# Educational Commons

## in Theory and Practice


## Global Pedagogy and Politics

Edited by
Alexander J. Means,
Derek R. Ford, and
Graham B. Slater

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*Editors*
Alexander J. Means
SUNY Buffalo State
Buffalo, New York, USA

Derek R. Ford
DePauw University
Greencastle, Indiana, USA

Graham B. Slater
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

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# About the Editors

## Editors

**Derek R. Ford** is an educational theorist, teacher, and organizer and is Assistant Professor of Education Studies at DePauw University. Informed by Marxism, post-structuralism, queer theory, and critical geography, his research examines the nexus of pedagogy, subjectivity, and revolutionary movements. His most recent book is *Communist Study: Education for the Commons* (Lexington, 2016). He is chair of the Education Department at The Hampton Institute and an organizer with the Answer Coalition. He can be reached at derekford@depauw.edu

**Alexander J. Means** is an Assistant Professor of Social and Psychological Foundations of Education at SUNY Buffalo State. He is the author of *Schooling in the Age of Austerity* (Palgrave, 2013) and *Toward a New Common School Movement* (Paradigm, 2014) with Noah De Lissovoy and Kenneth Saltman. His work examines educational policy in relation to political, economic, cultural, and social change.

**Graham B. Slater** is Marriner S. Eccles Fellow in Political Economy at the University of Utah, where he is completing a Ph.D. in the Department of Education, Culture, and Society. His research examines the relationship between neoliberalism, market-based school reforms, and the security and social welfare of communities excluded (particularly by race and class) from meaningful, liberatory, and quality forms of education. His scholarship and reviews have been published in *Journal of Education Policy*, *Educational Studies*, *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, and *Policy Futures in Education*.

# Notes on Contributors

**David I. Backer** is a teacher and a writer. He is an Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations in the College of Education and Social Work at West Chester University of Pennsylvania.

**Jesse Bazzul** is an Assistant Professor of Science and Environmental Education at the University of Regina. He feels that comprehensive attention needs to be given to the way typically depoliticized fields of study such as science education work to constitute both political and ethical forms of life.

**Gregory N. Bourassa** is an Assistant Professor of Social Foundations at the University of Northern Iowa. His research focuses on autonomist Marxism, educational biopolitics, and the intersecting operations of race, class, and power in schools and society.

**Noah De Lissovoy** is an Associate Professor of Cultural Studies in Education at the University of Texas at Austin. His research centers on emancipatory approaches to education and cultural studies, with a special focus on the intersecting effects of race, class, and capital. He is the author of *Education and Emancipation in the Neoliberal Era* (Palgrave), *Power, Crisis, and Education for Liberation* (Palgrave), and co-author of *Toward a New Common School Movement*. His work has appeared in many journals, including *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *Critical Sociology*, *Harvard Educational Review, Curriculum Inquiry*, and *Journal of Education Policy*.

**Michelle Gautreaux** is a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia. Informed by Marxism, social movement theory, and critical theories of education, her primary research explores the ongoing development of collective resistance to corporate education reform in Chicago, IL. Her work has been published *in Educational Studies*, *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor, Critical Education* and is forthcoming in *Education Policy Analysis Archives.*

**Max Haiven** is a writer, teacher, and organizer and an assistant professor in the Division of Art History and Critical Studies at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in K'jipuktuk in Mi'kma'ki (Halifax, Canada). His research focuses on themes including the financialization of society and culture, social movements and the radical imagination, the politics and economics of culture, critical art practices, and social and cultural theory. He writes articles for both academic and general audiences and has been published in venues including *Truth-Out*, *ROAR Magazine*, *Social Text*, *Cultural Studies*, *Cultural Politics* and *Interface: A Journal For and About Social Movements.* He is author of the books *Crises of Imagination, Crises of Power: Capitalism, Creativity and the Commons* (Zed Books, 2014), *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity* (with Alex Khasnabish, Zed Books, 2014) and *Cultures of Financialization: Fictitious Capital in Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

**Mark Howard** is an early career researcher working in the Philosophy Department of Monash University, Australia. Through the rubric of critical pedagogy and social epistemology, his current research focuses on the theory and practice of radical communities, arguing that the knowledge of these communities is essentially epistemological, forming an authoritative and credible mode of analysis of the nexus of politics and the radical subject.

**Khuram Hussain** is a former New York City schoolteacher and currently serves as an associate professor in the Department of Education at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, NY, where he serves as a community organizer with *Tools for Social Change*. He completed his Ph.D. in Cultural Foundations of Education at Syracuse University. His current scholarship explores the radical origins of multicultural education and contemporary grassroots anti-racist movements that resist neoliberal school reform. His book, *Imaging the Black Freedom Struggle: Political*

*Cartoons of Muhammad Speaks, 1960–1975*, is under contract with Johns Hopkins University Press.

**Anita Juárez** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, Culture, and Society at the University of Utah. Her research focuses on educational policy, theories of settler colonialism, race and ethnicity, and the political economy of education.

**Tyson E. Lewis** is an Associate Professor of art education and coordinator of the graduate program at the University of North Texas. He has published articles on critical theory and/or educational philosophy. His work has appeared in a number of journals including *Rethinking Marxism*, *Cultural Critique*, *Symploke*, and *Cultural Politics*. He is also author of four books: *Education Out of Bounds: Reimagining Cultural Studies for a Posthuman Age* (New York: Palgrave, 2010), *The Aesthetics of Education: Theatre, Curiosity, and Politics in the Work of Jacques Rancière and Paulo Freire* (London: Continuum, 2012), *On Study: Giorgio Agamben and Educational Potentiality* (New York: Routledge, 2013), and *Inoperative Learning: A Radical Rethinking of Educational Potentialities* (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

**Clayton Pierce** is an assistant professor in the Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies at Western Washington University. His books include the award winning *Education in the Age of Biocapitalism*, *On Marcuse: Critique, Liberation, and Reschooling in the Radical Pedagogy of Herbert Marcuse* (co-author), and *Marxism, Revolution, Utopia: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse Volume 6* (co-editor). His most recent research article, W.E.B. Du Bois and Caste Education, will appear this fall in the *American Educational Research Journal*'s Centennial Issue.

**Jennifer A. Sandlin** is an associate professor in the Justice and Social Inquiry Department in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University, where she teaches courses on consumption and education, popular culture and justice, and social and cultural pedagogy. Her research focuses on the intersections of education, learning, and consumption, as well as on understanding and theorizing public pedagogy. Through her current research projects, she explores The Walt Disney Corporation and the myriad ways its curricula and pedagogies manifest, and seeks to understand what it means to teach, learn, and live in a world where many familiar discourses are dominated by Disney as a global media conglomerate. She recently edited, with Peter McLaren, *Critical Pedagogies of*

*Consumption* (Routledge, 2010); with Brian Schultz and Jake Burdick, *Handbook of Public Pedagogy* (Routledge, 2010); with Jake Burdick and Michael O'Malley, *Problematizing Public Pedagogy* (Routledge, 2014); and with Julie Garlen, *Disney, Culture, and Curriculum* (Routledge, 2016) and *Teaching with Disney* (Peter Lang, 2016).

**Gardner Seawright** is a Ph.D. student in the Education, Culture, and Society Department at the University of Utah. He works at the intersections of race theory, environmental justice, and teacher education. This set of interests has resulted in the qualitative and philosophical study of the phenomenology of whiteness in classroom relationships, as well as place-based curriculum projects that explore decolonization and food justice.

**Nathan Snaza** teaches modern literature, literary and gender theory, and educational foundations at the University of Richmond, USA. He is the co-editor of *Pedagogical Matters: New Materialisms and Curriculum Studies* (Peter Lang, 2016), *Posthumanism and Educational Research* (Routledge, 2014). His essays have also appeared in journals such as *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, *Symploke*, Angelaki, *Cultural Critique*, *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *Educational Researcher*, *Metal Music Studies,* and *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*.

**Mark Stern** is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Studies at Colgate University where he teaches classes on education policy and social theory. His current research focuses on the political and cultural economy of public education in the United States. He completed a Ph.D. in Cultural Foundations of Education from Syracuse University and recent publications can be found in the *Berkeley Review of Education* and *The Urban Review*. He is also an honorary lecturer at the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

**Jennifer Sumner** teaches in the Adult Education and Community Development Program of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Her research interests include critical pedagogy and knowledge production, food and food systems, globalization, and sustainability. She is the author of *Sustainability and the Civil Commons: Rural Communities in the Age of Globalization*, co-editor of *Critical Perspectives in Food Studies* and editor of *Food, Learning and Sustainability: Sites for Resistance and Change*.

**Sara Tolbert** is an assistant professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning, & Sociocultural Studies at the University of Arizona. Her scholarship focuses on preparing math and science teachers to do justice work inside and outside of schools, improving the science learning experiences of minoritized youth, and engaging social and environmental activisms in/through school science.

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: Toward an Educational Commons

*Alexander J. Means, Derek R. Ford, and Graham B. Slater*

The present historical moment is one of profound challenges and contradictions. A consolidation of global power has emerged amid a stark fragmentation of everyday life and organized forms of resistance. New modes of alienation from community proliferate alongside an intensification of digital connectivity, while the acceleration of socio-ecologically unsustainable capitalist modernization sharply contrasts with stultifying inertia in realizing viable alternatives. Within this context, reclaiming and redefining a global commons and commonality acquire a new energy and urgency.

The idea of commons has a long history in Western and non-Western thought. Commons discourse has recently been reinvigorated and is now being debated across academic fields, including philosophy, sociology, business, political science, law, anthropology, and ecology. Commons have also become a referent in global policymaking, as is evidenced by the

A.J. Means (✉)
SUNY Buffalo State, Buffalo, NY, USA
e-mail: alexmeans1@gmail.com

D.R. Ford
DePauw University, Greencastle, IN, USA
e-mail: derekrford1@gmail.com

G.B. Slater
University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, USA



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efforts of technocratic organizations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to imagine new strategies for saving a stagnant global capitalism from its own destructive tendencies (Caffentzis, 2010; Federici, 2009). The commons have also become a key locus of struggle and inspiration across various radical-progressive social movements, for example, in struggles over land dispossession across the global South in places like India and Brazil, as well as in parallel struggles over debt, austerity, precarity, and predatory financialization across the affluent nations of the global North (Mason, 2013; Shiva, 2016). This renewed interest and engagement with commons can be attributed largely to growing recognition of the need for creative responses to a wide array of global crises, such as rampant worldwide militarization and threat of ecological catastrophe, that threaten our collective lives and futures.

The commons are most often invoked as a direct challenge to neoliberal hegemony and the destructive expansionary drive of capitalism to commodify and therefore *enclose* what remains of the world's shared fund of natural and cultural wealth (De Angelis, 2007; Harvey, 2003). These enclosures of global commons include resources like water and land, shared institutions, such as health care and education, and knowledge formations from Indigenous languages to our collective cultural production of knowledge and affects via digital media platforms like Google and Facebook. The relentless pursuit of private accumulation without end directly targets the commons as sites for regenerating a broadly discredited neoliberal valorization machine. At the same time, the commons are now often invoked as a pragmatic and utopian referent to rethink modern political categories and to imagine alternative modernities, resistances, and futures within and against what Saskia Sassen has evocatively referred to as the "predatory formations" of global capitalism and elite financial concentration (Sassen, 2014). The commons have thus been positioned as an imaginative axis for thinking modes of collectivity and sustainable forms of translocal social organization beyond the limitations of capitalism as well as "actually existing" historical experiments in state socialism. This framing of the commons as both an analytical concept and political ideal has generated fascinating new discussions around the nature of contemporary subjectivity and collectivity as well as new formations of civil society, community, labor, value, identity, difference, exchange, imperialism, neocolonialism, and the primary issue we focus on in this volume—education.

The present global order imagines education, broadly conceived, as a static abstraction, an eternal feedback loop that subsumes subjectivity, desire, and imagination within a bounded range of *common sense*. This represents a form of *education as capture*. This can be seen in recent years in the development of an increasingly networked global education movement led by monopolistic corporations such as Pearson and transnational policymaking bodies like the OECD that advocate for the standardization, privatization, and human capitalization of educational institutions and practices across the world (Ball, 2012; Rizvi and Lingard, 2009). Education is here imagined as a private good, a commodity to be bought and sold like any other. While there is certainly no shortage of celebrations of difference and diversity, education is in fact here constructed as a shallow repetition of the same, mainly a staging ground for the production of docile workers, enthusiastic shopaholics, and debtors. The promise of the commons, and of an education worthy of its name, is precisely the opposite of this mode of capture. Rather than the pseudo-reality and monochromatic world of unending commodification constructed by neoliberal common sense, the commons are in fact rich in variation and possibility. Such an understanding moves us away from realizing education as a mode of enclosing and capturing difference and toward a dialectically and immanently rich conceptualization rooted in the commons as a pedagogical and political sphere. It must be understood that the fault lines and generative tensions of commoning and enclosing, by enabling or constraining ways of being, knowing, working, and relating, literally *teach us*. In this way, to suggest that commoning and enclosing are *pedagogical* relations is also to recognize that they are *political* relations—that is, the commons are always a divided and contested terrain. Ultimately, the dimensions of commoning and enclosing always harbor latent forms of *potentiality*. As with education itself and the inherent contingency of life in classrooms and lecture halls shared by countless students and educators, the commons can never be fully captured or enclosed. Rather, as the essays in this volume argue from various angles, the commons represent an open and unfinished question: a necessarily hopeful and conflicted condition of our global commonality and interrelation. We want to suggest in this brief introduction that just as the literature on commons pushes educational theory in new directions, understanding the commons as an educational concept yields new insights for enacting the global commons more broadly. Lastly, the final part of the introduction provides an overview of the volume's themes and chapters.

## Commons and Educational Enclosure

In response to various historical developments concerning shifting global power relations, capitalism, technology, environmental degradation, social movements, and Indigenous struggles for decolonization, scholars and activists have sought to develop more complex understandings of the commons as an analytical and emancipatory category. We suggest that what emerges from this literature is that *the commons* (plural) can be understood as encompassing the totality of shared resources including our collective institutions and the natural wealth of the planet. Simultaneously, *the common* (singular) represents a social ontology; that is, it is the communicative, affective, and relational foundation upon which commons are produced, circumscribed, and governed. Out of these conceptualizations, the commons has inspired wide ranging debate and become a key referent in a broad variety of contemporary struggles for social change including over educational privatization, commodification, student debt, and disinvestment in schools and universities.

Cesare Casarino has suggested that "the common is legion" (Casarino and Negri, 2008, p. 7). Its definition and lineage are complex and varied. We know from anthropology and Indigenous oral traditions that human societies have always, to some extent, depended on and utilized intricate commons relations to organize production, exchange, status relations, and social reproduction (Graeber, 2001; Polanyi, 1944). It was not until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe, during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, that distinctly modern historical dynamics of the commons emerged. As Marx documented in *Capital Volume I*, the enclosures of commons in feudal Europe reflected a form of primitive accumulation. This originary violence and theft was central to the development of capitalism, both in terms of capturing commonly held land for private ends, but also for separating commoners from their direct means of subsistence, which was a key disciplinary strategy for driving communities into and accepting proletarian wage labor.

Recent historical accounts by scholars such as Peter Linebaugh (2008), Maria Mies (1998), and Silvia Federici (2004) have chronicled these processes in further detail and examined how the enclosure movements immanent to capitalist modernity transformed economic, social, political, community, and gender relations. In this sense, enclosures were intimately bound to the development of class society, patriarchy, slavery, and colonialism. Similarly, David Harvey (2003) and Massimo De Angelis (2007)

have alerted us to the myriad forms of enclosure immanent to neoliberal power formations as they attempt to cannibalize public resources and natural wealth, thus making primitive accumulation an ongoing feature of capitalist modernization as opposed to a temporally and spatially bounded historical phenomena. Slavoj Žižek (2009) has suggested that these enclosures of the commons today are organized around four central forms: (1) the enclosure of the natural world and the shared substance of life; (2) the enclosure of biogenetic commons; (3) the enclosure of knowledge commons including "intellectual property" and destruction of Indigenous knowledge; and (4) the enclosure of humanity itself signified through the construction of new exclusions, hierarchies, and surplus populations.

Contemporary struggles over education are deeply emblematic of processes of enclosure within the "world ecology" of global capitalism (Moore, 2015). Currently, education is increasingly captured within the technocratic managerial rationalities and ideological platforms associated with neoliberalization (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009). On the one hand, educational enclosure takes the form of *human capitalization*, which captures educational value within a technocratic schema aimed at transforming persons into capital "stocks" for the labor market (Lazzarato, 2012). Not only does human capitalization conceal the class and racial dynamics of education and work relations, but it ideologically manages and legitimates an emerging "post-work" landscape of economic volatility, precarity, and latent threat of mass technological obsolescence (Srnicek and Williams, 2016; Weeks, 2011). Here, self-valorization through credentialism and "lifelong learning" becomes a dividing line between the deserving and undeserving, success and mere survival in the flexible "gig" economy, and/or simply becoming one of the banished, or newly redundant and disposable, whose labor no longer matters to the system at all (Bauman, 2004). On the other hand, educational enclosure takes the form of *privatization* as a means of transforming K-12 and higher educational institutions and processes into potential investment opportunities and sites for profit extraction (Newfield, 2008; Saltman, 2012). In a stagnant "real" economy confronting new limits to productive investment and expansion, the educational sector, estimated at $600 billion dollars a year in the United States alone, has become a ripe source of potential value with hedge funds and Wall Street banks leading the way. This includes the global proliferation of for-profit K-12 schools and colleges; the broad intensification of corporate contracting for consulting, technology, online learning, and testing services; the financialization of higher education through student loans and

tuition hikes; and efforts of grant-making bodies and corporate influence to narrow and monetize university research and knowledge production. Taken together, these enclosures of the educational commons represent more than simply free market ideology run amok, but broader attempts to transform the very substance of our relationship to teaching, learning, knowledge, and to one another (De Lissovoy, 2016; Slater, 2014).

## Locating Education Within the Dialectic of Capital and Commons

In contradistinction to processes of primitive accumulation and enclosure, Linebaugh (2008) has framed a fidelity to commons as a means of achieving a more expansive conception of equality and freedom than those offered by liberalism and capitalism, which attempt to maintain a firewall between economy and polity. Alternatively for Linebaugh, commons frameworks find sustenance in the Magna Carta and its longstanding subterranean and potentially subversive influence over constitutional law. "Political and legal rights," he argues, "can only exist on an economic foundation" (p. 6). The theory of commons, in his view, "vests all property in the community and organizes labor for the common benefit of all … both in juridical forms and in material reality" (p. 6). Linebaugh's basic formulation of the commons as a way of thinking a new egalitarian political–economic–juridical framework tracks with a growing number of projects oriented toward rethinking theoretical categories and reigniting the radical imagination (Haiven, 2014).

Perhaps the most well known and widely discussed is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's Empire trilogy, which has had significant impact on radical scholarship and social movements over the last two decades (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004, 2009). For Hardt and Negri, there are two components of the common. The first refers to the common as conceptualized in modern political economy and its accompanying critiques, and this consists of things like water, the air, soil, and so on, what Marx referred to as the "free gifts of nature." This is the common that precedes humanity and into which humanity is born. The second aspect of the common is the result of what they call "biopolitical production": the creative generation of social life itself, including knowledge, habits, values, languages, desires, and forms of cooperation. Taken together, Hardt and Negri formulate the common as an immanent ontology and metabolic relation that "does not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its custodian, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world" (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. viii).

Hardt and Negri's conception of the common has perhaps been particularly influential because it locates the biopolitical production of the common within and against the contemporary historical development of capitalism in its neoliberal phase. They argue that the common today emerges out of changes to the organic composition of capital, or the relationship between variable capital (wages paid out for labor power) and constant capital (means of production and raw and auxiliary materials). This is a way of understanding who produces what, and under what relations and conditions that production takes place. In industrial capitalism, variable capital, by working on and transforming constant capital, produces surplus value. Here there is a strict delineation between the two forms of capital. There is a tendency in capitalist production to merge these two forms of capital, and Hardt and Negri, following the Italian autonomist Marxist tradition, locate this tendency in the section of Marx's *Grundrisse* notebooks titled (though not by Marx) the "Fragment on Machines." In these pages, Marx (1939/1993) writes that machinery, and not living labor, takes the center stage in the production process, as machinery progressively incorporates the knowledge and skill of living labor, or the "general productive forces of the social brain" (p. 694). "General social labor," Marx writes, "has become a *direct force of social production*" (p. 706). Within this analysis Marx located machinery as standing in opposition to the worker, yet Hardt and Negri contend that the boundary between workers and machines is breaking down within advanced capitalism, particularly within the circuits of global network technology and infrastructures, blurring the distinction between variable and constant capital, and leading to a reconfiguring of labor and the labor process on the basis of the "general intellect," or what Hardt and Negri refer to as the common.

This does not mean that industrial production and material goods are no longer central to capitalism, but rather that their value is increasingly dependent on the immaterial plane of the common, such as symbols, knowledge, code, desires, and cultural content. This moves typologies of labor such as service, affective, intellectual—and, we would add, educational—work from the periphery to the center of modern valorization processes. Through this transformation, production and valorization leaves the factory proper and is dispersed throughout society blurring the once fairly clear lines between leisure and work, production, and consumption. As a result, capital increasingly finds itself external to production, and instead of arranging production and disciplining producers, for Hardt and Negri, capital *expropriates* the fruits of social production on the basis of

the common. This can be seen in the way the data we collectively produce through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Google becomes a rich source of value and new products and targeted advertising for capital. Moreover, Hardt and Negri cite the fact that neoliberalism has primarily redistributed wealth through dispossession and financialization rather than stimulating the production of new wealth.

A relatively simple observation follows from this analysis; namely, that while capitalism today is increasingly dependent on the common, there are aspects of the common that always evade capture and control. Knowledge, for instance, does not obey traditional laws of scarcity attached to material goods and natural resources, particularly in an age when knowledge can be endlessly reproduced at near zero-cost through digital reproduction. Moreover, knowledge becomes more powerful as it freely circulates and is subject to collaborative retooling and experimentation. Therefore, as capital attempts to set up systems to expropriate aspects of the common, it reduces its creative generativity. A number of writers including Hardt and Negri have zeroed in on this contradiction to argue that the common is slowly undermining capitalism, while also rendering traditional conceptions of state socialism increasingly anachronistic. For instance, Jeremy Rifkin (2014) suggests "the capitalist era is passing … not quickly, but inevitably. A new economic paradigm—The Collaborative Commons—is rising in its wake that will transform our way of life" (p. 1). Rifkin argues that the shift from capitalism to postcapitalism is already underway due to the rise of abundant knowledge and network sharing economy platforms based on the common that challenge or evade traditional proprietary arrangements (think open source software and creative commons licensing, 3-D printing, distributed commercial platforms like Air BnB and Uber, alternative crypto-currencies like Bitcoin, and potential hyper-efficiencies created by new algorithmic and big data technologies). However, whereas Rifkin ignores the role of power and class conflict in the movement of history, Paul Mason (2016) recognizes how capital and its state formations are not likely to cede a postcapitalist future without a concerted struggle. He observes that "the main contradiction today is between the possibility of free and abundant goods and information and a system of monopolies, banks, and governments trying to keep things private, scarce and commercial. Everything comes down to struggle between the network and the hierarchy, between old forms of society molded around capitalism and new forms of society that prefigure what comes next" (p. xix).

Whether or not we buy into the idea that new forms of digital technology and centrality of knowledge are necessarily undermining, or pushing beyond capitalism, contemporary biopolitical conflicts over knowledge and valorization do indeed appear to move the question of education to the center of contemporary processes of social change. While formal education has always been implicated in the reproduction of class society and its racial and gendered hierarchies, neoliberal development has attempted to erode those elements of K–12 and higher education that have historically provided a limited, but important cultural foundation for critical thought and expansion of democratic possibility (Bowles and Gintis, 2011; Giroux, 1983). The effect has been not only to place restrictions on those forms of education conducive to achieving the progressive aims of enhancing freedom and equality, but also to capitalist valorization itself, as the social basis, creativity, and potentiality of education (i.e. the educational common in its institutional, epistemological, and ontological dimensions) is subordinated to logics of commodification and control (Means, 2011). In K–12 schooling this translates into highly scripted forms of curriculum and standardized testing that individually rank students and reduce knowledge to only what can be quantified and measured, thereby eroding what is most important for knowledge construction and various forms social and scientific understanding—that is, dialogue, collaboration, problem-posing, and experimentation. These trends are perhaps most intensively expressed in the United States through policies such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and the Common Core State Standards which are based in hierarchical systems of corporate management and instrumental rationality. In higher education there is a corresponding expansion of stultifying (but richly compensated!) bureaucratic administration, student-debt-financed state disinvestment and tuition hikes, the radical casualization of educational labor, and the gutting of liberal arts.

Each of these trends serves to place fetters on the potentiality of the educational common. While education is often invoked as a means of enhancing innovation, neoliberal systems appear implicated in deepening educational stasis and conformity. However, crucially, the educational common is not simply an institutional concept, an object of power, and/or a reflection of the contradictions of capitalism. As we have been framing it, the common is a site of social production with deep epistemological and ontological grammars that is immanent to but always exceeds such systems of capture and control. Thinking the common as social production, and thus as embodied surplus, or immanent potentiality, is therefore to recognize its inherent

educational character, which is to say its non-deterministic and constituent pedagogical dimensions. Like education itself, the common can take both oppressive and emancipatory forms. For example, the recent surge in right-wing populist movements across Europe and North America imagine a corrupted and exclusionary form of the common defined by belonging to a xenophobic and authoritarian white nationalist identity. The value of thinking the commons educationally, we suggest, is that it places emphasis on struggles over consciousness within and against such contemporary forms of enclosure and violence, particularly along the fault lines of class, race, gender, and nation. Cesare Casarino (2008) has similarly suggested that struggles over the common always turn on an axis of desire and subjectivity. He argues that we cannot simply assume that the desire to produce emancipatory 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 system of value, there are elements of the common (ideas, ways of being, and affects) that always remain *outside* its reach. Put differently, aspects of creativity, social relations, and imagination 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. We would suggest this implies a conceptualization of commons that places education as central rather than as peripheral to politics, at the same time it recognizes the pedagogical foundation of the common as potentiality.

## Political and Pedagogical Formations

The novelty of Hardt and Negri's approach is not simply that they view the common as a modality that potentially undermines capitalism in the long run, but in their insistence on a new collective subject of social change, or what they call the multitude. Rather than positing a dialectical revolutionary theory, Hardt and Negri identify horizontal and immanent forms of autonomous cooperation that are slowly exceeding and ultimately vanquishing capitalism. For Hardt and Negri, the multitude is understood as a multiplicity of irreducible singularities which resists all transcendent foundations and representational modes of authority. The transformational potential of the common is here viewed as an exodus from both capitalism (private property) and socialism (public property) and the enactment what they refer to as "absolute democracy." While the subjects composing modern conceptions of *the people*, for example, are each considered distinct,

their differences are typically subsumed within a common national identity. The multitude has no such uniting or commanding category. Instead of a stable identity, the multitude is an affirmative ontology. In order to enact the multitude and the common, Hardt and Negri argue, we need to think beyond those forms of organization that would corrupt it, including the party, the trade union, and the mass organization. Just as the state and corporation enclose the commons, these forms of organization enclose the multitude.

While the multitude is not a traditional class category and the common is not a traditional class project in the orthodox Marxist sense, for Hardt and Negri, they are nonetheless engaged firmly from within the production process. Giorgio Agamben (1990/2007), by contrast, roots his understanding of the common solely in the communicative and linguistic activity of humans. What capitalism expropriates is not just production but, more fundamentally, communicative being as a whole. What Guy Debord saw as the society of the spectacle is, in the last instance, precisely this kind of expropriation. Within the spectacle, our "own linguistic nature comes back to us inverted," which means that at the same time "the spectacle retains something like a positive possibility that can be used against it" (p. 80). The positive possibility is that we can experience language as such, not the ability to use language to say this or that, but pure communicability. The multitude of singularities for Agamben, then, is not united according to any predicates, identities, or conditions of belonging, but is diffused through their potentiality to experience being as such (i.e. a predicateless being). The political struggle is between this form of being—which Agamben calls "whatever being"—and the state. Thus, Agamben, like Hardt and Negri, endorses a horizontalist approach to organizing reclamation of the common.

These perspectives have been deeply influential in contemporary left thinking and have informed a wide variety of projects oriented around direct democracy from local cooperative movements, cyber-activism, to climate justice actions. Perhaps the most high-profile instantiation could be seen in the Occupy Wall Street protests that were organized on decentralized forms of consensus building and distributed decision-making. In educational theory, Tyson Lewis (2012) has drawn on Hardt and Negri and the deschooling perspectives of Ivan Illich to develop the concept of "exopedagogy" based in the immanent ontology of the common. For Lewis, exopedagogy is a "praxis of exodus" that relocates conceptions of education beyond transcendent categories of modernity and its colonial

logics. This includes thinking forms of education outside a liberal defense of public education as well as neoliberal privatism. Exopedagogy marks a new "educational commonwealth" that explodes the boundaries of the public and private property, state and capitalist command, and liberal and cosmopolitan frameworks of national and global citizenship education. He states:

> … exopedagogy is a new notion of educational organization and location that moves beyond education as private property (a corporatized image of the school and the attending reduction of education to job training), public property of the state (as regulated from above by national standards), or political cosmopolitanism (where the model of the relation between the state and a rights bearing subject becomes a transcendental model for global regulation). Thus exopedagogy is an attempt to align teaching and learning with the creative and productive labor of … the multitude and its struggle over the commonwealth. (pp. 845–846)

In a moment where educational institutions and imagination are being captured by the instrumental demands of capital, Lewis' insistence that educational theory begin reevaluating its own concepts and assumptions in the service of imagining fundamentally different ways of thinking educational organization and pedagogy could not be more urgent. However, a central problem with exopedagogy, and with left analysis and politics based on horizontalism more broadly, is that it tends to view all forms of institutional structure and authority as necessarily oppressive and not as sites that can be harnessed and reconceived for achieving broadly progressive and emancipatory aims (Means, 2014). While non-institutional forms of decision-making may be ideal for enacting local commons where people can debate and collaborate face-to-face such as in the creation of urban gardens, community schools, and/or affordable housing and transportation, as we "scale up" problems begin to emerge. For instance, how do we imagine effectively tackling issues such as global climate change and weapons proliferation, or reimagine production, exchange, and labor for the common benefit of all without some sort of newly constructed mode of radical democratic institutional coordination?

Along these lines, David Harvey (2013) argues that the common adds another axis into political struggle without bypassing the question of existing institutions, state power, and/or civil society (i.e. that aspect of the public that cannot simply be subsumed under the rubric of the state).

Thinking more concretely about the management of the global commons and what that entails leads Harvey to argue for thinking new articulations of the horizontal and vertical in political organization. Examining the actually existing commons reveals that there are always struggles and contestations over commons. There are different commons and different political, social, and economic groups vying for power within and between them. As such, commons are not always productive and liberating, and enclosure is not always and only a destructive or alienating act. He suggests specific forms of enclosure may even be necessary to protect and produce the common, which requires the capacity of the state or some other type of vertically integrated structure. Harvey gives Amazonia as an example, noting that an act of enclosure may be necessary to protect the biodiversity and Indigenous populations therein. Access for some must be restricted in order for Indigenous life to thrive. The common, for Harvey, is thus not "a particular kind of thing, asset or even social process," but rather "an unstable and malleable social relation between a particular self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood" (p. 73).

Other thinkers like Chantal Mouffe (2013) and Jodi Dean (2012, 2016) have argued that the embrace of horizontalism has signaled the retreat of the left from politics altogether. Politics, for both Mouffe and Dean, is based on antagonism as well as mediation (Mouffe) or intensification (Dean) of fundamental divisions. Theorists of the common who avoid or circumvent these questions are ill equipped to directly challenge the neoliberal offensive. As Mouffe (2013) puts it:

> It is not enough to organize new forms of existence of the common, outside dominant capitalist structures, as if the latter would progressively ebb away without any confrontations … They celebrate the 'common' over the market, but their rejection of the 'public' and all the institutions linked to the state displays uncanny similarities with the neoliberal attitude. Their insistence on seeing the state as a monolithic entity instead of a complex set of relationships, dynamic and traversed by contradictions, precludes them from recognizing the multiple possibilities for struggling against the commodification of society that controlling state institutions could offer. (pp. 116–117)

Similarly, Dean critiques concepts of the multitude and biopolitical production for denying the constitutive existence of antagonism, "as if we did not speak multiple, incommensurable languages" (2012, p. 120).

The embrace of local, identity-based activist projects, she argues, have thus displaced questions of transformation onto concerns of inclusion and participation. According to Dean, while most strands of the left have withdrawn from questions of state power, capital has solidified its grasp over the state, thereby strengthening its power. Left movements therefore cannot bypass the state, because "the state won't let them" (2016, p. 206). Ultimately, the embrace of horizontalism, Dean contends, leaves the left weak and divided, reinforcing neoliberal fragmentation and individualism. While for Mouffe the central issue raised by the common is one radical democratization via political contestations over ideology, for Dean, it is one of political organization, and she proposes a return to a communist party-form as an affective infrastructure that unites the many struggles of the oppressed into a common force that fully seizes the irreducible division that is common. In education, Derek Ford (2016) has worked to develop a praxis of communist study that assembles the dialectics of state/common, identity/difference, and inclusion/division as a constellation to be navigated pedagogically. Ford poses the communist party as an educational and political form of organization that is not the bearer of definitive knowledge, but the carrier of a desire that traverses the precarious assembling of contradictory elements of the liberatory project.

We do not wish to attempt a tidy resolution to these broader debates. Rather we see them as a series of productive tensions. One can embrace, for instance, the social ontology of the common and the deep anti-authoritarian spirit and principles articulated by Hardt and Negri as well as the exopedagogical project of Tyson Lewis, while also recognizing the crucial need for political engagement and institutional organization advocated by Harvey, Mouffe, and Dean. As Noah De Lissovoy, Alexander Means, and Kenneth Saltman (2015) have argued, in relation to contemporary struggles over educational commons, one can defend public schools and universities against neoliberal enclosure, while also advocating for modalities of educational culture and imagination that exceed their historically prescribed institutional, epistemological, and ontological assumptions and limits. In recent years, there has in fact been a reinvigoration of such engagement. From Oaxaca, Montreal, Chicago, London, Santiago, to Madrid—coalitions of parents, students, educators, and activists have sought to directly challenge the intensification of privatization and austerity in education through occupations of educational spaces, educational strikes, standardized testing boycotts, and mass demonstrations against tuition hikes and ballooning student debt. A central challenge for many

educational theorists and activists has been how to reconcile the need to defend public educational institutions as a basic social good, while simultaneously trying to find new language and principles from which to reimagine them in ways that do not reproduce their historical and/or present limitations. This includes the need for developing radically sustainable and democratic eco-justice alternatives to education, pedagogy, and politics (Bowers, 1997; Martusewicz, Edmundson, and Lupinacci, 2014).

While there have been interventions across in the social sciences and humanities that have sought to pursue such questions, particularly in relation to the university, or what the Edu-factory Collective (2009) has referred to as the "social factory," contributors to this volume largely come from the field of education itself. The traditions associated with critical pedagogy thus inform many of the discussions that follow. Importantly, these traditions do not confine education simply to schools and universities, but rather understand education more broadly as a cultural process, or what Paulo Freire, working with Brazilian peasants exiled from their communal lands, once referred to as *conscientization*, a fugitive act of "reading the word, to read the world" (Freire, 2003). For Freire, education was a site of radical love for the world and for others, a dynamic struggle for what he called "revolutionary futurity." Similarly, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2004) describe such an approach to education as a "radical passion" and "collective orientation to the knowledge object as future project" (p. 102). Drawing on the black radical tradition, Harney and Moten refer to this form of education as "prophetic organization" beyond the material and ideational grammars of Eurocentrism, racism, and the colonial impulses of capitalist modernization (p. 102). The essays in this volume adhere to such a deeply humanizing conceptualization of education as a radical form of love in common, while they also look to the commons as a means of reframing and imagining possibilities for transforming our schools, universities, and collective learning in its image.

## Overview of the Volume

*Educational Commons in Theory and Practice* suggests that education and educational processes, both formal and informal, are central rather than peripheral to enacting commons within the current historical conjuncture. It is not intended as a systematic volume or statement, but rather as an invitation to thought and an offering to a broader conversation. The essays collected here explore in their own distinctive ways how conflicts

over the commons raise, trouble, and answer *educational questions* concerning globality, geography, class, power, race, gender, institutions, sexuality, labor, technology, colonialism, subjectivity, and ecology. They also explore what *educational theory* might offer movements for commons, and how contemporary struggles over commons, particularly common educational institutions and practices, might inform radical pedagogies and enact alternative forms of imagination in common.

In Chap. 2, Max Haiven initiates precisely such an endeavor. Framing the commons as, at once, an "actuality," "ethos," and "horizon," Haiven defends notions of the commons from insufficient conceptual clarity while resisting a tendency to enclose the concept itself. Actual commons are a crucial point of departure, for they remind us that, far from a relic of an age past, commons persist, in both natural and built forms, as well as in an often incipient spirit of mutuality and reciprocity that exists in communities, classrooms, workplaces, art, friendships, and alternative media. This ethos of the commons, Haiven insists, signals a horizon representing the enduring possibility of enacting social life beyond those corrupting values and practices that subvert it. Ultimately, the horizon of the commons is much closer than it initially appears, for it is, in fact, the pedagogical setting upon which struggles to produce commons take place.

At the same time, the history of commons and their enclosure by interwoven systems of violence must be dealt with. In Chap. 3, Noah De Lissovoy confronts the problem of racism and its foundational role in colonial systems of expropriating commons that was fundamentally predicated on land theft and enslavement. In particular, De Lissovoy suggests that post-Marxist and radical democratic approaches to theorizing educational commons are, perhaps, insufficiently prepared to deal with these legacies of violence on their existing terms. In response to this theoretical deficiency, De Lissovoy makes the case for a *decolonial common* that faces head on, rather than evades, the historical antagonisms born of coloniality. Such a project, he argues, is necessarily pedagogical, and would entail the decentering of whiteness and its historically supremacist positioning in social hierarchies of human being, along with an ethical struggle to instantiate new solidarities without rushing to resolve deep relational wounds between groups of people.

Of course, diverse efforts to produce commons both globally and locally do not stop at the boundaries of politics and social relations. As Jesse Bazzul and Sara Tolbert argue in Chap. 4, the commons must be thought of as both a social and natural concept, and thus a key aspect of

the struggle for educational commons is overcoming the false division of these two dimensions. Drawing on the assemblage theory of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Bazzul and Tolbert seek to develop pedagogical practices that allow for rhizomatic mappings of natural commons and the social practices of commoning and enclosure that attend them. This form of engaged pedagogical activity, they claim, can expand the scope of vision and imagination often constrained in educational settings by Western notions of scientific rationality.

However, in Chap. 5, Gregory Bourassa gives us reason to pause and consider more deeply the presumptions that often animate pedagogical interventions aimed at developing the common. Cautioning against a prescriptive approach to revolutionary pedagogy, Bourassa suggests that pedagogical fidelity to the common requires being attuned to the dimensions of the common that are already-present *and* yet-to-come. Such sensitivity to the common's dual temporality is necessary to avoid reinforcing prescriptive forms of teaching that threaten to suppress the production and expression of new forms of the common. Moving away from a "pedagogy in common" or a "pedagogy for the common," Bourassa homes in on a conceptualization of "the pedagogical common" that seeks to evade proprietary theories of pedagogy, favoring instead a perspective that views educational praxis as inheriting social fields haunted simultaneously by historical injustice and revolutionary possibility. Teaching with a fidelity to the pedagogical common, then, must necessarily be an ethical and relational act set against foreclosure, an affirmative endeavor that seeks to valorize a vision of education as a constituent process that is mediating through and fueled by the surplus common.

In Chap. 6 of the volume, Tyson Lewis draws on the work of Roberto Esposito to argue for a shift from personal to im-personal education. For Lewis, an education that contributes to the production of personhood betrays the immanent ontology of the common. More specifically, the educational act of learning immunizes the student against the common by forcing the student to actualize their potential, to be this or that type of subject. Learning forces the student into an already-existing identity, preventing the student to enter into the common excess that exists beyond identity. In response, Lewis formulates an impersonal education that allows the student to resist the push to actualize an identity and allows the student to be anyone at all, a common singularity. Rather than learning to be this or that, the student is allowed to study the possibilities beyond the present order of things, accessing the excessiveness of the common.

Although the common is a rich source for affirmative and autonomist theories of radical educational struggle, it also appears as a difficult concept to grasp through the tangled legacies of racial oppression and dehumanization that constitute the present social order, especially in the United States. Applying insights from recent interventions into theories of racial biopolitics, Nathan Snaza and Jennifer Sandlin reflect on the public pedagogical impact of the Twitter hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. At once a radical grievance against white supremacy and an affirmative assertion of existential endurance, #BlackLivesMatter highlights the foundational problem of exclusionary theories of humanism undergirding systematic forms of racialized violence. Emphasizing this theoretical foundation, Snaza and Sandlin argue that the complex public debate stemming from the hashtag should elicit a more thoughtful consideration of how radical imaginative visions of a common humanity must first be routed through critical analyses of historical dehumanization.

In Chap. 8, Mark Howard explores the common in relation to radical social movements and popular forms of self-education. Drawing on the philosophy of Jacques Rancière, Howard discusses the crucial link between intellectual autonomy and emancipatory politics by foregrounding three generations of Italian social and workers' struggles. These movements highlight practices of co-research and the establishment of common spaces free from state organization and coercive authority such as independently run social services, study groups, and sites of cultural production like artist collectives and independent radio stations. What these movements teach us is that the achievement of community through self-activity is based on the refusal of the exclusion from intellectual labor and verifiable truth of equality.

Like Snaza and Sandlin earlier in the volume, Anita Juárez and Clayton Pierce argue in Chap. 9 that radical struggles to produce new educational commons are vulnerable to replicating exclusionary forms of humanism. Challenging the tendency in some strands of Marxist thought to rely on humanist concepts that do not always fully recognize how existential violations have historically impacted different groups of people in different ways. Drawing on the work of Glen Coulthard, Shona Jackson, and Frank Wilderson, Juárez and Pierce augment existing educational theories of primitive accumulation and enclosure through an engagement with decolonial and Afro-pessimist understandings of land dispossession and the ongoing objectification and exchangeability of people of color, particularly in the harsh landscape of human capital schooling.

In Chap. 10, Gardner Seawright focuses his attention on the relational dimension of the common in an effort to refine theories of solidarity. Drawing on the phenomenological tradition and relational and decolonial philosophical perspectives, Seawright discusses processes of dehumanization and solidarity in schools as intricately bound together, particularly as they intersect with impersonal bureaucratic procedures and class, gender, sexual, and racial logics. Seawright argues that the ambiguity and contingency of social life harbors the encouraging fact that dehumanization can be disrupted through generous forms of solidarity.

Of course, the struggle for the commons is just as much a practical problem of organization and a public problem of pedagogy as it is a theoretical problem of politics and ideology. In Chap. 11, Jennifer Sumner focuses on the idea of the "civil commons," which she defines as any instance of collaborative human endeavor to organize, protect, and mediate the use of the "traditional commons." Proposing an education *for*, *as*, and *by* the civil commons, Sumner argues for a primary emphasis on the necessary relationship between the civil commons and sustainability, pointing toward examples in both traditional and adult forms of education that might foster such conditions.

In Chap. 12, David Backer explores the cooperative school as a means of both commoning education and teaching what it means to live in common. In other words, not only does the cooperative school enact an educational commons, but it also teaches a lesson in what it means to exist outside of the private/public property relation. Weaving together theoretical work on cooperative labor with a reading of the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, a large-scale cooperative system that began as a school and flourished into a network of educational, financial, retail, and industrial production cooperatives. Backer asks us to shift our view of the withdrawal of the state from education as a form of privatization to a clearing of space for the construction of cooperative educational institutions.

Chapters 13 and 14 turn to sociological renderings of struggles for the common. Mark Stern and Khuram Hussain read a community struggle in relationship to literature on neoliberal urban development, telling and analyzing the story of a grassroots reimagining of urban development in a small city in Upstate New York. In response to a neoliberal land use initiative to privatize public spaces, a broad-based coalition of progressive, left, and civil rights activists and organizations mobilized a pedagogical model of resistance. Based on Hussain's teaching and organizing, the authors provide us with a situated example of a particular conception of

the process of commoning. Michelle Gautreaux takes us to Española, New Mexico in Chap. 14 to examine the pedagogical significance of a socially engaged art project (*Till*) that is part of a larger collective effort to revitalize the ecological and cultural commons in the region. Gautreaux provides a brief discussion of US enclosure of Indigenous land and resources, the expansion of global capitalism and the rise of the industrial food system, illustrating their connections to the environmental degradation of the southwest region amid the current prevalence of hunger and food insecurity. She then moves on to a richer description of the project, and through analysis of interviews with key participants, reflects on the pedagogical insight the project can offer for understanding the pedagogy of (re)building the common(s) in Española and beyond.

The essays in this volume are an invitation to thought and do not exhaust the myriad ways of conceptualizing the commons. Rather they suggest that education is a crucial register for thinking and enacting a different world. A future worthy of us will not come as the result of accident and/or in a ready-made blueprint designed by isolated intellectuals and/or a self-anointed vanguard, but through building formative educational cultures and institutions together. It is in this spirit that the volume proceeds.

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CHAPTER 2

# Commons as Actuality, Ethos, and Horizon

*Max Haiven*

The idea, and the ideal, of the commons has encountered a surge in popularity in recent years (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012, 2015). But the concept itself is at risk of enclosure (Haiven, 2016). While it has become a rallying cry for grassroots, anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist revolt, today it is also being conscripted to the service of capital's reproduction (De Angelis, 2013). This short essay explains how this is happening, then outlines a three-part method for imagining the commons in a more radical fashion: the actuality of the commons, the spirit of the commons, and the horizon of the commons. It does not provide a guide or a blueprint, but it does suggest a way to make some important distinctions at a very crucial time.

## The Enclosure of (the Idea of) the Commons

Today, we use the idea of the commons to name all manner of shared goods, from parks to rivers, from free and open-source software to collective houses, from public space to activist space (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015). Originally, the commons referred to the lands maintained collectively by English peasants in the medieval period, where theygrew food

M. Haiven (✉)
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, NS, Canada
e-mail: mhaiven@nscad.ca



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and tended animals for subsitence, and held their markets, festivals, and meetings (Federici, 2005; Linebaugh, 2009; Neeson, 1993; Thompson, 1968). This land was legally and customarily protected until the birth of capitalism when, through a combination of military and legal maneuvers, the commons were "enclosed," transformed into the private property of landlords (Perelman, 2000). This signaled the gradual death of peasant communities, freeing up their bodies and labor to become proletarianized, dependent on wages for survival (Marx, 1992).

As such, we draw on this legacy in order to illuminate the politics of privatization and corporate and financial control today (The Midnight Notes Collective, 2009). Examples abound: When financial interests, with state complicity, engage in urban or rural land grabs, for instance, we can liken the process to the enclosure of the commons (Liberti, 2013; Ross, 2014); when the natural world is despoiled for profit by extractive industries (Moore, 2015); when (nominally) public services of care like education or healthcare are privatized or dominated by a market logic (Federici, 2012b); when corporate interests dominate yet another aspect of our lived culture and social life, filling the void with commodities to answer our increased alienation (De Angelis, 2007).

Yet capital encloses our ideas as well (Haiven, 2014a). We have watched in horror as the notions of human rights,democracy,and gender equality, once wielded by radical movements, have been press-gangedinto the service of neoimperialism (Eisenstein, 2007). We have witnessed the abuse of terms like creativity, imagination, and even revolution to sell products, to accelerate the enclosure of urban space through gentrification, and to rebrand austerity as somehow beneficial to humanity (Haiven, 2014b). The rhetoric of environmentalism has been seized upon as a means to sell allegedly "green" commodities, "sustainable" corporations, and all manner of other horrors (Klein, 2015). The enclosure of language and ideas is a key function of late capitalism and colonialism and must be confronted.

Today, the name and the idea of the commons appear everywhere to rebrand capitalism and sell us the illusion of community. Neoliberal urban planners have enthusiastically seized upon the word "commons" as a password to all sorts of often ridiculous claims to improve "social cohesion," "economic vitality," and "placemaking" (Harvey, 2012), even though their actions typically have the function of enclosing formerly public spaces in the interests of real estate, commercialism, or policing and surveillance,.

New software startups eagerly court online coder communities and users, drawing on the (free) knowledge and labor of the digital "commons" to create more robust products for market. Around the world, new capitalist development schemes from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund tout the commons as the source of community resiliencethat ought to be monetized and commodified through microfinance loans or other schemes to encourage individualistic entrepreneurship (Bateman, 2010; Roy, 2012). Still elsewhere, neoliberal ideologues nod approvingly at localist efforts towards community survival (community gardens, solidarity clinics, collective housing and cooperativism) because they "reduce dependency" on the welfare state and keep people alive in the face of "market failures" (Klein, 2007; Westley, Murphy, & Anderson, 2008). And many of the digital platforms being ushered in under the banner of "sharing economy" actively enclose and appropriate the meaning of the commonsto encourage each of us to further commodify our lives (Rifkin, 2014; Scholz, 2014).

To the extent that capitalism deepens our experience of alienation, the idea and ideal of commons resonates more profoundly. To the extent that those who once imagined themselves entitled to a "middle class" existence find themselves among the ranks of the highly indebted, precariously employed "post-middle class," they hunger for the forms of community and authenticity the idea(l) of the commons suggests. Without rigorous work to define and defend the term, we risk its total enclosure.

The meaning of words is a terrain of struggle because words are a key to the radical imagination. As Alex Khasnabish and I (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014) have noted elsewhere, the radical imagination is not something we, as individuals, possess; it is something we, as collectives, do. This doing is a material struggle to build living alternatives, but it is also cultural. We need a shared lexicon in order to coordinate, to plan, and to build common cause. Thus, the struggle to reclaimterms from capitalist enclosure is important. While words and meanings are constantly changing and evolving, we need to see this process of change and evolution as a field of contestation.

I suggest that, in order to retain and embellish the radicalism and revolutionary potential of the idea of the commons, we approach it as three overlapping or interwoven phenomena. That is, the commons are three things all at once: actuality, ethos, and horizon.

## The Actuality of the Commons

By the actuality of the commons, I refer to the actually existing commons in our world. We can subdivide this category into three parts—the ambient commons, the built commons, and the cognitive commons—with the understanding that this is an artificial and somewhat problematic categorization.

The ambient commons are those aspects of the world that we share. In this sense, a river or watershed can be a commons (Neimanis, 2009). The global atmosphere is a commons (Sharife, 2011). Our communities and neighborhoods are commons (Harvey, 2012). The commons are those dimensions and aspects of our lives that we share and depend on, and that we, in turn, care for and cultivate together (Haiven, 2016). These commons are always under threat of enclosure; in fact, the vast majority are already semi-enclosed (De Angelis, 2007). For instance, many lakes and waterways are either privately owned or controlled by the state in the interests of private accumulation (Bakker, 2007). While technically no one owns the atmosphere, control over its fate is being decided by capital. While it takes common human relationships to make a neighborhood, today most are overcoded by private property ownership. When we fight for these commons, we are fighting to bring them back under common control, seizing them back from capital or the dimensions of the state that serve and protect private accumulation. The ambient commons are terrains of struggle.

The built commons are those actually existing commons we have built ourselves, collectively. These are solidarity clinics, social centers, co-housing or cooperatives, common farms and gardens (Azzellini & Sitrin, 2014; De Angelis, 2014; De Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2010). They are also our organizations and affinity groups. The built commons are those institutions we construct together on our own terms, based on the values of democracy, anti-authoritarianism, egalitarianism, anti-oppression, and so on (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014). Ambient commons can become built commons to the extent their care and governance is organized around what I will shortly call the "ethos" of the commons. Once again, the built commons are never pure: they are always under the threat and the processes of enclosure (Holloway, 2010). We know now, for instance, that cooperative enterprises and community gardens, while they allow commoners some measure of autonomy from the immediate pressures of capitalist exploitation, can help reproduce capitalism either by diverting claims and antagonisms within that system or by adding value to regions and neighborhoods that are ripe for financial speculation (Harvey, 2012). And

we know from (often bitter) experience that the norms, codes, value systems, and pressures of capitalism partially live on within even the best of these organizations and formations, for they are composed of us: broken and wounded subjects seeking to find a place to heal ourselves together (Crass, 2013; Dixon, 2014). We should also note that built commons can include those common aspects of public services and spaces currently enclosed and managed by the state. These are typically the residual manifestations of a temporary truce between capital and commoners, whereby our predecessors' aspirations for common care were frozen into the form of institutions, many of which have become bureaucratized and alienating, or have adopted a corporate model. But such a form does not exhaust their common potential, and the struggle to defend and reclaim and re-common public institutions remains crucial (Haiven, 2014a).

Finally, we have the cognitive commons: the realm of ideas, processes, and culture we share and co-create. Hence, the open-source codes of the free software movement, or the forms of knowledge and culture that are today under the enclosure of intellectual property regimes (Kostakis & Bauwens, 2014). We are entitled to the fruits of the cognitive labor to which we, in small and large ways, contribute, but they are everywhere being enclosed, with disastrous impacts. For instance, the patenting of seed stock or life-saving HIV drugs, or the more general reorientation of humanity's intellectual and technological potentials toward profit-making trinkets of distraction, rather than the liberation from work and the creation of sustainable abundance (Srnicek & Williams, 2015). The cognitive commons also names our shared potential to communicate and build relationships; it is precisely these capacities that today's form of capitalism seeks desperately to enclose, not only through the tightening of intellectual property laws, but also through the transformation of work toward precarity, which demands workers leverage their whole physical, mental, and social being to compete for employment (Hardt & Negri, 2009), and through the development of platforms associated with the "sharing economy," which encourages us to monetize our ideas, capacities, and relationships (Scholz, 2016). The cognitive commons also represents the world of ideas and ideals through which we are able to imagine and, hence, co-create the future (Haiven, 2014a). This is why the struggle over the enclosure of ideas like the commons is so vital (Caffentzis, 2012). Without them, we lack the shared cognitive material to name and advance our struggles.

