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Challenging the Ontological Space of the Doctoral Dissertation and Disputation

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Abstract

The doctoral dissertation and its accompanying disputation are considered the epitome of the academic institution. They consecrate the aspiring scholar, but their mission and position is far from clear in today's academia. The arrival of the professional doctorate and the doctorate by journal publication represent new innovations that challenge not only the conception of the doctorate but also how it is to be achieved. This essay has three parts. Firstly an examination of the genealogy of the disputation from the Greeks to the point when it joins with the

dissertation. Secondly, a consideration of the relation between the text of the doctoral dissertation and its oral defence. Thirdly, facing the challenge of new doctoral forms an argument is made to re-think and re-conceptualise the ontological space of the dissertation and disputation.

Key words: disputation, oral, viva, ontology

Introduction

The academic genre in its different forms has been challenged from many different angles. Nietzsche has been an inspiration for many with his use of aphorism and a logic that far from removing paradox wholeheartedly sought to embrace it. Lyotard (1988) inspired by Nietzsche and Wittgenstein discussed the academic genre as one of many language games. For him the academic genre fixed norms linking heterogeneous phrase regimes, such as reasoning, recounting, describing and so on. Thus, the academic genre of history, to take an example, entailed connecting ostension (showing) or a definition (describing) with a question, and the goal was to achieve agreement on the sense of the referent. Lyotard was not against the academic genre per se. He was more interested in positioning the academic genre as one of many other possible genres. Benjamin, writing in the 1920s also reflected upon the academic genre, and the treatise as a form of this genre. In his words:

Treatises may be didactic in tone, but essentially they lack the conclusiveness of an instruction which could be asserted, like doctrine by virtue of its own authority...The absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure is its primary characteristic. Tirelessly the process of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a roundabout way to its original object. This continual pausing for breath is the mode most proper to the process of contemplation. For by pursuing different levels of meaning in its examination of one single object it receives both the incentive to begin again and the justification for its irregular rhythm (Benjamin, 1977: 29).

For Benjamin the academic genre was the opportunity and invitation to pause and think, to return again and again, to think anew. Under today's drive to ensure that doctoral candidates complete this as quickly as possible, through published journal articles, this might be considered a somewhat idealistic and luxurious, romantic vision. And yet, there may be some

purchase in the demand to rationally think and argue in an unceasing manner, even if it is clothed in the further demand and criterion of presenting an original research contribution.

When it comes to critiques of the academic genre and the doctorate dissertation in particular, the name of Derrida quickly comes to mind. Like Lyotard, but unlike Nietzsche and Benjamin as outsiders and outcasts from academia, he radically critiqued the academic genre, read doctorate dissertation, from within its institutional boundaries. I shall open part III of this essay by exploring Derrida's critique of the genre of the dissertation, as voiced in a single text, the presentation he gave to mark the beginning of his doctoral defence.

Derrida occupies an important position in the argument to be developed below because he maps out an *ontological space of Being*, upon which it becomes possible to envisage the ground for a re-thinking and re-conceptualisation of the doctoral dissertation and disputation. In mentioning Being my allusion to Heidegger (1971: 45) is deliberate. The ontological space of Being refers to the gathering together in order to 'to make space for' the existence of an activity or a thing. Another word Heidegger uses is *Ge-stell* meaning to draw together, *enframe* and bring forth. The ontological argument directs attention to the existential, some might say experiential character of the doctorate, and in so doing seeks to provide a different perspective on the debate about the rise of the contemporary professional doctorate. Typically, this debate has highlighted responses to labour market demands and competing human capital theories, credentialism, corporatization or competition in higher education (Savage, 2009). Simplifying, the ontological speaks of the preconditions or supporting framework and how they are experienced existentially. But Derrida and Heidegger are not enough, and Reinertsen's (2009) innovative doctoral dissertation and accompanying disputation (which was traditional in its evocation of an oppositional logic), presented in part III of the journal, represent a further spur to my argument.

The ontological space of Being of the doctoral dissertation and disputation is not a new ground. It will be explored in two ways: in Part I the genealogy of the doctoral disputation will be considered from the time of the Greeks to the point when it joins together with the written dissertation, creating an ontological space still recognisable today. Secondly in Part II, the focus will be upon arguments seeking to understand the relation between the text of the doctoral dissertation and its oral defence. In particular, the argument will be that the changing character of the doctorate, challenged by the professional doctorate and the doctorate by

publication, might threaten its ontological space. Hence the need in Part III, to re-think and re-conceptualise the ontological space of Being of the dissertation and the disputation.

