Lesson Plans as Objects of Cruel Optimism and the Rhizome as a Way Out

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TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES often provokes discomfort, in teacher and learner alike. The difficult histories that punctuate social studies curricula do not always produce a pleasant learning environment, nor should they. Garrett (2017) reminds us that teaching about the social world means asking students to confront histories that are "populated with violence, suffering, loss and devastation" (p. 19). While addressing difficult histories can feel profoundly unsettling to bodies in a classroom, the alternative to doing so—returning to the majoritarian tales that obfuscate the often ugly realities of the past—reinforces oppressive institutions and further marginalizes students whose lives have been shaped by those events and systems deemed too uncomfortable by some to discuss. Miles (2019) notes that, in the face of difficult knowledge about the past, there is a natural inclination to seek out "knowledge that is comforting and reinforces our existing attachments and investments" (p. 476). In the United States, this impulse has manifested in a spate of recent legislation that aspires to discourage the teaching of history deemed controversial, restricting or outright banning "curriculum, lessons, professional development, and equity and diversity efforts addressing a broad but often loosely defined set of ideas about race, racism, diversity, and inclusion" (Pollock et al., 2022, p. vi). While such efforts have emerged in the past (Nash et al., 2000), the current political climate heightens the danger, even violence, provoked by political overreach into classrooms.

My purpose in this article is not to provide a solution for the ongoing entanglement of problematic circumstances that face educators, administrators, policymakers, and educational researchers—indeed, such a task is well beyond the scope of this (or any single) inquiry. However, I suggest that, in light of this context, teacher mentors, teacher educators, and school administrators have a responsibility to reconceptualize the expectations around certain pedagogical tools and strategies—in particular, lesson plans/planning—in ways that encourage teacher flourishing amidst complex, volatile, and uncertain times. To this end, I seek to explore the effects of the panopticon-like state in which many teachers find themselves when they endeavor to write a lesson (Bushnell, 2003) and to suggest how individuals who are positioned to supervise and/or support teachers might (re)frame lesson planning in ways that are both fortifying and humanizing.

Though social studies teachers are the focus of this article, I believe similar analysis applies to educators across multiple subject areas. Regardless of discipline, teachers in the United States are not only asked to teach content that has been "decontextualized and recontextualized" (Apple, 2014, p. 71) as it moves through filters of power and knowledge constructed by the state, but are then monitored and evaluated based on the fidelity of their instruction to linear, hierarchical, prescribed lesson plans. In other words, as Apple (2014) writes, "teacher development, cooperation, and 'empowerment' may be the talk, but centralization, standardization, and rationalization may be the strongest tendencies … [with] reductive accountability [and] teacher evaluation schemas" becoming the norm (p. 71). In the next section, I outline the current challenges facing educators, in particular social studies teachers, as a way to provide context to the issue of teacher job satisfaction or, more pointedly, the lack thereof.

Education is the Fray

A recent *New York Times* article about the rising swell of panic around Critical Race Theory (CRT) in schools quotes a teacher who succinctly captures the current atmosphere: "Education is not above the fray; it is the fray" (Powell, 2021). Undoubtedly, the latest educational gag orders are affecting teachers across subjects and disciplines (Pen America, 2023). Indeed, a study by Pollock et al. (2022) reveals how recent legislative efforts have affected teachers' pedagogical and curricular decision-making:

> Describing feeling "terrified" to teach "in this polarized environment," some teachers indicated that they and colleagues intended to remain silent on an array of issues that they otherwise would have taught, on topics as broad as "race" and "race and gender." Some said that as teachers were "left wondering" what they could do and "unsure what I am allowed to say and teach," many were "choosing to avoid" "controversial" topics and specific texts. (p. viii)

Teachers in 2023 are navigating a volatile and potentially treacherous terrain, littered with manufactured controversy (Wallace-Wells, 2021) about the ways in which critical and social theory informs education. Perhaps unsurprisingly, social studies education is firmly situated in the nexus of the most recent instance of this well-worn debate around how and what to teach about the past.

Social studies education has, once again (Nash et al., 2000), become a battleground—a contentious landscape upon which policymakers, academics, educators, and parents clash over curriculum and instruction. Certainly, the debate over how to teach about the past is not new, but recent legislation has dangerously concretized the ideological wars around what counts as history (Blight, 2021; Silverstein, 2021). This latest iteration sprang, in part, from the tumultuous and polarizing events that defined the years during and after the Trump presidency. Hill-Jackson et al. (2022) argue that this moment has brought about a "climate change" in education that has created an unsustainable environment for many teachers. Ladson-Billings (2021) describes this new climate confronting educators and students as being produced by "four pandemics—COVID-19, systemic racism, pending economic collapse, and environmental catastrophe" (p. 352). Social studies teachers attempting to address these issues and equip their students with the tools necessary to tackle disinformation and injustice have come up against forces that seek to undermine their

efforts and shore up traditional structures. What began as a conservative movement against teaching CRT (Sloan, 2022) has metastasized into a wave of state-level legislation aimed at preventing teachers from discussing issues deemed controversial, such as systemic racism, LGBTQ+ histories, settler colonialism, and indigenous erasure (see Ferguson, 2022; Hanshaw, 2023).

One such example is House Bill 1134 in Indiana, which requires that schools publish educational activities and lesson plans up to a year in advance as a way to “censor what’s being taught in the classroom” (Whiteleather, 2022) through regulating curricular materials, instruction, employee training, surveys, and personal analysis related to an “individual’s sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, national origin, or political affiliation” (House Bill 1134, 2022), effectively prohibiting teachers from discussing a variety of vitally important topics in the classroom. Many Indiana educators anticipate that the Bill will lead to a “mass exodus” of teachers; a teacher interviewed by the *Indy Star* predicted that, as a consequence of the Bill, there will not be “ enough people to fill the positions, or some of the folks you’re going to bring in aren’t going to be qualified” (Herron, 2022; see also Kamenetz, 2022). These conditions are being replicated, in varying degrees, across the country. A recent Florida bill states that “an individual should not be made to feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race” (Farrington, 2022). Similarly, the reprehensible “Don’t Say Gay” bill (H.B. 1557) attempts to silence any classroom conversations about sexual identity or orientation while empowering parents to sue schools that are perceived as violating the legislation (Block, 2022).

In essence, such measures prevent social studies educators from teaching the difficult but critical histories that shape our society today. These bills and book banning efforts seek to scrub the existence of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination and oppression from the historical narratives presented in social studies classrooms. In doing so, such measures threaten the autonomy and professionalism of educators, provide young people with a distorted and whitewashed worldview, and limit teachers’ ability to connect with and protect their students. These systemic and systematic efforts to bridle teacher independence and innovation are not limited to the content of the curriculum, but extend to the composition and delivery of that curriculum as well.

