
EMBODIED HERMENEUTICS: GADAMER MEETS WOOLF IN *A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN*

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ABSTRACT. Hans-Georg Gadamer has been criticized by a wide range of feminist scholars who argue that his work neglects feminine aspects of understanding, many of which are essential to sound theorizing about educational contexts. In this essay, Linda O'Neill employs Virginia Woolf's classic gender analysis both as a foil for Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and as an exemplar of feminist reasoning. Through her striking descriptions of embodied tradition, language, and transcendence, Woolf challenges and enriches Gadamer's work. Bringing Gadamer into conversation with Woolf offers expanded horizons for philosophers of education who choose to ground their studies of teachers and learners in a feminist epistemology resonant with the rich ambiguity of educational experience. This comparison, O'Neill concludes, suggests that the pluralistic reasoning of feminist inquiry offers engendered, embodied insights absent from Gadamer's hermeneutics and crucial to what Patti Lather calls "fieldwork in philosophy," an investigative alternative capable of informing sustainable educational policy, practice, and reform.

INTRODUCTION

This exploration of hermeneutic and feminist philosophizing juxtaposes Hans-Georg Gadamer's hopes for the philosophical tradition with Virginia Woolf's serious reservations about philosophers and the traditions that support their claims. Gadamer's philosophy has been criticized by a wide range of feminist scholars who observe that his life's work neglects feminine aspects of understanding, many of them essential to the creation of art and the integrity of educational inquiry. Woolf's classic analysis of gender and genius is used here as an exemplar of feminist theorizing with implications for philosophy of education that challenge both Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and restrictive conceptions of educational research.

Although her work is not in general formally associated with the philosophical tradition, Virginia Woolf, writing almost a century ago, crafted a series of arguments about the conditions necessary for a rich life of the mind that would not be out of place in the recent compilation of essays found in *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*.¹ This collection is part of the *Re-reading the Canon* series, which includes feminist interpretations of Plato, Aristotle, René Descartes, David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Mary Wollstonecraft, Søren Kierkegaard, G.W.F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, John Dewey, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and Gadamer, among

1. Lorraine Code, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

others. In this whimsical exploration, I undertake a similar project, re-reading Gadamer yet again, this time in light of selected passages from Virginia Woolf's classic, *A Room of One's Own*. Through this approach the unfixed, ever-expanding, self-correcting tradition of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* encounters Woolf's portrait of a tradition relentlessly hostile to at least half the human race.²

While scholars have disagreed about the relevance of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to feminist concerns, this comparison suggests that feminist inquiry offers engendered, embodied insights that are absent from Gadamer's hermeneutics and crucial to "fieldwork in philosophy," a research alternative capable of informing educational policy, practice, and reform initiatives.³ As the Egon Guba Invited Lecturer at the 2003 conference of the American Educational Research Association, Patti Lather noted that objections to the exclusive use of natural science statistical models for human science investigations are not new. What is new, in Lather's assessment, is the "nakedly political" nature of the moves to reinscribe a science of "generalizability, objectivity, and replicability" that has been "under duress for some thirty years." In an attempt to counter efforts to impose a narrow, unified definition of science, Lather has developed the notion of "fieldwork in philosophy" to reflect a more expansive definition wherein "sociality and history are seen as the only

2. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989); and Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; repr. New York: Harcourt, 1981). These works will be cited in the text as *TM* and *ROO*, respectively, for all subsequent references. *A Room of One's Own* originated with two papers written and read for the Arts Society at Newnham and the Odtas at Girton in October 1928. *A Room of One's Own*, which develops the themes of the lectures more fully, was written in a single month "as quick as my hand could write" (*The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, quoted in Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* [Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 2005], 216). As John Lehman notes in *Virginia Woolf* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1975), "despite the speed with which it was composed, it is spirited, lucid, cogent, amusing; it is, in fact, a masterpiece" (66).

3. Patti Lather, "This IS Your Father's Paradigm: Government Intrusion and the Case of Qualitative Research in Education," *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (2004): 22. The alternative of "fieldwork in philosophy" is intended to counter such approaches as using decontextualized "texts" that are numbers representing a school's "adequate yearly progress" reported by subgroup to represent racial, socioeconomic, gendered "context." These numbers simply reduce embodied experiences to disaggregated test scores that supplement aggregate test scores, in essence representing a "text" (number) with another "text" (number) while providing no real "context." For the purposes of this discussion, *context* is defined as those words and circumstances relevant to the thing under consideration, the whole situation or environment relevant to a particular word, number, happening, or personality and constitutive of its meaning. As Patti Lather warns, given the "importance of contextualized judgments" in educational research, policy, and evaluation, decontextualized "formulas for transparent accountability are more about politics than about quality of service." See also Patti Lather, "Scientific Research in Education: A Critical Perspective," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 20, no. 1 (2004): 14-30.

