BILDUNG, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND THE FORMATION OF SUBJECTIVITY IN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

In a time when the very thought of education is pervaded by the language and practices of standardization and efficiency, our subjectivity—the inner space of human experience that makes up who we are as singular beings—gets lost. As such, the very existence of the subject and its possibilities of reconstruction are at stake. Working from a reconceptualized field of curriculum, this study takes up the question of formation and asks in what ways subjectivity might get constituted through educational experience. The German notion of Bildung—which posits education as a process of formation or “becoming oneself”—offers crucial insights to the rethinking of educational experience today, in the effort to reclaim subjectivity, along with its sense of existential significance. Studying the process from a psychoanalytic perspective, I wish to shift the discussion of educational experience from psychological, behavioral, and other pragmatic connotations, and return it to a speculative philosophical investigation of what it means to become who we are, and what that entails in terms of desire and the unconscious. Exploring the phenomenon of subjective formation in relation to aspects such as philosophical anthropology, psychic dynamics, technology, and Eros, I come to conclude that an education that is inattentive to the inner life of the subject cannot be properly called education. The free associations I establish between curricular and psychoanalytic theory leads me to a basic and yet fundamental understanding of the process of becoming: the idea that subjectivity gets reconstructed in educational experience through an ongoing dialectic of struggle and reconciliation. While this dialectic exposes the drama of the split condition of the subject, with its failures and frustrations, it also offers the promise of the possibility of subjective reconstruction and change. It is an invitation to take risks, to learn to let go, and to imagine what might be.
Lay Summary

This research begins with a simple premise: that what we learn through education is much more than school content, we learn ways of being. The central question this investigation explores, then, is this: In what ways can subjectivity, our singular expression of “who we are”, emerge from educational experience?

In a time when education is influenced by the practices of standardization and measurement, our subjectivity—the human traits that make up who we are as singular individuals—gets lost. The guiding assumption in this conceptual research is that, in the present context of market-driven education, it is the existence of the subject as such that is at stake and needs to be rescued and better understood. To answer the question, this research explores education from the perspectives of German idealist philosophy and psychoanalysis. The findings show the importance for education to pay attention to inner life, and to face conflict in productive terms.
Preface

This dissertation is original, independent work by Fernando M. Murillo.

A version of chapter 4 titled “Curriculum as an Unfinished Symptom” has been submitted for a book publication.
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The most profound moments of reflection, intimate conversation, revelation and, eventually, conversion of St. Augustine take place in a garden. My experience completing the PhD here at UBC can be compared to such a garden.

This place has witnessed the full range of my own process of Bildung, from tears, heartbreak, and subjective shattering, to laughter, playful interactions, and thoughtful contentment. In this garden of sorts, I am forever grateful to William Pinar, Anne Phelan, and Sam Rocha. Bill, you entrusted me with freedom to explore, get lost, and find my way again. Your thought-provoking questions and commentary inspired me. Anne, you challenged me to take my ideas to extents I did not image possible. Your sharp yet gentle reasoning and questions helped me refine my thoughts. Sam, you baptized me into the humanities. You introduced me to ways of thinking and bodies of knowledge that forever changed the nature of my work and pushed me to whole new levels of reasoning and sensing. The work presented here could not have happen without each of you, while I acknowledge that all shortcomings in it are mine alone.

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I am no longer the same.
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Who am I and who am I becoming?” have become the most unsettling and fundamental questions we can ask ourselves”
Klaus Mollenhauer (2014, p. 115)

In “The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” (a classic Bildungsroman novel by James Joyce, 1916), we learn about the life of Stephen Dedalus, an Irish young man in the 19th century, and his experiences in prestigious schools, as he struggles to find himself, or who he is becoming. Attending first an all-boys Catholic boarding school, Joyce tells us that despite the highly regulated curriculum and day-to-day life, Stephen felt “that he was different from others…[that] he wanted to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld” (1994, p. 44). One may ask what could this “unsubstantial image” that made him different consist of? What is the nature of the relation that mediates his conscious learning and his felt singularity?

Despite studying at a privileged institution and becoming well versed in Latin, geography, and other school subjects, we are told that “nothing moved him or spoke to him from the real world unless he heard in it an echo of the infuriated cries within him” (p. 65). This attentiveness to inner life, to the yet unnamed desire that stirred within him (perhaps the unsubstantial image?), propels Stephen as he moves through higher education, struggling with his sense of origin, historicity, religion, nationality, and sexuality. Refusing to settle for the predeterminations that schooling declared to provide, something drives him in a more urgent curiosity to find out who he really is, and what he could be. In the midst of academic obligations and the push and pull of what he senses as possibilities for subjective transformation, Stephen realizes that “some instinct…stronger than education…armed him against acquiescence” (p.115).
At the end of the novel, and as Stephen prepares to travel abroad, he confides to us what his mother wished for his process of formation as she prayed over him: “that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels”. To this prayer, Stephen replies in both fear and anticipation, “Amen. So be it” (p. 185).

These passages point to central aspects which help us understand the plausible ways in which subjectivity— the singular notion and expression of who we are—can be constituted in educational experience.

One of these aspects refers to the distinction between instruction and formation. The non-coincidence of these two terms often used to talk about education becomes apparent in Stephen’s dissatisfaction with an experience of schooling that fell short of his more pressing existential questions and needs. This is why in spite of a highly organized school curriculum that carefully directed instruction, teaching and learning, Stephen declares that none of it was able to, by itself, move him or speak to him. He distrusts pedagogy because he does not believe that it can fulfill the more complex demands of his formation. This is not to say that instruction was not beneficial for him.

On the contrary, the Latin he learns, for example, is something he continues to put to use throughout his education and is what provides him access to the discussion and deeper understanding of what beauty and art is, a pivotal ingredient that eventually gives him the courage to become what his desire pointed to from the beginning: an artist. The process of formation—a fashioning of the self that molds and transforms the kernel of our subjective being—is, as we will see in the next chapter, far more complex than instruction. The discussion across this investigation will lead us to this first conclusion, that while instruction is a social practice that can be directed,
organized, and enacted from a basic pair group (parent-child, tutor-student) to a whole cohort of students, the formation of subjectivity is a purely self-directed phenomenon.

Another aspect that these snippets from the novel help us identify is, in relation to the previous one, the struggle between the inner and the outer world as a defining dynamic of the process of subjective formation. Stephen, a bright and dedicated student, demonstrates consistently along his trajectory of schooling that he not only learns the material he is presented with by his teachers, he takes the process seriously, and wrestles with it trying to understand it further. However, it is precisely as he attempts to create connections between the protocols of schooling and his inner existential demands; he senses a tragic disconnect. The school curriculum, with all its organization, presentation of content, and evaluation, simply failed to “move him” or “speak to him”. There were “infuriated cries within him”, a more pressing existential sense of reality and significance, which school simply ignored.

This reality is what the classic Bildung literature points to when it defines an irreducible and necessary interrelation between an inner world and its engagement with the outer world of culture, giving special precedence to the inner. The cultivation of the self is defined by Wilhelm von Humboldt as a phenomenon that is both more inner and higher than mere instruction, directed at heightening one’s powers and the elevation of personality (1999). It is what we see when the matter is approached phenomenologically, pressing down on the accidental and opening it up to the ontological nature of its substance.

A third aspect we find in the example of the novel and that will be of importance to keep in mind for the rest of this investigation is that of alienation. For Humboldt, the linking of our self to the world—the necessary condition for the expansion of our powers—entails a certain degree of alienation. Alienation, separation, profound engagement with alterity, these are all instances that
come to define the process of subjective formation as we see it throughout the educational experience of Stephen Dedalus, although in different forms.

It starts with the experience of boarding school, then the grappling with academic knowledge in terms of subjective significance, the identification and posterior struggle with religion, the profound difficulty with sexuality, the questioning of the notion of nationality, and finally, his physical removal to a foreign country. Seen as symptomatic expressions of a more primordial alienation (the subject itself is, for Jacques Lacan, constituted fundamentally as an internally split entity) alienation represents simultaneously the drama of separation and lack, but also the possibility for the emergence of subjectivity in singularity. Is this aspect of self-formation what we find in the enigmatic dictum of Scriptures, that in order to be found one must first be willing to lose oneself?¹

With these elements in mind, let us now define the more specific focus of this study, its themes, perspective, and the mode of investigation that thread the different chapters into one study.

1.1 The overarching question of the study

This research begins with a simple premise: that what we learn through education in terms of subject-matter is inextricably implicated with what we learn in terms of ways of being. The central question this investigation explores, then, is this: In what ways might subjectivity, our singular expression of self, be constituted through educational experience?

¹ Matthew 16:24-25 (NIV)
In a time when the very thought of education is pervaded by the language and practices of standardization, measurement, and technological procedures, our subjectivity—the inner space of human experience that makes up who we are as singular beings—gets lost. Thus, the central wager in this research is that, in the present context of commodified education, it is the very existence of the subject and its possibilities of reconstruction what is at stake and needs to be rescued. As such, this investigation is positioned at the heart of what defines the character of curriculum studies in its reconceptualized tradition.

The German notion of Bildung—which posits education as a process of “becoming oneself”—offers crucial insights to the rethinking of educational experience today, in the effort to reclaim subjectivity, along with its sense of existential, historical, cultural, political and sexual significance. Such reclaiming includes not only an acceptance of what is, but also a formative determination to change what has been bequeathed us.

In this respect, and particularly when pronouncing the word psychoanalysis, one might anticipate objections to a perceived patriarchal conception of subjective formation. To be sure, the history of the conceptual development of Bildung, as that of most accounts of subjective formation, started out undeniably as projects advanced by men and for men. Almost the entirety of the canon of Bildungsroman are accounts of the journey of formation of men. The subject, as it were, was male. Women, the Other. But after 1949, we know that things are more complicated than that. With Simone de Beauvoir we became aware that throughout history women—or the notion of the feminine—appeared as relegated to a position of a “second sex”. This awareness has been brought to bear in this dissertation in that the use of the terms subject or human person encompass both men and women in all their possible expressions of sexuality. The feminist impetus of theorists such as de Beauvoir enabled a more careful engagement with and a resignification of the extant bodies of knowledge regarding subjective formation, as we can see exemplified in the work of Deborah Britzman, extensively referenced here. Britzman shows how a highly resisted body of knowledge such as Freudian psychoanalysis, when taken seriously, can be engaged in productive ways by resisting a presentist judgment, looking at the language used by Freud as a product of its time and primarily as symbolic functions that operate in the psyche, rather than as markers of genital import. Classic feminism, such as the one represented in bell hooks, emphasize equality and, as an overarching drive, a return to love (see hooks “Feminism is for Everybody”). This is an important point of union with the emphasis of the work done in the ontological project emphasized in idealist thought as represented in the phenomenological and psychoanalytic tradition: the rescue of the universal in an understanding that the human condition is precisely human, indistinct of sexual difference. There is an acknowledgment of suffering, but also the possibility of transcendence. In this sense, the chasm between spirit and body is healed in Eros, a return to love.
By situating the exploration of subject formation in *Bildung*, in both its existential and psychoanalytic terms, I want to shift the discussion of educational experience away from psychological, behavioral, and other pragmatic connotations, and return it to an speculative philosophical investigation of what it means to become who we are, and what that entails in terms of desire, the unconscious, and “the everyday agony and ecstasy of living, in all its attendant mystery and complexity” (Thompson 2017, p. xii).

It is in attention to this mystery and complexity that the question driving this investigation is: How might subjectivity—our singular expression of self—emerge from educational experience?

The purpose or propelling force at the core of this exploration, however, is not related to finding applications for more effective or intentional curriculum designs and development, but rather—and perhaps even on the contrary—to make an effort to rescue singularity.

1.2 The recurring question of subjectivity

The question for the self and for the subjectively existing individual is an impossible one. But it is one that needs to be grappled with if one is to even begin to have an idea of one’s own process of becoming as an ontological phenomenon, rather than a mere epistemological one, as it has sometimes been reduced (or repressed?) within the teaching and learning economies of schooling (Taubman, 2011; Rocha, 2016). In this sense, and as Sam Rocha (2016) asserts, the questions of Who Am I and What is Education are not completely unrelated, but quite the opposite: we see them, in fact, coming together in the notion of *Bildung*. As Rocha indicates, when taken at their most fundamental ontological level, these questions can become quite uncomfortable and even scary, particularly in their openness, indeterminacy, and mystery proper of regions of our subjective selves deeply mediated by desire and the unconscious. *Bildung*, as the educational
process of forming a self into a subject, appears as one marked by discontinuity and non-coincidence.

Before moving further, it is important at this point to define and frame in general terms the way we understand the subjectively existing individual—a notion that will continue to appear throughout this study. With this tripartite qualification of the subject—a nomenclature I borrow from William Pinar—I want to emphasize the particularities that describe the subject within the scope of a reconceptualized notion of curriculum and of the psychoanalytically informed work developed here.

To speak of an individual is to speak from an understanding of the human being as unique, irreplicable, and irreplaceable. It is the sense of individuation that is perhaps more visible in a protestant ethics of salvation. The aspects of “originality” and “creativity” with which Anne Phelan (2015) characterizes individuality are undoubtedly fundamental but it is the “capacity for dissent” (p.1) that proves to be a key characteristic for the notion of subject affirmed here, as it highlights the inevitability of conflict and non-coincidence in the relation of the self with itself and with the world.

The notion that this individual exists “subjectively” reminds us that individuality is lived and experienced by the potentialities of inner life, such as feeling, judgement, reason, consciousness, memory, aesthetic sense, drives, unconscious material, spirituality, and sexuality. Specially as it regards the conditions of education today, it is the inward aspect of subjectivity which allows for the individual to be able to exist apart from institutional life (Pinar, 2011).

Predicated on the potentialities of inner life, subjectivity is an ongoing and singular process of interpretation. This is why the possibilities of the subjective require formation, expansion, shattering, reconstruction, and perfection. Subjectivity, in this sense, is never pre-
fixed nor a state one reaches once and for all, but a process defined in temporality: the leaking of
the past into the present and the possibilities of such reconstructed present for the future.

The acknowledgment and reaffirmation of the subject as “existing” foregrounds that the
individual is not a free-floating entity, but rather one that, as both Humboldt and Lacan remind
us, is always already implied with her circumstance with alterity and otherness. It is what we find
at the core of the Heideggerian “Dasein” (being-there) and in the general existentialist formula
that “existence precedes essence”. Existence is, in this sense, a paradoxical category. It is the
mode of being of the individual subject, but this mode of being is inevitably situated and
relational. This is why José Ortega y Gasset defines the existence of the subject as “me and my
circumstance”, and later on Heidegger reformulated it as “being-in-the-world”.

But, if the question for the subjectively existing individual is indeed an impossible one, as
we mention at the beginning of this section, why go back to it? The situation reminds one of
Sisyphus – the Homeric hero- in his endless, and seemingly, absurd task. However, “in certain
areas of human life”, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor tell us, “there’s something irremediably
hermeneutic”, areas where one “never really arrive at the final, definitive, description” (in Waldow
& Desouza, 2017, p.16). Subjectivity, in its deeply singular psychic nature, is one such area of
human life which, despite the impossibility of definitive determination, compels us to keep the
question alive.

The fact that the question of subjectivity continues to appear, though in different forms, signals
that this is a matter far from being exhausted. Two facts show the need to continue asking the
recurring question of subjective formation:
- Natality: the fact that new people are continuously arriving into the world. This is what generates what for Friedrich Schleiermacher constituted the central question of education: “What does the old generation want with the new?”.

- Our own reconstruction: regardless of our level of awareness, existence in this world involves a continuous process of change. Hope and discouragement, desire and frustration, shattering and reconstruction, heartbreak and mending its pieces back together.

Today, in the context of global curricular reform that promulgates standardization and the technification of schooling, the question for a renewed understanding of subjectivity becomes an urgent one. Rather than coming up with solutions to the demands of curricular policy for predefined and measurable learning outcomes, focusing on the question of human formation brings the question back to a discussion of the ultimate purpose of education.

In its openness and complexity, the terminology used to refer to the subjective varies substantially across the literature and traditions that have grappled with it. Self, subject, personality, identity, the human, they all seem to be used interchangeably and univocally. There are, however, differences in the emphases attributed to them in the traditions from which they are pronounced, so it is important to, from the outset, make some clarifications regarding how these terms are used here.

A first distinction regarding the choice of terms can be found in the notion of identity. Deriving from the Latin *idem* (same), it is normally the term of choice for psychology, which assumes a unitary notion of the person and, by extension, strives to find unity (or sameness) between the internal and the external, between intention and action, word and meaning, and so on. Although a case could be made in favour of a reconceptualization of the term in its Latin
sense, in its contemporary psychological use it has been tied almost exclusively to cognitive-behavioural schemes. For this reason, it is not a term I use. Contrary to the assumption of a unitary subject, what psychoanalysis shows is that the subject is, necessarily, a split entity. It highlights the non-coincidence between intention and language (or action), which becomes apparent in phenomena such as sublimation of desire, slips of the tongue, and bungled actions: we do not do what we really want to do, or end up doing what we did not intend.

My preferred term—subjectivity—is used here as a condensation of the background provided by the idealist and existentialist philosophical traditions regarding the problem of the self. A central notion in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the self is for Hegel what is at the heart of the “know thyself!” dictum. This knowing of one’s self occurs, in the Hegelian account, in a necessary relation to others. However, and in warning against an individuality threatened to be overwhelmed and inundated by the experience of others, Soren Kierkegaard—in *Sickness unto Death*—redefines the self as “a relation which relates itself to its own self”. In this reversal, the reflexive character of “self” denotes a stronger emphasis on self-awareness and attunement to inner life. As such, it can be said to be the genesis of individuality, as it is the kernel of the possibility for uniqueness and originality.

At the beginning of this work, I thought about subjectivity almost exclusively in terms of individuality. Knowing that perhaps individuality could be mistaken for individualism\(^3\), further reading into Kierkegaard provided me with an alternative notion that, apart from giving me a new

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\(^3\) Individuality may easily be associated with narcissism and the rejection of relations of care for others, what is commonly referred to as individualism.
vocabulary to refer to this issue, helped me gain further insight into the process of subjective formation: the notion of singularity.

In describing moments of reflexive suspension of the collective, Kierkegaard posits the result of such break: the ascension to a state of singular individuality. Singularity, then, becomes an important qualification to the discussion of subjectivity across this investigation. It maintains the focus on the uniqueness of a subject, but it also reminds that it is never a state that can be reached and maintained once and for all. There are moments of singularity, and its subjective substratum is something that requires ongoing cultivation. As we will see in Chapter 2, singular individuality is the primary focus for an education as *Bildung*.

I do not use these terms in any strict systematic way, but rather use them sparingly according to the context. As the reader will notice, however, I do use the term “self” when I refer to the more generic ontological state of being, and “subject” to the self that has undergone a somewhat more defining sort of educational experience. The self turns into a subject through cultivation. As I indicated earlier, I also use the term “subjectively existing individual”, after the work of Pinar, in an effort to emphasize the humanity and potentiality for singularity of the subject of education, in contrast to the objectifying effect of the denominations used by the economies of schooling, such as “student”, “teacher”, “professional”, and so on. At the very end of this work, I introduce the variation “subjectiveness”, after the language modelled by Heidegger, in an effort to condensate the variation of meanings into a single term.

1.3 Subject formation as a curricular problem and its mode of investigation

Asking for the plausible ways in which subjectivity can emerge and get reconstructed in educational experience, this investigation is situated within a reconceptualist tradition of
curriculum studies. The character of curriculum studies conceived in this way is one that is marked, for William Pinar, by a fore-fronting of subjective and social reconstruction. It is a field “simultaneously social and subjective”, and one that focuses on “power and psyche, the social and the solitary” (2011, p. xvi). In contrast with an exclusively ameliorative approach to curriculum, which focuses on outcomes, devaluing and ignoring intellectual resources, and thus plaguing the field with an impoverishment of theory, a reconceptualized approach makes subjectivity and intellectual understanding its raison d’être.

Defined thus, and with its focus on a theoretical understanding of the formation of subjectivity in attention to psychic life, this study finds itself at home in the reconceptualized field of curriculum studies. Curriculum, after all, is, as Madeleine Grumet explains (1988, p. xiii), “a temporary and negotiated settlement between the lives we are capable of living and the ones we have.” The subjective life of an “I” in the midst of its potentialities of becoming is what takes precedence.

Having situated the study within its curricular context, I recognize that, perhaps surprisingly, I do not draw from an extensive variety of authors recognized as curricular scholars, other than William Pinar and Deborah Britzman. The field of curriculum studies, in its reconceptualized form, emerges only in the 1970s as a challenge to the prevailing approach to curricular work which, in the North American context, had until then treated education as a matter of behavioral outcomes, planning, implementation, teaching, learning, and evaluation.

Historically recent as this “movement” of the field might be, a fundamental aspect which has come to define its methodical character to conduct its work has, from the beginning, been an interest in the reactivation of the past. “Finding the future”, William Pinar tells us, “means returning to the past” (2011, p. 12). Going back, looking in retrospective, being attentive to what
has been the history (one’s own and of the intellectual history of the field) is what provides us with
the necessary perspective to better understand the present, specially a present that today has been
disavowed in the trance of screens and the future-oriented obsession of the ameliorative agenda of
global curricular reform.

In terms of how such work is done is not only hinted at in the thematic emphasis of the
reconceptualized field of curriculum studies (its interests and attention to the past), but a key aspect
of it is embedded in the very name of the movement of reconceptualization: the work is done by
re-conceptualizing. We work by studying –again– concepts that may expand and refresh our
present understanding of curriculum and of what is at stake in it. It reminds one of how Jacques
Lacan conducted his work by bringing philosophy into the field of psychoanalysis, and so enabling
a new understanding of its work. Commenting on how he worked, Lacan exclaimed: “to rethink…
that is my method” (in Greenshields, 2017, p. 115).

When it comes to defining the main referential frame of sources for a reconceptualist field of
curriculum studies, in 1975 William Pinar made a clear demarcation of both the character of the
work and its main references:

“The purpose of this [reconceptualist] work is not to guide practitioners, as it is with the
traditionalists, and to some extent with the conceptual-empiricists. Nor is it to investigate
phenomena with the methods and aims of behavioral and social science… The function of this
work would appear to be understanding, and this understanding is of the sort aimed at and
sometimes achieved in the humanities. The humanities fields that have been influential thus
far are history, philosophy, and literary criticism. Hence the dominant modes of inquiry for
this group have been historical, philosophical, and literary” (1975, p. xii).
Humanities, not social sciences, is what enables curriculum studies to re-think itself and to understand its work in terms of its history, aspirations, limits, and possibilities.

Working within this demarcation of fields of reference (history, philosophy, criticism) and thematic interests (subjectivity, educational experience in its cultural, gender, and historical dimensions, among others), the conceptual work done in curriculum studies can then be said to be more focused than that done in philosophy of education, where topics and traditions of reference can be open *ad infinitum*.

The type of curricular research developed in this dissertation is a conceptual investigation that acquires its character and writing style from the humanities in general, and from philosophical references in particular. As such, it is a type of investigation which relies on speculative, associative thinking, an interpretive practice attuned to the existential experience of the human spirit. With its focus on the emergence and reconstruction of the subjectively existing individual, the primary and guiding concept taken up here is that of *Bildung*, or the cultivation of the inner self through education. Itself a complex notion configured and inflected by theological, philosophical,

\[4\] It is possible to follow the traces of this mode of work starting in the classics of rationalism (Descartes, Spinoza), down to the German Idealists and Romantics (Kant, Hegel, Schleiermacher), their influence on hermeneutics (Dilthey), down to their congealment in more specifically educational modes of theorizing such as *Geisteswissenschaft*, or the attention to the cultivation of the human spirit, and against the influences of the natural sciences. As such, it is a tradition that does not rely on cause-effect relations, empirical proofs, or questions of scientific validity, but rather on the systematic description of the plausible conditions for the possibility of existence of a given phenomenon.
educational (and at some point, political) roots, Bildung unavoidably preconditions the study to stand at the threshold between philosophy and curriculum studies.

Although there are clear demarcations between the fields of curriculum studies and that of philosophy proper, the main theme in this research—that of subjectivity—is one that blurs the lines between the two fields\(^5\), as we can see across the work of educationalists in the lineage of Wilhelm von Humboldt.