The Danielson Rubric

New York State offers one example of this development in the implementation of the Danielson rubric for teacher evaluation. This rubric, adapted from Charlotte Danielson’s (Danielson Group, n.d.) “Framework for Teaching,” is used in New York City public schools “as a formative tool to develop teacher practice as well as a rubric for use when observing and evaluating teacher practice” (WeTeachNYC, 2022). Clayton (2016) found in her analysis of the rubric that “as performance tasks are linked with high-stakes decisions, the measurement desire to increase validity and reliability necessitate the construction of low-inference rubric tools that sacrifice a complex view of teaching in favor of a behavioralist one” (Clayton, 2016, p. 97). Such instruments demand that teachers make efforts to align their pedagogical choices with reductive, prescriptive, and hierarchical rubrics that “overly focus on technique to the neglect of subject matter, context variations, and the social and moral aspects of teaching” (Valli & Rennert-Ariev 2002, p. 202).

The applied simplification and regulation of teacher practice, as found in standardized teacher evaluation tools like the Danielson rubric, combined with the associated psychosocial stress that often accompanies education (Drüge et al., 2021), the emotional and affective toll of teaching difficult histories in social studies (Epstein & Peck, 2018; Garrett, 2011/2017; Sheppard, 2010; Zembylas, 2016), and the current political landscape, which restricts social studies teachers' speech and autonomy (Pollock et al., 2022; Powell, 2021), together produce an unsustainable state for many teachers. Asimeng-Boahene (2003) writes of the burnout experienced by teachers living under authoritarian regimes, but his description of their conditions sounds remarkably similar to those faced by American teachers today: "social studies teachers feel pressure when handling controversial issues in an autocratic political system because they are likely not permitted to engage in a free analysis of major policies and established social habits" (p. 58). Moreover, social studies teachers face expectations to conform to standards shaped by neoliberal policies, to follow prescribed curriculum (Apple, 1999), and to prepare students for the increasingly challenging task of "thinking like historians" (Barton & Avery, 2016; Seixas, 2015; van Hover et al., 2016). In this atmosphere, teacher creativity is disciplined, and surveillance of teacher behavior is persistent and oppressive.

Indeed, in a study of public school educators in Chicago, Lipman (2009) "found that teachers experienced accountability as a system of intense monitoring and punishment [in which] teachers were scrutinized for their adherence to a scripted curriculum and test preparation" (p. 161). This "authoritarian system of state monitoring bred powerlessness" among teachers (p. 161). Such feelings of futility can in turn influence levels of "emotional exhaustion, perception of achievement and academic satisfaction," with a direct link drawn between "stress, burnout, and job satisfaction" (Briones et al., 2010, p. 116). The confluence of these factors, coupled with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the epidemic of school shootings, has produced a breaking point in many teachers contributing to the looming teacher shortage (Loewus, 2021) and has instigated a national conversation about the essential value of social studies education in a democracy (Collins & Bessinger, 2022; Gorbea & Jennings, 2022; Packer, 2022). However, until these conversations bear fruit in the form of policy change, teacher educators, administrators, and other individuals who are in a position to support classroom teachers must take steps to support teacher's efforts to reinvest in the field while also protecting teachers' psycho-emotional well-being and guarding against teacher burnout.

What the recent legislation and policies described above fail to account for is the inherent creativity that accompanies that practice of teaching—while teachers might choreograph their lessons, I argue that it is often the on-the-spot rejection of that planning that yields the most satisfying experience for both educator and learner. To this end, thinking with theory, in particular rhizoanalysis (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), offers a way to reconceptualize how teachers produce, use, modify, and sometimes discard curricular materials. Indeed, in order to support teacher success and retention, rethinking how teachers' approach the production and implementation of curriculum has the possibility of increasing educator investment, satisfaction, and commitment to the profession.

Thinking with Theory

The description above admittedly paints a rather dismal picture of the current state of affairs for social studies teachers. And until (or if) the political terrain shifts in ways that create space for

social studies teachers to freely explore the topics essential to their practice *and* democratic society, many teachers will continue to feel the pressure to regulate their speech and action in the classroom. However, thinking with theory may provide a means to recast some of these conditions in ways that can reanimate teacher joy in these trying times. Joy—feelings of pleasure and happiness—is an important but somewhat neglected concept around which to frame teacher satisfaction. Joy is a powerfully motivational and optimistic emotional state. It is simultaneously grounded in nostalgia and anticipation and may offer a reprieve from the emotional exhaustion generated by factors beyond a teacher's control. Joy in teaching might be found in learning, creating, or enacting. It can also be found in relationships with students and colleagues. Poetter (2006) reminds us that, for teachers, "joy fills the synapses between alienation and community" (p. 272), and he maintains that "joy should be a fundamental value and end in our work as teachers" (p. 286). However, he also acknowledges that "the educational process in our public schools has taken on such a joyless tenor for teachers and students on so many fronts" (p. 273), which he attributes, in part, to "the pressures, demands, and realities of standardized testing and curriculum" (p. 272). Likewise, Briones et al. (2010) argue in their study of teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction that "in relation to emotional exhaustion and professional achievement, they both displayed the expected relationship with job satisfaction, in other words, a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and satisfaction, and positive between satisfaction and the perception of professional achievement" (p. 121). The question is: how can social studies teachers feel the joy produced by professional achievement within a system that persistently strips them of their professional autonomy through rigid rubrics, evaluations, and censorship? One answer may be thinking with a theory that embraces uncertainty, complexity, and messiness.

bell hooks (1991) argued that the act of theorizing can liberate thinking, though she acknowledged that theory has often been used as a mechanism of gatekeeping within the academy. In her 1991 article, "Theory as a Liberatory Practice," hooks writes that

> it is evidence that one of the many uses of theory in academic locations is in the production of an intellectual class hierarchy where the only work deemed truly theoretical is work that is highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read, and containing obscure references that may not be at all clear or explained. (p. 4)

Indeed, theory can sometimes be used to "divide, exclude, keep at a distance," or even "silence, censor, and devalue" certain voices (p. 4). Conversely, theory can also be used to unlock understanding and give us language to capture particular experiences. hooks (1991) writes that she "came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within" (p. 1). She suggests that theory provides us with the ability to reimagine or explain a set of conditions. It can help to illuminate hidden variables, expose connections or gaps in the relationship between entities, shift horizons of expectation, and destabilize systems that appeared, at first glance, permanently affixed.

