

Embodied Others and the Ethics of Difference. Deterritorialising Intercultural Learning.

Giuliana Ferri
Brunel University London
College of Business, Arts and Social Sciences
Department of Education
Giuliana.Ferri@brunel.ac.uk
Orcid number: 0000-0002-4843-3273

Abstract

This paper investigates the embodied character of the relationship self-other in intercultural communication. I review Levinasian characterisations of the face of the other that are adopted in intercultural ethics to counteract cultural essentialism and I argue that these do not fully address the embodied relationality underpinning intercultural encounters. Employing the notion of a carnal hermeneutics, I look at the relation self-other to consider the implications of the epistemic erasure of ‘othered’ bodies and their struggles for recognition. In doing this, I interrogate the effects of positioning the body at the centre of intercultural learning space to deterritorialize intercultural education and to problematise the separation between body and mind, self and other, and intercultural communication understood primarily through the medium of English language learning.

Keywords

Embodiment, deterritorialization, self-other, carnal hermeneutics, intercultural learning

Introduction

In response to the call for this special issue on intercultural pedagogy and the question of the other, with this paper I address one of the major preoccupations of intercultural communication in recent times, namely the search for normative principles of ethical intercultural conduct in the relation self-other (Nair-Venugopal 2013). My intention is to focus on the bodily aspects of this relation, beginning with a reflection on the ethics of Levinas (1969) that centres on his phenomenological descriptions of the face of the other and the non-assimilability of the other to the categories of the self. It is noted that in reversing the totalising claims of the self towards the other Levinas essentialises the feminine and non-European cultures, limiting their existence to that of absolute, unknowable otherness. To this end, I address this critique of Levinasian ethics expanding further on the notion of

embodiment from the perspective of ‘othered’ bodies using insights from phenomenology that have influenced feminist and race theory. I finally introduce carnal hermeneutics (Kearney 2015) as a modality of interaction between self and other that considers reciprocity while maintaining their non-assimilability. The implications of embodiment for intercultural pedagogy are explored through the concept of deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) which captures intercultural interaction in pedagogical spaces in terms of embodied lived experiences beyond the binary self/other. It is suggested that learning environments are constructed as a series of assemblages that can be disrupted, or deterritorialised, by enhancing the embodied aspects of interaction.

Intercultural Communication and the Self-Other Relation

Intercultural communication as a field has been preoccupied with bridging cultural differences between self and other. This is most evident in various models of intercultural competence that have been developed with the intent to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to interact successfully with others, particularly in the context of second language teaching (e.g., Byram 1997) and internationalised Higher Education (e.g., Deardorff 2006). The acquisition of a second language is also linked to the development of intercultural citizenship education (Byram 2008; Porto, Houghton, and Byram 2018) blending foreign language education and global citizenship education (Martin, Esteve-Faubel, and Esteve-Faubel 2021). A political dimension is added with the emphasis on the development of critical skills and democratic approaches to language education (Phipps and Gonzalez 2004; Phipps and Guilherme 2004). However, many have questioned the notion of competence and the adoption of culture as a category to understand the self-other relation in intercultural communication. Culture is seen as insufficient to understand the complexity of contemporary societies (Abdallah-Preteuille 2006) due to its essentialist and nation-driven character (Holliday 2013) that does not account for competing power relations between differing groups

(Dervin 2015, 2017; Hoskins and Sallah 2018; Hua 2018). Simpson and Dervin (2019) employ Bakhtin's conception of dialogism as ontology to problematise the notion of competence as a closing off of dialogue between the self and the other. For Bakhtin (1981) the self is not an autonomous being separated from social relations, on the contrary the self is constituted in the process of constant dialogue with others through discourse and social praxis. This dialogue is steeped in the reality of heteroglossia, meaning not only the reality of language stratification but also the social and ideological struggles over language and meanings both between 'differing epochs in the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form' (Bakhtin 1981, 291). What is important to note for the purposes of this paper is that the other is not passive in this dialogic process, and this means that attempts to pre-establish normative and stable grounds for the relation between self and other would entail a closure of dialogue.