The notion of Bildung, as formulated in the German idealist tradition of philosophers/educationalists, lends itself to the exploration of the process of subjective formation in a form of study that is sensitive to the understanding of human experience in its existential and ontological dimension. Working with a phenomenological sensitivity, in this study I worked to approach a curricular understanding of the formation of subjectivity in Bildung from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective.

I want to offer three reasons to justify this decision. In the first place, this body of work—sometimes referred to as a phenomenology of the ego—constitutes in itself a theory of the subject, one mediated fundamentally by desire, language, and an excessive relation to lack. As such, it is a perspective that converses well with the insights produced by philosophers and educationalists in the Idealist tradition\(^6\), particularly in terms of the complexity of inner life and its function in the interpretation of the world.

\(^5\) In the 1800s, Immanuel Kant claimed that the field of philosophy could be reduced to four main questions: 1. What can I know? 2. What ought I do? 3. What may I hope? and 4. What is man? Ultimately, he asserted, the first three questions can be answered through the last. That is, the study of what it means and is implicated in being a subject.

\(^6\) Important part of the work of Jacques Lacan is informed by the impact that his study of Hegel imprinted on him, whom he cites to discuss the process of formation of the “I”.

Secondly, it is an approach that brings to the fore aspects of desire, fantasy, suffering, frustration, and enjoyment, all psychic dynamics that come to play a decisive role in the reconstruction of our sense of who we are. Importantly, its notion of symptom proves particularly helpful in theorizing curriculum (see chapter 4).

Thirdly, and in close relation to the notion of symptom, a Lacanian approach to psychoanalysis is a vantage point which helped me understand the precarity and failure of deliberate attempts at molding subjects to a certain predefined ideal, regardless of the carefulness and precision of curricular designs. On the contrary, the irruption of the real in our imaginary and symbolic constructions, allow for an understanding of the emergence and persistence of singular expressions of individuality, the attitudes toward life that defy rational and logical explanations, and lay bare the passionate attachment to fantasies of teaching and learning.

In this context of exploring the emergence of subjectivity in educational experience in the terms just presented, an important question one might ask is how does one know that the work is done well? How does one maintain a sense of direction and anchoring without getting too lost in the infinity of its complexity? This is a question of method which, in its Greek root (μέθοδος), implies looking back and recognizing the path one has walked.

It is important to specify that the notion of educational experience conceived here is broad in a phenomenological sense. This means that it refers to the more substantial aspects and universal structures which operate in the givenness of its appearance, i.e. the way in which the phenomenon appears to our consciousness. The passage from the hermeneutics of the being of the objects

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7 Such as the presence of Eros, existence in temporality, being with others, care for others, among others.
encountered (a first moment of phenomenological reduction that focuses on objects, as in the work of Edmund Husserl), to a conceptual analysis of the categories that animate the subsistence of the phenomenon (a second reduction into the being of the object, exemplified in Martin Heidegger), to a consideration of its existence as a phenomenon by discussing its way of being given (a third reduction into the givenness itself of the phenomenon, as shown in the work of Jean-Luc Marion), become apparent in the study of the erotic demand of education presented in chapter 7.

The theoretical impetus, organization, and writing style that constitute this dissertation are ones that, sometimes willingly and sometimes inadvertently, are imprinted with the character of the work and ideas of the thinkers with whom I engaged, whom I allowed to seduce and convince me. As such, this is a work that attempted to return to “what could not be known from the immediacy of felt experience” and that engages psychoanalytically with content that is, as Britzman (2013, p. 96) appreciates, normally “discarded, forgotten, displaced, defended against, and avoided”. It represents a possibility to work through what was taken for granted. It is the effort we see in Joyce’s character, Stephen Dedalus, as he grapples with his puzzling yet deeply felt “infuriated cries” within him, the sense of an unknown but pressing “instinct” that was, in his experience, “stronger than education” (1994, p.115).

Unavoidably, this type of work cannot be separated from biographical traces. My own investment in the question of becoming, and in returning to that which what could not be understood from the immediacy of experience, is inscribed in important ways in the biographical residues of having attended my whole school life one of the oldest all-boys schools in Chile. There, the possibilities of deviating from the unwritten norms of heterosexual masculinity or of having to

8 Or the bodies of knowledge I have slept with, as William Pinar once put it (Pinar, 2000, p. 30).
follow traditional professional paths (like becoming a lawyer, doctor or engineer) seemed rather unlikely. And yet, in spite of those 12 years of a relentless curriculum of traditional schooling, I am who I am, and I do what I do. The same question kept coming up then in my professional life working with universities that were changing their curriculum design to one based on competencies. What kind of subject were they trying to form, under what conditions, and for what kind of society?

In terms of composition and organization, this dissertation is a collection of essays. Curated in their particular themes and order of appearance, the essays compose a multifaceted vantage point on the possible ways in which subjectivity emerges in educational experience, from the theoretical underpinnings of Bildung and the psychoanalytic dynamics at work in its process. As such, this work is directed primarily to curriculum theorists, philosophers of education, as well as scholars and practitioners of psychoanalysis interested in the intersections with educational experience. From its Latin root, “essay” means “to try”, “to attempt”, or “to test”, making it a fitting genre for the task of re-conceptualizing ideas and arguments concerning the formation of subjectivity.

As a literary genre, the essay emerges with the work of Michel de Montaigne in the 1500s. At the time, this form of expression (a short, self-contained exposition and consideration of arguments regarding a particular theme) was not common, but the exploration of aspects of his own subjectivity to which Montaigne devoted his work necessitated a different approach to the style of writing: one that was freer in structure, that allowed for digressions and free-associations, and that was amenable to juxtaposition of themes.
A salient aspect of the approach developed by Montaigne is that the essays, individually and in their collected form, are not memoirs of lived experiences or anecdotes. They are rather reflected descriptions and commentaries on given phenomena which are discussed from different angles. Given the reflective character, openness to speculative thinking, and concise format of the essay, one can see how it came to be the preferred genre for authors across traditions after Montaigne. For example, the essayistic style is what comes to define almost the entirety of the work of Jacques Lacan (the most important book by Lacan, the *Ecrits* or “writings”, is actually a collection of seminars written in essay style). The stylistic possibilities of the genre proved particularly useful for Lacan’s description and discussion of a wide variety of aspects of psychic life, as represented in his essays on the “mirror stage” in babies, on words, on dreams, and so on. The composition of this dissertation draws on the potentialities offered by the essay in a collected form. Individually, each essay deals with a specific theme so they can be read as stand-alone piece. Collectively, and in the order in which they are placed, they offer a particular sense in which the main topic can be studied: from general to specific and back to general. As with other curated works, the characteristics of the individual components and their arrangement can also give place for new and ever-emerging interpretations that go well beyond the initial intentions and imaginations of the author.

In spite of its possibilities, as a genre, the essay also implies limitations. One is that it does not necessarily allow for a systematic treatment of a single theme across a continuum of chapters, lacking a progression that moves a narrative from an introduction, to an exploration of issues, to a climax of problems, findings, and their discussion, to a statement of a closure that concludes the discussion.
Considering the possibilities of the genre, but also the risks of its limitations, the organization of the essays presented in this dissertation echo the principles of reasoning René Descartes describes in his *Discourse on Method*. One of these precepts relates to the need to divide a complex problem into smaller parts or sections that, together, account for the whole. The other is to conduct thoughts by placing the different aspects of a problem in a certain order, even when the issue at hand does not have a natural order of precedence or progression in complexity. Importantly, what we see reflected in the Cartesian approach to method is that philosophical inquiry must speak of what is plausible regarding the phenomenon being considered in order to correct one’s own thinking. This is why, when looking back on his life work, Descartes confides: “my project has never extended beyond wishing to reform my own thought” (2006, p.15). Bildung scholars would agree on the educational value of such practice of study. In the last chapter of this dissertation I revisit some of the main points through which my thought was reformed.

1.4 A roadmap for the themes ahead

This study begins with a brief historical-conceptual overview of the notion of Bildung (chapter 2). By showing education as a practice mediated at its core by ideas of what it means to be human (philosophical anthropology), I recognize that Bildung is not exempt from tensions related to varying anthropological positionings, presenting nuances that conceive the process of subject formation in different ways, both in the relation of the self to itself and to the world. After this brief historical genealogy of the term, I show that Bildung is far from univocal, but suggest that such diversity and complexity might perhaps be its strength.

After considering the emphasis that Bildung places on formation and the cultivation of inner life, it is almost impossible not to contrast that notion of education with the practices of
schooling we have today and their fascination with a technological mindset and tools (chapter 3). Here I claim that in the compulsion to maximize efficiency and output, education is risking the vocation of human formation that Bildung represents.

To advance this claim I position myself with Otto Friedrich Bollnow’s existentialist perspective on education - one where the revelation of existence comes only through attentiveness to inner life and personal experiences of angst and also hope. These, I suggest, are the conditions for Bildung, understood here as the process of subjectification, the formation of the individual beyond “natural” predeterminations. Given these characteristics, which the optimized and instrumentalized practice of schooling disavows, present-day education represents the abandonment of the ethical task of Bildung and a tragic disconnection of education from lived experience. As such, undergoing this schooling cannot be properly called experience nor education in its Bildung sense.

If staring at screens, learning facts and procedures, and obtaining test scores is not in itself truly educational, how can one start making sense of what takes place in the curricular experience of becoming “oneself”? In what ways can one think about and conceptualize the phenomenon of formation in a way that addresses the psychic dynamics involved in its operation?

To explore these questions, I study the relation between curriculum and the structuration of the subject, suggesting that curriculum functions as a symptom (chapter 4). A central concept in this theorizing is the psychoanalytic phenomenon of the transference. In the words of Lacan, transference is what happens in a dialogic encounter that changes the nature of those involved. As such, I find it a helpful notion to think through a reconceptualized view of curriculum, bringing attention back to the human subject and the complexity of its formation. A crucial insight that emerges from this theorization is the understanding that curriculum functions as an unfinished
symptom. As language that interpellates the subject to face her desire, curriculum puts the subject in the position of completing the symptom as a response.

From this understanding of the psychic dynamics (transference, identification, desire, resistance) through which curriculum functions, I use the new vocabulary at my disposal to advance a methodological approach to criticism of curriculum from the vantage point of psychoanalytic theory (chapter 5). Using as a guiding thread the question “What is psychoanalytic critique in the field of curriculum?”, I first discuss a general concept of critique. From this general framing, I then delve into more specific concepts of psychoanalysis with which I develop a frame of sorts for a psychoanalytic critique of curriculum.

For this task of critique, when it comes to “listening” to the signifying traces of a discourse, Lacan teaches us that we do not need to take into account the entirety of someone’s enunciations. We are instead to pay attention to particular words that, due to their insistence and illocutionary force, concentrate centers of gravity of desire. These words, called “master signifiers”, are the focal point of the psychoanalytic critique of curricular policy that I perform on one of the main documents from the World Bank that drives educational reform today (chapter 6). Using as a method the frame I developed in the previous chapter, I critique the text of the policy in regard to the interplay of symptom, language, and subject, while attempting to identify their dynamics and effects in the Lacanian registers of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

One of the things I saw more clearly from this critique is how the symptomatic negotiation of curriculum in relation to the constitution of subjectivity is hinged at a fundamental level on desire. Desire, as a mobilizing force of subjective formation, cannot be thought about in serious terms without referring to the universality of its erotic substratum.
By way of revisiting a seemingly unimportant event in my life back in middle school— a teacher patting me on the back—I delve into an exploration of the relation of Eros and education in the phenomenon of touch (chapter 7). The proximity of the erotic and the body in formative experience becomes clearer as I describe it in relation to the universality of touch. To be able to describe the erotic phenomenon of touch as it appeared, I draw both from the phenomenological tradition represented in the lineage of Husserl, Heidegger, and Marion, as well as from psychoanalytic theory, as developed by Freud, around the notion of Eros and the drives.

In the concluding chapter (chapter 8), I return to the overarching question of the investigation—which asked in what ways subjectivity can emerge from educational experience—and revisit some of the most salient aspects examined across the study to systematize an understanding of it. These aspects include the perennial tension regarding the relation self-other and the problem and possibility of singularity in the process of subjective formation. Contrary to the efforts to make the subject appear as a unified entity, this study shows that it is precisely our split condition what makes our formation possible and necessary. I bring at this point the notion of eccentricity, which helps me to acknowledge this condition, and to affirm an understanding of education as subjective reconstruction.
Chapter 2: Bildung and the formation of the subject: Tensions and possibilities

This chapter provides a historical-conceptual treatment to the notion of Bildung. By showing education as a practice mediated at its core by ideas of what it means to be human (philosophical anthropology), it recognizes that Bildung is not exempt from tensions related to varying anthropological positionings, presenting nuances that conceive the process of subject formation in different ways, both in the relation of the self to itself and to the world. Starting with a brief historical genealogy of the term, the chapter suggests that Bildung is far from univocal, but that such diversity and complexity might perhaps be its very strength. The chapter will then look at four tensions with which the notion of Bildung grapples, highlighting the potential for existential and psychoanalytic angles in Bildung.

2.1 On Bildung and the problem of philosophical anthropology

The concern for the self has been a longstanding problem in diverse philosophical traditions across times and places. As Harvey Goldman (1992) indicates, for example, the very idea of the self—which he equates with the soul—and its relation with the socio-political milieu, has been historically worked on as an object of reflection to “achieve many different purposes”, among which he mentions “justice, knowledge, and the good (Plato); harmony and self-control (Stoicism); salvation (Augustine); political power (Machiavelli); scientific knowledge (Descartes) [and] authenticity (Rousseau)”, among others (p. x). One could add, however, that not all attempts to explorations of subjectivity have had the achievement of a particular a priori purpose in mind. The
notion of selfhood, within the idealist and existentialist tradition for example, appears more as a comprehensive and speculative investigation that describes the self as it appears. Selfhood, thus, in Hegel appears as a dialectical self; for Kierkegaard is a paradoxical self; in Dostoevsky, it appears rather as a “swarm”; while in Lacan self is a parole-être: a speaking being.

While the traditions behind these positionings differ in terms of orientation, historical contexts, interests, and subsequently, arrive to divergent and even opposing views on the nature and conditions of the self, what they all share in common is that they entail an anthropology; that is, they function on some kind of idea about what it means to be human.

Ideas of human nature are, for Roger Trigg (1999), essentially philosophical, and it is precisely only through such conceptions about what it means to be human that any human practice and society can be articulated. One can ponder the implications of the enactment of particular anthropologies when it comes to the field of education, as Trigg notes “ideas on human nature (anthropology) are not merely of importance to the individual, but radically affect the kind of society we live in” (p. 2). But perhaps it is in the work of Eugen Fink and his essay “The Unquestionableness of the Educator” that the constitutive relation between a philosophical anthropology and education becomes more clearly articulated: “The way in which human beings are seen predetermines the nature of education”. To this he adds: “maybe the right definition of education simply depends on the right understanding of human ‘being’ [Dasein]”.

Within the normative dimension for education that Fink posits with this last remark, one might not only ask what is the prevailing anthropology that may be operating in particular manifestations of education we encounter, but also critique them based on their completeness,

9 Unpublished translation by Norm Friesen
complexity and sophistication. As we will see, the notion of *Bildung* itself is not exempt of tensions related to varying anthropological positionings, presenting nuances that conceive the process of subject formation in different ways, both in the relation of the self to itself and to the world.
2.2 Defining Bildung

In the Western world, the anthropological question for the subject and its shaping intensifies from the 18th century onwards—perhaps both as a development of and a reaction against the totalizing discourse of the Enlightenment. Immanuel Kant—who attempted to theorize and write about his own time by answering the question Was ist Aufklärung?—is regarded as one of the first of a lineage of thinkers to write on philosophical issues in systematic idealist terms. Kant’s compelling conviction on the need for individuals to break free from the tutelage of mechanistic reason, and the call to a courageous and committed individual endeavour implied in his invitation to “sapere aude!”, mark what could be taken as an initial shift from a focus on reason as the use of externally imposed epistemological notions, towards a focus on subjectivity.

Although Kant does not make explicit references to individuality or education in the essay on Enlightenment, his remark “Have courage to make use of your own understanding!” (Kant, 1996, p.17) does point to assumptions and implications that connect these two aspects. Where he does make this connection clearer is on his later work Über Pädagogik (1803, translated by Churton, 1960). In it he writes: “Man must develop his tendency towards the good. Providence has not placed goodness ready formed in him, but merely as a tendency (…). Man’s duty is to improve himself; to cultivate his mind (…). Hence, the most difficult problem to which man can devote himself is the problem of education” (1960, p.11). But the force of his dictum on the relation between the human and education comes a few pages earlier: “Man can only become man by education”\(^\text{10}\) (p.6). Education—the process of cultivation of the mind and of improvement towards

\(^{10}\text{It should be noted that in the original text in German, Kant uses here the word Mensch (human, or human being), which Churton translated as “man”.} \)
the good—appears in Kant as an ethical human task that is personal and non-transferable. That is, it cannot be transmitted, given, nor received by either groups nor other individuals.

The use of the term *Bildung* to refer to the individual’s cultivation and process of perfection is of course not new in Kant. Following the exhaustive and impressively well documented archeology of the notion of *Bildung* that Rebekka Horlacher offers (2016), we learn that the term appears for the first time in the Middle Ages, in the work of the German theologian and philosopher Meister Eckhart (1260-1328). As Horlacher explains, the German language was not as developed at the time and did not have enough words to translate specific theological notions from Latin. *Bildung* then, was a neologism invented by Meister Eckhart to solve an issue of translation and interpretation. As he was translating sections from the Bible into German, Meister Eckhart encountered a problem in translating the idea of sinking into Christ in order to become who we truly are in his image. “The goal of this exercise”, Horlacher indicates, “was to transcend natural existence and reach real humanity, which he called *Bildung*” (p. 8). The practice of *Bildung* could be seen in this context as a deeply personal and systematic discipline, a discipline of the self.

Following Horlacher’s historical account, one of the first uses of the term *Bildung* as a purely educational notion appears in the work of Swiss philosopher Johann Sulzer in 1745. He uses *Bildung* to refer to an education understood as the cultivation of good judgement. In this sense, reason alone cannot guarantee a complete education, since our vital activity is not guided or controlled by mere reason. This is why, for Sulzer, it is equally important for education to be a practice that affects the soul. The fine arts, in their possibility to represent life, and their aesthetic value, can “touch the soul directly” and so produce an “educational effect” (p. 10).

Johann Herder—a Lutheran pastor and philosopher who studied under Kant in Königsberg—is, according to Horlacher, one of the first in using *Bildung* as the base for a theory of education.
In his view, an indication of Bildung is a person who is “an enlightened, educated [gebildet], sensitive, reasonable, virtuous, and enjoying man...” (p.11). As these characteristics suggest, Bildung is then a fundamentally personal educational discipline that rests on the working through academic knowledge and lived experience, in an inward exercise focused on virtue. As Horlacher points out, “Herder’s concept of Bildung did not rely on reason, political processes such as deliberation, or knowledge; he was not concerned with so-called outer, visible and suggestible topics, but with processes that take place inside the human being, which are much more difficult to access and to develop and therefore more valuable” (p. 12).

It is precisely this sense of value seen in the more “difficult” aspects of inwardness for the education of the subject that is at the core of what Wilhelm von Humboldt defines as his theory of Bildung. Humboldt—who came to play a fundamental role in the development and establishment of the notion of Bildung as a guiding ideal for education in his role as Minister of Education—sees Bildung as a higher and more inward attitude of mind, an attitude that shapes character and sensibility. In his 1793 Theorie der Bildung des Menschen, establishing the purpose and importance of Bildung in relation to a philosophical anthropology, Humboldt writes:

“It is the ultimate task of our 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” (2000, p. 58).

2.3 Tensions

As we have seen in this brief introductory sketch of the development of the notion of Bildung, one of the unifying threads that hold this formative project together is found in the value and importance attributed to inwardness and the focus on the multi-layered cultivation of the
personality. However unified and consistent as it may first appear, the conception of a true educational experience defined in *Bildung* is far from being univocal. As an intricate and complex approach to education, it is open to continued debate, and is constituted by tensions that appear as existential nuances in the understanding of what it means to develop as a subject. Let us briefly consider four of those tensions or areas of contestation: 1) the interpretation of the human, 2) the notion of developing as a human, 3) theology, and 4) the relation between self and world.

### 2.3.1 Interpretation of the human

This is perhaps one of the most basic, yet decisive issues that has historically determined the difference in approach to educational activity. The anthropological divide between nature and humanity is equivalent to the age-old problem of the ambivalence of the double root of the term education in Latin, i.e. *educare* vs. *educere*. In the educational arena, it also appears as the tension between formation seen as a process of *nature* versus *nurture*, sometimes expressed in the choice between speaking about human *nature* or human *condition*.

The definition of *Bildung* in Humboldt that we just commented at the end of the last section expresses a particular positioning on the matter. When he says, “it is the ultimate task of our existence to achieve as much substance as possible”, one should ask right away, what is it that he is referring to with such “substance”? The word in German he uses here is “*Inhalt*”, which can be translated as *content* or *matter*, and in the context of this passage refers directly to the concept of the human. Achieving as much “content” is then, in the Humboldtian sense, the ethical educational task of the individual in expanding, widening or extending the concept of humanity by showing a different version and expression of what it is to be human.
The central anthropological assumption here then is that the human as such is not fixed, predetermined and already defined by nature. However, there is a caveat here, in that the cultural approach to humanity we find in Humboldt does not dismiss nature out of hand. Kant expresses a similar position when he declares that “man can only become man through education” but makes the point clearer in asserting that the cultivation of the self towards the good (the purpose and point of one’s educational efforts) is a (re)construction of a “tendency” which is already in the individual: “Providence has not placed goodness ready formed in him, but merely as a tendency”. In this account, there is a starting point, provided by Providence (in Kant’s words), through nature. But the more agentic next step is in “man’s duty… to improve himself”, devoting himself to education. But to what extent is humanity a matter of unfolding, or a matter of what comes conditioned by nature?

Having a notion of where one puts the accent–nature or the cultural task after it–as the locus of education is not a simple matter in the educational field today, especially in contemporary times, when we are experiencing a regression to an efficientism based on psychological approaches that favor the former term: a conception of human development in terms of natural growth and predictable progressive maturation of psycho-biological stages.

2.3.2 Developing as a human

The issue of the conception of the subject derives directly into assumptions that inform the ways in which the “development” of the human is conceived. Most of the classic Bildung theory—as represented across the writing of thinkers such as Sulzer, Kant, and Humboldt–sees the true nature of the person as something that unfolds in and through the process of Bildung: the expansion and perfection of something which is already inscribed in the core of the person. This
view of unfolding presents two difficulties or challenges: the place and extent of nature on one hand, and on the other, the issue of limits to the progression of such unfolding.

The language and ideas used to describe the development of the subject by said lineage of authors are mostly based on the models available at the time, which were predominantly naturalist. The work of Johann Blumenbach—who was a naturalist and physician at Göttingen, in the midst of the emergence of the notion of “life” in the biomedical field—proved to be immensely influential at this time. One of his contributions that attracted much attention was the development of the theory of a “formative drive” or Bildungstrieb. This drive, responsible for all growth, striving and development, is what would make a flower grow from its seed under the right circumstances. But not only that. In Blumenbach’s account, Bildungstrieb is also a drive that allows for the development and perfection of humans beyond their initial natural determinations, reaching into their cultural formation.

Immanuel Kant was deeply influenced by this notion and praised Blumenbach for his discovery of the drive that “united the mechanistic with the purposively modifiable” (Richards, 2000, p. 12), since it provided another systematic element for his idea of history as the development of public reason.

The notion of human development as starting from an essence also appears to be present in Hegel. In section 445 of the Phenomenology of Spirit he asserts that “self has become the actuality of what it is in essence”; a position mirrored by Fichte when he declares “man ought to be what he is, simply because he is” (in Kivelä, 2012, p. 70).

Alexander von Humboldt (Wilhelm von Humboldt’s younger brother) also offered his contribution to the understanding of development and posited the notion of “life force”, though remaining within a more biological schema. His older brother, Wilhelm, also makes reference to
the natural world in his *Theory of Bildung* (he talks about the life of a flower) but only as a metaphorical figure used in contrast to the cultural effects of *Bildung*. Without the elevation of *Bildung*, he writes, human existence would not amount to much more than the existence of a flower that, after withering, has the “certainty of leaving behind the germ of its likeness” (1999, p. 59). In this sense, when referring to the reproduction of the flower in its likeness, Wilhelm is saying that the flower is doing nothing that is not already defined in its nature. The process in the human subject is quite different, as it requires a more pressing agentic task in the process of turning the self into a subject.

