

Research-philosophy-pedagogy as an *event* in the world:



What's the big deal?

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Few people living in this modern world could have failed to notice the crisis and the stark injustices affecting millions of people emerging from conflict in Syria. No one could have failed to notice also the qualitative range of *hospitality* extended by leaders, other agencies and individuals to people fleeing from Syria who have been caught up in this humanitarian crisis. For many people, too, including, not least philosophers themselves, the idea that in the medium term in response to this crisis, philosophy in its connection with research has an important contribution to make in helping us to understand things in a radically different way, will always be open to disputation.

At its best the European tradition in philosophy opens us to languages, practices and thinking that strips away the surface layers of our world without even announcing itself. It opens for us an archeology beneath the layers created by an almost overwhelming variety of obvious representation of faces, clothing and pictures we variously use every day as camouflages, disguises and concealments of really what's happening in practice. It is language, of course, that is our essential home in life. Each language has its own semantic structures, which in some way delimit and place boundaries upon the *hospitality* shown to other people, and to the 'Other' more generally, that is, to other possible differences at play in any one identity. Here is the economy of what is given structuring our practices. More starkly, and in the light of the current unfolding crisis in Syria, more concretely, it is no accident that all languages, including the languages of research and philosophy, each have a structure entirely consonant with that of law. As a matter of law each language has the capacity to include, exclude and to place matters in a 'state of exception'¹. The ever-changing makeshift encampment of thousands of people outside Calais provides a mark of that largely anonymous collective body placed in a 'state of exception' by our various

languages in the EU – a recognizable and seemingly self-disposable body left to survive the cold winter or whatever other possibilities become available.

It is not surprising that research has virtually nothing to say about this 'state of exception' in language. Largely unconsciously, until now the language of research, too, creates its own state of exception. As a paradigm of government [and of governmentality²] that always already presupposes research is only concerned with the rigorous production of truth claims to knowledge. *And*, that the practice of research is concerned with making transparent and visible such claims. Ironically, as my recent studies have shown, in such forms of practice in all of its many paradigms, social and educational research continues to sustain us all as *human beings*, in living in a 'state of exception'. Paradoxically, while such a possibility is at least tacitly apparent to us all, and educational/social research continually alerts us to those possibilities, in formal terms research would appear to remain disconnected from such a possibility.

There is another aligned problem, which also needs to be addressed in any possible greater alignment of research with philosophy. It is the problem of domestication. As new practitioners in any practice we all become inducted, familiarized, and accustomed to particular ways of doing things; including, not least, the everyday practice of discoursing with others, so learning the idiomatic and formal dimensions of particular languages used in a specific practice. Against this background the philosopher, Deleuze, for example, opens us to a distinction between the language of 'smooth space' that cuts through every specialist division of practice, and the more familiar divisions characterizing the language of 'striated space' produced by particular practices. Orating such a distinction in my recent book³ carries with it an express risk; it is always open to the accusation that its guile only ever

makes sense in any case, some might suggest, to a relatively limited elite involved with philosophical discourse. Consequently another traditional response to the use of philosophical discourse in research, of course, has always been to delimit and to naturalize only aspects of philosophical practice that serve to add further weight to particular aspects of research. It is easy then to become beguiled as a researcher with traditional accounts that constitute their own philosophical languages concerned with the production of truth claims to knowledge in research, delimited largely in terms of paradigmatic or epistemic structures. It is only in the last year, for example, studies have begun to open the challenge of re-visualizing research in terms of the delimiting hospitality inscribed in its law-like structures used to generate truth claims, and the relationship of such laws with moves towards social justice⁴. But, domestication of the practice of research *with* philosophy in this way carries with it the risk of the repetition of the very same metaphysical determination of the world of practice, where each word of research, deemed rigorous and transparent, is viewed as pointing in its own unique way to a particular phenomenon.

Closely aligned with the issue of domestication is that of expropriation of philosophical discourse used in order to reiterate and support existing theses presented in the name of research. For example, even captivating accounts by those who have taken the philosopher, Jacques Derrida's, work seriously are always at risk of expropriation; delimiting the full power of his discourse with a periodized post-modern reading of his work. St Pierre⁵, for example, in speaking of 'post qualitative research' locates Derrida's writings within 'the posts'⁶. For Derrida this is the mark of a progressivist ideology that has surrendered itself to a historicist compulsion 'as if one wished to order to linear succession [historical events in research]... to limit the risks of reversibility or repetition, transformation or

permutation'⁷. In challenging such forms of expropriation traditional discourses of research give no room for consideration of ethical practices that lie outside canonical and communitarian forms of ethic. Even though paradoxically and largely unconsciously, such ethical practices continue to sustain human beings in a state of exception. In radical contrast a stronger reading of Derrida's philosophy would open researchers to the possibilities of a heterogeneous ethic that foregrounds unconditionally the incalculable, impossible dimensions of any practice, so exceeding any economy of the gift. All forms of philosophical discourse, then, run the risk of expropriation and domestication.



