“CRUEL OPTIMISM,” BURNT-OUT-SOULS, AND THE RUPTURED FANTASY OF EDUCATION.

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Abstract

This dissertation conducts a philosophical political inquiry into ways in which the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" (Fisher, 2009) infiltrates and impedes public education and thus generates a "ruptured fantasy" of education. My project seeks to critically expose an exhausted depressive sensibility, promoted and perpetuated through the logic of neoliberalism, which gives way to what Byung-Chul Han (2015) terms the "burnt-out-soul." Late critical theorist Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism" offers a conceptual framework through which I critically consider the "double bind" induced through attachments to education. I particularly focus on the pernicious effects that result when education forges optimistic attachments, via the pervasiveness of "critical pedagogy," to enact social transformation in our increasingly menacing times. "Cruel optimism" in education, I argue, is not only instituted through neoliberal rationality but also through mechanisms of neoliberalism, which exacerbate the pre-existing structural and systemic violence historically normalized in education (violence perpetuated on the basis of racism, classism, ability, gender, and through the colonial project).

Tracking the trappings of an optimistic relation to education from an interdisciplinary perspective I wonder what it takes for educators to counter this wearing down of our souls that engenders a sense of hopelessness, and which impedes the "educational" (Di Paolantonio 2016, 2018; Biesta, 2013, 2018, 2020). Drawing on theorists both within and outside of education, and on my more than twenty-five years of experience as a high school educator, I consider the following questions: What happens when it is our "optimism" that provokes the cruelty of despair? What are the depressive repercussions of the "soul at work" (Berardi, 2009)? How do

critical educators survive as they attempt to disrupt, fight, and hope for possibilities within public education while existing in a constant state of exhaustion and despair as they "manage" and negotiate education's compromised conditions? Ultimately, I seek to think through how the "educational" can appear only in brief, fleeting moments given education's present conditions. Finally, in the last part of the dissertation, I offer my concept of thinking *with* images. Thinking *with* images, I argue, provokes pedagogical moments of interruption that give students time and space to attend to what they see, thus affording them the chance to think *differently* about the violence they live in these wretched times when the "past not yet past" (Sharpe, 2016) impacts them daily.

Acknowledgements

There is something odd about writing a dissertation: it often feels like a solitary act yet, it is not.
Sara Ahmed in her introduction to *On Being Included* (2012) writes, "Every research project has a story, which is the story of an arrival… [and] as with much research, the story of an arrival is a story of our encounters." Although my project is the result of a lifetime of encounters in and with education, my "arrival" would have been impossible without the following people.

Encountering my supervisor Mario Di Paolantonio, reading and thinking with him in his graduate courses during my first year of study, changed the whole trajectory of my graduate work. Mario's scholarship, academic insight, generosity, and deep understanding of what I was working towards, opened a space for me to expand my thinking, engage with a range of philosophers, and craft vocabularies through which to articulate the story of my project. I want to acknowledge that without his guidance I would never have completed this work.

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Introduction:

"Cruel Optimism" and the Desire for the Possibilities in Education

(re)Searching My "Burnt-Out-Soul"

Images surround us. They enter our bodies, appear in our minds, and become part of our beings. They exist outside of us and inside of us reflecting and producing both self and others. Affective responses to images linger in us, undo us, and move us. Images repel, captivate, thrill, disrupt, interrupt, and most important they call out to us. And, I suggest images have the potential to open spaces for thinking and learning together.

I came to this project in order to think through how an ethics of responsibility to and for others might be fostered in schools while thinking *with* images. I was consumed by a pressing need to consider ways that notions of responsibility, complicity, and implication in our relationships to others might be provoked through education. I am interested in the ways in which images, whether from popular culture, visual art, film, or photographic journalism, can help us question, teach, learn, and think about the world we inhabit and our relationality to our world. I have become more and more interested in the possibilities that encounters with images offer beyond the semantic and semiotic, beyond representation, beyond production and consumption, beyond what our eyes do. As such, I am interested in exploring how encounters with images might elicit ethical obligations to respond to violence witnessed (mediated) from afar and violence we experience directly, and inflict on each other.

Yet, despite a sense of excitement and urgency to grapple with these concerns, each time I attempted to *get* to the work of writing my dissertation I became immobilized. Again and again I had to ponder what obstacle was ultimately holding me back from moving forward. Beyond the "normal" PhD anxieties of being a fraud, of having not read enough, of constantly questioning my ideas, and doubting the purpose of my project, I found it difficult to grapple with what exactly was obstructing my attempts to complete my work. Spurred on by articles I read that sparked an idea (or ten), or conversations that fed my thinking, conference papers I wrote and those I listened to, the frustrations of educators I worked with daily, all these moments of inspiration would fizzle each time I would sit at a computer to write. And then, it hit me: my reluctance – my hesitation, uncertainty, and uneasiness – of doing and being in my work made sense through late critical theorist Lauren Berlant's (2011) notion of "cruel optimism."

The opening sentence in Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011) states, "[a] relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (p. 1). Education *itself*, I realized, was the obstacle hindering my desire to do and think through my dissertation. My desires around the possibilities of education – about what it might offer – are in constant turmoil in relation to my experiences as a high school educator and as a graduate student. The tension between the possibilities of education as an agent for social transformation (an ideal many educators including myself have been invested in) and our lived experiences in schools was stalling me. I began to realize that it was the compromised conditions of public education that was obstructing my ability to move forward and flourish in my work.

Berlant (2011) notes that not all kinds of optimistic relations are inherently cruel but that "they become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially" (p. 1). I was initially drawn to education as space within which, I

thought, possibilities of working towards a more just world would be at the forefront. I understood that my desires for a more just world formed through social democratic promises of my youth conflicted with the reality that sustainable systemic change needed to alleviate ongoing sexist, gendered, racist, and classist inequalities in our world was not on the horizon. And yet, despite the above mention tensions between my desires and reality, there remained, lurking within me a glimmer of optimism in the promises of education.

I entered the classroom as a high school teacher in 1994 after completing my Master's in Interdisciplinary Studies. My thesis entitled, "Spectacle and Discipline: Regulating Female Bodies through Dance," grounded in feminist theory, was an examination of representation, power, and spectacle in Western theatrical dance. Critical to this work was an understanding of the forces of Western historical and social constructions of female bodies, race, the "gaze," representation and looking. In this work, I drew on Guy Debord's (1983) theories of "society as spectacle," Timothy Mitchell's (1988) notion of "the world as exhibition," Laura Mulvey's (1989) concept of the "male gaze," bell hooks' (1992) analysis of Black female bodies and representation, Michel Foucault's (1979) discourses of power, discipline and "docile bodies," Elizabeth Grosz and other noted feminist scholars' philosophical, historical and cultural understandings of the regulation of female bodies. As well, John Berger's (1972) reworking of Walter Benjamin's ideas, into what Berger termed "ways of seeing," proved incredibly significant. Throughout my work here, I turned to critical and cultural theorists to help me articulate and consider historical, social, and philosophical ideologies that framed my lived experiences in the world of dance. I was able to think through how to identify and unravel mechanisms at work within the "dance world" that often seem invisible, and yet, operate in ways that create circumstances and conditions deemed "normal" while causing harm, and upholding

problematic notions of female bodies and female subordination. This work also offered me a theoretical positioning and foundation on which to develop and frame my thinking as I entered the world of education.

And so, I began my teaching career, my head filled possibilities of shifting educational paradigms and disrupting "ways of seeing." Influenced by scholars such as bell hooks, Judith Butler, Laura Mulvey, Patricia Hill Collins, Deborah King, Michel Foucault and John Berger I grounded my teaching practices in theories of cultural studies, feminist and critical race theory. I sought out educational and cultural studies theorists who worked within these theoretical positionings (Battiste, 2003,2005; Buckingham 1995, 1998, 2000, 2003, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Finn 1995; Friere 1970, 2005; Giroux 2001; Hall, 1997; hooks, 1992, 1994; Kellner 1995; King (1997) Kumashiro, 2002; St. Denis 2007; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). My "philosophy" of education, grounded in theories that aim to challenge systems of oppression and power, built on principles of feminism, critical race theory, and the possibilities of social change, I thought, reflected educational thinking, practices, and policies at the time. However, I soon realized that my attachment to and desires (optimism) to enact such a "philosophy" meant I was continually forced to negotiate complex systems of oppression that permeate hierarchal structures of education, curriculum, schools, teaching practices and many teachers' and administrators' thinking.

Registering "Cruel Optimism" in Education

During my first years as a high school teacher, I had not yet registered the full force of neoliberalism and the ways in which its particular logic and optics would varyingly assault education; this understanding would come a few years later. As political theorist Wendy Brown

(2019) notes, “nothing is untouched by a neoliberal mode of reason and valuation… neoliberalism’s attack on democracy has everywhere inflected law, political culture and political subjectivity” (p. 8). The assaults of neoliberalism on education, which I describe in detail in chapter one, would eventually undo many “progressive” educational reforms and movements that had been underway (in Ontario) for decades. Indeed, neoliberalism would open a door through which pre-existing oppressions were more forcibly entrenched, consequently expelling a previous sense of “hope” in the possibilities of education *despite* many educators ongoing attempts to maintain “optimistic” relations to education. As Berlant tells us, there is a relational shift that occurs when optimistic relations, that is relations with “objects that sustain you, turn on you and threaten the world you have come to rely on” (Skopje Pride Weekend, 2020, 22:02). Such a relational shift, from sustenance to threat, is the impasse structured by “cruel optimism.” It is within this impasse that we attempt to survive. Berlant (2011) explains, “the compulsion to repeat optimism, which is another definition of desire, is a condition of possibility that also risks having to survive, once again, disappointment and depression, the protracted sense that nothing will change” (p. 121-122). Shattered, we grip onto the crumbling shards of promises and adjust and adapt for at least a moment, holding on for dear life while trying to imagine something different.

Consequently, while consumed by a pressing desire to think through how an ethics of responsibility in our relationships to and for others might be fostered in schools by thinking *with* images, I am, at the same time, gutted by ways neoliberal logic exacerbates the already compromised conditions in education and thus increasingly impedes educators in schools and students in classrooms. Herein lies the crucial sense of “cruel optimism” of education in my work. Berlant (2011) describes “cruel optimism” as the “condition of maintaining an attachment

to a significantly problematic object" (33). In education, the cruelty rests in maintaining attachments to promises of education as inherently transformative (emancipatory), all the while liberal rationality and neoliberal logic capture and commodify education perpetuating violence, inequity, and oppression daily. The contradictions here – between promises of education's transformative potential (as proposed by critical pedagogy) and education's enduring reproduction of social injustices – are what over the years I have learned to resist and embody and ultimately, what has undone me.

Education philosopher Mario Di Paolantonio (2016) points out that the cruel paradox of the promise of education to prepare us "to adapt to (and survive) an ever volatile and menacing market" lays in the burden [that] such optimism [places] on the individual, consequently alienating and isolating one from what it might mean to hold a world in common (p. 148). How might we refuse the cruelty of individualization and interrupt the depressive atmosphere of despair manufactured by the infusion of neoliberal and capital logic into education? How do we *survive* continued attachments to the possibilities of education when relations of optimism to a "problematic object," in this case education, wear us down? Berlant (2011) tell us, "cruel optimism" is "a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic" (p. 24). It is within these fantastical and toxic "compromised conditions of possibility" of education that my work and I live.

Over the course of writing my dissertation "cruel optimism" has become central to my project. In fact, the process of unraveling the intensity of being stalled, of feeling unable to move forward in my work, mirrors the "double bind," which Berlant describes in her conceptualization of "cruel optimism." For Berlant (2011), the sense of "double bind" appears in the cruelty of

knowing there will be a loss whether you hold onto *or* let go of your attachment to the object that is itself impeding the fulfilment of your fantasy (p. 51). Consequently, the "double bind" creates a conflict between being able to break away from attachments that we (*critical* educators) know are not working thus losing the fantasy, which sustains us. Given this, how do we survive our cruel attachment to education? How do we attempt to unravel, disrupt, fight and hope for change within public education while trying to survive the constraints of education's "compromised conditions of possibility?"

Throughout this work I sometimes use the pronoun "we." I recognize the problematic universalizing tendencies at risk in using "we" as it obscures our singular positionalities. Understanding this tension, I most often use "we" to identify "*critical"* educators. I use the term *critical* educators to encompass a particular type of educator and therefore I have chosen to italicize the word *critical* when I am referring to these particular educators. For me, *critical* educators are educators who possess the ability to think and articulate that we are in an atmosphere that tends to obfuscate the problems that create the compromise conditions of education, which I expose throughout my work. *Critical* educators are those educators who are constantly pushing back against these toxic conditions despite an overwhelming sense that there is no alternative. At other times, I do lean towards a universalizing notion of "we" when I aim to conjure humanities' complicity in ongoing colonial, racist and gendered violence.

I am acutely aware that I do not exist outside the concerns and critiques I raise in this project regarding the compromised conditions of public education. Indeed, I have been marinating in these contradictions and impasses for over twenty-five years and I am complicit and implicated. I have been unable to protect students from violence embedded within the education system, violence they face in their daily lives or the violence that is overwhelming the

world. At times, when the sense that everything was crumbling around me and there was nothing to hold on to – when possibilities for the futures of public education seem so dire – I have even felt reactionary, nostalgically longing for a past in education that never existed.

Most importantly, I realize there is a cruelty located at the core of my desire to foster a sense of responsibility in students within a system in which they often feel abandoned. This cruelty lies within my *own* desire to ask students to consider *their* responsibility to and for others when so much of their lives are littered with violence that they all too frequently accept without question. It is a reality that students I worked with have been left to manage wretched conditions without support or acknowledgement in an education system that often dismisses them and that rarely has a transformative effect on their "lived bodies" (Probyn 2004). And therein lies my hesitation. As such, my dissertation and my final assertion is boldly that the "educational" (Di Paolantonio, 2016) is still possible, and that it resides *only* in moments that the classroom can sometimes shelter.

Striving for the "Educational"

Understanding the "educational" in contrast to education (the institutions) is critical to my work. Following Di Paolantonio, (2016, 2019b) I think of the "educational" as a space that opens possibilities beyond the present state of "learnification of education" (Biesta, 2005, 2012, 2013) that overwhelms the education today. I understand the "educational," as fundamentally relational (Biesta, 2013; Di Paolantonio, 2016, 2019b). More specifically, the "educational" can be understood as an encounter that creates an opening for "something new" to appear. We could even say that it is an "interruptive force" that allows the ethical and singularly unique to arrive through a sense of relationality (Biesta 2013, 2020; Di Paolantonio, 2019b). In this context the

"educational" in education opens a space for thinking beyond the self, beyond one's individual importance and success and unlocks the potential to attend to the world within which we exist. This relational orientation, I suggest, opens possibilities of thinking together, a process through which a sense of ethical responsibility to and for others comes *not* through knowledge (learning *about* the other) but rather through being in relation with others. As a grade nine student explained to me, "knowledge does not mean responsibility, responsibility comes from within."

Consequently, my assertion in the possibility of the "educational" appearing *only* in moments has evolved out of deep consideration of my 1) "ruptured fantasy of education," and 2) the hard work of learning and becoming with students all the while navigating the compromised conditions present in public education. According to Di Paolantonio, (2016) the "learnification of education" and today's self-serving optimism "renders education temporally insignificant and ultimately alienated from a sense of having anything to do with sustaining something larger and more durable than our immediate interests" (p. 151). As such, I argue that attachments to and optimism in education's potential (the "educational") are worn down and shattered by daily experiences in schools and in classrooms. This despair, I suggest, contributes to the depressive state of accepting the inevitability of way things are.

Invoking philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2015; 2017b) we can term this depressive state and resignation as the "burnout syndrome." I suggest that in education today the "burnout syndrome" is not a call to slow down, rest and rejuvenate the self (as in the constant managerial reminder to practice "self-care"). Rather, the "burnout syndrome" captures a situation in which the attachment to education as a place of transformation, and the performance of the "optimism" that it demands, births the "burnt-out-soul" (a position I elaborate on in chapter one). Stuck in this place between desire (optimism) and despair, *critical* educators committed to the

possibilities of education keep fighting but they are worn down and heartbroken trying to survive the depressive atmosphere that has settled throughout public education.

The Project

Being bound to education is, for me, a dance of cruelty and desire: a "ruptured fantasy." I do not want to theorize some ideal utopian fantasy that ignores the present problematic conditions in which education is stuck. I do not want to consider education reforms or "fixes" that simply provide Band-Aid solutions that repeat "initiatives" that have failed to provide substantive structural change to the inequities that continue to plague education. Rather, my aim is to hold present conditions to account, to consider and *think* the contemporary conditions of education from within the particular historical and political time in which they are occurring. For after all, it is these conditions (which seem to worsen daily) that engender what I refer to as the "ruptured fantasy of education."

I position promises of education as a "ruptured fantasy" because I have witnessed an accelerating dissolution of the ideal of education as a space of social transformation and emancipation during my teaching career.[1] And yet, despite this rupture I am stuck (floundering), trying to recover my initial attachments to the promise of education as something hopeful and "good." Berlant (2011) suggests, "fantasy is an opening and a defense" (p. 49). My notion of a "ruptured fantasy" is born from broken pieces of a desire (optimism) for a more just world: fragments and shards of idealistic debris that I hold up in defense. This "ruptured fantasy" (my defense) enables me to imagine and reflect on openings that might provide spaces for the "educational" to appear, while at the same time, I refuse, push and revolt against the desire to fall

[1]See: Azzarello, L. (2017). The Dilution of Alternative Schooling: Reverberations of Conservative Neo-liberal Bureaucracy. In Nina Bascia, Esther Fine and Malcolm Levin (Eds.), *Alternative Schooling: Canadian Stories of Democracy within Bureaucracy*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 55-67.

into a utopian fantasy of hope that believes sustainable, systemic change in education is possible in these contemporary compromised conditions.

Consequently, this dissertation begins with an inquiry into the contemporary historical present in an effort to grapple with what late cultural theorist Mark Fisher's (2009) calls the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism." I suggest this atmosphere infiltrates and impedes public education and thus induces a "ruptured fantasy of education." Essential to my work is the exposure of an exhausted depressive sensibility that is stimulated through neoliberal logic, dispersed via Fisher's conceptualization of the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" and residing in Han's (2015) notion of the "burnt-out-soul," thus rendering "optimism" in education cruel (Berlant, 2011). Tracking fraying relations of optimism (desire) in education I wonder what it takes for educators to counter this wearing down that engenders a sense of hopelessness and impedes the "educational" (Di Paolantonio 2016; Biesta, 2013). What happens when it is our optimism that provokes the cruelty of despair?

Although I aim to consider the present moment of education as it is shaped by a new menacing time of hyper-capitalism and neoliberalism I am acutely aware, following scholar Christina Sharpe (2016), of the "past not yet past" (p. 13). Hence, I am also concerned with ways in which mechanisms of neoliberalism increasingly exacerbate pre-existing systemic and structural inequities. Therefore, I aim to track the "double bind" of maintaining attachments to promises of education as a place of social transformation within the compromised conditions of public education's disposition and historicity as a place of violence, coercion and control and ways in which neoliberal logic exacerbates these violent tendencies. Thus, I ask, how can educators continue to perform an optimistic relation to education while attempting to survive the cruelty of ever-increasing compromised conditions of possibilities within education? Berlant

explains that "any optimistic relation can become cruel optimistic if the relation that once sustained you threatens your capacity to survive and you can't give it up for fear of losing everything" (Skopje Pride Weekend, 2020, 25:03). What happens when attachments to education fray and trying to survive the depressive atmosphere of education exhausts and wears you out?

And so, I proceed with trepidation, concern, and fear. Education philosopher Sharon Todd (2003) reminds us "any philosophical investigation into the ethical possibilities of education… cannot only *not* ignore the exigencies of present social conditions, but it must make those exigencies central to its conceptualization of the relation between ethics and education" (original emphasis, p. 1). With Todd's edict in mind, I undertake my dissertation first by contextualizing my notion of a "ruptured fantasy of education" which leads to my assertion that the "educational" can appear only in brief, fleeting moments and finally, I offer my concept of thinking *with* images. Thinking *with* images, I propose provides students with time and space to think and thus think *differently* about the violence they live and that surrounds them.

This dissertation is not a redemptive one. I see no miracle fix is on the horizon. Rather, this project is about the attempt to both bear and adapt while living on (surviving) in the "impasse of the present" (Berlant 2011). What is crucial to what I am saying here is that I have no practical solutions, no great hope, no promises, and no salvation, but I attempt to nevertheless hold onto acts of adjustment and modes of adapting (survival strategies) – that appear in moments and spark fleeting interruptions in the depressive atmosphere of the "ruptured fantasy of education." Unless we can *collectively* begin to refuse the elements that are wearing education and us down; unless there is a *new* (common) will within the people and institutions of education there will be no revolt and no future.

Theoretical Approach

Although profoundly personal this dissertation is a philosophical political project grounded in an understanding of working from an interdisciplinary perspective, a perspective that I developed during my Master's work at York University in the Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies. An interdisciplinary approach is not a method or methodology but rather a theoretical approach to questioning and exploring an idea, a situation, or a problem by integrating concepts from a range of disciplines in order to think deeply and differently about an object of study unconstrained by disciplinary borders.[2] As such my work draws on theorists both within and outside of education in order to examine, expose and open a space within which to problematize present conditions of education and the complex consequences of these conditions. I consider my theoretical approach as having at its core a "method" of philosophizing in the sense that I analyze, question, argue and interpret political and philosophical concepts in relation to education throughout my project. According to educational philosopher Claudia Ruitenberg (2009) this approach to research describes, "what philosophers of education do" (p. 321). Characteristics of this type of theoretical approach also follow certain interdisciplinary aspects of feminist educational scholar Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre's (2021) understanding of "post-qualitative inquiry." A mode of inquiry, which she explains, is *not* a methodology (p. 5). St. Pierre (2021) notes, "[a]lthough the label "post qualitative inquiry" will always be inadequate and cannot contain the thought it gestures toward" post-qualitative inquiry's goal is:

> …experimentation and the creation of the new, which is very difficult. Finally, and importantly, post qualitative inquiry is aligned with the humanities, with philosophy, history, the arts, the sciences, and literature, and not with the social sciences. (p. 6)

St. Pierre (2019, 2021) is describing a particular orientation to doing inquiry work in education and arguing for the field of education to validate and recognize the importance and possibilities

[2] See: https://interdis.gradstudies.yorku.ca

of education scholarship based in philosophical and humanities informed exploration. She is calling for a scholarship that extricates itself from the tensions of the notion of education as a "social science" rather than a philosophical endeavour. My theoretical approach has instinctively, without my realizing it, followed St. Pierre's (2019) recommendations that,

> … for those interested in post qualitative inquiry include putting methodology aside and, instead, reading widely across philosophy, social theories, and the history of science and social science to find concepts that reorient thinking. Post qualitative inquiry encourages concrete, practical experimentation and the creation of the not yet instead of the repetition of what is. (p. 3)

As such my dissertation's interdisciplinary approach brings together critical theorists who themselves work across and through disciplines such as philosophy, politics, education, cultural studies, feminist theory and critical race theory. Therefore, my project does not *apply* a methodology rather I draw on several theorists and their concepts to motor my thinking and support my arguments as I question the complex compromised conditions of public education.

Inspired by Berlant (2011) I have found "cruel optimism" to be a powerful structure through which to track my notion of a "ruptured fantasy of education" and the depressive atmosphere of despair that lingers in public education. Berlant's (2011) positioning of "cruel optimism" as an "analytic lever" (p. 27) provides an opening for me to track and untangle the trajectory of how manifestations of the depressive atmosphere of "capitalist realism" expresses itself in public education, which I argue, produces a sense of despair and exhaustion amongst many educators who, while encased within these states of being, continue to perform optimism in education. I join a number of scholars from a wide range of fields, including education, who have turned to "cruel optimism" as an analytical lever to think through a variety of problems in a range of contexts (Bone, 2020; Di Paolantonio, 2016; Houghton, 2019; Kalin, 2018; Kessel, 2019; Lipton, 2017; Lykke, 2017; Moore & Clarke, 2016; Ruitenberg, 2020; Sellar & Zipin,

2019; Shirazi, 2020; Shanks, 2015; Young, 2021; Zembylas, 2018; Zwicky, 2017). Political theorist Torrey Shanks (2015) perceives "cruel optimism" as providing a particular critical vantage point from which to analyse "psychic, affective and material sources of a recurring sense of political failure" (p. 5). My work aims to track and analyse this recurring sense of political failure within education through the critical vantage point of "cruel optimism."

In this dissertation, "cruel optimism" offers a structure through which to critically locate the dynamics of attachments to education as a place of social transformation in increasingly menacing times. Berlant (2011) understands the work of "cruel optimism" as being most concerned with "conceiving of a contemporary moment from within that moment" (p. 4). This dissertation takes up the task of tracking aspects of education from within the contemporary moment of neoliberal logic in order to analysis and interrogate the cruelty inherent in attachments to education as a space that promises (especially for educators) the pursuit of a more just world, as the system and its subjects are collapsing under the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism." "Cruel optimism" helps me contextualize the atmosphere that emerges when we are bound to promises of education that encompass equity, social democracy, and possibilities of dismantling the colonial project, gendered and racial oppressions, while contemporary political and social realities undermine these promises thus wearing us down.

Berlant (2011) expresses the way in which "cruel optimism" works as a provocative device through which to conceptualize and expose both the wearing down of the subject (particularly within neoliberal logic) and the ways in which subjects adjust and adapt to survive and strive for something new within compromised conditions. She writes:

> Cruel optimism is, then, like all phrases, a deictic – a phrase that points to a proximate location. As an analytic lever, it is an incitement to inhabit and to track the affective attachment to what we call "the good life," which is for so many a bad life that wears out

> the subjects who nonetheless, and at the same time, find their conditions of possibility within it. (Berlant, 2011, p. 27)

Thus, given my own experiences of the "ruptured fantasy of education," my dissertation tracks attachments to and desires (optimism) for the transformational potential of education, which are thwarted by neoliberal logic. Through this analysis I conclude that the place of possibilities in education (the "educational") reside in fleeting moments and I wonder how we might hold onto to those moments of possibilities. Consequently, my inquiry is concerned with the question of survival. In fact, this project is quite literally a form of survival for me. Ultimately my concern is about how *critical* educators survive attempting to disrupt, fight and hope for possibilities within public education while existing in a constant state of exhaustion as they "manage" and negotiate education's compromised conditions.

My inquiry, as previously noted is located within my experiences in relation to education as high school educator. St. Pierre (2019) notes, "[o]ne begins post qualitative inquiry with a concrete encounter with the real, not with a research question" (p. 12). Although my project does not adopt St. Pierre's (2019) mode of post qualitative inquiry as such, my "concrete encounters with the real" *have* shaped and drive my project. As a result, as I conduct my theoretical exploration and analysis of the compromised conditions of education in its present state, I draw on anecdotal evidence from my more than twenty-five years of teaching experience in high schools in Toronto. Chapter one is informed by my encounters with the ways in which neoliberal rationality has infested public education. In chapter two, while considering the normativity of violence as it appears in and through education, I capture retrospectively encounters of violence that I have witnessed or somehow been privy to. My consideration of the mis-promises of "critical pedagogy" in chapter three is a realization of the ways in which aspects of "critical pedagogy" have seeped into schools in problematic and hollowed out ways or have been

repurposed through neoliberal logic thus contributing to the "ruptured fantasy of education." Chapter four, "Living on within survival time," includes a retelling of an experience I had with students in an English class in order to demonstrate a moment of interrupting the "learnification of education." In chapter five, I briefly outline my shift away from working with images from a "critical pedagogy" lens and draw on my classroom experiences to help introduce and explain my notion of thinking *with* images. Referencing my very "real" encounters in education in these ways allows me to concretize and support my theoretical analysis.

As well, my theoretical approach includes the consideration of scenes from film, television series, and advertisements, which serve as objects of examination to help unravel the contemporary moment of education. Many of the theorists I draw on in this dissertation, (Berardi, 2009, 2017; Berlant, 2011; Fisher 2009, 2012; Sharpe, 2016) also engage with a range of mediated text in their work. Berlant explains her use of aesthetic objects in this way: "The key here is to not see what happens to aesthetically mediated *characters* as equivalent to what happens to people but to see that in the affective *scenarios* of these works and discourses we can discern claims about contemporary life" (original emphasis, p. 9). In a practice, different but not totally unlike that of Berlant's (2011), Sharpe (2016) tracks her theorization of being in "the wake" through readings of violent events, news reports and images and through consideration of objects such as poetry, visual artifacts, and film. Fisher (2009, 2012) and philosopher/activist Franco Berardi (2009, 2017) both draw upon music, art and film to help orient their considerations on the state of the world. For me, referencing mediated objects help me detect and gesture to "symptomatics" and affects that arise amid the ongoing "ordinary" everyday crisis of neoliberal logic as it impacts public education.

Within the first three chapters, I draw extensively on the film *Detachment* (2011, Kaye) to help recognize operational mechanisms of "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" and neoliberal logic at work, which I propose, induces despair and manufactures the disintegration of public education. The film *Detachmen*t (Kaye, 2011) is littered with a multitude of tropes found in popular films about "urban" public schools and the dissolution of public education: the angry black male; the neglectful, abusive, absent parents who, in this particular film, are to blame for almost everything including a failing public education system; the defiant male harassing a female student who, suffering from self-loathing, uses her art to express her isolation and despair; the smart black girl who gets only a cursory moment on screen (and in life). And, of course, at its centre, the film gifts us once again with "teacher as saviour," a notion I explore in more detail in chapter three. "Teacher as saviour" is a trope so commonplace (and problematic) that MADTV's 2007 skit "Nice White Lady" (Leddy, Grossman, & Bearse) and more recently, the 2015 short film TEACH (Gast, Schiller & Marcia), parody this archetype along with its accompanying racist, sexist and classist attitudes that breed injustices and violence in schools. These are all issues I consider in depth in chapter two and chapter three.

I include my reading of the film *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) not only because it reproduces familiar tropes and attitudes found inside and outside education, but because it does so while touching on other (re)occurring issues that reflect contemporary conditions of late capitalism's impact on public education. However, like most Hollywood films about public education *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) does not link the ways in which particular tropes and attitudes in education are fuelled by political conditions. Neoliberal logic is detected in the film through issues such as lack of funding, prioritizing test scores before learning and regarding students as numbers not people. The film also presents an abundance of "deficit thinking" from educators

that position students as undisciplined, out of control, lacking respect and having little desire to learn. Rather than considering systemic harm caused by embedded and reinforced racism, classism and sexism or the prevailing shift to a corporate-consumption-way-of-life as factors that affect students and their behaviours, films like this simply reproduce and naturalize "deficit thinking" mirroring attitudes of some "real life" educators. Consequently, *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) offers us a glimpse into ways that neoliberal logic collides with and intensifies pre-existing injustices and violence in public education, thus perpetuating a sense of despair that overshadows any "optimism" in education. This collision, as it occurs in "real life," and the ways in which it breeds the sense that there is "no alternative" underpins one of the key concerns of my project. We have seen mediated versions of these conditions before and yet, for many of us – youth and educators alike – we live it, or some version of it, every day.

Most importantly, *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) also brings us burnt-out-cynical-drug-popping educators who no longer have hope. It exposes the eventual breakdown of teachers who put their heart and soul into teaching and working with youth thus highlighting Berardi's (2009a) understanding of the depressive repercussions of the "soul at work." We also meet teachers, who despite the obvious crumbling system, keep fighting for change. Although there is perhaps nothing particularly new or earthshattering about *Detachment*'s (Kaye, 2011) vision of public education, what is distinctive, and of significance to my project, is its bleak tone that verges on communal depression, which, I suggest, haunts public education today. The sense of depression in education, which I explore throughout this work, is informed by Berardi's (2009a) and Han's (2015, 2017) understandings of the psychopolitical implications of the "soul at work" and Di Paolantonio's (2019b) insights into the depressive implications the "soul at work" has for education.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter one, "Neoliberalism and the Cruel Dissolution of Optimism in Education," tracks nuances of the insidious infiltration of neoliberal logic in public education revealing conditions that thwart desires for and attachments to education as space for social transformation. I contextualize the dense convolution of elements that bind together to form and inform Fisher's (2009) understanding of "pervasive atmosphere capitalist realism" as it appears in public education and locate these conditions in Berlant's (2011) sense of "cruel optimism." I think with philosopher Byung-Chul Han's (2015; 2017) notion of the "way-it-is" and the "burnout syndrome" to emphasize Fisher's sense that we are stuck in a place where we feel as if the is no alternative to capitalism and neoliberalism and the depressive sensibility established by this overwhelming sense of inevitability. I also address issues of neoliberal's technology of hyper-individualism as materializes in public education. More specifically, I make connections between Han's notion of the "achievement society" and educational philosopher Gert Biesta's (2009; 2010) idea of the "learnification of education," both manifestations of neoliberal logic. At issue in this chapter is an exploration of the ways in which neoliberal technologies heighten education's already compromised place thus generating a depressive atmosphere exasperating the already compromised conditions of education. What I am trying to think about here are the stark everyday life banalities that are exhausting and besieging education today.

Chapter two exposes ways in which violence in education and schools contributes to the depressive atmosphere within which my project is set. Extending Berlant's (2011) notion of "crisis ordinariness" I propose the "ordinariness" of violence obstructs education's potential to interrupt and counter those very experiences of violence that permeate schools and our worlds (racism, misogyny, colonialism, class discrimination and (dis)ability prejudice). My goal in this

chapter is to register how the "ordinariness" of violence contributes to the "ruptured fantasy of education" and to unravel some of the ways historical inequities and violence are fortified by neo-liberalisms' inherent violence and sense of "realism" (inevitability). Consequently, we can come to see violent events normalized in ways that support the neoliberal logic of reducing everything to individualistic episodes that deny connections to the social or the political.

In chapter three, I turn my attention to the call to reassert "critical pedagogy's" promise to act as a corrective to the violence of social, political, and oppressive injustices within education, schools and "the world." I revisit what I understand to be the (mis)promises of "critical pedagogy" because, I argue, foundational tenets and vocabularies of "critical pedagogy" are hollowed out, subsumed into the hyper-individualistic logic of neoliberalism and help perpetuate the notion of "teacher as saviour." I suggest that "critical pedagogy's" theoretical language of "empowerment" and "student voice," which often gets taken up in conferences, workshops, professional development and academic writing in abstract ways, ultimately do not provide possibilities for structural changes within education.

Having established my notion of a "ruptured fantasy of education" in the first three chapters and suggested that today we are in a new era of "survival time" (Berlant, 2011, p. 169, p. 255) chapter four considers how we might interrupt both of these dire predicaments. First, I how establish that two essential elements are required to open spaces for pedagogical moments of interruption, 1) the ability to pause and "pass time" together in the sheltered space of a classroom and 2) the cultivation of attentiveness. In the second section of this chapter, I indicate how the two required elements mentioned above are challenged by the ever-expanding infiltration of the digital sphere into classrooms. The final sections of chapter four, following Di Paolantonio (2016) propose that "passing time together" in a classroom with an object in

common has the potential to open a space to interrupt the seemingly hopeless depressive state that lingers in education today.

Chapter five extends on the final sections of chapter four and offers my notion of thinking *with* images, as potential pedagogical force of interruption. My offering is not prescriptive, nor is it a theory meant to be applied rather it is an offering of "survival." It is not a redemptive corrective to the "ruptured fantasy of education." Rather, this chapter presents the work that initially brought me to this project. It reflects *my* mode of "survival." It recalls my act of adaptation and adjustment to the "cruel optimism of education" revealing an understanding that shifts away from teaching about images in a way that focuses on power, representation, and ideology to mode of thinking *with* images which focuses on responsiveness. A shift, which in retrospect is a direct response to the untenable compromised conditions of education, that put my "soul to work." Consequently, the distinction I make between thinking *with* images and thinking *about* images is a move away from ways in which images are most often taken up in classrooms. Thus, in this chapter I propose that in "passing time together," and so collectively thinking *with* images of violence and suffering that face our time, we have the potential to open a space of learning where the potential to think differently about our responsibilities to others emerges. I propose that in our gathering together to think *with* images we have a chance to enable a move toward an ethical relation to and for others. At issue here is a sense of ethical responsibility that comes not through knowledge (learning about the other) but rather arises from our being in relation with others. The ability to sense (even momentarily) this ethical responsibility in the classroom provides the grounds upon which we can recover the "educational" in education.

In my conclusion, I position my dissertation within the radical potency of despair as an interruptive force – a force that counters the present infrastructures, which aim to constrain and

instrumentalize education. I point to a place of "stuckness" within which imagining a way out of the double bind of the "cruel optimism" of education seems almost impossible unless, as Fisher (2009) tells us, "a new (collective) political subject emerges" (p. 53). Considering the complexities involved in a "new collective" emerging, I maintain that in this present time, it is through *critical* educators commitment to the "educational" that fissures of possibility appear within the "ruptured fantasy" of education.

Chapter One:

Neoliberalism and the Cruel Dissolution of Optimism in Education

Tracking the Waves of the "Way-It-Is"

> *…Teaching and learning take place today in a time of crisis and chaos. The economy, the environment, and the educational system are all in dire peril due to the cumulative consequences of decades of neoliberalism and its concomitant regimes of dispossession, displacement, and disciplinary subordination.* Tomlinson & Lipsitz (2013 p. 3)

This chapter helps contextualize "the atmosphere" within which my "ruptured fantasy of education" is situated and thus has yielded my *reluctant* acceptance of the central point of my thesis, which proposes that under present compromised conditions of education, "educational" possibilities appear only in brief, fleeting moments. Drawing on Fisher's (2009) notion of "pervasive *atmosphere* of capitalist realism" I identify and unravel how characteristics of neoliberalism not only inform the operation of schools but also subvert and limit our sense of hope for the possibilities of the "educational." I track ways in which neoliberal logic infiltrates and harms public education in order to expose the despair that ensues through this mechanism. I consider the ways in which Fisher's (2009) notion of a "business ontology" along with neoliberalism's hyper-individualization contribute to the wearing down of education and educators. Tracking the insidious infiltration of neoliberal logic in public education I reveal conditions that thwart educators' attachments to education as space for social transformation and locate these conditions in Berlant's (2011) sense of "cruel optimism." I move to reveal how neoliberal rationality makes "optimism" in education seem fantastical, reinforces the depressive

atmosphere of education today and promotes the acceptance of Han's (2017) notion of the "way-it-is."

