 2009). Also, several studies suggest that race as a concept is abandoned in this geographical location (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011; Myrdahl, 2010).

Threads of these knowledges are however not part of ‘majoritarian’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) professional language offered preschool teachers as tools to practice ethical and just pedagogies in a globalized world (Andersen, 2015). Further, these tools have not stopped race’s ability to persist and continue to work in problematic ways in Norwegian early childhood education and beyond.

Rather, a contradictory effect seem to be that, and again I draw from Braidotti’s (2006) thinking, these strange times ironically promote how to fight ‘racism without races’ and embrace ‘multiculturalism without ending racism’ (p. 58). I have argued elsewhere that contemporary politics and perspectives in Nordic early childhood education aiming at working towards a more just and equal diverse society are not transformative enough (Andersen, 2015). Inspired by others (Rai, 2012; Saldanha, 2006) I have suggested to re-ontologize race, a shift that gives preschool teachers a very different starting point for creating more livable worlds in educational institutions. Put differently and broader, a turn to an ontology of difference when approaching that which troubles us (problematic race-things), allows us to affirm that which happens and engage with it in creative ways instead of working to negate it.

An ontology of difference - a ground for affirmative critique

In this section, I un-exhaustively lay out an ontology of difference as the ground for thinking of affirmative critique as transformative, political and ethical. Before this however, I want to share how my own curiosity towards an ontology of difference was an effect of struggling to work in transformative ways with problematic and imprisoned bodily race-experiences (or race-things) happening unintentionally with me when traversing an everyday early childhood landscape. These bodily race-experiences were archived through an ‘autoethnography of what happens’ (Stewart, 2013) concerning educators’ “white” racial subjectivity in professional early childhood practices (Andersen, 2015). These race-things could, at the time of archiving, only be recognized as episodes representing familiar and sad examples of how hard it is to work against racial discrimination. Below, as a (poor) documentation of a bodily race-experience, is a photographic image of a place close to where I used to live.



A documentation of race-things

The photo was intuitively taken as a reminder of what came into being (again and again) when passing this place by car over a longer period of time. Somehow, to pass this place created with me vague and floating expressions recognized in my body-mind as e.g. dirty, ghetto-like, unsafe, a place only immigrants and low-income families live, bad neighborhood, carrying a lot of traffic, dusty place, cold place and more. The challenge or problem with this was how these expressions tended towards something undesirable and how this created a stuckness in my body. Hence, I began questioning how this could happen. This bodily experience was far from “me”, and what I thought of as ethical ways of being in the world. Moreover, this experience and various other race-things happening seemed dangerously close to discriminatory practices. They were not quite the same, but still they seemed to have something to do with racial discrimination. Despite being familiar with several theoretical and methodological tools to think of these as discursively produced realities (various social constructivist theories) and not just an individual matter, the alike problematic bodily experience was repeated in various everyday spaces. More concrete, the practice of thinking of these race-things as discursively constructed, and further to deconstruct these discursively constituted processes, did not prevent the production of unjust and unethical race-things with me.

Elsewhere, I have written more extensively of the process of documenting racial subjectivity in its becoming (Andersen, 2015, 2017), and the motley data that became a data-archive in a study exploring “white” preschool teachers’ relation with race. Here I have also written of the necessity of a shift to a ‘post-interpretive empiricism’ (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 125). I will not go into this here, as the focus for this paper is on affirmative critique as a possible transformative analytical optic and practice. Instead, I work from the following question: How might one approach a (poor) documentation of a “white” body-mind’s race-experiences tending towards discrimination if one is interested in what else ethical professional subjects can become and in going beyond representational logics and humanist “better” solutions?

To work with this question, I have turned to philosophy (here and in the mentioned study), particularly the work of Deleuze and his collaborative thinking with Guattari is productive, but also the work of Bergson. Immensely productive to the problem I encountered is Deleuze and Guattari’s image of thinking and their understanding of reality as nomadic, creative and political. In their philosophy, ontology is embraced and coined with a radical conceptualization of difference. Here difference is expressed through the overlapping concepts *multiplicity*, *assemblage* or *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Grosz, 2005). As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write: ‘all we know are assemblages’ (p. 25), a statement that when taken not as a metaphor but as an expression of the real can swirl us into a different relation with the world, and sometimes with different futures. To extend a bit, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write of an assemblage as an ‘increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections’ (p. 9). Reality, when thinking with Deleuze and Guattari, is a self-organizing open system that is more or less stable and simultaneously in constant motion. This is quite different from reality understood as a stable ground, a “terra firma” or “solid earth” which is the case for modern western philosophy. Instead reality is mobile or what the French philosopher Bergson refers to as a ‘galloping terra firma beneath you’ (de Mille, 2013, p. 150).

