

**Gloves of Ice or Free Hands?
A Nomadic Reading of Rudolf Steiner and Bergson and Deleuze
and Others on Knowledge as Nonrepresentational and the
Importance of Aesthesis...**

Bo Dahlin, Rudolf Steiner University College, Norway

Abstract *This paper explores the educational significance of the philosophical critique of knowledge as a reproductive representation of reality. As it includes the notion of non-representational knowledge, Rudolf Steiner's epistemology is introduced and further linked to elements in Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze. Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea of Menschenbildung as the central function of knowledge is brought in. Humboldt and Steiner both emphasise knowledge as mediating the interplay between self and world, producing a deeper sense of reality. For education this means that teaching must respect the living nature of genuine concepts, as well as the aesthetic and "suffering" aspects of learning. Horst Rumpf has eloquently argued for the latter. In conclusion, some traits of Steiner's pedagogy are presented as possible practical implications.*

Keywords Rudolf Steiner, non-representational knowledge, reality, aesthetic

Introduction

This paper explores the educational significance of the post-positivist and structuralist critiques of knowledge as a reproductive representation of reality. Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1993) is an early (first published 1979) and well known example of such "postmodern" critiques of knowledge as representation. Three important themes that figure in this critique are the following: (a) that reality is not "given," (b) that the knowing subject does not passively reflect or "mirror" reality, and (c) that therefore the so-called correspondence theory of truth is inadequate. An overall concern is the rejection of objectivism and of the possibility of an absolute, universally valid ontology.

This philosophical critique has found its resonance in educational philosophy and theory. For instance, Osberg & Biesta (2008) note that constructivist, pragmatist, post-structuralist and so-called emergentist epistemologies (the latter

derived from complexity theory) have all contributed to the idea that knowledge is “neither a representation of something more ‘real’ than itself, nor an ‘object’ which can be transferred from one place to the next” (p. 313). Knowledge is rather something that “emerges” out of our participation in the world and its social activities.

On the other hand, we must realize that knowledge is also that which *enables* this participation; this will be one of the concerns of this paper. Knowledge, whether representational or not, is commonly viewed as helping us to understand reality, at the same time as “reality”—in our postmodern times—is a contested and ambiguous term (Anderson, 1992). If knowledge emerges through participation in activities or events, so does reality—and what reality will emerge cannot be predicted beforehand. Teachers must therefore be open to a pluralistic ontology and to the view that reality does not consist of “given facts.”

My contention is therefore that the critique of knowledge as representation has interesting implications for education. One such implication is the importance of developing living and flexible concepts; another basic concern of this paper. This in turn makes art and aesthetic experience of deep significance for the learning process. In unpacking these claims I draw upon several sources. One of them is Rudolf Steiner’s (1861-1925) philosophy of knowledge as well as his practical recommendations for education. I argue that some of Steiner’s ideas are compatible—or resonate in harmony—with the nonrepresentational epistemologies of Deleuze and Bergson. Steiner is therefore a philosophical and educational thinker who could be better appreciated in the academic discussion than he has been up to the present. The title of this paper contains one of Steiner’s metaphors for an educational practice that replaces the living thinking of children with the dead representations of adult rationality:

That is terrible, when in relating to the child one explicitly develops all conceptions into immobility. If one does that it is as if one were putting gloves of ice on the small hands of the child, so that they can no longer grow. We must never transfer ready-made conceptions to the child, but only such that can grow and change, conceptions that themselves live. (Steiner, 1991, p. 106)¹

I will return to this quote in the concluding section. In the following I will first introduce Rudolf Steiner’s epistemology as including the notion of non-representational knowledge, thereafter linking it to elements in Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze. Next I present Wilhelm von Humboldt’s idea of *Menschenbildung* or cultivation of humanity as the central function of knowledge (and education). In

¹ All quotes from non-English sources have been translated by me.

different ways, Steiner and Humboldt emphasise the role of knowledge as mediating the interplay between self and world, producing a deeper sense of reality. This leads on to Robert Spaemann's idea that the ultimate aim of education is reality, that is, to help us satisfy our deepest desires for truth, beauty and goodness. Such an education must proceed carefully and slowly, respecting the aesthetic, receptive and "suffering" aspects of learning, eloquently developed by Horst Rumpf. In the concluding section some traits of Steiner's practical pedagogy are presented as possible "practical implications" of these arguments.

The paper evidently builds on many different thinkers and theoretical frameworks that are usually not brought together. The reason for reading them together the way I do here is twofold: First, Rudolf Steiner's philosophy of knowledge and reality and its relation to so-called Waldorf or Steiner education is hardly known at all among educational thinkers. Although there are many publications presenting Steiner education, such texts almost always do so without considering the links that exist with other and more recent educational thinkers, and least of all with other *philosophers*. This gives rise to some misunderstandings of the rather long standing (almost a century) but still, in many respects, *other* form of pedagogy that takes place in Steiner schools. Second, I feel that bringing Steiner within the horizons of, for instance, Deleuze and Bergson, actually throws a light on the (possible) meaning of at least some of the latter's philosophical ideas (which are not always easily accessible).