It is important to acknowledge here that hooks is writing from a place of intersecting identities that have been historically and violently oppressed and marginalized, and so her use of theory as a way to explain existence within a matrix of oppressive systems should not be decontextualized. However, hooks' perspective on theory is helpful in reckoning with the current context facing social studies teachers in the U.S., many of whom are struggling to endure at the center of a maelstrom produced by neoliberal, conservative, cultural, and emotional demands. Thinking with theory can be one way to take back some agency within this tempest.

The Rhizome and Rhizoanalysis

The notion of the rhizome, as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), has been deployed in educational research to theorize educator and student learning and thinking. The rhizome has been used in considering preservice and novice teacher learning (Graham & Selmer, 2011; Strom, 2015; Strom & Martin, 2017), educational doctoral research (Cumming, 2014), teacher education (Adams, 2021; Hordvik et al., 2019; Marble, 2012; McKay et al., 2014), professional development (Sherman & Teemant, 2020), and pedagogical strategies and interventions (Adams & Kerr, 2021; Zembylas, 2007), among others. The rhizome is a useful lens through which educational researchers can interpret what goes on in a classroom, while also presenting practicing teachers with a way to remap the landscape of their own approaches to complex topics.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) challenge us to re-envision the way that we perceive ourselves, our history, our interior and exterior lives, our sense of time and space, and our relationships with those organisms and materials around us, both human and non-human. They seek to transform our thinking through introducing us to a paradigm that eschews binaries and dualities and embraces instability, unpredictability, evolution and devolution, symbiosis and fracture, and fragmentation and connectivity. Reading their book, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, can sometimes feel profoundly unsettling. This is the intention and by design. Their writing does not follow a linear progression arranged along unifying themes or predictable patterns. Their prose sometimes meanders and sometimes radiates intensity, at times circling back on itself and then breaking into a new train of thought or veering in an unexpected direction. In this way, they want their readers to experience the rhizome through the book. The book is a rhizome. Pivotal to the theory of the rhizome is the rejection of Western epistemologies that seek to explain phenomena through notions of reason and logic, those that center human experience and exceptionalism and organize concepts into binaries/dualities. Deleuze and Guattari argue that humanist, positivist, and even critical epistemologies inhibit our capacity to perceive relationships and phenomena not readily apparent if only interpreted through our socialized and reductive normative structures. This arborescent model (trunk, branches, and roots that lead to the construction of binaries, dichotomies, and hierarchies) blinds us to new ways of understanding our world and producing knowledge in unpredictable and unanticipated ways. Rhizoanalysis "involves experimenting with how to move between things in ways that nullify beginnings and endings" (Alvermann, 2000, p. 116) to allow for "strangling the roots of the infamous tree" (Alvermann, 2000, p. 117). Masny (2013) describes the rhizome in this way:

> A rhizome has horizontal shoots that take off in unpredictable directions. It has no beginning, no end. It spills out in the middle. For Deleuze, a rhizome functions to disrupt and to create change/becoming. (p. 339)

While rhizoanalysis offers qualitative researchers an innovative approach to data collection and analysis that can yield new insights that productively destabilize interpretation and offer an alternative to rigid, hierarchical, and linear methodologies (Masny 2013), I argue that rhizomatic thinking can also help educators to reorient their practice to resist hegemonic and prescriptive frameworks. In the following section, I will bring the rhizomatic framework into conversation with Berlant's (2011) notion of "cruel optimism" as a way to reconceptualize lesson planning.

Cruel Optimism and the Rhizome

In her book, *Cruel Optimism*, cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (2011) engages with Deleuze and Guattari's critique of arborescent and hierarchical epistemologies through interrogating and problematizing the classical concept of the "good life" (Hardt, 2015, p. 215). Cruel optimism describes the attachments that we have to objects that promise a "good life," but that actually prevent us from flourishing in the present. Berlant argues that such attachments lead to the exhausting and ultimately corrosive labor of striving to reproduce a fantasy of what we imagine is the good life. This aspirational and unattainable fantasy produces the ordinary as an object of suffering and reconstructs good life histories as being void of trauma. These shared histories are only amplifications of local or individual history but become "delaminated" from the personal or local, circulating "as evidence of something shared" (Berlant, 2011, p. 12). According to Berlant (2011), the reflexive definition and perception of your lived experience is constantly shaped by your "inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way" (p. 2). Hope and optimism, in this way, appear similar. We set goals for ourselves and work toward those goals in the hope that we incrementally improve our outcomes. This kind of optimism, however, is an attachment to an outcome that has been forged by the neoliberal illusion of the good life, which is constituted from social, economic, political, cultural systems that intensify and magnify the experiences of a few and, in doing so, create an unattainable standard for the many.

According to Berlant (2011), we process the historical present through intuition, or "the contact zone between the affects and their historical contexts of activity, a zone of inference that, as it encounters the social, will always shift according to the construction of evidence and explanation" (p. 79). If affect is the unsorted, unassigned data we experience through the sensorium, then intuition is a tool that transforms affect into emotion. Trauma serves a similar function—giving shape and imposing meaning onto the amorphous affect circulating within our bodies. In examining the role of trauma and intuition, Berlant presents the ways in which "genres" of understanding and process can lead us to develop our objects of cruel optimism. She writes that "the traumatic happening intensifies the nervous system of worlds and focuses persons on the sense that what's going on in front of them is history in the making" (p. 79). Trauma "shatters the biostory that was a foundation for what gets taken for granted about life's historical self-continuity" (p. 80). If trauma and intuition both shuttle our affects into normative habits of the mind, then can they also perhaps disrupt those pathways and reassign our affects to new attachments. There is opportunity to acknowledge our visceral response and reassign, or recode, its pathway and, ultimately, destination.

A rhizomatic framework offers us a way to shatter familiar refrains or genres in order to generate new understandings and liberate us from narratives that bind us to oppressive systems. In short, the concept of the rhizome can help us to overcome our attachment to objects of cruel optimism. A key feature of the rhizome is the principle of cartography, the opposite of which is tracing. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), "the map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves alleged 'competence'" (p. 13). A tracing "has organized, stabilized, neutralized the multiplicities," "and when it thinks it is reproducing something else it is in fact only reproducing itself" (p. 13). In other words, the cartography of the rhizome allows for unlimited points of juncture and disjuncture. While a tracing reinforces normative structures, a mapping opens new horizons. In terms of teaching social studies, the concept of mapping invites us to think about how difficult histories can serve to "nuance, and/or complicate long standing

metanarratives" about our nation (Salinas, 2022 p. x). According to Salinas (2022), "intentional interruption through the teaching of difficult histories requires an understanding of the flawed dominant narrative and its intent to dehumanize" (p. x). Interruption is destabilizing; it reveals multiplicities and yields fertile unpredictability. Social studies teachers who seek to trouble dominant narratives that have "gone awry" (Salinas, 2022 p. x) may find that the required interruptions are incompatible with the tools being used to evaluate teacher practice—namely, rigid rubrics and lesson plans.