Thus, the actuality of the commons refers, in all three forms, to the material and immaterial wealth of the commons that is all around us, but which, to various extents, is (semi-) enclosed, commodified, privatized, bureaucratized, or polluted and despoiled by capital. The actuality of the commons is not only those structures of horizontal democracy, peer-to-peer reciprocity and concrete egalitarian utopianism we build as movements; it is also all those aspects of society that depend on and sustain our common life, but which have been or are being enclosed.

## The Ethos of the Commons

The actuality of the ambient, the built, and the cognitive commons are all under the threat or the active process of enclosure. Nothing is safe from capital. But by the same token, at its root, capitalism is little more than the accumulated booty of the stolen commons, including the ongoing theft of our energies and cognitive and social potentials. And, as such, the ethos of the commons lives on, in fractured and sometimes mortally wounded forms, throughout capitalist society, even where we least expect to find it. Even the cultures of factories, or schools, or prisons have their common elements, in spite of their status as brutal architectures of enclosures. These are the relationships of solidarity, refusal, and reimagination that continue to exist even in the worst spaces and conditions (De Angelis, 2007), what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013), writing about radical work within the enclosed neoliberal university, call the "undercommons." Insitutions like academe, on the one hand, depend on the undercommons to survive and, on the other, everywhere and always try to deny, to starve, and to obliterate the undercommons.

The ethos of the commons speaks to that set of values and dispositions we bring to the work of "commoning"—defending the actuality of the commons and reclaiming or reinventing those aspects of common life stolen from us. When we declare our right to the commons, when we start a new initiative or defend lands or waterways from enclosure or destruction, we draw on and make manifest the ethos of the commons (De Angelis, 2014). The ethos of the commons is amorphous and depends on context but, generally, might be said to be animated by the ideals of grassroots direct democracy, egalitarianism, anti-oppression, refusal of state power and commodification, open access, peer-to-peer production, and participatory, non-hierarchical flexibility.

The spirit of the commons is at work both in our movements and, in a partial way, in our daily lives. In our movements, it is both the goal and the process of radical refusal and creative negation (Holloway, 2005). It is the conviction that we can organize society and our lives based on a non-coercive, non-commercial, and non-competitive set of values (Federici, 2012a). Yet such an ethos is rarely pure or uncompromised. For the most part, it remains under the surface like a subterranean river. In moments of open revolt, it erupts and transforms the territory of social life. Other times, it follows established but forgotten routes, channels of cooperation that have always been present, but which we have learned to devalue.

It is important to recognize that the ethos of the commons is no single thing; it is something more of a shared promise, raw potential (Holloway, 2010). It is will always be open to debate and reimagining based on the actuality of our commons experience, and of the lived realities of relationality and solidarity. The ethos is, therefore, not some abstract ideal; it is the *process* of the radical imagination derived and reproduced through revolutionary practice. That is, the ethos of the commons is a constellation or spectrum of collective activities, not a personal belief or conviction.

Thus the practice of commoning can occur in almost any social space. For instance, many families intentionally practice proto-commoning based on the ideals of respect, autonomy, mutual aid, care, and a dedication to collective growth (Gibson-Graham, 2006). When workers organize in the care-home or the factory or the university, they are, in part, drawing on and articulating the ethos of the commons. The ethos of the commons even infuses marketplaces (not financial markets, but actual physical markets) which are made up of a complex web of relationships, motivations, and exchanges.

What is crucial is that in all these spaces, from the family unit to the squatted house, from the occupied factory to the Saturday market, the ethos of the commons is always in struggle, competition, confluence, and contradiction with a variety of other tendencies: patriarchal and traditional coercive social norms and prejudices; competitive and fearful individualism; political and moral arrogance or cowardice; and possessiveness, laziness, or intellectual obscurantism. The ethos of the commons is never pure: it is always compromised and cross cut by the complexities and contradictions of both hetero-patriarchal colonial capitalism and also the foibles of the human experience.

For this reason, we must see the potential and the activity of commoning as occurring throughout all social spaces and processes, but be judicious and strategic in how we approach each. The reality is that capitalism and other systems of domination can only operate by allowing the ethos of the commons to persist in fractured, enclosed, and entrapped forms. Temporary foreign live-in caregivers who are brought from poor to rich countries to work can maintain their sanity and hope because they create a common community. Facebook is driven by commoning energies that are harnessed, controlled, and enclosed by a corporation. And many of us survive, materially or spiritually, because we build radical common communities, from housing cooperatives to activist networks to childcare collectives to reading groups. The ethos of the commons is all around us, and is quite literally key to our survival. But by itself it is not enough to overcome the parasitism of capital.

## The Horizon of the Commons

But herein lies the problem: if capitalism and other systems of domination in some degree rely on our capacities to common, to create undercommons, if they tolerate degrees of the commons the same way zoos allow animals some space and autonomy within their cages, how can our struggles transcend the demand for better conditions within those cages? Here, we need to add a third form of the commons: the horizon.

This horizon is the conjecture of a future society based on our lived experience of the actuality of the commons and on the ethos of commoning—that is, based on our present-day lived experience and on the hopes, dreams, aspirations, and goals that emerge from our practices (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2011). This horizon is not merely wishful thinking; it must be strategic. It must envision the outlines of a future society from the ground up, take careful and sober stock of the balance of forces, and make patient but urgent plans for revolutionary success.

Though all three aspects of the commons are equally important, the third is the most neglected. Today, the ideal of the commons has become so widely used and so deeply appropriated that we all too often lose sight of the magnitude of the challenges we actually face in building a different society (Haiven, 2016). More accurately, we purposefully (though perhaps unconsciously) *avoid* strategizing because that magnitude seems too great. Rather, we fixate or fetishize either the day-to-day work of cultivating this or that commons (the "actuality" of our particular collective

projects) or retreat into theoretical and idealistic debates around the ethos of commoning.

The horizon of the commons might be said to be three things:

First, it is the forums and venues, physical and textual, in whichcommons-oriented efforts can meet, debate, strategize, agree to disagree, make inter-collective decisions, trade or barter, and party or plot. It is the infrastructure of collaboration, the syntax of struggles, or the connective tissue that binds together a variety of initiatives, movements, people, and tendencies. It might take the form of a social center, or an online discussion space or a conference or an international meeting. In a way, crypto and alternative currencies can also play this role. In this sense, the horizon of the commons overlaps with many actualities of the commons, and it is in or through these forms of venues that the ethos of the commons is cultivated, grows, and spreads.

Second, the horizon of the commons is a shared capacity to create a narrative about the past, the present, and the future. It is our ability to tell stories about our own powers. Sometimes these stories are local and sometimes they are global, sometimes they are personal and sometimes they are theoretical. Sometimes they delineate a process that has occurred over three weeks, sometimes one that has occurred over 300 or 3000 years. Each commons will be animated by many such stories and theories, sometimes in confluence, sometimes in conflict, sometimes resonating with one another and sometimes in contradiction. Between commons, the sharing of such narratives and theories is a key task. For instance, my housing cooperative has a story about how, over 30 years ago, our predecessors started the coop, the values they held, and processes they used, and these, in turn, affect how we conduct our business in the present and plan our future. Meanwhile, we work within a local milieu where a number of commons-oriented initiatives share a historical and theoretical narrative , of which we see our present efforts as a part. But we also live on stolen Indigenous land in Canada, which overlays another narrative. We are continually discovering ways to weave these narratives together to arrive at a greater capacity for solidarity and a more potent place of collective power.

Finally, the horizon of the commons demands a vision, however hazy, of a future society, one forged largely out of the power of negation. The world we want to build must be imagined through a combination of, on the one hand, an extrapolation of the imperfect ethos and actuality of the commons we are building here and now and, on the other, a liberating and incomplete conjecture about what life might be like *in the absence*

*of* exploitation, domination, racism, gender-based oppression and so on. The horizon of the common in this sense is not so much our capacity to perfectly map a future society, but our ability to hold the future open. More accurately, it is our ability to travel, through collective acts of the imagination, into the future and "bring back" the resources to enable us to struggle in the present (Jameson, 2005).

In the first instance, this requires a utopian imagination; we must be able to perform the exercise of envisioning the light of our utopian dreams not only in order to bask in a nice daydream but to be able to illuminate the contours of power and possibility inour present society. This utopian projection is not pure fantasy: it is the sort of world we know we could create, that we ought to be allowed to create, were it not for the exploitation of, and the limits placed on, our cooperation today (Suvin, 1997). We exercise this utopian imagination not to envision an end-point of our struggle, but as a way to bring into greater clarity the structures and patterns of our *present day* society and organizations. We envision it so we can more accurately ask ourselves: what prevents that utopia from becoming a reality? What would it take to achieve it? What stands in our way? What must we do to calibrate our organizations and movements toward this end? Equally: how do today's structures and systems of domination, oppression and exploitation shape our thinking, behavior and struggles in the present? What would community look like and feel like in their absence? And how can we bring those lessons "back" from that imagined tomorrow to catalyze and improve our capacity for solidarity and care here and now?

But in the second case, we require a dystopian imagination as well. This is not simply because we must acknowledge the gravity of the threats that now face us by envisioning the blossoming of full fascism or the coming apocalypse, though certainly such visions should impel us to redouble our efforts to prevent such circumstances. We also need the dystopian imagination for two other reasons. First, a sense of proportion and timing: movements and commons often get wrapped up in the minutiae of their own operations and reproduction and thus lose a sense of scope when it comes to the challenges we face and the relative importance of our localized efforts. The dystopian imagination reminds us to keep our eyes on the prize, to put the day-to-day struggles over power, process and mundane collaboration in the wider context of the threats we face and the magnitude of the tasks before us.

## The Revenge of the Commons

And here is the final and most controversial point: we need the dystopian imagination because the commons will not win if they are relentlessly optimistic and positive. We must necessarily contend with and, indeed, compassionately but generatively embrace depression, fear, anxiety, hatred and revenge. To the extent we banish these spirits, we risk delivering the commons into the hands of an evolving form of personally customized capitalism obsessed with "positive thinking," optimism and the hollow promise of holistic autonomy within a market society (Berlant, 2011). Already we have seen how the "sharing economy" has coopted and conscripted both the actuality and the ethos of the commons in nefarious ways. This can only be countered by an anti-capitalist horizon of the commons, a sense of strategy and narrative that insists that we deserve more than to merely have our dreams and our labor sold back to us.

The utopian and dystopian imagination should rightly fill us with rage, with despair, with hatred of what has been done to our predecessors, what is being done to us now, and what will befall the future. It should make us anxious and depressed—these are logical and entirely reasonable reactions. We all too often seek to banish these "negative" emotions, insisting that the actuality and ethos of the commons be purified so as to be more appealing to the uninitiated. We tell ourselves that a horizon of the commons built on fury and anger will beget a poisoned society. We are told revenge is simply barbarism.

I am not arguing that these emotions be allowed to run loose. But in the same way that the commons gives practical and political form to the affects of love, solidarity, hope, cooperation, and conviviality, so too can (and must) it give political form to anger, resentment, fear, and sorrow. How can we create spaces and structures to mobilize these as shared, rather than individualized, emotions? How can we identify and loath enemies in such a way as to drive us to new plateaus of potential and solidarity, rather than single-minded fixation? How can we learn to grow solidarity and power by acknowledging and finding ways to care for depression, anxiety and mania? These are questions we cannot brush aside.

The horizon of the commons, then, is only partially about gentle and generative visions of a better future that will guide us out of the present. It is also about revenge: not a simplistic revenge against this or that corporation or politician, but a systemic revenge that sees the righting of

past wrongs and a chance to start anew. It is not only about liberating our grandchildren but, as Walter Benjamin once put it, avenging our ancestors. It is about developing a narrative that recognizes just how much has been stolen from us. We are exiles from a country that does not exist on a map, exiles from a country in which we could become our full selves, where the actuality of the commons suffuses all aspects of life, where the ethos of the commons animates all relationships. We are held against our will in a capitalist society that forces us to reproduce it at the cost of our mental and physical health, of the earth itself, of our relationships, of our potential. When we speak of revenge, it is revenge against oppression, exploitation and domination. It is a revenge large enough to encompass compassion and patience, but which will not be sated until we achieve the society we deserve, and that we have always deserved. It is a revenge that will, retroactively, make this nebulous "we" something tangible.

As long as our idea(l)s of the commons remain based on a stifling, compulsory optimism, they will never become anything more than semi-autonomous spaces within capitalism. At best, they will offer the means of small-scale withdrawal from the discipline and exploitation. At worst, they will become laboratories for new commodities and ways to create capital. The commons must have the courage to go further.

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CHAPTER 3

# Reframing the Common: Race, Coloniality, and Pedagogy

*Noah De Lissovoy*

Recent work in cultural studies and philosophy has exposed the whiteness that works through familiar conceptions of politics and democracy, including many progressive ones. These critiques do more than simply highlight the ubiquity of difference, in a postmodern vein; rather, they point to the irreducibility and persistence of the forces of partition and domination that have organized historical colonial projects, and which reappear in ongoing processes of racial violence and coloniality—processes comprised at once of material, symbolic, epistemological, and experiential registers (Mignolo, 2011; Mills, 1997; Quijano, 2008; Wilderson, 2010).

This scholarship has responded to liberal, progressive, and critical projects and theories; I believe that contemporary notions of the *common*, as they have been articulated in (post-)Marxist and radical democratic idioms, need to be confronted by the same questions and critiques. I argue that as partisans of a revolutionary project of commoning against contemporary capitalist enclosures, we should consider these questions carefully and should investigate how the notion of the common, and the pedagogies of

N. De Lissovoy (✉)
University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, USA
e-mail: delissovoy@austin.utexas.edu



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the common that might follow from it, should be rethought in light of the fundamental and ongoing impositions of racism.

I undertake this project through a consideration of contemporary theorizations of the common and associated senses of radical democracy. I focus in particular on the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2004, 2009) while also considering other influential articulations of radical democratic theory (e.g. Giroux, 2009; Laclau, 2005; Rancière, 2007, 2010). Raising questions regarding the epistemological standpoint from which these accounts are articulated, as well as the social ontologies they start from, I argue that they ultimately fail to adequately confront the colonial problematics toward which they gesture. Instead, they claim that the true moment of the political is to be found in antagonisms and discursive forms that transcend the particularisms of culture and identity. In response, I propose a notion of the common grounded in an ethical and epistemological responsibility to the oppressed and excluded, and analytically centered on the ontologies of race that articulate and reticulate capitalist modernity. A passageway into this *decolonial common*, I argue, can be found in the context of pedagogy, since teaching opens up terrains of confrontation and dialogue that are the condition of solidarity. On this basis, I outline a pedagogy that would work to dismantle the historical privilege of whiteness and return what it has claimed to the larger community of learners. Reimagined in this way, the notion of the common remains indispensable, pointing us toward new visions of revolutionary solidarity and subjectivity.

## Common, Multitude, and the Decolonial Option

The work of Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004, 2009) represents a powerful and provocative intervention into the terrain of radical democratic theory and cultural politics. In much the same way that they seek to look past the schema that organizes our understanding of social life in terms of the dichotomy between public and private, Hardt and Negri seek to move past the opposition between universal and particular that has bedeviled political projects in the past. Rather than looking for transcendent and universal truths, they locate the starting point for truth and politics in life and experience. Both the category of the *common* (which is comprised of the material and immaterial resources, tools, and codes that are both the ground and product of social life) and the notion of the *multitude* (the political subject that corresponds to the common) are said to be *made* by us in the course of life and struggle, rather than pre-existing as determined

essences (2004, pp. 196–202). At the same time, these categories, as Hardt and Negri present them, are also incompatible with a particularistic politics that refuses shared meanings and projects. Their vitality and potential come from the fact that they point at once to the extended networks of capitalist production and communication within which we are all inserted and to the process of collective struggle that can open up new possibilities for social life.

Likewise, rather than thinking in terms of the opposition of identity and difference that has framed much scholarship in cultural studies, Hardt and Negri highlight the notion of the *singularity*. Singularities are the elements, or social subjects, that make up the multitude. Singularities are not monads, sealed off in their separateness, but are rather nodes that have meaning only in relation to the differences that surround them, and which are themselves internally traversed by difference (2004, pp. 99–100). Similarly, the multitude, in contrast to *the people*, is not a seamless unity, but rather a body of singularities, necessarily shot through by differences between bodies and experiences—"a kaleidoscope in which the colors are constantly shifting to form new and more beautiful patterns" (2009, p. 112). Realizing the political potential of singularity and multitude depends on a project that persistently looks beyond the given; this potential is affirmed in the process of *remaking* self and society. In Hardt and Negri's politics of immanence, this does not mean faithfulness to a doctrine propounded from above, but rather a process of experimentation and exodus on the terrain of ways of doing and being. Just as capitalism in the present becomes increasingly focused on the production of immaterial goods, so too do revolutionary projects need to be concerned with the remaking of subjectivity, communication, and relationships. This biopolitical emphasis in their work—which points to the dynamic registers of body, experience, and affect—challenges accounts that abstract from these conditions of embodiment and that base themselves on unchanging essences or pre-given historical logics.

Hardt and Negri's proposals are helpful, challenging as they do the conceptual underpinnings of the apparent opposition between criticalists/Marxists and postmodernists, and opening up anticapitalist politics and political–economic analysis to an engagement with issues of subjectivity, culture, and identity. However, their rhetoric, which posits the unique originality of their claims, often has the effect of reducing other perspectives either to variants of their own argument or to varieties of essentialist thinking. Their key categories seek obsessively to evade—diagonally—

familiar dichotomies in left thinking and to pull free from their theoretical and historical determinants. Thus, the multitude, as they conceptualize it, both includes and pushes beyond the differences and antagonisms that have conditioned historical movements of resistance. In particular, anticolonial and decolonial thought are understood by them in terms of an "antimodernity" that is caught in a futile dialectics with modernity, and from which only the authors' own "altermodernity" has a chance of escape:

> We intend for the term "altermodernity" instead to indicate a decisive break with modernity and the power relation that defines it since altermodernity in our conception emerges from the traditions of antimodernity—but it also departs from antimodernity since it extends beyond opposition and resistance. (2009, p. 103)

In the same way, they argue that the politics of identity, while importantly exposing the way that capitalist property relations extend beyond the economy proper to the domains of race, gender, etc., at the same time enforces obedience to social categories ultimately given by modernity and capital. In their view, the liberatory line of flight for the multitude is obscured by political projects mired in the very historical dialectic that must be overcome (or refused). For instance, racial equity projects often depend on the same nomenclature and categories that have historically organized dominative racial hierarchies. By contrast, we stay true to the revolutionary surplus that inheres in the common, in their view, by always exceeding the determinations that would limit the ways that bodies might signify and the subjectivities we might invent for ourselves.

While these proposals are generative, I believe that at the same time Hardt and Negri evade a basic principle that should organize intellectual work on the terrain of cultural politics: the recognition that differences in cultural, geographical, and historical location have decisive consequences for knowledge projects. Interestingly, their very emphasis on embodiment and biopolitics partly secures this evasion, since in the same moment they de-emphasize the domains of ideology and epistemology: "This is an important shift: the power relation that defines the modernity–coloniality–racism complex is primarily a matter not of knowing but of doing; and thus our critique should focus on not the ideological and epistemological but the political and ontological" (2009, p. 80). By contrast, critical phenomenologists of race, who share Hardt and Negri's concern

with forms of doing, experience, and the body, have worked to trace the link between these registers on one hand and forms of reason on the other. Thus, as Linda Alcoff (2006) describes, differences in forms of embodiment and experience (as expressed in differences in racial and gender positioning) are tied to differences in our interpretive horizons. In addition, as standpoint theorists show, these situated horizons are not limited to those that organize everyday common sense, but extend to the frames within which the most sophisticated scholarly work is undertaken, pointing to the importance of a careful reflexivity in intellectual work (Harding, 1993).

In their impatience with what they see as the reificatory and particularistic politics of identity, Hardt and Negri in their own proposals seem to want to step quickly across the divide of the "colonial wound" (Mignolo, 2005) toward which they simultaneously gesture. On one hand, their argument points to the impositions that have accompanied capitalist expansion, and understands the violence of racism as a crucial form of Empire and an obstacle in the way of the becoming-common of society. However, the reactionary character that they attribute to projects interested in or based on histories of cultural difference and oppression, in which "freedom is configured as the emancipation of an existing subject, [and] identity ceases to be a war machine" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 330) belongs to a rhetorical logic within which the margins must still struggle to catch up with the center, even if that center is now figured as the project of the multitude—in fact as the politics of the *whole itself*. Thus, even as Hardt and Negri refer approvingly to Fanon, lost in their account is the absolute decisiveness of the colonial partition that he pointed to for those on both sides of this divide. After all, the violence of colonialism and coloniality do not just represent a (central) register of power, capital, and Empire; rather, as Aníbal Quijano's (2008) notion of "coloniality of power" suggests, power in the modern period (including as biopower and capital) is organized determinatively, and from the point of departure, as racial/cultural/geopolitical violence.

This violence extends from material forms of enslavement to symbolic forms of degradation to epistemological forms of erasure—of colonized bodies, minds and societies, a process in which "peoples were dispossessed of their own and singular historical identities," which were then replaced by a "new racial identity, colonial and negative, [which] involved the plundering of their place in the history of the cultural production of humanity" (Quijano, 2008, p. 200). This process extends from the genocides of the early modern period to contemporary racist and carceral capitalism.

For instance, the US prison system materially injures individuals and communities of color while at the same time aiming at a humiliation that erases their political agency and identity, a process that builds on long-standing forms of institutional assault and marginalization. To reframe Jodi Dean's (2012) notion of the "communist horizon" as a fundamental contemporary political–historical situation, we might say that there is, in capitalist modernity, an inescapable *decolonial horizon* that demands of us a militant decision and partisanship.

In the realm of intellectual work, this choice is in the first instance epistemological—taking the "decolonial option" means understanding knowledge projects as inescapably oriented one way or another on the terrain of coloniality, and it means choosing an orientation that refuses the "objectivity without parentheses" that leads to the "epistemology of management … and of obedience" (Maturana, as cited in Mignolo, 2011, p. 70) that has historically characterized Western thought. If we understand this objectivity not simply as a narrow positivism but more broadly as a self-arrogated privilege of perspective and authority over the *whole scene* of the social, then even the radical understanding of the common articulated by Hardt and Negri does not fully escape this perspective's pretensions. Their work begs the question: Beyond registering the historical impositions of colonialism, what notion of the common would be able to work beyond the persistent epistemological matrix of coloniality?

## Race, Racism, and the Democratic Imaginary

Investigations of and proposals for the common must be reflexive about the standpoint and positionality on the basis of which they are articulated, as I argued in the last section. A decolonial perspective on the common implies not just a recognition of the way that racism and conquest have been consequential in modernity but also an epistemological partisanship that situates accounts of the common within a perspective that starts from the experience of colonization. However, beyond these concerns, perhaps an even deeper challenge for this work is posed by a critical consideration of the political conception of democracy that underlies familiar radical democratic projects. Discussions of the common have emerged within the context of broader conversations regarding the shape of emancipation and democracy under and against capitalism. While attending to the politics of culture, these conversations have generally ignored or refused the *decisiveness* of the political role of race and racism, and are partly sustained, it might be argued, precisely by this disavowal.

Intellectual proposals for the common belong to a larger family of projects that have started from the Marxist tradition in thinking about radical movements against capitalism. However, the particular genus to which proposals for the common belong has sought to think beyond the familiar agent of revolution in Marxism (the proletariat) and the familiar mode of praxis (class struggle), while at the same time preserving the goal of radical social transformation on the basis of collective action. These (post-)Marxist projects aim to recognize a more complex and contemporary revolutionary subject, and more democratic and generative forms of radical organization. For instance, Ernesto Laclau (2005) has contextualized class struggle within a broader field of democratic struggle, and has described the latter in terms of an indeterminate logic of hegemony within which other subjects and contradictions (e.g. sexism or racism) might become primary in crystallizing the field of political antagonisms. Henry Giroux (2008, 2009) has emphasized the crucial role of struggles around culture, education and ideology in radical politics, while at the same time orienting this work within a broadly anticapitalist perspective. Jacques Rancière (2007, 2010) has aimed to destabilize the notion of politics itself that underlies left thought, and to point to moments of rupture and dissensus that inaugurate new political subjects and possibilities against prevailing orders of perception and action—orders that have often already enclosed left movements. While projects explicitly focused on the *common* in particular have differed in some ways from these interventions, nevertheless in the first instance it is important to think of work around the common in relation to this broader critical–theoretical context.

Indeed, it can be argued that while contemporary radical democratic theories hold to an emphasis on the political antagonisms that orient struggle, at the same time these projects share an impulse toward a widening—or commoning—of the subject itself of struggle. Thus, against the idea that emancipatory movements are properly organized to the extent that they discover and express a primary social contradiction, Laclau argues that such movements are in fact constituted differentially through "the unification of a plurality of demands in an equivalential chain" (2005, p. 77). Any one of a number of demands, including identity-based ones, can operate as the hegemonic signifier that condenses such a chain and opens up a terrain of populist struggle. (For instance, the "culture wars" of the 1980s and 1990s can be usefully analyzed in these terms.) Similarly, Giroux (2009) has shown that arguments against neoliberal capitalism should start from the experiences and forms of resistance of marginalized

groups—including and perhaps especially the experiences of youth. It is not simply that young people are often left out of political debates, for Giroux; rather, it is that the forms of assault and enclosure that they experience are central to the political logic of neoliberalism, and that without confronting the criminalization of young people and the commodification of youth culture we misunderstand the central impulses of contemporary capitalism. In these and other interventions, radical democratic theory in the present seeks to articulate the ensemble of relationships between social actors and forces that spread out across what István Mészáros (1995) called the "capital system."

These contemporary radical democratic projects aim to challenge the closure of older left formations and to open struggles for the common to an engagement with movements on the terrain of culture. However, I believe that these projects overlook the specific ontologies of race that underpin the political formations they aim to interrogate. They also ignore what might be called the racial-political unconscious of the very models of democracy and emancipation that they propose. Recent work on anti-Blackness has pointed to the way that racism works to structure the primary coherence of society for whites (James, 2011; Wilderson, 2010). From this perspective, it is only on the basis of the construction of people of color as non-human that the properly human world, in an existential sense, is made available *as their own* to white people, with all of its limits and possibilities. Even the kinds of alienation that are taken as centrally limiting human potential in much radical theory appear as historical challenges precisely in their contrast to the social death of the Slave—a figure that for Frank Wilderson (2010) still properly names the ontological status of Black people up to the present:

> If, as an ontological position, that is, as a grammar of suffering, the Slave is not a laborer but an anti-Human, a position against which Humanity establishes, maintains, and renews its coherence, its corporeal integrity; if the Slave is, to borrow from Patterson, generally dishonored, perpetually open to gratuitous violence, and void of kinship structure, that is, having no relations that need to be recognized, a being outside of relationality, then our analysis cannot be approached through the rubric of gains or reversals in struggles with the state and civil society …. (p. 11)

Likewise, within the "racial contract" to which whites are the only effective signatories (even as this contract governs life for all), as Charles Mills

(1997) argues, white people are made the only full and proper subjects of reason and history. From this perspective, emancipatory projects that seek to constellate a multicultural democratic movement—without coming to terms with underlying ontologies of race—can only "include" people of color as mute foils, in fact simply repeating the familiar domination the latter experience in inviting them into a political imaginary (however radical it may appear) that is from the beginning founded on their exclusion and violation. In Wilderson's (2010) terms, if the life and dreams of the Master are parasitic on the living death of the Slave, then even the former's most beautiful dreams will ultimately become nightmares for the latter.

In other words, to the extent that the underlying imaginary that organizes the coherence of radical democratic projects remains colorless—or rather, *white*—then in spite of their progressive cultural politics the kind of common that these projects propose will be broken, assimilative, and injurious: a colonial common flying an insurrectionary flag. Indeed, many charged that even the creative uprisings of the Occupy movement generally failed to come to terms with their own internal racial contradictions, and that the demands that the movement put forward—and that it symbolically embodied in its occupation of public spaces—were often oblivious to the prior (territorial, political, and ethical) claims long advanced by Indigenous peoples and other communities of color.

At the theoretical level, the very principle of contingency that much radical democratic theory has insisted on as the route to opening up politics to a diverse range of struggles misunderstands the priority of colonial violation as constitutive logic of modernity. For instance, the arbitrariness of the democratic demand that knits together the united front of hegemonic struggle in Laclau, or the democratic imperative that indifferently assimilates diverse teacher and student subjectivities in Giroux, betrays the persistent whiteness of these accounts at the level of the imagination: only from a position of detachment can one be indifferent—even if this is a matter of a conceptual rather than ethical indifference—to the particular suffering and demand that mobilizes struggle. If, as Wilderson (2010) argues, Black people's exclusion from the (political) world is the condition of the latter's possibility (for whites), then the primary ontological demand of Black people on human being must upset the possibility of politics itself. Likewise, while this observation might appear to echo Rancière's (2010) definition of politics in terms of the figure of "the part of those without part," this latter figure, which aims to tear politics away from a patronizing attachment to positivistic constituencies (e.g. the

working class), at the same time reterritorializes antagonisms that have played out historically in the context of coloniality onto a field of transparent formalism. In fact, Black resistance does not simply occupy the empty placeholder of the agent of dissensus that hides under the smooth surface of political life from ancient Athens to the present (as Rancière's philosophy would suggest), but rather announces the exceptionality of a vantage point rooted in a community whose violation and erasure exposes the limits, for power, not merely of politics but of humanity itself.

In terms of racial politics, radical democratic projects need to pay attention to what they share with liberal accounts, and not just how they differ. Glen Coulthard (2014) indicts the politics of recognition that supports theoretical and practical efforts in liberal multiculturalism to come to terms with Native claims of sovereignty. He argues that this liberal perspective, which "rests on the problematic background assumption that the settler state constitutes a legitimate framework within which Indigenous peoples might be more justly included" (p. 36), seeks to grant limited autonomy while refusing the historical agency and subjecthood of Indigenous peoples and reinscribing them within the dialectic of coloniality. It is important to interrogate radical projects for the common in the same way: In spite of their gestures toward culture and difference, do such projects repeat the assimilative logic of colonialism precisely in their agnosticism regarding the priority of the suffering and struggles to which they refer? Does a framework for radical democracy need to move away from the austere vantage point from which the particularity and priority of identities and struggles are folded into a clean conceptual symmetry? And how can the notion of the common be reframed in the context of the kind of rethinking of radical democracy that is necessary in this regard?

## Toward a Decolonial Common

I believe that in response to the problems I have described in this essay we should not reject the common as a political figure and project but rather rearticulate it. In this section, I consider how the senses of being, solidarity, and democracy that the common implies can be reframed in antiracist and decolonial terms. Indeed, the notion of the common, understood in this way, has a revolutionary potential that is missing from other radical democratic projects. Moreover, I argue that what ultimately makes possible this reframing of the common, and its mobilization in an effective praxis, is the instance of pedagogy. Pedagogy opens up a horizon

of dialogue that can allow for confrontation and communication across difference, and that can enact the decentering of whiteness (even, and especially, within radical theory and practice) that is necessary to make the common a reality.

A decolonial conception of the common needs to move from the static and totalizing figure of the multitude to a sense of the common that is anchored in the specific being of the oppressed and excluded. Responsive to the materiality of suffering of those who have been cast out from humanity as it has been imagined by colonial reason, the constitution of the common begins with the impinging of this Exteriority onto history (Dussel, 2008). Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) describe this process in terms of an "undercommons" that is always operative outside of and against politics, and that surrounds and threatens enclosure itself in its unceasing creativity:

> The fort really was surrounded, is besieged by what still surrounds it, the common beyond and beneath—before and before—enclosure. The surround antagonizes the laager in its midst while disturbing that facts on the ground with some outlaw planning. (p. 17)

Thus, beyond the autonomist distinction between constituted and constituent power, a contemporary project for the common needs to start from the paradoxical agency of those who have been banished not just from the table of power but even from the competition for the crumbs—"those without face and without history" (Marcos, 1995, p. 145) that have been the targets of colonial power.

This project would be distinguished from other radical democratic perspectives in the following respects: (1) As described in the first section of this essay, a project for a decolonial common would start from the vantage point of the people and communities that have been cast out by Western reason and "development." Thus, it would have a crucial *epistemological charge*, and would be sensitive to the differing understandings that emerge, even within the multitude, depending on the historical, cultural, and experiential starting point of philosophical and political projects. (2) It would likewise be grounded in a fundamental *ethical charge* to be responsible to the materiality of suffering of the excluded. This means, in Dussel's (2003) terms, an "analectical affirmation" (an affirmation beyond and outside of Western dialectics) of the dignity of the Other. This is impossible without an investigation of the concrete dynamics of

coloniality and the phenomenology of racism. (3) In addition, it would be intent on the *emancipation* of oppressed groups and identities, rather than on the indifferent liberation and proliferation of subjectivities. This third principle rests on a recognition of the particular history-shaping force of violence against colonized communities.

This last point is in explicit contrast to the proposals of Hardt and Negri (2004, 2009), who argue that the essential violence of power consists rather in the biopolitical channeling of subjectivity into fixed forms of identity. However, in other respects their account of the common contains important theoretical starting points which we should seek to rearticulate. In particular, their emphasis on biopolitics and the ontological plane is useful against overly economistic accounts of capitalism (and struggle against it); nevertheless, we need to start from a consideration of historical forms of injury and violation in this regard, particularly in terms of race, and not merely from an emphasis on production. In addition, their focus on new forms of sociality beyond the public/private split is generative; however, this vision needs to look not only to the future but also to diverse traditional perspectives, especially Indigenous ones, on the meaning of community (Deloria, 1999). Finally, their emphasis on the emergence of new forms of revolutionary solidarity and agency is important; at the same time, we need to recognize that solidarity is always dramatically riven by difference, not simply indifferently traversed by it, as their argument often seems to suggest. Solidarity is after all the negotiation of difference, not the submergence of it in the complexity of the networked totality.

If one important conclusion here is that the notion of the common needs to be concretized and contextualized, and returned to a special reference to communities that have borne the brunt of exploitation and domination, then the space of pedagogy is a central site in which this can be undertaken. As dialogical process, as reorganization of identity, and as construction of community, pedagogy opens immediately onto the horizon of the common. But it does so not through a simple proliferation of talk; rather, it is through the collective investigation of history, and the collective consideration of the refraction of that history in the voices of participants in learning, that the scaffolding of the common is constructed. We generally proceed, even in intellectual work, from more or less determined perspectives. But pedagogy confronts participants, including educators, with an implicit interrogation not only of opinions but also of *standpoints*. Genuinely critical pedagogy takes that confrontation seriously and builds on it. Thus, in the "epistemological curiosity" that

Freire (1998) insisted on as a condition of learning, we can likewise see a crucial condition of radical democratic politics. To be epistemologically curious means to be interested in why we think and understand what we do, and *from where* this understanding takes place. A pedagogy and politics of the common should be oriented toward democracy and solidarity, but it should be oriented toward these ideas in the context of a sensitivity to the different experiences and identities among which they find quite different meanings (De Lissovoy & Brown, 2013).

Furthermore, a *decolonial* pedagogy of the common is concerned in particular with the way that the possibilities of solidarity open up—or not—for those who have suffered the depredations of colonialism and racism. Epistemological curiosity in this context implies an investigation of the ways that even the notions of democracy, emancipation, and solidarity have been historically organized under the sign of whiteness (Grande, 2004). In the context of teaching and learning, there is an opportunity to uncover the dominative cultural logic that works through progressive as well as conservative traditions, and to locate, in the understandings of those who have survived this logic, the starting points for a different project. This means, in the first place, both a decentering and a dispossession of whiteness. Just as economic justice will never be achieved without a redistribution of wealth from rich to poor, and from white people to people of color, likewise in the context of teaching the epistemological authority that white people imagine is their natural property must be stripped from them and redistributed to—or *repossessed* by—the full community of learners. This is a matter not only of very deliberate choices in terms of curriculum, but also an art of pedagogy that listens to all while centering the "undercommons" (Harney & Moten, 2013) that lives within the voices and experiences of students of color. For whites, this means a necessary loss of certainty and safety (Leonardo & Porter, 2010); but in a world in which the invulnerability of whiteness secures domination, the possibility of real dialogue depends on making whiteness insecure.

In teaching, this means striving not for equality between perspectives, but for a strategic prioritization of voices that discloses and interrogates histories of power that work moment to moment even within classroom spaces. The centrality that whiteness persistently claims for itself, even within ostensible counter-discourses, needs to be challenged by the teacher. In the space that then opens up other histories and knowledges can be heard—and a properly *emancipatory* project can be built, as opposed to the mere provocation of multiple voices. The purpose here is

not to quash the possibility of learning and participation for white people, but rather to set this possibility, and the possibility of learning for all students, on a realistic foundation. No longer able to uniquely embody the Master, or human, or even revolutionary, whites are cast into a profound and confounding state of *nepantla* from which there is no easy exit. However, it is from the depths of this very confusion that a truly solidary form of participation and learning can emerge. For students of color, the pedagogical space that this process uncovers can at the same time become available for knowledge and identity construction. There is no avoiding this itinerary for white people of subjective destitution and uneasy reconstruction; and of course for teachers just as much as students this passage is likewise a necessary prerequisite to effective critical engagement (De Lissovoy, 2010). We should recall in this connection Freire's injunction to "class suicide" for critical educators, though reframing this task in terms of coloniality rather than class alone complexifies the process, and points to the depth of identity that is necessarily engaged.

Only a project at this depth can realize the common as a genuine process of biopolitical production, capable of remaking subjectivity as well as society. Reimagined in this way, and emerging from the negotiation of standpoints described above, the common remains a useful figure for the kinds of communication and relationships that critical pedagogy can provoke in the classroom. However, this rearticulated common is the effect of a very particularly inflected and culturally situated pedagogical *community*—asymmetrical, reflexive, partisan—dedicated not to the simple proliferation of subjectivity (under the sign of the kaleidoscopic multitude) but to the honing of a specifically decolonial and insurgent identity that can recognize both comrades and adversaries.

## Conclusion

As I have described, the notion of the common, and the notions of radical democracy that are its theoretical context, need to be interrogated with regard to the persistent problematic of coloniality that they generally bracket. We should question ideas of the common and democracy within a sensitivity to the geopolitics of knowledge that pushes epistemological questions to the forefront, and from the starting point of a recognition of the persistent force of racial ontologies in shaping understandings of and projects for democracy and solidarity. At the same time, the notion of the common, reframed both as a decolonial and pedagogical project, remains

indispensable—orienting us to the importance of the politics of the subject within a revolutionary vision of learning and community. In fact, while responding to crucial problems highlighted by critical theories of race, the notion of a decolonial common—activated in and as pedagogy—can perhaps also challenge the pessimism in some race-critical accounts with regard to the possibility of social transformation, not on glib progressive grounds but on the grounds of a radically rearticulated solidarity. Speaking from the vantage point of the "colonial wound" (Mignolo, 2005), and repossessing the epistemological and existential privilege that whiteness has sought to arrogate to itself, this project would point the way forward within the concrete difficulties of commoning (as a material, embodied, and dialogical process) that prevailing critical perspectives gesture towards but ultimately fail to work through.

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CHAPTER 4

# Reassembling the Natural and Social Commons

*Jesse Bazzul and Sara Tolbert*

Creating and preserving a 'common world for all' is not so much a call, as it is a chorus. The need to continually make the commons grow exceeds the grossly uneven distribution of natural resources and wealth between the global elite and the impoverished majority.[1] Witness the scientific designation of our current geological moment, *the Anthropocene*, a moment in Earth's history so marked by the activity of one primate species that geologists have proposed an entirely new unit of geological time, where human destructiveness will remain biologically and geologically evident for tens of millions of years on planet Earth (Lewis and Maslin, 2015). The Anthropocene's extinction rate is '100 to 1,000 times higher than normal background rates, and probably constitutes the beginning of the sixth mass extinction in Earth's history' (p. 172). In the last 40 years, Earth has lost half its wildlife diversity (Carrington, 2014).

J. Bazzul (✉)
University of Regina, Regina, SK, Canada
e-mail: jbazzul@gmail.com

S. Tolbert
University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA
e-mail: saratolbert@email.arizona.edu



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While we use the term Anthropocene for the sake of its increasingly widespread recognition, we want to highlight some of its limitations:

1. It renders less visible the populations of humans who have lived for thousands of years and maintained a more productive symbiotic relationship within their material/ecological communities and
2. It disguises the central role of patriarchy capitalism in the rapid (and recent) environmental destruction that distinguishes the Anthropocene from other epochs (see Moore, 2016). However, we argue that educational communities should be fixed on the predicament of rapid environmental destruction within the more recent history of the Anthropocene, along with the widening social inequality that is inseparable from it.

Instead, current education reforms position schooling as an apparatus of social control and human capital (re)production. Resistance to these reforms involves preserving and producing a shared world in-common, for example through the free sharing of intellectual labor, protesting the inaccessibility of higher education (e.g. in Canada, Chile), high stakes testing opt-outs in the United States, massive demonstrations and strikes against neoliberal education reforms among teachers, youth, and families (e.g. in Detroit, Chicago, Mexico City), eco-justice educational movements that re-appropriate land for food access, and indigenous education movements that center collective priorities and communal politics (see Barronet and Ortega Brena, 2008). This chapter argues for educational practices that (re)engage the commons (Means, 2013; Mueller, 2008). We outline a theoretical context for the *natural* and *social* commons as pedagogical concepts, synthesizing the two in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of *assemblages* in order to highlight political possibilities of the commons for critical education.

In modernity, knowledge of the natural world has been shielded from proper political reckoning, and the importance of protecting and producing a shared *commons* obscured. As an ethico-political concept, we can view the commons as the natural and social worlds, or wealth, to which 'we' have shared, equal access. This definition is difficult to apply today, nor does it reflect the relational ethic of many indigenous communities in which humans are understood as part of, not separate from, the natural world (e.g. the Lakota mitakuye oyasin, or 'all my relations' and the Maori kaitiakanga or 'guardianship, protection' as in of/for the natural world).

Though we often view parks, conservation areas, and nature reserves as common spaces, they are seldom accessible to all humans, nor to the biota that are 'pushed out' to make way for ornamental plants, animals, and other microscopic 'critters'. To afford nature a 'political imagination', and politics the materiality it needs for enactment, 'social' and 'natural' distinctions must be blurred, while recognizing that traditional linguistic, scientific, and cultural constraints will resist such blurrings. According to philosopher Bruno Latour (2009) one reason for our current environmental mess and growing social inequality is because Eurocentric notions of politics and nature have historically been kept separate; the former confined to what 'should be' while the later 'what is'. This fundamental schism has successfully functioned to keep politics out of the 'study' of nature, and 'nature' out of the practice of politics, moral philosophy, and ethics.

From the onset of the Anthropocene, humans are themselves a geologic force. In a provocative way, educators must recognize allusions to 'nature', all that is non-human or non-artificial, as ideological. The ideological character of nature as static other can be seen not only by continued disregard for ecological realities, but also from the 'voice of warning' when scientific breakthroughs reposition our place within an unquestioned conceptualization of 'nature'. Rejecting nature as unquestionable backdrop to which we must always 'return', is essential to asking big questions that link the 'social and the natural'. For example, Slavoj Žižek (2011) stresses that considerations of capital cannot be divorced from questions of nature and puts it this way: 'how are we going to think the link between the social history of Capital and the much larger geological changes of the conditions of life on Earth'?[2] One important lesson of structuralism is precisely that the taken-for-granted should be refused. When Roland Barthes writes, 'the "natural" is in short, the ultimate outrage' (Barthes, 1977, p. 85), we should understand a fuller ontological meaning to natural—the outrage comes not just from rendering the historical and political as natural, but the 'natural as natural'! If humans are inseparable from nature, then nature itself is *always already* ideological.

This undoing of the modern culture–nature divide is a necessary part of what Hardt and Negri (2009) call *altermodernity*. That is, shedding the controlling aspects of modernity, colonialism and private property, and grasping modernity's creative, immanent powers needed for creative labor and new political and educational practices that promote a multiplicity of differences and production of the commons (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Hardt & Negri, 2013). Combining the natural and social commons

requires a creative refocus on virtual/actual ontological frameworks that allow their interplay. As Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat (2001) point out, Indigenous thought and practices have long fused the 'natural' and the political and promoted communal living between humans and non-humans.

> Modern ecology and indigenous models of politics and ethics have much in common: they are both about complex relationships between living organisms and their environments. Indigenous thought has, in my mind, one key advantage: it sees the ecosystem as the appropriate site for the study of politics and ethics. (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001, p. 139)

If *the commons* serve as the grounds for education for emancipation, how do we envision its immanent potential in classrooms and movements for social and ecological justice?

We argue here that assemblage theory, in short, the fusing of material and discursive parts in social analyses, adds a much needed ontological dimension to education research and critical pedagogy. Clayton Pierce (2015) cautions that the neoliberal restructuring of schools does not allow teachers and students to take the view that both humans and non-humans have agency, precisely because agency is geared toward (bio) capitalist ends through entrepreneurship and commodification. The prefix 'bio' describes our current political reality where forms of life, including educational life, have become the focus of modern governance and control. Pierce stresses the double meaning of 'bio' in biocapitalism. In one sense, a new form of modern governance, and capitalism, that reaches into every corner of human social life to reproduce the subjectivities and modes of living needed to reproduce the social order. However, 'bio' also means the harnessing of *all* powers of life—literally the commodification or mobilization of DNA, cells, genes, etc. for the purposes of capital.

Education must not only produce and nurture a world-in-common, but also challenge the *enclosure* of the commons—that is, exploitation of what is common (forests, groundwater, and ideas) for private interests and the production of capital. Neoliberal, global capitalist enclosure of the commons is perhaps the key political battle for education for the twenty-first century (see Means, 2014; Slater, 2014). Hendersen and Hursh (2014) outline the biopolitical nature of our current moment—resistance to neoliberal reforms will come from below through production of the commons.

## Part 1: The Commons as an Emancipatory Pedagogical Concept

As stated above, privatization (or enclosure) of the commons is dangerous because it values biotic and abiotic entities as private commodities for certain individuals, not communities or the commons. The private commodification of water in California by Nestle™ is a good example of profit accumulation destroying the commons. Yet, resistance to privatization is growing. Urban populations are consistently creating the commons through shared struggles of collective existence, and the creation of 'ecological space' (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Indigenous peoples' ecologically and community-oriented sense of place is highly threatening to the goals of capital because indigenous ways of being often do not rely on products from global capitalist commodity chains (Peña, 2014; Wildcat, 2009). However, the struggle to produce and preserve the commons is not just about commodities, but the (re)production of subjectivities needed to produce the commons (Hardt and Negri, 2009). Graham Slater (2014) encourages educators to move beyond an exclusively anthropocentric notion of the commons as shared human language, communication, and by extension, culture.

> Although this is an invaluable aspect of the common, it is limited insofar as it asserts the primacy of verbal communication in social production and centers an anthropocentric vision of communicative relationships in which meaningful and responsive relationships with nonhuman animals and environments are subordinated to intraspecies dialogue … This shortcoming is not a fatal flaw in Hardt and Negri's conceptualization of the common, rather, it indicates the need to embrace this antagonism as the grounds for elaborating a more fully ecological theorization of the common. (p. 547)

Slater emphasizes an antagonistic version of the commons, for example one that does not let settler colonists feel comfortable with a social commons that forgets destructive colonial realities. Indeed, the commons has a history—a social, colonial, ecological, geological, mythological, philosophical, and theological past.

While there is some recognition that we share ecological habitats, with the rise of immaterial labor and its cultural, cognitive, artistic, intellectual and affective products that can be shared in common, our current notion of the commons needs to expand. The (bio)political potential of immaterial labor is that the ideas, signs, and affects required for (bio)capitalist growth,

rely on interconnectivity and free sharing—paradoxically, what global (bio) capitalism needs to grow is anti-thetical to the rule of private property. A recent article in *The Guardian* on the 'end of capitalism' articulates this well:

> By building business models and share valuations based on the capture privatisation of all socially produced information, such firms are constructing a fragile corporate edifice at odds with the most basic need of humanity, which is to use ideas freely. (Mason, 2015)

The old 'logic of scarcity' rule that is widely seen to drive economies and resource development also needs to be rethought. The logic of scarcity sees 'natural resources' as something to be consumed. However, according to Hardt and Negri (2009), a key aspect of the commons is that it puts the bios to work for the commons, involving not a logic of consumption but of growth.

Resources of the commons, such as free education, are continually renewable. If we read a text, offer an interpretation, discern a new truth in science, this by no means limits anyone else in doing the same. On the contrary, interpretations and new science proliferate when people are encouraged to build off the exchange of ideas, affects and interpretations. This on its own should be a justification for offering free K–12 and higher education! The logic of consumption distorts our view of the commons. For example, we are not running out of fossil fuels, in fact, there are too many deposits, and they should be left in the ground. Education should promote a fundamental shift in the logic of production from utter consumption of the commons to the proliferation of the commons (p. 300).

In Canada, Latin America, and New Zealand indigenous curricula and pedagogies that promote non-exploitative relationships and communal living are gaining ground thanks to community and indigenous activism. In Chiapas, Mexico, the Zapatista movement led to the establishment of autonomous education for indigenous Tzetsal youth in which children learn, alongside literacy and numeracy, skills for political resistance, collective democratic engagement, caring for land, gender equality and the revolutionary role of women, etc. (Barronet and Ortega Brena, 2008). In Canada, aboriginal communities have engaged in democratic politics through dissensus in the name of equality (Rancière and Corcoran, 2010; Bazzul, 2015). Indigenous political actions break down artificial dichotomies between natural and social commons. The Idle No More movement

advocates a view of rivers, lakes, and non-humans, as part of the same commons and deserving of equal consideration—something unthinkable to a modern juridical mindset. Such activist movements are *alter-futures* (much like Hardt and Negri's concept of altermodernity), a combination of democratic thinking and communal forms of life. Idle No More employed social media to (re)produce commons resources, understandings, and labor needed to fight for just futures. Educators whose aim is to produce a common livable world must challenge colonial discourses and ontologies, where land is viewed only as a 'natural resource' for human consumption rather than that which we are ecologically embedded within and part of (Barad, 2007; Watts, 2013). As we shall see in the next section assemblage thinking can help educators and students envision something new. Education for the commons recognizes that the long-term project is one of (re)production, something continually (re)made:

> The common is thus in a paradoxical position as being a ground or a presupposition that is also the result of the process. Our analysis, then, from this point on in our research should be aimed not at 'being common' but 'making the common.' (Hardt and Negri, p. 123)

Emancipatory education and social struggles have their basis in the common, not simply as a 'resource', but 'an inexhaustible source of innovation and creativity' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, pp. 111–112). The commons consists of a multitude of singularities, subjectivities formed along the lines of sex/gender, race, culture, class, spirituality and beyond.[3] Engagement with the commons is therefore an engagement with alterity, as the commons sets the stage for interactions with singularities and becoming. Encountering alterity begins a critique of what we have taken for granted as other or self, as well as processes of becoming autonomous that arise from the production of a shared commons (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 122; Slater and Griggs, 2015).

A pedagogy of the commons employs (bio)political reason to intervene in the controlling forces of biopower that employ education as a way to maintain a White/Eurocentric/global capitalist/neocolonial vision of the world (Bazzul, 2014; Tolbert and Schindel Dimick, in press). Engaging biopolitically means (re)working forces of biopower from below toward different forms of eco-social relations—life in the service of the commons (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 125).

> Whereas the traditional notion poses the common as a natural world outside of society, the biopolitical conception of the common permeates equally all spheres of life …. We might call this an 'ecology of the common—an ecology focused equally on nature and society, on humans and the non-human world in a dynamic of interdependence, care, and mutual transformation.' (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 171)

The struggle over subjectivity is integral to the commons, and therefore biopolitical in that forms of life (subjectivities) come together in cooperation to (re)produce the commons.

The Metropolis is an extremely important site for (bio)political struggle and producing the commons today, as cities are ideal locations for interactions of the multitude and immaterial labor. Facing down neoliberal restructuring of public schooling through coalitions of teachers, students, and parents is also a form of building the commons. Such coalitions create spaces where common interests, knowledges, relationships, and forms of life grow. At the same time the commons are a creative entity always in danger of enclosure—sometimes for purported social or ecological good. Figure 4.1 diagrams some enclosures of the commons through the privatization of life (e.g. genetic, educational). Biopolitical struggle is inherent to all fields of education including science education, where the (re)production of biotechnological labor is often in conflict with science for the common good (Bazzul, 2012; Bencze and Carter, 2011; Pierce, 2013). If scientific knowledge is produced in-common and belongs to all, why should it be appropriated, enclosed by companies such as Novartis™ and Monsanto™, and not just along global capital lines, but along those of nationality, gender, and race (Shiva, 2000).

