Care Ethics, Technologies of the Self, & The Pedagogical Artefacts of Postsecondary Education

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Abstract: We examine the ways in which care ethics decenter dominant technologies of the self (Foucault, 1997) that mediate markers of so-called good pedagogy in postsecondary teaching. By this, we refer to the cadre of artefacts that legitimize neoliberal institutions and fetishize achievements of individuals such as course evaluations and the use of teaching dossiers in some circumstances. These artefacts punish counter-hegemonic teaching practices while privileging dominant approaches to teaching and learning and smuggle in subtle ethics of accountability and surveillance. We wish to draw out the ways in which postsecondary institutional practices can be *technologies of the self* (Foucault, 1997) and ask: If we make a care ethic central to a way of working in postsecondary education, are there opportunities for care of the self, beyond production agendas?

Résumé : Dans cet article, nous examinons les façons dont l'éthique des soins déstabilise les technologies dominantes du soi (Foucault, 1997) qui servent de médiateurs à la soi-disant bonne pédagogie dans l'enseignement postsecondaire. Par cela, nous nous référons au cadre d'artefacts (ou d'objets) qui légitiment les institutions néolibérales et fétichisent les réalisations des individus tels que les évaluations de cours et l'utilisation de dossiers d'enseignement. L'utilisation de ces artefacts réprimandent les pratiques d'enseignement contre-hégémoniques tout en privilégiant les approches dominantes de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage. Ils introduisent clandestinement une éthique subtile de la responsabilité et de la surveillance. Nous souhaitons mettre en évidence les façons dont les pratiques institutionnelles postsecondaires peuvent être des technologies de soi (Foucault, 1997) et nous nous demandons : si nous plaçons une éthique des soins au cœur d'une façon de travailler dans l'éducation

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postsecondaire, y a-t-il des possibilités de prendre soin de soi, au-delà des programmes de production?

This paper began with a benign question we posed to ourselves: If humans ceased to exist at universities, what remaining artefacts would demonstrate that human learning was the goal of these institutions? Such a simple question undermines the complexity of contemporary postsecondary education sites. Indeed, there exist a myriad of artefacts that reflect dominant political thought – including neoliberalism. Our starting point was inspired by the broader neo-Marxist materialist tradition (Harvey, 1996), and specifically the Critical Realist (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 2008; Elder-Vass, 2010) commitments of understanding these artefacts as permanences generated of political processes. Rather than objects generated from banal policy requirements, the artefacts of teaching we are often left with at contemporary universities are complex and often careless bureaucracy. Given this, the goal of this paper is to theorize alternate artefacts and practices for postsecondary contexts that reject careless neoliberal technologies of the self and engage with an ethics of care (EoC) that embraces just pedagogies. To do so, we have organized this paper in three main sections: A review of Foucault's (1997) concept of technologies of the self; a discussion of teaching dossiers and how they have become an entrenched artefact of pedagogy in postsecondary education; how EoC pushes back against some of the prevailing postsecondary practices and artefacts. This paper builds on the work of various scholars investigating EoC (Lynch et al., 2009; Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 2013).

Technologies of the Self and Postsecondary Instruction

Foucault, in his discussion of technologies of the self, signals a time in Western history where there was a shift in the focus of practices of care of the self. What was once care of the (collective) self to become a good citizen, shifts to a focus on care as knowing thy-self. As Foucault explains, care of the self is partially achieved through technologies of the self whereby, through technologies of the self, a

shift occurs from a self as self-in-society, to a more autonomous self with less collective emphasis. Such technologies:

> permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1997, p. 225)

