

## Diffractive Enquiries for new temporalities of learning in Higher Education

Louise Lambert

**Abstract:**

This chapter considers how diffractive enquires (DE) enrich pedagogical practices for teaching and learning within the disrupted temporalities of contemporary Higher Education (HE). Human, material and environmental inequalities are the consequence of dominant modes of human knowledge making, production and consumption within which HE is implicated through socio-economic, historical, cultural and pedagogical practices. Pedagogies organised within linear, binary logics maintaining inequalities of access and engagement are disrupted by DE shift to see the world as deeply relational and entangled. Through re-configured temporal concepts of spacetime-matter and re-turn, I show how DE are fluid, affective, experiential pedagogies of response-able knowledge making, paying attention to different relationalities across structural and symbolic inequalities. These proliferate multiple ways of knowing and practising in HE. DE's commitment to 'staying-with' troubling concerns, opening and expanding rather than reflecting back, spurs responses of care and hope necessary to fulfil HE's promise for (re)making liveable worlds through its teaching and learning. Through examples of student explorations of space, time and matter in Education I show how using multi-modal texts, theoretical and experiential insights are diffracted through each other, generating multiple perspectives and provoking new conversations. These encourage responses of empathy and imagination, rather than solution and resolve.

**Keywords:** diffraction, re-turn, spacetime-matter, reflection, temporality.

## **Diffractional Enquiries for new temporalities of learning in Higher Education**

Louise Lambert

### **Introduction**

I write this chapter at a time of flux, a 'time out of joint' (Derrida, 2006, Barad, 2010). If the COVID-19 pandemic has assured us of one thing; it is that our deeply held notions of human progress and mastery are highly contestable, if not dangerously destructive. We live in an age of continuous and sustained threat both to the environmental sustainability of the world brought on by human production, consumption and disruption - the epoch of the Anthropocene - and to the fabric of societies. Human displacement caused by environmental catastrophe and war and conflict, threats to democracy and blurred boundaries of mis/dis/information within our media systems has made trust and reliability precarious concepts, and unhealthy relationships between people and their work has led to a global vulnerability to apathy, anxiety and burnout (Chabot, 2018). The pandemic has exacerbated and further exposed the human, material, and environmental inequalities globally as well as the ways these have played out nationally and within institutions such as Higher Education (HE), throwing into sharp relief temporalities and pedagogies that no longer seem relevant, desirable, or sustainable, and perhaps for some never were. This chapter sets out to consider and give examples of how educators might respond to the disrupted temporalities and logics of contemporary HE through Diffractional Enquiry (DE), in order to re-configure and move towards HE's promise for (re)making liveable worlds through its pedagogical practices.

## Time in Higher Education

Drawing on Biesta (2015), I am using the terms teaching and learning as being conceptually and existentially separate from each other. One does not necessarily cause nor require the other. Learning can be limited by its normative associations with comprehension and understanding but can instead be produced within incomprehensible, unsettling encounters that shift our relationships with the world. Many of the dominant approaches to teaching and learning that were taken-for-granted in HE are forever disrupted and dislocated following the Covid-19 pandemic. The formal and normal learning environments of the lecture theatre and seminar room where people met in synchronous time, dictated by university clock-times of timetabling into available space - the spatiotemporal norms of HE - with pedagogies moulded accordingly, have been disrupted by the possibilities to learn in other times and locations. It is not that the accelerated digital access that the pandemic necessitated has become a preferred modality for students or lecturers - it has engendered both fear and resistance - only that now it is possible to imagine learning otherwise to previously hegemonic practices and modes of delivery. It has unsettled and shifted expectations as to where and how teaching and learning take place and the access this affords in an unequal and digitally mediated world, exposing the labour that goes into navigating the time of others' – the experience of which depends on where one is situated in an economy of temporal worth (Sharma, 2014). Temporal worth is the means by which some people's time and experience of time is privileged over or entangled with others' embodiment or use of time, including that of institutions and institutional arrangements (Kitchen, 2023). The idea of time as relational, contingent and mediated through technologies and systems (Sharma, 2014) is referred to as temporality; 'the diverse set of temporal relations, processes and forms that are experienced through individual and collective action' (Kitchen, 2023:4). The pandemic has exposed how the uniform time of teaching and learning in the university often conflicts with the multiple temporalities of the contemporary subject whose

