

Ambiguity, Disorientation, Fabulation: Toward a Radical Pedagogy of Plasticity

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“Imagining things being otherwise may be the first step toward acting on the belief that they can be changed.”

-- Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*

“Humans make their own history, but they do not know they make it” (Marx qtd in Malabou 1).

“Humans make their own brain, but they do not know they are doing so” (Malabou 8).

“We know for certain that the ability to learn, to acquire new skills and new memories, is maintained throughout life. And this is true *in a different way from one individual to the next*. The capacity of each to receive and create [their] own form does not depend on any pre-established form; the original model or standard is, in a way, progressively erased.” (Malabou *What Should We Do with Our Brains?* 6)

neural ideology, which is not just “a matter of uncovering...a certain freedom from the brain but rather...to free this freedom, to disengage it from a certain number of ideological presuppositions that implicitly govern the neuroscientific field, and, by mirror effect, the entire field of politics” (Malabou 11).

In her book *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* Greene seeks to highlight “the ways in which we and our students might come to use imagination in search for openings without which our lives narrow and our pathways become cul-de-sacs” (17).

“the imagination to adjust what they gradually find out about the intersubjective world as they move further and further from the views of their original home, they are bound to reinterpret those experiences, perhaps to see the course of their lives as carrying out the possible (among numerous possibilities) rather than the necessary” (Greene 21).

“Without such realization ‘there is only recurrence, complete uniformity; the resulting experience is routine and mechanical.’ consciousness always has an imaginative phase, and imagination, more than any other capacity, breaks through the ‘inertia of habit’ (Dewey 1934, 272 qtd. in Greene 21).

For Greene, imagination presents one potential answer, for, “when habit swathes everything, one day follows another identical day and predictability swallows any hint of an opening possibility...Once we can see our givens as contingencies, then we may have an opportunity to posit alternative ways of living and valuing and to make choices” (23).

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Simone de Beauvoir -- Ambiguity

Sara Ahmed -- (Dis)orientation

Donna Haraway -- Speculative Fabulation

Beauvoir argues, “We must not conceal but assume our fundamental ambiguity” (Beauvoir “Introduction to an Ethics of Ambiguity” 291).

The only essential feature is the ambiguity of our condition and the idea that my freedom is linked to the freedom of all others: “To will oneself free is to will others free” (Beauvoir *Ethics* 78).

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed begins with the notion of orientation. “Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitants, as well as “who” or “what” we direct our energy toward” (3).

“Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or the the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one’s sense of confidence in the ground or one’s belief that the ground on which we resides can support the actions that make life feel livable” (157).

In Haraway's thinking, speculative fabulation is one of the many possibilities of the "SF" construction: "science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminist, science fact, so far" (2).

For Haraway, speculative fabulation is “closely tied to everyday storytelling practices of storytellers who aren’t all writers, who aren’t all professionals.” Fabulation is a way of making, a collection of “wild fact, facts that don’t hold still” that inhabit fables. For her, it is not the “speculative narrative” as it has been “domesticated in literary theory but the *fabulacion*, the worlding, full of animals and full of critters who maybe don’t really exist...full of creatures of the imagination...impossible worlds.” In this sense, speculative fabulation is a “critical germ, seed, and point of eruption.”

Giving learners the space to imagine, to fabulate, to combine fact and fantasy, to play with the various SF assemblages that Haraway imagines is to cultivate the space for neural liberation, a liberation that might carry forth from spaces of learning to spaces of existence (as if they were delineated), broadening what we might believe we have to say, what we believe *can be said, can be thought, can be felt, can be made* in the project of world-building. ***In the “information age” we don’t need education that teaches how to find what already exists; we need education that teaches how to imagine what might become.***

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