Other reconceptualisations of the relation self-other in intercultural communication have been influenced in particular by the notion of absolute alterity in Levinas and the need to preserve this alterity against cultural essentialism and attempts at reducing otherness within the limits of cultural belonging (Gehrke 2010; Ucok-Sayrak 2016). This approach to intercultural communication highlights the ethical dimension of the relation between self and other and in particular the impossibility of predetermining the outcome of intercultural interaction using skills and competences (Ferri 2018; Pinchevski 2005). Thus, the focus on embodiment is intended to expand on these recent developments in intercultural communication theory that problematise culture as an analytical category (Dervin 2014, 2016; Ferri 2018) and that foreground the contingent and often asymmetrical relation between self and other (e.g., Dervin 2020; Ferri 2020, 2022; Nakayama and Halualani 2010; Piller 2011; Hua and Kramersch 2016). The next section further engages with Levinasian ethics and in particular

with the notion of the face of the other in order to introduce the self-other relation from the perspective of embodiment.

Intercultural Ethics and the Face of the Other

Levinasian ethics readdresses the privileging of the rational mind over the body of Western metaphysical tradition, which neglects the complex bodily experiences that help shape our own sense of self. This dualism between mind and body became a main tenet in Western philosophical tradition in the seventeenth century with Descartes (1998) and the supremacy assigned to the thinking subject (*res cogitans*) over the body (*res extensa*).

In Levinasian ethics the supremacy of the thinking subject is destabilised by the encounter with the face of the other. The face appears as an epiphany, it overflows meaning and as such it cannot be totalised using language or the categories of reason. Levinas' phenomenological descriptions of the face (1969, 259) convey this radical, unknowable and absolute alterity using erotic desire and in particular the act of touching the other, and more specifically of caressing the other,

The caress does not act, does not grasp possibles. The secret it forces does not inform it as an experience; it overwhelms the relation of the I with itself and with the non-I.

Through this act of caressing, the self is confronted with the impossibility to fully possess an object of desire, as the closer we approach the other the further away it recedes from our grasp. This receding from the grasp of the self is embodied in erotic experience, capturing radical otherness as a future possibility or as an experience that is *not yet* (Ahmed 2002) and that lives in a future temporality. This distance characterises the relation with the other, meaning that the self is unable to contain otherness into predetermined categories of understanding: "The face resists possession, resists my powers" (Levinas 1969, 196). Being summoned by the face, the self encounters the other in a modality that is radically different from everyday communicative transactions, as Levinas (1985, 85) writes,

You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the colour of his eyes! When one observes the colour of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other.

Viewing this simultaneous presence and distance of the other, the relation self/other is closely linked to temporality and to a future that promises to bring the thinking subject outside of the solitude of the self. The temporal and future oriented dimension of this *not yet* (Ahmed 2002) is at the core of a relationship that is open ended, external to the categories and the certainties of the self, and impossible to categorise. For Levinas, social relationships with the other reside in this sphere of ethical engagement in which the self is not in autonomous but radically engaged with the other in an embodied relation.

The face of the other appears in its nakedness and vulnerability demanding the self to engage, to act, but at the same time this same vulnerability of the face presupposes the possibility of violence. The ethical imperative not to kill is realised in this moment of extreme vulnerability in which the self encounters the other in its nakedness, in its most stripped form, the face ‘‘is what forbids us to kill’’ (Levinas 1985, 86). In this regard, the argument made by O’Regan and MacDonald (2007) in relation to the inherent possibility of violence in the self-other relation is still compelling. According to this argument, intercultural communication is uncomfortably placed between a totalising embrace of the other, in which all differences are cancelled in the plenitude of intercultural consciousness, and a relativism that avoids to confront the possibility of disagreement with the other in an ultimately superficial celebration of difference. This aporia between relativism and totalising consciousness (O’Regan and MacDonald 2007) highlights the theoretical struggle to reconcile alterity, or the radical otherness of the other, with the need to find modalities of encounter that preserve uniqueness while establishing the grounds for dialogue. Establishing the parameters for a self-other relation requires taking into account the complexity of intercultural interactions in

multicultural societies with demands for recognition, conflicting values and unequal power relations between dominant and marginalised groups.

To this end, it is worth noting that Levinas's relationship with cultural diversity and troubling Eurocentrism have been the object of debate. Blond (2016) positions Levinas' radical alterity in contrast with the embodied and historicised other of postcolonial theory, involving racial and cultural difference and material inequality. Blond (2016, 262) argues that Levinas' ahistorical other "does violence to historical others who are racially and culturally engendered, the "other others", who demand to be heard". Similarly, Maldonado-Torres (2012) places Levinas' troubling remarks about non-Western cultures and people as an expression of Eurocentrism and Orientalism. Furthermore, the problematic use of the feminine to refer to otherness in order to convey the sense of something that is vulnerable and yet beyond the grasp of the self is critiqued by feminist philosophers, among others by De Beauvoir (1997) and Irigaray (1991) who highlight how the feminine is deprived of subjectivity and agency, reducing the female to an object of mystery, a *non-I*, and the self to a default male position.