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foundations we have."⁴ In drawing upon "sociality and history" and honoring the "complexities of existence," Gadamer's hermeneutics offers justification for philosophical fieldwork conducted in specific districts, schools, and classrooms in the service of educational goals. To the extent that Gadamer's hermeneutics is grounded in an androcentric epistemology, as some feminist critics have argued, this justification is weakened by the absence of crucial feminine aspects of understanding. After comparing Gadamer and Woolf's views of tradition, language, and transcendence, I will examine the implications of this analysis for fieldwork in philosophy as a viable and necessary form of educational research.

GADAMER MEETS WOOLF

Hans-Georg Gadamer asserts that with effort we can encounter tradition with "historically effective consciousness." We are not condemned to accept a fixed tradition as dogma, but are capable of resistance and creativity along with "entry into a language which we otherwise would not possess."⁵ Gadamer's hermeneutic circle, the site of historically effective consciousness, spirals out with increasing possibilities for "educative moral experiences," fostering the development of practical wisdom, or *phronesis*. This expanding circle of understanding serves to extend our horizons when we are open to differences, but it collapses when we see new situations simplistically as iterations "of pre-existing types."⁶ In order to confront the human tendencies toward provincialism, self-delusion, and habit that blunt our recognition of original elements, we must "foreground" prejudices that operate "unnoticed" in our daily lives and carefully consider the validity of claims we have formerly accepted without question.⁷ The capacities not only for cognitive surprise but also for being "pulled up short" and "called into question," to use Gadamer scholar Deborah Kerdeman's terms, are central aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Though sometimes painful, these challenges to habit and self-delusion point to "choices we could not otherwise imagine."⁸

In Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, understanding entails a return to the philosophical quest embodied by Socrates. For Gadamer, this quest includes the world of poetry "beyond the ironclad logic of science" embraced by his own father. Poetry makes compelling contributions to the expansive view of

4. Lather, "This *IS* Your Father's Paradigm," 23. Lather cites Pierre Bourdieu and Danish urban developer Bent Flyvbjerg in support of this proposal for case studies lying clearly outside the boundaries of current policy restrictions and raising questions about the aims and integrity of causal "research to practice" links that lead directly to profitable, scalable solutions. See also Thomas S. Popkewitz, "Is the National Research Council Committee's Report on Scientific Research in Education Scientific? On Trusting the Manifesto," *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (2004): 62–78.

5. Paul Hamilton, *Historicism: The New Critical Idiom*, 2d ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 82.

6. Chris Higgins, "From Reflective Practice to Practical Wisdom: Three Models of Liberal Teacher Education," in *Philosophy of Education 2001*, ed. Suzanne Rice (Urbana, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 2002), 97.

7. Wendy Kohli, "Understanding Human Finitude: Educating for Insight," in *Philosophy of Education 2003*, ed. Kal Alston (Urbana, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 2004), 219.

8. Deborah Kerdeman, "Pulled Up Short: Challenges for Education," in *Philosophy of Education 2003*, ed. Alston, 211–212.

understanding developed in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer's most comprehensive challenge to "science's monopolistic claim to have a corner on truth."⁹

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf is not concerned with the technical philosophical legitimacy of hegemonic truth claims, but with the daily lives of women.¹⁰ Considering the unrecorded lives of previous generations, Woolf decides that female students deserve a path from the material world to the social world to the intellectual world with the embodied lives of women as an organizing principle. In order for Gadamer's historically effective consciousness to lead to female genius in fiction, poetry, and, by extension, philosophy, women need, at minimum, economic security and privacy — for Woolf this means 500 pounds a year and a room of one's own:

We may prate of democracy...but actually a poor child in England has little more hope than had the son of an Athenian slave to be emancipated into that intellectual freedom of which great writings are born. Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends upon intellectual freedom. (*ROO*, 108)¹¹

Woolf foregrounds what Gadamer ignores: women often "had less intellectual freedom than the sons of Athenian slaves" and, therefore, "a dog's chance of writing poetry." Delivering this essay in 1928, six years after Gadamer completed his doctoral dissertation at Marburg, Woolf observes that women still have not attained entry into the realm of poetry, that indispensable companion to science in Gadamer's hermeneutic circle.¹² Writing to her friend G. Lowes Dickinson on November 6, 1929, Woolf explains, "I wanted to encourage the young women — they seem to get fearfully depressed" (*ROO*, xiv). Woolf clearly identifies tradition as one source of this depression.

