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Conference theme: *The role of 'Bildung' in vocational education and training and professional higher education*

Keynote, NordYrk Conference, 7–9 June, 2023

Seeing Bildung in the light of Luce Irigaray's philosophy



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Outline of the lecture

- How 'Bildung' can be described
- Who is Irigaray?
- Irigaray's philosophy
- Differences and Bildung
- Examples with sequences from my films



Bildung is the process of human development in a broad sense

Bildung is not only about a psychological and moral maturity, its also about developing practical knowledge or *skill* – as well as a theoretical, academical knowledge.

Three other main characteristics about the process of Bildung:

- 1) the development **must happen voluntary**, that is
- with the subject's own belief and conviction.
- 2) the subject must feel a **personal relevance** in this developmental process, and
- 3) **it never ends**; Bildung is a process that continues throughout life.



How 'Bildung' can be described

- **Humboldt: It's broad.** Bildung is to give our own person a content of the widest variety possible. This task can only be solved by connecting oneself to the world in the most general, vivid and free interaction (Humboldt, 1960, 235).
- **Hellesnes: It's temporarily.** The horizon of understanding is provisional, because it is constantly being developed in the meeting with the new (Hellesnes, 1992, 85 and 90-91).
- **Skjervheim: It can't be forced.** It presupposes a subject-subject relationship has to do with dialogue. A subject-object relationship and has to do with manipulation (Skjervheim, 1992, 172).
- **Merleau-Ponty: The body must be included.** The body is a dialectic of "lived being" in its biological and social environment (Merleau-Ponty, 2012/1945, 171; Merleau-Ponty in Bullington, 2013, 27).
- **Husserl: It's intentional.** The consciousness is always intentionally directed towards a phenomenon. Thus, there is nothing mental until there is *something* - a phenomenon - to think about (Lock and Strong, 2014, 60; Husserl, 1982/1950, 23).



Who is Luce Irigaray?

- Born in Belgium in 1930.
- Psychoanalyst, philosopher, linguist.
- Often mentioned as one of three French (feminists) philosophers, together with Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva.
- Was ostracized from the French Intelligentsia and expelled from teaching at Sorbonne.
- ***Criticized the very foundation on which western philosophy is based.***

(Hamley, 2016; Anand, 2017; Working with Luce Irigaray, 2023)

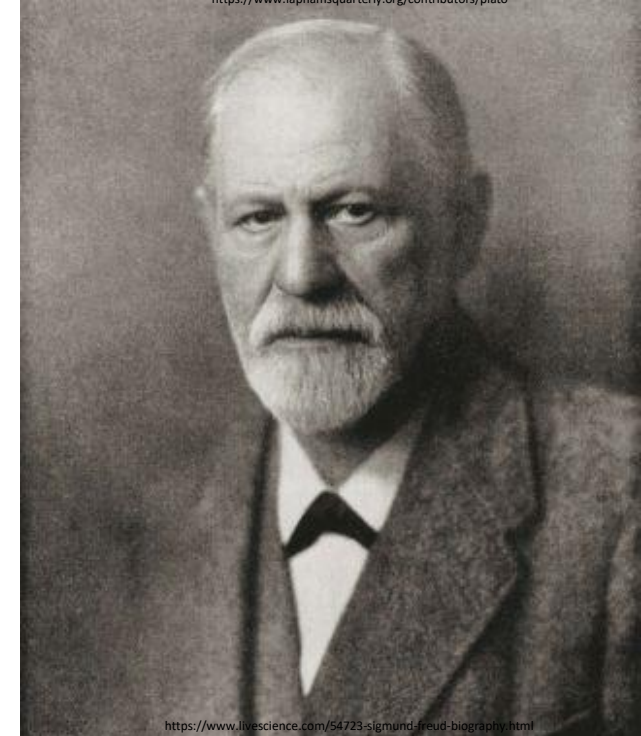
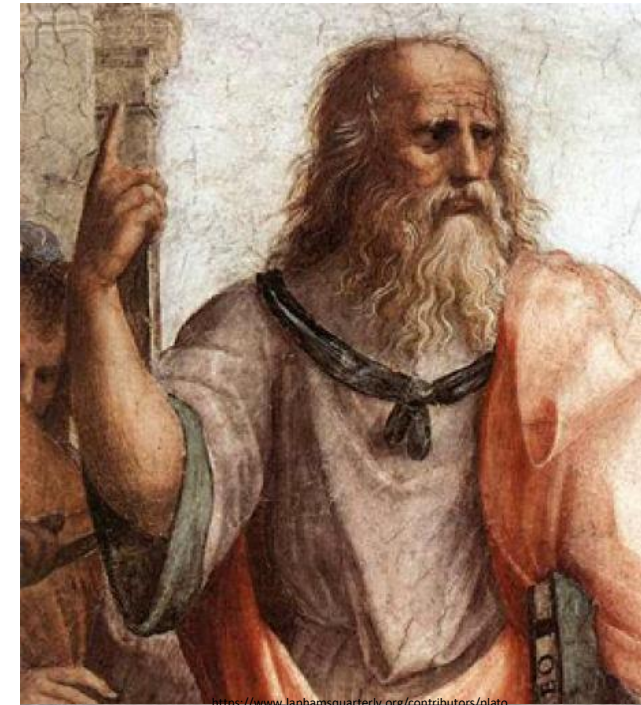
From the philosophical and psychoanalytic tradition



