

# 3

## RECOGNIZING MUTUALITY

### The More-Than-Human World and Me

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#### Introduction

In June 2009, I opened the newspaper and read the review of the multidisciplinary performance which I had directed and we had performed in the previous night:

*Katiska* is a work of five young men. It is a piece that leaves you speechless. It affects and touches the bottom of your heart. The starting point has been the performers' autobiographical material, and the work is born in collaboration between choreographer, composer, and performers with improvisation exercises. *Katiska* tells the young man's experience of the world and its expectations. ... The work could have the risk of collapse to stereotyping, and what is already said, but the movement at the same time dark and light, serious and ironic prevent crashing into this trap. First, they may declare the Truth, but the next instant they laugh for all of that. At the end, you can look at these five young people. They do not represent any type, but they are all unique personalities. The picture is optimistic. ... The artists are so strong on stage that their flesh and energy rush to the viewer's lap. Performers' movement is the most beautiful dance all the way to until the end, and it is difficult to believe that they have not previously danced. ... Their presence on stage is absolutely fantastic. The performance changed my world.

*(Hannuksela, 2009)*

I started the *Katiska* project in summer 2007 because I was very displeased with the image that was given about young men. In the media at the time in Finland, they were only described as drunk drivers or school shooters. Also, at schools,

in teachers' room discussions, many of the boys were described only with negative adjectives, such as lazy, bad-behaving, or just totally hopeless. However, when I was working as a secondary school teacher, I noticed that many of these boys had a need to share their concerns about life with an adult. In one-on-one conversations, I witnessed that these "hopeless" boys were actually very perceptive. So, I wanted to bring forward this alternative voice from young men.

The five young men of *Katiska* were just ordinary, middle-class, white, Finnish, 15–17-year-old youngsters, and they had not done any theater or dance before this project. I had to talk them into expressing with their bodies and movements. I did not use the word "dance" at the beginning of the process because that would have probably made the boys run away. In the boys' opinion, they were not dancing but just playing and fooling around. After improvising for six months, we started to put material together, and the multidisciplinary stage performance called *Katiska* was born. The work was a big success right from its premiere in May 2008, and since, it has been performed in six cities in Finland and five different European countries.

The project became so important, not just for me but also evidently for the boys and for our audience, that I did my doctoral research based on it. In my dissertation, I ended up formulating *the pedagogy of recognition* (Foster, 2012), borrowing from Paul Ricoeur's (2005) lexical and philosophical analysis of *recognition*. First, the pedagogy of recognition claims that new ethical understanding can occur when we shift our action from (conceptual) knowing to (perceptual) *recognizing*. Second, it suggests that education should move from supporting (egoistic) self-esteem to (critical and interrelational) *self-recognition*. Third, the theory aims to show how education can move from the model of possessive relations to others toward the *mutual recognition* of all life-forms.

In this chapter, I will look at the pedagogy of recognition (Foster, 2012) as a form of *EcoJustice Education* (Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2015). EcoJustice Education starts from a systematic cultural-ecological analysis: The critical investigation focuses especially on the structures of modern thinking and the discourses that reproduce those deeply rooted beliefs (Martusewicz et al., 2015). I will also suggest that an (*eco*-)phenomenological (Abram, 1988, 1996, 2010; Brown & Toadvine, 2003; Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2003, 2008/1945) attitude is an important starting point for an ethical pedagogy. Eco-phenomenology extends beyond the conceptual structures toward the sensual world, which is *more-than-human* (Abram, 1996). The pedagogy of recognition brings together the critical framework of EcoJustice Education and ecofeminism (Plumwood, 1993, 2002) as well as the acknowledgment of different ways of knowing, which are in this study researched through body awareness and movement practices, and then described with the help of (eco-) phenomenological concepts.

