

Freedom of the mind is not the same as the freedom of the body.

– Martin Parker & Elke Weik

Corporeal ethics in the sauna

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Openness should not be interpreted as weakness, nor as indecision, but rather as the courage to refuse the comforting refuge of broad categories and fixed unidirectional vision.

(Schildrick, 1997: 3)

Something gets under my skin, something disturbs me, something elates me, excites me, bothers me, surprises me. It is this experience that sets off a movement that extends my world beyond the intimate and familiar.

(Diprose, 2002: 132)

BEGINNING

Veera's e-mail to Alison:

All is well here in the North. No snow yet, but morning frost. At the moment I am busy with the last corrections to my PhD manuscript. It should be off my hands by the end of the week. However, I would be interested to work in a dialogue. How would you suggest that we proceed? Should we reflect upon the corporeal ethics in practice during the Corporeal Ethics seminar at the University of Lapland? Since we already have textual material for that (my reflection papers and your responses) it could be a light way to proceed. Naturally, some of it is too personal to be utilized.

Alison's reply to Veera:

So good to hear from you Veera and very happy that the end of the PhD is close. Yes your ideas collide with mine.... maybe even starting on my side with the tensions of 'teaching corporeal ethics pre course' and how this evaporated before me.

This manuscript is born out of exchanges between us; living at opposite ends of the world. Summer is fast approaching for Alison in Australia, a vast country experiencing undocumented weather shifts. Winter frost came early for Veera in Rovaniemi, a town of global signifi-

cance and quaintness. Our experiences of the world around us are so very different, but the climate crisis speaks to us both. Veera is finishing her doctorate at the University of Lapland, Alison's never-ending PhD was examined in 2003, and she has worked as an academic in the UK and Australia. We first met when we took part in a doctoral workshop 'Corporeal Ethics' at the University of Lapland in December 2016. Alison was invited to 'deliver' the course which Veera attended.

In what follows, we have a conversation which involves both of us remembering individual experiences and reflections, and our reflections on these reflections. We also draw on the written exchanges between us in the months following the workshop. The text that unfolds exposes the ways our lives come together and disband, we agree and disagree, we think, we feel. We have experienced struggle trying to keep our text, our ideas, our bodies, open. To bring our thoughts to a conclusion breaches the very conditions that we experienced. As such, this is a text without conclusions, a text that we hope will breathe on the pages of this online source, for others to experience in their own ways. Yet there is a tension between wanting to fully relate to and engage with each other in an ethical way through a required openness, which resists reduction and closure, and the inevitable textual closure present throughout this text. But perhaps this closure and subsequent fixing of meaning is a necessary condition for enabling each other to flourish? In many ways, this text is an experiment, yet without the structure and limitations of being an experiment.

REMEMBERING

Alison: I loved Lapland when my family and I visited from the UK some years ago, and I was so very delighted to have the opportunity to return. But, I realised that I had not been to 'real Lapland' before and that we had experienced Rovaniemi through a tourist simulation engineered for British tourists! I was excited to see the snow, and I was prepared for winter layering. I was even excited about teaching corporeal ethics with a small group of PhD students. Before the course, I was asked to prepare a course guide and recommend some readings. I had regular discussions with Professor Anu Valtonen as it became apparent that the rigid guidelines normalised in both UK and Australian Business Schools were not an expectation at Lapland. One of the challenges for the course was how to embody and enact corporeal ethics. How to be present rather than how to present such materials. How to open oneself to the other – the stranger. On reflection, this occurred naturally, even though I recognise that the encounters within this course were very unique.

I developed the aim of the course to review and analyse the nature of corporeal ethics as it has been employed in organization studies. The questions posed were: How can we establish the relationship between bodies, agency and ethics? What can corporeal ethics mean for rethinking ethics in organizations? What is the future of studying corporeal ethics in organizations? What possibilities become available if we take corporeal ethics seriously? How does corporeal ethics relate to resistance in organizations? How can corporeal ethics be researched?