Plato divided knowledge into two rationalities, where one category has priority over the other. The absolute, perfect norms stand, as the ideal counterpart to the imperfect physical world, which are only shadows of the real ideas (Platon, 1946).

Descartes doubts the reality of his physical experiences. How can we know whether our senses are deceiving us or not? He concludes that the only thing he cannot doubt is that he thinks (Newman, 2016).

Freud published a paper about female sexuality, where he establish the girls' «penis-envy» and dissatisfaction with her gender (Freud, 1925).



Her critique



- Freud used *male development as the paradigmatic measuring unit* of human development.
- Since Plato and before: the subject has been understood as a
 - *single operating,*
 - *monosexual subject,*
 - *which presupposes the erasure of difference in general,*
 - *and of the feminine in particular.*
- Descartes' 'Cogito ergo sum' and Plato's *Idea world: A denying of materiality.* Being has been seen as identical with thinking.
- We need to '*deconstruct' philosophy.* (Hamley, 2016)

- Using ~~male development as the paradigmatic measuring unit~~ of human development.

Humanity needs to be re-thought. We need to abandon 'the logic of the one and the non-one' and allow *the other* to emerge as themselves.

(Hamley, 2016)

We need to deconstruct philosophy and construct something new



<https://workingwithlucelrigaray.com/bibliography/>

We need to deconstruct philosophy and construct something new



- The subject has been understood as *single operating*,

Identity is essentially relational. We are all dependent of the differences each of us represent.

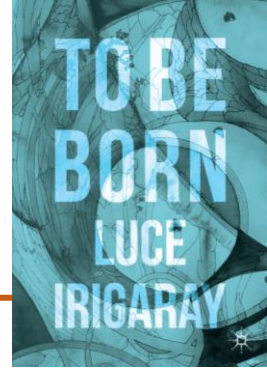
Individual differences is a condition for the humanity to develop.

(Hamley, 2016; Sampson, 2008)



The Bildung of humanity

To be born. Genesis of a New Human Being (2017).



- A defence of individuality amidst a culture that fosters conformity.
- “All the time we are reduced to what happened in the past. ***If humanity is dying today, it is because we are unable to open to novelty***” (the quality of being new, original, or unusual) (Irigaray. 2017).
- We tend to reduce the children to needs – not to human beings. ***Each person born is a messenger.***
- I am abandoned to a solitary destiny from birth, but ***my desire long for uniting with other beings*** – a long for deliberately assuming my origin – ***not as a mere repetition*** – this would be falling back to mere instinct or drive, or to falling into incest.
- ***Negotiating differences is who we are as humans.***

***We need to deconstruct philosophy
and construct something new***



THIS SEX
WHICH IS
NOT ONE
LUCE IRIGARAY

Translated by Catherine Porter

- The subject has been understood as a *monosexual subject*,

The sexual difference needs to be thought as a real difference.

It is not possible to describe them with a common description without being guilty of reducing one to an inferior version of the other.

Gender is a mediation between culture and nature; through experiments we can find new ways to describe woman.