Earlier in history, care of the self was not only for one-self, but also, to take care of oneself was to contribute to the citizenry. Across time, *take care of yourself* became obscured by *know yourself*. This positions care of the self as a revelatory activity wherein *know thyself* has a penitent quality where the self is renounced for salvation. Care of the self becomes an individual activity, separated from notions of inter-dependence, and often associated with confession (Besley, 2005; Bleakley, 2000). Possibly, such individualistic care of the self is linked to ideas about essentialist thinking of what it means to be a person and/or how individuals are constructed. Foucault (1988) outlines that prior to the 18th Century, mistakes and errors were not to be judged/evaluated, but rather are to be learnt from to participate in society. In contemporary education, students are asked to view setbacks (e.g., unsatisfactory grades, unhappy students) as individual learning and growth opportunities. Additionally, failure is presented as an opportunity for a student to work on resilience and self-reflexivity for learning (Chandler, 2014). In this framework, failure is reduced to an individual – perhaps the student or the teacher, and the response to such failures remain in the realm of the individual's control. As an example, a student needs to develop resilience and as an individual find ways to succeed. Such a framework conceals structural culprits and maintains both the problem and the solution in the realm of the individual. Foucault's earlier work on domination frames this idea when "[A] medical model was substituted for Plato's pedagogical model. The care of the self isn't another kind of pedagogy, it has to become permanent medical care" (1988, p. 31). Remnants of such medical models are seen, for example, as services for students with disabilities are housed under medical and support services, not pedagogical ones (Dolmage, 2017).

Similarly, Arendt points to the consequences a focus changes from the public realm to the individual realm (Bernstein, 2018).

Here, a focus on the self disrupts a sense of belonging in the polis, and an active member of the citizenry dissipates. Arendt interrupts essentialist ideas of personhood as innate, focusing instead on the idea that freedom and equality are only achieved as being part of the polis. Practices, technologies of the self, that move a person toward an individual focus, separate from the public, distance possibilities of freedom. Individuality as part of a citizenry opens possibilities of freedom whereby equality is only in citizenship. One's focus on the individual self, or work on oneself, out of context, would be detrimental to equality.

Han (2017) considers these ideas slightly differently through the notion of an achievement society. He takes up Foucault and challenges the idea that we have moved beyond late-stage capitalization of financialization. An achievement society is where the surveillance, order, and control of the disciplinary society are internalized (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018; Han, 2017). In an achievement society individuals undertake the project of themselves, to reach their full potential. Lee (2017) takes up such technologies of the self as self-help. He illustrates how life-long and self-directed learning is co-opted by neoliberal policy discourse, becoming "a key characteristic of active citizenship" (p. 146), and commodified as the consumption of learning, and self-as-entrepreneur (and contemporarily intrapreneur). This process further produces the individual who will be less dependent on the state regardless of need. Biesta (2005) addresses the commodification of education through the language of learning and the characterization of teachers positioned to meet the needs of students/consumers. Han extends these ideas when he states "*the neoliberal regime utterly claims the technology of the self for its own purposes:* perpetual self-optimization" (2017, p. 28).

When individuals fail to self-optimize and they increasingly internalize self-as deficit, even though they engage with the technologies-of-the self, such as:

> (1) rational and responsible self-management,
> (2) excessive self-positivity,
> (3) voluntary self-exploitation and
> (4) loosely connected selves without solidarity (Lee, 2017, p. 146).

Here we see the negation of the idea of care as engaging in caring with others becoming a *good citizen* and exposes one of the many

antinomies the analysis of considering care and self-optimization allows. Being with/caring with are not visible when optimizing *the individual self*. The self as a product to be maximized hides and devalues the relations of care while making them ever more inaccessible. It excludes and excises a person from the relations that foster feelings of self-worth and belonging, and the opportunities to receive and extend care to self, and others. Thus the optimizing of *the individual self,* perpetuates an ongoing removal from occasions to experience self-worth/belonging/success. As opportunities to experience self-worth are removed, there is a parallel reinsertion into circumstances and contexts of self-optimization and isolation. In this context an individual hopes to earn some sense of self-worth/belonging in the face of feelings of deficit.

Dowling (2021) grapples with the above antimony in a discussion of "ontological inadequacy" that is perpetuated through the ethos of constant self-optimization and an ever-growing self-care industry, creating optimal spaces of capitalist profit. Ontological inadequacy, in relation to race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, and age, offers an important link to intersectionality and the ways in which technologies of the self can further marginalize and maintain the status quo in teaching and learning. Failure to learn, once again, is positioned to blame the individual seen as deficit, while simultaneously reinforcing systemic power relations (e.g. patriarchal capitalism, colonialism, imperialism). The structure supports itself by creating the context whereby one feels the need to self improve and then providing the "solutions" that keep us in the deficit position. Structures and belief systems remain unexamined and intact while the individual must develop must find (unavailable) ways to self-optimize. At the unsuccess of this impossible achievement one must become resilient, by which the systems requiring the need for resiliency do not need to be considered, examined, or altered.