Bergson (in Kumar, 1959), who Deleuze and Guattari draw on in their radical conception of difference, articulates an awareness of how some might be dizzy and feel they lose their ground for thinking when presented with such an ontology. Something else might however happen if we are willing to encounter what exists as always in the making (Bergson, 2014), to accept change not fixedness as the ground to think from. An ontology of difference then, is a different starting point for practicing critique for change. With this conception of ontology, what *is* is change itself. Change is not something that humans as a species detached from a dead material world create. Change is already happening, and this calls for a different way of creating knowledge in human’s efforts of furthering social and ecological justice.

Before saying something about what this deleuzian philosophy might do to race-things, I will give some space to the question of the subject within this thinking. With Deleuze, the subject is not an ontological entity, but rather a practical subject who is continuously doing (Spindler, 2013, p. 136). Moreover, it is constituted over time through principles of association; a process of organizing and vitalizing repeated ideas coming from the outside, and passions; senses of desire and un-desire which make ideas stronger or weaker (p. 129-130). Through this process the mind becomes a subject, hence it is not the subject who organizes external ideas but the instances of ideas that gives rise to the system that constitutes the subject (p. 131). This challenges the idea of a subject who can guarantee a responsible agency (p.131) and the idea of a preschool teacher who always can practice ethically by intention.

What can various optics do to how we approach race-things

Working from an ontology of difference necessarily effects how educational researchers approach a phenomenon that is problematic in terms of justice and equity. It works on our methodology, for example, our methodological optics and how we create knowledge that we believe is sustainable and transformative. Staunæs (2010), in an article where she argues for a deleuzian optics in relation to the problem of whiteness, can be read as part of the earlier mentioned debate on the necessity for different modes of critique. Here, she is particularly interested in what a phenomenological versus an affirmative analytical strategy might perform. In a reading of Sara Ahmed's argument for phenomenology as a useful optics when critically studying whiteness, Staunæs asks if this analytical strategy is sharp enough if one has as an ambition to spot more than one already know, and further to be surprised. She claims that if one is not content with observing that whiteness is transferred habitual knowledge or what whiteness is performing, but rather has an interest in what else whiteness can *become*, the optic of phenomenology is not helpful. Phenomenology, Staunæs argues, leaves us without an optic to see whiteness' infirmity and the constant maintenance work needed to sustain it (p. 78). However, if approaching whiteness with a deluzian optics grounded in an ontology of difference a preschool teacher or a researcher wonders how something at all is retained. Staunæs (2010) writes:

Med den optik bliver man opmærksom på, at noget, der umiddelbart ser fikseret og ensartet ud over tid slet ikke er det. Det, der ser ud til at holde over tid, er blevet rystet undervejs, eller dele kan være skiftet du (p. 77)

A translation of this reads: With such an optic, one become aware of how something that immediately seems fixed and homogenous over time is not so at all. That which seems to last over time has been shaken along the way or elements have been replaced. This is not habitual work in the phenomenological sense, but rather a mutation-process, Staunæs (2010) writes. Accordingly, whiteness with a deleuzian optics can be approached as constantly shaken and hence always different, always becoming. Further, when interested in what else whiteness can become it is in this optics possible to approach whiteness as mutation-processes or differential becomings that somehow is too tight and too stable. Massumi (1992) writes of such stratified processes as a 'becoming-the-same' (pp. 106-107), and I suggest that the race-things I became curious of can be approached as such. Putting to work a deleuzian optics where what *is* is change with the phenomena of race-things happening, the question is no longer how to stop such events from happening. Rather, it is productive to ask what the possibilities are for its further reinvention, and how this might promote progressive social change (Hames-García, 2008, p. 315). Rai (2012) also supports this approach when he urges us to move beyond a reactive critique evident in contemporary antiracist discourse, as this might create other activist moves.

To trace and critique power relations are not enough in an optic working from an ontology of difference (Braidotti, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). A critical analytical strategy for this ontology is not to offer a particular solution towards change (change is what already is), but to be interested in

creating new connections and new concepts that can help us 'live a different existence' (St. Pierre et al., 2016, p. 100). In my grappling with how critique might be performed in relation to an interest in early childhood education and race when working with philosophies where ontology is constantly in the making, Braidotti's (2011, 2013) concept 'affirmative critique' has been of great inspiration. With this concept, it became possible to approach strange race-things as a becoming-the-same without giving up on critique, which also made me curious of how such a critique might differ from critique that is more traditional.

