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Curiosity – An Emplaced Virtue to Move Science Towards the Edge?

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> Abstract • I expand on the implications that Candiottio's enactive and situated account of love has for scientific research. In particular, I focus on curiosity as a common denominator of the strategies that Candiottio suggests in order to maintain desirable distance and loving relations with the concrete others that make up our world. Staying close to Candiottio's arguments around the importance of difference and distance for the development of loving (learning) relations, as well as the central role she ascribes to prolonged and attentive engagement with environmental others (inhabiting place), I offer resources and research questions to strengthen curiosity about self and other in scientific environments.

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« 1 » In her target article, Laura Candiottio provides an alternative view of love. Stepping away from universalist or fusionist

perspectives, she defines love as the need to listen more deeply to an other of desirable difference (be they human or not). Based on enactive and panpsychist theory, Candiottio describes loving as a situated and participatory practice: in concrete and sustained relationships of appreciation and care, we become able to listen more deeply and learn to recognize others, ourselves and our relationships, each on their own terms. Candiottio's account emphasizes the role of specific (situated) difference in love (§§24, 29), as well as the moral and political implications of loving (§§23, 28): when we appreciate our and others' different terms as given, but maintain connection through the desire to encounter and listen more fully, a generative space of meaning-making opens between others (lovers). At once, self, ideas and personal development become "emplaced" (§16), and the structures and dynamics present in the (responsive) environment inseparable from our careful attention and listening.

« 2 » Candiottio's view places knowledge – personal as well as structural development – in loving and situated relations *between others* who co-create spaces of mutual transformation. By participating in loving relations marked by careful attention and time and space to listen, we open up, bring our whole self to respond, and learn as a consequence (§15). In this commentary, I expand on the implications that such an enactive and situated view of knowledge has for scientific research – the collaborative endeavor of constructing and organizing knowledge in the form of testable explanations and predictions of empirical data. I do so in two steps: first, I dwell on curiosity about *edges* as a condition for deep listening (that is meeting ourselves, others and our relation to them each on their own terms). Next, based on Candiottio's concept of becoming native through specific, alive and ongoing encounter, I take a second step: I suggest a set of research questions to move academic work into directions that place enactive listening at the heart of knowledge.

Curiosity about one's edge as a precondition for meeting others on their terms

« 3 » In Candiottio's enactive account of the love of nature, autonomy and difference play a key role. As Candiottio argues, it is

the desirable *distance* between autonomous others that expands our space of possibility by opening up new paths (§§18–20). As the article progresses, she describes an existential engagement with others that *lets them be(come)* through enactive listening (§33, see also De Jaegher 2021). "Letting be" is an attitude that radically respects (refrains from judging) both one's own and others' terms (§35). Candiottio further outlines how this implies a priority of the encounter over knowledge: there remains an element of radical difference that I can never know or control (nor should I), but can move closer to by letting unfolding encounter be – a central line of argumentation in feminist epistemology (Mathews 2003). Candiottio returns to desire as a helpful ally in keeping this radical distance *open*: desire appeases our tendency to *fill* distance with knowledge, instead leading us into attentive exploration and listening more (§36). Concerning concrete strategies to develop (knowledge born of) enactive listening (§39), Candiottio suggests moving away from detached analysis, into participatory engagement (again closely relating to De Jaegher 2021) and a focus on shared aliveness (in particular, Weber 2020).

« 4 » In Candiottio's terms, I propose curiosity as a core ingredient of the ability to maintain a desirable distance between oneself and an other: instead of blindly imposing a known path, curiosity continuously expands possible and interesting ways forward based on my background of experience and that of others.

« 5 » Whether or not we encounter a situation with curiosity deeply affects our attention and perception (Brady 2018). When listening and expression expand and contract in the rhythm of our body and creative attention, we are deeply present to how and where we are. Ready and curious to encounter life as it unfolds, we move towards our and others' *edges* – unknown nearby areas of possibility, unfolding experience that intuitively guides us towards the most interesting path to take through a situation. Goal-oriented reasoning and behaviour – the power and clarity that result from taking a fixed set of assumptions for granted – become tools picked up and let go of flexibly, as it serves the larger situation.

« 6 » Where does the ability to enter a curious mindset come from? To my eye, it

evolves around fullness of listening as well as the resulting readiness to respond and engage. Can I relate to this in curious, open-minded gestures and a similar attitude? If not, better I do not, for I would bring and manifest part of the trouble I see. Curiosity about edges can therefore be seen as a key ingredient of loving relations and hence the development of knowledge. Curiosity provides us with meaningful research directions, together with methods and collaborative practices needed to move forward along a given path. By opening us to the life-world of the other, curiosity at once affords a wider perspective and sensitizes us to needs present in our environment (Gibson 1986; Robbins & Aydede 2009). Candiottio, in her account of situated love *to* a place as a participatory practice (§26), suggests that becoming native involves the development of virtues (§§30, 45) – curiosity could be seen as one such virtue.

« 7 » Importantly, I understand curiosity (fullness of listening, readiness to respond) as a quality that is inextricably directed to self *and* other: as I care and take responsibility for my experience, I become able to recognize and let others be. This allows me to see my self, priorities and opportunities to extend inspiring invitations to participate more clearly. As I develop courage to find and follow my edge, my excitement about others' learning and inquiry becomes peaceful, expands and grows. Again, such courage could be added to Candiottio's list of virtues (§30).

