

Practicing connections

“Doing” responsibility in historical-political educational processes

Britta Breser* ^a, Christian Heuer ^b

^aUniversity of Vienna, Vienna, ^bUniversity of Giessen, Giessen

Abstract

In light of multiple crises in the Anthropocene, the required major transformation in various societal and political realms is fraught with challenges and obstacles. In particular, the areas of education and training play a pivotal role in being able to respond “responsibly” to these ambiguities. Using two examples, one from the practice of political action, one from the practice of historical theory, the text problematizes the difficulties, but also the possibilities of “doing” responsibility through the lens of critical historical-political education.

Keywords

Anthropocene, crisis, doing responsibility, connections, historical-political education

1. Responsibility and its ambivalences

Life in the Anthropocene appears to be life in a constant crisis. Extinctions, wars, migration movements, social inequalities, pandemics, inflation, and climate change deeply shake habits, securities, and expectations, revealing contradictions of the “imperial way of life” (Brand & Wissen, 2017).¹ The fundamental promise of the Western welfare state to enable a secure life in an orderly society seems to be unattainable without fundamental individual, societal, and political changes (e.g. Neckel, 2023, p. 7). The planet and its inhabitants are in a crisis – a crisis with an indefinite time horizon. Thus, it is ultimately the practices of orientation in time and space, historical thinking, historical knowledge (e.g. Simon, Tamm & Domańska, 2021) and history learning as “practiced future care” (Schulz-Hageleit, 2004, p. 239) that face fundamental challenges when the future becomes a threat (e.g. Gumbrecht, 2012, p. 23). Particularly, human-induced climate change along with its current impacts and dystopian future forecasts as a change that do not develop from previous states but bring about something unprecedented (e.g. Simon, 2019, p. 7) stands as a sign of the planetary challenges in the Anthropocene. It is the climate issue “where opinions differ” (Nassehi, 2019, p. 54). In this crisis, the questions of what we should want, must do, and can do, as well as the associated search for guiding answers and alternative actions become problems for which there seem to be no simple solutions. In this unsettling space of

1 All quotations in this article were translated by the authors.

* **Contact:** Britta Breser ✉ britta.breser@univie.ac.at
Centre for Teacher Education at the University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

in-betweenness, the practice of historical-political education and its accompanying visions for future improvement reach their limits (e.g., Nordgren, 2021). The individual's orientation in time and space through the understanding and creation of meaning within the tension between societal participation and individual life practices becomes a persistently ambivalent challenge.² It unfolds differently than planned, encompassing moments of disengagement and non-participation as much as instances of involvement in negotiation processes of the political and political agency. Paralysing fear, insecurity, disorientation and the feeling of unavailability are so far inadequate recipes for a productive handling of the crisis.

Despite all ambivalences and polarizations, it can be observed that current crisis diagnoses are always linked to the concept of responsibility (e.g. Jonas, 2020, p. 38). The responsible “we” appears as a powerful actor in our current times of crisis (e.g. Eis & Moulin-Doos, 2013/2014, pp. 405 and 423). As early as 2017, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, the Club of Rome (a global think tank that studies and advocates for sustainable solutions to global challenges) pointed out “what we need to change if we want to survive” and notably who is responsible for it: “It’s up to us” (Weizsäcker et al., 2017). In this context, it is particularly the fields of education and training that play a central role in creating this addressed responsible “we” (e.g. Deutsche Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie, 2020). In these calls to action, education, responsibility, crisis, and future are powerfully related as interdependencies (e.g. Kuhlmann, 2021, p. 30), seeming to mutually condition each other, as responsible actions in the present and for the future are modeled as an effect of successful educational processes. Responsibility then no longer appears as a basic ethical concept, but becomes a “discursive operator” (Vogelmann, 2014, p. 21) of temporal practice, an instrument of the political, a way out of the crisis, and simultaneously an individual task of the historically and politically educated subject. This understanding of responsibility entails challenges and demands on the addressees of these calls to action, with such a call presupposing the autonomous and capable subject of action, which, however, only emerges as such during this call, without considering its prerequisites, (im)possibilities, and powerful entanglements (e.g. Buschmann & Sulmowski, 2018, p. 286). Failing at this challenge, withdrawing, and refusing the demands of taking on responsibility quickly becomes a moral failure in the crisis. The “I would prefer not to” (Melville, 2004), as famously articulated by Melville’s *Bartleby*, becomes a marker of irresponsibility.

In the following, we will attempt to explore the practices of “doing” responsibility (e.g. Buschmann & Sulmowski, 2018) for the discourses of history and political didactics from an interdisciplinary perspective.³ We consciously undertake this effort against the recurring demands on historical and political didactic practice (e.g. Pandel, 2022, pp. 13-18) to continuously refer to “native” discipline-specific terms and canonical works. Such a practice could indeed be described as “irresponsible” in the mode of scientific reflexivity. Under these conditions, the academics are indirectly encouraged to adhere to a closed rule system, to operate within a predetermined discourse framework, to submit to the prolonged current disciplinary practice, and not to dare to look into an open future, in order to venture into professionally “unknown” possibilities. To live up to our own aspirations, we will use two examples—(1) one from the context of political action and (2) one from the practice of grounding historical theory—to explore the connections between responsibility and the future. In both cases, pasts and futures are envisioned that seek to be different by negating the status quo. This conceptual shift is achieved precisely by problematizing the conditions of possibility for historical meaning-making itself, while pointing to the potential for transformation through critique and emphasizing the experience of being present in transitional spaces.