EMBODIED TRADITION

In his attempts to rehabilitate tradition, Gadamer argues that tradition is more friend than foe. We are part of tradition before we are aware of ourselves as

9. Jean Grodin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2003), 50. Gadamer criticized a narrow, methodologically restricted view of science that gained currency throughout the twentieth century. His philosophical hermeneutics has been used in support of diversity in methods, acknowledging the need for interpretive approaches that are informed by practical wisdom in educational inquiries. For example, in the realm of educational policy, Margaret Eisenhart has called for a "science plus" that entails "historical, theoretical, critical, and ethical scholarship," even if these are not called "science" by certain members of a research community. See Marilyn Cochran-Smith, "Taking Stock in 2006: Evidence, Evidence Everywhere," in *Policy, Practice, and Politics in Teacher Education* (Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, 2006), 212.

10. Rooms appear throughout Woolf's work, with reminders that rooms "like our bodies and our lives" are only partly our own, "carrying the marks of our predecessors as well as our own histories." See Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 2005), 96.

11. Woolf's attention to "social, moral, and ethical conditions" for young women, like Simone de Beauvoir's fictionalized concern, is instructive as a "valuable corrective against some philosophical conceits." See James D. Marshall, "Simone de Beauvoir: The Philosophy of Lived Experience," *Educational Theory* 56, no. 2 (2006): 189.

12. Woolf resented her lack of formal, institutional education, though her informal education included instruction in Greek and access to the many books in her family's library, including the Platonic dialogues. While she participated in conversations with her brother and his friends at Cambridge, she was educated primarily in the home.

distinctive human beings and historical subjects.¹³ We do violence to this treasured relation whenever we try to project ourselves out of our traditions.

For Woolf, this treasured relation entails more peril than Gadamer acknowledges. *A Room of One's Own* begins with a young woman on the outskirts of an English university campus not unlike the German institutions that sustained Gadamer's philosophical investigations. The woman is resting by a stream, looking at the water when a thought occurs, appearing like a fish breaking the surface and flashing "hither and thither" as she takes off walking excitedly, trying to follow her idea. She is intercepted almost immediately by a Beadle who reminds her that she is trespassing where only "the Fellows and Scholars" are allowed to tread. With this interruption the thought is banished back to the depths, irretrievable. When she reaches the library at "Oxbridge" she is informed that she cannot enter unaccompanied by a gentleman. When she returns to "Fernham," the women's college for "thin soup and prunes," she remembers the "smoke, drink, and deep armchairs" of Oxbridge and muses,

The human frame being what it is, heart, body and brain all mixed together, and not contained in separate compartments as they will be no doubt in another million years, a good dinner is of great importance to good talk. One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well. (*ROO*, 18)

Thinking of the "poverty and insecurity of one sex and safety and prosperity of the other," she ponders "the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of the writer" (*ROO*, 24). Asking why one sex historically has been so prosperous and the other so poor, she finds, after consulting sources from Pope to Dr. Johnson to Napoleon and Mussolini, "women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (*ROO*, 35). She concludes that this mirroring is "essential to all violent and heroic action" (*ROO*, 36). In heroic traditions, women too have "burnt like beacons in all the works of all the poets from the beginning of time" (*ROO*, 36). But these are not embodied women. Women, it seems, may grace poetry, but they are missing from history, as Woolf explains:

She dominates the lives of kings and conquerors in fiction; in fact she was the slave of any boy whose parents forced a ring upon her finger. Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband. (*ROO*, 43–44)

Since "nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century" (*ROO*, 65), Woolf has no model upon which to draw as she continues her investigation. This gap in historical knowledge has significant consequences for female novelists, poets, and philosophers, since "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice" (*ROO*, 65). Criticism of female intellectuals may be distracting, but it is insignificant, in

13. Openness to tradition "does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open and without it, there is simply no real human bond." Furthermore, this openness to the other entails recognizing that we "must accept some things that are against us," even when we are not forced to do so. When we are open to the stubborn otherness of the tradition that constitutes our understandings of ourselves and our world, tradition itself can "function as a means for recognizing false prejudices" (*TM*, 361).