In education, discussion of care often focuses on the role of teaching and relations between individuals (i.e., teacher and students). Reflective practices are often introduced to address the question of "how does a teacher know if their teaching is effective?" Reflective practice can be considered as a technology of the self and care of the self. Reflective practice is one avenue for care of the self in post-secondary education. Han (2017), Lee (2017), and Dowling (2021), point to how self-care (self-help) may be co-opted for means in service of neoliberalism—that is they become reflective practice artefacts (evidence) of effective teaching. Importantly, technologies

of the self, are distinguished by self-examination and self-creation, as such reflection can have multiple uses—constituting a specific self. For example, a teacherly identity or examining the teacherly self, perhaps revealing the *nature* of a teacherly self (Tamboukou, 2003) and/or the practices of a teacherly self. These reflections can be posited as practices of self-revelation and self-constitution and under some conditions acts of self-care.

The ideas of technologies of the self, as cultural practices that individuals engage to achieve certain states, that is happiness or self-optimization, provide a context to think about social practices in teaching and learning and the ways in which cultural practices contribute to how a self is constituted. Teaching dossiers are posited as a technology of the "teacher" self and their construction is an opportunity for teachers/instructors to reflect on their teaching. Teaching dossiers can be used for multiple purposes (e.g., tenure and promotion, teaching awards), and it is attention to such different purposes and their contradictions, that are central to care of the self, and are discussed in the next section.

Artefacts of Effective Teaching: The Teaching Dossier

Historically, teaching dossiers, as a measure of teaching effectiveness, came from public and student "calls for university 'accountability'" (Knapper, 1978, p. 2). Teaching evaluations, as one component of the dossiers, were heralded positively by students to influence faculty tenure and promotion decisions. Teacher associations (e.g., Canadian Association of University Teachers [CAUT]); however, expressed concern that teaching evaluations, that is, student evaluations of teachers, should not be the only measure (Knapper, 1978; Shore, 1974) of teaching effectiveness. Teaching dossiers are a comprehensive measure of teaching effectiveness and its construction is an opportunity to engage in reflective practice. This opportunity has the potentiality for self-care or self-optimization.

A statement of teaching philosophy is the context for the whole teaching dossier. Here an instructor outlines beliefs, and the rest of the dossier (educational artefacts) is then evidence for how the philosophy and enactment of the beliefs align. Other artefacts contained within the teaching dossier typically are a chronological list of what has been taught, a section of strategies which might include lesson plans and instructional strategies, and course syllabi. Also, reflections on teaching might be included along with teaching

contributions (supervisory committees); student and peer evaluations—formative and summative—numerical evaluations, and student comments; professional development; letters and notes (both solicited and unsolicited, testimonials); student's work; and prior teaching awards and recognition.

Teaching dossiers run the risk, much like self-help, of focusing on continual reflection on the self, and real or perceived individual inadequacies—rather than on the teaching and the constraints and opportunities that exist with particular institutions (e.g., strategic plans) and pedagogical zeitgeists. In some ways, with bias components like summative evaluations, the focus on self is erroneous and detrimental, as the self is not at issue, but rather it is bias within a broader structural sphere. Without attention to the ways in which the dossier comes to stand in for a self, self-exploitation and self-management become endless cycles in service of maintaining existing social inequities. Importantly, a teaching dossier can be fetishized, it becomes not only a representation of the reflection of an instructor, but it can also serve to obscure relations and intentions. The teaching dossier is valued while the practice of teaching is not.

The dossier has now become a representation of achievement of an individual, an external artefact of a self-reflective process, or a process of self-care. How is this individual optimizing themselves as a teacher for student learning? Inclusion of artefacts of teaching that challenge dominant ways of teaching can then be used as evidence against advancement in the academy. For example, students often devalue teaching that is experienced as different (Ray *et al.*, 2018).

