

# Re/thinking Curriculum Inquiry in the Posthuman Condition: A Critical Posthumanist Stance

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## Abstract

In the reconceptualisation era of curriculum studies, scholars drew on a range of theories such as existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, feminism, poststructuralism, and especially critical theory. They used critical theory as a lens to examine the influence of social and political forces on curriculum, in particular the role of dominant ideologies on schooling and higher education in capitalist societies. In this article we explore some of the limitations this has, especially with regard to the current posthuman condition, without repudiating all the benefits that it has offered. Then we re/think curriculum studies in the posthuman condition, drawing on insights from a particular strand of posthumanism, critical posthumanism. We experiment with the real, as well as with what a reconceptualised subject (one that is ecological) might mean for curriculum inquiry in South Africa. In our exploration, we re/think the curriculum concepts: curriculum-as-lived, curriculum as complicated conversation, and *currere*.

**Key words:** complicated conversations; critical pedagogy; critical posthumanism; critical theory; curriculum inquiry; curriculum-as-lived; posthuman subjectivity; *ubuntu-currere*

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## Introduction

In the reconceptualisation era,<sup>1</sup> curriculum studies were influenced by inquirers who raised critical questions about what and whose knowledge should be considered valid and how experience should be interpreted, theorised, and represented. In that era, some scholars also drew on critical theory and examined the influence of social and political forces on curriculum and in particular the role of dominant ideologies on schooling and higher education in capitalist societies. However, critical pedagogy (derived from critical theory) as an approach to curriculum inquiry is still embedded in the academe and has done little to transform schooling and higher education. More generally, decades of critical theory have been unable to arrest the neoliberal imagination, and critical theory's response to ongoing economic crises, global pandemics, impending ecological disaster and rampant techno-capitalism has been negligible. The limit point of critical theory is its inability to articulate the entanglement of the human and the more-than-human world. We, as authors who “neither preexist nor [are] external and separable from what is iteratively delineated and remade” (Barad and Gandorfer 2021, 25), argue for moving beyond the anthropocentric limits of phenomenology, critical theory and poststructuralism in curriculum work, and we find inspiration in emerging posthuman discourses that are producing new ways of thinking and doing in response to the posthuman condition.

We are reluctant to discard everything Enlightenment humanism has given us. We mostly foreground Rosi Braidotti's notion of critical posthumanism to invigorate alternative understandings of curriculum that are posthuman and post-anthropocentric without diminishing social justice concerns, but also think with other feminist materialists such as Karen Barad to further enrich the discussions. Critical posthumanism invokes one avenue to rise to the contemporary challenges of the posthuman convergence. The posthuman convergence is marked by a critical call “to build on the generative potential of already existing critiques of both Humanism and anthropocentrism, in order to deal with the complexity of the present situation” (Braidotti 2019, 9). We re/think the notions curriculum-as-lived, curriculum as complicated conversation, and *currere* (the autobiographical method of curriculum inquiry)<sup>2</sup> in relation to posthuman subjectivity. It is within the posthuman condition that

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<sup>1</sup> The 1970s witnessed a growing discontent with traditionalist curriculum work. This dovetailed with prominent student movements that occupied the education landscape in the 1960s (including the well-known 1968 student protests in Paris). This era is distinctive for its conscious abandonment of curriculum as only the perceived realities of classrooms and school practitioners. It is marked by the desire for curriculum to recognise education as value-laden and politically informed so that it can be an intellectual activity that reveals and challenges the power, knowledge and ideological assumptions that underpin curriculum work. Reconceptualists argue that curriculum issues need to be situated historically and engage with the field as a space of critical inquiry so that it can ask questions such as: What knowledge is of most worth in the curriculum and for whom? How might the curriculum foster emancipatory interests? (Pinar 2013, 154).

<sup>2</sup> *Currere* as autobiographical method is problematic in relational ontologies that are post-identitarian and post-anthropocentric. This is why *currere* is rethought in this article and *ubuntu-currere* is

we face times of unprecedented indeterminacy fuelled by issues such as ecological destruction, ever-present economic crises, poverty, and gender inequality, which require the invigoration of desires attuned to a post-anthropocentric world and curriculum field.

Our conceptual exploration has four parts, followed by parting thoughts. The first part of the article discusses the limitations of critical theory generally. It also examines specific aspects such as its epistemic limits with regard to challenging the dogmas of neoliberalism, and its limits as a decolonial theory and as a response to the posthuman condition, which is the convergence of posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism. However, the limitations of critical theory do not mean that a new ontological re/turn sweeps away all its benefits. The first part of this article ends with a rationale for a critical posthuman(ist) perspective. The second part of the article begins with a brief explanation of the limits of phenomenology, critical theory and poststructuralism as a further reason to seek alternative ways of experimenting with the curriculum. We argue that seeking other pathways should be understood in relation to the demands of the posthuman condition. With this in mind, we then propose that curriculum scholars take an improvisational approach to the curriculum. This requires that ontological questions as to the affects of subjectivity in curriculum inquiry be raised. The third part of the article draws attention to feminist materialist invocations of subjectivity, which reject humanist exceptionalism and include the relational dependence of humans and non-humans (Braidotti 2019). Critical posthumanism evokes why not everything Enlightenment humanism has given us should be abandoned, while at the same time arguing for a posthuman perspective of humanism that can enable us to rise to the challenges of our times. What we seek is an ecological understanding of posthuman subjectivity as a relational assemblage of human and non-human subjects that is always becoming. In the fourth part of the article, we re/think what critical posthumanism and posthumanist subjectivity might mean for curriculum inquiry by reinvoking three familiar concepts: curriculum-as-lived, curriculum as complicated conversation, and *currere*.