The desire and optimism that education can and should be a place of critical disruption and transformation is under constant siege as we tread the waters of "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" (Fisher, 2009). Referencing Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek's phrase, "that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism," Fisher (2009) explains "capitalist realism" as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it" (p. 2). Education scholar Noah De Lissovoy (2013) notes that the discussion of the effects of neoliberalism in schools "… so far has missed what is perhaps the key ideological effect of neoliberalism: the enforcement of the idea that *no alternative to the current organization of society and education is possible or imaginabl*e (original emphasis, p. 423). Fisher (2009) proposes that this problematic of the impossibility of imagining a "coherent alternative" is dispersed through "capitalist realism," a "pervasive *atmosphere*, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action" (original emphasis, p. 16). This conditioning, he suggests, is so pervasive that it naturalizes capitalism and is supported through neoliberalism's propensity to induce itself as a natural state. I suggest, following Fisher (2009), that the naturalization of neoliberal logic is an optics (a "way of seeing"), and that this optic has infiltrated public education making it almost impossible to imagine ("see") something different for education.

Fisher (2009) explains, "an ideological position can never be really successful until it is naturalized, and it cannot be naturalized while it is still thought of as a value rather than a fact" (p. 16). Tenets of neoliberalism are so immersive that, as scholar David Harvey notes:

> We have a mindset, in which in a curious way we have all become neoliberals without knowing it. And, even when we kind of object to some of the more egregious activities which are going on, we often look at alternatives in a very neoliberal kind of way. (The Real News Network, 2019, 2:37)

Alternatively, De Lissovoy (2013) suggests, "[c]apitalism, in its neoliberal moment, increasingly institutes itself as *coequal with reality itself*, so that to imagine alternatives to it is seemingly to lapse into delusion" (p. 425). In any case, the problematic of the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism," along with Harvey's "neoliberal mind set," and De Lissovoy's sense of delusion is ever present in contemporary public education and, as I suggest, directly contributes to the depressive atmosphere that lingers in schools.

Han (2017a) in describing atmosphere/mood as different than feelings and emotions states, "an atmosphere or mood expresses a way-it-is." He continues, "[a]tmosphere/mood is neither intentional nor performative. It is the element where one happens to find oneself (*etwas, worin man sich befindet*). It represents a state of being or state of mind (*Befindlichkeit*)" (p. 43). It is here, in the "element" – this place in which we find ourselves, a place that shapes itself into the "way-it-is" – that many *critical* educators are trying to survive. This sense of the "way-it-is" is all consuming, embodied and naturalized, and reflects Fisher's (2009) understanding of "capitalist realism." The atmosphere of the "way-it-is" is *a felt presence* of the haunting of capital. I propose this "element," in which we find ourselves in this present moment in education is a place that exudes a sense of the inevitable "way-it-is." This sense, this feeling at home (in place) with the "way-it-is" has overtaken us: it infiltrates our being, leaving a sense of despair

and the feeling that there is no alternative. It becomes almost impossible to imagine something different.

For Fisher, (2009) the sense of the "way-it-is" is expressed in his understanding that "a 'business ontology' in which it is *simply obvious* that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business" has emerged through the conditioning of "capitalist realism" (p. 17). Brown, (2015) along similar lines notes:

> The institutions and principles aimed at securing democracy, the cultures required to nourish it, the energies needed to animate it, and the citizens practicing, caring for or desiring it — all of these are challenged by neoliberalism's "economization" of political life and of other heretofore noneconomic spheres and activities. (p. 17)

Public education, a supposed "noneconomic sphere," has felt the reverberations of this "business ontology" and neoliberalism's "economization" in devastating ways. Brown (2015) identifies the process of subjectification through the inescapable burden of capital and neoliberal logic:

> To speak of the relentless and ubiquitous economization of all features of life by neoliberalism is thus not to claim that neoliberalism literally marketizes all spheres, even as such marketization is certainly one important effect of neoliberalism. Rather, the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities – even where money is not at issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as homo oeconomicus. (p. 31)

These conditions of neoliberal and capital logic establish a sensibility, a "way of seeing" that is reflected in thought, practices and policies that erode and usurp the possibilities of education as a force for social transformation. Public education in this present politics sits firmly in Brown's (2015) understanding of the neoliberal model of marketplace of capital and the subjectification of people as market actors (p. 31).

Although the initial foundations of the neoliberal assault on public education in Ontario were put in place in the early 1990s through initiatives introduced by a social democratic

political party, the NDP led by Bob Rae,[3] the total implementation of the "business ontology" would take hold during the "Harris years" between 1995-2002 (Bedard, & Lawton, 2000; Anderson, & Jaafar, 2003; Mackenzie, 2015; MacLellan, 2009; McCaskell, 2005; Noonan, & Coral, 2015; Sattler, 2012; Sefa Dei, & Karumanchery, 1999). Legislation enacted through several bills[4] structured on the idea of "economization" resulted in the amalgamation of distinct school boards into mega-boards, a funding formula that turned students into objects of revenue and stripped school boards of their independent taxing powers. Elected trustees would see their numbers reduced,[5] their mandated powers limited, and their salaries slashed. Democratic possibilities in public education were severely diminished, as elected trustees were no longer the driving force behind boards of education. At the same time the Harris government removed the legal rights of principals and vice-principals, all of whom were formerly teachers, to maintain their membership in teacher unions. Such steps intent on destroying unions and limiting rights to unionize are an ongoing agenda within neoliberal capitalist governments. Prohibiting principals' right to unionize or be included in any type of bargaining unit installed a rupture in school cohesiveness solidifying a "business ontology" complete with a new managerial workforce.

As a result of these governmental cuts many progressive changes in public education that had been taking place in Ontario since the late 1960's were decimated. Pro-equity and anti-discriminatory work and policies were annihilated[6] aided by the conservative Harris government's dismantling of equity policies and initiatives both provincially and specifically in

[3] For a comprehensive discussion of how the NDP's actions laid the foundation for the Harris's attack on public education see George Martell's (1995) book *A New Education Politics: Bob Rae's Legacy and the Response of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.*

[4] Bill 160 (the Education Quality Improvement Act), Bill 104 (the Fewer School Boards Act), Bill 30 (Education Quality and Accountability Office Act) Bill 74 (An Act to Amend the Education Act) Bill 132, The Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act) Bill 45, (The Responsible Choices For Growth and Accountability Act)

[5] As an example, in Toronto the number of trustees went from 74 across six boards of education to 20 for the newly amalgamation of these six boards.

[6] For a detailed and critical analysis of the breakdown of progressive initiatives, policies and agendas in the Toronto school Boards see Tim McCaskell's (2005) book *Race to Equity: Disrupting Educational Inequality.*

education. Harris "shut down an Anti-Racism Secretariat created by the NDP, and its counterpart in the Ministry of Education, abandoned policies aimed at increasing gender equity in administrative posts in education, and deleted references to pro-equity goals (e.g., anti-racism, gender) from future curriculum policy documents" (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2003, 14). As well, there were severe cuts to youth workers, social workers and other support staff who worked directly with students. School boards were forced to institute conservative business models in which budgets, staffing and resources were divided equally rather than equitably. Expertise is now assigned through the position one holds rather than through one's experience, a move that ended up devaluing pedagogical practices and knowledge of many classroom educators and support workers. As well, "student success" is now most often measured only in terms of credit accumulation and schools are judged based on students' results on government imposed standardized testing.

Working professionally together to create cohesive philosophies in schools began to deteriorate as principals had less and less control over the daily operations of their schools and performed as managers of teachers rather than colleagues. Consequently, leaders in positions of responsibility no longer function as educators but rather as administrators looking to impose the "bottom line." These same challenges are faced in education at all levels.

At the university level, Scholar Bronwyn Davies (2005), in *The (Im)possibility of Intellectual Work in Neoliberal Regimes*, details the difficulty of working under the "business ontology" accompanying neoliberal logic. Davies (2005) writes:

> What is understood as possible, and as desirable, is shaped by the obsessive regulatory practices of government through which universities and other public institutions are made to bend their energies to the ''bottom line'' and what Toni Morrison calls ''the bottomed out mind'' – the mind that disattends the effects of that bending except to report to government that the bending has indeed been productive of the things that government wants. (p. 4)

This ongoing bending towards a neoliberal hierarchical managerial system, in which all aspects of schooling are being measured, codified and packaged, is enacted through an atmosphere of inevitability, what Han terms the "way-it-is." Such an atmosphere induces a resignation towards a way of being in the world that feels and is compelled to act as if there is no alternative. Naturalized and accepted as the state of affairs in public education, despite boards and ministries of education policies that profess the opposite, the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" creates barriers to resistance, refusal and revolt thus contributing to the depressive state of public education.

And now, under the conservative government of Doug Ford, Ontario faces yet another slaughter of school funding and programing at both the public and university levels. Public schools face more cuts to staffing levels for teachers, educational assistants, social workers, child and youth workers and psychologists. At the secondary level there are increased class sizes, limited course selection for students, reduced services for the most vulnerable and enforced e-Learning[7] courses. These travesties are mind numbing and are sure to add to the public feeling of wretchedness, despair and impotency considering that the losses already imposed by the Harris cuts have never been recovered.

Neoliberal logic and the "business ontology" have become so entrenched in public education systems, so seamlessly integrated, that the possibilities for classroom teachers to question and interrupt it seem overwhelmingly impossible. It *is* the "way-it-is:" a naturalized

[7] The Ford government, in its initial announcements regarding changes to secondary education in March 2019, was moving to legislate that high school students complete four mandatory online courses before graduation. They also planned to centralize the delivery of these courses following American-style online systems, which are run by private enterprises. Attacked by education scholars, teachers and teacher unions, by November 2019 the Minister of Education announced they would only mandate two online courses.
For a brief outline of some of the problems with this legislation please see:
https://theconversation.com/in-doug-fords-e-learning-gamble-high-school-students-will-lose-122826
https://pressprogress.ca/doug-ford-wants-education-in-ontario-to-be-more-like-education-in-alabama-heres-why-thats-a-bad-idea/

state. We adjust. We "make do." And, amid this atmosphere we continue to function as if all is "well" and "good." Some of us attempt to resist *while* performing "optimism" even though we are worn down and have lost hope in the possibilities of education as a transformative space. While others don't see the operating logic as something to question or that can be challenged but rather simply accept it as the "way-it-is." This sense of the "way-it-is," has become so insidious that it appears as a "natural" state of being (an ontology) that unquestionably entrenches a certain way of seeing as the only way of seeing: an optics. This way of seeing (as if there is no alternative) *is* the technology of the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism." My claim here is that in linking the naturalization of capital and neoliberalism and the depressive sensibility established through its overwhelming sense of inevitability, Fisher (2009) helps us understand neoliberal capitalism not simply as a politics of economics but rather as *a way being in the world*, *a way of seeing* – an optics. The force of inevitability that there is no alternative is a mechanism that manufactures *a way of being.* The sensibility of such a logic produces not only a way of knowing but also, a way of seeing and feeling. This way of seeing, in which everything is reduced to the logic of capital provokes a sense of *exhaustion*, as Fisher (2009) identifies (p.7). Ultimately, a sense of resignation gives way to abandoning oneself and everything in the world to the "way-it is" (Han 2017a), producing what Han (2015) calls the "burn-out-soul" and Berlant (2011) refers to as the "wearing out of the subject."

Capitalist neoliberal rationalization and regulation as an optics (a way of knowing and acting) undermines the conditions of possibilities in education, dismantling and eroding hope, and demoralizing those educators (and others) who desire a more just and less wretched world. Predicated on a hyper-individualism success is determined by the ceaseless accumulation of material objects. And, whether you are "successful" or not in attaining such "capital" is

perceived solely as an individual responsibility enacted through the individual making the right choices or suffering the consequences. Such hyper-individualization erodes social responsibilities and asserts only individual blame. And yet, still, some educators continue to attempt to enact pedagogies of resistance, freedom and transformation while understanding that neoliberal restraints and the politics of the marketization of education are themselves barriers to such actions.

Consider the following text of a radio ad from the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario that aired in 2019 as a response to the Ford government's cuts that threaten public education.

> Despite larger classes, lack of resources, buildings in serious need of repair and dwindling supports, teachers and other educators still manage to make Ontario's public education system one of the best in the world. Every day we work hard to provide students with the public education they deserve. But we can't do it without your help. Join the fight for investment in public education at BuildingBetterSchools.ca. Children are worth it. (Radio ad Spring, 2019 EFTO/FEEO)

I suggest the vision projected in this advertisement reflects a sense of hyper-individualization that insidiously promotes a resignation to the "way-it-is." More specifically, through this apparently benign radio ad the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" is at work, in which fundamental questions and imaginaries challenging the structural impasses of capitalism are foreclosed, all the while perpetuating the optimistic "teacher as saviour" trope (which I discuss in depth in chapter three). Although the ad calls for us to work together and fight against cuts to education as a community, or as a society, it also reinforces the idea that, no matter what, *individual* teachers and education workers *will* absorb the extra work, *will* manage the compromised working conditions, and *will* do "good." What seems maddening here and which leads to burnout, resignation, and maladies of the soul (Berardi, 2009a; Di Paolantonio, 2019b; Han 2015, 2017a) is that in spite of ongoing cuts to teaching staff, buildings literally collapsing

around them and fewer social workers, psychologist,[8] educational assistances, custodial workers, and office administrators – that even under these severe constraints – teachers will maintain excellent standards of education. What this part of the story doesn't tell us is *at what cost?* The notion that we can continue to "maintain" something with less and less is located in late capitalist notions of production and relies on the enactment of hyper-individualization and the exploitation of people's inclination to self-exploit as neoliberal subjects. Yet, we need to detail what are the consequences of maintaining this vision in education rather than considering alternatives? When do we refuse to "make do?" How do we refuse?

Public education in its present state is a place where (paralleling the capitalist colonization of all public places and institutions) there seems to be no space left to think or envision structural alternatives. Although beyond the scope of this project, an issue that needs further consideration by education scholars *and* teachers is the knee jerk way Ministries and Boards of education have activated "remote" learning as an operational façade of productivity. This issue has become especially concerning as we navigate physical restrictions implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Attempts to "recreate" education "remotely" are an effort to reproduce education in its narrowest sense and to "manage" the appearance of productivity.[9] Despite these attempts to "maintain" and "manage" student learning, what the present turn to

[8] For example, at the Toronto Board of Education because of staff cuts psychologists, social workers and child and Youth workers are responsible for students in many different schools. Many have schedules that demand them being in one school in the morning, another in the afternoon and different ones the next day. Any hope of providing students with consistent long-term intervention and solutions to the issues they are facing is greatly reduced under these compromised conditions. And of course there are days when a social worker cannot be at the scheduled school due to an emergency at one of the other schools. Or she might be called away during the scheduled meetings with students. Most recently at a school I worked in there were two social workers assigned to the school; however, one came two half days and the other three half days so that students who were in crisis might not have access to any social worker on a particular morning or afternoon or they would not be able to the specific worker they had been working with.

[9] See: Singer, N. (2020, November, 30). Teaching in the Pandemic: 'This is not sustainable.' *The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/30/us/teachers-remote-learning-burnout.html?smid=fb-share&fbclid=IwAR1ag-CxooKjh7o2FGvG4cbbdNDnsk9pNS9mLfAksAW-6-UGKIyT8UfkcoQ

remote learning has in many ways magnified are the injustices and inequities embedded in capitalist society, as well as the harms that education often causes when it is implemented through the dictates of expediency and efficiency.

"Capitalist realism" indicates a position of "stuckness:" the sense that there is no alternative, that this is the best we have and to think or imagine otherwise is futile or infantile. Neoliberal logic enforces this inevitability through concentrating on the logic of capital as the only "reasonable" way and disciplines this inevitability through hyper-individualization and isolation. This same sense of "stuckness" plagues public education today. How under such conditions do we maintain "optimism" in education? At what cost does the system continue to function despite these very serious cuts? What is being maintained? What is lost? What impact does it have on those struggling to "manage," to make "it work"?

Managing (Surviving) the "Business Ontology"

In our present state of "business ontology" educators are forced to "manage" and "survive" ongoing bureaucratic absurdities as an increasing number of managerial demands overwhelm their days. As such, teachers have less time, less energy, and less support to work toward systemic changes that might benefit students. Consider some of the following circumstances in which educators find themselves.

Teachers are routinely forced to sit through one staff meeting after another in which the principal repeatedly "draw" their attention to which forms must be filled out. Rather than principals and teachers discussing pertinent issues directly related to the school and students, bureaucratic forms must be filled out repeatedly, for instance, if there are repairs needed in a classroom, if you are to be absent, if you have a concern about a student, if there is a safety issue,

a broken window, or if you want to do or request almost anything. The repetition of the same information each month (all which could easily be put in an email) takes up precious staff meeting time during which more vital educational issues could be discussed. However, it seems as if it is much more important to have correct forms filled out.

At the secondary level (in TDSB) teachers must assign grades to students who have never attended even *one* day of classes simply because they appear on a class list. To refuse to do so, or to argue the absurdity of such a bizarre requirement results in educators losing time and losing energy.[10] Yet to comply feels wrong. Principals as managers are charged with *ensuring* positive outcomes and "promoting" student success in terms of credit accumulation and graduation rates. There is a rule at the Toronto District School Board in which teachers cannot enter a final report card grade between 46-49 so they must choose to pass or fail students whose marks end up within this range, needless to say they are (very strongly) encouraged to mark the grade up to a 50 by the administration.[11] Both of these examples fall into the realm of playing a numbers game. In the first example, beyond the absurdity of assigning a mark to a phantom student, there are a multitude of reasons why a registered student never appears in your class and remains on a class list. Because there is a legal requirement for youth to be registered in school there are procedures that should be followed to locate the student and have the student begin attending school. Although the reasons a student might not be attending schools varies most often the student is struggling with a range of issues and needs support to deal with those issues in order to return to school. However, with severe budget cuts to attendance counsellor positions this has

[10] This situation would occur every report card period, particularly in the last four years of my career, when I would inevitably insert the mark of "0" for a student who had never appeared in my class at all. I would be called to the office of the vice-principal in charge of reporting and "reminded" that I must assign a mark of "1" as the system will not accept a "0" even though the student had *never* attended. I would refuse to do so thus forcing the vice-principal to go into the reporting system and change the 0 to as 1.

[11] As well, some administrators (vice-principals or principals) change failing grades to a passing grade once the teachers have submitted the marks– a right they have by law.

become more and more difficult over the years. Yet, to assign a grade, even a "1," because the computer system will not accept a mark of "0" seems absurd when there easily could be a specific code to insert that would identify the situation more accurately. Such a programming fix seems like a reasonable (and more accountable) solution. However, this would interfere with a school's "active" student numbers that (in Ontario, as mentioned above) directly affect a school's funding allocation. The second example, regarding failing versus passing grades, is a larger discussion beyond the scope of my specific point here. In terms of my argument, what is important is that the pressure to adjust grades in order to pass more students inflates a schools' "success" statistics (juking the stats) rather than benefiting students in any way. Increased "success" rates (credit accumulation) are used to demonstrate a particular school's potential marketization.

There is a wearing down that comes from being forced every year to provide practice tests and emotional support to students in the weeks prior to the implementation of standardized tests especially in schools where students regularly score very low on such tests. As almost everyone in education acknowledges standardized testing is not a good measure of students' academic abilities. Yet, schools carry on with a façade of possible success and direct teachers to provide practice tests and the "emotional support" needed to manage the detrimental consequences[12] of such testing on students.

[12] In Toronto at the secondary level when the Grade 10 standardized "literacy" test was first introduced teachers fought against its implementation. Although we performed our contractual duties of supervision and explained the test and the expectations to students, we did not help organize the administration of the test. However, today the test has become an accepted and naturalized phenomenon despite continued acknowledgement of its inequities and its ineffectiveness as a measure of students' abilities. Teachers now participate, some grudgingly, in whole-school activities implemented as "preparation" and "support" to ensure "success" on the test. And, in many schools in Toronto it has become a part of a teacher's responsibility to help manage, to create "initiatives" and to oversee professional development and support the implementation of the test when they accept a "literacy" position of responsibility. Many participate in this procedure despite articulating its ineffectiveness in measuring student abilities and the undue added stress it creates for students.

Although classified as a "crime" series *The Wire* (Simon et al., 2002-2008) was a critical look at institutional bureaucracy and the impact of neoliberalism on a particular city (Baltimore) and its citizens. Each season focused on the dissolution of a particular institutions – policing, organized labour, city politics, education, and news media. Season four aptly entitled "No corner left behind"[13] (Simon et al., 2006), dealt with numerous issues impacting the dissolution of education under neoliberal regime. One scene in "Know your place," episode nine of season four (Zakrzewski, 2006), brought forth the sense of absurdity and despair that standardized testing and the preparation for these tests manifests. A new teacher (Prez – formerly a police officer) is trying to understand the flurry of attempts to "teach to the test" in weeks prior to the state-wide test date. In a staff meeting in which the principal is directing *all* teachers to do test prep, Prez turns to another teacher, Mrs. Samson, sitting beside him and asks, "I don't get it. All this so that we score higher on the state tests?" She nods in the affirmative and he asks: "If we're teaching the kids the test questions, what is it we're assessing in that?" Her answer is very clear, "Nothing. It assesses nothing. The test scores go up, they can say the schools are improving. The test scores stay down, they can't" Prez responds with a nod, "Juking the stats" (Moyers, 2009). Prez's frustration about the process of test prep and his understanding that it is just another numbers game recognizes the dismal reality faced by many teachers confronted with standardized testing preparation year after year.

Imagine the exhaustion for those teachers who continue to strive for systemic change when they are asked to lead yet *another* equity professional development session despite ongoing racist, homophobic, and sexist attitudes that surround them, and which are entrenched at all levels of the institution. There is a box that must be ticked off for the school board's senior

[13] This title is referring to the education Act in the United States: No child Left Behind, instituted in 2002. This was a federal act making schools accountable for all students' academic progress and was tied to funding.

officials – so principals call on the same people to redo yet another equity "101" presentation during which the presenters will face the same push back from the same staff members every time and nothing changes. Or imagine being asked (told) to attend another board meeting or workshop on "student success," equity or Critically Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy because no other teacher will go (yet you have gone many times), and each school *must* have a representative (another box to be ticked off).

Imagine how it might feel to be told by a principal that, "this is the job you signed up for" when you and your colleagues raise concerns about the number of students smoking cannabis during the school day and *inside* the school building,[14] and then in the next breath being given the phone number for employee mental health support – a move masked as an apparent act of kindness and concern. Such tactics of apparent *concern* for the teacher's mental health are often used as a strategy by many principals whenever teachers raise questions of student inappropriate behaviour, or academic problems. What is implied and sometimes said directly to teachers goes something like this: if you don't like it or can't handle the "way-it is," *you* need help, so call this number and go off on leave. You *individually* are the problem. It is *you* who needs fixing. It is *you* who is now marked by the administration as having the problem.

How might you, as a professional, respond when a principal enforces "communal breathing" or "laughing yoga" at staff meetings? At issue is what happens to the educators' sense of professional integrity in these so called "professional development sessions," which solicit teachers to breathe and laugh on demand, which "invites" them to partake and contort their bodies (and souls) in certain ways whether it's something they want to do, feel comfortable doing with their colleagues, or in any way directly addresses concerns about school issues. What

[14] This concern is complex and goes beyond the simple need and desire to control the illegality of high school students partaking in this substance. For instance, there are students in our schools as young as 14 years old who consume cannabis first thing in the morning and maintain that it is a "need" for them, not merely for pleasure.

are the ethical and professional implications when principals use money from their budget to pay someone to conduct a staff yoga mediation session and at the end of the session the presenter's book is made available for purchase?[15] The capitalization of "well-being" normalized in workplaces today pathologizes almost every thought or action of resistance. There are pernicious consequences to the seemingly benign managerial promotion of "well-being." Specifically, through the discourse of "well-being" responsibility for "sicknesses" is placed on the individual denying and obfuscating any possible linkage to demands of capital and the neoliberal over-productivity. In other words, the discourse of "well-being" promoted by management provides a convenient and even "concerned" means of bracketing out the sensibilities and maladies embedded in the institutions that drive us into depressive states. The presumption that educators don't know how to care for themselves and that somehow enforced communal "mindfulness" with colleagues will help them is not only insulting but for many it is anxiety *inducing*. It is important to understand that there is no choice here; attending staff meetings and professional development sessions are part of teachers' contractual duties and to refuse can result in disciplinary action.[16]

Management dictating "mindfulness" in such "mindless" ways has underlying controlling and disciplinary implications. Such enforced "well-being" propagates the hyper-individualization accompanying the logic of neoliberalism. This bureaucratic attempt to demonstrate "care" is a

[15] Each of these "well-being" activates (and probably many more) have occurred in Toronto secondary schools. What are the implications in the last example for educators whose cultural and spiritual traditions are appropriated by "some white guy" and (re)presented to them by this person (who then tries to sell them his book) in a workplace situation in which they are forced to submit?

[16] In 2006 I was disciplined and charged with insubordination when I walked out of and refused to continue to participate in what was the fourth (or fifth) session of several professional development workshops on "life coaching" (one which had included enforced laughing yoga). None of the 23 staff in the school at the time felt what we were doing in these workshops and the money that was being spent on the "experts" to deliver these sessions was in anyway going to help us work with the 18–21-year-olds we were teaching. Even those staff members who had in the beginning thought that the sessions might be beneficial were totally in disagreement by the second or third session. Enraged and disgusted we participated as demanded and spent many hours later criticizing, raging, and shaking our heads. My act of insubordination was not an act of resistance but rather an act of refusal – an act of revolt. An act I was able to take because of my privilege of seniority.

managerial avoidance technique. Rather than address concrete issues in staff meetings and professional development sessions principals perform "concern" for staff well-being reinforcing the idea that it is up to the individual to "deal" with whatever the "individual" sees as a problem within the school or education. This attempt to dictate and manage educators' "well-being" and time for collective engagement suggests that if as an *individual* you would just learn how to be "mindful" and "take care" of yourself you will be better prepared *individually* to cope with the problems plaguing public education today. This is a strategy, not unlike the constant proffering of the employee assistance programs'[17] phone number at staff meetings, which end up negating and deflecting the fact that there are serious issues in education and schools that need to be addressed. Moreover, such tactics enforcing mindfulness and individual resilience end up depriving staff of the very limited time they have to meet as a group in which most would much rather spend working together to raise concerns, discuss and perhaps even find possible solutions to a range of issues in schools. Many staff members leave these sessions enraged, depressed, and exhausted. Some see these types of sessions as an inevitable, for some they feed their cynicism, while others tolerate them and a few even claim to feel better.

The institutionalized façade of "caring" and management of one's "well-being" is alive and well in the time of COVID-19. For example, while at the same time requiring teachers to somehow "manage" remote learning in all its social complexities and inequities as they navigate a range of difficult circumstances made necessary during the pandemic, the Toronto District School Board, sent out a board-wide email declaring "gratitude week." They did this the day

[17] These programs are important for employees; however, the way they are being flaunted by management diminishes this importance and renders the program a castigating tool.

after declaring over 400 teachers surplus to their schools.[18] The pretext of "care" rings hollow here, given the circumstances and the timing. As noted by a former colleague and good friend, "it's disingenuous. It's checking off a box. It's devoid of meaning." It is worth repeating that such bureaucratic lip-service regarding employees' "well-being" is a hollow act undertaken by management in order to appear "caring" while ignoring concrete problems within education and schools that have led to employees' feelings of despair. As exhausting and soul crushing as having to succumb to enforced mindfulness sessions, worse is the lingering feeling that accompanies one as they leave such sessions and return to the classroom to perform "optimism" in education for students

Stuck Between Despair and Optimism

Education scholars Alex Moore and Matthew Clarke (2016) explain the paradox and emotional disruption involved in teachers' conflicting positions of despair and performing "optimism:"

> … teachers who may find themselves resistant, whether actively or affectively [to conditions of neoliberal policy and logic] must also continue to persuade their students of the continued existence of the possibility of the good life – both for the individual student and for all students. This practice of sustaining a set of beliefs in students may necessitate another kind of personal disavowal that involves the recognition and management of one's own duplicity and complicity in the act: that is to say, 'I know there is little chance for many of you of achieving as much of what you would like from life as anyone else in this class, this school, this society; but I am going to tell you that there is, and we are going to work together to bring about these impossible futures.' (p. 670)

It is within this paradox of complicity that the cruelty of the double bind of "optimism" in education is located. I propose there is a parallel to be drawn between Berlant's (2011) tracking

[18] In the staffing process this means that on April 27, 2020 these teachers did not have a job for the coming school year. There will be staffing shifts and a number of these teachers may end up in a job (most likely in a different school). However, most teachers would not know whether they had jobs until late June 2020 and those who were not placed by that date could be waiting to hear if they have a job well into October 2020.

of the "cruel optimism" of attachments to the "good life" and of the "cruel optimism" of attachments to the promises of education.

Central to Berlant's book *Cruel Optimism* (2011) is a concern regarding ongoing attachments to what she refers to as the fraying fantasies of "that moral-intimate-economic thing called the 'good life'" (p. 2). For Berlant, (2011) the idea of the "good life" is signified through attachments to beliefs in the possibilities of such pursuits as "upward mobility, job security, political and social equality and lively, durable intimacy" (p. 3). According to Moore and Clarke, (2016) many educators become teachers because they "have a vision of the good life that is not only for themselves but for society more broadly" and thus they suggest "teachers are not only sustained by the same (imaginary) fantasy of the future 'good life' as others; they are, certainly in a felt sense, very much involved in the project of bringing it about" (p. 669). However, educators who enter the classroom with theories and philosophies that suggest education can be "good" and transformative and who possess a desire for a more just world are quickly frustrated, conflicted and disillusioned. There is a cruelty faced by classroom teachers who want to refuse or resist neoliberalism rationality in hope of maintaining fantasies of the "good life" (education). Moore and Clarke (2016) illustrate the untenable position faced by many teachers:

> To begin with, they may need to convince themselves of the possibility of helping to bring about the better world they envision, in spite of the fact that its translation/mutation into the terms and conditions of neoliberal policy – and even its possibility in the latter-day capitalist systems which such policy reflects and supports – may be working against the realisation of that vision. In a relation not unlike Freud's conceptualisation of 'disavowal', involving simultaneous belief and denial, they must keep on working at the realisation and its possibility as though it might happen, even though it may be apparent at some level of awareness that it probably will not – at least, not in their professional lifetime, and perhaps not even in the lifetimes of their students. (p. 669-670)

Wrapped in notions of achievement and success and layered in false promises, Berlant (2011) sees attachments to the "good life" as compromised and no longer attainable in our present state

of neoliberalism. Such attachments, she posits, induce a cruelty as we wade through the precarity of neoliberal rationality and capitalist logic responsible for the undoing of social infrastructures and that are increasingly inflicting more and more insecurity globally (Berlant, 2011 pp. 192-193). Subsequently, the fantasies of the "good life" are threatened. Similarly, attachments to education are threatened. The invested attachment to the promise of education as transformational and the desire to sustain this attachment (and thus our reluctance to dismantle its myths) is cruel because the attachment renders us complicit in "managing" a system saturated by neoliberal logic, fiscal cuts and a sense of inevitability that suggests there is no alternative. Yet, as Berlant (2011) tracks throughout *Cruel Optimism*, desires, and pursuits of the "good life" continue to thrive despite the cruelty located in these optimistic attachments.

It is under and within these conditions that attachments to the desire for the "good life" become cruel as they become less and less attainable. Herein lies cruel optimism's double bind. As Berlant (2011) tell us "…optimism is cruel when it takes shape as an affectively stunning double bind: a binding to fantasies that block the satisfactions they offer, and a binding to the promise of optimism as such that the fantasies have come to represent" (p. 51). The "double bind" faced by *critical* educators take shape through maintaining attachments to fantasies of hope and belief in possibilities for change, while we admittedly work tirelessly in the ether of the "way-it-is" (a realism that forecloses possibilities for change) often succumbing to its power. Consequently, I am arguing that the "optimism" generated from these promises, the hope we assign to education, are cruel. Berlant (2011) tells us, "because optimism is ambitious, at any moment it might feel like anything, including nothing: dread, anxiety, hunger, curiosity, the whole gamut from the sly neutrality of browsing the aisles to excitement at the prospect of "the change that's gonna come" (p. 2). The strain and violence involved in working within this double

bind comes from holding on to the promise of what "might happen" or "the change that's gonna come" while at the same time dealing with the pervasive doubt (realism) that it will ever happen. This "double bind" engenders a cruelty as *critical* educators negotiate their desires for change and their complicity in replicating this fantasy while understanding its limits, perhaps even its impossibility.

Within this "double bind," I propose that Biesta's (2009, 2010) notion of the "learnification of education" has space to flourish and thus entrenches itself as the norm, creating in education a support system, an enabler, for capital. The "learnification of education" is a narrow view, a limited way of seeing education as an extension of the labour market focusing on personal success, individualism, instrumentalization and measurable standardized practices. The prioritization of the accumulation of "skills" establishes a logic that education must lead directly to the "workforce" and that learning is of no consequence if it does not develop "transferable" skills. This move to the "learnification of education" aligns with Han's (2017) understanding of the mechanisms of neoliberalism's ideology of self-optimization (p. 30), which ultimately amounts to a force of subjectification in which we are constantly attempting to improve and achieve more of ourselves (p. 32). Fisher (2009), I suggest, would understand Biesta's notion of the "learnification of education" as a productive force manufactured within the "pervasive atmosphere of capital realism."

My point is that in education this compulsion of capital, which appears in the "learnification of education" and which upholds neoliberal rationality leads to a very limited understanding of education. In relation to the logic of capital education becomes relevant only in terms of what one can achieve materially. And it is this overreaching optics of neoliberalism that impedes possibilities and desires for education as a place of social transformation.

As Di Paolantonio (2016) explains:

> Our present educational optimism … is precisely cruel because it is not hopeful; it is cruel because it self-encloses education in the fears and delimitations of a present that has no sense of its implication with the larger significance of affirming our 'passing on', or even the simple fact of our passing time together. That is, under our 'present optimism' in 'learnification', education gets locked into and becomes exclusively defined by the present short-term impulse to acquire qualifications, knowledge and skills that would allow the individual 'to make it' in the fierce atmosphere of today's job market. (p. 151)

Education as a corporate exchange presents no hope for structural change, rendering the compromised conditions of education into obstacles for our doing and thinking the "educational." Under neoliberal rationality and enacted through the "learnification of education" (Biesta 2009, 2010, 2013), it is the "educational" that is compromised. Di Paolantonio (2016) explains it like this:

> Caught in the endless pursuit of self-improvement of managing oneself for success through an education, we admittedly end up losing not only something of ourselves, but also something worldly and fundamental about education itself. The cruel irony here is that this optimism in education ends up usurping what is educational in education. (148-149)

Enmeshed in the place of the "way-it-is" education begins to feel like just another mechanism for capitalism to reproduce and normalize its colonization of the public. Seeing no alternative to the "way-it-is" and to the pervasive encroachment of the "business ontology" in their profession, educators become complicit despite their desires to counter, resist and refuse the constraints imposed on their thoughts and actions.

The "way-it-is" not only instils a depressive state in education it also encourages a mood and disposition of utter resignation. The sense that there is no alternative is (re)enforced each time we question or critique the system and are dismissed, patronized, or punished by an institution that devalues our professional standing and judgement and which always reminds us that we are in the eyes of the market always replaceable (surplus). And yet, although we are

hyper aware of our complicity in a system many of us repeatedly disavow, we continue performing "optimism" or risk our ability to "survive."

It is here, in the mist of neoliberal logic, the "learnification of education" and the "achievement society" that the distinction between education and the "educational," as noted in my introduction, sits. Education (the institution), is a site constrained by the manifestations of politics and bureaucracy of the day as well as layered with residue of history which, I suggest, create conditions that impede the "educational." The "educational," as I'm mobilizing the term, can be understood as a force or event, which opens possibilities for the ethical to arrive. In other words, the "educational" opens spaces to risk thinking beyond what we know, what we think we know and for thinking together about our responsibility to and for others. The "educational" is thus a force of relational encounters. As Di Paolantonio (2016) puts it, the "educational" always "implies the 'beautiful risk' of human interaction, the relational encounter where human beings come together to influence each other with words and interpretations that work to forge and sustain a common world" (p. 149).

My question then is what happens to the "educational" when we are saturated by the neoliberal demand for personal success and individual optimization? What happens when the market model of education overpowers and consumes the "educational," reducing education and learning to skill acquisition? My short answer, which lays the groundwork for many of my concerns in this project, is that a depressive state of exhaustion emerges. This depressive state of exhaustion, located in the state of "burnt-out soul," forges a disposition (an attitude or temperament of resignation) that not only demoralizes and sucks the hope out of educators, but ends up invading our beings, shattering us and stunting our ability to think change amidst the atmosphere of "capitalist realism."

The Exhausted Soul of *"Maybe this Time"*

This section explores the depressive exhaustion that emerges through education's saturation in neoliberal logic. At issue is how neoliberalism – understood as a logic and optic – leads to a sense of exhaustion and despair in education. As Berlant (2011) tells us, part of the effects of "cruel optimism" is that people are "worn out by the promises that they have attached to in this world" (28). This wearing down is rendered through an "optimism" that maybe *this* time the promise will be fulfilled. My claim here is that through continued attachment to the promises of education (as hopeful place for self-flourishing and social transformation) what occurs is the wearing down of "the soul."

Following Di Paolantonio (2019b), Han (2015, 2017a) and Berardi (2009a) I consider the "soul" not in a spiritual sense but rather the soul as an expression of the energy of the whole body and all that that encompasses. The soul in this sense, as Berardi (2009a) describes, is "the vital breath that converts biological matter into an animated body" (p. 21). Di Paolantonio (2019b) expresses Berardi's notion of the soul like this:

> [it] is a conception of our soul that refers to our interiority, our desires and passions, and the ensemble of affective and libidinal forces, all of which allow us to find delight in the company of others and extend care to our being together in the world. (p. 604)

It is this understanding of the soul that is important to my discussion of the exhaustive depressive wearing out of the soul as it materializes in education and educators. For Berardi (2009a), the soul is usurped and ultimately enslaved by capital logic and thus depleted, hence his notion of the "soul at work" (p. 24). He explains:

> Our desiring energy [the soul] is trapped in the trick of self-enterprise, our libidinal investments are regulated according to economic rules, our attention is captured in the precariousness of virtual networked: every fragment of mental activity must be transformed into capital. (Berardi, 2009a, p. 24)

Berardi's conceptualization of the "soul at work" is captured in Han's (2105) notion of the "burnout syndrome" which he attributes to "the *systemi*c violence inhabiting the "achievement society," (p.10) a society, which is induced through the hyper-individualization of neoliberal logic. Han (2015) tell us, "burnout syndrome does not express the exhausted self so much as the exhausted, burnt-out soul" (p. 10). This "burnt-out-soul" induced through neoliberalism births Han's (2017a) "achievement subject" through acts of "auto-exploitation" or what Berlant refers to as the "entrepreneurial subject" attained through self-exploitation (Skopje Pride Weekend, 2020, 34:00). As Brown (2015) realizes neoliberalization's mode of reason is "boring in capillary fashion into the trunks and branches of workplaces, schools, public agencies, social and political discourse, and above all, the subject" (pp. 35-36).