lives are lived unevenly amidst paid and often insecure work, caring responsibilities, social, environmental, technological, and cultural environments. Equally, we might consider how temporal worth has been altered by technological acceleration, demanding our attention in shorter, faster episodes, measured in likes, navigated through scrolling. The genie, the *djin* - the spirit of the threshold - is out of the bottle and a 'return to normal' is neither possible, nor many might argue, desirable. 'Normal', suggests Kress et al. (2022:1), '...is what brought us here to this moment...(n)ormal was cruel and violent for much of humanity and the natural world.' The pandemic highlighted and, in many cases, worsened pre-existing systemic socio-economic, racialised and gendered injustices, and the environmental fragilities of the age of the Anthropocene.

In England, as with many countries in the Global North, being a student in HE was already precarious and high tuition fees and high costs of living continue to render many students simultaneously workers and learners. Expensive, unreliable travel to campus, costly and inconsistent childcare and poor social care infrastructures heighten family and care responsibilities. Aligned to these social and economic conditions for students are the challenges of remaining physically and mentally well amidst regimes of economic control that have rendered some bodies, human and non-human, exploitable and expendable and temporal – bodies in flux - never more pronounced than during the pandemic. Such conditions make student demands for more flexible access and responsive pedagogies understandable if not yet fully understood by HE institutions heavily invested in capital-intensive physical infrastructures. The prerogative of HE ought to be at the vanguard of generative responses to such worldwide growing inequalities. However, the 'public pedagogy' of neoliberalism, that assumes the economy as governing not only markets, but also life in society, (Giroux, 2019) pervades the marketized and bureaucratized systems of HE and works to stymie HEs ability to respond in ethical or nuanced ways. As such, it neglects its response-abilities (Barad, 2007) to

practice with collegiality, kindness and care and create time and space for rich and deep intellectual immersion and engagement for students and staff alike. Barad's *response-abilities* are about the ability to invite in, welcome and enable a response to and relation with the other; humans and nonhumans, what Kuokkanen (2007:39) describes as 'an ability to respond...to the world beyond oneself, as a willingness to recognise its existence'. However, these are not values, practices or ways of thinking included in the design of the neoliberal university, where the logics of profit-making and metrics privilege calculated, transactional exchange over meaningful connections. Values, argues Chabot (2018) forged by the mediocre and indifferent logic of corporate management. Under neoliberalism, systemic failures are repositioned as the responsibility of the individual, never the problem or failure of the social or structural. This is an ideology that 'normalises a culture of cruelty, because it suggests that compassion, worrying about others or social justice are undesirable values because they get in the way of the market' (Giroux (2019, n.p). An example of this can be seen in both political and institutional demands for individualised resilience, the need for a resilience that is designed or 'engineered' at the outset in anticipation of unavoidable stress that must be must tolerated. Holling (1996) suggests an ecological resilience rather than engineered resilience enables us to trouble the idea of the individual as a single system with inbuilt solutions Instead, ecological resilience suggests an interdependence within multiple systems of unpredictable phenomena that are more-than the individual. In HE and in wider society, the demand for accessing solutions to the 'individual' problem mask the under-resourcing of fundamental support structures e.g., for mental health. The managerial 'solutions' are often offers for resources that are no more than consumerist, 'McMindfulness solutions' (Kress et al, 2022:2). Resources linked to systemic reform and equality are unavailable or are resources the individual must generate themselves, further amplifying inequity of access and support, or exist in policy rather than in practice. The power imbalances inherent in HE, caught up as they are within these neoliberal logics of