Lesson Plans as Objects of "Cruel Optimism

Lesson plans can be objects of cruel optimism. A lesson plan is part of a lesson segment, is part of a unit, is part of a semester, is part of a course, is part of a way of thinking about ourselves, our world, our place in the world. A lesson plan is a narration of a linear movement through time—one activity moves to the next and to the next. Lesson plans drive us through a series of incremental goals that construct scaffolding that enables the learner to access the next goal and then the next, climbing up through the hierarchy of skills and content until critical analysis or complex understanding has been achieved. A lesson plan, separated from a segment or unit, presents the best version of what could be. These descriptions represent attachments to the neoliberal concept of the good life. Our lessons allow our students to race to the top, to conquer standardized tests, to accumulate points, master skills, accomplish goals, and attain dreams. If we execute the objectives of a lesson plan like conductors of an academic symphony, we will not only enable our students to be the best versions of themselves, but will also be deemed "good teachers." If an administrator walks into such a classroom, certainly the educator observed will earn a "highly effective" on the Danielson rubric!

If, though, a lesson plan is indeed an object of cruel optimism, there is something about it that prevents us from flourishing in the present. If the lesson plan we have constructed veers off course, is interrupted or disrupted, falls flat or fails to inspire (or at least engage), the teacher may experience feelings of anxiety or disappointment. Any seasoned educator knows that this latter scenario is far more common than the former. If an administrator enters the classroom during one such episode, the teacher may drop to the wearisome designation of "effective"—or even the dreaded "unsatisfactory." This is not a suggestion that lesson plans serve no practical purpose and should be stricken from teacher practice. However, the lesson plan cast as a blueprint that demands fidelity of implementation (O'Donnell, 2008), which seeks to produce empirical evidence that assigns value to both students and teachers based on neoliberal standards of achievement, used as an implement of surveillance, and containing the specter of punishment in the form of negative teacher evaluation might contribute to the production of educators who feel disaffected and disassociated from the profession.

The Rhizome as a Way Out

In conceiving the topic for this article, I floated my conceptualization to a few teachers in my professional circle, and our conversations crystallized my own thinking around the way that the concept of the rhizome can be liberatory for teachers caught up in and disciplined by systems of regulation. Before delving into my discussions with Christie and Amelia, it is important to note

that this is not a qualitative study, though the moments explored here occurred during data collection for a larger qualitative project. My purpose in writing this article is not to make prescriptive assertions. Rather, in thinking through the concepts presented here, I excavated my own fourteen-year career teaching social studies in New York City, and brought these musings to my peers to see if their experiences aligned with my own.

Christie is a teacher at a mid-sized school in New York City. She teaches three mainstream U.S. History classes and two Advanced Placement Government classes. The school serves a racially, economically, and academically diverse population, and Christie has taught there for sixteen years. Amelia has taught social studies for seventeen years at a large and academically high-achieving high school, also in New York City. She currently teaches Global Studies. Despite the difference in setting and student body, both teachers expressed similar experiences when discussing their curricular construction and instruction process. During each conversation, I briefly described the rhizome and how I interpreted its application to the process of lesson planning and subsequent instruction. Both teachers became animated during my description, nodding heads and uttering affirmations while I spoke.

In my talk with Christie, she provided a detailed narration of a lesson in which she deviated from the plan she had painstakingly constructed prior to the class. Christie's supervisor requires teachers to produce lesson plans that follow a fairly prescribed and rigid format: content and skill objectives, aligned state and Common Core standards, a detailed list of timed activities, formative and summative assessments or checks for understanding, differentiations and accommodations for students with different abilities, and required materials. When I asked whether elements of Christie's lesson plans were pre-populated, she confirmed that certain components, such as standards and differentiation, were typically copied from lesson to lesson rather than generated anew. When I asked if she was mindful of the Danielson rubric when planning a lesson, she said it was always in the back of her mind. Each term, her assistant principal, who conducted observations and teacher evaluations, would identify a particular part of the rubric as a term focus and would look for evidence of pedagogical strategies that satisfied Danielson's expectations. For instance, if the AP's focus was Domain 3c of the Danielson Framework, she would look to see if:

> Virtually all students are engaged in challenging content through well-designed learning tasks and activities that require complex thinking by students. The teacher provides suitable scaffolding and challenges students to explain their thinking. There is evidence of some student initiation of inquiry and student contributions to the exploration of important content; students may serve as resources for one another. The lesson has a clearly defined structure, and the pacing of the lesson provides students the time needed not only to intellectually engage with and reflect upon their learning but also to consolidate their understanding.

As a teacher educator and educational researcher, certainly nothing in the passage above strikes me as bad practice. Moreover, the elements of this component reflect some strong pedagogical practices that I encourage my own students—pre-service teachers in a social studies methods course—to employ. Thus, it is not necessarily the content of the rubric that is problematic. Rather, it is its application as an institutional tool of evaluation that produces lesson plans as objects of cruel optimism.

The lesson plan for the day that Christie narrated for me was detailed to the point of being exhaustive. Every minute of the period was accounted for, with additional layers of contingency in case an element of the carefully choreographed lesson veered off course. When asked about the anticipatory nature of her plan, Christie related that much of the plan's construction was to satisfy the rubric used by her administration for purposes of teacher evaluation. Indeed, veers regularly occurred, and those moments both contained and produced joy and excitement for Christie and her students. In Christie's own words:

> *I was teaching about third parties and how it's so difficult for them to become relevant in general elections. We got into the 2016 election, and the kids wanted to see the Libertarian Party platform. They started researching the platform, looking into different topics and discussing their opinions. One student said, "This isn't even possible! It's like a utopian society!" They thought many elements of the platform were absolutely ridiculous (like eliminating income tax, etc.).*
>
> *This actually happened again yesterday! I was teaching about primaries and asked them whether they agreed with the idea of closed primaries. It turned into 15 minutes of heated debate (I allotted for a 2 min turn and talk). A few kids thought it was helpful to keep only party members involved in the decision-making process, and most thought it wasn't fair and excluded a huge portion of the electorate.*
>
> *If any admin had come in my room, I would have been hit on the Danielson rubric for timing … . I think it's the point about planning/pedagogy … for not finishing the lesson in time … which both times I did not.*

Thinking through this moment, I was reminded of hooks (1994) *Teaching to Transgress*, in which she writes,

> To enter classroom settings … with the will to share the desire to encourage excitement, was to transgress. Not only did it require movement beyond accepted boundaries, but excitement could not be generated without a full recognition of the fact that there could never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices. Agendas had to be flexible, had to allow for spontaneous shifts in direction. (p. 7)

Putting Christie's expressions of joy and excitement into conversation with the feelings of cruel optimism induced by her lesson plan illuminate how a rhizomatic framework might offer a way to diffuse teacher anxiety and encourage teacher flourishing.

