Editorial
Teaching Thumbelina

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This special issue of *Somatechnics* discusses ways in which higher education is not only a matter of the teaching and learning mind but also, and simultaneously so, a matter of teaching and learning bodies, technologies, built environments, and disciplinary regimes. Minds, materialities, technologies, and infrastructures are entangled in schools, classrooms, and other teaching and learning spaces. These entanglements are increasingly becoming the focus of philosophies of education, pedagogies, and didactics. Guest editors Chantelle Gray and Carol A. Taylor are, from their respective philosophical perspectives and national locations, leaders in the field that is thusly opening up to research and praxis. The articles that they have brought together under the title 'Higher Education and the Somatechnics of Pedagogy, Classrooms, and Learning Technologies' present fascinating insights in the ways in which embedded, affected, and embodied 21st-century subjects teach, learn, and move through educational spaces and temporalities.

A special issue on higher education is not just timely because it may represent or add to an innovative academic trend. In fact, many of the issue's authors question and criticize academia's push to increasingly innovate perspectives, concepts, and approaches, going beyond seemingly traditional academic research. This push to innovation represents a neoliberal trend in the regime of science and scholarship that affects what researchers, teachers, students, support staff, and even administrators themselves can do in schools, classrooms, and on-line or hybrid teaching and learning spaces. Therefore, this special issue is also timely for its diagnostic value.

The late French philosopher Michel Serres (1930–2019) asks the following question on the opening page of his short book on education, a book translated as *Thumbelina: The Culture and Technology of Millennials* ([2012] 2015):

> Before teaching anything to anyone, we should at least know who our students are. Who, today, is enrolling in our schools? (1)

Just this question. Otherwise the page is left blank. I have tried to transmit the intellectual and affective impact the question has on me, reader of the booklet *Thumbelina*, to you, reader of the journal *Somatechnics*, by intentionally indenting the two lines. Do I know who is enrolling in our schools? Do you?

Serres answers his own question by attending to young people's minds and bodies, the technologies they use, the built environments that they pass through and use, and the accompanying and co-constitutive disciplinary regimes he is capable of noticing. His starting observation is double. First, Serres notices young people moving excessively and unstoppably in classrooms. And he hears them constantly chatting. Students, today, have a hard time concentrating in their seats in lined-up benches. Second, Serres sees the same young people on the metro in Paris, for example, tumbling over each other while thumbing through apps on their smart phones. Serres ([2012] 2015) argues in characteristic vein:

> When Thumbelina uses her computer or smart phone, these devices both require the body of a driver, alert and active, and not that of a passenger, relaxed and passive. Demand and not supply. Her back is straight, her stomach is taut. Thrust such a person back into a classroom, and her body, used to driving, will no longer tolerate the posture of a passive passenger. Deprived of a machine to drive, she becomes active and busy in other ways. A disturbance. Put a computer in her hands, and she will reassume the gestures of the body-pilot. (35)

Serres's observation is that linear classroom arrangements and 'frontal teaching' are no longer suitable for those enrolling in our schools today. He argues that interdisciplinary research, teaching, and learning is but a first step that reaches *collectivity* (Serres [2012] 2015: 37, 62). A second step is needed so as to reach *connectivity*: a 'kind of sharing' that 'reintroduces symmetry in education' (62).

The authors brought together in this issue each respond to collectivity and connectivity in different ways. Sonja Arndt and Marek Tesar bring to the fore the issue of racial, ethnic, religious, and

indigenous Otherness and othering in higher education institutions during times in which collectivities are fundamentally challenged. Nikki Fairchild questions Serres's celebration of connectivity and ICTs by reflecting upon the disruptive impacts of quantitative measurement by data recording software. Kristin Smith, Donna Jeffery, and Kim Collins make a similar move in that the many temporalities of hybrid teaching and learning spaces are scrutinized only to conclude that – in my terms – we cannot assume that non-linear classroom arrangements lead automatically to practices of sharing and experiences of symmetry. Chantelle Gray follows up on the point of neoliberalisation blinding academics with its perverse measures. She intelligently mobilizes process ontologies as to interpret the use of drugs for cognitive modification and enhancement as more-than-progressive and, hence, less-than-purely-capitalist. Carol A. Taylor and Jasmine B. Ulmer argue for connective methodologies for post-industrial city-dwellers and they propose and practice a methodology that extends the collective as to include non-humans. Delphi Carstens makes a similar move toward transformation as he demonstrates how queer science-fiction and sonic fiction have the potential to broaden and deepen students' takes on the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene. Together, these articles have the potential to generate much-needed changes in pedagogies and didactics along the lines of Serres whilst resisting our universities' push to irresponsible innovation.

Reference

Serres, Michel ([2012] 2015), *Thumbelina: The Culture and Technology of Millennials*, translated by Daniel W. Smith, London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield International.