This depressive exhaustion, produced through the infectious logic of capital, is not simply a state of overtiredness but rather an embodiment of Han's (2015) "burnout syndrome" and the "subjection of the soul to work process," (Berardi, 2009a, p. 24) and the "wearing out of the subject" (Berlant 2011). Fisher's (2009) atmosphere of "capital realism" establishes a new era in which "what we are dealing with…is a deeper, … more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility" (p. 7). Likewise, Han (2017a) explains the new era of neoliberal psycho-politics this way: "the neoliberal regime is in the course of inaugurating the age of exhaustion" (30).

As I mentioned in my introduction, the film *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) captures the sense of exhaustion that resides in Fisher's (2009) "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" (p. 7) and rehearses Berlant's (2011) sense of "cruel optimism" as it appears in public education. Consider one of the final scenes in the film *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011, 1:21:45) which begins with the principal's voice coming into a classroom over the PA system, we hear: "Attention all

teachers." The camera cuts to an extreme close-up of the principal's face and we see her *lying* on her office floor, the microphone resting on its side while she continues making the announcement; a quick cut to another extreme close-up – her hand fingering her wedding ring for just a second – the viewer aware that her marriage, like work, is in disarray. The camera then shifts to a high angle shot revealing her curled into the fetal position as she proceeds to inform the staff of a lunchtime meeting. The viewer assumes that at this meeting she will announce that she's been fired. Her dismissal has resulted because students' low tests scores are impacting the neighbourhood real estate market. That this capital concern for housing prices is a driving force that controls education and students' schooling may seem absurd to some, unfortunately, it is an all too "real" factor that directly affects education, teaching, learning and the operating of schools today. For example, the Toronto real estate market has long used provincial test scores as an incentive to boost property sales to the point in which the online real estate website Zoocasa has, "in response to concerns over test scores and rankings, … recently launched a new feature on its website allowing prospective buyers to see which district a property falls in, as well as the EQAO test scores and Fraser Institute ranking of nearby schools" (Boisvert, 2017).

The scene described above could be read as illustrating the very real stresses resulting from educators' personal lives as they collide with their work lives. The scene also bears witness to a moment that exposes ways that a principal's "managerial" role has evolved into an agent for a market driven notion of education and nothing more. However, what is critical to my concern about the depressive state that lingers in education is how this scene captures the violence of the wearing down of educators' soul as they attempt to survive a system compromised by the logic of capital. As Berardi (2009a) tells us, "[w]hen economic competition is the dominant psychological imperative of the social consortium, we can be positive that the conditions for

mass depression will be produced. This is in fact happening under our eyes" (p. 100). This type of wearing down of the subject leads to an exhausted visceral sense of despair from which there seems to be no escape. The principal in *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) is not simply tired, angry or exasperated; she is curled up in a ball on the floor in despair while *continuing* to fulfill her "duties" and "maintaining" a sense of normalcy. She is alone, isolated, and broken but she *is* productive – her soul *is* at work as Berardi would say (2009a), however crushed it might be. The wearing down of the soul (at work) occurs at the same time as one forces oneself to remain "productive."

The school's "success" and "reputation" becomes an individual principal's burden, which reinforces the neoliberal logic of hyper-individualization. This shift to a "business ontology" has altered the "job" of being a principal into one of being a "boss" and thus, either changes the person who takes the "job" or attracts a type of person amendable to this managerial shift. Alternatively, this shift births the "burnt-out-soul" in those who try to maintain a sense of community, collegiality and hope as reflected in the scene from *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) described above. This scene reminds us of the numerous ways in which principals, as agents of the managerial class, must navigate the prevailing "business ontology" now ever present in schools.

The principal in *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) is held *individually* responsible for students' low-test scores, which have had a negative impact on the progress of capital values, therefore, she is *individually* to blame and thus *individually* "punished." Factors of capital that impact low test scores such as the underfunding of schools, lack of special needs support, reduced numbers of educational assistants and social workers are not and cannot under the pervasiveness of the "business ontology" be taken into consideration. It was *her* responsibility to "manage" and thus

her failure. She has – as the image of her curled up exhausted on the floor in the fetal position captures – not "managed" to "survive," rather, she has become Han's (2018) "achievement subject:" one who has totally collapsed. "The achievement-subject exploits itself until it is completely burned out" (Han, 2018, p. 89).

The "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" and the wearing down of the soul, function to instil a sense of isolation, self-blame and even self-destruction. It is difficult to ward off sensations of failure and self-reproach under these conditions. I thus return to the film *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) to consider another moment in which the exhaustive sate of self-despair overwhelms a faculty member. Toward the end of *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) guidance counsellor Dr. Parker, makes a confession to a colleague about her violent inappropriate lashing out toward a student. Prior to and interspersed throughout Parker's confession, filmed in a quasi-documentary style, Henry Barthes (our "teacher as saviour" played by Adrian Brody) speaks directly to the camera: "Haven't you ever had enough? Haven't you ever just wanted to tell someone to fuck off?" Cut to Dr. Parker sitting on a bench with another teacher: "I think I'm sick. I crossed the line today" (58:20). Cut back to Henry as he continues: "I mean the whole… The whole thing is fucked. The whole thing is fucked. Is it not?"

Cross cut to a flashback of Parker's inappropriate outburst. The scene begins with the student, Missy, entering Parker's office: "What up Dr. Parker? Can we get this over with? I've got shit to do" (58:33). The scene ends with Dr. Parker distraught hurling an abusive rant at Missy's seemingly blasé attitude about her future. Cut to Parker on the bench stating: "I'm a total burn out" (1:00:10). Although Parker's outburst is multilayered and complex it is filled with realities resulting from our living under neoliberal rationality and sensibility. Her outburst reflects an overwhelming sense of despair revealed in Henry's depressive notion that "the whole

thing is fucked" and the feeling that our only possible response is to tell someone to "fuck off." The student, Missy, justifiably gets to tell Dr. Parker to "fuck off" at the end of the scene because the outburst, on the surface, is a personal attack hurled at her. Yet, Parker is basically crumbling into herself under the same burden: the feeling that "the whole thing is fucked." Schooling and teaching are "fucked" for students and teachers.

Missy's apparent nonchalant belief that her future holds possibilities for a modeling or music career without her putting forth any effort or thought into how this might occur, sparks Parker's outburst, which is possibly the result of her exhaustion and frustration from hearing youth constantly giving into prefabricated corporatized fantasies of a life of fame they consume daily. This attitude exacerbates Parker's heightened awareness of the limited choices our current state of capital presents for young people. In a state of intense hostility towards the capitalist agenda she spews out the dire employment statistics. Driven by her inability to change, help or support students Parker then unleashes, in an ugly and vile way, her greatest fear for what is a stake for young women given this reality. Namely, she spells out that they will fall prey to sexual abuse and exploitation. Her attack seems to lay the blame on Missy and her attitude towards her future, although Parker at some vague level understands that the pervasive neoliberal logic of our time has determined the present social and political despair facing youth and their futures. However, because there is a sense of no alternative that accompanies this "realism" Parker succumbs to the individualization of the problem resorting to blame. First, blaming, Missy for her nonchalant attitude toward the future and then turning the blame inward, onto herself, where it is left to fester. Dr. Parker's move toward individualizing blame is an internalization of the sense that there is no alternative. There seems to be nothing, no political or social intervention

that might alleviate the feeling of despair living a present that seems to have nullified possible futures thus she must be to blame for failing Missy.

What is of particular interest here is Parker's confession that she sees *herself* as ill. Parker takes her outburst to be a state of "burnout" that is a *sickness* in *her*. She sees her "breakdown" as a personal inner failure resulting from her *individual* inability to help or provide guidance and reassurance to students. Parker views this as her individual failure. She does not connect the wearing down of her soul, her "burnt-out-soul" as part of feeling trapped in and complicit in the workings of a compromised system ruled by neoliberal logic in which success is measured through your constant productability. Rather, Parker feels totally and solely responsible for her failure to guide Missy towards pursuing college. As Han (2017a) realizes "people who fail in the neoliberal achievement society see themselves as responsible for their lot and feel shame instead of questioning society or the system" (p. 6). Parker blames only herself. Despite her hard work and self-exploitation, she has failed in her role as a producer of other "achievement subjects." For Parker, a feeling of isolation and self-loathing emerge from this hyper-individualized "auto-exploitation."

Parker is the neoliberal "achievement subject" absolutely and individually responsible for her own failure and her failure to help create an "achievement subject" out of her student Missy. Her outburst is sparked by Missy's apparent disregard for and revolt against the "achievement society." And although Parker's initial aggression is directed toward Missy what surfaces is her sense of depression of having failed to do her "job" rather than an understanding that what is needed is resistance and revolution. Han (2017a) explains, "[u]nder neoliberal regime of auto-exploitation, people turn their aggression *against themselves*. This auto-aggressivity means the exploited are not inclined to revolution so much as depression" (p. 6-7). Here we discern through

what is the "ordinary" daily sense of crisis for teachers under the demands of neoliberal rule. Educators' "optimism" slowly dissolves resulting in not only the "auto-aggressivity" but also in violence directed at those we are trying to "help" and "care" for. The crisis of education morphs into a hyper-individualized game of survival.

The wearing down of *critical* educators, I suggest, manifests this depressive exhaustion as they attempt to resist either individually or in small groups of like-minded colleagues, while plagued with the sense of being accomplices in a compromised system. Jarred back and forth by rage, hope, disdain, desire, excitement, and disgust *critical* minded educators are in trapped in a type of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" state, existing on a seesaw of burnout and hope. This constant back and forth, leads to performing "optimism" all the while being subjected to ever increasing degenerating demands from capital and neoliberal rationalities that impede the ability to sustain progressive work in schools. With this in mind, we must ask ourselves what happens to notions of justice and equity when we accept the constraints enforced on the system and promise to maintain "optimism" as educators? What happens, that is, to educational workers and to their progressive commitments to the public as they take on more and more with less and less?

Riding a rollercoaster of desire and despair we are compromised and complicit each time we "manage" another cut, another act that constricts the "educational," each time we push through more bureaucratic demands, fill out another form, swallowing our discomfort and hanging on to our fantasy of and desire for education's potential. As education scholar Sharon Todd (2009) realizes "education tenders the hope that we can be rescued from the bed of destruction" (p. 1). Yet, she also realizes that "we lie in the bed we made for ourselves" (p. 1). We attach ourselves to the "force that education appears to have" (Todd, 2009, p. 1). This attachment to the possibilities that education *appears* to have (possibilities of critical disruption

and transformation), much like the desire for the "good life," is a space complicated by and shrouded in a "cruel optimism" that is itself mired in the already comprised injustices and violence that permeate education.

Fisher (2009) appreciates that to find a possible way out, "to reclaim a real political agency means first of all accepting our insertion at the levels of desire in the remorseless meat-grinder of Capital" (p.15). He continues, "what needs to be kept in mind is both that capitalism is a hyper-abstract impersonal structure and that it would be nothing without our co-operation" (p. 15). This point is critical as, despite the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" that envelops us, we are complicit in its technologies and its diffusion. Unfortunately, the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism" allows for and invites a surrendering of our relationality and thus our responsibility to and for others. Fisher (2009) notes, "what is being disavowed in the abjection of evil and ignorance onto fantasmatic Others is our own complicity in planetary networks of oppression" (p. 15).

Our surrendering resides in the overwhelming sense of inevitability, a persistent crushing feeling that there is nothing we can do to alter the way of the world, what we see, how we see or what we know. Rather than simply lay blame on outside forces we must place ourselves within these forces. We must unravel the conditions that invite our complicity. As noted above, educators are unavoidably complicit as we participate in practices and behaviours that support the demands of educational systems that are consumed by neoliberal logic, that are inherently inequitable and often perpetuate violence despite our efforts to counter these destructive attributes. Therefore, in chapter two, I proceed to register and track the "crisis ordinariness" of violence that appears in and through education. I gesture to ways in which neoliberal logic

exacerbates pre-existing violence in public education and students' lives, thus adding to the sense of despair and exhaustion that I have described above.

Chapter Two:

Tracking the "Ordinariness" of Violence that Appears In and Through Education

The "Crisis Ordinariness" of Violence

> *We are from the start by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own.*
> Judith Butler *(2004)*

Chapter one positioned public education as a compromised depressive space entangled within the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism." I explored the wearing down of the soul and the cruelty that emerges when we invest "optimism" in education. More specifically, I was concerned with pointing out the problems and limitations that arise as *critical* educators navigate their optimistic attachments to education and the consequent realism (fatalism) of the present state of education that entraps such educators. This cruelty, I suggested, is revealed particularly through the "double bind" in which educators find themselves: simultaneously complicit in (re)producing the promise of education while realizing its limits and perhaps even its impossibility. I also gestured toward the violence ensconced in the manifestations of the mechanisms that produce the "burnt-out soul" (institutional violence, violence put upon the self and violence enacted by and on others).

In this chapter I track ways in which violence appears in and through education to expose another element that contributes to the depressive atmosphere plaguing education. I realize that tracking the multitude renditions of violence that impact education is a daunting task, and I am by no means proposing to exhaust the breadth of such an exposition. Rather, what is pertinent to

my project is registering the atmospheric disturbance that vibrates through the ordinary ways in which violence appears and disappears in schools, thus exposing the ubiquitous normalization, and individualization of violence.

As noted in chapter one, the "pervasive atmosphere of capital realism" is not a simple external rationality but rather a "logic" (Han, 2017a) that invades our beings and settles in as the "way-it-is." The sense of inevitability and hyper-individualism instilled through neoliberalism becomes intermingled with the enduring legacies of colonial and systemic violence based on sex, gender, class, race, and (dis)ability embedded within educations' structures, curriculum and attitudes (Battiste, 2005; Dion, 2010; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2011; Kumashiro, 2002; Maynard 2017; Mckittrick in Hudson, 2014; Noroozi, 2017; Ng, 2013; Sharpe 2016). Drawing on Berlant's (2011) conceptualization of "crisis ordinariness," and invoking Sharpe's astute declaration of a "past not yet past," I gesture toward ways in which, contemporary manifestations of ongoing historic violence are blurred and intensified as they are absorbed into the "pervasive atmosphere of capital realism." The social (and political) is individualized within neoliberal logic, thus displacing attentiveness to structural and systemic mechanisms of violence. Ultimately, violence in all its permutations is attributed to individual interpersonal acts or framed as isolated occurrences. This individualization amplifies the ways in which violence is expected, accepted and tolerated not only in education but also within our worlds.

In order to mobilize my thinking about the normalized, everyday ways in which violence and suffering linger within the atmosphere of education I draw on Berlant's (2011) understanding of events which induce trauma *not* as exceptional but rather as existing within the concept of "crisis ordinariness" (p. 10). Berlant's (2011) intent is not to deny that events can be traumatic but rather to excavate them from the logic of the exceptional and locate them within

the act of "living on" within the everyday. "Living on," therefore, requires adaptation and adjustments within the "ordinariness of crisis." Berlant explains, "people are so powerfully attached to an image of the ordinary world as offering potentially a smooth life that they have to classify radical disturbance as an exception" (cited in Brad Evans, 2018, Paragraph 10). "Crisis ordinariness," consequently, is connected to the temporality of the ongoing adjustments to the everydayness of crisis (trauma, violence) in the ordinary. In this sense, a violent traumatic event does not have a finite end; it is not an exceptional extraordinary contained happening, rather, its subject navigates the rhythms of the everyday, shifting in and out of the traumatic event's intensity "living on" in the present shaped by crisis.

For Berlant, crisis is embedded in everyday life – in the ordinary. According to Berlant (2011) "crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness, but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming" (p. 10). The ordinary, for Berlant (2011) is:

> … a zone of convergence of many histories, where people manage the incoherence of lives that proceed in the face of threats to the good life they imagine. Catastrophic forces take shape in this zone and become events within history as it is lived. (p. 10)

Berlant's offering of "crisis ordinariness" provides me an analytic space in which to expose ways in which violence and suffering are embedded within the ordinary everyday rather than in a space of exception thus promoting the normativity of violence and contributing to the compromised conditions of education.

My claim here is that the daily subjection of the "crisis ordinariness" of violence as an element of the depressive atmosphere of education, ultimately ruptures the myth of education as a place of equity, social transformation, and emancipation. I am particularly interested in the ways in which youth negotiate their bodies (and souls) as they adjust and adapt to a range of

violence they experience outside and inside education. I am concerned about the ways, in which students' beings are subjectified, understood and enacted upon in a system that aims to control, define, and consume them.

To illustrate the disjointed yet continuous ways in which violence appears and disappears in schools I organize each section of this chapter around actual events of violence that have occurred in schools. I highlight encounters that I have witnessed or somehow been involved in their aftermath.[19] I invite the reader to bear witness to the "crisis ordinariness" of violence in schools not as an attempt to invoke the readers' horror, not to shock, nor to conjure sympathy in order to force you (the reader) to feel empathy and (re)imagine yourself in these scenarios. Rather, my intent is to expose the fleeting yet ubiquitous manner in which these scenes occur, and to register our (the adults') positionality as witness to these events and thus our complicity. I understand this act of bearing witness as a mode of encounter that opens a space for you, the reader, to sense the weight of the disjointedness engender through the scenes of violence I expose in this chapter. The scenes I describe are not meant to be cumulative; they do not point to a final summation; they are not representative of one particular phenomenon as each scene is rife with possible readings and the potential to elicit a range of responses. However, what is critical here is registering the "crisis ordinariness" they each inhabit as a means to gesture toward the ways in which different manifestations of violence as ordinary contributes to the compromised conditions of education.

I read these violent events as *scenes*. (Re)imagining these encounters as film clips, I expose and register the ways in which they are spliced into the reel of the everyday. Whether

[19] The scenes I recount, although disturbing to some, are "ordinary" occurrences in the daily routines of schools and do not particularly stand out compared to others I might have included. I could have filled pages with other similar scenes and most educators could easily replace the ones I describe with others, which also could be read within the framework of "crisis ordinariness."

they appear as jarring cuts or complex transitions the violent scenes, as in film, last only minutes. However, when replayed, these scenes do not have a finite end. Rather, these violent scenes remain haunting time slipping in and out of students' ordinary everyday lives. This slippage – into and out of the everyday – is most apparent in the ways in which students manage to "live on" experiencing joy, laughter and pleasure within the "crisis ordinariness" of violence.

In the first section of this chapter, I read three scenes to emphasize that students are subjected to violence in many different forms and that their experiences of violence that occur *outside* the school often re-appear in hallways and classrooms and thus enter the realm of education. I recall these three scenes to help register the varied kinds of violence students experience in their everyday and that educators witness daily. Each of the three scenes I retell in this section come to the surface not as exceptional events, but rather, as part of students' ordinary lives as they adjust and adapt so that they might "live on" in the everyday.

Individualization of Blame and the Erasure of Collective Responsibility, the second section in this chapter, first considers ways in which systemic sexism and racism (both which punish women *for* their bodies) is compounded by neoliberal rationalization of the individualization of blame. I suggest that neoliberal hyper-individualization of blame allows for the erasure of any social or political responsibility for ways in which violence is enacted, reacted to and often deactivated in schools. Second, I point to educators' desire to blame parents as a way to erase any political or collective responsibility for the inequities and violence that underpin education. As such, in keeping with the logic of neoliberalism, individualizing behaviour is a way to "manage" blame and dismiss any communal responsibility thus relieving education, the school, the administrators and educators of any responsibility for violence that appears in and through schools.

In the final section of this chapter, thinking through the interconnectedness of the historical violence and harm of anti-Black racism and its relation to contemporary harm, I draw on Sharpe's (2016) conceptualization of the "afterlives of slavery" and her theorization of "the hold" to expose the cruelty and violence induced through the ongoing need (demand) for more data that is solicited to (re)inform us about the realities of anti-Black racism in education and schools. I suggest the increasing demand to speak the language of "data" in education ends up (re)producing and (re)legitimizing, amongst many other pernicious effects, what is already known and entrenched as the "realism" (the inevitability of "what is") of education. I suggest that there is a violence, a cruelty, in this repetition of the same, in which our ability to engage with the historicity of racism is replaced by the drive for more and more data that simply confirms the inevitability of the atmosphere of the "way-it-is."

Violence, "Crisis Ordinariness" and the Everyday

Students are swimming in the residue of violence, both real and mediated: living it, reacting to it, acting on it, seeing it, ignoring it, producing it, participating in it and embodying it. Students live in the back and forth of crises of violence. They adjust, adapt and it often seems as if they accept the "ordinariness" of violence, whether it is violence they have experienced, witnessed or mediated violence they consume. For many students, the trauma of violence is a part of their ordinary everyday life; they intuitively understand Berlant's (2011) notion of "crisis ordinariness."

Berlant (2011) understands a misrepresentation in the naming a situation "a *crisis* that which is a fact of life and has been a defining fact of life for a given population that lives that crisis in ordinary time" (p. 101). As such, Berlant (2011) warns, to think of *crisis* of violence and

suffering as *extra*ordinary, can "distort something structural and ongoing within ordinariness into something that seems shocking and exceptional" (p. 7). To deny the structural conditions of the normativity of violence and suffering is to misrepresent its *ordinariness*. I am drawn to Berlant's (2011) move away from an understanding of trauma and traumatic events as "exceptional" to understanding violence and suffering as "ordinary" occurrences within the everyday because of the ways in which violent events float in and out of the mundane everyday routines of school. I suggest much of the (ordinary) violence students face (and enact) emerges from social and political structural conditions, which are located in the ongoing normalization of violence. The normalization of violence *is* the crisis of violence. The normalization of violence obfuscates its historicity, thus generating the "crisis ordinariness" of violence.

The three scenes that open this chapter are a type of montage; an assemblage of very different experiences of violence and suffering which students shared with me. Each scene in this montage evokes something different yet together present the intensity of violence experienced by students and witnessed by educators. There is much at stake within each of these scenes, yet I present them here to gesture toward the "ordinariness" of how these events are woven into students' everyday exposing the ways in which students "live on" in "crisis ordinariness" often through laughter and connections with their teachers and friends.

Scene 1:
Imagine if you will – the last day, the last hour of my teaching life spent making a report to Children's Aid supporting and worrying about a student I would most likely never see again as both summer break and retirement would begin in a just a few days. A disclosure of family violence appeared seemingly out of nowhere, delivered through a silly joke. The joke opened a space for the student to express his fear for his younger siblings and his desire to ask for help.

I had interacted with this student for a semester, joked with him and his friends in the hallway, listened to him when he was concerned about one of his friends, but until the very last day of school I did *not* know about his violent home life. On the last day of class he was working with

an educational assistant finishing his final art project and I stopped by the table to check in. We started talking and laughing about things that had happened in class over the semester when he made a joke about being worried about the upcoming summer holidays. He said he was not worried about himself (as he had adjusted and was prepared to fight back) but he was concerned about what would happen to his younger, smaller siblings particularly when he was not home to protect them. As we talked the student let me into the "ordinariness" of the violence and suffering that impacted his everyday life. He was matter of fact about the violence experienced in his home; violence was a part of his everyday – *not* exceptional. It is the ongoing ordinariness of the structural conditions of family violence that appears in this brief scene and makes its way into the school in an ordinary seemingly casual way.

Scene 2:
Imagine if you will – A moment that begins with a student asking for help with a question about an assignment, and then seemingly out of nowhere, she begins to reveal details about her brother's recent arrest. She ends her story explaining that she, her younger brother, and mother won't go home because they expect a police raid is imminent.

This young woman was not seeking advice or asking for help. She was not afraid. This was *not* an exceptional event in her life. She just wanted to talk. She assumed her brother would be going to jail for quite a while and she was sad – an emotion she rarely displayed – so I was on high alert. She continued matter-of-factly and wondered what it would be like without him around, how hard it would be to visit him in jail because of transportation and what an annoyance it was that she couldn't go home for a few days. And then, one of her friends came banging on the classroom door ready for a smoke break – both students took off laughing and that was that. Cut scene.

I read this scene as a momentary reprieve for the student, an aside, in which she took a minute to think about how to adjust her life around this recent (but not exceptional) ordinary

crisis she was facing. She was not concerned about the arrest (or her brother's involvement in serious crimes) but rather how *she* was going to adapt to the unfolding change in her everyday life. Her abrupt exit might be seen by some as form of escape from thinking about her brother, or from possible embarrassment of having revealed her feelings. However, over the three years that I have known this student she has never sat through a whole class. For, her this scene was a moment of adjustment to her ordinary every day.

Scene 3:
Imagine if you will – A concerning look on a grade nine student's face and I ask: "You, ok?" And, as we stroll down the noisy hallway, she reveals a recent sexual assault. But in that second when I'm about to respond, my mouth opened ready to offer help and support, one of her friends runs up, hugs her, starts laughing and recounts something funny that happened on the bus on the way to school that morning. The two girls take off laughing and the disclosure evaporates into the atmosphere.

I was not shocked. This young woman's disclosure of rape, although heartbreaking, was not an exceptional occurrence. Unfortunately, this was one of many such disclosures made to me by several young women I have taught over the years. It was crushing, but not *exceptional*. I followed up. I talked to the school's social worker. The social worker was already aware of the assault and was in ongoing conversations with the young woman. I found the girl later that day to check in with her and talk to her – she assured me she was "fine" and that *I* needn't worry.

The young woman's ability to be immediately transported into her friend's exuberant storytelling calls up Berlant's (2011) idea of "living trauma as whiplash" (p. 81). The young woman's whiplash demonstrated in the quickness that she moves from being in the event (telling me) and being drawn into her life that goes on (her friend's story). This back and forth is what Berlant refers to as "living on" in "crisis ordinary." In the snapping into cruelty and back out again there is a diffusion of trauma through the ordinary (Berlant, 2011, 82). Nicholas deVrilles

(2012) helps us understand Berlant's differentiation between "surviving" trauma and "living on" within the "ordinariness" of trauma. He writes:

> A small difference in word choice exemplified, for me, Berlant's shift away from the dominant model of trauma theory: rather than a subject who "survives" a traumatic event understood as a break with the historical present, she describes the "living on" of the subject in the ongoing present shaped by crisis (p. 196).

Trauma happens in the everyday; it is crisis lived in the ordinary.

The young woman's disclosure of rape, which seemed to evaporate into her immediate present, is the act of "living on" in "crisis ordinary." Her subsequent declaration of being "fine" (which she *really* seemed to be in *that* moment) can be attributed, I think, to ways in which, as Berlant tells us, that "analytically it turns out that even the worst events—holocausts, rapes, nuclear destructions—are embedded in life, and twist continuity rather than shattering it" (Manning & Berlant, 2018 p.114). The twisting, from telling me about the assault to running off with her friend, points to the continuity of young woman's ordinary everyday life, not a life shattered but a life changed. Girls and young women in schools (like most women) adjust to the violence of sexual harassment and being sexually assaulted as part of the "ordinariness" of the everyday. Such violence is a *crisis*, however an "ordinary" one.

Individualization of Blame and the Erasure of Collective Responsibility

It's Her* Body's *Fault:

Not surprising, and hence its "ordinariness," is the crisis (trauma) of sexual harassment and violence against women, which abounds inside (and outside) schools. Young women in schools live it daily (Taylor et al.; 2019; Falconer 2008; Hlavka, 2014; Klein, 2006; Larkin, 1994/1997; Orenstein, 1994). Many young women, like their adult counterparts, shrug much of the harassment and violence they experience off as the everyday "ordinariness" of being female.

Young women have been "living on" adjusting and adapting to its "ordinariness" their whole lives. It is important to note that the regulation of female bodies is complicated by racist and colonial logic in which certain female bodies are viewed as more inherently "sexualized" and more "disposable."

These attitudes toward female bodies, sexual harassment, and violence against women appear in the television series they stream, the movies they watch, the music they or their friends listen to; it is repeated over and over and so pervasive that it is often invisible, or easily ignored. In school young women are caught in the double bind of being taught to reject sexist stereotypes all the while living the "crisis ordinariness" of a misogynistic world that reveals itself to them daily.

Scene 4:
Imagine if you will – It's lunchtime I've opened my classroom to a few young women who want a place to "be." Sometimes we work on art projects, other times another art teacher and I talk with them and other times the young women sit chatting amongst themselves while my colleague and I talk. One day the girls are laughing really loud. We hear one girl saying, "yah he always talks to my breasts." Without them having identified the "him," my colleague and I immediately know "him" is the Vice-principal (he does it to female staff as well). My colleague and I look at each other, take deep breaths and ask if they're ok? We ask the girls if they want to talk about it and if they want to report it. They laugh some more. "No miss, we know he's a perv." I ask have you talked to your mom about this. The young woman laughs and says, "yah she knows he's a perv." The girls turn away and start talking about something else.

The young women were amused by our concern. They a performed an exaggerated roll-of-the-eyes that exuded the attitude: "boys will be boys" ("boys" includes the Vice-principal). For these particular students there was no shame in their bodies, they did not feel responsible for this man's harassment but rather they had adapted to the fact that men talking to your breasts is such a common occurrence, so "ordinary," that they simply adjusted. Ironically, and perhaps sadly, my own adjustment to the "crisis ordinary" of such violence is that I'm proud of their attitude. I'm thrilled that they have not expressed shame or felt that they have somehow provoked this act

of sexual harassment. However, I am also incensed that this man[20] falls into the category of "boys will be boys," and that his inappropriate behaviour is accepted – even expected and simply laughed off because *really* what can be done if it's a "natural" reaction?

Scholar Heather R. Hlavka (2014) found that "young women overwhelmingly depicted boys and men as natural sexual aggressors…they described men as unable to control their sexual desires" (p. 344). The normalization, expectation and acceptance of sexual harassment and violence embedded in heteronormative discourses, which have "allowed for men's limited accountability for aggressive, harassing, and criminal sexual conduct" (Hlavka, 2014 p. 339) is not an idea that exists only in young women's minds but is regularly legitimized and articulated by educators. One of the most obvious and constant examples that perpetuates the normalization of men's "natural" *in*ability to control sexual aggression towards women that surfaces in schools year after year is the discussion about how girls dress, or rather *shouldn't* dress.[21] Most often the issue is raised by a female teacher who either feels offended by certain girls' attire (or lack thereof) or by a female teacher who feels a sense of (understandable) protectiveness for the young women. Unsurprisingly some male teachers will inevitably chime in with "yah they distract the boys in my class" or something to the effect that implies girls should know better than to dress "provocatively."[22] The belief, as it (re)surfaces in this conversation across schools, that *clothing*[23] induces male violence thus holds the individual female responsible for any sexual

[20] During the 4 years I worked with this particular Vice-principal (also the head of the equity committee) many of us (staff members and students) often called him out regarding his sexist attitudes and comments, yet his behaviour persisted.
[21] Young women have protested dress code policies across Canada. For example see: https://globalnews.ca/news/3476638/lethbridge-high-school-students-plan-protest-after-strict-dress-code-is-posted/
[22] Even as they fight against such ideas young women understand the double bind of their everyday. See: https://www.buzzfeed.com/tanyachen/canadian-teen-dress-code-rebuttal
[23] These issues have been reinforced through dress codes within schools and school Boards. In 2019 Toronto District School Board updated its dress code to alleviate some of these issues; See: https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/new-dress-code-for-tdsb-students-comes-into-effect-this-fall-1.4450696. However, it is important to note that policies do not necessarily change attitudes though it provides those discriminated against a way to take action.

harassment or assault that occurs. The fact that many educators continue to naturalize and normalize male sexual aggression and harassment towards women as a biological truth and thus "uncontrollable" permits and thus condones violence against women despite decades of feminist and queer theory that reputes this belief. At the same time the thinking that male violence towards women is "natural" perpetuates a culture of sexual violence thus reducing women to their bodies as sexual objects to be devoured, touched, and possessed. As such, in these educators' minds, young female students must be denied their desires, their sexualities, and their bodies.[24] According to this way of thinking young girls in schools, are meant to "control" (or be controlled by the adults) their own desires and bodies otherwise there is always the danger of violence. Therefore, young girls and young women must deny and hide their bodies for their own "protection." And if *they* do not control their desires or the performance of their sexuality (whatever that may be), they then are held responsible for any violence or harassment that comes their way. Young women schools are routinely blamed and violated because of their desires, their sexuality, and their bodies.

Scene 5:
Imagine if you will – A group of young Black women removed from a "multi-cultural" assembly, by a White principal, told their dance (their projections of themselves) has nothing to do with "culture." At the same time the sensual South Asian dancers garbed in "traditional" clothing have the right to perform. In this performance "real culture" is reproduced through their attire.

The young Black women are reprimanded for being too "sexy." Their young female Black bodies are dismissed and disregarded as overly sexualized, and they are reprimanded for their performance of their bodies. The construction of Black females as "hypersexual" compared to the "fragility" of white female bodies (Connell 2005; Gilman 1985; Hill, 1990; hooks 1992) comes into play here. Whereas, in this scene, a particular "type" of clothing permits young South

[24] For further discussions on desire, sexuality and sexual bodies in relation to education see: Connell, 2005; Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland 2006; Gilbert 2014).

Asian women's bodies to exist, to be seen, to be sensual and sexualized. In this case, these young women's bodies are understood as extensions of an idea of "culture" that "makes sense." The sensual young South Asian female bodies are wrapped within a comprehensible image that is containable. Their clothing permits their bodies to exist, to be seen, to be sensual and sexualized. As such a colonial understanding and control of what makes "culture" cultural remains intact in their performance.

I often wonder what the response would be to the young South Asian women's bodies if they had not been adorned in "tradition." What if they had performed their dance dressed in the same clothing as their Black counterparts? Instead, they are understood as extensions of an "other" that "makes sense" within a Western colonial mind. Their culture is located in a comprehensible package that is consumable. The colonial notion of "tradition" and what makes "culture" (food and dress) remains intact in their performance and thus acceptable.

Scene 6:
Imagine if you will – At another school, different (but the same?) young Black female bodies are excluded from performing at a "multi-cultural" event – stopped by a Black teacher who tells the young Black women that, *who* they perform is not *who* they "really" are. She tells them that they don't know *their* culture.

Through these cutting accusations and the dismissal of their performance, of their *being,* the girls are reduced to one body in one moment – shamed and left wondering: Who am I? Where is my culture? Where is home?

The three events above reveal intersections and interconnections between discriminatory practices based on sex, gender, race, colonialism, and sexuality that are upheld and embedded within the infrastructure of education exemplifying educators' and educational institutions' need to maintain control over particular bodies as they appear in schools.

Scene 7:
Imagine if you will – 10:00 am and a crashing sound in the school hallway is the result of a grade eleven boy slamming his grade nine "girlfriend" into the lockers. A teacher intervenes, first with an outraged scream and then physically apprehends the boy. Later in the day it's revealed there has been no action taken by the administration despite the teacher immediately informing them of the incident; the principal doesn't want to interfere in teenage "relationships." It is fall 2017.

The principal's response relegating this act of violence to an individual-interpersonal "relationship" issue absolves him of any responsibility to understand, acknowledge or address ongoing violence against women and girls within the education system (and the world). Individualizing and personalizing this event and thus dismissing the physical domination of a male student over a female student as an isolated interpersonal act reinforces and accepts violence against women as an "ordinary" part of "romantic" relationships. The neoliberal logic of individualizing blame flattens violent events and attitudes into general individual acts and so blatantly denies the political, that is, an understanding of what historically has come to sediment and settle a certain structure of power into the "way it is." Consequently, in disavowing the political such violence is presented as naturally existing. Neoliberal logic of individualization is firmly entrenched in education policy, actions and schools thus granting permission to the managerial class to dismiss, minimalize and ignore any connections between each episode of violence with those embedded in and through systemic institutionalized technologies of oppression. What we see here, as violence is isolated and episodized from other instances of violence, is an erasure of the political and the historicity of the social.

When structural issues are raised in staff meetings by educators wanting to address the historicity of issues of race, gender, sexuality, or ability as contributing factors to violence in schools, they are often either dismissed or met with eye rolls and simply tolerated. *Critical* educators' attempts to contextualize the nuanced aspects of violence and inequities in schools (even when invoking polices that seem to support their analysis), are most often met with the

need to blame individual students or a set of individuals (especially those positioned outside the school) to alleviate educators and administrators' social, individual, and professional responsibility in the perpetuation of violence in education.

Who Else Can We Blame?

When blaming students or the outside world fails many educators and administrators simply blame the parents. Blaming parents for the problems within school hovers beneath the surface throughout the film *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011). This attitude becomes *overly* explicit in scenes depicting "parents' night" (1:17:40). The series of scenes which reveal this attitude begins with eight black and white images shifting every two seconds from one to the next in a slideshow-like format accompanied by a haunting dirge-like soundtrack. The images appear one after other offering up dark empty hallways and grey melancholy empty classrooms signalling a sense of abandonment. The third image that appears is an extreme close up of an empty student chair – the viewer understands the message of this rather simplistic symbolism. It is not simply the building that has been abandoned but the students as well. No one is there. Therefore, no one must care. The slow black and white shots of empty spaces continue ending with an exterior gloomy shot of the seemingly deserted school. Cut to a slow interior dolly shot (now in colour) inching down a hallway towards the backs of two women sitting at a table. Dr. Parker and a teacher are stationed by the front doors of the school, ready to welcome any parents who might arrive. The teacher gives a heavy sigh and says, "I just don't understand it. Where are all the parents? "Hmmmm? Parker looks to her right and responds, "I don't know." Cut to a shot of a teacher alone in her classrooms then to another teacher, alone in the hallway who begins a monologue that is interspersed with close ups of other teachers. He says, "I was in my room for

two hours and saw one parent – where are they? Where is everybody – it's uncanny no air raid sirens no bombs. It doesn't happen that way. It starts in a whisper – and then nothing" (1:18:28). Cut to a scene of two "older" teachers reminiscing of days gone by. One of them asks, "Hey do you remember those nights when we had two parents at a time and then there were more there were many more waiting in the wings and the halls were full of joy and celebration now it's nothing. Remembrance, of things past" (1:18:52).

This scene, embroiled as it is in a nostalgic ideal of the "good life" of the past, highlights the need to blame something outside; something (someone) beyond education's control. Thus, blame is often and easily directed towards parents rather than the social and political inequitable infrastructures that might be causing this sense of emptiness (exterior and interior). Blame is easy. In this case, the blame directed towards parents, relieves educators from considering or addressing the social and political inequitable infrastructures that underpin education as well as ignoring their own complicity in perpetuating these inequities.

Blaming others absolves educators of any sense of collective responsibility to attend to or to refuse the present crisis of education. Unfortunately, variations of blame-the-parents are rampant among many teachers in "real" schools. *If only the parents would discipline their children – if only the parents were home – if only the parents cared – if only the parents….* In both the film *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) and my own experiences the act of blaming parents resides in racist, sexist and classist attitudes. Rarely do educators working in schools where the majority of students are White middle-class or economically privileged make such comments about parents. Rather, in White-middle-class schools, educators and administrators are often *fearful* of parental retribution and thus do not blame the parents as they often do in schools in which the majority of students are not White or in "impoverished" schools. Instead, in White

middle-class or economically privileged schools educators and administrators readily find someone or something else to blame for students' in appropriate behaviours, such as their friends, the music they listen to or the student's flawed personality.

