

Chapter 10

Aesthetics and Educational Value Struggles

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10.1 The Enclosure of Educational Value

The headline from NBC News read, “Principal fires security guards to hire art teachers—and transforms elementary school” (NBC 2013). Orchard Gardens, a public K-8 in the Boston area community of Roxbury, was opened in 2003 with high hopes and expectations. However, from the beginning Orchard Gardens was plagued by conflict and academic dysfunction. As a result, the school quickly found itself ranked in the bottom five of all public schools in Massachusetts. Serving a population of mostly poor and mostly black and brown youth, Orchard Gardens was the type of school where backpacks were banned due to the fear that students kept weapons and other contraband in them. And like many urban public schools, security guards at Orchard Gardens often outnumbered teachers in the hallways. According to various reports (McGuinness 2013; Hsieh 2013), this all began to change in 2010 when incoming Principal Andrew Bott decided to dismantle the school’s massive security infrastructure and redirect hundreds of thousands of dollars from its security budget to hiring a cadre of art teachers. Arts and humanities programming now permeates everyday life at the school. This turn to the arts and creativity is credited with spurring the radical transformation of Orchard Gardens. Test scores in all subjects have improved (even as test preparation has been significantly reduced), student conflicts have dramatically receded, and students report that they actually enjoy going to school (McGuinness 2013; NBC 2013; Hsieh 2013).

While a school modeled on the arts and imagination is not a particularly new or innovative idea, the conversion of Orchard Gardens would appear to represent a very different logic of school organization typically associated with the dominant

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educational policy trajectory and its disenchanting attachment to instrumental rationalities and hierarchical corporate management. However, in contrast to what many progressive and radical educational critics tend to assume, this does not mean that creative and imaginative capacities are not accorded considerable value within the language of corporate school reform. In fact, we are incessantly told that in a global milieu where economic value is increasingly generated through advanced technical and immaterial labor—finance, intellectual property, design, and innovation—that creativity and other non-instrumental and expressive qualities typically associated with progressive pedagogies and arts-based education are more crucial than ever. From corporate philanthropists to free market advocates and business gurus, to academics and journalists, to the pages of financial magazines and popular manifestos such as Daniel Pink’s *A Whole New Mind*, Ken Robinson’s *Out of our Minds*, and Seth Godin’s *Stop Stealing Dreams*—creative and imaginative capabilities are positioned in mainstream educational debates as core educational values. Within this light, the success of converting Orchard Gardens from a “prison school” to a school founded on creativity and the arts could perhaps be viewed as the fulfillment of the corporate school reform ideal.¹

The cognitive dissonance begins to emerge when we look a little more closely at how creative value is conceived in dominant educational discourse. This requires a brief excursus into the question of value itself within late modern culture. The anthropologist David Graeber (2001) suggests that there are three traditional conceptions of value:

1. “value” in the sociological sense: conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in human life
2. “value” in the economic sense: the degree to which objects are desired, particularly as measured by how much others are willing to give up to get them
3. “value” in the linguistic sense, which goes back to the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and might be most simply glossed as “meaningful difference” (pp. 1–2)

Graeber argues that, by themselves, each of these ways of framing the concept of value are insufficient, largely because they do not account for ongoing processes of human action and transformation. Alternatively, Graeber develops a theory of value as “the way individuals represent to themselves the importance of their own actions” (p. 47). “Value” in this sense is understood as a guide to individual action that is always immanent to, but contains the potential to exceed, larger social processes and systems. “Value” is thus “the way people who *could* do almost

¹The negative consequences of zero tolerance policies, prison cultures, and criminal justice encroachment in schools have become widely acknowledged in educational research and theory. For some of the most insightful critical analysis see (Giroux 2009; Lewis 2003; Saltman and Gabbard 2010). My own work has sought to decenter the emphasis on *militarized security* in schools and educational research through a focus on the structural and symbolic threats to *human security* of which zero tolerance policy is only one manifestation of a broader devaluation of social and education life under neoliberalism (Means 2013).

anything (including, in the right circumstances, creating entirely new sorts of social relation) assess the importance of what they do” (p. 47).