economized, marketized, hyper-individualized educational models demand that students become *entrepreneurs of the self* (Foucault, 2008, Germain, 2022, Lalu, 2019) and work to make already marginalised students, often at the intersections of race, gender, class, citizenship, and disability, even more precarious. One of the features of the resilient, entrepreneurial body is flexibility. Flexibility has become part of the efficiency, effectiveness and excellence discourses, the ‘empty buzzwords’ of HE institutional policies and practices (Lalu, 2019). Any positive connotations of such concepts have been lost and are instead ‘...used to activate and manage individuals in the efficiency model’ (Brinkmann, 2009 in Kascak et al, 2011:75). The demand for flexibility in HE – for students and for lecturers, not for the institution itself which is resistant to flex - has been significant in the structuring of academic time, learning time and equality of access to HE. The ever-eroding opportunity for academic job security, for example, through flexible contracts, further erodes the time and spaces for staff and students to nurture the connections and relationships that enable deep, productive and generative thinking.

#### Time and temporalities

The fracturing of academic time in the post pandemic university has significant implication and opportunity for how we might re-imagine new temporalities of learning and what pedagogies might refuse the logics that brought us to such an unequal and fragile state. A re-imagining and re-new-ing is possible, and it is certainly worth the conversations as to what that might look like. As Lalu (2019:54) suggests, HE pedagogues have an urgent responsibility not only to keep asking ‘what is the university for?’, but to create pedagogical spaces and enquiries ‘...for the invention of the unprecedented’, to think anew the knowledges necessary for the civic literacies of the university and develop pedagogical approaches that move (drawing on Weber); ‘both into the future and into established knowledge.’ Hybrid, multi-modal access may characterise the ‘new normal’, but living and learning across digital and non-digital spaces is far from a settled mode, albeit one which aligns more closely with students’ ways of navigating

the world. It has brought into question the pedagogies associated with traditional HE times and spaces, as well as ways that the ‘technological resources of society that have altered the span of attention, retentive abilities, memory and recall, and, at times, the very desire to think and reason’ (Lalu, 2019:53). It invites new repertoires of enquiry. Digital or hybrid worlds facilitate fluid engagement across multiple times, spaces, and streams of information, blurring the boundaries of formal and informal environments of work, study, homes, parks and streets, on transport and within our families and communities, unsettling the taken-for-granted ways of navigating our lives; ‘...present/absent, being/non-being, here/there, now/then are all undone in spatial and temporal indeterminacy’ (Bozalek et al. 2021: 9). The values placed on the ways of knowing that are produced within these blurred spaces, navigated with blurred identities (in person, as avatar, simultaneously professional/parent/carer), are similarly disrupted. The production of ‘everyday’, multiple knowledges that include experiential, affective, indigenous, community, local knowledges are otherwise to the humanistic ways of knowing, focused on mastery, linear progress and ‘exponentially increasing capital’ (Chabot, 2019:43) that dominate Western educational systems, privileging human centrality and exceptionality over relationality with non-human subjects and worlds. A more expanded and distributed view of the human, as composed in relation to and in co-dependence with the non-human, with biological, technological and material entities, evoke a more equal and symmetrical relationship with the phenomena of the world (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Alaimo, 2016; Haraway, 2016).

These are ways of thinking about the world otherwise to the linear logics of progress and mastery. What Derrida (1976) referred to as ‘violent hierarchies’ of Western traditions of the cognitive and logocentric ways of knowing that sees difference always as opposition, as binary structures of dominance and oppression, e.g., nature/culture, male/female, white/other, able bodies/disabled bodies. These homogenized and normalized knowledges do further work