This will also allow us to problematize the normative “overload” (Bachelard, 1980, p. 153) of the pathos of responsibility and its governing effects from a perspective of subjectivation and time theory (e.g. Vogelmann, 2013, p. 20). Our critique is intended as a contribution to a reflection

2 The concept of “Bildung” cannot be adequately translated into English with the term “education.” Bildung „has no obvious English-language substitute“ (Friesen, 2021, p. 343). Nevertheless, for the sake of readability, we have chosen to use “education” in this text. However, it should be noted before reading that the term “education” here encompasses the concept of “historical-political Bildung,” which involves more than just historical learning, possessing historical knowledge, or having the competencies for historical thinking. Rather, it is about the process of individuals becoming present in time and space—what educational philosopher Gert Biesta (e.g., Biesta, 2019) refers to as “trying to be at home in the world”—through modes of historical thinking and political action. This dimension is largely neglected in the English-language discourse (e.g. Thorp & Persson, 2020).

3 In this attempt to theoretically explore historical-political educational processes, we primarily draw on German-language texts because we see an opportunity to make the largely untranslated ideas of German-language history and politics education didactics accessible to an international debate (e.g. McGregor, Pind & Karn, 2021).

on the Anthropocene that does not merely focus on its negative, e.g. ecological, consequences but also encompasses its own symbolic orders, including those of historical-political education (e.g. Heuer, 2022) and responsibility, implicitly oriented towards the narrative of progress and its inherent drive for optimization (e.g. Wulf, 2022, p. 34). Against this backdrop, we will then discuss (4) how historical-political educational processes, within their shared interrelatedness and interconnectedness, can be understood as a relational event of responsible actions, being responsible, and feeling responsible for the future, as the Other that approaches us. At its core, our aim is to reveal possibilities of speaking about responsibility in the context of historical-political education in the Anthropocene in a different way, “without already being able to sufficiently achieve it” (Rüsen, 1989, p. 88).

2. “Knowledge is responsibility. Your actions are your duty!”⁴

It is Monday, October 16, 2023 at 9.30 a.m. The third week of lectures in the winter semester begins at the University of Graz with an oversized banner and eight blindfolds for the eight stone representatives of “progressive scientific spirit, revolutionary research, and global thinking” (Leljak & Wentner, 2019, p. 12) standing on the roof of the university, in the face of man-made climate change in the Anthropocene: “We are all the last generation before the tipping points” is written in black and white at a height of almost twenty meters. After using public spaces and their infrastructure as locations for various protest actions in the face of global warming over the past two years, these actions have now also reached the public education centers of colleges and universities. From the main building of Austria’s second-largest university, the megaphone resounds: “We as a society must break out of this paralysis in order to finally take action” (Letzte Generation Österreich, 2023). Only a few people stop to listen to the words. Most of the passing students and staff pull out their smartphones, take a quick photo, and hurry on. Compared with the other protest actions by the climate activists of the “Last Generation,” the banner drop from the roof of Graz University was only marginally provocative. Only a few of the grandparents and parents waiting for their grandchildren and children to graduate in front of the main building reacted angrily, while most others were indifferent or even in sympathy. The actions of the “Last Generation” usually polarize more than almost any other. While the protest actions are largely “unconditionally” supported (e.g. Rucht, 2023, p. 18) by some public intellectuals and climate scientists, there are defensive reactions from established parties and parliamentarians, as well as sometimes extremely violent counter-reactions. These range from physical violence against the “climate stickers” to media-staged public incomprehension and rejection of national symbols, luxury shops, and public buildings “stained” with orange paint, to the Germany-wide raid on activists in spring 2023, or the labeling of the “Last Generation” as the “Climate RAF” by the German CSU state group leader Alexander Dobrindt. The civil disobedience of the “Last Generation” and their offensively articulated call to take responsibility in the face of man-made climate change is facing widespread rejection from large sections of the population (e.g. Rucht, 2023, p. 19), even though the majority of both the Austrian and German population generally attaches social importance to climate protection. Many observers interpret this polarization as a generational conflict, of young versus old, “Generation Z” versus the “boomers”, speaking of a glaring “responsibility gap”, proposing a “climate generation contract” (Interview with the sustainability researcher Sebastian Helgenberger, 2022) and calling for solidarity and togetherness, not least between the generations in the current crisis. The fact that this interpretation is a media-effective instrument of simplification, with which the sheer incomprehensibility of the threat is shifted to a “clearer terrain” (Minkmar, 2023) the well-known and recurring conflict between the generations and their different areas of experience and horizons of expectation, becomes just as obvious as the fact that the traditional use of the basic historical concept of “generation” (e.g. Jureit, 2017) and its symbolic function of simultaneity conceals the generational heterogeneity of the activists, their non-simultaneities. The “Last Generation” sees itself as the first generation in the space between “no more” and “not yet,” in the gap of the crisis (e.g. Breser et al., 2022, p. 39): “We are the first generation to feel the consequences of the climate crisis – and at the same time the last generation that can still do something. We are the last generation of people who

4 The “Last Generation Austria” protest continued on November 9, 2023 at the University of Vienna with the banner drop “Knowledge is responsibility”: in addition to the banner displayed from the roof of the university, there was another one on the entrance steps, this time with the slogan “Your action is duty!” Cf. online <https://us13.campaign-archive.com/?u=b0301f11ba8a0837a2985ff50&id=ed53cf5b54> [retrieved on November 21, 2023].

can still stop the collapse of our livelihoods" (Letzte Generation Österreich, 2023). And this generation includes people, old and young, boomers, parts of generations Z, Y, and X. And so they are not a generation because they were born at the same time, share experiences of time and expectations of the future, form the foundation of a togetherness through "being born together with others" (Wimmer, 2019, p. 286), but because they share the same evaluations and judgments of their experiences of time and derive the same motivations for action from them (e.g. Wimmer, 2019, p. 289): "Through their actions, people want to contribute as subjects to the flow of time [...], to realize in it ideas of what should be, but is not yet or no longer" (Rüsen, 1990, p. 159).