The group would spend three days together and the days were planned as follows: day 1 involved looking back at how and why corporeal ethics makes sense to us, the way in which it emerged in my own work and understanding the key features of corporeal ethics and what

this means for individual research interests. Day 2 involved designing research projects and highlighting the methodological issues that emerge. Day 3 explored the relations with emerging debates on affect, resistance, politics, feminist ethics; and future directions that the group's ideas could be taken in.

Ideally, assessed coursework would not be applied to a course based on reflexive practice as a focus on learning for assessment could surface and reinforce instrumental approaches to class participation which would disrupt the focus of corporeal ethics as a pre-reflective, emergent, embodied way of interpersonal engagement. However, the assessment was set as follows:

Piece 1

For your pre-course assessment (worth 30% of the marks), please read my paper 'Corporeal Ethics and the Politics of Resistance in Organizations' (with Carl Rhodes (2013), Organization 21(6): 782–796) and

Provide a written critique of the paper (approx. 1,000 words).

Think through an example from your own life/working life which enables you to apply the idea of corporeal ethics.

Prepare a 5-minute presentation on the above.

Ask yourself: what can corporeal ethics as a philosophy and practice offer your research?

How can we research corporeal ethics in organizations?

Piece 2

Keep a reflexive journal of your observations of the course and the ideas that emerge (worth 20% of the marks).

Piece 3 (worth 50% of the marks)

Please choose one of the following and write an academic essay (up to 3,000 words including references).

Take a pressing social problem of your choice (maybe one that works organizations ignore or do not engage with sufficiently). How can corporeal ethics be used to address these problems?

Or,

'The intercorporeality of bodies has transformative potential in organization.' Critically discuss.

PRE-READING

Alison: My relationship to the course participants started before I arrived because they had been given recommended reading weeks before the course. I would read and assess this pre-assessment when I reached Rovaniemi. This activity opened an initial dialogue and set

the foundation for an openness to the materials, and on reflection, perhaps a way of trusting me from the outset. I recall feeling overwhelmed by the extent to which participants ‘opened themselves up’ through reflecting on the relevant reading prescribed in relation their research and lives (see the list of readings).

Veera: I do not think that I was specifically ‘open’ before the course. In response to the request from Alison to write a reflection on the pre-course reading, I read the proposed articles and produced a text that was titled “From corporate to corporeal ethics”. Since I do not have a background in business or organization studies, the feminist critique of business ethics and its formal codes of conduct were quite strange to me – at least in an academic sense. However, I was familiar with Diprose’s corporeal ethics from reading cultural waste studies, especially Gay Hawkins’ (2006) seminal work *Ethics of Waste* in which she suggests that corporeal generosity could offer a key to a more inclusive ethics of waste.

My preparation for the course was reading and writing in haste and trying to grasp the whole feminist criticism of business ethics. The arguments in the course material articles began to collide in my mind with articles on ethnographic research ethics that I had been reading.

ARRIVING

Alison: This was the first course where I had genuinely experienced being institutionally free to be ‘me’ and to work creatively in more embodied, emergent ways than I had worked in other institutions. There were no norms to resist, and I started to think about the ways in which a course on corporeal ethics could be delivered. I say delivered because teaching is often planned in terms of delivery rather than as experience and engagement. I planned the sessions, the readings and I over-prepared lecture-based material. This material, whilst central to providing the frameworks of corporeal ethics that I had read and written on, did not sit comfortably in my skin – even on the flight to Rovaniemi I was preparing, and I didn’t feel ready or ‘right’. I kept preparing and planning the ways in which I would engage with the students – relying solely on whether the students would engage with me and my material.