I am well aware that the different sources are presented in very sparse and fragmentary ways, and that there are more or less sharp differences, even contradictions, between them, if their thought would be regarded in its fullness. However, a complete account of such issues belongs to a rigorous and purely philosophical work. It would also demand much more space than is available in a paper. I therefore (with a few minor exceptions) limit myself to take hold of the, at least, partial agreements that can be intuited between these disparate sources. This approach is inspired by the "rhizomatic method"² and "nomadic thinking" that has been derived out of Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) work (see for instance Gough, 2006; Semetsky, 2007; Robinson, 2009). Deleuze and Guattari juxtapose rhizomatic and arborescent ways of thinking and writing (*ibid*, p. 6f), where the second is the more common in mainstream philosophy. Following the "logic" of a tree, arborescent thinking starts at a given and well-defined point and follows its logical consequences down its various branches, until—ideally—all the branches have been covered. The rhizomatic procedure is different because there is no self-evident point of departure and its "logic" has the unpredictable and dynamic character of a rhizome. Similarly, nomads never have a fixed dwelling place but move their camps according to needs and circumstances. To use this approach in philosophy means to

² A rhizome is the root network produced by some plants, for instance mushrooms.

theorize connections across different—what could be called—philosophical territories, constructed by various thinkers. If I am a mushroom in the process of sending out roots I do so searching the territory around me for somewhere “to land,” partly to temporarily stabilize myself, but mainly because I have an irresistible drive to live and to grow. This seems to me to be an apt metaphor for the rhizomatic approach deployed in this paper.

The Nonrepresentational Epistemology of Rudolf Steiner

The idea of knowledge as nonrepresentational is of course not completely new. In his philosophy of knowledge Steiner was ahead of the critique of positivistic notions of knowledge, in that he strongly opposed the view of knowledge as a kind of mirror image or reproduction of reality.³ In the preface to his doctoral dissertation (1892), Steiner writes:

The task of knowledge/cognition (*Erkenntnis*) is not: to reproduce something that is already present in another form, but: to create a completely new realm that only together with the world given to the senses results in the full reality. (1980, p. 11; italics in original)⁴

This can be interpreted as saying that the experience of reality arises out of the confluence of knowledge and sense experience. Phenomenologically speaking, knowledge is a reality-constituting factor or force.⁵ Steiner notes that his view is somewhat prefigured by Hegel in that for the latter, the “confluence of ‘essence’ and ‘appearance’ gives the concept ‘reality’” (Steiner, 1986, p. 252).

However, Steiner (1993) also recognizes several *forms* or *levels* of knowledge.⁶ The basic level is what we ordinarily call knowledge, including scientific knowledge. Steiner calls it *materielle Erkenntnis* (material knowing), referring to knowledge of the external world as it is given in ordinary sense experience (including the use of instrumentations like microscopes and telescopes etc). Above this, Steiner maintains, there are further levels, the first three of which he calls

³ Nietzsche is another 19th century example and Steiner agreed with many of Nietzsche’s ideas; see Steiner (1985). Most commentators on Steiner’s philosophy develop his relation to Goethe’s scientific writings, whereas Nietzsche is left out. I believe that a reappraisal of Steiner’s relation to Nietzsche would reveal his affinity to certain aspects of poststructural philosophy (cf. Welburn, 2004).

⁴ A problem in this particular quote is the German word *Erkenntnis*, which is a substantivated verb and therefore connotes a certain act or activity that is not present in the word “knowledge.” Nevertheless, the questions that Steiner deals with in his *Erkenntnistheorie* are the same as those dealt with in philosophical theories of *knowledge*.

⁵ It is not possible here to go deeper into the complexities of Steiner’s reality concept; see however Muschalle (2001-2005) for an extensive exposition.

⁶ In this respect Steiner follows the esoteric tradition of Western Hermeticism, which also “assumed a sequential hierarchy of ‘levels of knowledge’” attained in “‘altered’ states of consciousness that transcend rationality” (Hanegraaff, 2008, p. 128).

imagination, inspiration and intuition. These kinds of knowing normally take place unconsciously (*superconsciously* rather than *subconsciously*) but they can become conscious through certain spiritual work on oneself (Steiner, 1992).⁷ Interesting as they may be, these higher (or deeper) forms do not concern us here; we look instead more closely at the first level of ordinary knowledge – cognition.