The actors of the "Last Generation" are in the interstice of the political, in time and in the space of the present, interconnected precisely because they form historical and political meaning (e.g. Vajen et al., 2022) through their experiences of time that can be understood by others: "They motivate themselves in their activities through notions of belonging that extend beyond the boundaries of their own lifetime" (Rüsen, 2020, p. 95). Their "knowledge", which leads to responsibility and legitimizes it, also exists in narrative form, it is a story of somebody and for somebody. Their interconnectedness, their shared responsibility, ultimately result from a common practice of historical-political education, facing the challenge and demand "to enable the future of descendants through present actions" (King, 2015, p. 33). And ultimately, it is also attributable to the inherent ambivalence of this "generative challenge" (King, 2015, p. 33) that this "Last Generation" polarizes when it undertakes to "courageously resist" (Latour, 2019, p. 24). Because taking care of the present practice for a future, assuming responsibility, from which one will be excluded due to their own life expectancy, is disturbing, unsettling, fearful, and is inherently always in crisis, precisely because the "past self" (King, 2015, p. 47), such as one's own "imperial way of life" (Brand & Wissen, 2017), is called into question. Thus, the ambivalences of educational processes and the normative demands associated with them (enlightenment, responsibility, sustainable lifestyle, etc.) of the "homo responsabilis" (Grunwald, 2021) have been pointed out time and again by psychoanalytic research (e.g. King, 2022). If the "where from" disappears, the "where to" is unreachable, and the "now" becomes a problem due to its own impermanence. The "Last Generation" is in crisis because it disrupts continuities and becomes a place in search of practices of responsibility in the crises of the Anthropocene: "However, this reality is not beyond our time, but in time as its rupture, which is manifest with each new beginning" (Wimmer, 2019, p. 303).

For our search for practices of doing responsibility as effects of historical-political education processes, the following appears to be interesting: Even though the history of the Anthropocene and anthropogenic climate change, along with their dystopian future forecasts, cannot be seriously doubted by anyone based on empirically plausible sources, responsible action in the political practice of the "Last Generation" and the responsibility of its actors are denied by large parts of the population, just as they in turn attribute irresponsible actions to established parties. Even though the "heroic concept" (Henkel, 2021, p. 9) of responsibility seems to be crucial for the practices of generative belonging of collectives, it is far from fixed itself. Rather, the crucial aspect is how this responsibility is enacted in concrete actions and for whom, and how these others react to this action: "Responsibility is not simply there but is produced through the involved actors in concrete practices" (Buschmann & Sulmowski, 2017, p. 287).

3. Can tomorrow be different? Responsibility and the future

As much as the concept of responsibility is a central term in various everyday, political, and scientific discourses, it is difficult to provide a catch-all definition (e.g. Heidbrink, 2017). Responsibility appears in different contexts as a term, expression of feeling, task, and ability at the same time. However, the questions of what it means from the perspective of historical-political education when one is asked to act responsibly, to take on responsibility, or when one is attributed responsibility, are difficult to answer. Rather, the term often appears in the context of history and political didactics as a "morally charged placeholder" (Sombetzki, 2014, p. 198) for a whole array of different phenomena (e.g. Kühberger, 2007; van Norden, 2021), causing the empirical reality of its implementation and its empirical observation and theoretical reflection to appear challenging. It is ambiguities that characterize the use of the category of responsibility between everyday linguistic harmlessness, theoretical indeterminacy, and empirical unavailability (e.g. Meyer-Drawe, 1992, p. 14): "The sympathetic sound of the word stands in contrast to its often not unobjectionable implications" (Meyer-Drawe, 1992, p. 14). However, these implications become