A contrasting feminist reading of Levinas is offered by Ahmed (2000, 2002) who warns against reducing the radical otherness of the other to the particularity of a finite and specific embodied other, a reduction that in intercultural communication in particular would reintroduce cultural essentialism. In other words, this radical otherness is essentialised when it is reduced to the immediate physical, cultural and linguistic characteristics of the other facing me. Ahmed suggests shifting the focus from this concrete other facing me to the modalities of encountering the other, and in the specific how each instance carries the traces of past encounters with 'other others' (Ahmed 2002). Taking Ahmed's point, I argue here that attending to these modalities of encountering others shifts the relation between self and other into the realm of embodied relationality. Besides the individual physical, cultural and

linguistic characteristics that can be observed in interaction, bodily presence to one another includes emotional affects and responses that are not necessarily registered or perceived at rational, cognitive level. This bodily response is complicated by the fact that the other facing me is also an embodied self, in other words a complex, sentient and relational lived body with an experiential perspective different from mine.

Embodied Others

Considering the self as an embodied entity, it could be argued that we live in the world guided by pre-existing conditions that will influence our ethical choices (Käufer and Chemero 2015) and in particular our responses to others. Some of these pre-existing conditions are made particularly visible when considering the experiences of ‘othered’ sexualised, gendered, disabled or racialised bodies. Certain bodily responses can be traced back to the cultural politics of colonial and post-colonial history and the practices of othering established through the rearrangement of humanity into a Western self and a colonised other. Ahmed (2004) describes the affective feelings that are harnessed by the figure of an imagined other who invades and threatens a common space, eliciting fear, disgust and hatred. This affective response can be seen in current ethno-nationalisms that demarcate the undesirable other, as for example in the equating of asylum seekers to alien invaders or insects swarming a country, eliciting fear and disgust towards those marked as undesirable others because of their visible differences.

Although the affective responses generated by bodies are primarily felt rather than registered cognitively, these emotions can be framed within cultural, political and historical contexts. The connection between negative affective responses and the politics of colonialism and imperialism is further reinforced by Zemblyas (2020) with the notion of disgust, which is traced back to both Ahmed (2004) and Kristeva’s (1982) concept of the abject. Similarly Butler (in Meijer and Prins 1998, 281) illustrates the process of abjection as a discursive

production that creates an irrevocable otherness, which she identifies not only in reference to sexuality and gender but trans-culturally in the representation of non-Western modes of life as being inferior, as class inequality in the perception and representation of poverty and in the stigmatization of mental illness and physical disability,

So, we get a kind of differential production of the human or a differentiated materialization of the human. And we also get, I think, a production of the abject. So, it is not as if the unthinkable, the unlivable, the unintelligible has no discursive life; it does have one. It just lives within discourse as the radically uninterrogated and as the shadowy contentless figure for something that is not yet made real.

These differences are muted discursively, but they are visible in the bodies of those who are othered producing affective responses that are left mostly unnoticed and unregistered at a more conscious level. The supremacy afforded to abstract reason in Western metaphysical tradition has created an idealised and Eurocentric model of humanity that is encompassed in the classical image of the Vitruvian man (Braidotti 2019) whose bodily perfection symbolises rationality as the measure of all things, narrowing the human to male, able bodied and white. This perspective has produced an epistemic erasure and a process of abjection of those others who were not made in the image of this universalised model of humanity. The centrality of embodiment to understand the experiences of racialised and gendered others is discussed in the next section with an overview of phenomenology, before introducing carnal hermeneutics and the issue of reciprocity in the self-other relation.

Phenomenology and the Lived Body

Phenomenological tradition views the material existence of the body as embedded in cultural contexts, in terms of a set of possibilities that are realised within the constraints of historical conventions (Butler 1988). The interaction between the materiality of the body with its lived, experiential dimension is evident in Husserl's (1989) distinction between Körper (the body as a physical entity) and Leib (the human body as it is experienced personally). With this distinction, Husserl addresses the twofold character of corporeality as an object among other

objects and at the same time as a subject of intentional action. Subsequently, Merleau-Ponty adopted this distinction with the notion of the body schema denoting how the lived body (Leib) is an organic unity connected to its spatial surroundings. According to this notion, the world is experienced and inhabited by the sentient subject in a complex interaction in which consciousness is enmeshed with the sensory and affective dimensions of the lived body, entering in a reciprocal relation with the objects of perceptions:

As a body schema, the whole body, with all its sensory, motor, and affective operations, is that through which the world appears; the world is not made present first to a subject of consciousness, who is in the body like the pilot of a ship (Whitney 2018, 492).