If the development of the human as such is something that exceeds mere biological determination, growth, and reproduction, then one can conceive the process of cultivation in *Bildung* as encompassing all other aspects of human experience, including the expressions of Eros and libidinality, such as identification, knowing, creativity, and, of course, sexual orientation.

Such encompassing, however, is not without frictions in contemporary notions of what it means to develop as a subject. When it comes to concrete expressions of humanity in its diversity, as in gender and sexual orientation, one wonders in what ways the notions of human development posited by the German idealists converse and/or inform positions such as the sentiment now popularized by Lady Gaga in her song “Born this way”¹¹, and that of Judith Butler, who denies the existence of an essence with which one is born.

Perhaps a more nuanced position, one amenable to modern psychoanalysis in its foreshadowing of the unconscious, can be found in Nietzsche’s thoughts on education in his

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¹¹ As an exponent of pop culture, singer Lady Gaga seems to align to a certain degree with the now popular view of a naturalist perspective of humanity (like that of Alexander von Humboldt) in the lyrics to the song “Born this way” (2011). In it she declares that since God makes no mistakes, regardless of ethnicity and sexual orientation, one is made perfect and simply “born this way”.
Untimely Meditations: “Your true educators and formative teachers reveal to you that the true, original meaning and basic stuff of your nature is something completely incapable of being educated…and is in any case something difficult of access…” (2007. p. 129). This position points to the existence of an aspect that is already present in us (the “basic stuff of your nature”) that seems to inform our individuality, and which is hard or even impossible to symbolize, much like the unconscious. This, however, does not exclude the necessity of formation beyond those natural determinations.

In any case, the complex interplay of nature and nurture remains. The modern approach represented in epigenetics seems to be an attempt to bridge the divide.

As for the ever-ongoing progression of unfolding that informs the notion of Bildung—as we see it in Hegel, Fichte and Humboldt, among others—can be regarded as problematic. To what extent can we aspire to unfold? And under what circumstances and conditions? As Otto Friedrich Bollnow would indicate, an inevitable aspect of educational experience is precisely that it is marked by discontinuities, interruptions, breaks, and the unexpected. But the idea of discontinuity (and particularly non-coincidence) seems to be an avoided and repressed notion across modern educational discourse. Although Hegel does emphasize the importance of negativity, the notion seems to be absent in Kant and Humboldt: there is no discontinuity in the growth and unfolding of a flower. Crisis, angst, lack, non-coincidence, and the irruption of the unexpected are, on the contrary, central to both the existentialist and psychoanalytic account of human development.
2.3.3 Theology

The notion of Bildung is, in its very origin, a theological concept.

As mentioned earlier, when Meister Eckhart came up with the neologism, he was trying to find a way to express a particular sentiment: a theological notion centred on transcendence and in the striving towards being molded into the image of Christ. The root *Bild* in *Bildung*, means “image”, which shows its consistency with the Scriptures when it comes to the creation of humanity. In Genesis 1:26 we read “Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness”. This point is then mirrored and developed in the New Testament, as we read that Christ is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and then in the apostolic plea for a life of spiritual maturity, which requires to “be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

As the Dictionary of Untranslatables (2014) states, a notable aspect of Meister Eckhart’s doctrine of *Bilde* (or *imago* in Latin) is his conception of *das Bildsein* or “being-an-image” (p.108). Christian theology, according to the Dictionary, “distinguishes between the image, which partakes of the nature of man and thus cannot be lost, and the resemblance. Sin disturbed the second, and the economy of salvation must permit its recuperation” (ibid). Such theological outlook is what at the same time constitutes Eckhart’s philosophical anthropology of the human as “being-an-image”. In this light, and in relation to the passage from Genesis –that mankind was made in the image and likeness of God– I am led to believe that within this perspective, *image* relates to the nature of the human, while *likeness* or resemblance relates to character, which is modifiable. This two-part structure of the human is what underlies Kant’s notion of education – that of improving and cultivating what has been given as a tendency– and Humboldt’s notion of expanding and extending our substance.
As it has become clear by now, the notion of image used here has nothing to do with pictorial representations or that of interest to semiotics, but one that is rather—as we will see later—a psychodynamic function. “…Eckhart’s doctrine is characterized by his dynamic conception of the image…a kind of internal gushing forth and boiling. Eckhart’s image is never at rest, but constantly seething, because it is life” (ibid).

Interestingly, in the Lacanian account of the subjective structure, the register of the imaginary also plays a fundamental aspect of life, as it is the seat for the ego: a construction mediated by the function of the Name of the Father. The theological substratum in the Lacanian perspective is quite patent and reminds of that of Eckhart’s, although Lacan does not define selfhood in terms of image but in terms of language: the parlêtre or speaking being. As we can see, the theological aspect of the process of becoming is at the same time an anthropological problem.

As Eugen Fink reminds us, the notion of the human we have determines our understanding and practice of education. One can imagine the differences that may arise in the sense of human dignity, purpose, and existential sustenance—among others—depending on how we conceive of human life: as just another animal, or a random collection of cells and atoms, or as made “a little lower than the angels and crowned with glory and honour” (Psalms 8:5).

As Fink puts it, education is a purely human practice: animals cannot educate and God does not need education. Humans then, as “sumnum ens” or higher beings, oscillate between animality and the cultivation and elevation of the self towards resemblance to God. Just as Fichte speaks of reaching a state of harmony within ourselves as the aim of educational experience, Fink agrees that education is about something higher than mere practical needs: “we need education to overcome our existential plight”, he asserts. In our human condition of imperfection and incompleteness, education becomes both the possibility and necessity to find counsel and ways to
build character and grapple with the vicissitudes of being subjects who suffer, who hope, who doubt, who enjoy, who hate, and also love.

Following the historical progression of the concept of Bildung, as it started being used as a purely educational one, the theological component began to dissipate, at least in formal terms. In this sense, one might ask what happens to a notion once it is divested and emptied of its original essence and purpose. For Harvey Goldman (1992), a reason for the decline of Bildung (and perhaps one of the reasons why Nietzsche attacked it, as he saw it reduced to mere encyclopaedism) was precisely the disappearance of its religious content.

In spite of this disappearance, at least in formal terms, what remains from Bildung’s theological origin is the understanding that formation is a process centered on bringing about a Gestalt, an emergence of forms that strive towards completion, perfection, and harmony.

2.3.4 Relation self-world

The three aspects we have seen so far intersect in important ways for an understanding of the formation of the self as a singular individual. Education is generally conceptualized as a relation that takes place between a self and an other, although such relation to otherness is conceived in varied ways – a relation to an individual other, to a community, to the world – to varying degrees of interpenetration in such intersubjective arrangement, and to varying ends.

The relation of self and world, and its educational potentiality, is something that appears early on among German idealists, and continues to reverberate in contemporary philosophico-educational debate today through their legacy. One of the most prominent contributions of Idealist thought is the reclaiming of individual subjective experience, which has as starting point the recognition that objects of human cognition are not objects in themselves – preexistent, “out there”,

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waiting to be discovered— but are appearances in a process mediated and constituted by consciousness. The relation between self and world appears at the same time, within this tradition, as an understanding of consciousness as something that emerges only in and through recognition of another.

In Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, for example, this relational understanding of consciousness is actually posited as a condition for the constitution of the individual as such within the human collective. As Hegel puts it, “self-consciousness…exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (section 178) and then adds that “it is therefore through culture that the individual acquires standing and actuality” (section 489). This importance attributed to the cultural collectivity—which finds its immediate antecedent in Kant—appears to inform also the educational project of Wilhelm von Humboldt. The formative function of Bildung is to be attained, according to Humboldt, by the “linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay” (2000, p.58).

One of the implications of this “linking” of self and world is what Christoph Wulf (2003) calls mimesis, or the notion that in this dialectical relation, we become like the world, and the world becomes like us. A mutual imprinting, as it were.

It is in the words of Hegel that this assumption becomes more apparent: “the process in which the individuality molds itself by culture is, therefore, at the same time the development of it as the universal, objective essence, i.e. the development of the actual world” (PS, section 490). While the assumption may seem basic and unproblematic for the understanding of educational experience in general within the collective, this position of mimetic interfusion between self-world raises problems and questions when it comes to the formation of a subject as a subjectively existing individual.
In a different but related discussion, Harvey Goldman (1992) references Max Weber to make an interesting point about the fold side of the totalizing project of rationalization and its massification typical of the Enlightenment, in relation to the self. In Weber’s view, Goldman explains, “rationalization threatens to impose itself totally on the self and society, depriving them of the capacity to posit anything but their own submission to a rationalized order requiring obedience”. In the face of massification and an ever-growing technological mindset, Goldman’s assessment is accurate as it is timely for our present situation: “rationalization promised mastery of the world but has come back to master the self, shaping it to its own demands, through the pressure of material needs and social order” (p. 12).

It is perhaps already sensing this threat that the German Idealists and Romantics – including Humboldt – eventually break from Kant and his moral categorical imperative. Instead, under the more radical form of Idealism represented in those after Kant (Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, and others until today) and the educational project of Bildung, the imperative becomes the formation of the self into a subject according not to external demands, but those of inwardness.

### 2.4 Bildung as intersection of existentialism and psychoanalysis

The tensions within the notion of Bildung are an indication of the complexity of what it means to educate the self into a subject. As such, the openness to interpretation, contestation, and transformation of conceptions and practices that derive from the notion of Bildung represent its strength and an important quality of this conception for education today, as it provides the necessary space to discuss the process of one’s becoming in the complexity and indeterminateness of its existential and psychodynamic nature.
What is important to acknowledge at this point is that the tensions we have discussed so far are not only a matter of concepts one can grapple with in a detached theoretical manner. These are aspects that are intimately experienced. They are lived and suffered (sometimes painfully) throughout our lives in the ongoing process of becoming, and appear as existential questions and demands, and are expressed in embodied forms and in psycho-social symptoms. *Who am I?, Why do I do the things I do,? What kind of person am I becoming?, Where am I going?, Is this who I want to be?, Why do I have to go through this?, Who are these people to tell me what to think or how to be?, What is the purpose for all this*?

Already in Hegel we find an early antecedent to existential and psychoanalytic insights into educational experience in the formation of subjectivity. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* he writes: “If the specific nature…of the individual, together with what these have become as a result of cultivation and education [i.e. *Bildung*], are taken as the inner… then this essence has its appearance: in his mouth, hand, voice, handwriting, and other organs and permanent characteristics” (p. 189). Educational experience as the cultivation of the inner self, i.e. *Bildung*, is not only a private movement of invisible inwardness. It contains, involves, and is fundamentally expressed in the totality of the person, including the body, as Hegel suggests.

In this sense, I claim that approaching *Bildung* from an existentialist perspective – with its attention to angst but also hope–and a Lacanian approach to psychoanalysis–with its attention to the psychic dynamics at work in the process of re-construction of the self- offer unique potentialities for a fresh understanding of the idealist notion of education as *Bildung* and the rescue of its project in today’s context.
Perhaps one of the first and most general affinities that connect Bildung and existentialism, and that make the process of educational experience readable in such terms, is not only a concern for the subject as being, but a conception of the individual as a difficult, complicated notion, a site of struggle. A clear sign of the importance attributed to the problem of the subjectively existing individual is the separation of philosophical thought into its continental and analytic camps, and, in particular, the shift from an orientation centred on epistemology to one centred on ontology. This movement from “knowledge” to “being” represents, in a way, a subversion of the “cogito ergo sum”. The reversal of the Cartesian logic (that later on gets crystallized in the Heideggerian notion that “the essence of Dasein is existence”), finds its antecedent in the Idealist rejection of the Kantian ethics of duty (to a social imperative) and the affirmation of an ethics of being instead.

From this focus on being, the exploration of the human does not remain at the surface level of “human nature” (with its bio-neuroscientific approach focused on behaviour) but allows to delve into the core of subjective individuality, in the complexities of its temporal and psycho-emotional ordeal. In other words, it represents a passage from human nature to the study of the human condition. Within this perspective, existentialist and psychoanalytic approaches enable a more intimate and detailed account of the process of becoming, as they recognize that existence and suffering—specially in modern times—are not simply biological, medical, nor emotional issues: they are an existential condition.

It can be said that the Idealist approach to the human condition got established as a guiding ideal for education within German universities through the notion of Wissenschaft, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries. In what could be regarded as a curricular orientation (in the wider sense
of the term), *Wissenschaft* is the systematic scholarly study of what pertains to human experience (giving precedence to the arts), with the purpose of achieving the highest possible level of *Bildung*.

Powerful and influential as it was for the organization of an educational system directed at a process of self-discovery and improvement, this orientation—highly systematized by Humboldt—did not settle the tension between an accent on the collective or the individual, nor did it intend to. In this context, while Hegel defended a position in which the human appears with a vocation to be social (see PS, p.342), Soren Kierkegaard posits existence as an issue of individuality, not community.

For Kierkegaard, Hegel’s dialectic between self and world (individual and the social) ends up overwhelming individual experience with the experience of the other. But Kierkegaard’s position does not appear to be simply antithetical to that of Hegel. It rather subverts it. By proposing a notion of singularity, he finds a way to include the Hegelian universality in the constitution of the individual, without turning such universality overwhelming or totalizing.

In *Fear and Trembling* (Marino, 2004) Kierkegaard presents the notion of the “single individual”, which is the result of an ongoing engagement between an individual with the universal. In this dialectic, the individual subordinates temporarily to a universal ethics (that of the social context), but upon suspending it in favor of one’s passion, the individual reaches a superior and higher form of individuality: the singular individual. Using Abraham as an example, Kierkegaard suggests that, as a singular, tragic hero, Abraham suspends the ethical (universal) obligation to the other (the son). “While the tragic hero is great because of his moral virtue”, Kierkegaard explains, “Abraham is great because of a purely personal reason” (p.14). He does not operate within the *telos* of the ethical to save a nation, to uphold a state, nor to appease God: he acts instead in a purely private endeavour, Kierkegaard shows. His subversion of the Hegelian
systems appears more clearly in the problema 2 of *Fear and Trembling*. Kierkegaard shows here that for Hegel, the outer is higher than the inner. But in faith, as in passion (and faith is a passion), there is a paradox: that interiority is higher than exteriority\textsuperscript{12}.

If this is the case, then, it would follow that a true or higher form of *Bildung* would be an education that does not only relate the individual with the universal social in terms of subordination, absorption, or mimesis, but rather, one that prepares the individual to suspend the universal when necessary, and in so doing, achieve moments of singularity.

While the idealist project presents the relation between self and world as a totality and a progression towards the absolute (as it appears in the Hegelian dialectic of the self), it also contains at the same time expressions of such relation in ways that account for the moments of suspension and breakdowns that come to define the self in its singularity (as shown by Kierkegaard). The psychoanalytic account of the process of subjectification—particularly in its Lacanian expression—delves into that specific aspect, recognizing that in the dialectic relation between self and the world, and between the self with itself, there is always an excess, a debris, a surplus of signification.

Interestingly enough, what we see in both Kierkegaard and Lacan is not a refusal of the Hegelian dialectic system per se, but rather, a re-working of it that opens up the space for difference. This is why Lacan cannot be read apart from his theoretical antecedent in Hegel,\textsuperscript{12}

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\textsuperscript{12} Kierkegaard here also adds as an example that “the uneven number is higher than the even” (p.26). This reference to numbers to talk about issues of interiority reminds of Musil’s *Bildungsroman* novel “The Confusions of Young Torless”, where the main character – Torless- describes himself as being profoundly bothered by the mathematical concept of “irrational numbers”. As Pinar (2006) suggests, the psychoanalytic implication of such experience can be found in the resemblance between irrational numbers and Torless’ own repressed interiority.
particularly in the foundational lecture “The subversion of the subject: the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious” (Écrits). In it, he introduces the “graph of desire”, which is really an account of the formation of the subject. What at first sight may appear as an issue of psycholinguistics (particularly in the synthesized equation of Signifier/signified, we find that, in reality, is nothing less than a theory of the subject. This psychoanalytic insight into the process of subjectification, which I explore in chapter 4, allows us to see the intricate relation between self, desire, and the other, which binds together and give rise to the subject as such. As an intimate account of the self’s singular expression of the universality of being-in-the-world, we gain a conceptual grasp of the mediations of consciousness, the unconscious, desire, and erotic interplay of the self with itself and with the other.

The tensions and issues outlined so far are, at the same time, also possibilities. While some, like Goldman, have referred to the difficulty of institutionalizing Bildung as a flaw (and reason for its decline), perhaps it is precisely the inward, unpredictable and resistance to hard definitions and homogenization that provides Bildung with one of its strongest and truly educational characteristics.

It is in consideration to these and other aspects that conform the complexity of Bildung that the following chapters are directed to, grappling with an understanding of what it may mean to (re)construct subjectivity in educational experience, and what makes such experience a significant and worthwhile one.
Chapter 3: Technology and the (un)educated subject: What is the price of neglecting the subjectively existing individual?

“Information is not knowledge . . . and without ethical and intellectual judgment – which cannot be programmed into a machine – the Age of Information is an Age of Ignorance”
William Pinar, 2004, p. xiii

“What good is for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? What can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”
Mark 8:36-37

3.1 Introduction

The publication of Franklin Bobbitt’s *The Curriculum* in 1918 represents an important antecedent to the ensuing trend of linking education to the demands for efficiency of the industrial world and the enthusiastic aspirations for controlled and predictable action through the scientific method. This notion is perhaps made clearer in the metaphor Bobbitt had used five years earlier to define the practice of education in a paper on a scientific approach to schooling: “Education is a shaping process as much as the manufacture of steel rails; the personality is to be shaped and fashioned into desirable forms” (1913, p.12). Since then, the same logic has been reworded, expanded, and presented in perhaps more “palatable” fashions by others such as Ralph Tyler (1949) in his *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, while the same hubris is repeated more recently, only this time justified by digital technologies, as in Ben Williamson’s (2013) *The Future of the Curriculum*.

Given this scenario, in this chapter I claim that in the compulsion to maximize efficiency and output, education is risking the vocation of human formation represented in the German tradition of *Bildung*, and prioritizing instead instrumental forms of practice. Positioned from Otto
Friedrich Bollnow’s perspective of existentialism—one where the revelation of existence comes only through attentiveness and attunement to inner life and the personal acknowledgment of angst and also hope—I frame the discussion around the question of what is at stake for the process of subjective formation when formal education disavows questions of existential nature.

To answer the question, in what follows I first juxtapose the conception of education as it is expressed in contemporary discourses of learning and those represented in the German tradition of Bildung. I then offer critical commentary on technological thought and tools in relation to their imposition on education and the challenges posed in terms of subjective and social (re)construction. But first, a few words need to be said on the assumptions that sustain the claim, namely, the notion of formation, the disavowal of subjectivity, and the kind of questions raised by an existentialist approach.

First, formation, as a term of choice to refer to education, is not used by chance but in direct contrast to a utilitarian notion of education centered around skills and information. Dylan Evans explains the term “formation” in its Latin use by contrasting it with the English term “training”: “Whereas the English term carries connotations of a formal programme, or a bureaucratic structure, [formation] connotes a process which alters the subject in the very kernel of his being, and which cannot be regulated by set ritualistic procedures nor guaranteed by a printed qualification” (1996, p.213). Such process focuses on the subjective (re)construction of the individual, not on mere behavioral/cognitive change.

Second, the disavowal of subjectivity and the existential dimension of human life in education is evident in different aspects of schooling affected by the global reform movement.
Concrete examples can be found in the educational policies pushed by the World Bank\textsuperscript{13} and their explicit disregard for humanities and emphasis on quantification, standardization, and overall market use-value of training. At the same time, technology-oriented organizations such as the International Society for Technology in Education, promote not only a complete adoption of technological tools, but also a “computational” and “algorithmic” thinking\textsuperscript{14}. Within such totalizing frame, one can only wonder where is intellectual and ethical judgement, emotion, indeed, the self.

Third, an education mediated by questions of existential nature involves understanding that for our process of actualization as human beings, it is not enough to be merely born into the human race. It requires an ethical engagement which brings to the fore the humanization of the individual, the pursuit of one’s interests and desires, the actualization of one’s potential, but above all, the exploration of the question of significance, of purpose, of what makes life worth living. This is, for Albert Camus, the most central question of all, against which all other issues of knowledge come second. It includes being attuned to both conscious and unconscious material of inner life, such as desires, suffering, fears and dreams. In Peter Taubman’s words, it means paying attention to “the palpably invisible…to the minor tremors, and the fleeting sensations that hover around or strike the corners of consciousness” (2011, p. 186).

\textsuperscript{13} An example can be found in the document \textit{Peril and Promise}, a blueprint for current educational reforms across the globe put together by the World Bank’s Task Force on Higher Education and Society.

\textsuperscript{14} These are the terms used by ISTE in their 2016 Standards for Students, accessed on August 15\textsuperscript{th}, 2017 \url{http://www.iste.org/standards/standards/for-students-2016}
3.2 Learning and Bildung

The differences in priorities and, indeed, in the whole conceptualization of what is considered education between a utilitarian-technological approach and one concerned with subjectivity and the human being is not only a contemporary controversy, but one that stems from the etymology of the word education. In Latin, it has two different roots which refer to opposite meanings. On the one hand Educare refers to the process of externally guiding, molding, instructing or “feeding” someone from the outside; that is, a directive approach. On the other, Educere refers to a process of producing meaning from the inside out, to draw forth. A process that relies on a capacity for self-formation.

From there we can see how education comes to be constituted by a fundamental ambivalence that gets expressed in a variety of ways. Fernando Savater (2008), for example, comments on how education is constantly caught in the paradox of a conservative function (the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge) and its drive to bring change and transformation. In the same way, Viviana Mancovsky (2001) also points out that the educational impulse is fundamentally split between an attitude of domination and an emancipatory will.

But the practice of education today has come to be dominated by a totalizing approach which, imposing the language and logics of industrial production and economic transactions, reduces the concept and purpose of education to that of learning. The World Bank, for example, in its blueprint for educational reform “Peril and Promise” frames education as a means to national competitiveness in the global economy and justifies the approach with the language of 21st century

\[\text{For more on this, see Biesta, G. (2005) Against Learning: Reclaiming a language for education in an age of learning, Nordisk Pedagogik, No. II, Vol. 25, pp. 54–66.}\]
learning, by which the task of education is to “select, absorb, and create new knowledge more efficiently and rapidly” (2000, p. 10).

Such reduction is, of course, not new. Discussing Nietzsche’s critiques of the scholarly education of his time, Vincent Duhamel\(^{16}\) points to the tragic tendency that began to take hold, which—in spite of rather noble claims—saw education as a matter of erudition, a purely rational activity focused on the accumulation of knowledge, disregarding the pursue of the individual’s transformation. This approach to education, which seems to fit within the frame of *educare*—as a natural process of growth that requires external intervention, represents for Duhamel not only a practice that divests education from its core ideals, but also one that posits particular political implications. This form of education as learning is, in his words, “compatible with the taming or domestication of individual forces prompted by an appeal to social cohesion or submission to the state”. In contrast to this prioritizing of external stimuli and bodies of knowledge to be internalized, the notion of *Bildung* indicates something beyond nature and utility.

When facing the question of what constitutes an educated human being, from the perspective of *Bildung*, Gert Biesta asserts that the answer is not to be found in an adaptation to an existing external order, or in the development of skills and socialization, but rather in the “cultivation of the inner life” (2002, p.378). This cultivation signifies, as Rebekka Horlacher indicates in her historical study of *Bildung*, a practice marked by the “autonomous, self-

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\(^{16}\) In his conference presentation entitled *Bildung and Young Nietzsche’s Critique of Scholarly Education* offered at the Graduate Student Conference on Philosophy of Education, Montreal, September 2009.
determined, and self-reflected personality in its full realization”, in other words, a process of “becoming oneself” (2016, p.1).

This becoming oneself acquires an urgency, perhaps in existentialist terms, in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s *Theory of Bildung*, as he asserts that “It is the ultimate task of our 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” (2001, p.58). One of the implications of *Bildung* in its conceptualization of the subject is that nature is not enough to account for our humanity. The development of what makes us truly human—the achievement of substance, the process of becoming oneself—is not only a laborious act of creative expression but a distinctive ethical imperative of authentic educational activity.

When the practice of schooling decides to rely on a natural course of growth and maturation, and directs its attention to reduced notions of learning, i.e. the processing of information, recognition of patterns, and changes in behaviour, it not only leaves individuals in an unfinished state, but supplants the attentive task of self-formation and self-discovery with busywork. One of the results of such disregard for inner life and prioritizing of information is, for Duhamel, that it sets individuals on a path to their own corruption.