Part I: The genealogy of the doctoral disputation

Today's doctoral disputation has its roots in Medieval universities. The successful candidate in the public disputation was awarded a licence to teach and the degree of Masters of Arts. In exploring the disputation genealogically back to the time of the Greeks it becomes evident that it was not a component in an institutionalised research degree. But first some points on etymology.

In Anglo-Saxon parts of the world the word used for an oral examination is the viva, coming from the Latin *viva voce*, meaning 'by the living voice'. In other European countries, the word disputation (*disputas* in Norwegian) is used. This is more in keeping with the word used in ancient times and the Middle Ages.

The modern word, disputation, comes from the Latin verb *disputare*, meaning the action of debating or addressing a controversial argument in public. *Disputare* is a compound verb, constructed from *dis*, meaning separately and *putare*, meaning to consider or think (Ayto, 1990: 176). In classical Latin the discussion it referred to was not one giving rise to heated emotions. In late Latin on the contrary – in the *Vulgate* for instance – it gained an association with acrimony, along with argument.

If we examine the texts of Cicero, who lived between 106-43 B.C., we find a passage mentioning talk of a friend reluctant to discuss, the phrase used is *ad disputandum*, who:

...had been stating views on oratory at large (SRD - in public), in debate with Antonius, and reasoning in the schools, and very much in the Greek mode (*De Oratore*, 1942, book II, 13).

A little later Cicero asks in rhetorical fashion:

Are we new to debate of this disputational kind? (*Aut hominess ab hos genre disputationis alieni?*)

His assertion is that the Romans had inherited the public disputation from the Greeks. Fabius Quintilianus, writing in the first century A.D., confirms this when he talks of argumentation based upon ‘the exercise of refuting and confirming’ (*On Education and Oratory*, book 2.4, 18). The reference is to Aristotle’s work on syllogism, as found in the *Topics*, and *Prior and Anterior Analytics*.

Central to the Greek culture of the disputation was the understanding and practice of dialectics, often in public arenas. The word used was *dialegein* (Latinized version), meaning not merely to argue or converse, but to argue for a conclusion or establish by argument through questioning.

For Aristotle, the dialectic revealed the character of all reasoning. In the *Topics* Aristotle is clear about the role that can be played by dialectic:

...a method by which we shall be able to reason syllogistically from generally accepted opinions about any problema brought forward, and shall ourselves, when under examination avoid self-contradiction. (*Topics*. I:100, a18-21)

Dialectical problems are addressed in disputations and he supplied advice for would-be participants:

To defend either a thesis or a definition, you should first work out an attack on it for yourself. For it is clear that it is those things on the basis of which questioners refute the thesis that you should oppose. Avoid defending an unacceptable thesis. For people will think you mean it. (*Topics*, VIII, 160b, 14-23)

The reader is given an indication of how the dialectic was practiced at different venues. He suggested the following: training in disputation, encounters and philosophical science. (*Topics*, I:101, a26-30). The encounters he has in mind are those places where the opinions of the public will be confronted. In other words, in public disputations.

The extent to which Aristotle institutionalised training in dialectics in the Peripatos is impossible to determine. Nevertheless, in the Peripatos he followed Plato’s precedent in the

Parmenides; namely stating antithetical views. The goal was to keep things open through a never-completed questioning. As the Peripatos developed it held much in common with the doubting Sceptics, and less in common with the more popular Stoics. (Grayeff, 1974: 63-65) This is perhaps why its influence as a school was limited in ancient Greece.

These early Greeks used the disputation – in the version developed by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle – to delimit their hard won knowledge from those interested in using the disputation for a different goal and a different type of knowledge. The Sophists were not interested in the pursuit and attainment of true knowledge, they developed disputation as a skill schooled in rhetoric. Put simply, the public disputation served different intentions for Greek philosophers and Sophists.

In the method of the Sophists, their use of rhetoric was based upon longer expositions in public lectures (*epideixeis*). As Guthrie (1969: 41) has noted, it was also based upon inviting questions from the audience and not merely upon long speeches on a prepared theme. Secondly, Sophists also took part in contests at Olympian and Pythian games, where rhetoric was used in an agonistic ‘verbal battle’ over prizes (*Protagoras*, 335a).