to marginalize students through negating difference. Practices and enquiries that reproduce social inequalities, yet are often privileged in our 'efficient' neoliberal institutions, tend toward pedagogical modes that are one-way, instructional, and instrumental. These banking modes (Freire, 1970/2016) of the passive student/active teacher keep the already marginalised silent and so their stories and experiences remain unheard, and limit engagement with the dialogic models that keep us alive to difference both within human and non-human spheres. In the neoliberal logics of corporatized HE, efficiency and employability trump engaged world citizenship, favouring modes of enquiry that tend toward finite and delineable knowledge, that can account for teaching and learning in measurable ways (Vasudevan, 2011), that are caught up in hegemonic 'time as progress' models. This means that the complexity of time and space are inadequately conceptualised for contemporary HE spaces (Burke, 2018). As a result, educators are confronted with what Geerts (2019:126) calls '...a pedagogical praxis in which students are to be spoon-fed easily-digestible material in short sessions, demarcated by neoliberal academic clock-time'. Whilst critical pedagogic practices in HE activates teaching and learning within the social, cultural and political, it is to relational philosophical perspectives that I turn to now, drawing upon posthuman and materialist enquiries as 'the continued viability of HE pedagogy resides in its ability to generate countermoves' (Carstens, 2021:128). I consider Diffractive Enquiries as 'countermoves' that are able to respond in ethical and generative ways to interrogating, rethinking and collapsing the binaries that dominate some of HEs disciplinary cultures to proliferate further and other ways of knowing. For Tsing (2015: 210), when we begin to trouble the 'forward-march' of time-as-progress, we might look for and be open to what has previously been ignored; 'without that driving beat, we might notice other temporal patterns.'

### **Diffractive Enquiries**

Diffractional Enquiries are philosophically, conceptually and pedagogically different to the practice of reflection. Reflection is a ubiquitous, if theoretically opaque practice in HE (Collin et al. 2013). It is one of HEs dominant modes of enquiry that, I argue here and elsewhere (Lambert, 2021), has been scooped up within the context of the enterprising, autonomous, self-regulating individual outlined above. In the practice disciplines where my own work is located and, (e.g., teacher education, social work or nursing) it is often an instrumental and technical task orientated toward summative assessment of progress and competency which is shaped, institutionalised and instrumentalised within neoliberal education models. Almost always a solitary and cognitive exercise, it is linear, solution orientated and often disengaged from affective, material and messy encounters.

To begin to trouble both the carving of time for efficiency and effectiveness and the highly constructed narratives of human progress (time as arrow) that are separate from nature and the multiple, non-linear ways of knowing the world, we need to forge new, broader, and more response-able pedagogical practices. Ones that stimulate new imaginaries and ways of working to account for the necessary blurring of the binaries of nature/culture, etc. that no longer make sense, and for a more multi-directional temporal logic. As Carstens (2021: 121) asks, ‘...how might different temporalities, different categories of thought, action, affect and aesthetics, as well as different orders of life and non-life be placed in productive conversation with each other in HE classrooms and settings?’

Diffractional enquires resist some of these normative pedagogical modes and invite in interference rather than stasis and sameness. ‘Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Unlike reflections, diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere, in more or less distorted form...’ (Haraway, [1997] [2018](#): 273). DE draw on the work of Haraway (1997) and Barad (2007) and on feminist new material/posthuman practices as a means of disrupting the linear logics and hegemonic timescapes of the Anthropocene, to ‘undo pervasive

conceptions of temporality that take progress as inevitable and the past as something that has passed and is no longer with us' (Barad 2018:57). DE are modalities that forge connections across multiple and heterogeneous elements and phenomena, where 'there is no singular act of absolute differentiation, fracturing this from that, now from then' Barad (2014:168). Instead, differences shift within 'every 'thing'', reworking and being reworked through reiterative reconfigurings of spacetime-matterings...each being (re) threaded through the other' (Barad, 2017: 178-179). Through the concept of 'composting' time, space and matter, Barad (2014, 168) proposes an act of *re-turning*. This is not a linear, two-way movement as in return or reflect, but a *re-turn* as 'turning it over and over again - iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime-matterings), new diffraction patterns.' Barad likens this to the earthworm, '...aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it', a movement described by Tsing, (2015:22) as being a countermove to the linearity of progress logics, a 'looking around rather than ahead'. Temporal diffractions that ensure enquiries are lively and multiple. Conceptually, spacetime-mattering is ontologically flat. Neither space, nor time nor material is privileged or static, but always already multiple, relational and emergent in its interaction, or *intra-action* as Barad (2007) suggests, the 'intra' suggestive of the middle and the rhizomatic, rather than the two-way reflection of 'inter'.

