

TO CO-CO-RESPOND: A RESPONSE TO IRIS VAN DER TUIN ‘ON RESEARCH “WORTHY OF THE PRESENT”’

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Iris van der Tuin’s provocative and intellectually generous cartography of ‘research worthy of our time’ spurs us to consider, or more to *co-co-respond* with the most pressing questions and problems of contemporary academia, those spilling out from the algorithmic condition (Van der Tuin, 2019. p. 9), the drain of hyper-individualism, the precarious but necessary project of decolonizing research.

We co-co-respond with these ideas situated in a North American university officially committed to reconciliation with indigenous peoples (SFU Aboriginal Reconciliation Council, 2017), and equity, diversity and inclusion (Simon Fraser University, 2018). We are learning that these goals are fraught with contradictions and vulnerable to competing forces, to the overdetermined practices and discourses of competition, individualism and whiteness. Van der Tuin encourages us to *attend* to the differences that have been produced in our schools and other learning environments—differences of race, gender, language, ability, economic status—but make sure we use theories that do not continue to reify these differences so that they become further inscribed in our institutions. We must be wary of the rush to a universalist vision of reconciliation, diversity and unity that erase differences and complexities. In these entangled colonial and algorithmic pasts and presents our researcher lives too are implicated, we are responsible for the agencies of our research materials, their lives, our lives in the world. Van der Tuin maps the potential to shift as we must from diversity to radical multiplicities, from indifference to difference.

As Van der Tuin reminds us, our everyday academic life and labour are already deeply entangled in the coded objects of the algorithmic conditions, pulling us into new realms of academic capitalism. It is tempting in this hyper-individuated new world to hunker down and play it safe, or to play the metrics, compete, be visible, but perhaps not *present*, and to police our disciplinary (and physical) boundaries very carefully. After all, it is in the disciplinary space of education that we make connections, that we share stories, that we connect to teachers and

students, that we create spaces and places for new ideas to grow. But we must resist this pull to stay “within the enclosure of...our own kin” (p. 13) and to exert ourselves to live paradoxicality, as Van der Tuin also does with the *making kin* of US-American feminist scholar Donna Haraway and the *unkinning* of Cameroon-born and South Africa-based theorist Achille Mbembe. Within this paradox, she identifies a new creative space in which to “move beyond both individual personhood and the totalizing humanism of Man” (p. 14).

How else but in these paradoxical spaces we engage with “wicked” problems (Coleman et al, 2018), such as those of the algorithmic condition and its ethical-mathematical-linguistic-social-political philosophical-ecological effects and consequences, or of climate change as carbon-jet streams-pipelines-extraction-settler colonialism-racism-white privilege-wild-fires-markets-green-economy, and, and, and... ? It is daunting, especially in our work as educational researchers, where we feel not only the weight of these macroscopic, geo-political forces, but also the urgency of what’s at stake at the scale of students’ and teachers’ lives, and even the microscopic scale of imperceptible affects that circulate in our educational institutions. Van der Tuin exhorts us to resist the indifference and apathy that such multi-scale, multi-actor issues involve and to “start by way of situatedly affirming historical and affective multiplicity” (p. 15).

Suzanne read Van der Tuin with her internet browser open to a pre-print public review version of *Generous Thinking: The University and the Public Good* by Kathleen Sylvester (2019). She too is thinking with Van der Tuin of the limits of critique (Latour, 2004) and of the constraining, stultifying Euro-centric individualism in the university that “must be avoided at all costs” (Van der Tuin, 2019, p. 13). Sylvester wants a university and a research culture of more generous thinking, “an openness to possibility [...] a means of learning to think with, rather than against.” This is, says Sylvester, much like the rule of agreement in improv theatre, that an opening gambit be met with ‘yes, and...’ To do otherwise shuts down the flow and the game sputters to a stop. To do other is not only ethically bankrupt, but also philosophically problematic in its assumption that there is one, right way to read the world.

This is not, for Sylvester, or for Van der Tuin, a wet noodle, anything goes, relativistic kind of equity, diversity or inclusion, pivoting around Euro and white-centric claims to neutrality and innocence. After all, “Intending to make kin while not seeing both past and ongoing colonial and other policies for extermination and/or assimilation augurs for very dysfunctional ‘families,’ to say the least.” Co-responding with Cesaire, Mmembe, Stengers, and Haraway, Van der Tuin offers us a radical, situated, political-ethical 21st century research that “take all forms of scholarship seriously and [asks] fundamental questions about their conditions of possibility” (Van der Tuin, 2019, p. 16).

Nathalie read Van der Tuin as she was preparing a talk for a conference focusing on a specific sociocultural theory on mathematics learning, a talk she had been invited to give as an outsider, as a critic of sorts. She was inspired by the idea of setting critique aside in order to ask questions about the situated conditions of possibility of this particular sociocultural theory. By asking questions about how the constructs used came into being and how the theory was made possible, the desire to overturn or replace gave way to a constructive work of imbrication,

towards new concepts that could be oriented to the social *and* the biological, to language *and* the body.

Van der Tuin thus offers a method of sorts, a method that she proposes for the humanities, but that is worth thinking about in the social sciences as well. In examining the conditions of possibility, we trace assumptions back to their animating forces, to the very questions that were posed and required solving. What would happen if we took this orientation into our thinking about quantitative versus qualitative methodologies? As we taught our psychology-based and sociology-based theories? As we thought about traditional versus non-traditional forms of research? We have a lot to learn about our own ways of thinking, of doing research, of mobilizing theory and practice. All these binaries that have become dead because of dogmatism, arrogance, laziness, convenient making kin, and sometimes, just lack of creativity.

That these questions about the conditions of possibility are always situated, through and through, means that if we want to continue asking them, we must modulate them in relation to our current contexts. We repeat the question that Descartes wanted to know about knowing but it cannot be the same question anymore. Questions are no more eternal than answers. In doing this work, in examining the conditions of possibility, educational researchers have a method for producing new concepts, that is, for speculating on how things could have been otherwise. In education research, where we often focus on what has happened, be it in a particular classroom, or in a set of policy documents, or in the latest crisis. This speculative method that Van der Tuin proposes shifts our attention to the virtual, both to what could have been and what still could be. This is not about imagining utopian futures. But it is about inquiring into the boundaries we make, the splits that continue to encumber us and that produce things that matter. We hand this text back and forth from Suzanne in a café in Vancouver, to Nathalie, who is in Germany, maybe home today in her apartment in Berlin or in Utrecht by now, about to walk out like Suzanne has done, into the warm blanket of snow. As we travel in different directions, in great circles that will always intersect somewhere in the world, Nathalie plugs into Suzanne's words, and Suzanne into hers, weaving across the grain the hopes of producing new ideas that can matter.

References

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