In this “material knowing” Steiner distinguishes four basic elements interacting with one another. The first is sense perception, in and through which the *object* is experienced as actual and present. The second is the mental *image* that remains in *memory* even when the object is absent. This element has a representational character in that it is like a picture which with various degrees of clarity and completeness “reproduces” the object. (Representations therefore for Steiner play a certain role in knowledge.) The third element is the *concept* that is linked to the image and gives an *understanding* of the object. However, in contrast to the image, the concept is *not* a representation of the object, at least not in a reproductive sense (I will return to this issue in the next section). The fourth element, finally, is the “I” or the *subject* of knowing, which creates links, connections and relations between images and concepts. Of these four elements, the concepts and the I are crucial for the emergence of genuine knowledge/cognition. Mere sense perception and memory images, although they are necessary elements for the whole process, nevertheless do not provide a real understanding of things. On the basis of this account it seems clear that when Steiner (in the quote above) says the task of knowledge/cognition is to “create a completely new realm,” he is primarily referring to the conceptual element of the knowing process. The subject is, of course, also important since without its inner activity, relations and connections between concepts and images will not emerge.

Looking further at his understanding of concepts, Steiner (1984, p. 90f) emphasises the importance of the scholastic notion that *universalia* (concepts or ideas) have three different modes of existence: (a) *ante rem*, meaning “before the thing,” that is the pure idea existing in a spiritual realm; (b) *in re*, “in the thing,” that is the idea as an immanent power working in the thing itself by giving it its form and qualities; (c) *post rem*, “after the thing,” referring to the idea as it appears in human consciousness, knowledge or cognition. Unfortunately Steiner does not relate this to his analysis of material knowing described above, but it seems reasonable that the concepts he talked about there are the *universalia post rem* of the scholastics. Steiner seems to imply that a reconnection to early scholasticism (which was basically Aristotelian and ended with Thomas Aquinas) can help us overcome the predominant modern belief that knowledge of spiritual worlds—if they are even believed to exist—is principally impossible. In contrast to a common

⁷ Lovat & Semetsky’s (2009) discuss how Deleuze’s ontology of the virtual can be linked to a mystical practice of the enhancement of perceptual abilities. This is one of the possible links between Steiner and Deleuze.

misconception the ontology of the scholastics was not based on a sharp dualism between spirit and matter; their ontology was monistic (Steiner, 1984, p. 90f). All of creation rested ultimately in divine wisdom. Even though the deeper aspects of this wisdom was accessible only through revelation, human thinking could to some extent penetrate this revelation and clarify it; thereby turning it into knowledge. There was only a shade of *epistemological* dualism in this standpoint. But this dualism grew stronger and gradually came to dominate all philosophical thinking, leading to the deep cleft between knowledge and faith, science and religion, so characteristic of modernity. Kant, who constituted the limits of knowledge as absolute and principal, delivered the final nail in the coffin for the corpse of spiritual knowledge. For Steiner, in contrast, the limits of knowledge are contingent, based on empirical and psychological conditions, not on a fixed principle.

For the purpose of this paper I will not go deeper into Steiner's view of the role of the subject and the nature of its activity in knowing or cognition but focus first on the nature of concepts and secondly on the significance of sense experience (*aesthesis*). It may however be of interest, regarding the role of the subject, to note that Steiner (1986, p. 185f) on the one hand describes concepts as the result of an "inner construction," in contrast to the mental memory images (*Vorstellungen*) produced by sense experience, which arise more or less by themselves (unless we make a special effort to memorize). On the other hand, the process only appears as a construction to our normal state of consciousness. From the perspective of the higher levels of cognition, concepts are more like shadow images of spiritual realities, which is why it is possible even in ordinary consciousness to intuit the spiritual realm through concepts (Steiner, 1986, p. 240-41). In this sense, therefore, taking concepts as (shadow) images, they *do* have a certain representational character, but they represent something that is commonly *unknown* to us. Obviously there are both similarities and differences between these ideas and what we today call individual constructivism, according to which our concepts and representations are constructed in subjective processes, so-called between-the-ears constructivism (Sfard, 1998). But constructivists of course take different stands on the existence of a spiritual realm beyond these constructions.

The interpretation of Steiner's philosophy of knowledge presented here is seldom seen in the relatively few instances of mainstream educational thinking that consider his ideas. As an example, Heiner Ullrich (2008) even claims that Steiner said human thought can be transformed "into the supposedly objective mirror of being" (p. 123); implying that Steiner actually held a representational view of knowledge or cognition (cf. Rorty's above-mentioned critique of knowledge as a "mirror of nature"). It would take up too much space to go deeper into this issue here; however, considering the sources I have referred to above, Ullrich's interpretation of Steiner seems rather distorted (cf. Dahlin, 2013).

