6.1: Introduction

An Introduction Without Guarantees: Conviviality in the Time of Neoliberalism

Rachel Riedner

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Summertime in Capital (Washington, DC)

In early July of 2006 and 2007, a group of sixteen university-based cultural workers and faculty got together for a two-day works-in-progress discussion at the George Washington University in downtown Washington, DC. [1] Our objective was to create a space for discussion, collaboration, exchange, and friendship among university teachers and scholars who work in the DC metropolitan area. Instead of a traditional conference structure where participants go to a panel, hear and discuss papers, and then leave, this workshop-like conference consciously sought to cultivate a space of what our colleague and disability studies scholar Abby Wilkerson calls *convivial community* among people from a variety of disciplinary locations and different institutions where the sharing of food, stories, time, and work create "a rich emotional and material interdependence" (13). Everyone gave a paper and everyone responded, everyone gathered for lunch or afternoon drinks, and everyone was involved in critical exchange. The fact that all participants were together for the majority of the day—both in and out of the university conference space—gave the conference an intimacy that is difficult to reproduce in large conferences. Informal conversation became integral to the papers being presented. Stories of children and family, friends and colleagues, and activist work were not rhetorically separated from intellectual work. There was a fluidity to stories of activist pedagogy, more traditional language of critical analysis, laughter, discussion of working conditions, and stories of everyday life.

Summer provided a time away from rigors of the school year, and a desire for conversation and dialogue across disciplinary, institutional, and departmental boundaries not entirely prescribed by structures of professionalization and/or market driven education provided the affective energy. We called the summer conference "Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogies for the 21st century," invoking a Freirian tradition where meaning and action are created, revised, contested, and reworked in relation and through reflection. Critical pedagogy productively broadens the idea of a convivial community from "a rich emotional and material interdependence" to include substantial and critical exchange, reflection, dialogue, and action. Bringing critical pedagogy in conversation with convivial community, we move towards a rich, interdependent community where there is a responsibility for full participation. In this context, we reflect as a means of making our own lives. Cultural Studies provided an interdisciplinary umbrella for scholars from a variety of disciplines in the humanities which address complex, contextually specific, contemporary formations of culture.[2]

This introduction argues for critical conviviality—rich emotional and material interdependence where meaning and action is created through participation and reflection – as a political and rhetorical response to the conditions of literacy and pedagogy at our current, historical conjuncture, what I'll refer to as neoliberalism. The conference took place in Washington, D.C., the center of U.S. state power, the location of the U.S. government, and the home to its administrative agencies and financial arm. D.C. is a primary site for the production of neoliberal cultures of capital power, military power, and biopower, as well as the proliferating rhetorics that sustain and challenge those cultures. In the District of Columbia, we witness the simultaneous "management" of democratic and liberatory claims along with modes of urban governance. The "management" of democratic and liberatory claims imposes what David Harvey calls "structured coherence," the particular form and space of capital that produces social cohesion, on contradictory places and identities.[3] With Harvey, we can see the space of DC in a new stage of capitalism that constantly reconfigures itself to accommodate changing political

and cultural conditions. In this phase, as Harvey argues, neoliberalism "builds and rebuilds a geography in its own image. It constructs a distinctive geographical landscape, a produced space of transport and communications, of infrastructures and territorial organizations" (*A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 50).[4]

As Rosemary Hennessy's work suggests, while universities are often thought of as bastions of liberal thought, they are caught up in "waves" of economic policies, ideologies and pedagogies: "tuition at state colleges and universities and the tenure system have been two targets of economic policies, the growth of part-time faculty and a pervasive 'corporatizing' being two of its most glaring symptoms" (41). In the context of neoliberalism, there has been much pressure to reshape curriculum, policies, rhetoric, interactions between faculty, research, pedagogy, and relations with students (among other things) more closely to the demands and goals of the neoliberal marketplace. These attempts to reshape the educational process in universities are integrally connected to the labor conditions of teachers and the ways in which "education" and "teachers" are constructed in the broader public. That is, market pedagogies work to reshape processes of education and labor at the same time as they reconstruct and contain our language, bodies, and relationships to education and educational work.

In this context, pedagogical practice becomes increasingly directed towards market-centered goals (efficient, final product writing) and faculty work becomes directed towards professionalization. There is both a deflection of critical inquiry away from the particulars of the current rhetorical situation and the contexts of cultural production and, in some cases, an over reliance upon state and market rhetoric to provide coherency. That is, critical inquiry is directed away from the current conditions of labor, economic and cultural flow across national borders, the globalization of power in relation to institutional dynamics, curricular change, situated reflection, and conjuctural analysis, and the general day-to-day workings of academe—at the very moment in which these are the sites through which neoliberal goals are being advanced.