Haraway (1997:273) characterises diffraction as a 'narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meaning'. By this she gestures to the trans-disciplinarity of DE, of 'plugging-in' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/1987) texts and resources from music, arts, film, fiction, theory and of diffracting these again through students' lived experiences, including tentative, partial and affective responses to living that Mazzei (2014:743) refers to as 'ideas, fragments, selves, sensations'. Haraway (in an interview with

Schneider 2005: 149), notes that different reading practices associated with different texts also work to

...interact diffractively. I know the difference between one set of skills and another, but they constantly interrupt each other productively. They produce jokes, so that what appears to be straightforward gets bent in interesting ways.

Art practices, reading poetry and hearing music are different skills, affect different senses, that offer insights through their interference with each other, to issues and phenomena. These can be productive of new thinking, of creating new networks that are often fresh and playful. In my own curriculum, this is also about what is produced when texts are dialogically read through each other with other human and non-humans – a relational rather than hierarchical pedagogy to engender multiple perspectives and interpretations. As Campbell (2004:171) notes ‘in a differentiated social space, different social positions will produce different knowledges...a knower occupying a social position of subjugation will provide a more accurate knowledge of oppressive social relations.’ Inviting the non-human other into DE can be encouraged through a focus on objects and phenomena inside and outside the classroom, through movement and through paying attention to the affective possibilities of intra-actions in spacetime matters of learning and teaching. I give some examples of this later in the chapter.

DE works not to find resolve or solution to different and uncomfortable ideas but is an act of ‘keep(ing) knowledge production on the move’ (Mazzei, 2014:743) and simultaneously preserve the differences for what they bring to the assemblage; the Deleuzoguattarian concept of ‘complex constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities, and territories that come together for varying periods of time to...create new ways of functioning’ (Livesey, 2005:18) DE preserves then the

holding together’ of the *disparate* itself. Not to maintain together the disparate, but to put ourselves there where the disparate itself holds together, without wounding the dis-

jointure, the dispersion, or the difference, without effacing the heterogeneity of the other. (Derrida 1994:29, in Barad, 2010:254)

This also makes diffractive enquiries generative for working across theory/practice divides, something that benefits my own work with students of education who often also work in practice setting in schools, colleges, universities, community settings, homes and hospitals. The students I teach attend a post-92 university in the West Midlands. Located in the School of education, health and social work, they are often simultaneously practitioners and students who are doing a masters level degree in educational practices relevant to their own settings. Some are neophyte practitioners, others very experienced. Some have moved into HE teaching specializing in their practice areas, a trajectory not unlike my own. Moving into HE from a practice environment (secondary school teaching), I work across the boundaries of the two, often using practice-as-research methodologies. Practice-as-research is closely linked to material, experiential and creative arts-based practices that position ‘making’ as a process to foreground what ‘gets made’ through simultaneously thinking and doing in connection with others, rather than what gets understood, produced and therefore foreclosed. As such, practice-as-research is about ‘creating a text that is a site of praxis’ (Hickey-Moody, 2015:191); theory and practice enlivening each other as productive tools for living and working in complex spaces. The complex issues students often face in practice require an appreciation of the performative nature of knowledge; the ways in which how we come to know what we know about schools, for example, is entangled with the social, political, material and discursive and also how what we know is simultaneously brought about through these entanglements. Barad (2010:265) notes how entanglements are specific material relations of the ongoing differentiation of the world’. This is not the same as ‘being as one’ but are ‘relations of obligation – being bound to the other – enfolded traces of othering. Othering, the constitution

of an ‘Other’, entails an indebtedness to the ‘Other’, who is irreducibly and materially bound to, threaded through, the ‘self’ – a diffraction/dispersion of identity.