A distinction may be made between curriculum inquiry in the posthuman condition and posthuman curriculum inquiry. The former relates to all curriculum inquiry that occurs following the posthuman turn<sup>3</sup>: positivist, phenomenological, critical, poststructuralist and posthuman, because old paradigms do not disappear when transformations occur in philosophical thought. The latter refers to curriculum inquiry that involves posthuman theorising. In this article, critical posthuman inquiry is performed as one way of doing curriculum work in the posthuman condition.

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invoked, which is attuned with relational ontologies. As Le Grange (2018c, 291) writes: “*Ubuntu-currere* shifts our registers of reference away from the individual human being to an assemblage of human-human-nature. In other words, subjectivity is ecological. Moreover, the subject is always in becoming and the becoming of a pedagogical life is relational—the subject becomes in relation to other humans and the more-than-human-world.”

<sup>3</sup> The reconfiguration of the unit of reference for the human (Braidotti 2013, 2019, 2022).

## The Limits of Critical Theory/Pedagogy

Critical theory, and its educational derivative critical pedagogy, has been subjected to recurrent critique over the years. We shall focus on some more recent ones. Jahn (2021) argues that recently there has been a renewed interest in critical theory because of the rise of populism across the globe. Critical theory has been variously accused of being a portal to post-truth politics, of accounting for the rise of populism and of failing to attain its emancipatory goals. It is interesting that Horkheimer's coinage of the term "critical theory" in a 1937 (republished in 1968) essay, "Traditionelle und Kritische Theorie", was in opposition to the rise of populism in Germany in the late 1930s, which parenthetically coincided with the pinnacle of logical positivism. Horkheimer was puzzled that a science of reason could not avert the development of a wholly unreasonable society—why the co-existence of science and national socialism became possible (Jahn 2021). Critical theory was invoked by Horkheimer and others to prevent such complicity. However, decades of critical theory appear to have failed to provide an antidote to the rise of populism and a re/turn to parochial nationalisms. Jahn (2021, 1283) writes, "[t]he current debate is therefore motivated by the parallel question: what makes the coexistence of critical theory and populism possible, and what resources does critical theory offer to confront this challenge?" The debate is ongoing, but Jahn (2021) contends that instead of abandoning critical theory it should be reinvigorated by re/visiting its tenets—that the metatheories of critical theory need to be understood afresh. Moreover, she argues that there is empirical evidence of the political achievements of critical theory. She writes: "Critical theory is today firmly (though by no means irreversibly) embedded in universities and textbooks, in social movements and international organizations, in public debates and foreign policies" (Jahn 2021, 1290).

Nevertheless, Jahn (2021) argues that the alignment of critical theory with the historical forces of neoliberalism has cost it its inspirational quality. In 2013, Johnson argued that three decades of critical theory had failed to provide a significant challenge to the creeds of neoliberalism and that the naturalisation of capitalism had laid bare the epistemic limits of critical theory. Decolonial scholars such as Tuck and Yang (2012) have pointed out the limits of critical theory in addressing the effects of settler colonialism—that it fails to engage the entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave on which settler colonialism is built. These authors argue that while anti-racist, LGBTQ+ and social justice projects of all kinds are important, they do not embody decolonisation. Unless the repatriation of indigenous land is made a central concern, we cannot speak of decolonisation—decolonisation is not a metaphor for social justice projects (Tuck and Yang 2012). Tuck and Yang (2012) give particular attention to Paulo Freire's celebrated *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which they acknowledge has had a profound effect on the development of critical pedagogy and on educators committed to social justice. However, they point out that Freire (1972) locates his work of liberation in the minds of the oppressed, which they argue is an abstract category of dehumanised worker in relation to a correspondingly abstract category of oppressor. Such abstract categories

create ambiguity as to who the oppressed and oppressor are and also produce an “innocent third category of enlightened human” who suffers with and fights alongside the oppressed (Tuck and Yang 2012, 20). Tuck and Yang argue that the Freirean paradigm marks a departure from Fanon’s work of liberation, which was always firmly positioned in the particularities of colonisation, including the structural and interpersonal relations of Native and settler. The problem with Freire’s philosophies is that they make educators treat colonisation as a metaphor for oppression and in doing so create the flawed assumption that if the minds of the oppressed were to be decolonised, then the rest would follow. We go along with Tuck and Yang (2012) who argue that the limit of critical theory as a potential “decolonial” theory is its overstatement of mental colonisation to the neglect of material reality. With regard to critical pedagogy more specifically, there have been other critiques such as Ellsworth’s (1989) well-known article published in the *Harvard Education Review*. Among several critical comments, Ellsworth (1989) points out: that the abstract jargon of critical theory hides repressive pedagogies in classrooms; the paradoxical and partial nature of all voices; she expresses doubts as to whether teachers can engage oppressed students as disinterested mediators; and questions whether the classroom can function as a Habermasian public sphere. Deever (1996) points out the limits of the languages of critique and possibility produced by critical pedagogues, and he argues that critical pedagogy remained ensconced in the academic realm and that it had little effect on changing schools. He argues that proponents of critical pedagogy failed to engage in the politics of negotiation and translation.