Adding Bergson and Deleuze to Discussion About the Concept as Nonrepresentational

The various versions of modern constructivist epistemology are to a great extent inherited from Kant's "Copernican revolution" in the theory of knowledge, placing the inner activity of the subject in the centre of the knowing process. This is a common element in all Neo-Kantian philosophers; also for French philosopher Henri Bergson, a contemporary to Steiner whose thought has recently gained renewed interest partly due to the work by Deleuze (1988) on him (see Mullarkey, 1999, Moulard-Leonard, 2008). Steiner recognised Bergson's philosophy as an expression of the deepest insights possible within the frameworks of ordinary consciousness, that is, without having developed conscious access to the higher forms of knowledge mentioned above (Steiner, 1999, p. 35). According to Bergson, our ordinary consciousness has been colonized by what he calls "spatialized time"; a representational kind of knowing – experiencing that cannot grasp and understand the actual living flux of reality (Bergson, 1992; see also Douglass, 1999). Reality in itself is continuously moving – becoming, but our ordinary representational thinking cannot grasp this because it spatializes time and makes it linear and sequential. Like the picture frames projected on a film screen, it gives the impression of movement but this impression is an illusion. Only intuition or intuitive thinking can grasp reality as moving/becoming and time as what Bergson calls *duration*. This is like the movement of the film projector itself, which is real. Our ingrained habit of spatializing time makes us live in virtual images and representations of the world, which for Bergson is a secondary, derived reality. It is good enough for the pragmatic purposes of daily life, but it is not ultimate reality and truth. Even science is concerned with this secondary reality, because practical interests and not the search for ultimate reality are what drive scientific research.

As can be gleaned from this short account, Bergson tried in his philosophy to reach a level of cognition that goes beyond our ordinary knowledge, including science. In this attempt a creation of a new kind of flexible and mobile concepts is crucial (Bergson, 1992). The similarity with Steiner is the idea that such concepts are possible; the difference is that for Steiner this is the essential nature of all genuine concepts in contrast to representations, which may often be rigid and static.

Similar to Bergson and Steiner, for Deleuze our understanding of the nature of concepts is of great significance. Deleuze also harboured some interest in scholastic thinkers, in particular Duns Scotus (Smith, 2001). Perhaps Deleuze can be taken as an example of a thinker who takes up the purely hypothetical possibility pointed to by Steiner (without any lamentation, let it be noted) that instead of letting the dualism between knowledge and faith grow beyond proportion (which is what actually happened in history), one could have tried to strengthen or intensify one's thinking and perceptual faculties so that they could penetrate deeper and deeper into the divine wisdom that is the foundation of the world. Deleuze, of course, only

fleetingly and in passing alludes to “the divine,” because between him and the scholastics we have a century or two of purely materialistic science laying claim to all that can be labelled reasonable and rational. Nevertheless, Deleuze is explicitly concerned with metaphysics and although he is often interpreted as an ontological materialist, his is not the common reductionist materialism. There is a spiritual potential in his thinking, related to his distinction between *the actual* and *the virtual* (Bryden, 2001; Lovat & Semetsky, 2009). Deleuze’s concept of the virtual owes a lot to Duns Scotus (Boundas, 1996) and can even be taken as a synonym for the spiritual, as well as for time and subjectivity. Deleuze himself says: “Subjectivity is never ours, it is time, that is, the soul or the spirit, the virtual” (1989, p. 82-83).

Now, in Deleuzian terms, a concept can be described as a virtual intensive multiplicity, continuously generating actualizations or instances of itself. That is, concepts are not static and shadowy reproductions of an already given reality; they are living forces in the virtual plane of intuition (Deleuze, 1990). This means that the linguistic-verbal definition of a concept is not the concept itself but only a pointer to its virtual force. The words of the definition do not reproduce the concept as such but serve like a set of guideposts indicating the virtual *movement of thinking* that enables the production of an infinite variety of exemplifications. Hence the concept is a multiplicity in unity, and the movement of thinking that produces it takes place beneath the surface of our spatialized time-consciousness (Bergson, 1992). Therefore, if there is an education leading into the full reality of things, from a Steiner-Bergson-Deleuzian point of view it must somehow go beyond spatialized time and representational knowledge to intuitions of this deeper becoming/duration – to the virtual realm of living concepts.