Technologies of the self run the risk of ontological inadequacies and mark social hierarchies as *natural* while at the same time renouncing an individual's self, that has been constituted through, and within, an inequitable society. This idea is particularly important for teaching dossiers and their components. Bias, inherent within artefacts contained in a teaching dossier (e.g., summative teaching evaluations) reproduce social inequalities, while simultaneously masking them. An individual may experience a renunciation of the self, that is, their gender or social class dismissed and made invisible in the dossier, yet the artefact in the dossier – a summative teaching evaluation, for example – is reproducing the social inequity, under the guise of an objective artefact. The individual and the purveyors of the teaching dossiers identify an ontological deficiency through the perceived objective

and multifaceted dossier: In actuality, the teaching dossier is revealing societal inequity. Harvey (2014) notes that both process and outcome are components of capital, but when investigating technologies of the self, such as reflective practice through a compilation such as a teaching dossier, the outcome is privileged over the process. A focus on processes may be an important avenue for addressing new artefacts, and/or taking the context given for the artefacts in a teaching dossier, more seriously. Self-reflection is also being co-opted under a banner of so-called optimal education and learning. Often, typically marginalized individuals who "fail" to learn are also seen as being deficit in an ability to self-reflect (Chandler, 2014).

Understanding the ways in which artefacts can become and are mechanisms of neoliberal agendas is an entry point to recognizing how they participate in broader fundamental neoliberal practices that oppose care, through isolation, individualism, and fragmentation which result in a kind of devaluation, erasure, and dehumanization. People, in the most profound ways, resist neoliberal frameworks through acts of care, connection to one another and to community which creates an EoC that necessarily exists outside of neoliberal categories and allows for a preservation and reclamation – to preserve or reclaim that which neoliberalism takes from us through those mechanisms (Isserles, 2015; Shickluna, 2020).

In this context of academia, we ask how we build this into our postsecondary ecosystems? When we consider neoliberal mechanisms, and categories and notions of productivity, expertise, success, etc., how can we work outside of, or even in opposition to, these? For example, working collaboratively and collectively builds a framework of solidarity and resists individualism and competitiveness. Finding ways to value process, learning, and growth over results-oriented artefacts challenges and resists fragmentation, erasure, dehumanization which extends further to resist the neoliberal imposition and make space from within to protect against the harm of such imposition.

EoC and Possibilities to Disrupt the Logics of Teaching Artefacts

Our aim is twofold: to forward a discussion of disrupting artefacts of postsecondary education that are not based in carelessness, and to address some of the larger issues in postsecondary education that inhibit the genesis of careful artefacts. We imagine, moving forward,

that new and careful artefacts will instill a disruptive solidarity venture by those involved in academic labour and the production and sharing of knowledge. This solidarity venture encompasses research, teaching, and learning. It is widely understood how issues such as debt, precarity, austerity, and health impact a solidarity venture. Beyond this, we wish to articulate some pragmatic blockages to a more unified philosophy around postsecondary education.

One of the contributing deterrents for developing careful artefacts in postsecondary education is the refusal to recognize students as workers by English Canadian systems. This creates a disjuncture in understanding the labour of those involved at our postsecondary institutions. Quebec institutions have done better as we see through the work of Audrey Dahl (2021) and Jonathan Turcotte-Summers (2019). Dahl traces the impact of the Jean report on increased participatory education and the solidification of policy decisions around non-alienating education. Turcotte-Summers, likewise, has pointed to the struggles of students to establish the right to strike and enjoy the benefits of other organized labour that attempt to ameliorate or extinguish inequalities of an alienating economy. Both authors leverage Freirian arguments against oppressive pedagogy, and the "necrophilic" (Freire, 1972, p. 77) aspect of carelessness pedagogy. We posit that artefacts of care in postsecondary systems must address the denial of recognition of labour across participants in a system and, at a bare minimum, eliminate necrophilic systems.