Developing education for the commons, may involve developing more qualitative indicators of both *growth* (and *corruption*) of the commons, since it exceeds the use of metrics (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Education for the commons must move away from reproducing what Hardt and Negri (2009, p. 159) identify as *corrupt* forms of the common—systems of organization geared to the needs of certain individuals and not what is common to all. Some examples of this corruption are *nepotistic practices*, the chauvinist (nationalist) *nation state* and its blind adherence to mythic natural origins, the rule of private property, ethnocentrisms, racisms, heteronormativity, and the *corporation*—a parasite of the commons for the accumulation of (bio)capital. The following educational goals are relevant for fostering the biopolitical production of the commons:

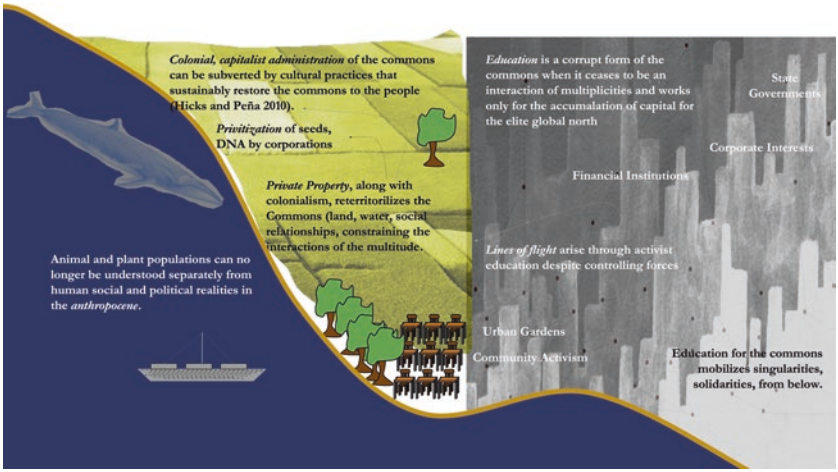


**Fig. 4.1** Assemblage of natural and social commons and the juxtaposition of urban and rural; molar and molecular; private and communal property; enclosure and freedom

- *Maximizing Free Accessibility of Knowledge*—Education must facilitate access to knowledge and give all students the competencies and tools to access this knowledge.
- *Flattening Hierarchies*—Education for the commons involves tearing down structural and pedagogical hierarchies (see Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994; Hardt, 2011).
- *Preservation of the 'Natural' Commons*—Education must employ rationalities toward the service of life, ecology and relations between humans and non-humans.
- *Trouble the 'Expert'*—Educational communities must de-privilege the voices of experts who tell us we have no alternative (like the 'TINA' rhetoric of neoliberalism).
- *Inclusiveness*—Radical inclusion should engage subjectivities at the precarious edges of politics as they have the greatest knowledge of, and ability to challenge, practices of biopower.

Education for the commons employs the power of the commons, which is greater than imperial or corporate power. Classroom communities can envision assemblages of the commons to help forge an escape from private

interests and state institutions that would contain/exploit the commons. Figure 4.1 lays out some dimensions of biopolitical engagement within the commons, including the role of cities, privatization, and collectivist practices.

Neither private interests nor state power can fully contain the commons because the commons belongs to the multitude of singularities that comprise it. What is common goes beyond any force trying to control it—its productive form is rhizomatic, rebellious, and unwieldy (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

The 'multitude' can be thought of as an assemblage of human and non-human forms of life along with abiotic factors that make life possible. Through the expansion and interaction of the multitudes a myriad of possibilities emerge. At the same time, hierarchies, walls, and relations of power that would co-opt and capture this expansion are also parts of assemblages. This is *not* to say that struggles to produce and maintain the commons are not organized, nor are they separate from modes of economic production. Quite the contrary, social and economic (re)production ultimately stems from the commons—which is why it must be the center of educational life and pedagogies of love and collective being (Freire, 1972; Hardt and Negri, 2009). The next section introduces the concept of assemblages as a way for students and teachers to elucidate the commons as the product of a multitude of singularities, along with its biopolitical character.

## Part 2: (Re)drawing the Commons with Deleuze and Guattari's Assemblages

Conceiving of the commons as complex assemblages helps provide a critical, ontological dimension to transformative research and pedagogy. Deleuze (1988) describes diagrams as machines of discursive and non-discursive content simultaneously. They either help others create or understand—or they fail. Diagrams can offer a visual representation of the natural and social commons for critical, and politically engaged, pedagogy. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) emphasis on ontology fuses the *actual* with the *virtual*—what *does exist* with what *could exist*—in order to imagine new animal/plant/non-human/human relationships.[4] Noel Gough (2004) encourages educators to re-imagine education as a material-semiotic assemblage caught up in socio-technological networks,

where connecting with these assemblages means taking into account non-organic, non-human entities. Assemblages, expressed here as *diagrammatics*, merge materialities, practices, discourses, ecological dependencies, and institutional arrangements as an assembly of *intra-acting*[5] parts, as well as relations of force that stabilize an arrangement or direct it toward a certain purpose. Diagramming assemblages is a way to *palpitate*, or tease out, multiplicities, imagine modes of becoming, trace rigid structures, and open possibilities for different actors and networks. This chapter offers three diagrammatic assemblages as a way of imagining (bio)political engagement and the commons: a *Topology of the Commons* (Fig. 4.1); *Lines of Flight* (Fig. 4.2); and the *Tar Sands Struggle* (Fig. 4.3).

Assemblages describe how parts of a system relate and co-constitute each other, as well as ways of knowing and doing (Barad, 2007; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Immanent becoming is the terrain of the assemblage; and diagramming assemblages clears space for different thoughts and forms of collective action (Ford, 2014). The parts or entities of an assemblage have various *histories*: social, material, cultural, ecological, biological, physical, ideological, fictional, mythological etc., that provide a socio-material account of the interplay between plants, animals, peoples (privileged and oppressed), institutions, relations of power, and geologic and evolutionary forces. This point of historicity means that assemblages

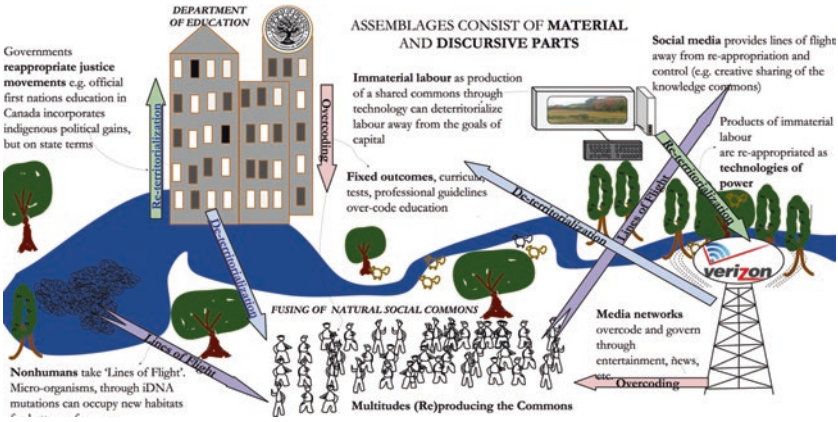


**Fig. 4.2** Assemblage demonstrating the concepts of reterritorialization, deterritorialization, lines of flight, and overcoding and their relation to the commons

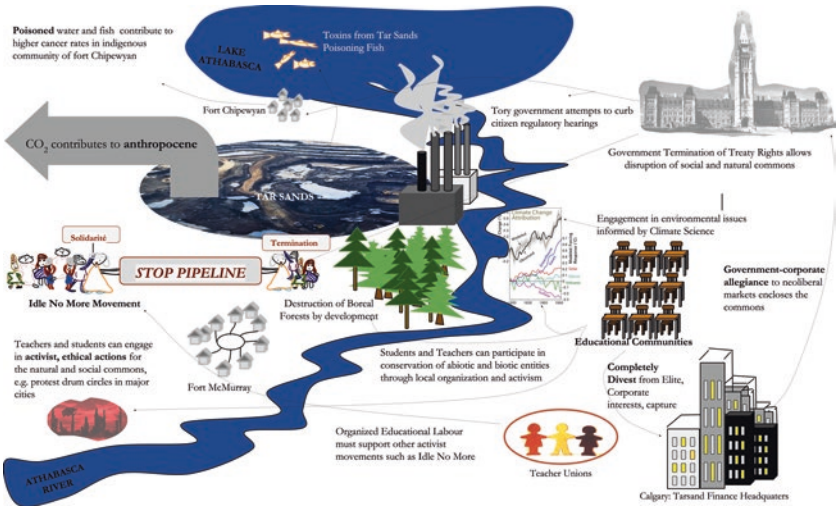


**Fig. 4.3** Assemblage of the political problem of the Tar Sands

are simultaneously discursive and social, biological, and material. As Karen Barad (2007) asks, 'If biological forces are in some sense always already historical ones, could it be that there is also some important sense in which historical forces are always already biological' (p. 65)?

Educational institutions, networks, and practices figure into assemblages both as mechanisms of control and (bio)political intervention. Assemblages consist of material and discursive parts (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), and can be 'free-flowing' (*deterritorialized*) or 'bound-up' (*reterritorialized*) and discursively *over-coded* with various coding systems such as laws, speech acts, DNA. Figure 4.2 demonstrates the concepts of reterritorialization, deterritorialization, lines of flight, and overcoding in relation to the commons. In addition, the differences between arborescent structures and rhizomatic lines of flight can be made visible as forces of control, subversion and becoming.

The part to whole relationship is vital to understanding assemblages. Parts of an assemblage, for example, a classroom or body of water have contextually specific capacities, and when they intra-act they have emergent properties that cannot be attributed to the individual parts (see Bazzul and Kayumova, 2015; Delanda, 2006). The intra-action between entities in assemblages separates them from collections. Parts can be separated from

one assemblage and 'plugged' into another resulting in new capacities and emergent properties. In this way, *performativity* is inherent in assemblages, where the semblance of a unified whole is actually a performance of interacting capacities that change depending on how parts are fitted together. Assemblages are *irreducible* in that they can't be reduced to the sum of their parts, yet *decomposable* in that they can be broken apart and reformed into different assemblages with different emergent properties, performing different functions. Assemblages trouble totalities like 'society' and 'humanity' (Delanda, 2006). The intra-actions of the parts of an assemblage (multiplicities) enact processes, including processes of making the social and natural commons. Diagramming assemblages can help locate both what is constraining and enabling to these processes.[6] Figure 4.3 is an example of the political problem of the Tar Sands, diagrammed as an assemblage.

Diagramming assemblages allows educators to consider forces that appropriate and exploit the commons, including the labor and subjectivities of the multitude. For example, when thinking about the sociopolitical context of charter schools in the United States, the language, affects, and capital, operationalized by arborescent structures such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, can be diagrammed and visualized. In Fig. 4.3, forces, peoples, and institutions that keep the Tar Sands operating at the expense of communities as well as productive forces that fight against enclosure of the commons via resource extraction can be related together. Assemblages allow educational communities to determine lines of flight, or modes of deterritorialization, away from rigid, authoritarian, and destructive structures. These lines of flight are vital to political movements, because as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) put it: 'there is always something that flows or flees, that escapes binary organization, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machine: things that are attributed to a change of values, the youth, women, the mad and so on' (p. 216).

What Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue for in *A Thousand Plateaus* is a focus on the ontological production of social life: unhinging the fixity of things to imagine how they can be re-materially assembled, disassembled, or altered. What we are also seeking through the use of assemblages are alternative forms of subjectivity—to imagine alternative powers. If we say that the 'subject' of an assemblage is multiple, as all subjectivities are, we must acknowledge at least three points:

1. The subject exists only in relation to other entities,
2. The subject is a location of multiplicity since the term 'subject' itself is understood to be a linguistic construction and an effect of power, and

3. An individual's complete subjectivity can never be truly 'captured' (Foucault, 1977; Butler, 1997).

Working with assemblages helps facilitate a reconstitution of parts/entities to bring about (bio)political, queer events—new monsters on the horizon. *Desire* as a creative, revolutionary force immanent to assemblages can challenge the existing social order (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; Styhre, 2002). The problem is that the social order can arrange communally harmful interests that act as a capture for desire. An important goal of education should be to refocus desire toward the production and preservation of the commons. Assemblages of the natural and social commons—bird populations, community gardens, a university—all embody particular configurations of desire. Diagramming assemblages can involve outlining how desire is invested in certain consumerist interests at the expense of environmental justice, as well as, how communities can harness desire for making and protecting the commons. *Deterritorializing* from the capitalist structures and arrangements meant to capture and harness our desire will come from heterogeneous, plural, and collective modes of thought and action (Gough and Price, 2009).

Finally, if assemblages afford new ways of being, questions of ethics emerge. Karen Barad (2007) articulates the ethics of intra-connectivity, as providing *the ability* for entities, ecosystems, and organisms to *respond*, that is, an allowance of becoming. However this *ethos* is even more enlivened when we conceive of being in assemblages as an ethico-political problem of the commons. Assemblages of the common would not only allow entities to respond with forms of self-determination, but insist that responses allow the commons to grow by providing the material conditions of becoming for all. Assemblages without emancipatory political considerations are more likely to embody an ethos of continued destruction and inequality—especially if controlling forces of modernity, private property, colonialism, and white supremacy envelop all forms of life.

## Drawing Things Together

This chapter is part of a larger effort to reconceptualize education for the commons. We have approached this project through assemblage theory. We'd like to conclude with a summary of the major points about the commons and diagramming assemblages.

1. The commons consist of everything that can be shared in common such as knowledge, ecosystems, and social movements.
2. The commons provides a space for becoming different, living in just relations with others, and a merging of the natural and social.
3. The commons is in danger of enclosure by those that seek the short-term gain of a few.
4. Struggles to create and preserve the commons are (bio)political as they are struggles over collective forms of existence.
5. Education for preserving and producing the commons is a site of biopolitical struggle.
6. Diagramming the commons through assemblages can help students and teachers trace oppressive powers and find different, collective forms of existence.

In a time when the story of an 'individual' existence is being increasingly revealed as a gross misrepresentation of the complexities of our 'world-ecology',[7] a story serving no one, we desperately need another (set of) story apparatus(es) to reimagine our collective and intertwined human/non-human, biotic/abiotic existence. Indeed, there is no individual existence; 'we are all lichens' (Gilbert, Sapp, and Tauber, 2012, p. 336). Diagramming is a (re)storying apparatus, a form of art–science activism that can help participants in educational communities imagine and (inspire to) enact new possibilities for more mutualistic symbioses with/in nature: 'The human social apparatus of the Anthropocene tends to be top heavy and bureaucracy prone. Revolt needs other forms of action and other stories for solace, inspiration, and effectiveness' (Haraway, 2016, p. 36, Kindle Locations 1094–1095). No less than our common future is at stake. Diagramming the commons can be an activity for educational communities to understand, produce and preserve the commons.

**Acknowledgments** We would like to thank Alexa Schindel Dimick for her careful reading of this chapter. Her insight is invaluable.

## Notes

1. Hardt and Negri (2009) refer to both 'the common' and 'the commons' in their writing, the essential difference being that the former is more abstract than the latter. We refer to the commons in this paper as a key pedagogical concept, which can also address what is 'in common'.
2. See in more detail Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2009) 'The Climate of History: Four Theses.'

3. The Multitude can refer to any beings; however, peoples, subjectivities that have come against mechanisms of (bio)power, are most able to then turn against this power biopolitically. This can be seen in indigenous struggles, where peoples are fighting extinctions, and continue to work against forms of imperial colonial power towards new ways of living.
4. Todd May (2005) characterizes Deleuze and Guattari's virtual/actual distinction in terms of problems and solutions. Problems are inexhaustible open fields, while solutions consist of stable identities tied to a certain form of a problem.
5. We choose to use the word 'intra-action' to recognize Karen Barad's insight that entities and phenomena in nature are mutually constitutive, emerging through an entanglement with each other. Our position is that both interaction and intra-action are useful and accurate terms to describe entities in relationship.
6. Although we focus on assemblages that involve humans, assemblages, due to their virtual character, can also describe the growing field of ecology and science and technology studies (see Hustak and Myers, 2012; Stengers, 2010).
7. See Moore (2015).

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CHAPTER 5

# Toward an Elaboration of the Pedagogical Common

*Gregory N. Bourassa*

## Some Prefatory Remarks

In the opening of their most recent book, *Declaration*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri put forth a provocative assertion: their text is not a manifesto but, as their title suggests, a declaration, the key distinction being that a manifesto aims to summon something into existence, whether it be a new world or a global subject of opposition. In contrast, for Hardt and Negri (2012), a declaration puts forth "a new set of principles and truths" derived from the *already-present* desires of the multitude (p. 1). The insight of this inversion proves to be valuable, for it calls on a type of responsiveness to the form and content of social movements that are already occurring. It is a methodological approach that maintains that theory must be responsive to practice. Moreover, it assumes the primacy of a constituent social ontology or what we might regard as an "extra-capitalist commons, the social dark matter of neoliberal society" (Fleming, 2014, p. 7). For the purposes of this chapter, the distinction between a manifesto

G.N. Bourassa (✉)
University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, USA
e-mail: gregory.bourassa@uni.edu



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and a declaration can serve as a helpful starting place to begin thinking about the relationship between pedagogy and the common.

One could make the argument that in Paulo Freire's (2000) writings we find a similar line of thought in his cautionary remarks about the impatient revolutionary educator who seeks to bypass a form of problem-posing education, opting instead to "utilize the banking method as an interim measure, justified on grounds of expediency" (p. 86). In such a scenario, the impatient educator, like a prophet with a heightened urgency for the revolutionary moment, seeks to guide students along an already-determined, *proper* path. Here, the educator as prophet verges on the position that "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 72). The cost of this epistemic arrogance is that the educator—as "proprietor of revolutionary wisdom"—denies *communion* and impairs students' creative power (pp. 60–61). For Freire, this approach violates what he understands to be a dialogical revolutionary process and, as such, the impatient pedagogy of the manifesto must be understood as a form of banking education. The collective process of inquiry that is so crucial to Freire's model of problem-posing education is negated in the pedagogy of the manifesto, supplanted by an inexplicable mistrust of the creative and social power of students. Thus, in an effort to liberate, the pedagogy of the manifesto utilizes an instrument of alienation that closes "the dynamic present" in order to summon a "predetermined future" (p. 84).

In this chapter, I consider two readings of Freire that are helpful in pointing the way beyond the pedagogy of the manifesto. Tyson Lewis and Frank Margonis have both extended Freire's analysis and attempted to counter the most insidious aspects of the pedagogy of the manifesto by reading Freire through a messianic and Levinasian lens, respectively. Moreover, through these readings I try to pinpoint a number of the key tensions that have productively aggravated theories of the common. Namely, in the form of a question, I ask: In what situations might we think of the common as *already-here* and in what situations might we conceive of it as *not-yet*? Or, put differently, should the common be imagined as a place of arrival, or one of departure, or perhaps even neither or both? Such explorations are crucial and potentially expand or constrict the ability of theories of the common to mobilize around ongoing struggles, particularly those rooted in forms of identity politics. We might attribute some confusion around these questions to the opening remarks in *Multitude*, where Hardt and Negri (2004) somewhat enigmatically

suggested that the common "is not so much discovered as it is produced" (p. xv). While this rightly safeguards against romantic propositions of recovering the common as if it were an originary subjective essence or an *a priori* identity, it tends to be dismissive of forms of struggle in which identity politics is a central component, not to mention the edifying forms of biopolitical production that emerge from such struggles. Hardt and Negri offer something of a correction in *Commonwealth*. There, we find a more nuanced discussion of identity politics, the abolition of identity and the paths to altermodernity—paths that grow out of but also go beyond struggles rooted in the identities of antimodernity. Thus, in their later writings, Hardt and Negri (2009) frequently describe a process of encounter through which "the common is *discovered* and produced" (p. 256, emphasis mine).

This shift calls for us to be ever-more attentive to the already-here dimensions of the common. To fully accept the common as a point of arrival, however, is to conceal difference and multiplicity. As Gilles Deleuze (1994) has suggested, the emphasis on a fixed identity, and its tendency toward representation, not only conceals difference and multiplicity but obstructs forms of becoming. The problem here is that the biopolitical production of the common may be foreclosed, or, worse yet, tend toward forms that are consistent with capitalist command or the constituted order. Thus while the aim is to move away from a politics fixed on identity, Hardt and Negri (2009), nevertheless, suggest that we cannot preclude the possibility of starting there. In other words, while there is the risk of constraining singularity in the forms of identity, we must not deny or neglect to "build on the promises of the common they mobilize" (p. 164). This raises a number of complications, and suggests that an important task for educational theorists exploring the relationship between pedagogy and the common is to attend to the above questions and the implicit presuppositions contained in our responses.

I try to address these tensions by embracing Lewis' messianic interpretation of Freire, as well as Margonis' Levinasian reading, while, at the same time, insisting on the indispensability of a Marxian analysis of the capitalist modes of relation. This latter emphasis allows for an understanding of the expropriating logics of constituted power and, more importantly, acknowledges the forms of biopolitical production that are already here and very much the product, so to speak, of antagonistic struggles with and through forms of identity politics. Moreover, I enthusiastically adopt Lewis' and Margonis' suspicion of the prescriptive thrusts of educational

projects, whether by calling forth a predetermined type of student subject or guiding students from the improper to the proper. In this way, I follow Lewis (2010) in his skepticism of "the pedagogy of the manifesto," for it attempts to "dictate *proper* political action and *proper* political goals" (p. 244, emphasis mine). It is an approach that risks becoming insensitive to "new forms of revolutionary politics" that are *already* taking place (Badiou, 2012, p. 3). Similarly, by attempting to be more responsive to the already-here dimensions of the common, I follow Margonis (2008) in thinking that a pedagogical ethics begins with a basic understanding of students as "collective beings, whose abilities to learn and think and act are developed most powerfully when they are positioned within intersubjective spaces that draw out their strengths, bolster their confidence, and call their intelligence to a higher level of attunement" (p. 65). For these reasons and others, I am tempted to extend Lewis' analysis and cast it on all forms of pedagogy. That is, I am inclined to ask: Can pedagogy ever really escape the problematic tendencies and teleological strivings of the manifesto? Is pedagogy always an exhaustion of potentiality, a depotentiation of the common?

Finally, with these considerations I pivot to Noah De Lissovoy's insightful essay "Pedagogy in Common," which explores various iterations of the common: transnational, communicative, postcolonial and ecological. Alongside these constructions, De Lissovoy introduces the idea of *the pedagogical common*. The concept, however, remains unexplored and is eclipsed by his development of what he calls "pedagogy in common." While De Lissovoy's concept of pedagogy in common offers a number of important—and similar—insights that contribute to the idea of the "pedagogical common" that I elaborate here, I want to suggest that these two framings are very different and that the pedagogical common warrants theoretical consideration as a concept in itself. Thus this chapter takes some liberty in exploring an imaginative reading of the unexplored within De Lissovoy's text.

To develop this concept, I draw from Arjun Appadurai and his distinction between *culture* and *cultural* in order to offer a similarly tentative sketch that delineates *pedagogy* from that which is *pedagogical*. I suggest that the adjectival form potentially connotes a common dimension that is often concealed in proprietary conceptions of pedagogy. Moreover, pedagogy is often conceived and employed as a technology that is attached to a teleological outcome. Thus, if pedagogy (in its revolutionary form) crudely attempts to bring about a particular type of subject, then attend-

ing to that which is pedagogical entails a different type of operation: a collective responsiveness to the already-animated intersubjective spaces that we inhabit. It calls for educational theorists to be attentive to that which is already here, namely constituent forms of life and the productive dimensions of the common. Furthermore, to be attuned to that which is pedagogical is to insist on a conception of "men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 84). Finally, it better enables us to appreciate not only what is common about the pedagogical but what is pedagogical about the common.

In what follows, I will suggest that the pedagogical common is an important concept that allows us to explore forms of educational praxis that not only withdrawal from the most insidious pedagogies of the manifesto but the proprietary logics of pedagogy in general. The break from the property relations of pedagogy is a potentially subversive challenge to the logics of coloniality, patriarchy and whiteness that subsume many educational projects, relations and spaces. Moreover, the turn to the pedagogical common opens a horizon for the production of a new political terrain, one in which youth, particularly those most vulnerable in what bell hooks (2003) describes as an "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal" social order, are understood to be the main protagonists whose collective faculties of living labor and living knowledge nourish new visions of society (p. 1).

## Challenging the Pedagogy of the Manifesto

Lewis has suggested that critical pedagogy is strained by prophetic tendencies. Much like Hardt and Negri, what is at stake for Lewis (2010) in the prophet's message of a time to come is the "closure of the present" (p. 235). The pedagogy of the manifesto too hastily attempts to call forth a particular type of revolutionary subject and thus takes the form of an enclosure that "exhaust[s] potentiality in the form of actuality" (p. 247). Reading against the tendency to situate Freire's liberation theology in this prophetic tradition, Lewis offers a compelling account of what he refers to as Freire's *messianic moment*. Exploring Freire's (2000) assertion that liberatory education reconciles the teacher–student contradiction in such a way "that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students," Lewis proposes that critical pedagogy can be returned to the time of the now—*kairòs* (p. 72). In Lewis' (2010) terms, "the messianic reveals an immanence

between this world and the future world" (p. 239). The key to this messianic moment is the division of the division that separates teacher and students. The figures of teacher and student are suspended or deactivated, inviting a new space and time of possibility and allowing unforeseen ways of being and relating in the world that are otherwise foreclosed in the traditional student–teacher relation. In other words, this division of the division produces a remnant—a moment and zone of indistinction. The teacher *as not* teacher—but also *as not* student—is in communion with students *as not* students, ultimately rendering inoperative the student–teacher relation that is characteristic of banking education.

In this new space of potentiality, the corrupt script of constituted power is set aside: the archetypal and hierarchical ordering so recognizable in classroom settings is challenged by an authority that "becomes authorial through its deactivation" (p. 243). Drawing from Jacques Rancière, Lewis suggests that we read Freire's spatial remnant as an *atopia*—"an immanent space of displacement and defamiliarization where individuals no longer know who they are because hierarchies and subject positions are suspended through dialogue" (pp. 245–246). The dwelling place of this atopia is one of open potentiality that—in stark contrast to the pedagogy of the manifesto—conceives of education as a pure means without end. Moreover, the becoming subject of this education is not preconfigured *a priori* but emerges or becomes imperceptible through this dialogical activity. This process gives new meaning to Freire's (2000) conception of education as a common event, where "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72). In this way, the temporal (*kairòs*) and spatial (atopia) dimensions that Freire invites offer a new foundation for the biopolitical production of the common.

Alongside Lewis, there is another re-reading of Freire that is worth considering here. In attending to the "relational closures" characteristic of student–teacher relations—particularly those strained by colonial logics—Margonis (2007) considers the reconciliation of two traditions typically understood to be bound in opposition (p. 176). On the one hand, there is the traditional Marxian emphasis of Freire. This is a mode of analysis that strives to overcome the relational gulf, and particularly the *capitalist mode of relation* that produces a chasm between the oppressors and the oppressed. On the other hand, from the vantage point of the Levinasian tradition, to assume a category such as "the oppressed" is an immediate act of violence, given that this tradition asserts the Other to be unknowable

prior to face-to-face encounters. Thus a Levinasian approach to pedagogical relations posits that Marxian frameworks—by assuming a subordinate positionality of the Other—enact a relational closure that short-circuits pedagogical and ethical possibilities.

Similar to the messianic moments that Lewis suggests are made possible in the space of atopia, Margonis proposes that the Levinasian event is an invitation into the open, "to those moments of pedagogical exchange where teachers and students lose their scripts and anxiously search for the best ways to respond to one another" (p. 180). For Margonis, this ethics has the potential to produce a powerful intersubjective space where the preplanned aims of the pedagogy of the manifesto are discarded in favor of a Levinasian form of welcoming that refuses totalizing and finite descriptions of students. This Levinasian ethics can aid critical pedagogy and disrupt the "economy of the revolutionary narrative" that "predetermines what the critical teacher can hear and see in her engagement with students" (Margonis, 2008, p. 66). As such, it allows for the elements of mystery and surprise, creating an opening to valorize subjugated knowledges, while also producing new knowledges that might otherwise not find expression. Thus in jettisoning the prescriptive revolutionary narrative, one can be attentive to "the embodied dynamics of the educational relationship—the traits of students and teachers which are *already there*" (Margonis, 1999, p. 105; emphasis mine).

Here, however, we stumble upon some of the key tensions identified earlier: the question of whether we imagine the common as already-here or not-yet. Moreover, should the common be imagined as a place of arrival, or one of departure? Or, perhaps neither or both? Margonis' exploration of Freire's educational thought provides some helpful insights to consider such questions. By exploring a pedagogical ethics that is at once imbued with a Levinasian openness and also attuned to "the social, political, and existential dynamics of relational closures," Margonis (2007) posits a formulation that begins to displace the oppositions between unity and plurality and form and content that potentially muddle our understandings of the common (p. 176). Instead, we arrive at a pedagogical conception of the common that acknowledges its dual dimension: *Our communication, collaboration, and cooperation, furthermore, not only are based on the common that exists but also in turn produce the common* (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 128). The common, then, is already-here and not-yet, already targeted by and exceeding the logics of expropriation and, at the same time, an indiscernible condition of potentiality in the form of the *as not* or *not-yet*.

If it is the case, however, that we are to read Freire through a messianic and/or Levinasian lens, it is likewise the case, as Margonis (2007) suggests, that within Freire we can also find the critiques that force us to attend to the limitations and "very real constraints" that accompany these readings (p. 181). Simply put, the colonial, gendered and racial asymmetries of the constituted order inescapably pervade educational spaces. While one can aim to suspend these relations, this is not easily achieved nor is to desirable to gloss over the *epistemological remainder* that such asymmetries produce. That is, the "subjugated knowledges" and standpoints that take form from such asymmetries must not only be validated but they must play a crucial role in undermining the logics and knowledge of an imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal system while leading the way in imagining and valuing alternative ways of being that violate this constituted order (Collins, 2000, p. 251). In other words, the desire to read Freire through either a messianic or Levinasian filter must be strongly tempered by a recognition of "the adversarial field of classroom relationships" (Margonis, 2007, p. 181). We might think of such relationships as relational closures of the common that infect educational spaces, constrain singularity, and often crystallize representational forms of identity. Following Margonis (1999)—who does not merely reconcile a Levinasian ethics with a Marxian mode of analysis, but more importantly makes us aware of how they can both inform a pedagogical ethics—I propose to engage in a generous and creative re-reading through which we acknowledge that "one of the distinctive strengths of Freire's relational perspective is the capacity to capture *both* the dynamics of the face-to-face encounter and the ways in which microscopic relationships are partly constituted by sociological and political institutions" (p. 102, emphasis mine). It is with this task in mind that I attempt to elaborate the concept of *the pedagogical common*.

## The Pedagogical

In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Appadurai develops an important distinction between *culture* (the noun) and *cultural* (the adjective). In Appadurai's (1996) view, "much of the problem with the noun form has to do with its implication that culture is some kind of object, thing, or substance" (p. 12). Here, culture falls into a trap. It appears as a fixed, settled substance—a property. In this regard, the term culture takes on a conceptual form that tends to obscure difference, fric-

tion and, ultimately, operations of power. The dimensions of difference only emerge through the adjectival use, *cultural*, to indicate, for instance, that something has a *cultural dimension*. Starting from this concern for difference and contestation, Appadurai elaborates on how the term *culture* develops and delimits certain understandings:

> culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension that attends to a situated and embodied difference. Stressing the dimensionality of culture rather than its substantiality permits our thinking of culture less as a property of individuals and groups and more as a heuristic device that we can use to talk about difference. (pp. 12–13)

Immediately, we can follow Appadurai's lead and establish some useful distinctions between *pedagogy* and *pedagogical*. Pedagogy, as a noun, connotes a sort of fixed substance that one possesses or employs, often—but not always—independent of any consideration of context. Some have sought to account for context with the idea of a situated pedagogy but this fails to address the proprietary assumptions about pedagogy in the first place, for it still assumes that pedagogy is a technology to be employed by the educator as owner.

Such proprietary assumptions are difficult to shed. We might even say that there seems to be a proprietary logic that is endemic to the very term, making it incomprehensible outside of a relationship to an owner with deliberate end goals. For instance, it is not uncommon for prospective and practicing educators to be queried: "What can you tell me about *your* pedagogy?" Such questions assume an asymmetrical educational relationship where the educator is the proprietor of a particular pedagogy which can be wielded to produce a predetermined learning outcome or, in the case of the impatient revolutionary educator, a predetermined student subject. What is at stake here, closely orbiting questions of ownership, are struggles concerning the uneven terrain of knowledge validation and the widespread dismissal of some populations as "agents of knowledge" (Collins, 2000, p. 266). Thus struggles materialize not just for "the right to learn but also *the authority to know*" (De Lissovoy, Means, & Saltman, 2015, p. 73). If an embrace of pedagogy secretes a form of banking education, then it also mobilizes the capitalist modes of relation along with it. This point better allows us to understand institutions of schooling as "a key space of conflict, where the ownership of knowledge, the reproduction of the labor force, and the

creation of social and cultural stratifications are all at stake" (Caffentzis & Federici, 2009, p. 125).

The adjective *pedagogical*, however, immediately calls our attention to difference, disrupting the proprietary dimensions that are associated with the noun use of pedagogy. For instance, we could say that something has a *pedagogical dimension*, stressing "the idea of situated difference in relation to something local, embodied, and significant" (p. 12). Similar to Appadurai's adjectival use of culture, the adjectival use of pedagogical permits a way of thinking that is less about an educator as proprietor and, instead, points us toward a recognition of the differences, dissonances and asymmetries that pervade the contexts we inherit and navigate. In other words, it may be the case that our continued use of pedagogy as a noun not only forecloses an alternative future but it also tends to conceal. What is concealed are pedagogical dimensions that already animate a particular educational space.

This concealment, if unexplored, has grave consequences, for education unfolds in something akin to what Margonis calls *social fields*. Such fields are alive with forces, and are animated by subjects who are thrust into intersubjective relation with others. Educators, then, would be wise to ask, "What are the pedagogical dimensions of the social fields that we inherit and inadvertently inhabit?" Considering this question would entail, as Margonis (2011) points out, "Viewing educational spaces as social fields with rhythms and patterns of communication allow[ing] us to assess the dynamism of the educational relationships in play" (p. 437). In this way, social fields precede us and pervade our interactions. We enter into them and inherit their histories, values, logics and rationalities. Hence, all education unfolds on a particular social and political terrain, within a particular field. This is the inescapable reality that Freire's Marxian analysis never allows us to jettison. This means that the pursuit of knowledge and education—the biopolitical production of the common—can never be a neutral endeavor. Given that the social logics of white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy and imperialism have been so durable despite varying degrees of contestation, what W. E. B. Du Bois (2002) called "deep education" remains, for many, a dangerous, collective, liberatory and subversive act (p. 72). It is necessarily a clash with constituted power. This is so because, as Jose Medina (2013) claims, "Social injustices breed epistemic injustices" (p. 27). In other words, if social injustices persist—and they certainly do—then epistemic injustices engulf social fields, further contributing to the devaluation of subjugated knowledges while bolstering

"processes whereby some lives and forms of life are made more or less valuable than others" (Means, 2013, p. 18).

Needless to say, given this asymmetrical "topography of exploitation," the relation of the common to capitalist command takes different forms (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 151). Indeed, as Hardt and Negri (2004) suggest, "the logic of exploitation … is not by any means the same for everyone" and "we should recognize that this implies divisions of labor that correspond to geographical, racial, and gender hierarchies" (p. 151). Perhaps the uneven unfolding of the logics of expropriation and exploitation for different populations is best understood by grasping capital's dual relationship with the common. That is, the common is both a *source* and *threat* for capital, which is "vampire-like," for it "lives only by sucking living labour" (Marx, 1976, p. 342). Clayton Pierce (2013) offers a thorough account of how this plays out educationally in a process he refers to as *extractive schooling*, through which "educational vitality has become a mineable good" (p. 3). In this process it is a rather banal or benign form of the common that capitalist command seeks to proliferate. For the most part, as Gigi Roggero (2010) explains, such a form of extractive schooling abides by "upstream" logics of capital, whereby "the act of accumulation, the capture of the value produced in common by living labor/knowledge, takes place more and more at the end of the cycle" (p. 359). Here, capital kindles the common with the aim of expropriating its productivity.

Opposite of this type of kindling, however, capitalist command also has a more arsonous relation to the common. If for some populations there is an expropriation of the common at the end of a cycle, for others—those "dangerous classes from the perspective of the forces of order"—there is a preemptive enclosure or clearing of the common early in its life cycle, or even when it is in embryonic form (Hardt & Negri, 2012, p. 23). This type of fire to the common does not aim to expropriate its productivity but to suffocate its biopolitical production and burn its subversive character to the ground. This is exemplified quite clearly in Alex Means' (2013) critical ethnography, *Schooling in the Age of Austerity: Urban Education and the Struggle for Democratic Life*, in which the school functions as an apparatus of enclosure that circumvents opportunities for students of color to be, interact, and produce educational life "in common with others" (p. 29). For instance, dress codes, scripted curricula, surveillance, the school-to-prison pipeline, and other policies and practices of disposability operate in this fashion to preemptively enclose the common and arrest biopolitical production.

By being attentive to asymmetries of power, enduring colonial legacies, and the uneven logics of expropriation and exploitation, we could say that the educator begins with an attentiveness to *the pedagogical*, that is, with an attentiveness to the rivaling epistemic and ontological tensions that already animate educational spaces. To be clear, the pedagogical—returned to noun form—is that which is inherited and therefore must be unveiled and attended to with responsibility. It is always already acting on us and we must constantly discern its unfolding logics and confront the ways in which they are sustained. However, there is another dimension of the pedagogical that reveals itself here—the pedagogical common—and we must attend to it "from a position of receptivity," for doing so may offer a way to counter the logics of disposability described above (Margonis, 2008, p. 65).

## The Surplus of the Pedagogical Common

In the metamorphosis from noun form (*pedagogy*) to adjectival form (*pedagogical*), and back to noun form (*the pedagogical*), something significant occurs: the pedagogical sheds its proprietary dimensions. Such a shift gestures toward a process of "transforming that which was once private property into that which belongs to no one" (Lewis, 2012, p. 847). This is significant because the pedagogical, as a noun, acquires a dual meaning. On the one hand, as suggested above, it connotes a social field of constituted power. Attending to this dimension of the pedagogical allows one to retain a Marxian analysis that is necessary to identify logics of exploitation and abolish capitalist modes and hierarchies of relation. On the other hand, by jettisoning proprietary dimensions, the pedagogical is immediately relational and thus becomes a key site of the common—a collective and intersubjective site of biopolitical production. Thus while the pedagogical is a social field that is imbued with the dynamics of constituted power, we can also say that such pedagogical social fields are always-information, unsettled and contested. Moreover, I would propose that the common is the constitutive motor, the foundation of the pedagogical, while constituted power merely emerges as an apparatus of capture. This autonomist formulation places certain responsibilities on educators that are easily elided when pedagogy is relied on as a technology, for in attending to the pedagogical—in noun form, as a concrete situation (a here and now) of a particular social field—one is simultaneously engaging the

frictional undercurrents of the common and the reactionary rhythms and patterns of constituted power.

Ultimately, I want to suggest that a collective attentiveness to the pedagogical is a crucial component of what Margonis (1999) refers to as a "pedagogical ethics" (p. 105). Such an attentiveness is a necessary step to appreciate the generative aspects of the common. Attending to the pedagogical might begin with some very basic questions: What are the hierarchies that are presumed to operate in this social field? What ways of knowing and thinking are valued or devalued in this field? What are the investments that particular groups have in the unfolding of knowledge production in this space? While educators must perpetually wrestle with such questions, it is important to invite students to collectively engage in these inquiries as well and, moreover, to recognize the ways in which youth are already wrestling with such questions. The point here, then, is not for educators to be the ones that ask these questions or pose problems. This paternalistic type of educational relationship should be problematized. Many students already confront such questions on a daily basis while doing the difficult labor of valorizing subjugated knowledges and inventively violating the codes of constituted power. But educators do have a responsibility to allow for and foster educational openings or events that, rather than leading to a particular end, affirm perspectives and ways of being that can initiate new beginnings and allow for the indeterminacy of "a new thing," emerging "into an old world" (Arendt, 1963, p. 193).

Not surprisingly, Freire provides partial insights about what it might mean to attend to the pedagogical. Through a collective process of posing the "'class as a text'" to be read, Freire (2005) suggests that the class can arrive at "a new understanding of itself," leading "to the production of new knowledge about itself, through a better understanding of its previous knowledge" (p. 90). As Freire describes it, this process of knowledge production starts with concrete realities, but is ultimately open-ended. This reading of the educational space itself and its absent-presences, along with the collective body that inhabits it, cultivates unanticipated forms of imagination and offers a "new understanding of teaching and learning, and of discovery" (p. 96). In fact, this section of Freire's text, *Teachers as Cultural Workers*, may offer some of the best clues for how both Levinasian and Marxian traditions can, together, inform a pedagogical ethics. Moreover, it also reveals that Freire was very much attuned to the dimensions of the pedagogical common, for he sought to violate,

at every step, "the claim to ownership" over educational spaces (p. 95). For Freire, the educational space stripped of proprietary dimensions is always common and in formation because, as Roggero (2011) puts it, the knowledge produced in and through the pedagogical common is "embodied in living labor, its production, and its struggles" (p. 8).

Thus we might be well served to read Freire not as a technician of pedagogy but as an astute observer of the pedagogical. Moreover, we might creatively read Freire as a theorist of the common who offered numerous clues about the common dimensions of the pedagogical and the pedagogical dimensions of the common. In this view, *communion* is one of his central concepts, albeit one that remains underdeveloped and, as such, open to reinvention. What is clear, however, is that communion is pivotal for Freire because it is a precondition for forms of biopolitical production. But if communion does not appear prominently in Freire's (2000) writings or if it seems to fade at times in his analysis, it is largely because he so keenly discerned the machinations and parasitic tendencies of a "praxis of domination" (p. 126). He painstakingly focuses on the ways in which constituted power and capitalist command seek to eradicate the biopolitical production and processes of natality that communion engenders. Reading Freire through an autonomist framework, we could say that a praxis of domination emerges to preempt *actors in intercommunication* laboring through common problems (p. 129). His concern for communion, then, ends up taking form in a detailed analysis of its opposite, a praxis of domination, or what we could call enclosures, the "historical antonym and nemesis" of the common (Linebaugh, 2014, p. 1).

Still, it may be that Freire offers some of the best clues about the questions I posed earlier: is the common already-here or not-yet? Is it a point of arrival or one of departure? In one of his most dynamic passages that illuminates his understanding of the pedagogical dimensions of the common, Freire (2000) writes, "we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that human beings in communion liberate each other" (p. 133). Here, Freire reveals the biopolitical and pedagogical dimensions of the common. Such an insight takes on new meaning, however, when we pair it with Hardt and Negri's (2009) elaboration of the distinction between emancipation and liberation: "whereas emancipation strives for freedom of identity, the freedom to be *who you really are*, liberation aims at the freedom of self-determination and self-transformation, the freedom to determine *what you can become*" (p. 331).[1] Freire's invitation to continu-

ously reinvent and re-read his ideas creates the possibility for an interesting interpretation of these passages. Either that, or we discover that Freire was way ahead of his time. As it goes: just when we think we are past Freire, we find him again, ahead of us. In either event, these passages help us understand the dual dimension of the common: it is discovered and produced; it is a product, but also a precondition. Moreover, Freire indicates that this process of liberation, of *becoming*, is a collective endeavor, a production of the common that produces a new common. This could be thought about as a form of exodus in common that "requires taking control of the production of subjectivity" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 332). Such a move amounts to what Lewis (2012) refers to as a de-appropriation of the commonwealth "in the name of the creative and productive powers of the multitude" (p. 846). Interestingly, however, we might make the case that Freire shows that this pathway to altermodernity can start with the identities of antimodernity. For Freire, this doesn't necessarily have to result in the foreclosure of ethical and pedagogical possibilities and it doesn't necessarily stunt the possibilities for new subjects to emerge.

Key to this process is that such a de-appropriation takes form as a unique type of *disaccumulation*. If, as Silvia Federici (2004) notes, "primitive accumulation has been above all an accumulation of differences, inequalities, hierarchies, divisions, which have alienated workers from each other and even from themselves," then disaccumulation might involve the dissolution and abolition of such tendencies. Thus disaccumulation and communion are joint processes to labor through, but for such processes to be pedagogical, the conception of communion with which we start must be one that allows for distance and mystery to remain. It must be a tenuous notion of communion that calls into question totalizing and finite constructions of identity. Singularities have to remain. Thus communion cannot be an untroubled point of arrival; it must be both questioned and explored. In this way, we could think of communion as a tentative staging ground for the expression of grievances, where singularities explore what they share in common and what they do not, ultimately laboring toward some type of disaccumulation—a destituent project of the abolition of capital and its modes of relation. Accompanying this, there must be the constituent project of common-valorization or what Hardt and Negri (2009) refer to as "the accumulation of the common," meaning "not so much that we have more ideas, more images, more affects, and so forth but, more important, that our powers and senses increase: our powers to think, to feel, to see, to relate to one another, to love" (p. 283). It is these

two projects that subtend the pedagogical common and they must be conceived as joint processes.

To attend to *the pedagogical common* is, inescapably, to attend to and dwell in friction. Approaches that mitigate this friction have sought to absorb, channel, contain, or eradicate the constituent dimensions and biopolitical production of subjugated knowledges. In general, one could say that schools have sought to manage or "deal with" subjugated knowledges, while progressive educators have routinely attempted to "care for" them by harnessing them into a more proper form. Rather than seeking to rush beyond this friction, educators must attend to the pedagogical common in such a way as to dwell in it and allow for forms of contestation to remain open. This would involve adopting what Enrique Dussel (2008) calls a negative or critical ethics, one that starts from the standpoint of the "victims of the prevailing political system" (p. 78). In a similar vein, educators must embrace a "materialist reconceptualization of suffering" that understands that the experiences of the most vulnerable "offer pathways to distinctive understandings of suffering that serve as the speculative blueprints for new forms of humanity, which are defined above all by overdetermined conjurings of freedom" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 14). In dwelling in these frictions—by appreciating the indeterminacy of the pedagogical common—educators allow for forms of biopolitical production to initiate and reanimate an insurgent education and politics of transfiguration.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, De Lissovoy's discussion of a pedagogy in common develops similar ideas to those elaborated here—ideas that should inform the development of the pedagogical common. Like Lewis and Margonis, De Lissovoy (2011) calls for "a similar unraveling of the authoritative figure of the teacher, and a similar discovery of the power and intelligence of the group, which is at the same time a recognition of the agency and autonomy of students themselves" (p. 1126). What is particularly powerful about De Lissovoy's notion of pedagogy in common is that it is one of the few models that allows for the possibility of the not-yet common through "a utopian political project," but does not abandon the task of imagining forms of education that are responsive to the common that is already here (p. 1125). Thus, De Lissovoy rightfully calls for a type of interaction "that not only recognizes the validity of students' agency and knowledge, but also absolutely depends upon them, not as settled powers but rather as open-ended processes and potentialities" (p. 1131). The turn away from pedagogy to the pedagogical is intended

to forefront these aspects of De Lissovoy's ideas and to challenge more directly the proprietary dimensions and capitalist modes of relation that are endemic to pedagogy; to dispense with a particular type of certainty—the teleological striving—of pedagogy. Ultimately, in breaking with pedagogy, and particularly the most insidious pedagogies of the manifesto, the turn to that which is pedagogical is a disavowal of capital and the relations and forms of life that sustain it. As a form of exodus from pedagogy—from the capitalist modes of relation—an attentiveness to the pedagogical is an invitation to further rethink common production, relations and ways of being.

By honing in on the two dimensions of the pedagogical common, we can begin the project of conceiving educational spaces as sites of production and discovery or, alternately, experimentation and exploration. By avoiding prescriptive thrusts and being responsive to the pedagogical common, education becomes a form of exploration: a means without end. Thus like Walt Whitman's poetry of the future, conceiving of the pedagogical common as a site of experimentation and exploration desires "to arouse and initiate more than to define or finish" (p. 202). In this form of refusal—the refusal to constitute—the pedagogical common is both constituent, in the sense that new subjectivities emerge, and destituent, in that it necessarily strives to dissolve the precepts and operations of constituted power. As a form of experimentation that allows something new to make an appearance in the world, education unfolds as a process of self-valorization in which students can violate the constituted and enclosed time, space and aims of schooling while producing a surplus common, a permanent excess that continuously escapes capitalist command and colonial logics. The pedagogy of the manifesto, obviously, will not suffice here, and it may be that pedagogy itself is too troubled by its proprietary associations. An alternative educational logic of the pedagogical common may indeed be the only way to be responsive to the surplus common and its declaration to construct another possible world.

## Note

1. It is worth noting that, as life itself is put to work in the age of biocapitalism, the idea of emancipation—*the freedom to be who you really are*—more and more becomes an injunction to "just be yourself." As Carl Cederström and Peter Fleming (2012) note, capitalism necessarily depends on forms of life that it cannot replicate and therefore "the demand to 'just be yourself'"

increasingly resembles biocapitalism's "cunning way of capturing the much needed sociality" of the common (p. 17).

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CHAPTER 6

# Impersonal Education and the Commons

*Tyson E. Lewis*

While certain educational philosophers have been quick to point out the instrumentalization of education through the ubiquitous language of "learning" (see, for instance, Biesta, 2006), they have failed to recognize how learning is immanently bound to the language of personhood, personal choice, personality, and personal development. It is not uncommon today to hear advocates of the privatization of public education speak about the liberal ideals of personal choice, individual rights, and privately owned property. Interestingly, those on the far right also speak about personhood education as an alternative to comprehensive sex education. Progressive parents seek teachers that let their children develop into full persons, teachers who can make personal accommodations to the uniqueness of each particular child, and teachers who allow children to express their personalities, and so forth. Thus, from liberal to conservative camps, the language of the person fundamentally shapes the landscape of learning.

In developmental psychology, the language of persons also dominates. A case in point is Kathleen Stassen Berger's textbook *The Developing Person Through the Life Span* (2015). Such a title effortlessly links biological development to personhood without question. Here the assumption

T.E. Lewis (✉)
University of North Texas, Denton, TX, USA
e-mail: lewistyson4@gmail.com



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is that the child develops personhood through education. Each phase of a child's life is marked by biosocial, cognitive, and psychosocial development which cumulatively help the child enter into the sphere of personhood with the skills, dispositions, and emotional maturity needed to be a global citizen of the world. Personhood is here personhood-in-potentiality which needs to be actualized through various developmental stages of life. Education is the key that binds together developmental potentiality and social norms, values, and traditions.

Throughout these various domains, what I want to point out is that learning and personhood are intimately interwoven. Children learn in order to become a person and they become a person through learning. Indeed, if we live in a world of "learnification" (Biesta, 2010) then one might just as well argue that the subject of learning *is* the person—or rather the child as a person-in-potential. The learner learns in order to become a person within the order of things. And likewise, the person becomes a life-long learner in order to renew his or her status as a viable person. The relation between the two is mutually constituting. The concept of the person is as indispensible to understanding the function of contemporary schooling as the practice of learning. Indeed, the goal of learning seems to be the endowing of the credentials of personhood, or the granting of a qualitative value to personhood (in the form of degrees, certificates, and so forth). Learning grants the child *recognition* as a specific kind of person.

And if this is indeed an accurate set of assumptions, so what? One can quickly point to the political importance of the concept of personhood for extending rights beyond White, male, property-owning, adult citizens. Between the figure of bare life which has no legal status and the citizen (who is granted rights by the nation-state) stands the person, who is defined by the right to bear rights that are universally granted simply by the fact that one is a person (regardless of class, race, gender, nationality, and so forth). If there are current problems with human rights (including the problems related to the rights of refugees), then these problems concern how such rights are enforced and who is considered a person. Within a liberal paradigm, the notion of personhood itself is never to blame for such problems.

Yet Roberto Esposito (2012) argues that the real problem facing politics today is not an improvement of the correspondence between rights and persons so much as the figure of the person as such. For Esposito, the very concept of personhood is problematic. At its base, personhood divides life against itself, and is thus part of what he terms an immunological

paradigm that splits the body from the mind, the rational from the animal, the inside from the outside, the self from the other. This immunological paradigm includes:

1. Liberal forms of personhood as ownership and security,
2. Scientific forms of developmental/psychological personhood,
3. Religious fundamentalist forms of pro-life personhood, and
4. Fascist attempts to politicize life in the name of national health and personal will-to-power.

Underlying each and every manifestation is the submission of biological life/the body to the level of a thing to be owned, managed, or destroyed. If this is the case on the political level, then we also need to question the unexamined consequences that draw together learning, development, and personhood as an educational good.

For Esposito, the alternative is a shift from the personal to the impersonal, thus recuperating that which would otherwise be sacrificed (the body, the outside, and the other). If Esposito's question concerns the question of a politically impersonal life, my question could be phrased in educational terms as: What would it mean to lead an impersonal educational life? What practices beyond learning are needed for life to return to that which is most impersonal? While learning to be a person, personal learning, and learning as personhood all equate education with individual ownership, personal advancement, and self-actualization, an impersonal education would return education back to the commonwealth, back to what is held in common. Here I refer to the common as that which exists in excess of ownership, property, and territorial boundaries as specific features defining persons and personhood. Rather than an immunizing education through learning to become a person, what we have is an affirmative biopolitical education for impersonal (and thus common, multitudinous) flourishing.

## Personal Problems

Esposito's book *Third Person* (2012) offers up an archeology of the person. The problem begins at the very inception of personhood with Aristotle's now famous definition of the human being as a "rational animal." On this

view, the human is constituted through an internal split that both unites and separates the rational (mind) and the animal (body). The person is precisely the public mask that the human animal wears. This mask is never reducible to the animal that it presupposes but disavows. Thus, personhood is an *artificial* entity that is never a permanent feature of one's self. It can be worn, but because of this, it can also be taken off (or forcibly removed).

As a being that wears a mask, the rational animal has suffered two interconnected historical fates in Western civilization. On the one hand, there is the history of "animalization" through which the human is reduced to bare, animal existence. On the other hand, there is the history of "personalization" through which the animal is submitted to the rule of reason, spirit, or will. The first passes through a brutal history of eugenics, culminating in Nazi genocide, and the second passes through the liberal management of life, culminating in contemporary bio-ethics. While the surface appearance of these two historical trends might seem to be radically different (if not political opposed to one another), Esposito finds a deeper level of biopolitical cross-over between the two. In essence, this point of convergence rests on the shared understanding of the human as essentially split down the middle between animalization and personalization, between the particulars of our animal bodies and the generalizable abstractions of our rational selves. While no one can live in my particular body, anyone can dawn the masks I wear (as they are abstractions). This dividing line is played out on the level of the racialized population in Nazism and through the individual subject's ownership of his or her body (as thing) in liberalism. In both cases (although in different ways), personalization (of a certain racial group or of a certain individual) hinges on a process of de-personalization (projected outward onto the racial other or projected inward toward one's own animal body). In this way, personalization is always predicated on an immunization of the part that has no part within the community of persons. Something/one is always sacrificed so that those deemed to be persons can remain healthy, pure, safe, and so forth.