Many leading-edge qualitative researchers, who have variously sought to derestrict possibilities for participants, would argue that they already open understandings of human beings in their various practices; not least, those working with bricolage, trans- and multi-disciplinary inquiry, poetry, narratology, feminism and post-colonialism⁸. Each of these groups may dispute my contention regarding domestication and expropriation of philosophical discourse in research⁹. But, even here the customs of practice in research tend to hold onto presuppositions concerning the production of truth claims to knowledge. No one, it would seem, has attempted to visualize what it means to undertake research within space opened by dissemination from 'Plato's pharmacy' and other ancient locations. In holding onto its custom of moving towards the virtue of truth claims, the governmentality of research; despite everyday a number of its own studies countering and refuting such claims, continues to maintain a vice-like grip on producing polysemic forms of space, wherein particular phenomena are open to a multiplicity of different meanings. In radical contrast once more, a strong reading of Derrida's philosophy would not only alert researchers to the delimiting *hospitality* given in the production of law-like structures of its very language: along with the challenge of absolute and unrestricted *hospitality* in moves towards social justice in all forms of research. It would also make plain that any 'de-centring' of moves in research deserve to be placed within a space opened by dissemination and not polysemy. In this way the language of research with its concerns about its law-like structures, its space opened for restricted hospitality and other space opened for absolute hospitality in moves towards social justice would also be entirely consonant with understanding more fully not only the crisis presented by the violence in Syria. But also, as suggested earlier, such revised language, thinking and expectations could also be employed to bring

greater understandings to the table concerned with our complex relationship as human beings with all forms of social and educational research. Especially as we live as *human beings* in a 'state of exception' in all of our various languages.

Another facet of the domestication of philosophical discourse within mainstream practices of research is that of specialization within delimited fields of practice. One of the enduring consequences of such specialization concerns the matter of education aligned with pedagogies of research. While possibly no one would dispute that one in some ways becomes educated by simply entering any place of research, just as Williams first suggested that one gains 'permanent education' simply by virtue of walking into a shopping arcade or a railway station and so on. And, in radicalizing Bernstein's proposition, any pedagogic act involves a 're-contextualization' of practice³. One is immediately struck by the 'absent-presence' of formal discursive practices within the many fields of research concerned with the issues of education and pedagogy. Yet in this reading of Bernstein's work, every act of research and of philosophy constitutes a pedagogic act that serves in some way to re-contextualize extant practice with such supplementary language. From this perspective, therefore, in a strong reading of the contribution of philosophy in research that seeks to avoid any domestication, much remains to be uncovered and understood concerning the effects of the absent-present powers of educational and pedagogic forms of discourse upon the practices of research.

In fact, in terms of the semiotic repetition and reiteration of signs in the everyday practices of the language of research, two radically contrasting ethics of education have been uncovered. One, 'delimiting education' cultivated by its corresponding pedagogy in research places emphasis upon the

conditional, calculable, possible dimensions of such practice. The other, 'unrestricted education' and its corresponding pedagogy, by contrast places emphasis upon the unconditional, incalculable, impossible dimensions of research³. Again the possible consequences of delimiting and unrestricted education upon any of the traditional stages involved in the process of research have yet to be understood.

Returning to the outstanding issue, signaled earlier by italicizing the 'event of research'. The *event* is not a synonym for the process of research, however such process may have been conceived in the customs of its practice. Rather than traditional forms of paradigmatic research, which reduce its outcomes to delimiting law-like structures located in the present. The *event* of research embraces *both* the production of such laws in the name of research, aligned with moves towards social justice that seek to deconstruct and so revise, refine, redefine, transform, such structures. The event of research is thereby consonant with the temporal structuring of our own practices as human beings. Currently just how this works in the everyday practice of research is being visualized by Flint and his colleagues. It requires a new form of education for researchers involving them in a strong reading of Derrida's and others' philosophies and their possible application in research. The *event* of research also makes demands upon democratic process that deserves further critical examination¹⁰.

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- ² 'Governmentality' involves a complex triangular inter-relationship of three forms of power: sovereignty, discipline, and governmental management. See Dean, M. [2010] *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (2nd Edition), London: Sage.
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- ⁵ St Pierre, E.A. [2011] 'Post Qualitative Research: The Critique and the Coming After' in, Denzin, N.A. and Lincoln, Y.S. [eds.] *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* [4th Edition], London & New York: Sage: 611-625
- ⁶ [ibid: 615-18]: the posts here refer to postmodernism and poststructuralism.
- ⁷ Derrida, J. [2008] *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Elizabeth G. Rottenberg [eds.], Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press: 88
- ⁸ Derrida, 2008: 88
- ⁹ Flint, K.J. [2015a]: 125-203
- ¹⁰ Flint, K.J. [in preparation, paper vi]

Raising academic standards in UK schools

Adjacent Government looks at how the Department of Education are improving standards in schools to help pupils leave school with qualifications to find employment...

