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Philosophy has helped my self-understanding as education researcher: I am curious about cultural phenomena like *our intercultural lives* and *the role of our spoken languages* in it, as well as 'artefacts' like films and theatre, and how their processes of *coming into being*, can be understood educationally. A puzzle for me has always been the question of interpretation and representation. How is it possible to get to the 'truth' of cultural phenomena, when they are so bound up in *particular* events, places, relationships and sensations? It is the befuddlements of methodological 'correctness', that led me to turn to philosophy and to ask what words like *truth*, *meaning* and *method* might actually mean. This is the use of theory/philosophy in education for me.

In the company of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013) and his book *Truth and Method*, I was able to name the humanities research tradition - hermeneutics and phenomenology - I was actually part of and distinguish its mode of knowledge creation from that of the (social) scientific tradition. What I had seen as the stubbornly and frustratingly particular, dialogic and situated nature of cultural phenomena, Gadamer, in contrast, did not consider an *obstacle* to objective truth. He appointed this messiness as being at the very heart of the *miracle of understanding* (Gadamer 2013) in the human sciences. It was his unsettling dissolution of the *subject - object relationship* (106), which intrigued me most. It resonated with my own experience of *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*) - a concept coined by Gadamer's teacher Martin Heidegger (2006). Describing the basic structure of our existence (being) in the world, *Geworfenheit* poses the rather dazzling analytical paradox of how to get far away enough from 'being' to think meaningfully about it. In my everyday thrownness, when facilitating community arts projects, I found myself socially and materially *embedded* in relationships, situations, certain pedagogical and artistic practices, which did not only often suspend purposive relations (e.g. that of researcher-subject; educator-student), but also undermined my search for an Archimedean point of view - wanting to 'look in' on the party.

It was Gadamer's confidence, that the question about the truth of art will shine some light on the question about what knowledge in the human sciences might mean in the face of such thrownness, that kept me engaged. He posits that art is a mode of knowledge that acts differently to that of the other sciences, because it understands itself as being *part of the world*. Art cannot be easily abstracted as sensory data or ideational linguistic or cultural utterance - for coding and systematising - in the way that we might go about *creating knowledge* in the natural and social sciences. The meaning of art and other cultural phenomena (like my arts projects and your favourite movie), unfolds in our *encounter* with them, within the world of which they speak; a world which we are of course already part of. It is a bit of a circular situation and is described as such – the hermeneutic circle. Encountering art is therefore always also an encounter with ourselves.

Despite this stubborn particularity and situatedness of art, the knowledge it creates cannot be considered subjective per se. Namely, it is not merely located in our, the individual's, consciousness. Gadamer gets in fact quite impatient with our modern penchant for subjectivism:

'The "subject" of the experience of art, that which remains and endures [the truth], is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. This is the point at which the mode of being of play becomes significant.' (107)

If art is knowledge, and encountering an artwork means sharing in that knowledge, how do we do justice to the truth that is revealed within this dialogue (with art, the world and ourselves) - beyond the mere subjectivity of the person?

In order to approach this hermeneutical conundrum, Gadamer puts forward the concept of play. It is meant to help us orient ourselves towards the mode of being of the work of art and the ontology (which just another word for mode of being) of human science knowledge in general. Play, Gadamer insists, exists independently of the subjectivity of the players. It *comes to presentation in* the players, yes, but only when their usual subjective points of view, and the purposive relationships that mark their everyday lives and identities, are momentarily suspended, and they loose themselves in the 'seriousness of play' (ibid). That is to say, the *structure of play*, patterned by the to-and-fro movement that is instigated by its specific rules, regulations and rituals (children's play, a theatre performance or a ritual might be the most

obvious examples), absorbs the players into itself - and makes all playing a *being played* (109ff). Take that as a metaphor for research!

This ontological structure of play denotes our *freedom* to take the initiative, of *playing* with seemingly open, but serious possibilities. At the same time, it also reminds us of the limitations to our freedom, of the risk of being 'outplayed' - by the (perhaps unforeseen) consequences of *the game's* rules, our own or other people's actions, or perhaps by general bad timing. Most importantly for Gadamer, we have to keep in mind that the players' conduct is intimately tied to the make-believe goals of the game, which finds its ultimate purpose in *being represented* (but never in a fully perfected state), usually to a (real or imagined) audience. *Presentation* is thus the mode of being of the work of art, and human science knowledge more generally (119). It invites a spectator to 'get in touch' and calls for their attention. Within this (potential) joy of recognition - of something of the world and oneself in it - when encountering art 'what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all contingent and variable circumstances that condition it; it is grasped in its essence. It is known as *something*' (ibid). It is this miracle of understanding that provokes my ever hermeneutically circular, befuddled curiosity about how to think, speak and write education research *as an event* where meaning occurs - joyfully in the face of our existential thrownness. But before you throw up your hands in despair and bewilderment, contemplate these wise words by *Toni Erdmann*, life coach, trickster extraordinaire, and protagonist of the eponymous 2016 German comedy: 'You have to do this or that, but meanwhile life is just passing by'.

References

Gadamer, Hans-Georg (2013) *Truth and Method*. London, New York: Bloomsbury

Heidegger, Martin (2016) *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

Toni Erdmann (Germany 2016, Maren Ade)