In this sense, Esposito offers a compelling historical overview of how the emphasis on rights and personhood are not a viable alternative to the death camps of Nazism. Beginning in the 1800s, our political lexicon was permanently altered through the incorporation of the zoological, anthropological, and biological into questions of personhood. Increasingly, the political ceased to be seen as a socio-culture (let alone economic) struggle so much as a biological struggle concerning the survival of ethnic and

regional groups. Likewise, under the (mis)appropriation of Darwinian evolutionary theory, human action was displaced from the sphere of history to nature. These intellectual trends culminated in what Esposito (2012) refers to as the "thanatopolitical drift" (p. 52) of Nazism wherein the health of the species is safeguarded through the extermination of the other. Such a move is only acceptable through the externalization of the animal in the rational animal onto someone outside the ethnic community. Once this animal quality is projected outward, the shared personhood of the Aryan race could be defined against the radical de-personalization of the Jews (now thought of as sub-human animals). Here the animal is not an origin point but rather an internal point of divergence that separates humanity from itself into higher and lower races.

Against the resulting horrors of Nazi genocide, the international community quickly adopted the language of human rights and personhood. The concept of the "person" was meant to fill in the gap between the human being (as bare life) and the citizen (as a subject with legal status). Esposito (2012) summarizes this strategic move toward personhood as follows: "Since Nazism, by identifying the human directly with the body, had taken away any ability for human beings to transcend their corporeal matter, it seemed that the first thing to do was to give them back their decision-making powers. Human beings were once again endowed with a rational will in relation to themselves and their fellows and made masters of their own fate within a framework of shared values" (p. 72). Yet even though this gesture was informed by the best of intentions, it once again reinscribed the ancient cleavage between mask and face, reason and animality, granting personhood to the spiritual and moral dimensions of human character all the while de-personalizing the body. The result is a liberal person who "owns" his or her body as if it were a thing. The rational, volitional part of human life comes to dominate and pass judgment over the animal part of human life. Liberal bio-ethicists, such as Peter Singer, are cited by Esposito as quintessential theorists of liberal personhood. Singer, for instance, insists on degrees of personhood, where the only true person is indeed the healthy, adult individual. Children are either potential persons or they are not, and this distinction opens up the justification for infanticide. Although Singer insists on the difference between his version of liberal biopolitics and Nazi thanatopolitics, Esposito points to a shared point of conceptual overlap: the belief in a founding gap between animal life and personhood. The very gap which the international language of human rights and personhood was meant to heal is once again opened,

leading to the possibility that the liberal management of life lends itself to new and perhaps more insidious forms of eugenics.

## Personhood and Childhood

Throughout educational history, we can similarly find points of convergence between de-personalization and personalization. As Esposito points out (2012), the child in ancient Roman law was not so much a person as a potential person. Because of this liminal legal status, the child was subjected to the father's power. The *patria potestas* was, indeed, a form of sovereignty that could be wielded to put a son to death. Esposito (2012) states "If a slave was fully equivalent to a thing, then the personal condition of a son (meaning, every male Roman citizen) ranged between the standing of a free man and a de-personalized condition more debased than that of a thing" (p. 80). The father's sovereignty over the child exists precisely because personhood is in potential. As such, children are fragile, inexperienced, and largely deficient. While submission of the child to the sovereignty of the father is purportedly for the child's welfare, it also opens up a door through which potentiality for personalization can all too easily slide into potentiality for de-personalization (in the form of abuse, neglect, and in extreme cases, infanticide).

Within this framework, we can give new meaning to Dame Justice Elizabeth Butler-Sloss's (1988) emphatic statement that the "child is a person" (Department of Health). What is striking about this statement is twofold. First, it is striking that Butler-Sloss felt compelled to formulate an argument for this position. In other words, it is not self-evident that children are full-fledged persons. Second, despite support for this claim, there are many who argue that Butler-Sloss's clarion call has not been adequately heard in the United States. Caroline Sawyer (2006) points out that the limited personhood of the child is directly related to the restriction in children's legal rights to questions pertaining to family law. Within the scope of family law the child is conceptualized as dependent on the family, and his or her legal rights are reduced to the single right to *not* have the state interfere with the private family (unless the child's welfare is at stake). Lacking any positive, autonomous legal status, a child alone is conceptualized as somehow pathological or disabled. Sawyer argues that the result has been the subjugation of children. The connection with *patria potestas* should be clear at this point. Despite the many differences between contemporary law and its Roman ancestors (including limitations

of this power as well as its extension to the mother), there is a thread that connects childhood to sovereignty, and thus the right to manage life remains bound to the abandonment of life.

The ambiguous legal status of children explains why students in schools in the United States today can be subjected to searches, restricted speech, and corporal punishment much more frequently than adults outside of schools. Simply put, learners are not seen as persons with attending rights and duties but as persons-in-potential and thus given over to the powers of the school *in loco parentis*. A brief survey of Supreme Court decisions concerning the paradoxical location of children in relation to schooling helps to illustrate this point. *Parham v. J.R.* (1979) revealed the difficulty of granting children due process rights; *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser* (1986) restricted rights of free speech in schools; *New Jersey v. T.L.O.* (1985) restricted children's Fourth Amendment rights for freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, removing requirements for search warrants while also lowering probable cause thresholds; and *Ingraham v. Wright* (1977) did not require schools to use procedural safeguards before inflicting corporal punishment (Walker, Brooks, and Wrightsman, 1999). This last case is most disturbing, especially when we consider that as of 2014, 19 states in the United States still allow corporal punishment in schools. As I have documented elsewhere (Lewis, 2006), various lockdown practices and zero tolerance policies in schools under No Child Left Behind were not the exception to the rule but rather revealed that truth of the rule: that underlying the progressive paternalism of the schoolhouse to help the child actualize his or her potential for personalization is a more fundamental power to de-personalize the child.

As an alternative, Sawyer (2006) makes the claim that "Children would be more appropriately regarded not as dependent family members but as social actors, as in the social sciences literature. Their childhood should not mean their exclusion from the legal fabric. Instead, it should entitle them to a legal personality that accommodates their youth, as can be seen in other areas of law" (p. 2). There are several assumptions in this citation that are worth pointing out. First, there is a glissade between being a social actor and being a legal personality. It is as if Sawyer cannot conceive of a social actor that interrupts the law, suspends it, disrupts it, or refuses it. If Sawyer were correct, then a host of revolutionary figures would be excluded from being conceptualized as viable social actors. Outlaws have no standing within the law and yet can function as important social actors (both in the sense of terrorists and as revolutionaries). Second, there is the

assumption that personhood will solve or at least mitigate issues related to the fragilities and risks of childhood. Yet it seems clear that the extension of rights to other adult minorities who are equally at risk for violence and abuse has not always been an effective strategy (this is not even to mention the rather insufficient social, economic, and political results of international human rights).

There are two extremes embedded within this legal framework. The first concerns the child as abjected (abandoned) and the second concerns the child as object (of concern and investment). Between the two is the more ambiguous status of the child as potentially a person. Whereas in the first case, this potentiality is subjected to the animal life of the child (de-personalization), in the second case, it is continually actualized through learning (personalization). Stated differently this potentiality can be equally actualized and not actualized. It can both lead to personalization or animalization. The child—within the legal paradigm of the family—rests precariously between these two positions.

The gap between the animal and the human constitutive of personhood is thus played out in these legal debates through the figure of the child. Even in its most progressive formulations, this gap is not alleviated so much as repressed. But this is not simply a malfunction of the law. Rather, it also serves a decisive ideological function. The precariousness and undecidability of the child enables the adult to displace the internal gap constitutive of all persons as persons. By making the child the exception to the rule, the adult can maintain the fiction that he or she—as an autonomous, self-sufficient, liberal subject—is in *full possession of his or her personhood*.

Substantiating this essential fiction underlying the liberal construction of the autonomous, adult self is the science of developmental psychology. Here personhood is not so much a legal status as it is a state of consciousness that can and should be developed through life experiences. Sherwood Thompson (2011), for instance, argues that education should help children "develop character strengths and a sense of personhood" (p. 34) in order to reach their goals and to "take personal ownership of one's life" (p. 35). Such strength is further equated with a developed sense of spirituality as a character trait that enables persons to contemplate their actions in relation to the reactions of others. There are three important points here. First, personhood is something that rests in potential and that needs to be developed through learning. The person-in-potential is the person as learner. Second, personhood is linked directly to ownership. Personal possession of one's self by the reasonable aspects of one's self is

a mark of the maturity of personhood. Third, personhood is equated with the spirit and with spiritual growth. These last two points are important precisely because they reconstitute the gap which developmental personhood attempts to suture over. Ownership *over* one's life does not erase the division between the animal and the spiritual for only if some aspect of one's being is reduced to the status of a thing can it be owned. The liberal, adult, individual constitutes itself through developing a hierarchical split within itself, which is then disavowed and displaced onto the child-in-need-of-development.

Another important problem played out in the field of developmental psychology concerns the boundaries of who should be considered a person. This is the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion that is constitutive of the political terrain of personhood. As we have seen, the question of including children within the scope of personhood is contentious, but this also matters when considering those who are seriously ill or disabled. The problem here is that personhood might be too restrictive, and its identification of personhood with reason, self-awareness, and even spirituality too exclusionary. Indeed, this notion of the moral person lies at the very heart of the liberal tradition. For instance, John Locke (1975) wrote that a person is "a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection" (p. 335). Personhood is both inside us (we are all potentially reasonable and intelligent beings as Locke argues) and yet outside of our animal bodies (reason and intelligence are part of our better nature or spiritual essence). Liberal personhood is a domain that splits the self into two parts, with the animal, embodied part subservient to the higher faculties of reason. The worry here is that such a construction of personhood will necessarily exclude those who have suffered severe brain trauma or children who are developmentally different. For those who link a specific form of consciousness with personhood, then the only recourse is to de-personalize a whole range of humans that do not meet the specified requirements.

Given this background, Karen Schwartz (2009) attempts to recuperate personhood for those who would otherwise be discounted. She does so through a shift of emphasis from states of conscious awareness to embodied relationships. Instead of clinical diagnoses, Schwartz turns to stories that emphasize an individual's holistic state of being, including an individual's actions, dreams, accomplishments, fears, and so forth. Schwartz's inclinations are laudable here, but two problems quickly emerge from this analysis. First, while troubling any quick and easy identification of

personhood with the "higher faculties," it is precisely this identification that is reinscribed through the emphasis on the testimony of others. It is as if the personhood of a de-personalized person is only personhood as long as a fully able-bodied adult testifies to this fact through the act of witnessing the appearance of trances of personhood. Second, while genuinely desiring to solve an important issue concerning the wellbeing of those who are otherwise neglected, widening the circle of personhood denies a historical fact which Esposito helps us to understand: personhood only defines itself against that which it is not and therefore presupposes some kind of exclusion/subtraction/abandonment.

Even though developmental psychology has a certain predominance in education today, this pride of place should not distract us from examining its ongoing complicity with some of the founding assumptions of eugenicists from the first part of the twentieth century including Francis Galton and Ernst Rudin (Pilgrim, 2008). For eugenicists, personhood-in-potential means that there is a residual element of the animal always threatening the learning process, always threatening to undo the smooth actualization of this potentiality. Thus, questions of learning dovetail with questions of health, fitness, and genetic predisposition to the point where educational and medical questions became almost interchangeable. Historically, if potentiality for personhood could not be realized through learning processes, the results were educational de-personalization in the form of institutionalized abnormality or degenerate extinction (Lewis, 2009).

And it is no coincidence that animalization continues to be linked directly to the developmental degeneracy of certain classes and races. As Licia Carlson (2003) argues, there is a long-running history in popular and scientific discourse of equating women, certain ethnicities, certain races, and disabled groups with the animal. That which had to be immunized in order to construct the person returns in the form of a psychological projection onto the other as animal. Thus, in the 1894 report from the committee on compulsory education in the United States, we read the following, "Careful research into the history of pauperism and criminality seems to show that the child's bent is fixed before his seventh year. If childhood is neglected, the child will mature lawless and uncontrolled and the final end will be the jail or the poorhouse" (cited in Tyack, 1970, p. 70). Here the racialized, urban immigrant child is a lawless animal whose intellectual, moral, and civic development will be permanently retarded precisely because of a lack of mental hygiene. If the child cannot be immunized through eugenic education against the threat of the

return of the animal, then he or she becomes *feral* and thus a threat to the overall health of the population at large. But this is not ancient history. As Republican Bill McCollum declared, "Violent juvenile crime is a national epidemic," and "today's superpredators are feral, presocial beings with no sense of right and wrong" (cited in Ayers, 1997/1998). The threat of the feral as a "presocial being" indicates that the eugenic fear of contamination of the person by the animal is alive and well in the popular right-wing imagination. Development and deficit converge and diverge around issues of mental health/hygiene, opening up the possibility that children suffer through de-personalization. Stated differently, educational life can quickly become devoid of its educational dimension, reducing schooling to either a form of incarceration or extermination for those who are most vulnerable and whose lives are most precarious.

## Theorizing an Impersonal, Common Education

The dialectics of personalization and animalization suggest that personhood is an aporia that always results in the exclusion/sacrifice of something or someone. Stated differently, the person always effects a separation between either (1) the individual subject and its pre-individual body (marked as animal), or (2) the social subject and its other (marked as racially or ethnically inferior). Inscriptions of personhood through law and/or psychology do not fill the gap between the public mask and private face which wears it so much as produce ever more displacements of the excess or surplus that lies at the exterior edge of the person. As such, merely arguing for the extension of personhood to those who have been traditionally excluded will not solve the central problem at hand. But what is the alternative? In conclusion, I would like to suggest an *impersonal* education, one which lets idle the infernal dialectic of personalization and animalization, which we find in the law and in developmental psychology. Esposito (2012) describes the shift toward the impersonal as follows: "The impersonal does not negate the personal frontally, as a philosophy of the anti-person would; rather the impersonal is its alteration, of its extroversion into an exteriority that calls it into question and overturns its prevailing meaning" (p. 14). Another name for this exteriority is the common. The common is neither private nor public, neither internal nor external, neither personal nor animal. It is an indistinguishing threshold that suspends and renders inoperative these binaries that define not only political but also educational landscapes. Impersonalization is the gesture

of "anyone at all" (Esposito, 2012, p. 125). Anyone at all can attend this school. Anyone at all can be educated. Anyone at all can teach.

Anyone at all is the fundamental gesture of an education in common. There are three fundamental features of this gesture. First, impersonal education or an education for anyone at all renders inoperative constitutive dichotomies between personalization and animalization. The impersonal anyone at all is neither subject nor object. He/she is anyone at all who falls outside such binaries. Second, the impersonal anyone at all interrupts the taken-for-granted logic underlying the constitution of the liberal subject. As argued above, the liberal subject is the person who *owns* her or her personhood as property (credentials, rights, privileges, qualitative, and quantitative values). This property immunizes the liberal subject against any contamination from the outside (by granting them privileges, access, and recognition). An impersonal education would therefore have to shift paradigms from education as personal consumption and personal property (one buys and owns what one learns as cultural capital) to a fundamentally different paradigm. The impersonal anyone at all *owns nothing*, is *radically poor*, and is exposed to contamination. Education as contamination and contagion would emphasize education as exposure (rather than ownership).

Second, if the liberal subject is granted mastery of and choice over his or her personal fate through the rights and privileges of personhood, then the impersonal anyone at all gives up mastery, embracing the contingencies of being-in-common, and finds in such exposure a new form-of-life. This is a multitudinous education (Lewis, 2008).

Third, the liberal subject insists on personal rights, freedoms, and liberties and his or her political actions are safeguards against invasion (by the state, by the immigrant, and by the poor). As opposed to the reduction of the political to personal security, the collective character of engagement determines the character of the impersonal. Here Esposito (2012) cites Blanchot who argues that the act of "putting in common … supposes that each person renounce the exclusive rights of both ownership of and intervention in his own problems, recognize that his problems also belong to everyone else, and thus agree to conceive of them in a common perspective" (p. 133). The 99% is important in this respect for it indicates a new post-identity politics that is anonymous, impersonal, and thus radically common. The 99% is anyone at all. A common education is an education for and by the 99%.

For education, there is a final implication of the impersonal that is important to note, and that in some senses summarizes all of its constitutive features. Whereas the liberal subject is a subject who *learns* to

actualize his or her potential personhood (through various credentials and measures that prove personal viability, health, and fitness) and thus gain access and ownership over certain privileges, the impersonal anyone at all breaks with the educational logic that binds learning to actualizing personhood. Recently there have been a number of theorists who have begun to call for impersonal education. Studying has emerged as a particular educational logic that falls outside the logic of liberal learning (Lewis, 2013). Instead of learning how to actualize one's personhood, studying suspends such ends. Thus, the paradigmatic studier lacks a place within the order of things, gives up his/her willful mastery over the future, and loses any sense of ownership over outcomes. Here we can think of the studier as the one who would prefer not to be a person. As such, the studier is anyone at all, a *common singularity* who prefers not to define the self in relation to property, who prefers not to operationalize the body into a mere biopolitical machine for maximizing outputs, and who prefers not to vaccinate the self against the perceived threat of difference. In relation to the impersonal body in educational practice, Joris Vlieghe (2013) has theorized that physical practices such as calisthenics expose the inoperative gestures of the body without destination, meaning, or social function. A body in repetitive movement is a singular body yet falls outside of the notion of individual action, individual intention, or individual expression. Here the body is not something subordinate to the spirit, intellect, or intentions of a subject. It is not an object to be owned trained or made to express the personhood of an individual. Rather the body shows itself showing itself in its nudity(the body not as a prop to uphold a mask but rather as a body as such); it shows itself in its capacity for impersonalization. In all cases, learning for personhood gives way to a radically different conception of educational communism wherein the self is exposed, contaminated, and given over to the outside. It becomes an anonymous anyone at all, and in that anonymity finds a new kind of joy.

Precisely because the child is a person-in-potential, he or she is what is most common to humanity. As Deleuze (2005) once wrote, in childhood we see *a* life. Not this or that particular, personal life, but life as such, an anonymous or impersonal life. The child does not wear a mask. Children only make faces, and in these faces we see reflected back to us anyone at all. Instead of an education, which attempts to divide the child against this impersonal life in order to actualize personhood, can we not think of an education that would *celebrate* and *enrich* it? Can we not think of an education that sees the impersonal as a promise rather than a problem? My answer is an absolute YES. Indeed, anyone at all can imagine such an education.

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CHAPTER 7

# #BlackLivesMatter: Racialization, the Human, and Critical Public Pedagogies of Race

*Nathan Snaza and Jennifer A. Sandlin*

In response to the relentless and widespread violence inflicted upon black and brown bodies in the United States, especially the violence that is enacted and condoned by official government agencies, the social media hashtag #BlackLivesMatter has gained currency as a way of organizing and coordinating what are often local responses to specific acts of violence in order to represent the national and indeed global reach of antiblackness and systemic and systematic racisms. This hashtag provides us with a useful point of departure for considering how racialization—that is, processes that produce race in ways that blur the biological/cultural distinction—has been linked to a particular political concept of the "human," one that organizes virtually all social, political, and economic relations in today's hypercapitalist, globalized world. Although #BlackLivesMatter does not

N. Snaza (✉)
University of Richmond, Richmond, VA, USA
e-mail: nsnaza@richmond.edu

J.A. Sandlin
Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, USA



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directly refer to the human, it is, implicitly, its field of intervention. In this chapter, we argue that it intervenes in two ways, one critical and one imaginative and creative. At the level of critique, #BlackLivesMatter demands a reckoning with racist histories of dehumanization that constitute the often disavowed condition of possibility for modern politics founded on a particular Western humanist conception of "the human." At the same time, it spurs us toward a creative re-configuration of that particular vision of the human, one that would not be deformed by its colonialist, racist, and heteromasculinist restrictions. In short, it calls us to a politics of countering dehumanization not with a politics of increasing inclusion within a dominant model of "the human," but toward a decolonization and reconfiguration of the human.

Mainstream media coverage of anti-black police violence in the United States has frequently made explicit the connection between race, racialization, and a particular conceptualization of "human." Eugene Robinson, writing for *The Washington Post*, for example, argues that "The name Ferguson should become shorthand for dehumanization."[1] Referring to the same event, Erin Aubry Kaplan wrote in the *LA Times*, that:

> For much of our history it's been impractical, virtually impossible and often illegal to regard blacks as people, black men especially. How to think first of Michael Brown's welfare, his individuality, when black men are the very definition of criminality and sub-humanness, when black life was once so degraded, when the public lynchings of black men were family-friendly events suitable for postcards? We may congratulate ourselves on how far we've come, but the fact is that we still live that legacy of degradation, a legacy most vividly expressed in these high-profile clashes between blacks and police.[2]

These statements, which are not academic critiques but opinion pieces in major metropolitan newspapers, allow us to specify precisely how Black Lives Matter as a movement invested in enacting critical public pedagogies can function as a critique of dehumanization. That is, through proclaiming that black lives DO matter, the statement "Black Lives Matter" exposes the fact—as evidenced by the utter mistreatment of blacks described by Kaplan, above—that historically black lives have NOT mattered to white Americans or to ostensibly race-neutral political, economic, and social institutions. Proclaiming that Black Lives Matter not only exposes this legacy, but it also simultaneously seeks to counter that very same "legacy of degradation"—to rewrite it, to reject it—not to deny it, but to redefine how black lives can

be treated differently. Implied in the statement is that "black lives matter *too*" or "black lives matter *as much as any other human lives.*"

This implicit critique of dehumanization, which is a powerful organizing tool, was widely, and at times seemingly willfully, misunderstood in the United States. Some of this misunderstanding was due to a ubiquitous lack of historical knowledge about the ways that black lives have been subject to institutional violence since the country's emergence (to say nothing, just yet, about how indigenous lives were treated). The hashtag #AllLivesMatter emerged as a kind of counter-slogan, one that, presumably, sought to make the straightforwardly humanist case that all *human* lives matter,[3] but which could only do so by disavowing 500 years of dehumanizing history. In other words, in the rush to assert a more general and "inclusive" humanism, the ways in which prevailing forms of institutionalized violence against black bodies are authorized *precisely by not seeing black people as human* were pushed off the table of public debate. While some might claim this was an "innocent" or "accidental" mistake, we assert that, instead, perhaps the very idea of black lives mattering—with its accompanying critique of white privilege and systemic racism—felt too threatening to many white people, who could not even bring themselves to contemplate, much less accept or admit, how black lives have been routinely and systematically devalued in US society. Critical public pedagogy campaigns like #FergusonSyllabus and #CharlestonSyllabus emerged following some of these events, and these hashtags were linked to websites gathering resources on US history, literature, and politics that could help people, perhaps especially teachers, construct educational experiences focused toward analyzing the histories of racialized oppression and violence that form the conditions of possibility for the police shootings and church bombings. Such pedagogical actions are, of course, crucial but they also work from an assumption that the sort of antiblackness that finds expression in #AllLivesMatter is due to an ignorance of history that white people are willing to redress. Unfortunately, we think that much of the anger, willful ignorance, and purposeful hostility that also were expressed through #AllLivesMatter relies on an "active dynamic of negation, an active refusal of information," and a passionate resistance to exactly the kinds of knowledges #BlackLivesMatter and #FergusonSyllabus seek to lay bare and redress (Felman, 1982, p. 30), including and perhaps most fundamentally the powerful refusal to see black lives as "human."

Introducing a special forum in *Feminist Studies* on teaching about Ferguson, Jennifer C. Nash (2015) notes that "to speak about Ferguson is always to speak about more than Ferguson" (p. 211). That is, speaking about Ferguson pushes us to explore not only racialized police violence against black bodies, but also the myriad forms of institutional and social antiblackness (and antibrownness, anti-indigeneity) that are part of the fabric of everyday life, including the school-to-prison pipeline (Laura, 2014), the so-called War on Drugs, racial and economic segregations of all sorts, international monetary aid policies that have systematically forced austerity upon states throughout Latin American and Africa, and the ways that globalization has allowed overwhelmingly white countries to consume resources at rates that quite literally risk destroying the existence of human beings while the material, social, corporeal, and ecological costs of this accumulation are "outsourced" to black and brown countries (Jhally, 2000).

In her contribution to the Ferguson special forum, Sylvanna M. Falcón (2015) calls for pedagogies that would encourage "students … to think about globalization as a reconfiguration of social space and political landscape, [so that] they could situate Ferguson as a 'global' site of contradictions rather than an individual incident of racist policing in a US city" (p. 221). Ferguson, then, opens onto Guerrero, Mexico, where 43 students went missing in 2014, onto Palestine, onto Latin America, and onto debates about Syrian refugees, ultimately becoming a way of studying racialized state violence as a global phenomenon. What #FergusonSyllabus and other related critical public pedagogies help us to imagine, then, are ways to attune directly to how the global political framework of human rights has always been articulated in relation to strategies of dehumanization.

## Racialization, Dehumanization, and Sociogeny

And yet, #BlackLivesMatter, as a critique of dehumanization, does not rest with trying to make the case that black lives are human and thus matter too. Instead, confronting dehumanization necessarily entails a thorough *rethinking* of what it means to be human. BlackLivesMatter demands a struggle over humanness as something that could or might be common to all humans. That is, while we think a sense of sharing in humanity might someday come to function as a common, we also think that a rush toward asserting a common humanity elides the ways that racialization and engendering have allowed a highly particular conceptualization of the human to pass itself off as the human as such. This synechdochic structure

makes dehumanization ubiquitous, and we would argue that any thinking of the human as common must therefore begin with an analysis of dehumanization in order to avoid mistaking the human for a neutral, universal category.

We believe that the political theories associated with biopolitics—and specifically as those theories are reread and rethought through black studies and black feminism, which seek to articulate a "racialization of bare life and its politics" (Marshall, 2012, p. 1)—offer a promising avenue for thinking about global power dynamics in ways that go far beyond the neutrality and universality of human rights discourses, by articulating a different political vocabulary (Agamben, 1998; Esposito, 2010; Foucault, 1979; Mbembe, 2001; Wolfe, 2012). Biopolitical discourses have shifted the focus from the empty category of "the human" toward concrete practices of investment in life; securing the health of individuals and populations; and strategies of management, regulation, and control over bodies, subjectivization processes, and movement through political and social spaces.

Much of the biopolitical literature focuses on "bare life," a term coined by Walter Benjamin and then elaborated across a body of writings by Giorgio Agamben. Bare life, broadly, refers to a condition where the human is reduced from being a citizen to being "merely" a living creature, "whom one can kill without incurring the penalty of murder" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 33). While some scholars have used the term "bare life" to theorize the death of Trayvon Martin (Musiol, 2013) and while there seems to be proximity between Agamben's formulation of bare life and the lives of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and so many other black people whose deaths were not considered murders, scholars within black studies and black feminist studies (Ferguson, 2012; Marshall, 2012; Weheliye, 2014) assert that Agamben's conceptualization of bare life, because it "occludes races as a critical category of analysis" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 8), cannot clearly diagnose how "race facilitates the production and occlusion of discrepant valuations of human life in the United States and throughout the black diaspora" (Marshall, 2012, p. 2). In this chapter we engage with critiques of biopolitics from within black studies (Ferguson, 2012), taking our lead from Alexander Weheliye (2014), who, drawing on the work of black feminists Sylvia Wynter and Hortense Spillers, argues that, because there is no "indivisible biological substance anterior to racialization," attempting to imagine or theorize otherwise—as bare life and biopolitics discourse does—both fundamentally "misconstrues how profoundly race and racism shape the modern idea of the

human" and "overlooks or perfunctorily writes off theorizations of race, subjection, and humanity found in black and ethnic studies" (p. 4).

At stake in this critique, then, is the relation between the human as a biological entity (one that is, in fact, called into question by a wide range of thinkers who might be grouped under the heading of "posthumanism") and racialization as a social assemblage. Racialization, for Weheliye, "construes race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (p. 4). To put this still slightly differently, race *is* not, except through assemblages of racial-izing bodies in differential ways. Some bodies are made to be white, which enables those persons to enjoy a wide range of legal, economic, political, and spatial privileges that are routinely and often violently denied to bodies made to be black, brown, or red. And without an understanding of how racialization has shaped conceptualizations of the human, then, what is also at stake is the risk of never being able to

> Understand the workings of and abolish our extremely uneven global power structures defined by the intersections of neoliberal capitalism, racism, settler colonialism, immigration, and imperialism, which interact in the creation and maintenance of systems of domination; and dispossession, criminalization, expropriation, exploitation, and violence that are predicated upon hierarchies of racialized, gendered, sexualized, economized, and nationalized social existence. (Weheliye, 2014, p. 1)

What Weheliye calls racialization has an important resonance with what Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) called "racial formation" in their book *Racial Formation in the United States*. They write that, "Our theory of *racial formation* emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual nature of race at both the 'micro-' and 'macro-social' levels, and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics" (p. 4). For Omi and Winant, race is always in process of becoming in relation to existing political struggles around race. In other words, while race is a material reality that shapes the bodies, health, and institutional capture of all humans, its status cannot be understood as fixed in biology or even in ethnic history. Race is a political concept that requires assemblages in order to become real and corporeal. Thus Omi and Winant's concept of "racial formation" and what Weheliye calls *racialization* signal

how race is a social and political fiction, born from centuries of imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and capitalism, that *becomes* real, material, and seemingly natural. To give a simple example, no two US census forms have included the same options for racial or ethnic identity. These shifts are due to struggles made by various groups to shift official demographic recognition of their self-identifications. But the struggle is, in turn, born from the ways that official categories shape how individuals self-identify in the first place. That is, when an individual has to "have" a race, one must identify with categories that pre-exist that individual. Furthermore, that individual may, over time, struggle to change the options for identification but there is always a primal scene of racialization. Even before birth, in fact, we are inserted into racialized categories with which we are compelled to identify.

The necessity of racial identification is the precise point of departure from whitestream biopolitical thought for Weheliye (2014), who recognizes that the dominant model of being human, the one developed in imperialist Europe and forcefully extended across the globe (Fanon, 1967), requires every human to be racialized. We must also note, following Judith Butler's (1993) work, that every human must have a gender in order to perform being human. That we are all both raced and gendered is forgotten or ignored by biopolitical theories that are animated by some unmarked "human"—that is, there is no human without an ascribed race or gender because the same assemblages that produce humanity (via practices of humanization) produce racialization and gendering (along with other ways of structuring and hierarchizing humans). Indeed, the production of various marginal, non- or less-than-humans is inseparable from the production of "fully human" persons. Weheliye (2014) turns to Sylvia Wynter's provocative re-conceptualization of the human in order to underscore this point, a re-conceptualization that takes as its point of departure Frantz Fanon's notion (1967) of "sociogeny." In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967) writes:

> Reacting against the constitutionalist tendency of the late nineteenth century, Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. He substituted for a phylogenetic theory the ontogenetic perspective. It will be seen that black man's alienation is not an individual question: Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stand sociogeny. (p. 11)

For Fanon, as for Wynter and Weheliye, race has its origins in social assemblages but it *becomes* real, material, ontological through sociogeny, a

concept that signals the inescapably social emergence of (human) persons. Wynter (2001) glosses these as "states specific to the modes of subjective experience defining what it is like to be a human within the terms of our present culture's conception of what it is to be human" (p. 46). Sociogeny, then, names the ways that particular concepts and narratives (such as a dominant version of "the human") effectively *become* part of the origin or emergence of particular human beings. It pinpoints how social and political fictions can become naturalized and seemingly inescapable. To translate this back into the terms used above to pose racial formation, as much as we are all required to form an identity through identifications with existing racial and gendered categories, we also form our identities *as human* in relation to presently existing conceptions of that term. Indeed, it is only because of the functioning of a particular category of the human that we feel compelled to *have* a race or gender in the first place.

Indeed, gender and sexuality are not only inescapably connected to the very existence of race as a political concept (Stoler, 1995), they also constitute linked but distinct axes of humanization and dehumanization. As Weheliye (2014) explains, "the sociogenic anchoring of racial difference in physiology and the banning of black subjects from the domain of the human *occur in and through gender and sexuality*" (p. 42, emphasis ours), a linkage also taken up within queer theory. As Dana Luciano and Mel Chen (2015) note, "Many of queer theory's foundational texts interrogate, implicitly or explicitly, the nature of the 'human' in its relation to the queer, both in their attention to how sexual norms themselves constitute and regulate hierarchies of humanness, and as they work to unsettle those norms and the default forms of humanness they uphold" (p. 186). To put this in terms that may be more familiar, what black feminist theory calls "intersectionality" is an account of how the human emerges through differential humanization assemblages (Puar, 2012), producing full humans only by simultaneously producing nonhumans, inhumans, and less than fully human persons. A political response to the dehumanization of humanizing assemblages thus requires constant vigilance to the ways in which gender and sexuality are deployed both in racialized state violence as well as in political responses to that violence. As Treva B. Lindsey (2015) writes:

> The demand for recognition of the humanity of all Black people requires activists, allies, and the broader US public to critically consider the impact of state violence on individual Black people, Black families, and Black communities.

> To affirm the particular experiences of Black men and boys with state violence should not and cannot relegate the experiences of Black women and girls, queer people, and trans* people to the margins of our activism and our documentation of contemporary anti-Black racial terror. (p. 236)

To conceptualize this differential humanization, or the ways that some become more human than others, we can follow Wynter's project, which operates according to a founding distinction between "the human" and "Man"—the presently dominant form of being human, one forged in early modernity. We quote Wynter (2003) at length to explain this conceptualization of "Man" and its destructive impact on humanity:

> The argument proposes that the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves … The correlated hypothesis here is that all our present struggles with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, struggles over environment, global warming, severe climate change, the sharply unequal distribution of the earth resources (20 percent of the world's peoples own 80 percent of its resources, consume two-thirds of its food, and are responsible for 75 percent of its ongoing pollution, with this leading to two billion of earth's peoples living relatively affluent lives while four billion still live on the edge of hunger and immiseration, to the dynamic of overconsumption on the part of the rich techno-industrial North paralleled by that of overpopulation on the part of the dispossessed poor, still partly agrarian worlds of the South)—these are all differing facets of the central ethnoclass Man vs. Human struggle. (2003, pp. 260–261)

Wynter sees a violent synecdochic logic underwriting modernity's invention of the human: a particular *genre* of the human "overrepresents" itself as being the whole of humanity and uses considerable violence in order to draw the entire (human) world into its machinations and under its logics. Two things about Wynter's formulation here are crucial for us. First, Wynter reveals how what appear to be disparate social justice-related struggles—for example, for racial, gender, and environmental justice—are actually very importantly linked, because they emerge as a reaction against very similar logics and coalesce into a demand for *new ways of being human*, ways that will not be yoked to Man and its violences. Second, Wynter's

highlighting of the conflict between "Man" and "humanity" reminds us that experiments with other ways of being human are all around us—in fact, those individuals and groups whose humanity has been in question during modernity provide living alternatives to being Man.

## From Body to Flesh

Weheliye (2014) ends his book *Habeas Viscus* by stating that "to have been touched by the flesh, then, is the path to the abolition of Man: this is part of the lesson of our world" (p. 138). Fundamental to Weheliye's project of disrupting Western humanism's conceptualization of "Man," then, is the forwarding of *flesh* and its "atrocity" as "a pivotal arena for the politics emanating from different traditions of the oppressed" (p. 2). Drawing on a distinction first announced by black feminist literary critic Hortense Spillers (1987), Weheliye (2014) thus disentangles the body from the flesh: "If the body represents legal personhood qua self-possession, then the flesh designates those aspects of human lives cleaved by the working together of depravation and deprivation" (p. 39). Weheliye creates the concept of *Habeas Viscus* ("you shall have the flesh") to stand in contrast to that of *Habeas Corpus* ("you shall have the body"). This flesh is "anterior" to the body but it is not some mythically unmarked, purely biological human corpus either. Quoting Spillers, Weheliye (2014) notes that flesh too is produced via assemblages: "its creation requires an elaborate apparatus consisting of 'the calculated work of iron, whips, chains, knives, the canine patrol, the bullet' ("Mama's Baby," 207), among many other factors, including courts of law" (p. 39). We are here reminded that there is no such thing as a "human" outside of institutions and that sociogeny is not merely ideal or ideological: it is corporeal, violent, and vicious.

This flesh, which appears in the violence of racializing assemblages that are an irreducible factor of humanization as Man has bequeathed it to us, is, for Weheliye, a more conceptually and politically interesting starting point for thinking biopolitics than the "bare life" proffered by most (white) thinkers since Giorgio Agamben introduced it in *Homo Sacer* (1998). Weheliye (2014) writes that:

> In the absence of kin, family, gender, belonging, language, personhood, property, and official records, among many other factors, what remains is the flesh, the living, speaking, thinking, feeling, and imagining flesh: the ether that holds together the world of Man while at the same time forming the conditions of possibility for this world's demise. (p. 40)

That is, *flesh* is what is lost, leftover, or uncapturable in modernity's focus on the *body*. While the legally defined *corpus* "is the bearer of both objection to sovereign power and of individual liberties" (Agamben, 1998), this concept cannot account for, speak to, possess, or even really *see* "relational flesh," which "speaks, conjures, intones, and concocts sumptuous universes" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 121) that are hidden from Man; thus flesh becomes, potentially, the very "path to the abolition of Man" (p. 138). This flesh is, thus, both the crucible from which "Man" is constructed—through the violence of racialization that will mark *some* bodies as subject to exclusion from Man and *some* other bodies as fully human—and a point of departure for thinking about a different, non-Man way of being human, or being other-than-human.

It is at this point that Weheliye's critique of biopolitical discourse's disavowal of race can be most audibly sounded, but first it may be helpful to recall Chela Sandoval's (2000) provocation that:

> the primary impulses and strains of critical theory and interdisciplinary thought that emerged in the twentieth century are the result of transformative effects of oppressed speech upon dominant forms of perception—that the new modes of critical theory and philosophy, the new modes of reading and analysis that have emerged during the U.S. post-World War II period, are fundamentally linked to the voices of subordinated peoples. (pp. 7–8)

Put somewhat differently, the theoretical discourses associated with poststructuralism, postmodernism, and, we would add, posthumanism are all grappling with the same problems that have propelled the critiques of modernity made—and largely ignored by—the whitestream academy, by those Sandoval (2000) calls "the oppressed": black, brown, and indegenous folks; women; GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and queer) persons; the disabled; the poor. This work is easily forgotten, dismissed, ignored, or disavowed by white scholars, however, which leads Weheliye (2014) to write that "If I didn't know better, I would suppose that scholars not working in minority discourse seem thrilled that they no longer have to consult the scholarship of nonwhite thinkers now that European master subjects have deigned to weigh in on these topics" (p. 6). As questions of what a human is have become crucial to theoretical antihumanism and posthumanism, there has been a tendency on the part of whitestream scholars to answer by looking primarily to European thinkers and problems instead of toward what Weheliye calls "minority discourse" and Sandoval calls "US third world feminism." Diagnosing precisely this avoidance, Tavia Nyong'o (2015) writes:

> Colluding with … liberalism, posthumanist theory has tended to present the decentering of the human as both salutary and largely innocent of history. Up until the present time, we are told in one version of this philosophical fable, we have incorrectly centered the human. Now we can, and must, correct this error, if only (paradoxically) to save ourselves. It is in anticipation of such tales that black studies has repeatedly asked: have we ever been human? And if not, what are we being asked to decenter, and through what means? There is a 'speaker's benefit' attendant to the act of declaring one's non-sovereignty: one must presume to have it in order to relinquish it. (p. 266)

Nyong'o thus challenges posthumanism to eschew its (racist) pretense to universalism precisely by attending to histories of dehumanization and the critical responses that have shaped black studies and other minority discourses (including feminism, queer theory, disability studies, and indigenous studies). This means, among other things, foregrounding how there is not and never has been a single, monolithic, and universal "human," no matter what some whitestream thinkers would have us believe. Sandoval's provocation consists in reminding those privileged scholars in the west, mostly white, that their theoretical concerns emerge out of the histories and struggles of oppressed peoples and should not be divorced from those struggles. It is no surprise that just before offering this thesis, Sandoval dwells on and with what Cherríe Moraga calls "theory in the flesh" (p. 7).

As an example of exactly the kind of privilege Sandoval (2000) is discussing, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri posit the flesh in their account of the politics of biopolitical globalization but do not connect their notion of flesh to Spillers's conception of it, nor to Moraga's, nor to any account produced by the racially oppressed. While we recognize the importance of a project that seeks to use biopolitics to reimagine political struggle in an era of transnational globalization and empire, we also believe that this struggle must be animated by critiques of humanism and dehumanization offered by black, brown, queer, feminist, and other scholars who refuse the insipid and dangerous universality of "the human." Instead, we have to practice what Jose Esteban Muñoz (2015) calls "touching inhumanity":

> Once one stops doing the incommensurate work of attempting to touch inhumanity, one loses traction and falls back into the predictable coordinates of a relationality that announces itself as universal but is, in fact, only a substrata of the various potential interlays of life within which one is always inculcated. (p. 209)

Perhaps in an attempt toward such incommensurate work, in *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri (2004) write that "the flesh of the multitude is pure potential, an unformed life force, and in this sense an element of social being, aimed constantly at the fullness of life" (p. 192). While this version of flesh situates it as something linked to the multitude by a genitive ("of"), they elsewhere claim that "the multitude is something like singular flesh that refuses the organic unity of the body" (p. 162). In terms of political theory, the multitude rejects modern political relations founded on sovereignty and its fetishization of "the one" who rules, whether a single head of state or "we, the people." While we think that this self-organizing multiplicity may well offer a helpful way of collating global struggles against empire, we also think that this refusal of organic unity has to be pushed much further than Hardt and Negri's prose suggests.

Seemingly recognizing what Weheliye directly states about the ways that flesh is anterior to the body and that flesh offers possibilities of being human that diverge from Man, Hardt and Negri use this flesh to call attention to "multitude, the living alternative that grows within Empire … [it] is not a matter of everyone in the world being the same; rather it provides the possibility that, remaining different, we discover the commonality that enables us to communicate and act together" (p. xiii). Even as this "commonality" may be precisely the thing we have to work toward articulating in our political struggles, we have to insist on foregrounding how "remaining different" requires a constant vigilance with respect to dehumanization. To put this in the most direct terms we can, what we need is to conceptualize humanness without privileging what Mel Chen (2012) wonderfully calls "a whiteness triple-dipped in heteronormativity, ableism, and speciesism" (p. 102). What we have to attend to are what Wynter often calls "genres of being human" as verb, always in the plural.

## Fleshy Pedagogies, Affect, and Alterhumanism

While the politics associated with #FergusonSyllabus and its metonymically linked critical public pedagogies are enormously important with respect to the critique of dehumanization required in our present moment as a response to racialized state violence, black critiques of biopolitics require us to supplement these with pedagogies driven by the creative pursuit of alternative ways of performing humanity. The danger of resting with critiques of dehumanization is drawn out by Roderick Ferguson's (2012) analysis of the biopolitics of "minority difference" in universities.

Following the widespread protest in the US in the 1970s that led to the establishment of ethnic studies programs at many colleges and universities, Ferguson sees the emergence of a "new interdisciplinary biopower [that] placed social differences in the realm of calculation and recalibrated power/knowledge as an agent of social life" (p. 34). That is, the particular ways in which universities (and other educational institutions) responded to student protests was to seek "calculation," or strategies of inclusion through containment and neutralization. Rather than taking up the task of re-thinking the human undergirding educational institutions, new ethnic studies programs allowed universities to include the study of race and gender *within* pre-existing models of pedagogy and scholarship. This calculation, unsurprisingly, failed to address the most pressing concerns of the student protests, which is why we are seeing, as we write, an explosion of activism on campuses around the country linked to Black Lives Matter that makes demands uncannily similar to those from the 1970s.

We would like to propose that this supplement to critiques of dehumanization take up two particular tasks. The first is a shift toward taking seriously the ways that emotion and affect play out in educational spaces and institutions. As Rebecca Wanzo (2015) argues, "the civil rights struggle over police brutality is very much about feeling—whose feelings are allowed to count" (p. 230). In other words, we have to recognize that racialization plays out precisely at the level of affects and that classroom spaces often preserve the whiteness of educational institutions through the modulation and sanctioning of particular feelings. This means, among other things, that our pedagogies must resist at all costs the desire to protect white feelings as part of these discussions, for this protection is impossible without a simultaneous delegitimization of the feelings of black, brown, and other racialized subjects. The emphasis on affect is crucial for the second task, which is the simultaneity of critique of dehumanization *and* creative imagination of new forms of being human that we describe above. This double task is immediately affective: it requires "black rage" (as discussed, for example, by bell hooks and Lauryn Hill) and hope.

One model for this new pedagogy can be found in what Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) call "black study." Describing how study is antagonistic to much of what happens in educational institutions, Moten zeroes in on affect: "How come we can't be together and think together in a way that feels good, the way it should feel good?" (p. 117). Rather than a focus on the transmission of information and knowledge, study is a radical process of becoming-together through analysis and creation. Harney writes:

> So we enter into the social world of study, which is one in which you start to lose track of your debts and begin to see that the whole point is to lose track of them and just build them in a way that allows for everyone to feel that she or he can contribute or not contribute to being in a space. (p. 109)

Harney and Moten link this conception of black study, via Fanon, directly to the search for alternative way of being human and organizing the social world. The point, Moten argues, is "to critique but also to destroy and disintegrate the ground on which the settler stands, the standpoint from which the violence of coloniality and racism emanates" (p. 132). Since a subject that has no standpoint is impossible (without slipping into the *pretense* of universality that anchors whiteness!), this requires the production of alternative, decolonized standpoints.

This double movement of critique and creative experimentation is necessary for *everyone*. As Jack Halberstam (2013) argues in the introduction to *The Undercommons*:

> The mission then for the denizens of the undercommons is to recognize that when you seek to make things better, you are not just doing it for the Other, you must also be doing it for yourself. While men may think they are being "sensitive" by turning to feminism, while white people may think they are being right on by opposing racism, no one will really be able to embrace the mission of tearing "this shit down" until they realize that the structures they oppose are not only bad for some of us, they are bad for all of us. Gender hierarchies are bad for men as well as women and they are really bad for the rest of us. Racial hierarchies are not rational and ordered, they are chaotic and nonsensical and must be opposed precisely by all those who benefit in any way from them. Or, as Moten puts it: "The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us. I don't need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?" (p. 10)

The fight against racist, colonialist, heterosexist, and ablest conceptions of the human is not a fight that can be delegated to this or that group who suffers dehumanization. It is a fight we have to engage *in common*, from the undercommons, since the reigning conception of the human, what Wynter calls "Man," fucks us all up, although the ways that it kills us vary enormously and these differences matter. What #BlackLivesMatter compels us toward, then, is a collating of struggles based on particular

experiences of dehumanization and exploitation toward the *common* aim of producing new genres of being human, ones that would make racialized state violence impossible by cultivating new grounds for political relations. These new genres of being human will begin in the *flesh*: in the corporeal, affective, and material experience of both rage and hope, critique and creative experimentation.

## Notes

1. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/eugene-robinson-dehumanizing-ferguson/2014/11/27/1f2883a2-75b9-11e4-a755-e32227229e7b_story.html
2. http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-kaplan-ferguson-michael-brown-obama-20140819-story.html
3. That is, we have not seen anything in the popular press connecting #AllLivesMatter and the lives of, say, cows or pigs, or chickens in factory farms.

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CHAPTER 8

# A Question of Knowledge: Radical Social Movements and Self-Education

*Mark Howard*

To understand radical social movements (RSMs) and their relation to knowledge practices we must recognise their valence, which is *essentially* epistemological and not simply social.[1] This is to claim that, first, the discursive dimension of the radical community is a credible mode of analysis of their social and political conditions, and second, we can learn from their discourse and practice. The actions of this 'community', as Jacques Rancière spotlights, verifies their common capacity for the *invention* and *demonstration* of political concepts, arguments, objects, and the like, and in so doing they reclaim 'thought as something belonging to everyone' (Baronian, Rosello, & Rancière, 2008, p. 3). Therefore, in the first instance, support for my claim is available in Jacques Rancière's writing on emancipatory politics.

The intent of my engagement with Rancière's political thought is to reveal a way of understanding the formation of community that respects the epistemological work of the RSMs beyond the confines of expert knowledges and contests their facile recuperation within the mechanism of social aggregation. The radical political subject, according to Rancière (2003, pp. 205–206), destabilises the systemic and hierarchical elaboration of what belongs to a specific community as delimited through the

M. Howard (✉)
Monash University, Clayton, VIC, Australia
e-mail: mark.howard@monash.edu



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proclamation of rules, practices, and dignifying subjects. He asserts that social movements are not identitarian; in fact, they are constituted by fighters trying to dismiss 'the identity *given* to them by a social order' (Rajchman, 1995), an identity that I suggest walls off the limits of community and diminishes particularity and difference. Significantly, as I will show, Rancière's work on politics logically brings us into contact with thinking on the pedagogical relation.

While pedagogy is not Rancière's focus, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* he highlights that the 'myth of pedagogy', which defines a relation of intellectual inequality between teacher and student, further divides the world into those who know (e.g., philosopher and adult) and those who do not know (e.g., common person and child) (Rancière, 1991, pp. 4–7). This presupposition of intellectual asymmetry underpins the hierarchy of social order and supports a division of manual and intellectual labour, partitioning society into the 'two humanities'—the active thinker (intelligent) and their passive medium (ignorant) (Rancière, 2009a, p. 30). Two important consequences are that first, it postpones the 'proper moment' of politics to the 'time of theory', and second it 'infantilises society', making all those of inferior intellect dependent on explication for comprehension to occur (Rancière, 1991). The authority of the intellectual is derivative of the assumed ignorance of the masses; consequently, it is explicitly those subjects excluded from intellectual labour that can undermine the systems of thought (social knowledge) that sustain what are essentially contingent hierarchical orders.

In the second instance, my view of RSMs draws strength from the example of co-research amongst the first generation of contemporary Italian social movements, and the subsequent third generation's establishment of concrete spaces free from formal organisation and coercive authority (Castellano et al., 1996, p. 234). The first generation workers' struggles focused on localised practices of dissent, and were independent to any readily discernible programme of political demands. The actions of this group sought autonomy from the work place and system of industrial relations, and their struggle reached out into their personal communities and daily lives beyond the factory (Negri, 1988, p. 210; *The Last Firebrands*, pp. 25–26). The third generation, the Movement of '77 or area of social autonomy, looked to alternatives to political militancy such as independently run social services and spaces of self-teaching, and sites of cultural production like artist collectives and independent radio stations. In both instances (worker's struggle and social autonomy) radicalisation, through self-activity, is the refusal of the exclusion from intellectual labour, the dismissal of social relations derivative of the myth of intellectual asymmetry.

## Social Movements and Intellectual Emancipation

RSMs exist in a space that is marginal to the political community, and they act outside the established standards of behaviour, disturbing social order *and* the discourses that have that order as their object. By transgressing the conventional limits of representation they set up a polemical relation to social ordering. This conceptualisation of the nexus of politics and RSMs imagines a collective actor that generates both practical (real life/subjective) and theoretical (discourse/objective) *discontinuities*. Their self-aware practices of *immediacy* achieve real life outcomes by *directly* dealing with the impediments present in the environment. The correlate effect of the observation of these practices in the discourse on politics is an undermining of existing schemas of thought and driving theoretical renewal. Crucially, this challenges the hegemony of social knowledge—a system of thought that orders experience, structures perception and meaning, and prejudicially partitions and organises society.

While the common is a contested site, volatile and processual, where constructions of the possible (common sense) compete one against another, social knowledge aims to stabilise the situation by establishing a material order. In response, the struggles of the radical subject decouple aptitude from social location; they untie the particularity of the individual from the constraints of a determinate knowledge. Subsequently, Rancière (2003, p. 203) aims to reveal how 'a so-called (…) social movement [is] also an *intellectual* (…) one, a way of reconfiguring the frameworks of the *visible* and the *thinkable*'. To achieve his aim, he places his concept of politics against the background image of society as a 'distribution of the sensible'. He is interested to show that what qualifies as a community is always already underscored by conventions of meaning and significance that order that which is *given* to us in sense experience (Rancière, 2006a, pp. 1–2). This 'regime of sensibility' is a construction of, and at the same time a limit to, what is possible (Rancière, 2009b, p. 120). As Caroline Pelletier (2012, p. 109) identifies, membership in the community thereby requires 'adopting its ways of knowing … [and] new members are initiated over time, using pedagogic techniques'.

A consequence of this vision of social aggregation in the writing of Rancière is that he remains sceptical of the claims of anti-authoritarian and progressive pedagogues who proclaim to undermine the existing systems of social inequality. Alternatively, Rancière resolutely believes that politics begins when those who 'cannot' show that indeed they 'can', causing

disputation. The outcome is a polemical common sense, a restaging of the common and what belongs to it, where the collective arises from 'sharing what is not given as being in-common' (Rancière, 1999, p. 138). Opposed to the 'given community' of 'like-mindedness' is an antagonistic community which, to borrow from J.M. Bernstein (1993, pp. 102–103), emerges from interruption and exemplars of difference. The nascence of the radical political subject is an intervention in, or exception to, the ways community are gathered. The processual and disputatious nature of the antagonist community disconnects from the existing material ordering of bodies, and eschews the gradualism of progressive culture that attempts to pacify the excluded with the promise of reconciled futures. By transgressing social boundaries and breaching epistemological hierarchies, the antagonist disrupts the sensible co-ordinates of community, and teaches us. We learn, as Deranty (2010, p. 23) notes, of the error of the assumption 'that relegated them [those from below] to this position within the hierarchy'.