The Sophists are important in the genealogy of the viva because they suggest precisely a different goal for public disputation – victory, rather than truth. Learning the skill of speaking becomes a cornerstone of higher education in antiquity and in the Middle Ages.

At the time of the death of Cicero in 43 B.C. and Cæsar in 44 B.C. careers in the military and administration were less open and fluid. There was less use for the persuasive speaker in public and open debate was no longer a preliminary to all decision making. Eloquence – in the sense of rhetorical skill – ‘moved from the forum and the senate to the lecture-hall and the private salon. The set declamation took the place of the speech or the political debate’ (Knowles, 1962: 64). Rhetoric continued to be taught in higher education, but it had less relevance to the political and social life of the times.

In Greco-Roman times, the public disputation among philosophers was less a give and take, where questioner and answerer exchanged positions. For example, Plotinus (205-70 CE), a Platonist allowed his students to interrupt with questions. But, it was not the more open Socratic question and answer, rather he dealt with questions such that they furthered his

teaching on a particular theme. The role of questioner and questioned was fixed. The philosophical disputation therefore had an increasingly different goal in mind, one which was protreptic. It resulted in the instruction and socialisation of less advanced students into a more domesticated or more controlled dialectical form of argumentation. Support for such an understanding can be found in Cicero's text, *Tusculan Disputations*. He positioned participants in the teaching session by labeling protagonists A for auditor (pupil) and M for magister (teacher).

Philosophers, rather like Christian leaders, fashioned themselves into holy persons. Porphyry, noted that his teacher Plotinus had experienced divine inspiration and this could not be bettered by techniques or performances of disputation. Lim (1995: 46) has summarised this change in the following way:

Philosophical authority left dialectic and alighted on the person of the philosopher-teacher himself...the philosopher effectively withdrew himself from overt challenges.

As philosophers backed away from public disputations based upon the dialectical form of Socrates, Christians also sought to restrict the occurrence of public disputations. Christians let the authority of their religious leaders ward off invitations to public debate. They referred to scripture and held this to be beyond dispute in public events. Lim's observation is fitting (1995:108):

Like the classical Greeks, Christians in the later empire discovered that the written word fettered the dynamic logos and the dialectical element of speech. Yet while the Greeks viewed such a constraint negatively, Christians, with their belief in revealed truth and their need to achieve social closure, found in the written word a god-sent gift.

In other words, the religious leaders could use written words to bring about closure. Moreover, silence and an increasingly mystical view of Deity as beyond human grasp were strategies used in response to the dialectical questioning. For example, Christian bishops of Nicaea were able to defeat a dialectical philosopher attacking their preference for hierarchal order by simply using the *simplicitas* of the Christian message.

The demise of the public disputation among philosophers and Christians and in other public arenas was not reversed until the rise of the university. At the medieval university of Paris in the 13th century, students were apprenticed to a master and when he regarded the students as ready they took a public viva if they sought a licence to teach. Wilbrink (1997: 35) noted:

What really was innovative and characteristic of the universities, as new institutions, was the examination by a committee of masters.

This meant that the individual master became dependent on his examining colleagues. It also meant teaching was connected with formal examinations. Wilbrink (1997) discounts the view that the Chinese were the inspiration for university examinations in Europe. Their written examinations did not particularly resemble their European counterparts. Another more probable explanation is that the idea came from the Muslim world. Already in the 11th century the disputation was an important instrument in the development of Muslim law. It is also the case that jurists were an inspiration for the development of the disputation in the arts and sciences (Clark, 2006).

Before the age of experimental science, the disputation ‘was the only method to develop new knowledge, and to critically analyse newly discovered or translated theories’ (Wilbrink, 1997: 36). Of course, this did not apply to all disputations. As Perreiah (1984: 94) has noted the disputation was a compulsory daily activity among students attending Oxford and Padua in the 14th century. Such daily disputations had a didactic goal. But, on occasions a particular disputation was a major event and all other activities in the university were cancelled.