Once onto-epistemologies are reconfigured as fluid, entangled and performative then the normative practice of reflection no longer makes sense. As such DE are a ‘counterpoint to reflection, both are optical phenomena, but whereas the metaphor of reflection reflects mirroring and sameness, diffraction is marked by patterns of difference’ (Barad, 2007:71). Reflection relies on phenomena being stable and unchanged long enough to be encountered and examined, whereas by thinking and enquiring diffractively, attention can be paid to what new knowledge emerges from performative, entangled phenomena behaving fluidly and unpredictably within spacetime-matter. As Barad (2007:185) notes, ‘knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part of the world’. For both Barad and Haraway, this is an ethical practice within which we can ‘...respond, to be responsible, to take responsibility for that which we inherit from the past and from the future in the entangled relationalities of inheritance that we are’ (Barad, 2010:264). This is vital for HE if its pedagogies are to teach within the legacies of colonialism, imperialism and through the plundering effects of capitalism. Both Haraway and Barad engage an ethics of *response-ability*, ‘...to the thick tangles of spacetime-matters that are threaded through us, the places and times from which we came but never arrived and never leave is perhaps what re-turning (turning again) is about.’ (Barad, 2014:184). As such, diffractive practice calls us again and again in the re-turning of our enquiries, to how our entanglements and intra-actions with the world matter. ‘To put oneself at risk to risk oneself, which is never one or self. To open oneself up to indeterminacy in moving towards what is to come.’ (Barad, 2010:264). The indeterminacy of what is to come is characteristic of what Haraway (2016:1) described as ‘...disturbing times, mixed up times, troubling and turbid times.’ For which a global pandemic has only made more unstable. She adds that:

The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response...In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening that looms in the future, of clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations. Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present.

Both Haraway (2016) and Barad (2017) suggest the ‘thick present’ or ‘thick now’ which include the past and the future – the injustices of the past and the continued implications of this (Barad, 2019), and also the entanglements, connections and commitments (Barad, 2012) of the human and non-human - the who and what we count as ‘each other’ when the empirical boundary and binary between human and non-human has been blurred (Braidotti, 2013, Haraway, 1991).

### **Diffractional temporal enquires in practice**

I turn then to a small example of DE from one of my own modules on critical pedagogies which is part of a postgraduate Master’s in Education course in an HEI in the UK. As previously noted, the students on this module are most often practitioners: teachers, nurses, social workers and educators in a range of settings and sectors. They are a diverse group in terms of age, ethnicity, gender and lived experiences. The module is designed to blur the dualism of research/practice using a practice-as-research methodology and asks students to research their own sites of work, study and life in embodied and mobile ways. Students conduct in-situ mini ethnographies of mobility and access, of the flows and movement as it relates to knowledge production and generation - where it comes from and how it is (re)produced in different spaces for different bodies, what Massey (1991:25) calls ‘power-geometry’. It is also an opportunity to find affinities across their own and others’ practices and think about the effects/affects of

their own pedagogic practices within their specific settings to be more able to ‘act into’ these spaces.

Students are introduced to a range of theoretical approaches across the module from different lecturers and researchers in the university, including feminist, class and queer theory, critical race theory, game theory and materialist and posthuman theory. Multiple theories of spatiality offer a toolkit and spatial-temporal vocabulary to ‘plug in’ alongside their experiential knowledge of practice settings to explore from multiple perspectives how different bodies, human and non-human intra-act, the effects/affects or power and how knowledge is produced in the spacetimemattering of where they live, work and study.

The students use spacetimematter as a generative concept for composting the intra-actions of time, space, matter in their own work/community spaces. Who and what, where and how does movement/flow/engagement happen in spaces at ‘ground’ level? Where do our practices and knowledge about practices come from? Why and to whom do they matter? These intra-actions are re-turned with the texts and theoretical resources available to them. These resources are often generated by the students themselves and the ‘reading list’ is fluid – new resources added as ideas and new thinking is generated through the ethnographies. Pre-pandemic, we walked on campus and in the city where the campus is based, as well as students exploring their own local areas where they live and work. During the pandemic, when we could not meet on or off campus in person, we met in digital spaces and these remained as sites for exploring spacetimematter even after we returned to in-person activities, plus the ‘hybrid’ spaces of the neither here/there.