Related to this break in solidarity, is the objectification of the teaching person and obscuring of the social relations that undergird teaching, learning, and the work of a university. Therefore, the kinds of artefacts that we value in a teaching dossier might represent relations of solidarity between people and knowledge. This process is not unlike Harvey's (2010) analogy pertaining to commodity fetishism:

> You go into a supermarket and you want to buy a head of lettuce. In order to buy the lettuce, you have to put down a certain sum of money. The material relation between the money and the lettuce expresses a social relation because the price — the how much — is socially determined, and the price is a monetary representation of value. Hidden within this market exchange of things is a relation between you, the consumer and the direct

> producers — those who produced the lettuce. Not only do you not have to know anything about that labour or the labourers who congealed value in the lettuce in order to buy it; in highly complicated systems of exchange it is impossible to know anything about the labour or the labourers, which is why fetishism is inevitable in the world market. The end result is that our social relation to the labouring activities of others is disguised in the relationships between things. You cannot for example, figure out in the supermarket whether the lettuce has been produced by happy labourers, miserable labourers, slave labourers, wage labourers or some self-employed peasant. The lettuces are mute, as it were, as to how they were produced and who produced them. (pp. 39–40)

Care theory offers another way, "an alternative notion to that of the autonomous, self-actualized individual" (Isserles, 2015, p. 129). Thinking about care as a relation, rather than the doing of some *thing* by one to another, brings into relief (Britzman, 2003) relations and their constitution and supports care as the container for human flourishing. When a teaching dossier is used for tenure and promotion, teaching as social reproduction and self-reflection is co-opted for wage and earnings, without attention to the ways in which its artefacts come into being. This runs the risk of, once again, obscuring social relations. When we begin to read these artefacts and processes through an ethic of care, we begin to see new openings. In the same way we need the process for the appearance of lettuce in the grocery store not to be mute, the artefacts of teaching can, similarly, not be muted.

There are several ways to speak to artefacts of teaching one is to think about the ways in which new and different artefacts may be generated and how these artefacts fit within and offer insights into current scholarly activities in relation to care in teaching and learning. Another way is to highlight how the artefacts of teaching constitute a teaching dossier and how traditional educational artefacts can be seen to disrupt and offer a different framework of teaching beyond financialized production goals and self-optimization. For example, the oft cited need for equity, diversity, and inclusion to be part of a teaching practice is considered and enacted in course design, or instructional strategy. Yet it is vital to recognize that there are faculty members, graduate students, and administrators who are part of equity deserving social groups who

have been marginalized, and that common design ignores or erases this reality. Rather, the artefacts contained with a teaching dossier are sanitized and context-free measures of teaching effectiveness.

Fiona Rawle (2021) notes that, among other aspects, pedagogies of kindness "say 'no' to theater" (para. 15), understanding how structural aspects of postsecondary education smuggle in seemingly kind or careful rhetoric from ideologies of liberal contractualism. Interestingly, during the pandemic, the conditions for being un*carefull* are exacerbated. The reliance on a more foundational academic artefact – publications – have seen these exacerbations and have demonstrated gendered impacts on our collective *curricula vitarum*. In the aptly titled article, "No Room of One's Own," Colleen Flaherty (2020) notes that in an early survey of academic journals, "two journals say that they're observing unusual, gendered patterns in submissions. In each case, women are losing out. Editors of a third journal have said that overall submissions by women are up right now, but that solo-authored articles by women are down substantially" (para. 2). As the pace of academic publishing can be slower than other forms of workplace productivity, the ramifications will only realize as more time passes.

Careful postsecondary pedagogy in the pandemic also faces the antinomy of artefacts of the domicile – often the artefacts of the home are viewed to be fostering care, yet they also expose deep seeded beliefs about the purity of knowledge and scientific process. The imagined decorum and prestige of academic knowledge and credibility is challenged by our embarrassing domiciles and the perceptions of the porous bodies that occupy them. In this scenario it is not that the emperor has *no* clothes; the emperor *has* clothes, but they are soiled and combined with the shamefully grubby garments of children and partners we live with. Here, the concept of domestic life has been thrust into our academic and professional lives in ways that many believed that we had seamlessly amalgamated with our own identities outside of where we live: We have not. Before the pandemic, we could meet with students in an office lined with books, uninterrupted by cats defecating in their litterboxes in the video background, toilets flushing, and family members wandering across the kitchen seeking a cup of coffee in their Holister sweatpants. Take, for example, a few years before the pandemic, a viral video of a male academic, Robert Kelly, working from his home office in a BBC interview, only to be upstaged by the appearance of his two young children (Usborne, 2017). The video exposed more than simply a humorous consequence of working from

home, but also served to open a complex discussion on intimacy and racialization as many assumed that Kelly, a white man, had a "nanny" (para. 8) when his wife, Jung-a Kim, came into the room to bring the children away from the camera.