I was picked up at the airport by the coordinator of the doctoral school and her husband and taken to my apartment. Then I saw Anu walking along the road to the apartment with a bag of essential supplies. The generosity was surprising and overwhelming. Where had I arrived at? Everywhere my gaze turned sparkled like crystals, remembering the suffocating heat that I had left in Sydney. Padded people moved through the snow with ease and sophistication! As a child in Wales, schools would close when it snowed because the roads closed!

Next morning, Anu collected me by car, and we drove to ‘The Sauna-seminar building’ in the snow. A picturesque cottage building in the middle of the forest. I was cast in a world that I hadn’t experienced and I needed to be knowledgeable! I was adrift in a university unknown to me. I felt like the foreigner, the stranger... And, now on reflection, this was a very important place for my body to sit and work from. The toilets were frozen. There was an actual sauna. Anu brought bags and bags of groceries for everyone to share. I thought I understood the Finnish culture, my late mother-in-law was born and raised in Helsinki, and I had visited a few times, but it became apparent that I had very limited knowledge. We met the first students who had arrived early, and we immediately started talking about mutual connections

and points of interest. The group didn't stop talking until three days later when I jumped in a car to go to the airport to collect my family who were arriving for a long weekend. The whole experience was abundantly generous, full of hospitality and wonderful openness. Herein lies a special vulnerability that is necessary for an educator because within such vulnerability spontaneous openness has the possibility to surface.

FROM CORPORATE TO CORPOREAL ETHICS

Excerpt from Veera's pre-course assignment:

In the article "Corporeal ethics and politics of resistance in organizations" Alison Pullen and Carl Rhodes (2014) seek to develop an alternative notion of ethics that would take into account the employees' subjectivity, bodily sensibility and active role in producing ethics in organizations. For this purpose they look for inspiration from feminist philosopher Rosalyn Diprose's (2002) ideas about radical corporeal generosity. Diprose develops an ethics that does not derive from rational calculation and normative thinking but instead from affective, pre-reflective engagement of sensible bodies. For Diprose a physical encounter is always an ethical moment: to be open and generous towards the other, albeit different bodies, is to be open to other ways of thinking and doing. These ethical encounters are disturbing but it is exactly this disturbance that goes under one's skin and makes one think. It is important to notice that although Diprose calls for openness and welcoming of the other ways of being, it does not necessarily mean that one has to adopt or even approve the other way of thinking. Diprose's notion of corporeal ethics opens up to forms of resistance because it resists rigid categories and preconceived ideas – doing things the ways they have always been done (Pullen & Rhodes, 2014). Corporeal ethics can sometimes be contradictory to the normative institutional codes of conduct. The authors argue that the Diprosean idea of corporeal generosity can overcome the gap between organizational ethics and subjective resistance. It can help to grasp the oppressive grassroots practices in organizations concerning for example matters of sex, race and gender. Since this kind of ethics grows from bodily engagement and openness towards others, it cannot be fully organized and managed. But, I suggest, it can be encouraged. One way of encouraging corporeal ethics in organizations is to ditch the idea of ethics as an administrative and managerial issue. The ethics based on radical generosity is not about "collective management of ethics" but instead about "affectively resisting" oppressive practices within organizations. This kind of ethics grows from corporate to corporeal ethics.

However, the notions of corporeal ethics and corporate ethics do not seem exclusionary categories but, rather, complementary. The idea of corporate versus corporeal ethics is close to ideas of procedural ethics and ethics in research practice (see e.g. Guillemin & Gillam 2004). Marilys Guillemin and Lynn Guillemin note that both modes of ethics are necessary and that there needs to be a living relation between these modes. Organizations need to have formal ethics guiding their attitudes towards e.g. environmental issues or suitable working conditions (which again define and guide actual practices). The formal code of conduct is the only way to make sure that the organization as a