The final section of the scene depicting parents' night in *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) moves from the wistful nostalgic memories of the school full of parents to a shot of the supply teacher, Barthes, (our supposed saviour) walking down one of the dark abandoned hallways. The camera cuts to a pseudo interview with him. The interview is interspersed with more black and white images of the empty school. Full of weighty *meaningful* pauses Barthes reflects on parents' night, "I actually felt quite at home – there were no parents – heh heh – I thought how appropriate – it's like – a moment of insight – the… the reality of the fucking problem in the first place. Some of us believe that we can make a difference and then sometimes we wake up – and we realized we failed" (1:19:10).

Although, the first part of Barthes' comment indicates a need to blame the parents (and reflects what we have learnt about his own problematic family life) what do we make of his final statement: "we wake up and we realize we failed?" I read his final assertion as if he is invoking a collective blame that has been missing so far in the film and I would propose throughout education today. It's as if he realizes that perhaps it is not only parents who fail children, but teachers, education and life. And so, we are transported back to consider the "cruel optimism" of education: we fail students daily despite our desires and attachments to possibilities of education as something good and even transformative. And, this scene seems to be suggesting, we repeat these failures over and over again through the repetition of the same.

More Data Please: The "Double Bind" of Repeating the Same

> *We live in a world formed by the entanglements of empire, colonialism, and all the violences of slave trading, cultural decimation, and institutions formed entirely to destroy the human being from the inside out, outside in. That world is not a world from the past; historical experience is not really even historical. Historical experience saturates the present and gives content and orientation toward the future*.
> (Drabinski, 2013 p. 198)

In this section, I suggest the cruelty of the "double bind" (of holding on to fantasies of the "change that's gonna come" while doubting anything will change) resurfaces in the constant need for educators and education researchers to provide (more of the same) evidence to (re)assert the "realness" of ongoing inequities that (they already know) exist within education and schools. There is something disturbingly cruel and violent about the need to continuously (re)produce research data that (re)asserts the reality of White supremacy in our world, country (Canada) province (Ontario) city (Toronto). I argue that neoliberalism's fetish with the language of data forces community organizations and education researchers to (re)produce (more) "proof" of racial inequalities in schools order to advocate for equity (James, 2017, p. 2). I suggest this demand for more data that repeats what we (should) already know is a violence of "crisis ordinariness."

As such, I begin this section thinking with scholar Sharpe's (2016) analytic of the violence of the "afterlives of slavery" alongside Berlant's concept of "crisis ordinariness" to consider the ways in which manifestations of the violence of anti-Black racism circulate in and contribute to the depressive atmosphere of education and schools. Sharpe's (2016) "way of knowing" goes beyond a simple understanding the interconnectedness of historical harm and its relation to contemporary harm. Sharpe (2016) shows us that the violence of slavery is an ever-present ongoing stream of harm – there are no lines of separation between past and present – the

violence of the "afterlives of slavery" is ingrained in the systems we work in daily, often in what *we* do and what we are asked to do within these systems.

Sharpe's (2016) work, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, tracks the "reappearance of the slave ship in everyday life in the form of the prison, the camp, and the school" (p. 21). She tells us, "the means and modes of Black subjection may have changed, but the fact and structure of that subjection remain" (p.12). The violence of slavery's afterlife, as Sharpe reveals throughout her work, permeates all aspects of our present every day and thus Sharpe turns our attention to what is at stake in "*not* [emphasizes added] recognizing antiblackness as total climate" (p. 21). Sharpe's profound tracking of the ways in which the violence of the "slave ship" (re)appears in the everyday of the present is significant to my discussion of "crisis ordinariness" of anti-Black violence in education and schools. Here, I suggest, the "total climate" of anti-Blackness that Sharpe exposes, lingers in the atmosphere (the weather) of the ways in which contemporary renditions of colonial racist violence drift throughout the compromised conditions of education today.

Scene 8:
Imagine if you will – the lunch bell rings and students exit the building and begin to head to Burger King, Tim Horton's, anywhere away from the building that holds them hostage daily. Suddenly a car pulls up – driven by a parent – two girls emerge and jump another girl as she walks by. The two girls chauffeured to the violent altercation by a parent proceed to take the other girl to the ground using her hair as a grip – they then proceed to kick and punch her as more and more students gather to watch – phones in the air. Once the police arrive the girl who has been beaten is arrested. She was found to be carrying some sort of "fake" gun or a bb gun.

Videos from students' cell phones of the brutal attack are circulated immediately.[25] In the end, despite video documentation of the attack, which clearly showed three White girls grabbing and beating the young Black woman, it was the young Black woman who was the only one that

[25] Students readily shared videos of the attack with several staff members and it is through viewing the video that I was witness to the actual event.

suffered any consequences: physical *and* criminal. In the aftermath I neither witnessed nor heard of any consequences for the attackers or the parent who delivered two of the girls to the school even though it was revealed that the two girls dropped off by the parent had been called in as back up by the girl who initiated the attack. My understanding is that because the girl who was attacked wouldn't press charges the school administration also chose not to press charges or hold the attackers responsible. However, the young Black woman who was attacked and beaten was arrested and charged by the police because of the weapon they found on her. Yet this weapon had played no role in the attack – so, we must ask how did it come to be found? Why was the victim held and searched? How did the victim become *suspect*? Many students, a few educators and the social workers understood the racism embedded in the way in which this attack was dealt with, still, there was no consideration given by the school administration about the underlying racism entrenched in the attack, or the police response to the attack. The violent event was reduced to issues between individual students. Yet, what I and others saw was (once again) the criminalization of a Black youth and the abdication of responsibility by the school administration. I read this violent event as an example of Sharpe's understanding of the everyday after life of the slave ship, which appears in and through education and policing. The dismissal of the violence executed on the young Black woman on school property and subsequently being held by the police performs and enacts ways in which institutions systematically work to contain and control Black bodies.

In chapter three of *In the Wake* Sharpe's (2016), theorization of "the hold" as a contemporary apparatus that continues to contain (to *hold*) Black bodies in the present opens a space to help us think about the ways in which education and schools "hold" the bodies of Black students. Sharpe (2016), tell us, "the hold repeats and repeats and repeats in and into the present,

into the classroom and the hospital" (p. 90). Sharpe's (2014, 2016) critique of a front-page feature in the *New York Times* written by Andrea Elliott (2013) entitled, "Invisible child: Dasani's Homeless Life in the Shadows" (2016), illustrates how particular narratives of Black bodies are produced in and through education (90-93). Sharpe's (2016) critique of Elliot's article highlights the usage of the language of "the ship" and "the hold" that permeates Elliott's descriptions of Dasani's school and of the school principal. She explains, "it is maritime and martial metaphors like, ships, success, struggle, sacrifice, and surveillance that activate the narrative of Dasani Coats, invisible child" (Sharpe, 2016, 91). Sharpe (2016) astutely identifies Elliot's article as, "education in the belly of the ship" (p. 92). She explains:

> Dasani's narrative is one of her instruction in how to live in a world that demands here death, and it is used as curriculum. That is, not only does the Invisible Child series feature the education of Dasani but it is itself, featured in the *Times* Education section, as this series becomes part of a larger curriculum as a narrative of individual resilience and overcoming – a "Teaching and Learning with the New York Times" that consists of the traumatizing and retraumatizing of Black children for the education of others. (p. 92)

Sharpe (2016) later poses a questions all educators should be asking themselves, *"How can the very system that is designed to unmake and inscribe her also be the one to save her?"* (p. 92). Through this question Sharpe (2016) reveals the cruelty and the "double bind" embedded in the promise of education: that education is supposed to "save" (to transform, to emancipate) yet remains embroiled in, informed by, and structured on systems of oppression. In a later article, Sharpe (2018) expands on and explains what I understand to be the underlying thinking in her question regarding education noted above. She writes:

> We know that what the state or the university or the private contractor working in our financialized present calls care is often continued violence, continued limits placed on black life, possibility, education, movement, sustenance, and joy. The same instruments used to kill us are imagined as the ones that will save us; saving and killing often look a lot the same as far as black people are concerned. (p. 175)

Sharpe's (2016, 2018) thinking recalls Brown's (2015) statement that "liberal democratic practices and institutions almost always fall short of their promise and at times cruelly invert it" (p. 18).

In *Policing Black Lives: State violence in Canada from slavery to the present,* Black feminist activist Robyn Maynard (2017) devotes a chapter to exposing connections between policing and school, which I suggest, evokes Sharpe's understanding of the "hold" on Black students and their bodies. Maynard (2017) opens her chapter, "The (Mis) education of Black youth: Anti-Blackness in the school system" by (re)telling the violent "hold" enforced upon a six-old-girl by police in a Mississauga school in 2016. Two police officers, who work under the motto of to serve and protect, "handcuffed the girl – who weighed a total of forty-eight pounds and was unarmed – by attaching her hands and feet together at the wrists and ankles" (p. 208). I have witnessed high school students arrested by police, physically restrained by youth workers and other trained education workers but I have never seen a teenager violently restrained in the way the police officers assaulted this little girl. According to police officials the justification for "holding" the six-old-girl Black girl in such a fashion was to protect other students and the girl herself (Maynard, 2017, p. 208). This violent "hold" sanctioned by police and school authorities exemplifies the "crisis ordinariness" of the violence of "slavery's afterlife" on young Black bodies.

Scene 9:
Imagine if you will – During an art class a guidance counsellor came into the classroom to check in with a student about course selection for the next semester. He then turns to a different student and asks, "are you really sure you won't come out to ball?" The student replies that he has no interest. I say, you know sir not all tall Black boys want to play basketball – to which the guidance counsellor replies, "yah but he's *so* good." The counsellor leaves and the student turns to me, rolls his eyes and tells me (with a heavy sigh) that he has no interest in playing basketball, he just wants to focus on his courses and graduate.

This young man's response reveals a feeling of exasperation, exhaustion, and a sense of inevitability located in how he is continuously reduced to an aspect of his body. His desires, his *being* are not of concern; it is his Black Body as a tool to be put to work for the guidance counsellor (who happens to be the basketball coach) that takes priority. Black education scholar Carl James (2017) notes, "the tendency for school staff to focus on the athletic prowess and aptitude of Black students was… identified as a means by which the academic success of Black students is undermined" (p. 43). Rather than attend to students' own desires, we harvest young Black male bodies for our sports teams and disconnect them from their singularity as we encourage (even demand) they perform in accordance with restrictive roles assigned to them by the authority of education, history and the commodification of bodies.

Black cultural critic, poet and novelist, Dionne Brand (2001) asserts, "the body is the place of captivity. … Those men, raiding villages, leading coffles, throwing buckets of water, those examining limbs and teeth, those looking into eyes for rebellion, those are the captors who enter the captive's body" (35). She explains:

> Slaves became extensions of slave owners – their arms, legs, the parts of them they wished to harness and use with none of the usual care of their own bodies. These captive bodies represent parts of their own bodies that they wish to rationalize or make mechanical or inhuman so as to perform the tasks of exploitation of resources or acquisition of territory. These captive bodies then become tools sent out to conquer the natural world. Of course they aren't merely tools but the projections of the sensibilities, consciousness, needs, desires, and fears of the captor. (30- 31)

Attempts to harness Black bodies as tools for and of the captors, I argue is (re)produced through education and by educators as apparent in the instances I retell above: from the Black girls being refused to perform their bodies (through dance); the police coming to schools to contain and place "holds" on Black bodies; to the implementation of Black bodies as merely tools for sport.

The captors' (educators) fears are glaringly apparent in the normalization of regulating Black children and youth into "special education" programs.

The fifth film in Steve McQueen's anthology series *Small Axe* (2020) is simply entitled "Education." However, there is nothing simple about this film. In a compelling sixty-three minutes, McQueen layers the racist, social and politically complex story of 12-year-old Kingsley Smith who in 1970's London is sent to a school for the "educationally subnormal." According to the headmaster, Kingsley is to be expelled to this "special school" because of his low IQ test score and because of his perceived "inappropriate behaviour" (McQueen, 2020, 0: 10:44). His apparent inappropriate behaviour" is in fact nothing more than the silly fooling around attributed to 12-year-olds. His low-test score, moreover, is due to his dyslexia. Neither his "fooling around" nor his dyslexia of course should qualify Kingsley for this "special school." These schools were initially established for children who were perceived through the problematic frames of the times to have "low intellectual abilities" and "developmental disabilities."[26] However, as identified by Bernard Coard, (1971) these schools for the "educationally subnormal," would in the late 1960's in London begin to house many students who were deemed to be "below average" intelligence and destined for menial labour. McQueen (2020) exposes the racism, neglect and deficit thinking rampant in both mainstream schools and schools for the "educationally subnormal" through Kingsley's educational journey. This film is an important piece of education history and a clear example of the ways in which schools fail students. Most importantly is realizing that McQueen, perhaps without knowing, is pointing to the "past not past." Often cloaked in a notion of "care," thus perhaps less easily identifiable as racist, Kingsley's story is repeatedly replayed today as many educators accept the over representation of Black youth in "special educational" classes

[26] Schools under the category of "Intensive Support Programs" such as Maplewood High School and Drewry Secondary School provide this role in Toronto District School Board today. See: https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Leadership-Learning-and-School-Improvement/Special-Education/ISP

and programs as "normal" (James, 2017; A. Lopez 2020). Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, I propose that this over identification and *acceptance* of the over representation of Black youth in "special education" is another form of "the hold" as contextualized by Sharpe (2016) and is layered in paternalistic and colonial mind sets. The inability to radically interrupt the problematic of schooling as an ongoing agent of colonial racist oppression in meaningful ways that would allow for, even a nominal release of "the hold" on Black bodies, furthers the compromised conditions of education in the present.

Critical educators are constantly straddling desire and despair as they are faced with the double bind of equity policies[27] that become façades of inclusion rather than actions capable of producing structural change, on the one hand, and the need to keep challenging inequities that permeate education and schools. Yet, it seems as if educators and like-minded others (education researchers, parents, students, community organizations) get held hostage by the need for more and more data when they insist on action to remedy the gross inequities apparent in education and schools. The constant need to speak the language of "data" to confirm (through repetition) what we already know arguably displaces funds, time and energy that could be directed towards structural changes needed to alleviate colonial and racist inequities and violence. Yet, in our present over valuing of "dataism" (Han, 2017) funds, time and energy are increasingly employed (over and above everything else it seems) in the pursuit of data.

Han's (2017) consideration of the neoliberal phenomena of "dataism" as a new fetishism and form of control (p. 56-57) provides us with a jumping off point to consider the pernicious implications of the desire and constant genuflecting toward data. Although Han (2017a) is concerned mostly with the notion of "big data" which refers to digital data I am proposing that

[27] For a discussion on the myth of equity in universities see Davies, B. (2005). The (im)possibility of intellectual work in neoliberal regimes.

his idea, which holds that data fetishism ultimately impedes action, is being realized through the neoliberal obsession with data collection. The compulsion to continuously collect more data (that simply repeats what we already know) inevitably mounts a barrier to action that might advance "real" change in education thus (re)instituting and (re)legitimizing colonial and systemic oppressions.

In the introduction to the report *Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area* James (2017) identifies what I understand as the persistent need for "data" to prove what so many of us already know. He writes:

> Without the data or research studies to support individuals' perceptions of anti-Black racism, then experiences and concerns may never be taken seriously by school administrators and educators. Some individuals with whom I spoke also talked of a number of incidents with Black students and parents and were seeking data to challenge their respective school boards' assertions that these incidents were not connected to anti-Black racism in the school system, but instead were "isolated incidents." (p. 2)

There are three points in the above quote that I suggest impact the ways in which pre-existing colonial racist attitudes in education[28] are fortified through neoliberal rationality: 1) the need for more data that arises as school administrators and educators (often) do not take experiences of anti-Black racism seriously; 2) the positioning of anti-Black racism in schools as "isolated incidents"; and, 3) the need to talk the language of data in order to be *heard* because the belief that numbers speak, not humans, has becomes more and more entrenched under neoliberal governance.

The belief that it is only through (more) "data" that school administrators and educators will take anti-Black racism *seriously* demonstrates an underlying denial that anti-Black racism persists/exists in schools. Yet, "data" on the systemic racism faced by Black students in Ontario

[28] See: Paradkar, S. (2019, September, 6). As a black student he was told to dream small but he hoped things would change for his son. The Toronto Star. https://www.thestar.com/news/atkinsonseries/2019/09/06/as-a-black-student-he-was-told-to-dream-small-but-he-hoped-things-would-change-for-his-son.html

has been (re)produced for over forty years.[29] As such, we can assume that these school administrators and educators who seem to need (more) convincing ignore past studies that conclude: Black students face ongoing oppression through racist attitudes, beliefs, and curriculum. As well, these very same school administrators and educators either ignore or do not realize that equity and anti-racism policies[30] have been created and implemented based on such research. Reporter Sherina Harris (2020) echoes my point:

> Parents, students and advocates have long spoken out about systemic racism in Ontario's schools. For Black students, Indigenous students and other racialized students, it's not a new revelation that the education system and some of the people in it are racist and working against their success. Decades-old reports outline some of the same recommendations that students are asking to see today. (Paragraph, 9)

And yet, little has changed for Black students in Ontario as revealed by James (2017):

> As an institution within the city, the "old" Toronto School Board, which has historically had the largest number of Black students, has since 1970 engaged in efforts to report on, if not directly address, the education issues faced by Black students in the board. For the most part, the educational performance of Black children in Toronto schools has been a matter of continued concern for parents; and studies by the school board have consistently confirmed there is cause for concern. We recognize that many of the policies, programs, and initiatives that have been in place – both at the system and local levels – though useful, have not managed to significantly change the situation for Black students. (p. 11)

James' (2017) observation that even with data, policies, program, initiatives in place the conditions for Black students has not significantly changed in over 40 years is heartbreaking to say the least. Attempts to find solutions through policy, classroom practices and curriculum often lead to more bureaucracy, new "initiatives" that often repeat what some educators are already doing or rename an initiative that was instituted five years before. There is more downloading

[29] In Toronto concerns regarding the inequities and oppressions faced by Black youth in schools was documented as early as 1975 (T. McCaskell, The Race to Equity: Disrupting Educational Inequality, 2005 p. 96). As well, James (2017) provides an overview of Ontario initiatives to address inequities in education for Black students (p. 6-19). See also: Kisha McPherson (2020). Black girls are not magic; they are human: Intersectionality and inequity in the Greater Toronto (GTA) schools. Curriculum Inquiry, (p. 3-4).

[30] The Ontario Ministry of Education and individual school Boards throughout the province have created such policies. See for example: The "Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards" Policy 1993 Ontario Ministry of Education.

onto teachers to track students, more surveys, and more data collection. These bureaucratic moves result from the need to appear to be "doing something" resulting in little change for many students' "real" lived experiences. Little of the apparent "good-will" trickles down to the student and adds to the depressive exhaustion of most *critical* educators – as they are doing everything that they can to combat the compromised conditions of education.

I suggest, the reasons that these "attempts" to "fix" education and schooling have not had significant impact for Black students is because of a deep refusal, by many white school administrators and educators, to accept (understand) that the violence of "slavery's afterlife" continues in the everyday despite the plethora of "data," information and research that proves this truth. This refusal is part of the compromised conditions of education and leaves *critical* educators who advocate, teach and argue for change exhausted and floundering in the "impasse of the present" trying to adjust and adapt in order to "live on." I propose this refusal combined with the demand for "proof" (data) (re)enforces and maintains racist attitudes by assuming that unless we have "more data" racism just might not "really" exist. I want to draw attention to the implicit underlying logic at play here, which asserts that students (and parents) facing systemic oppressions are always suspect and thus to blame for violence they face.[31] I propose that the suspicion assigned to Black students (and their parents) is an enactment of the "hold" that Sharpe (2016) describes. As a result, those who "complain" are *held* in contempt and thus the incidents they are concerned about are easily constructed as "isolated incidents."

As such, I read the problem of the continuous relegation of anti-Black racism in schools to the realm of "isolated incidents," as mentioned by James (2017), is not only located in the historical "past not yet past" (Sharpe, 2016), but also supported by and justified through the neoliberal logic of individualizing blame discussed above. I suggest isolating racist violence to

[31] See: https://ca.yahoo.com/news/human-rights-commission-awards-mother-210629737.html

the individual alleviates school administrators and educators of the responsibility to look beyond "interpersonal behaviours." I propose that individualizing racist interactions whether between teachers and students or between students ultimately denies the systemic historical ongoing violence of racism experienced by students within schools and education. Often incidents of anti-Black racism are moulded into "simple" renditions of individual episodes and identified as "bullying" thus striping the event of its political resonance. Locating acts of anti-Black racism in the realm of individual volition helps to normalize the ongoing implementation of neoliberalism's mechanisms of hyper-individualization in schools. In this way the concept of "bullying" is a tool used to erase any *need* to consider political-social structural frameworks.[32] Because of the individualization of incidents of anti-Black racism and the refusal by administrators and educators to take concerns about anti-Black racism "seriously," it is understandable that *more* data is required (or desired by those who already know) to situate these incidents in the larger context of White supremacy. On the other hand, my third concern is the ways in which the ongoing "need" for more proof through the neoliberal language of data contributes to the "cruel optimism' of education. I suggest below that the attachment to the optimism that more (of the same) "data" will somehow (this time) alter, improve, disrupt the inequities in education that many of us desire is not only cruel but also violent.

James (2017) notes that some Black parents and students desire (need) such data to support their claims of anti-Black racism in schools. It is understandable that when Black parents and students' experiences of systemic and overt racism are constantly dismissed and/or individualized they feel compelled to rely on and use the language that school administrations

[32] For consideration of "bullying" within the realm of neoliberalism see: Winton, S. & Tuters, S. (2015) Constructing bullying in Ontario, Canada: a critical policy analysis. *Educational Studies*, 41(1-2), p. 122-122. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2014.955737; Valentine, D.S. (2014). A critical Foundations Analysis of "The Bully" in Canada's schools. *Radical Pedagogy*, 11(2), p. 80-103.

seem to understand. Thus producing and reproducing data becomes *the* way to be heard.[33] I understand researchers, parents and students' hope that data has the potential to interrupt the ongoing unsatisfactory ways in which school administrators and educators respond to racism by "proving" (what we already know) that the "total climate" of anti-Blackness in schools is not a series of "isolated incidents" of bullying behaviour, but rather ongoing and systemic**.** Some might argue that the collection of data allows us to see historical patterns of colonialism and racist ideologies in education and to realize that these injustices and inequities have not yet been rectified, as noted by James (2017 p. 11). However, I do wonder if data does not offer us anything new or something that we didn't already know, what is the point of it?

The following passage from the Durham District School Boards' recent publication, *Compendium of Action for Black Student Success 2018-2021* makes clear that the pursuit of "data" simply reproduces what has already been documented and (re)searched as it references research done over the past 30 years:

> The Ontario Education system has been aware of, and is concerned about, the achievement, outcomes and experiences of Black students since the Provincial Advisory Committee on Race and Ethnocultural Relations was formed in 1987. Since then, a number of reports, both provincial and municipal, have pointed to the same issues and concerns in schooling for Black students: streaming, high dropout rates, a lack of Black educators, Eurocentric curriculum and Anti-Black Racism. (p. 6)

I suggest (re)searching what we already know so that we "know" it again does not help students, does not give *critical* educators hope, rather, it further deepens the depressive atmosphere they are trying to "survive." Berlant (2011) tells us, "the compulsion to repeat a toxic optimism can suture someone or a world to a cramped and unimaginative space of committed replication, just in case it will be different" (p. 259). The continuous gathering of data to "study" what we already

[33] It would be interesting to expand this notion of the need to use the "correct" language, as I understand ideas of "language usage" often to be layered in racist, classist and sexist oppressions; however, this idea is beyond the scope of this work.

know, I suggest, is an attempt to look as if we are "doing" something while simply repeating the same. If we are continuously repeating the same only to repeat it again, how does such repetition promote possibilities for a different, more equitable future in education?

The hope vested in the pursuit of data is reminiscent of Berlant's notion of hoping for the "change that's gonna come" (p. 2) in your attachment to your object however cruel this optimism for change might be. Fisher (2009), in a somewhat similar line of thinking to Berlant, explains the tendency in capitalism to generate a perception of hope in what is coming. He writes:

> The way value is generated on the stock exchange depends of course less on what a company 'really does,' and more on perceptions of, and beliefs about, its (future) performance. In capitalism, that is to say, all that is solid melts into PR, and late capitalism is defined at least as much by this ubiquitous tendency towards PR-production as it is by the imposition of market mechanisms. (p. 44)

It is in this market rational of perceptions of future performance that policies of change reside. What change is "gonna come" if we've already known what the data tells us? What change "is gonna come" if we have supposedly already attempted to make changes that reflect the inequities found in the data? What change is "gonna come" if our leaders are more concerned with "perceptions" of action and empty claims to inclusion rather than transformative action and actual structural changes? What change is "gonna come" if our leaders do not "know" or "understand" or believe in the structural forces and historical contexts that inflect equity?

Consider the event that took place at a Toronto District School Board elite arts school just a few years ago: The principal, under the alleged intent to address "achievement gaps" created what "has been dubbed the 'Blacklist'" (Murray, 2018, paragraph 2). This was a list of non-white students circulated to teachers to identify students who would need extra "help" to achieve "success." The problems at play with this incident are too numerous to address here, however, what is important to note is that most of the students on the list were already high achieving

students and were Black. The list was compiled by going through photos in a yearbook, in which the administrator chooses, simply by looking at the photos of students, those who "seemed" most "at risk!" The notion that this principal was following policies regarding "data" about achievement gaps is absurd. She was racially profiling students, assuming they would need "extra support" because of how they performed their race. As noted by James in a newspaper report: "the list in effect categorizes all Black student as 'at-risk,' which allows for 'a web of stereotypes to apply to Black students'" (Mochama, 2018, paragraph). Just as disturbing is the response by the director of education, as it rings hollow and is void of any substantive action.[34] Mochama (2018) reports:

> In response to a request for an interview, the school board's director of education John Malloy sent an emailed statement. 'A mistake was made by the principal of Etobicoke School of the Arts that has hurt student and their families; the principal and the TDSB apologies for this. While it should never have happened, we will continue this significant work of challenging our bias, removing barriers and creating equitable and inclusive schools for all.' (Paragraph 10)

The director in his statement asserts that this incident "should never have happened" and in another newspaper report said, "Unfortunately this strategy that was used was not a strategy that we support" (Amha, 2018). However, the fact that this incident *did* happen, and many other such incidents continue to occur in the largest and most diverse board of education in Canada, which professes to have the most "progressive" equity polices, attests to the fact that "the hold" on Black students lives persists even in the most (supposed) exemplary board.

The question then is how to "survive" in this mess of contradictory conditions in which on the one hand we embrace the desires for a more just world, while, at the same time, we find ourselves immersed in a world of injustices to which there seems to be no alternative, a world

[34] Although there were calls by parents and students for the principal's resignation she was reassigned to the Board and is presently the Centrally Assigned Principal in charge of Virtual School during the COVID crisis. https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Virtual-School/Virtual-School-Secondary

where nothing new can happen. It is my sense that during my over 25 years of teaching we have simply been renaming, recycling, reinventing "the same," which rather than strengthening our resolve has washed out all meaning in what we do. Consequently, a feeling of "stuckness" has become the pervasive atmosphere of education, in which we feel ourselves marooned with diluted hollowed out theories that become mantras of change while everything stays the same. The very foundations meant as a corrective have thus led to a *ruptured fantasy of education*. The "cruel optimism" of education then lies in ways we come to (re)produce the same to maintain our attachment to the optimism of education as being transformative. Berlant (2011) points out:

> Some scenes of optimism are clearly crueler than others: where cruel optimism operates, the very vitalizing or animating potency of an object/scene of desire contributes to the attrition of the very thriving that is supposed to be made possible in the work of attachment in the first place. This might point to something as banal as a scouring love, but it also opens out to obsessive appetites, working for a living, patriotism, all kinds of things. One makes affective bargains about the costliness of one's attachments, usually unconscious ones, most of which keep one in proximity to the scene of desire/attrition. (p. 24-25)

The potency our attachment to education itself adds to the depressive atmosphere of education today. Our desire to hold on to this optimism comes at a cost. What are the costs of hanging on to the fallacies of education as a place to cultivate social change? Or, more precisely what are the costs of working on promoting educational "reforms" rather than radically altering education systems? That is, why is it that we can only consider reform and adaptation in education rather than look to alternatives or ways of challenging the structural impasses that have been historically erected? What are the costs to *critical* educators and what are the costs to students when we feel stuck in always repeating the same? I suggest we are weighted down trying to survive and adjust as we work to "live on" within education in the "impasse of the present" (Berlant, 2011, p.16).

The scenes collected in this chapter track some ways in which students move in and out of their lived experiences of the "crisis ordinariness" of violence in schools. The scenes form a type of archive of everyday racism and misogyny faced by many students. This archive not only calls attention to the ways in which students adjust and adapt to the normalization of violence and conditions of injustice in their lives, but also reveals ways in which education and educators are complicit in perpetuating, dismissing, and minimizing such violence. The scenes also reveal that despite the plethora of research and data, which provide evidence of the violence of inequities in education, such research does not alleviate "the hold" on Black students, nor does it release students from ingrained misogyny, racism, and classism that permeates our world and thus education.[35] For many *critical* educators enmeshed in the everyday life of schools there is an exhaustive dimension that ensues from witnessing and intervening in the "crisis ordinariness" of violence experienced by many students. We (*critical* educators) work to support students within depleted working conditions, working to interrupt the managerial individualization of violent events and the inability for others (administrators, educators and senior board staff) to understand the manifestations of violence of a "past not yet past." We fight to hold on to our humanity despite our burnt-out-souls wondering how to counter the everyday "crisis ordinariness" of violence in education.

In *Violence: Humans in Dark Times*, Brad Evans and Natasha Lennard (2018) ask, "if fighting violence and oppression demands new forms of ethical thinking that can be developed only with the luxury of time, what does this mean for the present moment when history is being steered in a more dangerous direction and seems to constantly accelerate?" (p. 2). This question is perhaps more poignant in this present moment in which any sense of democracy is under siege

[35] For an example of a critique that discusses the dangers of educational research that simply produces static deficit data see, Rochelle Gutiérrez's (2008) article "A 'Gap-Gazing' Fetish in Mathematics Education? Problematizing Research on the Achievement Gap," in *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 39(4), 357-364.

through a "peculiar *fascist sensibility*" which wields a "necropolitical form of neoliberal governance: one that, through purposeful disregard and indifference, isolates, impoverishes, humiliates, criminalizes, deports, and kills disproportionality on racial lines" (Di Paolantonio, 2020, p. 1).

How then, do we work with students to navigate intersections of injustices and violence that many of them experience outside and inside education? How might we provide students with time and space to think and think differently about the "violence they live and that surrounds them?" For Evans (2018b) the answer is, "to reinscribe more forcefully the value of critical pedagogy" (p. 86). Yet, as I argue in the next chapter, and as I mentioned previously, attempts to (re)do the same, to repeat what has been done before in the hope that something different might happen or that the change we desire will happen *this* time, simply strengthens the "cruel optimism" of education. In what follows, I consider the entrapment of "critical pedagogy" in an optimism that ends up repeating and reproducing the same, hence partaking in the feeling of "stuckness" and "capitalist realism" that is suffocating education.

Chapter Three:

Revisiting the (Mis)Promises of "Critical Pedagogy" in Neoliberal Times

"Cruel Optimism" and the Promises of "Critical Pedagogy"

I am provoked to consider Evans' (2018b) desire to (re)assert "critical pedagogy" as the corrective to the neoliberal dissolution of education within the context of my notion of the "ruptured fantasy of education." Despite its varying iterations promoted over the past forty years "critical pedagogy" has failed to substantively take hold as a fundamental approach to education. However, during this time the language of "critical pedagogy" has leaked into schools, permeating many aspects of education. "Critical pedagogy's" language is invoked in school policies, flaunted in professional development sessions and inscribed in curriculum documents. The vocabulary of "critical pedagogy" seems to flood social justice and equity education yet its promises do not manifest. Teachers schooled in these theories – these promises – often hope, as they move into classrooms, to execute transformational and emancipatory pedagogy. It is as if "critical pedagogy" has become a figure of speech that conjures an assumed understanding of what education is and what education does without grasping its conceptual etymology. Consequently, in attempts to uphold performances of the promises "critical pedagogy," theory is applied in abstracted ways, initiatives with "empowering" titles are introduced and policies are rewritten to include emancipatory language. Each of these acts creates an illusion of change as either a "fait accompli" or a fantasy that a process of change is in progress. Thus, leaving the work of dismantling infrastructures that (re)produce oppressions of the "past not past" unattended.

My intent is not to disavow the need or desire for criticality in pedagogy, rather, my intent is to argue that desires to (re)institute "critical pedagogy" fall into the trap of repetition of the same, which gives no attention to the vital imperative to dismantle structural inequities within education. Consequently, when we lean on these abstractions, we find ourselves unable to reformulate what education might do in this present moment of despair. As well, I suggest, the desire to reforge "critical pedagogy" ignores: 1) the underlying problems within its rationalist foundations; 2) the ways in which the notion of "critical" get abstracted and hollowed out in schools, and; 3) the ways in which its messianic characteristics collide with neoliberal logic of hyper-individualization thus corrupting possibilities of collective change.

In this chapter, I propose that Evans' (2018b) call to (re)forge the optimism of "critical pedagogy" invokes Berlant's (2011) notion of the "double bind," which involves holding on to fantasies that impede what is promised (p. 51). I realize Evan's call "to fight once again for reinscribing the value of critical pedagogy" is a response to his concern with the ways in which neoliberalism is increasingly hindering education (p. 86). In this effort Evans is joined by many of the leading proponents of "critical pedagogy," such as Michael Apple (2011), Henry Giroux (2001, 2007, 2014, 2015), Peter McLaren, (2005, 2007), and Don Macedo (2005, 2007). Each of these scholars consider the detrimental impact that late capital and neoliberalism is having on education while remaining attached to (re)producing the same corrective: a rendition of "critical pedagogy." This has varyingly meant renewing calls for instituting "real" critical thinking (Evans, 2018b; Giroux, 2014; Leistyna, 2007) or publishing more "books and material that provide critical answers to teachers' questions about 'What do I do on Monday?'" (Apple, 2011, p. 24-25). McLaren (2007) argues that (re)asserting a Marxist theory of class is the most urgent

need toward (re)vitalizing "critical pedagogy."[36] While Darder & Mirón's (2006), call to action is to (re)center the idea of "democratic schooling" in "efforts to confront the powerlessness and uncertainty that is so much the reality in many public schools today" (p. 12).

Although the intention that motors these calls to (re)institute (to double down on) tenets of "critical pedagogy" are located in a realization that education remains a place of inequity and violence I am sceptical of the attempts to resurrect "critical pedagogy" as the corrective in these increasingly menacing times as it is my sense that the redemptive attitude embedded in "critical pedagogy" ignores the depressive despair induced by the "pervasive atmosphere of capital realism." As noted by the late education and environmental scholar C.A. Bowers (2002), "[t]he criticisms of capitalism that run through the writings of critical pedagogy theorists, while basically correct, fail to consider the deep conceptual patterns that underlie the industrial mode of production and the messianic vision that it rests upon (p. 25). As well, as I suggest below, "critical pedagogy's" reliance on modernist rationalism remains as problematic today as they were when initially critiqued over thirty years ago.

As noted in chapter one, holding on to promises of education as a place of social transformation (as proposed by critical pedagogy) educators are often left floundering within the "double bind" of trying to avoid reproducing neoliberal attitudes in education while at the same time trying to hold on to their desires (optimism) for the possibilities of education. Clinging to such promises and hoping for the "change that's gonna come" (Berlant, 2011, p. 2) through the repetition of the same, in this case the promises of "critical pedagogy," adds to the dynamic of my conceptualization of a "ruptured fantasy of education" and "cruel optimism" in education. Berlant (2011) tells us, "any object of optimism promises to guarantee the endurance of

[36] Patti Lather (1998) makes this same observation about McLaren in *Critical pedagogy and its Complicities: A Praxis of Stuck Places* (p. 488-489).

something, the survival of something, the flourishing of something, and above all the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it" (p. 48). Along similar lines, in the *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed tells us, "the promise is an assurance, a positive declaration intended to give confidence and trust that an expectation will be met" (p. 29). Many educators' trust is worn out, their souls burnt out. The depressive "pervasive atmosphere of capital realism" in public education that I describe has broken their trust. They are undone by language that promises hope in education but that has been hollowed out and drained of meaning. While they professionally try to survive the cruel onslaught of neoliberal "managerial" rule they are, at the same time, working to counter violence (in its many forms) that wears them down and undermines the promises of education for students. It is keeping in mind the compromised conditions of contemporary education and the resulting atmosphere of despair that leads me to suggest that (re)playing promises of "critical pedagogy" intensifies "cruel optimism" in education in these increasingly menacing times.

Maxine Greene's essay, "In search for a critical pedagogy" (1986), raises concerns about the role of education in what she referred to as "dark and shadowed times," (p. 441). Although writing almost 35 years ago Greene hauntingly tells us that the times are "peculiar and menacing" (p. 440). She writes:

> Reform reports speak of… children as "human resources" for the expansion of productivity, as means to the end of maintaining our nation's economic competitiveness and military primacy in the world. Of course we want to empower the young for meaningful work, we want to nurture the achievement of diverse literacies. But the world we inhabit is palpably deficient: there are unwarranted inequities, shattered communities, unfulfilled lives. We cannot help but hunger for traces of Utopian visions, of critical or dialectical engagements with social and economic realities. And yet, when we reach out, we experience a kind of blankness. We sense people living under a weight, a nameless inertial mass. How are we to justify our concern for their awakening? Where are the sources of questioning, of restlessness? How are we to move the young to break with the given, the taken-for-granted —to move towards what might be, what is not yet? (p. 427)

Greene's words admittedly could have been penned today in reference to our present menacing times. As such, we must ask what has become of the promises of "critical pedagogy"? Greene in her 1986 piece goes on to call for a "common school" for "all the children" in order to work against oppression and inequality (p. 431). However, as explored in the previous two chapters we have, a generation later, dramatically failed to put into practice her call despite repeated assertions by many educators, boards of education and faculties of education that keep on proposing and insisting that education is a place to foster democracy, social transformation and equity. It seems that we simply repeat the mantra of change while changing nothing and alarmingly while conditions simply worsen. Although each of the issues I raise in this chapter may warrant further investigation my goal here is to gesture toward some of the complexities involved in desires to re(institute) "critical pedagogy" as a corrective to our new menacing times.