Are UK schools performing as well as they should be? Last month Adjacent Government reported that only 18% of parents in England thought that the government listened to them about their child's education. Does this mean that the government are missing a trick in regards how schools perform?

However the Department for Education have reported a different story. In figures published in October, they revealed that standards continue to rise under the Academies Programme. The provisional GCSE results that were published showed that for the first time converter academies are performing 7.2% above the national average, with 63.3% of pupils achieving the headline measure of 5+ A* to C GCSEs, including English and maths.

Converter academies make up the single biggest type of secondary school, representing 40% of schools. More head teachers are having the freedom to run their school in a way that works for their pupils.

The government believes that the results demonstrate that the Academies Programme is "continuing to transform the landscape of English education." Speaking about the results, Schools Minister Nick Gibb said¹: "As a one nation government we are committed to delivering educational excellence in every area of the country, and these results demonstrate the progress which is being made in extending opportunity and raising academic standards.

"Converter academies are leading the way in strong academic standards and over time we will see the excellence and expertise of strong sponsors spread. As well as raising standards, our plan for education is ensuring more pupils leave school with qualifications which we know will give them the best possible chance to achieve their full potential."



The government has recently focused their attention on ensuring pupils study core academic subjects. Earlier this year, Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan announced that all pupils starting secondary school from September must study the key English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects of English, maths, science, history or geography, and a language at GCSE.

The new measures aim to place the UK education system on par with the best performing countries. The government wants to ensure that young people are able to compete with peers across the globe when they go into or apply for full time employment.

The EBacc was introduced back in 2010 to help pupils from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds study the key academic subjects. Figures show that the proportion of pupils entered into the EBacc has almost doubled, rising from 22% in 2010 to 39% in 2014.

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan said²: "As part of this government's commitment to social justice we want every single person in the country to have access to the best opportunities Britain has to offer – starting with an excellent education.

"This means ensuring children study key subjects that provide them with the knowledge they need to

reach their potential – while setting a higher bar at GCSE so young people, their parents and teachers can be sure that the grades they achieve will help them get on in life.

“And it means giving teachers the training they need to tackle low-level bad behaviour which unfairly disrupts pupils’ learning.”

The government seem to be doing all they can to ensure pupils in Britain remain focused on their education, and leave school with the ability to gain employment. Behaviour and academic ability go hand in hand in terms of achieving high performance at school.

In June, Schools Minister Nick Gibb³ announced an investigation into the impact of smart phones and tablets on behaviour of pupils. Although some schools use tablets as learning tools, teachers are reporting the growing numbers of children bringing personal devices into class. This is leading to disruption in class, which hinders teaching.

In May, the London School of Economics (LSE) found that banning mobile phones from classrooms could benefit students’ learning by as much as an additional week’s worth of schooling over an academic year. The [report](#) suggested that banning phones would benefit low-achieving children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Nick Gibb said: “Since 2010 we have given teachers more power to ensure good behaviour in the classroom. But we need to make sure the advice we give to schools and the approaches being used across the country are fit for the 21st Century when even primary school pupils may be bringing in phones or tablets.

“Whether it is the use of mobile phones in schools or the attitudes of parents to their child’s behaviour in class, we will now probe deeper into behaviour more generally to ensure that no child has to put up with having their education disrupted by misbehaviour.”

The government certainly seems to be committed to ensuring education is one of their key priorities. The government are also inviting your say on failing schools. Launched in October, the [consultation](#) is on proposals to speed up the transformation of failing schools and schools that are deemed to be ‘coasting’.

“We are committed to delivering on our manifesto to commitment to transform failing and coasting schools, so that every child has the benefits to an excellent education,” said Nicky Morgan⁴.

“Over the course of the last Parliament, we saw a million more pupils in good or outstanding schools. The measures outlined in this consultation will focus on the next million, extending opportunity to young people right across the country.”

The consultation, which runs until 18 December, will seek views on revised ‘Schools causing concern’ guidance. This sets out how regional schools commissioners will use the new powers to turn around failing schools.

It still remains to be seen if the current Education Ministers are doing a better job than the previous Secretary of State, Michael Gove. But with the recent GCSE results, and proposals to transform schools across the UK, they are not off to a bad start.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/academic-standards-continue-to-rise-under-the-academies-programme>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-reforms-to-raise-standards-and-improve-behaviour>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/impact-of-smartphones-on-behaviour-in-lessons-to-be-reviewed>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/have-your-say-on-measures-to-transform-failing-schools>

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