Building on Graeber’s theory of value as the self-representation and immanent capacity for ethical judgment and creative human action, Massimo De Angelis (2007) has offered the language of “value practices.” For De Angelis, value practices constitute the way we see, act, and define for ourselves positives and negatives in relation to others and the world around us. Value practices are thus “social practices and correspondent relations that articulate individual bodies and the wholes of social bodies in particular ways. This articulation is produced by individual singularities discursively selecting what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’ within a value system and acting upon this selection” (p. 24). Overlapping webs of value practices thus coalesce into distinct *value systems* that organize dominant ways of seeing, perceiving, imagining, and making ethical judgments on what is included and excluded from our social reality. Value systems may develop that challenge our orientation to the world leading to new possibilities, while at other times they harden into habituated frameworks of perception and thus foreclose creative action. Drawing on the work of Canadian philosopher John McMurtry, De Angelis refers to such enclosed systems as *value programs*. He observes that “a value system is a conceptual grid through which we see the world; it defines (even unconsciously) what is good and what is bad, what is normal and what is abnormal, what we must resign ourselves to, and what is possible to change” (p. 26). In contrast, “a value program,” De Angelis writes, “is a value system that cannot *conceive* of an outside beyond itself” (p. 26).

For De Angelis, and others working within the autonomist Marxist tradition, the value system of neoliberal capitalism, and its intricate web of market values and consumer identifications, constitutes the critical horizon of social imagination and contestation today.² It is a value program, or paradigm, that seeks to subordinate all external forms of value to its internal logic and drive for accumulation. Of course, there is nothing inherently new in pointing out the expansive *colonizing drive* of capital. As Marx (1977) detailed, as a system, capitalism is centrally concerned with the endless production and circulation of a specific form of value, i.e. surplus value (the division between wages allocated and the excess value produced through the labor process). In order to fulfill the coercive demands of perpetual accumulation, capital must attempt to incorporate all value systems and value practices into its own distinct value orientation. This entails enclosing values and social relations held in common (land, labor, and culture) by expropriating them as private property. Within our current historical moment, the value system and program of neoliberalism, or what Michel Foucault (2009) once referred to as a “permanent economic tribunal,” has attempted to extend the colonizing drive of capital into ever-new domains of life. We can see this in the worldwide enclosures and privatization of the planetary bios and public resources that took shape with the

²For further analysis of value and capitalism today see Max Haiven’s (2011) brilliant essay on value struggles over the radical imagination within the strictures of financialization.

rise of globalization in the 1980s and have intensified in the post-2008 period of financial crisis and austerity (Harvey 2010). More crucially for the discussion that follows, new enclosures of human experience including art, creativity, friendship, knowledge, sensuality, and communication have become increasingly central to contemporary patterns of expropriation and valorization (Berardi 2009; Haiven 2011).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009) have argued that this enclosure of human experience has meant that the *common*, defined as both the actual and potential site of creative social production, has become a driving force of global capitalism. This is not to suggest that industrial production has declined in either volume or in its exploitive substance as Hardt and Negri sometimes seem to suggest (the rise of neo-feudal sweat-shop labor across the postcolonial world attests to that), but that the command and control aspects of valorization are increasingly *dependent* on the production of what Marx referred to as the “general intellect” that includes forms of collective knowledge and subjectivity. Hardt and Negri suggest that the value program of capital has thus become increasingly *biopolitical* as social life itself and ideas, images, codes, and affects produced in common are drawn deeper into capital’s value program. This process has *spatial* and as well as *temporal* dimensions as divisions between labor-time and leisure-time and public-space and private-space have rapidly fragmented. This is perhaps most readily visible when one thinks about how digital technology allows the workplace to extend into the domestic sphere, while the preferences we register and the data we produce through our personal internet usage through Facebook, Twitter, Amazon, Google, Flickr etc. become the basis for targeted digital advertising, new product development, and direct production of information as future exchange value and intellectual property for capital. For Hardt and Negri, the circuits of biopolitical production, immaterial labor, and the expropriation of value from the common have created a fundamental contradiction. As capital attempts to incorporate the full range of value practices and value systems produced in common, it creates frameworks of enclosure and control that inhibit the creativity and productivity of the common. For instance, ideas become potentially more valuable and can lead to greater innovation as they are freely circulated and exchanged allowing the general intellect to blossom organically, while intellectual property places restrictions on knowledge through patents and other protections. Hardt (2010) puts it this way: “the more the common is corralled as property, the more its productivity is reduced; and yet the expansion of the common undermines the relations of property in a fundamental and general way” (p. 136).