Christie's on-the-spot veer from her original plan illustrates several elements of the rhizome, but in particular the notions of "asignifying rupture" and "line of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 10, 11). Christie's students ruptured her lesson. They "broke" from the plan, "shattered at a given spot," and "started up again" on a new line (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9). Her objectives in the first example—a lesson about third parties—transformed into something unanticipated but also related, also existing in the rhizome. Her students then took a "line of flight" in relating the Libertarian party platform to that of a utopia—using the new metaphor to interrogate the realistic possibility of the ideological underpinnings of Libertarianism. As the plan was fractured, the broken pieces began to take on new meaning—what is a utopia? To what extent does a political platform align to the lived experiences of students in a classroom? How do we reconcile the tension between political promises and outcomes? Both students and teacher were

invested in the process of "becoming" through the "circulation of intensities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10) that flowed through the classroom. The uncertainty and destabilization of the veer produced new meaning that brought teacher and student together, blurring hierarchies through the process of collaborative discovery.

In my next conversation, Amelia discussed her process of lesson planning during remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like so many teachers, the abrupt shift to online instruction forced Amelia to reimagine her approach to teaching social studies, both because virtual instruction requires different pedagogical strategies and because her students were grappling with the associated stresses of learning from home during a pandemic. Additionally, without the expectation of preparing students for a high-stakes assessment, Amelia expressed that she felt unbound from many of the structures that previously shaped her lesson planning process. Considering the unprecedented circumstances facing both teacher and student, she made the decision to discard the curriculum she had taught for years and start anew. Embracing this novel flexibility, she described the experience of lesson planning during the pandemic as arranging "a translucent multidimensional floating puzzle." For instance, Amelia related that she rejected the progress-oriented and chronological structure she had used to frame her freshmen Global Studies class for many years. Instead, she selected a few concepts she felt were often uncritically accepted in the official curriculum found in standards and textbooks and built new lessons around interrogating these ideas. A new unit on the notion of "civilization" spanned space and time, investigated common assumptions that underpinned the word itself, and drew upon diverse and underexplored examples from world history. Importantly, Amelia shared that the day-to-day, minute-to-minute plans that made up her unit often shifted direction in response to student interest and thinking. She countered the precarity of the pandemic with curriculum development that flowed dynamically, lessons shooting off in unpredictable directions and reattaching to comfortable narratives in disruptive and compelling ways.

Amelia's description of her lesson planning process and products intimates a reconfiguration of thinking that eschews linear or hierarchical structure, instead conceptualizing her lessons rhizomatically. Her "translucent multidimensional floating puzzle" is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's description of rhizoanalysis: "you start by delimiting a first line consisting of circles of convergence around successive singularities; then you see whether inside that line new circles of convergence establish themselves, with new points located outside the limits and in other directions" (p. 11). The crisis precipitated by COVID-19 created conditions that allowed Amelia to engage in more satisfying and generative lesson planning because of the elimination of structures that mediated and surveilled her thinking.

A third example of the potential of applying a rhizomatic framework to the enactment of a lesson plan comes from recent research by Fitzpatrick and von Hover (2022). Though their inquiry sought to answer very different questions than are the focus of this article, reading their work revealed compelling evidence of the benefits of eschewing a rigid plan in favor of a rhizomatic approach. In a study aimed at exploring how interrogation of secondary sources can help teachers discuss difficult knowledge and histories, Fitzpatrick and von Hover analyzed the pedagogical and content choices of a veteran social studies teacher, Lance Weisand. In his reflections, Weisand expressed a desire to challenge mythologized historical interpretations that reify master narratives and allow teachers to avoid contentious topics related to "race, gender, ethnicity, religion, class, immigration, sex" (Weisand et al., 2022, p. 180). Of note in their analysis of Weisand's style, Fitzpatrick and von Hover underscore his pedagogical fluidity and dynamism. Rather than scripting his student's encounters with difficult knowledge, Weisand allowed his

lessons to flow rhizomatically, embracing the ruptures and lines of flight that emerged during discussions. They observed that Weisand saw an "unplanned moment to discuss with students the complexities of history" (p. 184). Instead of adhering to a lesson plan that showed clear alignment to a set of standards or a rubric, Weisand responded to the students in his classroom—their affects and emotions drove his on-the-spot choices more than a lesson plan that promised realization of content and skill objectives.

The examples of Christie, Ameila, and Lance Weisand bring to mind Poetter's (2006) contention that joy in teaching emerges out of authentic connections between teachers and students. Poetter calls us to "make the subject matter come alive in the lives of students as a starting place for thinking about and planning for and delivering curriculum and teaching and for connecting us as human beings" (p. 285). Instead of acting as an object of cruel optimism, these teachers' rhizomatic lesson plans continuously reinvest both them and their students in the process of (co)creating, rather than accepting, knowledge. They embrace the joyful and generative unpredictability produced by multiple bodies and minds sharing space in a classroom.

Concluding Thoughts: Teaching as a Project

The proliferation of highly scripted "teacher proof" lesson plans (Fogo et al., 2019) and the explosion of educational resources offered, for a price, by "teacherpreneurs" on sites like Teachers Pay Teachers (Harris et al., 2021) underscores the significance placed on the materiality of instruction—the paper or document that the lesson exists upon—rather than the minds and bodies of the teacher and students enacting the lesson in space and time. Without wholly discarding the object of the lesson plan—indeed, a plan of some sort is certainly necessary, especially for novice teachers—reimagining the purpose and attached significance of the lesson plan could reinvest teachers in the *project of teaching*. The theory of the rhizome may offer teachers, teacher educators, and those who evaluate teacher practice an opportunity to liberate thinking about lesson planning in order to transform the plan from an object of cruel optimism into a productive and emancipatory practice.