(Re)Problematizing the Foundations of "Critical Pedagogy"

"Critical pedagogy," in North America, influenced by a certain interpretation of Cultural Marxist theory and the work of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire was perceived to be a pedagogical corrective to social and political violence of power, disciplinary domination, and oppression, as well as a force to activate, "liberation," "empowerment" and "agency" in students and "democracy" in education and beyond (Apple, 2011; Friere, 1970/2000, 2005; Giroux 2001, Greene, 1986; Kincheloe, 2007; McLaren, 2005, 2007; Macedo, 2005, 2007). These foundational concepts of "critical pedagogy" offer the promise of social democratic transformation and emancipation through education (Apple, 2011; Friere, 1970/2000, 2005; Giroux, 1988, 2000, 2006; Greene, 1986; Kincheloe, 2007; Kellner and Kim, 2010; McLaren,

2005, 2007; Macedo 2005, 2007). Although there is not one definition of "critical pedagogy,"[37] and many different conceptualizations of "critical pedagogy,"[38] there is agreement by many education scholars (Biesta, 2013, 2005; Weiner, 2007; Kincheloe, 2007; Peters, 2007; Gur'Ze-ev, 2005; Trifonas & Balomenos, 2012) that the core desires mentioned above characterize its intentions. However, despite the promises of "critical pedagogy" it has been challenged by post-structural, feminist, queer, critical race and anti-colonial theorists for its reliance on an universalizing predisposition towards oppression (Bower, 2002; Delpit, 1995; Ellsworth, 1989; Gaztambide-Fernandez 2012; Gore 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Lather, 1998; Kumashiro 2002; Trifonas, 2003; Tuck and Yang 2012).[39] Feminist education scholar Elizabeth Ellsworth's (1989) seminal critique of "critical pedagogy" explained, "key assumptions, goals, and pedagogical practices fundamental to the literature on "critical pedagogy" – namely, 'empowerment,' 'student voice,' 'dialogue,' and even the term 'critical' – are repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination" (p. 298) and are rooted in notions of Western rationalism. As well, interwoven within critiques by feminists (Ellsworth, 1989; Lather, 1998) and Black scholars (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1997) are the problematics of paternalistic attitudes, such as: the idea that teachers hold knowledge that will "empower" students; the universalization through rationalist assumptions; and "critical pedagogy's" dependency on rational dialogue and essentializing understandings of forms of oppression (Kumashiro, 2002). These tendencies within "critical pedagogy," countered by feminist, poststructuralist, postmodern and anti-colonial thinking realize the underlying perpetuation of an oppositional dynamic between rational and

[37] See: Eric J. Weiner (2007).
[38] For details on the complexities of the understandings of "critical pedagogy" see: Nicholas C. Burbles (Ed.). (1998); IIan Gur-Ze'ev (Ed.). (2005*);* Peter McLaren & Joe L. Kincheloe (Eds.), (2007).
[39] For brief summaries of these challenges see: Michalinos Zembylas (2018) *Reinventing critical pedagogy as decolonizing pedagogy: The education of empathy*; Mary Breuing (2011) outlines some of the historical roots and definitions of critical pedagogies in *Problematizing "critical pedagogy"* and Seehwa Cho (2010) *Politics of "critical pedagogy" and New Social Movements*.

irrational (with the rational taking priority). As noted by education scholar Joe L. Kincheloe (2007) "a rational inquiry that devalues the role of irrationality will sink under the weight of its own gravities" (p. 16) which perpetuates modernist universalizing tendencies. Consequently, I suggest that promises of "critical pedagogy" are enacted in schools through patriarchal notions that access to knowledge comes through "rational" deliberation and dialogue, which ultimately silences some students while prioritizing others. The idea that newly "empowered students" will be provoked to enact "critical citizenship," "civic courage" thus ensuring "democratic public spheres" (Buckingham, 1996, p. 630) is a foundational tenet of "critical pedagogy." "Critical pedagogy's" assumption that rational deliberation will provoke "the right" way of understanding the world and therefore lead to student "empowerment" reinforces the arrogant patriarchal tendency, that remains at its core despite the numerous critiques of this problematic inclination mentioned above. Biesta (2005b) notes:

> Although the point of departure for "critical pedagogy" is to be found in a radical critique of modern education, it can be argued that "critical pedagogy" at the very same time remains part and parcel of the modern education endeavor, both in terms of its aims and aspirations (emancipation, democracy and justice), and in terms of its means (demystification, ideology critique, critical reflection). (p. 146)

One aspect of "critical pedagogy's" modernist leanings is apparent in its binary notion of "knowing" wherein there are those who know and those who need to be made to know. As such it is through the unveiling of this "correct" knowledge (or way of knowing) that "critical pedagogy" educators will enable the emancipation of those who "need" to be emancipated.[40] Zembylas (2018) notes:

> Limitations of Freirean theory and critical pedagogy, suggest[s] that "critical pedagogy" discourse not only entails problematic dualisms (e.g., oppressed/oppressor;

[40] There is an underlying message in much of the literature on "critical pedagogy" that teaching from this perspective is a teaching practice meant particularly for "urban" youth, a notion I would argue reinforces paternalistic and modernist attitudes of education.

> empowered/disempowered; dominant/subordinate), but also fails to imagine alternative manifestations of criticality that go beyond rationalistic and teleological assumptions. (p. 407)

Following Jacques Rancière, Biesta (2013) explains the problematic of such a dualistic approach to education "introduces a fundamental *dependency* into the "logic" of emancipation. This is because the ones to be emancipated remain dependent upon the "truth" or "knowledge" revealed to them by the emancipator" (p. 78). Such critiques hold that "critical pedagogy" itself reproduces hierarchal attitudes in which the "critical pedagogue" is in possession of the "correct" knowledge through which the student (the other) shall be liberated once they have seen the light. I wonder if it is because of this orientation, of starting from the assumption of dependency located in the "logic" of emancipation, that education cannot get out of the cycle of (re)producing inequities and remains caught in a repetitive loop of (re)searching what we already know, as mentioned in chapter two.

De Lissovoy (2007) importantly reminds us, "Lisa Delpit (1995) has criticized progressive educators for a facile assumption that *they* understand, by virtue of a critical orientation, the needs of students of color" (p. 364). Ellsworth (1989) noted that "critical pedagogy's" reliance on rational reasoning and its universalizing aura denies "the intersections and interactions among relations of racism, colonialism, sexism and so forth" (p. 304). These critiques of "critical pedagogy" and others hold true today and I find them important to revisit because of the ways in which patriarchal notions that "teachers" *know* what "oppressed" students need remains an active agent in the ways in which conservatives, liberals and neoliberal educators flatten difference into sameness.[41] And they tend to do so, it is important to point out, through the universalization and abstraction of suffering and oppression, which ends up making our theoretical observations of such suffering and oppression palatable and non-threatening.

[41] Recall my retelling of the principal's actions at Etobicoke School of the Arts in chapter two.

For example, at a professional development session[42] keynote speaker Desmond Cole, a Black anti-racism activist and journalist spoke to an audience of Toronto educators offering the direct and clear message that anti-Black racism exists throughout schools in Toronto and thus affects Black students across the city. At the end of Cole's talk, a white-male teacher raised his hand and made the comment that non-Black students who have divorced parents have problems just like those experienced by Black students and that therefore we shouldn't only focus on issues of Black racism. The attempt to equate these two experiences by an educator demonstrates the depth of the problem Cole was raising and gesturing educators to consider. I read this White-male educator's comment directed at Cole, his presentation and those of us in attendance, as an educators' way of saying "all lives matter"[43] when faced with their own implication and complicity in White supremacy. This teacher exemplified the ways in which giving agency to all "voices" often allows White voices to minimize the experiences of others and violently denies the unique singularity of Black students' experience of racism in education.

Referring to "critical pedagogy's" failure to adequately deal with issues of race, scholar Ricky Lee Allen (2014) notes "white students sometimes use 'student voice' to ignore the claims of students of color, asserting that a critique of whiteness minimizes their voice" (p. 123). In the case I describe above, it was a White educator using the tactic of "voice" to shut down what I assume he saw as a prioritization of Black (students') lives. Giving voice (through supposed rational dialogue) that results in conflating difference into sameness to hold onto White supremacy is a practice that I have witnessed repeatedly from White educators when issues of systemic racism are being discussed. We see at play here what Ellsworth (1989) was problematizing in her early critique of "critical pedagogy's" omission of power relations within

[42] This PD session took place at Bloor Collegiate, Toronto District School Board, February 2019.
[43] The response "all lives matter" is layered in racist assumptions and attitudes toward the Black Lives Matter movement.

the notion of "voice" (p. 308 - 310). Cole's directness and truth offended many "liberal" White teachers that day. And, in response to hearing themselves implicated in systemic anti-Black racism there were other attempts, such as the one noted above, to silence and render Cole's "voice" suspect. Faced with the stark realities that Cole exposed many in attendance that day refused to acknowledge their complicity in a racist system and so retreated into the liberal and neoliberal fantasy world of universalizing difference and advocating for hyper-individualized explanations of racial violence rather than reckoning with systemic Black oppression that exists in education and schools. This move away from reality ends up maintaining and reproducing the neoliberal mantra that issues of racism are nothing more than individual "perceptions" of an experience as noted in chapter two. Moreover, the White-male teacher's response to Cole's astute, informed and very poignant lecture demonstrates ongoing refusal by many White educators to accept the delusions of White supremacy. Such refusal of historicity makes it easy (unfortunately) to understand why and how Black parents and students are held hostage by the need to produce more and more "data" that "documents" the systemic racism faced by Black students in schools. The ongoing denial of White supremacy by educators (and others) reinforces and validates the continuous need to repeat data collection (of the same) as outlined in chapter two and reinforces neoliberal's attitude of hyper-individualization.

Another problematic that resurfaces in efforts to reinscribe "critical pedagogy" as a corrective to our present menacing times is evident in attempts to prioritize one form of oppression over another thus creating a hierarchal ranking of different types of oppression. Consequently, fragmentation and the establishment of factions ensue amongst educators who seemingly have common desires for the possibilities of education. This is most obvious in the desire to prioritize class above other forms of oppression to thus diminishing the work of

feminists and critical race theorists' understandings of the nuanced dynamics of multiple intersecting forms of oppression. For example, although McLaren (2005) understands the ways in which tenets of "critical pedagogy" are co-opted by liberal and neoliberal education reforms, he also maintains that "progressive teachers have taken 'critical pedagogy' out of the business of class analysis and focuses on a postmodernist concern with a politics of difference and inclusion" (p. 81). He sees this postmodern position as having usurped class in favour of issues of race and gender thus diluting or annihilating "critical pedagogy's" praxis. Yet, Black feminist scholar and critical pedagogue, influenced, like McLaren, by Freire, bell hooks (2000) tells us otherwise. In *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, hooks (2000) acknowledges the imperative to talk about "the interlocking systems of race, gender and class" because the "class conflict is already racialized and gendered" (p. 89-90). I suggest, McLaren's (2005, 2007) desire to (re)assert class and issues of labour as the dominate way of framing oppression (dis)misses any understanding of the notion of "multiple jeopardy" as described by Black feminist scholar Deborah King (1988 p. 4). King (1988) understands the complexities of the interrelation of multiple forms of oppressions, of which class is one, no more important than another. Rather, what is important in her analysis is that "the modifier 'multiple' refers not only to several, simultaneous oppressions but to the multiplicative relationships among them as well. In other words, the equivalent formulation is racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism" (p. 47). I suggest, that by prioritizing class McLaren diminishes the reality of racialized and gendered beings and engages in a patriarchal understanding of oppression, which I suggest feeds into attitudes like those expressed by the White-male teacher mentioned above. As well, I would argue prioritizing class over other forms of oppression ignores "racial capitalism," a concept which demands attention if we are striving to claw our way out of the "pervasive atmosphere of capital realism."

In *Whiteness and "Critical Pedagogy"* (2014), Allen wonders, "what would 'critical pedagogy' look like if it had been founded upon the belief that White supremacy, not capitalism, is the central problem of humankind?" (p. 121). I suggest Allen's question speaks directly to the notion that capitalism *is* a funded and maintained through White supremacy. Therefore, it is problematic when critical pedagogues, like McLaren, insist on prioritizing class rather than working within the messy complexity of intersections of class, race, sex, and gender. I would even go further and suggest that when educators acknowledge the intersectionality of oppression *without* explicitly fore-fronting the relation of capitalism *and* White supremacy we ignore the present historical moment in which "the hold" remains ever-present allowing colonial violence to remain intact.

Below, I briefly consider two ways in which aspects of "critical pedagogy" get taken up in education that maintain "the hold" on Black students. I first consider the notion of "student voice" and link it to the problematic of education as a "safe space." I link these two concepts because it is proposed that through rational deliberation all voices are heard and that this can be accomplished in a "safe" and respectful way. As such it is worth recalling Delpit who observed in 1995 that, "[p]rogressive white teachers seem to say to their black students, 'Let me help you find you voice. I promise not to criticize one note as you search for your own song.'" (p. 18). Delpit (1995) is directing us to consider the ways in which the concept of "student voice" is often used in schools as a hollow act of acceptance and, as such, denies Black students' *beings.* The performance of providing space for "student voice" is often produced through a nod of the head and a (tight) smile which essentially puts a "hold" on (contains) Black students' voices rather than promoting a space within which to learn something different, something new. Giving students "voice" and nothing more is what Delpit (1995) is critiquing in the quote mentioned

above. She is pointing to the harm done in practicing a limited performance of this act of emancipatory pedagogy. In other words, promoting "voice" and nothing else is not enough. I suggest that Delpit (1995) is arguing that supporting "student voice" must be accompanied by thoughtful response and consideration given to ideas expressed by students. If not, what happens to criticality? Criticality is a practice. Consequently, I propose Delpit (1995) is arguing that with "voice" there must also be reflection, critique and learning and that it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure this important aspect of pedagogy enters the space along with "student voice." Otherwise, if everything voiced is simply "accepted" I suggest there is an invisible silencing that occurs. This invisible silencing, I argue, creates as a sense of restrictive containment, a sense of being "held" in limbo wherein a student's words hover as "accepted" yet are ultimately deprived of attention.

The problematic dynamic of "student voice" is apparent in Ellsworth's (1989), "Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy." Ellsworth (1989) reflecting on and analysing an attempt to put into practice tenets of "critical pedagogy" in a course created *specifically* to work with students to unravel and address incidents of racism that had occurred on the university campus where she taught writes:

> I expected that we would be able to ensure all members a safe place to speak, equal opportunity to speak, and equal power in influencing decision making – and as a result, it would become clear what had to be done and why…. Acting as if our classroom were a safe space in which democratic dialogue was possible and happening did not make it so. (p. 315)

Here Ellsworth (1989) realizes the problematic task of creating a "safe space" through "democratic dialogue" (a tenet of "critical pedagogy") in an environment rife with inequities. Simply allowing "student voice" does not create a democratic "equal" space. As noted by education scholar Melissa Gibson (2020):

> One of the driving principles of democratic deliberation and deliberative pedagogies is that each side in a deliberation, each voice, is respected equally; it presumes a social contract between equals. However, in our political reality, each voice is not respected equally nor does each voice have equal opportunity to participate in democratic discourse. (p. 435)

The illusion of equality embedded in the notion of "student voice" and rational deliberation ignores the dynamics of systemic oppression and, I suggest, begs the question – *why would we expect or want education to be a safe?*

Feminist and anti-colonial scholar Katherine McKittrick also questions the desire for education and classrooms to be safe spaces. In fact, she describes the desire for education, teaching and learning to be safe as "a white fantasy that harms" (cited in Hudson, 2014, p. 237). Peter James Hudson (2014) in an interview with McKittrick asks her:

> On twitter, you (depressingly, brilliantly) wrote, "I've never glimpsed safe teaching (and learning) space. It is a white fantasy that harms." I'm wondering if you could expand on that as it pertains to the Black student in Canada? How does such a vexed space inform your own pedagogical practice? (p. 237)

She responds:

> …I wonder a lot about why the classroom should be safe. It isn't safe. I am not sure what safe learning looks like because the kinds of questions that need to be (and are) asked, across a range of disciplines and interdisciplines, necessarily attend to violence and sadness and the struggle for life. (p. 237)

That Hudson (2014) considers McKittrick's original tweet both "depressing and brilliant" (p. 237) is, I suggest, an important marker that points to McKittrick's insightful critique of the problems underlying both the desire for and the declaration, by some, that classrooms *are* or *should* be "safe spaces." Her statement is "depressingly brilliant" because in one phrase she exposes core problems underpinning modernist universalizing notions of education as a "safe space" in which all voices can have equal status. Mckittrick realizes that education as "safe" is a fallacy for many. And most importantly understands that the desire for education to be "safe"

negates the very important work education should be doing: provoking the "educational," questioning social and political inequities and opening spaces for something new to arrive. Biesta (2013) expresses a similar concern when he asks, "at which point [does] the desire for safety become uneducational?" (p. 2). Biesta's (2013) question understands that "safety" nullifies and negates possibilities for what he calls "the beautiful risk of education:" a space in which we do not know what is coming and a place where we are open to the *not* knowing.

Fallacies and desires to represent education as safe, good, transformative, and equitable deny education's disposition and historicity as a place of violence, coercion, and control. Education scholar Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, (2012) writes, "[t]he coercion in the process of 'learning to become' is made all the more violent when the task is to challenge – to transform – the subjectivities inherited from, and continually produced by, ongoing processes of colonization (, p. 51). Todd (2003), drawing on Cornelius Castoriadis writes, "education by its very socializing function and its mission to change how people think and relate to the world, enacts a violence that is necessary to the formation of the subject" (p. 20). As well, Todd (2001) suggests that if educators teach in the hope that students learn and change, then the struggle of learning in itself can be thought to be a violent type of act. Consequently, there is a violence in learning. As Biesta (2005b) explains, "there is a risk in learning, a risk that you might change and that you might learn something you didn't want to learn, perhaps even something about yourself "(p. 61). Consequently, I understand that coveting the notion of "safety" in education both counters the "beautiful risk of education" and is often used as another form of "the hold," because safety (as proposed in education) contains thought and refuses the violence of *becoming* something new and the possibility of *learning* something new.

What I am suggesting here is that foundational attributes of "critical pedagogy" depend on a form of "rationality" that underscores and privileges Western White (male) colonial notions of the production of knowledge and learning, which reproduce underlying assumptions of liberal tendencies toward universality, translating difference into sameness, thus opening a space for neoliberalism's hyper individualization to thrive. As, well I am pointing to the ways in which the language of "critical pedagogy" (e.g., "empowerment," "student voice") circulates in education, figures of speech devoid of meaning and thus action. Consequently, desires to (re)assert "critical pedagogy" as a corrective to our present menacing time contributes to the "ruptured fantasy of education."

In the next two sections I explore the ways in which "critical pedagogy's" messianic characteristics encourages the idea of "teacher as saviour" through both its redemptive undertones and its positioning of teachers as owning the power and knowledge to emancipate those who *need* emancipating. Once again, I suggest this aspect of "critical pedagogy" adds to the "ruptured fantasy of education" as it supports neoliberalism's hyper-individualization, perpetuates colonial oppression and encourages mechanisms that induce the "burnt-out-soul."

"Don't Worry, *I'll* Save You"

"Critical pedagogy's" positioning of teachers as the "emancipators," those with *the* knowledge and power to emancipate, feeds into notions of "teacher as saviour." I suggest the idea of "teacher as saviour" is lurking within many of us in North America who have gone through Faculties of Education, especially those of us who received our training under the auspices of "critical pedagogy." This desire to "save" is a layered dynamic wrapped up in and ignited by the notions of education as a place of social transformation and emancipation. The

complexities of a desire to "save" are also complicated by the ways in which this desire is bound within the idea that teaching is a "calling." While for others it simply resides in one's ego, in the desire to prove they know "better" and "more" than others. Whatever awakens our teacher-hero complex, the "teacher as saviour" trope is rife with paternalistic attitudes, laced with classist, racist and sexist underpinnings and upheld by the fantasy of public education as the "great equalizer" and purveyor of the "good life." And although some might brush off the idea of "teacher as saviour" I suggest it resides deep in the consciousness of liberal and "critical pedagogy's" understanding of education. As such, "teacher as saviour" is a trope we see reproduced in popular culture repeatedly. This trope is so ingrained in our social consciousness that it is also repeatedly parodied.

For example, clearly parodying the Hollywood film *Freedom Writer* (LaGravenese, 2007) MADTV's "Nice White Lady" (Leddy, Grossman, and Bearse, 2007), satirizes the notion of the liberal-white "teacher as saviour" while also parodying teaching practices meant to "liberate" and "empower" disadvantaged/oppressed students. Layered in middle-class liberal whiteness "Nice White Lady" (2007) reflects the ways in which a film like *Freedom Writer* (LaGravenese, 2007) reinforces beliefs that we can "know the other" and thus "fix the "other" by *giving* the "other" (students') their "voice" by providing a structure for them to find their "voice" through curriculum (journaling). We learn that in a world of deficit thinking all that is needed is a nice-white-lady[44] armed with educational theories of liberation who know what "these" students need.

Similarly, in less than ten minutes, *TEACH: A Short Film* (Gast, 2015) insightfully parodies the ways in which theories of "critical pedagogy" are taken up not only in classrooms

[44] Although the saviour trope is not always a "nice White lady" for an analysis of the domination of white women in this role see Amy Brown (2015), *Waiting for Superwoman: White Female Teachers as "Neoliberal Saviors"*

but also through teacher education programs. In this short film, we find a recent graduate of the "Better Teacher's" six-week program"[45] attempting to "emancipate" a classroom of Black high school students and give them what they "need." In the opening scene the teacher, Mr. Prescott, is rehearsing how he will welcome the students and says: "I don't want you to think of me as a teacher, I want you to think of me as a coach or a mentor or maybe even the person that saves you" (0:25). This short parody portrays the teacher as "knowing" what the students need thus highlighting a range of stereotypes that are often imposed by educators on Black students who are universally presumed to be at risk. The students plead with the teacher to just proceed with the biology lesson, yet he continues to undermine and dismiss them and their request, as *he* knows what they need: liberation. In one scene the teacher is meeting with the principal after he ripped up a student's textbook to demonstrate that what *he* was there to "teach" (emancipation) could not be found in a textbook. He says, "I teach to inspire and challenge…. I can help these kids. Have they ever had anyone like me?" The principal scoffs and replies: "Believe me Prescott students here have had a lot of ignorant white teachers just like you" (5:50). The next day in class the teacher apologizes for his behaviour on the previous day and says, "I think we should start over. Maybe we should spend some time getting to know each other." A student, the one whose book he ripped up the day before, says, "Can you just teach us biology? I mean we're all here to learn." Prescott leans in towards the student, "That's great! Why do you want to learn biology?" The student responds that he plans to study science in the future. Prescott seems astounded, his reaction ecstatic. "That's amazing! What did - Did you like watch an inspirational movie or something?" The student proceeds to tell the teacher that he stayed up all night with his father watching the first season of *Cosmos* and he realized he wanted to go into a field that helps

[45] The "Better Teacher's Program" is a parody of organizations, such as Teach for America (which is mentioned later in this chapter) and university programs that focus on preparing teachers to work with "urban" youth.

people. Suddenly Prescott seems confused, totally discombobulated, "So you…r (stutter). Your father is home?" The student starts to respond then realizes what Prescott has said. There is a sudden silence and absolute stillness in the classroom, the teacher's racist assumption (of absent Black fathers) pounding the air. A female student breaks the silence and in a flattened controlled tone of frustration and rage emphasized by two firm taps of her pencil on the desk, says, "Seriously. We're going to tell the principal if you don't teach us biology" (6:59). Flustered, Prescott scrambles to find his textbook, "Let's talk about bio for a little then maybe later I can take some time and save you" (7:08). The teacher's overt racism wrapped up in the guise of emancipatory theories of education that aim to help particular students in this parody may seem over the top, however, I suggest it is this idea that is often replicated in schools, in both overt and subtle ways. Recall, for example, the principal of the elite arts school who created the "Blacklist" in a supposed effort to "help" address the "achievement gap" referenced in chapter two. *Toronto Star* reporter, Mochama (2018) includes James' analysis of this event. James explains "the list in effect categorizes all Black student as "at-risk," which allows for a "web of stereotypes to apply to Black students." This attitude toward Black students is reproduced regularly and supported through paternalistic, racist, and colonial attitudes inherent the problematic ways "critical pedagogy's" emancipatory tenets are taken up in education and enacted through ideals of the "teacher as saviour."

The "Cruel Optimism" of "Teacher as Saviour"

The "teacher as saviour" trope is layered in values of teaching as a "noble" profession and proposes a liberal means of ensuring equality and efforts to uphold middle-class ideals of success and advancement. However, important to note here is how the notion of the "teacher as

saviour" has its foundations in colonial logic (Brown 2015; Bixler, 2020; Cruz, 2018). Saving the other *through* education is embedded in colonial logic and lingers, in contemporary concepts of "teacher as saviour."

In "Do the White Thing: An Analysis of the 'White Teacher Saviour Film' as a Colonial Civilizing Mission Narrative," Melina Bixler (2020) notes, "masquerading as a humanitarian effort, the colonial mission served as the backdrop for Europeans to assert their self-proclaimed 'superior' values and morals onto non-Europeans" (p. 4). César A. Cruz (2018) in "Confessions of an 'Educator' Blinded by Savior Complex and Poverty Porn," elaborates on this issue noting that "many missionary movements the world over, have been based on the belief that it is the God-given duty of the 'saved' one, to 'save the savages.' It also has deep historical roots in education" (paragraph 10). He goes on to assert that such colonial missionary attitudes, most devastatingly enacted upon Indigenous peoples in and through residential schools, continue to morph through "hidden" colonial attitudes in contemporary education and continue to harm "Indigenous, Black, Brown and most other kids of color and poor kids" (paragraph 12). He understands, as do I, the notion of "teacher as saviour" as bound by colonial logic and upheld by tenets of "critical pedagogy."

Elizabeth E. Heilman (2005) states, "a core mythic aspect of the critical identity of utopian "critical pedagogy" is revolutionary, heroic and oppositional" (p. 127). She goes on to note, "the hero image in western society includes a Messianic element in which the hero suffers in order to cleanse and save their society" (Heilman, 2005, p. 128). As previously noted, Han's (2015, 2017, 2018) notion of the "achievement subject" induced through the neoliberal regime tends toward self-exploitation, which he in turn refers to as "voluntary self-exploitation." Consequently, I suggest that Han's (2018) understanding of neoliberalism's mechanism of

"voluntary self-exploitation" reinforces teacher heroes and is supported by messianic characteristics of "critical pedagogy" as understood by Heilman (2005). First, as both human and material resources are slashed, neoliberal capitalist modes of production rely on individuals to be more and to do more; with regards to education, we find that many teachers comply with such imperatives imposing increased demands on themselves to "manage" the new menacing time (remember the ETFO advertisement which assured the public that the "teachers" *would* manage). Second, "critical pedagogy's" explicit and less explicit grandiose proclamations of "critical pedagogy" as heroic, also reinforce the notion of "teacher as saviour."

Heilman (2005) directs us to consider Peter McLaren's request that we "do battle in the streets, in the boardrooms, in the classrooms" (p. 128). Referencing critical pedagogue Ira Shor, Heilman (2005) goes on to explain, that although not always explicit, the "hero identity" is embedded in the language of "critical pedagogy." She writes, "Shor identifies principal goals of Critical Pedagogy, and in this list the hero identity is suggested in terms such as oppose, transform, illuminate, challenge and interfere" (p.128). As such, the language of "critical pedagogy" and the hyper individualization of neoliberal logic as it manifests through "voluntary self-exploitation encourages (expects) educators to continue heroically with less and less and under dire circumstances. The added burden of self-exploitation fuels the "burn-out-soul." As Han (2018) so clearly notes, "burnout is the pathological consequence of voluntary self-exploitation" (p. 34).

In Cruz's (2018) self-reflective vision of himself as inhabiting the "teacher as saviour" cloak he begins to unravel the problematic pedagogies of "student agency," asserting that there is an underlying disconnect between the need for education "reform" rather than "revolution." I suggest that Cruz's "confession" articulates an embodiment of the depressive state of "cruel

optimism" in education. Although understanding structural barriers that impede change in education, Cruz ultimately finds himself and his pedagogy to be lacking and ineffective. Like the fictional Dr. Parker in *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) Cruz embodies the neoliberal rationality of individual self-blame. He did not (could not) live up to his own "teacher as saviour" hero. He writes:

> Jaime Escalante, … the one played by Edward James Olmos, in the 1980s educational film "Stand and Deliver," was my shining example and hero. I thought that film was right on. A Latino educator who believes in his students and prepares them for the greatness that's already inside of them, what's not to like about that? As I look back on the impact that "Stand and Deliver" had on me, I now realize that I have seen over 20+ films that appear to have the same story of a broken neighborhood and a hero educator. Even in that poster I was being set-up; "The school. The teachers. The Parents. The Students. No one cared, except one man. He was the new math teacher." (Cruz, 2018, paragraph 10)

The complexities of who has the potential to save someone and who needs to be saved add another layer of complexities to constructs of teachers and teaching. The need to "save the savages," or the attitude that they, the savage students, cannot be "saved" is apparent in many Hollywood films about "urban" education and schools from *Blackboard Jungle* (Brook, 1955), *To Sir with Love* (Clavell, 1967), *Stand and Deliver* (Menéndez, 1988), *Dangerous Minds* (Smith, 1995) to *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011). Unfortunately, such attitudes also remain complex undercurrents in unraveling educators' desires for transformative possibilities within education, as they navigate their own relationships with their "teacher as saviour" subjectivity. We find here questions such as, which students must be "saved" or can be "saved," which teachers are best "equipped" to do the saving? And consequently, how should educators go about "doing" the saving?

The "teacher as saviour" trope is important to my tracking the ways that symptoms of neoliberal logic collide with and affect pre-existing elements in public education because it is a notion not only perpetuated in fiction, but also impacts factual everyday life. Indeed, a number of

these films are based on "true stories." But, more importantly, the notion of "saviour" trope is important for my work to register because it is often implied and propagated within attitudes and desires in teacher training. Cruz (2018) explains:

> These films position teachers as saviors, givers of hope, counselors, mentors, surrogate parents, cheerleaders, and everything in between. If it wasn't for them, "these kids" would probably die. These narratives create the need for organizations like Teach for America, or educational reform organization fill-in-the-blank, to exist. It also becomes addicting for us to keep immersing ourselves in this type of educational poverty porn, stuff I know I shouldn't be watching but they got me hooked like a fiend. I'm stuck watching films that paint neighborhoods a certain way, from reservations to rural towns, where the conditions are destitute, and in need of saviors with "lesson plans." I wish this was only limited to films, but it lives everywhere, from grad school texts, to educational "research" findings. (Paragraph 5)

Cruz points to Teach for America,[46] the organization parodied in *TEACH* (Gast, 2015) mentioned above, as one incarnation of how conservative organizations position the need for educators to "save" certain students. I suggest that the saviour trope also lingers, perhaps in more subtle ways, in liberal notions of education and through the "fundamentalist tendencies and the instrumentalism inherent in ["critical pedagogy's"] own conception of education" (Biesta, 2005, p. 147). I agree with Cruz's assertion that the conflation of popular film, teacher education and educational theory play a role in perpetuating not only the idea of "teacher as saviour" but so do teachers' latent desires to "save." The romanticized positioning of individual teachers as "superhero/saviour" is embedded directly or indirectly in teacher education and education theories, whether through conservative ideas that exclaim we must "save them from themselves" or via "progressive" notions that proclaim we must provide the tools so that they can "save" themselves.

[46] For information on Teach for America see https://www.teachforamerica.org/ and for a critique of Teach for America see: https://www.propublica.org/article/how-teach-for-america-evolved-into-an-arm-of-the-charter-school-movement

Amy Brown (2015) in her chapter, "Waiting for Superwoman: White Female Teachers as 'Neoliberal Saviors,'" concurs with Cruz's understanding of the widespread influence of the "teacher as saviour" trope. She writes, "it is important to note that this trope is reproduced in teachers' minds through mass media, through teacher training and professional development programs and through national policy debates in education" (p. 84). For example, in a call for "teacher education programs [to] help prepare pre-service teachers to be activist educators" (p. 163) as a way to "save" public education in the current neoliberal political climate, Eden Haywood-Bird and Ai Kamei (2019) propose:

> In order to prepare future teachers to embark on their careers during such an inhospitable time, we believe that part of our role as teacher educators should shift into preparing teachers to be activist educators who stand for the profession's rights and practices, and defend education as a public service that protects children's right to access quality education. (p. 167)

Although their analysis of the destructive forces of neoliberal governmental attacks on public education and teachers' professionalism is sound, and the "desire" for teachers as activist that work to protect public education principled, it seems that once again the burden for change is to be imposed on individual classroom teachers. Restrictive forces of neoliberal policies in education already overburden educators, as Haywood-Bird and Ai Kamei (2019) acknowledge. Yet, their article, "Activist in (teacher) training: Educator training programs need to do their part," reads to me as an attempt to "manage" the current neoliberal situation in education by propagating the notion "teacher as saviour"[47] through the language of "activism." In this view not only do pre-service teachers learn about pedagogy, but they are to be sent into schools as new teachers armed to counter what many of us, who have considered ourselves teacher "activists," have not been able to stop or even slowdown in the last three decades.

[47] For a reflection on how one teacher educator is trying to break down the concept of "teacher as saviour" in teacher education see Brittany A. Aronson's (2017) article, "White Savior Industrial Complex: A Cultural Studies Analysis of a Teacher Educator, Savior Film, and Future Teachers in *Everyday Practices of Social Justice* 6, (3), 36-54.

One point in Haywood-Bird and Ai Kamei's (2019) four-point definition of what a teacher activist is, reads as follows: "a professional teacher who understands that there are risks in being a teacher activist and acknowledges and accepts those risks" (p. 168). This point, I argue, ignores the precariousness that new teachers (and seasoned teachers) face under the neoliberal "managerial" regime that controls schools. New teachers' positions are not secure, they are often moved from one school to another year after year,[48] asked to teach outside of their areas of expertise, and are often called upon to oversee numerous extra-curricular activities as "favours" for the administrations. To keep their jobs new teachers feel as if they have no choice but to comply with these demands while at the same time navigating the complexities of being new classroom teachers. As well, I have witnessed new teachers, who participate in "activism" as encouraged by Haywood-Bird and Ai Kamei's (2019), intimated, harassed and belittled by other teachers and administrators. However, Haywood-Bird and Ai Kamei's (2019) do not discuss what risks await new teachers when they take on the role of "teacher activist" when they enter a school. They do not offer any concrete examples of *how* new teachers should approach, interact, or deal with colleagues and administrators who are hostile to the challenges brought forth by them. Nor do they delve into the complex terrain of creating change in educational institutions that remain more and more underfunded and under neo-liberal regime. Instead, they outline why teacher educators should prepare teacher candidates to be "teacher activist," create a list of skills pre-service teachers need to acquire in order to identify the problems in public education and then they provide a few "lessons" that are meant to help pre-service teachers develop these skills. However, their discussion neglects to address what putting these skills into practice might look like and they do not consider the isolation that new "teacher activists" might feel in tackling this role on their own.

[48] For example, a colleague of mine was placed in ten different schools within her first eight years of teaching.

As an educator who in the past has defined herself as a "teacher activist" and "advocate" for students, who has worked with like-minded educators and individually to resist and push back against the "pervasive atmosphere of capitalist realism," and inequities within education, I understand Haywood-Bird and Ai Kamei's (2019) call as falling into a destructive "self-exploitive" sense of hyper-individualization. Ultimately, Haywood-Bird and Ai Kamei's (2019) call ends up propping up and reinforcing Han's notion of the "achievement subject" as it accepts the state of education (the inevitable depressive realism of it all) and expects individual classroom teachers to "save" the day. This attitude renders the authors, in my opinion, complicit in the present "cruel optimism" of education and in the promotion of neoliberal self-exploitation as they promote, yet again, another unfeasible version of "teacher as saviour."

The Dangers of Theoretical Abstraction

In this section I consider the problem of applying theory in simplistic thoughtless ways thus demonstrating a careless disregard for an object of inquiry, which promotes an empty instrumentalization of theory. Although, I do not support McLaren's (2005) call to prioritize class over all other forms of oppression, like him I am concerned with the ways in which theory often gets diluted through hollowed out language and thoughtless application. McLaren's (2005) writes:

> While teacher education programs have not been able to root Freire out of the philosophy of teaching, they have cannily domesticated his presence by transforming the political revolutionary with Marxist ideas into a capitalist-friendly sage who advocates a love dialogue – separating this notion from that of a dialogue of love. (p. xxix-xxx)

Acknowledging as much we need to ask: What happens through the domestication of revolutionary theory? What are the dangers when such theories are taken up in schools or by academics or administrative managers in piecemeal ways? What happens when educationalists

merely engage such theories without concern for the revolutionary praxis they demand? With these questions in mind, I explore below how the simple focus on the abstract potentiality of such theories undermines the vitally grounded criticality they purport to uphold.

In what follows, I consider education scholars Marcos Godoi, Christiane Caneva & Renata Lopes Jaguaribe Pontes' (2017) reading of a scene in the film *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) to demonstrate what I mean by a thoughtlessness instrumentalization of theory. "L'analyse des films *Freedom Writers*, *Precious* et *Detachment* à partir de la pédagogie de la liberation,"[49] presents an analysis of three popular films and proposes ways in which the films "could be used as tools for initial and continuous teacher training to illustrate emancipatory practices in underprivileged schools" (Godoi, Caneva and Pontes, 2017, p. 295). To demonstrate "critical pedagogy" in action, particularly a Freireian pedagogy of liberation through conscientization (p. 295), the authors state the intent of their paper is to identify ideas of emancipatory education in three films about education and to develop reflections on the potential usage of these films in teacher education (p. 309). My reading of this article aims to expose not only the domestication of theoretical ideas but also point to limitations of theory particularly when it is twisted into, imposed upon or put into action in partial, thoughtless, and forced ways devoid of specificity.

My key question here is what happens to criticality when a twenty-second piece of dialogue is selected to demonstrate the potential of education "comme un acte d'amour" [as an act of love] (Godoi, Caneva and Pontes, 2017, p. 306)? What happens when a few seconds of conversation is lifted out of context to apply or prove a theory, thus ignoring what has come before and what is still to come? What is being demonstrated when only a minuscule slice of a story is used to invoke concepts of "critical pedagogy" (or any theoretical concept for that

[49] The English translation of the article title is: Analysis of the films *Freedom Writers*, *Precious* and *Detachment* from pedagogy of liberation perspective.

matter) such as Freire's notion liberation through conscientization? Although I do think particular scenes in a film can be extracted and used in isolation to illuminate an idea, in this particular instance, if the intent of the authors is to reveal the importance of the relationships that teachers establish with their students, and how these relationships might evolve into an event of liberation though dialogue of love, I had to ask myself did they watch the whole film? And if they did, how do they justify their narrow interpretation of these twenty seconds of dialogue given events that occur later in the film? What exactly are they proposing teachers in training might learn through this scene? What lessons do the authors suppose teacher candidates would take away from their analysis of this minute section of dialogue?