The ontological re/turn, as a response to the posthuman condition, brought with it a vast assemblage of thought experiments in the form of new realism/s, new vitalism/s, new feminist materialism/s, matter realism/s, speculative realism/s, object-oriented ontologies, and non-representational theories. The emergence of these theories is also the result of the overreach of social constructivism (the social construction of reality) evident in both critical theory and poststructuralism. These theories deem critical theory and linguistic poststructuralism anti-realist and anthropocentric. Speculative realism, for example, is a philosophy that signifies a return to speculating about the nature of reality independent of human thought and holds that continental philosophy (phenomenology, structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction and postmodernism) has descended into an anti-realist stance in the form of what Meillassoux (2008, 5) terms “correlationism”. Simply put, correlationalism means that reality appears only as the correlate of human thought, and the limit of correlationalism is why conventional continental philosophy might be considered anthropocentric. New materialists argue that matter matters, that all matter has agential capacity and that even speech and language are underpinned by material energy flows (Le Grange 2018a).

Braidotti’s (2013, 2019, 2022) critical posthumanism is informed by her anti-humanist roots and aims to develop affirmative perspectives on the posthuman subject—to affirm the productive potential of the posthuman predicament (the need to connect with the more-than-human world and our increasing entanglement with technology).

Genealogically, Braidotti's critical posthumanism can be traced back to poststructuralism, the anti-universalism of feminism and the anti-colonial phenomenology of Frantz Fanon (1967a) and his teacher, Aimé Césaire (1955). Braidotti (2013) avers that what all these intellectual endeavours share is a sustained commitment to work out the implications of posthumanism for the mutual understandings of the human subject and humanity as a whole. Importantly, she points out, the situated cosmopolitan posthumanism produced by these intellectual endeavours is supported by both the European tradition and by "non-Western" sources of moral and intellectual inspiration.

Braidotti (2013) draws attention to another powerful source of inspiration for present-day reconfigurations of critical posthumanism, which is ecological and environmental concerns. Critical posthumanism concerns the larger sense of the interconnections between self and others, including the more-than-human world. She points out that environmental theory highlights the link between the Protagorian idea of Man as the measure of all things and the domination as well as exploitation of non-human nature (the more/other-than-human world). Furthermore, it proposes that inspiration could be found in a life-sustaining spirituality that concerns a reverence for the sacredness of life based on a deep-seated respect for all that lives (Mies and Shiva 1993). A critical posthumanism does not mean that social justice is sacrificed but that it becomes integral to a more encompassing ecological justice. The posthuman subject is not a rational autonomous individual, not merely a mentally conscientised subject, but is ecological—embodied, embedded, embrained and enacted. In other words, the subject always becomes through intra-action<sup>4</sup> with other humans and the more-than-human world.

Barad states that "[t]he world theorizes as well as experiments with itself" and that "[t]heorizing is a particular form of intra-acting and as such part of the world" (Barad and Gandorfer 2021, 15). Thus, theorising as a mode of experimentation too occurs through intra-actions and as such, "[t]heorizing in its radical openness provides not only possibilities for thinking otherwise, but for thinking thinking otherwise" (Barad and Gandorfer 2021, 17). The notions of experimentation and the posthuman subject will be discussed in the next two parts of the article.

## The Need for Experimentation and Improvisation

As we have noted before, curriculum inquiry has been influenced by a number of philosophical traditions, including phenomenology, critical theory and

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<sup>4</sup> The neologism "intra-action" was first coined by Barad (2007, 33) as a key component to her "agential realism" and "*signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies*" (italics in original text). "Intra-action" is radically different from traditional "interaction"; the latter carrying the assumption that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction. Intra-action assumes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through intra-action (Barad 2007).

poststructuralism. Each of these traditions has limitations that point to the need for another way of experimenting.

Firstly, the nature of conscious subjective experience of phenomena, as they appear in themselves, has for long occupied phenomenologists. Phenomenologists have tirelessly theorised the interaction between subject and object. However, in so doing, long-standing object-subject dualisms have been retained. In addition, belief is upheld in “the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent” (Barad 2007, 46), which points to the problem of representationalism that faces phenomenologists.

Representationalism is a Cartesian by-product or habit of mind (Barad 2007) that has deep anthropocentric roots. Representationalism concerns “the belief that words, concepts, ideas and the like accurately reflect or mirror the things to which they refer” (Barad 2007, 86). This belief holds that it is possible to turn the mirror back onto oneself by, for example, invoking reflexive methodologies. A further problem with representationalism is that it privileges the discursive (meaning/culture) to the detriment of the material (matter/nature). Discursive practices and material phenomena are said not to stand “in a relationship of externality to each other” (Barad 2007, 152). This is because materiality is seen as a given or an effect of human agency, as opposed to an active factor in processes of materialisation (Barad 2007, 183).