whole has an understanding of the shared values and objectives. In addition to the formal ethics, the organization should also be open to new ideas and ways of doing; to be flexible enough to take into account forms of bodily, spontaneous and situated ethics. For example, the ethical codes for the research (procedural ethics) may seem restrictive and often a dull taken for granted part of the research planning. Not many qualitative researchers such as myself can think of any ways how they would cause harm to their research participants, but still these issues need to be thought through even though they seem taken for granted. But following these formally defined ethical research codes still doesn't guarantee ethical research. In the course of the research process (e.g. during fieldwork) the researcher constantly stumbles across ethical dilemmas that she/he has to solve immediately. Guillemin and Gillam call these urgent ethical encounters "ethically important moments." They are often questions of affective, embodied ethics. Sarah Gilmore and Kate Kenny (2015) suggest that the living relationship between procedural ethics and ethics in practice is achieved by practising constant reflexivity. This solution could also work on the organizational level: could organizations promote ethicality by practising constant reflexivity between the managerially defined ethical guidelines and non-managerial affective and resistant corporeal ethics of the grassroots level?

ALISON'S REFLECTION ON WRITING THE ARTICLE

Alison: Practically this article was for me a way to engage with a feminine ethics, a way of understanding how individuals respond differently to both mundane and disruptive encounters. As a feminist researcher, using feminist philosophy to rethink some of the entrenched masculine logic of organization, Diprose's corporeal ethics provided a theoretically sophisticated way of understanding embodied experiences. What possibilities could be captured by placing the body at the centre of human, organizational experience to read ethics and to live ethically? Veera beautifully captured the embodied, affective ethics that has been lacking in organization studies through the critique of mainstream business ethics, which is Carl's [my partner and colleague] obsession. Also, Veera identified the ethico-political struggle to live life – an ethics without politics and a politics without ethics appears unviable (cf. Parker, 1998). Yet the main question that arises is how we make sense of often abstract concepts, and it seems that when we read about corporeal ethics, we think about these bodily experiences and how these abstract processes relate to these experiences. Corporeal ethics enables tensions between ontology and epistemology to surface. The pre-reflective underpinning of corporeal ethics where the body precedes the mind is imperative. I always think of my relationship with my son who acts before thought manifests. This is the pre-reflective, affective engagement of sensible bodies that Veera speaks of drawing on Diprose. It is here that the open generosity towards the other becomes possible – or could be encouraged after Veera.

VEERA'S PRE-SEMINAR THOUGHTS – REFLECTING ON ALISON'S REFLECTIONS

Veera: When I entered our Sauna-seminar building (this is probably a unique thing – in some of the most informal seminars we actually have turned the sauna on and had a collective sauna

afterwards, but, to be honest, that happens very rarely), I did not have any special expectations. Just another basic seminar. Anu, our professor and the organizer of the course, had arranged the table in the middle of the seminar room nicely with coffee, cookies, fruits and other beverages. This was nothing unusual. Most of the PhD students were already there. Also, Anu and our visiting guest, Alison Pullen from Australia, had already arrived. There was a hospitable atmosphere: talking, laughter, and warmth between us students and the two professors.

I reflect on the beginning of the course later on:

Even though most of us had not met earlier there was a special atmosphere of openness and trust right from the beginning of the course which I think everyone of us sensed. Even though our university is very informal and non-hierarchical, this kind of atmosphere is not often reached. Sometimes cultural practices of bodily presence can form a barrier for creating an atmosphere of trust and openness. (Veera's post-course reflection assignment).

When trying to pinpoint what enabled the co-creation of the shared feeling of generous togetherness, I write:

The atmosphere of trust and openness was co-constituted by informal material setting and generous offerings, hospitality of our host and organizer (Anu), intense and honest presence of our course tutor (Alison) as well as our own welcoming and open attitude (students). (Veera's post-course reflection assignment.)

The generosity was not pretentious – there was a feeling of genuine interest in us and our thoughts. And this interest was enacted in very practical acts which prolonged long after the course ended: it continued in e-mail discussions, commenting our papers and even as Facebook friendship. Alison really invested her time in us. Alison ends one of her e-mails to me: “Overall, I have spent hours reading your thoughts, and reflecting closely, on my reactions to them. Sincere thanks to you for writing. Write often, write well.”