Woolf's view, compared to the fact that women for centuries "had no tradition behind them, or one so short and partial that it was of little help" (*ROO*, 76). Stepping squarely into essentialist territory she asserts that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (*ROO*, 76). The tradition of great men cannot help, "however much one may go to them for pleasure" (*ROO*, 76).¹⁴ From this perspective, Gadamer's valiant attempt to rehabilitate tradition is based not on an ever-expanding hermeneutic circle, but on a gendered semicircle.

When philosophers of education situate themselves within gendered horizons and encounter a tradition of hostility to female philosophizing, one alternative to gender essentialism is sensitivity to the need for pluralistic reasoning and pluralistic modes of validation. Over the last twenty years, approaches to inquiry grounded in heightened awareness of gender, race, and class have often employed and affirmed the need for pluralistic reasoning. A tradition dismissive of identified groups may be called into question in feminist studies, as Patti Lather explains in her analysis of battles over "what counts" as "science" — and therefore legitimate — in officially sanctioned educational research. But a patriarchal tradition ("your father's paradigm") may also be relentless in its attempts to re-normalize "hard" science (verifiable, falsifiable, quantifiable) against "soft" interpretation (re-interpretable, debatable, contextual) in a quest for a "unified" rather than pluralistic theory.

As current reform policies repeat the mantra of "scientifically based research" worthy of informing educational policy and practice, feminist philosophers of education point to the possibility that this epistemological hierarchy, with its "masculinist" language and logic, is so "naturalized" in our accepted horizons that we do not recognize the extent to which our research traditions are gendered male. Drawing on feminist theory, Lather asserts that to insist on the use of research traditions that ignore "the messiness of practice-in-context" is to "impoverish" educational practice, actually harming "the children, teachers, and administrators in our schools."¹⁵

EMBODIED LANGUAGE

Gadamer has been hailed for re-legitimizing the language of poetry and the language of classical philosophy as a counterbalance to the precise language of science. From his study of Greek philosophers Gadamer finds, not a system for guiding thought or a grounding in some first principle, but the "conceptual and intuitive power of the language in which we live" that is based on "primordial world experience." The "use" of words in a language is not a "using" at all, according to Gadamer; instead, language is "the element in which we live, as fishes live in water." Rather than looking to math and the physical sciences for models of reason, Gadamer defends the questioning of Socrates and the practical wisdom of Aristotle. Embracing the animating power of "poetry, the arts, the humanities,"

14. Later Woolf describes the "infinitely obscure lives" of historical women and concludes, "for all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. And the novels, without meaning to, inevitably lie" (*ROO*, 89).

15. Lather, "Scientific Research in Education: A Critical Perspective," 7. See also Lather, "This IS Your Father's House."

Gadamer concludes that without these, philosophical reason risks “barrenness.” His hermeneutic philosophy returns to Greek concepts redolent with an “immediacy of experience,” the “keen pleasure” of questioning, and thinking that is created from spoken language rather than the languages of sciences that lead to mathematics. According to Gadamer,

These philosophers profited from and built upon the artful development of the spoken language in Homeric and Hesiodic verse art, and they built upon rhetoric, which had flourished as a highly developed art through which the youth in their claim to education engaged in verbal battles with their peers. It is a language whose influence, through the alliance between rhetoric and dialectic, has continued through many centuries.¹⁶

It is exactly this highly developed spoken language and verse art that Woolf finds unsuitable for her imaginary female authors. Homeric verse and epic poetry are not fitting vehicles for women to use in their own writing, according to Woolf, because these traditional linguistic shapes were “made by men out of their own needs for their own uses.” Older forms were hardened into established “arcades or domes” by the time females became writers, so it is logical that a female author would write novels — the genre being “young enough to be soft in her hands.” In addition, since books need to be “adapted to the body,” women’s books might be shorter, concentrated, and not dependent upon “long hours of steady and uninterrupted work.” Seeking a “psychology of women by a woman” for insights into “what alterations of work and rest” might best suit women writers, she wonders where she will find this information “if through their incapacity to play football women are not going to be allowed to practice medicine” (*ROO*, 77–78).