I will use the *Katiska* project with young men as a practical example of pedagogical recognition. I will demonstrate how to rewrite the masculine identity

through art practice in such a way that it can challenge the concept of human identity, the hierarchical relationship between human and nature, and the other dualisms typical to Western culture. In this task, I will borrow in particular insights from the work of late Australian feminist philosopher Val Plumwood (1993, 2002).

Ecofeminist theory helps to reveal the problems of domination, not just of women but also any other kinds of domination “since the oppressed are often both feminised and naturalised,” as Plumwood (1993, p. 18) points out. Young men do not belong to the typical “oppressed” group of people, but as I will demonstrate in this chapter, the hierarchized binary model, typical of Western culture, limits the identities of both women and men (Martusewicz et al., 2015; Plumwood, 1993). In dualism, for example, the masculine and feminine are seen as oppositional and exclusive. The relationship is hierarchized, with men being endowed with more value and women being inferiorized. In the big picture, the *Katiska* performers may be seen as belonging to the dominant group, but it is not their whiteness or maleness as such that automatically places them into the role of dominator; rather, it is the structural “identity of the master,” the domination by “a white male elite” which forms “the ideals of western culture and humanity” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 23). I agree with Plumwood (1993) that in order to critically reconstruct the human identity, we must not only recognize and rebuild the oppressed identities but also rewrite the narratives of master identities.

Both emancipatory and critical interest drove my work in the *Katiska* project from its beginning. In other words, the aim was to question the stereotype of a man but also to free men from this particular type of masculinity. In this chapter, I will connect the investigations of masculinity to the criticism of rationality and human domination of nature, and tie all of these together with the concept of recognition.

## From Teaching Knowledge to Acknowledging Recognition

The first aspect of Ricoeur’s analysis of recognition is *recognition as identification*. So, the pedagogy of recognition suggests a shift from teaching *knowledge* to acknowledging *recognition* (Foster, 2012). In practice, this means that instead of seeing teachers as the possessors of correct knowledge and students as the passive receivers of these truths, both teachers and students could turn into active investigators of the world. In the *Katiska* project, I did not aim to teach anything specific to the boys; I rather wanted to undertake body- and movement-based research together with them. In this process, many of my own preconceptions and my “knowledge” of young men changed, and I started to recognize things that I did not know before.

When you know something, you believe that you are right, so in fact, in the moment of *recognizing*, you will notice whether you were originally wrong. It is

*hesitation* that gives recognition its distinctive character; therefore, recognition is not just separate from knowledge, but recognizing actually opens the way to knowing (Ricoeur, 2005). Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2008, p. 463) points out that also “our errors become truths only once they are recognized.”

In dance education, teachers are traditionally expected to know the right steps of a particular dance style, and then to teach that right technique to the students. Also, for traditional choreographers, the dancers are seen as instruments whose task is to perform the choreographer’s visions onstage. Dance, like any other activity in Western culture, follows the Cartesian tradition, which has made us believe that there is an objective world around us, and from which, through our rational thinking, we are able to perceive that world and thus “know it.” We seem to live in the illusion that we can control the world by our rational thinking. The concept of human is reduced to a thinking mind. The whole construction of the world is based on the logic of *instrumental reason* (Plumwood, 1993).

If the traditional choreographic process was controlled by the model of *rational* thinking and the *instrumental* attitude toward dancers, contemporary dance practice, based on collaborative body and movement explorations between the choreographer and the dancers, challenges the rational and instrumental model by inviting the sensory and co-creative powers to lead the process. In the choreographic process of *Katiska*, we used improvisation, so I only gave tasks for my dancers, and they improvised movements based on those tasks. While I may have had some ideas of the outcomes beforehand, the truth is that because we used improvisation, I would never have predicted what kind of performance the process finally produced.

In modern Western culture, we locate our mind as the center of the universe and treat everything else as the objects of our rational control—including our own bodies. Following the Cartesian tradition and the hierarchized dichotomy of mind and body, we focus so much on what is rational that the sensory side of human awareness is often a neglected area. This is also true in education. At school, the body is merely present as an object of investigation in a biology class or a focus of improvement in sports or a physical education class.