ALISON'S REFLECTIONS ON VEERA'S REFLECTIONS

Alison: Veera, I had no sense of who would attend the seminar, and I assumed you would all be from business and management studies! The group was multidisciplinary, and those working in management and organization studies were working across disciplinary boundaries. The space facilitated a way of being – shoes off, indoor socks on, comfortable clothes, continuous supplies of refreshments – and relating. I can still visualise us peeling the skins from the mandarins and the sweet, sharp smell of the pith. Even the frowning was endearing. I think whilst start of course nerves were evident in small doses these emotions only surfaced from insecurity over some of the philosophical complexities and points of connections with well-known thoughts in the field. Reflecting now, the pre-course materials conditioned (to some extent) the open and generous encounters alongside stealthy critique. There was no escaping the moments – we seemed to develop an earnest for listening more than speaking. Indeed, I don't think I can recall a time where I have been in a classroom where its members had so much respect and care for each other – so much control to listen to others and not compete for airtime.

During our introductions, we located ourselves in relation to the disciplines and the vulnerability from not knowing each other's fields shifted the authority and knowledge base

of the expert teacher with his class. The table furnished and dressed provided a sense of belonging and shared community through which democratic actions were effected. I wonder whether I am glorifying the experience? I wonder whether I am being too ideological? I also ask whether being a woman enabled an openness and generosity? Are women's bodies read and received differently? I always try to stay close to 'me' and to disrupt traditional power relations between members of the class and myself when I teach (Pullen, 2016). But, in the sauna, I became much more at ease with exposing my vulnerabilities and inner thoughts with others more quickly than I could ever remember. Was it the small group? Was it that the group had a majority of females (there was only one male present; a detail to which we will return to later)? Was it that we were mature with vast life and work experiences? I learned so much from each and every person – from the ways in which music influences writing with Foucault, the preoccupation with living bodies, autoethnographic versus fieldwork tensions of being an action researcher in one's own organization, human and non-human animals, the etymological importance of placing words under arrest, the Arctic Circle, loss and grief, challenging mainstream management research, postcolonial critique of ethics and feminist care. Most of us are still in contact. There is something here about the ways in which we open ourselves up at different moments, each of us sharing personal details of our histories, contexts, families, weaknesses and strengths. At times surfacing vulnerabilities created a tension – it was very emotional, wasn't it? Was there an unusual willingness to account for oneself, which, as this accounting became transparent and available to others, fostered a community of practice that was affective and non-rational? We laughed, joked, and cried through the sessions. Do you remember when the funding came through to support the studies of two members of our group? I do not cry, but I cried. The sessions were critically and intellectually robust and challenging, and one in which corporeal ethics emerged through the affectual members of the class. The discursive and bodily security blankets that we often use in unfamiliar contexts, especially professional work environments, were broken down.

Veera: The pre-course assignment instructions ended with a question: "How can we research corporeal ethics in organizations?" I concluded my paper by suggesting that "corporeal ethics is difficult to grasp, because it enacts only in fleeting moments of fleshy encounters. These affective moments do not verbalise easily." (Veera's pre-course assignment.)

One of the most memorable ethical encounters during the course was a small working group session in which we were assigned to create a research design together. There were four of us. We were PhD students at different phases of the process and from different disciplinary backgrounds. We only had half an hour initially to plan the task. As we started talking and sharing ideas, we were all of a sudden full of excitement: our research interests and different approaches started to complement each other. We were feeding ideas to each other so fast that we were almost struggling to keep up with them.