Humboldt’s Idea of *Bildung*: The Unrestrained Interplay of Self and World

I have used Bergson and Deleuze to give a somewhat “updated” account of Steiner’s view of conceptual knowledge or cognition as being of a non-representational kind. Concepts are not static representations but living virtual forces. As we have seen, *reality* for Steiner means the confluence, the somehow “flowing together” in our consciousness, of sense perceptual world experience and conceptual knowledge or cognition. The idea that reality is constituted in this way can, I believe, be fruitfully related to Humboldt’s idea of (valuable and meaningful) knowledge as that which *mediates the self with the world*. In his theory of *Bildung*, Humboldt says:

It is the ultimate task of our very existence to achieve as much substance as possible for the concept of humanity in our person, both during the span of our life and beyond it, through the traces we leave by means of our vital activity. This can be fulfilled only by the linking of self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and

most unrestrained interplay. *This alone is the yardstick by which each branch of human knowledge can be judged.* (2000, pp. 58-59; italics added)⁸

This quote has to be seen in the context of early Romanticism and its idea(l) of self-cultivation. For Humboldt, to live a genuinely human life means “to grasp and make into a part of my humanity” as much of the world as one can (quoted in Bruford, 2009, p. 24). As a consequence, Humboldt is concerned that the knowledge we acquire does not turn into a dead mental baggage carried around in our heads, but that it contributes to our self-cultivation and human fulfilment. He is concerned with *Menschenbildung*, that is, the cultivation of humanity or the human essence, the becoming-human. Knowledge contributes to this process if it increases the animated interplay between self and world, in other words, if it enables us to participate in the various activities of the world around us. Knowledge does not only emerge out of these activities.

Adding Humboldt to our earlier account of Steiner-Bergson-Deleuze on the concept of reality and on nature of concepts, we have conceptual knowledge and the world of sense experience flowing together to constitute reality, but in this constitutional process *the self* is also actively involved and cultivated in its essential humanity. Humboldt did not (as far as I know) go deeper into the concept of “world” and took it perhaps as a synonym for “reality,” as we commonly do. But we need to distinguish the two terms; world is not the same as reality. From a phenomenological point of view—and Steiner’s philosophy is a kind of phenomenology (Welburn, 2004)—the world is “given” (in a relative sense). In contrast, as we have seen, *reality* is never given; it is constituted.

The world as “given” is what is revealed to sense perception. (Merleau-Ponty devoted a substantial part of his philosophical work to the study of this rather simple fact. See, for instance, Merleau-Ponty, 1964; 1968; 1992). But if, following Humboldt, our knowledge is a mediator between the self and the world (as given in sense perception), then the nature or quality of that knowledge has a certain impact on *the way* the world is mediated to the self, and also on how the self engages with the world. An *unrestrained* interplay between self and world implies a particular kind of knowledge. When the self experiences the harmonious confluence of its knowledge with the world revealed by the senses, it experiences reality and itself as

⁸ The last sentence is italicized here because it is often left out when this passage is quoted, whereas I feel it gives a very important accent to Humboldt’s view. It seems to entail a criticism of all knowledge that remains an abstract mental baggage, of no use except in games like *Trivial Pursuit* and similar I-know-more-than-you competitions. Is not this the kind of knowledge mostly promoted in schools? The present trend to formulate “learning outcomes” in terms of competencies may be a reaction against this observation, but one doubts that it will really change anything in this respect.

living in reality and truth. But when the nature of our knowledge prevents this interplay, we experience alienation because we are unable to feel part of the world and to participate in its activities.

What is the difference between the knowledge that sustains unrestrained interplay and that which alienates? What is the nature of a knowledge that flows harmoniously together with sense experience? Sense experience is *lived* in a continuous flow: In this respect it is very different from mental conceptions and stable, more or less rigid *representations* of phenomena. The ancient Greeks called the world as primarily given in sense experience *aesthesis*. At the level of *aesthesis* the self is *unreflectively* engaged in the world; knowledge plays no part in it. But doesn't this nevertheless give us a hint that the knowledge we let our students acquire at school must have an "aesthetic" character? That it must make sense not only for the narrowly focused intellect but also for our emotional and sensuous life?

For Steiner knowledge must be able to interact with sense experience in order to constitute reality. For Humboldt, knowledge must help put the self into interplay with the world, the more unrestrained the better. Together these two points suggest that genuine knowledge—and therefore genuine learning—is such that it makes sense of all experience (makes it real) and allows an unrestrained interplay of self and world. Education that results in such knowledge I would like to call education *to* reality. The "to" instead of the more conventional "for" is meant to indicate that reality is not given beforehand and then we educate for it (following the rather common notion that reality is so to speak outside the classroom, and we prepare our students to go out and meet it). *To* reality indicates a direction and an intention that is not based on a fixed conception of what reality is like; but on an understanding that whatever it is like, it is constituted by the interaction between our concepts and our senses.