A similar sentiment can be seen in Dwayne Huebner, when he refers to learning as a “tyrannical myth”, and a “trivial way of speaking of the journey of the self” (1999, p.408). Instead of focusing on the technocratic notions of teaching and learning, and as a protection against their enslaving conditions, Huebner proposes bringing attention back to the practice of study. Although he does not use the term *Bildung* per se, his notion of study appears as impregnated by it. Study, Huebner tells us, means primarily engaging in a practice through which we transform ourselves. It involves working on a journey of our own, struggling with the spirit and otherness beyond
ourselves and finding our way to the full realization of who we are as particular subjects. Horlacher would agree since, from its inception in the Middle Ages, the notion of *Bildung* refers to an exercise to “transcend natural existence and reach real humanity” (2016, p.8).

As we can appreciate, while contemporary notions of learning center on natural, neurocognitive and behavioural interactions, *Bildung* seeks to take the individual beyond his or her natural determinations, into the realms of culture and subjectivity. Instead of the rationalistic, cognitive and now “algorithmic” thinking promoted by the enthusiasts of digital technologies and supporters of standardization, an approach to *Bildung* infused with an existentialist awareness recognizes the educational value of facing non-rational aspects of lived experienced, namely, angst, suffering and anxiety. It could be argued that these aspects are the ones that allow for a more honest and complete experience of significance and meaning. Perhaps this is the sentiment behind Camus’ suggestion to get to know the darkness of the night. In this sense we might ask what happens when we are suddenly confronted with the certainty of death? Or when we are forced to be confronted with ourselves while we lie awake in bed in a sleepless night? Or when the battery of our favourite device dies during a long commute?

In Otto Bollnow’s notion of existentialism, working through these darker aspects of existence is necessary, although not the exclusive focus of attention. Also “hope” and “trust” have significant educational value in the pedagogical atmosphere\textsuperscript{17}. In the 1700s, Horlacher tells us, the German philosopher and theologian Johann Herder had already indicated that the point of introspection and self-examination in *Bildung* is the cultivation of “an enlightened, educated,

\textsuperscript{17} In an upcoming edition of Ralf Korrenz’s “Otto Friedrich Bollnow: Anthropology and Education”, edited and translated by Norm Friesen.
sensitive, reasonable, virtuous and *enjoying* man” (in Horlacher, 2016, p.11) (emphasis added). In contrast, enjoyment and the construction of an interesting, fulfilled life does not seem to be found within the frame of efficient learning in the 21st century.

In summary, we can see how the contemporary notions of learning and the tradition of Bildung diverge in several aspects, some of which relate to the categories of temporality, knowledge, and the position of the subject.

In terms of temporality, contemporary notions of learning are oriented towards the future. As the International Society for Technology in Education declares, their focus in the adoption of digital technologies is to promote “future-ready learning”\(^\text{18}\). Blind to the present, and uninterested in the past, the possibilities for significant engagement with the self and the surrounding socio-political context are foreclosed. It becomes impossible to realize that the compulsion for innovation is nothing but a repetition of the past. In its disavowal of the past, the World Bank declares that “Systematic knowledge has gradually replaced experience” (2000, p.17) doing away with any reminiscence of the past, and directing their anxious compulsions and imaginations towards an uncertain future.

The notions of Bildung, in contrast, confer educational value to historicity and autobiography. Cultivating oneself involves the understanding that “meanings are not confined to the past”, as William Pinar puts it, but “they leak into our experience of the present” (2015, p.33). As such, these historical meanings are significant to a reconstructed understanding of our generational repetitions, the way they affect our present and the possibility to do things differently.

\(^{\text{18}}\) [www.iste.org](http://www.iste.org)
Instead of seeing learning as a linear, summative incrementation, from the perspective of Bildung, discontinuity, alienation and hesitation are all part of the process of becoming. Educationally speaking, Bildung does not suggest a return to an idealized past, nor a complete orientation towards an idealized future, but rather a reflective dwelling in the junctures of the already but not yet.

In terms of knowledge, because of its focus on use-value of what it knows, the approaches centered on learning place most of their interest on the questions of “what” can they know and do, and “how” can they best achieve it, rendering the educational process into an instrumental and utilitarian exchange. Ethical judgment, on the other hand, appears as one of the main points of an authentic education in the traditions of Bildung. The questions then become not only “what” and “how”, but “what for”, and “should I?”. This is the kind of judgment that allows Oedipus – Sophocles’ hero- to face the crowd in Colonus as they press him with the overwhelming evidence of his misfortunes, and suggest he would be better off dead. Instead of complying with the logical reasoning of the crowd, he hangs on to his inner desire and calmly replies: “I would prefer not to be”.

As for the position of the subject, technological tools and thought are, by definition, an orientation to efficient means to an end, the maximization of controlled activity and outcomes. But when applied to education, the technological economy forces the wrong question, one framed by an expectation of efficient rate-of-return, disregarding human condition. By virtue of its outward focus and orientation, the subject and her inner life are absent from the equation of technological views of learning. This is partly why, in spite of their illusion of connectivity and collaboration, technologies of learning cannot supersede their dehumanizing effect. Educational experience in

19 See Gert Biesta (2012), Wilhelm von Humboldt’s theory of Bildung (2001), and Otto Bollnow on existentialism.
the traditions of *Bildung*, in contrast, affirm intellectual knowledge and discipline but focusing their relevance in terms of their contribution to an all-around human being. The subject, then, and her ethical engagement with the world takes precedence. The cultivation of inner life, then, can be importantly realized and expressed in the development of an ethics of care for oneself and care for others.

### 3.3 Technology and educational experience

Commenting on a classic novel of *bildungsroman* (*The Confusions of Young Torless*, by Robert Musil) William Pinar highlights what appears to be one of the common threads that tie together different understandings of *Bildung*, which is a demand for education to be “meaningful in terms of individuation, not simple socialization” (2006, p.8). But when the practice of formal education starts to operate on the assumptions and expectations of efficiency, accountability, and verification and measurement of predefined outcomes, the focus of attention is shifted away from the subjectively existing individual and toward aspects of schooling that are amenable to such demands, i.e. what Biesta (2012) calls the dimensions of “qualification” and “socialization”: the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and skills in the former, and the reproduction and adoption of traditions and ways of thinking and doing (like pro-social behaviour, for example), in the latter.

In this context, I claim that operating exclusively from this perspective of learning, educational activity gets centered around preoccupations with content and outcomes, and falls into a technological “insatiable thirst for novelty” (borrowing Nietzsche’s words) that obliterates a
sense of historicity, hinders the practice of study, precludes attention to inner life, and in so doing, displaces the subject. When education disavows the dimension of individuality and subjectification, severing lived experience from the curriculum, as Pinar notes, it fails to hold significance for those involved in it. It not only leaves the process incomplete: it betrays the truly educational purpose of study.

In such fracture between the technological practices and tools of schooling\textsuperscript{20}, and the subjective lived experience of the individual, we can see an instance of what Albert Camus calls, from the perspective of existentialism, the absurd. “This divorce between man his life, the actor and the setting”, he tells us, “is properly the feeling of absurdity” (2000, p.8). The absurdity of the disjuncture of a practice of schooling that separates and dismiss the subject’s lived experience, taking inner life for granted, is not only educationally tragic for the individual. Technological rationality applied to education can also be socio-culturally catastrophic. The Holocaust or the monstrous attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – pinnacles of technological, instrumental thought-are recent examples of (in)human history that show where that mindset leads.

As for the individual, Camus frames the problem of the absurd in the urgency of a matter of life and death. It is the question of significance that makes us decide whether life is relevant and worth living. Faced with such question–Camus tells us–one option is suicide, if the feeling of absurdity gets established and confirmed. Could this be the case that is taking place in the alarming rates of student suicide in Korea and elsewhere?\textsuperscript{21}.

\textsuperscript{20} Examples of this are the now popular demands for “flipped classrooms”, interactions on online plataforms, the use of blogs as assignments, the growing number of university courses that require the use of “clickers”, and the addition of computer coding as a new subject in the school curriculum in the province of British Columbia, Canada.

\textsuperscript{21} For more on this, and a discussion of Haekbolism and an ethics of care, see Jung Hoon Jung, “Self-Care and Care for Others in Education” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2015)
The other option, the one affirmed by Camus and also here, is to turn to an education of the self that “intensif[ies] the passion for living” (2000, p.6). One that returns to the truth that dwells within and in the spirit.

As we have seen, the stakes are high. They involve our individuality, subjectivity, sense of purpose, and, indeed, our very life. And yet, contemporary notions of learning rely on providing “solutions” by saturating school life with even more technological devices and applications.

As Pinar has noted, education—in an intoxication with technology and science—is pressed down and reduced to imaginations of a technological future: “if only we place computers in every classroom, if only school children stare at screens (rather than at teachers evidently) they can “learn”, become “competitive” in the “new millennium” (2004, p.xiii).

But divested of any sense of attentiveness to inner life and cultivation of the self, schooling turns into a series of computer-mediated “activities” and “collaborations” marked by their instrumentality and futility. In the absence of inward reflection and transformation, the assessment that the renowned critic George Steiner made elsewhere suits the present situation of technological practices in schooling: educationally speaking, they are “didactically ingenious, but essentially false” (1984, p.8).

In this sense, they remind of Homer’s myth of Sisyphus. The gods had condemned him with the punishment of having to endlessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain, wait for it to roll back down, only to push it back up. Commenting on the myth, Albert Camus suggests that the gods had devised such activity knowing that “there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour” (2000, p.86). Given this scenario, the educational experience of a form of schooling obsessed with digital technologies cannot be properly called “experience” (since the
subject is never fully present in a relationship of affinity with otherness), nor “educational” (in the absence of inward attentiveness and reflective transformation of the self).

3.4 Conclusion

A human practice that could be properly called education, from a perspective of Bildung, would be one led by a concern for the personal acquisition of human substance, the perfectibility of character and a transformation of the self, which—through ethics and aesthetics—thrives towards a sense of wholeness and transcendent purpose. Such practice is sustained in the conviction that an existential understanding of the self requires a reflective engagement with inner life.

But in the present conditions informed by contemporary notions of learning, I contend that computer technologies—when taken as the primary mode of understanding education—are a distraction from the ethical task of self-discovery. Displacing the subject, disavowing historicity and virtualizing a sense of time and place, the trance induced by screens preclude the possibilities for an educational engagement with political and cultural reality. In the same way, it distracts from attention to the subtler manifestations of inner life in its desires and dreams, and its fears, sufferings and aggressiveness. As psychoanalysis has taught us, uncomfortable and even terrifying as it may be to have a close encounter with ourselves, avoiding such encounters with the darker side of our existence in the luminous projections of screens does not mean it’s not there. Forgetting is not the same as getting rid of.

As we have seen, the price of dismissing or muffling inner life with technologies is not trivial. For one, in becoming numbed and insensitive to the inner movements of the soul in the subjectively existing individual, as well as in others, we become objectified. The acquisition of humanity, of substance, and of an all-around personality does not develop naturally from our
biological determinations nor from simple interaction. It is the fruit of an ethical ongoing task of self-discovery and (trans)formation that takes us beyond cognition and into the realm of culture and subjectivity. At the same time, and as a derivation of the aforementioned, there are political consequences. As Donald Winnicott once asserted, by ignoring the deeper, unconscious dimensions that constitute our subjectivity, “we pay the price of just staying as we are, playthings of economics and of politics and of fate” (in Britzman, 2003, p.110). To that, we may add, we become playthings of social media, of the insatiable thirst for the new, of the endless technological “solutions” (to a yet undecided problem).

In the context of such conditions, the underpinnings and notions that congeal in the perspective of Bildung might represent today an important possibility for self and social reconstruction. Such possibility lies in the revitalization of a practice of study animated by subjective significance and sustained in the development of sensibility and character. Perhaps, as an intellectual endeavour that aspires to affect the soul, an authentic education that addresses the subjectively existing individual is one that allows us to answer the question once posed by Nietzsche: at the end of the day, what have we really loved?
Chapter 4: Curriculum as an unfinished symptom

“The subject in question has nothing to do with the subjective in a vague sense...The subject is what I define in the strict sense as an effect of the signifier”

“A symptom here is the signifier of a signified that has been repressed from the subject’s consciousness. A symbol written in the sand of the flesh...”

It is not uncommon to come across the intuition that curriculum has consequences in our individual existence which go far beyond the acquisition of information and the development of skills. It is the sense that, through formative experience, we become “who we are”, constructing a vision of ourselves and those around us. But in what ways can this phenomenon be thought about and conceptualized in a way that addresses the psychic dynamics involved in its operation?

This chapter explores this question by studying the relation between curriculum and the structuration of the subject, theorizing it by means of the psychoanalytic phenomenon of the transference. Transference, in the words of Lacan, is what happens in a dialogic encounter that changes the nature of those involved. As such, it is a helpful notion to think through a reconceptualized view of curriculum, bringing attention back to the human subject and its ongoing process of formation.

A crucial insight that emerges from this theorization is the understanding that curriculum functions as an unfinished symptom: as language that interpellates the subject to face her desire—through transference—curriculum puts the subject in the position of completing the symptom as a response.
The chapter closes with a discussion of the notion of curriculum as a “conversation” from the psychoanalytic perspective of the transference involved in and through the dialogical encounter.

4.1 Introduction

That curriculum is a situation that produces certain kinds of consequences other than those related exclusively to the learning of content or skills is a well-accepted notion (see Bernfeld, 1973; Apple, 2004; Britzman, 2010; Taubman, 2011). Especially among those of a more progressive and critical bend, there seems to be an agreement that through curricular activity we learn ways of being in the world; that we construct a vision of ourselves and those around us, mainly due to the fact that the pedagogical situation is imbued not only in facts and information, but in political, social and cultural beliefs that shape both students' and teachers' dispositions.

Today, in a climate of ever-growing homogeneity and standardization of educational practices, the question for the subjectively existing individual reoccurs, and perhaps with more urgency than before. At a time when more institutions of higher education are transitioning toward market models of education and competency-based curricular organization, it has become a challenge for them to differentiate what defines their institution in its singularity, what sets them apart from the project and identity of other institutions, and what “seal” they are imprinting on

22 In a trend fostered and directed by international economic organizations such as the World Bank and the OECD, universities all over Europe and in most countries in America are adopting curricular designs based on practical skills, the use of quantitative standards of measurement, and imposing cost-efficiency rationales on their programs, causing a reduction in the length of degree programs, the reduction of classroom interaction on exchange for computer platforms, a lowering of standards for student admission and graduation, among other transformations to the spirit and purpose of the university.
their graduates. But beyond issues of skill qualification, the more pressing question that remains is that of the formation of the subject as a human person.

But for a traditional approach to curriculum this is not an issue of particular concern. Recall here that for Franklin Bobbitt (1913)–one of the fathers of modern curriculum theory and design, who introduced the notion that education required external standards–education is “a shaping process as much as the manufacture of steel rails” (p.12). Along with equating education to a mechanical and objectifying process of manufacture, he places education in the realm of the natural and even biological, thus shrouding it in the appearance of inevitability and predetermination: “In the field of biological production, of which education constitutes one sort, the factor of growth enters in to complicate and in part to obscure the working of our principles”, Bobbitt laments (p. 13). Within the same tradition, in 1949, Ralph Tyler contributed to further establish a notion of education seen primarily as an objective and controllable process of production of outcomes, one that can be predicted by objectives and measured by testing.

Not surprisingly, the question for inwardness in the cultivation of the human spirit had been effectively removed from educational discourse. But as we will see later on, disavowing does not mean getting rid of. As the reader will recall from the introduction, the shift that started taking place in the field of curriculum studies known as the reconceptualization was a response to the dehumanizing terms that the traditional approaches to curriculum had started to impose on education. Just like in the German notion of Bildung, a reconceptualized perspective conceives education primarily in terms of a process of being and becoming, a matter of expanding our human substance, in attention to intellect, body, emotion, and spirit. The realm of culture, not biology or economics, is what drives the process of cultivation of interiority.
Curriculum theorist Dwayne Huebner made important contributions to a reconceptualised understanding of curriculum by way of attentive study of philosophy, particularly through the work of thinkers such as José Ortega y Gasset and Martin Heidegger, who delved deeply into the question of being. In a piece from 1966 entitled “Curricular language and classroom meanings”, Huebner strongly criticized conventional classroom language, highlighting the need to focus again on the human subject and its complexity at the center of educational practice. He refers to the term “learning”, for example, as a “tyrannical myth” that has taken deep roots in curricular language. As a term that has displaced the subject, he tells us:

“Indeed, curricular language seems rather ludicrous when the complexity and the mystery of a fellow human being is encompassed in that technical term of control—the “learner”.
Think of it—there standing before the educator is a being partially hidden in the cloud of unknowing. For centuries the poet has sung of his near infinitudes; the theologian has preached of his depravity and hinted of his participation in the divine; the philosopher has struggled to encompass him in his systems, only to have him repeatedly escape; (...) and the man engaged in curriculum has the temerity to reduce this being to a single term—“learner”. (2008, pp. 102-103).

But it is not until 1976 when, partially inspired by Huebner’s work, a young William Pinar marks a definitive shift in curricular studies in a move away from attention to schooling and toward subjectivity instead. During a conference on curriculum theory in Milwaukee—one attended by Ralph Tyler and Elliot Eisner—Pinar read what proved to be a controversial paper in response to both the traditional and the seemingly progressive approaches to curriculum. In what was considered an avant-garde theoretical position, he reframed the reconceptualist approach as one
that rejected the “intellectual imperialism of the social sciences in the field of education” and felt “disdain for experiments and other contemporary forms of pseudo-empiricism”. Further, he made a crucial distinction between education and schooling.

“What is practiced in schools often bears little or no relation to the process that is education”, he asserts, positing educational experience as the primary interest of a reconceptualised view of curriculum. Education, in contrast to schooling, is conceived as a broad concept, one that is mediated fundamentally by one’s own biographic situation. As such, to talk about education means to talk about the “intellectual and psychosocial development of individuals”, to pay attention to “body and feeling”, to refer to the self-initiated discipline of study, and, overall, to the experience of subjective reconstruction and transformation.

With this paper, Pinar provoked a turning point in the field of curriculum studies, one that brought the focus of attention back to the subject at the center of educational experience and opened the way for a more careful and dedicated consideration of the problem of subjective reconstruction.

In the work of Jacques Lacan, the subject and its process of becoming is also a central focus of attention. This becomes apparent in one of his landmark works where he posits his theory of the “mirror stage”. The full title of this paper from 1949 is a first indication of this interest: “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”23. In this paper, he explores the transformation that takes place in early infancy in terms of the transition from a “specular I” to a “social I”.

23 The paper was to be delivered originally in 1936 but Lacan was interrupted 10 minutes into his presentation and forced to step down, as the main organizer of the conference deemed it impenetrable. This did not discourage Lacan from continuing to develop his theoretical (and stylistic) approach, and thirteen years later gave the same paper again, this time gaining international attention.
This transformation of a self into a subject is, as Lacan shows, a phenomenon of language, a change that takes place the moment we are thrust into the realm of the symbolic. The notion of the subject as a “parlêtre”—a neologism introduced by Lacan to refer to the subject as a “speaking being”—further reaffirms his insistence that the subject is an effect of the signifier. It is language what sustains the phenomenon of the “transference”—the affective relation established between analyst and analysand, or between teacher and student—a relation composed of previous identifications with figures of authority, fantasies, expectations, affects, love and hate. Later on, this chapter will further explore the notion of subjectivity from a Lacanian perspective and its implications for a theory of curriculum.

4.2 Curricular work and its unpredictable psychic consequences

“...education does not just require crisis but is, in and of itself, an exemplary crisis...”
Deborah Britzman, 2003, p.7

“to teach without hope, without focusing on outcomes, whether these are social revolution...or learning square roots...is to shift our attention to the palpably invisible...to the minor tremors, and the fleeting sensations that hover around or strike the corners of consciousness”.
Peter Taubman, 2011, p.186

If we take curriculum as the ever-present question for “what knowledge is of most worth?”, then clearly doing curriculum implies an act of selection. But an aspect that re-conceptualists and critical theoreticians have helped to consider is that such act of selection constitutes at the same time an act of exclusion. Even though the process of doing curriculum is sometimes understood and presented as an objective and impartial selection of cultural contents (often by “experts” in each field), the question of what makes the excluded contents undesirable, or unimportant, reframe the process from the perspective of desire and its expression in the subjacent ideological and
epistemological beliefs that guide that process of inclusion/exclusion, determining what is important, valuable, and desirable in a certain context and time.

The power of deciding what and how other people are going to study (and not study), brings curriculum into the realm of ethical activity, not only because it decides and pre-stipulates the kind of experiences that others will have, but fundamentally because—in Foucauldian terms—that selection of knowledge, mediated and constituted by power relations has an impact in the configuration of identity of those involved in the pedagogical practice. In this context, it is interesting to note that for Tomás Tadeo Da Silva (2001), curriculum is often presented as a canon of universal culture, when in fact, is a selection of a very particular type of culture: Eurocentric, white, masculine, and heterosexual. As contents are not neutral, they are bound to have certain demands and consequences in the process of their manufacture, circulation, and consumption.

A similar concern seems to be shared by Eagleton, when he urges critics to be attentive to “the kinds of effects which discourses produce, and how they produce them” (cited in Bracher, 1993, p. 3). It is perhaps in the same logic and concern that Peter Grimmett and Mark Halvorson call for a re-conceptualized curriculum design (2010). In their critical review of William Pinar and his colleagues’ “Understanding Curriculum” (1995), Grimmett and Halvorson assert that, “…the two aspects of curriculum understanding and curriculum creation must co-evolve if the power of re-conceptualist curriculum is to pervade the life-world of learning”, and suggest that Pinar dismissed the issue of design, leaving for others to re-conceptualize the design of non-technicist curriculum, and by doing so, “ignored what institutional text does” (p. 242).

In terms of curriculum design, if the selection of knowledges and ways of thinking and being have an impact in the configuration of subjectivity and sense of agency, then it would make complete sense to try to come up with a design that would foster certain positive traits in those
involved. However, these designs might not actually produce the effects one would hope for. This is clear in Anne Phelan’s suspicion of designating prior identities via curriculum design, because “human beings constantly exceed and frustrate prior identifications, often contradicting their own expressed and deepest commitments”, the reason why “designating a prior identity…does not guarantee anything” (2010, p. 321).

In this tension between a liberatory call for action and the impossibility of teleological designs for subjective formation, Grimmett and Halvorson draw an interesting assumption: that institutional discourse does things, as it frames, directs, and creates the conditions for the learning that takes place, they explain. The scholarship of Critical Discourse Analysis (see the work of Teun Van Dijk and Norman Fairclough) seem to attest to this assumption. But are these discursive effects predictable?

Phelan does not seem to think so, and she warns us again about the “incalculability of action”, reminding us that “subjectivity is a quality of human interaction and not a set of characteristics individuals possess” (2010, p. 326). Jacques Lacan would agree. As he indicates in his Œcrits, “every discourse derives its effects from the unconscious” (p.701). Discourse then has effects, but since they are derived from the unconscious, those effects cannot be foreseen. Phelan’s view of subjectivity, in my opinion, is in sync with psychoanalysis. As Deborah Britzman (2009) asserts, a defining trait of curricular work is that “all education suffers a radical fate of indeterminacy” (p. viii). I am not exactly sure that indeterminacy is what is “suffered”. It certainly was not the case in older traditions of study that acknowledged that indeterminacy as part of the process of formation (McClintock, 1971). But the main point stands.

Even though pedagogical experience has shown the consistent failure at attempting to control outcomes via teleological curricular discourses, their existence and imposition should not
be regarded as unproblematic. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1957), Freud points out that, inefficacious at realizing all their aims as some discourses can be, they are not innocuous: they do produce effects.

In view of the circumstances that the term “effect” can give the impression of referring to visible behaviors, or that they can be planned, controlled or traced back to a “cause”, I prefer to turn to the language suggested by Britzman (2003), when she refers to education as a process that entails psychical *consequences*. This way, we become more attuned to the consideration of the dynamics that take place in the ongoing psychic (re)construction of subjectivity through the use of language.