This moment of bodies working together and sharing thoughts was carefully facilitated by Anu and Alison. Yet, our group came up with ideas that were totally unexpected – I remember Alison very gently pointing out that she had had some idea of what kinds of ideas she expected us to work with. They were nothing of the kind that we eventually came up with! When we presented our research plan about boundary work between death and

life – corporeal ethics of encountering death, decease and leprosy – I recall Alison being faintly surprised, perhaps even disappointed for a moment – but she quickly adapted to our enthusiastic moods.

I reflect on our group session:

I experienced a unique feeling of shared flow moment – a sensation of creating and thinking together. Our bodies and minds were attuned to the same level as if we were almost able to sense what the others were thinking. As one of us very practically described it, my half-finished sentence was finished in another person's paper. I am sure that the excitement of discovering and ideating together is something that all of us will remember and cherish, since it does not happen very often. My previous most memorable flow-moments have always been moments in which I have been writing something and new thoughts have started to pour through my fingers. In those moments writing and thinking (in solitude) have been not only simultaneous activities but inseparable. Writing has been thinking - my fingers have done the thinking. This time we were experiencing the flow moment together as separate bodies that are united at some level and thus pushing each other further. (Veera's post-course reflection paper.)

In her e-mail, Alison wrote:

Your account of bodies working together in the group work was evident for Anu and I to watch! You thought we were drinking wine but we were watching you closely and the ways the two groups worked were remarkably different. Oh, to trust each other through physical and cognitive intimacy to create something unique is wonderful! I wonder whether this could be replicated, or lost in the moment? Could you return to that space and produce or reproduce it again? (Alison's e-mail to Veera)

Alison: As I reflect now Veera, we were waiting, but there were stark differences in the ways in which the two groups worked. Your group was standing making dramatic gestures which we read as being excited. There was a lot of quick talking and frantic writing because everyone had gone overtime. The other group was much more cautious. They respected the individuality of each other's positions and ideas to the point that the merging of ideas was challenged. Your group, as we discussed later, had much trust and support. We noted that you looked at us, but you didn't care because you were so passionate about the task and definitely wanted the project to be great! The other group struggled to get the idea formed even though each group member had the expertise to complete the task; each person taking their ideas and understanding the ideas from their point of view. The group recognised the process that they went through as they fed back their ideas to the main group. Through this process, corporeal ethics became evident – in the openness to other's ideas in your group and in the cautious respectfulness in the other group.

Veera: I think our group was able to attune to each other's ways of thinking so smoothly because three of the four of us were already familiar with each other's research and we had attended the same seminars together. On the contrary, the other group was not familiar with each other's interests beforehand and, since two of them were from another university, they were probably unfamiliar with our working practices. Hence, it took them much longer to prepare the ground for fruitful co-operation, so to speak.

Coming back to you observing our work – could you elaborate a bit on this? What were you and Anu actually observing when we were innocently going on with our group work? Were you conducting an experiment? Where’s the ethics in that?

Alison: Observing you wasn’t planned. But, when we saw the differences between the groups we got excited to note the differences in the ways you worked and the processes and outcomes that eventuated. We saw the ethical dilemmas that the groups had in action – from wanting to work ethically by including everyone, to developing projects that could focus on the understanding processes of corporeal ethics, to practising ethics. But as we discussed in the class, when we start to observe ethics in action, and we discuss openly these processes of corporeal ethics, do we move away from embodying the pre-reflective ethics at the heart of corporeal ethics? You wrote in your essay:

For Diprose the disturbing moments of corporeal generosity open up a possibility to learn to think differently. That is why this mode of openness towards the “other” is very important for an ethnographer. Only by being open to other’s difference can one make sense and understand other ways of thinking and practising. (Veera’s pre-reflective assignment)

Yet in studying this difference and openness, through the conceptualisation and categorization inherent in research design and practice, do we close down the very differences that we advocate against? How do we engender the ‘welcoming of the alterity of the ethical relation’ (Diprose, 2002: 140) in our research designs so that open relationships without categorisation and judgement (Knights & O’Leary, 2006; Pullen & Knights, 2007; Pullen & Rhodes, 2014) can flourish? This problematic requires having responsibility to the other with an appreciation of the other, alongside the understanding that the other is never fully knowable (Butler, 2005; Diprose, 1994).