clear when one confronts the ambivalences of the “Last Generation’s” Doing Responsibility, which aims to make decisions in the political sphere, with those “scripting games” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 169) of theory in which justifications of historical-political responsibility are theoretically designed (e.g. Kuhlmann, 2021). In this way, responsibility can be understood empirically as something active in “active practices” (Vogelmann, 2014, p. 20) and thus becomes accessible to analytical observation: “In this perspective, responsibility therefore does not appear as an overarching, universal, and therefore timeless concept, but is constantly produced anew and differently as a concrete, historically and culturally situated, practice-specific phenomenon.” (Buschmann & Sulmowski, 2017, p. 288). What these two different practices have in common is that in both cases of doing responsibility, times are related and futures are designed. Responsibility can therefore also be analyzed as a powerful practice of time. This can be exemplified by the historical-theoretical modeling of historical responsibility that Jörn Rüsen put up for discussion in a volume published in 2003 entitled “Can yesterday get better?” Under the title “Taking responsibility for history. Critical reflection on the ethical dimension of history” (Rüsen, 2003), Rüsen attempts to describe historical responsibility “as a different kind of truth,” “which is produced by the discursive procedures with which historical knowledge fulfills its cultural functions in social life” (Rüsen, 2003, pp. 49-50). To this end, he distinguishes three temporal dimensions of historical responsibility, of which “responsibility for the future” is of particular interest for our argumentation, precisely because he places his remarks in the context of “threatening environmental problems” and the associated challenge of generativity: “Today, there is a growing realization of the responsibility of present-day actors for the future living conditions of their descendants” (Rüsen, 2003, p. 57). Historical thinking in particular has the task of “deciphering opportunities for action” and “opening up future perspectives” that arise from the “past sediments in the living conditions of the present” (Rüsen, 2003, p. 58). Against this backdrop, Rüsen develops his concept of “irresponsible” historical thinking, which is characterized by a vision of the future that appears as a “circumstantial extrapolation of conditions that are predetermined in the past or arise in present contexts of action” (Rüsen, 2003, p. 59). In such cases, an “effective[...] ethical[...] obligation from the historically founded perspective of the future would be excluded” (Rüsen, 2003, p. 58). Rüsen sees the “irresponsibility” in the idea of dominating history constructed from this closed future. In such a temporal relation, the future then becomes the necessary consequence of a certain historical development, the past thus becomes the condition of the closed future itself: “This conviction can increase the self-esteem of the actors to the point of fantasies of omnipotence: they can imagine that they control the course of history based on their knowledge of a comprehensive law of historical development” (Rüsen, 2003, p. 59). Ultimately, such a constructed future would have subjectivizing consequences for the narrators themselves. In such a time regime, they would be deprived of the freedom to “negate or transcend the limitations that the past has built into the open possibilities of future life” (Rüsen, 2003, p. 60). And it is precisely this keeping open of the future that, for Rüsen, becomes the condition of historical responsibility, of responsible historical thinking (e.g. Rüsen, 2003, p. 73). Rüsen thus joins a modern discourse context that was first opened up in 1975 in terms of history didactics. In the important book of critical-emancipatory historical didactics, *History and the Future*, Klaus Bergmann and Hans-Jürgen Pandel, following Ernst Bloch’s *Ontology of Not-Yet-Being*, outline the image of a “real future”, an image that precisely opens up a future of “the not-yet, the objectively not-yet-there” (Bloch, 1960, p. 87) in contrast to a future that “is knowable and is known” (Bergmann & Pandel, 1975, p. 108). Historical thinking, (narrated) history, with its inherent emancipatory momentum, then becomes the motor for designing an open future that can be expected on the basis of the shared space of experience. In their understanding, historical responsibility for the future then manifests itself in keeping the future itself open, the “critical rejection of pre-determined development[s]” (Rüsen, 2003, p. 59) as Jörn Rüsen called it in 2003.

Just as with the example of the “Last Generation” banner drop, this example of theoretical practice also makes it clear how much the concept of responsibility itself is temporally and culturally situated and how its successful attribution is an effect of powerful processes of addressing. It is true that this theoretical modeling of science could be used to qualify the historical thinking of the “Last Generation” as “irresponsible,” precisely because they legitimize their doing responsibility with a history that is ultimately not a history, but rather the “extrapolation of given conditions” (Rüsen, 2003, p. 73) and is thus oriented towards the political “overcoming of problems and crisis possibilities” (Bergmann & Pandel, 1975, p. 39). At the same time, it could be argued that this plausible justification of theoretical practice cannot be used to derive appropriate decisions for the future in the political space of the present. The gap between theoretical responsibility and responsible political action can therefore hardly be bridged, precisely

because both practices of doing responsibility follow different logics (e.g. Kuhlmann, 2021, p. 135). Inasmuch as this theoretical modeling of historical responsibility is a child of modernity, in which open futures could be expected based on past experiences, the doing responsibility of historical-theoretical and historical-didactic practice can also be questioned and problematized in the mode of scientific reflexivity (e.g. Bourdieu, 1993, p. 372), precisely because it is difficult to hold on to the image of an open and “real” future, towards which we are moving by constantly designing this future through historical thinking, when the future itself becomes a threat: “What to do when the opening up of ever new options and the self-evidence of individual and collective spaces of possibility without stop rules and saturation limits is lost?” (Lessenich, 2022, pp. 90-91). So what would practices of doing responsibility look like as effects of historical-political education if the future is no longer something that is in front of us as a regulative idea, but rather something that is currently approaching us as a threat (e.g. Chakrabarty, 2022; Hübner et al., 2023)? What could it mean in the time horizon of the Anthropocene to act responsibly, to be responsible and to feel responsible (e.g. Rushing, 2015)? When we have to look forward and no longer just backward (e.g. Rüsen, 1983, p. 65) in order to cope, to worry, and to imagine: How can tomorrow be different for the future inhabitants of planet Earth?

4. Responsibility and historical-political education in the crises of the anthropocene

There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It depicts an angel who looks as if he is about to move away from something he is staring at (Benjamin, 2010, p. 19).

Being in a planetary crisis in the face of man-made climate change and its consequences poses numerous challenges to the process of searching for a way out, for possibilities of criticizing current symbolic orders, for emancipation from structuring structures of the political, and for those of future historical-political orientation, while at the same time generating numerous impositions on individuals and societies. These are challenges and impositions on the constructions of self and world relations, questions about the form and possibilities of a “world-centred education” (Biesta, 2022) and the associated “responsibility for the world.” The experience of contingency, of a break in time, which precedes the attribution of a crisis, the darkening of the available horizon of expectations, presupposes a presently experienced otherness (e.g. Blom, 2023).

The experience of crisis as the ongoing disruption of the expected therefore requires orientation in time and space in order to experience oneself as a subject capable of acting on an individual level and to be addressed as such by others. As critical moments, the manifold crises of the Anthropocene then represent places of searching and orientation between the before and after, given the diversity of possible futures. Crises are thus always also places of historical-political education. Because in this contingency of the in-between space, “which has made us what we are”, we can also find the possibilities of “no longer being, doing or thinking what we are, do or think” (Foucault, 1990, p. 49). For despite all uncertainty, human beings remain what constitutes their humanity, namely “capable of acting” and an “actor par excellence” (Fleury, 2023, p. 9). As spaces of possibility for historical-political education, crises thus point to the contingency of the socio-cultural and political framework, shake plausibility and traditions, demand thinking in alternatives, and challenge positionings, becoming present in the present: “The crisis repeatedly makes it clear how fragile the unquestionable entity that we call society is” (Mergel, 2012, p. 14). And it should be added that in the age of the Anthropocene, this no longer applies only to society, but also to world and self-relations, the planet Earth, and its inhabitants as a whole. The crises of the Anthropocene thus compel us to become restless, to adopt a critical-reflexive distance from ourselves and conditions and to get moving in order to constantly reprocess the unsettling experiences of temporal and spatial change in the practice of life for ourselves and others. Historical-political education understood in this way does not appear as a harmonious unfolding of unconscious resources, as a kind of crisis management formula, but rather the educational process manifests itself as an ambivalent struggle with oneself and one’s own entanglements in time and space (e.g. McLean, 2024). In the crises of the Anthropocene, historical-political education becomes a tightrope walk at the boundaries of the present (e.g. Lessenich, 2019,