The scene from *Detachment* (Kaye, 2011) that Godoi, Caneva and Pontes (2017) chose to focus on is an interaction between the "hero" teacher Barthes and a student, Meredith. The authors explain: education as an act of love can manifest itself through the relationship that exemplary teachers establish with their students (Godoi, Caneva and Pontes, 2017, p. 306). Therefore, we as readers are urged to note the reassuring attitude of Barthes towards Meredith, a student who they tell us is uncomfortable with her sense of self and expresses emotional pain (Godoi, Caneva and Pontes, 2017, p. 306). In their analysis, the authors only communicate a portion of the conversation between Barthes and Meredith to the reader. To be clear, the authors choose to focus only on twenty seconds of what the teacher says and, in their analyses, never reveal what has led up to this point, or what comes after. Rather, they reference only a few sentences of a conversation from a longer scene. Their analysis revolves around the following lines said by Barthes (the teacher) to Meredith (the student): "We all feel pain. We all have chaos in our lives. Life's very, very confusing, I know. I don't have any answers, but I… I know if you ride it out, it will all be ok" (*Detachment* Kaye, 2011, 1:09:34). After noting that the concept of

hope, as well as those of trust and human affectivity are at the basis of Freire's thought, the authors conclude that Barthes, through dialogue, and establishing a sense of trust and hope, has helped Meredith overcome a situation of oppression (Godoi, Caneva and Pontes, 2017, p. 306). The authors' "textual and contextual reading" of these few sentences as an example of a pedagogy of "liberation" raises concerns as it reveals only a very small portion of the scene.

What Godoi, Caneva and Pontes (2017) disregard is that the scene in which they have extracted the dialogue noted above from, is rife with tension from the moment Meredith enters the otherwise empty classroom to talk to Barthes. The viewer, if they have watched the whole film, is aware of Meredith's vulnerability and her growing emotional attachment to Barthes. The scene begins with Meredith entering the classroom to give Barthes a gift she has created for him – a representation of her impression of him. The photo collage is a shot of an empty classroom with a large shot of Barthes' head mounted onto the right-hand corner of the photo, which takes up the full length of the image – his facial features are removed and rendered blank. His reading of the image is summed up in his words: "a faceless man in an empty room" (*Detachment* Kaye, 2011, 1:08:10). Meredith explains the image by saying, "I watch you around the school you always seem so sad like maybe you have a hard time with things maybe you need someone to talk to." His response is to ask her if *she* needs someone to talk to. He does the appropriate thing by asking her if she wants to talk to Dr. Parker, the guidance counsellor. But Meredith immediately rejects his offer, visibly demonstrating feelings of distress, as if she thinks he is rejecting her. He says "ok," sensing her panic, and asks what he can do to help. Meredith, referring to a prior class discussion says, "Like you said, we're born into this, there's nothing left nothing but to realize how fucked up things are, it's not enough - *I* won't last" (*Detachment* Kaye, 2011, 1:09:23). It is at this point that Barthes utters the lines to Meredith, mentioned above

which Godoi, Caneva and Pontes (2017) focus on: “We all feel pain. We all have chaos in our lives. Life’s very, very confusing, I know. I don’t have any answers, but I… I know if you ride it out, it will all be ok” (*Detachment* Kaye, 2011,1:09:34). Godoi, Caneva and Pontes (2017) assert that Barthes words of reassurance to Meredith demonstrate “education as an act of love” (306). However, I argue, his words are platitudes, clichés that promise that it will get better, thus devaluing and brushing aside Meredith’s feelings of distress that *need* attending to. Barthes universalizes her particular pain and suffering by saying “we are all the same” flattening out difference and different experiences of pain. Godoi, Caneva and Pontes, (2017) also omit the end of the scene where after this exchange Meredith asks Barthes if he likes her and he responds with: “Yes, of course I do” (*Detachment* Kaye, 2011,1:10:06). It is here that Meredith breaks down crying and wants to be physically consoled by Barthes. She moves into Barthes holding on to him, not wanting to let go. Barthes at this point tries to move away from Meredith but he is backed up against the chalkboard. He gently puts his hands on Meredith’s shoulders to push her away from him, acutely aware of the problematic predicament he faces as a male teacher physically consoling a teenage female student. A concern that is warranted when another teacher comes into the classroom and her immediate reaction to what she sees is accusatory toward Barthes. Rather than displaying concern for the student who is obviously in extreme distress, she demands Barthes explain what is going on as Meredith runs out of the classroom. Barthes calls to Meredith to come back as she runs out of the classroom crying but Meredith does not respond. What is most disturbing, however, is that neither of the teachers follows Meredith to help her or to insure that she gets some sort of help.

Godoi, Caneva and Pontes, (2017) read twenty seconds of conversation from this scene as Barthes having reassured Meredith or brought her hope (l’espérance) through dialogue and

through his assurance of the possibility of a more serene future (p. 306). However, I suggest the end of this four-minute scene easily disputes their reading of this "conversation" and is *totally* shattered by the time the film is over. I believe conversations with students, both formal and informal, have the potential to spark change, dialogue, questioning and often provoke different ways of seeing and thinking as well as have the potential to help students who are in crisis. However, what does it mean when education scholars select a twenty second slice of a film to represent notions of "liberation through conscientization" and do not consider (or mention) that in the end, the student kills herself?

I see a number of ways in which the whole classroom scene Godoi, Caneva and Pontes, (2017) refer to could be used to provoke discussions amongst teacher candidates about depression, shaming of young women, dynamics of male teachers comforting young women or family violence, all of which are part of the dynamics revealed in the relationship between Barthes and Meredith. They might ask teacher candidates to consider what you might do when a student says to you, "*I* won't last" (*Detachment* Kaye, 2011,1:09:25). Yet, in their article the authors conveniently isolate twenty seconds of conversation to exemplify, the content of the film notwithstanding, a teacher helping a student overcome a situation of "oppression" (Godoi, Caneva and Pontes, 2017, p. 306). Are the authors implying that Meredith has realized liberation through suicide? I doubt it.

I draw on the above example to illustrate and underscore that my concern in this chapter is not just a critique of the call for a renewed implementation of tenets of "critical pedagogy," but also with the problematic ways in which theory is often thoughtlessly put into (mis)practice. Godoi, Caneva and Pontes' (2017) analysis reflects the dangers of taking up tenets of theories (and works of art attempting to grapple with complex issues) in partial ways to support a desire

for education to be transformative. Theory, in this context becomes a hollow act. Consequently, I am suggesting that thinking education only as the abstract application of principles of theory forecloses the "educational" rather than opening space for it to appear thus perpetuates the "ruptured fantasy of education."

Berlant notes, "[no] theory on its own can induce a better new consistency for living" (cited in García Zarranz & Ledoux-Beaugrand, 2017, p. 13). She continues:

> A good theory helps shape what we pay attention to and how we live and imagine living; it can be an anchor when things are awry, but it can be a harm when it stops us from taking in singularity, anomaly, and unpredicted forms of life. (García Zarranz & Ledoux-Beaugrand, 2017, p. 13)

Perhaps this is the hidden point of this chapter: the limitations (and sometimes harm) of theory without thinking. Such thoughtlessness clouds what is "educational in education" (Di Paolantonio, 2019a). Thinking with Arendt, Di Paolantonio (2019a) points us to the "need *to attend* to *the gravity* of what we are doing when we do what we do, even when we believe we are pursuing the most serious of things" (original emphasis, p. 215). Otherwise as he notes, our seriousness "can cloud our attentive relationship to the very world in front of us" (Di Paolantonio, 2019a, p. 215) Wrapped up in the "seriousness" of applying theory, Godoi, Caneva and Pontes' (2017) bore down on one section of one scene in a film and neglect to attend to what is right in front of them: Meredith does not experience education as emancipatory nor does she experience Barthes' attempts to reassure her as giving her hope for a better future rather she kills herself in a very public way at the school. In fact, Meredith's very public act of suicide might be read as a testament to the failure of education and school promises to "save" students.

Desires to hold on to abstract principles of theory, such as tenets of "critical pedagogy," in ways that ignore the moment in which we are living and attempting to survive concerns me because such optimism (in the potential promises of theory) obscure what is right in

front of us. And so, I return once again to the question: How do educators hold onto their attachments to the hope that education can help forge a better future when the system depletes their souls? How do educators survive the cruelty of ever-increasing thoughtless time in education?

A *Different* Menacing Time – "Survival Time"

I suggest, surviving "cruel optimism" in education requires attuning ourselves to a *different* time from that in which critical pedagogy emerged – a *different* menacing time than that which Greene described in 1986. We are in a time in which capitalist and neoliberal affronts to education, which Greene (1986) once addressed, have not only persisted but have also been magnified. Given the particularities of our moment, I argue that imagining education amid surmounting "ordinary crisis" requires searching for spaces of possibilities within the "impasse of the present" (Berlant, 2011).

As noted above many "critical pedagogy" scholars (Apple, 2011; Giroux, 2001, 2007, 2014, 2015; Leistyna, 2007; McLaren, 2005, 2007; Macedo, 2005, 2007) point to the pervasiveness of neoliberal rationality that consumes education today. In their own distinctive ways, they more or less point to neoliberalism as being highly problematic while maintaining that reforging "critical pedagogy" today remains the corrective for addressing the inequities that continue to plague education. I restate here that the cruelty in the call to (re)assert "critical pedagogy" rests in the misrecognition that enmeshed as we are the "psychopolitical age" (Han, 2017a) repetition of the same will *not* alter (or fix) the ongoing dilution of public education or the sense of despair that lingers in the burnt-out-souls of educators. Berardi (2017) observes that we are now in the "age of impotence." He explains, "capitalism is a dead dog, but society is

unable to come out from under the rotting corpse, so the social mind is devoured by panic and furious impotence, until finally it turns to depression" (Berardu, 2017, p. 26). I suggest that Berardi's notion of the "age of impotence" has similar resonances to the political thinkers that I have been working with thus far in this dissertation. Namely, Berardi's point here aligns itself with: 1) the sense of inevitability and "stuckness" located in Fisher's (2009) notion of the "pervasive depressive atmosphere of capital;" 2) Han's (2015; 2017) "burnt out soul;" and 3) Berlant's (2011) notion of fraying fantasies of the "good life." Each of these political thinkers, along with Berardi, places us in a present time saturated by the violence of neoliberal rationality in which our usual attempts of repair have faltered leaving us wondering, as Berlant (2011) asks, "what happens when the loss of what's not working is more unbearable that the having of it, and vice versa" (p. 27). Despite living within an unbearable sense of despair the fear of letting go of our attachments to the promises of education keeps *critical* educators looking for openings that might lead to something different (better). What I am gesturing to is that *because* of the failure of the promises of education (and the ongoing repetition of such promises) *critical* educators are left searching for moments of interruption as they have lost trust in the possibilities for sustainable systemic changes within educational institutions.

> Berardi (2017) in expressing his "despair or, rather [his] vision without hope" writes:
>
> > My despair is based on an intellectual understanding of the failure of the promise of modernity that has nourished my formation, but I know, too that announcing the failure of the intellectual enterprise that has motivated my life does not make me happy. (p. 61)

Berardi's declaration above suggests he realizes the cruelty of his optimistic attachment to the "promises of [an emancipatory] modernity." Perhaps "critical pedagogy" scholars who call for (re)instituting "critical pedagogy" hold fast to their attachments to a utopian promise of education because they are unable to bear the numbing sensation of impotence in the

emancipatory project of education. Why not declare the failure of such promises, as Berardi (2017) has, and work within the "impasse of the present" to disentangle from the fraying fantasies of utopian promises? The answer to this question, I think, lays in the very sense that we are drowning in the feeling that there is no alternative, which I have been describing thus far. Although we can acknowledge, maybe even theorize, the desperate times in which we are living, *thinking* something new seems inconceivable. However, as I am proposing, putting forward solutions that repeat the same (failed) optimisms contributes to the depressive atmosphere that lingers in public education.[50] Berlant (2011) explains the consequences of our getting stuck in the repetition of the same like this:

> The compulsion to repeat optimism, which is another definition of desire, is a condition of possibility that also risks having to survive, once again, disappointment and depression, the protracted sense that nothing will change and that no-one, especially oneself is teachable after all. (p. 121-122)

So, then the question becomes how do we survive the *new* menacing time? How can we disrupt the sense of inevitably in which nothing new seems possible? How do educators hold on to optimism in education and *think* beyond mere survival?

Han (2018) thinking with Aristotle writes, "[t]he capitalist economy absolutizes *survival*. It is not concerned with the good life" (p.18). Han (2018) goes on to state, "mere survival is obscene" (p. 18). There is a definite sense of the obscene in education when you consider the cruelties of trying to survive a public education that has lost its commitment to the public good under neoliberal capitalist logic. Berlant (2011) notes that we shouldn't call it the "good life but 'the bad life' – that is, a life dedicated to moving toward the good life's normative/utopian zone but actually stuck in what we might call survival time, the time of struggling, drowning, holding

[50] Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, I suggest that it is exactly the depressive atmosphere I describe throughout my dissertation that is also responsible for inducing an attitude of "why bother" that affects some educators who simply "survive" by simply compiling with what is asked of them.

onto the ledge, treading water — the time of *not- stopping*" (p. 169). It is exactly the emergence of the sensibility of "survival time — the time of *not- stopping*" within education that I have exposed thus far as I track elements that shape "cruel optimism" in education. My purpose has been to make visible ways in which numerous elements such as the ever-increasing neoliberal logic of hyper-individualiztion, ongoing enactments of White supremacy, the naturalization of misogynist thinking and practice and continued implementation of the "learnification of education" interconnect and converge to form the depressive atmosphere that lingers in schools today. Consequently, I ask, how do we "live on" within "survival time?" How do we refute the overwhelming sense that there is no alternative? How do we *"live on"* feeling that education and educators are hanging by a thread clinging to a "ruptured fantasy?" How do we "live on" repeating the same when the same is not working? Is it possible to break away from what is not working – to interrupt "survival time" even for a moment?

In the next chapter I suggest, the capacity to survive "cruel optimism" in education depends on being able to read moments of interruption that open "educational" spaces *within* the present hostile institutional structure. It is my proposal that such moments can interrupt education and excavate *time* within which the "educational" can appear, even if just briefly. I argue that to unearth the "educational" we must work within the "impasses of the present." What this means is that to survive the compromised conditions of education educators must looking for openings, for "modes of living on," in the impasse of the historical present (Berlant 2011, p.8, 49, 195, 199).

Chapter four works from the premise that the present time of "survival time" in education, "the time of *not-stopping,*" demands that educators constantly adjust and adapt to toxic conditions to recuperate some sort of hope in education. Such adjusting and adapting

(living on) I insist, is not a move toward a different (better) future but rather a mode of survival through which glimmers of something better surface momentarily. *Critical* educators stuck in "survival time," are weighted down by their burnt-out-souls grasping for a glimmer of something that might, even for just a moment, provoke something more than mere survival and interrupt the depressive atmosphere of "capitalist realism" in education. As Fisher (2009) tells us,

> The very oppressive pervasiveness of capitalist realism means that even glimmers of alternative political and economic possibilities can have disproportionately great effects. The tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again. (80-81)

For educators tiny events of possibility, that Fisher alludes to, come in the form of pedagogical encounters in which teacher, student and text come together in "survival time" and, for a moment, interrupt the overwhelming sensation of despair that lingers in education today.

My reluctant proposal, noted in my introduction, and which I expand on in the next chapter, is that these tiny events of pedagogical encounters appear *only* in brief, fleeting moments given the present state of public education. At issue is not *only* the ability to read such moments when they appear, but also the ability and energy to *pause* and tend to the "educational" possibilities a fleeting moment holds. Perhaps the need to pause and take time seems like a simple request. However, given educators' burnt-out-souls the mere act of surviving, as Berlant (2011) tells us, "absorbs most of the energy and creativity people have" (p. 168). Therefore, chapter four begins by considering the elements needed to interrupt the present conditions of education, which make it increasingly difficult for *critical* educators to grasp onto the fleeting moments when they appear. As well, I bring to light another dynamic element, which magnifies the sense of the "time of non-stopping" and challenges educators' ability to pause and attend to moments of interruption in

classrooms: the ever-expanding intrusion of the digital sphere.[51] The final sections of chapter four describe two classroom experiences that I suggest invoke Di Paolantonio's (2016) understanding of the pedagogical importance of "passing time together" with an object in common, in which for a moment, teacher, student and text come together in the "impasse of the present" and, for a moment, interrupt the "learnification of education."

[51] I use the term digital sphere to encompass a range of digital phenomena such as: digital devices, digital technologies, digital culture, the digital divide, digital communication and digital data.

Chapter Four:

Interrupting "Survival Time:" Pausing to "Pass Time" Together

Catching our breath?

Given the overwhelming depressive state of education how can *critical* educators catch our breath within the psychopolitical forces of neoliberalism? How can we bear the ubiquitous violence that surrounds us? What promises of education can we put forth from within the stuckness of the present in which the future of education (and so much else) is collapsing under the weight of despair? How can we stand up for education and work to break the double bind of "cruel optimism?" How do we to interrupt "survival time – the time of non-stopping?" How do we make space for the "educational" while burdened by the instrumentalization of education and our burnt-out-souls?

To address these questions the first two sections of this chapter consider the problem of harnessing time and attention within the present compromised conditions of education. The first section argues that pedagogical moments of interruption need an un-divided attention, a pause in time and space within which to foster the "educational." In the second section of this chapter, I claim that the expansion of the digital sphere introduces yet another "cruel optimism" into the world of education by inducing a crisis of attention. Paradoxically this crisis of attention subsequently challenges my call for cultivating attentiveness. An in-depth exploration of the multitude of problematics, controversies, and consternations that the digital sphere has unleashed on education is beyond the scope of this project. However, what is of concern to my work is the

ways in which the maladies of the digital sphere manifest through students' screens, structuring and perpetuating the narcissism and hyper-individualization required by neoliberalism. I argue that the proliferation of what feminist scholar and artist Bracha Ettinger (2020) refers to as the "screen gaze," fragments attention and challenges the ability to find the time required to tend to pedagogical moments of interruption.

Extending on Berlant's edict "to hold the space open beyond survival: the space of flourishing," (Barnard Center for Research, 2011, 49:28) and invoking Di Paolantonio's (2016) understanding of the pedagogical importance of "passing time together" with an object in common, the third section of this chapter explores pedagogical moments of interruption that open possibilities to momentarily suspend the (negative) violences of education. Such moments, I will discuss, allow for a temporary housing of the "educational" and interrupt the sense that there is no alternative. This momentary possibility affords the "burnt-out- soul" a vital reprieve. Continuing to draw on my experiences as a classroom educator I endeavour to reveal how teacher, student and text come together in the "impasse of the present" and, for a moment, interrupt the "learnification of education." Through my reading of an exemplary moment of "passing time together" that occurred in a grade-eleven English class I explore how, in this class, sparked by one student's comment, we were able to disrupt the compromised conditions of education and for a moment "live on" in "survival time" *together*. In the final section of this chapter, I develop this notion further by exploring the way in which a grade nine student's sudden affective response to an image opened a space for a whole class to think together outside their isolated individual worlds and took time to pause and attend to the world they inhabit.

The Problem of Time and Attentiveness in the "Time of Not-Stopping"

Both Berlant (2011) and Berardi (2017) acknowledge that we are in a time in which the promises underlying social democracy have abandoned us. However, they continue to look for openings of interruption that might lead to *something new – something different* – to help fight against the cruelties of our time. Berardi's (2017) "vision without hope," referenced in the previous chapter, is ensconced in possibilities of not giving up especially when giving up seems to be the only viable option for survival; while Berlant (2011) looks for "moments when life could become otherwise, in the good sense" (p. 48). Berlant (2011) sees possibilities in reinventing *from* the scene of survival to imagine a "potentialized present that does not reproduce all of the conventional collateral damage" (p. 263). Similarly, *critical* educators look for possibilities within the "ruptured fantasy" of education in order to stop, for at least a moment, perpetuating cruelty and harm that foreclose the "educational." Consequently, we (*critical* educators) adjust and adapt even when our optimism feels destructive and wretched. It has been my experience that *critical* educators continue to look for space and time to interrupt the depressive atmosphere that threatens to consume us and our students *even* while we feel ourselves drowning in despair: suffocating from the barrage of hollowed out words and theories, battling the "learnification of education" and restrictive mechanisms of neoliberalism, exhausted from resisting the sense of inevitability that overwhelms us, and reeling from the violence that surrounds us.

Although a sense of hopelessness and heartbreak motors my understanding of the "ruptured fantasy of education" I (and *critical* educators like me) nonetheless maintain an attachment – a commitment – to the "educational." To be clear, this commitment is not the gratuitous hope embedded in cynical managerial evocations of equity and inclusion; nor are such

commitments grounded on liberal fantasies of education as a portal to the "good life," nor is this commitment located in the promises of hollowed out theory. Rather, *critical* educators' commitment to the "educational" is an act of survival layered in feelings of desperation and powered by our determination to *confront, expose, and fight against* education's thoughtless acquiescence to neoliberal logic and capitalist demands.

As explained in my introduction, the "educational," is fundamentally relational. The "educational," is an "interruptive force" that allows the ethical and singularly unique to arrive through a sense of relationality (Biesta 2018; Di Paolantonio 2019b). Such a force *needs* to pause time so that we might think together. Such a force *needs* space that opens rather than forecloses relationality. Such a force *needs* attentiveness – an attentiveness that attends to questioning not answering. Philosopher and political activist Cornel West states, "education is about the formation of attention. You attend to the things that matter. It's about cultivation of the self" (ABP Speakers, 2016, 0:24). I understand West's articulation of the formation of attention in education as a process of developing an ethics of responsibility (and courage) to cultivate the self *in relation* to the world. Biesta (2020) describes this process of the cultivation of self as "education as subjectification." Drawing on education scholar Philippe Meirieu, Biesta (2020) writes,

> Education as subjectification is …[best] described as encouraging an "appetite" for trying to live one's life in the world, so to speak; it is about arousing a desire for wanting to try to live one's life in the world, without thinking oneself in the center of the world. (97-98)

I contend that developing a sense of attentiveness to the world, our place in it, and our relation to it and others can be fostered through education. Educational scholar Jan Masschelein (2010) explains a sense of attentiveness that involves the "I" but does not center the "I." He writes:

> To be attentive is to open oneself to the world. Attention is precisely to be present in the present, to be there – in the present – in such a way that the present can present itself to

> me (that it becomes visible, that it can come to me and I can to see) and that I am exposed to it in such a way that I can be changed or 'cut' or contaminated, that my gaze can be liberated (through the 'command' of what is present). As, such attention makes experience possible. (48)

However, the task of fostering attention, in the sense of making the world present within education is a task that demands a pause in *time*. It is a task that requires interrupting "survival time – the time of non-stopping." A task that seems almost impossible within the constraints of present compromised conditions of education. And yet, the *critical* educators' commitment to the "educational" continually strives to hold time and space open for pedagogical encounters of interruption to occur despite our burnt-out-souls.

What I want to make clear is that *critical* educators enact their commitment to the "educational" under immense duress. The tension between existing in "survival time" and interrupting "survival time" to reclaim a sense of the "educational," takes energy. The energy needed here is the energy of the soul. As previously noted, I understand the soul as an expression of the energy of the ***whole*** body and all that that encompasses (Di Paolantonio 2019b; Han 2015; Berardi 2009a). Thus, the double bind for educators becomes endeavouring to reinvigorate our burnt-out-souls to counter the sense of impotence that exhausts us, all the while looking for openings to interrupt the "ruptured fantasy" of education.

Berlant captures the burden of this double bind when she notes, "for activists, the ambition to survive the world *and* further disturb it produces psychic loads so very difficult to carry, seeking out breathing room for life while seeking to make *more* disturbance (cited in Brad Evans, 2018a, Paragraph 9, original emphasis). The weight of a sort of panicked anxiety, which morphs into a sense of a hyper-depressive-exhaustion depleting the energy of the soul, makes it difficult for *critical* educators to pause for anything other than trying to survive "survival time." "The time of non-stopping" ensures that *critical* educators are constantly reacting to the demands

of doing more with less, particularly less time. Not only is the soul depleted by meaningless bureaucratic demands, by cuts to human resources, hollowed out language and attempts at repetitive "solutions," but *time* is also consumed and depleted by these elements. In addition, as I outline below, the struggle to harness time is challenged by a crisis of attention provoked through the ever-present infiltration of digital devices into classrooms.

Gazing into the Screen: A Crisis of Attention

Running parallel to the timeline of the proliferation of neoliberal destructive forces in education, which I describe in chapter one, is the never-ending expansion of the digital sphere. From the mid 1990's to present day the digital sphere has accelerated at an unprecedented speed and infiltrated classrooms with a stealth force. Philosopher Hagi Kenaan (2013) writes, "The fact that our ordinary spaces of existence, both private and public, [and those in between] fill up with screens, only attests to the grip of the screen structure on our subjectivity" (p. xviii). Drawn in by the seemingly all-knowing screen the student's gaze is in constant motion; their beings radiate frenzied-panicked-surges that seem to keep them on edge always anticipating the next ping, afraid to miss out on something, anything, everything. Students frantically shift their eyes from their screen, to the teacher, to their screen, to their work, to their screen, to the textbook, to their classmate's screen and (sometimes) back to the teacher's projected screen at the front of the class. Students move in and out of their screens constantly – living life in fragmented intervals of distraction, anxious waves of anticipation and sporadic flashes of excitement. They play games,[52] scan their social media platforms, watch the most recent YouTube sensation, or stream latest Netflix show, or podcast. Students scroll through images of violent tragedies, then roused by the

[52] Such behaviour is not limited to high school student. During my graduate studies I witnessed a graduate student playing Candy Crush during a graduate seminar.

sound of a ping, laugher erupts as the student reacts to a text or image sent by a friend – all the while sitting in a classroom supposedly attending to the lesson at hand. Berardi (2009b) explains:

> Focusing on an object for a certain deal of time is becoming an impossible task for a large number of kids: attention tends to change immediately its focus, looking for a new object. There is a direct a relationship between the exposure time of the mind to the video-electronic stimulus and the growing volatility of attention. Never in the history of humankind has the mind of a child been exposed to such a fast and invading bombardment of info impulses. It is obvious that this acceleration is producing unpredictable effects on the cognitive domain. (p. 98)

Consequently, the infectious magnetism that pulls the gaze *into* the screen[53] institutes a crisis of attention. Thus, time and attention are consumed and rendered disjointed by the constant rhythms of students' digital devices.

Inundated with an over an overabundance of stimulation leads to what Berardi (2009b) refers to as a "permanent electrocution" (p. 36, 39, 45) and a crisis of attention (p. 108). The sensation of "permanent electrocution" creates a frenzied sense of numbness, increased problems of attention, anxiety, panic, and fragmentation (Berardi 2009b, Ettinger 2020; Fisher, 2009; Han, 207a, 2017b). Berardi (2009b) writes:

> [The] acceleration of stimuli is a pathogenic factor that has wide ranging effects in society. Economic competition and digital intensification of informatic stimuli, combined together, induce a state of permanent electrocution that flows into a widespread pathology which manifests itself either in the panic syndrome or in attention disorders. (p. 36)

Likewise, Fisher (2009) notes, if "something like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a pathology, it is a pathology of late capitalism - a consequence of being wired into the entertainment-control circuits of hypermediated consumer culture" (25). Not only are we wired into our screens – our screens are wired *into* us. As Kenaan (2013), tell us "we have lost the capacity to see the extent to which our existence has become screen-compatible, or more bluntly, after Baudrillard, that we ourselves have become the screen" (p. xviii). Consequently, when a

[53] See: *Screenager* (dir., Delaney Ruston, 2016) and *Stare into the lights My Pretties* (dir., Jordan Brown, 2017)

teacher asks a student to put away their smartphone (which is in fact a highspeed data processing device) it often feels as if you are asking a student to relinquish part of their very being. In an *Equity and Social Change* course I team-taught with scholar and educator Vanessa Russell, we asked students to create life-sized bodies and to somehow represent the impact of oppression upon that body.[54] Although students were *not* required to make the body represent themselves some students did. Interestingly, two of the students who chose to represent themselves portrayed their cell phones as *part* of their bodies. These students did not view their cell phones as an object separate from themselves. Rather, they understood the devices to be an integral part of their beings. One student depicted his head-phone-wires as tentacles that merged into his physical being enabling information from his phone to flow directly into his brain. The other student transformed her hand into a pink blob to represent her phone as part of her physical being. Both students did this deliberately. They understood their phones to be vessels of connectivity embedded in their bodies that allows the world to come to them, thus ensuring they are constantly connected to the digital flow that gives their lives meaning.

The perceived need to keep up with and react to the constant influx of information, the latest social media rage, and the demand to always be available to communicate at a moment's notice has become normalized and thus expected and accepted. Theorist Jonathan Crary (2013) in his book 24/7 describes ways in which cyberspace (the digital sphere) has become, not only a tool of capitalism, but also a form of communication that expects an immediate reply. Although Crary (2013) is referring to ways in which cyberspace has obliterated the lines between private and public space in relation to labour, what is relevant here is that any sense of the classroom as a sheltered space for students, teachers, and text to come together has been obliterated. For example, because of these blurred lines, I have spoken to many students' parents or guardians

[54] See: Russell & Azzarello, 2014, p. 325.

during class time not because I have initiated contact but rather because the adults phone the student with the expectation that the student will answer immediately. And answer they do. It is at this point that I request to speak to whoever is calling. I will explain that the student is in class and offer to pass along a message. Often, I'm told it's not important and they will call back during lunch break. There is usually no sense that such a disruption might have any impact on what is (or should be) taking place in the classroom. Needless to say, what has become an "urgent" message has changed along with the new 24/7-communication protocol. As Crary observes:

> One of the goals of Google, Facebook, and other enterprises (five years from now the names may be different) is to normalize and make indispensible, as Deleuze outlined, the idea of a continuous interface – not literally seamless, but a relatively unbroken engagement with illuminated screens of diverse kinds that unremittingly demand interest or response. (75)

The demand to react immediately and the fear of missing "something" creates a sense of stunned distraction even when students are trying to focus on the "lesson" at hand.

Students' screens draw them into their own worlds thus making their ability, and I might add their desire, to attend to a specific object *together* in a classroom a difficult enterprise. The pull of the "screen gaze," makes attending to a particular task, or object outside the screen more difficult than ever before. Their attention focused inward, bound by their desires, and fears they remain absorbed in their own worlds, lulled into a hyper-alertness waiting for the next text, notification or poke. Berardi (2009b) suggests that we are functioning in a "sort of continuous excitation, a permanent electrocution, which leads the individual mind as well as the collective mind to a state of collapse" (p. 45). Fisher (2009) notes that students are "too wired to concentrate" (p. 24) while according to Ettinger (2020) "we are subdued by the screen gaze" functioning in what she calls "digital stupor" (11:01). Consequently, I suggest "digital stupor,"

does not simply induce a state of distraction and a dulling of one's senses, but rather it produces an *electrified numbness.* This electrified numbness instils a disconnected daze rather than a direct connection to anything or anyone. Accordingly, students are left in isolated, frenzied trances waiting for the next thing to appear on their screen separating them from the world. According to Han (2017b) we have become a "digital swarm." The "digital swarm," Han (2017b) tells us, "does not constitute a mass because no *soul* – no *spirit* – dwells within it. The soul gathers and unites. In contrast, the digital swarm comprises isolated individuals" (original emphasis, p. 10). Educators see this isolation in our classrooms – students' heads bent over their screen-absorbed world drawn in and isolated.

I draw attention to thinking about the impact of the "screen gaze" at this point in my project because first, I contend that the isolating, attention deprived state of electrified stupor works in concert with the sense of isolation imposed through the "learnification of education." As noted by Di Paolantonio (2016):

> In a very obvious manner the cruel optimism in 'learnification' perpetuates the condition of 'loneliness' as the learner, reduced to an atomised, isolated monad in pursuit of his or her self-optimising, cannot but be deprived of that common sense and ground that allows one to stand in relation to others in the world. (p. 154)

What I am suggesting here is that the self-centered isolation promoted through the "learnification of education" also occurs through the "screen gaze." The constant inward pull of the self-centered screen acts as a mechanism of fragmentation, which deprives the ability to "stand in relation to others in the world." As Kenaan (2013) suggests, the screen erases the "distinction between inside and outside, between overt and concealed, between levels of reality" (p. xvi). As such, everything that appears on the screen is flattened to the same thus there is no sense of perspective – no sense of relation. As Kenaan (2013) asserts, the screen "permits no encounter" (p. xviii).

Second, I am proposing that the crisis of attention induced through the "screen gaze" not only engenders a sense of hyper-individualization but also swallows time. Time is consumed by the hyper need to constantly be looking for immediate pleasure located in the depths of the screen and in turn time consumes attention thus severing the potentiality of being in relation to the world. Ettinger (2020) tells us:

> The phenomenological experience of social digital media is of accelerating addiction. The subject repeatedly and endlessly looks for the enjoyment achieved by immediate satisfaction of needs… Leaving no time-space for desire to appear. No time-space for wondering, douleur and lamenting, witnessing, for caring the other for caring *for* the other, no time to develop love, care and affective response-ability – and no possible passage from elementary empathy to ethical compassion. No possibility for imagination. (12:56)

Berardi (2009b), like Ettinger (2020), understands the problem of "time" as a problem of connectivity to others and the world. Berardi (2009b) recognizes that the speed of the digital sphere nullifies the possibilities and even the desire to tend to the world and our relation to it. He writes:

> [T]he acceleration of experience provokes a reduced consciousness of stimulus, a loss of intensity which concerns the aesthetic sphere, that of sensibility, and importantly also the sphere of ethics. The experience of the other is rendered banal; the other becomes part of an uninterrupted and frenetic stimulus, and loses its singularity and intensity – it loses its beauty. Thus we have less curiosity, less surprise; more stress, aggressiveness, anxiety, and fear. The acceleration produces an impoverishment of experience, because we are exposed to a growing mass of stimuli that we cannot elaborate upon, according to the intensive modalities of pleasure and knowledge. (p. 70)

Unfortunately, in education and particularly in schools, there is a sense of surrender to the intensification of the digital sphere and all that it encompasses. There is a managerial "acceptance" of the intrusion of the digital sphere into classrooms and an attitude that we must simply manage and thus embrace what is inevitable and seemingly beyond our control. Managing this intrusion means that any concerns or questions about students' use of smartphones in the classrooms are reduced to individual teachers' responsibility and their

classroom management skills (or lack thereof). In order to cater to what is perceived to be the inevitable fragmentation of time induced by the crisis of attention spawned by digital interventions educators are schooled in teaching as a pathological act of "nursing" attention disorders.

Educators are not only encouraged to "integrate" new technologies into their teaching they are also advised to reproduce the rapid-fire staccato attack of the screen by providing a constant barrage of different types of "activates" and a range of visual means to relay information. As such, apps such as *Kahoot*[55] are not merely ways to "engage" students (get their attention) as some educators propose, but rather the tempo of the screen becomes *"the"* mode of communication educators are being encouraged to replicate. Instead of thinking about ways to slow down, attend to, and tend to a text, a theme, an image or a mathematical equation with care and attentiveness, educators are being told to transform themselves into screens. This transformation, of educator into screen, participates in perpetuating students' sporadic attention and fragmented sense of time. Yet, those educators who teach through the frenzied tempo of the screen – moving from one activity to the next and using the latest apps – are rewarded for incorporating technology as pedagogy.

I suggest there is a cruelty in the acquiescence to the tempo of the screen as we further deprive students of the time needed to experience being in relation to each other and the world. Surrendering to the intensity of the digital sphere we participate in subduing students and promote a sense of stupor rather than attentiveness. However, it has been my experience that when given time and space to "pass time" together so that students' attentiveness is engaged a

[55] Kahoot is described as a "game-based learning platform." See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XzfWHdDS9Q

sense of being in relation with others ensues. In such a moment I have witnessed that a space is opened for what is "educational" in education to appear.

Pausing to Take Time: Pedagogical Moments of Interruption

As I have been noting, time and attention are needed to foster pedagogical moments of interruption, yet to do so requires us to disentangle, for a moment, from the sense of stuckness, and find time to break free from "survival time – the time of non-stopping" and live (for a moment) in the impasse. This impasse, following Berlant (2011), is a moment in time, a holding pattern, which suggests a temporary housing. It is in the impasse, in this temporary space that something new can enter through an opening (p. 5). Berlant tells us,

> It's really important to hold the space open beyond survival – the space of flourishing. One of the things we do when we are trying to create a critical space is a space where it would be possible to survive and better and where survival would be the minima and …what should the minima be that would constitute life so that we could imagine what flourishing would be and that flourishing is what the 'good life' is. (Barnard Centre for Research on Women, 2011 49:28 – 50:50)

As Berlant notes, "one of the things [cruel optimism] is about is the relationship between survival and flourishing" (Barnard Centre for Research on Women, 2011, 48:46). It is within this relationship that moments appear, for me, as "the minima," as a space of survival, a space to take shelter from the cruelty of the everyday. For Di Paolantonio (2016) a space of flourishing rests in the "…possibility of hope within what is inherently educational, (…) with a sensibility and affirmation for 'passing-on,' which fosters a sense of worldly 'sur-vivance' rather than 'mere survival'" (148). Specifically, spaces of flourishing are identified in my project as those that can bring us in relation with each other and that allow us to *feel* our being part of the world *together*. "Passing time" together takes *time* and *attention*. "Passing time" together requires an interruption of the numbing electrification caused by the "screen gaze" and deceleration of the "time of non-

stopping." Pausing to disengage from our hyper-individualized worlds, opens a space to cultivate the formation of attentiveness towards others and the world.

Below I describe such a moment of interruption. Set in a classroom that vibrated with the depressive atmosphere of education, students and I found a moment that let us open a space in the impasse of present so that "something new" could happen. In such a space, I go on to discuss, we momentarily interrupted the "learnification of education" (Biesta, 2009, 2010), ignored our worn-out souls, and together accomplished something more than merely surviving.

The event took place in Grade 11 Workplace English course. The "learnification of education" (Biesta, 2009, 2010) discussed in chapter one is deeply embedded in the concept of workplace courses in Ontario. These courses are designed:

> [To] equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to meet the expectations of employers, if they plan to enter the workplace directly after graduation, or the requirements for admission to many apprenticeship or other training programs. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9)

What is not apparent to people who do not work in the Ontario education system is that these courses, meant as direct pathways to the world of work, are often used to warehouse students with weak skills or who display a variety of personal or social "adjustment" issues. These courses often act as a form of streaming and a means to contain students, who for a variety of reasons, are struggling at school.