Critique when moving away from Kantian philosophy

The philosophers turned to in this paper have in common a move away from Kant's philosophy and his interest in elimination of a possibility for absolute knowledge (Lawlor & Moulard-Leonard, 2016; Nesbitt, 2013; van der Tuin, 2011), or a determination of the limits of understanding (Moulard-Leonard, 2008, p. 90). Latour's 2004 article *Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?* is one example of contemporary quests for other modes of critique in the humanities and social sciences than the kind inherited from Kantian thinking. The planetary conditions are not the same as during the Enlightenment, he argues, a period when the powerful tool of 'matters of fact' functioned to debunk many 'beliefs, powers and illusions' (p. 232). Hence, modes for critically questioning what happens in the world in order to produce knowledge that can contribute to ecological and social justice, he argues, should be replaced accordingly. Latour (2004) asks what critique would do if it could be associated with more and not less; with multiplication and not subtraction (p. 248)? I read Latour's contribution in this debate as in sympathy with Braidotti's (2011, 2013) call for an affirmative critique in a posthuman era.

In short, affirmative critique is a way of overcoming a modern genre of critique that is human centered, e.g. critique where the subject is understood as in charge (van der Tuin, 2015, pp. 39-40). Hence, this mode of critique rejects a researcher subject placed outside the phenomenon of interest. This connects to the earlier presented understanding of the subject in an ontology of difference. As posed by Juelskjær and Staunæs (2016), affirmative critique is not about critiquing from a distance but to 'become sensitive to the sensorium' (p. 48) we are of. Hence, an ontology of difference calls for an 'embodied mode of critique' (Bunz et al., 2017a, p. 9) where one as a researcher is interested 'the complicity of oneself' ... 'with-in the conditions or phenomena that are under critical consideration' (p. 7). This relates to a monist metaphysics where what is known always is entangled with the one who does the knowing (Bunz et al., 2017a), and this differs radically from Kant's conception of the subject as transcendental (Voss, 2013).

Affirmative critique extended

My interest in different modes of critique than a Kantian was produced through reading a branch of philosophy where reality is understood as forces of morphing matter, mutation processes or constant becomings. Importantly, the forces productive of change is also productive of habits (Grosz, 2005) which in some cases are experienced affectively as imprisoned ways of living (Spindler, 2013). Massumi's (1992) 'becoming-the-same' mentioned earlier is here an overlapping concept, and the strange race-things that caught my interest in an undefined way I suggest are examples of such habits. From this, my questions in the following parts concerns: how can researchers intervene with imprisoned ways of living? How might race-things be analysed or approached if working within an affirmative critical framework that aims at transformation? How might this be ethical? These are complex questions with no universal answers, still, and beginning with the latter, I will try to work through them.

Sellars (2006) when writing of ethics, suggests that the only meaningful response to what happens to us is to embrace it no matter what it will bring. This is about affirming what comes to pass he

explains, 'to will it as if it were what we would have chosen for ourselves' (p. 161). It is an 'an ethics of the event' where the subject is conceived as 'a process or series of events' and where 'every new event becomes a constitutive component that must be affirmed as part of oneself' (p. 161). Every event then, no matter its content, is a part of who one is (p. 166). The ethical choice for Deleuze, Sellars continues, is 'one between a life of bitterness and a life of joy' (p. 166), where one of joy is to assess events by their power of creation. The act of documenting imprisoned ways of living can be understood as attempts to affirm and will what comes to pass (external ideas). To affirm the strange race-things as part of myself as a practical subject constituted and existing through principles of association and passions (organizations of external ideas), I suggest is an element in an ethics of the event.

In accordance with this conception of the subject and ethics, Braidotti (2011) suggests that to perform affirmative critique one 'has to start from micro-instances of embodied and embedded self and the complex web of social relations that compose the self' (p. 268). I suggest that the race-things documented can be approach as micro-instances of self, and the previous brief folding out of strange times in relation to race in a Nordic landscape is an example of an incomplete tracing of social relations that compose this self. However, and I find this question particularly challenging: how can such events or instances be worked with(in) to create qualitative differences that might morph into something else and hopefully be productive of more just habitual becomings? This concerns being curious of how documented race-things can be assessed by its power of creation, and how to approach these within an affirmative critical framework.