Now it is precisely these struggles over the common that I believe we must keep in mind when considering tensions in how the value of creativity and imagination are conceived in educational discourse today. Let us take a recent article in *Fast Company* magazine written by Jennifer Medbery, CEO of an educational technology company called Kickboard, as a representative example (Medbery 2013). The article, titled “Reinventing Education to teach creativity and entrepreneurship,” is suggestive of a twofold view of value to be derived from the educational common: (1) the value of student subjectivities as future productive labor; and, (2) the value

of direct profit generation from processes of teaching and learning. Medbery suggests that in our current economic environment schools need to graduate students with creative and imaginative capacities to fill and invent the employment niches of the future. These are students who “tinker, create, and take initiative” rather than simply “regurgitate facts and formulas.” At first blush, this might suggest the need to break from the all-encompassing focus on measurement and high-stakes testing that has dominated classrooms since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. However, for Medbery, the problem with education today lies not in instrumental accountability and standardized testing *per se*, but that schools have been focused on “measuring the wrong things.” In order to ensure student subjectivities capable of producing future economic value in the “global knowledge economy,” schools require a new generation of data analysis tools and digitized systems of accountability and standardized assessment that measure students’ cognitive and non-cognitive capacities for creativity and invention. This value can only be realized, Medbery argues, through the commodification of the common of the school itself. She states that this entails nothing less than a “revolution” in educational purpose and content wherein “entrepreneurs see a disruptive opportunity to ‘democratize’ education” by providing new data and assessment platforms designed to “increase the efficiency of the learning market by lowering barriers to knowledge acquisition.”

The entrepreneur-led revolution that Medbery envisions posits a new instrumental vision of *experiential learning* where teachers are reduced to facilitators, record keepers, and analysts of data, while students “discover” knowledge supplied by computer algorithms designed to transform them into “leaders, problem-finders, and rule breakers.” Medbery suggests that this unlocks both “the art and science within teaching” where “art is the relationship you build with kids, and the science is purposeful assessment that generates real evidence of student growth.” “Accountability is a good thing,” she argues, “but only when you measure what matters.” Schools “should be producing students who tinker, make, experiment, collaborate, question, and embrace failure as an opportunity to learn.” This can be realized, of course, by purchasing her company’s products which are designed to convert the common of educational production into a site for the production of present and future economic value for capital.

The economic and technocratic view of education embraced by Medbery is widely shared by a new generation of corporate education reformers and educational entrepreneurs. On the one hand, there is a broad *affirmation* of *non-instrumental* capacities typically associated with progressive approaches to schooling and arts-based education. On the other hand, there is a profound *negation* of the development and dynamic potentiality of these capacities as public education is radically defunded and its value and substance is reconceived in purely *instrumental* terms (human capital development, measurement, testing etc.). In a 2011 report by for the National Education Association titled *Starving America’s Public Schools*, Jeff Bryant observes the depth of this contradiction. He identifies how new federal and state austerity measures are currently decimating public education across the United States. This includes:

- Massive cuts to early childhood education programs (pre-K and kindergarten);
- Huge class sizes in many subjects, reaching levels that are upsetting parents and potentially damaging students' education;
- An end to art, music, physical education, and other subjects considered to be part of a well-rounded education;
- Cuts in specialized programs and/or hefty fees for them. Some of these programs serve students with developmental issues or those who need more individualized attention. They also include extra-curricular activities such as band and sports as well as academic offerings in science, foreign language, technology, and Advanced Placement subjects.