The educational practices, like any activities in Western culture, are based on the concept of the body as an object. The body means the material, biological, anatomical, and physiological entity. In traditional dance practice, this is true too. The body is treated as an object and often like an obstacle. Thus, it has to be punished and trained in order to reach the standard ideals. In contrast to the Cartesian concept of body, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/2008) phenomenological description of the *lived body* is not understood as an object but as a subject of experience. The lived body refers to the experiential extension in which the body is conscious of itself, and which we also call the “self.”

The lived body is the unity of body–mind–spirit. In other words, it is bodily, cognitively, and spiritually present in and of the world. It is the body

in which all our experiences, emotions, memories, and narratives are born and placed. Not only does this kind of concept of the body integrate the body and mind of a person, but the lived body also extends from the egoistic self toward the recognition of me, the other, and the world as interdependent of each other.

In his later theories, Merleau-Ponty (1968) used the concepts of *flesh* and *chiasm* to overcome the dualism of objective existence and subjective experience. Flesh is the essential substance of the world—everything that is sensible, visible, and present to us in the material world—but it is also the metaphor of existence itself. The flesh is the body and the world intertwined. Chiasm refers to the reversibility of things: When I touch something, I recognize that I am at the same time being touched. So, it is crucial to understand that it is my multi-sensual body that connects me to the world.

Similarly, Wendell Berry (1996) believes that the biggest problem in Western culture is “the isolation of the body”:

At some point we assume that the life of the body would be the business of grocers and medical doctors, who need take no interest in the spirit, whereas the life of the spirit would be the business of churches, which would have at best only a negative interest in the body. In the same way we began to see nothing wrong with putting the body – most often somebody else’s body, but frequently our own – to a task that insulted the mind and demeaned the spirit. And we began to find it easier than ever to prefer our own bodies to the bodies of other creatures and to abuse, exploit, and otherwise hold in contempt those other bodies for the greater good or comfort of our own.

(p. 104)

It is critical to understand that not any kind of dance practice can question the mind–body dualism and “the logic of instrumental reason” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 2). Following Merleau-Ponty (2008), I believe that it is after all our sensual body that ties us to the world, and thus I claim that through multi-sensory body awareness and movement practices, we can deeply understand our being in the world and the world in us. We cannot have any other information about the world than that which can be accessed through our own consciousness, but it is important to note that for a phenomenologist, the connection between thought and the world does not happen through Cartesian deductive reasoning but rather through *perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2008). Instead of the mind, Merleau-Ponty highlights the importance of the *body* in perception. But it is not the body as an object among other objects in the world; rather, it is *my* lived body. This kind of connection based on perception is also the foundation for natural science, but it cannot be explained or described through the categories of natural science (Merleau-Ponty, 2008). Especially if we are trying to understand

our *belongingness* to the world, or like Plumwood (1993) describes, the *continuity* between self and other, existence cannot be explained through dualism.

I suggest that if we want to understand the world beyond the conceptual structures created by modernism, we have to allow enough time to perceive the world through and in our bodies. Through art practice, with a phenomenological attitude, we can investigate and extend our understanding of human as more than a rational being, and our and others' bodies more than instruments. Only this way can we also better understand how the narrow concept of human (body) is closely connected to the questions of ecological destruction.

Plumwood's (1993) feminist critique of rationalism is highly relevant to environmental ethics. She argues how the concept of reason is clearly separated from the concept of nature:

Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast to reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness.

*(Plumwood, 1993, pp. 19–20)*

Reason, which opposes itself to the body and nature, is fixed to the dominant position. All rational activities are seen as more valuable than those involving the body. However, the practice that highlights the importance of the body, our sensory experiences and emotions, “does not imply abandoning all forms of reason, science and individuality. Rather, it involves their redefinition or reconstruction in less oppositional and hierarchical ways” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 4).