pp. 108–109), specifically where the future reveals itself to us (e.g. Deile, 2022). At this boundary, in the crisis, otherness becomes possible. For ultimately – and there is no doubt about this – one is the actor capable of acting, the one who can act, is and feels responsible, and tells a story about it. Crises can therefore also be understood as places of historical-political educational processes, in which one has to critically analyze one's own conditions and in which different subjectivation practices and educational processes can be initiated. These are times of crisis in which the symbolic and political orders can be experienced as constructed orders for someone that could also be organized differently. And so the crises of the Anthropocene also open up new time horizons, new pasts, presents, and futures (e.g. Nordmann, 2020, p. 99; Landwehr, 2020, p. 146). The practices of historical thinking, political action, and historical narration are changing.

And so Benjamin's "angel of history" could be read differently. The storm would then no longer carry him "inexorably into the future", but would come at us from afar, with open wings. The future would then no longer be open and far out, not unattainable and guiding as a regulative idea. Rather, it would be the future, the Other that comes to us from elsewhere: "As a result, this appeal, this promise of the future, will necessarily open up the production of a new context, wherever it may happen [arrive]. The future is not present, but there is an opening onto it; and because there is a future [il y a de l'avenir], a context is always open. What we call opening of the context is another name for what is still to come" (Derrida, 2002, p. 20). And to be able to expect this other in the future, to take care of it in the now of the future, to take responsibility, and to give it answers to its questions, would then perhaps be the task of doing responsibility in the context of historical-political education with the aim of "response-ability" for the planet in the Anthropocene: "Response-ability is about both absence and presence, killing and nurturing, living and dying – and remembering who lives and who dies and how in the string figures of natural cultural history" (Haraway, 2016, p. 2).

In order to learn to see these other practices of historical-political education and doing responsibility, we need to meet in other places. "In order to change", wrote Richard Rorty, "it is important to be brought to a place from which something new becomes visible" (Rorty, 2003, p. 52). Places that are not primarily used for argumentation and reasoning, that "do not breathe the spirit of science" (Rüsen, 1989, p. 91), but places where something is marked and shown – namely differences, paths, and possibilities. They can be used to train the eye for alternatives, including the concept of doing responsibility. In these aesthetic manifestations, the complex interplay of social orders and social actors, their integration in the field of planetary forces, dominant discourses, and entanglements in one's own and other people's history(ies) is thematized. This also refers to subjective as well as societally shared imaginary concepts (e.g. Jehle, 2024). They are about affiliations and demarcations, about recognizing and criticizing symbolic and social orders. And precisely by demonstrating the exclusionary effects of hegemonic discourses, powerful dispositives and dominant symbolic orders, they point to the criticism of our own orders, our own standpoint, by confronting us with other perspectives: "At the same time, they force us to expose ourselves to severe self-doubt" (Rorty, 2003, p. 60), writes Rorty. And by showing us possibilities and creating interrelationships, the objects of aesthetic practice are able to challenge us to become present, to position ourselves narratively in times and spaces. They stimulate, affect, and address. They lose their pure object status by doing something to us. At best, they challenge us to act, be, and feel responsibly.

To cite this article

Breser, B., & Heuer, C. (2025). Practicing connections: Doing responsibility in historical-political educational processes. *Historical Thinking, Culture, and Education*, 2(1), 28–38. <https://doi.org/10.12685/htce.1399>

Peer review

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymized during review.

Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely thank Hannah Van Reeth (Giessen) for the numerous discussions, tips and wise thoughts.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Christian Heuer  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1760-0040>

Britta Breser  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7042-8112>

References

- Bachelard, G. (1980). *Die Philosophie des Nein. Versuch einer Philosophie des neuen wissenschaftlichen Geistes*. [The Philosophy of No: An Attempt at a Philosophy of the New Scientific Spirit] Suhrkamp.
- Benjamin, W. (2010). Über den Begriff der Geschichte [Das Hannah-Arendt-Manuskript]. [On the Concept of History [The Hannah Arendt Manuscript]] In W. Benjamin: *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. Ed. by Gérard Raulet (pp. 7-29). Suhrkamp.
- Bergmann, K. & Pandel, H.-J. (1975). *Geschichte und Zukunft. Didaktische Reflexionen über veröffentlichtes Geschichtsbewußtsein*. [History and Future: Didactic Reflections on Published Historical Consciousness.] Fischer.
- Biesta, G. (2022). *World-Centred Education. A View for the Present*. Routledge.
- Biesta, G. (2019). *Trying to be at home in the world. New parameters for art education*. Artlink39. <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4781/trying-to-be-at-home-in-the-world-new-parameters-f/>
- Bloch, E. (1960). *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*. [The Principle of Hope.] Vol. I. Aufbau.
- Blom, P. (2023). *Aufklärung in Zeiten der Verdunkelung*. [Aufklärung in Zeiten der Verdunkelung.] Brandstätter.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *Sozialer Sinn. Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft*. [Social Meaning: Critique of Theoretical Reason.] Suhrkamp.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). Narzißtische Reflexivität und wissenschaftliche Reflexivität. [Narcissistic Reflexivity and Scientific Reflexivity.] In E. Berg & M. Fuchs (Eds.), *Kultur, soziale Praxis, Text. Die Krise der ethnographischen Repräsentation* (pp. 365–374). Suhrkamp.