Most of the students in the class I was teaching had reading levels well below their designated grade level, many struggled with comprehension when they read, and writing remained a problem for most of them. One of the students was placed in the *workplace* course because of poor attendance. The administrative reasoning for placing the student with poor attendance in this *workplace* course follows the thinking that, because the academic work would be "easy" the student would pass the course even if she did not attend class regularly. Another

student was placed in the *workplace* course to lessen his stress levels as he was dealing with depression. However, both students' academic skills far surpassed those required for this course and so it felt as if they were stuck in a holding pattern: "doing time" until they could be done with school. It should be noted as well that the students' social location as it manifested itself in the minds of those "in charge" often determines why they are placed in certain courses. And, in this situation (which is similar in other schools) the students did not question why they were placed in this course.

At the beginning of the semester students entered this class already disengaged – they knew what was coming – another long haul in an English course that would involve trying to write paragraphs that seemed pointless to them and reading, or rather, being read things that some adult had decided they would enjoy or would be "good" for them. Day after day the students would sit shoulders slouched, mostly despondent, embodying the "cruel optimism" of education, trying to survive yet another English class. Each class felt like a replay of the day before. Each day the room was filled with a sense of loneliness and isolation – each of the students immersed in their individual world trying to survive not only school but their day-to-day struggles: a mother's chronic illness; severe anxiety; poverty; night work and day school; deep depression; a fear of not belonging; a profound need to find their place in the world; a sense of school fatigue resulting from years of struggling through their lived experiences while attempting to survive the cruelty of a system of education that had failed them in so many ways.

The students' isolation was deafening. Their alienation from each other, from the work of school, and from a desire to learn hung heavy in the air day after day. Although I had placed the desks in a u-shape to simulate (stimulate) a "coming together" (a sense of *being* together) the ten students who attended most regularly sat spread out amongst the twenty-five desks keeping as

much empty space between them as possible – only two of them sat side by side (usually watching wrestling on one of their phones). Lurking throughout the classroom was a constant current of emotion that pulsed between our bodies linking us together, while we struggled to remain separate – untouched by each other. Each day the moods were different, but the flow of emotions from one body to another was constant. Some days were so subdued that a calm haunting cloaked the classroom; other days were electric, filled with a bubbling sense of agitation and a frenzy waiting to explode. And, alongside all these moods was my rage and my despair invading the air. Despair for not being able to undo the years of schooling that had flattened the student's desire to learn together; rage at my inadequacies as an educator; rage at my inability to fulfill what I saw as my responsibility to and for the students, not just my responsibility to teach them but my ethical responsibility to them as human beings and as a group. I felt rage directed at myself for wanting, for *needing*, them to want something different. My despair grew as I failed to ignite within the students a willingness to come together and think something new, something different. Simmering in the air was an underlying sense of stuckness, hopelessness and inevitability that nothing could change. We all felt it.

I felt as if I was in a twisted version of the film *Ground Hog Day* (Ramis, 1993) in which each day is an exact replay of the day before. The main character in *Ground Hog Day* (Ramis, 1993), Phil, relives the same day over and over. After a period of desolation and frustration of being caught in a never-ending loop he realizes that the repetition will continue unless *he* does something different. He begins to pay attention to his surroundings, to the people he encounters, and by doing so he begins to think of himself in relation to the place and people around him. Through his newfound attention Phil begins to learn something different every time he relives the day thus allowing him to alter the outcome of the day. Eventually, after many loops of

adjusting and adapting he manages to release himself from the ongoing loop of the same. I do not read this film as a magical form of redemption,[56] but rather as a slow evolution of taking what you know and using the information, feelings, and attitudes on offer to change the environment and circumstances. In my version of *Ground Hog Day* (Ramis, 1993) nothing I did seemed to alter the repetitive loop in which I was caught. Nothing I learned or thought I learned from one day to the next seemed to help me alter the outcome of the next day. A text, an image or an idea that sparked a response, a flicker of interest one day would fizzle the next day when I tried to rekindle and rework it with the students in the class. Unlike Phil, I could not manipulate what I was encountering each day to feed my own desires.

On other days I felt like the main character in *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer, 1998) another film in which the main character, Lola, is also caught in a loop repeating the same day. Though unlike Phil from *Ground Hog Day* (Ramis, 1993), who seems to have as much time as he needs to replay his day until he gets it "right," Lola does not. Lola's loop repeats three times. She is caught in a race against time – she has twenty minutes to save her boyfriend's life and three tries. *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer, 1998) feels like being trapped in a video game trying desperately again and again to overcome obstacles before time runs out and disaster strikes. Overwhelmed by a state of high anxiety, reinforced by the intense techno soundtrack, time *is* running out for Lola and it is this heightened sense of panic that exemplifies my own feelings of frantic despair as I tried to navigate this class. Each day I felt as if time was running out and that there was nothing I could do to win the "game." Then, suddenly after months of barely surviving, a moment appears, born out of a student's simple question: "Why can't *we* read *Romeo and Juliet*?"

[56] Although some might read this film as Phil becoming a better more caring person such a reading, I argue, would overlook the underlying sexist attitudes which present his manipulation of the character Rita as a 'romantic' act.

And so, a female student's off the cuff request generated a moment in the impasse within which a disruptive pedagogical encounter appeared. Reading *Romeo and Juliet* became an act of interruption, an act of defiance against the "learnification of education" that ended up kick-starting our ability to "pass time" together so that we could generate a common world for a brief moment. You may wonder how reading Shakespeare could be an act of survival and an act of rebellion, but it was. Reading Shakespeare is not a common (or suggested) practice in this course and might be viewed by some educators as ludicrous given curriculum guidelines and the students' "academic" abilities. The *workplace* course I was teaching, according to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007), is designed to emphasize developing "*skills necessary for success* in the workplace and in daily life" using "*contemporary* informational, graphic, and literary texts; and to allow students to create texts for "*practical*" purposes." Although some might argue that Shakespeare has something to teach about daily life, this was an unusual (and not contemporary) work to include in this course. Also, like many other educators, I have for many years tried to discourage the idea that we must continue to teach Shakespeare in every English class in high school.

However, what became clear as the students and I spent time discussing as to whether we should read *Romeo and Juliet* were the layers of complexities underlying what school and education meant to these students. In our discussion the purpose of education was laid bare for them, as we engaged with what they understood learning to be, and how they understood their own subjectivities in relation to education and Shakespeare. For these students the idea of reading Shakespeare was a normative part of an English classroom, yet it had not been part of

their experiences. They knew their brothers, sisters, and friends in other English classes[57] read Shakespeare and these student students felt a sense of loss from this exclusion. Some of them expressed a sense of hostility and indignation because they felt as if they were deemed not worthy of the "Shakespeare experience." A sort of elusive idea about Shakespeare lived in their unconsciousness and so they opened a space of risk to come together to "pass time" with each other, Shakespeare, and me.

In "Against Learning: Reclaiming a lanuage for education in an age of learning" Biesta (2005b) writes "to engage in learning always entails the risk that learning may have an impact on you, that learning may change you. This means, however, that education only begins when the learner is willing to take a risk" (63). The risk for these students came through the willingness to do something together in a classroom that was not expected of them. Something *they* chose. The risk for them became an act of defiance, an act of curiosity: a moment in which the "educational" appears in education. Di Paolantonio (2016) explains:

> Education… binds us together in the very moment of its passing. In other words, we have to appreciate that at a very basic level, education is constituted by the flow of our passing time together. That is, that through an education we are given a unique place to become, together, temporal subjects. Education is where we literally pass the time together (in all senses of the term). We hangout for hours a week, making time for each other and together spend time working through common material and, thus, we give time to what is not here—to the past and to the future. And our passing time together through an education enables us to possibly feel the sense in our fleeting togetherness, to share in a sensibility and to possibly have the chance of saying 'yes 'we' are together in this world passing time.' (p. 150)

Rather than sitting in a fragmented classroom – each individually absorbed with our own distinct concerns – there emerged a sense of possibility in being together, not hope exactly, but a *feeling* that the sense of isolation and alienation, which had settled heavily in the room could be

[57] It is important to note here that some high school students do not have an understanding of different "pathways" connected to course levels (essential, applied, academic or open, workplace, college, and university) and the impact that these levels have on curriculum expectations and curriculum content.

interrupted for a moment. For a moment we weren't hopeless. Within the "cruel optimism" the "educational" crept into this classroom - not because of Shakespeare - but because the students took the risk to "pass time together," to think together, to be in relation with each other and so come to feel that they are together part of the world. It is not to say that the students rushed into class ecstatic every day, this was not a Hollywood version of redemption, the realities and pressures of their outside lives were still with them, in the room, but there was a new awareness of each other, a connection, which had not previously been apparent. This awareness was dynamic – their whole sense of being together through this curious endeavour made them aware of each other – the sense of isolation and alienation evaporated as we engaged in a relational encounter of risk: the students, Shakespeare, and me. Risk appeared in the students' willingness to open a space for the unknown and for each other. Risk appeared in their determination to engage with the text despite its complex language and structure, and despite that fact that they were not expected or favoured to do so.

When we started "reading" Romeo and Juliet we began with a comic version written in Shakespearian language. I read it out loud and translated almost every passage – this was not working. Not only was the language a problem, decoding the graphics was also a challenge for most of the students in this class. With the help of the librarian, I found old copies of the 'NO FEAR' version of the play, which, for those of you unfamiliar with this publication, has the original text on the left-hand side of the page, side by side with an easy-to-understand translation on the right. We began again, with me reading (the translated version) out loud and summarizing every few pages. The students were engaged in the story and as we passed the days with *Romeo and Juliet* one of the students said, "why can't *we* read?' and so they began to take on different roles reading the play themselves, with me continuing to summarize as we went. The

summarizing every few pages was necessary given that many of the students struggled with reading and although they could read most of the words, they often didn't comprehend what they were reading as they read. But they were engaging with the characters and the story – bringing their own life experiences and opinions into discussions as I would recap and check for understanding. What emerged was a coming together in which we could "pass time together," share ideas, struggles and support each other's learning. If a student missed a class, the other students would catch them up on the storyline (always with a personal commentary about what had taken place in the play). If a student seemed out of sorts as they entered the class, they would soon become absorbed in the play and for a brief moment allow themselves to escape and feel part of the group. At one point I had a family emergency and had to step out of the classroom for a phone call – and I could hear through the open door that a student took over assigning parts and starting into the day's reading. The brief moment that the class came together with *Romeo and Juliet* was mesmerizing. Students who had barely interacted with each other or listened to each other for weeks and weeks now were suddenly laughing together, yelling at each other, caring for each, being in relation with each other and responsible to and for each other. And so, we moved on to Macbeth with only a few weeks of school left defying and interrupting the "learnification of education" and embracing the relationality of the "educational." To remind my readers, Shakespeare was not curriculum content in this classroom. Rather the text appeared as an implement of survival, offering a means through which to "live on" in the impasse. We came together in this class, "passing time" with each other and Shakespeare, and together we found a way to *live* not merely survive the present conditions of education, even if only for a moment.

Moments of Survival within the "Ruptured Fantasy" of Education

Moments of "passing time together," such as the one described above, provoke a feeling of something more than mere survival (Di Paolantonio 2016). For a moment there is a sense of "living on" in the impasse of the present, of being in relation with each other and being part of the world *together.* I suggest it is in these moments, that together, we can release the "educational" from the grips of "capitalist realism" and the "learnification of education." I do not make this claim as a statement of hope rather I understand such pedagogical interruptions as modes of survival that release us momentarily from "survival time." What I am suggesting is that pausing time to "pass time together" with an object in common has the potential to open a space for the "educational" to appear. In a moment when a student's comment opens a space for "something new" to appear I am immediately (and cruelly) reattached to possibilities of the education within the "ruptured fantasy of education." My desire (re)born in a flash.

I am by no means proposing a prescriptive corrective to counter the present compromised conditions of education. Rather, I am suggesting that amidst the instrumentalization of education and the increasing lack of material resources such fleeting moments end up opening a space and time within which the possibilities of the (im)possible appear.

Such a moment occurred in a grade nine class when a student – despite his complicated life, distractions from his screen-absorbed world, and the chaos vibrating through the classroom walls suddenly, viscerally displayed an affective response to an image. While facing the image the student became so attentive that it seemed as if time stopped. The image that induced this reaction was Canadian Press photographer Ryan Remiorz's photograph of 14-year-old Waneek

Horn-Miller,[58] cradling her four-year-old sister Kaniehtiio, after having been stabbed in the chest by a Canadian soldier during the siege of Kaneshatake in 1990[59] (Figure 1).

Scholar Brian Massumi (1995) writes, "the skin is faster than the word" (p. 86) and I suggest faster than the eyes. Upon registering the image of Waneek-Horn Miller it was as if the student was touched by fire. Before his eyes could totally absorb the image of Waneek-Horn Miller he jumped up from his desk (leapt out of his skin), his phone suddenly no longer of

[58] Licensing rights procured from Canadian Press

[59] During the summer of 1990 what began as a protest to protect an ancestral burial ground (the Pines), on Kanien'kehá:ka land from the expansion of a golf course and development of townhouses turned into a 78 day stand-off between the Kanien'kehá:ka people, the Quebec police and the Canadian military. Waneek Horn-Miller was stabbed in the chest by a soldier's bayonet as the blockade was coming down on the last day of the siege.

interest and his mind racing. His body reacted, registering feelings of agitation and concern. It was if his body had become his eyes. His verbal responses were a mixture of confusion and anger. His questions: How could this have happened? Who allowed this invasion? What?

There was a sense of whiplash in his reaction, a double take that paused time. In this pause the student's affective response opened him, and the other students, to the world. Subsequently, I witnessed that a moment of complete attentiveness had encased the room as the other students were drawn together in a moment of encounter with the image. The other students who had only seconds before been absorbed in their own worlds seemingly trying to survive the mundane depressive world of school were suddenly "passing time together" thinking *with* and *attending* to the image of Waneek-Horn Miller. Until this moment engaging with the complex, violent, ongoing colonization of Indigenous land had remained a somewhat abstract concept difficult for these grade nine students to grasp. However, now they were talking about, questioning, and thinking about each other's responses not only to the image but also to their realization that colonial events of violence are not located in the far away past but are present in our everyday lives. Massumi (1995) writes, "[o]ne always affects and is affected in encounters; which is to say through events. To begin affectively in change is to begin in relation, and to begin in relation is to begin in the event" (ix). It is the potentiality of provoking to students to begin to sense their relationality to others that lies at the core of my notion of thinking *with* images, which I explore in depth in the next chapter.

One grade nine student's initial encounter with this image unleashed an interruption in time which consequently opened a space for the whole class to come together to "pass time" and think *with* and *attend* to this image. In this moment the usual monotony and feeling of sameness of school time was broken and the students felt a sense of beginning to be in relation with the

image, each other, and Canada's colonial present. The students in a rudimentary sense were beginning to understand Sharpe's (2016) notion of the "past not yet past." Such moments, in which students encounter the "past not yet past," open a pedagogical space for thinking and learning beyond "survival time."

Di Paolantonio (2016) explains how education as an act of "passing time together" can call us to attend to that which is outside ourselves.

> Education, in this sense, offers a unique place and time where, through our passing time together, we have a chance of sensing our exposure to the other and to a world that charges me and calls me out in a singular way beyond my concern with my own duration: calls me out to attend to what is at risk of being lost, to what needs my tending, mending and time. (Di Paolantonio, 2016, p. 157)

One student's sudden attentiveness to the image of Waneek Horn-Miller and her sister (Figure 1) morphed into a moment of interruption and a summons to respond. In this responsive act the student moved out of himself provoking other students to attend to the image. The class together moved into a relation with the violence and pain we inflict on each other in the world and began to question, in their own way, ongoing colonial practices and harms. Through this pedagogical encounter the students' responses refute Susan Sontag's (2003) concern that we can no longer act on the atrocities we see because we are numb to images of violence and atrocities.

Sontag (2003) does not trust the feelings that arise from seeing images of atrocities. She tells us that we might be shocked, disgusted, perhaps even excited by the images. We might "flinch" with repulsion or ecstasy or we might be shamed or feel compassion. Despite the ability to have heightened reactions to images of pain and suffering she asserts that affective or emotional responses to images of atrocities cannot incite *thinking*. In fact, she argues that such responses engender inaction – an inability to engage in change (Sontag, 2003). Somehow for Sontag (2003) feelings create a barrier to thought. Yet, I argue that the student's affective

response, which brings forward a tornado of emotion ranging from anger, outrage to sadness, proves otherwise. Butler (2005) raises a problematic in Sontag's binary implication that there is a split between being affected and being able to think and understand (p. 824). Sontag (2003) seems to suggest that written texts allow us to think and understand and therefore act while photographs haunt and immobilize because they provoke emotions: rage, despair, and frustration. She appears to distrust 'sentiments' resulting from viewing because she fears that they are directed at the photograph, the object, not the suffering of others. Sontag (2003) sees sentiment as clouding the capacity for thought and judgment. However, Butler implies that affect can mobilize us and has the power provoke thought and knowledge.

The student's reaction to the image of Waneek Horn-Miller and her sister (Figure 1) *did* provoke thinking, questioning and action. As Butler (2009) tells us, affective responsiveness is the "very stuff of ideation and of critique" (p. 34). Moreover, the student's thinking sparked thinking and attentiveness in the other students as they began to talk about and question their own responses and each other's responses that ranged from disgust, anger, and despair to disinterest. In this moment, we were able to "pass time" together and attend to, question, and think *with* this image. In that moment, in that classroom, we were brought together to consider our responsibility to the world outside of ourselves. What moments like this offer, no matter how fleeting, is an interruption *in reified time itself* (in the temporal economy of the always the same) to open an actual concrete space for the possibilities of education to take shape even if just for short time. And, I suggest, these moments that ground us together briefly ease the wearing down of the soul.

My attachment to the pedagogical possibilities that appear in moments of responsiveness, which bring teacher, student, and text together, underpins my pedagogical practice of "thinking

with images." I am especially interested in how such pedagogical encounters, for a moment, hold us in our "un/common"[60] world and open spaces where we can "pass time together" and concretely contemplate: the "past not past," our pain, and our responsibility to others. It is through such encounters that *critical* educators and students are afforded the possibility of wondering about what it might mean to forge a more just world *together*.

Continuing to draw on my classroom experiences chapter five proposes that my notion of thinking *with* images, has the potential to open and unleash such pedagogical moments. I gesture toward a turn to ethics that moves away from recognition as it appears in "critical pedagogy" (and subsequently conventional understandings of social justice education), towards the significance of response as ethical encounter provoked through "passing time together." In giving us time and space education can invite an ethical mode of looking that opens possibilities of fostering moments of interruption. Such moments enable us to move out of our increasingly narcissist, isolated wretched selves so that we can begin to think about our implication in the world. I will unfold how it is through the ethical mode of looking that *together* we can come to think about how to be in the world differently. At issue here is how we can come to interrupt the "time of non-stopping" through pausing and taking time to think together *with* a particular image: to sit in a room with others and to look, think, feel, and look again, questioning and responding together *with* an image. Holding something in common between us I suggest opens the potential to learn something new that stimulates rather than numbs our attention.

Education should give you energy – feed the soul – not deplete and drain your soul. I propose that the glimmers of the "educational" that appear in pedagogical moments of

[60] I borrow the term "un/common" from Athena Athanasiou (2016) who writes: "the purpose of the slash in un/common…is to imply the not-in-common at the hear of being-in common and therefore to trouble the presumptions of commonness." I use this term here to acknowledge the differences, pluralities and "un/commonness" that make up the lives of students and teachers.

interruption do exactly that. In the impasse of the present as we flounder in “survival time” pedagogical moments of interruption, like the ones described above, make life bearable in the midst of (and attachment to) a “ruptured fantasy” of education.

Chapter Five

Pausing to Look: Recuperating the "Educational" in "Survival Time"

Surrounded by images of violence

We are steeped in a world mediated by images, visions of violence appear on our screens steadily before us: A dead child washed up on a shore, bodies buried under shattered buildings, (another) Black man shot dead by police, hundreds, and hundreds of unmarked graves of Indigenous children dead and abandoned at residential schools. Such pictures of violence and death appear before us daily. They stay with us in unnerving ways even when we try to avoid, dismiss, reject, analyze, or rationalize them. They often hover in the background of our minds resurfacing when we least expect them. Some of these images rest firmly at the forefront of our thoughts while we bury others deep in our bodies, yet they stay with us. And, while these images are often deemed "intolerable" or "unbearable" many of us also produce, consume, and engage with violent images of death, pain and suffering as part of our everyday. They come to us through news, entertainment, art, and play. Unsettling images of very "real" violence often appear alongside advertisements for our favourite store or the latest cat video. Many films and television shows created for our "entertainment" condone and sensationalize violent acts such as murder, rape, and war while others attempt to critique and question how people and societies can tolerate such violent acts. Images of war appear in virtual worlds of make-believe, yet war is a lived reality for many students in our classes. Violence against women, gender violence and racist acts of hate (both real and fictional) are replayed so often, in news and entertainment that

they are normalized continuously appearing in our physical lives and on our screens. Remnants of such images, as well as the residue of the lived reality of violence come into our classrooms daily embedded in our and our students' minds and bodies.

Consequently, the following questions have been fundamental underpinnings to my work as a classroom teacher and to this dissertation: 1) What possibilities open when educators give students time and space to think and question the violence they live with, embody and are confronted by? 2) How do educators counter the commodification of violence and apparent apathy, complacency, and normalization, of violence and inequities that occur inside and outside education? And so, I offer my notion of the pedagogical force of thinking *with* images (together in a classroom) as an example of one mode survival that has the potential to interrupt "survival time" in education and as a response to the above two questions. Thinking *with* images is *my* pedagogical mode of "living on" in "survival time."

Thinking *with* images, as I define it, is a pedagogical approach to attending the complexities of the "past not past" in an effort to give students time and space to attend to what they see and to engage the world they inhabit. I contend that cultivated through pedagogy (responding, questioning, thinking, and rethinking) thinking *with* images has the potential to interrupt the cacophony of life's disturbances, disrupt the "screen gaze's" threat of isolation, challenge the "learnification of education," and unhinge neoliberalism's hyper-individualization which induces a disregard for others. It is my experience that attending to (pausing to take time) and opening a space to think *with* images unleashes pedagogical moments of interruption in which *together* students can begin to unravel the complexities of their experiences of and their relationship to the world. Thinking *with* images opens a potential space within which we can take a pause without the pressure of having to reach a finite answer. By taking such a pause we can

come to ask questions of our questions *together* and so make a place where something new and different might appear.

The first and second sections of this chapter explain my shift away from teaching about images from a traditional "critical pedagogy" and media studies approach, which focuses on power, representation, "student voice," and individual emancipation. This shift gestures to thinking pedagogically about the possibilities of an ethics of responsibility that emerges through responsiveness. I then briefly explain my turn to ethics and introduce my notion of thinking *with* images. "More than the eyes do: Attending to what we see," the final section of this chapter, is divided into three parts. First, I explain my conceptualization of looking as an act of responsibility that evolves through attending to our affective responses. In the final two parts of this section, drawing on my classroom experience, I present examples of thinking *with* images in the classroom.

Shifting Approach: What was missing?

As noted in the introduction to this project, my educational philosophy was *and* remains deeply informed by feminist theory, critical race theorists, the field of cultural studies and its interdisciplinary approach to thinking and analysing cultural objects. From the beginning of my teaching career, I was concerned with disrupting discriminatory representations of race, class and gender and exposing power dynamics that uphold, produce, and reproduce systemic oppressions. Consequently, as I entered the field of education, I was interested in the possibilities of addressing and disrupting the above-mentioned issues through analyzing and questioning "visual culture" texts in the classroom. My understanding of "visual culture" aligns with scholars' Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2001) definition of visual culture as "those aspects of

culture that are manifested in visual form – paintings, prints, photographs, film, television, video, advertisements, news images and science images" (p.4). As such the range of texts that fall into this conceptualization of "visual culture" blur the lines between "fine art" and "popular art."

Given my inclination to work with visual culture objects in my academic work, my initial attraction to "critical pedagogy," through media studies made sense when I began my teaching career. Media studies informed by "critical pedagogy" draws on theoretical aspects of cultural studies, incorporates teaching with popular culture objects and appealed to my then Foucaultian understandings of power and disciplinary technologies (Buckingham, 1996; Kellner & Share, 2007). As noted by Biesta (2005a) "critical pedagogy wants to use education as an instrument for emancipation. It relies upon the demystifying power of critical reflection to expose the workings of power" (p. 149). "Critical pedagogy's" tendency towards recognition of power as an illuminating force towards emancipation also undergirds the theoretical framework of media studies. Thus, my considerations and analysis of a range of visual texts including, advertisements, photojournalism, film, popular culture and art in the classroom were influenced by "critical pedagogy's" promise that recognizing (exposing) dominant enactments of power through deliberation and interrogation would lead to a more democratic world by provoking individual agency and by promoting "critical thinking" in students.

Following promises of "critical pedagogy" I developed teaching practices that focused on the power of images, the way that images construct and disseminate meaning, the understanding that images often perpetuate dominate ideologies, and an understanding that how images are read depends on how we are singularly situated. Although students, most often, grasped the concepts I was introducing they did not see what could be done to combat these truths. Many of the students lived lives burdened by the "crisis ordinariness" of inequities and violence outside and inside the

education system. Some students wondered what actions they could take to induce change considering the seemingly infinite number of mediated images we are bombarded with daily. While others felt that images and problematic representations were the least of their problems. Each student reacted differently: some felt defeated, others were enraged, and some seemed untouched, while others were numbed by the inescapabilty of the violence and oppression surrounding them. Many students, although understanding problems of oppression, felt "this is the way things are – we can't change it," conjuring Han's (2017) notion of the "way-it-is" and Fisher's (2019) revelations about the increasing sense that there is no alternative. Other students brushed concerns aside saying, "this has nothing to do with me – I like everyone." These students usually maintained that issues of social, political, and financial inequities were problems of individual fault, attitude or behaviour, and thus responsibility to address or change them lay with the individual. Others were eager to do work that might bring attention to the complexities of issues of representation in images and took on several projects in an effort to expose and counter white supremacy, patriarchy and the colonial agenda. However, despite our efforts, educators and students alike, not much seemed to alter students' experiences of inequities inside or outside schools. After less than a decade of working from "critical pedagogy's" theoretical understanding of "emancipatory" education, I sensed that something vital was missing. What wasn't working? What was *I* doing wrong? What didn't *I* understand?

Through the process of unravelling "cruel optimism" in education it has become clear to me that my disillusion with "critical pedagogy's" problematic promises of "emancipation" and "empowerment" is interconnected with the onslaught of elements that birthed my notion of the "ruptured fantasy" of education described in the previous chapters. My experiences in the classroom told me that there was a disconnect between theoretical promises of "critical

pedagogy" as a transformative radical pedagogy (Kellner & Share, 2007; Martin, 2007) and the dynamic complexities of violence as they manifest inside and outside of classrooms. There seemed to be a disregard for students' multifaceted positionality, experiences, and knowledge. Following Rancière, Ruitenberg (2011) notes, "work that has explicitly critical, emancipatory objectives can defeat its own purposes and become stultifying if it does not leave the student room to use her or his own intelligence" (p. 212). The contradiction between a theory of emancipation and the act of invalidating students' singularity to "gift" them with liberation was eroding my confidence in "critical pedagogy." I sensed "critical pedagogy's" problematic arrogant patriarchal tendency (in which I was complicit) that understands education as an instrument of emancipation through learning to recognize structures of power while it also exerts a form of power. I felt as if I was, inadvertently, reproducing, repeating, and reasserting social and political inequities rather than challenging them. In other words, I was trapped in the fundamentalist tendencies and the inherent instrumentalism of "critical pedagogy's" conception of education (Biesta 2005). As Ruitenberg (2009) tells us:

> The biggest mistake a teacher can make, in terms of emancipation, is to be attached to a predetermined outcome, an idea of an emancipated state to be reached, and do everything in her or his might to "help" the student reach that state. (p. 221)

Following Rancière, Ruitenberg (2009) writes, "curriculum with explicitly political objectives may set up relations with students that undermine these objectives" (p. 221). She explains:

> Rancière does not advocate pedagogy where the teacher is no longer teacher and takes on the role of a friend: in that model the actual and necessary difference in power and will between teacher and student would be denied. Rancière reminds us that pretending that this difference in power and will does not exist, and then manipulating the student into certain interpretations, is much less respectful of the student's intelligence than being honest about the difference in power and will and using it to direct and re-direct the student to the material to be interpreted. (Ruitenberg, 2009, p. 221)

I was in fact living the discomfort, dissatisfaction and the vexing ethico-political conundrums that come with instrumentalizing emancipation that Ruitenberg and Rancière point to, and which I discuss in chapter three. However, as a classroom teacher, it was difficult to parse out exactly what was unnerving me at the time. Buckingham, writing in 1996, synthesises my confusion when he explains that:

> [R]ecent critical pedagogy theory has extensively incorporated feminist and Black cultural theory—for example, the work of Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha, bell hooks, Judith Butler and others—while simultaneously dismissing or ignoring feminist work on pedagogy itself (Luke 1992). In the case of 'race', for example, this has led to a situation in which fundamental tensions tend to be effaced: where Black theorists such as Hall (1992) and Gilroy (1993) are explicit about the tension between powerful but 'essentialist' accounts of ethnicity and the potentially liberating possibilities of 'hybrid identities', the critical pedagogues persistently claim to be transcending such contradictions. (p. 631)

If "critical pedagogy" flattens difference into sameness, how do we re/introduce the notion of singularity and relationality when encountering the alterity of others?

I came to realize that some of my unease with "critical pedagogy's" emancipatory theory of education was located in the contradictions of "critical pedagogy's" supposed adoption of the "inclusion" of difference while holding on to a universalization of these differences and their realization. I was beginning to sense that ultimately "critical pedagogy" centers its theory around the primacy of the self and thus reinforces liberal and neo-liberal reaffirmation of the individual as the central subject in education. Scholar Jeffery T. Nealon (1998) writes:

> Any ethical system that understands the other as simply "like the self" will be unable to respond adequately to the other's uniqueness and singularity; indeed, such reduction amounts to a kind of subjective colonialism, where all the other's desires are reduced to the desires of the "home country," the self. (32)

The notion of reducing the other to the self, which Nealon (1998) refers to, often occurs in education by teachers highlighting and focussing on what similarities we might have with others

rather than doing the difficult work of acknowledging the differences which we can never "know."

Consequently, my growing unease was also wrapped up in ways in which "critical pedagogy's" emancipatory language gets institutionalized within anti-racist and anti-oppressive educational and managerial initiatives and subsequently becomes hollowed out and drained of meaning. Echoing Ann Lopez (2021), it is clear that years of equity, diversity and inclusive discourses in education have not worked to address social and racial injustices. Students (and educators) do not feel empowered to oppose or alter the ever-increasing inequities within educational settings or beyond. Rather, educators and students continue to adjust and adapt in order to survive the "crisis ordinariness" of the violence of inequities that surround us. Lopez (2021) asserts that educators and teacher educators have been "engaging in comfort and laminated equity." This plastic-coated "easy" version of equity has not worked because it does not directly take up issues of White supremacy and the continuous perpetuation of colonial concepts of knowledge (Lopez, 2021, 55:25). Extending Lopez's point I suggest that "comfort and laminated equity" also neglects to make direct connections to the ways in which White supremacy and colonial thinking are reinforced and perpetuated through neoliberal logic of capital and the entrenchment of its administrative ethos. It is from within the cruelty of these problematic conditions that my shift away from confronting images *only* through a lens that critiques issues of power and representation, and dominant ideologies occurred.

I remained committed to the need to directly address issues of White supremacy, misogyny and class inequities within our world and education, however, I began to question and reconfigure the ways that I was using visual objects within the classroom, as well as questionings the types of questions I was asking students about such texts. As such, I have become concerned

with addressing a pedagogical need for something different, something beyond the usual ways social and political inequities, injustices and violence are taken up in schools, different from prescribed versions of liberal anti-oppression education and social justice education that contain predetermined outcomes in which students are manipulated to produce specific responses.

It is not that I abandoned the need or desire to teach about and discuss problematic social, political, and economic structures of power that support White supremacy and inequities in our world but rather I began to think differently about how I might work with images to provoke a sense of being in the world and a responsibility for how we are in the world. I began to wonder about how students might be brought into relation with the world by questioning (and requestioning) their responses to what they see *and* how they might understand not only the cruelty, inequities, and violence in our world but also their own relationship and responsibility, to such injustices if their relationality was brought to the foreground. I was, albeit unaware at the time of what to call it, engaging in a turn to ethics.

Subsequently, my turn considers "passing time" together and thinking *with* images as an ethical (relational and "educational") encounter: an encounter beyond the semantic and semiotic, beyond representation, beyond production and consumption, beyond what our eyes do. I do so not to ignore content, or diminish the power of what we see, nor to minimize form and aesthetics. My turn to ethics does not aim to ignore, deny, or refuse discussions or analysis of the above-mentioned ways of reading of images rather, it aims to shift the prioritization of such readings toward thinking about and questioning our "readings" and responses to an image, in order to move toward (hopefully) questioning our relation to what we see. It is my proposal that ethical possibilities appear when we take time together to *attend* to our encounters with images: to "look and look again" (Sharpe, 2018, p. 177). Revisiting and rethinking our responses to what we see, I

argue puts us in relation with others and our world and has the potential to elicit a sense of responsibility to the world and others.

A Sense of the Ethical: A Non-Prescriptive Pause

In this section I gesture toward my turn to ethics drawing on Biesta (2005, 2010, 2013) Chinnery (2003, 2006, 2017), Di Paolantonio (2016, 2018, 2021), and Todd (2001, 2003, 2009), all of whom consider Levinas' notion of responsibility in relation to education. I draw on these scholars' thinking education through a Levinasian lens in order to 1) clarify my mobilization of an ethics of responsibility and 2) make clear my understanding of "response" as having the potential to provoke ethical encounters. Such ethical encounters I propose can release students from the constraints of the neoliberal logic of hyper-individualization and the limitations of the "learnification of education," and from the pull of the "screen gaze." As I have been noting throughout this work, I'm interested in the relationality that is inherently infused in the very idea of the "educational." As Di Paolantonio (2018) tells us, "[w]hat is educational in education, that is, what offers an ethical approach to education, exceeds "my time" and helps to give meaning and hope to a person's existence beyond the perishable and temporally insignificant ego" (p. 285). I propose that this understanding of the "educational," as that which in education exceeds the ego, and opens onto the expansive relationality of the world, can come to interrupt the depressiveness of "survival time" even if just for a moment.

Drawing on Todd (2003) I do not use ethics to mean the instrumentalization of teaching morality, which as she notes, would be administered through the acquisition of "knowledge" (p.6). Rather, like Todd (2003), I am interested in ethics "in terms of those *moments of relationality that resist codification*" (original emphasis, p. 9). Therefore, my notion of thinking

with images is by no means an exercise in developing a prescriptive way of teaching an ethic of responsibility nor is it a method of *how* to "look at images." As Todd (2009) clearly articulates, you cannot *teach* responsibility. Recall the grade nine student, I mentioned in my introduction, who explained to me, "knowledge does not mean responsibility, responsibility comes from within." Todd would explain his point in this manner:

> …[T]he obligation we have toward others is not something one learns as a piece of knowledge. Responsibility is a response to the command of the other; it is a prescriptive to a prescriptive. In no way can responsibility be instilled or inculcated in a direct fashion and thus it cannot be systemized into any curricula or teacher manual. But this is not to say that it has no bearing upon education. (76)

Similarly, I suggest you cannot teach people how to *look,* what to see, nor can educators predict what students might learn once they come to know (see) something.

"Passing time" together in classrooms thinking *with* images is not a practice meant to elicit specific responses from students nor is it meant to force students to prioritize *the teacher's* interpretation of an image, nor is it to simply an exercise in having students express their ideas, reactions or feeling about an image. Thinking *with* images is not about teasing out some mysterious meaning hidden deep within an image, rather my concept of thinking *with* images is about *pausing* to take time together with students to attend to and question their ideas, reactions and feelings provoked by an image. It is important to note that I am not advocating a process through which students simply express ideas, thoughts, and feelings and that is enough. To do so would be replicating the problematic and harmful ways in which promoting "student voice" is often enacted in education as I discussed in chapter three. As Biesta (2018) accurately warns us:

> [E]*xpression itself is never enough. And the reason why this is so* becomes clear when we ask a number of "What if?" – questions, such as: What if the voice that expresses itself is racist? What if the creativity that emerges is destructive? Or what if the identity that poses itself is egocentric, or, with the words of Emmanuel Levinas (1991, p.44), ego-logical, that is just pursuing the logic of the ego? (p. 14)

Pedagogically tackling the “what if questions” is what we need time and space to do together. It is attending to “what if questions” that opens a space to recuperate the “educational in education.”

What is in my offer of thinking *with* images is the potential of the “educational.” The “educational” comes through thinking about and questioning our own and each other’s ideas, thoughts, and feelings in order to open space for ethical relational encounters to occur. Through our interactions with each other we are afforded “relational encounter[s] where human beings come together to influence each other with words and interpretations that work to forge and sustain a common world” (Di Paolantonio 2016, p. 149). Biesta (2012) describes the possibilities of such encounters like this:

> The encounter with something that is other and strange—that is not of one's own making—is an encounter with something that offers *resistance* (and we could even say that it is an encounter with the very experience of resistance). Such an encounter, so I wish to suggest, is of crucial educational significance if it is granted that education is not a process of development of what is already ‘inside’ nor a process of adaptation to what comes from the ‘outside,’ but is an ongoing dialogue between 'self' and ‘other’ (in the widest sense of the word 'other') in which both are formed and transformed – a process through which we come ‘into the world’ (see Winter 2011) and the world comes into us. (p. 42-43)

I propose that students’ encounters with images can elicit Biesta’s idea of an “ongoing dialogue between 'self' and ‘other’” and thus bring them into the world in relation to each other and others.

I am not proposing a prescriptive teaching “strategy” or a theoretical framework to be adopted and codified under the umbrella of “art education” or “aesthetics education” nor am I working to apply a particular theory or method of teaching. What I *am* proposing is an engagement with pedagogy as an “interruptive force” to entice a relational encounter with injustices in our world to consider our relationality and responsibility to that which is radically unknowable (Todd, 2003, p. 3). Understanding pedagogy as an “interruptive force” is not about

centering the self, claiming some sort of emancipatory potential, nor is it simply about recognizing power structures of oppression. Rather, pedagogy as an "interruptive force" offers "the possibility of fostering openings for 'subjectivity' to emerge" (Di Paolantonio, 2019b, p. 604). Di Paolantonio (2019b) explains:

> In contrast to optimizing one's "brain power" for performing specific measurable outcomes, education has to do with the allotment of a time and a place in which the existential singularity, irreplaceability and particularity of each person can emerge through being in a responsive relationship to others and to the world. (p. 604)

Following Di Paolantonio (2016, 2018, 2019b) and Biesta (2012, 2018, 2020) I suggest that pedagogy as an "interruptive force" helps us to make sense of the world, to think about how we are in relation with other and to question how we *want* to exist in relation to what and who is other.