Access to knowledge is a central concern for RSMs addressing situations of inequality and exploitation. One pathway is delineated by theoretico-political intervention, which is comparable to pedagogy as means. This route retains the aspirations and progressive ideals of the enlightenment, which assumes a 'lack' in the subject, alienating the excluded of their knowledge and postponing self-determination. A similar relation persists in contemporary theories of critical pedagogy, which has as its object the epistemological hierarchies of the formal institutions of education. Along with the related concept of popular education, which is community based, critical pedagogy entrusts emancipation to the pedagogic relation. While informal, popular education, like critical pedagogy draws upon an external agent as educator, who, while decentred makes the pedagogic situation explicit. That is, emancipatory pedagogy, in whichever guise, typically requires an 'intellectual intervention', and in particular one free of the polluting influence of ideology and power (G. Biesta, 2010, p. 44).[2] The outcome is that critical pedagogies usually maintain minimally stratified models of education (Brophy & Touza, 2007, p. 132). In part, this is attributable to the figure of Paulo Freire that looms large over the field of emancipatory education, as does the legacy of his belief in false consciousness and his struggle to address the figure of the universal intellectual in traditions of pedagogy.[3]

Rancière's counter to the pedagogic relation of theoretico-political intervention is that there is, in fact, an intellectual symmetry to the relations of politics: the oppressed can teach, and as Deranty (2012, p. 192)

emphasises, we learn 'not from their pathos, but from their discourse and action (…)'. At the core of Rancière's (1991, p. 4) telling of the story of Joseph Jacotot—a theorist of the equality of intelligence—in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, is Jacotot's revelation that the myth of pedagogy is foundational in the 'fiction of the explicative order of the world'. This pedagogical relation underwrites the valorisation of the intellectual, and in effect 'declares the inability of the ignorant to be cured of their illusions (…)' (Rancière, 2011, p. xvi). Rancière takes seriously the consequences of the ontological division of society into the 'two humanities', and responds radically to this partition by attempting to recover the perspective of the exploited, acknowledging their capacity to articulate and organise their experience. As Deranty (2012, p. 192) notes, he shows 'hermeneutic humility', or, he is epistemologically humble.

Rancière's investigation of social and political domination occurs, as Kristin Ross shows, on two fronts: one through the resources of his archival project and the other through his critique of theoretico-political intervention. The former presents the 'unexplicated' thoughts and words of the exploited and excluded, while the latter lays the foundation for his criticism of those intellectuals claiming to 'know and thus speak for, or explicate, the privileged other of political modernity'. While distinct, the praxeology and polemic of Rancière's work 'entertain a crucial dialogue' (Ross, 1991, p. xxiii): his archival work is testament to his belief that the reasoning of those subjects dominated within the existing social order is the equal of the rationality and logic of the so-called experts and specialists who dominate the dialogue on the natural order of society (Rancière, 1989, p. 11).

The axiom of equality sets out the praxis of Rancière's archival project, which he approaches by documenting the voices and experiences of the exploited (thought from below), creating a space where, for example, the workers' words are removed from their usual situation—'social stuff'—and enter into a dialogue as the equal of philosophical narrative (Rancière, 2009b, p. 117). He assumes their 'common capacity to invent objects, stories and arguments' (Rancière, 2006b, p. 12). Consequently, acts of intellectual or self-emancipation are a 'self-affirmation' of the excluded 'as a joint-sharer in a common world' (Rancière, 1995, p. 49). This breaks with the convention of the universal intellectual, and by association the educator of enlightenment pedagogy, who, through their unique capacity for rational thought and cognitive existence beyond the polluting ideologies of society, found, and guarantees knowledge.[4]

Rancière's 'excursion' 'into the flesh of working-class experience, into the thinking and practice of emancipation', (Baronian et al., 2008, p. 2) caused him to reject the belief that the role of the intellectual was to enlighten the antagonist community. In *Althusser's Lesson*, Rancière argues that at the core of the prevailing critiques of social domination was a theory of the inequality of the intelligences, an assertion that the 'masses' were ignorant and incapable of controlling their own destiny. This 'clears the way' for the 'intervention of philosophy' (Rancière, 2011, pp. 10–11). The implication of a division of manual and intellectual labour is that intellectuals are responsible for 'instructing and organising' those blinded by the dominant bourgeois ideology, those inflicted by false consciousness. Consequently, the theorist claims the only hope for those immersed in the 'thickness' of ideology was 're-education by the authority of Science and the Party' (Rancière, 2011, p. xiv). However, the practice of workers, peasants, immigrant workers, youth, women, and national minorities during the tumult of the 1960s 'renders absurd the efforts of classical leftism to unify these struggles and bring them under its hegemony' (Rancière, 2011, pp. 118–120).

The radical subject's demonstration of their capacity for discourse and reason undermines their exclusion from intellectual labour, reclaiming a role in knowledge practices and the common. Primarily, Rancière's (1991, p. 137) political thought derives its coherence from his most enduring idea that equality is common to everyone—there is only one intelligence—and vitally such 'radical equality' is 'not given, (…) it is practiced, it is verified'. Further, it 'is not a goal to be reached but a supposition to be posited from the outset and endlessly reposited' (Rancière, 1995, p. 84). Equality, as axiomatic to politics, exists in a negative sense as the challenge to an existing form of inequality or hierarchy, while in a positive sense it presents as self-activity, the practical demonstration of being capable of more than exploitation (May, 2008, p. 40). Consequently, the promise of politics for Rancière resides in the 'global change in the ways of living, thinking and feeling', a revolution in the forms of life not in the forms of government (Blechman, Chari, Hasan, & Rancière, 2005, p. 295).

## The Italian Situation: Social Struggle and Self-Activity

While political philosophy and social science have great success in proving the existence of inequality, Rancière is interested to see those who 'demonstrate the existence of equality' (Rancière, 1995). Such demonstrations

are present in the self-activity and self-determination of the first and third generation of the contemporary Italian movement sector. These antagonistic communities typically emerged in the second half of the twentieth century from the actions of as yet *unidentified* subjects, subjects unconstrained by the enclosures of social knowledge. They were, in part, a result of the influx of 'atypical individuals' into the space, first, of industry (the southern agriculturalist immigrants), and subsequently the city (urban youth). The effect this had on the politics of the Left is that it cleared away 'points of resemblance', confounding conventional political thought (Castellano et al., 1996, p. 231). The redundancies and gaps created in the determinate knowledge of the Party by the innovative practices of the RSMs engaged the intellectual in a process of theoretical renewal. As revealed below, by breaking from the restrictive culture and ethos of *the* working class, the radical political subject produces new forms of being and in doing so they literally teach us about the relation and dynamics of the common, community, and social knowledge.

## The First Generation

The intent of the 'first generation' workers' movement was to change the relation of the factory workers to the political and industrial systems. This was an attempt to take back the control of daily life from the demands of the work ethic. Rather than seeking representation in the existing system of political relations through negotiation with the company, certain groups took charge of the situation by directly altering the work/leisure balance by taking extended breaks, stopping work, and absenteeism (Lotringer & Marazzi, 1980, p. 9). Typically, practices were localised and peculiar to the distinct experiences of the work place. Freed of the constraints of the Party and the political project of the 'historic worker', the workers' movement focused on needs and desires, as Toscano comments, independent to economic rationale 'and nationalist and productivist agenda'(Toscano, 2009, p. 80).

Wright (2002, p. 76), discussing strikes at Fiat in 1963, writes, 'the most important property of these wildcats lay in their refusal to play by the established rules (…), they were unpredictable (…), [and] "they demanded nothing"'.[5] Nothing, that is, in terms recognisable to the capitalist system of exchange, but something that goes beyond the logic of the system. The innovative and creative practices of the new collectives, organised from below, achieved real life outcomes by directly dealing with

the impediments to equality present in their environment. It also interrupted the history of the Italian Left and defied the way that the conventional Marxist thought of the PCI (Italian Communist Party) inscribed the figure of the worker. Consequently, the new situations of the radical political subject engaged the intellectual in a process of theoretical and methodological renewal, a process exemplified by co-research, which hoped to generate a shared knowledge attentive to the experiences of the worker (Wright, 2007, p. 271).[6]

## Co-Research

Co-research was a significant break from the nineteenth century notion of the 'worker-intellectual', a worker drawn into a circle of intellectuals educated in the enlightenment tradition of rational thought (Wright, forthcoming). The focus of co-research, involving workers and grass-roots intellectuals, was on recovering the knowledge of the worker, 'daily expropriated by capital' (Bologna, 1978, esp. p. 122). As in critical pedagogy's dialogical methodology, co-research purportedly overcomes the object-subject divide, creating a 'co-subject' relation. This, Bologna states, is an attempt to open a relationship with a social movement endowed with knowledge and the capacity for self-organisation (Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995). He continues,

> So this completely changes the vision which makes the political elite an active subject and the mass movement a passive subject: the political elite, a kind of stratum endowed with knowledge and, instead, the mass movement, a stratum endowed only with wishes, with desires, with tensions and so on. (Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995)

Co-research was a bilateral attempt to shift the focus of workplace interventions away from reductive interpretations of the worker that historically tied them to questions of wage and the time of work and its organisation. Instead, the research tried to understand the 'worker as a whole person', contemplating the real life effects of work. Social theory was to be a pragmatic activity of the workers, an antagonistic science, and as Cuninghame (2002, p. 57) explains, was to move beyond a theoretical conflict between Marxists, neoliberals, and post-modernists occurring in universities, or as part of the State's production of social policy. The rejuvenation of radical thought, inspired by 'the upsurge in autonomous

working class militancy (…)', maintained the centrality of the worker, but 'was otherwise critical of orthodox Marxism's *victimist* vision of the working class …' (Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995).

Initially, the workerist project was an effort to relay the self-activity and the experiences and perceptions of the workers, to write in their language and not that of the intellectual or party militants (Bologna, 2002; Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995). However, in the second half of the 1960s, efforts to politicise and organise the radical community reintroduced familiar theoretical panaceas—such as the vanguard intellectual and paradigmatic subjectivity—to the analysis of political struggle. These theoretical bridges between objective and subjective, concrete condition and action, structure and agency, express, in part, the desire amongst the leadership and intellectual circles of the Italian far left to identify an adequate political subject.[7] As Wright noted with regard the workerist experience, sometimes self-activity frustrates the intellectual who wishes to see the antagonist community move in a certain political direction (Cowden & Wright, 2013, p. 216). The outcome of this exchange was the capturing of the creativity of workers autonomy by a theoretical explanation of the identity of a new revolutionary subject.

## The Intellectual

> There was a collaboration between the left intellectuals searching for the revolutionary subject and the workers in revolt (…). After this collaboration came to an end, the [second] group were still workers and the [first] still academics. (*The Last Firebrands*)

Michael Hardt (1996, p. 1) claims that the theorising of the Italian radical intellectuals 'has ridden the wave of the movements (…) and emerged as part of a collective practice, (…) *interpreting* one day's political struggles and *planning* for the next'. Firstly, Hardt is asserting that radical theory is a layer of radical practice, lending *coherence* to the movement by exploring new ideas, strategies and decisions, and forms of organisation. Secondly, while the movement and the intellectual reach common political shores, Hardt's analogy places the intellectual atop the surging tide of radical practice. Ostensibly, in the interest of advancing a *common* political programme, radical thought organises and channels the subjectivity of the movement, selecting amongst the tide of social movements the most energetic. Such political intervention, however, created cleavages within

the Italian Left, firstly amongst competing intellectual circles, and second between the antagonist community and the political elite. Periodically, the theoreticians re-asserted their authority in the organisation of dissent, imagining themselves as the vital link between working class struggle and working class consciousness. Here, as with condescending forms of pedagogy, the intellectual serves, as Melucci (1992) spotlights, 'as the external supplier of that (…) which the actor is lacking'.

The original cohort of workerism, in particular leaders such as Tronti and Negri, relinquished the initial vision of workerism in exchange for an 'adequate' theory of the revolutionary subject and a 'muscular' political ontology (Chiesa & Toscano, 2009, p. 2). However, the collapse of the New Left organisations in the 1970s would remind them of the polemical force of the antagonistic community and its hostility towards all forms of social aggregation. The original intent of co-research was to relay the creativity and innovation of the worker, and to learn from their practice and discourse; however, in the end the intellectuals would alienate the movement of their knowledge, which they would 'ideologise ex-post' (Cuninghame & Bologna, 1995).

At its best, Wright claims, co-research is a form of self-education, with workers analysing in detail their lived situation and identifying and sharing ways to overcome the obstacles in their environment that prevent them from living the kind of life they desire (Cowden & Wright, 2013). Ultimately, however, Italian co-research proved only a poor approximation of self-education (self-research) that researchers such as Alquati believed was required for true self-management.[8] In reality, co-research is more accurately a form of 'subversive pedagogy', a radical critique of social knowledge (Borio, Pozzi, & Roggero, 2007, p. 177) that offers its own account of the distribution of the common, mapping out how best to enclose its variegated fields of struggle to reduce inequality. This downgrades the struggles of the radical subject to the material of the theorist, reinstating hierarchical orders founded on the presupposition of an intellectual asymmetry.

## The Third Generation

The second generation of Italian movements (the movement of '68) coalesced around the organisations of the New Left. Here, the theorists of the first generation took on the role of organising and politicising the movement. However, during 1973–1974, the mass movement of the

workers began to disaggregate, and at the same time the PCI and official organisations of the left forged closer links with the political institution. In response, the third generation reached beyond the factory and had a new social basis, which from 1975 to 1977 was primarily constituted of an urban youth movement that breached the political culture of '68. The most active and innovative area of collective antagonism during this period existed in the social and cultural field, where autonomous spaces to experiment with new forms of community and life opened up. This 'area of creative autonomy', constituted primarily by collectives forming at the margins of society, avoided engaging with the political institution and produced what Lotringer and Marazzi label a 'surplus of knowledge', an excess of invention and intelligence outside the current demands of society (Lotringer & Marazzi, 1980, p. 15).

The third generation, a variegated field of anti-capitalist and anti-liberalist collectives, reached its zenith in the area of social autonomy and culminated in the 'Movement of '77' that rejected the militant intellectuals of the previous generation. This was a diffuse self-seeking radical community unperturbed by its particularity and lack of stable collective or political identity. The dispersed subjectivity, communalism, and separatism of the collectives exemplified the starting anew of the antagonistic community. They imagined the vanguard intellectuals as the 'police', attempting, as Ruggiero (2000, p. 171) states, to interchangeably 'co-opt or ostracize' the predominantly youth movement. Or as Palandri recounts, 'we were their donkeys', carrying forward the intellectual's plans (Cuninghame, 2002, p. 186). The institutions of party politics and the radical organisations of the neo-Leninist intellectuals burdened these communities and twice excluded them from the knowledge practices of antagonism. The response of the Movement of '77 was self-activity, self-education, and the opening of common spaces for cultural production.

The *centri sociali* (social centres), one of the most persistent and compelling legacies of the Italian movement sector of the seventies, emerged as part of the self-activity of the antagonistic youth movements of the 1970s (Moroni, 1994). Consisting predominantly of urban youth, the movement of social autonomy relocated into the city. It set up self-managed occupied social centres (CSOAs) that recognised neither public nor private ownership, taking over and squatting public spaces, and abandoned buildings (Ruggiero, 2000, pp. 170–171). The public spaces were host to various events such as concerts, became sites of political activity, and provided welfare from below. They were sites of self-management

and self-production—for example, creating fanzines, providing food co-operatives, and informal opportunities for self-education (Mudu, 2004). These positive expressions of 'living marginal' were an *immediate* rejoinder to the experience of social exclusion.[9] Ruggiero, in his study of Milan social centres, states, 'The movement of the *centri* does not rely on a precisely identifiable set of ideologies which, in some traditional movements, help endure the present while postponing happiness to a future Jerusalem'.[10] Social centres are more accurately a place of resistance, eschewing gradualism, and avoiding the trap of seeking answers to social exclusion in the progressive logic of social aggregation.

Subsequent to the self-organised workers' movement, certain subjects of the area of social autonomy extended political struggle into new areas, beyond the walled in political community. Their achievements were opaque to the political thought of the organisations of the Left and the representational logic of the political institution. The students, urban youth, women, the unemployed, generally those excluded politically, culturally, and socially, organised directly and independently of the existing institutions and parties (Red Notes, 1978, preface). However, they did not give up the terrain of politics, but, instead, they reconceptualised its territory as the resistance to conventional styles of life. According to Bologna (2002, p. 8), the irretrievable error of the primary organisations of the New Left was traceable back to the formative decision of its instigators to form an extra-parliamentary group. Instead, he states, 'we should have continued working in the social sphere, constructing alternatives (…): alternative spaces, liberated spaces'.

## Conclusion

At key moments throughout the 1960s and 1970s, political contestation was manifest in Italy in the nascence of a radical political subject. This is evident in the Movement of '77, which practiced new forms of life, was novel and creative, and did not seek their endowment from an external authority. These social movements realised community through a 'doing' particular to the local and specific conditions of the collective, and did not aggregate about a given sense of the common. This is not an isolated phenomenon in the Italian situation. The first regeneration of the antagonistic community began by refusing identification through their relation to work. This subject was born of the self-activity and self-organisation of workers. The first generation took responsibility, Hardt (2005, pp. 17–18)

believes, for self-constitution and the re-ordering of society based on *their* knowledge of the material conditions. Negri outlines how the *immediacy* of the struggles of the new radical community, coupled with the disorderly, mobile, and multiform nature of their radical practice, made little sense when analysed with the existing concepts and categories of radical thought. The new struggles were intelligent, driven by an independent knowledge of their situation, and as I clarify, did not rely on an external agent for explication of their social and political condition. While Negri would become a crucial figure in suffocating the innovation and creativity of this community, he did retrospectively, at least, observe the originality and importance of their practices (Negri, 1988, p. 202). In the contemporary movement sector of Italy, the radical political subject interrupted authoritarian forms of organisation, and returned to self-aware and self-determined practices of community.

The Italian RSMs claimed the right to participate autonomously: this is not an act of self-exclusion, it is a reclaiming of equality and it is the refusal of 'the exclusion from knowledge' (Melucci, 1981, p. 193). The practices of the radical community verify their ability to control the symbols and language of society, to define new conventions of meaning, and to offer alternative reasons and explanations for action. This rejuvenated radical subject removes itself from political servility, social obedience, the hegemony of social knowledge, and deconstructs the two humanities ontology. Through the revival of self-determination, emancipatory practice breaks from the epistemic community that ties politics to organisation from above, theoretical or pedagogical intervention and the logic of social aggregation—progress. This is the promise of the radical political subject, the potential to disrupt the relation of command, the 'normal relation' of better over worse, higher over lower, or its simple inversion in the rebellions of the men of desire (the ignorant) against the men of reason (the intelligent) (Rancière, 2006a, pp. 2–3).

Access to knowledge has become a central concern for RSMs. One pathway, delimited by pedagogy, leads to the informational resources necessary to order social and political relationships, which, Melucci (1981, pp. 178–179; 1994, pp. 112–113) identifies, in modern societies is inequitably distributed. An alternative is to undermine the systems of thought that prejudicially partition society. Here, those excluded from intellectual labour demonstrate, and we must witness, that there is only one intelligence. This act of radical equality reworks the formal elements of the environment to provide a refreshed perception of society, action, identity,

time, and space. I claim, supported by Rancière's political thought and the example of the contemporary Italian RSMs, that it is the alternative path that reveals the political potential of creativity and innovation. This conceptualisation of the nexus of politics and RSMs imagines a collective actor that generates both practical and theoretical discontinuities.

Contemporary social movements, in response to their reincorporation within the social order, Sassoon (1984, p. 406) remarks, involve endless invention, 'no longer endless struggle'. Accordingly, it is the innovative and creative aspects of social action, the 'non-binding' and diffuse forms, which provide insight into the dynamics of collective action. This is where we can witness the nascence of RSMs, learning from their response to the hegemony of social knowledge and efforts to enclose the productive force of the common. Therefore, to understand RSMs requires more than an evaluation in terms of political rationality and organisation. Essentially, it involves questions of knowledge practices and the logic of social aggregation. We must avoid treating knowledge from below, self-activity and self-education, as a partial epistemological phenomenon that requires an intellectual intervention or further explication. Theoretico-political intervention and emancipatory pedagogies threaten to become remedies to ignorance. Accordingly, whenever we observe the dynamics of RSMs—those fighting against the status quo—we must consider their valence as essentially epistemological and not simply 'social-stuff'.

## Notes

1. Alberto Toscano discusses the importance of considering the valence of radical communities in his work on fanaticism. See Toscano (2010, p. 58).
2. Gert Biesta perhaps best summarises the intent and current status of critical pedagogy, with relevance to the writings of Rancière, in works such as G. Biesta (2010), G. J. Biesta (1998) and Bingham and Biesta (2010).
3. See for example Freire (2000).
4. See Berardi (2007, pp. 134–135).
5. Here Wright refers to Alquati (1975).
6. The efforts of these researchers crystallised around the intellectual circle associated with the journal *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks, 1961–1965, and later *Classe Operaia*).
7. See for discussion Melucci (1996, p. 15).
8. For further discussion see Wright (2002, pp. 24–25).
9. See Viola 1976 cited in Cuninghame (2002, pp. 174–175).
10. See also Foa (1982).

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CHAPTER 9

# Educational Enclosure and the Existential Commons: Settler Colonialism, Racial Capitalism, and the Problem of the Human

*Anita Juárez and Clayton Pierce*

## Introduction: Who Counts as Human in the Commons?

In recent years, educational theory has largely focused on conceptualizing and thinking through what an educational politics of the commons might look like (Bowers, 2004; Lewis & Kahn, 2010; De Lissovoy, 2011; Lewis, 2012; De Lissovoy, Means, & Saltman, 2014). A politics of the commons remains attractive to those who want to find an educational exit point from the aggressive and violent nature of capitalist forces that continue to destroy humans and ecosystems within the current neoliberal moment. This concern is especially relevant since schools in the neoliberal phase of capitalism, as this literature points out, play a pivotal role in maintaining and reproducing the ongoing processes of primitive accumulation. Upon entering this debate within the literature, we understand primitive accumulation in Marx's (1977) original historical materialist sense: a historical

A. Juárez (✉)
University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, USA
e-mail: anita.juarez@utah.edu

C. Pierce
Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA, USA



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account of how land, resources, and cultural knowledge and practices were violently seized from feudal peasantry of Europe in the pre- and early-capitalist periods, providing the originary wealth that fueled industrial capitalism. We see this definition as foundational to enclosure/commons analyses within the Marxist and neo-Marxist literature in education. With that said, the goal of this chapter is to provide a theoretical contribution to the commons/enclosure literature in education that expands and challenges some of the limitations of Marx's conceptualization of primitive accumulation. Our contribution applies settler colonial and Afro-pessimist analyses to the concept of humanism as it relates to neoliberal constructions of education, hence highlighting a dimension of the commons/enclosure debate that has not been taken up in educational theory. We argue that this conversation is an important one to consider when thinking through what the politics of the common would look like in connection to educational struggles of communities and people who face insidious forms of primitive accumulation like urban gentrification, merit pay and other classroom productivity-based accountability strategies, carceral disciplinary practices, and the general creation of disposable populations through austerity measures (Means, 2013).

The theoretical perspective we offer is informed by the work of Frank Wilderson, Shona Jackson, and Glen Coulthard. We contend that their combined critiques, and advanced theorizations of primitive accumulation and enclosure, forefront fundamental assumptions about who can be human in the commons and how one becomes human within the social relations established by settler colonial and racial capitalist nations. Our analyses emphasize two particular areas in these authors' work:

1. What does the reacquisition of dispossessed land look like in calls for regaining "direct access to the means of subsistence" in settler societies like the US? and
2. How might conceptualizations and practices of humanism in the European Marxist tradition focusing on alienation and exploitation participate in erasing Indigenous peoples' presence while supporting antiblackness?[1]

In essence, what we are suggesting with these questions is that any commons movement in education built on questions of direct access to land, labor, cultural knowledges, and non-institutionalized learning needs to cautiously interrogate what Wilderson (2010) calls "Humanism's existential commons."

For Wilderson, "Humanism's existential commons" in modernity is reflected in Marx's analysis of slavery as a form of primitive accumulation in *Capital Volume 1*. Wilderson draws a distinction between the worker and slave by pointing out how the wage worker stands in equal relation to the capitalist in terms of how they can theoretically spend money on commodities. What the white worker learns here, according to Wilderson (2010), is that if they

> can buy a loaf of bread, they can also buy a slave. It seems to me that the psychic dimension of a proletariat who 'stands in precisely the same relationship' to other members of civil society due to their intramural exchange in mutual, possessive possibilities, the ability to own either a piece of Black flesh or a loaf of white bread or both, is where we must begin to understand the founding antagonism …. (p. 13)

The founding antagonism Wilderson is referring to here is the way "Humanism's existential commons" has been created through capitalist social relations imbued with what Du Bois (1998) called the "psychic wages of whiteness," the psychic and material privileges white workers garnered in racial capitalist society by virtue of their race. Wilderson's key point here is that whiteness is predicated on the ontological condition of social death imposed upon enslaved Black people—and maintained by a racial caste system in the post-Reconstruction period—as well as the genocidal relationship to Indigenous peoples endemic to settler states. The white worker achieves full humanity because they directly benefit from a settler state where "the dehumanizing impulses of colonization are successfully acted upon because racism in these countries are predicated on the logics of possession" (Moreton-Robinson, 2015).

In the section that follows, we engage the commons literature both inside and outside education as a way of tracing the productive directions theorists of the commons/enclosure in education have pushed traditional Marxist analyses through the development and application of neo-Marxist theories of the commons and enclosure. We pay particular attention to places in the educational literature that provide openings for challenging an ontology of humanness for whites, and one of suffering and erasure for Black and Indigenous peoples. Subsequently, we suggest important points of theorization around a commons movement within education and what this might look like within the current neoliberal reform context. We use the work of Wilderson, Jackson, and Coulthard to highlight the ways US schools currently maintain and reproduce white settler forms of

accumulation and antiblackness through the recent authorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Ultimately, we argue that neoliberal enclosures do nothing new (in a historical sense) besides change the terms of the same process of primitive accumulation—one built on the fungibility of students of color and the preservation of humanity set within the boundaries of what Du Bois called the "white world" and its most abundant inhabitant: the white accumulatory subject.

## Commonalities in the Commons Literature

Many contemporary scholars have now observed that primitive accumulation is an ongoing feature of capitalist societies rather than a distinct historical phase (Coulthard, 2014; De Angelis, 2001; De Lissovoy, 2008; Harvey, 2006; Perelman, 2000). The capitalist enclosure of communal spaces and basic necessities of life (i.e. land, education, housing, forms of work, food production and access, etc.) creates and coerces into existence numerous levels of dependency across the globe in our age of neoliberal ascendency and dominance. Primitive accumulation continues to appropriate epistemological, ecological, cultural, economic, and spiritual systems from across the globe (De Lissovoy et al., 2014). Through various "biopiracy" enterprises masquerading as development and natural conservation projects, for example, state/corporate neocolonial projects continue to viciously extract value from land, species, and Indigenous knowledge systems. Important to note is that besides producing planetary lethal effects, neoliberal forms of enclosure create unique levels of violence. Vandana Shiva (1988, 1999, 2005) and Silvia Federici's (2004, 2012) respective work, for instance, have brought attention to the relationship between land dispossession, patriarchy, and reproductive work—and in particular how this connection has led to the transformation of the body and the elimination of women's power (Federici, 2004). Their work illustrates a highly important gendered dimension to the ways enclosures work within the contemporary processes of primitive accumulation, thus emphasizing how patriarchy and capitalism are an important power coupling of enclosure in Western modern history.

Framing primitive accumulation as a necessary and ongoing set of procedures, as opposed to confining it to a single historical moment, not only allows a consideration of the intrinsic role of violence and warfare in capitalist developments (Federici, 2002), but also encourages a sustained interrogation of the state as a key agent of enclosure (Harvey, 2007). Yet,

within the uneven development projects driven by neoliberal state/corporate interests where distinct geographic spaces of enclosure look different, De Angelis (2001) reminds us that because peoples from all across the world are facing similar neoliberal strategies of accumulation "it allows us to identify the broad essential question that any discussion on alternatives within the growing global anti-capitalist movement must pose: the issue of direct access to the means of existence, production and communication, the issue of the *commons*" (pp. 19–20).

Crucially, institutions of education have been one of the most contested sites where enclosure and commons have been interrogated. This is in large part because creating economic and political dependency requires teaching people that they are incapable of learning outside the purview of expert control and that education is little more than a commodified product detached from autonomous social and cultural concerns (Illich, 1971). In the field of educational theory, several scholars have argued for the need to move away from forms of subjective enclosure caused by neoliberal, educational policy and curriculum, and toward collective movements and spaces that can help facilitate subjectivities attuned to a politics of the common (De Lissovoy, 2011; De Lissovoy et al., 2014; Lewis, 2012; Means, 2013; Schnyder, 2010; Slater, 2014).

In jumping to a politics of direct access around these different means of the commons, as the autonomist Marxist Massimo De Angelis suggests, we want to ask for a collective pause that considers whether the move to direct access to the means of production adequately deals with foundational assumptions about who can be fully human in the future commons. It is our contention that we must deeply reflect on how anti-blackness and settler colonialism complicate the idea of remaking our social existences through "direct access to the means of existence, production and communication." Here we would be in agreement with De Lissovoy et al. (2014) that "a new common school movement will need to challenge the *whiteness* of education," and abolish schools in neoliberal society that are part of a "racist containment of black and brown students in preparation for semipermanent marginalization within the flux of an uncertain service economy and prison state" (pp. 92–93). We would, however, suggest that one important place to start a radical educational movement based in a commons that "confront[s] the violent ontology that determines these students as mere objects or disposable instances of 'bare life'" is to begin to articulate what an *abolitionary pedagogy* might entail within the neoliberal education context (p. 93). Extending

previous calls in educational theory for developing an abolitionary pedagogy, we argue that it is important to link a theory and practice of abolitionary pedagogy to the commons movement in education—reason being that the white world remains invested in an ontological basis of humanity that is measured by the accumulatory white subjects' ability to extract material and psychic wealth from the less than human "dark world" (Allen, 2004; Gillborn, 2005; Leonardo, 2002, 2009; Pierce, 2013b; Watkins, 2005). In fact, the white world's education has supported and normalized this dehumanizing ethic.

As part of a commons movement in education, an abolitionary pedagogy would thus entail dismantling what Du Bois (1998) called the "wages of whiteness": the privileges white groups have accrued over the centuries in the US that advantages the "white world" with better social, economic, and psychic life conditions. In this sense, an abolitionary pedagogy would need to draw on Du Bois's material and psychic concept of the "wages of whiteness" to confront how the white working class learned to be antiblack because their ontological and material conditions are predicated on the dehumanized condition of the Black worker. A commons movement in education connected to an abolitionary pedagogy would also need to articulate in practical terms how the original and sustained theft of land from Indigenous peoples are tied to the white accumulatory subject supported by the wages of whiteness and the ontological condition of antiblackness. Such a project, as the authors we turn to below suggest, would need to address how even Marxist revolutionary politics can harbor settler colonial values and fail to adequately see the ontological consequences of focusing on exploitation and alienation over fungibility. Here we might consider if calling for a politics of the commons based on a move to retake the means of production (especially how communities choose to educate themselves) includes returning Indigenous lands and other forms of wealth to tribes across the Americas—both at a material, psychological (i.e. wages of whiteness), and organizational level. To begin to broaden Marxist oriented theorizations of the commons we now turn to work in the educational literature that has advanced the analytic of primitive accumulation in some important ways. In particular, we point to work that deals with how primitive accumulation and the co-articulating projects of race and class operate in and through the racial capitalist and settler colonial project of schooling in the US.

The persistent commodification and privatization of public education by neoliberal regimes has led to a series of new critiques and proposed alternatives for rethinking the politics of education from the standpoint of the commons. Take, for example, Damien Schnyder, whose work explores how schools function within a "prison regime" that intentionally attempts to enclose Black autonomous spaces of being by subjugating the humanity and culture of Black youth. Schnyder (2010) has introduced the idea of white capital's urgency to remove and erase the vernacular cultures of Black and brown populations—particularly since they serve as potential sites for creating, imagining, and practicing autonomous ways of existence. Along similar lines, Noah De Lissovoy theorizes educational enclosure through the ways accumulation and carceral forms of power work within the neoliberal schooling context. De Lissovoy (2012) argues that "schools increasingly exclude and marginalize students of color in preparation not for regular work but rather for an existence on the periphery of the economy or within the walls of the prison system" (p. 750).

Both Schnyder and De Lissovoy point to an important feature of how primitive accumulation and enclosure work within the neoliberal context of schooling today: Black and brown bodies are made productive and capitalized upon by locking their life chances within ontological spaces that deny humanity outside of the white settler patriarchal framework. In other words, schools play an important role in maintaining the processes of primitive accumulation and enclosure because they enforce epistemological and ontological allegiance with forms of dispossession, eliminating students of color from the workforce through carceral "violations" that hinge on making disposable life profitable (such as in the prison industrial complex). Here, as De Lissovoy points out, schools in the neoliberal context are not solely concerned with human capital workforce production but on managing bodies and populations for "useful" forms of labor such as prison, military, or service types. In this sense, as Schnyder (2010) points out, the school in the school-to-prison pipeline is not simply a carceral staging area: it is a site of cultural violence and epistemic punishment in itself.

In the above review of the Marxist and neo-Marxist literature on the commons/enclosure there are two themes we want to highlight before we move into our analysis. On the one hand, the analysis of theorists working more closely within the Marxist tradition focus on the problem of the commons and enclosure through the processes of proletarianization and removal of people from their means of subsistence (De Angelis, 2001;

De Lissovoy, 2008; Harvey, 2006; Lipman, 2011; Perelman, 2000). Here the ongoing process of primitive accumulation centers on capital accumulation through wealth acquisition not only in land (real estate) and other forms of dispossession (i.e. access to land for food production) but also increasingly in what Hardt and Negri (2009), De Angelis (2007), and others have called cognitive or immaterial labor, which operates "on the level of information flows, communication networks, social codes, linguistic innovations, and practices of affects and passions" (pp. 140–141) in the neoliberal period of capitalism. The process of proletarianization, however, assumes an ontology where labor (human creative and productive powers) exists in an existential commons understood largely through the paradigm of worker exploitation and alienation as well as the reproduction of values associated with consumer capitalism. Shifting to a lens of fungibility asks us to consider how the process of proletarianization is also antagonistic to Black peoples.

The second thematic of the Marxist and neo-Marxist commons/enclosure literature we want to distinguish is a focus on non-human and cultural enclosure. Here we see the work of Shiva and of Federici as illuminating the ways capitalist enclosure involves the capturing and appropriation of non-humans, ecological systems, and cultural knowledges rooted in place. Within this thematic of the commons/enclosure literature we also see how capitalist enclosure is tied directly to patriarchal and imperial power relations—women's knowledge and labor are a target of global capitalist enclosure precisely because it is in the knowledge and practices of women that capitalist development can capitalize on pharmaceutical or agricultural ventures in the global "South" or simply exploit women's labor in trade zone cities like Juarez, Mexico. These analyses within the commons/enclosure literature open up a potentially productive point of connection to the question of who counts as human in the commons (Lewis & Kahn, 2010). In particular, by bringing attention to how the non-human world and gendered bodies and populations are affected and utilized in neoliberal forms of primitive accumulation, the question of life and production of subjectivity is centered (Bowers, 2004; Slater, 2014). We would extend this point, however, by asking how the processes of primitive accumulation, and revolutionary responses to them, might not adequately deal with how racial capitalist and settler colonial states are built on an "existential commons" that dehumanize Black and Indigenous peoples. In this sense, we are suggesting that the debate around human and non-human, as well as cultural appropriation, in the educational commons literature needs to

cautiously evaluate assumptions on who can be fully human, especially how it relates to understanding the revolutionary subject and whiteness. Building on existing work in educational theory pushing the debate on the antiblack and white supremacist underpinning of schools (De Lissovoy, 2012; Dumas, 2014, 2016; De Lissovoy et al., 2014; Schnyder, 2010; Sojoyner, 2013), we want to ask this question: how do we theorize and construct a commons politics around schools when one of the primary institutional goals has been to preserve white supremacy and capitalist accumulation which are premised on Black suffering and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands and ways of life? In other words, if the public school was never designed to include a definition of humanity that did not equate to the white possessive subject, then to what degree, if at all, can a commons movement in education (primarily focused on the overthrow of exploitation and alienation) change the existential commons in a way that does not premise whiteness as the measure of humanity?

## Analytics for Interrogating the Existential Commons

### *Land*

In recent years, critical studies of settler colonialism have offered powerful models for examining contemporary colonial arrangements in the Americas. Settler colonialism refers to the ongoing process of colonial occupation whereby nation state formation and settler colonial relations are established, maintained, and advanced at the expense of Indigenous peoples and land. The work of Coulthard rests within the growing body of literature that highlights the centrality of Indigenous land dispossession to understandings of decolonial struggles (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Barker, 2005; Byrd, 2014; Calderón, 2014; Coulthard, 2007; Goldstein, 2008; Patel, 2014; Sexton, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). What is particularly useful about Coulthard's work is his Indigenous reconceptualization of primitive accumulation, which shifts focus from capital accumulation to land dispossession. The latter, he contends, moves us away from Marx's initial idea of capitalist-modernity as central to human development (hence avoiding the possibility of replicating settler state dispossession through calls for socialist undertakings) and asks that we begin any conversation on the commons from the fact that "the commons" belong to Indigenous peoples and are rooted in Indigenous relationships to land.

Regarding the historical relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state, for instance, Coulthard argues that the history and experience of colonial dispossession in settler societies such as Australia, New Zealand, and the US have been the dominant background shaping the social relations of settler states. In other words, he maintains that for Indigenous peoples, practices of settler-state dispossession and Indigenous modes of resistance are both centered around questions of land more so than around labor. Coulthard's interrogation of the ongoing effects of colonial dispossession of Indigenous lands and modes of self-determination therefore insists that class-based analyses be situated alongside the varying forms of exploitation and domination that converge within settler colonial political arrangements. It is this precise claim—that land and dispossession be understood as central to capitalist enclosures, whereby colonial dispossession operates in relation to other hierarchical social relations—that should fundamentally shape discussions around what constitutes the commons. To extend and complement these assertions, the work of Shona Jackson provides an additional layer of complexity that must be taken into account around the question of labor and how Marxist conceptualizations, in particular, can allow for the erasure of Indigenous peoples and appropriation of land.

### *Labor*

Although Jackson's (2012) perspectives, on what she refers to as "creole indigeneity," is specific to the context of colonial Guyana, her theoretical insights offer useful analytical tools for assessing the convoluted nature of material and ontological relations within settler states like the US. For instance, she uses the concept of "creole indigeneity" to describe the ways in which colonialism created the conditions for Creoles (former enslaved people of African descent) to "indigenize" the New World and, in doing so, displacing and objectifying Indigenous peoples through modern nation building (see also Bedford, 1994). That is to say, the relationship to the land (by way of labor) that Creoles developed through various liberation movements in the post-colonial period positioned Creoles as settlers because of their ability to maintain a greater degree of power within the postcolonial state that provided a pathway to citizenship based on labor and land use that excluded and erased Indigenous peoples.

For Jackson, in order to understand the complex subordination of Black, Indigenous, and Indo-Caribbean peoples—and the struggles

among them—it thus becomes necessary to examine how a 'coloniality of belonging' intertwines their material and ontological relationships. Jackson explains:

> In Guyana, the interior is the last remaining space undeveloped by white colonials onto which blacks can shift the narrative of civilization. In the continued deployment of colonial logic within the postcolonial state, to leave it underdeveloped would be to prove black inferiority. The indigenous body, collapsed with this space, remains that which must be but cannot fully be integrated, civilized, or developed, forcing the state to maintain a contradictory approach to Indigenous Peoples and their lands, which simultaneously represent the limit and measure of black humanity within the settler state. (p. 12)

By addressing the ways in which "… those brought in as forced labor (racialized capital) now contribute to the disenfranchisement of Indigenous Peoples" (p. 3) within the Caribbean islands, Jackson highlights the manner in which "colonized" subjects—in this case, Black and Indigenous peoples—are collectively positioned in political and ontological relationships that essentially sustain colonial structures of domination. As such, Jackson's analysis asks that we consider the function of labor in shaping the formation of social, cultural, and political subjectivities in relation to land and the erasure of Indigenous peoples even in revolutionary contexts. Particularly by framing labor as a "time of belonging" through which capitalist notions of progress and development are normalized, Jackson critiques Marxian metanarratives that relegate Indigenous peoples to the past by favoring capitalist modes of belonging and being.

### *Fungibility and Antiblackness*

Paired with Coulthard's (2014) emphasis on the centrality of land and Indigenous dispossession through primitive accumulation, Jackson's (2012) analytical weaving of racialized capital and colonial practices of belonging to the land unsettle general assumptions of humanness in the commons. Both theorists' work asks us to consider the different ontological positions of Black and Indigenous bodies in relation to white social being predicated on Indigenous erasure and antiblackness. Wilderson's (2010) compelling analysis of what he calls "the grammar of black and red suffering," which assumes that African slavery is not rooted in alienation and exploitation but rather fungibility, further complicates the underlying

assumptions and components of dispossession within traditional Marxist critiques of political economy.

Whereas Jackson (2012) contends that a white settler colonial paradigm is limiting in how it fails to capture how other colonized subjects could function as settlers themselves, Wilderson insists that whiteness and blackness be understood within the structure of the Master/Slave relation. In other words, "the Red, Indigenous, or 'Savage' position exists liminally as half-death and half-life between the Slave (Black) and the Human (White, or non-Black)" (p. 23). The "symbolic value" of whiteness and black slavery is central to Humanism—for not only does it confine Black bodies to an ontological status that exists outside of humanity void of relationality, it positions Blackness as a "fungible commodity"—where the value of Black bodies is based on their exchange value to whiteness and the accumulatory projects of the state that pay "wages of whiteness." To this end, Wilderson argues that African slavery was not organized around exploitation and alienation, but accumulation and fungibility—"the condition of being owned and traded"—that places Black bodies in a constant state of nonhumanness and thus as an object of ownership and exchange (Wilderson, 2010, p. 14). Like Coulthard, Wilderson decenters the worker/capitalist relation as the focus of analysis by emphasizing the core "antagonism" that exists between the Black and Human world as one of "fungibility." Centering fungibility shifts thinking about primitive accumulation and enclosure as based on worker exploitation and alienation from their direct access to means of subsistence in some important ways.

Wilderson's assertion of Black fungibility (a state of anti-Humanness) and indigeneity (Savage) as semi-human recenters how we think of the commons and enclosure because it asks us to focus on a more fundamental problem of modern society: Humanity (whiteness) is defined and predicated on the fungibility of Black bodies and populations as well the genocide of Indigenous peoples and land dispossession. So, in this sense, a commoning politics of education that emphasizes the direct control of communities over their productive powers, or, for instance, in the critical pedagogy tradition, conscientization, would not necessarily deal with the variety of ways antiblackness and Indigenous erasure is integral to educational inequality in the US.

Following Michael Dumas (2016), we would argue that recommoning education within communities needs to take up the challenge of how the ontological condition of human (whiteness) would need to be abolished as the originary act of enclosure in the modern and premodern era for a different paradigm of the "existential commons" to emerge.

The combined critiques made by Wilderson, Jackson, and Coulthard, ultimately shed light on the different levels of colonial violence—psychic and material—produced by the process of primitive accumulation and enclosures. More specifically, it brings attention to two major matters:

1. The ways in which identity formation and modes of being fluctuate between different axis of power, and
2. How subjects are differently positioned in relation to land, labor, dispossession, and each other.

It is their particular attentiveness to antiblackness and Indigenous dispossession within settler colonial contexts that presents crucial implications for how the educational commons can be theorized. We believe these analytics are especially necessary when discussing educational commons in relation to the white settler state and its contemporary neoliberal reform policies.

## Homo Economicus and the ESSA: Racial Capitalist Schooling in the Neoliberal Period

In this final section we apply Wilderson, Jackson, and Coulthard's analytics of land, labor, and antiblackness to the ESSA. We do this to show how enclosure in the example of school policy involves more than a reproductive strategy used by state and corporate actors to bolster neoliberal economic arrangements. Centered on creating policy and practice "innovations" as a response to the failed NCLB policies, the ESSA reframes the government's approach to dealing with the ongoing achievement gap between low-income students of color and white students through a neoliberal governance approach. Initially, a major point of contention regarding the ESSA policy is how it allows for teacher preparatory academies backed by corporate philanthropists to be sites of teacher education and credentialing (Strauss, 2015). What we want to highlight here, however, is how its insistence upon a human capital model of subjectivity, *homo economicus*, allows neoliberal educational enclosures to proliferate. Yet, we also suggest the need to take up the ways primitive accumulation and its systems of enclosure have fostered an ontological condition of humanity based on imperial and antiblack values. In other words, we want to ask how *homo economicus* serves not only to animate the ESSA's economic project of increasing and optimizing the human capital stock of

the educational population in the US by deregulating teacher education, but also how critiques of neoliberal polices ignore the way such polices preserve an ontological condition based on antiblackness, land dispossession, and settler labor.

In this sense, we echo De Lissovoy et al.'s (2014) recent call to revision a new common school movement in the US. For them a new commons movement in education "is an effort to strengthen and reconceptualize public schooling for a genuinely democratic society beyond the crisis and failure of neoliberalism." Such a reconstruction of the educational commons would include not "merely need[ing] to defend public schooling; we need to remake it. We believe that engagement with the theory and practice of the global commons provides a set of creative and ethical referents suitable to this task" (p. vii). Within such a reconstructive educational project we suggest that an *abolitionary pedagogy*—centered on fungibility, land dispossession in settler societies, and labor as more than a linear-progressive concept—as key analytic points of departure for a new commons movement in education. Let us now look at the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) policy to see what a theory of abolitionary pedagogy linked to a commons movement in education would need to emphasize.

As many theorists have pointed out, homo economicus is the operative human subject from which neoliberal rationalities and governing practices are derived (Bröckling, 2011; Foucault, 2008; Olssen, 2006; Peters, 2005; Pierce, 2013a). Where there has been very little work, however, is in the area of better understanding how homo economicus reaffirms whiteness and settler identities through a colorblind market rationality. In other words, homo economicus's agency in the world is based on the individual's ability to compete and be held responsible for their entrepreneurial decision making in market-based society. In this ontological schema, whiteness and the privileges it endows subjects with is erased and masked over with notions of meritocracy, equality through market freedom, and other myths that construct the white imaginary since the founding of the country. What the "achievement gap" discourse allows, when connected to neoliberal governing reform approaches to education like the ESSA, is a way to not only maintain but also discipline the material and psychic social conditions in schools and society where whiteness is constantly equated to being fully human.

For example, in his remarks on the passage of ESSA, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan situated the piece of legislation as part of the long civil rights struggle to attain equal and high-quality education for working-class students of color. Within the civil rights framework, Duncan

suggested that ESSA is "about what kind of opportunity Brandon, Russhaun, Federico Christina and Star have. Throughout our nation's history, the federal government has played an important role in protecting their civil rights" (Duncan, 2015). Duncan's framing of the ESSA within the civil rights legacy is important because it is based in the liberal humanist tradition where the rights-bearing individual achieves freedom and equality through property possession and competitive advantage, all of which are supported and recognized by the (neo)liberal state. Moreover, it normalizes the assumption that access to state-sponsored resources, like public education, is a sufficient measure to tackle social and economic inequities. It ignores, for instance, the way state-recognized solutions have historically sought to dilute and co-opt racial justice and struggles for autonomy and self-determination (Coulthard, 2014; Melamed, 2011; Schnyder, 2010; Stern & Hussain, 2015). What we want to emphasize about the ESSA again is not the particular ways it advances the neoliberal restructuring of education, though this is also important, but rather how such policies fit within the larger governing logic of the settler colonial and racial capitalist state that predate neoliberal forms of governance. To be clear about what we mean here we provisionally outline what educational enclosures associated with the ESSA look like within the coordinates laid out by Coulthard, Jackson, and Wilderson's work analyzed above.

With the analytics of fungibility, land dispossession/rights discourses, and labor as a linear-progressive Western concept in view, we can see not only the underlying liberal political economic assumptions of policies like the ESSA, but also the liberal humanist definition that animates how students/people are understood and measured as rights possessors and accumulatory subjects. From the standpoint of fungibility, the ESSA activates the "achievement gap" as a tool of the racial capitalist/settler state in that it sets up students of color (who the policy frames as the gapped population) for participation in an exchange-value system of education steeped in the co-articulating projects of white supremacy and capitalist accumulation. In other words, the ESSA policy as a human capital development strategy encloses students and communities of color by forcing them to play the rigged game of entrepreneurial market decision making in the new educational "flat world" while also holding them accountable to the amount of human capital investments made over their educational lifetime. Here the benefits of whiteness are not accounted for; instead, they are built into the performative logics of an educational landscape based on the ontological subjugation of students of color and in particular the historical pattern of

antiblackness schooling the US has always upheld and reconstructed in a variety of ways (Dumas, 2014). The achievement gap population is necessary, in other words, to support the white accumulation of "better" forms of education—fungibility here allows educational actors to choose from market menus that reinscribe social and political conditions of social death for students and communities of color and Indigenous populations while creating the conditions of full humanity that can only be achieved through accumulation connected to the fungibility of "gap" populations. The use value of gap populations generated in racial capitalist-settler colonial schooling contexts, in other words, is defined by how these groups exist as exchange value in the racial capitalist economy of schooling in the US.

When we apply Coulthard's analytic of primitive accumulation attuned to rights-based political discourses and land dispossession, we can see how the ESSA preserves white-settler identity by affirming education as fundamentally an accumulatory project supported and recognized by the state. In this sense, as a human capital accumulation model, the ESSA affirms and teaches settler rights to property (both in the form of educational property such as elite charter school access and connected neighborhood gentrification projects) by enclosing educational value into commodifiable and exchangeable forms. For example, while the ESSA may seem only to focus and promote educational reforms in the US around solving the persistent problem of the "achievement gap," it is also a *normalizing* governing tool that teaches white subjects and people of color to understand themselves as *homo economicus*—rights bearers and accumulators of human capital investments and resources.

Coulthard's work thus highlights the way enclosure happens at the level of subject production, connecting to work in educational theory that critiques neoliberal subjectivities (De Lissovoy et al., 2014; Slater, 2014). Individuals, through settler colonial processes and systems of the state like educational institutions, are taught to understand themselves through rights based and generated from the accumulatory property (both in terms of land and whiteness as property) system of settler colonial states. Here, we would argue that part of the solution of closing the gap offered by ESSA is in effect enforcing forms of recognition (how the state and its institutions view and govern its citizens) based on colonial power relations. As Coulthard argues, building off Indigenous scholar/activist Taiaiake Alfred's work, "colonial recognition politics serves the imperatives of capitalist accumulation by *appearing* to address its colonial history through symbolic acts of redress while in actuality 'further entrenching in law and practice the

bases of its control'" (p. 155). So, in this sense, the ESSA enforces a type of subjectivity where only through acquiring forms of human capital can individuals seemingly become a marketable educational subject—ongoing primitive accumulation takes place through the subject's internal recognition of property acquisition in terms of valuable human capital dispensaries (i.e. elite charter schools, segregated districts, etc.)—which connects to another important type of possession through accumulation.

Finally, Shona Jackson's work offers another important insight in terms of how we might think of educational enclosure today, and similarly, what a commoning movement in education should entail. Specifically, we argue that Jackson's work of rethinking the Marxist notion of labor as an inherently emancipatory concept is invaluable because it offers a productive critique to Marxist-influenced education literatures, such as critical pedagogy. For example, in looking at the question of human capital accumulation as the predominant model of education in the US today, a Marxist approach would highlight the ways neoliberal education based on skill acquisition and entrepreneurial behavior is ultimately a dehumanizing and alienating theory and practice in which to organize education in society. While we would fundamentally agree with this analysis, we would also argue that it is also limited by starting with the question of how human creative, imaginative, and productive powers are distorted, disfigured, and usurped for the needs of the capitalist production process and the endless hunt for surplus labor value. Jackson's work illustrates for us that while labor was *the* key categorical target to focus on in industrial capitalist settings in Europe (and the colonial world) for Marx, it doesn't adequately account for the ways labor also plays a crucial role in maintaining settler colonial relations even in political contexts oriented toward liberation and anti-colonial political movements. Precisely because, as an emancipatory concept, labor in the Marxist tradition is still rooted in a progressive-linear model of state development that constructs humanity within the limits of how it is alienated or exploited in capitalist organized societies. Jackson's study of creole indigeneity, on the other hand, shows how labor even in Marxist revolutionary settings is built on the erasure of Indigenous peoples (it is their land being labored on to develop into a modern nation state and a corollary notion of citizenship). It also shows how enclosure vis-à-vis Black (creole people of Guyana in the case of Jackson's example) communities work through their participation in settler colonial practices of nation building that require land to meet the productive needs of modern states, socialist, capitalist, or communist.

So, in taking Jackson's critique of labor and applying it to the problem of human capital educational models, we argue it offers a more penetrating explanation to the question of educational labor within the neoliberal educational context. Namely, while homo economicus is a deeply alienated human subject because his (homo economicus is also a patriarchal subject) productive capacities are locked within the accumulatory limits of skill and behavior acquisition most valuable within neoliberal society, a revolutionary Marxist subject whose labor has been emancipated from the model of homo economicus does not necessarily overcome the underlying developmental model of modern society where production and land (nature) are still required to realize full humanity. In other words, even if the problem of alienated labor is addressed by emancipating human labor power from the clutches of the capitalist mode of production in its neoliberal phase, how does the question of land and racial domination get dealt with by placing productive powers in the hands of the 99%?

## Moving Forward

The goal of our analysis has been to engage, and perhaps broaden, the parameters of the commons/enclosure debate in education. In short, we want to offer a theoretical tool for meditating on the idea of an educational commons. Such a project is key, though perhaps not wholly sufficient, to ensuring that struggles for educational commons do not fall prey to a politics of enclosure wrapped in revolutionary clothing. In an effort to advance such a theoretical project, we close with three summative points of departure for an abolitionary pedagogy that seeks to expand and reconstruct the existential commons:

- Shifting focus to fungibility instead of alienation and exploitation as the originary problem of enclosure and the "existential commons" from which common movements should be theorized and practiced in education requires us to consider how subjects are both materially and ontologically positioned in contemporary settler contexts.
- Land dispossession and rights discourses: common movements in education not only need to divorce themselves from rights discourses and policies, but also consider what land repatriation and the abolition of private property would look like—this is necessary to move away from the processes of primitive accumulation based on logics of accumulation and forms of state recognition that promote imperial subjects of consumption, ownership, and entitlement.