Maxine Greene (1987) argued that the longevity of teachers who are fully invested and engaged in the profession is reliant on a shift away from educators functioning as "'good daughters' … middle managers, transmission belts, or complaint members of a 'team'" (p. 181). Greene explains:

> I should think that a teacher in touch with his or her own interrogations, confrontations with deficiencies, and lived reality would project situations in which students would be empowered to make sense of their own lived situations–to "name," as it were, their worlds. To be enabled to name one's world is to be offered a range of languages or symbol systems or even disciplines to use as perspectives through which to see … . To be told to take part in a tightening of requirements and a raising of standards across the board, no matter what the cost in failure and drop-out, should convey a feeling of personal frustration, if not despair. It is when people become aware in this subjective fashion of lacks, especially those that are covered up with affable, correct, or reassuring talk, that they are moved to repair, to surpass, to choose a flight and a leap ahead, a refusal and a realization. (p. 186)

Greene encourages us to embrace teaching as a project that is ongoing, fluid, constantly evolving, and in a continuous state of disassemblage and reassemblage. Teaching as a project imbues the teacher with agency and autonomy, which has been shown to increase "teacher job satisfaction, professionalism, and empowerment" (Girard et al. 2020, p. 232). Prioritizing teacher autonomy also creates a classroom experience that is more responsive and inclusive of student diversity and mindful of "dismantling past oppressive structures" (Dunn et al. 2021, p. 218). Reorganizing our conceptualization of the lesson plan to allow for the possibility of rhizomatic thinking and action can empower social studies educators and their supervisors to embrace those moments when an asignifying rupture or a line of flight produces unexpected and fruitful outcomes. Such on-the-spot transformations should not cause anxiety—they should not prevent a teacher from flourishing in the present because of the fear of not attaining a goal or standard. A lesson plan should be a map, not a tracing. Those of us who teach, supervise, and support teachers must remember that a lesson plan as a map works best when it "fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages," and "provides multiple entryways" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 2) to engage and invest both student and teacher.

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Agential Schooling
"Where Dreams Come To Die"

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"SHIT, SCHOOL IS WHERE DREAMS COME TO DIE," a statement from Samantha, a Latinx female student, who was joking with her classmates before the start of their 9th grade Ethnic Studies class at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year. I paused in that moment, thinking how Samantha's statement was often true for many students, particularly students of color. Samantha's joke, an agent, started a four-year project of wondering and wandering with a high school Ethnic Studies program. Long after Samantha's statement about schooling, I continued to ponder the question: why is it that schools are often places of domination where dreams come to die? Even with all of the progressive and radical interventions (e.g., Ethnic Studies, multicultural studies, Black Studies, democratic educational endeavors, youth participatory action research, etc.), schooling is still a driving force in many schools around the nation.

Schooling is a term often mobilized to illustrate how schools are spaces used for social regulation and reproduction, while also reinforcing problematic forms of racial, gendered, and classed domination (Anyon, 1981; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Patel, 2016; Vaught, 2017). Schooling has been envisioned as effects or outcomes of economic structures via Marxist analysis, racial domination via critical race theory, and complicated entanglements between individuals, discourses, and institutions via poststructuralism. While they have been helpful to our understanding, such scholarship has not treated schooling as a nonhuman agent, or as being. That is, much of the focus has been on actions of individuals rather than the entanglement and co-constitution of the various actors operating in schools. Beyond the presence of humans, there are nonhuman and discursive actors that need to be accounted for within schooling spaces. It is not just human actors, but also nonhuman agents that are entangled with and co-constituting phenomena.

This piece, a posthumanist analysis of schooling that is a component of a larger four-year entanglement, puts forward a complex accounting of schooling that decenters the human and acknowledges those agents—schooling discourses, clipboards, policies, handouts, etc.—that often go unacknowledged in purely humanist framings. This is a shift away from dualism and linearity to a repositioning of educational phenomena as entanglements of multiplicities, situatedness (e.g., politics, power, material flows, etc.), becomings, and the more-than-human world. A posthumanist framing of schooling, what I label *agential schooling*, accounts for schooling as an agent rather

than solely positioning it as an outcome or effect. In what follows, I discuss literature on schooling, focused on a brief accounting of effects. I then discuss the context and methodology used within the four-year project. I transition to articulating the apparatuses that support agential schooling, then move to discuss two examples further accounting for the multiplicities entangled within an agential schooling framing. I end with a diffractive analysis of the two intra-active phenomena.

Schooling – A Brief Accounting of Effects

Schooling is a form of domination that has been historically accounted for in relation to racial, economic, and gendered dynamics. These are not the only forms of domination present within schools, but they are driving forces in our society and schools. What follows is a brief accounting of the literature on these forms of domination within schools.

Race

The United States is a settler colonial nation, something rarely acknowledged in schools; schools often provide narratives of the U.S. as a linear progression towards the development of a just society (Patel, 2019; Salvio & Taubman, 2020). The erasure of the violence of settler colonialism and reframing of the national narrative as a liberal progression illustrates how schools often center Eurocentric onto-epistemologies that dehumanize, delegitimize, and erase people of color. There is a racial contract "between those categorized as white over the nonwhites, who are thus the objects rather than the subject of the agreement" (Mills, 1999, p. 12). Whites are privileged, and people of color are exploited for their lands, bodies, and resources and denied access to opportunities (Mills, 1999). Leonardo (2013) coined the term, "educational racial contract," expanding upon the racial contract, illustrating racial oppression in schools where "minority children lie outside of this learning paradigm because all the dehumanizing machinations of schools have failed to bring them in line. They have not shed their subperson status, thus better to define them as substudents" (p. 608). Curricular violences often frame Black individuals as one-dimensional (e.g., slaves) or in deficit framings (Neal & Dunn, 2021). Schools are "spaces … which function to terrorize students of color" (Love, 2019, p. 13). Within schools, students of color are often dehumanized, overly policed, and depicted as deviant.

Furthermore, when it comes to racial domination, schools have been positioned as sites of suffering (Dumas, 2014), anti-Blackness (Dumas, 2016), spirit murder (Love, 2016), dehumanization (Irizarry & Brown, 2014), deculturalization (Spring, 2016), and dispossession (Vaught, 2017). We must remember we live in the afterlife of slavery (see Hartman, 2007) and reside within a larger climate/weather of anti-Blackness (Sharpe, 2016). This climate/weather is especially prevalent in the current educational discourse around anti-CRT legislation, which can be seen throughout the United States.

Gender

Other key aspects of regulation are forms of gender and sexual oppression in schools. Youth are constantly "bullied, harassed, and victimized in schools as a result of their perceived

sexual identity or gender expression" (Abreu et al., 2016, p. 325). Students of color are also punished disproportionately. For example, Black girls in every state in the United States "are more than twice as likely to be suspended from school as White girls" (Love, 2019, p. 5). Schools reinscribe patriarchal, racial, gendered, and sexual oppression. There are other forms of oppression that are important to consider when thinking about schooling but are outside of the scope of this project (e.g., ableism, the deculturalization of immigrant youth beyond Latinx students, etc.).