Gadamer claims that “Language is among the things one hears, and, as the logos, language encompasses simply everything.”¹⁷ His hopes for an expansive encounter with tradition rest on the possibility of openness in dialogue and the capacity for generous, disciplined listening. Woolf counters with the need to cultivate the capacity to *not* listen. She explains that Jane Austen and Emily Brontë, in order to write like women, had to ignore the “perpetual admonitions of the eternal pedagogue — write this, think that.” They were successful to the extent that they “were deaf to that persistent voice, now grumbling, now patronizing, now domineering, now grieved, now shocked, now angry, now avuncular, that voice which cannot let women alone” (*ROO*, 75).¹⁸ Throughout her polemic, Woolf pits female creativity against male interruption. Evoking “women’s relation to the dominant culture” of her time, she begins the book with a contradicting conjunction: “But, you may say, we asked you to speak about

16. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Reflections on my Philosophical Journey,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago and LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1997), 22, 6, and 25.

17. *Ibid.*, 22.

18. Woolf subsequently warns that it is “the most abject treachery” to sacrifice even the smallest part of the writer’s vision in deference to “some professor with a measuring-rod up his sleeve” (*ROO*, 106). Lather draws upon French feminists in her analysis of the “language of research,” also taking into account refinements to address the essentializing aspects of French feminism. Lather extends Luce Irigaray’s observations that men have much to lose when established “languages” are challenged, pointing out that while it may be advantageous for women to question admonitions to “think that,” it is threatening to the pedagogue whose position is secured by the accepted, naturalized language of masculine universality. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985). See Lather, “Scientific Research in Education.”

women and fiction — what has that got to do with a room of one's own?" (*ROO*, 3). Following the path from material to social to intellectual freedom, Woolf calls into question Gadamer's faith in linguistically universal human encounters with tradition.

Feminist philosophers likewise examine the ways in which language itself forms and conforms, hardening into hierarchies, systems, and Woolf's "domes and arcades" that order our embodied experiences in gendered ways that sustain and constrain us. While contemporary comparisons of the language of "hard" masculinist "good sense" with the "excesses" of women's "fluid economies" prompt critiques of essentializing, Woolf recognizes the danger and takes this step anyway, considering the distinctive female and male embodiments of the languages that we have lived historically and continue to live. Feminist philosophers of education who attend to the embodied, gendered aspects of language remind educational researchers to consider the ways in which our traditions and language are rich with echoes, traces, and contradictions that influence what and how we teach and learn. In the complex interplay of body and mind, dialogue and deafness, Woolf reminds educators that language is expressed and received by embodied learners. Educational research that disembodies as it decontextualizes may be useful, but it is not sufficient for formulating educational policy that honors human complexity, immanent and transcendent.

TRANSCENDENCE

Woolf's emphasis on embodied tradition and language also challenges Gadamer's view of a kind of transcendence capable of escaping the perils of appropriation. For Gadamer, knowledge is not a function of a subject that stands in and of itself and "makes everything else an object." In the "transcendental relationship between being and truth," knowledge is "an element of being itself" (*TM*, 458). When we claim to "transcend" our conditionedness and argue that we know the other without distortion, we are actually attempting to master rather than to understand or communicate. Thus, in knowing one another, we cannot rely on the critical, objectivizing methods we use to evaluate historical sources or master (predict and control) events in the physical sciences. Rather, we know one another best when we share the natural language of conversation that binds us together, when we "think within" our traditions without being trapped by them, and when we establish the mutuality of the I-Thou relation. In Gadamer's conception of historically effective consciousness, wherein we attempt to know one another across generations, "consistency of desire" is an ethical bond (*TM*, 458).¹⁹

Woolf, in contrast, seeks to transcend a "consistency of desire" trapped in a hermeneutics of romantic love. As she explains, women in fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, seen "only in relation to the other sex," hence the "astonishing extremes of her beauty and horror, her heavenly goodness and hellish depravity — for so a lover

19. For human subjects, transcendence in the linguistic virtuality of the hermeneutic circle is real but limited; true being is "present before an infinite mind," and in metaphysics, "*belonging* refers to the transcendental relationship between being and truth, and it conceives knowledge as an element of being itself and not primarily as an activity of the subject" (*TM*, 360 and 361). Gadamer argues, "consistency is an obligation for every kind of rationality," and in practical experience "at issue" is "the consistency of desire itself" (*TM*, 569–570).

would see her as his love rose or sank, was prosperous or unhappy." Woolf asks how a full, interesting, or truthful account might be given of women "married against their will, kept in one room, and to one occupation." If men were "only represented in literature as the lovers of women, and were never the friends of men, soldiers, thinkers, dreamers," certainly our accounts of them would be impoverished. So it was with women when "love was the only possible interpreter" (*ROO*, 83–84).