A serious consideration of this situation cannot but bring to the surface the often inhibited reality of anxiety, the underlying symptomatic structure that, for Freud, has come to define modern life, and the situation of education, for Britzman. It is precisely this indeterminacy revealed by psychoanalysis that renders our thinking about education problematic, as it lays bare our deeply held wishes, fantasies and desires, threatening to expose our fears, frustrations, resistances, repressions and the various defense mechanisms we so often employ to dress the narcissistic wound of the impossibility of our work in education: activism, rationalization, idealization, intellectualization, practicality, deferment, forgetfulness. The appearance of defense mechanisms is a clear indication that the ego is trying to defend against discomfort and suffering. This faces us with the difficult question Freud left for education, that of having to explore the relations between learning and suffering (Britzman, 2011).

Faced with the biting reality of suffering and the anxiety produced by the impossibility of our work it is not uncommon to want to resort to some sort of activism in the hope of transforming, avoiding, or in the very least, having the complacency of having denounced uncomfortable
situations. But in the process of educating and being educated, determination, will, and resolution may not bring about the commitments and transformations hoped for in the subject.

4.3 Missing links in the progressive project: dis-identifications and the unconscious

The notion that curricular work affects and regulates the identity of those involved in the pedagogical relation is, of course, not new nor exclusive to post-structural and psychoanalytic approaches. Various traditions and lines of work informed by Critical Theory helped bring into consideration some fundamental aspects of the educational act that challenged traditional and technicized notions of curriculum, inviting a profound reconceptualization of curriculum. The understanding of education as a political act, the ideological nature of curriculum, the struggle of power relations in the everyday life of schooling, the embeddedness of school in the social, cultural and economic milieu, and the role of schooling in class reproduction are a few of the many insights that enabled an understanding of the workings of curriculum beyond the transmission of subject-matter, which then congealed in a scholarship of identity politics and revolutionary dissidence.

But can the formation of the subject be sustained in political discourse, apart from subjective identification – what for Lacan is the basic condition for the constitution of the subject through the transference?

Calls for a meaningful pedagogical practice, sustained by the hopes for social justice, inspired in radical social change, and articulated in direct action are certainly enticing and

24 See the work of Siefried Bernfeld and Klaus Mollenhauer in the German tradition, Jurjo Torres and Paulo Freire in the Ibero-American tradition, and Michael Apple and Peter Taubman in the North American context.

25 See for example James Kirylo’s 2013 “A Critical Pedagogy of Resistance: 34 Pedagogues We Need to Know”. 68
appealing for any teacher committed to an emancipatory project. It is perhaps due to a certain sense of responsibility, Taubman (2011) asserts, that educators are often found wanting to “do something now” and rushing to “turn any theory into practice” as they “measure theory by its use value in the classroom” (p. 58). But, again, to what extent can the discourse of structural macro categories of the social and the economic effectively and sustainably interpellate the individual subject? Or even more, attempt to produce a sense of personal identification?

In the symptomatic compulsion to act (and to repeat), the progressive and critical agendas (such as the professionalization agenda, the social justice agenda, among others) appear to dismiss crucial aspects of the subjectivity of both students and teachers. Following Taubman (2011), “social reconstructionists, in their focus on radical social change, marginalized a consideration of the psychic dimensions of social life…muffling the more radical insights, questioning and theory of freedom found in psychoanalysis” (p. 85). Some of the foci of attention that differentiate a psychoanalytically informed practice from that of progressives, are what make up an approach to curricular work that is attentive to the exploration of daily existence in terms of its “pain, violence, boredom, frustrations, terrors, dreams, desires, illogic, repetitions and obsessions” (Taubman, 2011, p. 124). In short, and by bringing the content of unconscious material to the fore, a psychoanalytic perspective of curriculum acknowledges as a starting point the most primal condition of humankind: that of suffering in the process of being and becoming.

26 William Pinar (2011) has noted that the critical pedagogue, busy in ideological and social critique, leaves the “I” unaddressed, and asks whether the failure of the mantra of resistance is predicated in its dissociation from subjectivity. Deborah Britzman (2010, 2014) has also documented the pedagogue’s tendency to “ceaselessly act” (2013, p. 125) and to quickly turn theory into possible practical applications, leaving no space for inward attention.

27 This is a central element in the diagnosis that Norbert Lechner (2002) does of Chilean civil society after the violent US intervention in the country in the 70’s. Neoliberal democracy’s failure to represent people in their fears and dreams help explain societal disaffection for civic participation.
Since “pragmatism was not interested in the foundational topics Freud had raised”, Taubman (2011, p. 61) reminds us, traditional progressive and critical pedagogues could not see that the identifications they sought to achieve in the public by “telling it like it is” or the call to action can produce at the same the opposite effect: dis-identifications.

Looking back on my own biographic trajectory, I can recognize elements that led up to a growing sense of dis-identification with assumptions of critical pedagogy to which I held firmly since my undergraduate education. Perhaps my moving away from the discourse of traditional critical theory, which marked my origins at a Jesuit university sometimes referred to as a “communist university”, can be grasped psychoanalytically as the inevitable and necessary repudiation of the image of the father in the process of individuation, building new identifications for the subsequent reconstruction of subjectivity. A really short, though superficial, example of such dis-identification can be found in the insisting discourse of “resistance” in critical pedagogy. I had not become aware of the implications of the use of the notion until a colleague that worked with me in the curricular design of a nation-wide school program brought it to my attention: “The word resistance seems to appear a lot in your speech. Don’t you find it exhausting to live life resisting all the time?” The question and the reflection on its implications stuck with me long after the initial shock and perplexity.

It was only after that informal analytic intervention that I came to learn from Argentinian philosopher Walter Mignolo that resistance simply validates the existence of the norm, so instead of resisting, the ethical task is to re-exist. William Pinar would probably put such a task in terms of subjective shattering first, and then subjective reconstruction.

Critical theoreticians tend to focus on resistance, but psychoanalysis shows that what we resist, persists. That is precisely what happens in therapeutic practice when dealing only at the
level of the symptom: the suppression of one symptom can only assure the reappearance of subjective conflict in the form of another symptom.

Is perhaps the instability of interpellation and the failure to create identifications in subjectivity that explain in part the fact that the project to educate “critically transformative” and “reflective practitioners” remain largely an “unrealized promise”? (Russell, 2014). I share in Taubman’s discomfort with identity politics, in that they have failed to recognize the unconscious, and with it, the understanding that “resistance to identity is at the heart of psychic life” (2011, p. 161).

Ignoring the psychoanalytic constitution of subjectivity in its core dimensions of desire, libidinal ties, suffering and anxiety cannot go without consequences in the formative enterprise of curriculum work. Britzman (2003) cites Donald Winnicott when in a talk given to policy makers in 1965 titled “The Price of Disregarding Psychoanalytic Research”, he points to a fateful consequence also raised by Carl Jung: “We pay the price of just staying as we are, playthings of economics and of politics and of fate” (p. 110). The discursive revolutionary impulse was also met by this warning when Jacques Lacan addressed the students in the Paris protests of 1968: “What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a new master. You will get one”.

In what could be seen as a reconciling effort to bridge the tension between the insights of psychoanalysis and the progressive project, William Pinar (2006) asserts that in order to resuscitate the progressive project in both subjective and social terms, we need “to understand that self-realization and democratization are inextricably intertwined” (p. 2) and in this effort, curriculum scholars “must renew our commitment to the democratization of…society, a pedagogical process that requires the psycho-social and intellectual development of the subjectively existing individual” (pp. 2-3).
Interestingly, as history shows, not all the left-wing and critical theorists have disavowed the subjectively existing individual or rejected pure theoretical work as bourgeois or narcissistic. As Taubman (2011) notices, the work of Frankfurt School scholar Herbert Marcuse demonstrates a strong commitment to the emancipatory project of psychoanalysis. In spite of the accusations from fellow Frankfurt School scholars, such as Eric Fromm, of “neglecting the practical”, Marcuse sought to explore the philosophical and sociological implications of Freudian concepts, aiming “…not at curing individual sickness, but at diagnosing the general disorder” (Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*, cited in Taubman, 2011, p.152). In contrast, he found the urgency for practical solutions in his colleagues to be “complicit with the rein of instrumental rationality and blind to the unconscious conflicts that render such gestures at best suspect” (p. 152).

The atrocities of a technocratic mentality expressed throughout modern times (e.g., the Nazi regime, or the violent intervention in Chile to overthrow the democratically elected socialist government in the 70’s and turn the country into a laboratory of neoliberal policies) have left critical scholars shocked and perplexed. Facing such horrors and hopeless times, for some it was time to recognize the danger of an action-oriented mentality, and ultimately, the impossibility of idealistic grand utopias. Taubman would agree with such sentiment, as he sees that one of the implications of psychoanalysis for curriculum is that it puts us in a situation where “we must accept our own complicity in the realities we discover in the classroom” (2011, p. 172).

In this sense, Deborah Britzman’s claim is timely: “the approach that can best turn education inside out”, in the interrogation of our complicit intentions and “…to understand its inhibitions, symptoms and anxieties, is psychoanalysis” (2009, p. viii). It is to the exploration of these issues expressed in curricular work that we now turn.
4.4 Curriculum as a site of transference

The dynamics encountered in clinical experience with patients who exhibited varying processes of progress, and resistance to it, based on the relationship between analyst and analysand, led Freud to formulate what would become one of the organizing principles in the exploration of the unconscious: the notion of the transference. In his 1949 “Outline of Psychoanalysis”, Freud explains it this way: in analysis “the patient sees in his analyst the return…of some important figure out of this childhood or past, and transfers on to him feelings and reactions that undoubtedly applied to this model…. This transference is ambivalent: it comprises positive and affectionate as well as negative and hostile attitudes towards the analyst” (p. 66).

In what sounds as a familiar scene to anybody who has taught (the relationship between analyst and analysand resembling that of teacher and student), notice how the ambivalence with which Freud defines this relationship also speaks to the “incalculability” of the pedagogical act referred to by Phelan earlier in this chapter. The relation with the pedagogical is confirmed in the educational attributes that Jacques Lacan confers to the relation of transference. In Seminar XI he indicates that “as soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere there is transference” (p. 232). Knowledge then becomes a central aspect in this relationship, and it occurs only when patient or student recognize in the analyst or teacher the figure of a subject who is supposed to know. Transference, then, can be said to be a central and identifying trait of the educational relationship between an analyst and the analysand, and between teacher and student.

The dialogic nature and decisive implication of curriculum work in the reconstruction of subjectivity by means of the transference can be inferred from the definition of transference and effect attributed to it in Lacan: “in its essence…transference…is quite simply the speech act. Each
time a man speaks to another in an authentic and full manner there is, in the true sense, transference… something takes place which changes the nature of the two beings present” (Seminar I, p. 109).

An important aspect that helps explain the potency of the transference is that even though it operates by means of the symbolic, or what can be accounted for at least in retrospect, it activates the unconscious, and with it, what cannot always be accounted for. The result is not superficial (cognitive) nor unidirectional: it changes the subjectivity of the two (or more) present. Having established the transformative effect in the subjects involved in a pedagogical situation by means of the transference, we can now explore in more detail the dynamics that take place in this process through what Lacan called the psychic register of the Imaginary.

4.5 The Imaginary and the formation of the subject

In the Lacanian framework, subjectivity is understood in the interplay between three psychic registers: the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. In general terms, the register of the Real is where desires, passions, jouissance and drives are located, along with everything that is unspeakable. The register of the Imaginary is the seat for the ego, which comprises both conscious and unconscious processes such as memory, defenses and judgment. The register of the Symbolic is the place of language, the capacity of representation. This register impacts on the other two.

In the process of formation of the I (or the Freudian ego, which is located within the Imaginary), Lacan gives special attention to the psychical phenomenon of identification, or the capacity to locate ourselves in the other and to represent ourselves. This function of identification takes place in relation to the presence and mediation of an image. Following Lacan, identification is an inaugural process in the formation of subjectivity that starts in early childhood (the mirror
stage and the recognition of ourselves) and continues throughout life by the formative presence of subsequent specular images and the recognition of the other.

Lacan explains the formative effect of the symbolic image when he describes identification as “the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image…” (2006, p. 76). In this sense, the images with which we are faced provide the Gestalt, or a vision of unity that allow us to assert ourselves in individuality. In the understanding that the image is symbolic in nature, that is, expressed in language, there is a real question about how we go about creating an image of ourselves, as it carries significant implications for the understanding of the curricular act.

In “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious” (1960), Lacan tells us that the process of ego construction is imaginary in nature and proposes that the circuit of identification “goes from the specular image to the constitution of the ego along the path of subjectification by the signifier… (2006, p. 685). This presupposes a couple of crucial elements for the theorizing of curriculum. One of them, is that the process of subject formation occurs by the action of signifiers–language, words–that is, a symbolic act. The other, is that despite the initiation of the process of subjection in the register of the symbolic, the impact of its action (or its psychic consequences, in Britzman’s words) are decided on a completely different register: that of the imaginary, as it interpellates the ego to assume a particular subject position.

What the curricular discourse of higher education does is precisely this: it constructs an image of a certain professional subject through a linguistic representation in program descriptions, graduate profiles, frames of competencies, course syllabi, evaluation and assessment, and classroom interactions, to which students are expected to strive to resemble.
But the process is far from being linear and straightforward. As we saw earlier, the same process by which we create identifications is the same one that brings about dis-identifications. Furthermore, and in what may seem a rather surprising insight at first, Lacan asserts that the image can simultaneously provoke passion but also oppression. This is because the image that we are presented (or that we construct for others) of a “good teacher” or an “exemplary parent”, for example, is precarious, imaginary, and cannot really sustain our value, sense of dignity and self-worth. The instant the image falters (which it will, due to its ethereal projection in the imaginary) it ends up being oppressive. As humans, we simply cannot continuously keep up a resemblance to an ideal image. This is a source of particular pain and suffering for the hysteric and the perfectionist (a trait of narcissism), many of whom feel at home in the teaching profession.

The complexity of curricular work resides in the consequences it provokes at different registers of the psychic apparatus simultaneously: it operates in the symbolic, irrupting in the imaginary, while associating and struggling with and against the desires, libidinality and traumas of the real. What is at stake in curriculum then is the formation of the subject.

The choice of the word “formation” here is not by chance, as it certainly was not in Lacan’s vocabulary. Dylan Evans (1996) explains the difference between the English term “training” (as in teacher training) and the Latin term for “formation”: “Whereas the English term carries connotations of a formal programme, or a bureaucratic structure, [formation] connotes a process which alters the subject in the very kernel of his being, and which cannot be regulated by set ritualistic procedures nor guaranteed by a printed qualification” (p. 213).

Since curriculum alters the subject at such depth, it is necessary to contemplate some considerations regarding the notion of subject in relation to the pedagogical/analytical act.
In her psychoanalytic investigations in education, in 1998 Deborah Britzman found herself “wondering about pedagogy’s capacity to address the ego” (in Pinar, 1998, p. 321), quite possibly moved by the important functions of the ego, such as perception and reality testing. In this sense, for Britzman the ego and education share in common a constitutional ambivalence between change and adaptation.

Jacques Lacan, however, does not equate the ego with the subject, and in fact places them in different registers: the ego with its conscious sense of agency within the register of the imaginary, and the subject within the symbolic order (Evans, 1996). This way, Lacan seems to be stripping the subject of conscious calculations, as he equates the subject with the subject of the unconscious. In its symbolic character, the subject is an effect of language (Écrits, p. 708). Writing almost a decade later, Britzman would seem to agree: “…education requires association, interpretation and a narrative capable of bringing to awareness, for further construction, things that are farthest from the mind” (2009, p. viii).

But it is in “The Subversion of the Subject” (1960) where Lacan presents the intriguing “graph of desire”, defining the subject as the inextricable relation between signifier and desire. In demonstrating this intricate constitution of the subject, he opened the way to the understanding of the subject as primordially split, against the illusion of the unitary subject of psychology (desire is always the desire of or for the other), and the libidinal investments of desire in what we construct as knowledge.

The implications of these facts from analytic experience for curriculum are, of course, manifold. It is “the struggle for words”, Britzman asserts, what “has as its pressure point the speaker’s theory of language joined to erotic life”, and in agreement with Lacan, suggests that
“Listening for the Eros of language is a key contribution psychoanalysis brings to understanding the undercurrents of communication that do affect pedagogical exchange” (2014, pp.123-124).

For Peter Taubman, working with the unconscious and desire is a pedagogical act of creation articulated with its temporal dimension: “…teaching becomes the creation of conditions for re-symbolizing and re-constructing alternative futures that lie in scattered looks, ideas, feelings, sensations, words, gestures but have not yet come into being” (2011, p.187). In the dwelling in this “now but not yet”, and in the struggle for words, we are confronted not only with the other, but with our own image—a source of suffering and anxiety—as we are faced with the fragility of the imaginary and the enslaving patterns of repetition of what remains unsaid. In this conflictive process of formation of the subject, symptoms are bound to arise.

It is to the exploration of this aspect faced in the analytic and curricular act that we now turn.

4.6 The unfinished symptom

“…education cannot proceed without anxiety, and this emotional fact presses on our first education, creating an archive of symptomology and dissolving its terms into unconscious ideation, repression, the compulsion to repeat and the return of the repressed”.

Deborah Britzman, 2011, p. 128

As we have discussed so far, the often unspoken reality of the curricular experience is that it throws us right into the drama of becoming. The process of subjective formation is one that is “suffered, dramatized, enacted” (Butler, 2004, p. 45), and in the context of higher education, Britzman describes it as “the drama of human beings constructing their identities…in situations marked by tension between what seems given or inalterable and what may be perceived as
possibility (2003, p. ix). A psychoanalytic view of education then has as starting point the acknowledgment of uneasiness, suffering and discontent.

In this sense, we recognize that in the drama of having to educate and be educated, the pedagogical relation carries with it particular psychical consequences – that of symptoms, among which, for Britzman, anxiety is one that plagues all education.

But what do we talk about when we talk about symptoms? From a traditional perspective of medicine, symptoms are seen as “the perceptible manifestations of an underlying illness that might otherwise remain undetected” (Evans, 1996, p. 205). While this view is predicated on a distinction between surface and a depth where causes “hide”, Lacan changes the entire logic of the matter by demonstrating that the symptom belongs to the realm of the symbolic, that is, language. In a talk in 1953, Lacan asserts that the issue of symptoms “can be entirely resolved in an analysis of language, because a symptom is itself structured like a language” (2006, p. 223). In this sense, the distinction between surface/depth in the traditional approach to medicine is superseded, as language is always present right there “at the surface”, open to interpretation.

Following Lacan, “a symptom can only be interpreted in the signifying order”. It is an articulation of something else, since “a signifier has meaning only through its relation to another signifier” (p. 194). From this perspective, a symptom is a word trapped in the body. This is why Lacan insists that “a symptom is language from which speech must be delivered” (2006, p. 223), a position shared by Freud as he referred to symptoms as “meaning being suffered” (Britzman, 2011, p. 31).

A practical illustration of this from Lacan’s clinical experience is the case of a woman he treated who was afflicted with Astasia-Abasia (being unable to move or walk without assistance or support). After several months in which she resisted different therapeutic approaches, Lacan
identified the image that marked her discourse: that of her father. As he recounts it, the outcome of the finding came with the deliverance of meaning: “…it was enough for me to remark that she had not had [her father´s] support…for her to be cured of her symptom” (2006, p. 88).

As an object of interpretation, the symptom is a signifier with no universal meaning. That is, the production of symptoms and the meaning we make of them is something that can only be resolved at the level of individuals. The non-universality of meaning attributed to the chain of signifiers operating in the transference in the pedagogical relation leads me to suggest the theorization of curriculum in terms of its function as catalyst in an unfinished symptom.

I recognize a commonality between analysis and pedagogy (apart from the fact that both were identified as the “impossible professions” by Freud), in that—as Lacan indicates—“psychoanalytic action”, as well as pedagogical action, “develops in and through verbal communication, that is, in a dialectical grasping of meaning” (2006, p. 83). Being a meaning-making practice, curriculum always implies the making of a subject, since as Lacan suggested, “every meaning phenomenon implies a subject” (ibid). In this dialectic, each subject involved in the relation constructs an understanding and attribution of a meaning differently.

In this sense, the completion of the response to the signifiers / images provided in the pedagogical relation set up by curriculum is marked by a hallmark trait: its unpredictability. Our need to constantly respond and complete the symptom is predicated on our own sense of incompleteness, of being split right from the moment of weaning, the sense of loss that comes thereafter, and the constitution of our desire in terms of the desire of the other. Britzman (2009) seems to be pointing to this as she discusses education as both interminable and impossible: “education itself will be interminable because it is always incomplete, and because it animates our own incompleteness” (p. 3).
The psychical responses with which we take part in the complicated conversation of the curricular situation are varied. As mentioned earlier, Deborah Britzman identifies anxiety, along with inhibitions, as common completions of the symptom initiated in the pedagogical relation (2014). In what appears to be a shared diagnosis, Taubman (2011) also references work that identifies anxiety as an “essential topic” to be addressed in teacher education programs (p.108).

Under today’s obsession with the specification and standardization of practices and outcomes in higher education, one could see how the unpredictability in a true pedagogical act may be a source of anxiety for those who wish to control it. Referring to the impossibility of education Britzman indicates that “…however good and intentional our methods may feel, we cannot guarantee, for either ourselves or others, the force, experience, or interpretation of our efforts once they become events in the world of others” (2003, p. 16). What a scary thought for the reformer and the pedagogue that takes upon herself the task of transforming society!

Within the Freudian structure of the psychical apparatus (Id, Ego and Superego), anxiety is a symptom that originates in the Ego. As we have seen, this is also the space where the psychical consequences of the curricular act are felt and get sedimented. Since the task of the Ego is to pursue pleasure (in complicity with the instincts of the Id) while at the same time avoiding displeasure (defending against the moral impositions and castigation from the Superego), any increase of displeasure is met with the signal of anxiety (Freud, 1949).

Since the main purpose of the Ego is self-preservation, anything that is perceived as a danger to the present configuration of the self as it is will trigger the Ego’s deployment of a series of defense mechanisms. Examples of some of these are rationalization (one of the main forms of resistance against psychoanalytic insights), repression, projection, sublimation, forgetfulness, and even late arrivals to sessions/classes are counted as an aggressive form of resistance and evasion.
(Lacan, 2006). Anxiety then, is ultimately an expression of conflict, and a clear indication of a sense of threat to a familiar configuration and stability of the self.

In this sense, it is not surprising that any education – particularly higher education – would bring about anxiety, where there is much at stake. But why is it that anxiety and other similar expressions of discomfort do not seem to be only a prevalent but a defining trait of the process of teacher education in modern times? (Britzman, 2003a).

This is a similar question to the one raised by Freud (1949) when he asked why neurotics – in spite of having the same innate dispositions as other people, the same experiences and the same problems to solve – seem to live so much worse, with greater difficulty, and suffer more feelings of displeasure, anxiety and pain. His answer goes along the idea of disharmonies and disorders in the Ego. At first sight, it could be said that people with artistic/creative capacities and those who choose to become teachers share a similar psychological structure: that of the neurotic.

As we said, in its consideration of safety and self-preservation, the ego guards itself in its function of reality-testing using anxiety as a signal of danger threatening its integrity. In this sense, the completion of the symptom in the form of strong anxiety experienced by those in the process of becoming teachers, as well as by their educators (something perhaps not experienced quite as much in other occupations, such as engineering) could be evidence of the deep process of transformation of not only cognitive structures, but of the self. This is why the ego interprets pedagogical situations as processes that threaten its current familiar configuration and balance.

Although Lacan also refers to issues of the ego, his approach is more nuanced, warning against the temptation to strengthen the ego, and thus making the person more adaptable to society. In one of his early papers from 1948, Lacan suggests that the ego is constituted by two categories, i.e. the spatial and the temporal, and places anxiety as a symptomatic phenomenon of the temporal
I am inclined to believe that a reason for his view of anxiety as a temporal phenomenon can be explained by his understanding of the symptom as an expression of conflicting desires. In the Rome Discourse (1953) he asserts that the symbols of the symptom express the language of desire. As we know, desire is by definition metonymic. It never remains the same and never accomplishes what it supposedly desires. It continuously moves along an endless chain of signifiers. In other words, desire changes in time.

As with other temporal phenomena, symptoms derived from anxiety can also be recurring. At the same time, they do not always remain as a privately felt discomfort and show up externally in discursive manifestations. A common instance of this can be teachers’ constant pattern of judging ideas on their use value. This is something that Deborah Britzman brings to our attention: comments such as “it is nice in theory but not in the real world” … may well represent unfinished symptoms that defend against the more difficult question of what happens when our pedagogy is caught somewhere between ignorance and knowledge, between not knowing what to do and still having to act…” (2003, p. 75).