Bouge (2011) argues that we cannot just blindly start a process of becoming (creation of qualitative differentiation) with no point of inception. Such a mode of resistance is always contingent and specific: 'one resists the intolerable where one finds it, when one can no longer tolerate it' (p. 82). This I suggest is in line with Braidotti's suggestion of where/when to start performing an affirmative critique. The challenge however, Bouge continues, lies in how to move from the presence; the now, and how to resist it so it might become something more. Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) answer to this is creation; 'to create is to resist' (p. 110) they claim. As a strategy for creation, they suggest to experiment, as experimentation is 'that which is in the process of coming about – the new, remarkable, and interesting' (1994, p. 111). Pointing back to Latour, to critique need not be about subtracting from things happening, or use representational logic for then to come up with oppositional strategies to hinder a return of what we find problematic. Rather, to critique can be to multiply and vitalize strange happenings to push problematic repetitive reality-creating forces in new directions so that other connections can be productive in these assemblages. Experimenting in addition to a heightened curiosity is also what St. Pierre et al. (2016) are suggesting as a methodological practice to think outside discursive-material structures that imprison us, and as a way to create conditions under which something other arises (p. 104). Creativity and experimentation then seem to be possible guidelines for analysing data when doing 'critique as intervention' (Bunz et al., 2017a).

Art-ing with strange race-things – making affirmative critique productive

The already rich body of critical qualitative research offer scholars who want to engage in increasing possibilities for justice and equity, a wide range of multidisciplinary historical work that rely on multiple life experiences and philosophical locations (Cannella, 2015). This important work have inspired many researchers to perform methodologies in ways that interrupt linear and stable constructions of research. Accordingly, Koro-Ljungberg (2012) writes that critical qualitative scholarship has demonstrated that 'methodological movement'; that is when researchers participate in rather than orchestrate the research process and when intimate relationships of theory and practice are performed, might foster surprises and contribute in generating alternative ways of living

(p. 89). Moreover, ‘methodological movement’ can assist qualitative researchers ‘to stimulate transformation and promote elimination of oppression and injustice’ (p. 84) as it enables them to connect in unforeseen ways to continually morphing complexities produced in the process of research. In what follows this conception of methodological movement has stimulated me to experiment with how to analyse race-things when working within an affirmative critical framework.

In earlier attempts to perform analysis with the presented documentation of strange race-things (photo of a place), I have experimented in multiple ways. I have for example tried to think outside habitual limiting discursive-material structures tied to racial discrimination by working with the method of intuition (inspired by the philosopher Bergson) (Andersen, 2015). I have also experimented with soaking a print of the photo in water and documenting with a camera how the paper slowly dissolves (see below).



Soaking print of documented race-things

The affirmative critical analysis I present a record and discussion of next, became what I have named *art-ing*. This came into being in a process where I had asked a 12-year-old child¹ to collaborate in an experimentation with data. The experiment became possible through thinking with an ontology of difference, theories of the subject as practical and immanent, perspectives on affirmative critique and writings on methodology where movement and data-becoming-something-else is privileged. In retrospect, I also see many connections to the artistry methodologies explored by other researchers in early childhood education as practices for expanding our imaginations of childhood (Osgood & Giugni, 2015; Otterstad & Waterhouse, 2018). In their work, photography, artwork, poetry, cuddly animal toys and more functions as modes for reconfigurations. In the following experimentation, one could say that a child’s artistry practice became a ‘laboratory instrument’ (van der Tuin, 2011, p. 31) for creating connections from habitual imprisoned race-things.