For Woolf, "A true picture of man as a whole can never be painted until a woman has described that spot the size of a shilling" as men throughout the ages "have pointed out to women that dark place at the back of the head" (*ROO*, 90–91). We must have the opportunity to see and call into the open each other's blind spots in order to transcend the limitations of our own gendered capacities for self-reflection. Seeming to catch a glimpse of the essentialism haunting this claim, Woolf wonders whether thinking about one sex as distinctive from the other interferes with the "unity of the mind" (*ROO*, 97). In place of Gadamer's fusion of horizons between interpreters and tradition's texts, Woolf imagines a "natural fusion" of "two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body." Perhaps these two sexes must be "united in order to get complete satisfaction and happiness." In Woolf's version of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," Mary Carmichael, her hypothetical fledgling author, takes a first step out of the mirrored shadows by writing the line, "Chloe likes Olivia" (*ROO*, 97–98). With this stroke of the pen, she makes visible new relations and opens new horizons for both males and females.

If one form of transcendence is the genius to write (or philosophize) with "a curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself," then for women a degree of blindness as well as deafness is required (*ROO*, 93). Woolf watches Mary Carmichael "lengthening out for the test" and hopes Mary herself does not see "the bishops and the deans, the doctors and the professors, the patriarchs and the pedagogues all at her shouting warning and advice." As they call to her "like the crowd at a fence on the race-course," Woolf wills her not to look right or left, not to curse, not to laugh, not to hesitate, but to "Think only of the jump..." (*ROO*, 93–94).²⁰

Along with Woolf's transcendence of "traditional" gender horizons comes competing possibilities for androgynous and distinctively gendered selves. Woolf imagines the intellectual fusion of male and female, but retains her claim for distinctive, gendered understandings as she continues her argument: "It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only?" (*ROO*, 88).²¹

20. Woolf describes the "greatest release of all" from the conditions of poverty, "which is the freedom to think of the things in themselves" (*ROO*, 39). Compare this with Gadamer's explanation that our exchanges of words either reach our listeners or fail to make the "thing meant ... more and more present." See Gadamer, "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey," 22.

21. Woolf explains, "for we have too much likeness as it is, and if an explorer should come back and bring word of other sexes looking through the branches of other trees at other skies, nothing would be of greater service to humanity; and we should have the immense pleasure into the bargain of watching Professor X rush for his measuring-rods to prove himself 'superior'" (*ROO*, 88).

Woolf imagines two ways of “fortifying differences” that transcend gender essentializing without destroying embodied distinctiveness. One is the fusion of male and female horizons within a single androgynous mind. The other is to have less anxiety over what is called male and what is called female with more space allotted for pluralistic notions of gender. In Woolf’s *Room of One’s Own*, it is the academic (the male Professor) who is all too inclined to measure and rank rather than to recognize and transcend traditions, discourses, and embodied differences. The reliance on measuring and ranking is also often the only officially sanctioned “horizon” for educational reform legislation, which typically employs a narrow definitions of “science” as controlled experiment. Rather than transcending overly restrictive definitions of scientifically based research as the only legitimate justification for educational policy, in a backlash against a more expansive fusion of horizons offered by “cultural studies, feminist methodology, radical environmentalism, ethnic studies, and social studies of science,” federal guidelines renormalize earlier and demonstrably impoverished notions. As feminist theorizing suggests, educators and students would be better served by intellectual fusions of horizons that are distinctively gendered, pluralistic, and inclusive. Policy can be informed by large-scale, experimentally designed studies, but such studies are not sufficient; insights from the hermeneutic tradition are also essential. Lather’s proposed fieldwork in philosophy as part of that hermeneutic “tradition” remains grounded in embodied educational experience and open to transcendence via dialogical reinterpretation and critique.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