Secondly, critical theorists who level critique against social reality as a deformed ideological reality have encountered similar critiques to those levelled against phenomenologists. According to Barad (2007, 47), “critical social theorists struggle to formulate understandings of the possibilities for political intervention that trouble the framework of representationalism”. Critical theorists also tend to position themselves outside the reality they seek to critique and, in so doing, they distance themselves from the discourse they engage with, which (in turn) perpetuates the object-subject divide. This is reminiscent of Snaza and Weaver’s (2016, 3) argument that “it is impossible to think, criticize, and write about a system *except from inside it*. One must always inhabit the discourse one wishes to throw into question.”

Thirdly, the linguistic turn and concomitant poststructuralism, which is essentially about deconstructing established structures of thought (discourses) that sustain power relations, “are also cut short by their own remnant anthropocentric and representationalist assumptions” (Barad 2007, 27). In referring to the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler (specifically on performativity), Barad (2007) demonstrates how most poststructuralists still struggle to bring the discursive and the material in closer proximity, which results in binaries being kept intact. To summarise, the anthropocentric nature of phenomenology, critical theory and poststructuralism promote representationalist thinking, strengthen binary thinking, and remain caught in the discursive realm with little attention being given to the material realm (for a more detailed discussion refer to Barad and Gandorfer [2021]).

The philosophical challenge of seeking alternative pathways to metanarratives such as phenomenology, critical theory and poststructuralism should be understood in relation to the demands of the posthuman condition. Marked by the entanglement of geological Earth time and human history, the new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, has given rise to an “accelerated version of human impact on the planet” (Parikka 2018, 51). Coupled with this is the fact that humans have created advanced technologies that are capable of destroying all life on Earth (Braidotti 2013). This posthuman condition is characterised by a predicament. Le Grange (2018d, 1594) avers that “the predicament concerns how one adopts the positive dimension of the posthuman condition by embracing all of life and its interconnectedness, and at the same time how one resists the potential negative effects of advanced technologies [...] without being technophobic”. Consequently, “new notions and terms are needed to address the constituencies and configurations of the present and to map future directions” (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018, 1). However, the creation of new concepts is not just a matter of inventing new words, but essentially requires experimentation (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018).

Le Grange (2016) reinvokes Aoki’s notion of “curriculum improvisation”, and adds “curriculum experimentation”, as a way to move beyond instrumentalist justifications in and of the curriculum, which has been shaped by traditionalist accounts of curriculum. Curriculum improvisation is akin to improvisational jazz in as far as musicians, composers and instruments become one, spontaneously creating new lines of music. Le Grange (2016, 33) states,

in the case of curriculum improvisation, pedagogy is akin to improvisational jazz where every musician (student) is a composer—where a “mistake” could be a line of flight that produces something new. In the classroom situation, although the [teacher] may be more experienced and “knowledgeable”, the educative performance, as in the case with improvisational jazz, is a meshwork of interactions that does not enable one to identify actions of teacher/lecturer that cause learning.

To engage in an improvisational manner with the curriculum requires that we ask ontological questions, which prompt us to next engage with posthuman subjectivity from a critical posthumanist stance.

## Posthuman Subjectivity

As mentioned previously, we are living in the posthuman predicament marked by “complex intersections between advanced technology and accelerating environmental crises”, which create polarised socio-economic divergences feeding an advanced capitalist spirit that masks the brutality of ensuing social injustices (Braidotti 2022, 5). There is no escaping the internally contradictory and explicitly complex world that we must navigate as humans, especially when the power mechanisms that it continues to create “are simultaneously uniting humanity in the threat of extinction and dividing it by controlling access to the resources needed to meet the challenge” (Braidotti 2022, 4).

In part, this necessitates that “our registers of reference [shift] away from the individual human being to an assemblage of human-human-nature [so that] subjectivity is ecological” (Le Grange 2019, 222). When subjectivity is ecological, it forms a web of interconnections where “we” (all living entities) share the same planetary home, and in so doing “the materially embedded differences in location that separate us do not detract from our shared intimacy with the world, our terrestrial milieu” (Braidotti 2022, 8).

Understanding that “‘We’-who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-convergence-together” (Braidotti 2020, 5) requires understanding humanism. Braidotti’s (2022) notion of critical posthumanism is deeply vested in feminist theories and it is from this stance that she urges that not all of what Enlightenment humanism has given us should be abandoned. Humanism was central to the construction of liberal democracies in actioning church-state separation and using the rule of law to promote democracy and fundamental freedoms. From the Enlightenment, “humanism took its emancipatory belief in the universal powers of scientific reason and faith in technological progress, as well as adjacent values such as secular tolerance and equality for all” (Braidotti 2022, 18). Humanism can be regarded as one of the backbones of emancipation rooted in “equality and struggles for recognition and justice” (Braidotti 2022, 17).