Sexism manifests within schools via entanglements between adults and students, student-to-student, popular media, or familial engagements that influence students' academic dispossessions (Leaper & Spears, 2014). Teachers can play a role as some may hold hostile views of students. For example, African American girls are often stereotyped as "aggressive, loud, rude, sexual … violent, and crime prone" (Lopez & Nuño, 2016, p. 30). Girls of color labeled as "at-risk" often are "viewed by educators and schools as misfits, dangerous or unwanted bodies" (Hines-Datiri, 2017, p. 33). Students of color are more likely than their white counterparts to be identified as having a learning disability (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). These stereotypes lead to detrimental learning outcomes for students of color.

Biased educators, school practices, policies, and policing oppress girls of color (Hines-Datiri, 2017). Girls of color are suspended at higher rates (Hines-Datiri, 2017), over identified in special education (Wun, 2016), and frequently punished for "subjectivity defined behaviors" (Murphy et al., 2013, p. 586); Black girls are often viewed as disruptive or defiant (Morris, 2016). Gender bias reinforces white, hetero-patriarchal ways of being.

Economic

Beyond racial domination and patriarchal ways of knowing and being, exploitative capitalism also influences schools. Jean Anyon (1981) illustrated the connection between social class and school knowledge. Working class students are not taught their histories but often positioned as deficits; middle-class students are taught to consume, reproducing capitalist ideologies of production and consumption, and professional/elite schools teach their students the history of the elite (Anyon, 1981; Bertrand, 2019). Anyon's work demonstrated that one's social position heavily influences their school experience. Bowles and Gintis (1976) articulated the idea that schooling works in service of capitalist economic reproduction; they asserted, "that major aspects of educational organization replicate the relationships of dominance and subordinancy in the economic sphere" (p. 125). Key components of twentieth century industrial capitalism, "efficiency, productivity, standardization, interchangeability … discipline, attention, scheduling, conformity, hierarchical administration, the separation of knowing and doing … were discovered and crafted in the workplace and then transported to society … institutionalized in schools" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 411). For example, just as workers often lack control over their labor and feel a sense of alienation due to this, so too do students lack control over the curriculum and content in school. Schools with large populations of working-class students and students of color are often overcrowded and have more unqualified teachers compared to their affluent white counterparts (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Neoliberal "technoscientific authority" and "data driven instruction" undermine local communities and their abilities to "shape and govern the education of their children" (Henderson & Hursh, 2014, p. 177). These moves limit and subvert democratic education.

Agential schooling builds upon, and is in conversation with, discussions of schooling like those exploring Marxist framings of schooling as working in service of capitalist exploitation/economic reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), gender domination (Leaper & Spears, 2014), and those examining schooling and racialization as demonstrated by Spring's (2016) deculturalization, Valenzuela's (1999) subtractive schooling, and Vaught's (2017) dispossession. While they have been helpful to our understanding, such scholarship has not treated schooling as a nonhuman agent. The posthumanist accounting shared here makes two distinct cuts that expand and build upon earlier scholarship. First, it positions schooling as an agent, as protean, rather than as an effect or outcome that is mostly driven by human actors. This framing expands our analytical apparatuses by accounting for agents that often go unacknowledged in traditional humanist qualitative research. Second, there is an expanded analysis of agents (e.g., inclusions of nonhuman and discursive actors) and how those agents come to be entangled and co-constitutive.

Methodological Entanglements

As stated, this posthumanist entanglement is a component of a larger project that explored four years of embedded work within an Ethnic Studies high school program. I examined schooling through a posthumanist lens to better understand the intra-actions between humans, nonhumans, and discourses in a public high school. Intra-action refers to the way that the agents—human, nonhuman, and discursive—are co-constitutive (Barad, 2007). A posthumanist framing of schooling—agential schooling—demonstrates how schooling is protean and shifts as we seek to understand and challenge it. To shed light on this issue of examining agential schooling, the following research question is taken up: What are the apparatuses supporting schooling, and how does schooling operate as a nonhuman agent in a public high school, Vantage High (pseudonym)?

I utilized a case study of one high school, Vantage High, to study agential schooling. This western Massachusetts high school had 1,500 students; roughly 80% of the student population is Latinx (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2018). Within the four years of research, I worked with and studied an Ethnic Studies youth participatory action research (YPAR) professional learning community, a 9th grade Ethnic Studies course, an 11th grade Ethnic Studies course, and afterschool YPAR programming across three years. For this project, my data is primarily pulled from the 11th grade classroom, B7, which included 15 students, one teacher, myself as the researcher/participant, and a plethora of nonhuman and discursive agents.

Using ethnographic methods, I pulled from Hong's (2011) layered ethnography, being attentive to my relationships with the agents (human, nonhuman, and discursive), while also paying attention to what happened in the various spaces. Critical ethnography emphasizes a particular attuning to how power and domination operates (Madison, 2011). Engaging posthumanism as a mode of inquiry afforded me the possibility to decenter the human and account for the agency of the more-than-human world (Ross, 2021). As Barad (2007) asserts, "the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through their intra-action" (p. 33). Furthermore, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) indicated that "discourse and matter are understood to be mutually constituted in the production of knowing" (p. 115). As Rosiek (2019) notes, intra-action "is not primarily a means of discovering the nature of objects, but is a process of entanglement in which two agents are mutually co-constituted" (p. 79). Agential realism afforded me the possibility to account for intra-actions, non-human agency, and the more-than-human world.

I utilized diffraction to explore patterns of interference and read material through one another. Diffraction stresses "reading insights through rather than against each other to make evident the always-already entanglement of specific ideas" (Barad, 2017, p. 64). Differences matter, and in particular, entanglements (both a focus on those included and those excluded) come to matter when there are intra-actions; "diffraction is a matter of differential entanglements … reconfiguring connections" (Barad, 2007, p. 381). Dixon-Román (2017) furthers this by asserting that diffraction "focuses on the nature or effect of relational and connected differences" (p. 69). The intra-actions and differential entanglements create something new.

This work illustrates the methodological interplay/entangling of ethnographic methods (e.g., participation observations and fieldwork), interviews, and Baradian (2007) agential realism. Barad's intra-action is utilized to account for the entanglement and co-constitutive role of humans (e.g., students, teachers, researcher, administrators, etc.), nonhumans (clipboards, desks, handouts, etc.), and discursive agents (e.g., schooling, policies, racism, etc.). Diffraction allowed for reading insights through one another rather than against each other, helping to explore how difference was produced via patterns of interference.