As I grow into myself, the more convinced or committed I am of the power of the lived materiality of gendered subjectivity to reject the passive body in research/the classroom. I am sure we connected because we were able to share connections, or fleeting moments, of motherhood that sometimes become verbalised. But, so much of our intercorporeal experiences and knowledge remains unspoken and the difficulty is how can we capture this in the classroom and do we need to do anything with these moments? We certainly experienced and discussed in detail in the sauna the struggles between mind and body... and we were comfortable with silence and not finding answers, even though some of our colleagues wanted more answers to explain the phenomena that they were processing corporeal ethics through.

BREACHING, CLOSING DOWN DIFFERENCE

Veera: During and after the course we always came back to the “fleeting moments of fleshy encounters”. We reflected upon some unexpected, fleeting encounters which had stayed with us. Some of the encounters were disturbing, and some were uplifting creative moments, just like the one that I described earlier. In my post-course reflection journal I wrote about one “ridiculously tiny” disturbing moment that happened at the beginning of the seminar and which set our genders firmly in place:

There were two awkward moments that (to put it in Diprosean parlance) got under my skin and made me think: Firstly the fleeting moment in the beginning which firmly set our gender(s) in place. In the beginning of the first day you greeted the only male student in the course by noting that he is underrepresented in the course. You did not have to define what you meant, since we all understood that you were referring to his maleness. I thought at that moment that this kind of blunt “sexing” was quite unnecessary in that situation. From this moment on this person had to represent “maleness”. For me this somewhat awkward embodied encounter was an important ethical moment because it made me realize how strongly this bifurcation of maleness and femaleness still defines us and our social situations. He is stuck with being a male even within a feminist and gender-conscious social situations as well as I am stuck with being a woman. There’s no escape, or is there? (Veera’s post-course reflection paper.)

Alison responded to my criticism at the time with:

Thanks also for writing about failed moments of corporeal generosity which have disrupted me also. In relation to what you have written, I have remembered the ways in which my treatment of him occurred and perhaps why I hadn’t lingered on it at the time, or returned to it with him. I hear your words and I think that gendering him in that way emerged because we had had rather a long discussion before the course started and I think he mentioned him being the only male, but I may be absent minded. But, it is interesting to note the ways that we continue to dichotomise gender even when we ‘use’ queering. Interestingly, my reading of him was different to what you and he may have thought but I verbally collapsed him to male with all the multiple readings that this involves. I have questioned the ways in which humour fails generosity. To keep being generous requires a slow pace, or does it? Unplanned humour violates the generous space? (Alison’s e-mail to Veera)

I continue in my paper:

*This ridiculously tiny incident is an example of corporeal generosity and the ethical importance of embodied encounters. These kinds of failures in embodied encounters open up a world of ethics. The embodied reactions are important in those fleeting moments but I think that the ethical importance stays longer: as these moments of failure stick and sting, **they force us to think**. They force us to think if things could be done differently. (Veera’s post-course reflection paper.)*

Later on, we continue to jokingly discuss the gendering incident, which was uncalled-for nonetheless. I admit that I may have misread the situation and missed the humour in the remark:

Thanks again for thorough re-reflections. I think I read the gendering situation wrong because I hadn’t heard your previous discussion. But this misinterpretation reveals again how social situations are subjectively experienced very differently, no matter how generous and open we try to be! (Veera’s e-mail to Alison)