- Brand, U. & Wissen, M. (2017). *Imperiale Lebensweise. Zur Ausbeutung von Mensch und Natur im globalen Kapitalismus*. [Imperial Way of Life: On the Exploitation of Humans and Nature in Global Capitalism] Oekom.
- Breser, B., Heuer, C. & Marschnig, G. (2022). Krisen erzählen – Über die Orientierungsfunktion historisch-politischer Bildung. [Telling Crises – On the Orientational Function of Historical-Political Education.] *Zeitschrift für Didaktik der Gesellschaftswissenschaften* 13(2), 37–55.
- Buschmann, N. & Sulmowski, J. (2018).: Von 'Verantwortung' zu 'doing Verantwortung'. Subjektivierungstheoretische Aspekte nachhaltigkeitsbezogener Responsibilisierung. [From 'Responsibility' to 'Doing Responsibility': Subjectivation-Theoretical Aspects of Sustainability-Related Responsibilization] In A. Henkel, N. Lüdtke, N. Buschmann & L. Hochmann (Eds.), *Reflexive Responsibilisierung. Verantwortung für nachhaltige Entwicklung* (pp. 281–295). Transcript.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2022). Anthropocene Time. *History & Theory*, 5–32
- Deile, L. (2022). Favoring an offensive presentism. In Z. B. Simon & L. Deile (Eds.), *Historical Understanding. Past, Present and Future* (pp. 57–68). Bloomsbury.
- Derrida, J. & M. Ferraris (2002). *A Taste for the Secret*. Polity Press.
- Die Deutsche Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie. Weiterentwicklung 2021. [The German Sustainability Strategy: Further Development 2021.] (2020). <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/975274/1873516/9d73d857a3f7f0f8df5ac1b4c349fa07/2021-03-10-dns-2021-finale-langfassung-barrierefrei-data.pdf?download=1>
- Eis, A. & Moulin-Doos, C. (2013/2014). Prekäre Verantwortung zwischen Entpolitisierung und politischer (Selbst-)Steuerung. [Precarious Responsibility between Depoliticization and Political (Self-)Governance.] *Soziale Systeme* 19(2), 405–429.
- Fleury, C. (2023). *Hier liegt Bitterkeit begraben. Über Ressentiments und ihre Heilung*. [Bitterness is Buried Here: On Resentments and Their Healing.] Suhrkamp.
- Foucault, M. (1990). Was ist Aufklärung? [What is Enlightenment?] In E. Erdmann (Ed.), *Ethos der Moderne: Foucaults Kritik der Aufklärung* (pp. 35–54). Campus.
- Friesen, N. (2021). The Necessity of Translation in Education: Theory and Practice. In A. Wilmers & S. Jornitz (Eds.), *International Perspectives on School Settings, Education Policy and Digital Strategies. A Transatlantic Discourse in Education Research* (pp. 337–351). Budrich.
- Grunwald, A. (2021). Der homo responsabilis. [The Homo Responsibilis] In A. Grunwald (Ed.), *Wer bist du, Mensch? Transformationen menschlicher Selbstverständnisse im wissenschaftlich-technischen Fortschritt* (pp. 216–239). Herder.
- Gumbrecht, H.-U. (2012). *Präsenz*. [Presence.] Suhrkamp.
- Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
- Heidbrink, L. (2017). Definitionen und Voraussetzungen der Verantwortung. [Definitions and Prerequisites of Responsibility] In L. Heidbrink, C. Langbehn & J. Loh (Eds.), *Handbuch Verantwortung* (pp. 3–33). Springer.
- Henkel, A. (2021). Einleitung. [Introduction] In A. Henkel (Ed.), *10 Minuten Soziologie: Verantwortung* (pp. 9–18). Transcript.
- Heuer, C. (2022). Lost in Transition? – On History Education. *Public History Weekly* 10(4), DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2022-20088](https://doi.org/10.1515/phw-2022-20088)
- Hübner, A., Nitsche, M. & Barsch, S. (2023). Diffundierende Zeit(en). Das Anthropozän als Herausforderung für das historische Zeitverstehen. [Diffusing Time(s): The Anthropocene as a Challenge to Historical Understanding of Time.] *Zeitschrift für Geschichtsdidaktik* 22, 84–99.
- Interview with the sustainability researcher Sebastian Helgenberger (2022, July 3). *Der Standard* <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000137014532/umweltwissenschaftler-helgenberger-wir-brauchen-solidaritaet-zwischen-den-generationen>.
- Jehle, M. (2024): Lehren aus der Geschichte? Gedächtnisbildungen und darin aufbewahrte unverwirklichte Möglichkeiten. *Geschichtstheorie am Werk*. [Lessons from History? Memory Constructions and the Unfulfilled Possibilities Stored Within Them. Historical Theory at Work]; <https://doi.org/10.58079/12jmu>
- Jonas, H. (2020). *Das Prinzip Verantwortung. Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation*. [The Principle of Responsibility: An Attempt at an Ethics for Technological Civilization]. Suhrkamp.
- Jureit, U. (2017). Generation, Generationalität, Generationenforschung, Version: 2.0. [Generation, Generationality, Generational Research, Version: 2.0.] *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, http://docupedia.de/zg/Jureit_generation_v2_de_2017