Biesta's (2018) understanding of "teaching as interruption" is something different than teaching as facilitation, or teaching as empowerment and different than "teaching as emancipation in the way in which it is understood in traditions inspired by neo-Marxism and the Frankfurt School, [such as "critical pedagogy,"]" (p.149). Rather, for Biesta (2018), "teaching as interruption" is a provocation to interrupt the self and our desires in order to question and keep questioning which "desires are going to help in our attempts at existing in and with the world" (p. 150). The impetus for "teaching as interruption" is not to reach a final "concrete" answer but to sustain our ability to questions. He writes, "such teaching requires suspension – providing time, space and forms to meet our desires and work on them – and sustenance – support for the difficult encounter with the question of the desirability of our desires" (Biesta, 2018, 150).

I propose giving students time and space to think together *with* images can be a pedagogical interruptive force that disrupts self-centered desires in order to question and consider one's place in the world *in relation* to others. As such, I put forward my notion of

thinking *with* images that reference unjust cruelty, violence, hostility, and death, as a force through which the other appears to us; a force, in the Levinasian sense, that calls us into question and summons us to respond to that which lies outside what we know and what we think we know. I use the term response invoking Biesta's (2005) notion of "learning as a reaction to a disturbance." He explains, "we can look at learning as responding to what is other or different, to what challenges, irritates and disturbs us, rather than as the acquisition of something that we want to possess" (Biesta, 2005, p. 62). Learning here is about questioning our responses to what we see and taking the risk to learn from this questioning. Learning *how* to read an image or *how* to look at an image falls into Biesta's notion of learning as the acquisition of knowledge, information, or skills rather than learning that opens a space for the relationality of one's existence to emerge. I thus consider "response" as a pedagogical provocation that invites a sense of attentiveness that requires pausing to think, and question our responses to what we see beyond ourselves.

Attending to what we see in this way, I speculate, opens a space in education where responsibility in the Levinasian sense can come to be felt: responsibility not formed in guilt, caring or empathy, but rather as an obligation to and for others that might surface and be sensed as a call in and through education. As educational philosopher Ann Chinnery (2003) notes, "Levinas rejects the prevailing construal of subjectivity as sovereign rational autonomy and posits instead that subjectivity is constituted by ethical responsibility to and for the other" (p. 5). She goes on to explain, "Responsibility is about surrender and openness to the other; about saying "yes" to the otherness of the other; and about suffering through anxious situations not of our own making, but to which we are nonetheless called to respond" (Chinnery, 2003 p. 7). Chinnery, in her lecture, *Rendered Responsible by the Fragile*, says the problem with empathy is

that "it puts too much of a burden on the other person to make her or his life intelligible to me so that I can recognize our basic similarity" (Simon Fraser University, President's Faculty Lecture, 2017, 8:57). Consequently, empathy collapses and erases difference and centers the self. Chinnery explains it like this: "The impulse to reduce the other to what I can understand by erasing the differences between us is to commit what some philosophers call a kind of metaphysical violence toward the other" (Simon Fraser University, President's Faculty Lecture, 2017, 10:00). Rendering empathy into a pedagogical practice meant to develop a sense of responsibility to others is limited because it either turns the other into the self or self into the other, either way "empathy is very much an ego activity" (Todd, 2003, p. 62).[61] Berlant (1998) also understands empathy as an attempt at universalizing others' pain and suffering through what she calls "sentimental culture" (p. 641). She explains, "… sentimental culture promotes a way of acknowledging and actually exploiting apparently irreducible social differences to produce a universalism around, especially modes of suffering or painful feeling" (p. 641).

Students are often tutored in the idea of empathy through liberal notions of developing sympathy or compassion through the idea of "putting ourselves in someone else's shoes" or as Chinnery puts it, "to imaginatively project myself into the other's situation" (Simon Fraser University, President's Faculty Lecture, 2017, 8:48). Such attempts aim to make students imagine how they would feel if they had to experience similar conditions of injustices in the hopes of then eradicating injustice. As Chinnery (2006) explains:

> Simulation exercises meant to replicate situations of suffering that are removed from the students' own lives (such as asking them to go without food for a day in order to experience hunger, or to curl up on the classroom floor in spaces marked out to the size of that allotted to prisoners on the slave trading ships in order to identify with those who endured such horrific conditions) are of little educational or moral worth. In addition to implying that moral responsibility need only be extended to those persons and situations

[61] See: Todd (2003) Being-for or feeling-for? Empathic demands and disruptions. In *Learning from the Other: Levinas, Psychoanalysis and Ethical Possibilities in Education*, pp. 43-63.

> into which one is able to imaginatively project oneself, these simulation exercises diminish the very real suffering of the hungry and oppressed by suggesting that one can somehow access another's mental state by simply replicating the external conditions of that experience and projecting one's own feelings onto the other. (335)

In my experience such simulation exercises become totally self-referential – they do not elicit a sense of responsibility, nor do they open us to being in relation with others. Rather, I suggest they diminish and flatten experience of oppression into the something that can be packaged, consumed, and marketed as knowledge and understanding. Such activities reinforce "othering" others, most often positioning others as victims that the rest of "us" can ingest and become for an hour or two. Encounters through simulation exercises attempt to "educate" from the "inside" through an adaptation of something that comes from the outside by activating a sense of empathy (and sometimes guilt) rather than opening a space for what is unknowable (beyond my imagining and experience) to appear. Instead, simulation exercises center on the participants' emotional self in order to increase their empathy. Consequently, such simulation exercises prioritize the self's capacity to cultivate empathy and not concern for others for whom, as Chinnery (2003, 2006, 2011, 2017) following Levinas, tells us we must be responsible for. Todd (2009) describes Levinas' notion of responsibility like this:

> [F]or Levinas responsibility is not a salve for soothing the wounds of the world couched in some nice language of "care," "love," or "empathy"; his is not a comforting philosophy. It is a relentless examination in the ways in which violence plagues our lives and our capacities for responding in the face of them. (20)

I suggest that this sense of responsibility that comes from being in relation with others is what has a chance to appear when we "pass time" together and think *with* images. To be clear, our being in relation with images and others (not the acquisition of "knowledge" about an image or attaining more information about others) affords us the potential of sensing our ethical responsibility, which in turn harbours the "educational" in education. Biesta (2020), following

Levinas states, “responsibility… is not something we choose but is instead something we encounter” (p. 101). It is here, in the “encounter” with the other and others that the notion of the “educational” as an “interruptive force is enacted (Biesta 2013, 2018, 2020; Di Paolantonio, 2019b).

As stated above, my notion of thinking *with* images is by no means an attempt to develop a pedagogical “blueprint” to *do* ethical work or a formula of how to “teach” about images rather, it invokes what Sharon Todd (2009) calls “a pedagogy of implication.” That is, “a pedagogy whereby we are continually vigilant in attending to the needs of others in a way that takes responsibility for our own responses” (77). How might taking responsibility for our own responses open us to consider our responsibility to and for others, those past, present and yet to come? How might a vigilance of attending to images that reference pain and suffering bring to light the enduring twisted threads that connect historical and contemporary injustices of the “past not yet past?” How might pedagogical moments of interruption enacted through “passing time” together and our thinking *with* images ease the “cruel optimism” of education and disrupt “the time non-stopping?”

More Than What the Eyes Do: Attending to What We See

Attending to how we look demands that we consider *how* we see; first recognizing that we often see without looking. This endeavour requires an attentiveness to look beyond what we recognize, beyond the familiar, beyond oneself and consider what we often disregard, avoid, or refuse to look at. Sturken & Cartwright (2001) write:

> To see is a process of observing and recognizing the world around us. To look is to actively make meaning of the world. Seeing is something that we do somewhat arbitrarily as we go about our daily lives. Looking is an activity that involves a greater sense of purpose and direction. To look is a choice. (p. 10)

Looking is not merely an activity of the eyes but rather an activity that engages our whole being. According to cultural historian, curator, and scholar Mark Sealy "there's a responsibility in looking – and because there's so much to look at these days we might have forgotten how to look" (Harvard Art Museums, 2021, 1:10:06). Sealy goes on to explain what it means to pause and spend time looking at image. He puts it this way:

> Being in the image and being beside it and being in the space with it and then asking yourself, what's that doing to me?… Why is that so charged … Wow, that did that to me and I'm now somewhere else I'm transformed by that emotion even for a split second. (Harvard Art Museums, 2021, 1:10:33)

What Sealy underscores here, is that the responsibility in looking involves pausing *and* questioning one's responses to an image. In other words, looking demands time and attentiveness.

Following Masschelein (2010) I understand promoting attentiveness in education as *different* from helping students "to open their eyes, i.e. to become (more) conscious about what is "really" happening in the world [or] to become aware of the way their gaze is itself bound to a particular perspective and particular position" (43). Masschelein (2010) is describing, the automation and instrumentalization of theoretical ideas of education that aim at acquiring a specific type of knowledge through a particular ideological position (such as "critical pedagogy") rather than an educative sensibility, which is promotes attentiveness. He writes, "e-ducating the gaze is not about arriving a liberated or critical view, but about liberating or displacing our view. It is not about becoming *conscious* or *aware*, but about becoming attentive, about paying *attention* (original emphasised, p. 44). I suggest that we think of looking as an act of attentiveness through which students have time and space to consider and question their affective

responses to images. Such a proposal is a pedagogical move toward the "formation of attention." Massumi (2015) writes:

> Thinking *through* affect is not just reflecting on it. It is thought taking the plunge, consenting to ride the waves of affect on a crest of words, drenched to the conceptual bone in the finesse of its spray. Affect is only understood as enacted. (p. vii)

For example, revisiting the students' encounter with the image of Waneek-Horn Miller and her sister, referenced in the previous chapter, I suggest that they *took* "the plunge" as Massumi (2015) describes above. In the moment of pause, when the whole class shifted their attention to the image, they began to "pay attention" and think *with* the image, which stimulated their affective responses. In this act of attentiveness the students were not simply reflecting on what they were looking at but rather they were engaged in questioning their affective responses. The students' encounter with the image of Waneek-Horn Miller and her sister was a pedagogical moment of interruption. A space of interruption opened, and the students' usual self-centeredness seemed to evaporate and a different kind of learning ensued. As Butler and Athanasiou (2013) note, "the predicament of being moved by what one sees, feel and comes to know is always one in which one finds oneself transported elsewhere into another scene, or into a social world in which one is not the centre (p. xi). As Massumi, explains: "To affect and be affected is to be open to the world, to be active in it and to be patient for its return activity. The openness is also taken as primary. It is the cutting edge of change" (ix). Through this encounter the students were transported outside of themselves into relation with the image – thinking *with* it not just about it.

I could not have orchestrated this particular pedagogical moment of interruption which appeared suddenly through one student's response to an image. As Biesta (2013) writes, "an interruption that really interrupts always arrives unexpected, as a thief in the night" (p. 52). And while, in my experience educators cannot predict when such a thief might arrive, we must be

prepared for the unexpected so that we can pause and take time and give space to such an interruption. Yet, I am sure that I and other educators miss many opportunities to read such moments and to pause for a moment with students, immersed as we are in the mere act of surviving "survival time – the time of not-stopping." And yet despite our burnt-out-souls we still crave or actively look for possible ways to provoke such moments.

In the next section of this chapter, I recall two different classroom experiences that capture the complex nuances of thinking *with* images. Such moments, I point out, invite the ethics of "responding" into the classroom as a way of learning to attend to the violence and cruelty that surrounds us. The examples I offer are my recollections of what I understand to be pedagogical moments of interruption. My retelling of these experiences reflects a moment in which students and I were able to take shelter in the classroom away from the constraints and the depressive exhaustion of "survival time" and "pass time" together thinking in relation with ongoing violence in our world.

"What Do *You* Want Me To See?"

When asked to respond to an image many students begin thinking and answering in automated ways in which they have been trained. They assume they are being asked to dissect the image from an "objective" point of view even if they are feeling uncomfortable or confused. As such, students routinely hold back their affective responses to what they are seeing in order to do the work of "learning." They put aside their affective responses privileging the search for the "right answer" in the manner of which they have been "schooled." Trained to find meaning, to think about the shapes, the colours, the rule of thirds and so on students work to demonstrate this knowledge. Some state with confidence what the image means, where it came from and why it is

important; others try to guess the *right* interpretation of what they are seeing. I suggest these types of responses from students are formed by a logic that demands them to dissect and conceive of an image from the outside rather than imagining that they have a place in relation to what they are looking at. In other words, they attempt to imagine what they are meant to think. The search for the "right answer" to the assumed "unasked" question: what does the teacher want me to see? Yet what might appear when we move beyond these more familiar questions?

Consider artist Nadijah Robinson's (2012) work, *Seven H(a)unted Acquitted Police, for Junior Manon*[62] (Figure 2) an image I have used in my classroom teachings numerous times.

How might questioning our responses to this image engender an ethical encounter? I suggest Robinson's image is not simply a medium through which information is communicated but rather it is a *force* in our sight, and we are obligated to negotiate our relationship to the unknown spaces the image presents to us. It is, in Levinasian terms, a summons, that is, a call from the other. We are called to respond to the exteriority, to that which is separate from ourselves and which extends beyond ourselves. Such a call creates cracks and ruptures as the image inserts itself into our being.

What do we see when we look? In this moment of seeing, we are in a position to decide how we look. To look, as an activity of responsibility, requires asking questions of ourselves

[62] Reproduced with permission of the artist, Nadijah Robinson.

such as: What am I seeing? What do I not want to see? How am I implicated in this image? What is my responsibility to my responses to this image? What does it mean that I might want to turn away? How does what my peer has just said make me rethink my own thinking? What am I actively choosing not to see? Do I dismiss my implication in this event because of where I live, where I come from? And if so, why? Questions such as these, I suggest, can help students begin to think *with* an image. Such questions can provoke students to put aside or question the more familiar ways they have been taught to think "about" an image. These questions, I propose, open a space to pause, to interrupt the "learnification of education" and to do as Sealy (Harvard Art Museums, 2021) suggests, to be in, beside and in the space *with* the image.

When I have shown Robinson's (2012) work, *Seven H(a)unted Acquitted Police, for Junior Manon* (Figure 2) in class students initially respond by explaining the particularities of what they "see." They often begin by describing the design, they might comment on the number of panels and the different textures within each panel; students always suggest the artist is trying to tell the viewers something through each attribute. They suggest there might be a meaning in the placement of the figures, or in the colours used for the figures on the ground versus those who are upright. Their comments are often formed as questions – wanting to be reassured that they are *seeing* the right things. And so, I ask them to keep looking, to keep talking, to keep thinking. I try to reassure them there is no correct response rather, I explain, their responses are what we can think about and question together. I give them time. Some of them get uncomfortable and there is silence and then a student asks are the people on the ground dead? Another student wonders about the white figures standing on the blue bodies. Are they cops? A student says: "I don't think I like it." Others ask why not? Someone says, quietly my "dad's best friend is a cop – he's nice." Another round of discussion begins, and the students are no longer

trying to interpret every aspect of the form of the image or guess what the artist is trying to convey – they are now "in" the image thinking *with* it. The students are in the image, beside the image and in the space with it. They talk about violent racist acts that are happening everyday around them. They begin to see that the thread connecting the past to the present is unbroken (the "past not yet past"). At some point a student Googles the name "Junior Manon" and reveals to the class that he was an eighteen-year-old Black teenager who died while being forcibly restrained by a Toronto police officer in 2010. Some of the students are overwhelmed at the date, as they understand the ongoing never-ending list of black men killed by police. The words "I can't breathe"[63] resonate in the room as we think with Robinson's (2012) image. Some of the students share racist altercations they've had, with police, in stores, in school and together we to respond to each other, to the difficult questions and thoughts that appear. We work together to unravel (not to solve) the complexities of the hate felt by so many. Another shift in our attention occurs when a student puts forth the idea that the iridescent white figures are the police officers' consciences. As the students think about the white figures a student says he thought they were just "White guys" but that listening to the others talk, he's thinking differently now. I mention I thought of the white figures as ghosts – and the students start to wonder what action the ghosts could take – whose ghost are they if they're ghosts? What would they do if they were ghosts? The students begin to discuss how to challenge racist acts they witness and experience daily. And, although there is a heaviness in the air there is also a sense that through our thinking together *with* this image, we interrupted the normalization of racism, and together paused to *think* about how we exist in relation to each other and in relation to the racist violence some students experience daily, and others witness every day.

[63] See: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/28/us/i-cant-breathe-police-arrest.html and Athena Athanasiou, (2020) (Im)possible Breathing: On Courage and Criticality in the Ghostly Historical Present.

"I Don't Want to See That!"

A young woman enters the classroom notices the image displayed on the screen at the front of the classroom and in a loud voice screams: "I don't want to look at dead person. Why is that there? …. Why am I looking at a dead person? I don't want to see that." After glaring at me for a second, she turns away shaking her head and sits at a table with some of her classmates. Yet her reaction has stirred the other students and they begin to focus on the image that they had either not seen or simply ignored as they entered the classroom. Projected on the screen is a reproduction of a still photograph of James Luna (Puyoukichum/Luiseño) (Figure 3) during his

performance of *The Artifact Piece* (1987),[64] performed in the San Diego Museum of Man. The image shows Luna laying in a display case on a bed of sand, exposed, almost naked, covered only by a towel. As more students take notice of the image, they wonder out loud about two

[64] Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of James Luna and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York.

things: first, is the person they are seeing alive or dead? And second, why would I (the teacher) expose them to this image?

The image of Luna (Figure 3) has evoked a very different initial response than Robinson's work. Rather, than trying to analyse this image with terms that they already "know' or trying to guess what they think my (the teacher's) expectations are students are confused and taken aback by the image facing them. This confusion over the image facing them is partly due to the fact that the image is not in any traditional sense a work of art, whereas Robinson's work (Figure 2) clearly is. Nor does the image of Luna appear to be a news photograph like the image of Waneek Horn-Miller and her sister (Figure 1). Rather, the image of Luna falls into a category of the "strange and unknown."

Consequently, students' affective responses are immediately present in the room. And so, we start by talking, questioning and thinking about their initial responses: about looking at death, about death they have seen, about whether we *should* look at death, about who would want to look at death. I then ask the students to consider in what ways the "impression of death," which Luna's image has provoked in them, is different from death as it appears on their screens: in video games, movies, and in news photographs. What, I ask, has made the image of Luna's body less tolerable, confusing, or disruptive than images of death they encounter non-stop on their screens? The answer (at least partially) is because the image has appeared in a classroom. Students seemed to feel that looking at this image *in school* was somehow jarring. Students "understand" the screens' contextual frame, and thus when horrible images (real or mediated) appear on their screens they "know" how to respond, they know what is expected. They can swipe to the next image, or the quickly react with emojis and *then* move on, sometimes they may hesitate wondering if what they are looking at is "real" but whatever their reaction students

understand the pedagogical intent of the screen: it is "teaching" them to continue their pursuit for pleasure (Fisher, 2009, p. 22). However, the pedagogical intent is unclear to them when faced with the image of Luna in a classroom. What pedagogical possibilities might come from this unexpected encounter with Luna? What might this image of a seemingly "dead" body have to offer us?

Within the context of "aesthetic education," Ruitenberg (2002) suggests that the only way for educators to prepare to for what might occur when introducing art that is "so unfamiliar and radically 'other,'" into the classroom, is to accept that "we cannot be prepared for what is coming" (p. 452). Although, the images I work with in the classroom would not necessarily fall into Ruitenberg's (2002) classification of works of art, nor am I "using" images (only) for the aesthetic experience they provide, which *is* Ruitenberg's intent, it is her understanding of the sensibility of unpreparedness for what might come that resonates with my notion of thinking *with* images. Ruitenberg (2002) tell us "welcoming art-that-is other as a guest into the classroom requires space – literally and metaphorically" and also requires that the space to remain "unstructured" (p. 458). As well, for Ruitenberg (2002), there is a responsibility to being in relation with a work of art. She writes, "the work of art addresses us as other, and we can only perceive the work if we re-spect it. In this way, learning to live with art is paradigmatic for learning to live with otherness" (Ruitenberg, 2002, p. 458). It is precisely these pedagogical elements that Ruitenberg describes which are embedded in my notion of thinking *with* images.

Returning now to the students' thinking *with* Luna's image (Figure 3). Once the students had finished giving their initial reactions to "seeing" death, they want to know "exactly" what they are looking at. And so, I contextualize Luna's image. I explain that Luna's performance of *The Artifact Piece (1987*) took place in a museum where Luna lay in an exhibit box as if he was

an object (an artifact) to be viewed and consumed by museum visitors. His display case was placed in the same space as the artifacts of the Kumeyaay Nation who are Indigenous to the land now referred to as San Diego and Northern Baja California. The artifacts of the Kumeyaay Nation on display adjacent to Luna, demonstrate the colonial tradition of displaying stolen objects taken as anthropological and ethnographic representations of supposed "ancient," "primitive," and "vanishing" cultures.[65] I also inform the students that near his display case Luna positioned cases in which he exhibited important objects of *his* life: sacred medicine objects, a Jimi Hendrix album, his Master's degree, his arrest record and so on (Figure 4).[66]

The students in this grade nine class are not familiar with performance art outside of a traditional understanding of what constitutes a "performance," and, although somewhat perplexed they

[65] Today the San Diego Museum acknowledges that the display of Kumeyaay artifacts were originally presented the Kumeyaay as a people of the *past*, thus denying their ongoing present existence.
[66] Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of James Luna and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York.

reengage with the image and begin to think *with* it and *with* Luna. Their questions and responses now respond to the strangeness and otherness of the image, Luna, and his action. They do not attempt to decode, "read" or interpret the image rather, they begin to be in relation with Luna's image and the "past not past." They are, to use Sealy's language *beside* the image, in the space with the image.

The students begin to question and rethink their initial affective responses *together*. What made some of them want to turn away? What is it about "otherness" that makes them uncomfortable? How might they be implicated in what they are seeing? What did they not want to see? One student said she did not want to look at someone else's pain, which leads to questioning the privilege of being able to turn away. Who can turn away? When can someone turn away? As visual studies scholar and curator Makeda Best tells us, "there is a privilege to being numb to things" (Harvard Art Museums, 2021, 1:08:44). Perhaps, it is the sense of a "privilege of numbness" that so provoked Sontag's thinking when she wrote, *Regarding the pain of others* (2003). Students often seem to exhibit a sense of numbness toward atrocities and pain of others when teachers explicitly "tell/teach" them what they "should" feel. Yet, when students are allowed to pause and attend to pain and violence that they see rather then being "schooled" into a particular perspective, something different takes place. There may be a hesitation, a desire to turn away, but there is also an openness that makes space to question those affective responses. And, I suggest it is it is attending to such responses *together* that we begin doing work that is "educational:" putting ourselves in relation to others, the world, and wondering how we want to *become* in this world.

I am aware that when I offer my notion of thinking *with* images, I am describing a very nuanced pedagogical experience. However, I maintain that it is through such pedagogical

moments of interruption in which we "pass time" together that a "*sense of educational ethics* emerges" (original emphasis, Di Paolantonio, 2018 p. 275). In "passing time" together we can, as Di Paolantonio (2016, 2018) tells us, do the work of "passing on." He writes:

> [W]hat is "educational" in education (what truly teaches us) involves engaging the past and the present with "something more" than itself, with something hopeful, with a transgenerational interpretive practice that implicates our time with the fact that for it to meaningfully survive we must "pass on" – that we in turn iterate, rather than merely repeat the Same. (Di Paolantonio, 2018 p. 282)

The intention underlying my notion of thinking *with* images provides a pause in time and space in which students can begin to sense being in relation to the world and begin to consider that their singularity does not make them the centre of the world but rather places them *within* the world and with others. And so, I reiterate once again that pedagogical moments of interruption cannot be manufactured, canned, codified or reproduced yet, they can interrupt the "learnification of education," the electrified numbness of "digital stupor," and for a moment ease, appease and recharge our burnt-out-souls. Thinking *with* images, is an act of trying to "pass on" the realization that because the "past is not yet past" the present must be disrupted if we want to do more than merely survive.

In my conclusion, I address concerns that might render my project simply a litany of critique. As noted in my introduction, my project does not seek to be redemptive. Rather, I suggest that if we want to stop simply surviving by adjusting and adapting to the ongoing compromised conditions of education we must wrestle with the cruelty of the double bind. As Berlant (2011) aptly tells us:

> All of the affective paradoxes of the political in relation to mass demands for social change uttered from the impasse of the present extend from this, cruel optimism's double bind: even with an image of a better good life available to sustain your optimism, it is awkward and it is threatening to detach from what is already not working. (p. 263)

How then I ask do we “detach from what is already not working?” My conclusion considers the generative force of despair, as a motivator to interrupt the unsettling frustrations that perhaps all there is left to sustain education and *critical* educators is a “cruel optimism.”

Conclusion

The Radical Potency of Despair

My dissertation seeks to register the depressive atmosphere of the "ruptured fantasy" of education within the impasses of the present. To render legible the "ruptured fantasy of education" I have sought to keep at the forefront the uncertain and compromised conditions of public education and the worn-out subjects who labour their souls away within its institutions. In tracking the "cruel optimism" of education I thus bear witness to the weight of the complex dynamics and the cruelty of the double bind within which *critical* educators find themselves: desperately holding on to a "ruptured fantasy of education" while grasping for air and trying to "live on" in "survival time."

Immersed in the work of thinking the inevitability of the despair undergirding the "cruel optimism" of education, I feel as if I am scrambling – trying to imagine how to imagine something new in a moment of "stuckness." Berardi (2017) writes, "the line of escape from the inevitable is the inconceivable: what we are currently unable to conceive of, to imagine, and therefore unable to see" (p. 236). Thus, I understand my project as an attempt to write *the* present impasse that has ruptured our relation to education, exposing a fantasy that has dissipated, and yet grasping on to moments that appear in "survival time." My work is a whispered revolt aimed to counter – to talk back to – the very infrastructures that fail *critical* educators and students daily.

There is nothing redemptive here, no substantial or sustainable solution. My work does *not* join the discourse of hope in education, which is storied as "hope through progress, hope through goal directed action, and hope through rebirth" (Edgoose, 2010, p. 388). Rather, my work contributes to educational scholarship, which considers possibilities in the present *despair* that engulfs educators and education (Carusi, 2017; Edgoose, 2010; Di Paolantonio 2016, 2019; Zipory 2020). In "Why Bother Teaching? Despairing the Ethical Through Teaching that Does Not Follow" (2017), education scholar F. Tony Carusi conceptualizes despair in education as an ethical act. Carusi (2017) understands that a sense of despair is produced through the instrumentalization of education, yet, rather than reject despair in teaching and education he proposes "a teaching that does not follow from the hopeful logic of education but instead despairs the ethical as a refusal and negation of the normative order of education" (p. 634). He points out:

> In the normative orders of education, despair is something to be moved away from rather than toward. Despair is undesirable, even a sign of pedagogical failure. It stands in a negative relation to education to the degree that education is wrapped up in the pursuit of happiness, hopefulness, and the fullness of society. (2017, p. 642)

Consequently, instead of disregarding the present sense of despair in education, Carusi (2017) suggests, despair might "be a condition in which ethical teaching finds new movement" (p. 642). Similarly, educational philosopher, Oded Zipory (2021) suggests, "teachers' despair can be seen as positive in itself and as a sign of vitality, especially in comparison to cynicism, resignation or even in comparison to automatic optimism" (p. 393). Zipory (2021) goes on to state:

> Listening with attention to the voice of despair, not as a pathology or as a moral flaw, but as a legitimate and potentially inspiring part of human political nature, could give education new vitality. It could distance education from privatisation and instrumentalisation, which are often served today chiefly by the proponents of hope. (p. 394)

My dissertation invites readers to *think* "with attention" to the voice of "despair," which I articulate through "cruel optimism," burnt-out-souls and the ruptured fantasy of education. My work brings forth the sense of despair located in the present toxic conditions in education as an ethical act. An act, which registers the despair and exhaustion that accompanies the depressive atmosphere of capital realism in education. And yet, an act that at the same time ultimately explores the potentiality of the "educational" that appears in fleeting moments of "passing time together" thinking with an object in common.

Following Berlant's conceptualization of "cruel optimism" I make visible the toxic conditions that are absorbed into the atmosphere of the "way-it-is," which render these conditions "normal." The toxic conditions I expose are part of the vapour educators breathe, and that shroud us in the inevitability of the "way-it-is." At times my work might feel like fragmented elements of something illusive, something not quite whole. This sensation is a result of there being too many pieces to the puzzle (many which are not even included here). The pieces do not fit together in a precise orderly fashion but rather they overlap and inform each other. Consequently, this dissertation is a collage-like assemblage in which connections are forged through fragmented scenes of "crisis ordinariness" that envelop education.

Making legible scenes of neoliberalism, scenes of violence, scenes of thoughtless instrumentalization of theory in education, and scenes of "crisis of attention," I register the symptomatics of the collapse of a politic within public education. It is precisely the convergence, the overlapping, and the splicing together of these scenes, which constitute the weight of the depressive atmosphere in education. My intent has been to bear witness – to lay bare – scenes through which the political is annihilated from education. The series of scenes, which archive educators' and students' struggles to adjust and adapt in "survival time," are collected to expose

the brokenness that wears us down and impedes imaging something different, something new for education.

Overwhelmed by a sense of stuckness between despair and optimism (desire), wounded but still fighting, many *critical* educators harness their despair as an impetus to keep moving, working and thinking. Scholar Ann Cvetkovich (2012) would call this the "productive possibilities" of despair (p.14). Despair, it seems, can be a generative space of critique (Zipory, 2021). Despair, it seems, can "critique the present and provoke movement without yet projecting a future" (Carusi, 2017, p. 633). The productive effect of my own despair led me to graduate school and eventually opened space and time within which I could navigate, think, critique and begin to assemble the fragments of a "ruptured fantasy" of education. The process of despairing education provided a generative force through which I could assemble fragmented pieces of rupture in education and then, finally, conceptualize my own acts of "living on" in "survival time" in schools through philosophical, political and educational thought.

All of this took time – demands time. At times I was engulfed in despair. At other times I was motivated by the despair of *critical* educators fighting to find space for the "new" despite the consequences of living with burnt-out-souls. At times I was paralyzed by the despair I was writing. At other times I was inspired by memories of students who moved through their own despair in ways that were unimaginable to me. And, in time, I recognized Di Paolantonio's (2016) conceptualization of the "educational" potentiality in "passing time together," as describing what I had unknowingly been working to enact in my teaching, and in my daily adjustments to the new menacing times in education.

Chinnery echoes Di Paolantonio's understanding of coming together and being in relation with others in classrooms when she points to "an important site of ethics and politics" in

education (Simon Fraser University, President's Faculty Lecture, 2017, 24:51). For Chinnery, the importance of "physical proximity," of spending time together – of "*being* together" as bodies in shared space – is a critical element of education. Drawing on Butler (2004, 2011), Chinnery refers to "up-againstness," as bodies coming together in public spaces. This "up-againstness," (an unwilled proximity) Chinnery suggests, has the potential to provoke relational encounters and engender responsibility to and for others. Although, Chinnery acknowledges that there are risks to bodies coming together in classrooms, she realizes that *without* such physical proximity we risk losing the potential that might open us up to others (Simon Fraser University, President's Faculty Lecture, 2017, 25:45). Thinking about what is lost without "physical proximity" she gestures to the problem as it appears in online education. She explains:

> When we remove from education the requirement of spending time in physical proximity with those we might not normally choose to spend time with we risk missing something important about being human… we risk forgetting that any experience of being is an experience of being *with*. (Simon Fraser University, President's Faculty Lecture, 2017, 33:16)

Chinnery's words are hauntingly prophetic given the incredible upheaval caused by "remote learning" as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Being physically together in space, I would argue, is a critical element of teaching and learning. As philosopher Martine Berenpas (2021) tells us:

> In the classroom, teachers can respond to the needs of students, not only by actively asking for their opinions but also by interpreting their bodies. Facing one's students as a teacher does not only mean transmitting knowledge and teaching skills but also involves being affected by their bodies; a sensibility vital for teaching, but that is more difficult to enable when classes are held online. (p. 3)

Something is flattened and missing from encounters online, which in turn makes the pedagogical moments of interruption I describe much less possible online. In conversation with two friends, colleagues whom I consider to be *critical* educators, we discussed my conceptualization of

fleeting moments, and the insurmountable challenges of "remote learning." During our conversation one of them said (with despair): "and those fleeting moments are *impossible* online." As Kenaan notes, "the screen permits no encounter" (p. xviii). Berenpas (2021) also warns us, "We should be aware of the fact that online education is not able to mimic the unpredictable contact with other bodies and runs the risk of 'becoming plastic'" (p. 15). Reflecting on what is lost in the online encounter Berenpas (2021) concludes, "[b]eing human means being exposed to the immediate presence of others, being in the presence of their bodies as a moment of genuine contact and is precisely these moments of genuine contact that we at this moment miss the most" (p. 15).

It is in the moment of contact with other bodies who are situated in place (in a space) that helps promote the "educational" in education. In my final two chapters I draw on the concepts of "passing time together," "physical proximity," and "up-againstness" in order to help situate elemental examples of what lived experiences of moments of encounter "look" and "feel" like in a classroom. Layered within these examples is the act of holding space and time open for students to *think* together: an act of working to cultivate a sense of ethical attentiveness in which the "I" is not centered but rather comes into question.

To cultivate attentiveness is a call for thinking together. Scholars Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) refer to our "thinking together" as a form of "study." In his introduction, to *Undercommons,* (2013) Jack Hlaberstam explains Moten & Harney's definition of "study" as "a mode of thinking with others separate from the thinking that the institution requires of you" (p.11). I understand "study" in this form as an interruption to the learnification of education and an act of forgoing matters of curriculum that merely reproduce the instrumentalization of education. Through this sense of "study" a form of attentiveness is cultivated so that we might

give space for something new to appear. As Zipory (2019) points out such calls for attentiveness are:

> … different from the common notion of consciousness raising to be found in critical pedagogy… where the critical pedagogue aims at specific knowledge to be gained, the teacher who is calling for attention need not direct towards the "correct" insights or conclusions. (p.168)

Consequently, taking time to attend to and think together, as I have proposed, has the potential to interrupt the depressive atmosphere of education as it eases the burnt-out-souls of both educators and students in a space that is open to the possibility of the new.

My offering of thinking *with* images, in my final chapter, is a move away from the expectation of predetermined expectations, and a departure from dominant approaches to working with images in education. I suggest my approach to thinking *with* images is initiated from a perspective within which the visual opens a space for ethical engagement and thought. I am doing something different than cultural studies, visual research, art education or media studies. Although, aspects of these ways of thinking may arise in classroom discussions and are not dismissed outright, my conceptualization of thinking *with* images asks different kinds of questions, while also asking students to attend to and to question their responses, to look at what they see differently. I see the possibilities in the visual to bring the ethical – to open an ethical sense of engagement. I suggest that thinking *with* images and attending to ones' responses to the visual encounter opens up a space of ethical possibility that provokes an ethicality of thought, which interrupts the instrumentalization of education. Like Chinnery, I know that coming together to think *with* images otherwise holds no guarantees to produce ethical encounters, however, I assert, the potential lies *in* the "coming together" and "passing time." Without the time to think together, to "study" together, without the vital "physical proximity," *critical* educators risk remaining in a stagnate state of despair rather than motoring our despair toward

something different, something new. It is the cruelty of our despair that has the potential to interrupt, for a moment, the smothering sense of inevitability that overwhelms us today.

My dissertation stays within the difficult conditions of the impasse of the present drawing on glimmers of interruption (Fisher, 2009) as a refusal to fall prey to a sense of hope in education that produces a false sense of progress and that denies the very real despair that we are in. I write about being bound to the "educational" while immersed in the cruelty of the broken promises of education. And so it is, that my desire (optimism) is located in despair not hope. I remain attached to a "ruptured fantasy of education," holding fast to moments of interruption that open possibilities for the "educational" to appear. Even though I have not given up (hence this dissertation, my small act of refusal and revolt), I see no escape. Like Berardi (2017), who writes in the afterword of *The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, "what escapes my grasp, what I cannot see, what I cannot imagine, what I cannot even conceive is the means of escape" (p. 233). *I* cannot imagine a way out of the impasse *in* education.

Fisher (2009) proposes the only way out would be "if a new (collective) political subject emerges" (p. 53). However, he notes, "the required subject – a collective subject – does not exist, yet the [climate] crisis, like all other global crises we're now facing, demands it be constructed" (p. 66). What might that "new (collective) political subject" look like? How does such a subject emerge from the all-consuming capitalist realism? As neoliberal hyper-individualization actively destroys any sense of collective responsibility, or at least makes it relatively impossible to maintain and execute, how might a (new) political subject come about? Han (2017) explains it like this:

> Those subject to the neoliberal economy do not constitute a *we* that is capable of collective action. The mounting egoization and atomization of society is making the space for collective action to shrink. As such, it blocks the formation of a counterpower that might be able to put the capitalist order in question. *Socius* had yielded to *solus*.

> Contemporary society is not shaped by multitude so much as solitude. The general collapse of the collective and the communal has engulfed it. Solidarity is vanishing. Privatization now reaches into the depths of the soul itself. The erosion of the communal is making all collective efforts more and more unlikely. (p. 13-14)

Considering the problematic elements of the infiltration of neoliberal logic in education, which I put forth in chapter one, how do we establish a "new (collective)" subject in education? As I have sought to render legible in multiple ways, neoliberalism and its mechanisms crush the sense of a possible collective through the ever-increasing managerialization, fragmetization and instrumentalization of education and its hyper-individualization of subjectivity. How then do we imagine something different, something new? If there is no collective, how do we refuse the present toxic conditions of education and "collectively propose a different educational project" (De Lissovoy, 2011, p. 433)? How do we revive a desire for a collective from the shattered debris of neoliberalism? The tension of this untenable position in which we find ourselves is captured in Berlant's question, "How do we build a new world from where we are?" (cited in Bojarska, 2019 p. 302). My question, amid all my previous (despairing) questions, then is how do *critical* educators reforge a sense of the "educational" from where we are?

Berlant's closing call in *Cruel Optimism* (2011) is "to reinvent, from the scene of survival, new idioms of the political, and of belonging itself, which requires debating what the baselines of survival should be in the near future, which is, now, the future we are making" (Berlant, p. 262). I offer my dissertation as a piece of "cruel optimism," a dialogue written from the scene of survival, which aims to participate in wondering what baselines of survival should be in education? I refuse to suggest superficial solutions. I have no desire to project a fantastical future: a false sense of possible escape from our "new" menacing times in education. Rather, I tether myself to the radical potentiality that lies in *critical* educators commitment to the "educational" motored by our despair in the present. I hold steadfast to moments of interruption

and disturbance that *critical* educators forge together with students in the shelter of the classroom, moments, which give their souls a temporary respite. I present the potentiality of the "educational," which appears in fleeting moments, as a space that opens the possibility to live otherwise, to think otherwise, and to be in relation otherwise.

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