Sexual difference – an ontological difference



- Not admitting sexual difference is a self-destructive threat to life from within that does not admit its own complexity and interweaving with the other.
- Without the sexual difference nothing new would occur. The gender difference is the condition for an infinite number of variations of women and men.
- Sexual difference represents the condition of life (Irigaray in Grosz, 2008, 36).
- ***People with different sexes creates different relations to the world.***
- Summarized, ***being is divided in two types*** that cannot be reduced to each other.

(Grosz, 2008, 33-44)

Critique;

- ***Does Irigaray only recognize heterosexual relationships?***
- ***Does she ignore oppression related to race, class, religion and sexual minorities?***

Irigaray answers:

- This is about not idealizing an objective, neutral humanity which will reduce us to sameness and uniformity (Irigaray in Grosz, 2008, 42).
- Recognizing sexual differences makes it possible to recognize ***all sorts 'of others'*** without establishing hierarchies (Irigaray in Grosz, 2008, 43).
- The gender difference is not a norm (like class and religion) but a physical trait (Grosz, 2008, 38).
- The sexual difference is still the reference when identifying to the other sex, or change gender (Irigaray in Grosz, 2008, 42).

We need to deconstruct philosophy and construct something new



- which ~~presupposes the erasure of difference in general, and of the feminine in particular.~~
- **To coexist with- and to recognize the other as ‘other’ is the precondition, not only for our ability to learn something new, but also for developing our identity – or our Bildung.**

We need to deconstruct philosophy and construct something new



- Descartes' *'Cogito ergo sum'* and Plato's *Idea world: A denying of materiality.*

We are born of another human being.

We exists as embodied subjects in relation with other embodied subjects.

Language, philosophy, relationships are also mediated by the body.

In search for a new ontology

- She is *deconstructing the traditional philosophy*, and thereby shares the methodology of postmodern philosophers.
- But deconstruction for its own sake is a nihilistic folly (dårskap).
- «I am in search for a new ontology» *Not* a new order of 'the one', ***not a reversal of the positions.***

(Hamley, 2016; Irigaray 1985a, 227–230; 1985b, 106–119; Sampson 2008a, 63, 61)



<https://literariness.org/2016/12/19/uce-irigaray-and-psychoanalytic-feminism>

What could that new ontology be?

- Not something that never changes,
- not something completely without borders.
- Something that would enable development, learning.
- Something fluid, elastic, movable – that could cultivate the awareness between ourself and the other.

The in-between



- She questions all sorts of binarities (poor/rich, ignorant/knowledgeable, mortality/immortality). ***Is there a third option?***
- A synthesis which is neither one, nor the other, and which make progression possible?

The in-between.

- Not in-between as points on a line between binarities - ***this thinking operates within the logic of the same - but something moveable and elastic – between us.***