As an unfinished symptom, the images / signifiers put in play by the curricular situation will provoke incalculable responses in students as they finish up the symptom, as informed by their biographies, existential meanings attributed to the situation, and the psychological structure prevalent in their psycho-somatic life. A symptomatic response can become pathological if the libidinal energy that sustains it is allowed to become stagnant or stuck in a self-referential loop. An important aspect for the process of formation is, in this sense, to keep the libidinal energy flowing in the dialogical nature of transference.
4.7 Curriculum and the flowing of transference

As imaginary work, the images curriculum constructs for those in the pedagogical situation are unstable and precarious, and as such, they cannot always sustain a subject’s notion of self, let alone produce identifications with it in predictable ways. It is in part the frustration produced by the incalculability of the pedagogical encounter that throws us in constant efforts to change, update, or better describe the image(s) we provide, through redefinitions of standards of practice, course contents, syllabi descriptions, statements of outcomes, or criteria for assessment and evaluation.

The issue then is what happens next, after the confirmation of the presence of a myriad of different symptoms completed by both teachers and students in the environment of interpellations, identifications and dis-identifications set off by the curricular situation.

In the understanding that anxiety and all its related symptoms and defenses derive from the ego, a popular approach has been to find ways to strengthen the ego. In this effort, what is deemed as a faulty image is to be replaced by a different one, usually by way of an attempt at positive reinforcement of the individual (“you can do it”, “cheer up”, “pull yourself together”). Ego psychology and behaviorism have profited immensely from this approach. However, this is an imaginary “solution”: the seat of the image and the ego-ideal is the register of the imaginary, and as we have discussed, we cannot be sustained in the long run by it. Lacan attacked these approaches reminding that strengthening the ego can only help it succeed in its purpose: promoting the safe but stagnant social adaptation of the individual. This is clearly not the point of the emancipatory project of the analytic act. For this reason, in the rather radical conference of “The Subversion of

A different approach, one more in sync with a psychoanalytic view of education, is to move in the opposite direction, away from the imaginary of the ego and into the realm of the symbolic. The point is to create the conditions for teachers and students to ground and assert themselves in language, speaking not from a specular image in the imaginary (the ideal or normative view of how things should be, or what they think is expected from them) but from the Real (the drives, their desires, *jouissance* and suffering). In a certain way, this movement reminds of what Socrates did with his students, undoing speculative images through constant and open questioning, pushing the limits of what seemed granted.

While traditional approaches to curriculum\(^\text{28}\) influenced by ego psychology and other forms of technical rationality focus their efforts in getting individuals to adhere to a certain image or ego ideal, psychoanalytic experience has shown that the investment and fixation of libidinal energy within the self (itself a form of narcissism) brings about illness not only expressed in internal psychic disturbance, but also oftentimes in somatic manifestations. The treatment of paralyses or recurring fainting through psychoanalytic confrontation attest to this. Peter Taubman cites the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi, who warned that education was “literally a forcing house for various neuroses” (Ferenczi, 1994 in Taubman, 2011, p.47).

In contrast, a liberatory approach sees the need to keep that libidinal energy flowing from the inside out; a movement that calls for real and authentic transference, that is, it requires conversation. This is one of the reasons why psychoanalysis was referred to by one of Freud’s

\(^{28}\) Like those characterized by their reliance on planning, predetermined behavioural objectives, and evaluation.
patients as the “talking cure”. In the light of the implications of a Lacanian perspective of the transference, perhaps the most beneficial purpose to which curriculum workers can give themselves is, instead of making efforts to fixate energy in attaining a certain pre-defined image or ego-ideal, to engage in a practice that keeps the transference flowing, a practice in which free association allows for repressed material and desire in the unconscious to be liberated.

Such is the possibility that we find in an understanding of curricular work that takes the risk of assuming itself as a function of speech. This function is what is at the core of the process of subjective formation in the Lacanian account, hinted at in this chapter’s epigraph. It is from a poetics of representation in speech, Deborah Britzman appreciates, that we can imagine new ways of speaking and understanding the desire that drives our process of becoming, as it links “the creation of meaning to the problem of signifiers, interpretation and truth effects” (2009, pp. 388-389). In taking the position of a speaking being—and thus mediating desire symbolically—we find a chance for “the speaking subject to assume a new subjective position in desire” (p. 391) by engaging with the indeterminacy that defines education and that action forces us to elude.

Curriculum theorist Dwayne Huebner also describes the potency of speech and conversation in the pedagogical relation. “In conversation”, he asserts, “we are significantly changed… reality is found, solitude transcended, and life shaped” (1999, p. 80). The transformative potential of conversation adduced by Huebner certainly finds sustain in the etymology of the term. In its Latin roots conversation derives from the components Com (with) and Versare (to turn). This way, conversation can be loosely translated as “to change together”.

This is the type of conversation Lacan has in mind when he says that transference happens every time people speak in a full and authentic manner. Conversation that allows for the flow of
transference differs dramatically from the instrumental use of talk in the classroom that teachers incorporate as a strategy to get students to do or learn something (Huebner, 1999).

In considering the performative effect of curriculum in the ongoing reconfiguration of the subject through a use of language that appears as an unfinished symptom, psychoanalysis opens the invitation to rethink received and familiar notions and, in so doing, reimagine the possibilities of joining in a conversation that, acknowledging our sufferings and desires of the Real, can lead us in the subjective reconstruction of more honest and authentic lives.
Chapter 5: Critique: Between Theory and Method

[THIS CHAPTER HAS BEEN REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS]
Chapter 6: Analyzing symptoms in policy: a psychoanalytic reading

[THIS CHAPTER HAS BEEN REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS]
Chapter 7: A touch of skin: Eros and the body in educational experience

A desk only covered by a notebook, a couple of pens, and a Spanish textbook is in the middle row at the center of the classroom.

There is something written on the board, quite possibly some grammatical functions to be used in a morphosyntactic analysis of sentences, but my attention is not fully focused either on the task at hand, neither on the indistinct chatter of my 8th grade classmates who, like me, appear to be only mechanistically completing the assignment given by the teacher, preferring instead to talk, or daydream.

In this in-between state of attention, I suddenly perceive a presence standing behind me. In the back of my eye I see that it is the teacher, as he is looking at what I have written in my notebook. As I remain motionless, the thoughts that rushed through my head at that moment appeared in the form of questions: Had I done enough? Was my handwriting neat enough? More importantly, Was what I was doing correct?

And then he touched me.

He laid his hand on the back of my shoulder repetitively, gently but firmly, and walked away.

Time seemed to freeze for a split second.

Not a word was said, but as he walked away slowly towards the board, I heard again the chatter from my classmates, though indistinct as before. I sat up straight, and tried to forge on with what then I considered to be tedious work.

After all these many years, the sensation of that brief touch of a teacher’s hand on my shoulder, and what it meant, lingers intensely in my memory.
Considering the pedagogical context and effect of this touch, in what ways could the phenomenon of touch be accounted for in terms of its educational significance?

To approach this question, in this chapter I want to posit the erotic and the body in close relation to the universality of touch, in an attempt to show their proximity in formative experience. To do this, I work through an essay by Ignacio Martín-Baró called “La Psicología de la Caricia” [the psychology of a caress] (1970). As Martín-Baró compellingly shows, there is a subtle dialectic through which touch and the human being shape each other. A gentle stroke of a hand on skin has “far more content” and is radically different “than…pulling a door or pushing a button,” Martín-Baró indicates. Furthermore, the tactile, according to him, is closely associated with the notion that “the mere movement of a hand, in contact with another body, stops being movement and turns into meaning”. In discussing the phenomenality of meaning in touch, I draw both from the phenomenological tradition represented in the lineage of Husserl, Heidegger, and Marion, as well as from psychoanalytic theory, as developed by Freud, around the notion of Eros and the drives.

By exploring the relationship of the touched and the touching, I inquire into the educational implications of Martín-Baró’s claim that “en el hombre, la caricia se reviste de trascendencia” [in men, the caress is drenched with transcendence]. The paper then offers a discussion on the Freudian perspective on the drives, as lending an understanding of the phenomenality of touch by positing Eros as “the ultimate cause of all activity,” particularly including educational activity.

In what follows, I organize this phenomenological exploration of Eros and touch in education through three progressive movements or reductions - what Samuel D. Rocha (2015) refers to as a trinitarian lens: the Being of the phenomenon in the sphere of appearance (what makes it “be” for consciousness), its Subsistence (its way of being, the conceptual categories of what
animates and sustains the phenomenon), and its *Existence* (its embodied, incarnate way of being given).

**7.1 Being. What is in the touch? A first reduction*²⁹* into the patting on the back**

The teacher’s patting on my back was an episode that, perhaps, most of my classmates did not notice, and if some of the ones sitting behind me did, it was probably irrelevant. If I were to ask some of them today whether they recall the Spanish teacher patting me on the back during an afternoon class in the fall back in 8th grade, most likely, they would not be able to remember that such thing happen. And if I told them that it did happen, they would perhaps nod but dismiss it as something without any particular importance. For them, it was nothing. For me, on the other hand, it has not escaped my memory to this day. It was not nothing. It was something. Something instead of nothing.

So how does this ‘something’ of the patting -and the imprinting it left- appears? What makes it be as a phenomenon in the realm of its appearance?

At the first level of what I perceive through the senses (what in Hegelian parlance would be referred to as “sense-certainty”) the phenomenon makes its appearance intelligible to me through at least three main components. These refer to the aspects of relations, physical contact, and the unfolding of meaning. This first level of reduction can be guided by a recurring question in philosophy: what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for this phenomenon to appear?

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²⁹ “First” is meant here not in a historical way (e.g. the chronology of phenomenology as inaugurated by Husserl, and then revisited by Heidegger, Marion and others), but as a layer, a first moment of phenomenological reduction that seeks the *whatness* of Being, which then leads to sensing the life forces of Subsistence, to finally encountering the givenness of flesh-and-bone Existence.
A basic starting point would be to recognize that, in order for relations and physical contact to take place, and for meaning to ensue from them, these aspects are necessarily contained and supported within a physical spatiality and proximity. In the story shared at the beginning, the physical space that provides these conditions is the classroom. We will later see how, in this case, physical proximity in space is one of the basic conditions for the appearance and sustenance of a relation that could be properly called educational.

7.1.1 Relations

Anybody who has given or received a pat in the back knows that they always happen within the context of, or in the forming of some kind of relation. In this particular case, the first and most salient characteristic of the relation is that it is established between a teacher and myself – a student. The teacher, an older man, is a figure invested in authority given his alleged mastery of a particular disciplinary knowledge. As a “subject supposed to know”, he demonstrates his familiarity with his discipline with ease: he knows grammar rules by heart and cites them profusely, he is able to provide as many examples as necessary, is well versed in national literature, and is able to select essential readings from among them. In this sense, he inspires a sense of respect, perhaps due to an authority of experience. As a young, impressionable student in a high-achievement school, one learned quite quickly to recognize and respect those teachers who took their discipline and their work seriously.

But we must not forget that the type of relation established between teacher and student, and in particular, between this teacher and myself at this precise moment, is a relation that is mediated by institutional factors and arrangements. This teacher is not someone who merely presents us with material to learn. He also gives grades. He has the ability to judge and decide
whether one passes or fails his course. And not only that. He is also the one who speaks. He asks most of the questions and decides whether and when one is allowed to speak. He also grants or denies permission to go to the restroom. If he wanted, he has the ability to write remarks about one’s attitudes in a permanent student record, and to summon one’s parents to school if deemed necessary. This teacher, Mr. Avendaño, never did any of those things, and did not have a problem granting permission to go to the restroom, but everyone knew that –because of his position as teacher– he could eventually exercise his authority on any of those things.

The relation established between Mr. Avendaño and myself was, at this point, also affected by another aspect of school life: the rest of my classmates. In the context of a large all-male school, and in a middle-school classroom, there was a constant attitude of surveillance over anything that escaped what was seen as the norm. Any deviation from that unwritten social norm was always cause for castigation either by verbal/physical punishment or mockery. In this sense, the effect of the teacher’s touch is in no small way mediated by the presence of the other students. Having three rows of students sitting right behind me, many of them could have noticed the event of the teacher’s slow patting on my back. Why is the teacher patting me? and not them? Why am I somehow receiving a special treatment? Isn’t physical contact between males something a little queer? The perception of my classmates at this point could have unraveled things in many possible directions. The weight of the reality of these relations, and their plausible implications, suddenly made their appearance in the split second of the moment that the hand of the teacher was first placed on my back.
7.1.2 Physical contact

The phenomenon of the patting on the back makes its appearance visible in the fact that it is constituted by physical contact between a hand and a body. There is touch. In this touch, in turn, there is “touching” and there is “being touched”. These two aspects that conform the touch speak of the dialectical possibility that emerges in physical contact. A caress, Martín-Baró notes, “has no definition other than word” (p. 496) which “acquires plenitude when it becomes dialogue” (p. 497). This is why, as the reader may have noticed by now, I have used terms like “pat” and “caress” interchangeably, since I am not interested in isolating one particular physical pattern of tactile contact, but rather I want to emphasize the dialogicity of the fact of touch. More importantly, I want to claim that “pat”, “caress”, “stroke” and other forms of touch are expressions of a singular universal reality: the erotic need for contact as a demonstration of being present (present as gift and present as presence) which is, at the same time, a basic condition for the possibility of the pedagogical. This is, ultimately, what we see at work in the person who holds the hand of someone who is dying, or in the lover that calmly and playfully runs his fingers through the beloved’s hair.

Interestingly, the potential for touch to become dialogue entails, at the same time, the possibility for it to become a mere expression of a monologue-touch. The dialogic touch, however, is marked by the presence of the other – the one who touches and the one being touched, as opposed to a caress where it is all about the one who touches, or mostly about the one being touched. Transcending mere physiological perception, this dialogical encounter that needs no words can appear in an infinite number of existential expressions. Through touch, this dialogical encounter of existential nature can appear in “the caress of compassion, of sharing in the suffering, in the woman that caresses the forehead of her sick son. The caress drenched in emotion in the father that plays with his son’s hair. The mute caress of a blind person, a true act of knowledge, which is love.
The caress of a re-encounter after long years of distance. The caress that presses on the shoulder of a friend who is suffering difficulties” (Martín-Baró, p. 497).

The moment the hand of the teacher established contact with my body, time seemed to freeze. What does this mean? What are the implications? The possibilities of meaning in such unspoken dialogue were wide open.

7.1.3 Meaning

The moment of touching and being touched unfolds here as meaning, affect, and effect. In my mind’s eye, when the teacher lays his hand on me, it is like he has something to express, he is telling me something without words. I, in turn, also without words perceive and understand what I think it is being conveyed in the touch. It is in this moment and space between the touching and the being touched that I experience physical contact as the tactile structuration of ideas and feelings, as Martín-Baró describes it. As he further shows, physical touch –just like a word– “vibrates, expresses, transmits, communicates (…) it cheers or saddens, asks or gives, grants or denies, comforts or infuriates” (p. 496).

The slow pat on my back unfolds as the expression of a content, but one that is not information, disciplinary knowledge, or an instructional lesson. Rather, the content perceived carried the existential meaning of affects, the effect of which is formative rather than informative. Just like in discursive communication, the meaning of the affects involved in touch are something which is felt during the touch (mid sentence), but that can only be understood in retrospective (at the end of the utterance of a sentence). Precisely in its dialogical nature, as opposed to a mere physiological sensation, a caress expresses meaning, affects and intention. And just like in the utterance of a signifying chain, what one “hears” or “interprets” in the touch is a private matter
only accessible to the one being touched, as one interprets based on one’s own unconscious investments.

Given the relational context of this touch, the meaning I perceive is an affective demonstration of acceptance on the part of the teacher. The pat on the back is felt as a sign of approval, and an openness to being present, to being close. The effect of the content of this caress—one that could not have been predicted by the teacher—is that it led me to study, perhaps as an unconscious way of responding to the gesture of the teacher. But it is here, in this closeness of physical touch, that the intimate dialogical encounter of a caress becomes also dangerous: the language of the erotic drive that propels the pedagogical relation can appear as enticing, intimate, sensuous and sensual, seductive, and also—of course—sexual.

To some, physical touch in its triad of relation, physical contact, and meaning can raise questions in terms of appropriateness, intentionality, and ethical considerations. But the erotic demand that drives all education persists, and continues to show itself in the unending longing for presence, touch, and being touched.

7.2 Subsistence. A second reduction into the way of being of the pat on the back

Remaining at the perceptive level of the phenomenon would not yield much more than a description of an anecdote. Pressing down on the accidental appearance of the teachers’ caress, however, gives way to an encounter with the substantial, what animates the desire for the relation between student and teacher. This is why it is necessary to move further and into a second reduction: that which focuses on the conceptual treatment of the forces that sustain this phenomenon.
There is a certain sacredness to touch. There is a reason why when, encountered with a particularly significant experience (a comment someone makes, a play, a song, a speech, a gesture), we often say that it was “touching”, or that we were “deeply touched” by it, especially when we find that words do not suffice to account for the effect of such encounter within ourselves. The same sentiment is tapped on and elicited in popular culture with TV shows such as “Touched by an angel”, or song titles such as “Touch from you”. In pictoric art, perhaps nowhere is this force of touch more powerfully represented than in Michelangelo’s fresco The Creation of Adam, where the focal point of the sublime tension of proximity is between the hand of God and the hand of Adam, as they reach out to each other, in what we witness as a moment of union, not just of hands, but of heaven and earth. This is a moment that Adam experiences in full nakedness, when he has nothing to say, nothing to cover with, and nothing to hide.

What is it that animates\textsuperscript{30} and creates the conditions of possibility for experiences and phenomena to appear and be inflicted with such sense of the sublime, of existential significance, beyond the mere physicality of skin on skin?

The educational process of self-formation is, according to what Yotam Hotam suggests, one that is inextricably related with the theological and the erotic. “Since God…bares the exclusive responsibility for the creation of the human soul…, the self-formation (Bildung) of the soul by the human being is an erotic experience that is a wishful reunification with the original divine from which the soul was created” (in press, p.17). Right from the start, we would not be

\textsuperscript{30} In the full sense of the term. In Latin, \textit{anima}: soul, life. In its derivation \textit{animat}: instill with life.
wrong in asserting that the sense of the transcendent in phenomena –like in the case of Bildung– finds its origin in its divine inception, and the reminding that comes with it of the possibility of trespassing the limits of mere corporeality and temporality. Important as this starting point may be, we still need to understand what and how is it that this relation is sustained and becomes operative.

The relation between man and God appears here to be one end of the erotic dialectic of formation. The other end can be found in the relation of the self with itself and with the Other. In this dialectic, I claim, what we find at work is the same desire for a return to oneness, a unification and restoration of the primordial split within ourselves and with the Other, as the Lacanian concept of the “mirror stage” compellingly demonstrates. In one word, this desire is nothing but Eros. In Plato’s Symposium, we find similar evidence to this claim, when Aristophanes declares that the purpose of Eros is to restore, to bring back together the primal unity, healing the cleft in man’s nature. This pursuit for wholeness (which is the same aim in Humboldt’s notion of Bildung) resonates in this case with the notion of religare, the Latin root of the word religion, which literally means to join back together.

However, and more importantly for the present discussion, is what remains as the common denominator for both sides of the dialectic (man to God, man to himself and the world) which is the presence of Eros and the diverse manifestations of its erotic demand. It is necessary at this point, then, to zoom in into the notion of Eros itself, enunciating some key aspects that would help us define its contours and discern some of its modes of appearance.

While in everyday parlance Eros, or the erotic, is commonly associated directly with the sexual at its genital level, a closer look will reveal a differentiation that is fundamental to
understand it in its magnitude at a general level, and within the context of the touch, at this particular level.

The most basic thing to keep in mind is that Eros is a Greek term which is translated interchangeably as love and desire. In the Platonic account, Eros appears systematically in relation to a desire for beauty and the good, but also in close relation to knowledge and wisdom. In Plato’s Symposium, for example, Eryximachus speaks of erotics as the principle behind disciplinary knowledge. For Socrates, Eros is also the mediator between wise and unwise, i.e. it dwells in the wisdom-lover, the philosopher, or anyone who engages in the educational formation of the self.

This already gives us a sense of the multifaceted and generative nature of Eros. In modern times, however, the notion of the erotic comes to the fore again, though in a more radical and controversial form, by the hand of the insights from psychoanalysis and, particularly, the work of Sigmund Freud. In his 1940’s Outline of Psychoanalysis, Freud decided to lay out in a simple and concise way some of the main tenets of psychoanalysis. In it, he refers to Eros as a “force”, an energy which is the “ultimate cause for all activity”. The Freudian account becomes controversial, however, when he proposes to refer to this basic drive as “libido”. The erotic or libidinal energy, nonetheless, is not just about genital sensations, Freud points out, as it is also the origin of other forms of human expressions and activities which range from art to social order. Education, as an exclusively human act, is not an exception.

How could it be possible that the same energy that initiates genital excitation be the very same one that makes art possible, that gives origin to the structuration of the socio-political order,

31 See, for example, W. Hamilton’s translation of The Symposium (1951) in Penguin Books.
that sustains the desire to educate and be educated, and the same mysterious force by which we fall in love? To some, even to this day, such proposition is an outrage, a threat to their dignity disguised in the language of intellectual dissatisfaction. For others, the Freudian (re)discovery, and its derivations, are a source of inspiration, an existential analytic with far superior explanatory power than most existing psycho-social and political accounts, and the possibility of an encounter with the puzzling and yet enchanting nature of mystery.

Perhaps it is precisely due to this all-encompassing and multifaceted nature of Eros that it becomes difficult to recognize its rather mysterious presence and enigmatic effects. An incredibly honest instance of this difficult, puzzling presence and yet palpable effects of Eros can be found in an important novel of Bildungsroman, “The Confusions of Young Master Torless”, by Robert Musil (2013). In this novel, we find Torless—a young secondary student at an elite boarding school—struggling with existential questions as he engages in academic endeavors, explorations of his sexual being, and interactions of these kinds with his peers. Tormented by a growing awareness of sensuality, which wrestled with his rational and spiritual intentions, he finds in writing a form of relief. While his peers are asleep, and by the light of a gas lamp, he writes in his notebook which he titles “De Natura Hominum”:

“I can sense something within me...and I’m not sure what it is (...) I think I must be ill...even mad!...Mad –because otherwise why am I so alarmed by things that other people find perfectly normal? And tormented by this alarm?”. He then questions his own experience, perhaps in a self-analysis of sorts: “Up until now I’ve had the same attitudes as other boys of my age, as all my classmates...But is that really true?”; “What are the things that alarm me? The most insignificant ones” (pp. 109-110).
And here is where he starts wrestling with his thoughts to make sense of that which resists signification, the presence of Eros as an expression of the Real: “What is about them [those things] that alarms me? Something I don’t recognize. But that’s just the point! Where does this thing come from? I can sense its presence; it has an effect on me; it’s as if it wants to talk to me… It’s as if I have an extra sense that other people don’t have, a sense that is there, which draws attention to itself, yet which doesn’t function” (p. 110).

It is at this point, in recognizing the frustrating elusiveness of desire, that the homo-erotic tension of his educational experience becomes attached to corporeal identifications. Torless confides: “…it isn’t just inanimate objects that have this effect on me- no, what also troubles me is human beings. Beineberg and Reiting for instance [his closest friends]. Not just what they say, not just what they do- no, everything associated with their physical proximity has an effect on me...” (p. 110). The enigmatic and mysterious force of Eros makes its appearance coded in the guise of diverse forms of expressions, particularly, through symptomatic ones. Torless has an episode where he is deeply troubled by the mathematical concept of irrational numbers, falling into a spiral of distress, leaving his young teacher quite concerned.

“Torless is upset by irrational numbers”, William Pinar suggests, “because they symbolize what he cannot understand in his lived experience” (2006, p. 305). What is resisting symbolization here, surfacing through the symptomatic distress over the inability to understand subject-matter content is, precisely, Eros. Through the mechanism of displacement, the latent content of his homo-erotic desire appears in a different, perhaps more socially acceptable form, that of academic complications. This displacement of libido does not seem uncommon for Freud, who reminds us

32 I understand symptom here as a conflict between a subject and his or her position in relation to his or her desire.
that such exchange is a technique of our psychic apparatus to fend off suffering. It is the same move we find in sublimation: one gains the most if one can avoid suffering and loss and, instead, heighten pleasure. What is interesting for us here is that Freud identifies with precision one of the sources from which we try to gain pleasure through sublimation: intellectual work. It is in its erotic origin and nature that we locate “the artist’s joy in creating [and] a scientist’s in solving problems” (Freud, 1949, p. 28).