Due to this reciprocity that is encompassed by the body schema, we make sense of the world through the lived experiences that shape our intentionality and for Merleau-Ponty (1968, 135) the flesh is the meeting point of this reciprocal relationship:

It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication.

Considering that the flesh and the objects of perception are entangled in this relation, lived experience of the world is the precondition of any claims to knowledge. In this sense the body becomes the privileged point of entry to the world, displacing the supremacy of abstract consciousness inherited from Western metaphysical tradition.

Feminist literature is rich in phenomenological descriptions of the lived body and in particular of the ways in which women's bodies inhabit the world. One aspect of this interaction is that of limited intentionality, described through the modalities that constrain women's ability to act in the world in virtue of the body that they inhabit. In this regard, de Beauvoir (1997, 295) illustrates the othering of the female body through societal norms and expectations that congeal her being in the world within the limits of her sexuality: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". In other words, for de Beauvoir women are made visibly other by virtue of the limitations imposed on their intentionality that constrain their interactions with the

world. As an illustration, Young's *Throwing like a girl* (1980) describes the condition of being a woman as that of inhibited intentionality, or the ways in which female bodies learn to take less space, to reduce their intensity, to be guarded. For Ahmed (2017, 23) as a result of this limited intentionality our bodies store memories that accumulate over time like a heavy burden, "gathering like things in a bag". A similar experience affects racialised bodies, as it is recounted by Fanon (2021) in his phenomenological description of the ways in which race functions in colonial and post-colonial contexts to demarcate otherness and to designate the boundaries assigned to bodies: what they can do and cannot do, the ways in which they are affected by the gaze of others, how this gaze paralyses and congeals the subjectivity of those who are othered, altering irremediably their body schema. Fanon describes how his own body schema changed into an 'epidermal racial schema' when a little white boy in France pointed at him and singled him out for his blackness. Fanon (2021, 93) writes:

My body returned to me spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter's day.

Through this essentialised gaze the body is racialised and gendered, altered in its intentionality and in its being in the world. Despite the epistemic erasure of othered bodies and the power dynamics that instigate processes of invisibilisation towards those who are marked as 'other', carnal hermeneutics introduces the relation between self and other from a perspective that considers reciprocity.

Carnal Hermeneutics

In line with phenomenological tradition carnal hermeneutics (Kearney 2015a, 2015b) reasserts the role of the carnal as a site of meaning and the non-assimilable nature of the interaction between self and other. Returning to Merleau Ponty's conceptualisation of the flesh as the mediating point between the perceiving body and the world, Kearney further develops the notion of the body as 'living flesh'. As embodied entities, we are in an intimate relation with our own flesh through which we perceive and make sense of the world, but at

the same time we are in connection with other bodies in the immanence of relations, or via the integrated mind-body nexus that is activated through initial sensory responses to the presence of others. Kearney's (2021) latest work on carnal hermeneutics employs insights from psychoanalysis to reclaim the importance of tactile embodiment and in particular of visceral reactions as the primary access to the world and to others, prior to language and to rational thinking. In this sense, Kearney emphasises the role of emotions in determining our responses to external stimuli, locating the gut as the primary organ through which we first respond to the presence of others. For Kearney, this embodied response means that there will always be a distance between two embodied selves, and that this distance forms the basis of the relation with the other. In other words, because this is a relational process the other is not engulfed and possessed by the categories of the self:

The other is revealed to my flesh as *both* inscribed in my embodied relation through flesh and as always already transcendent (Kearney 2015a, 120).

In this relational process, self and other are not reduced to sameness. Due to their relational and embodied nature, encounters are characterised by a twofold ontological texture: we feel and we are felt, we see and we are seen, we touch and we are touched. According to Kearney, this reversibility of the twofold ontological texture means that the self and other are never reduced to the 'same', they will never be totally assimilated to one another. There are pedagogical implications that can be drawn from approaching embodiment through the twofold ontological texture and the non-assimilable character of the self-other relation afforded by carnal hermeneutics.