Alison: There is so much here. I have much difficulty in accepting my positioning of the student as the only man in the room, and I have struggled to reflect on it. I would have only

said something like this in a comfortable environment, and this was a slippage, yet I also acknowledge that I am never politically correct as I don't like silencing myself and I genuinely think that political correctness masks so many aspects of life including discrimination and oppression. In classroom life, I provoke and disrupt, but this was not my intention here. This is not the openness I preach! I reduced gender. I still feel uncomfortable about this incident, but it is in this space of not being able to clarify my thoughts, explain the judgements and violations that the ethical moment arises – ethics arises in the tension of not being able to make decisions, explain our actions, make sense of ourselves. The power of this ethics is central to learning, challenging the dominant, and living a livable life. In a recent e-mail you wrote:

Hei, just a quick thought:

If there's a suitable place for reflecting on being open to (cultural) differences which were present (but never a hindrance) in the course you could also do that. I am referring to our limited bodily language and facial expressions (or lack of them) and especially the non-hierarchical tradition (both of university and Finnish culture in general) and how you were able to adapt to that. Had you found us rude and unwelcoming from the start (for calling you by your first name, not necessarily showing our enthusiasm etc.) and behaved accordingly, the atmosphere in the course would have been totally different.
hugs, Veera

p.s. PhD came out of press. It's fabulous and I'm really proud of it. I will not read it, though :D I'll publish a photo in FB when I have time. (e-mail from Veera to Alison)

Congratulations on the PhD and you have probably read it enough! The cover speaks. Enjoy your defence, you have a huge future ahead of you. You are a role model for so many women as you have achieved so much on your own terms. Veera, you have taught me a lot about the entanglements of working corporeally, pre-reflectively. The Finnish have taught me a lot too! Oh, I just remembered the pre-Christmas party of the Faculty of Social Sciences I was invited to and the Napue gin and tonic with cranberries and rosemary in a fishbowl. The bawdy burlesque show of the Midnight Sun Burlesque group shocked me especially in a work context!

I have Finnish friends, and I know them to be facially serious, and one friend told me that in Finland when you can sit comfortably and not speak with those around you then this is a sign of true friendship. But, this silence is uncomfortable for a Welsh woman (who is known for talking, Welsh people talk a lot!) but over the years I have become more like this. I find many Finns cold facially, and they are not as physically intimate as some other cultures until we become friends. But, it is in this space of building relationships with people different to us which then delivers the possibilities of not knowing, unknowing, openness to difference and a means of not reducing each other culturally. I am also very comfortable with non-hierarchical environments and never thought any of you were rude or unwelcoming as we have established earlier. But, being in unfamiliar places enables us to develop shared practices of our own, but perhaps if we don't slow down the humour and the categorising that many of us do when we read people that the possibilities for breaching the practices of unlearning and relearning become under threat. You are absolutely spot on when you say: "humour is meant to lighten up and bring joy, but there's always danger of misunderstanding and hurting someone". And you

raise the tension again: “But then again, a world without humour would be a very dull place, wouldn’t it?” These tensions and disruptions evident in our time together enable us to challenge ourselves and respond inter-corporeally – the site for ethico-politics.

CLOSING/OPENINGS

In this paper, we have exercised an open dialogue between two scholars at different phases of their academic career, in different parts of the globe. During the process, we have shared thoughts about embodiment, ethics, and gender, and these abstract ideas have been entangled with quite intimate details about our life histories as well as the difficulties and joys of our everyday life. During the process of writing this dialogue, Veera’s children were suffering from chicken pox, and Alison’s son tore a ligament in his ankle and was on crutches. Despite the thousands of kilometres between us, we have comforted and supported each other, and to much extent, being connected through the words that we share here enabled this without talking about the children in great detail. These embodied encounters as women, as mothers, as writers, with many shared values and interests, are reflected by the relative ease in which this conversation surfaced between us. We hope our text is full of tension and struggle – but also of flow and connection. Of us. Of our bodies. One of staying close to writing the skin and what we remember that has crept under it. This is a text of the others who sit on these pages incomplete and unfinished, and who have not read our text but they form the community that we speak of.

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