Spaemann's *Erziehung zur Wirklichkeit*

German philosopher Robert Spaemann once gave a lecture that was published under the title *Education for Reality (Erziehung zur Wirklichkeit: Spaemann, 1987/1988)*. The *for* in the title seems opposed to the point of view I have expounded above, but Spaemann's reasoning is actually an interesting complement to my own. Even though the title implies that education has a rather definite purpose, according to Spaemann education does not really have an aim. *Teaching* and *instruction* have aims, but not education, because education is part of life, and life does not have any other purpose than to be lived. We learn throughout life, but what we learn is a secondary consequence of living. The paradigmatic example of education for Spaemann is therefore learning to speak one's mother tongue. Of course there may be more or less frequent instances where parents or other adults explicitly teach the child words and grammar, but these are nevertheless exceptions. Spoken language is generally acquired as a side effect, as the child simply *partakes of life* in and

outside of the family. This is a good example of how knowledge emerges out of participation, but once having learnt to speak this knowledge also increases our potential for further participation.⁹

Nevertheless (and somewhat contradictory) Spaemann also suggests that there *is* a general purpose to education, which is precisely what he calls education for reality. The world is actually not real to all people, Spaemann claims. Personal opinions, interests, likes and dislikes distort our understanding of the world. This implies that there actually is, or could be, a non-distorted, objective view of reality, which is of course an outrage to present constructivist and post-structural epistemological sensibilities. How can such a stance be justified, knowing that there are many different views of reality and that it is virtually impossible to find out which view is objective and true? But what if we acknowledged that the nature of reality *is* such, that we *can* have different views of it and yet these views can be epistemologically rational and ontologically objective within their own local frameworks?¹⁰ Such an acknowledgement would mean *not being stuck* in a particular opinion or perspective and therefore undermine the clinging to limited (distorted) views of the world.

Furthermore, for Spaemann the task of educating for reality is not scientific but primarily social and moral. It has to do with love. Children first of all need to *be loved* in order to become real to themselves. That is the basis on which they learn to love others. Only through love does the other become real for me. An education for reality is therefore an education for love. To this we could add that love is the most intense form of participation in the world, the deepest form of unrestrained interplay. Love makes me real. When I am real, others are real and the world is real. When the world is real we face its beauty as well as its horror. This usually inspires moral ideals and the wish to do good. But in order to act fruitfully we need knowledge and understanding, even wisdom. So we set out to learn more about the world and about ourselves.

Such a view of education may appear “unrealistic,” not least for present day neoliberal educational policies. But as Spaemann points out, reality and what is considered “realistic” in our culture is very often understood in a Freudian manner. Reality, for Freud, is that which *frustrates* our dreams and desires. Children, therefore, have to learn that the real world is bound to frustrate their innermost dreams, and school is a good place to learn that. The so-called “reality principle” has to replace the childish “pleasure principle.” But for Spaemann reality is not that

⁹ How children can learn in informal and autonomous ways at home has been described by Thomas & Pattison (2007), challenging the idea that education must happen in schools.

¹⁰ This is of course just a hint to the direction in which I think an answer is possible; the question is too complex to pursue further here. However, the recent philosophy of “meta-Reality” developed by Roy Bhaskar, encompassing both *epistemological relativism* and *ontological realism*, seems a promising way out; cf. Zembylas (2006).

which frustrates our desires, on the contrary: reality is that which *fulfils* our deepest human – spiritual desires or needs, because it brings us truth, beauty and goodness.

True meaning and fulfilment in life are surely not possible to find “outside reality,” in an understanding of the world based on illusions and deceptions. So in a general sense education must be “for reality”; this must be part of its ultimate and overriding purpose. That reality in our postmodern times is a contested concept does not reduce this educational task, but makes it a greater moral challenge than before. Reality is no longer a neutral fact but a deeply moral issue (cf. Barad, 2007).

Real Learning is Slow Learning is Aesthetic Learning: Horst Rumpf

Another alternative and “unrealistic” educational vision that belongs within the horizons of the theme for this paper is that of Horst Rumpf. For several decades, Rumpf has argued for a radically different approach to education, in which experiences of uncertainty, wonder and mystery are essential elements of the learning process. This view of education involves learning to *sense* all the ambiguities, doubts, “breaks,” and “disturbances” which, for instance, a literary work or a natural phenomenon can offer. Such disturbances are necessary for a personal appropriation of living concepts. We have to accept that which *slows down* the learning process and makes understanding more rich and complex. However, in their training, future teachers often learn to ignore precisely such “disturbing” experiences; probably because they contradict the illusion of knowing. This is unfortunate because such experiences contain fruitful possibilities of connecting to the experiences of their future students—and, we may add—for the students to establish connections to the world. As Rumpf puts it:

A knowledge that is solely systematically and disciplinary grounded leaves questions about the formation [of this knowledge], and about the powers of wonder and doubt accompanying this formation, out of consideration. But it is precisely in these questions that the future teacher must feel at home—because it is her job to cultivate the formation of attention to particular aspects of the world among beginners, laymen, and children. (1987, p. 36)