- King, V. (2022). Generative Verantwortung im Anthropozän – Perspektiven psychoanalytischer Forschung. [Generative Responsibility in the Anthropocene – Perspectives from Psychoanalytic Research.] *Psyche. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen* 76, 1132–56.
- King, V. (2015). Zukunft der Nachkommen – gegenwärtige Krisen der Generativität. [Future of Descendants – Current Crises of Generativity]. *Psychologie und Gesellschaftskritik* 39(2/3), 27–53.
- Kühberger, C. (2007). Dimensionen der Verantwortung von Geschichtslehrer/-innen am Anfang des 21. Jahrhunderts – Exemplarische Einblicke. [Dimensions of Responsibility for History Teachers at the Beginning of the 21st Century – Exemplary Insights.] In C. Kühberger, C. Lübke & Th. Terberger (Eds.), *Wahre Geschichte - Geschichte als Ware. Die Verantwortung des Historikers gegenüber Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft* (pp. 163–180). Verlag Marie Leidorf.
- Kuhlmann, N. (2021). Enabling and disabling ethical responsiveness. Struggling with and for 'responsibility'. In M. Karcher & S. S. Rödel (Eds.), *Lebendige Theorie* (pp. 129–142). Textem.
- Kuhlmann, N. (2021). Verantwortung als pastorale Adressierungsformel. Zur Ambivalenz einer pädagogischen Subjektivierungsform. [Responsibility as a Pastoral Addressing Formula: On the Ambivalence of an Educational Subjectivation Form.] *Pädagogische Korrespondenz* 64, 29–50.
- Landwehr, A. (2020). Zukunft – Sicherheit – Moderne. Zu einem unklaren Verhältnis. [Future – Security – Modernity: On an Unclear Relationship.] In A. Landwehr, *Diesseits der Geschichte. Für eine andere Historiographie* (pp. 139–155). Wallstein.
- Latour, B. (2019). *Das terrestrische Manifest [The Terrestrial Manifesto]* (3rd ed.). Suhrkamp.
- Leljak, G. & Wentner, A. M. (2019). *Uni Graz-Guide. Architektur und Kunst am Campus der Karl-Franzens-Universität [Uni Graz Guide: Architecture and Art on the Campus of the University of Graz]* (2nd ed.). Leykam.
- Lessenich, S. (2022). *Nicht mehr normal. Gesellschaft am Rande des Nervenzusammenbruchs. [No Longer Normal: Society on the Brink of a Nervous Breakdown.]* Hanser.
- Lessenich, S. (2019). *Grenzen der Demokratie. Teilhabe als Verteilungsproblem. [Limits of Democracy: Participation as a Distribution Problem.]* Reclam.
- Letzte Generation Österreich (2023). *On the campaign in Graz.* <https://us13.campaign-archive.com/?u=b0301f11ba8a0837a2985ff50&id=93998ec4d8>
- Letzte Generation Österreich (2023). *Fragen und Antworten. [Questions and Answers.]* <https://letztegeneration.at/fragen-antworten>
- McGregor, H. E., Pind, J. & Karn, S. (2021). A 'wicked problem': rethinking history education in the Anthropocene. *Rethinking history*, 25(4), 483–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2021.1992159>
- McLean, P. (2024). Überwindung des 'Abgrunds' zwischen historischem und politischem Denken? Befreiung als Brücke zwischen historischer und politischer Bildung. [Overcoming the 'Abyss' Between Historical and Political Thinking? Liberation as a Bridge Between Historical and Civic Education.] In J. v. Norden & L. Yildirim (Eds.), *Historisch-politische Bildung im Diskurs. Perspektiven der Geschichtsdidaktik* (pp. 176–193). Wochenschau.
- Melville, H. (2004). *Bartleby, der Schreiber. [Bartleby, the Scrivener.]* Diogenes. Mergel, Th. (2012). Einleitung. Krisen als Wahrnehmungsphänomene. [Introduction: Crises as Perception Phenomena.] In Th. Mergel (Ed.), *Krisen verstehen. Historische und kulturwissenschaftliche Annäherungen* (pp. 10–22). Campus.
- Meyer-Drawe, K. (1992). Nachdenken über Verantwortung. [Thinking About Responsibility.] *Friedrich Jahresheft* 10, 14–16.
- Minkmar, N. (2023, September 12). Boomer gegen Junge. [Boomers versus Youth.] *taz Futurzwei* No. 26 <https://taz.de/Generationenkonflikt-Klimakrise/!5925265/>
- Nassehi, A. (2019, October 24). Alles, sofort? Das geht nicht. Warum es für eine moderne Gesellschaft so schwierig ist, die Klimakrise zu bekämpfen. [Everything, Right Now? That's Not Possible. Why It is So Difficult for a Modern Society to Combat the Climate Crisis] *Die Zeit*, 54.
- Neckel, S. (2023). Das Dilemma der sozial-ökologischen Gleichzeitigkeit. [The Dilemma of Socio-Ecological Simultaneity.] *Merkur* 77(894), 5–14.
- Norden, J. v. (2021). Unsicherheit und Verantwortung als Koordinaten einer emanzipatorischen Geschichtsdidaktik? [Uncertainty and Responsibility as Coordinates of an Emancipatory History Didactics?] In L. Deile, J. v. Norden & P. Riedel (Eds.), *Brennpunkte heutigen Geschichtsunterrichts. Joachim Rohlfes zum 90. Geburtstag* (pp. 252–255). Wochenschau.
- Nordgren, K. (2021). The Anthropocene and the Need for a Crisis in Teaching. *Public History Weekly* 8(9), DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2021-17397](https://doi.org/10.1515/phw-2021-17397)