Embodied Others in Pedagogical Practice

hooks (2009, 153) explores the carnal or embodied dimension of pedagogical practice reflecting on the role of touch in establishing embodied connections in the classroom, "before words are spoken in the classroom, we come together as bodies". For hooks, attending to the individual embodied stories and experiences that we bring to this common pedagogical space

harbours the potential to challenge oppressive, racist and patriarchal structures. In further exploring the erotic aspect of embodiment hooks (2009) is mainly concerned with its emancipatory potential, however certain emotional and affective responses in embodied relations are more closely connected to the aforementioned processes of abjection. What I believe is most relevant in hook's analysis is that the body becomes a site of knowledge and that differing perceptions of the body are made visible in educational spaces by materialising the figure of the educator as a focal point of the gaze of others. As an illustration, the poet, feminist, writer, educator Audre Lorde brought her multiple selves in institutionalised pedagogical spaces from a minoritized position of othering, while teaching the structural inequality behind oppressive practices to training police officers at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. In the poem *Blackstudies* (1997, 153) Lorde conveys her own experience of navigating the intersectional complexities of her role as a black, queer, feminist educator. Lorde describes sitting in her classroom on the seventeenth floor, "bottom pinned to a table" while her students are waiting outside,

outside my door they are waiting
with questions that feel like judgements
when they are unanswered.

Lorde's educational practice is entangled with the specific locations of her teaching and with the educational spaces she embodied with her 'othered' presence, described through the bodily sensation of being pinned to a table while waiting for the judgment of her students. Indeed, classrooms are not neutral sites of pedagogical transactions (Pennycook 2011) but spaces already loaded with power asymmetries and othering practices that become visible in the experiences of minoritized students and educators, reflecting wider societal inequalities for example in relation to the intersecting axes of race and gender discrimination (Bradbury, Tereshchenko, and Mills 2022; Kozleski and Proffitt 2020; Sinha 2018; Tereshchenko, Bradbury, and Mills 2021). It can thus be argued that these wider inequalities illuminate the

epistemic invisibility of the body in the pedagogical relation (Wagner and Shahjahan 2015) and in particular the aforementioned discursive invisibility of ‘othered’ bodies. In this respect, embodiment, affect and relationality are fundamental aspects of education (Youdell 2017) that have been overlooked in favour of rationalistic and disembodied accounts of educational practice (Evans, Rich, and Davies 2009).

It is not my intention to claim a corrective able to readdress these imbalances in order to empower students to achieve a heightened level of critical consciousness. In this regard, the potential repressive and essentialised nature of critical pedagogies that universalise the experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups has been explored in feminist poststructuralist literature (e.g., Ellsworth 1989; Lather 1998). According to this literature, one of the limits of critical pedagogy is to assume that all oppressed and marginalised groups share the same identity and the same experiences, ignoring the ways in which all individuals are at the centre of axes of oppression and privilege. In this sense, positing the non-assimilability of self-other resists narratives of group emancipation while acknowledging power relations and inequalities that traverse bodies and their experiences in educational spaces. The notion of deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) is employed here to suggest that reflecting on the role of embodiment in the self-other relation in terms of reciprocity can further expand the scope of intercultural pedagogy beyond fixed and mechanistic notions of a linear process of teaching and learning, totalising claims of critical consciousness in critical pedagogy, and intercultural responsibility towards ‘the other’.

Deterritorialising Intercultural Learning

I use the concepts of assemblage and deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) to describe how learning environments are arranged and configured and to indicate some of the possibilities inherent in embodiment to disrupt established configurations within these spaces. Although the English word assemblage does not fully capture the semantic web of the French

word *agencement*, the process of assemblage recalls the image of a dry-stone wall (Deleuze and Guattari 1994) arranged in differing combinations that are not predetermined or held together like in the pieces of a jigsaw. As assemblages take form, they become coded and acquire delimited functions and boundaries, forming structures that homogenise the different elements into stratified and hierarchical systems. Despite this, assemblages are also traversed by movements of deterritorialization, conceived as processes of experimentation and tentative creation of other assemblages:

Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place in it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times (Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 161).