For Gadamer, “it is an illusion to see another person as a tool that can be absolutely known and used,” just as it is an illusion to view history as “the instantiation of a general law” rather than as something “historically unique” (*TM*, 59).²² In the I-Thou relations that characterize Gadamer’s fusion of horizons, keeping others’ claims at a distance prevents the mutual risk-taking essential for understanding other human beings. By keeping feminist claims at a distance, for example, Gadamer retains universalist conceptions of tradition, language, and transcendence. But as Barbara Thayer-Bacon has argued in her exploration of feminist theory applied to epistemology, when we “pretend to offer a neutral, general theory of knowledge... what we really offer is an androcentric Epistemology... visible in the objectification and neutralization of the subject.”²³ Woolf chronicles the neutralization and objectification to which Thayer-Bacon refers and for which Gadamer has been criticized.

22. I-Thou relations do not allow us to understand other persons or “human nature” in the same way we understand the natural phenomena we attempt to predict and control.

23. Barbara J. Thayer-Bacon, *Relational “(e)πισtemologies”* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 28. Thayer-Bacon describes her project as “one of redefining Epistemology in a nontranscendent manner,” including a reclamation of “traditional Epistemological concerns of standards and criteria for warranting arguments and determining truths from falsities” in order to “make them visible and hold them accountable as well as make them pragmatically useful, but on socially constructed grounds, not on transcendental grounds” (6). Despite Gadamer’s brilliant philosophical protests against the tyranny of objectification in the human realm, this is a recurring criticism. See, for example, the essays collected in Code, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*.

Seeking pedagogical support for gendered I-Thou relations, Woolf asks if it might be possible that education ought "to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities." For Woolf, this fortification is not for purposes of competition, a "pitting of sex against sex." Such comparisons belong to the private-school stage of human existence where it is "necessary for one side to beat another side" (*ROO*, 88). Rather, education brings out and fortifies differences because "poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father" (*ROO*, 103).

What might a commitment to "fortify differences" rather than to converge on a single set of standards mean for educational research? Educational research requirements, such as those delineated in the No Child Left Behind Act, rest on the assumption that single sets of standards, buttressed by natural science research methodologies, can be trusted to yield results upon which educational practice and large-scale reforms can be built. The "gold standard" for educational research in this legislation is defined as the use of large-scale experimental designs with random selection, random assignment, and "results" that can be applied irrespective of educational context.

Lather's fieldwork in philosophy, so potentially useful in the formulation of educational policy as well as in the improvement of school and classroom practices, characterizes "science" as an endeavor that goes well beyond the quasi-experimental and experimental designs. Complementing large-scale experimental designs, fieldwork in philosophy includes case studies rich in ambiguity and close to "the complexities and contradictions of existence." Such case studies honor practice and acknowledge the forces that actually "make life work."²⁴

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, in its emphasis on historically effective consciousness and practical wisdom in close, active, thoughtful engagement with "the complexities and contradictions of existence," supports Lather's call for fieldwork in philosophy. This support does not negate the legitimacy of statistically sound inquiry employing experimental and quasi-experimental designs (what Lather calls the "Father's Paradigm"). Gadamer challenges restrictive definitions of science, but, as Kerdeman demonstrates, his critique is not a sweeping indictment of empirical or statistical scientific methodologies.²⁵ Rather, it is a caution that making "context" visible requires the verbal formulations of the hermeneutic sciences. Such formulations do not attempt to verify or falsify claims that can be made statistically; instead, they "indicate the context of understanding in which

24. Lather, "This IS Your Father's Paradigm," 23.

25. For a discussion of Gadamer's views on science, see Deborah Kerdeman, "Extending Gadamer's Corrective: *No Child Left Behind* and Hermeneutic Conversation," in *Philosophy of Education 2004*, ed. Chris Higgins (Urbana, Illinois: Philosophy of Education Society, 2005), 150–153. As Kerdeman argues, Gadamer fully acknowledges that our human need for certainty (or our need to know "how large the uncertainty factor is") prompts us to ask scientists to "give us true directions"; then we all too often *unfairly* hold "science" responsible when findings are misused. We should invite, not exclude, scientists who "recognize that their presuppositions and conclusions *may be wrong*" to join deliberations about educational purposes as we attempt to allow the truth of positions other than our own to "transform us" (151–152, emphasis in original).

the subject matter means something." They increase intelligibility by offering a whole constructed by words that "can be given in words alone" (*TM*, 564).