Professionalization, then, is not simply the process of constantly updating one's credentials in order to compete in the academic marketplace. It is this for sure, however, what is not being talked about, are the ways in which professionalization also prescribes the modes of relation we have with others in academe. That is, what's just as troubling as increased competition, publish-or-perish, and high-pressured credentialing, are the ways in which our modes of engagement become overdetermined by the appropriate identities of professionals. In Wilkerson's argument, an emphasis on individual success is bolstered by "attendant strict dichotomies: normate versus deviant or disabled, producer versus consumer, worker versus client, donor versus receipent, social actor versus nonperson" (13). An emphasis on autonomous personhood is embodied in and through professionalism has the effect of narrowing possibilities for full social participation by those who do not fall into normative categories. For those who do not fall into or chose not to participate in normative categories as well as for those who do meet the requirements of normative categories, individual success is valued over substantial, reflective, and critical exchange.

Of course, professionalization and market pressures on higher education are not strictly new. They are, rather, part of a cumulative pattern through which capital remakes itself and incorporates new or different challenges to its hegemony. What *is* new are the ways in which in a time of expansion of global power and its accompanying rhetoric of freedom (freedom to accumulate wealth), neoliberalism works locally to bolster normative logic of professionalism. In this rhetoric, professionalism is valued over critique, service rather than care, membership rather than affinity, and charity rather than community and solidarity.

If, as Chandra Mohanty argues, universities are contradictory spaces—spaces where different ideas and exigencies converge, where opportunities for conviviality are both created and foreclosed—what are the possibilities for rich social participation and critical pedagogy that are not contingent on normality and professionalism? How, in the context of streamlining of education, to forward rich, participatory, critical relationships where meaning and action are created, contested, and reworked through reflection against and beyond structured coherence and institutional, market, and state pressures?

In a recent interview about new social movements in South America, John Holloway argues that there is no pure position in a capitalist system. Reading the work of the Zapatistas and other autonomous groups in South America, Holloway argues for the ordinary and the everyday making of meaning against and beyond value (in the Marxist sense) and friendships with those who oppose value across social boundaries created by capital another time and space. In the context of capitalism and state power what matters are struggles for dignity, and formation of community among those who oppose capitalism. As Holloway argues:

. . . [it is very important] to look around and recognise, to learn to see all the ways in which people are already

struggling against and beyond capital, struggling for dignity in their everyday lives. The most terribly destructive idea on the left is the idea that we're special, that we're different. We're not—everybody rebels in some way: our problem is to recognise rebellion and find a way of touching it. The most profound challenge of the Zapatistas is when they say "we are perfectly ordinary people, therefore rebels": that is perhaps the most important thing—to understand the everyday nature of revolution.

Holloway argues that seeing everyday work and social interaction (gardens, dance parties, friendship, revolutionary movements, etc.) as "moments of rupture." Rather than looking for a singular, powerful, persuasive rhetoric that opposes itself to capital, Holloways' work (and the Zapatista's) suggests a rhetoric of ordinary and the everyday independence and respect that are not formed by the structured spaces, including institutions, time (including workday), or structures of feeling of capital.

Everyday movements for friendship, dignity, and conviviality are not the same and constant attention needs to be given to their differences. Yet, to revise and extend David Harvey's argument that anti-capitalist struggles can be found in all regions of the world where "manifestations of anger and discontent with the capitalist system . . . can be found" (71), it can also be argued that contentious, joyful activity to create spaces for productive, critical conviviality can also be found where neoliberalism seeks to mold people into a coherent, normative identity.

Local Pedagogies

This introductory essay has explored conviviality, critical participatory interdependency, arguing that conviviality creates the social interactions through which communities can move from reflection to action. It has argued that rich, emotional, participatory interdependencies can create literate possibilities: specific, situated pedagogical responses that shape our social worlds. This edition of *Enculturation* offers essays that investigate range of contested issues that relate to the educative and political dimensions of culture as a means of teaching ourselves and making our own lives in and through rich, emotional interdependence.

Essays in this edition of *Enculturation* represent a range of disciplinary locations. Writers in this edition of *Enculturation* teach in Women's Studies programs, Hispanic Language and Literature Departments, Writing Programs, and English Departments. All essays focus on practices of learning, whether these are local events (Shields, Rabin) or part of wider social processes (Murphy). Some suggest means through which authority and hegemony can be countered and affinities mobilized through specific classroom practices (Shields, Claycomb, Weise, Kristensen, Ryder, Rabin). As they excavate classrooms in the context of wider cultural contexts, these essays argue that pedagogy can be mobilized as social power.