Alongside severe budget cuts, public funding for schools is being shifted to for-profit corporations like Medbery's Kickboard to support a new generation of privatization and instrumental curriculum. For example, Florida has cut more than \$1 billion from its yearly education budget while redirecting \$229 million to corporate interests; Ohio has cut \$800 million while redirecting \$107 million; and Pennsylvania \$851 million while redirecting \$52 million. According to Bryant, "children everywhere are losing essential learning opportunities when schools lay off staff, cut back programs, reduce course offerings, and charge families, already being hit hard financially, extra fees to cover school expenses" (p. 7). Moreover, "the tax dollars that could be used to restore these direct services to children and families are being transferred. . .to private concerns that are of questionable value to the public" (p. 7). This suggests that there is in fact little concrete support for nurturing the general intellect and the creative capacities of all young people (the exception of course is that children of the elite can still expect a well-funded and enriching education that includes exploratory learning and ample time and resources for creativity and the arts). Instead, public schools for the majority are being redefined within a procedural and profit-driven notion of educational value and creativity that captures and degrades the educational common rather than nurturing and enhancing it.³

³ It is important to clarify and differentiate at this point the relationship between public schooling and the educational common. For Hardt and Negri, the common is considered an immanent site that includes shared resources and the coproduction of ideas, knowledge, relationships, and subjectivities. Hardt and Negri are often inconsistent in the way they define the relationship between the public and the common. They argue that the common is or should be considered a distinct third space beyond capital (private property) and the state (public property) with its own epistemological, ontological, and political make-up. At points in their book *Commonwealth* (2009), however, they include aspects of the "public" as part of the common. They describe public education, for instance, as a "basis for biopolitical production" and that its privatization and defunding serves to "drain the common" (p. 144). Moreover, Hardt and Negri conclude by arguing for strengthening the public as one specific way of enlarging the transformative and democratic potentiality of the common (as one example, they advocate for a guaranteed basic income). My own position is that the educational common includes certain elements of the "public" dimensions of public schooling while always exceeding these elements. Public schools are a province of the state and are subject to economic and technocratic rationalities and forms of control. However, public schools are also contested social resources that are, in ideal terms, supposed to be

10.2 Towards an Aesthetic Revalorization of the Educational Common

As Massimo De Angelis (2007) points out, struggles over the common are centrally struggles over value. As the self-representation and immanent capacity for ethical judgment and action, value practices and their accordant value systems are always embedded within, yet have the potential to push beyond given orders of perception and organization. If neoliberal rationalities have attempted to reorient educational experience and creative value within the educational context, they have done so in ways that work to capture and enclose the educational common itself within a narrow field of exchange value. To resist the creativity deadening impulse of the neoliberal drive for economic value thus requires enlarging and inventing alternative value practices and systems that imagine a common educational life other than endless commodification and enclosure.

There are myriad examples of such resistant value systems already in formation today such as in the various movements associated with Occupy Wall Street that erupted in 2011 against the ongoing looting of collective futures by predatory financialization. In the educational context, they can be seen in movements that directly oppose corporate school reform such as mass demonstrations against privatization in Chicago and emergent standardized test boycotts from Seattle to Brooklyn. Cesare Casarino (2008) has suggested that such struggles over value and the common always turn centrally on an axis of subjectivity and desire. He argues that we cannot simply assume that the desire to produce different values and senses of the common exists *a priori*. However, as Casarino points out, while capital attempts to expropriate aspects of human experience and cannot imagine a common *beyond* its own value program, there are elements of the common (values, ideas, ways of being, and affects) that always remain *outside* its reach. Put differently, aspects of creativity, imagination, and communication can never be fully enclosed. For Casarino, radical politics today entails thinking about how to enhance those aspects of the common that remain as *surplus* to capital and to state domination. This requires nothing less than a revolution in desire and subjectivity. He states:

To claim back and seize the common as production entails a drastic reorientation of subjectivity such that one might begin to distinguish between, on the one hand, the common as its own foundation, and, on the other hand, the common as the foundation of its own negation in capital. It entails the production of a form of subjectivity constitutionally unable any longer to be interpellated by and to identify with the capitalist desire to posit itself as indistinguishable from the common. It entails the production of a form of subjectivity constituted by a counterdesire. Such a counterdesire is *the desire to be in common*—as

democratically responsive to the needs of diverse localities. At the same time, public schools are also a powerful site in the production of ideas, values, relationships, and possibilities. As contested sites of biopolitical production, public schools serve as a basis for the coproduction of an educational common that does not always simply fall in line with the either the demands of the state or capitalism. Quite often, the educational common stands in direct confrontation with them. This position is developed further in De Lissovoy et al. (2013).

opposed to the desire to be for the common as-captured-by-capital, the desire to be for the common-as-negated-by capital, the desire to be captive of one's own negation—in short, as opposed to *the desire not to be*. (p. 17)

I think it is important to be clear here that the production of a counterdesire *to be in common* is in fact the production of a desire that resists *all determinations*. It is thus a form of desire constituted *not as an absence or lack* within a negative ontological foundation, as in the Hegelian and Freudian traditions, but a form of desire as a *creative constituent force*. To posit such a constituent desire that resists determinations is not to reject ethical judgments. Nor is it an effort to *prescribe* a new reality *ex nihilo*. Rather it is an affirmation of those aspects of experience and imagination generative of alternative value practices and systems that might enhance a common life beyond its negation through endless commodification. We cannot prescribe the valences of such a common life in advance because it is something that can only arise through a process of social cooperation and radical democratic action. Fortunately, the counterdesire to be in common is all around us. It occurs whenever human beings engage in value practices and communication other to capital and forms of external control. It is immanently present when teachers and students construct new and different senses of the world and the common together in the course of everyday life in schools and classrooms (De Lissovoy 2011). I want to suggest here that one element in enhancing a broader educational common against neoliberal enclosure is to recover and reimagine creativity and imagination in schooling through a form of *aesthetic education* that takes seriously a desire that resists determinations and works to affirm and construct new forms of value rooted in our fundamental commonality and equality. Here I take aesthetic education to include the “arts” as a field of visual and aural experimentation and production. However, I want to suggest that aesthetic education has a much broader meaning implicated in the articulation and delimitation of the full range of human experience. Such an approach is offered not in the spirit of an all-encompassing “aestheticization of education” in the sense conveyed by Walter Benjamin’s warning of the “aestheticization of politics,” but rather as a way of defending non-instrumental experience, values, and capacities within and against an increasingly dominant emphasis on narrow economic and instrumental values and value practices that serve to imprison educational desire and imagination.

An initial point of departure for this discussion can be found in Friedrich Schiller’s seminal statement on aesthetic education in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Written in reaction to the failure of the French revolution to realize its abstract ideals of equality in concrete form, Schiller’s letters set the stage for a long line of philosophical criticisms of modernity that have attempted to reconcile tensions between freedom and necessity, bureaucratic science and spirituality, rationality and sensuality, and that ever elusive relational gap between the universal and the particular. In the second letter, Schiller calls to mind observations later made by Max Weber and the Frankfurt School, by lamenting that a “spirit of freedom” (that for Schiller was embodied in art) is everywhere under assault by an unremitting march of instrumental reason. According to Schiller, this insurgent

force, which he refers to as “the business spirit,” leaves a “degraded humanity under its iron yoke” as “the frontiers of art are narrowed while the limits of science are enlarged” (Letter II). “Utility is the great idol of the time,” Schiller observes, “to which all powers do homage, and all subjects are subservient”. Within this “great balance on utility, the spiritual service of art has no weight, and, deprived of all encouragement, it vanishes from the noisy Vanity Fair of our time” (Ibid). For Schiller, aesthetic education (*Bildung*) is imagined as a means to not only free human creativity from its subordination to calculative and instrumental utility, but a force capable of realizing a fundamentally different art of living and being together in common.