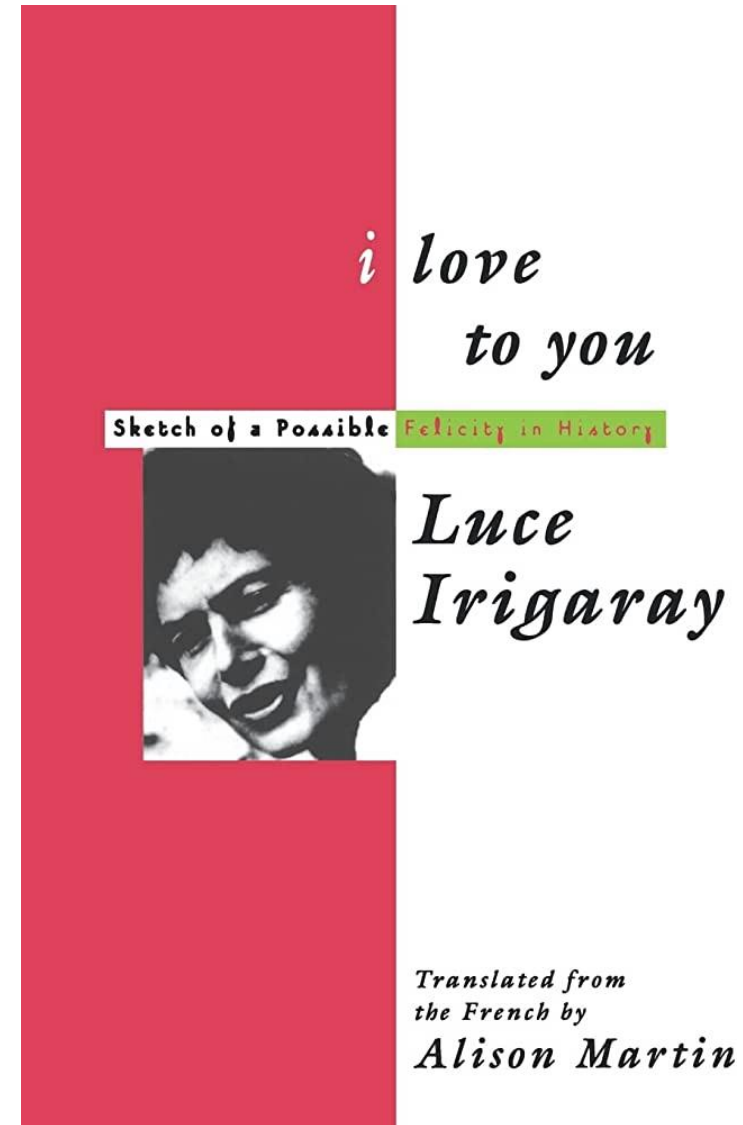
The ‘in-between’ is a position that

- smashes the logic of ‘the one’,
- acknowledges the dependence on others
- makes transitions possible.
- makes it possible to learn from reality.



«*I love to you*»

- The word ‘to’ marks the space between two lovers.
- We are substantial *different*, - we do not have immediate access to the other.
- With the word *to*, we are in a position *in-between*, or *towards* ‘the different other’, that enables us to develop, learn and cultivate.
- The love is a gift, not a demand of something in return (Sampson, 2008, among others)



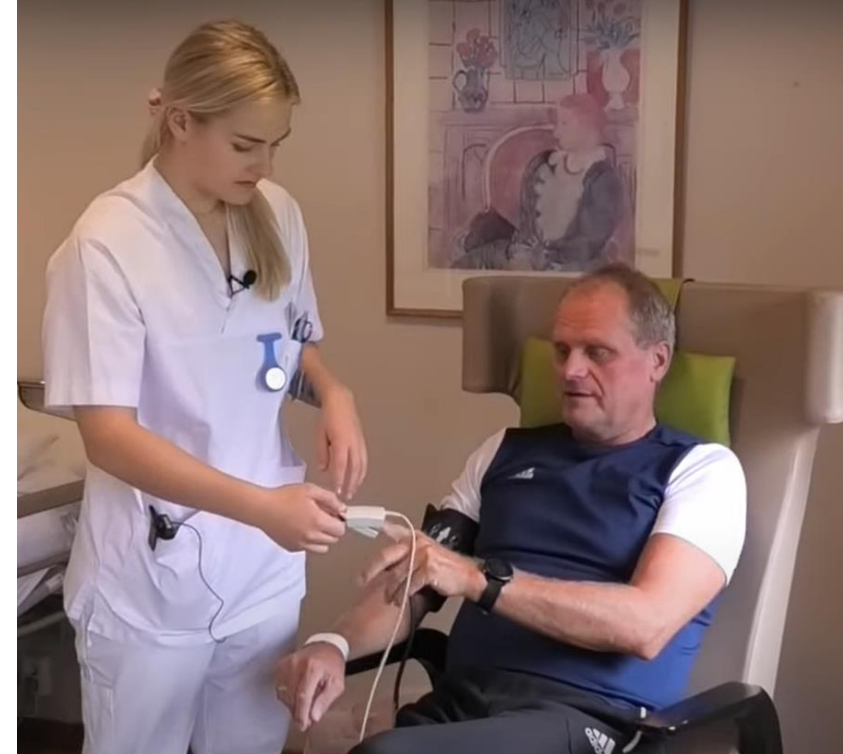
How to relate all this to vocational Bildung?

For Irigaray, Bildung can be described as the

respectful communication between differences.