- Labor as settler project: how do we conceptualize and practice labor (creative and productive human capacities) as a revolutionary category in ways that do not feed into settler colonial notions of belonging to places? In the context of the US, an abolitionary pedagogy should focus on the ways that "wages of whiteness" limit the liberatory potential of labor by privileging the "white world" and dehumanizing the "dark world." The more than five hundred year presence of "wages of whiteness" complicates immediate revolutionary solutions. A revolution of white subjectivity should begin by confronting how whiteness has infused the concept of labor with dehumanizing possessive characteristics.

These points present useful implications for rethinking what an educational commons might look like under neoliberal processes of primitive accumulation. For instance, the standpoint we offer here for thinking through current forms of educational enclosure does not only ask that we consider how public schooling plays a central role in facilitating practices of enclosure that target people of color and Indigenous peoples, but that we carefully discuss the advantages, limitations, and/or possible dangers of accommodating common struggles to state-recognized forms of education. Moreover, ignoring the ways in which we are each materially and ontologically positioned in relation to Humanness, land, and the liberal settler state, threatens to reproduce exclusionary, even violent practices of the commons.

## Note

1. We use the terms "Black" and "antiblackness" to signify the way that US settler colonial and white supremacist contexts shape the material and ontological experiences of Black bodies and populations.

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CHAPTER 10

# Common Relationality: Antiracist Solidarity, Racial Embodiment, and the Problem of Self-Possession

*Gardner Seawright*

The common is inherently relational. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009) put it in *Commonwealth*, "we all share and participate in the common" (p. viii). The shared participation of the common flows through the "common wealth of the material world—the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty" that we are all bound to and dependent upon (p. viii). Secondly, the common is the result of social production—of interaction and movement across social worlds—and "cohabitation in a common world" (p. viii). As I walk out of my house each day to face the world, the common serves as the field and medium for experiential and relational engagement. The common is not a container that encases relationships, nor is it a fixed landscape that one can traverse. Instead, the common should be viewed as the generative prerequisite of

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G. Seawright (✉)
University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, USA
e-mail: g.seawright@utah.edu



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social relations. What this means is that the common is coextensive with the movement, interconnectedness, and social production of everyday life. The threads of social life are constantly being woven together—constantly becoming—and it is this ongoing interweaving of threads that constitutes the social production and enactment of the common.

I wake up on a mundane Thursday morning, eat breakfast with my partner and son, walk out of the apartment, catch a bus, and eventually land in front of a classroom. The becoming common is present across this commonplace trajectory. As I move through the world I am embedded in co-created relationships. Through these relationships—the threads of social life—whether positive or negative (or more appropriately for this chapter, humanizing or dehumanizing), the common surges forth: from the loving bonds of family, to the taken-for-granted "good morning," a subtle nod, or avoided eye contact with passers-by. All of these mundane engagements are filled with an array of meanings that include racialized, gendered, or colonial meanings, all of which shape the necessarily conflict-riven and divided character of the common. These bonds, these relations, are actively made, and they are made in ways that exceed my individual identity and reflective intentions. Through the contemporaneous praxis of everyday life, I am drawn into and help incite an intersubjective social fabric that is contingent to the constant production of the common.

The social fabric and becoming bonds of relationships are the central analytics of this chapter. By analyzing the politics of racial embodiment that are entwined with the social fabric, this chapter advocates for an educational ethic of common relationality as a way to make sense of antiracist solidarity in relation to, following Sylvia Wynter (2001, 2003), the dehumanizing social treatment resulting from the racialization of bodies. This elaboration of an educational ethic of common relationality is developed through a phenomenological analysis (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) of an interaction between Michael Boucher (a self-identified "mostly white male" educational scholar), an Assistant Principal (AP), and Deshawn, a black student (see Boucher, 2014, p. 2).[1] This interaction will assist in illuminating a possessive form of individualism that defines sociality in U.S. schools (Macpherson, 1962). It will also bring to light possessive individualism's contingent relationality, which simultaneously engenders a dismissal of social forms of oppression while encouraging the dehumanizing and racializing treatment of those marked as racially inferior. Interrogating the relationality of possessive individualism leads into a discussion of how the sovereign subject of possessive individualism is consistent with a social

habit that must be paid attention to in projects of antiracist solidarity. In response, common relationality is conceptualized with regard to the need for solidarity to be understood in ways that decenter the subject and embrace the dynamism and ambiguity of a common social field that is constantly in the process of becoming.

## The Quest for Antiracist Solidarity

Being in solidarity with students—in particular with students of color, and other historically dehumanized students—has been a long cherished goal of critical educators and relational philosophers (e.g., Freire, 2000; Margonis, 2007). Yet solidarity also remains a contested and often nebulous concept (De Lissovoy & Brown, 2013; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). The undetermined nature of the concept thus requires elaboration in terms of what it means for a teacher who embodies certain forms of whiteness to proclaim antiracist solidarity, and the complex meanings embedded in solidary actions or encounters.

As a first step toward a more serious consideration of what it means to be in solidarity, I turn to a narrative between Boucher and Deshawn (Boucher, 2014). Through this narrative, we will be able to begin to excavate the co-existing dehumanizing and humanizing potentialities embedded in the common. As Boucher (2014) explains, Deshawn had been labeled as both "jailbound" and a "thug" in a case-meeting with administration (p. 2). The interaction began during the opening moments of a standardized math test in the school auditorium. Students without calculators for the test were asked to put up one of their shoes as collateral for a borrowed calculator. Deshawn resisted this arrangement and walked out. Boucher followed him out and recounts:

> The assistant principal (AP) who had called him a "thug" in the case meeting stopped him. As they moved outside the auditorium and into the hall, I hurried to meet them. When I arrived, the AP was yelling and threatening Deshawn with suspension. Deshawn roared back that he did not care. I stepped between them, looked at him, and asked what was wrong. Tears welled up in his eyes as he told me that the he did not have a calculator and that he was not going to hand over his shoe. Deshawn had few possessions, and he was not going to toss one of them into a pile with 50 others. I turned to the AP and I asked if Deshawn could go back in the auditorium, and I would get him a calculator. She huffed and agreed. (p. 3)

This example offered by Boucher illustrates the importance of considering the active, corporeal, and relational dimensions of solidarity. The intercorporeal dimensions of Boucher's solidary encounter are clearly meaningful when simply considering the physical sequence of the encounter. First, you have Deshawn and the AP performing a familiar dance of discipline, or participating in what David Seamon (1980) would call a "place-ballet," an almost automatic embodied act in which familiar dancers in a familiar space perform a habituated routine. In this case, the familiar and habituated routine is a teacher or administrator disciplining a student of color: the administrator leaning-in with what we can assume is a furrowed brow or even a pointing finger, yelling at a student who either, with head and eyes down timidly receive their punishment, or, as in Deshawn's case, yells back in frustration, exhaustion, and resistance.

Then Boucher enters, becoming more intimately involved in the exchange, and through his physical disruption of the immediate agonistic bond, as well as the habituated routine, he offers a re-characterization of the exchange between Deshawn and the AP. In doing so he does not eliminate or ameliorate the antagonism, he adds a layer of meaning. Boucher's intervention introduced, in part, a humanizing character to an exchange that had up until this point been predominately characterized by dehumanization. In short, Boucher's act of solidarity cannot be separated from him physically interrupting the dehumanizing exchange between Deshawn and the AP, and from attempting to insert a relationality built upon a politicized caring.

Boucher's corporeal interjection provides an example of the common simultaneously harboring folded layers of humanization and dehumanization. As such, the possibilities of antiracist solidarity must be negotiated in relation to these ever-present potentialities in addition to the role teacher's play in shaping the character of a particular encounter. Deeper examination of encounters like Boucher's begin to reveal the multivalent variables constituting the "human setting" in which (de)humanization occurs (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 136).

## Possessive Individualism and Habitual Dehumanization

Consider the AP's reaction to Deshawn's act of defiance, his choice to opt out of a humiliating scenario: the yelling, the threats of suspension, and the aggressive body-language that we can assume accompanied this

agonistic practice. It is not merely Deshawn's breaking of the rules that inspired such a reaction, nor the fact that this same AP had previously declared that Deshawn was indeed a "thug." I would argue that these two facets of the encounter are intertwined and conditioned by social-historical forces of habituated racialization that serve to individuate and dismiss the intersubjective lived realities of racial dehumanization.

Being labeled a "thug" is a not an experience unique to Deshawn. The historical criminalization of the black body has long played a role in shaping relationships between those socially marked as white and black. As will be explained in more detail below, the criminalization of the black body is relationally dependent on the white body being situated as the representative of civil society. The AP's treatment of Deshawn is consistent with a social habit of *possessive individualism* that purports an ethic of personal responsibility while denying the social conditions of oppression. This normative pattern of interacting in schools—this place-ballet—bolsters an intersubjective thread in the common that actively humanizes one demarcated group while dehumanizing another by creating an environment in which social success and failure are perceived as natural outcomes of superior and inferior humans. An example of this relationality can be found in trends of school discipline practices that see students of color disproportionately introduced to the criminal justice system and subsequently ushered into the school-to-prison pipeline (Alexander, 2012; Lewis & Solórzano, 2006; Wald & Losen, 2003). Thus, in many ways, Deshawn's experience is ordinary.

Reacting to the black body as if it is the essence of criminality reflects a social habit woven into the common particularly found in the U.S. Departing from a pragmatist notion of habit and drawing from Judith Butler's concept of performativity, Hardt and Negri (2004) suggest that social "performances are constrained by both the weight of past performances and social interactions" (p. 200). Hardt and Negri continue with the assertion that "performance, like habit, involves neither fixed immutable nature nor spontaneous individual freedom, residing instead between the two, a kind of acting in common based on collaboration and communication" (p. 200). In this way, hierarchized demarcations associated with race, gender, class, civility, and sexuality inform normative social behaviors and disappear into social habit along with all the associated coded meanings and valuations. In turn, habitual behaviors, with their latent racialization, produce the common (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 198).

The common is traditionally understood at the scale of macroscopic social relations, which paints a picture of the common as made through a global network of constantly moving and intersecting relationships (Hardt & Negri, 2004, 2009). When that global weave is zoomed in on, and one particular interaction among the many is isolated, the social production of the common is better understood in the moment as interaction, as an encounter between individuals in the human setting engaging one another with an *intentional arc*.

## *Intentional Arc*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) offers additional nuance to how social habits become infused with our individual actions by directing us to consider the meaning embedded in our pre-predicative (inter)actions. Merleau-Ponty would point us toward Deshawn and the AP's embodied conversation, which gave rise to the imperial gestures enacted by the AP that subsequently set the tone for verbal communication. The exchanges of corporeal gestures are habituated reactions, for humans are always-already reacting to a sensual world. The cultivation of one's habit is the direct product of longitudinal perception and experience within a particular social world. The resulting habituation allows a person to navigate their world(s) with a dynamic set of social skills steeped with the necessary cultural acuity.

The ability to successfully navigate complex material worlds without always having to reflectively think about it is what moves Merleau-Ponty to suggest that our daily movements are guided by an intentional embodied knowledge. And this pre-predicative ability to navigate the world is imbued with cultural etiquette and ideology to such a point that Merleau-Ponty argues that moving within a world is always subtended by an "intentional arc" that "projects round about us our past, our future, our *human setting*, our physical, ideological, and moral situation" (p. 136). Knowing how to be in a particular social world is "to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intentions and the performance—and the body is our anchorage in a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 144).

Within the context of Deshawn's interaction with the AP, what is being suggested here is that while the AP has reflective intentions that guide his trajectory, there is also a vast world of pre-predicative movements, actions, and meanings that are elicited through an intelligent body that responds

with deftness to social conventions and attitudes, or the intentional arc of the social situation. As the AP intercepted Deshawn leaving the testing auditorium, their understandings of how *to be* in their worlds, and how to navigate this particular situation, were ingrained with social and historical meanings. These meanings were drawn out through an intersubjective and intercorporeal exchange that was unique to their particular situation, but consistent with the social expectations.

The AP's reaction to Deshawn's misbehavior/resistance was instilled with an intentionality consistent with what Linda Alcoff (2006) calls racialized "habits of perception," which correlate with a coded visual registry that informs "reactional capacity, epistemic reliability, moral condition, and, of course, aesthetic value" based on skin pigmentation, shape of eyes and nose, hair type, perceived gender and sexuality, etc. (p. 191). Deshawn's experience is similar in character to George Yancy's (2004) description of the racializing phenomena of having white folks lock their car doors, clutch a purse, or check to make sure their wallet is there, after crossing paths with a black person.

The racial character of Deshawn's encounter was conditioned by "potentiality already mobilized" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 106). Merleau-Ponty uses this phrase to frame a discussion of the way the body approaches a familiar task, such as using a pair of scissors. In the case of the scissors, the already mobilized potentiality is the bones, muscles, nerves, and other sensory organs responding to the familiarity of scissors. The racialization of bodies activates within the sensual proximity to something that is corporeally familiar, which is framed by particular codes and values affixed to racialization types. In this way, race too is mobilized through bone, muscles, nerves, and our perceptual body.

Familiarity in a situation is also dependent on the participant's spatial orientation. Sara Ahmed (2007) suggests that spaces carry the capacity for a racial orientation, and certain spaces like public schools, universities, courthouses, neighborhoods, etc. are oriented specifically to whiteness. A school space having an orientation toward whiteness means that students marked as white will feel welcome and *in place*, while students racialized as black may feel unwelcome and out of place due to the prevalence of a sociality that routinely situates them in deficit ways. With this normative social behavior in place, Deshawn's defensive reaction and the AP's aggression can be seen as consistent with social expectation. Deshawn could expect to be treated in dehumanizing ways and the AP could expect that students of color will consistently misbehave. All of this is to say that our bodies

respond with meaning to spaces and situations and with others prior to reflection.

A body's reaction to social stimuli is not neutral. Tracing normative patterns of interaction reveal the way that seemingly spontaneous social reactions are encumbered by a culturally specific social ontology. The predominant form of sociality in the United States is anchored by a possessive individualism: an individualistic and aggressive ontology that is concomitant with a white supremacist racial hierarchy. Understanding the relationality consistent with possessive individualism is crucial to understanding the dehumanization of the AP's actions, because, as a way of being and interacting with the world, possessive individualism encourages an obliviousness to historical and social forms of oppression, which, in turn, encourages a relational practice that is actively racializing and dehumanizing.

### *The Sovereign Subject of Possessive Individualism*

In the United States, educational discipline is beset by an ethic of individual responsibility, which presupposes that social habits have no impact on the lives of students and teachers (Margonis, 2015). An ethical orientation to individual responsibility rests upon the assumption that individuals are the authors of their own actions, and each individual has control over their choices and actions (Margonis, 2015, p. 2). As an ethical practice, the principle of individual responsibility is an outgrowth of an ontology of possessive individualism and curates relationships as if they were interactions between *sovereign subjects.*

The AP's threat to suspend Deshawn, as interpreted through this paradigm, is an attempt to make Deshawn take responsibility for this particular action. Consequently, actions like Deshawn's are routinely understood as a failed sovereign, in the sense that a student's trajectory up to the point of a disciplinary encounter is understood as a history of poor decision-making and an inability to properly cultivate their abilities to succeed in school. The act of disciplining a student-as-sovereign-subject is an individuating process that disconnects the student from history. This approach individualizes both the student-as-disciplined and teacher-as-discipliner allowing the teacher to actively disconnect from the student's trajectory after the encounter, as well as absolving the teacher of any culpability in perpetuating racially dehumanizing spaces. Most importantly for this paper, this type of individualization disguises the enduring presence of the common,

and its particular social-historical antecedents such as the legacies of colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism, which all continue to fundamentally influence relationality.

At its core, possessive individualism is a *way of being* rooted in perceiving and relating to people as sovereign subjects. As such, possessive individualism serves as a guiding relationality for much of the social and political actions that have made and continue to make the United States. Possessive individualism is integral to the history of capitalism, colonization, patriarchy, and white supremacy. In C.B. Macpherson's (1962) political history of possessive individualism, he asserts that the social relations consistent with possessive individualism are an "essential ingredient" to liberal-democratic principles, and are contingent to capitalism (p. 1). Macpherson goes on to suggest that possessive individualism cannot be abandoned while market relations are the preeminent model of social intercourse.

Market relations tend to precipitate a way of viewing and engaging with people in the world as primarily the buyers, sellers, and cultivators of property (i.e. in Marxian terms the market relations I'm talking about here are the result of social relationships being defined by exchange value). This capitalistic relationality has only intensified over the years. As can be seen in the market-based reforms that have transformed schools into places primarily designed to maximize the future earning potential (i.e. human capital) of students (Pierce, 2012; Slater & Griggs, 2015). As such, schools have increasingly encouraged a way of relating to others and to the world in terms of a market economy and its smooth capitalistic functioning. Now, more than ever, students are predominantly taught within a social field that perceives them as self-possessing individuals whose educational worth is evaluated according to standardized metrics and through testing technologies that sort and rank students respectively.

To understand possessive individualism's contingent relationality we must understand that possessive individualism harbors a distinct sense of human equality. This equality rests upon the possessiveness of possessive individualism, which "is found in the conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them" (Macpherson, 1962, p. 3). In this sense, it is human nature to own one's self in the way one owns a commodity, and it is perceived as only natural to extract maximum value from this commodity through any means an average industrious person might have at their disposal.

Owning the self establishes justification for both equality and the establishment of hierarchies in this social schema. With possessive individualism guiding human relations each human is born free with a supposedly equal amount of embodied property, as well as an equal amount of potential to cultivate the capacities of said property (Locke, 1690/1952). Those who do not successfully realize their potential are perceived as naturally inferior. John Locke (1690/1952) is an exemplar of this position in stating, "we must consider what state all men are naturally in, and that is a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man" (p. 4). Locke continues by asserting that all men are created equal "unless the lord and master of them all, by any manifest declaration of his will, set one above another, and confer on him by an evident and clear appointment an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty" (p. 4).

The problem with a sense of equality that sees society as a set of sovereign proprietors of the self that relate to one another as free equal individuals that have achieved all they could independently is that it quickly discounts any historical or political social mechanisms that prevent people(s) from realizing their potentialities. When considering historical and political social forces like patriarchy, colonization, white supremacy, and capitalism "every man has a property in his person" (Locke, 1690/1952, p. 17) should be rearticulated as "every [white male colonialist] has a property in his person." Charles Mills (1998) explains further that this social conception of embodied property justified "both native American expropriation and African slavery, giving rise to a white moral consciousness accustomed to full or partial ownership first of nonwhite land and bodies and later differential opportunities vis-à-vis nonwhites" (p. 162). Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (2013) suggest that the onto-epistemological impositions linked to possessive individualism cultivate a way of relating to one another that is dependent on property fixed to bodies, as coded through physical markers of whiteness and maleness. Subsequently, being a "self-contained, proper(tied), liberal subject" requires a performative prerequisite of violently dispossessing those who fall outside the bounds of humanity, and the spaces they occupy (women, communities of color, indigenous peoples, and the resources they hold) (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 27).

It is important to note that possessive individualism of this kind does not foreclose collectivities (Macpherson, 1962, pp. 255–257). And when

considering the collective attributes of possessive individualism in relation to its racialized nature, the particular formation of racist collectivities designed to protect the property rights of individuals accorded as fully human becomes clear (Mills, 1998). Cheryl Harris (1993) provides evidence of this type of collectivity in her thorough detailing of the times that whiteness, as form of property, has been defended and upheld in U.S. jurisprudence.

In sum, with possessive individualism having been threaded into the fabric of relations that is the common, when Deshawn's Assistant Principal perceives and reacts to him as a thug it is because Deshawn has supposedly earned that reaction through the inferior cultivation of his own property. Now, I would argue that in this moment, just like every other moment, the common surges forth, it becomes. But it is in moments like this that dehumanization can be seen as a habitual part of the "social communication" that produces the common (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 198).

As the AP treats Deshawn as a sovereign subject—as a self-possessing individual disconnected from history and unwanted social influences with ultimate control over his being and potentialities—who must take responsibility for his choices in order to better cultivate his future economic potential he is suggesting that Deshawn may too realize his individual potentialities. Here it is important to remember that possessive individualism, as a social relationality, is concomitant with the history of capitalism (Macpherson, 1962). The embodied property that sits at the foundation of possessive individualism is a form of elevated property that only exists in relation to the devalued or dehumanized non-property of those marked as black (Mills, 1998). As such, possessive individualism engenders a racializing dehumanizing relationality rooted in hierarchized notions of humans, which subsequently encourages a dehumanizing treatment (i.e. oppression) of those racially marked as inferior by those racially marked as superior.

### *Relationality Across Hierarchized "Genres of Being Human"*

Sylvia Wynter (2003) suggests that within social systems premised upon colonization a particular "genre of being human" is deployed as the normative ontological benchmark. The present hegemonic genre of being human is synonymous with a particular human morphology that is now labeled whiteness, maleness, and rational citizen, or what Wynter simply called "Man" (p. 327). The colonial genre of being human in operation

is perceived as simply *being*. Walter Mignolo (2009) describes this condition as the illusion of a zero-point epistemology, which perceives the situatedness/subjectivity of a particular culture as neutral, objective, and ultimately generalizable. Within the context of race, Charles Mills (1998) refers to this type of epistemic acrobatics as white ignorance.

With this type of zero-point epistemology in mind, the social praxis associated with the regime of Man requires a relationality that subordinates, and attempts to erase, alternative genres of being human that do not reflect the social habits and human morphology most valued by the West. In this way, the superiority of male, white, and colonial subjectivities cannot exist without their subordinated Other to reinforce their own inflated value and exclusivity (Hoagland, 2007; in relation to whiteness, see also, Harris, 1993, p. 1737). Sarah Hoagland (2007) illuminates the social praxis of Man as it pertains to whiteness in her argument that it is only through action that white folks become white. It is only through the receipt of daily privileges that bodies with a particular skin pigmentation are made white. Racial oppression is also actively made through the daily distribution of burdens to those demarcated by darker skin, which serves as the inverse product of white privilege (Alcoff, 2006; Leondardo, 2009). But as Hoagland (2007) explains further, in order to maintain a position of natural superiority the relationality between those that embody the valued form of humanness and subordinated Other (non-human) must be denied vis-à-vis a zero-point epistemology that presupposes objectivity, and as Hoagland adds, individual autonomy (pp. 98–99).

The denied and dehumanizing relationality fixed to Western cultural traditions of possessive individualism are inextricably linked to, as Sylvia Wynter (2003) argues, the common-sense answers to questions of whom, and what we are (p. 264). The capacity of an individual living in a social world like the United States to answer/know these ontological questions is rooted in living and experiencing race—is rooted in the social production of the common. Principally, the determining factor shaping the way one experiences race is the degree to which one is identified, and subsequently treated, as a human.

Expanding upon what it is to be actively racialized and dehumanized Frantz Fanon (2008) provides an analysis of the lived experience of being black that is historically unique yet reflective of current normative relational temperaments. Fanon understood racialized relationality based upon a sociogenic principle, which merges a pure physiological phenomenology (ontogeny) with the symbolic register of race, gender, and civility.

The sociogenic principle suggests that to fully understand being-in-the-world there must be acknowledgment of the ways that colonial racism extends beyond the ideological, has been encoded in flesh, and normatively guides relationships, treatment and interactions within/across social worlds (Fanon, 2008; Wynter, 2001, 2003). Along the lines Fanon argued, "for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (p. 90). For Fanon (2008), being *made* black is an ontological violation (p. 93)—a violation consistent with the attempted erasure of his primordial humanness (Weate, 2001, p. 173) through a social system predicated upon notions of humanness inseparable from whiteness, thus making non-white physiognomy equal to a state of unevolved non-humanness (Wynter, 2003).

Here it is important to remember that racial constructs, as well as the character of the hegemonic genre of human, evolve over time, and remain elastic when presented with a challenge. Consider the history of the "good" liberal subject of the United States: during the Jim Crow era it was perfectly acceptable to be considered "good" while staunchly believing in segregation, while contemporarily the terms have been updated with the requirement that to be good one must be not hold any individual racial animus and must treat everyone as equal economic actors (Melamed, 2011). Both of these positions, in praxis, still uphold a system of white supremacy, but in as much as they reflect the hegemonic genre of human the character of this human changes over time.

The relational nature of hegemonic humanness, as consistent with the racialized/ing nature of the common, is not predetermined by colonization or the history of slavery. Instead the current state of relational dehumanization woven into the common is better understood, as Frank Margonis (2015) suggests, as "neocolonial dances," which

> offer contemporary participants an intimation of the role they should play, but participants carry out those roles in ways that are tied to their own bodily understandings and to contemporary circumstances; the dances are an extension of behaviors and scripts handed down from prior generations, and they are a re-creation that occurs with new contours and new moves. (p. 12)

As such, a relational dehumanization can be seen in the socially curated dance between Fanon (2008) and white child on a train who shouted "look, a Negro!" reinforcing the racial human/non-human binary (p. 93).

Similarly, dehumanization can also be seen in a school administrator shouting threats of suspension, or even the seemingly innocuous "huff" of acquiescence from the AP, when Boucher (2014) offered a more humane outcome to their interaction. In this case, the act of threatening suspension or vocalizing a disapproving huff actively elevates a genre of being human characterized by whiteness, maleness, civility, and possessive individualism. Consequently, this active elevation of hegemonic humanness subsequently dehumanizes otherwise ways of being embodied by those who fall outside the racial markers of humanness.

## Solidarity and the Pursuit of Ethical Relationships

The moment when Boucher steps between the AP and Deshawn, physically creating a barrier to the intimately agonistic relationality, he is attempting to act in solidarity with Deshawn through a relational challenge to the habituated dehumanization described above. Or, at least, he is acting in solidarity with Deshawn based on his particular idea of what antiracist solidarity actually is, and in this practice Boucher is not alone. At the end of the day, despite solidarity's conceptually contested nature, antiracist solidarity exists in pursuit of ethical relationships contra to systems of oppression. In this way, ethical relationality is a condition of solidarity.

Within the more specific context of a common relationality and this chapter what is ethical is firmly grounded in humanizing treatment. For instance, while Boucher does not use these terms in his own conceptualization of solidarity, his action is a challenge to the normative relationality established by the regime of Man and its dehumanizing treatment. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) speaks to this when he suggests that any educator pursuing antiracist solidarity is necessarily embarking on a quest to cultivate ways of relating to students in tension with colonial models of relationality. In short, attempting an antiracist solidarity is a striving to shift the relational character of a situation toward humanization.

The use of "striving" in this context is quite intentional. If, as I am arguing here, racial dehumanization is inseparable from embodied demarcations operationalized within social fields, to what extent can the role white teachers play in dehumanizing encounters be altered? Put another way, can attempts at solidarity fueled by a deep and political caring for one's students, alter the racialized character infused into an encounter by a white teacher?

Answering these questions of individual strivings quickly become more complex within the context of the common, because an individual does not act upon the common, we act within the common. As such, the character of relationships and encounters are not solely determined by our reflective efforts—others' efforts, the spatial setting, our pre-predicative movements, along with many other relational variables come together to define a moment. Many of the variables are products of cultural habit, which give them a character of, for instance, coloniality, white supremacy, or other forms of oppression that are more readily analyzed at the level of social systems, not intimate social exchange. Considering racial oppression at the level of relationality begs additional questions like: to what extent are there multiple layers of characterization within an encounter? While Boucher's (2014) immediate actions were characterized by a political caring, how does his embodiment as a "mostly white male" influence the sediments of meaning within any particular encounter that may or may not reinforce social structures of dehumanization (p. 2)?

One way to try and answer these questions is by shifting the constitutive variables for what makes an ethical relationship ethical away from ethically responsible individuals and toward this complex web of relational variables—i.e. the common. I am not suggesting that individuals are not responsible for cultivating ethical relationships. What I am suggesting is that to understand a full ethical picture, so to speak, we must push the individual (vis-à-vis the destruction of the sovereign subject) to the background where they can be seen as a part of a whole social situation that is already infused with racial hierarchy.

Various political forces are already mobilized and supersede any teacher's reflective intention to approach a student in solidarity. Before a teacher can reflectively engage a student two bodies have already been engaged in the common, and this engagement is already characterized by "habits of perception" that guide the situation (Alcoff, 2006, p. 191). For teachers who harbor antiracist intentions they must recognize that racialized exchanges do not simply cease because a teacher has a reflective praxis of respect and solidarity. *The problems with subject-centered discussions of relationality and solidarity is not that concern over individual subjectivity is misplaced, but that we need to give greater consideration to the social forces that exist beyond one's control and live within the larger web of social life.*

## Antiracist Solidarity and Common Relationality

Antiracist solidarity needs to be understood within the context in which racialized events actually occur—the context of the common. Analyzing the dehumanization that is habitually woven into the ongoing production of the common requires a way of deriving meaning from an active world in the process of becoming. Existential phenomenology provides a conceptual architecture for making meaning from this approach to an active world. Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests that there is no separating being and meaning from movement within the material world. For Merleau-Ponty, the world is not an object distinct from humanness, and in-fact, it is only through the world that humanness may be known (p. xi). The degree to which we are bound up in a social world subtly shapes understandings of being, of the self, others, and world, and this shaping is happening continuously within the social fabric—thus the importance of maintaining a critical sensitivity to the ambiguous and multivalent meanings of the common.

With an eye to the social world unfolding within sets of complex and frequently agonistic worlds, María Lugones (2003) explicates an understanding of ontological pluralism, which suggests that a person's being is relationally dependent on the politics embedded in a particular "social world." Meaning that relationships are a constitutive force—who a person is, and how they understand the self, will be different in their mother's home, work place, or on the bus. Lugones develops this theory in relation to the lived realities of women of color and those "familiar with experiencing themselves as more than one: having desires, character, and personality traits that are different in one reality than in the other, and acting, enacting, animating their bodies, having thoughts, feeling the emotions, etc., in ways that are different in one reality than in the other" (p. 57). Following Lugones (2003), studies of the politics of antiracist solidarity require a conceptual model for deriving meaning from social situations in a way that acknowledges that subjectivities are not fixed attributes of sovereign individuals, but are relationally contingent, embedded in the social bonds that formulate the particularities of the unique social worlds that we are thrust into.

The common, as a concept, prescribes a perspective complimentary to the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Lugones's ontological pluralism in that it suggests that our entanglement with the material world is purposeful and always-already unfolding. To suggest that

something is always-already unfolding implies that it must unfold from somewhere, which, in temporal terms, means it is unfolding from "now" and "here," and that it will continue to unfold creating a duel temporality that is simultaneously always-already and never-quite-yet (Hardt & Negri, 2004). The common is always-already brought to life through the praxis of the living world. Within the same register, since the praxis of life never ceases the common is always becoming; it is never-quite-yet and always over the horizon, so to speak. The common is never punctuated or ever fully realized. The duel temporality of the common highlights a potentiality of being that can never be fully captured. The potentiality in question here is not always married to positive effects. The common is linked to social production and "cohabitation in a common world," which means creativity, communication, love, friendship, and education all blossom from the common, just as the common is also the generative source of dehumanizing practices such as white supremacy and capitalism (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. viii).

For example, during the encounter between Deshawn, Boucher, and the AP, dehumanizing and humanizing exchanges were layered on top of one another. At the moment when Boucher interjected himself into the encounter Deshawn was "roaring back" at the AP (Boucher, 2014, p. 3). This roar can be read from a number of angles, but I see it as a "last straw" moment in which Deshawn resisted the dehumanizing treatment he had been exposed to in school by an administration that perceived him as a "jailbound thug." Deshawn's resistance adds a layer of humanization to this encounter contra the AP's attempt to individuate and dehumanize him. The solidary act of Boucher stepping between Deshawn and the AP can be seen as adding some humanizing character to the exchange, as is consistent with Deshawn responding to Boucher with tears instead of retargeting his roar.

In addition to these layers of meaning, it is important to also note the additional ambiguities of this moment. Consider that Boucher effectively ended Deshawn's act of resistance, which subsequently resulted in getting him to take the standardized test and thus reinserting him into an educational system that does not value his life. My aim is not to prove either of these points, but to provide an inroad for considering the many ambiguous meanings embedded in any particular moment. For, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests, ambiguity is the "essence of human existence" (p. 169). Through the emphasis on the social attributes that bonds humans and the larger world together—like language and the

shared use of world's material wealth—the common necessarily decenters the individual subject. As such, provides the ideal conceptual template for considering socially microscopic modes of relating that do not rely on subject-centered analyses.

Rosalyn Diprose (2002) gives additional conceptual shape to relational understandings that decenter the subject. Diprose offers insight into the ways that bodies are innately interconnected, and importantly she gives significant attention to the way that social systems work through bodies. Diprose argues that our bodies have a sensibility, that is, a carnal perception and affectivity that exist prior to conscious thought or will—*bodies respond and know*. With this in mind, Diprose argues that social systems of oppression work *through* innately interconnected bodies. Or, with an eye to this chapter's project, dehumanization works through the common. This position is categorically opposed to normative Western assumptions of sovereign subjectivity. The categorical difference between Western assumptions of individual sovereignty and an embrace of the common can be found within a concept elucidated by Diprose, *generosity*.

Generosity, or the primordial corporeal-openness to other beings, is denigrated by the assumption of the individual as sovereign and singular subject. Diprose suggests that the self does not arise out of an individuated consciousness, but "through the ambiguity and generosity of intercorporeality, a generosity that transforms existence" (Diprose, 2002, p. 95). For Diprose, generosity is foundational to human existence; sociality is predicated on embodied beings' prereflective openness to others, and through this generosity affectivity is cultivated. The generosity of socially entangled bodies produces a full affective range, including prejudice, discrimination, domination, and submission (Diprose, 2002, p. 76).

Antiracist solidarity grounded in common relationality is necessarily generous. For, a politics of solidarity rooted in generosity requires an embrace of all of life's overlapping layers of undeterminedness, determinedness, and ambiguity. A solidarity that recognizes generosity recognizes the dynamism of experiencing a world. Through generosity considerations for solidarity can moves in a direction that gives primacy to the bond of relation itself, and echoes the conceptual particulars of the common. This is a push against ontological sovereignty and toward a self that "does not have identity except through action. The deed, act, or performance is the self actualized" (Diprose, 2002, p. 61).

Embracing the ambiguity of relationality holds a radical potential to disrupt the determined structuring of social life. Consider this in relation

of Lugones's (2003) ontological plurality, one in which the situational context—the particular social world—determines the ontological character of a social encounter. This position is foreshadowed by Merleau-Ponty (1962) who suggests that no phenomenon is reducible to one meaning, each is involved in a

> network of meanings within the Unity of the social event, it is impossible to reduce the life which involves human relationships either to economic relations, or to juridical and moral ones thought up by men, just as it is impossible to reduce individual life either to bodily functions or to our knowledge of life as it involves them. But in each case, one of the orders of significance can be regarded as dominant." (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 173)

Finally, this is where the strength of an approach to solidarity guided by an ethic of common relationality lies. Giving primacy to the social bond provides a pathway for understanding that while necessarily imposed dehumanizing relationalities appear inescapable under the current cultural regime, the dominant character of our most immediate relationships harbor an ambiguity with potential to subordinate dehumanization and give relational primacy to humanizing interactions. In this way, an ethic of common relationality shifts solidarity away personal ethics and intentions that reinforce dehumanizing possessive individualisms and toward being a relational condition of the common.

## Note

1. This interaction serves in an introductory capacity to Michael Boucher's (2014) article "More Than an Ally." Boucher's narrative sets the stage for the rest of the article, which centers on an ethnographic case study of another white teacher striving to be in solidarity with his African American students. My reinterpretation of Boucher's encounter is not a negation or affirmation of his own interpretation, but is instead offering an additional analytical vantage point focused on a differing locus of meaning from which to consider the way antiracist teachers *do* antiracism. Phenomenology is less focused on providing answers and is more a method of questioning and illustrating the taken-for-granted nature of daily living (Van Manen, 2014, p. 27). In this way I am using Boucher's encounter as a foil for considering what antiracist solidarity looks like, as well what is at stake and in play during a moment of solidarity.

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CHAPTER 11

# Education and the Civil Commons

*Jennifer Sumner*

Although the idea of the commons has recently been gaining in popularity, there is little precision about its meaning. This anomaly leaves the term open to conceptual vagueness and parochial application, making it difficult for scholars to analyze, practitioners to grasp, and policy makers to enact. In contrast, the concept of the civil commons has been clearly defined—"the organized, unified, and community-funded capacity of universally accessible resources of society to protect and to enable the lives of its members as an end in itself" (McMurtry, 1998, p. 376). Universal healthcare programs, environmental legislation, conventions on the rights of women and children, workplace safety regulations, and public education systems are some of the many examples of the civil commons. The traditional commons—shared natural resources on which people depend, such as grazing land, water sources, and forests—are a subset of the civil commons because they all protect and enable human lives.

This precise conceptualization opens the door for understanding the commons as an inherently pedagogical concept. Using the civil commons as an analytical tool, a normative political ideal, and an actually existing phenomenon, this chapter will engage with education for the commons,

J. Sumner (✉)
University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada
e-mail: jennifer.sumner@utoronto.ca



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education as a commons, and education by the commons. In particular, the chapter will investigate forms of education that promote the civil commons, public education systems as unrecognized expressions of the civil commons, and the pedagogical opportunities that the civil commons offers.

While all of these educational intersections are crucial in and of themselves, the chapter will also link them to the concept of sustainability, which involves building the civil commons (Sumner, 2007, 2011). This conceptualization has cascading implications regarding the role of education and its pedagogical potential for contributing to a world that is socially just, economically fair, and environmentally sound.

## The Commons

First used in written English in 1479, the term *commons* has been defined as the undivided land belonging to the members of a local community as a whole (OED Online, 2016) and also includes other natural resources like water. Over human history, the commons have been used for a wide variety of cooperative activities, such as livestock grazing, fuel collecting, and food gathering. As Jules Pretty (2002, p. 6) explains:

> For as long as people have managed natural resources, we have engaged in forms of collective action. Farming households have collaborated on water management, labour sharing, and marketing; pastoralists have co-managed grasslands; fishing families and their communities have jointly managed aquatic resources. Such collaboration has been institutionalized in many local associations, through clan or kin groups, water users' groups, grazing management societies, women's self-help groups, youth clubs, farmer experimentation groups, church groups, tree associations, and labour-exchange societies.

Contrary to Hardin's (1968) ill-informed concept of the "tragedy of the commons," rules and traditions have long prevented overuse of the commons, so that they are able to provide a means of subsistence for numerous families over time. For example, in Kenya during the dry season, people keep themselves alive by feeding their goats the pods from acacia trees, each clump of which is controlled by a committee of elders who decide who should be allowed to use them and for how long (Monbiot, 1998). Nobel Prize winner Eleanor Ostrom (2011) has updated such rules in her study of common water resources:

1. Define clear group boundaries.
2. Match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions.
3. Ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.
4. Make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.
5. Develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members' behavior.
6. Use graduated sanctions for rule violators.
7. Provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution.
8. Build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.

It is rules such as these, forms of institutionalized collective agreement based in human agency, which point to the larger concept of the civil commons, of which the traditional commons are a part.

## The Civil Commons

A recently developed concept with an ancient pedigree, the civil commons gives a name to all the collective projects people have planned to ensure that life is less "nasty, brutish and short" than it might otherwise be for many. The civil commons has been defined as any cooperative human construct that protects and/or enables universal access to life goods (McMurtry, 1999). In other words, the civil commons is cooperative, not competitive, in its mode of engagement. It is a human construct, not a naturally occurring phenomenon, and so must be built by human agency. It enables universal access, not paid access, and it provides life goods, or means of life. For people in pre-industrial England, these life goods would have included such items as food and fuel. In modern times, these life goods have expanded to encompass clean water, adequate shelter, education, healthcare, open spaces, and a safe workplace. According to McMurtry (1998),

> The nature of the civil commons can be expressed as follows: *It is society's organized and community-funded capacity of universally accessible resources*

> *to provide for the life preservation and growth of society's members and their environmental life-host.* The civil commons is, in other words, what people ensure together as a society to protect and further life, as distinct from money aggregates. (p. 24)

For McMurtry (1998, p. 370), the civil commons is "the middle term between life and more comprehensive life" because it makes the basic resources of life available to all its members.

To differentiate the civil commons from traditional commons, McMurtry (1998) points out:

> I have introduced the concept of "civil commons" to distinguish it from the traditional "commons"—the shared natural lands upon which an agricultural village economy depends. I mean by the civil commons both the traditional commons and all other universally accessible goods of life that protect or enable the lives of society's members. … the concept of the civil commons subsumes both the traditional commons and the built commons of universally accessible social goods evolved by public sectors since the Industrial Revolution and, in particular, since the end of World War II. (p. 399)

As a relatively new term, the civil commons differs from other conceptualizations of the commons, such as put forward by Hardt and Negri (2009). For these authors, the common is distinct from public and private forms of property: "the political project of instituting the common … cuts diagonally across these false alternatives—neither public nor private, neither capitalist nor socialist—and opens a new space for politics" (Means, 2014, p. 127). In contrast, the civil commons extends into and transforms both the public and private arenas. For example, although many forms of the civil commons are informal (such as neighborhood care teams or barn raisings), a great deal of the civil commons has become codified and administered by the state. According to McMurtry (1998, pp. 371, 376), "democratic government itself is the civil commons in one of its most powerful capacities of shared growth," and at its most developed stage, government "becomes one with the civil commons, but is as yet far from achieving this full representation of the commons interest." The civil commons also extends into the market, through commons-oriented enterprises such as fair trade, non-profit organizations and cooperatives, which operate both within and against the market in

complex ways and in the process seek to transform market relations (see, e.g., Raynolds, 2002).

The civil commons also differs from the public sphere, a contested concept that is not typically associated with the provision of life goods. Habermas (1987) maintains that the public sphere is based in communication: "the institutional core of the public sphere comprises communicative networks amplified by a cultural complex, a press and, later, mass media," which can be viewed from the systemic perspective of the state as "the environment relevant to generating legitimacy" (p. 319). Feminists, on the other hand, understand the public sphere (and its correlate the private sphere) as based in gendered power relations, with the public sphere being "the stereotypically masculine world of politics and paid employment" which is often used to limit women's lives and make their economic productivity invisible (Johnson, 2000, p. 240). Neither conceptualization addresses the concrete foundation of all civil commons formations—life goods—without which we could not flourish, and which capitalism will never provide, unless profit is involved. In this way, the civil commons challenges the capitalist project with a working alternative and disrupts neoliberal conceptualizations of privatization and austerity. As McMurtry (2001) notes, in opposition to the dominant money-oriented values embedded in global capitalism, not one civil commons institution or practice is developed or financed to generate profit for private investors. This is undoubtedly at the root of the myth of the tragedy of the commons and the underlying impetus to the longstanding enclosure movement.

## Enclosure of the Commons and the Civil Commons

In 1968, Garrett Hardin, a professor of biology, wrote an article about what was at that time referred to as "the population problem." In this article, he argued that the commons could not work as a concept because of human greed, based on "the tendency to assume that decisions reached individually will, in fact, be the best decisions for an entire society" (p. 1244). The result, he maintained, is a tragedy—"the remorseless working of things" (p. 1244). The solution he put forward involved "private property or something formally like it" (p. 1245).

There have been many counter-arguments to Hardin's thesis since it was published. Feeny, Berkes, McCay, and Acheson (1990) argued that Hardin had developed an incomplete theory. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) pointed out that Hardin's arguments contain all the

ideology and justification of globalization, liberalization, and privatization, while Röling (2000) maintained that Hardin did not distinguish between the commons and an open-access resource. In his book, *Deep Economy*, McKibben (2007) added that "The 'tragedy of the commons' really reflected what happened when hyper-individualism came into contact with older, more community-oriented ideas about the land" (p. 199).

In contrast to Hardin's perspective, Monbiot (1998) maintained that "for human beings, as for the biosphere, the tragedy of the commons is not the tragedy of their existence but the tragedy of their disappearance" (p. 362). Hardin's article illuminated a longstanding propensity, both in theory and in practice, toward the enclosure of both the commons and the civil commons—most recently illustrated in the global phenomenon known as "land grabbing" (White, Borras, Hall, Scoones, & Wolford, 2012). The most famous enclosures took place in England during the Industrial Revolution. Driven by wealthy landowners who wanted to turn the commons into private sheep farms so they could profit from the international wool trade, the enclosure of the commons has been described by Polanyi (2001) as "a revolution of the rich against the poor" (p. 37). Polanyi described how the enclosures had a powerfully unsettling effect:

> The war on cottages, the absorption of cottage gardens and grounds, the confiscation of the rights in the common deprived cottage industry of its two mainstays: family earnings and agricultural background. As long as domestic industry was supplemented by the facilities and amenities of a garden plot, a scrap of land, or grazing rights, the dependence of the laborer on money earnings was not absolute; the potato plot or 'stubbing geese,' a cow or even an ass in the common made all the difference; and family earnings acted as a kind of unemployment insurance. The rationalization of agriculture inevitably uprooted the laborer and undermined his social security. (p. 96)

Without the means to feed, house, and otherwise care for themselves, thousands were forced to migrate to the cities. In a scenario reminiscent of today's displaced rural people in the global economy, they formed a desperate mass of starving humanity living in urban slums, with the lucky few who actually found work in the new "satanic mills" of the Industrial Revolution forced to endure brutalizing conditions.

In modern times, the enclosure of the civil commons became particularly widespread after the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s in the form of structural adjustment programs forced on developing countries by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in return for loan guarantees (Palast, 2001). As a prerequisite for receiving loans, these

supranational organizations required developing countries to sell off their public resources to the private sector, including civil commons institutions that provided water, electricity, healthcare, telecommunications, and transportation. Their explicit objective was to inculcate solely economic motivations in the rich as well as in the poor (Berthoud, 2010), thus wiping out the social motives that lay behind much of the civil commons formation.

In the same vein, the financial crisis of 2008 entailed the world's greatest shift of public wealth to private hands by using nearly $16 trillion in public funds to prop up the international financial system (Ellwood, 2014). This unprecedented maneuver defunded for generations to come the public sector that provides so many forms of the civil commons—yet another modern form of enclosure. A disheartening confirmation of this trend was recently reported by Oxfam (2016a), which produced a briefing paper showing that the wealth of 62 people was equal to that of the poorest half of the world's population, while the richest one percent owned more wealth than the other 99 percent. To facilitate this transfer of wealth, multinational companies and wealthy elites are using tax havens and thus "refusing to pay the taxes that society needs to function" (Oxfam, 2016b, p. 1). It is these taxes that often pay for the life goods of the civil commons, such as education and healthcare. This ongoing funneling of wealth to the top tier of society confirms the enclosure trend set in motion with the rise of capitalism.

The enclosure of all forms of the commons is indeed immanent to capitalism, which must continually expand or face stagnation. One of the ways capitalism has facilitated expansion is through enclosure, beginning with the English enclosures right up to the present day. In other words, "capitalism has to continue the colonial enclosure of other people's commons if it wants to continue its constant growth or accumulation" (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999, p. 149). In this way, capitalism is structured to attack the shared base of people's lives—the civil commons—as a competitor against its program of profitable control of all of societies' life goods (McMurtry, 1999). Neoliberal capitalism has accelerated this trend. In the words of McMichael (2013), this "savage regime" is premised on the redistribution, rather than the production, of wealth, thus moving the "common wealth" of communities around the world into private control (p. 45). As Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) have pointed out,

> the very global institutions that represent the capitalist world-market system use the mechanisms of violent intrusion, enclosure, division, fragmentation, segregation, and then hierarchisation and centralisation to get access to the resources that are still controlled and used by local communities as commons. (p. 144)

Enclosure of both the commons and the civil commons clearly represents a revolution of the rich against the poor. Enclosure also instantiates what David Harvey (2006) has aptly described as "accumulation by dispossession," that is, modes of accumulation that dispossess the majority of their means of life, such as schemes for the privatization of water, electricity, education, and healthcare. Such dispossession can be facilitated by what Naomi Klein (2007) refers to as the shock doctrine, spurred by real or manufactured crises to move public wealth to private control. Like any form of social action, enclosure is learned—not only through economics courses but also any other educational endeavors that assume a neoliberal perspective, resulting in an enclosure of the mind as well as the commons. But enclosure can also be unlearned, or not taught in the first place, and be subsumed by education for the civil commons, education as a civil commons, and education by the civil commons.

## Education and the Civil Commons

Working collectively for shared outcomes has a long history. Humans survived as a species because they cooperated (Leakey & Lewin, 1977), and the propensity to work together runs deeply in our genes. This propensity is highlighted by the concept of the capitalist camping trip. A philosopher at All Souls College, Oxford, G.A. Cohen (2001) proposed a camping trip based on the principles of market exchange and strictly private ownership. For example, the person who catches the most fish demands that he have better fish for dinner than anyone else; another person who finds a bounteous apple tree demands reduced labor, more room in the tent, or more bacon for breakfast than anyone else in exchange for the apples; and yet another person recognizes the campsite from descriptions his father gave him, so announces that only he can eat the fish from the pond that his father stocked 30 years earlier. The ridiculousness of the conceptual scenario is immediately clear, given that on real camping trips people contribute gear, skills, time, and energy to the mutual enterprise, ensuring "that there are no inequalities to which anyone could mount

a principled objection" (p. 59). What is also clear is that humans self-organize differently on their own time, and this is the power behind the civil commons. This power can be harnessed through three forms of education: education for the civil commons, education as the civil commons, and education by the civil commons.

### *Education for the Civil Commons*

Education can be used for a range of purposes—to promote conformity to the status quo, to encourage questioning and critique, or to foment revolution and change. The first purpose is the most dominant, with few educational courses, programs or institutions "teaching to transgress" (hooks, 1994). In fact, not many of educational encounters teach about sharing and cooperation, let alone the civil commons, particularly in the age of neoliberal capitalism, which rewards competition, individualism and private ownership. For example, in a survey of contemporary economics and business textbooks, Schugurensky and McCollum (2010) found very few examples of the social economy, in spite of its ubiquity in society today. From this finding, we can predict that the civil commons suffers the same fate, given its overlap with the social economy. There are a few exceptions to this educational lacuna, however, that can provide the basis for modeling education for the civil commons. One example took place at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto with a course called Commons, Communities and Social Justice, which took place in the winter of 2015. The course focused on all aspects of the commons, opened with a component on the civil commons, and was taught in common by a number of faculty members. It was premised on the observation that while industrial capitalism grows via the enclosure and outright destruction of the commons, human wellbeing and sustainability today depend not only on the protection of the commons but its extension into most areas of human experience. From this initial stance, the course went on to explore the concept and political significance of the commons and commons-related policy, education activism and debates in the economic, social, political, cultural and spiritual realms.

### *Education as a Civil Commons*

Education can also be understood as a form of civil commons in and of itself. While long reserved for the wealthy and privileged—from the

Roman Empire to Victorian England—education opened up to the less privileged with the rise of democracy and the establishment of public education systems. These public education systems are, in effect, cooperative human constructs that enable universal access to the life good of education—now a human right and the gateway to other rights. According to UNESCO (2016), "Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights." Tellingly, however, UNESCO reinforces the neoliberal subject by adding that education "promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits" while ignoring the collective provision on which most education is based. The reasons for this collective provision are, paradoxically, made clear in the following sentence: "Yet millions of children and adults remain deprived of educational opportunities, many as a result of poverty," and reinforced in phrases such as "economically and socially marginalized adults and children." Thus, even a dedicated supranational organization such as UNESCO toes the neoliberal line, ignoring the collective origins of education while touting its individual benefits.

The value of education as a civil commons can be summed up in the words of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF, 2016), which sees public education as a public good: "Public education is the cornerstone of tolerance and democracy within our diverse society." Universal, publically funded education began in many countries with the recognition that children needed to be taught basic knowledge and morality in order to function fully in society. Free education for the poor was introduced in Scotland in the early seventeenth century (Moore, 2006) and universal education spread throughout Europe over the next few centuries.

The concept of universality is crucial to public education, as it is to all forms of the civil commons. Universality involves the decision not to exclude specific groups from the provision of life goods, but to open them to everyone. For example, one of the five pillars of the Canadian healthcare system is universality—it applies to all Canadians, not just a portion of the population. This is based on Canadian social democratic commitments to the universality of publically supported programs and the belief that universal social programs would lead to a collective sense of self-benefit and a commitment to the programs, as well as social cohesion and a population not divided into "haves" and "have nots" (Davis & Tarasuk, 1994). Universality ensures not only that the needs of everyone are addressed, but also that everyone has a stake in the provision of life goods and thus does not begrudge them to anyone else. In terms of education, universal access

to both formal and informal education, with the goal of knowledge sharing, enables a more comprehensive understanding of both the subject matter and the world (Woodhouse, 2011). However, "this potentiality can only be realized where institutions are in place capable of creating the conditions for human learning as a good for all participants" (p. 85). This last statement highlights the potential limitations of a concept like universality, particularly in terms of liberalism, which may espouse formal universality (i.e., universal rights under the law) but harbor informal systems of exclusion based in racism, patriarchy, classism, and so on. The civil commons provides a robust alternative to liberal notions of universality by juxtaposing universal entitlement and market rights, which by definition involve exclusion through the price mechanism and hence enable informal systems of exclusion. To emphasize this juxtaposition, McMurtry (1999, p. 217) clearly defines universally accessible as "available without market price or other exclusionary fence to it, where need and choice concur with the common life interest served" (p. 217). To further differentiate the civil commons from liberal notions of universality, he goes on to emphasize how the civil commons selects for what serves the life sequence in two senses: regulation and enablement. First, it evolves a framework of law and regulatory protection for human and environmental life; and, second, it provides goods to directly enable human or environmental life to grow. One of these enabling goods is education.