To begin, students use mapping methodologies (which we explore using maps from Katharine Harmon’s (2004) *You Are Here, Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination* – an excellent and productive example of the visual effects of mapping, to disrupt

the spatial routines of the spaces of work, study and community. Walking and talking around the campus, students hand draw maps of the spaces they frequently inhabit, how they use and move and respond differently within these, an example of which is below

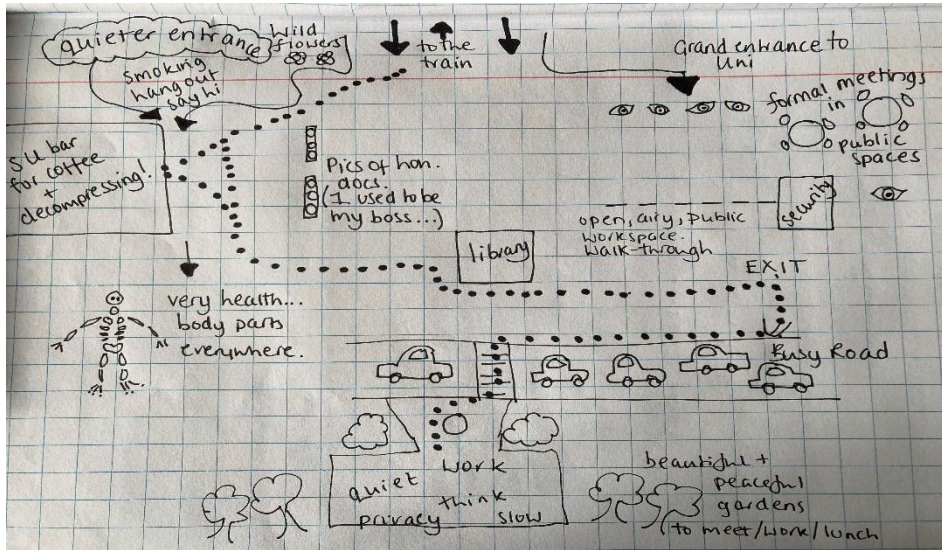


Figure 1: entering the university. Photo by the author

Thinking about how these spaces are embodied and what they produce in terms of access and social, academic, material engagement is often generated through the story-telling that walking-with others generates. The act of walking and movement is fundamental to the idea that the classroom, or indeed the university, is not the only intellectual space. As Chabot (2018:5) notes, bodies ‘often know more than our blinkered psyches’ and tell us when things are not right. The often brilliant and rich thinking that is generated through walking in conversation with others, is privileged in this activity and the rich literature on walking features as part of the module to illuminate the sensuous, bodily ways of knowing the world. As Solnit (2000) notes:

It starts with a step and then another step and then another that add up like taps on a drum to a rhythm, the rhythm of walking. The most obvious and the most obscure thing

in the world, this walking that wanders so readily into religion, philosophy, landscape, urban policy, anatomy, allegory, and heartbreak.

The maps are shared and mapped across each other to explore how different bodies access and engage, are made to feel welcome, excluded, (un)safe, accepted. Paying attention to the ways different, e.g., racialised, classed or sexualised bodies move through and embody different spaces has profound implications for developing more inclusive HE pedagogical spaces that contribute to practices of social justice (Burke, 2018). The use of maps draws on a growing body of cartographic approaches in research and in education, see for example Kuntz (2018), Martin and Kamberelis (2013), Ulmer and Koro-Ljungberg (2015).

What emerges is often how spaces are productive of affects and thinking with affective knowledge often takes students in multiple directions, generating new thinking (and often subsequent new reading). For example, a transphobic sticker on the mirror of the women's bathroom on campus is peeled off generating discussion about *who is really welcome here?* Mapped alongside this is an image of the 'notify app'. Notify is a digital platform, accessed through an app that allows users report incidents of concern, including health and safety. It is strongly promoted to students and staff. *Where do these go and what happens to complaints and concerns?* The unsettling affects of the sticker, its position on the mirror, demanding attention, and queries about the institutional ability to respond to students' concerns become an assemblage the students diffract through a number of texts and personal experiences. The politics of complaint via Ahmed (2021), a consideration of queer temporalities and the exhausting affects of normative temporalities as a young queer person (Todd, 2023) and a song, 'Black Tie' by the protest singer, Grace Petrie (2018) [Grace Petrie - Black Tie \(Official video\) - YouTube](#). The latter, about the experiences of school as a non-binary person, bring memories of being out of time and out of place into the discussion in affective ways, a re-turning through previous experiences and also the experiences of young people in schools in which many of

the students work. These small moments, bringing together the ‘noticings’ from a single walk, produce rich considerations of and for pedagogic practices.