In one of his later publications, Rumpf (2010) distinguishes between two learning concepts, labelled simply as *Lernen 1* and *Lernen 2*. The first is the now commonly established notion that learning is about *grasping and mastering* a certain part of the world; acquiring an ability to *perform* something to the satisfaction of needs and desires (one’s own or others’). *Lernen 2* is a more *receptive* kind of learning, not directed towards grasping and mastering something “useful”—in fact not directed to anything except to undergo and to “suffer” an experience that one allows to unfold. In comparison to *Lernen 1*, this learning may

appear passive, but the *allowing* of the experience is actually another kind of action. The word suffer means not only “to undergo pain” but also, precisely, “to allow.” What is allowed in this learning? It is feelings of astonishment and doubt, feelings of opacity and not knowing or unknowing—similar to the kind of perplexity that Socrates liked to evoke in the citizens of Athens. But it means also a kind of *dwelling in sense experience (aesthesis)*, based on the wish to “let the world come close, as if letting it under the skin” (Rumpf, 2010, p. 11). Referring to what I said above about the kind of knowledge that flows harmoniously together with sense experience, this points again to the significance of the aesthetic aspects of learning for the unhindered interplay between self and world, essential to Humboldt’s idea of *Bildung*. Aesthetic experiences belong to *Lernen 2* in that they have the capacity to undermine our habitual frames of mind and thereby widening the horizons of the world.¹¹

All this is of course not to say that *Lernen 1* is not necessary and useful, it is only meant as a critique of the reduction of all learning to this special kind of learning. The critique is particularly important since the present call for “better” and “more effective” forms of teaching and learning tends to completely disregard *Lernen 2*, because the latter focuses more on the content than on the form of learning or the method of teaching. More precisely, *Lernen 2* has to do with the *enrichment of the tensions* in the substance of what is taught (Rumpf, 2010, p. 14). Educational researchers usually ignore this possibility, putting more emphasis on the forms of teaching and learning. However, post-structural influences on curriculum theory and “subject didactics” (*Fachdidaktik*) have pointed in the same direction (for instance, Weaver, Morris & Appelbaum, 2001). Phenomenology is another philosophical stream bringing out these commonly neglected aspects of learning. As Rumpf points out (with reference to Meyer-Drawe), phenomenological perspectives on learning have in common that they focus on “productive disturbances” and “delays” of learning because they bring to attention aspects of *what* is learnt that is often neglected or too quickly passed by (for a similar argument regarding science education, see Dahlin, 2001; Dahlin, Østergaard & Hugo, 2009).

“Below the varnish of our habitual seeing the things sleep”—this quote by Rumpf (from Gernot Böhme) points in the same direction as Bergson’s distinction between representational knowledge and intuition. Our habitual seeing of things is actually a non-seeing, because it is more based on mental representations than on actual seeing-perception. In actual perception direct intuition is also at work—but unconsciously, that is why things sleep around us. Perhaps, as Wilson (2006) argues, Husserl invented phenomenology in order to try to awaken us from this sleep.

¹¹ Experiences of the sacred also belong here, but I leave them out in order not to overburden the text.

In *Lernen 1*, with its focus on grasping and mastering things, there is very little space left for feelings of wonder, for what Rumpf (inspired by Adorno) calls *Staunkraft*; meaning something like “the power or ability to be astonished.” In wonder and astonishment one is overwhelmed by the complexity of something, or simply by its sheer being. One realizes that one cannot grasp and master the thing; that one’s representational knowledge does not do it justice. Perhaps the virtual intensity of the concept must give rise to such bewilderment when it tries to “incarnate” in an individual consciousness, and perhaps Plato’s dialogues are illustrations of precisely this. But somehow we learn to avoid such humiliations of our cognitive powers; we learn to disregard how the actual experience of things overflows the framework of our representations. The result of this avoidance is what Adorno labelled *reified* consciousness or “consciousness without shudder” (Foster, 2011, p. 264). Reification is the incapacity to be moved, affected; it is “the fear of exposure to the other” (Foster, p. 264). For Adorno, it is the task of art to recover this capacity lost or cast aside. Here it is of course relevant to note that the understanding of art as non-representational has been characteristic of artists for about a century. As the famous painter Paul Klee said, art “does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible” (quoted in Wrathall, 2011, p. 17). Just like a new concept, a work of art (when it fulfils its purpose) opens up a new way of seeing things. But this demands something of the receiver. The recovery of the ability to shudder “requires an arduous practice of working upon the self, one that begins to weaken the attachment to reified forms of thought and action” (Foster, 2011, p. 264). Reified forms of thought are precisely *not* the living concepts that Steiner, Bergson and Deleuze describe and argue for. But the work upon oneself in order to weaken one’s attachment to reified representations need perhaps not be so arduous if *Lernen 2* was more prevalent in our forms of education.