Schiller’s aesthetic education was derived expressly from Kant’s notion of aesthetic judgment in the *Critique of Judgment*. For Kant, aesthetic experience of beauty elicits a temporary free-play of the senses that produces a momentary suspension of the intellectual faculties prior to rational conceptualization. This affective suspension produces a moment of indeterminacy or disinterestedness. For Kant, this reflects a *singular* expression of a *universal* principle. As reflective and rational beings capable of producing and apprehending aesthetic representations, individuals possess the universal capacity to experience beauty and, in turn, translate and transform these moments of suspended affectivity into rational judgments concerning value, taste, and form. Kant’s aesthetic judgment thus presents a unity of sensual imagination and rational understanding. Schiller’s innovation was to suggest that rather than confined to the Kantian synthesis of subjective experience and the transcendental categories of the mind, such a unity between universal reason and affective imagination could be objectively extended to every aspect of social life. In this sense, the universal experience of freedom unleashed through aesthetic encounters and artistic creations could become a medium for a historical-educational process whereby the antinomies immanent to modern life could be overcome and new forms of community could emerge. Jurgen Habermas (1990) has argued that Schiller’s aesthetic education positions art as a “communicative, community-building and solidarity giving force” capable of overcoming the solipsism of “the business spirit” and its collapse of human experience into instrumental reason (p. 46). Aesthetic education paves the way for a dialectical understanding of emancipation encompassing both consciousness and sensuality. Importantly, art here is aimed precisely not at the total “aestheticization of living conditions, but at revolutionizing the conditions of mutual understanding” (pp. 46 & 49). Habermas states:

For Schiller an aestheticization of the lifeworld is legitimate only in the sense that art operates a catalyst, as a form of communication, as a medium within which separated moments are rejoined into an uncoerced totality. The social character of the beautiful and of taste are to be confirmed by the fact that art “leads” everything dissociated in modernity—the system of unleashed needs, the bureaucratic state, the abstractions of rational morality and science for experts—‘out under the open sky of common sense’. (p. 50)

Like Habermas, Jacques Rancière has suggested that Schiller represents an “unsurpassable reference point” for understanding the revolutionary implications of modern aesthetic life. According to Rancière, Schiller’s central insight is that

“there exists a specific sensory experience—the aesthetic—that holds the promise of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community” (2002, p. 133). Implied within this formulation is a recognition that freedom turns on an ontological distribution whereby “the activity of thought and sensible receptivity become a single entity” which constitute a “new region of being—the region of free play and appearance” (2004, p. 27). It is thus the role of *aesthetic education* to develop this mode of life toward the concrete realization of a common humanity. Rancière argues that Schiller’s “aesthetic revolution” forged a new idea of “political revolution” whereby the freedom embodied in artistic creation becomes an *educational medium* for a new art of living together. This notion of revolution informed German Romanticism, as articulated in the founding document of Hegel, Schelling, and Holderlin. It was subsequently rearticulated in a variety of Marxist revolutionary aspirations for an emancipated common life in both form and content—the classic debates between Bertolt Brecht’s “aesthetic estrangement” and Georg Lukac’s “aesthetic realism” are a touchstone in efforts to map the educational force of Marxist revolutionary aesthetics (Adorno et al. 2002). However, the hope that characterized this program for uniting intellectual and sensual freedom eventually gave way to despair embodied by the later critical analysis of the Frankfurt School and surrealism in the arts. Modernity was thus to become a kind of “fatal destiny” where Nietzsche and Heidegger culminate in the development of the postmodern “reversal,” which Rancière describes as a kind of “grand threnody of the unrepresentable” and denouncement of “the modern madness of the idea of self-emancipation. . . and its inevitable and interminable culmination in the death camps” (2004, p. 29). Rancière states that perhaps one can say “we have experienced the reality of that ‘art of living’ and of that ‘play’, as much in totalitarian attempts at making the community into a work of art as in the everyday aestheticized life of a liberal society and its commercial entertainment” (2002, p. 133).