The traces and expressions of Eros we have found so far along the path of ancient Greek philosophy, modern literature of Bildungsroman, and the insights from psychoanalytic experience, allows us to describe to some degree the force that operated and sustained the touch with three basic ideas.

First, Eros appears here as a drive that joins and brings things (and people) together. It is a tendency for closeness, contact and, ultimately, oneness. Eros is what propels attachment and what directs our desire of and for the other. The desire to love and be loved. By placing his hand on me, the teacher established a particular kind of relation, one where he and I recognized each other’s presence, in the midst of an indistinct chatter of forty other bodies in the 8th grade classroom.

Second, understanding Eros as union implies also recognizing the other side of the dialectic: separation, death. Freud reminds us that we cannot understand one without the other. Eros and Thanatos, love and death, are the two basic drives that give rise to all others. In their union, we find the very first and the very last reduction (Rocha, 2015). The beginning and the end, and everything in between. It is this paradoxical relation that educates. This is the sense in Deborah Britzman (2010) when she declares that “Eros manages to gather all that we want with all that we worry about losing” (p. 325). The desire to unite is predicated on lack, a fear of losing love.
Third, in sum, we can confidently now speak of Eros as a propelling force. As Britzman compellingly puts it, “Without our libido, we erotic creatures would have no reason to think, to fantasize, to dream, to fall in love with people and ideas, and to reach out to others” (ibid). In its paradoxical nature (love/death, union/lack) and in its excess that cannot be signified, the productive and creative energy of Eros also exposes our fragility and finds us in a place of vulnerability. The force of Eros propelled the teacher to reach out, to establish a physical connection with me in an act directed at bonding. And yet, it is the same force that left both of us in a state of vulnerability, in front of ourselves and those around us. The erotic energy in that touch placed us at the anxious intersection of the questions of desire, encapsulated by Lacan in the question “Che Vuoi?”: What do I want? and What do you (as other) want from me? It is the way we (unconsciously) go about answering these questions that we lead our daily lives.

We have arrived at the heart of the matter, the revelation that the substance of the touch, the erotic dialectic of touching and being touched, does not explicate itself in physical perception. Rather, the Being of Eros—the fundamental existential force that animates the desire for closeness—is one of universal, ontological nature. In this understanding, Eros appears as a force that is subjacent and prior to all other accidental forms of embodiment, notions of the ethical, intentionality, the social, and so on.

This second reduction has disclosed the ontological structure of the Being of this touch in its particular mode of appearance: in its Being-in a classroom setting and in the existential experience triggered in the touch of skin.

There is something more to this touch though, something that does not get fully accounted for in the first reduction to the thing itself (the object), nor in this second reduction to its way of Being (in its subsistence). What marked the existence of the phenomenon of the touch in its
significance and fixed it in my memory was not the act in itself, nor the energy of its subsistence alone. It was something perhaps prior to those aspects, something Martín-Baró hints at when, speaking of the caress, he realizes that it is always already embedded in a dialectic of giving and receiving. This is what Jean-Luc Marion would later theorize under the dictum that “what shows itself first gives itself” (2002, p.5).

7.3 Existence. What exists in this phenomenon? A third (folkloric) reduction into incarnation

The first reduction we performed at the beginning of this paper corresponds to the transcendental reduction, inspired in Husserl, which is aimed at the “thing itself”. It attempted to show the teacher’s touch as a constituted object, its whatness, or what made such object be. The second section performed an existential reduction, as inspired by Heidegger, into the way of Being of the touch. It delved into the unseen (but felt) existential erotic force that explicates the subsistence of the touch as a phenomenon. Jean-Luc Marion builds on these two levels of reductions and proposes a third one, a reduction into givenness, or the way of being given. The focus is on what is given in what shows itself as a phenomenon.

The reasoning Marion uses to critique the other two reductions and suggest a third one is important here to phenomenologize the event of the touch to the extent of its way of appearing and, more importantly, to what was given through it, the affects that derive from its showing. In the first reduction, phenomena “can only reach the rank of objects” and so “their phenomenality is merely borrowed” (Marion, 2003, p. 87). In the second one, the question of the “self at work in what shows itself”, and its effects, remain “largely undetermined” (ibid). Marion argues that,
before a phenomenon can be constituted as an object or determined in its Being through its appearance, there is a givenness to it, which constitutes the true irreducible kernel of a phenomenon.

But he goes a step further as he advances the central thesis to his phenomenology, which is that “nothing can show itself unless it gives itself first”. In this move, Marion gives precedence to the gift, and locates such givenness ontologically before the phenomenon even appears as such: the given is anterior to manifestation. What follows from this proposition is that, in the phenomenon of the teachers´ touch, there is something that is being given, and this givenness is not completely reducible to its way of appearing.

However, the primacy of givenness over the mode of appearance of the phenomenon does not do away with the importance of such way of showing itself. Marion´s methodological approach to phenomenology can in fact be summarized as the work of locating, within the space of manifestation itself, the regions where “the self of what shows itself testifies to the impact of what gives itself” (2003, p. 88).

While we have disclosed, to a certain extent, important aspects of the phenomenon of the touch in the previous two movements of the reduction, we are yet to arrive to a more irreducible phenomenological kernel that would testify of the impact of the event. What is being given shows itself through a certain mode of appearance that makes it, potentially, recognizable. For the context of this investigation, the reduction to givenness requires taking a step further, a reversal into the realm of what Rocha (2015) calls the level of Existence: the embodied, incarnate way of what is being given.

He touched me. Whatever it is that is being given in the touch, makes its appearance in the flesh and bones of his hand, and the skin of my back. The reversal that connects givenness to
Existence, or the phenomenological movement between what is given and an embodied appearance can perhaps be exemplified through another analogy, one from Scriptures. In the Old Testament, we find Isaiah prophesy the promise of an irruption of heaven on earth, the appearance of the son of God among humans: “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isaiah 9:6). More than 600 years later, and as recorded in the New Testament, we find the fulfillment of the promise in incarnate form: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). The givenness of the son of God is something that was already there, only not yet shown. It is after several hundred years that we see the incarnate, flesh and bone appearance of that promise in the person of Jesus Christ. An existence that makes its givenness apparent.

In the sphere of consciousness, a phenomenon gives itself by showing itself and, to offer itself more clearly and fully, it embodies itself so that we can do our task of phenomenologizing the appearance (and revelation) of the gift. In this sense, and as it is clear in Marion’s work, what gives itself implies an invitation for the subject to take an active role in both discerning and receiving the gift. It gives to the receiver (the *given-to*) the task of phenomenologizing the given, to be attentive enough to recognize the gift and to receive it, to reveal the given as a phenomenon, and “to grow to the capacity of the given” (p.100). As we will see, this work that the given demands of the given-to constitutes an important factor to determine the educational value of an experience.

What we find in the phenomenon of the teacher’s touch is an educational moment, precisely in the terms that Wilhelm von Humboldt referred to the character of *Bildung*, as it is marked by something both higher and more inward, a transformation of the attitude of mind that flows harmoniously into character. The task of phenomenologizing the given, the attentive recognition

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33 Since Marion works from a theological frame, it only seems appropriate to draw from a similar perspective.
of the donation, constitutes a moment of transformation of the self. For Marion, the phenomenon “gives itself to us from its own self, to the point that it affects us, changes us, almost produces us” (2003 p.90). In short, the reduction makes us available to receive what is offered, and we are educated by it.

There is a link that connects the giver of a gift and the receiver. The teacher gave a pat on the back, but the true offering embedded in it was a gift of erotic recognition and communion, one that—because it is shown as an offering—its open to the risk of going unnoticed, being accepted or rejected. The erotic, William Pinar suggests, “is the name we can give to an ethical practice of embodied subjectivity” (in Rocha, 2015, p. xiv), and as such, this union of subjectivity and palpable embodiment sustained by the erotic is precisely what we find as constituting the touch. In the context of schooling, however, this relation gets threatened by a greater precarity, as the erotic force and its embodied offering are subjected to the weight of suspicion, moral policing, behavioral prescriptions, and other forms of fear and resistance.

In spite of modern social mores, the ever more regulated school policies of conduct, and the increasing shift to technological “telepresence” (but patent absence) in schooling, history shows us over and over again that the givenness of that which educates makes its appearance in the incarnate presence of bodies, in the touch of skin. In Plato’s Symposium, for example,

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34 This is a nuance that Rocha (2015) notes on the subject of givenness: giving—as Marion himself highlights—implies an imposition to receive. However, a givenness that shows itself as an offering allows space for hesitation, not noticing, taking partially, or rejecting what is offered altogether. This view could potentially be developed into a fourth reduction.

35 In Civilization and its Discontents, Freud exposes at length these social norms as an important source of neuroses.

36 Like what we see in the current fascination with video-conferencing, ideas such as “flipped classrooms”, and other forms of escaping the much more difficult position of having to face an other.
Alcibiades—speaking of his experience listening to Socrates’ teaching—declares: “Whenever I listen to him my heart beats faster than if I were in a religious frenzy, and tears run down my face”. He then tells us that Socrates’ speech “stirs us to the depths and casts a spell over us, men and woman and young lads alike” (1951, p. 101), confiding then a glimpse of the warm, intimate effect of such erotic spell: I then “laid myself down under his worn cloak, and threw my arms round this truly superhuman and wonderful man, and remained thus the whole night long” (p. 107). In the same way, we find evidence of the relation with the embodied offering in the relation established between John, the disciple, and Jesus. It is John—the ‘loved disciple’—that gets to rest his head on the chest of the Master, in loving union.

As we can see, the phenomenological reversal to the realm of embodied givenness in that which exists marks a shift “from the field of accuracy” of the objectified world to “the register of truth” (borrowing the words of Lacan in his Ècrits, p. 13). One could also name that the register of the Real. As such, and in facing givenness in flesh and bones, we encounter what Sam Rocha refers to as the phenomenological folkloric reversal. It takes an otherwise unimportant event for schooling—an event that might even be seen as dangerous, inappropriate, something to be regulated or even banned—and accepts it as what it is, recognizing its existence as an offering of educational value.

One could understand the resistance to such stance for being-in-the-world, since what is interpreted as being offered in the phenomenon of touch is, first of all, not readily accessible to everyone, and will be taken differently according to each individual. As Martín-Baró indicates, the interpretation of a caress is something unconscious and only accessible to the person being caressed. The terms in which the touch is interpreted, and its offering received, depends to a large
extent in the intersubjective desire of the one who touches and the one who is touched. One is recognized in the other. In the teacher’s touch, no words were necessary for me to access the dialogical encounter of his touch, and its offering which I took as sign of recognition, affirmation.

What we find in this last movement of the reduction of the touch, is, in short, an offering of love.

7.4 Concluding thoughts

The touch was “educational” in so far its offering was not only “shown”, but also recognized and received. As Karsten Kenklies (in press) has pointed out, “showing” is the differentia specifica of an educational activity, and such showing is twofold: someone shows something and someone recognizes that something has been shown. However, the acts of showing and recognizing (as well as the act of receiving the offering as a gift) are acts that also require of a particular intentionality, a will to show and give, and a will to recognize and receive. This is the same dialogicity that Martín-Baró helped us identify in the dialogical encounter of touch and being touched.

The mysterious quality of Eros we have discovered in the phenomenon of touch is, at the same time, the elusiveness that comes to define education itself: a seductive and enchanting force that drives us ahead in our desire to bring together what we have been, engage it with our present context and condition, and strive for what we might be.

Thinking about Eros and the body in educational experience, one can be reminded of St. Augustin and his famous dictum: “nemo est qui non amet” (without love, one is nothing). Taking this stance seriously demands a question: Can there be education without love? The reductions we
have performed here seem to suggest that, without love, we can perfectly have teaching, learning, even fun and interactive teaching and learning with technologies. But without a beginning and an end propelled in love, and sustained in an erotic Dionysian impulse—as Nietzsche would put it—none of those things would amount to (authentic) education in the Bildung sense: there is no being to begin with, so no true formation of the self can ensue.

The gift of the touch is then revealed not as a sensuous truth, but rather, as an encounter with the Real.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

“Mihi quaestio factus sum”
[I have become a question/problem to myself]
St. Augustine - Confessions X, 33,50

An education that is inattentive to the inner life of the subject cannot be properly called education. Owing to the means-to-an-end mindset that has come to define the field, the practices of schooling have lost all individual character, and with it, all the charm for the subjectively existing individual.

What are the nature, origin, character, sexual orientation, and spiritual convictions of such an individual? What about her desires, memories, joys, sufferings, and terrors? Aspects such as these, that make up the singularity of individuals, are at best subsumed in the categories of the social and the political, or simply ignored and dismissed in the language and practices of standardization and social science.

In this investigation I have challenged the notion of a generic and unitary subject upon which standardization rests, and in developing a philosophical understanding of the process of becoming I have emphasized instead the centrality of a complex conception of the subject for a process that can be called educational. The elements provided by this study of the formation of subjectivity in terms of Bildung and psychoanalysis helped bring into view the vicissitudes of the subject in its human condition of being primordially split, the varied ways in which desire regulate one’s process of formation in singularity, and the symptomatic aspect of the negotiation and resistance to such educational experience.

In this chapter I recapitulate these themes and complicate them with afterthoughts, in an attempt to show their scope and significance to an understanding of the process of formation of
subjectivity in educational experience. I take this return to the overarching question of the investigation as a chance to look back and recognize the path taken (method) and to rethink the more salient characteristics that define the rather elusive phenomenon of subjectivity.

In retrospect, when it comes to method, a general observation is that this investigation represents (however modestly) a possibility of bringing the humanities back to the center of the study of education. Part of the significance of a humanities-based approach to this study in particular is that it enabled the description of dimensions of subjectivity that would have otherwise remained unaddressed under the lenses of quantification and the social sciences. It provided the conditions to describe phenomena in a language that speaks more authentically and accurately of their essence and modes of appearance. This, I believe, is the way to proceed if the reconceptualized field of curriculum is to continue to strive. Methodologically, a study based on humanities can probably do very little to show novelty, but what I showed instead was a particular way of “working through” the problem proposed, associating psychoanalysis and curriculum theory to describe and critique dimensions of the phenomenon with juxtaposed commentary.

This form of work led me to a basic and yet fundamental understanding of the process of becoming: the idea that subjectivity gets reconstructed in educational experience through an ongoing dialectic of struggle and reconciliation. The subject, in its split condition, longs for the recuperation of a sense of oneness. This is why a process of formation, in its pulls and pushes, is one that requires transcendence. Transcendence can mean, on one level, the leaving behind the determinations of nature and moving forward into the realm of culture (as we saw in the account of most German Idealists). On another level, transcendence for the formation of the subject must by necessity consider the connection of the finite of the human with the eternal of the universal in
a relation of mimesis, the working towards resemblance of perfection. In this sense, education appears as a practice of *religare*, i.e. to be joined back together.

This understanding of the subject as primordially split, however, must not be mistaken for a fragmented, incoherent assemblage of multiple parts (now including the addition of technological devices to the body) that post-humanists and enthusiasts of cybernetics would celebrate. As we saw in chapters 2 and 3, the formative action of *Bildung* moves in the opposite direction, in the need to bring things together rather than dispersion in multiplicity. This is also the purpose of a reconceptualized curriculum: to reconstruct subjectivity, to reassemble, sometimes leaving aspects behind, in the work of expanding the substance of what makes us human.

And here perhaps is part of the mystery of subjectivity: that while it is a fundamentally relational phenomenon, with many aspects which are visibly displayed (through discourse, actions, symptoms), it nonetheless remains an intimate space of internal reality which is never completely pre-existent, responds to its own reasons, and thus can never be predicted. It is an always ongoing process of re-creation. Is it possible that the very mystery of this ambiguity is what enables subjectivity to exist as a phenomenon of creative expression of life? If this is the case, as this investigation suggests, perhaps the mysterious dimension of subjectivity needs to be respected as such. This is an insight the poets seem to have known all along. As Federico García Lorca once put it in a drawing from 1934, “only mystery makes us live, only mystery”.

But the life of the subject, in its mystery and unpredictability, is not something that sounds amenable to the ears of the school reformer. The fact that curricular reforms have overlooked the

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37 The clinical name for a subject under such conditions of fragmentation and multiplicity is Schizophrenia (a psychotic disorder), which in its Greek root translates as “divided mind”.

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subject, does not mean that they have been able to dismiss the issue and its consequences entirely. The curricular reform that ensued in the post Sputnik era in the United States, and the present global curricular reform movement towards competency-based and measurable outcomes models in higher education are examples that attest to this point. They represent efforts at having a predetermined effect or impact in the society they set out to configure.

They also represent the failure of forcing education to be about something other than the formation of a subjectively existing individual. These reforms show the precarity and eventual failure of an input-output approach, and of their predefined outcomes when it comes to the subjective formation of individuals. The generation schooled in the rigours and mathematically oriented 50’s ended up creating the 60’s and 70’s. In the highly technicized and efficiency-driven schooling of today, we are starting to see its fruits: the vanishing of the language and sense of vocation, the disappearance of humanistic endeavours and a sense of transcendence, a rise in student suicide, sadly, among many others. The aspects of the Real that make up our singularity do not lend themselves to the homogenizations of the categories of the social.

Confronted with these failures, the non-coincidence between expectation and reality, the frustrations, the gaps and discontinuities, but also the transformations and breakthroughs in our own processes of education, one must recognize that the entire enterprise of running the course of

38 In the case of the school reform of the 1950s in the United States (which introduced “teacher proof” curricular packages) there was an interest in creating a more disciplined, rational, scientific oriented society. In the face of the defeat in the space race by communist Russia, there was an assumption that concluded, first, that this was a problem that had to be attributed to schooling, and second, in relation to that, that the teaching of more mathematics and science would result in a societal change of foreseeable characteristics.

In the case of the current global reform movement, the guiding assumption is that education is primarily about information and the acquisition of competencies, and that such process needs to be tied to, and respond efficiently, to the requirements dictated by the economy and the labour market. Hence, the horizon of schooling is reduced to the search for efficient means (to an undecided end), and the imposition of a technologically oriented society of specialists in particular protocols for action.
formation –curriculum– comes down to a matter of our own subjective selves. The perhaps unspoken yet deeply felt intuition is that the subject is the site and raison d’être of educational experience. Only then one gets to see education in its genuine problematic dimension: not a matter of more effective teaching and learning, but a matter of becoming more authentically human. When pondering the type of person I am, the type of person I am becoming, and how that is being shaped through one’s educational experience, one can get to a similar realization to that of Augustine: I have become a problem to myself.

In the next sections, I first revisit and develop this notion of subjectivity as a problem. Pressing down on the relation between self and world, I then modulate the differences between the accounts of subjectivity in Bildung and psychoanalysis by bringing in the notion of eccentricity. This notion helped me to better understand the interrelations of the Real, Eros and desire in the symptomatic negotiation and resistance to identifications in educational experience. In the last section I enunciate aspects that define the limits of this study and that project the possibilities for further work. These relate to the curricular as a site not only of anxiety, but also love, and to the implications and challenges of instituting and institutionalization for an education as envisioned in the tradition of Bildung.

### 8.1 Subjectivity as a site of struggle

Subjectivity—the complex compound that makes up “who we are”–is such a basic, everyday way of existing in the world, that when is not left entirely unexamined, the treatment it is often given is one that relies on narratives of the lived experiences of individuals or in normative declarations of how people “should” turn out as a result of a particular curricular experience. In all cases, the substantiality of the phenomenon is taken for granted. And this is not surprising. “What
is ontically nearest and familiar”, Martin Heidegger reminds us, “is ontologically the farthest, unrecognized and constantly overlooked in its ontological significance” (2010, p. 43). In other words, those aspects that we simply and unreflectively rely on for our everyday engagements with the world and with ourselves—as this investigation has shown—are precisely the aspects that are the most difficult ones to grasp analytically, because we have been able to live our entire lives without having to think much about them: their process of formation is taken for granted, and we settle for descriptions and explanations of practical instances of phenomena, while the conditions that enable their appearance continue to elude us.

Once we have acknowledged that subjectivity is in fact a central theme that defines the character of curriculum, and that sustaining it as a recurring question is a necessary condition for a reconceptualized understanding that restores the connection to the purpose of education, we are in conditions to see that, despite the avoidance of the problem in modern discourse, the understanding of the subjective “I”, and its processes of formation, are a site of struggle. Different positions on who the subject is, how it comes to be, and what his possibilities and limitations are, will result in differing philosophical anthropologies, and these, in turn, will inevitably inform views on what counts as education, as well as what forms of public participation (in political action, for example) are deemed desirable or acceptable\textsuperscript{39}.

The stakes of the position one has concerning the subjective are high. Regardless of our ability and varying degrees of precision with which we can think and talk about our beliefs

\textsuperscript{39} Recall here how the Nazi regime, for example, found a justification for both their indoctrination of the German masses and the atrocities committed against Jews, in the appropriation (and misreading) of the Heideggerian ontological distinction between world and wordless, as well as other anthropological commentaries in Nietzsche. In the opposite direction, the attitude of the Spanish conquistadores changed towards the native peoples of America once they established that the indigenous were fully human and had souls, prompting the Crown to facilitate the conditions to evangelize and educate them.
regarding subjectivity and how we come to be who we are, such positioning is already operating in our day-to-day dealings with the world, with ourselves, and with others. It informs every gesture and word, how we think, how we feel and what we do in the process of educating and being educated. It is what creates the difference in regarding an educational encounter with the other as a “shaping process as much as the manufacture of steel rails” (Bobbitt, 1913, p.12) or engaging in such encounter with a sense that “there are no ordinary people” …that we “have never talked to a mere mortal…but it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendours” (C.S. Lewis, 1980, p.46).

Now, the problem of formation of subjectivity has been over-simplified in modern times, particularly in a broad psychological perspective, reducing it to a contraposition of individual versus social determinants, in the best cases, or simply to a matter of choice between nature or nurture (genetic predispositions or influence of the environment). I am, of course, dissatisfied with both.

One sees individuals as a predetermined biological object of nature (as Bobbitt did) whose process of “growth” requires external guidance and feeding into them the elements they lack for a proper development. The other subsumes the subject into the grand category of the social, determining the self after the characteristics and values of the community (whatever that might be), erasing the possibility of singularity and exceptionality.

40 Franklin Bobbitt (1913) equated the process of human education with that of technological farming: a matter of determining the right combination of interventions to the plants (students) and their environment in order to yield the best harvesting (learning) results from a crop (classroom).
Are there other ways of thinking about subjectivity that do not force us to choose between a sense of the human as a \textit{tabula rasa} with only biological determinations, and on the other hand, a collectivism that minimizes our possibilities to distance ourselves from our surroundings?

8.2 \textbf{Subjectivity from a third space: the eccentric I}

Fortunately, looking into the past we can find richer ways of engaging with the problem of subjectivity and its process of formation. As discussed in Chapter 1, the tensions in the notion of \textit{Bildung}–regarding its philosophical anthropological underpinnings–bring to the fore nuances of particular importance for understanding the phenomenon of subjectiveness. One such tension relates to the possibility of individuality underlying the relation between a self with itself and with the world. As we know, in the German idealist tradition, in figures like Kant, Hegel and Humboldt, we find a notion of \textit{Bildung} sustained in the understanding that the process of formation or “acquiring substance” (in Humboldtian terms) is predicated on the expansion of inner dispositions that are already present (“placed there by providence”, in Kant’s words). The process of extending this inner kernel is made possible by “linking the self to the world” to sustain an animated interplay between the two, as Wilhelm von Humboldt would have it. In this sense, the external world (\textit{Umwelt}) is essential for the formation of the inner world (\textit{Innenwelt}), as it provides the conditions for what is a distinctively human way of being-in-the-world: we become more like the world and the world becomes more like us. The constitution of “world” is not so much a matter of space and objects, as Heidegger then clarified, but more of a matter of otherness. The transformation of one side of the dialectic reflects on the transformation of the other.