The worldview which focuses only on reason and knowing repeats itself (see also Varto, 2008). To find new understanding, we have to allow ourselves into the vulnerable stage of not-knowing. Recognition is not a result of rational thinking, but rather, it is a moment of perception in our lived bodies when sensory input meets the mental idea of the object. In recognition, it is the hesitation that opens up our way to a knowledge that we did not have before. Education that encourages new openings must abandon the controlling position of reason.

## **From Egoistic Self-Esteem to Critical Self-Recognition**

The second level of the pedagogy of recognition suggests a shift from supporting one's egoistic self-esteem to developing critical *self-recognition*. The value of art education is often explained in its capacity to support young people's self-esteem. This aim is also undoubtedly valuable, but there is also a risk that in the competitive culture and with the instrumental attitude toward oneself and another, the self-esteem of only the few “best” ones is supported, and the self-esteem of others is sent in a downward spiral. The rise of self-esteem should

never be the main task but rather a side effect of an ethical pedagogical practice. In order to avoid supporting egoism, the students should be guided toward self-recognition in which they value themselves as capable actors (Ricoeur, 2005), but where they also acknowledge others as equally active and valuable.

The pedagogy of recognition describes the concept of identity as narrative (Ricoeur, 1992, 2005) and performative (Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004); in other words, identity is always culturally constructed in a certain time and place (Foster, 2012). Dance as a bodily and performative art form is an especially useful tool to investigate and reveal the stereotypes of gendered identity. We learn to perform, for example, women and men, masculinity and femininity. The good news is that because identity is a narrative and performative construction, it can be negotiated again (Ricoeur, 2005). That was one of the biggest aims of the *Katiska* project as well. For example, the performers sing: “men do not dance, men do not sing, ...”, but then the boys do sing and dance anyway. The use of irony is an especially effective way to talk about stereotypes and to expose the prejudices and values of people (Foster, 2012). The *Katiska* boys’, our audience’s, and my own preconceptions about masculinity changed during the project.

When a classmate of Rasmus, one of the *Katiska* boys, heard that he was doing this dance project, he was asked: “So, are you a gay or a god-botherer?” The question is very revealing: Dancing is obviously an activity which is excluded from masculine men; thus, the male dancer must be either homosexual or religious. The question implies that dancing is neither a heterosexual nor rational activity. So, dance as a bodily practice is something feminine and spiritual.

That is to say that this simple question hits right in the heart of dualism, to the hierarchized dichotomies which are dangerously grouped together: mind–body, man–woman, masculine–feminine, rational–spiritual, and heterosexual–homosexual. The man is using his rational mind and not his sensual body. He is not a spiritual but a rational being. These qualities make him a “real” man. So, if you are a man but you use your body, you must be homosexual.

Also, Plumwood (1993, p. 28) describes the “elite men” with words such as “objectivity, abstractedness, rationality, and suppression of emotionality.” Interestingly, the modern choreographies by men could be described with the same words, in contrast to a female choreographer such as Pina Bausch, who was known for the sensual and emotional expressiveness of her works. Bausch’s concern about dance is linked with her understanding of human identity; she is equally worried about whether dance and whether humans have cut themselves off from their true meaning and become empty and mechanical (Kozel, 1993, p. 55).

In *Katiska*, the performers investigated the performative discourses of masculinity, but they also went somehow deeper. Through the bodily practice with a phenomenological attitude, they were able to touch the self, the lived body, to find experiences and emotions that they did not know that existed in them, and in all of us. The praise from the audience undoubtedly supported the boys’ self-esteem, but more importantly, the process has helped the boys, our audience, and me to find our way to critical self-recognition.