Through her rich descriptions of contexts extending from embodied traditions, to the language in which we live, to the ever-expanding interpretive circle that defines, sustains, and transcends us in its linguistic virtuality, Woolf challenges and enriches Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Her insights about the often unrecognized primacy of embodiment extend Gadamer's conceptions of tradition, language, and transcendence. The implications for education include a resonance with current debates about the nature, scope, and precision of legitimate educational research.

In addition to insights relating to tradition, language, and transcendence — laid out like lampposts illuminating possible paths for the young women she directly addresses — Woolf offers pointed advice for those who value "masterpieces" in intellectual endeavors. Genius is not the work of a single person, but the force of tradition concentrated in a single voice, verse, insight, or creation. The continuity of tradition that leads to the creation of masterpieces requires "500 pounds a year and a room of one's own." Applied to case studies in philosophy as a viable form of educational research, this advice implies that feminist inquiry grounded in the language of philosophy and in the dynamics of richly contextualized lived experience — like large-scale, double-blind research grounded in the language of the medical sciences and in the precision of statistical calculation — requires sustained support.²⁶

Given increasingly restrictive federal funding guidelines, Lather recommends "the preparation of program evaluation and policy analysts" capable of influencing educational policy formation. Such analysts will be able to combine "context-dependency with practical deliberation" and will be cognizant of knowledge/power categories elaborated in critical feminist theory. Lather's proposal for the legitimacy of "case studies" and "fieldwork in philosophy" challenges philosophers of education to consider what kind of space, what kind of "room," can be claimed for "a methodologically diverse approach to program evaluation and policy," including critical cases of practice-in-context.²⁷ Such approaches offer opportunities for scrupulous, pluralistic reasoning about the complexities and paradoxes of education.

Woolf's advice also implies that fieldwork in philosophy will require enough space to support standards that encourage, through critical evaluation as well as affirmation, hermeneutically informed knowledge derived from disciplined, pluralistic searches within specific educational contexts. Educational researchers conducting case studies in philosophy may pursue "evidence" that is less easily measured, but it is evidence that constitutes the material conditions shaping the

26. See, for example, the definition of "scientifically based research" set out for funding purposes in Section 9101 of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Legislation and Policies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2002), <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf>.

27. Lather, "Scientific Research in Education: A Critical Perspective," 4.

social worlds that sustain the recurring patterns of those phenomena other researchers choose to measure. Since there is “little evidence that evidence-based practice actually works” across the full range of educational contexts, it is “embarrassingly naïve” to trust that experimental research alone leads to “one best way” to teach, to learn, to structure educational institutions, or to drive educational policy.²⁸

CONCLUSION

Woolf brings to life through literature what Gadamer affirms through philosophical hermeneutics: that the primordial lived experiences of human beings, in and outside of schools, cannot be understood without careful attention to accessible traditions, embodied language, and potential transcendence in pursuit of intellectual freedom and practical wisdom. In Woolf’s embodied hermeneutics, interpreters are called to remember that texts are embedded in contexts of gendered possibilities and limitations. They are asked to take seriously the claim that release from poverty — in Woolf’s analysis, a historically gendered condition — is necessary in order to develop the intellectual freedom “to think of the things in themselves” (*ROO*, 39).

The possibilities of feminist inquiry in pursuit of pluralistic reasoning and research are heightened when Gadamer meets Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*. Gadamer claims a space for hermeneutic investigation, contending that “hermeneutic experience extends as far as does *reasonable* beings’ openness to dialogue” (*TM*, 568). Woolf claims a room of her own, with enough space to work through the living tissue of tradition toward a pluralistic *reason* born of two parents — distinctively gendered, fully embodied, historically conscious human beings. A conceptualization of educational research informed by feminist theorizing offers wider horizons for philosophers of education who choose to explore the embodied lives of teachers and learners. Rather than seeing such explorations as “preliminary or supplementary,”²⁹ a feminist inspired notion of educational research asserts that more “room” for “practice in context” enriched by insights derived from pluralistic reasoning and grounded in the “rich ambiguity” of educational experience is essential for sound, inclusive, sustainable educational policy.

28. *Ibid.*, 3.

29. Patti Lather and Pamela A. Moss, “Introduction: Implications of the *Scientific Research in Education* Report for Qualitative Inquiry,” *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 1-3 (2005): 1; see also Lather, “Scientific Research in Education: A Critical Perspective,” 7.