Students go on to conduct quasi ethnographies of the urban spaces of the city centre and/or the surrounding areas where students live and - given the demographic of students at this HEI - have often grown up, thus collapsing time space and matter as memories, histories, experiences, objects, stories, streets, buildings, people, signs and images and affective flows become part of personal spatial assemblages. The political struggles of inclusion and exclusion are realised in the many examples of hostile design in the city. Such noticings are diffracted through the artwork of Sarah Ross [Sarah Ross \(insecurespaces.net\)](http://insecurespaces.net) whose ‘archisuits...include the negative space of the structures and allow the wearer to fit into, or onto structures that deny them’. The archisuits also blur the distinction of the body with the spaces it inhabits – a live art project illuminating the ways bodies and spaces intra-act. This playful, anarchist response to the hostile architecture of the city, diffracts the normative embodiment of the city through subversion and imagination and sparks discussions of how spaces are reclaimed, often diffracting again through current news events. Over the last few years, these have included Reclaim The Streets, the Black Lives Matter protests and vigils for murdered women, including transgender women and the homeless.

During the pandemic, when these city spaces were devoid of the closeness and busyness of people, parks and green spaces and the multi-species inhabitants of the world, took on different significance. From these, different assemblages emerged – connecting the students in the class to the environment, and issues of environmental justice in new ways that were not so foregrounded pre-pandemic. This vitalised the reading and texts, this time to include environmental literature and environmental literacies for children in schools as a means of responding to contemporary concerns of young people. As digital spaces became where a significant amount of time was spent and all teaching sessions were moved online, our mapping

activities moved to explore digital spaces. Using a digital collaging method, we mapped our pandemic lives in all their hybridity through personal photographs, images and memes, thinking with spatial theory about *power, control, freedom and democracy* in online spaces. The digital mapping, and the hand drawn mapping described above are examples of what Barad (2017:22) describes as ‘montage and fragmentary writing’ that disrupts linear and normative academic writing practices and enable diffractive engagements with the things that matter to students and how they connect these with the theoretical and experiential learning of their degrees.

### **Concluding comments**

Re-thinking HE’s pedagogies through reconfigured temporalities of learning feels necessary for those of us working in education if we are to reclaim teaching discourse from a singular to a more pluralistic, diffractive lens. If HE is to be committed to ‘its sense of inventiveness’ (Lalu, 2019: 53) to take an ethical response-able stance to the complexities and questions of the world. HE pedagogies are deeply tied in with the multiple temporalities of living and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which the pandemic has highlighted the structured and unequal relationalities to time experienced by different bodies. Therefore, rethinking temporalities through spacetime matter calls to attention the very real challenges of such uneven access and how educators are called upon to respond to these inequalities. Refusing linear and binary logics of HEs discourses, including those of progress, effectiveness, efficiency and resilience is to renew our thinking about what matters in education. This is a rethinking that calls to account our singular focus on the human at the expense of the more complex entanglements of the non-human world.

DE is a way of moving beyond the uniformity, toward conversations across boundaries and perspectives. By plugging in eclectic and multi-disciplinary knowledges, texts and resources and the different skills and sensory processing we bring with these, DE reminds us

that deep, rich, intellectually engaged thinking is not simply the preserve of the university classroom but is made possible where time and space are given over to listen, collaborate and share with others. DE attempts to fracture the neoliberal positioning of students as self-regulating and responsabilised individuals to expose the ways inequalities become structured into our institutions. DE are embodied, affective and fluid. The mobility of the pedagogies (literal and theoretical) illuminates how multiple and oft neglected knowledges might disrupt the idea of individualised subjectivity that is beyond response-ability to others and the world (Braidotti, 2019) in ways that can be productive of new knowledge and ways of thinking about the possibilities of practice and action. This orientates students to ‘act into’ and practice in their own lives, work and study to create change. As such, DE is a pedagogy of hope for different futures.

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