The genealogical presentation can be broken-off at this point because with the rise of the universities the disputation slowly becomes institutionalised and creates an ontological space of Being still recognizable today in the practices of the doctoral disputation¹. Firstly, this ontological space of Being is characterised today, as then, by a face-to-face meeting between the teacher/examiner and candidate where questions are posed and answers sought. Secondly, the ontological space of Being becomes enframed as the site for the award of a formal

¹ It must be noted that the disputation has also declined in other areas e.g. it is rare at BA level in the natural and social sciences. Clark (2006) offers a longer discussion of the so-called ‘public farce’ of the disputation and its demise as an integral part of academic life.

qualification, which today, as then, permits admission into the community of scholars. Moreover, with the arrival of experimental science in the centuries to come and a greater emphasis on written culture (Ong, 2003), the dissertation will gain in importance to join and become gathered together-with the verbal activity of the disputation. But this does not so much change the ontological space of Being of the disputation, as enrich it with an added dimension. The character of this connection is one of the topics of the next part of the essay.

Part II: The relation between the textual dissertation and its oral defence

The changing form of the doctorate is related to how the knowledge it produces is changing in a conceptual sense and also how it is achieved in the sense of who produces the knowledge and where. If the ontological space of Being of the scholarly doctorate remained solidly within the university and this did not change with the arrival of the research-based PhD in the course of the 20th century, this is by no means necessarily the case with the arrival of the professional doctorate. With the professional doctorate the role of the workplace in professional doctorates, such as EdD (education), DBA (business) and EngD (engineering), is heightened. Thus, while the knowledge produced in the doctorate must still meet the demand for originality, it is not the same demand for originality found in the traditional doctorate and measured against existing research knowledge. It is instead increasingly originality in terms of how it is applied to or contributes to the development of professional practice.

Scott et al. (2004) propose a conceptualisation of the knowledge found in professional doctorates that moves beyond Gibbons et al.'s (1994) distinction between disciplinary knowledge constructed in the university and trans-disciplinary knowledge produced outside the university. They propose four modes of knowledge bridging the professional and more traditional doctorate: disciplinary knowledge (academic centre dominant, but reflect on practice), technical (intervening in practice in an objective manner), dispositional (individual develops competence to reflect upon action) and critical (knowledge undermining the practice setting). The professional doctorate has significant components of technical and dispositional knowledge unlike the traditional doctorate. It shares with the traditional doctorate the potential for critical knowledge. It is also includes disciplinary knowledge acquired in the course of compulsory taught modules and as components of the dissertation/submitted essays. While disciplinary knowledge is still a necessary component in the doctorate, and with this a certain legitimacy is given to the university's role in it's collection, transmission and

transformation, the role of professional practice means that the university's position as the sole arbitrator of knowledge is challenged. However, the university retains its key position as the site awarding the degree.

As a consequence the ontological space of Being of the doctorate is widened to include the site in which the doctoral candidates undertake and experience their professional practice. The education doctorate and business doctorates recruit professionals who are in mid-career and interested in knowledge that can enhance their role as reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983, 1987). Moreover, while the graduates of the traditional doctorate gain immediate and unqualified access to the community of scholars in their chosen field, it is by no means certain that professional doctoral graduate desires or will be granted such access by scholars already in the field. In other words, the ontological space of Being becomes differentiated not in terms of the form of assessment per se, which is shared, but in terms of access to either a scholarly or practitioner community.

The ontological space of Being of the doctorate also concerns, as indicated in Part I, the character of the connection between the dissertation and the disputation and how it is experienced. Scott et al. (2004) in their otherwise excellent reflection upon the professional doctorate choose not to examine this relation. They consider only the possibility and primacy of textual work submitted in the course of the professional doctorate program and for final assessment. They do not consider the possibility of candidates being asked and also being assessed on the basis of giving a public lecture on their work or some other form of public presentation. This is an element in the traditional Scandinavian doctorate, where along with a public disputation the candidate might also be expected to offer a prepared lecture on a topic chosen by the doctoral examining committee. The public lecture entails an additional face-to-face component in the doctorate degree, whether professional or traditional. And its very presence indicates a widening of the ontological space of Being of the dissertation and disposition to include an extra component.