We continue to see this in the appeal of humanism to recognise and trouble, for example, the ongoing inhuman power relations that are endured by minorities and vulnerable groups (LGBTQ+, indigenous, Black and colonised peoples) who remain the targets of discrimination and exclusion through “patriarchal violence, femicide, homo- and trans-phobia, colonial expropriations and mass killings” and other forms of human suffering (Braidotti 2022, 41). However, humans are not all human in the same way. This creates an insoluble double bind: on the one hand, there is a desire for social justice “to extend human rights across all categories in a more equitable manner” but, on the other hand, the idea of the human is still captured in the gaze of the European renaissance ideal of rational Man being the measure of all things, resulting in a humanistic image of humans and the rights that govern them as universal. Central to Western modernity and the colonial ideology of European expansion, a hegemonic image of Man has played a role in defining the human not as a species, but largely as “a marker of European culture and society and for the scientific and technological activities it privileges” (Braidotti 2022, 18). As such, when humanism assumes a “superior universal consciousness [it] posits the power of reason” and “functions as a centralized databank that edits out and de-selects the existence, activities, practices as well as the alternative subjugated memories of the multiple sexualized and racialized minorities” (Braidotti 2022, 19).

The anthropocentric gaze that dominates reinforces a phallogocentric and Eurocentric visage of what it means to be human. Braidotti (2022, 41) contends that a posthuman perspective of humanism is needed so that the humanistic paradigm can be reviewed, historicised and assessed critically to enable us to rise to the contemporary challenges of the posthuman convergence. For us to be “worthy of the urgency and complexity of

our times”, we need to use theories such as critical posthumanism to engage with the paradoxes and contradictions of what has been the cornerstone of our traditional understandings and practices of being human. Braidotti (2022, 42) attests,

[w]hat used to be the measure of all things, the human body, is now an obsolete piece of machinery by comparison with the speed and liveliness of the new technologies. Nature, far from being an endless reservoir of resources, is impoverished to the point of extinction. Technology, far from being the promise of radiant futures for humanity, is a threat to its very survival.

The complexities emanating from the posthuman convergence thus invigorate a much needed dis-identification with humanism so that the resulting conditions can be scrutinised in terms of the intersection of powerful structural socio-economic forces such as advanced capitalism. Dis-identification is a reconfiguring of “what it means to be an object, a self, a human, a researcher” (Murriss and Bozalek 2022, 58), and in so doing posthuman subjectivity “explodes the boundaries of humanism at skin level” (Braidotti 2011, 83). As such, critical posthumanism does not merely revise or replace humanism. Critical posthumanism is a “critical intervention in some of the most controversial and urgent contemporary debates about the ongoing transformations of the human” by dislocating the centrality of the human and searching for “new definitions and practices of what being human may mean” (Braidotti 2022, 5–6).

Posthuman subjectivity, as the assemblage of human and non-human actors, rejects dualisms and transcendental universalisms (Braidotti 2018, 339). Accordingly, critical posthumanism rests strongly on neo-materialist philosophy of immanence, which assumes monism (all matter is one), autopoiesis (matter is intelligent and self-organising), subjects are nomadic (not unitary), and subjectivity includes relationships to a multitude of non-human “others” (Braidotti 2018, 340). In this image, the subject and all of life “celebrates the diversity of life—as *zoe*<sup>5</sup>—as non-hierarchical matter, which recognizes the respective degrees of intelligence and creativity of all organisms” (Braidotti 2018, 340). The posthuman subject is thus based on a *zoe*-centred egalitarianism, which runs counter to the spirit of contemporary capitalism and possessive individualism (Braidotti 2018, 341). To embrace a subjectivity that functions in a nature-culture continuum of non-linearity (without dualisms and universalisms), critical posthumanism sees the subject as relational, ethical, situated, embodied, embedded, embrained and continuously becoming (Braidotti 2018, 340).

With regard to re/thinking curriculum inquiry, Le Grange (2019, 212–3) argues that the South African curriculum needs to be liberated from “the colonizing fetters of humanism” as many South African curriculum scholars “reinscribe a transcendental

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<sup>5</sup> As opposed to *bios* (life of humans as organised in a socially constructed society), *zoe* is the life of all living beings (human and non-human) as vital and self-organising matter (Braidotti 2019, 10). *Zoe* decentres the human by removing it from its ontological pedestal and placing it on an immanent plane with technology, animals, and all other non-humans (Braidotti 2019, 158).

view of the subject and *currere* as a *a priori* image of a pedagogical life”. Rather, it is through intra-action that the curriculum writes the teacher as the teacher becomes through the curriculum, and the curriculum becomes through the teacher. There is no individual “I” preceding or overseeing the curriculum. The posthuman subject, as imaged through critical posthumanism (Braidotti 2022), is one who works within and through the curriculum so that it does not have “fixity or closeness” but rather “the immanent potential of the becoming of a pedagogical life” (Le Grange 2019, 214). Teachers/academics have become territorialised into the trappings of Western education, with its humanistic commitment to transcendence. Transcendence, “the belief in the existence of a substance/thing beyond empirical space, power or existence”, creates dualisms and separations between humans and nature, further promoting humanistic agendas (Le Grange 2019, 215). The immanent potential for the becoming of a pedagogical life can benefit from using posthuman subjectivity as one avenue to find vectors of escape from an arrogant “I” (Western individualism) to generate new connections that open up alternative pathways for becoming a humble “I” (embodied, embedded, extended and enacted) (Le Grange 2019, 221). When subjectivity is ecological, curriculum inquiry can foster co-operation and not competition though a oneness of self and the cosmos in ways that are caring towards other humans and the more-than-human world (Le Grange 2019, 222).