- Nordmann, I. (2020). Das Miteinander Sprechen und Handeln. Hannah Arendts Begriff von Öffentlichkeit als Modell für den Diskussionsraum der Erwachsenenbildung. [Speaking and Acting Together: Hannah Arendt's Concept of Publicness as a Model for the Discussion Space in Adult Education.] In T. Oeftering, W. Meints-Stender & D. Lange (Eds.), *Hannah Arendt. Lektüren zur Politischen Bildung* (pp. 93–103). Springer.
- Pandel, H.-J. (2022). Geschichtsdidaktische Begriffe – lieber borgen als bilden? [Historical Didactic Terms – Prefer Borrowing Over Educating?] In U. Mayer, H.-J. Pandel, G. Schneider & B. Schönemann (Eds.), *Wörterbuch Geschichtsdidaktik* (4th ed.) (pp. 13–18). Wochenschau.
- Rorty, R. (2003). Der Roman als Mittel zur Erlösung aus der Selbstbezogenheit. [The Novel as a Means of Liberation from Self-Absorption.] In J. Küpper & C. Menke (Eds.), *Dimensionen ästhetischer Erfahrung* (pp. 49–66). Suhrkamp.
- Rucht, D. (2023). *Die Letzte Generation. Beschreibung und Kritik.* [The Last Generation: Description and Critique.] ipb working series, 1/2023; https://protestinstitut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/WP_1.2023.pdf
- Rüsen, J. (2020). *Zerbrechende Zeit. Über den Sinn der Geschichte* [Breaking Time: On the Meaning of History.] (2nd ed.). LIT.
- Rüsen, J. (2003). Geschichte verantworten. Kritische Überlegungen zur ethischen Dimension der Historie. [Taking Responsibility for History: Critical Reflections on the Ethical Dimension of History.] In J. Rüsen, *Kann gestern besser werden? Zum Bedenken der Geschichte* (pp. 47–87). Kadmos.
- Rüsen, J. (1990). *Zeit und Sinn. Strategien historischen Denkens.* [Time and Meaning: Strategies of Historical Thinking.] Fischer.
- Rüsen, J. (1989). *Lebendige Geschichte. Grundzüge einer Historik III.* [Living History: Outlines of a Historical Method III.] Vandenhoeck.
- Rüsen, J. (1983). *Historische Vernunft. Grundzüge einer Historik I. Die Grundlagen der Geschichtswissenschaft.* [Historical Reason: Outlines of a Historical Method I. The Foundations of History Science.] Vandenhoeck.
- Rushing, S. (2015). Butler's Ethical Appeal. Being, Feeling and Acting Responsible. In M. Lloyd (Ed.), *Butler and Ethics* (pp. 65–90). Edinburgh University Press.
- Schulz-Hageleit, P. (2004). *Geschichtsbewusstsein und Zukunftssorge. Unbewusstheiten im geschichtswissenschaftlichen und geschichtsdidaktischen Diskurs. Geschichtsunterricht als 'historische Lebenskunde'.* [Historical Consciousness and Concern for the Future: Unconscious Aspects in Historical and Didactic Discourse. History Education as 'Historical Life Science'] Centaurus.
- Simon, Z.B. (2019). *History in Times of Unprecedented Change. A Theory for the 21st Century.* Bloomsbury Academic.
- Simon, Z. B., Tamm, M. & Domańska, E. (2021). Anthropocenic Historical Knowledge: Promises and Pitfalls. *Rethinking History* 25(4), 406–439.
- Sombetzki, J. (2014). Historische Beiträge zu einer Minimaldefinition von 'Verantwortung'. Etymologie und Genese der Verantwortung vor dem Hintergrund der Verantwortungsforschung. [Historical Contributions to a Minimal Definition of 'Responsibility': Etymology and Genesis of Responsibility in the Context of Responsibility Research] *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 56, 197–219.
- Thorp, R. & Persson, A. (2020) On historical thinking and the history educational challenge. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 52(8), 891–901, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2020.1712550](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1712550)
- Vajen, B., Firsova-Eckert, E. & Lange, D. (2022). Krise, Sinnbildung und politische Bildung. [Crisis, Meaning-Making, and Civic Education.] *Zeitschrift für Didaktik der Gesellschaftswissenschaften* 13(2), 19–36.
- Vogelmann, F. (2014). *Im Bann der Verantwortung.* [In the Spell of Responsibility.] Campus.
- Vogelmann, F. (2013). Verantwortung als Subjektivierung. Zur Genealogie einer Selbstverständlichkeit. [Responsibility as Subjectivation: On the Genealogy of a Self-Evidence] In A. Gelhard, Th. Alkemeyer & N. Ricken (Eds.), *Techniken der Subjektivierung* (pp. 149–161). Wilhelm Fink.
- Weizäcker, E. U. v. & Wijkman, A. (2017). *Wir sind dran. Was wir ändern müssen, wenn wir bleiben wollen* [We Are On It: What We Need to Change If We Want to Stay] (2nd ed.). Pantheon.
- Wimmer, M. (2019). Generative Differenz, Generationendifferenz, Kulturdifferenz. Fremdheit zwischen Generationen. [Generative Difference, Generational Difference, Cultural Difference. Strangeness Between Generations.] In M. Wimmer, *Posthumanistische Pädagogik. Unterwegs zu einer poststrukturalistischen Erziehungswissenschaft* (pp. 267–308). Schöningh.
- Wulf, C. (2022). Anthropozän. [Anthropocene] In M. Feldmann, M. Rieger-Ladich, C. Voß, & K. Wortmann (Eds.), *Schlüsselbegriffe der Allgemeinen Erziehungswissenschaft. Pädagogisches Vokabular in Bewegung* (pp. 29–38). Beltz Juventa.