The face-to-face component can be conceptualized with the inspiration of Levinas who notes that 'meaning is not produced as an ideal essence; it is said and taught by presence' (1969:67). Meaning is not therefore produced 'in' the mind, separated from external others. Levinas's develops his perspective by noting that 'speech consists in "coming to the assistance" of the word...it brings what the written word is already deprived of: mastery. Speech, better than a

simple sign, is essentially magisterial' (1969: 69). It is important to understand what Levinas is proposing, namely that speech by a person present has a protreptic goal. It teaches and the question becomes, what does it teach? Speech marks a presence of the other and this carries with it an obligation to listen to what they have to say. But, it is not primarily the teaching of content that Levinas wishes to highlight. It entails a willingness to be open before making a decision on the truth, falsity or dissimulation carried in the content of what is said or in the manner in which it is said. The call to openness is an ethical obligation on the part of those present.

In the context of the disputation, it is speech connected with and emanating from the face that causes participants, both candidate and examiners, to break out of an egoism, which they might otherwise wish to keep. The presence of the face of the other 'introduces into me what was not in me' (Levinas: 1969: 203). In accordance with Merleau-Ponty's (1968) chiasm of shared inter-subjectivity, Levinas demonstrates how we are drawn into a state of shared contingency and sociality in our relations with others.

However, the obligation to openness in the ontological space of Being of the disputation has to be balanced against the increasing weight given to the value of the dissertation contra the disputation. In Australia for example, the doctoral disputation is only held on rare occasions when the examining committee might have doubts about the authenticity, for example, of the candidate's submitted research. In Norway the public disputation has generally the character of a ceremonial consecration of the candidate (Bourdieu, 1996). This is the case because the public disputation is not arranged unless the examining committee has already approved the dissertation and very rarely do candidates fail the public disputation. The Norwegian and Australian example question the totality normally presumed to exist between the dissertation and the disputation, tipping the balance in favour of the dissertation. The role of the disputation as integral to the ontological space of Being of the doctorate is as a consequence threatened. The face-to-face meeting is either lost or flattened to a ceremony that is not a high stake assessment event.

The doctorate by publication represents a different challenge to the ontological space of Being of the traditional and professional doctorate. It challenges not so much the disputation component of the dissertation-disputation totality. As a number of published articles in referee journals, for the beginning academic, or as a number of books, for the academic midway (or

later) in their career the totality may lack the identification of a single narrative thread more clearly evident in the dissertation. The whole is instead a collection of potentially overlapping threads that the candidate tries, either successfully or unsuccessfully, to draw together in a previously unpublished introductory essay. The introduction essay constitutes a summary for the compilation, termed *kappa* in Norwegian/Swedish.

At stake are two things: the form of the examined work and its legitimacy. The former with respect to the degree with which the introductory essay (*kappa*) connects different narrative threads into a coherent whole. With respect to the latter, the examining committee for the doctorate by publication encounters articles already passed by referees or books already accepted by publishers and their reviewers. This means that the legitimacy for the submitted work lies in the first instance elsewhere. It can be difficult for the examining committee to question and criticise this legitimacy. Thus, an article in a renowned international journal may not in the opinion of the examining committee be of doctoral quality. As a consequence the ontological space of Being of the doctorate by publication takes its legitimacy, which was previously the sole property of the university and its examining committee and distributes it, either in part or completely to others separated in time and space: journal editors and their choice of reviewers.

Summarising, the ontological space of Being of the traditional doctorate is transformed to include the site of practice and the site of others who have refereed journal articles submitted by candidates (beginning academics) or acted as reviewers for manuscripts submitted to publishers (academic taking their doctorate midway or later in their career). On the one hand, this might be interpreted as threat to the ontological space of Being of the examining institution. Similarly, when the disputation is no longer required the ontological space of Being of the dissertation and disputation as a whole is obviously transformed. On the other hand, it is still the university that is the formal and final examining instance with the authority to make an award. On this count the threats do not ultimately challenge the legitimacy of the university. Is it possible however, to envisage or find examples of more radical challenges to the ontological space of Being of the doctoral dissertation and disputation? This is the topic of Part III.

Part III: Re-conceptualising the ontological space of Being of the dissertation and disputation

In this part of the essay two examples will be addressed. The first is the case of Derrida's presentation at the beginning of his doctoral disputation (June 2nd 1980). The second concerns a radical doctoral dissertation at a Norwegian university (June 15th 2007). The space in time is a mere 27 years and this is small in comparison with the history spanning centuries as the doctorate gradually became institutionalised and achieved more status than the master (*magister*) degree and the *habilitationschrift* of the lecturer (Clark, 2006: 203-4).