## Curriculum Inquiry and Critical Posthumanism

Next, we re/think what critical posthumanism and posthumanist subjectivity might mean for curriculum inquiry by reinvoking three familiar concepts: curriculum-as-lived, curriculum as complicated conversation, and *currere*.

### Curriculum-as-Lived

Ted Aoki (1993, 261) has long been critical of the curriculum-as-plan because it is the lure of Western epistemology, market-driven incentives and the privileging of a single curriculum (namely, *the* curriculum) riddled with a “techni-scientific language of planning” and “written for faceless people in a homogenous realm” (Aoki 1993, 261). One of the limitations of such a technical curriculum is that it is dehumanising when it privileges “superior universal consciousness” and disembodied metanarratives (Braidotti 2022, 19). Expressed by Aoki (1993) as legitimating lived curriculum, for him a curriculum-as-lived offers “the more poetic, phenomenological and hermeneutic discourse in which life is embodied in the very stories and languages people speak and live” (1993, 261). In other words, when the curriculum-as-lived is legitimated, it regards the lived experiences of teachers, learners and others involved as important for unlocking the contextual and material experiences of those who occupy education so that “soulless” education can be challenged (Le Grange 2017, 118).

Aoki (1993, 263) avers that a curriculum-as-plan should not be ignored or replaced but rather decentred so as to legitimate subjective, embodied narratives and to allow these to dwell contrapuntally with metanarratives. As such, the curriculum could be proffered

as a pedagogic situation “living in tensionality” from the in-dwelling of a curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived (Aoki 1993, 257). This tensionality is productive and creative when used to inform the generative transformation of the curriculum and how it is lived. However, Aoki’s (1993, 1999) image of lived experience is premised on phenomenology and other humanist tendencies that do not invigorate the type of ecological subjectivity needed to create alternative pathways for thinking about curriculum-as-lived in the posthuman condition.

We argue that an ecological subjectivity that is becoming might offer posthuman musings for thinking about lived curriculum and its tensionalities. South African curriculum remains entrapped in bureaucracy and a “technician’s mentality” (Pinar 2013, 150), because a “culture of performativity” dictates “what to teach, how to teach and when to teach”, and this privileges and measures performance, ignoring who is in schools and classrooms and what their “hopes and dreams are” (Le Grange 2017, 118). For Slattery (2013, 74), when curriculum is simply “an academic exercise” it is detached, impersonal and technocratic. We believe instead that a lived curriculum invigorates teachers as improvisers of the curriculum. As improvisers, teachers can be “sensitive to both their own and their learners’ changing lives and experiences and the fluidity of the contexts in which they find themselves” (Le Grange 2016, 32). This fluidity enables the type of becoming that Braidotti (2019) describes as a positive life-force or *zoe* that sees the vitality of life as endless. As a dynamic unfolding of reality, the curriculum-as-lived is intelligent, self-organising, experimental, improvisational and continually becoming. Becoming does not only imply coming into existence—it also means becoming many and different in ways that do not establish a norm for all. In these terms, the curriculum does not view experience as atomised, normalised and governed by neoliberalist individualism that is competitive. Instead, it views it as a materiality that is “not performed on the Earth but bent by the Earth” so that its liveliness embodies “a microcosm of the living wholeness of the Earth/Cosmos” (Le Grange 2016, 34).

For Braidotti (2019, 158), subjectivity is not atomised, but “a moveable assemblage within a common life-space, which the subject never masters but merely inhabits” in ways that are transversal and grounded in embedded and embodied material practices. It is through such material practices that we are reminded of Barad’s (2007) notion of intra-action. Inspired by agential realism, intra-action is a helpful way of understanding the curriculum-as-lived as entanglement, namely, where no pre-existing agencies precede but rather emerge through material practices of engagement as part of the world in its differential becoming (Barad 2007). For instance, if we think of remote teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown period when schools were closed, we might ask how the material conditions in different South African contexts constrained or enabled the becoming of pedagogical lives. In this sense, lived experience is largely

influenced by material conditions<sup>6</sup> and how they are entangled so that the lived experience is not used as a measurement for something like remote teaching and learning but rather as the reality of its many intra-acting influences as inseparable. This could demand, among other things, that stakeholders such as policymakers and schools approach something like remote teaching as a material condition, entangled and as fully immersed and immanent in a network of human and non-human relations of assemblages such as learners' entanglement with technology and the multiple human and non-human influences this could have on all forms of lived experience. Our argument is that when subjectivity is viewed as becoming, experimentation and improvisation iteratively produce alternative ways of thinking about curriculum inquiry as entangled within and part of the world and its imperceptible *zoe* assemblages. When curriculum fails to evoke such assemblages, the curriculum remains discursive, humanistic and anthropocentric, falling short of the "real" material assemblages that lived experience (for all forms of life) could offer curriculum inquiry so as to invigorate ecological transformation with social justice ideas.