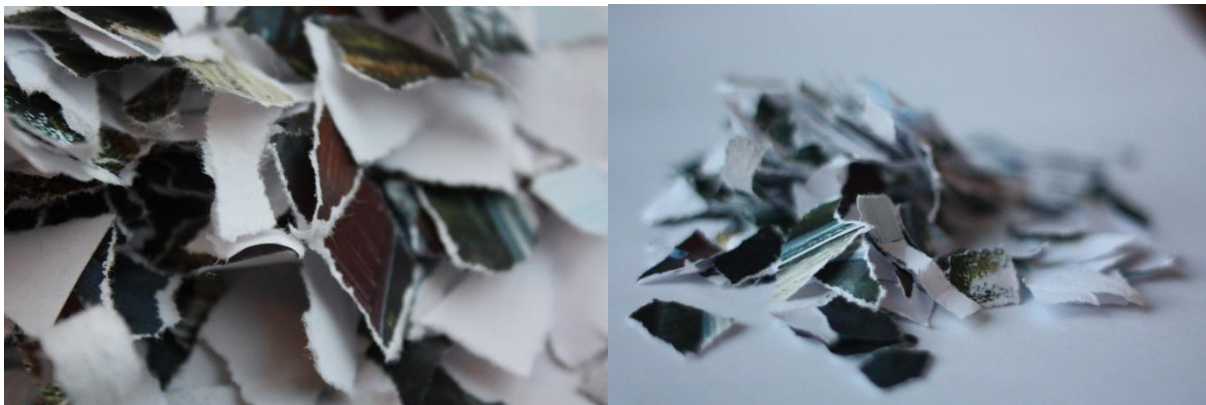
The challenge of going beyond habituation when wanting to engage creatively with data is perhaps similar to difficulties an artist experience when encountering an empty canvas. In an article on the potentiality of the force and truth of art beyond aesthetics Jagodzinski (2009) writes of possible hinders to a creative process. He suggests that in a creative process of bringing forth something new, like the artist’s encounter with a canvas, it is not the empty canvas that is the difficulty but all types of clichés occupying it’s surface (p. 342). Jagodzinski argues that by getting rid of such constrains ‘emptiness may be found for doing to begin’ (p. 342), and that this is ‘creativity proper’ (p. 342). To

¹ The child who took part in the collaborative process is related to the author. Like the author she is a “white” female.

find emptiness for producing qualitative differences from documented race-things because one is curious of what else race can become, has no recipe. As a white woman and a previous preschool teacher with longstanding interest in perspectives and concepts concerning social justice in a diverse society, constraints for being creative seemed to be everywhere, and I connect this to Nesbitt (2013) who writes that race works perhaps as one of the strongest stratifications we have in the 21-century. Accordingly, Saldana (2013) writes how race operates ‘far ‘below’ any mental or linguistic detectability’ (p. 7), and art-ing I suggest holds a potential of creating connections creative of more and not less in a mode not limited to intentionality, rational logics and language.

Hence, I wondered what might happen to race if omitting traditional theoretical perspectives on race and racializing processes, and if going beyond the idea of a researcher apart from the phenomenon of interest and in control of the analysis. This opened up a space for asking someone else to work creatively and collaboratively with data. By asking a child to collaborate on intervening with a documentation of strange race-things then, I hoped to go beyond habitual ways of questioning and analyzing racial discrimination drawing on theories grounded in phenomenology or social constructionist thinking. Maybe would this create an emptiness for more just race-becomings, or at least a mode for differentiation not so constrained by conceptual clichés? Hence, to work with prints of data and ask a child to collaborate on what to do with it can be viewed as an experiment towards “finding” emptiness for different productions of reality.

The child was given no interpretations of the photo; however, she was familiar with my research interests from listening (and not) to me talk about it and doing it over years. Prints of the photo were brought to her room (originally meant for the soaking experiment that did not initiate much), and we sat down to work out what we could do with/from them. I shared verbally with her my interest in experimenting and that there was no limitations to this practice. While sitting on the floor with the prints we both started ripping the prints into small pieces. This doing was perhaps initiated by the assemblage prints-hands-idea of experimenting-associations-floor-and more. Although not knowing what next, we continued until we had piles of ripped paper.



Data prints becoming piles of ripped paper

Also the child started experimenting with sorting the pieces by color, a process that evolved into another process; composition with ripped paper, a clean sheet and glue. The process became more and more a collaboration between the child and the paper, colors and glue. Very little was said in the process. At a point, I intuitively decided to withdraw from working directly with the prints and started photographing the experimental process. After a while, she shared with me what the bits and pieces surprisingly were becoming; a hot dog on a plate and a soft drink with a straw (see below).

After finishing, we brought the “art” to the kitchen workbench to photograph it. A couple of weeks later, on the move together with newspapers and other stuff we do not know where to store, it was put in a drawer where it still is.



Data piles becoming through a process of art-ing

Naming the creative experiment art-ing was done while trying to write about the above process. I found later that others have used the word *art-ing*. One of them, Jagodzinski (2009), writes that art-ing processes ‘sets up an encounter for a potential event to take place where the potential for exposing the flows and intensifications of power enable us to be loosened, healed, or free of them’ (p. 345). Through the above process of art-ing I suggest that the researcher is placed ‘below the threshold of presentation and meaning’ (Jagodzinski, 2009, p. 346), and that such “use-less” art-ing’ (p. 349) flies a humanist making up of better solutions to the problem of race. This uselessness provides it with a force that has a potential ‘to open up future contingencies’ (Jagodzinski, 2009, p. 340). It does not confront power, as would be a more Enlightened mode of critique, but rather ‘transform the situational relations of power’ (Jagodzinski, 2009, p. 347). It is about creating more connections through “useless” creative doings.