## From Tolerance to Mutual Recognition

Getting recognition from others, and also from oneself, is one of the driving forces of both politics and individual lives. So, it is not a surprise that recognition has been a popular topic in politics over the last two decades (Fraser 2008; Honneth, 1995; Taylor, 1994). The concept of recognition is connected to the idea of justice, but it is also tied to the question of what we respect and value. The idea of equal respect secures some kind of recognition for everyone, but the idea of esteem based on one's achievements or usefulness creates insecurity (Taylor, 1994, pp. 34–35): “am I worthy of being recognized.” The metaphors “human resource” and “natural resource” (Martusewicz et al., 2015, p. 67) reveal how the recognition of others is based on their instrumental value: the worth of other people to my ego, an individual to society, animals and plants to humans (see also Plumwood, 1993).

The third level of the pedagogy of recognition is a *mutual recognition* (Foster, 2012). Through the examples of the *Katiska* project, we can look at different aspects of mutual recognition. The project shows how it is important to both give and receive recognition. We can look at the mutuality between the performers but also between the performers and spectators.

In performing arts, there are always present at least two bodies: the performer's and the spectator's. In contrast to the traditional understanding of drama, contemporary theater performance does not aim to present a coherent storyline or a psychologically correct narrative, but in contrast, the performance is presented as a montage, which brings together multiple voices. In this way, the performance respectfully invites the audience to make their own interpretation of the work. There is no one correct way to interpret the work, but rather every spectator has freedom to experience the work in a personal way. The actions onstage can give rise to very different emotions, memories, and narratives, depending on the personal history or the current mental state of the spectator. For us, the creators of *Katiska*, this kind of art-making requires a special attitude: We have to accept, or even enjoy, the fact that we can never take total control over the interpretations of the work. The artwork happens in the mutual meeting of artists and spectators. The work is an invitation for the audience to share sixty minutes in their lives with us. It is a place for meeting with the performers but also with oneself, as one of our (high school student) spectators beautifully described:

The performance was also interesting as an experience. My friend and I were moved to tears by some of the scenes, not because of the scene itself but by the thoughts and the memories that it evoked. It was pretty fascinating.

(Foster, 2012, p. 122)

Once when I was in Copenhagen, Denmark, at the Theatre Academy giving a workshop and talking about the *Katiska* project, one of the dance teacher



students asked if I had ever wished that the boys had been able to dance technically better. I was very surprised about this question because I had never thought about it that way. I had instead always been astonished by how brave and skillful these guys had been. Apparently, they were not able to do pirouettes or point their feet, but that kind of formalistic and mechanistic dance, which treats bodies like objects and machines, does not interest me as a choreographer. The pedagogy of recognition highlights the importance of accepting everyone as they are. It celebrates the diversity of people and their expressions.

One of the spectators said that the boys were all very different from each other but also equally good. Traditional dance training, which forces everybody to the same ideal forms, does not support diversity. It can be said that traditional dance practice with an instrumental attitude creates the dancers. In contrast, dance practice which is based on improvisation allows everyone to express themselves with their own personal movements. So, the dancers create the dance.

Once when we had an audience discussion after the *Katiska* show, there was a question of whether the performance should be categorized as a dance or theater piece. It is true that the work is difficult to categorize as a certain art form. For dancers, it looks more like theater, and for theater people, it looks like dance. I often describe *Katiska* as a multidisciplinary stage performance, dance theater, or physical theater. One of the spectators felt that there was no need to force the work into some existing box if the work presented everything that was needed.

In contrast to modern art, contemporary art is often multidisciplinary. It is quite typical that the work of art is impossible to be described with modern concepts. There are no limitations in contemporary art, only countless possibilities. The art and philosophy which are interested in the relations of the self and the world are necessarily indefinite in the conceptual level, not because of the novelty factor, but because the phenomena on which they focus are formless in every way (Foster, 2012, p. 209). If life is ambiguous and in a constant flow, why would we need to force an artwork into a static and coherent form?