Thus, considering the physical and social arrangement of the classroom as an assemblage, thinking about intercultural learning through the lenses of deterritorialisation has the potential to subvert the hierarchical, disembodied, structured spaces of learning environments. I outline here an intercultural territorial assemblage formed of three strata and with corresponding possibilities for deterritorialisation: first, the disembodied teaching of skills and competences with the separation between the teacher or instructor as the expert in intercultural awareness and the students who are the receivers of this instruction; second, intercultural communication understood primarily through the medium of English language learning; third, the separation between body and mind, self and other.

In relation to the teaching of competence and intercultural awareness, the focus on knowing the other, seeing the world through the eyes of the other, or acquiring awareness of other cultures, recalls a positivist paradigm of intercultural communication that assumes a rational mind in control of the interaction with the other. In addition to Kearney's carnal hermeneutics outlined above and in particular the role attributed to visceral reactions in our relations with others, there are further insights from clinical studies that present interesting challenges for

the teaching intercultural competence and awareness. These studies (e.g., Appleton 2018) have asserted the role of the gut as an organ that is directly linked to the brain, a fact that is echoed in linguistic expressions when describing decision making that relies on instinct ('gone with your gut') or feelings such as anxiety ('butterflies in your stomach'). Barnacle (2009) suggests incorporating this insight from medical science into pedagogical practice, arguing that qualities and dispositions such as openness or criticality are not the result of direct instruction that can be measured in terms of the acquisition of specific and discrete skills but that the whole self, the integrated body-mind nexus, needs to be taken into account. In this respect, the use of performance to enhance intercultural learning (e.g., Frimberger, White, and Ma 2018 on creative arts in intercultural pedagogy; Mitra 2015 on intercultural dance; Nelson 2013 on intercultural queer theatre) illustrates some of the possibilities for deterritorialization disclosed by being attentive to the embodied elements of interaction in learning spaces.

Returning to Ahmed's aforementioned idea of the modalities of encounter in self-other relations, a second potential deterritorialization of intercultural learning resides in a shift from the emphasis on language learning and cultural awareness between speakers of different languages, particularly through the medium of the English language, to thinking about language in its semiotic and multimodal relation with bodies, senses and objects (Pennycook 2018). Assuming that language is always situated and entangled in geo-political inequalities, environments, social and affective dimensions, deterritorialising language in intercultural learning reflects the complexities of interaction and relationality in lived, embodied encounters, disrupting assumptions of transparent understanding between self and other. As an illustration, this embodied aspect of language use is visible in Kramsch's (2009) multilingual subject, in Ros i Solé's (2016) nomadic language learner, and in Ferri's (2022)

intercultural reading of minor literature. All three underline the precarious, experiential, power laden and lived realities of intercultural speakers.

The third and final potential for deterritorialization of intercultural learning is directly connected to the other two, in the sense that the separation between body and mind, self and other results from the disembodied teaching of skills and competences and the focus on culture as an analytical category to understand the other. Thinking about embodied encounters in the pedagogical space deterritorialises the sense of belonging derived from identifying with a national culture to situating knowledge in common lived experiences, entanglements, positionalities, and relationality beyond cultural differences between self and other. This attuning to the specificity of bodily presence and lived embodiment maintains the irreducibility of the other to the totalising grasp of the self. Thus conceived, both self and other are materially embedded, affective and relational, always situated and compromised, entangled and unique.

Concluding Remarks

With this paper I reflected on the search for grounded principles and norms on which to root intercultural relations between self and other. In order to address a disembodied, positivist tendency in intercultural communication theory to view ethical engagement in terms of tolerance, awareness, adaptation and linguistic competence, I took embodiment as a starting point to understand how relationality and lived experiences can guide intercultural learning beyond these constructs. I extended this notion of embodiment to think about embodied others, and in particular the ways in which their bodies have been made epistemically invisible through processes of universalisation and erasure of difference. My aim was to illustrate the framing of intercultural communication and intercultural learning in the experiential engagement and the messiness of lived interactions, entanglements and contextual positionalities. An intercultural pedagogy attentive to embodied relations is open

to the possibility of disagreement and recognises the existence of forms of inequality that have been made epistemically invisible and discursively muted.

From this perspective, the notion of deterritorialization of intercultural learning was employed to outline how processes of experimentation can subvert established assemblages, hierarchies, and fixed notions of self and other. However, it is recognised that assemblages are temporary formations and should not become reterritorialized into a new set of established rules, models of competence, and normative principles. With the precariousness of current global challenges, intercultural communication can embrace the experimentation of new forms of engagement that recognise epistemic erasures and the unequal relations between different forms of knowledge, living and being.

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