Experiments to include higher education as a form of civil commons have taken place in a number of countries. These experiments are situated within a larger context of the deliberate undermining of all levels of education by the neoliberal market. In the words of Janice Newson (1992, p. 234), "The principles that benefit markets undermine the objectives of education and conversely, education that achieves its intended purposes cannot serve well as a marketable commodity." At the University of Saskatchewan, Woodhouse (2011) explains, this larger market context expressed itself as reduced budgets, fewer faculty, more students, increased emphasis on research for the market and the centralization of university governance. In the face of this shift from the institution's founding ideals as "the people's university" (p. 78), resistance emerged from a number of sources and coalesced in 2002 as the People's Free University (PFU). This civil-commons construct opened its doors in the fall of that year to 200 students aged 12 to 82 from a range of social classes and ethnic backgrounds who enrolled in six different courses. In practice, the PFU "provided learning experiences to anyone regardless of their ability to pay" (p. 79), backed by a philosophy of inclusiveness and a "conscious

effort to balance practical and theoretical subjects" (p. 80). Although this experiment only lasted a few years, one aspect stands out for Woodhouse: "the concept of universal accessibility enabling a fuller realization of life through education is a defining characteristic of both the civil commons and the PFU" (p. 86).

A similar experiment took place in the United States some years earlier called the Free University Movement. Described by Draves (1980) as encompassing a new vision of learning, free universities were supported by a community of scholars who believed that learning was a process that could be taken on by anyone at any time. In a similar fashion, several popular universities have appeared in France in recent years, such as the Université Populaire de Caen in Normandy and the Université Populaire d'Argentan, both of which offer alternative visions to further totalization of the global market (Woodhouse, 2011). In addition, several countries currently offer free tuition at the post-secondary level, such as Scotland and Cuba.

### *Education by the Civil Commons*

Woodhouse (2011, p. 80) describes the civil commons as "an interlocking set of institutions supporting and promoting life by providing universally accessible life goods such as publicly funded education, health care, and clean water and air." Such civil commons institutions share the goal of universal provision and protection of life-requirements and life-standards (Noonan, 2011). These institutions offer a myriad of educational opportunities, not only by their very existence but also through a range of pedagogical endeavors. Such endeavors can be understood as public pedagogy—the combination of top-down educational influences through cultural forms and bottom-up teaching and learning found in communities, hobby groups and social movements (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010). In particular, public pedagogy focuses on how informal cultural institutions, including civil commons institutions such as libraries, parks and historical sites, can both help to shape dominant forms of knowledge and hegemonic representations, and become sites of contestation and resistance (Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2013). For example, libraries can teach people to be flexible in the global market by offering seminars on how to update your résumé or teach people to self-organize by hosting workshops on setting up a cooperative or starting a community food hub. Parks can discreetly steer campers away from areas that are clearcut by

logging companies or become sites of confrontation as in the anti-logging protests in Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia. And historical sites can reinforce the dominant view of history or provide descriptive memorials to counter-hegemonic groups, such as plaques honoring the Underground Railroad or battered women.

## Education, the Civil Commons and Sustainability

While the links between education and the civil commons are vital in many ways, a further connection reinforces the importance of these links. That is, the civil commons is the foundation of sustainability (Sumner, 2007, 2011). Put another way, sustainability involves building the civil commons—environmentally, socially, and economically. To convey the primacy of the environment, the relationship among these areas can be understood in terms of nested hierarchies (Sumner & Sanders, 2016), with the economic nested within the social, which in turn is nested within the environmental.

Using the framework of nested hierarchies, environmental sustainability involves building and maintaining cooperative human constructs that protect and/or enable universal access to *environmental life goods*, such as organic certification, clean water bylaws, and public space formation (e.g., provincial parks and town squares). As the real bottom line in any understanding of sustainability, the environment is crucial to the survival of human and planetary life. Wright (2004) made this clear in his scan of past civilizations and predictions for current ones when he stated that "The lesson I read in the past is this: that the health of land and water—and of woods, which are the keepers of water—can be the only lasting basis for any civilization's survival and success" (p. 105). He vividly described how many civilizations collapsed when they crossed this line. Over millennia, however, there is also evidence that the health of land, water, and woods has been protected by the civil commons. Common grazing lands, communal water sources, and sacred groves are examples of cooperative human projects that have ensured universal access to environmental life goods.

Nested within environmental sustainability is social sustainability, which involves building and maintaining cooperative human constructs that protect and/or enable universal access to *social life goods*, such as laws ensuring old-age pensions, declarations of women's rights, and setting up neighborhood palliative care teams. This definition complements Clark's (2006) understanding of the social aspects of sustainability, which

comprise three main elements: commitment to fair and just labor practices, gender equality, and the preservation of communities and culture. These elements include such civil commons areas as gender, race/ethnicity, and class equity laws, minimum wages, union organizing rights, volunteer opportunities, food bank and communal kitchen establishment, and the observance of public celebrations.

And nested within social sustainability is economic sustainability, which involves building and maintaining cooperative human constructs that protect and/or enable universal access to *economic life goods*. The economic aspects of sustainability are recognized as being dependent on the other two hierarchies, and include such civil commons areas as cooperatives, credit unions, community currencies, public procurement, minimum wages laws, fair trade, food hubs, and the social economy.

All in all, the more a society builds the civil commons the more sustainable it becomes; the more it encloses the civil commons, the less sustainable it becomes (see Sumner & Sanders, 2016). This argument has cascading effects in a world plagued by unsustainability. For example, if sustainability involves building the civil commons, then compound terms like sustainable development gain new meaning. Through the lens of the civil commons, sustainable development involves development that promotes the civil commons, not private entrepreneurship. Projects that build public health clinics, public schools, or public libraries would all be examples of sustainable development, whereas projects that encouraged people to start their own businesses would not. The concept of sustainable globalization (Sumner, 2007) would involve globalizing the civil commons, not the rights of transnational corporations as is currently the case through transnational trade agreements.

In the same vein, sustainability brings new meaning to the field of education, particularly because sustainability does not come naturally, but must be learned (Sumner, 2003). Since every social encounter provides an opportunity for learning, "learning must become a way of life if we are to learn our way in to a more sustainable world" (p. 25). Just any type of learning, however, will not suffice. Sustainable learning involves learning that is based on building the civil commons. In essence, sustainable learning

> is a participatory, transformative process that involves learning through social action, developing critical consciousness and encouraging dialogical engagement, all within a life-values perspective. Sustainable learning is a process of building the capacity and power of people to recognize, name and

> confront the impacts of corporate globalisation and to change the present unsustainable situation. It should enable people on both sides of the North-South divide to make sense of the complex local-global dynamics in order to create solidarity around a common sustainable vision of individual and community well-being based in building the civil commons. (p. 28)

The association of sustainability and the civil commons has also been applied to the field of adult education. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto offers a course called Adult Education for Sustainability. The course is based on the three main and enduring traditions of Canadian adult education: first, a set of unyielding social purposes, informed by passion and outrage, and rooted in a concern for the less privileged; second, a systematic and sustained philosophical and critical analysis that develops the abilities to connect immediate, individual experiences with underlying societal structures; and three, a keen attention to the specific sites, locations, and practices where such purposes and analyses are made real in the lives of Canadians (Nesbit, 2006, p. 17). Sumner (2008) argues that these three traditions open the door for adult educators to engage with sustainability and the civil commons because building the civil commons reflects the social purposes of adult education and focuses concern for the less privileged into civil commons projects. In addition, by providing universal access to life goods, the civil commons allows adult educators to critically analyze neoliberalism and its inherent unsustainability. And finally, the civil commons helps adult educators pay keen attention to the sites where it plays out in the life of Canadians, such as education, healthcare and the environment. In this way, adult education for sustainability allows adult educators to honor their traditions and continue them into the future.

Thus, in many ways, education that foregrounds the civil commons means education that prioritizes sustainability. In the age of neoliberalism, this is indispensable. It provides both a means to critique our current unsustainable state and a vision of a more sustainable alternative.

## Conclusion

"The civil commons comprise the most civilizing aspects of human achievement and are distinguished by an ability to offer universal access to services which ensure the survival and growth of all organic life" (Woodhouse, 2011, p. 85). This is particularly true in terms of education,

which is not a panacea, but can contribute to building a more sustainable world if it centers on the civil commons. Education for the civil commons, as a civil commons, and by the civil commons all carry the potential to help us better analyze our choices, aim for an attainable ideal, and emulate actually existing models. Normalizing the civil commons through education would move it from the realm of what Welton (1991) referred to as "dangerous knowledge" to common knowledge, or even what could be termed "commons knowledge." This knowledge could help us to create a truly civilized world that features social justice, economic fairness, and environmental integrity.

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CHAPTER 12

# Educating the Commons Through Cooperatively Run Schools

*David I. Backer*

## Introduction

Cooperatives have long been enlisted by those interested in building alternatives to capitalist arrangements on the basis of the commons. Some think of cooperatives themselves as being commons because cooperative collective action can subvert capitalist productive relations (De Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2010; Polanyi, 1968), while others claim that cooperatives constitute commons through self-governance, polycentricity, and collective action (Allen, 2013; Ostrom, 2010). Still others see cooperatives as "actually existing commons" and highlight the uneven, differential ways in which commoning must occur (Eizenberg, 2012; Noterman, 2015). De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2010) argue that a worker cooperative is a labor commons, for example. They write that the history of worker cooperative movement

> provides a practical demonstration of the art of collective association key to all commoning practices. It also offers an example of decentralized control of common resources that potentially connects the traditions of labor struggle to the modes of activism honed by both ecological and networked

D.I. Backer (✉)
West Chester University of Pennsylvania, West Chester, PA, USA
e-mail: david.backer@gmail.com



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> radicals. At the same time, the scope and diversity of commons activism indicates the broader currents for social change with which cooperativism must be interwoven if it is to become part of "the coming economies" beyond capital.

The authors draw a connection between commons and cooperatives by claiming that the latter is a "key" to all commoning practices: its focus on associated labor (and Marx's mixed assessment of cooperatives), workplace democracy, and the distribution of surplus to its workers. Cooperatives exemplify collective control of resources, linking struggles as diverse as the labor, ecological, and anarchist movements. Modifying Marx's formula for the circulation of capital through money, De Peuter and Dyer-Whitford propose that cooperatives are a way to "circulate the common."

> If the cellular form of capitalism is the commodity, the cellular form of society beyond capital is, we suggest, *the common*. A commodity is a good produced for exchange, a common [is] a good produced to be shared. Exchange presupposes private owners between whom it occurs. Sharing presupposes collectivities within which it occurs. The circuit of the common traces how these collectivities—which we term *association*—organize shared resources into productive ensembles that create more commons, which in turn provide the basis for new associations. So in a rewritten circulation formula, C represents not a Commodity but Commons, and the transformation is not into Money but Association. The basic formula is therefore: A — C — A'. This can then be elaborated into A — C … P … C' — A'.

Here is a theory of commoning, drawing from Marx's formula relating money and commodities. In a commons-based economy, associations share resources to produce commons rather than private individuals exchanging to produce commodities. Associations yield commons, which then produce new commons and new associations. Cooperatives are one form of association which bring about commons, on the authors' view. Given their history and potential for drawing together various struggles, cooperatives must be considered among possible (perhaps necessary) options for the coming economy "in which the workplace is an *organizational commons*, the labor performed is a *commoning practice*, and the surplus generated, a *commonwealth*."

De Peuter and Dyer-Whitford follow in the tradition of leftist-radical and environmentalist thinking about the commons (see Bollier, 2002; Hardt & Negri, 2009; McMurtry, 1999; Midnight Notes, 1992; Shiva,

2005). There are other traditions however. Allen (2013) draws from the work of Elinor Ostrom's (1977, 2010) research on polycentric governance and self-governance of common-pool resources (CPR). Governance, for Ostrom (as opposed to government) is a set of rules and procedures for "how things are done around here," and she provides mainstream economic research in support of collective decision-making and distribution procedures which are neither state-run nor market-run. Ostrom's Nobel prize-winning research focuses on creating and maintaining a commons. Allen then comments that "cooperatives as well as cooperation are an important organizational form in governing a commons" (p. 4).

These theorists linking cooperatives to the commons do not mention education in any rigorous or systematic way. Just as a capitalist mode of production needs a way to reproduce the skills and know-how for its perpetuation, a commons-based mode of production would require this as well. The academic literature lacks theoretical elaborations of the reproductive requirements for alternative economic systems, particularly educational theory, and philosophy of education (for educational theorists working with utopian socialism generally see Gutek, 1972; Robinson, 1955; Sidwell, 1972). This chapter is an attempt to draw out these ideas. The connection between the commons and cooperatives implies several educational projects. First, there is an educational project in learning how to live and work cooperatively. If people learn to cooperate, then they will learn the commons. This is a significant project given the difficult "nitty-gritty commoning involved in developing and managing … overlapping material and immaterial commons" which "is inevitably complicated by the differing subject positions of members" (Noterman, 2015, p. 3). People living and working and consuming with cooperatives need to *learn* how to do so, which implies at least two kinds of education: synchronous (in the moment) and diachronous (over time). Cooperators must learn how to manage the present set of differences among their membership, as well as the formation of skills, knowledge, and subjectivities for the continued health of the cooperative as availability of resources, political requirements, and person-to-person situations change (Ornelas-Navarro, 1980). The second educational project is learning about cooperatives—their history, theory, and practice. Finally, there is the educational project of cooperative schooling: running a school cooperatively so that its governance is cooperative rather than state-run or market-run (Woodin, 2014). This cooperative school would be one kind of educational commons (among others, like academic publishing). In this chapter, I am chiefly interested

in articulating a theoretical claim about the last project: that cooperatively run schools can educate the commons causally and reproductively. The claim, related to the first two educational projects, is that cooperatively run schools educate the commons because going to school at a cooperative can cause commons to come about by reproducing the kinds of knowledge and skills necessary to maintain an existing commons. I will make this case by completing the theoretical background already begun in this introduction, then narrating the "educational genesis" of one of the world's best-known large-scale industrial cooperatives: the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation in Spain. After narrating that educational genesis as a kind of founding myth, I claim that cooperatively run schools can teach the commons and lay out a brief set of considerations for how to apply this strategy in the United States in the early twenty-first century.

There are precedents and contemporary developments in cooperative schooling to consider. Linda Shaw (2012) with the Cooperative College claims there is a "quiet revolution" in the United Kingdom, where there are over 900 schools describing themselves as cooperatively run, as well as national-level organizations supporting these schools. Kerchner and Muffinger (2010) survey teacher-run cooperative schools in the United States, such as the Avalon School and the EdVisions Network in Minnesota, which also use cooperative models. Meyerhoff (2013) casts radical higher education initiatives as constituting a form of "undercommons," opening the door for thinking about extra-institutional and movement-embedded schools as a kind of educational cooperative as well. Rosen (1987) theorized the revolutionary potential for cooperatively run educational institutions, though he focuses more on workplace education than P-12 schooling. His arguments help put language to the claim, however. For Rosen, the cooperative model of education "is based on the active confrontation and hopeful transcendence of … mechanisms eliciting consent to the capitalist relations of production" (p. 118). Ornelas-Navarro's theoretical framework for analyzing schools and producer cooperatives translates these claims into the world of P-12 schooling explicitly. These authors are part of a small tradition of educational scholars who have thought through the philosophical and theoretical foundations of cooperative education as an anti-capitalist project (Sidwell (1972), Gutek (1972), Ornelas-Navarro (1980, 1982), Gail Davidge (2014, forthcoming) and members of the Cooperative College (Woodin, 2014)), though none have undertaken a fresh examination, demonstration, and articulation of this necessity in the context of Marxist educational theory or critical pedagogy. The research

and practice of cooperatively run schools needs a theoretical statement oriented toward the creation and maintenance of such institutions. Such a statement could serve as part of a "text" for cooperatively run schools. Kerchner and Muffinger, in their case study of teacher-run schools in the United States, call for a "text about the new idea."

> The text is a guide to practice, that says, in effect, that if one believes in the bundle of ideas that constitute Avalon and similar [cooperative] schools, here's how to put those ideas into action. [The text] takes the ideals … and creates a coherent vision of practice. (p. 31)

This chapter aims to start crafting such a "coherent vision of practice" for cooperatively run schools by assembling one "bundle of ideas": the literature on the commons mentioned above, Ornelas-Navarro's (1980) and Rosen's (1987) theorization of cooperatively run schools as revolutionary non-reformist reforms, and finally crafting a founding myth from the case of the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation's educational genesis. My hope is that this chapter contributes to the forming of a coherent vision of practice, creating intellectual conditions for starting, maintaining, and supporting cooperative schools.

Some qualifiers before proceeding. "Cooperative" is an unstable signifier, both in general and when it comes to education. The word has many meanings. First, "cooperative learning" is a term widely used in educational research to mean several different things, none of which are the explicitly anti-exploitative, anti-capitalist learning in the tradition of the Rochdale pioneers, Robert Owen, Karl Marx, and the Mondragon Cooperative at play in this chapter. In one case, "cooperative educational programs" actually means the exact opposite of how I intend it here. There are schools and universities that partner with the private sector to place their students, as part of their degree, in firms to work as interns (Thiel & Hartley, 1997). The school and private sector "cooperate" together to provide "real-world" experiences for their students. In this case, students learn how to be exploited workers in a context of enclosure rather than one of the commons, and this educational experience is called "cooperative." Next, "cooperative learning" is the name used by Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1988) in reference to "non-competitive learning," "non-individualized learning," or "collaboration." Known also as group work, this is a pedagogy which emphasizes students working together rather than alone or against each other. While this certainly would be a promising

pedagogy for a cooperatively run school devoted to learning the commons, it is not explicitly anti-capitalist. Cooperative learning in this sense does not aim to be a non-reformist reform or a negation of the negation against exploitation, though it certainly could be mobilized as a pedagogy in an institutional context devoted to educating the commons.

But even the idea of a cooperatively run school in the tradition of Owen and Marx remains problematic: the cooperative schools Gail Davidge (forthcoming) studies each have their own understanding of cooperation in the anti-exploitative sense, which sometimes do not invoke notions of exploitation or politics at all. Their processes and organizations are extremely diverse. There are some schools which call themselves "cooperatives" but do not orient themselves politically, or if they do, they orient toward educating students to become productive members of society as it is. This fact broaches one of the central critiques of cooperativism from the left: that cooperatives are complicit with capitalist modes of production rather than creating disruptions and alternatives to it. To resolve this issue, as anti-capitalists in favor of educating for the commons, we might be tempted to seek an *a priori* set of criteria to help us determine which cooperative schools educate the commons and which ones comply with the capitalist mode of production. Yet ideologically fixing cooperation is impossible, and may even go against the spirit of community economy, at least as theorized by Gibson-Graham (1996, 2003, 2006) and Byrne and Healy (2006). Arguing that cooperatively run schools can educate for the commons may be doomed to recuperation, a "reformist reform" which serves the capitalist mode of production rather than challenging it. I will respond to this criticism more fully at the end of the chapter.

This is all to say that arguing cooperatively run schools educate for the commons entails specific usages of "cooperative learning" and specific views of political economy. The best way to illustrate the claim is to look at examples, such as the Escuela Profesional Politécnica (EPP), which helped create the conditions for the Mondragon Cooperative Experience. Simply put, the EPP has a causal and reproductive connection to the MCC, and the schools which continue to serve the MCC reproduce the cooperative, exemplifying the potentiality of cooperatively run schools to educate the commons.

## Mondragon: Background

There very well could be an intellectual genre called "Mondragon Studies." The large-scale industrial cooperative corporation, a network of financial, industrial, retail, and educational cooperatives, commands a privileged place in social sciences and humanities disciplines. Scholars thinking about the actual work of anti-capitalist economy or community economy find a kind of oasis in Mondragon, which reports significant successes. In 2013, the "worker cooperative federation" reported 34 million euros in assets held by a complex of 103 cooperatives, 122 production plants, 8 foundations, and 13 international service companies. That year Mondragon Cooperative Experience (MCE) employed 73,985 people, 84% of whom are worker members of the cooperative system (Mondragon Annual Report, 2013). Foundational texts telling the story of Mondragon and its significance to cooperativism include Azurmendi (1984), Bradley and Gelb (1983), Whyte and Whyte (1991), Oakeshott (1990), Johnson and Whyte (1977), and Kasmir (1996). Theorists such as Wolff (2012) have written articles recently called "Yes, there is an alternative to capitalism: Mondragon shows the way." Major news outlets like *Democracy Now!, Al Jazeera, The Guardian*, and others cover Mondragon in this same way: a large-scale industrial alternative to the capitalist mode of production. Many note the importance of education to MCE, but the texts devoted to this theme are fewer in number. Ornelas-Navarro (1980) and Meek and Woodworth (1990) are the chief sources pointing out the essential role of education for the initial formation and continued well-being of the Mondragon cooperatives. Drawing from these sources, is it easy to see that the story of MCE begins with K-12 schools.

## Mondragon's Educational Genesis: Formation of the Escuela Politecnica Profesional

They called him "the red priest." Father Don Jose Maria Arizmendiarrieta returned to his native Basque Country as a parish priest in the Catholic Church in 1941. Lacking the oratorical skills of his predecessors, a student of Marx, Owen, and the Rochdale Pioneers, his parishioners were impressed by his political clarity and vision. The skeptics must have called Father Jose Maria "red" out of self-preservation: in 1941 Carlos Franco vilified socialists and communists throughout Spain. Working in a steel-

rich territory with a homogeneous Basque population, whose culture had strong social solidarity, Father Jose Maria aimed to create more employment opportunities for his parishioners. The primary steel company in the area, Union Cerrajera, was a private firm, unequally distributing wealth in the region and creating tensions between workers and the small group of owners in a classic working class/capitalist class divide. At that time, the workers at Union Cerrajera had a well-organized (though underground) union, which enacted several large-scale strikes in 1941, including a successful general strike in the town of Mondragon. Ornelas-Navarro claims that Father Maria Jose's initial intentions were to lead the youth of Mondragon in the social doctrine of the Church (Ornelas-Navarro, 1980, p. 117). However, the red priest's goal eventually became the mobilization of the Basque region's social cohesion, natural resources, and socialist theory to make gains for the working class. This interest led directly to the creation of programs such a medical clinic, a youth sports league, a public movie theater, and eventually a school oriented toward working class empowerment.

The strategy of starting a school to make gains for the working class emerged out of an experience Father Jose Maria had at the beginning of his tenure as a priest in the region. Union Cerrajera operated an apprentice's school (Escuela de Apprentices), though it was small and restricted to wealthier families' children, leaving few spots for working class children to learn managerial and engineering skills. Union Cerrajera asked Father Jose Maria to teach at this school. The priest became disenchanted with it, and began organizing with union leaders to create a school open to working class children. Jose Maria's strategy was to mobilize "the people of the town to create a technical school by playing on the local addiction to soccer," (Ornelas-Navarro, p. 118, Meek & Woodworth, 1990, p. 507) Through fundraising for the youth soccer league, the union and church were able to acquire land where the Escuela Politecnica Profesional (EPP) is still situated, including the soccer field and large workshops for students to learn manufacturing skills. This "school for the working class" began operations in 1943, enrolling 20 students and employing five professors (Ornelas-Navarro, p. 119).

The school was not a cooperative at first. In fact, it did not become a cooperatively run institution until five years later in 1948. The EPP was founded as a private school, governed and financed by "a board representing the small capitalist enterprises of the town which had collaborated financially in its creation" (ibid.). This board also included members of the

Catholic association and students' parents (ibid.). The fact that the school itself was not cooperatively run is a fascinating aspect of the story, particularly for the present argument. Father Jose Maria was able to make a series of strategic concessions to the existing social formation in order to achieve his ultimate goal of making gains for the working class through schooling. In keeping with the idea that "cooperatively run school" is an unstable signifier, while the governing and financing structures of the school were not strictly cooperative, there were elements at its inception which led directly to the formation of the Mondragon Cooperative.

First, the school's finances were made to be "transparent as glass" from the very beginning (ibid., p. 120), published in "a relatively easy-to-understand statement of accounts … published for general inspection, not only by those directly interested and collaborators, but by anyone who desires to look at them" (ibid.). Second, the mission, pedagogy, and curriculum of the school included a clearly articulated set of values deriving from Father Jose Maria's commitments to social theory, gains for the working class, and Catholicism. At the EPP

> … the idea that all economic, political, and social problems can be reduced in the last instance to the problem of man (or the human being) is prominent. Hence the objective of the school should be not only to form technicians but also to form human beings with the spirit of social responsibility as taught by the Catholic church … [and] thus to develop human intelligence. (Ornelas-Navarro, p. 120)

This humanistic vision was augmented with a technical, brass-tacks commitment to employment and improving workers' material conditions of existence through cooperative ownership. Father Jose Maria "chose to focus on the creation of a technical school rather than standard liberal arts education because these impoverished people … needed concrete skills and knowledge that could lead to jobs and a better standard of living" (Meek & Woodworth, 1990, p. 511). In general, Ornelas-Navarro concludes that "[t]he task was to look for the appropriate people and prepare them to undertake cooperative activities." These "cooperative activities" involved both a mentality which understands and values collective ownership, human intelligence, and faith combined with a concrete training in skills. The school was a place of preparation to instill this combination of humanism, religion, and cooperative ownership. Father Jose Maria

> believed it was possible to create a social and economic order in which labor was valued as the critical element of the firm and in which the common person could be his or her own master as a cooperative owner and participant in the enterprise … the school was a place where could be taught and instilled in the potential new leaders of industry. (Ibid.)

The school grew. In five years, enrollment increased to nearly 100 students. Since cooperativism was Father Jose Maria's goal, he wanted to find a way to make the school itself a cooperatively run institution. The board of capitalist owners and the Catholic Church were prohibiting the school's growth in this direction, and under Franco's regime after World War II it was nearly impossible to make the school a cooperatively run institution through mainstream legal channels (though Franco's fascist regime and the Catholic Church were not explicitly hostile to cooperativism either, see below). As enrollment increased so did maintenance costs, making the job that much more difficult. But Jose Maria was able to find a legal loophole in 1948 and charter the school's organization as a "league" or "association for education as culture," which the government had to recognize as legitimate. Under this reorganization and the new charter, the school became more cooperative:

> … a General Assembly was organized … to represent all constituents involved in the services, support, and operation of the school. These groups were specified … according to the following four types, to ensure that all stakeholders in the school would have a voice and a vote: individuals with a desire to join; active members who paid dues or served as teachers; sponsors and firms who gave annual contributions of at least 1000 pesetas …; and honorary members who were government authorities … Each of these groups were granted the right to elect ten representatives to the school's General Assembly, and, in turn, the General Assembly was empowered to elect a fourteen-member Supervisory Board. (Meek and Woodworth, p. 513, quoted from Whyte & Whyte, 1988, p. 30)

This new structure permitted similar actors to maintain involvement with the school, but also open up its organization to multiple positionalities in a more democratic General Assembly structure. In addition, this initial iteration of the school already had a transparent financial reporting system and humanistic-cooperativist mission. The school now had a collective decision-making structure and procedures, increasing its emerging cooperative status. Requisite funds were found and the school continued to

grow to 170 students by 1952 (Ornelas-Navarro, p. 195), at which point Father Jose Maria lobbied the Supervisory Board to move the school to a larger building which could hold 1000 students. Despite initial apprehension at this optimistic growth goal, the Board approved the move (ibid., p. 514).

The first class of graduates finished at the EPP in 1947. Eleven of these high school graduates continued their educations with advanced night classes at the EPP. These classes were recognized and approved by the nearby University of Zaragoza, permitting the students to graduate from university. These 11 college graduates, having been educated at the EPP, went on to work in Union Cerrejara for several years. In 1956, five of them came together to start a worker cooperative, ULGOR (formed by the first letters of their own last names). ULGOR would become the first cooperative in the Mondragon system. These five students had maintained friendships with one another and Father Jose Maria after graduating from the EPP. Disappointed with their experiences on the shop floor of the capitalist Union Cerrajera, the priest "guided" them in the creation of a "new enterprise" owned by workers. (Ornelas-Navarro, p. 125) Having been educated at the EPP and having kept in touch with Father Jose Maria, they "established a paraffin stove factory in 1956 in the form of a joint stock company." They wanted to make a firm "which conformed to the ideals and examples previously discussed with Jose Maria" (Meek and Woodworth, p. 516). Investing their own money in a "blind pool," they combined it with community resources. Doing extensive community outreach, they raised an initial investment with the Mondragon community by 1958 and began building the company, factory, and organizational structure (ibid.). Article I of ULGOR's "Internal Regulations" document stated that "[m]anual labor should enjoy the prerogatives inherent in its dignity in all productive processes" (ibid., p. 517). By 1959, four other cooperatives—a consumer cooperative, two producer cooperatives, and a "Working Peoples' Bank"—emerged in Mondragon, and the EPP was reorganized a second time to become part of this cooperative network. The EPP became a school "which exists to service the industrial cooperatives" (ibid.). Starting as a school, the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation would grow into one of the most successful large-scale cooperatives in the world, and now includes a university and graduate school as part of its educational system.

## The Claim

Meek and Woodworth (1990) write that the Mondragon Cooperative Experience had an "educational genesis." This "genesis" happened, and continues to happen, in two senses: a causal sense and a reproductive sense. Meek and Woodworth continue:

> Indeed, without the educational programs and systems … and the continued elaboration and development of new educational mechanisms and institutions, the cooperative enterprise might never have started … the EPP and Alecoop created the necessary engineering and managerial talent to sustain the system and propel its expansion. (ibid., p. 506)

The causal sense is the first claim above: "without the educational programs and systems" the cooperative may never have started. In this sense, *education caused the Mondragon Cooperative*. Without education, there would be no Mondragon cooperative. The reproductive sense is the second argument above, which claims that the EPP "created the necessary engineering and managerial talent to sustain" and propel the cooperative. In Ornelas-Navarro's landmark research on schooling and producer cooperatives, he claims that schools can have a reproductive role in anti-capitalist social formations by training workers to live and work with cooperative relations of production. Using Bowles and Gintis's (1976) notion of "correspondence" in a more general way, Ornelas-Navarro builds on the assumption that curriculum, pedagogy, and school activities correspond to economic behaviors outside of the school. This correspondence does not entail a "mechanical correspondence" between MCE and EPP, however.

> Since the EPP is different in structure from standard capitalist schools, the outcomes produced by such a school also tend to be different. These differences in outcome are due (a) to a more democratic and egalitarian organization and governance, and (b) the combination of formal education with paid productive cooperative labor … The linkages between the EPP and the MCE are exemplified in the types of values and attitudes the EPP reproduces in its contribution to the reproduction of labor power. (Ornelas-Navarro, 1980, p. 19)

Schools train students to be workers, and their behaviors in school correspond to work behaviors. Rather than capitalist correspondence, however, the students' activities in the EPP corresponded to cooperative relations

of production. In other words, there was a correspondence between their school behaviors and work behaviors, but this correspondence guided the students to a non-exploitative economic life rather than an exploitative one. The schools reproduce cooperative know-how and ideology. The reproductive claim therefore goes like this: *education reproduces the Mondragon Cooperative*. Given the causal and reproductive role that education played in the Mondragon Cooperative, we might say that the EPP educated for a labor commons in the Basque Country of Spain. The cooperatively run school educated the commons in that particular case, and continues to educate for the commons.

The generalized claim to make here is that other cooperatively run schools can educate other commons in other places and other times. The implication of this general claim is that such a school supporting the cooperative economy could emerge now in the United States.

## Considerations

There are obvious tensions with this general claim and its implication. The Mondragon case is only one example, whose success relied on a set of contingent historical factors permitting the school and cooperative factory to emerge, survive, and thrive. I can identify five such factors which complicate the argument that cooperatively run schools can educate the commons in other places and times, specifically the United States in the twenty-first century. First, there was the commitment and leadership of Father Jose Maria receiving resources from the Catholic Church, as well as his unique anti-capitalist/cooperativist interpretation of Catholic doctrine. Such mixtures, organizational energy, and resources are an unlikely combination. It is unlikely that activists and educators can work within a similar set of structural folds, occupying positions within several well-funded organizations in both government and market, in such a way as to wield the necessary resources within those institutions toward such radical aims. Are there such possibilities in the United States in the twenty-first century?

Second, we must consider the cohesion and solidarity of the Basque community, as well as the unique productive forces in their region. Cultural solidity, a history of steel work, and continued availability of natural resources for steel production were serendipitous and propitious ingredients. Few communities are small enough, cohesive enough, and resource-wealthy enough to support a similar initiative. Third, at a larger level, there was a strange harmony between Franco's fascist government

and the Catholic Church in Spain at that time, which supported Father Jose Maria's aspirations and eventually permitted large-scale cooperatives. Franco's fascist ideology, as Ornelas-Navarro notes, encouraged the dissolution of social classes, and his fascist government had the Catholic Church's support. A priest starting a cooperative school and factory in Spain at that time was not met with hostility from the existing balance of political forces.

Fourth, there were unique legal structures and loopholes which let Father Jose Maria start the school and then reorganize it into a cooperatively run institution. Educational laws in the twenty-first-century United States are much different. Fifth, Father Jose Maria was able to make strategic concessions to capitalists in order to start and sustain the school, and his star students in the first graduating class worked at Union Cerrajera before starting the stove cooperative. It is not clear that organizers interested in creating a cooperative school would have the ideological flexibility and vision to permit such concessions now. Even if the organizers were able to be flexible, it is not clear that the social formation would vindicate their long-term plans in the inevitable event that they would have to make concessions: while a neoliberal democratic-capitalist social formation does not execute dissidents and others like a fascist regime, it has its own forms of repression to keep itself in place. The United States in the twenty-first century will most likely not be friendly to community economies devoted to dissolving social classes for anti-capitalist purposes. Rather than shooting organizers in the head or imprisoning them, the government, market, and wider culture might suffocate the energy and resources necessary for cultivating such a school, while demutualization withers the strength of existing cooperatives who might support these schools.

Despite the above tensions, there may be forces and realities at play in the United States right now which, if galvanized, could prove fertile for such a project. I can think of five such forces and realities.

First, activists have pushed back the most recent wave of educational "reforms." The Opt-Out movement in particular has, through direct action and organizing, resisted the network of neoliberal market-governance, high-stakes testing, and curriculum centralization created by the No Child Left Behind Act and Race to the Top policies. President Obama has apologized "for all the testing," and his Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has stepped down, recognizing his problematic reliance on tests. The Educational Success for all Students Act (ESSA) was passed at the end of 2015 with bipartisan support in the United States Congress,

leaving educational policies up to states after a nearly 20-year period of strong federal oversight. Furthermore, there is widespread distrust of government educational policy, including high-stakes testing, standardization through the Common Core, and value-added measurements. At the very least, ours is a moment where there might be mainstream interest in other educational models, pedagogical experimentation, and openness to different kinds of schooling.

Second, the charter school is a volatile political object. On the one hand, it has permitted a marketization and privatization of schooling. Private companies are now running schools using public money rather than city, municipal, and state governments both funding and administering schools. Teacher unions have suffered. On the other hand, however, there is nothing essentially marketizing in the charter school as a political thing. Like Zucotti Park, the privately owned public space in New York City which the Occupy Wall Street movement occupied and transformed into Liberty Square, the charter school is an ambiguous object which can be creatively reappropriated. It is subject to struggle. EdVisions, for instance, is a charter network which supports teacher-run schools operated by teacher-owned worker cooperatives (Kerchner & Muffinger, 2012). The network of teacher cooperatives in this case is the "operator" of the school and the charter permits this operator, since it is not the government, to administer the school. Just because a school is not government-run does not mean it must be market-run. Certainly market-run schools have been the recent trend, but it is not a foregone conclusion. The retreat of the government from public schooling should not necessarily be seen on the left as an evil *a priori* (though it has been a severe threat to teacher unions). It was precisely this retreat which permitted the "quiet revolution" of cooperative schools in the United Kingdom mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Rather than writing it off as yet another instance of the global market structure's dominance in educational life, activists and leftists could see the retreat of the government from school operation as an opportunity to create moments of anti-exploitative educational activity.

Third, Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign has created an unprecedented space in national public discourse for critiques of capitalism. Support for Sanders, which has been surprising to most, indicates an interest in anti-capitalist politics, policies, and practices. Though Sanders did not get the democratic presidential nomination, he has created a political platform from which to argue for socialist policy. A cooperatively run school is consistent with such a platform, and we may see candidates emerge in

upcoming local, state, and federal elections during the next five years who can rally public support for such a program. Even before Sanders began his campaign, the Socialist Alternative party supported and continues to back Kshama Sawant, a socialist City Council member in Seattle. Sawant has been re-elected by her community, and with such politicians benefiting from high public approval the time may be ripe for a systematic organization of cooperatively run schools in pro-socialist districts, cities, and states.

Fourth, there is a budding cooperative economy in the United States which requires trained cooperative labor to sustain itself. According to the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Center for Cooperatives, circa 2009:

> Nearly 30,000 United States cooperatives operate at 73,000 places of business … These cooperatives own roughly $3 trillion in assets, and generate roughly $500 billion in revenue and roughly $25 billion in wages. Extrapolating from the sample to the entire population, the study estimates that cooperatives account for nearly $654 billion in revenue, roughly 2 million jobs, $75 billion in wages and benefits paid, and a total of $133.5 billion in value-added income. Americans hold 350 million memberships in cooperatives, which generate nearly $79 billion in total impact from patronage refunds and dividends. (Deller, Hoyt, Hueth, & Sundaram-Stukel, 2009, p. 2)

These cooperative institutions—just like capitalist firms and government firms—need well-trained labor in order to continue existing. They need people who can cooperate, participate in collective decision-making, and know how to be member-owner-users. These are neither natural skills nor intuitive behaviors. One cannot just start cooperating without any training. Rather, these skills come about through initiation and practice. Regions with strong cooperative economies might support schools which teach cooperation.

Fifth, in my own current context—Cleveland, Ohio—the ground may be fertile such a school. Facing some of the largest levels of economic segregation in the United States and also high levels of educational inequality (Florida & Mellander, 2014), a community-operated school could give students, parents, and community members a sense of ownership in neighborhoods where that is absent. Cleveland also has ample vacant lots, inexpensive properties, and city officials are looking to encourage many kinds of building, development, and programs which address issues the city faces. Finally, Evergreen Cooperative Corporation is a network of three worker cooperatives following the Mondragon model in Cleveland.

One cooperative handles laundry for the Cleveland Clinic, another specializes in solar panel installation, and the last is a lettuce farm with a three-acre indoor facility in Cleveland's Central neighborhood (http://www.evgoh.com/). Evergreen focuses on employing local labor, particularly Clevelanders of color coming out of jail. The cooperative is roughly 30% worker-owned at this point, though the network is less than ten years old. Such organizations require workers that know how to cooperate, and a cooperatively run school could conceivably form a partnership with the cooperative to share resources and inform curriculum.

## Conclusion

Cooperatively run schools educate the commons, as we can see in the case of Mondragon, and the ground may be ready in the United States for a "quiet revolution" like the one in the United Kingdom. Cooperatively run schools can create the conditions for less exploitation and reproduce the kinds of skills and know-how which maintain the strength of cooperatives, which, as Dyer-Whitford argues,

> Despite their contradictions … are part of a long tradition of troubling the subject of waged-labour (associated labour), developing an ethics of production (workplace democracy), sharing wealth produced in common (surplus distribution), demonstrating the state can aid in the encouragement of alternatives to capitalist enterprise (state support), and fostering a parallel, community solidarity economy (cooperation among cooperatives).

The claim here is that, using the Mondragon educational genesis as a kind of founding myth, such schools should proliferate in the United States with a clear focus on reproducing non-exploitative capitalist relations of production. This anti-exploitative educational work could aid the growth of an already budding cooperative economy which challenges the status quo in each of the ways mentioned in the passage above.

One objection to this claim, from critical pedagogy and Marxist educational theory, is that cooperative institutions are not sufficiently powerful to resist the social structures of enclosure prevalent in a dominantly capitalist mode of production. Cooperatives are a "deeply ambivalent organizational form" (Dyer-Whitford), which Marx ultimately thought resulted in "dwarfish" institutions easily co-optable by capital. Anarchist critiques, on the other hand, would point out that such institutions still require the

imposition of work in exchange for resources. Both traditional and autonomist Marxists have valid points in arguing against such a scheme. This Scylla and Charibdis might be too powerful for cooperatively run schools to be part of revolutionary strategy. A "quiet revolution" such as the one in England is not "loud" enough to disrupt Capitalism's hegemonic song. The objection raises the general question of strategy and theory backing the claim that cooperatively run schools can educate the commons. Is cooperativism the right strategy? The responses to this question will fall along a spectrum of Leftist positions: New Left, Old left; social democrat, socialist, utopian socialist, scientific socialist, communist, anarchist, liberationist, left libertarian, Marxian liberal; Marxist-Leninist-Maoist; autonomous Marxist; feminist, postmodernist, poststructuralist, postcolonialist, anti-essentialist … Each position will argue for its version of the correct Marxist/Marxian interpretation, from which they might deduce policy, practice, and programs. Adjudicating between these perspectives is a necessary but large task outside the scope of this chapter.

Within the scope of this chapter however is to find a theory-strategy at an "appropriate" level of abstraction for the claim (Malott & Ford, 2015), at least in order to respond to the theoretical disagreements it might inspire. The theory which best fits the present argument is J.K. Gibson-Graham's postmodern feminist Marxism. Her line of thinking would respond to the above objection by saying that it is not obvious that capitalism must be or should be characterized as a "global structure" which is "big." Such a monolithic characterization, that we live "within" or "under" capitalism, is essentializing and prohibitive. Gibson-Graham argues that such a conception of capitalism—that it is a monstrous object able to "appropriate" structures into itself through self-regulating unity, singularity, and hegemonic totality—is not the only way to conceive of economy. Building on Resnick and Wolff's (1994) Althusserian reading of Marxism, emphasizing the idea of overdetermination, incorporating insights from second wave feminism (1993) as well as Laclau and Mouffe's notion of radical politics (2001), Gibson-Graham differentiates Capitalism from capitalism. The former is a monstrous, all-encompassing "mode of production" which presents the Left with a monstrous dilemma: either create total social transformation or create nothing at all. Such a characterization ignores all the various ways in which surplus value is appropriated and distributed (including household work, self-employment, and primitive communisms) and does not theorize, support, or encourage many forms of actually existing noncapitalist production. The

latter however, capitalism with a little "c," is the unstable, fragmented, and piecemeal set of economic arrangements within which many forms of exploitation, appropriation, and distribution occur next to one another. Gibson-Graham's theory-strategy changes the way we think about capitalism to stoke the growth of anti-capitalist practice. The theory-strategy of capitalism with a little "c" thereby encourages cooperatively run schools as an alternative educational community economy among a great number of other alternatives, sensitive to differences while still concretely concerned with noncapitalist production. Mondragon is the case in point here. The theory-strategy above also permits the variability of what "cooperatively run school" can mean, respecting the instability of that signifier. Disagreeing with the cooperatively run school argument, in other words, means disagreeing with Gibson-Graham's interpretation of Marxism, which would be a fascinating thread to follow, though it is outside the scope of the chapter. This above serves to summarize the thesis of this chapter, however: cooperatively run schools take a "little-c" approach to capitalism and its transformation. It is my proposal that governing schools cooperatively can change our economic arrangement into something less exploitative.

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CHAPTER 13

# Big Talk in the Little City: Grassroots Resistance by and for the Common/s

*Mark Stern and Khuram Hussain*

## Results May Vary

An early sign of public resistance appeared in the online comments section of a news story celebrating Geneva's, NY, designation as an "All-American City" by the National Civic League. The article glowed with praise from civic leaders like city manager Matt Horn who extolled the prize as "an affirmation by our peers and leaders in the community engagement field that the community's approach toward addressing our challenges is innovative and respected" (Visit Geneva, 2016a, p. 3). A lone commenter, Janice Loudon, promptly replied, "results may vary" and pasted a link to a story which questioned the city's commitment to equitable neighborhood development (Loudon, 2015). The message stuck out: the only critical comment publicly linked to an upbeat news story about a hard luck city. To compound matters, the comment came from a member of the city's Neighborhood Resource Center (GNRC)—which had been using Geneva's "All-American City" designation to publicize a narrative of progressive urban development in Geneva. GNRC and city leaders were

M. Stern (✉)
Colgate University, Hamilton, NY, USA
e-mail: mstern@colgate.edu

K. Hussain
Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY, USA



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confounded by her public criticism, but Janice was unmoved (Loudon, 2015). She was concerned with the city's mounting public narratives of inclusion, growth, and urban progress, which varied dramatically from the actual land-use policies they aimed to implement.

As an insider, she witnessed the unfolding of a city government agenda to shape the direction of land-use for the next 15 years. Known as the "Comprehensive Plan," it would essentially advise city government on how to develop housing, public spaces, and employment. As Janice sat through monthly planning meetings, she realized she was witnessing the emergence of a plan to help urban elites winnow public land-use for their interests, while simultaneously claiming to expand it for everyone—all of it couched in the language of progress. And she was not alone. The sole Black member of the GNRC was alarmed by committee discussions on the need to create low-wage jobs for unemployed residents, subsidize high value homes to attract upper-middle-class professionals, and move away from "social justice type" initiatives that make the city seem like a welfare haven. The corporatist tenor of the comprehensive plan committee is unsurprising given lead consultant Charles Buki's neoliberal worldview. Buki dismisses concerns over food deserts, arguing that low quality price-gouging markets are "not a limiting factor" to nutrition for poor communities (Buki, 2012a, p. 10). Buki (2012b) debates the appropriateness of HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) interventions in poor communities and faults the public behavior of communities of poverty for the "weaken[ed] market demand, reduce[d] prices" that "amplify the conventional wisdom to disinvest" from poor neighborhoods (Buki, 2012a, p. 9).

Few people outside of the GNRC or city government knew anything about Buki or the political context shaping the comprehensive plan. Instead, the public face of the comprehensive plan was administered through an online survey that was widely circulated as "an opportunity for all residents to provide their input" to the data collection process which would inform the comprehensive plan ("Comprehensive Plan," 2015). While the GNRC claimed the online survey "asks basic demographic information" (Shaw, 2015, p. 6), a critical reading of the survey reveals a preponderance of questions privileging the cultural context of upper-middle-class homeowners, with detailed dropdown options for questions regarding property taxes, salaried incomes, and drivable destinations. There was notably limited space for discussions of walkable access points, renters' rights, or access points via public transit. All in all, the survey added up to something of an illusion of a common process for citizens' voices to be heard. Not

only was the online medium exclusive to those with access, but the structuring of the questions themselves precipitated particular kinds of answers that would be in the service of legitimating plans to subsidize property development and attract upper- and middle-class housing to raise the city's tax base. It was, as in many cities, business as usual.

Yet the burgeoning resistance represented by Janice was expanding well beyond containment. Within weeks of their discovery of the GNRC's project, Janice and others familiar with the GNRC joined *Tools for Social Change (Tools)*—an interracial, interclass grassroots collective established to promote multiracial dialogue and community action. Janice and others spoke through anger, tears, and a persistent pain over the fate of the city. In turn they found allies in common cause and the beginnings of a new strategy for subverting the discursive strategies of the power elite.

This chapter documents this struggle. Framed within the literature on neoliberal rationality and neoliberal urbanization, *Tools* emerged as a direct challenge to the privatizing land-use policies of the GNRC and the anti-democratic processes that were utilized to gain policy legitimation. Moreover, and perhaps a bit symbolically, *Tools* was also a kind of rebellion—one of many across the country and the globe—whose existence and growth points to the growing outrage against the continued enclosure of material, political, and spiritual life and the fight for more democratic spaces and ideals. Janice's language, "results may vary," calls specific attention to the uneven ways that contemporary urban development affects different populations. In her fracturing of the hermetic seal around the triumphant narrative of development, Janice, along with many others, entered into a pedagogical register, asking hard questions and at the same time opening space for new possibilities, common and otherwise.

In what follows, we first situate the uniqueness of the story in Geneva within a larger constellation of literatures on neoliberalism, urban development, and the common/s—an intentional spelling we are using to render the relationship between how space gets used, to what end, and who makes those decisions, and the way this frames how communities acknowledge and honor their common humanity and shared vulnerability. Framing neoliberalism as a kind of pedagogy that trades on the appropriation of democratic rhetoric, we explain how notions of development and individual value have been tethered together in the current historical enclosure. Dialectically, we also situate how neoliberal enclosure has generated new social conditions whereby the widespread dispossession of space has given rise to a shared/commonality. This common space, we

argue, is both a recognition of shared violence and a starting point for a new pedagogical project of revitalizing a more radical democratic spirit. With a bit of a theoretical compass in hand, we then turn back to our story in Geneva to document the how and why of the work of *Tools*. Using Khuram's experiences working in the community and public record as data we aim to provide an intimate sketch of what a pedagogical process of and for the common/s looked and felt like on the ground.

## "Uniquely" Urban?

As part of the marketing campaign for the comprehensive plan, the Geneva Economic Development Partnership, a public–private organization created in 2012 "to develop an investment strategy that focuses on the arts and culture, tourism, downtown and industry" (Shaw, 2012, p. 2), started the website visitgeneva.com as means to promote Geneva as a place to live, visit, and do business. With its location on the fertile banks of Seneca Lake, the largest of the Finger Lakes with a number of vineyards dotting its shores, its proximity to highly selective liberal arts and Ivy Leaguecolleges (Hobart and William Smith Colleges; Cornell; Ithaca College; Wells College), and its small-town feel, the partnership, via the website, has marketed Geneva as "uniquely urban" (Visit Geneva, n.d.b). Though many factors like those above do create a particular kind of uniqueness about a little city like Geneva, our focus in this section is to interrogate claims of uniqueness by situating the singularity of the story we are telling about Geneva within the contemporary literature on neoliberal urbanization, neoliberal rationality, and the common/s. In doing so, our aim is to show how the "unique" ways and means that anti-democratic urban development came to be in Geneva are symptomatic of a far more pervasive domestic and global phenomenon. Moreover, and perhaps more important and reparatively, we also aim to show how the resistance that will be documented in this paper is also part of a far more developing phenomenon of grassroots organizing and resistance to neoliberal rationality, further enclosure of the commons, and a perversion of democratic processes and ideals.

## Appropriating Appropriate

Over the past 20 years, the city—both as a material space and theoretical concept—has (re)emerged in critical literature in a big way (e.g., Cucchiara, 2013; Harvey, 2012; Lipman, 2011; Mitchell, 2003; among many others). Reasons for this are multiple and outside the scope of this

paper; however, a salient theme that will provide much of the underlying foundation for this project has to do with the concerns around how processes of neoliberal urban development have appropriated the name and processes of democracy for exclusionary and anti-democratic ends. In order to explain these multiple processes, Harvey (1973, 2008, 2012), working within and building upon Lefebvre's writings on cities and the production of space, has helped to lay out particular kinds of analytic foundations for thinking the city in regard to, first, "the perpetual need to find profitable terrains for capital-surplus production and absorption" (2008, p. 24) and, dialectically, the material conditions for broad organizing and resistance to capitalist enclosure of public space and processes.

In regard to cities being spaces that are generative to capitalist modes of production, here we want to think about how neoliberal urbanism has appropriated discourses of *appropriate development* in order to hegemonically gain raced and classed public consent to undertake particular kinds of projects—much like the development of high-cost housing in Geneva. Scholars have long turned to a Gramscian notion of *common sense* to explain how those in power utilize discourse and media in order to "rationally" explain why and how certain procedures or policies should play out (e.g., Kumashiro, 2009; Rupert, 2000). Using a mix of techno-scientific language that performs expertise and an affective tenor that promises a better tomorrow (less crime, greater tax base, more jobs, better schools, changes in race and class demographics, and so on), the term *development* in and of itself has been operationalized in debates on urban spaces to signify progress and, generally, betterment (Escobar, 2012; Rist, 2007). Who gets to set the criteria of what constitutes better and the discursive stage to define to what end, matter greatly in the construction of what constitutes appropriate use of space and resources.

The Geneva Comprehensive Plan's lead consultant exemplifies how neoliberal urbanism appropriates the discourse of appropriate development to legitimate enclosures and dismantles the commons:

> To really embrace demand is, after all, to embrace choice. Easy to say. But few in the field of community development really do. Why? Because "choice" requires that we tackle "consequences." And, of course, "consequences" in community development are anathema to a field unable to leave anyone behind. What are those consequences? Loss. In any genuine market there is competition and that means winners and losers. The consequence of choice is that some lose. Some blocks. Some homeowners. Some neighborhoods. Some cities. This is unacceptable to many in the very field ostensibly committed to revitalization. (Buki, 2012c, p. 4)

This discourse manifests globally in the mass gentrification of/forced removals in urban areas, which has sustained unprecedented growth over the past 10 years (Zukin, 2010). Capitalizing on the materialization of 60+ years of state-sanctioned racialized disinvestment in the infrastructure of urban spaces in the United States, capital turned to urbanization as a means to absorb surplus capital and create accommodations for profiteering through the construction of speculative surplus value (Harvey, 2008, p. 24). Gentrification has brought formerly suburbanized, upper-middle-class, educated, and professionalized populations into urban areas en masse. Facilitating this migration has been a radical housing and commercial transformation of historically abandoned urban areas. New construction (that looks much like suburban gated communities) has created entirely new neighborhoods through displacing and forcibly removing vulnerable and, in the eyes of capital, disposable, communities—many of whom have lived in areas for generations and were most formally exposed to the spatial racism and classism. The groups moving into neighborhoods come not only with wealth, but with the political, economic, and cultural capital that both legitimates and necessitates new development while those being pushed out bear the brunt of blame as the impediments to urban renewal and growth. Appropriate development looks a certain way—not only new material construction that mimics suburban sensibilities of private property, surveillance, and homogeneity, but also a new construction of racial spatial logics. To harken back to Janice's comment from above: *results may vary* depending on who you are, the color of your skin, and the kinds of capital you might have.