Rasmus, one of the *Katiska* performers, describes his experience of performing the so-called “table” scene:

The movement arouses different emotions, longing, beauty and sensitivity, strength, but at the same time weakness as well. I do not pay attention anymore to how I look, but I rather do what feels good and right. Moving with others makes, in my opinion, us all a unitary creature, or a person, or a feeling, who does many things and goes through them. Contact with others is a good thing because then you feel that there are others as well helping the creature to say what it needs to say. Overall the table scene awakens sensitivity and tenderness, but also the strength of five men.

(See Foster, 2012, p. 204)

Rasmus describes how the self that looks itself as an object from the outside disappears. His focus turns toward his internal experience, but at the same time also to the connection of the self and the other. Rasmus's description shows the diverse and even contrasting emotions that the moving evokes in him, but also his physical and, at the same time, spiritual connectedness with the others. When he is moving with the other boys, his ego disappears, and he slips into the space between the self and the other (Foster, 2012). Interestingly, he describes the state not just as "a person" but also as "a feeling" and as "a creature." In other words, in his experience, the immersion of himself and the others also blurs the boundaries between human and body/self.

Movement improvisation can take one to the experience of *I-lessness*—to the disappearance of the ego. I coined the term *I-lessness* (Foster, 2012) to describe the state where the ego does not exist, but the experience is very much alive, and the self is intertwined with others and the world. The self merges into the world, and the world merges into the self. However, this feeling of merging does not mean falling into sameness:

Experiences of 'being with' are predicated on a continually evolving awareness of difference, on a sense of intimacy felt as occurring between 'the two of us.' The fact that the self and the other are not merged is precisely what makes experiences of merging have such high emotional impact.

(Benjamin, 1988, p. 47 quoted in Plumwood, 1993, p. 156)

In short, *I-lessness* is experienced as the disappearance of the rationally controlled and constructed I, but not the disappearance of the self. The state of *I-lessness* can only be understood when we abandon the dichotomies of mind–body, self–other, and reason–nature, and search for mutuality in relation with others and in the living space of in-between dualism:

*I-lessness* is a rejection of extreme subjectivism, which highlights the individual and independent self over others. On the other hand, the term refers to the overly accentuated position of objectifying and judging eye or I that is in control of everything.

(Foster, 2012, p. 212)

In order to build both socially and ecologically sustainable practices in pedagogy, we need to overcome not just our individualistic but also anthropocentric attitude. One of the fundamental aspects of ecological transformation can be found in mutual recognition, not just between humans but also with more-than-humans. Thus, with the concept mutual recognition I am not just referring to it as a question of social justice but in the broader context of EcoJustice. I want to challenge the anthropocentric view of (social) justice by understanding

mutual recognition not only in its rational, cognitive, and political aspects of human life but as necessary to a feeling of belongingness to the world. With our senses, we are attuned to relationships, and by adopting a phenomenological attitude in education, we can nourish again our dependent but forgotten relationships, not only with other human beings but also with more-than-humans (Abram, 1996). The concept of mutual recognition consists not only as respect and acknowledgment of others but also its affective and sensory stance toward oneself and the whole world.

## Discussion

As a phenomenologist, I am not looking for so-called objective truth but rather what it is a fact for me before thematization. Phenomenologists often describe the world as a mystery, but is it not true that the world is very concrete and natural for us when we live it? It only becomes a mystery when we have to conceptualize it.

From knowing to recognizing, from self-esteem to self-recognition, from tolerance to mutual recognition, the pedagogy of recognition is an educational theory and practice which is built on multiplicity and mutuality. With the practical examples from the *Katiska* project, I have tried to demonstrate how a body- and movement-based practice with a phenomenological attitude can support pedagogical recognition.

The pedagogy of recognition does not only aim to reveal the problems of modern thinking, but it helps, not just to imagine, but to actually see and feel, what else could be. I believe that with a phenomenological attitude and a critical approach, we can educate and create art that “changes the world.”

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