Rancière’s conception of what he calls the *aesthetic regime* is based on an acceptance that modern aesthetic life is ineluctably characterized by historical tendencies toward both domination and liberation. Thus, for Rancière, the pedagogical and revolutionary potential of the aesthetic regime is radically contingent and internally differentiated. Perceptions, judgments, and desires are always already constructed in relation to the vast web of values, images, and affects that constitute and divide a community. Drawing on Schiller, Rancière argues that aesthetics frame human experience. They are concerned “with time and space as configurations of our ‘place’ in society, forms of distribution of the common and private, and of assignation to everybody of his or her part” (2005, p. 13). In Kantian terms, aesthetics refer to the *a priori* fields of visibility and sayability that organize sensible experience and delimit perceptual value. It is in this field of legibility where the parts of the common are arranged, where material shares and allotments are apportioned, and distributions of rights and commitments are normalized and legitimated. Rancière refers to this as the “distribution of the sensible,” by which he means “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that discloses the existence of the common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (2004, p. 12). This aesthetic distribution is governed by

what Rancière refers to as the *police*. According to Rancière, police logic represents the Platonic tradition of defining for the *demos* the “proper” division of the common. It does so by taking the rich heterogeneity of the common and reducing it to a static perceptual consensus. For example, neoliberalism thrives on the incorporation of difference—market niches, lifestyle distinctions, and celebrations of multiculturalism. Similarly, within educational policy, a neoliberal consensus operates through the language of “social justice,” “inclusion,” “diversity,” and “leaving no child behind.” These incorporations serve largely to flatten meaningful differences and obscure growing inequalities through a monochromatic universality that, in effect, denies plurality and serves to foreclose the political by defining the limits of what is given to sensible legibility. This signifies, for Rancière, “the reduction of politics to the police. . . it is the ‘end of politics’ and not the accomplishment of its ends. . . the return of the ‘normal’ state of things which is that of politics non-existence” (Rancière 2001, Thesis 10).

Rancière thus contends that while aesthetics are fundamental to politics, politics as such are a rare occurrence. This is one of the significant distinctions between Rancière and other theorists of his generation such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Rather than situate politics as inherent expressions of everyday power relations, Rancière situates politics as singular moments of possibility. For Rancière, “nothing is political in and of itself for the political only happens by means of a principle that does not belong to it: equality” (1999, p. 33). The political at the heart of the aesthetic is here imagined as a disruption and reconstruction of given orders of perception through imaginative and creative acts. According to Rancière, this notion of politics as *dissensus*, is actualized when universal equality—the fundamental right and ability to make a claim on the division of the common—is pressed into service in a singularized form. Politics is thus a process of *subjectification*—a contingent moment when those occluded from full recognition and participation in the community (the “supernumerary” element or “part with no part”) constitute themselves as equals through creative acts and in turn disarticulate and reconfigure the sensible partitions of the common. Rancière states that “politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the world where they are not” (1999, p. 27).⁴

⁴There are some important differences in the way that Hardt and Negri and Rancière frame the relationship between politics and the common. Michael Hardt (2009) has argued that Rancière’s conception of the common as the site of social distribution of parts and roles finds great affinity with the conception of the common that he and Negri defend. However, Hardt argues they differ on two specific fronts. First, he argues that the common is not simply a natural fixture or condition of the social as Rancière sometimes seems to suggest, but that it is always being produced and reproduced. The issue at stake here for Hardt is that radical politics should not just be concerned with a disruption that rearranges the parts of the common, but should be engaged with how the common is currently produced and how it might be produced in the future in ways that are more