« 8 » Beginning the work in myself, I care about gathering and emplacing – inhabiting – resources for staying curiously in touch with my experience and activity. Spending time and building habits that bring me close to my edge (unfolding experience), I prepare for situations in which self-responsibility is challenging: when I feel disrespected, when a group situation does not (seem to) support my learning and joy – when there is an opportunity to *lead* along and invite others to learn from my edge.

« 1 » How can I thus inhabit curiosity? Besides a rich base of nourishing food, rest and pleasurable physical activity, I find resources to strengthen curiosity in: *time spent alone*, navigating possibilities at my pace; *synergies* – working with what is available. By integrating my wider back-

ground of activities and needs into any given choice, I learn that I am not alone in my responsibility or control – my (chosen, inhabited, home) environment provides resources, solutions and pleasure; *curious-creative exploration* – listening circles, a form of group dialogue based on taking turns at sharing personal experience and noticing what resonates (Linnea & Baldwin 2010), provide space for this. So does “informal” space to explore ideas together in conversation and relational practice. My earlier work with Katrin Heimann and Pedro González-Fernández (Lübbert, Heimann & González-Fernández 2021) further provides starting points for researchers to expand their toolbox through reflection and shared exploration of their research interests and specific embodied and interpersonal situations; *time spent not expecting answers* – sensing into edges of new ideas, change, laughter or mourning as they arise and fade. The micro-phenomenological interview technique (Petitmengin 2006) presents a method that aims precisely at this quality of report. Through process-oriented “how-questions” as well as interpersonal rapport (Heimann et al. *in press*), it moves us away from so-called “satellite” dimensions of experience (explanation, justification, interpretation), closer to multi-sensory experience as it unfolds. Related techniques to strengthen and investigate our access to emerging experience include focusing (Gendlin 1961), thinking at the edge¹ and insight dialogue (Kramer 2003). See also Mary Rees's (2019) work on opening science towards emergence – in particular, her focus on researchers' awareness of their “amoebic response,” subtle inner movements of approach and retreat (Rees 2019: 61).

« 2 » I will now revisit the concept of *becoming native* in the context of scientific environments.

Questions for a science that practices enactive listening

« 3 » In keeping with Candiottio's instantaneous (specific, concrete, §§24, 26, 29, 35), alive (biological community, §25) and ongoing (priority of asymmetrical encoun-

ter over knowledge, §§42, 43) conception of the process of becoming native, I argue that scientific research benefits from places that keep curiosity alive: regular material and social modes of interacting that invite us to listen and respond more fully to ourselves, as well as the beings that host or represent our phenomena of interest. The following general research questions could be starting points for further investigation:

- How can scientific methods (of experimentation, documentation, analysis, publication) support curiosity and the meeting of differences on their own terms?
- How can scientific research contribute to the development of natives and places in which a complex biological community thrives?
- How can we ground knowledge in the slow but constant change that unfolds in the prolonged, situated encounter of radical differences – and hence conduct cutting-edge research that *inhabits place*?

« 4 » Candiottio's account prompts us to inquire about the specific (life, background, resources of a) researcher, research group and institute. If instances of embodied encounter have primacy over knowledge (§29), and embodied encounter is a holistic endeavor that happens not just through words but sound, smell, touch and emotional receptivity more generally (§40), then *particular* expressive qualities of concrete others and their experience of shared aliveness (§41) are central. Joan Halifax's work around GRACE – an intervention to facilitate compassion – offers useful insight and tools to support situated encounter (Halifax 2018). In a related vein, the scores for the Playful Academic (Lübbert et al. 2021) prompt us to integrate our particular reflective and embodied sensitivity into our research practice. Here are some suggestions for research questions targeting situating curiosity:

- How can we ground and gather our full, embodied attention to focus on our research intention?
- Which materials and methods, relationships, practices and places allow us to involve curiosity towards ourselves in our research process (so that we can fully meet another)?

¹ | See “Introduction to Thinking at the Edge” by Eugene Gendlin at <https://focusing.org/felt-sense/introduction-thinking-edge>

- What marks situations in which we respond relaxedly and attentively to learning with others?

« 5 » I further read in Candiotta a call for space to let each other be(come): to take a few steps together, before and as we conduct experiments and interviews, collect our data; to listen to one another and follow our edges as they arise *here*, with *this* other. Confidently leaning into edges, we invite others into participatory sense-making. Fixed plans and opinions cease to dominate, opening research to more complex, concrete and situated forms of sense-making. Data may then be born of enactive listening (continuous becoming) (loving relations). Joseph Dumit's (2014) argument for a more plastic scientific method similarly emphasizes time for care and play, to yield genuinely surprising findings. The following research questions hence focus on change through encounter:

- How can attunement to self and other, as well as pause and consideration of what serves best be integrated into any research protocol?
- Which forms of documentation and communication support encounter (mutual curiosity, offering, change) throughout the research process – from preparations, to dissemination and publication of findings?

Conclusion

« 6 » I close with three take-home messages for practicing researchers:

- 1 | Take care of your habits and toolbox, so that you are well prepared to respond in the moment. What is needed can then gradually manifest in your experiments and work.
- 2 | Construct your niche in science: find and help create spaces where attending to your amoebic response is welcomed and supported. Your work can then be grounded and deepened through genuine encounter.
- 3 | Bring your research insights and questions out in the world, meeting the diverse places and people that make up your life world with curiosity. Your full capacity to inhabit place and live at the edge can then enter, inform and guide your work.

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