### **Curriculum as Complicated Conversation**

The need to think about communication in curriculum scholarship was highlighted when William Pinar (2004) invoked the idea of curriculum as "complicated conversation" based on his reading of Richard Rorty and Michael Oakeshott's notions of conversation, and amidst the need for scholars of curriculum to reassert their commitment to the intellectual advancement of the field. Complicated conversations are not mere chit-chat, nor do they signal the simple exchange of information (Aoki 2004). It is thus not an exchange of "representational knowledge", but "a matter of attunement, an auditory rather than visual conception, in which the sound of music ... being improvised is an apt example" (Pinar 2004, 189). Unlike in traditional settings where communication is akin to a classical orchestra with the conductor (teacher/lecturer) giving the prompts based on the musical sheet (predetermined outcomes) and orchestra members (students) following and reflecting the lead, complicated conversations, like improvisational jazz, do not conform to predetermined outcomes (predetermined musical sheet) but "produce something new and transform those engaged in the conversation" (Le Grange 2018b, 6). Complicated conversations as learning spaces require that scholars do not seek to provide "airtight" arguments, but that they seek spaces to continually construct different and new understandings of curriculum (Pinar 2004, 2). Complicated conversations are not only important for the advancement and renewal of Curriculum Studies as a field, but are also a productive idea as it could potentially influence a person's becoming when engaged in frank and ongoing self-criticism (Le Grange 2018b). Self-criticism as one dimension of complicated conversations is important since it mitigates against

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<sup>6</sup> This includes an assemblage of material things such as data/WiFi, the Internet of Things, technological devices such as computers, electricity, space (physical distancing), access to educational supplies (paper, pen and books), nutrition (some teachers and learners receive food and water at school), social well-being (such as care), and physical safety from things such as domestic abuse, to name but a few.

hierarchical power relations that are present (and that could colonise) when humans engage and exchange (Le Grange 2018b). Self-criticism inspired by the notion of immanent critique is useful, because immanent critique

seeks to energize new modes of activity, already in germ, that seem to offer a potential to escape or overspill ready-made channelings into the dominant value system. The strategy of immanent critique is to inhabit one's complicity and make it turn—in the sense in which butter “turns” to curd. (Manning and Massumi 2014, 87)

Engaging in complicated conversations is one way to “inhabit one's complicity and make it turn”. However, this requires an even more nuanced understanding of curriculum as complicated conversation than was originally envisaged.

Complicated conversations, re/thought in posthuman terms, are not predetermined in any sense, but are radically open intra-actions. We argue that such an understanding of complicated conversations compels us to further “complicate” complicated conversations through experimentation and ongoing intra-action in and as part of the world that we inhabit and that inhabits us. It further implies that the complexity of our complicated conversations proliferates and that it is seen as iterative and contingent, as we experiment and intra-act.

This intra-action, which increases the complexity of complicated conversations in critical posthumanist thought, is not limited to what is proffered by discursive or cultural dimensions, but extends to material or natural dimensions. That is, the material (or matter) is as important as the discursive (or meaning), and vice versa. Also, matter and meaning are inseparable. Barad (2007, 132) aptly states, “Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that doesn't seem to matter anymore is matter.” This means that a hegemonic philosophical framework, such as social constructivism that tends to privilege the discursive/meaning/culture, should be challenged and complemented with agential realist alternatives that pave the way for the material/matter/nature to feature again as being inseparable from discourse (in the Foucauldian sense). Complicated conversations in critical posthumanist thought are not a reflective practice (as this is representationalist), but performative accounts of understanding, thinking, observing, experimenting, improvising and theorising curriculum “as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being” (Barad 2007, 133).

### **Ubuntu-currere**

The notion of *currere* was first introduced by Pinar in 1975 as an autobiographical method for performing curriculum work. It shifts the focus of curriculum from a predetermined course to follow (the Grecian “chariot track”) in order to focus on the human being running the course, because each individual is different due to their genetic make-up, socialisation, geographical location, gender, sexual orientation, aspirations, interests, and so forth. The introduction of *currere* was part of a broader movement in

the United States of America aimed at humanising education, as a response to the homogenising, normalising, dehumanising effects of curriculum in the Tylerian mould.<sup>7</sup> *Currere* involves a process of self-inquiry/transformation involving four moments: regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetic. In a later work, Pinar (2011) explores the decolonial potential of *currere* by engaging with Fanon (1967b), reminding us that Fanon contended that there can be no decolonisation without individual liberation. As Pinar (2011, 40) writes: “[T]he regressive-progressive-analytic-synthetic method of *currere*—can be political when it disables, through remembrance and reconstruction, colonisation through interpellation.”