Derrida's doctorate was based upon three of his own books and was thus a doctorate by publication. He showed no concern with the possibility that the legitimacy of his submitted work might lie elsewhere. Nor was he concerned with the text vs. oral debate as in some of his own books. Instead, in his presentation he directed attention to his own 25 year journey from the date when he initially registered for a doctorate to finally reaching the disputation. He was skeptical of the university because it had a certain 'rhetoric, the staging and the particular discursive procedures, which historically determined as they very much are, dominate university discourse' (1983: 42). Central to these is the thesis, read dissertation, of which he said the following:

The very idea of a thetic presentation, of positional or oppositional logic, the idea of a position, of *Setzung* or *Stellung*, that which I called the epoch of the thesis. (op.cit.)

In other words, in Heideggerian terms the thesis opens up ontological space of being for these kinds of logics and also for the university's 'ordered procedures of legitimation, of the production of titles and diplomas and the authorization of competence' (op.cit.). Later he added that the university was a rite of legitimation, a rhetoric and institutional symbolism that 'neutralizes whatever comes from outside of the system' (p44).

In his early years he believed his doctoral dissertation would be in terms of form and content located outside or beyond the norms of the thesis, as defined in the rules and regulations of the university, and at the same time, in accordance with one of its acceptable forms, such as an interpretation of Hegel's theory of the sign (p43). Later he found his work creating a stage that couldn't easily be transported to the stage of the university because he no longer

identified or classified his own created stage as one under the heading of philosophy or non-fiction. The implication being that the thesis had to fall under such a heading (p47).

The reader of Derrida's opening presentation at the beginning of his doctoral defence, which he later published and to which I refer (Derrida, 1983), still has to wait until the final pages to find an open declaration as to why he actually decided to complete his doctorate. He said the reason was the 'friendly advice of this or that person among those present, who effected in me a decision I could not have come to alone' and also the awareness that with institutional politics changing he had 'concluded that it was perhaps better, and I must underline the "perhaps", to prepare myself for some kind of mobility' (p48).

He also admitted the presentation might sound like a 'self-justification, self-submission (as of a thesis), a self-defence'. But he didn't want to be understood in this manner. Rather, he wished to say he didn't know where he is going with his defence and presentation, other than that he would have liked it to be a 'joyous self-contradiction' (p50) as a defence without a defence, As an end to the 25 years old journey. His presentation 'delights in being without defence' (p50).

Care is required in interpreting Derrida's presentation. We were not present and no video footage or transcription of the verbal defence after his presentation exists to my knowledge. The presentation clearly belongs to his disputation, its opening, and yet is also connected to the published work. However, if we examine in more detail what he is saying in the presentation, it can be read as an attempt to undercut the very notion of a doctoral defence by saying that he is not defending his works against questions and hesitations that might be raised to their value. This is to refuse the oppositional logic he identified as a characteristic of the dissertation and also the accompanying disputation, which has its roots back to the time of the Greeks (see part I). Simply put, Derrida refused to challenge the ontological space of the Being of the doctorate on its own terms. This is in itself a challenge to the doctorate, from within the form of the doctorate. It is perhaps a risk that an accomplished and renowned academic can afford to take, but is hardly sound advice to beginning academics when the launching of a career is at stake and admission to the community of scholars.

It is therefore appropriate that the second example is precisely of a doctorate candidate (Reinartsen, 2009) at the beginning of her academic career, and secondly inspired by the ideas

of Derrida. Not it must add inspired by this particular presentation, instead by a range of his concepts such as haunting, mourning, aporia, writing, community and chora. The ostensible topic of her dissertation was school development in a Norwegian school. And yet the reader of the dissertation meets something more and something different to what might have been expected in a traditional treatment of this topic. The very title of the dissertation is already a taste of things to come:

Spunk A Love Story. Teacher Community Not. Writing Toward a De-authorized and Double(d) Perspective of Research and Reform in Schools

The reference to spunk refers to Astrid Lingren's (1992) well-known fictional books for children about a girl called Pippi. Spunk is Pippi's made up word for what we do not have a word for. And this is how Reinertsen thinks and experiences school reform. It is something always in process as it takes place and any concepts or words to describe it will always reify what has not reached a conclusion.

Reinertsen's dissertation is very much a philosophical work, or put differently if you try to find a single disciplinary box to put her work in it must be as a reflection upon educational philosophy. What might educational philosophy be to Reinertsen? It is not a philosophy **of** education, but philosophy **as** education; embedded in doing educational philosophy with others and upon oneself.