## Appropriate Appropriated

Alves dos Santos Junior (2014) suggests that "appropriate" neoliberal urban development is characterized by "constant urban growth based on destruction and reconstruction of cities and the grave social, environmental, and political effects associated with this dynamic" (p. 147). The means by which contemporary development masks its deleterious effects has to do with the way that discourses about development maps onto the logics of economization of everyday life. In *Undoing the Demos*, Wendy Brown (2015) suggests that, "Neoliberalism governs as sophisticated common sense, a reality principle remaking institutions and human beings everywhere it settles, nestles, and gains affirmation" (p. 35). Arguing beyond a way of treating neoliberalism as merely a set of economic principles and

policies that mediate relationships between the state, the market, and individuals, Brown argues that neoliberalism has become a "normative order of reason … a widely and deeply disseminated governing rationality [that] transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with human themselves, according to a specific image of the economic" (pp. 9–10). More than just engaging in particular kinds of processes and practices that will maximize self-interest and profit (economic), Brown lays out an argument showing how "neoliberal rationality disseminates the *model of the market* to all domains of life—even where money is not at issue—and configures all human beings exhaustively as market actors …" (p. 31, emphasis original). In this formulation, we can begin to see how the reconstruction of urban spaces has been undertaken with little if any thought for common/shared experience and democratic process.

If, as Brown suggests, all decision-making within neoliberal rationality is considered within the realm of market logics and individualized metrics, if citizens in a state are interpellated into particular kinds of consciousness wherein one is only responsible for themselves and their families, then notions of the common and public good get pushed to peripheral ethical domains. This means more than just the economic defunding of public services and institutions like hospitals and schools and being replaced by a market model for public goods. This means that considerations for other people, for the usage of space, and for the restructuring of urban life are considered only insofar as they might enhance a portfolio of monetary and non-monetary investments of an actor (Brown, 2015, p. 10). The degree to which any decisions would be made in the interest of a collective—to support an idea of a common/s life—would be mediated by the degree to which it increased the value of the lives who could not afford to exist in restructured urban life. In Buki's words, urban development "means winners and losers" (Buki, 2012c, p. 4). In turn, two emergent themes become present. First, there is direct link between the way neoliberal urban development pushes out unwanted communities from areas ripe for capitalist development and surplus value generation, and the way that individualistic neoliberal rationality pushes out any sense of concern for vulnerable and—most especially to those that might serve as reminders that the homogenization of urban space is a violent act for which new occupiers with class and racial privilege must be accountable (Schulman, 2012). Second, and as we'll move into below, the kinds of decisions that get made about development are top-down, coerced, and considered in the image of the dominant class.

## Contesting Appropriation

Though Brown's argument on neoliberal rationality can feel unavoidably deterministic, there remains, both on the ground and in the literature, contesting claims over what utility means and how value is considered. Alves dos Santos Junior (2014) points out that "What is use value for a particular agent may be exchange value for another; and vice versa, due to the different forms of material and symbolic reproduction of agents" (p. 149). What gets considered appropriate by a ruling class, then, because of the way a space will be utilized and the degree to which that utilization might create surplus value, doesn't go without contestation. For others, that same space could have a use value that might increase common and democratic life. Thinking dialectically, the kinds of processes outlined above in regard to neoliberal urbanism and *appropriate development* have been met with a rise of urban movements refusing to cower to the power and logics and capital, and instead fighting for the promise of urban spaces and, therein, democratic ideals (Harvey, 2012).

Within the literature, much of these contestations have been documented under the umbrella plea and rallying point of the right to the city. Though a full review of the literature on the right to the city isn't possible in this paper (e.g., Attoh, 2011; Marcuse, 2009; Purcell, 2003), we use this term to call attention to who has the right to determine urban development and, related, to use urban spaces. Attoh suggests that much of the right to the city literature is concerned with how urban power is "exclusively wielded by private interest and in which an increasingly small urban elite produces and manages surpluses for their own ends" (p. 676). Cities are places where surplus capital is created through the interrelationship of industries like real estate, finance, construction, food services, transportation, tourism, higher education, medicine, and technology. Most of those who work in these fields or in fields what allow these industries to run and create surplus value live in urban areas (either in the space of these industries or in the export processing urban areas of a global urban connectivity). These same populations, scholars and activists argue, do not benefit from the surplus value they create in their labor practices and they have little to no say in the direction the development *their* cities take. The right to the city, then, suggests both a collective democratic right and voice in deciding how and to what end cities are created, designed, and used, and a plea for the imagining of and the creating of new democratic urban areas. "The right to the city," writes Purcell (2003), "stresses the need

to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting away from capital and the state and toward human inhabitants" (pp. 101–102).

Here we want to think alongside De Lissovoy (2011) and Butler (2015) in connecting the right to the city to the commons, and to what De Lissovoy calls the common. In materialist literature, the commons refers to collectively/publicly shared space that, historically, was enclosed/privatized through the course of capitalist development. Far from being merely a moment of static history, Harvey (2003) has suggested that these enclosures, though different in kind, have continued throughout the reign of capitalism. The right to the city is a call for a new articulation of the commons. It is a demand that suggests that all inhabitants and producers of urban space, a space that generates wealth and value, need to be part of the process that decides how to best use space in ways that further equity, pleasure, and democratic ideals. The right to the city and the commons both, perhaps at their core, demand that the relationship between space, human relationships, and democracy be reconsidered (i.e., common/s). How space gets utilized, by whom, and with what purpose, offers critical commentary on the state of human relationships and, in turn, ethical questions about responsibilities to and for others.

Clarifying this connection, De Lissovoy (2011) suggests that the language of the commons provides insight into what he calls the common. The loss of the commons, and the kind of democratic promise inscribed within it, have created a particular kind of shared/common social condition that is marked by a uneven topography of what Butler (2004, 2009) calls precarity. Precarity refers to the quasi-ontological condition of what it means to live in a world where bodies are exposed to the unpredictable flows of power, political economy, racism, and, among other social forces, war. This is an irrefutable state of being: precarity and/or the possibility of it is what all people share common by definition of our being and the vulnerability of our bodies to forces outside of our control; however, this common phenomenology is not an equal opportunity social condition. Most especially for those living lives of extreme vulnerability, exposed the violence of racialized capitalism, state-sanctioned incarceration, and an ethos of dispensability, the common refers to a set of interdependent relationships that render some bodies structurally more exposed and precarious than others. For De Lissovoy, this interdependent condition of precarity, a condition predicated on the enclosure of common spaces and possibility for democratic thinking and being that came along with it, is

what human beings share in common. And, insofar as precarity is relational—what creates decreased precarity for some (white skin) creates increased precarity for others (non-white skin)—herein also lies where one can make claims for ethics and obligations to and for others (see also Stern, 2012). What we have in common is the world in its neoliberal state and the grave environmental, physical, and relational consequences that emerge as effects. Resonating with Brown above, Butler (2015) suggests that this political ecology is "[u]sually induced and reproduced by governmental and economic institutions … [and] acclimatizes populations over time to insecurity and hopelessness; it is structured into the institutions of temporary labor and decimated social services and the general attrition of the active remnants of social democracy in favor of entrepreneurial modalities supported by fierce ideologies of individual responsibility and obligation to maximize one's own market value as the ultimate aim in life" (p. 15). And yet it is from here, both Butler and De Lissovoy suggest, that we have the ability to reimagine responsibility in democratic society, process in democratic society, purpose in democratic society, and justice in democratic society. This is why we use common/s—as a means to verbally and visibly articulate the relationship between space and precarity in all its violent and hopeful possibilities—to use one word to represent the contingent relationship between space (commons) and how that space constitutes an ethical relationship between people in that space (common). Common/s is a means is signify the co-constituting possibility and necessity of materiality and relationality.

## Toward a Common/s

For Butler, it has been the beauty and hope of current waves of protest—from Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter to the new teacher movements emerging across the country—that has provided a new articulation of shared responsibility and a fidelity to the kinds of democratic ideals embedded within an idea and a materialization of the commons. She writes that, "Over and against an increasingly individualized sense of anxiety and failure [i.e., the kinds of privatized affects that emerge within neoliberal competitive citizenship], public assembly [like *Tools*] embodies the insight that this [neoliberal precarity] is a social condition both shared and unjust, and that assembly enacts a provisional and plural form of coexistence that constitutes a distinct ethical and social alternative to [neoliberal mantras of individual responsibility]" (pp. 15–16). As communities come to

understand their experiences as shared and symptomatic of historical formations and continued exploitation, they have come to challenge both the degree to which their voices are heard and their lives are considered real, and the construction of neoliberal spaces. In embracing what they share in common—the destruction of the environment, the denial of rights and appeal, the violence of mass precaritization—loss marks a rallying point for collective action toward new common/s. Here the right to the city comes to include, as De Lissovoy (2011) suggests in relation to the common, "a name both for an actually emergent experience of interconnectedness and for a utopian political project … reconstructed by globality at the same time as we participate in inventing it" (p. 1125).

Shared structural, racial, physical, educational, and spiritual violence has given way to protest and assembly to reclaim democratic process and to be heard and seen; in Butler's (2015) contention, "ways of avowing and showing certain forms of interdependency stand a chance of transforming the field of appearance itself" (p. 43); in other words: the common/s. Appearance, here, should be understood both as a sense of visibility—of being seen/heard—and also in regard to the way that the existence/appearance of public spaces/common/s appear and, as such, mediate human relationships. "As much as we must insist on there being material conditions for public assembly and public speech," Butler writes, "we have also to ask how it is that assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment" (p. 71). The example that follows provides a unique case study in how a group of people who were rendered without rights or voice used their common experience to make a plea for a more democratic and public use of space. In doing so, in the act of appearing and making pleas, and making sure their voices were heard, something else happened too. People also began to reimagine what community might mean in a small, unique city like Geneva. This also meant a rethinking of how, through our shared experiences, we remain responsible to each other to speak up, to show up, and to fight against injustice.

## Big Talk in the Little City

*Tools for Social Change* operates through a sequential process of critical race dialogue followed by action and repeat. Collective dialogue seeds the meaning and purpose of action and self-selected subgroups organize community members into action teams that plan and execute community

work. Since its inception in 2015, *Tools* has conducted 50 weekly meetings with 40–60 regular participants; organized three citywide events that placed city council and the mayor's office in direct dialogue with city residents; supported the campaign of the first Black councilman in the city's 200-year history; and lobbied for a food desert designation for Geneva's north side. Situated in the city's sixth ward, housed in Geneva's oldest Black church, and next door to the largest housing projects, *Tools* works to maximize spaces of encounter between the city's privileged classes and its most marginalized residents. Founded by a collective of academics, Black civic leaders, and white progressives, its agenda is driven by collective decision making and multi-pronged actions. Yet when *Tools* fully realized the GNRC's plans, the collective halted all action to focus on a singular mission: reclaim the development of the comprehensive plan through democratic processes.

At the 11th hour of the GNRC's online survey completion, Janice and a band of *Tools* representatives met with the GNRC comprehensive plan committee. *Tools* came to address mounting concerns by the city's largest grassroots organization regarding their process for preparing the comprehensive plan. I (Khuram) presented *Tools*' vision for a "big talk" in the city. We planned to leverage *Tools*' strengths for dialogue and organizing by training facilitators to organize dozens of gatherings in spaces occupied by residents that the online survey failed to engage: Black and Hispanic churches and barbershops, housing projects, free lunch programs, the Salvation Army, senior housing, and so on. We planned to interview community members about their views on housing, employment, and public space conditions. We would record their answers, transcribe their words, and report out on the broadly public conversation about land-use in the city's history. A less-than-unanimous majority of the GNRC agreed to pause their final write-up and provide *Tools* with time and resources to democratize the city's information gathering process.

The ensuing weeks witnessed a cadre of locally trained facilitators engage 14 different community dialogues in 12 different locations in Geneva, recording a combined total of over 22 hours of dialogue throughout the city. Over half of the participants were Hispanic or Black, and most were women. Three of the dialogues engaged Geneva's Spanish-speaking residents, with one talk conducted entirely in Spanish, and others conducted bilingually with the help of translators. Ultimately, the full collection of transcribed interviews were analyzed and synthesized by critical ethnographer Jessica Hayes-Conroy, who was commissioned by *Tools* to produce

a final summary document for the public. The purported aim of the Big Talk was to produce this document and better inform the write-up of the comprehensive plan. Jackie Augustine, who served as a city councilwoman for two decades, described it as the "most progressive and benevolently-disruptive effort ever sanctioned by the city" (J. Augustine, personal correspondence, February 4, 2016). However, it retains two additional and equally valuable purposes: it represents the production of knowledge at the grassroots level through collective, collaborative processes, and it provides a new ground to fight for the common/s. Genevans told their own story, through themselves and to themselves, and then identified its significance and echoed it back to those in power, while dreaming out loud about what urban development for the common/s requires.

It was a powerful moment of public expression by nearly 200 residents, many of whom articulated a critical and dialogical rejoinder to city government's narratives of progressive urbanity with stories of gentrification, socioeconomic and racial isolation, and the lived consequences of development initiatives. For instance, in one session a middle-class white participant and a working-class Black participant dissect the politics of space in Geneva:

> I sell houses … and I had multiple people, one was an older City Councilman, ask me to sign a petition not to have [a particular development] out [in a wealthier neighborhood]. And the reason what he said was 'they don't belong on this end of town'.
>
> ***
>
> You're right. Your point is a very true point. In a lotta people's minds and hearts … 'they' don't want 'us' [people of color] to live in these specific neighborhoods … this is exactly [the problem]. … To be honest, I don't go many places in Geneva … I go do my shopping and I come here, I go to church but I don't spend my time [in] a lot of places in Geneva. (quoted in Hayes-Conroy, 2016, p. 10)

Such public narratives collectively brought to the surface stories of systematic racism, job and housing discrimination, and racial isolation. Further, dialogue participants provided a critical reading of the city's development policies as essentially an enduring process of dispossession masked by a selectively manufactured image of an idyllic lakeside town, lined with Victorian row houses, and a historic liberal arts college.

In plainspoken ways, interviewees—who generously quote Paulo Freire and Maya Angelou—provided a critical rejoinder to the progressive claims of city developers like Buki by highlighting the contradictions between policy claims and practices.

Furthermore, the Big Talk narratives served as a collective public envisioning of a more spatially democratic city. The voices in the Big Talk gave meaning to what collective belonging looks like—and could look like. Hayes-Conroy (2016) notes that "across many of the social groups who participated in the Big Talk, including among people of color, Spanish-speakers, low-income residents, persons with disabilities and youth" the library, and in warmer months, the lakefront represented the "only truly accessible space for many disenfranchised Genevans" (p. 19). While white, middle-class Genevans occupy these and other downtown commercial and public spaces with ease, the narratives surrounding Hayes-Conroy's "truly accessible" spaces illuminate a longing and affinity that disenfranchised communities have for common spaces. Moreover they provide a narrative of a city that could and should be for everyone. Participants invoked their right to a living wage, health benefits, job training programs, and support managing equal opportunity employment complaints. They named the enclosures of political and cultural capital that were cultivated by City officials, private individuals, and business owners; and called for equitable access to the downtown for Latino and Black businesses. As one Black woman stated:

> They have their culture, different than from mine; if they wanted to have people working and provide more for their community they could not do so because the City does not allow it. We cannot make a better day in Geneva, or have a dynamic city. It is a cycle that never ends … We should have new politics that are more open to new, fresh ideas. (quoted in Hayes-Conroy, 2016, p. 7)

These "new politics," as articulated in the above quote, represents a marginalized voice in that it is an official city document. While that is remarkable, the radical nature of the discourse is even more so. It is an affirmation of democratic imagination within a multiracial, multicultural city. It implicates racist enclosures for undermining human agency while simultaneously reimagining a common/s that redresses enduring structural, racial, physical, educational, and spiritual violence. It is, ultimately, the reclamation of what matters in a city, what is possible in a city, and who gets to speak for a city.

## Reclaiming Process

Significantly, the radical voices that emerged out of the Big Talk did so through a process that aimed to symbolically and literally embody the common/s. Specifically, the processes by which the Big Talk was conceived, developed, and executed were democratic and staged within a discourse of common purpose and common ends, and within a freely accessible and reproducible public document. From the generation of questions, to the training of facilitators, to inviting participants to the interviews themselves, we wanted the process to operate democratically. For us, it was both an end in itself and a way to telegraph a message that the final product stood a chance of transforming who had a right to be seen and heard in Geneva. This is exactly the kind of process, one that mends the physical, the processional, the rhetorical, and the political, to enact a performance of a certain kind, and that has the potential to, as Butler (2015) suggests, enact new social orders and ways of imaging social justice and democratic life. Interviews and correspondence with facilitators reflect how the process itself was transformative, acknowledging a new way of making public meaning across space, race, and class. Facilitators Meredith Beckley and Fred Brockway witnessed an unanticipated expression of appreciation from many participants who, "for the first time felt heard" publicly regarding their views about the city (M. Beckley and F. Brockway, personal correspondence, 1/26/2016). Sophie Halter, a bilingual college student who co-facilitated a Big Talk in a Spanish-speaking church, reported:

> I am speechless and in awe of the honesty, vulnerability, and courage I witnessed during our conversation. We all dove into the topics and talked for almost 2 full hours. Folks became more and more honest as we continued the dialogue …. Everyone provided incredible insight into the realities and lived experiences of silenced voices in this community. Folks really dove into the injustices they saw in Geneva and the systems of oppression and privilege that perpetuate those injustices. *¡Ay, fue increíble!* (S. Halter, personal correspondence, 12/6/2015)

Further, the student indicated that interclass, interracial, and interspatial collaboration among facilitators was essential to the process and final outcome:

> The conversation would not be possible without Dominga's close relationship with Spanish-speaking folks living in Geneva, as well as Molina's connection [to the community] …. *¡Lo hicimos equipo! Hicimos historia hoy, es la verdad. Hicimos historia!* (S. Halter, personal correspondence, 12/6/2015)

*Tools* participants are fond of reminding each other that "the journey is the destination" or, in Freire's words, "we make the road by walking" (Freire & Horton, 1990). This process-orientation serves to situate much of the assessment of the democratic function of the Big Talk within the actual everyday instances of the Big Talk itself. Moreover, facilitators largely evaluated the success or failure of their particular sessions on the grounds of how empowering, accessible, and representative, their sessions were, and not necessarily on the potential outcome of the talks. This, sometimes singular, focus on process communicates a distinctly different approach from simply gathering data, and instead intimates a coproduction of knowledge at the grassroots. In turn, the work of generating knowledge at the grassroots inheres a public witnessing of a community resource; a resource that can now be identified, deployed, and defended. Moreover, when city hall attempts to proclaim its land-use initiatives for the next 15 years, a more engaged community can publicly and explicitly name and confront the claims of the city against the terms of purpose people have identified for their "uniquely urban" city. In this sense, the work of *Tools* and other independent, organized and spontaneous social actors has only yet begun, with the Big Talk offering an opening salvo in the struggle for commoning processes and space.

*Tools*' Big Talk offers a "uniquely urban" case study for what we know is a much larger global movement of grassroots organizations resisting and reclaiming various articulations of common/s. The fetish of individuated neoliberal rationality has given rise to rearticulations of interdependency and shared *common* experience. As processes of enclosure continue to recapitulate histories of forced removal and dispossession, the vulnerable have come to understand their predicament and shared precarity as something held in common—be it in Cape Town, Rio de Jainero, or in a small city in Central New York. Through these shared manifestations, collectives and communities have organized and assembled in various spaces to reclaim processes, conversation, and democratic ideals—making visible both the bodies upon which historical and contemporary violence has been wrought and the bonds between those people. The dialectical force of this situation can't be understated. The global valence and systematicity of these processes have created a unifying understanding as to how neoliberalismtransforms local communities in the image of capital. The universal pull of privatization and neoliberal rationality has had the unintended consequence of generating new forms of social belonging and resistance. Resistance appears in spaces—public squares, barbershops,

churches, and community centers. Melding together the insights of Butler and De Lissovoy, the appearance of resistance, the ways that communities like *Tools* occupy space and, in doing so, enact and engage in a counter-hegemonic politic, provide for new ways of thinking the relationship between the commons in the spatial and political sense and the common experiences of precarity. To be sure, and with hope, these new formations have the ability to do important political and pedagogical work in terms of challenging the way the very notion of public and democracy are understood. This is big talk regardless of the size of the city.

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CHAPTER 14

# Revitalizing the Common(s) in New Mexico: A Pedagogical Consideration of Socially Engaged Art

*Michelle Gautreaux*

Española, New Mexico, is a place with a long and rich agricultural tradition, dating back 2000 years. For centuries, small-scale farming has been integral to the culture and identity of the Native American and Hispanic villages in northern New Mexico (Cleveland et al., 1995). However, despite this longstanding agricultural tradition and connection to the land, poverty and food insecurity are prevalent in the region. New Mexico is ranked as the second most food insecure state in the USA and fourth in the nation in child food insecurity (Feeding America, 2015; New Mexico Food Gap Task Force, 2008). In northern New Mexico, farmers have faced tremendous economic challenges as the small-scale farms in the region historically do not provide a stable, sustainable source of income to families. In short, there is a paradox whereby the farmers and residents of Española who cultivate food in a region referred to by some as the "breadbasket of northern New Mexico" are food insecure and cannot live off their land or access the food they produce, but rather, must seek work outside their communities and travel far to buy fresh produce.

M. Gautreaux (✉)
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
e-mail: michellegautreaux@gmail.com



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My argument in this chapter is that the pervasiveness of poverty, food insecurity, and other related social issues, such as drug addiction, alcoholism, and Type 2 diabetes, among residents of Española must be understood in relation to the larger expansion of global capitalism. Specifically, this analysis must be grounded in a critical historical understanding of US colonialism and processes of enclosure and conquest of native pueblo land and their resources for economic exploitation and industrial development.[1] Comprehending the current prevalence of hunger and food insecurity in Española (and in the world at large) also calls for a critical look at how the global food system is controlled by large corporations and international institutions that are responsible for widespread food insecurity on one hand, and the increase of diabetes and obesity on the other (Patel, 2008, 2012).

However, in the face of this historical process of enclosing the environmental (and cultural) commons by the USA, and most recently by transnational food corporations, there is a growing collective effort to bring the community of Española together to reclaim and embrace agricultural traditions, as well as provide an alternative way of growing food that is sustainable and socially just. This chapter turns to a small socially engaged art (SEA) project called *Till* as a way to reflect on the revitalization of the ecological and cultural commons in the region.

Bringing together varied definitions of "till" as the cultivation of land, a truncation of "until," and a cash register, *Till* sought to explore current environmental, political, and economic realities and future possibilities for traditional agriculture in the Española Valley. There were three main aspects to the project: (1) the creation of a platform for dialogue and events in the storefront of an abandoned Ford dealership, slated to be developed into the future Hunter Arts and Agriculture Center and home to the Northern New Mexico Food Hub; (2) the mentorship of a group of youth from an organization called Moving Arts Española; and (3) a series of encounters over food with local stakeholders in the Hunter Arts and Agriculture Center to discuss local food issues and the future of the Center.

This chapter will analyze and reflect on *Till* through a pedagogical lens. I approach this task as an educational researcher grounded in a political commitment to movements and initiatives struggling against neoliberal capitalism. The analysis presented in this chapter draws from the literature on SEA and the educational literature on the commons (e.g. De Lissovoy, Means, & Saltman, 2014; Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2015). My understanding and analysis of *Till* is from the standpoint of

an external researcher and is informed by interviews with four participants in the project, as well as many extended discussions with the artist creator of *Till* over the course of approximately one year. Although there were several components of the project, this chapter explores the pedagogical significance of parts one and three, the transformed Ford dealership and the series of encounters over food.

## The Ecological and Cultural Commons and Socially Engaged Art

There is an emerging field of work among critical scholars that explores the notions of the "common(s)" and "enclosure" for educational theory (see e.g. Bowers, 2006; De Lissovoy, 2011; De Lissovoy et al., 2014; Ford, 2014; Lewis, 2012; Martusewicz et al., 2015; Means, 2014 ; Slater, 2014). This chapter draws from the work of De Lissovoy (2011), De Lissovoy et al. (2014) and Martusewicz et al. (2015), as well as Helguera (2011), to conceptualize the pedagogical relationship between SEA and the common. De Lissovoy's (2011) conceptualization of the common as "a name both for an actually emergent experience of interconnectedness and for a utopian political project" (p. 1125) connects well with the form of SEA that will be explored in this chapter.

As a category of artistic practice, SEA is emergent, drawing upon the histories and practices of performance art, process-based conceptual art, and installation art (Helguera, 2011). As this type of practice continues to evolve, there have been a number of terms utilized within a contemporary discourse, including participatory art, community art, and social practice, to name a few. These categories or terms, and the wide ranging methods of practice that may or may not fall within them, are unresolved. However, the contested and shifting boundaries are part of its attraction for some, as a lack of clarity around a concept can be generative.

At the core of SEA is social interaction. As Helguera (2011) argues, "All art invites social interaction; yet in the case of SEA it is the process itself—the fabrication of the work—that is social" (p. 11). In this chapter, SEA and the common are understood as inherently pedagogical, as "pedagogy is one of the most essential moments of collectivity or being together" (De Lissovoy, 2011, p. 1129).[2] SEA projects are particularly interesting sites to reflect on the pedagogical task of (re)building the common through developing authentic meaningful relationships that are not

only rooted in a critique of neoliberal capitalism and a call for an end to economic exploitation but also begin to live out a more communitarian way of engaging with another, one that rejects the increasing commodification of all aspects of life for the sake of profit, and instead proposes a way of living that "protect[s ] the ability of both human communities and natural systems to live well together into the future" (Martusewicz et al., 2015). This chapter analyzes *Till* pedagogically as a "project of collective invention," an example of a teaching situation that served momentarily as a "laboratory for construction of new modes of relationships and collective activity" (De Lissovoy et al., 2014, p. 89). *Till* was a small part of a much larger community effort in the Española Valley that seeks to make small-scale organic farming economically sustainable, and in that process, revitalize the cultural commons of the traditions, stories, and ways of being that reconnect people to their agricultural roots and ancestry, primarily those of the First Nations and Hispanic villagers.

## Context: Connecting the Local to the Global

Placed within the larger historical, economic, and political context of the expansion of global capitalism, one can see that the situation of "economic impoverishment and ecological degradation" in northern New Mexico has been "many generations in the making" (Fisher, 2008, p. 486); first, the conquest and enclosure of the land and resources of the Native American tribes by the Spanish, and most recently, the conquest and enclosure of land and resources of the Native Americans and Hispanic villages by the US government. In particular, when the USA seized the land in 1848 from Mexico, it embarked on an aggressive process of communal land enclosure, which as Fisher (2008) explains, resulted in "… approximately 80 percent of the community land grant acreage in northern New Mexico [being] transferred from the communities to federal, state, and private owners" (p. 488). This systematic process of land enclosure and capitalist expansion is directly connected to the overall ecological degradation of the land and resources and the resulting economic hardship experienced by farmers. For example, the expansion of the railroads through native pueblo lands and Hispanic villages in the region during the late nineteenth century resulted in deforestation and overgrazing of the land; trees were cut down to allow for the railroad to go through the land and large livestock corporations from the USA and Europe aggressively increased the number of cattle in the region which

caused serious environmental damage to the lands and tremendously decreased their productivity (Cleveland et al., 1995; Fisher, 2008). As a result, self-sustaining, agriculturally rich communities found themselves in a now ecologically depleted land, no longer able to survive. As Fisher (2008) explains,

> This process followed the classic colonial pattern by which self-sufficient societies have been transformed into dependent societies around the world: a modern, consumption-based economy co-opts the land base of a subsistence economy and consumes its resources to the extent that the subsistence society can no longer support itself with its traditional practices. In the end, the loss of their subsistence economy, as well as the imposition of property taxes, forced the Hispanic villagers to pursue wage labor outside their communities. (p. 489)

Most of this work consisted of part time seasonal work and many left the rural villages to go to nearby towns and cities looking for work (Fisher, 2008). This trend continued for many generations. In more recent history, for example, during the period starting in World War II and continuing to today, many rural residents of Española left their communities and farms to get jobs in Los Alamos, which according to one interviewee, is "the only example of real industry" in the region (T. Lopez, personal communication, November 10, 2015). As another interviewee explained, having to leave the community for jobs in Los Alamos has resulted in "cultural dislocation," as the connection of communities to their lands was often severed (S. Moore, personal communication, November 16, 2015). Not only has cultural dislocation and the physical relocation in search of work cut off communities' connection with their land and agriculture, but as pueblos were forced onto smaller and smaller reservations, in particular during the post-war consolidation of the reserves, they were also subject to harsher, more extreme food rationing (Frank, 2014). Many times, the food brought in to the reserves was not healthy and even spoiled (Frank, 2014). This also produced changes in the pueblo's relationship with food.

The change in the overall diet of the pueblo natives and their relationship with food should also be situated within the broader context of the rise of the global food system in the period post World War II. In short, to understand why there is such food insecurity as well as a rising rate of diabetes and obesity in New Mexico today (and in the rest of the world), one must critically examine the "systems and institutions [who] hold power over food" (Patel, 2012, p. 2). While it is outside the scope of

this chapter to provide a detailed analysis of the global food system, a few key trends that are important for understanding the context of Española are discussed.

The post-war period saw the rise of a rational scientific approach to food production (i.e. the invention of TV dinners) and the increased use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers (Patel, 2008; Pollan, 2010) which are widespread today. Industrial food production has not only profoundly changed our way of eating, but it is also contributing to climate change, something farmers in Española (and across the world) experience that poses enormous challenges to their ability to grow crops, as growing seasons are increasingly unpredictable (S. Moore, personal communication, November 16, 2015). In today's global food production, chemicals and pesticides are used to grow plants and animals are raised in large factory-like farms. Many foods are highly processed and contain lots of sugar and fat. Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are more expensive than processed foods (Pollan, 2008). According to a New Mexico Food Gap Task Force (2008) report from the USA, "nationwide, the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables has increased over 77% since 1989 while the cost of sweets and fats has decreased 33%" (p. 5). Modern industrial agriculture has made it cheaper and easier to eat processed, unhealthy food while making it extremely challenging for many to access fresh produce.

Fundamental to understanding such trends in agriculture and eating is the change in international trade policies toward trade liberalization. The effects of global neoliberal economic trade policies in the 1980s and 1990s, and in particular, trade liberalization in food, have proven disastrous for most, particularly farmers and rural and urban poor, but highly profitable for a few. The global trend of government policies that favor and support larger, consolidated commercial scale farms over small-scale farms can be seen in New Mexico as well (Fisher, 2008). The nature of small-scale farming prevalent in northern New Mexico faces the challenge of not being able to compete with large scale, commercial/industrial agriculture that dominates the global food system. US policy has encouraged farmers to cultivate crops for the market, such as wheat, and raise cattle, which has resulted in farmers becoming dependent on machinery, irrigation equipment, and seeds from outside their communities (Cleveland et al., 1995). Market-oriented crop cultivation provides no assurance or security for farmers. Mid-sized and large farms mostly sell their produce in markets in other parts of the state and nationally, and residents of rural villages and towns cannot access the local food produced by farmers (New Mexico Food Gap Task Force, 2008).

This reality of not being able to access local fresh food is a reality for residents of Española and is connected to a larger trend in impoverished areas in the USA and across the world. As Patel (2012) argues,

> "The food system's dysfunction continues to be lucrative for a range of food and agriculture companies. Profits often derive from the increased consumption of processed food, which in turn have driven a global obesity epidemic. Yet the distribution mechanisms within the food system that ration food on the basis of ability to pay have produced the paradox of a billion hungry during a time when there are more than 1.5 billion people overweight." (p. 2)

Many rural regions in New Mexico (and across the USA) are food deserts; instead of supermarkets, many communities only have convenience stores to shop at or fast food restaurants (New Mexico Food Gap Task Force, 2008). The convenience stores most often do not carry fresh fruits and vegetables or the traditional food of the native populations. If stores do carry fruits and vegetables, they are very expensive, as small stores must pay more for the products they sell, in comparison to large grocery store chains (New Mexico Food Gap Task Force, 2008). Residents have to travel long distances to reach a full service supermarket and as gas prices are quite high and public transportation is either poor or non-existent in rural areas, this puts particular difficulty on low income, single parent households, or elderly people who may not own a car (New Mexico Food Gap Task Force, 2008). Female-headed households are particularly vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity and poverty, not only in New Mexico but globally (Page-Reeves, 2014; Patel, 2012). In short, the lack of fresh produce in impoverished rural (and urban) areas and the overabundance of fast food restaurants and convenience stores are created by our current global food system. Without the ability to buy fresh food, many communities, such as Española, experience undernourishment and food insecurity, relying on processed food that is inexpensive but unhealthy.

## Reclaiming the Ecological and Cultural Commons in Rural New Mexico

Resistance to the corporate control of the world's food system and a vindication of the ecological and cultural commons integral to the cultivation of food have been growing nationally and internationally. In Española, a community driven effort toward ecological and cultural revitalization and

sustainability has been taking place for about two decades. This larger effort is comprised of various organizations. In particular, *Till* was realized with the assistance of and collaboration with the Santa Fe Art Institute (SFAI), Siete del Norte community development corporation (CDC), Moving Arts Española, and the Española Farmers Market. Those who were interviewed and are referenced in this chapter are affiliated with each of these organizations. The section that follows provides a description of these various organizations to situate *Till* in the community. Then, a richer explanation of *Till* is provided to reflect on the pedagogical insight the project can offer for understanding the pedagogy of (re)building the common in Española. The last section discusses some limitations that *Till* and other SEA projects may have, and poses some questions that this project has raised for the author.

The SFAI, located 25 miles south of the Española Valley, was founded in 1985(Santa Fe Art Institute, 2016 a)[3] Under the leadership of Sanjit Sethi, who held the directorship from 2013 to 2015, SFAI began to host thematic residencies with the purpose of bringing together an interdisciplinary group of creative practitioners around particular social, political, economic, and environmental issues that resonate locally and globally. As described above, food insecurity and poverty are pressing social issues in Española and for that reason, "Food Justice" was the inaugural theme. Featuring a mix of local, national, and international artists (27 in total), the residency ran from September 2014 to June 2015 and sought to explore how creative practitioners might "confront inherent social, cultural, and economic problems in our food system"(Santa Fe Art Institute, 2016 b) .

Grounded in a commitment to cultivating authentic community partnerships, SFAI has established relationships with several organizations in the Española Valley. SFAI staff members connected the artists in residence to local people and organizations in Española engaging with food justice through art, education, health, and community development work. In particular, three organizations, and the individuals in those organizations, were integral to the realization of *Till*: Moving Arts Española, Siete del Norte CDC, and the Española Farmers Market. There is a strong effort among these organizations to address the pressing social, political, and economic issues of Northern New Mexico. Moving Arts,[4] for example, brings art and education together by providing inexpensive instruction in gymnastics, dance, music, and visual and circus arts to youth in Española in a way that connects peers with one another, supports multiple forms of expression, and offers consistent emotional support. Todd Lopez from

Siete del Norte CDC is working on a project, in collaboration with Roger Montoya from Moving Arts and others, to transform an old abandoned Ford dealership into a food hub for the region. The food hub will be part of the Hunter Arts and Agriculture Center, and as Todd Lopez described, represents a collective approach that helps make small-scale traditional farming, which has been a part of the cultural fabric of the region for centuries, an economically viable livelihood.[5] The Española Farmers Market is headed by Sabra Moore, a locally based artist in the region. Moore considers the market a cultural institution and has sought to not only make the market a more viable place economically for the small-scale farmers in the region, she has also in the process, "tried to make them more visible and honor them culturally" (personal communication, November 16, 2015). The work of these organizations is grounded in the recognition of the complex culture and history of the region, where indigenous cultures intersect with centuries of Spanish and later Anglo American colonization, as well as a collective acknowledgment of the relationship among art, agriculture, and education in revitalizing the ecological and cultural commons of the region.

Working within the context of these historical and contemporary concerns around SEA and pedagogical projects, Holly Schmidt, participant in the Food Justice Residency, developed a project called *Till* in Española. This project emerged out of a research period in the fall of 2014 which involved in-depth interviews with community leaders, active participation in local food-based events, and field observations. With the support of a number of organizations including SFAI, Siete del Norte, Española Farmers Market, and Moving Arts, *Till* was realized over a period of six weeks.

The first part of the project involving the creation of a platform for dialogue and events in the storefront of an abandoned Ford dealership, slated to be developed into the future Hunter Arts and Agriculture Center and home to the Northern New Mexico Food Hub, was realized with support from Todd Lopez and the Siete Del Norte CDC. The old Ford Building, which is located on the historic main street of Española, was visually transformed through a series of collages using transparent colored film in the large bank of windows in the front of the building. The geometric patterns in the windows represented place settings at a table. This visual reference to the act of sharing food as a community indicated the future potential of the building as a place for coming together around food and culture. The window installation included the doors of the garage, which sits next to the storefront. The circular patterns on the garage doors represented corn kernels in an acknowledgment of the

pre-existing community-inspired murals on the exterior of the building and the foundational food of the region.

The second aspect of the project involving the mentorship of a group of youth from Española was carried out through collaborating with Roger Montoya and Salvador Ruiz at Moving Arts. Youth ages 12 to 16 participated in after school art making sessions where together with Holly, they created numerous paper mache prickly pear cacti and flowering yucca, native plants from the area. These plants were installed inside the storefront along with a set of refurbished doors that were turned into tables using painted sawhorses. These additions helped to set the context for the events that followed.

The third aspect of the project consisted of hosting meals with local stakeholders in the Hunter Arts and Agriculture Center to discuss local food issues and the future of the Center. This included a lunch for a select group of nine local growers co-hosted with Sabra Moore. The lunch was an opportunity to bring together farmers from the area to discuss the challenges posed by changes in the regional climate and the need for resilience and regeneration. This event also brought together growers that know one another from the area and local farmer's markets but have not had an opportunity to come together to discuss the challenges they face and possible solutions. Following the lunch, a dinner was hosted with Roger Montoya for a group of political stakeholders from the city, county, and state along with leaders of arts organizations and local funders, all with a role to play in ensuring the future of the Hunter Arts and Agriculture Center.

## Reflections on *Till*

Understanding that "approaches to the global are always mediated by the local, and my location influences the ways in which the questions I consider show up" (De Lissovoy, 2011, p. 1120), this next section does not aim to present *Till* or the analysis of it as a blueprint of any kind. Rather, the hope is that the analysis and reflection on this project may provide insight to educators, artists, and community members interested in exploring or creating their own projects rooted in the common and working toward building a more socially just world.

One important aspect of the pedagogical significance of *Till* is that it intentionally created an experience for participants whereby they could

have a physical, emotional, and intellectual experience of something that is not yet, but could come to be. By transforming the space of the old Ford dealership, residents of Española were able to inhabit this once abandoned space as something different, something with life and vitality. This act generated hope, as the residents began to see other possible futures for the space. For example, as Roger Montoya shared in his interview, the building has continued to be a site of activity since *Till*. The residents of Española are "starting to use it much more freely and people are getting an understanding that it's a vessel to fill with a whole host of topics all around social gatherings" (personal communication, November 9, 2015). Since *Till* took place, there have been two major events hosted in that space. A New Mexico artist and SFAI resident, Israel Haros Lopez, engaged with the space by painting a mural and hosting a day-long event of music and food. This event was part of the US Department of Art and Culture's (a network of artists and cultural workers mobilizing creativity toward social justice) Day of Imagining, which supported events like this across the USA. Over the summer of 2015, there were a series of events around creating an urban garden and compost area in the parking lot.

Reflecting on *Till*, Roger talks more explicitly about the hope that it has inspired in the community:

> I think that these events and this work that we've been doing cooperatively are feeding into this notion of hope and continued buzz and excitement. It's in such a location, you know, everybody sees it. They're curious, they're having a whole bunch of reactions. Some people hate the murals, they hate this garden project, but the fact that they're commenting on it is very cool. They're noticing that human beings are doing something with the place, like a rumble, like an earthquake and I think once it does it's going to be quite exciting because we've had these sort of warm up acts with a long extended series of appetizers but that the real meal is going to be quite scrumptious. (personal communication, November 9, 2015)

The observation that residents notice that human beings are transforming the space is especially important, as it signifies that participation in the project has helped inspire a sense of real and meaningful agency among the community. Todd Lopez of Siete del Norte echoed similar sentiments to those of Roger:

> … you know, it's that emotional aspect of bringing a community together, of generating some type of hope, some type of optimism and some type of real

> engagement. You know, when you've got people stopping by the building and Roger is there painting with this big crew and they're like "What's going on?" and he can talk to the people on the street, in the community, you know, "this is what's happening here and by the way, grab a paintbrush and join us." And the next thing you know, they are and people suddenly begin. So this doesn't become a project that's being brought in by some outside organization and just being thrust into the center of the community in the hopes that it's going to be really great … it's actually one that the community begins to own …." (personal communication, November 10, 2015)

The reflections from Roger and Todd illustrate how the experience of transforming a space has generated a hope and a possibility, as thoughts of "I wish this place were different" can seem not so far-fetched, out of the reach of possibility, but rather, immanent in the present circumstance. This project served to initiate a much broader, authentic community engagement with the space, beyond the realization of *Till*.

It was very fitting for Roger to use the metaphor of a scrumptious meal in his reflection on the transformation of the building, as the other key part of *Till* was the series of meals hosted in that space. *Till* opened a creative and generative communal space where a group of local farmers could come together to discuss important issues affecting their lives and their community.

The discussion began with filling plates, introductions and a simple question about whether the growers had noticed any changes in the climate over the last five years. Over the course of two hours, the changes in climate were discussed along with the importance of building resiliency by trying new seed varieties and approaches. The loss of pollinators, particularly bees, was noted along with the sharing of methods for attracting alternative pollinators. Challenges beyond climate such as the impact of historic nuclear fallout and the effect of pesticides were also raised. There was a pervasive concern among all in attendance for the land not as property but as an ecology of human and non-human actors. With their day to day connection with the natural world comes an embodied understanding that the common is a complex web of relations and practices of care.

While the lunch brought together local growers to learn about their collective experiences, share their concerns and discuss ways to move forward, another meal was held to bring together community leaders, political stakeholders, and local funders. This dinner was conceived in collaboration with Roger Montoya with the intention of gathering together people that

are committed to the future of the Hunter Arts and Agriculture Center, but who wouldn't typically sit down to share a meal. As this diverse group entered an intimate space of conversation, there was a shift in the habituated social and political relations. This face-to-face encounter brought a humanness to these varied efforts to move toward a more sustainable and just future for the diverse communities of Española. However, as it is briefly discussed below, views on what a sustainable and just future means or how to move forward collectively are not straightforward and can be points of contention in the process of (re)building the common.

The meals cultivated an initial connection among all those in attendance with the hope that an initial seed would be planted and continue in other ways unknown at the moment of the SEA project itself. In other words, there is potential that is immanent in such a collective encounter, a potential than can never be fully encapsulated or known. Speaking about the shared meals, Sabra Moore, a local artist and manager of the Española farmers market said,

> Tilling is cultivating and so that definitely cultivated something new. I think all of these small steps are really crucial as part of a concept of a non-hierarchical way of building things. When you take small steps, people get to be part of it, I feel like that's what that is, all of these small steps. It comes from a bigger picture … and I think that's all part of a bigger dialogue. (personal communication, November 16, 2015)

Important to note in Sabra's remarks are two points. Her comments indicate that *Till* is one step in an overall attempt to create new forms of relationships, non-hierarchical and democratic. Second, her reflection on people being a part of the process is a fundamental component to the notion of (re)claiming and revitalizing the common: that it must encompass people feeling authentically and meaningfully connected and to do that, small steps are important. As Ross (2015), reflecting on the educational philosophy of John Holt argues, "authentic meaning cannot be cultivated en masse" (p. 5).

A key aspect of SEA practices is to create a space for difference and alterity, bringing those whose voices have not been heard into an open space designed to reflect their concerns and issues. As Moore said in her interview, "People need to see themselves and their experiences acknowledged and patterned and when you don't have that it's the way people remain oppressed" (personal communication, November 16, 2015).

In the case of *Till*, this was manifest in the window designs, in the meal which was made from locally grown food—the very fruit of the farmers' labor—and in the encounter that took place, whereby those farmers became protagonists able to name their world (Freire, 2000), collectively discuss their experiences and concerns, as well as begin to build relationships based on solidarity and trust.[6] *Till* created communal experiences, such as shared meals, that help to create spaces for authentic experiences of true interconnectedness with the hope that longer term relationships would form.

However, it is important to bear in mind that although these types of encounters over meals have the potential to generate dialogue, what emerges in the space of the encounter is unpredictable and often contentious in nature. As De Lissovoy (2011) points out, the commons is "an on-the-ground clash and combination of languages, histories, and struggles" (p. 1123), and in places marked by historical and current systems of domination and oppression, such as Española, this is felt even more so. For example, although there has been an overall positive and welcoming reception of *Till* and other efforts in the region, they have also been met by questioning and mistrust by local residents, as in addition to the history of colonialism and enclosure of land for economic exploitation, there is also a history of broken promises and dashed hopes that is still very present in the community (T. Lopez, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

On a final note, it is important to briefly address the challenging nature of the collective process of revitalizing and (re)building the common. In the case of Española, not everyone that is part of the effort to revitalize the ecological and cultural commons necessarily has the same critique of capitalism or considers capitalism to be the root cause of the problems the region faces. For example, participants named poverty, drug addiction, environmental degradation, and food insecurity, among others, as the most pressing problems in the region but these were not explicitly attributed to capitalism per se. Moreover, acquiring the abandoned Ford dealership, which will become the future Hunter Arts and Agriculture Center and home to the food hub, has been through working with a CDC that, while working toward economic justice for growers and sustainable alternatives in the region, still operates within a market driven model. As mentioned above, the farmers at the dinner expressed their concern over the land being understood and treated as property rather than as an ecological web of human and non-human actors. This illustrates a

contradiction and tension; farmers will greatly benefit from the local food hub but the creation of the food hub will be through means that directly contradict how they view and relate to the land. Lastly, with regard to the common(s) as a way to think about the collective efforts in Española, not all interview participants felt that the notion of the commons was a particularly relevant or accurate way to describe the efforts. For example, Sanjit Sethi expressed concern over the theorization of the commons as "… feeling too distinctively spatial in nature," which he felt was not particularly helpful or relevant in thinking about collective projects in the context of SEA, which is rooted in social interaction and dialogue between participants (personal communication, November 24, 2015). These brief examples point to the challenges of moving forward collectively among people who have differing perspectives on where problems come from or how best to solve them. Furthermore, they also signal the tension and contradictory challenges that exist in re(building) the commons from our present circumstances within capitalism.

## Questions Raised through Analyzing Till

Critical reflection is a central component to this discussion of the pedagogical significance of a project like *Till*. This next section addresses some of the limitations that such projects have and poses some questions that *Till* has raised for the author.

The provisional status of *Till*, the social engagements and the installation, lends the project its power and possibility, but at the same time, it also represents a limitation to the project. On one hand, because of its very short duration, *Till* created the possibility of more intense and powerful encounters. As Sabra reflected in her interview,

> You're creating a structure, maybe not a permanent structure that people can participate in. It's creating a form that communicates, and that form can take many, many, many forms of material and that nonetheless is a significant thing. (S. Moore, personal communication, November 16, 2015)

However, in the context of working toward rebuilding the common, such work does not happen overnight and any sustained effort working toward a better more sustainable future requires a long time commitment. Moreover, in reflecting on the provisional status of the site, some ethical questions are raised around short-term community engagement projects

with local communities. As the director of SFAI, Sanjit Sethi, stated in his interview, relationships between institutions and community organizations must be based on "fundamentally really want[ing] to understand what you do and what your headaches are [and] that again takes time. You can get a good feeling the first meeting, but I don't think the actual relationship is developed like that. You have to go ahead and spend that time" (personal communication, November 24, 2015).

As stated earlier, foundational to revitalizing and (re)building the common are social relationships that require time and are built on trust and respect. Can those relationships be built and can authentic trust from the community be gained with short-term projects where artists make a point and eventually leave? What place, then, can projects, such as *Till,* play in any sustained, long-term effort to revitalize and rebuild the common? In his interview, Sanjit addressed this concern by pointing out that "short durations don't mean that we can't have seminal ideas …. It's about how that time is used and if that time happens to be the right moment" (personal communication, November 24, 2015). In this sense, although *Till* and projects like it are temporary, that doesn't automatically mean their purpose is less significant or that they cannot plant the seed for a larger initiative or help to set something in motion.

The existence of strong community engagement networks is particularly important in the realization of SEA projects and in the rebuilding of the common as well. *Till* was realized in a setting with a strong community engagement effort already established and in close collaboration with key community organizations; there are, and have been, many community organizations in Española working toward a similar effort of revitalizing the ecological and cultural commons. *Till* has been able to spark and serve as a catalyst of events that have followed because of the solid community effort already established, by organizations such as Moving Arts, the Española Farmers Market, among others. Those solid community contacts help to ensure that the inspirational spark and potential of a project is realized and carried out in the future, once the project finishes. For example, as Sabra mentioned above, she would like to continue the dialogue with the farmers over meals, inspired by *Till.* However, because of Sabra's role in the market and her relationship already established with many of the farmers, the continuation of the meals is an idea that can be more easily realized.

In theorizing and making *Till* the focal point of this analysis, while realizing that its potentiality can never be encapsulated, it is also important

to be mindful not to attribute too much to the project. It is one of many efforts and its purpose has not been to be the main effort to revitalize and (re)build the common. Care should be taken not to take *Till* out of context. The various community members and organizations in Española are putting their lives toward these efforts, and projects like *Till* are part of this much larger effort. This is not to diminish the project's importance and potential, however, as revitalizing and rebuilding the common consists of many components and all efforts, however big or small, have their role.

## Conclusion

As economic crises and environmental destruction caused by capitalism intensify and expand, the urgency of a collective effort to revitalize the common globally cannot be understated. This interest by scholars and activists in the notion of the common as stated above is a call for not only an end to neoliberal capitalism but also the collective construction of a new way of being and relating with one another and the planet.

At times, such an encompassing call can seem overly abstract. What does or what can rebuilding the common look like in particular places or contexts? How can we bring theory to bear in an effort to understand and evaluate these current endeavors to reclaim the common in particular places? In other words, echoing Ross (2016), "how can we create a better balance between the abstraction (a focus on the general nature of things) and authenticity (a focus on the particulars)" in our theorizing on and understanding of the political project of the common (p. 216)? It is toward this endeavor that this chapter attempts to contribute.

The analysis in this chapter has attempted to provide the necessary amount of abstraction to explain how the situation in Española is part of the larger context of global capitalism, colonialism, and global food policy. In an effort to understand what the common as both social interconnectedness and utopian political project could mean in a particular context, and to explore this pedagogically, this chapter focused on one SEA project.

What does *Till* mean in terms of the larger collective project of the common? For one, it is important to emphasize that the common is not a monolithic, predetermined project, but rather, as De Lissovoy et al. (2014) argue, "the common as a political project is always provisional and in process, rather than the mere result of an objective dialectic" (p. 19). Understanding the common as being in a state of flux as it is continuously

being made, it will look different depending on a context, as issues that communities face are not the same.

However, it is also important to recognize that although we cannot have a prescriptive, fabricated idea of the common as a utopian political project, or know exactly what the revitalization of the commons will look like in particular places beforehand, foundational to the notion of the global common, and efforts to revitalize the commons across the world, is the understanding that we must remake ourselves and engage with one another and the planet in ways that are fundamentally different from the ways in which we currently live and engage with one another and the planet under capitalism.

How we go about remaking those relationships with one another and the planet is a pedagogical question. By saying this, it does not imply that this question should, or could, be approached with one certain answer. Nor does it imply that one can evaluate or assess the projects and efforts of various communities based on a certain rubric, so to speak. Not at all. However, it is also important to make clear that to say that there is no prefabricated understanding of the common does not mean that the common as utopian project is without substance or direction. Educators, artists, and community members should seek to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the pedagogical aspects of all efforts to revitalize the commons, however big or small, however ambitious or modest, they may be.

This chapter has argued that *Till* was an example of a collective invention, and its pedagogical significance is in the platform that it created to allow participants to experience, momentarily, different ways of being and engaging, whereby they were able to begin to develop a meaningful sense of their agency to act in the world, individually and collectively. In relation to the pedagogical task of (re)building the common, the hope is that these experiences of agency and meaning in remaking a place are able to meaningfully generate or initiate new knowledges, ways of being that will lead to a more generalized collective effort and movement that gains the courage to think of ourselves and communities beyond capital. As communities of people have meaningful experiences whereby they can see themselves as agents, the hope is that this seed will continue to grow and evolve. Change has to start somewhere, and it is usually slow, but the hope is that seeds that are and have been planted will continue to grow in new and different ways, as other collective efforts take place in the future. *Till* has provided that possibility of experimentation with a new space and sense of agency and as communities continue with this momentum, the hope is that we slowly teach ourselves new ways of being.

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## Notes

1. The process of enclosure is integral to capitalism. In the context of New Mexico, colonization and conquest of land and resources is a clear example of the enclosure of the commons that native pueblos experienced and continue to experience. For a more in-depth understanding of the pluralism in the discussion on the process of enclosure and capitalism, see Marx, 1976; De Angelis, 2007; Harvey, 2003; Linebaugh, 2014, among others.
2. Recently artists and curators have taken an interest in the purpose, methods, and spaces of education and their generative potential. This concentration of interest in education on the part of artists and curators is referred to as the "educational turn" in contemporary art. For a more in-depth discussion of the "educational turn," see Irit Rogoff (2008) and Pablo Helguera (2011), to name a few.
3. In contrast to Española, Santa Fe, New Mexico is experiencing thriving art and tourism industries. The city hosts over 200 commercial galleries and a number of prominent public galleries and museums including the Georgia O'Keefe Museum, Site Santa Fe, and the Museum of Indian Arts.
4. Moving Arts was founded by Roger Montoya and his partner Salvador Ruiz. Montoya is also the co-founder of La Tierra Montessori Charter School of the arts and sciences, which features an educational emphasis on arts and sustainable agriculture for K–8. Both are located on the Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo which sits adjacent to the City of Española. Moving Arts and La Tierra work closely together to offer integrated learning through the arts.
5. The food hub would make it possible to aggregate at least part of what farmers grow to be able to provide food for larger local markets, such as schools, hospitals, and seniors centers, which currently source their food from elsewhere, usually with contracts with big food providers. In addition, cooperative processing facilities could reduce food waste ensuring that all crops even those not sold at the market could be preserved.
6. Freire's work has been very influential in dialogic approaches to socially engaged art.

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[1] Note: Page numbers with "n" denote notes.


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