The insights of Schiller and Rancière allow us to consider a unique vision of aesthetic education with the potential for imagining different senses and possibilities for revaluating the educational common. “The entire question of the ‘politics of aesthetics’”, Rancière, argues, turns on Schiller’s conjunction “that aesthetic experience will bear the edifice of the art of the beautiful *and* of the art of living” (2002, p. 134). This conjunction offers a notion of aesthetic education as a form of experience and social production that attempts to bridge the gap between consciousness, beauty, and a common life in both form and content. However, drawing on Rancière’s insights, Tyson E. Lewis (2012) has argued that while education contains an inherent aesthetic dimension, it is by itself neither an art nor is it a form of politics. Education is aesthetic in so far as it sets the scene for a specific form of experience that is always framed within a perceptual distribution. This is a perceptual distribution that serves to police the horizon of educational desire and value. Simultaneously, a police logic that attempts to instantiate a “proper” partition of educational life implies the possibility of its radical other—the eruption of an “improper” universal equality that might reframe the educational common within a more democratic register. Thus while education is situated within a given logic and partition of sensibility, it is also a space of relative autonomy and diverse value practices and struggles where human beings might recreate their relationship to one another and the world in profoundly unimagined ways. In short, education may not itself constitute a form of politics, however, it always threatens to generate politics emergence.

Aesthetic education, as drawn from Schiller and Rancière, thus becomes a kind of ethical and normative injunction to think alternative ways of organizing and articulating creative educational experience and value. This would first mean taking as foundational the relative autonomy and radical egalitarian capacity of communities, teachers and students to collaboratively engage in acts of the imagination and dissensual self-constitution. Such constituent acts contain the potential for generating new value practices and ways of seeing and being together that might both deconstruct and reconfigure the partitions of the sensible order in schools and communities. This universal capacity for ethical judgment and creative coproduction, that aesthetic education seeks to name and affirm, can never be fully enclosed within a prescriptive value program, although it can be tamed, distorted and/or subverted. While it thus cannot offer institutional blueprints or

radically democratic. Hardt states that “when politics and aesthetics begin, according to his [Rancière’s] notion, the common already exists and thus the central question is how its parts are to be shared, divided and distributed. No longer today, however, can we consider the common as quasi-natural or given. The common is dynamic and artificial, produced through a wide variety of social circuits and encounters. This recognition does not negate the importance of Rancière’s notion of *partage* and the common, but rather extends it further to account also for the production of the common” (p. 23). Second, Hardt argues that Rancière does not adequately account for the way capital and economic production and distribution have increasingly become biopolitical, and in the process, have made the common itself a central aspect of valorization and economic command. Hardt thus argues, as I have intimated in this chapter, that we thus must “consider the economic realm along with the political and the aesthetic” (p. 23).

guarantees, aesthetic education would seek to make room for and avow those value practices and constituent desires that remain outside and/or resistant to instrumental determinations and forms of economic and political capture within contemporary struggles over schooling. These are surplus values and surplus desires to capital and calculative rationality that are already present in varying degrees within the everyday experiences of students and teachers in even the most disenfranchised and authoritarian institutional contexts (Means 2013). A defense of genuine creativity and the radical imagination in public schooling should take seriously the need to develop and affirm these surplus values and desires through an ethical fidelity to *beauty and equality* in the realization of a form of educational flourishing aimed at the full development of human capacities and aspirations in common. This would necessarily require an engagement in diverse value struggles and creative acts of dissensus that make claims on and work to reconfigure an educational common beyond its enclosure under neoliberalism. The sad passions animating corporate school reform only recognize one form of value as the mad pursuit of capital accumulation without end. Such a distorted sense of learning and living together *can never fully succeed* as human experience is always generative of other value practices and possibilities. Aesthetic education names this impossibility at the same time that it names the actuality of alternatives.

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