In her essay, "Writing Britain: James VI & I and the National Body," Samantha Murphy offers a reading of "narrative imperialism," from the autobiographical texts of King James I of England. These texts, Murphy argues, enabled their practitioners to establish in the service of nation-building an "absolute identity, in relation to which others will either conform or be rendered 'alienable'." James used displays his body through the written word as a means of creating a new national literacy, "a new common-sense map of meaning that consolidates his vision of absolute monarchy." Whether in the context of early twenty first century global capital where class, race, and ethnic based exclusion is a strategy of state-capital authority or the King's writing as it creates common sense identity as part of a strategy of early imperial nation-building in seventeenth century Great Britain, pedagogy as instruction is constitutive power and violence. The pedagogical violently, even persuasively, inserts us into this authoritative system. This is not violence and authority that is at the limits of the social order but violence that is at its center, a constitutive, state-sponsored violence.

Pedagogy writ large as a strategy of state-sponsored hegemony is effective insofar as it remains hidden *as pedagogy*, as a historically specific rhetoric charged with teaching people how to be subjects of the nation-state. As Randi Kristensen points out in her discussion of Bakhtin in "From *Things Fall Apart* to *Freedom Dreams*: Black Studies and Cultural Studies in the Composition Classroom," pedagogy works as an authoritative, powerful discourse that "cannot be questioned, [and] demand[s] and receive[s] unquestioned allegiance." A hidden pedagogy—one that works culturally to create allegiance to powerful social institutions—demands allegiance. Likewise, in Lisa Rabin's essay, "Literacy Narratives for Social Change: Making Connections

between Service-Learning and Literature Education," pedagogy that teaches people to consent to the authority of the nation-state comes in the form of "closed" texts, mandated by national policy, where "scripted material that encourages a passive stance towards recognizing and processing information." Here, the nation teaches passivity as means of consolidating its own authority. In Ryan Claycomb's discussion of grading in writing classrooms, "Performing/Teaching/Writing: Performance Studies in the Composition Classroom," authority is managed and facilitated when "a writing product is assigned a grade that eventually solidifies into a mark on their permanent transcript at once reduces the act of writing to a quantity and drains the radical potential of that writing even as if reifies the teacher as a power figure." Claycomb links this notion of grading as performance to "market-driven understanding of higher education" which has the effect of "turn[ing] the act of writing into a marketable commodity." Phyllis Ryder's essay, "Rhetorical Publics: Beyond Clarity and Efficiency," considers authoritative pedagogy in common place advice about "proper" public writing. She questions the presumption that "one could enter into a public conversation using the same discourse conventions, no matter the location of that conversation—whether in a church basement or a gay-rights fundraising banquet or a university faculty meeting" (4).

In a Freirian tradition, pedagogy is not just the site of cultural authority but site of struggle. When dominant rhetorics are naturalized as common sense, seen as part of an inherited tradition, or part of some universal truth, or consolidate the authority of the nation-state, essays in the edition also suggests that understanding how authoritative pedagogy—the powerful interests that it embodies as well as words that are used to articulate these ideas and concepts—can be used as a site of political intervention. In "A Deconstructive Pedagogy," Aliya Weise, teaching a writing course centered on discourses of the animal, argues that paying attention to how rhetoric enacts violence is an initial move of critical literacy. Writing, Weise argues, becomes central to examining how language operates: "from petting baby piglets to eating pork, from acting like a bitch to behaving like animals, students are asked in the first weeks to examine a few of the myriad ways our language first sets up these conceptual structures 'human' and 'animal'." Weise's deconstructive pedagogy explores how "writing plays an important, central role to the boundary creations and transgressions in the human/animal binary."

Critical pedagogy goes beyond understanding the social production of common sense—it turns our attention to the situated social locations in which this common sense is produced and reproduced. Rabin and Ryder locate their pedagogy in what John Trimbur calls "cultural processes," processes that happen within specific cultural locations and places that are imbricated in social relations and multiple social forces. In this edition, Tanya Shields, writing about Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, argues for reading practices that provide students with "historical, political, and social contextualization" must supplement discursive analysis. For Rabin, in the context of schooling posts No Child Left Behind where many children are "forced to spend precious class and leisure time at "remedial" work in literacy," there's a huge divide between university literature study and "school children's technocratic training" (4). In this context, an after-school club which gives students a space to see reading and writing as more than "functional skills" helped create an alternative public sphere for these students. (9)

Yet as Kristensen takes pains to point out, "work cannot be accomplished in sixteen week semester." Institutional and social constraints, including the time and space of the semester, the multiple social and pedagogical influences which come to bear upon pedagogical work, and the powerful demands of institutions to produce writers who can perform particular tasks or knowledge shape the pedagogical limitations of resistant pedagogy. While Kristensen's work enacts pedagogy of resistance, she recognizes the limitations offered by institution of the university. Enacting pedagogy as does creating convivial community within the structure, time, and place university has limitations, and in Stuart Hall's words, is "without guarantees."