Forty years after Pinar introduced *currere* as autobiographical method, Le Grange (2015) combined *currere* with the African value/philosophy *ubuntu* to create a new concept: *ubuntu-currere*. We contend that *ubuntu-currere* opens up new possibilities for curriculum inquiry in the posthuman condition because subjectivity becomes ecological, extending politics/ethics to the more-than-human, without denying the ontological distinctiveness of the human and social systems. *Ubuntu* means humanness, more specifically that we are or become human in relationship with other humans. However, *ubuntu* is not parochially speciesist and therefore not anthropocentric as some have claimed, but rather emblematic of the relatedness of all things in the cosmos.<sup>8</sup> In other words, relatedness among humans is a microcosm of the relatedness of everything in the cosmos (Le Grange 2022). As Ramose (2009, 308) reminds us, humanness is not humanism, and *ubuntu* is a “condition of being and the state of becoming, of openness or ceaseless unfolding”. The human becomes (and is always becoming) in relationship with other humans, the more-than-human and with technology in an increasingly technologically mediated world. Social justice is not denied in the posthuman condition but is emblematic of a broader ecological justice. However, justice is not given but a justice-to-come as an ongoing ethical practice of loving attentiveness (Barad 2007). As Barad (2007, 7) writes:

Justice, which entails acknowledgment, recognition, and loving attention, is not a state that can be achieved once and for all. There are no solutions there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly.

The only constraint on becoming is life itself—becoming is constrained only when humans and the more-than-human are harmed. *Ubuntu-currere* invites a life of experimentation with the real: a life of experimenting with new ways of intra-action where humans and non-human subjects are produced through relations in response

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<sup>7</sup> The “Tylerian mould” refers to all curriculum approaches that are variants of Tyler’s (1949) curriculum rationale.

<sup>8</sup> This notion of *ubuntu* aligns with the holistic/monistic cosmologies of many Africans living in Africa south of the Sahara. The extent to which such cosmologies align with Spinozist monism might be contested. However, the authors of this article hold that *ubuntu* does not have fixity and denies human exceptionalism, so the notion of *ubuntu* presented in the article is attuned to Spinozist monism.

social injustice; experimenting with new ways of connecting with the more-than-human world that may avert ecological disasters and engender love for life; and experimenting with new technologies to invigorate new assemblages of human/nature/technology that advances life (all modes of life). *Ubuntu-currere* invites us to think about the agential capacity of “land”,<sup>9</sup> a central concern for indigenous/decolonial scholars who hold that land is not a possession but “teacher”. In South Africa, where land restitution is a failed project, *ubuntu-currere* invites the invigoration of complicated conversations on land and land education in classrooms. *Ubuntu-currere* shifts the focus from the individual (in Pinar’s *currere*) to subjectivity that is ecological, and we would suggest posthuman. As Le Grange (2019, 223) writes, “*Ubuntu-currere* opens up multiple coursings for developing post-human sensibilities driven by the positive power of *potentia* that connects, expresses desire and sustains life.”

But posthuman is not anti-human<sup>10</sup> and does not deny the imperative to address social justice and the tools for doing so that critical theory has given us. It also does not deny desires of decolonial scholars. Invigorating the becoming of pedagogical lives in the posthuman condition may require abandoning performative words used in education such as “aims”, “outcomes”, and “standardised assessments” and invoking words such as “curriculum experimentation” and “curriculum improvisation” (Le Grange 2016), immanent critique and radical openness.

## Parting Thoughts

In our attempt to experiment with the real in the posthuman condition and what a reconceptualised posthuman subject might mean for the field, we have reconsidered three notions of curriculum studies (curriculum-as-lived, curriculum as complicated conversation, and *currere*). In re/thinking curriculum-as-lived, curriculum as complicated conversation and *currere*, ideas first invoked to humanise curriculum, to rescue curriculum from the banality of curriculum configured in the Tylerian mould, we have opened up ways of thinking curriculum in the posthuman condition.

Unlike practices that dominate schooling and university education, curriculum does not transcend or pre-exist pedagogical encounters. There is no *a priori* image of curriculum or a pedagogical life. Curriculum/pedagogical lives are produced through intra-actions of humans (teachers/learners) and non-humans (books, biophysical environment, technology, buildings, etc.). Curriculum theorising is a mode of experimentation that occurs through such intra-actions and the radical openness of such processes creates possibilities for thinking curriculum otherwise. And the ethical response-ability of

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<sup>9</sup> The agential capacity of land does not pre-exist intra-actions with human and non-human materials but is a product of such intra-actions.

<sup>10</sup> As Barad (2007, 428) writes, “antihumanism has been used by some poststructuralists who nonetheless take the boundary between nature and culture, the human and the nonhuman, to be a given”.

humans is to be conscious of “we-ness” (that becoming of pedagogical lives occurs in intra-action with other human and non-human subjects).

As we re/think curriculum in the post-Anthropocene, in times when socio-ecological crises are ever present, how might we rethink the role of human and non-human subjects in invigorating ecological justice? Here again, there is no agency that pre-exists human and nonhuman subjects—so an ecologically just world is always a becoming; justice is produced through human and non-human intra-actions and is therefore always a radically open process without finality. As Barad (2007) reminds us, it is a justice-to-come and our responsibility is to love attentively.

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