This story served as an early foreshadowing of pandemic learning, and how our cultural assumptions around productivity, professionalism, and domestic life laid bare our hypocrisy about what we really value. Perhaps experts could have a tasteful picture of their children on their desk, but could you imagine the epistemic deficiency of anyone having to interact with small children. We try to expose some of the ideas of so-called proper pedagogy and how those ideas may influence an artifact such as a teaching dossier. They also highlight how uncareful assumptions of care can manifest in the dossiers as they relate to the concept of professionalism.

Learning from home, however, poses not just a danger of artefacts of care – domestic artefacts – exposing imagined uncareful ideals of professionalism and scientific purity. As Grace Lavery noted in a tweet:

> One reason I'm so anti-Zoom is that I teach classes in queer and trans studies, where part of the point is to handle ideas that the family home renders unthinkable. My undergrad students say things that, were they to say them in their parent's houses, might expose them to harm. (Lavery, 2020)

Quarantined domestic spaces, especially when filled with other family members, do not always carry guarantees of safety or care. By this, we are not just referencing the increase in domestic violence (Connell, 2021; Owen, 2020) and physical violence, but the subtle dissuasions of critical thought that may have long reinforced current meaning schemes. In this way, we cannot expect people to simply mute their microphones and think of critical theory. Although spaces of classrooms and community learning are not necessarily inherently more intellectually liberating, there is an escape from the routines of people's lives that have formed and reinforced the mental, conceptual, and emotional trajectories of learners. In these previously used physical spaces, people were forced to test their perceptions and identities outside of their places of dwelling. We do not wish to sound too myopic, however, as these pre-pandemic spaces came, and will return, with their own system of rewards and punishments. Navigating public spaces (or quasi-

public, as a classroom or facilitation space may be) is easier for people with the social and cultural capital that aligns with hegemonic powers.

Asynchronous online learning opportunities may help to remedy the dangers of criticality in the domicile but are not perfect. If the activities are written, rather than spoken, there is the prospect of a little more distance from those that may challenge participants. At the same time, we must keep in mind the ways in which family, the domicile, and the context that sustain production are misrepresented and disavow "all that sustains it and all human arrangements" (Brown, 2020, p .103). It is important to be mindful of the ways in which flexibility and access are co-opted for production and the cost of technology, who pays, and what it obscures (Federici, 2019; Gago, 2020). Access to information, once again, is highlighted in contrast to the context and circumstances that foster learning. The importance of mattering, belonging, and connection are obscured, and teachers, students, and learning are again reduced to modality of transmission. Here the possibility of "abeyance structures – perhaps allowing for access but disallowing the possibility of action for change" (Dolmage, 2017, p. 77) looms large.

Conclusion

We have attempted to engage in an investigation of pedagogical artefacts and how they may smuggle in technologies of the self that carelessly divert attention from just pedagogy in favour of self-optimization. We do not suggest that neoliberal artefacts and practices crumble under the adoption of an EoC: nor do we forward that EoC is a panacea for the contemporary ills of modern postsecondary education. We do, however, posit that this critique from a care perspective is necessary to demystify and illuminate the impact that the artefacts of teaching has on the continued political economy of teaching and learning. We also highlight that the pandemic, while shifting both patterns and recognition of labour, has not proven to disrupt our pedagogical artefacts in a careful way. Rather, there is little evidence that the processes that produce the permanences we call artefacts have been changed in a substantive way. Given this, it becomes ever more urgent that we begin to unpack what exists at postsecondary institutions and separate careful pedagogy from that of a neoliberal pedagogical political economy.

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