Art-ing could be compared to writ(e)-ing, a practice Stewart (2017) writes of as to slow down attention ‘to wait for something to take shape’ and to get onto a composition of her own to ‘get rid of a container concept that does not work’ (p. 124). In my curiosity of strange race-happenings one container concept that did not work (transformatively enough) was racial discrimination (but also tolerance, respect, cultural diversity and more). When used to think with the photo of a place, the concept racial discrimination did not do justice to what I had tried to capture by taking it. Neither did it create any movement to the problematic race-things happening. To affirm, as presented earlier in the paper, concerns the emerging of something else. It is ‘to lighten, to unground, to release the fresh air of other possibilities, to combat stupidity and cliché’ (Rajchman, 2000, p. 13). All though I do think of writing as a creative practice capable of ungrounding, I felt somehow that using language through writ(e)-ing as a practice of experimentation was potentially too productive of ‘becoming-the-same’ (Massumi, 1992) and of clichés. This I believe links to how race is such a strong stratification worldwide but also how I, as a white person born in the 70’s in the Nordic region, have embodied a poor language concerning how to think of and talk about race. Someone might think of this as an advantage, but to me this seemed to be in the way of creating new connections. Art-ing then, is here experimenting with ‘a pass at capturing something’ (Stewart, 2017, p. 124) as to change the environment for future race-things. Everything initiates, Stewart (2017) writes, thus art-ing I suggest is an intervention that has the potential to ‘make racisms and colonial enterprises stutter’ (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, & Rowan, 2011, p. 30), so that something else might arise.

Snapping at the world vs believing in it

Stewart (2017) suggests that a humanist critique 'keep snapping at the world as if the whole point of being and thinking is just to catch it in a lie' (p. 124). What is argued in this paper is that an affirmative critical analysis can affirm that which is unbearable and that art-ing is a practices of assessing that wick happens by its power of creation. In a deleuzian line, this mode of critique is not approaching the world as lying, instead it *believes in the world* and aims at resisting control (Deleuze, 1995, p. 176). It is not aiming to work against, while simultaneously keeping 'the critical edge of saying "no"' (Thiele, 2017, p. 28), but to create more. This concerns approaching for example strange race-things with the belief that 'other realities and relations *are* always already with-in that which actually *is*' (Thiele, 2017, p. 29), and risking the uncertainty in experimenting. It relates to the knowledge that every event or external idea is constitutive of the subject. The subject continuously practices the world one might say; hence, to interfere in stuck assemblages through art-ing becomes constitutive of different possible worlds and different possible lives in early childhood education and beyond. The transformative force in this ontology then lies in and through the shift to the affirmative. Here you can affirm imprisoned becomings, for example, how race continues to become in unethical and unjust ways despite a multitude of efforts to work against this, but also involve in practical experimentations curious of the possible. The possible is however always 'knowledge yet to come' (Jagodzinski, 2009, p. 345).

While there are no answers to or limits to how affirmative critical analysis can be done in transformative ways when working with empirical material the concept of 'methodological movement' (Koro-Ljungberg, 2012) has been of great inspiration as it privileges openness to uncomfortable and unsolved matters and the-not-yet-known is understood as of importance to social justice issues. Through the presented art-ing nothing final and certain happened. Still, I argue that what happened, the process of being creative with data, might matter to future race-becomings. For preschool teachers that experience similar or other strange happenings, the experimentation recorded and argued for here might encourage to seek other critical modes than a more Enlightened one.

As a way of summarizing: various and leaky conceptualizations of critique and creativity seem nowadays repeatedly to materialize as extremely important in relation to the performance of critical educational research. Encounters with Braidotti's (2011, 2013) concept of *affirmative critique* have for me intensified this important-ness. Also, they contribute to an endurance of staying with the difficulties and questions produced when working from and within two seemingly disparate traditions in thought. That is, 1) critical thinking's commitment regarding working against and resist inequalities and problematic power relations, *and* 2) affirmative philosophies' engagement with going beyond dualisms and their interest in creative immanent production of difference and movement, while experimenting with future-oriented research practices working from these.

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