Conviviality and Community

How we teach, how we engage with authoritative rhetorics, how we emphasize and work with analysis and critique the place of the classroom, how we situate our analysis, and how we create activist responses where public debates are limited can—but is not guaranteed to—move us beyond critique of hegemonic rhetorics. Along these lines, Claycomb, like Rabin and Shields, emphasizes the possibility of moving outside the physical, corporeal, normative, temporal, and institutional boundaries of the classroom, asking, "how might we countermand the foreclosures of student empowerment enforced by a systematic insistence upon performance as an objective and quantifiable metric of student value? How [can] the positionalities of our students . . . be best

challenged and mobilized for social action? How can we suggest student excess through assignments, model theatricality in our classroom manner, or promote spectacle in ways that spill out beyond the boundaries of the classroom?"

In a conversation about leftist states and autonomous movements in South America, Holloway argues in a critique of leftist governments that the question for autonomous movements is *how* the decision is made to interact with states: "the issue is one of form . . . the *how* rather than the *what* of politics. In the context of constitutive pedagogy and market-driven, streamlined, efficient universities, Holloway's "How do we create our own space and time?" becomes a question of *how we create literacies* in these fraught contexts. The *how* suggests the forms and everyday places through which we compose analysis, how readings are constructed, how we make sense of, define, figure out, explain and create literacies (Hall 26). The movement of making sense and accounting for—grasping different ways of figuring out a problem—can move, as Raymond Williams suggests, towards new ways of seeing, of figuring and figuring out, of grasping for explanations of our social and political world. The place of social participation and the means through which, as Weise argues, a "hospitable environment for an array of activisms take place, radical activism such as: friendship, conviviality, hospitality, justice, compassion, and many others." For Holloway, the how moves us from a response or a critique of an oppressive state structure to a movement to create our own practice of time and space, and, by extension, our own dignity, our own literacies, our own spaces of conviviality.

How do we create our own time and space that is not part of the structured coherence of institutions or nation-states? How, as Eileen Schell asks, do we create academic culture "of respect, fairness, and visibility rather than a culture of shame, rage, and invisibility—a culture that is based on collective action and solidarity" (214)? How can we create convivial communities—with students, with colleagues inside and in other institutions, with support staff, cafeteria workers, janitors, and with comrades outside the university—that would enable us to envision literacies, identities, and spaces of critical exchange outside market demands? How to create a rich, emotional, material interdependence that as it is "attentive to questions of access, opportunities, power, and voice of different racial, sexual, class-based communities" (Mohanty 176) can be mobilized and can be linked to other struggles? How do we actively forge collectivities through the rhetorics of the everyday friendship, spaces of participatory conviviality, across borders that are local, military, policed, facilitated, and managed?

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[1] The DC summer conference was in part inspired by the Convergences conference organized by David Rieder and Christa Albrecht-Crane at North Carolina State in the fall of 2004.

[2] There has been considerable discussion about the relationship between cultural studies and critical pedagogy as well as the failure of cultural studies scholars to recognize contributions of critical pedagogy (Giroux). My purpose is not to explore the complex and contested intersections between these two traditions in depth but rather to point out that the contributions of both traditions created a shared discursive, and political, space through which conference participants created convivial, critical exchange.

[3] By “structured coherence,” Harvey suggests the particular form and space of capital that produces social cohesion: “There are processes at work…that define regional spaces within which production, consumption, supply, and demand (for commodities and labour power), production and realization, class struggle and accumulation, culture and lifestyle, hang together as some kind of structured coherence within a totality of productive forces and social relations.” First cited in *David Harvey: A Critical Reader.*

[4] There is a range scholarship on neoliberalism in a variety of fields. For further reading, I’ll point to a few texts that represent this range of approaches and analysis of neoliberalism. For a historically-based and US-based discussion, neoliberalism as economic policy that is written into culture, see Lisa Duggan’s *Twilight of Equality*. On neoliberalism and the movement of peoples and labor, particularly gendered labor across national borders, see Saskia Sassen’s *Cities in a World Economy*. For discussion of movement of language, culture, and goods across national borders in a neoliberal economy, see Inderpal Grewal’s *Transnational America*. For critiques of supranational organizations and their use of neoliberal rhetorics in addressing disablity, see Robert Mcruer’s “Taking it to the Bank: Independence and Inclusion on the World Market.”