It has a number of premises: A weighting towards process rather than product, describing the experience of teachers and pupils as they experience school reform. Secondly, it is problem driven, not hypothesis driven, although it is not always evident what are the research questions (p86). Moreover, this is a difficult distinction at the best of times, since hypotheses can emerge from problems and vice versa. Thirdly, of her approach she says:

Beginning not with a politics of which we would then give examples, but with examples out of which we might invent a politics (p95).

Her goal is to understand attempts to create a sense of community among teachers and pupils through school reform. But it is not a community that can be named once and for all. She

seeks, in Derrida fashion, to move towards the community yet to come and its possible/potential, never to be fixed conditions.

The radical aspect of her doctoral dissertation, in addition to the focus on process rather than product, is the manner in which she continually puts everything we know, or think we know, under erasure and this is primarily through her way of writing. It refuses a linear ordered list of contents. A couple of chapter titles are illustrative (her underlining):

1 (2) Writing me; farewell lovely, welcome difficult, about hitting rock bottom but reporting myself off the sick list and slowly growing myself up (p 24-60).

4 (5) – 5 (6) – 6 (7) 00(0) Writing up still, never writing down: A last introduction or an end without end, summing up again perhaps, concluding but without. Being serious and trying even harder through my fear of being too explicit, not to let anybody suffer from me.

She includes subjective autobiographical reflections on her role as a researcher, and how she simultaneously refuses the role of action-based researcher or that of the distanced, objective observing researcher. Lastly, she continually questions rather than provides answers that might obstruct the emphasis on process. Simply put, she sets in motion a process of *différance*.

As already commented, there are significant risks entailed in submitting a dissertation such as this. The examiners in the disputation in adopting an oppositional logic (as they did in her case) inevitably find themselves in danger of reifying her dissertation into fixed concepts and a set of findings that can be listed. This is to de-value her grasp of the process she has attempted to document. Put simply, a different vocabulary is required to examine process rather than product, where research questions are embedded rather than explicit. With the inspiration of Derrida and some of his concepts she provides a radical re-conceptualisation of the traditional doctoral dissertation. What is left unanswered and still required is a radical re-conceptualisation of how the examiners are to assess the dissertation and undertake a disputation more in tune with the dissertation. Thus, to pose the question without proposing an answer: If an oppositional logic is refused by the dissertation how is the disputation to be undertaken with its opponents?

Conclusion

The genealogy of the disputation becomes united with the disputation with the rise of the university and a greater emphasis on written treatises. As a consequence the ontological space of Being of the dissertation and disputation as a shared experience is thus thrown into existence, to use a Heideggerian term. With the arrival of professional doctorates and doctorates by publication this ontological space is threatened by competing sites of legitimation for the work submitted for formal doctoral assessment. But the university has still maintained its dominance as the site awarding the degree. The dropping of the disputation for doctoral dissertations might result in an impoverishment of the ontological space of Being. The dissertation, whether in its traditional form or based upon published articles or books has however, appeared resilient. This may change and the examples of Derrida and Reinertsen represent a spur to the re-conceptualisation of the ontological space of Being of the couple dissertation/disputation or the dissertation on its own. They seek to show the ontological Being of a process, how it is experienced as practice, *as-doing*, rather than its reification in an oppositional *is*. Simply put, they show rather than posit and argue.

The price of such a re-conceptualisation may be too high for beginning academics. It may be left to accomplished and experienced academics taking a higher level degree or a senior doctorate. Nietzsche once spoke of how the student was connected to the university 'by the ear, as a hearer' (1909: 125)². This was because they were dependent on this sense in order to access, from teachers and professors; what was a valued and acroamatic teaching originally reserved for the few. Today, through the internet, much can be accessed as pod-casts or a multi-modal presentations (Kress, 2003) using images, text and sound. But, the doctorate as the epitome of the university institution is still for the chosen few and still remains a textual phenomenon, with the disputation as a possibility not always invoked by examining institutions. From such a perspective, even the re-conceptualisations of Derrida and Reinertsen have not ruptured or radically challenged the textual dominance of the ontological space of Being of the doctorate. Developments and challenges await...

² Derrida (1988) also reflected upon the same quote.

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