But for this condition of being to acquire an educational characteristic in the sense of \textit{Bildung}, the task of formation is to take the human beyond his natural determinations, and
transition towards the world of culture, in a constant striving for perfection. As such, the educational condition of humankind is that it is in a state of flux, of movement. It is open-ended in its striving, but not devoid of a sense of purpose and direction: as the early Idealists and the more contemporary efforts represented in the Geisteswissenschaften (or the human sciences of spirit) emphasize, the mark of a formative endeavour is the striving towards the perfectibility of spirit, and such striving is to be reflected in the harmonious development of sensibility and character. This is an important trait of the notion of “unfolding” at the heart of Bildung as a project of cultivation of the inner self.

Interestingly, most of the criticism that has been raised regarding Bildung and Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik claim that this understanding of education—and of the subject—emphasizes individuality at expense of the social, and that such alleged disinterest in the social is what would explain the use of its vocabulary and theoretical apparatus to justify the Nazi regime. But the same claim can be made in the opposite direction, i.e. that it is the “herd mentality” of a collectivism devoid of a sense of individuality that precludes the possibility of dissent, setting the stage for the horrors we have witnessed in this past century.

On a closer examination, the evidence we find is that on all accounts of Bildung, from Kant to Hegel to Humboldt to more contemporary theorists, the condition for the unfolding of the self is the relation it establishes with an “other”. In fact, they emphasize that the cultivation of one’s inner self has consequences in the conditions of the spirit or mind of the collectivity around us. For Hegel, for example, it is only through culture (what is already out there) that the individual acquires standing and actuality, and the degree of ascension in spirit one reaches contributes to the conditions of the spirit of the nation. In Humboldt, one’s Bildung is also closely related to the character of a nation, reason why in his position as Minister of Education of Prussia, he establishes
Bildung as the guiding principle for the educational system. But not only that: he sees the importance of Bildung in relation to the possibilities of “a nation, of an age, of entire mankind” (p.59). In the same way, for more contemporary theorists like Hermann Nohl (in the tradition of geisteswissenschaft), what is at stake in the cultivation of the inner self is the configuration and possibilities of the spirit of the Volk.

One of the things we learned from Wilhelm von Humboldt about Bildung in relation to the world is that Bildung does not only happen in the construction of personal character, but also, and quite importantly educationally speaking, in the molding of the world according to how the mind/spirit is: a tendency for unity in complexity. In our being-in-the-world we encounter a multiplicity of things out there, but we must see how they are connected. Complexity without unity is chaos. As an existential condition, man “seeks to grasp as much world as possible and bind it as tightly as he can to himself” (2015, p. 58), because “Man seeks unity only to escape from dissipating and confusing diversity” (p. 60).

This relation to otherness as an existential condition resonates strongly across the work of Jacques Lacan, but is a particularly important aspect to his account of the constitution of the subject41. In what he refers to as the “mirror stage” we find an inaugural moment in the life of the self as it turns into a subject, the moment in which we playfully recognize an image of ourselves outside of ourselves. This moment of precipitation of the I, charged with libidinal dynamism, marks the transition to subjectivity through a central ontological phenomenon, that of identification. The centrality of this phenomenon lies in that, in the full sense of the analytic term,

41 Particularly as it appears in the seminars “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function” (1949), and “The Subversion of the Subject” (1960).
it entails “the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image” (2006, p. 76). As a phenomenon that radically constitutes the subject in relation to the non-I, it is also one marked by alienation: the specular I turns into a social I.

The alienating aspect of this transition—central to Bildung—is played out in at least two dimensions. The relation between an inner (Innenwelt) and external world (Umwelt), is one fundamentally mediated by desires and fantasies. As such, the subject is bound to be situated in a position of discordance not only with externality, but also with his own inner reality. This non-coincidence is what brings about, for Lacan, a cycle of “shattering of the Innenwelt to the Umwelt” (p. 78).

The other dimension is that of language. One of the most important cuts that mark the beginning of the subject as such is his stepping into the realm of the symbolic order. Language is always already directed to an “other”, reason why in its constitution, the subject is from the beginning split, or divided. Siding with Hegel, Lacan recognized that even our desire is predicated on the other, on having our desire recognized. But at the same time, he introduces a caveat: it is in this desire that we verify that “man’s desire is alienated in the other’s desire” (p.285). Clarifying this point three decades after, he tells us that “desire full stop is always the desire of the Other” (2008, p.38). In this analytic observation, Lacan introduces a reversal in the Idealistic position: the other is not only out there, it is already in us.

Already aware of this relation, Martin Heidegger perhaps overemphasized the role of the other in the ontological formation of being, when he asserted “everyone is the other, and no one himself” (2010, p. 124). This certainly resonates with Lacan, but he presents it in a more nuanced form. In the “Mirror stage”, one of his landmark seminars, the main theme is still the function of the “I”.

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The existential impetus of psychoanalysis re-establishes the connection between the drives and the other conditions that make the formation of the self into a subject possible: desire, libidinality, suffering, fantasy, discontinuity. Illuminating and explanatory as this psychoanalytic account of the formation of the I may be, we still seem to be in a position where we are forced to choose sides between individuality and culture when it comes to understanding the formation of subjectivity in educational experience.

But with Helmhut Plessner (a German philosophical anthropologist influenced by Husserl, and contemporary to Heidegger), this does not have to be the case. His theorizing provides us with a language to think of subjectivity from an in-between vantage point, one that cannot be situated in the internal nor completely located in culture.

One of Plessner’s central contributions to the understanding of the human—and one with important potential for curriculum studies—is his notion of eccentric positionality. “Man not only lives (lebt) and experiences his life (erlebt)”, he tells us, “but he also experiences his experience of life” (in Jos de Mul, 2014, p. 16). One of the direct implications of this view is that, as human beings, we stand outside. In other words, we are aware of our experience precisely because we can see it from a place that is not its center (and hence ec-centric). “Eccentricity”, Plessner explains, “is a characteristically human form, referring to the way we are positioned ‘facing’ the world” (1965, p. 291 in Mollenhauer, 2014, p. 17).

Klaus Mollenhauer, offering a synthesized yet clarifying account of this notion of eccentricity, explains that human beings exist in three dimensions:

1) As living bodies

2) As living beings in their bodies (with “thoughts and feelings or soul”)
3) As a speaking “I” with the ability to “see” both of these entities [1 and 2, the living body and living being].

Some of the question that arise from this condition are, for Mollenhauer, “What does this “I” consist of?” and “How is it that we can speak of an “I”, use the first-person singular, in a sentence at all?” The answer he gives is quite important, as it helps us understand Plessner’s position, and open up a different possibility for thinking about an ontology of the subject:

“…the “I” stands outside both the body and the soul. For it is from this external view point that both body and soul can be “seen”, perceived or experienced: I can obviously observe and tell others about “me”, “my body” and its “thoughts and feelings”. But beyond the body and the life it contains, there is a third entity: The “I” which exists as a “vantage point” from which I perceive myself as a living being that exists both as body and soul. In this regard, “I” am literally outside of me: “ec-centric” (p. 17).

This vantage point of an eccentric “I” disrupts the classical view that education consists mostly of a process of absorbing the world, in a movement from outside to inside. Positioned in-between self and world, this view of subjectivity reminds of the language of “third space” or of in-betweeness of Canadian curriculum theorist Ted Aoki. But more importantly for this discussion, what this perspective brings to the fore is a reminder that Bildung, as a process of self-formation, cannot ever be reduced to a matter of input-output, or straightforward internalization: it is a process modulated by the self, and as such, one that is also met with resistances, dis-identifications, traumas, fantasies, dreams, and all the existential aspects that make up the “I”. Hence, Bildung is a process that will unfold in unique ways for each individual.
In the dislocated or split condition of the eccentric subject of Plessner we find a perspective with strong reminiscences of the notion of selfhood in Lacan. Although we do not have evidence of actual exchanges between the two thinkers, it is possible to establish some intersections between their philosophical anthropologies that bear important implications for our understanding of curriculum in relation to the formation of the subject.

8.3 The problem and possibility of singularity

While traditional approaches to subject formation tend to rely on conscious efforts on the part of the subject itself (through habits, discipline), or an external subject such as the teacher (and his duty of presenting and representing the world to others), psychoanalysis also takes into account the aspects that configure the way we live our lives (and what we do, think and feel on an everyday basis), that cannot be readily defined as conscious, or even voluntary. Of particular interest are the aspects at work when our intentions and decisions fail, breakdown, backfire, when we (and others) end up doing what we do not want to do, or do not do what we think we want to do. These are the non-coincidental aspects that mark the failure of identity politics.

Desire, trauma, and suffering take the center place of attention. The way we approach suffering and trauma (the repetition of what causes suffering, but also enjoyment) is what defines, for Mari Ruti (2012), the singularity of being: our “distinctive and more or less inimitable character” (p. 14).

In this sense, it is important to understand that the more existential aspects of our lives (like desire, suffering, fantasy, trauma) do not operate in isolation nor are they insulated from the more conscious processes, decisions and resolutions. They are inextricably related. This is why Plessner’s theory of eccentric positionality (which emphasizes our place in spatial dimensions) can
be helpful to think subjectivity in its complex and interrelated composition. As a triadic determination of human existence that is constituted in the simultaneous interactions between an inner world (*Innenwelt*), an outer world (*Aussenwelt*) and the shared world between the two (*Mitwelt*) it seems to lend itself to a fructiferous dialogue with Jacques Lacan’s Trinitarian topology\(^{42}\) of selfhood, which brings together the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real.

In the topology of the Borromean knot\(^{43}\), for example, Lacan illustrates the inseparable link that keeps together the three aforementioned registers. But the unity and in-betweeness of the “I” that links interiority and exteriority, that Plesser brings to our attention, is perhaps better visualized in Lacan’s topology of the torus\(^{44}\). As a ring that designates the relationality of a being with itself and its environment, a torus provides us with a three-dimensional form in which its “peripheral exteriority and central exteriority constitute but one single region” (2006, p. 264).

What this represents is that there is no clear-cut and definite distinction between interiority and exteriority, self and world: by trying to turn it inside out, a torus maintains its radical interiority, its concentric hole. The same principle can be applied to the distinction of the conscious and the unconscious, and the manifestations of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real. Our human condition expressed in our constant striving after desire (in spite of never achieving it once \(^{42}\) In the notion of topology Lacan found a helpful way to think about and represent the position and interrelations of psychic functions. In Seminar XXIV, for example, he refers to the Mobius band to illustrate the link between the conscious and the unconscious (it is continuous, without a surface and a depth, up or down, but a unified interrelation between the external and the intimate).

\(^{43}\) The topology represented in three interlinked rings. This image has been used to represent the “three in one” interconnected nature of the Trinity.

\(^{44}\) A torus is a three-dimensional figure in the shape of a ring or donut. Its most salient characteristic is that, even if it is bent in any direction, it will maintain its toric characteristics: the surface in the inner and outer regions is one and the same.
and for all), or our compulsion to repeat, reveals a toric structure of subjectivity: “Man goes around in circles” Lacan tell us, “because the structure, the structure of man is toric” (Seminar XXIV).

This trinitarian union of three tori in a Borromean knot can help us make sense of the interrelations between the Lacanian registers in the configuration of the “I”, as it negotiates the dialectic of inner and outer world, while helping us make necessary distinctions in terms of what each of the three registers can bring to the process of formation of the subject. At the same time, this perspective allows us to make connections with the role of curriculum in educational experience.

In this sense, we could say that subjectivity is the provisional configuration resulting from the interactions between the register of the symbolic (which includes language, and with it the pre-established regulations and norms of the social world), the imaginary (the seat of the ego, memory, judgment, and the foundation of our notion of selfhood), and the real (the seat of desire, of what resists symbolization, the traumatic kernel of the unfathomable).

Subjectivity is shaped in important ways by the symbolic and the imaginary in their quasi-conscious nature, as they establish our mode of perception, expectations and our relation to symbolic law. Language, for example, in its symbolic nature is, in Wilhelm van Humboldt’s account, not only the “formative organ of thought”, but also the constitution of a way of understanding the world which, by its phonetics, lexicality and grammar, has a “lasting influence on the imagination and feelings of those speaking it” (Koller, 2011, p. 376).

But if subjectivity is mostly formed by the somewhat shared aspects of the norms of the symbolic, and the other-oriented preoccupations of the imaginary, where are we to find a place for the formation of a subject in singularity?
The answer is to be found in the remaining register: the real. “Singularity”, Mari Ruti (2012) suggests, “relates to the rebellious energies of the real that elude both symbolic and imaginary closure” (p.1). Difference and pure singularity, then, is animated and sustained in the untamed and irreproducible contents of the real, a register that refuses collective predeterminations. As an uncomfortable (and often terrifying) source of conflicting, unspeakable desires, and unrelenting demands for enjoyment, the real is a problem, but also a possibility for the emergence of the truly singular subject.

In what ways can this help us understand curriculum and its possibilities for subjective formation and reconstruction? In this trinitarian distinction, we recognize that most things concerning the registers of the symbolic and the imaginary are susceptible, to a certain extent, to be interpellated, coerced, or even seduced (in some cases, mesmerized or brought to a trance, as with screens), manufacturing a sense of what is shared in common, of what is expected, of what is desirable. But because of the insistence of the Real, there is always a possibility to refuse those identifications and experience instead moments of singular, extraordinary existence. This is what we see at work beneath Anne Phelan’s keen observation on the limits of identitarian practices that rely on mere performativity: “human beings constantly exceed and frustrate prior identifications, often contradicting their own expressed and deepest commitments” (2010, p. 321). It is in the singularity of the Lacanian real that we find the kernel of the precarity of processes of identification, which fail even in spite of discursive reiteration.

In order to be relevant to the formation of a truly all-around human being, an educational experience would have to create the conditions for the recognition not only of biographic elements in general, but a facing and engagement with the more particular existential and traumatic aspects of it: fears, sufferings, but also dreams and joys. In other words, the acknowledgment of what
makes the heart both beat and break. In curricular terms, this understanding of subjective formation in *Bildung* faces us with the fact that the most intimate aspects of singularity, i.e. the real, remain impervious to teaching.

At the same time, it is important to recognize right away that this understanding of the process of *Bildung* does not do away with academic knowledge and instruction. The cultivation of subjectivity does not happen in a vacuum: it requires a relation to content and the direction of discipline. Without content, there cannot be a serious and balanced understanding of the self. Repetition, memory, recitation, use, they all play a part in the development of discipline and habit. These, in turn, strengthen the ability for judgement, discernment, or – in the words of Humboldt – the expansion of our powers, which is at the center of our humanization.

Klaus Mollenhauer (2014) would agree, as he reminds us that the “powers of reason” are the “productive forces for Bildung” (p. 104), and that this process is marked not by satisfaction with who I am now, but by what I could be. It is the engagement with academic knowledge, after all, what defines and provides the necessary condition for study to acquire its character as a spiritually enhancing subjective practice (Pinar, 2011).

### 8.4 A symptomatic question of desire

Now, the potentiality of singularity, and indeed, of education, is something mediated at a fundamental level by desire. Mollenhauer’s comment on *Bildung* as a process of what one *could be* points to this reality. After all, one only desires what one does not have, what one lacks, what one is not yet, what one aspires to be. As Friedrich Schleiermacher once famously formulated it, the central question of education was for him “what does the older generation actually want with the younger one?” In his conception of *Bildung*, the particle “want” functions here as the modulator
of the educational relation. The same question can be asked in the opposite direction, it terms of what does the younger generation want from the old, and from themselves.

As we saw in chapter 7, the pedagogical is a relation intrinsically propelled by an erotic demand, a demand that draws us together to others, to bring ideas and knowledge together, and at a primal level, to strive after desire. In this light, the canonical curriculum question “What knowledge is of most worth?” discovers its most fundamental substratum: what is it that we most desire for ourselves, and from others?

As it has become clear across this investigation, the pedagogical appears to function on the basis of a triple relation comprised of the self, the other, and desire. Perhaps a clear application of this relation appears in the (mostly) German theorization of pedagogy through the notion of the didactic triangle: the relation between teacher, student, and content, which sustains educational practice. Even if it happens unconsciously, the type of relation established between teacher and student, as well as the selection of the content, is one mediated by desire. The interrelation among these three aspects of self, other, and desire is initiated, in a Lacanian framework, by a sense of lack: the deeply felt (yet often disavowed) sensation of separation, that something is missing, or might be lost.

Perhaps it is in the intuition and experience of this primal human condition of lack that Eros makes its appearance and force felt. As we have established, in the Freudian schema the erotic is not only about genital sensations, but rather a love-force that joins together. Advancing along that thesis, Lacan locates desire in what he termed the objet petit a (a), or the object cause of desire. In this account, the objet petit a concentrates the unattainable object of our desire, which cannot be located in any one thing or person in particular, maintaining its elusive yet beckoning nature. Importantly for our discussion, the (a) in Lacan stands for autre: desire is the desire of the other.
But how does this play out in the educational situation? As Deborah Britzman (2010) tells us, what Eros brings together in educational experience is not only what we want or worry about losing: it covers our fear of losing love, which comes from the recognition of the other.

This erotic relation we have to lack is, importantly, what at the same time enables our capacity for negotiation and refusal of identifications. It is precisely in this negotiation that symptomatic formations emerge: a symptom is here a conflict arising from desire.

In this context, I want to emphasize three characteristics of the symptomatic nature of desire that have been important for my understanding of the curricular in relation to the formation of subjectivity:

In the first place, the location of our desire (objet petit a) stems from the register of the Real, even when it appears to be located outside. Desire, in this sense, has a toric topology. What we seem to expect, want, and demand from the other is inextricably related to our own desiring sense of lack.

Secondly, precisely because desire operates based on a sense of lack, it attempts to cover and compensate for it. This is how we come up with plans, designs, methods, and structures that will, hopefully, set the conditions to attain what is desired.

Thirdly, while the symptomatic acts just mentioned do not constitute a pathological reaction, but rather things worth pursuing, the effects of the negotiation with the object cause of desire can often times become excessive. Anxiety, angst, and suffering can overpower the relation, giving place to a mortifying experience (as in repetitive, over-compliant, compulsive behaviour).

Regardless of the actions we take to go after our object of desire, the sensation of lack, separation, and incompleteness returns, and so we go at it again: we find it important to reform the curriculum yet again. Just one more time. Perhaps this time we will get what we are after.
8.5 Institutionalization, singularity, and the tragedy of letting go

The process of subjective formation, in the account of Bildung we have presented here, is one that –remaining close to Humboldt– is directed towards perfectibility. As such, it is an impossible task to fully attain in our lifetime, but it gives a sense of direction and purpose for our efforts and human striving. The impossibility of attaining a definite conclusion does not dissuade us from running its course. It is perhaps a similar sentiment the apostle Paul invokes when he declares: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after (…). Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do … I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God” (Philippians 1:12-14).

This pressing toward perfection is also the hallmark characteristic in the Hegelian system, a constant movement of ascension toward spirit. The pedagogical imperative of ascension from the certainty of the senses to concepts, and from concepts to spirit is perhaps inscribed in the very denomination of what makes us human. ἄνθρωπος (anthropos), after all, literally means “the upward looking one”.

Spirit appears, for Hegel, in an “I that is We and We that is I” (1977, p. 110). This notion reverberates in Plessner’s positionality of eccentricity, since the realm where all eccentric I’s come together is what defines the realm of spirit (and this, in turn, defines the state and possibilities of the spirit of a nation). This leads me to believe, then, that what we find in this dialectic is the communion of the universality of spirit and the particularity of the subject. These moments of sublime connection are what give place to the experience of individual singularity. Uniqueness among thousands. Is not this what the beloved feels when the eyes of the lover recognize from afar the eyes and face of the beloved, even when surrounded by a crowd of many others?
There is a certain poetics to the formation of subjectivity, but, as we have seen, we should not forget that poetics include tragedy. The educational experience of becoming can be filled with possibilities, but not a few of them can be awful ones (Pinar, 2011). We experience breakthroughs and sublime moments of satisfaction in our process of subjective reconstruction, but also setbacks, frustrations, and not on rare occasions, devastating shattering. It is in this sense that the process of formation is revealed in its tragic dimension. Aristotle, describing tragedy as something serious, that has magnitude, and that is complete in itself, used terms that also seem to apply well to a description of the process of becoming oneself.

Consider the case of St. Augustine and the vicissitudes he describes in his process of becoming, as they illustrate this dialectic of struggle and reconciliation at the heart of formation. “I have become a question to myself”, St. Augustine confesses, but the question also becomes conflict. As we read in book 8 of the Confessions, he tells us that the question for the inner self did not really exist while he refused to look properly at himself. But only once he was willing to engage in authentic conversation with others more experienced than he, something happened: “…you placed me before my very eyes so that I could see. And I did see and was horrified” (8.7). Confronted with his own incompletion and non-coincidence of intentions and actions, he is thrown into a state of subjective shattering.

As he describes it, “The fierce quarrel, which I had provoked against my soul in the chamber of my heart, went on in my interior dwelling” (8.8), and in this state, he sees the tragic dimension of the process of formation: “I was in conflict with myself, and my very identity was disintegrating” (8.10). It is only then, after an honest encounter with himself, that he is in a position to be more attentive and to find new directions of study for the reconstruction of his inner life. In this he finds calm. In this calm, Augustine is able to recognize that he is being transformed.
As we can see, the reconstruction of subjectivity involves the inner struggle of conflicting desires, and in this study we were able to shine some light on the psychic dynamics at play in this conflict. But with Augustine we also learn about the reconstructive power of reconciliation. Formation includes reconciliation with the past, with what one has been. At the same time, this reconciliation is also the necessary condition for the projection of what might be in the future. This aspect of reconciliation is disclosed to us in exemplary ways in Augustine and Stephen Dedalus (the main character in James Joyce’s “The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”). Both cases show an account of the process of becoming as fundamentally marked by disidentifications and non-coincidence, but also by moments of redemptive reconciliation with the singularity of their beings.

Understood this way, Bildung for each individual is then not only a progressive, accumulative process of broadening, expansion and gaining. It entails also losing, letting go, pruning. As a form of discipline, in sacrificing the present for the future, Bildung becomes also the question for what might have been (Mollenhauer, 2014). In this relation to loss and lack, is curriculum the site of symptomatic expression of what education misses?

This issue of the understanding of the symptom as a relation to what is missing, but also as a defense against our own fantasies of what it means to be educated, or what we take as aggressions against our specular images of who we are, remain something to be explored in greater detail and depth.

Related to this, an issue that remains is the tensions arising from institutionalization. What is the role played by the institution? What are implications of the act of instituting processes of formation? In what way are they related to the processes of self-discovery and subjective reconstruction? The Lacanian account of the notions of phallus, castration, and the Name of the
Father may provide important points of entry to the exploration of the subjectivity in relation to authority and the law.

### 8.6 The formation of subjectivity as interminable task

One thing we can be sure of, is that what is at stake in our processes of formation is not the acquisition of skills and competencies to secure our participation in the workforce. It is rather the conditions for our own humanization, the reactivation of the vocation to be more, the expansion of our substance, and the transcendence of what “is” towards the both higher and inner space of what might be. *Bildung* is then, in one word, possibility. It is the process in which subjectivity emerges through the particular ways we choose to engage with our past in the now, re-construct the present, and anticipate the not-yet.

As a symptomatic experience, driven by the erotic, the understanding of the process of subject formation we have gained here allows us to reaffirm a notion of curriculum that brings to the fore the dimension of the universal, and restores the sense of transcendence that marks all authentic education. This understanding is perhaps a reactivation of what C.S. Lewis (2015) once referred to as the “weight of glory”: the sense that what operates on, in, and through us as human beings is a glimpse of the universal and the transcendent, not simple biological, neuro-kinetic circuitry. This demands that we take education seriously.

The same sense of seriousness, urgency, and transcendence is at the heart of *Bildung*, as Humboldt described it, both in his work on the theorization of *Bildung*, as well as in the implementation of it as the guiding principle for educational policy in his role as minister of education. As we have also seen, it is psychoanalysis that reminds us of the “weight” of the process of formation as a purely human and existential drama, one that in its singular expression, proves
to be infinitely more decisive in the direction of who we are, much more than any process of schooling could ever attempt at having, regardless of planning, strategies and technologies.

“I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain” writes Albert Camus at the end of his book on the Homeric hero. On what sounds like a description perfectly applicable to the investigation taken up here, Camus continues: “One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity…that raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well… Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself, forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart” (2000, p.89).

I too, like Camus, now leave the Sisyphean problem of subjectivity at the foot of its mountain. The task that remains ahead is the erotic and ethical need to continue to engage in the ongoing study of subjectivity. In the process, arduous and unending as it may be, one must imagine Sisyphus, and ourselves, happy.
Bibliography