Vocational learning realizes this in several aspects:

- *We are both body and mind*, and our knowledge concerns both the intellectual and the material.
- The meeting with practice motivates us to develop *a sensitiveness towards the other* - humans or materials.
- *The interaction with the different 'other' is the precondition, not only for our ability to respect the other, but also for developing ourselves.*



Examples from my films

- With a *dialogical sensitivity* the apprentice investigates the limitations and possibilities in the tool and the material.
- The silent communication where the apprentice try to coordinate his actions according to the conditions in the specific task, material and tool at hand.
- Respect and mentally and bodily awareness for the new. In contrast to theory-learning, he has *a bodily contact with 'the other'*, - the difference he is about to relate to.

Practical sensitiveness: The respectful communication between differences



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwNzHSLpQU> From 17:59 to 19:14

Isn't our actions dependent of our cognitive capacity?

“Yes, but cognitive, what does that actually mean? Eh... yes, but it's not about... if I know how to multiply by 7. It's about... Yes, it sits here. ...**It's in the fingers**. And... there is a connection between that and the brain, right? ...I don't know...” (Janicke in Hestholm, 2021, 10:29 m.-10:57 m.).

Her intellect is **embodied** and her fingers are constantly directed towards the possibilities and limitations of the materials. She is **in-between** a position of knowledge and ignorance - which enables learning. Her relation towards the other is **elastic, movable** – that **cultivates** the awareness between herself and ‘the other’.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2B1EIIAHdQ&t=2s> frå 9:58 – 10:57





Practical learning; developing awareness of ‘the other’

- **The attentive search for feedbacks** in the very limited range of expression of a patient who has lost his ability to speak.

Suzann: “I learn a lot from all the different patients and the different actions around each patient. Like Einar, who needs to practice his swallowing, for example. (...) You have to get to know the way the patient communicates and read the body language and facial expressions... and eye contact.”

Limoo: “You're getting good at facial expressions. If they're in pain, if they are fine, if they get irritated, right? The eye contact. The language is missing, but he shows it on his body, whether he's feeling well or not.”

- A concrete example of a **respectful communication between differences**. The healthcare-workers don't have immediate access to the patients needs, but they acknowledge him – and let him **emerge as himself**. Again,- we see the practitioner's flexible position of **in-between** ignorance and knowledge that make **transitions possible**.

Developing one's individuality and self-confidence in practice



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lr3SXRJ_qvg&t=391s 5:45 m.-7:18 m

«I used to worry for the future and what I should become. But after I came here, that has completely gone away. It's not a problem any more, and there's no panic about it. Because now I know that... I know a lot more, and that I... understand more than what... I thought I did from school. (...) So I think it's bad that many only look at the education, what you've done at school and so on. Because it has nothing to do with who you are, what you have done in school.» (Robin in Hestholm, 2022b, 6:25 m.-7:16 m.)

A strong critique of the compulsory school's ability to **mediate knowledge and self-confidence through practical experiences**. For Robin and Iben – it was first in this environment - where **the knowledge is bodily mediated** - that they discovered their own resources. The practical relation between them and the materials, tools and customers at the garage - has awakened and cultivated their dispositions, so that they now can believe in a future for themselves.

Practice forces us to relate to 'the different other'

But is everyone able to do that?



"I've done a lot of mistakes in my time, (...) but you do learn from these mistakes. However, it is not a given that everyone can do it. It depends on interests, of course, but also on abilities. What can we do? What do we feel we can do? So, it's not just to learn, (...) it comes from within. I call it practical intelligence."

(Janicke in Hestholm, 2021, 7:24 m.-7:53 m.)



- *The share of practical knowledge in compulsory school constitutes less than a quarter of the curriculum.*
- The children *miss out on key developmental processes* in practice. As a consequence
 - many believe that practical knowledge is a knowledge of little value,
 - many pupils start at a low level of knowledge in practice when they enter vocational education
- Luce Irigaray gives us *a richer repertoire of arguments* to the discussion of what knowledge we need in the process of Bildung.
- Inspire our critical vocabulary about all paradigmatic "sameness" in a world of ontological differences (Irigaray in Hestholm, 2023).



The meeting with the different other secures development, renewal and Bildung

“Integration, of course, does not amount to coexistence. **Integration is a way of reducing difference to sameness.**” (Irigaray, 2008a, 204).

“(…) our culture knows only sameness, and (…)
in order to awaken consideration and respect for difference(s), we have to start in the school.” (Irigaray, 2008a, 204).

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