What Rumpf calls *Lernen 2* is also not very different from what Semetsky (2009) refers to as “learning from a singular experience, which is not representative but affective, that brings forth a shock to thought and produces *becoming* as a form of intuition” (p. 450; italics in original). This “shock to thought” is a kind of suffering; it means *allowing* something to be or to happen, allowing an event to unfold without imposing one’s own will, but which nevertheless engages the will in intuition, reflection and becoming—that is, in learning. The cultivation of aesthetic experience is an important aspect of this kind of learning but sadly neglected in present outcome-based curriculums, which tend to increase mere “teaching for the test” and therefore *Lernen 1*. As Rooth-Bernstein remarks regarding science teaching, students are rarely “given any notion whatever of the aesthetic dimension or multiplicity of imaginative possibilities of the sciences, and therefore, no matter how technically adept, can never truly understand or appreciate them” (1997, p 63-64; see also Girod, 2007)—but this was perhaps true even before present neoliberal educational policies.

Implications for Pedagogy

Every teacher must know, Spaemann maintains in another essay (2001), that what she can transmit to her students is only memory, something of the past—hence, representations. Is teaching ever possible without representations? I think not, except perhaps in purely practical subjects. But it is crucial for teachers to understand that there is something vitally important beyond representational knowledge. This paper is devoted to the clarification of this issue.

Educational research is strongly linked to practice—or expected to be so. After a long exposition of philosophical ideas, the question usually arises: so what? What does it mean for the practice of education? However, when it comes to philosophy of education, my stance is that practical consequences are to a great extent unpredictable. More exactly, they are dependent upon the philosophical understanding of the teacher, and what teachers will do out of their philosophical understanding only teachers themselves know—or perhaps not even they do. However, a few remarks may be appropriate.

We have seen that for Steiner, knowledge + experience = reality, put simply. We create conceptual knowledge, and we undergo or “suffer” experience. Experience usually changes, develops, matures and deepens. Knowledge must keep up with this unfoldment of experience and life. How then should knowledge be acquired so that it leads us deeper into reality rather than turn into useless mental baggage, unable to interplay with life? What forms of teaching and learning can support the fruitful interplay of knowledge and experience, self and world, resulting in an education *to* reality? These questions are particularly relevant to the fact that students often experience school knowledge as too abstract and irrelevant to their daily life. Steiner’s notion of living concepts versus static representations seems particularly important in trying to answer such questions. Above I tried to elucidate the notion of living concepts with elements from Bergson and Deleuze, relating living concepts to intuition and virtual multiplicities. In order to stimulate the acquisition of living concepts, Steiner recommended narrative and descriptive approaches in and for education and strongly opposed the use of static definitions, which—following the quote given in the introduction—would be like putting gloves of ice on the children’s hands. This analogy is interesting considering the role that hand gesturing seems to have in thinking. According to Goldin-Meadow (2005), in problem solving children often express unspoken thoughts with their hands and teachers can profit from learning to read such gestures. “Gloves of ice” would freeze the movement of the hands and therefore the movement of thinking, preventing the development of dynamic concepts but probably supporting the production of static representations (cf. Dahlin, 2009). In addition, it is interesting to note that the evolution of the human brain may have been inseparable from that of the hand (Wilson, 1998).

Instead of definitions, narrative and descriptive approaches should be employed in teaching. The importance of artistic activity and aesthetic experience is also emphasised in Steiner schools, being perhaps their most well known characteristic. All this is in accord with Rumpf's (2010) critique of the learning concept dominating present educational policy and practice, based to a large extent on performativity, accountability and teaching-for-the-test. I would like to suggest that the prevalence of these policies and practices actually resonates well with the constructivist learning theories that inform much of today's educational research, in spite of the fact that many of the proponents of these theories are also critical of present educational policies. The reason is that these theories tend to emphasise the role of the subject as "active" and "productive"—hence, as a "performer", a subject trying to master an object. The *passive*, "suffering" aspects of learning are thereby generally neglected, but they are vital and stimulating aspects of experience.

Let me end with a quote from von Wright (2007) concerning the possible reconstruction of the notion of *Bildung* for our present educational needs. *Bildung*, von Wright says, involves perhaps not only certain abilities or competencies but "the power to, from a certain interface between the self and the world, dare the question, refuse participation and allow the astonishment" (p. 42). Does not this power, this courage to question, this refusal, and this allowing, arise out of the insight that reality is not given to us ready-made? Are these not, therefore, basic ingredients in an education *to* reality?

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Author Details Bo Dahlin is Professor Emeritus of Education at Karlstad University and Senior Researcher at Rudolf Steiner University College, Oslo. Contact address: Kantelegatan 4A, 656 36 Karlstad, Sweden. E-mail: bo.dahlin@comhem.se



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