Apparatuses Supporting Agential Schooling

Within the larger four-year entanglement, I analyzed how various apparatuses—policy, curriculum, hierarchical relations, adultism, prescriptive entanglements, discipline, and punishment—supported agential schooling. Apparatus, here, references an agent that works in service and supports another agent. For example, educational policies have often worked in service of perpetuating social regulation (see Dumas, 2016; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

First, the curriculum. There are variations of curriculum based upon ideas surrounding what is intended to be taught, what is actually taught, the learning that occurred, and the hidden curriculum (the implicit lessons produced) (Rosiek & Kinslow, 2016). The hidden curriculum is one of schooling's most effective modes of domination as it obscures domination, normalizing oppression (Wozolek, 2020).

Similarly, within schools and classrooms there are hierarchical relationships between administrators, teachers, and students. Youth are often seen as "either dangerous or vulnerable" (Kirshner, 2015, p. 3) or positioned as property of the state, "citizens-in-the-making or citizens-in-waiting" (Vaught, 2017, p. 113). These hierarchical relationships are built off of adultism, the assumptions that those who are older have more knowledge, skills, and abilities (DeJong & Love, 2015). Younger individuals should abide by and passively accept the information given to them within these hierarchical relations (see Table 1; also see Albright, 2023), what Freire (1970) labeled as banking education.

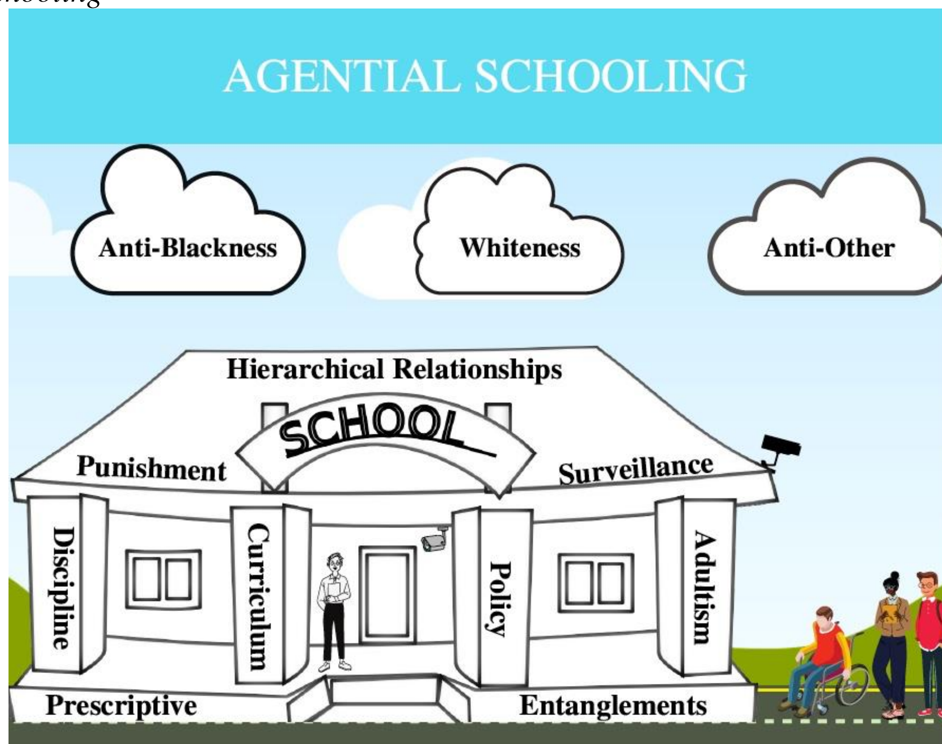
Adding to this, schooling also operates through prescriptive entanglements. For example, many traditional classrooms have prescriptive curricular entanglements with warm-up activities (e.g., do-nows), followed by a variation of "students will be able to" (followed with a verb of analyze, synthesize, etc.), and the class ending with some version of an exit ticket where students demonstrate mastery of the learning objective.

Table 1
Problematic Hierarchical Relationships

The Teacher…	The Student…
Teaches	Is taught
Disciplines	Is disciplined
Has knowledge	Needs knowledge
Talks	Listens
Chooses activities, curriculum, class material, etc.,	Has the illusion of meaningful choice

Many practices within schools are prescriptive, not allowing for the unpredictability of learning (see Patel, 2016, 2019). Students are then rewarded or punished based upon compliance, mastery, etc. For example: Can a student silently listen as a teacher lectures? Can a student follow a specific academic writing structure or follow the formulaic steps of a math problem? Punishment and rewards structures can be internalized; the self becomes the regulator. Foucault (1995) demonstrates that discipline's power resides in hierarchical observations, normalizing judgments, and examinations. These apparatuses emerge and play different roles within different entanglements based upon the large assemblage and intra-actions occurring within the given phenomenon. Figure 1 demonstrates a graphic illustration of the various apparatuses along with the larger climate or weather of anti-Blackness, Whiteness, and anti-Other that operated within Vantage High (see Sharpe, 2016). A further analysis of these apparatuses, an agential cut, is a part of another project outside the scope of this current piece.

Figure 1
Agential Schooling



In the following section, I provide examples of schooling intra-actions and account for the more-than-human agency of schooling.

Nonhuman Agency: Classrooms, Clipboards, and Administrative Observations

The following two intra-actions illustrate the entanglements of human, nonhuman, and discursive agents and apparatuses and demonstrate the nonhuman agency of schooling I encountered at Vantage High. These two examples, agential cuts, are also diffractively read through one another to further demonstrate schooling's agency.

Reproducing Hierarchical Schooling

Various schooling entanglements emerged within B7. Students in B7 often vocalized their detestation of hierarchical relationships between teachers and students, the lecturing, and lack of collaboration in classrooms. However, when afforded the space to create an exclusively student-driven classroom, they reproduced the problematic components of schooling they rallied against.

Danielle, the teacher, walked into B7 one morning and stated, "Hey, you all remember we are presenting our work this weekend, right?" The students responded, "Yes." Danielle then replied, "Great, you all create the PowerPoint agenda, and I will be back near the end of class so you all can catch me up." Danielle told the students that I was in the room and that I should be treated like a any other member of the learning community; it was up to the students. The only ask of the day was that there would be a PowerPoint agenda created for Saturday's event. Danielle later told me that she did this to see how/what the students would do with the autonomy and no teacher constraining their actions. As soon as Danielle left, the students almost immediately went to reproducing a hierarchical classroom.

Stacey and Luis, two active students in the class and larger Ethnic Studies community in the school, immediately stood up and walked to the front of the classroom and started to ask the students questions about what they wanted to do. There was no conversation about how the class would proceed nor an appointing of Stacey or Luis as leaders. They took this task upon themselves. This action was met with a variety of responses. Maria and Samantha withdrew from the activities and talked amongst themselves for the remainder of the class. In a later conversation, both Maria and Samantha stated that they felt frustrated that Stacey and Luis took control of the class without input from their peers on the process, and because of that they withdrew. Samantha stated, "It was fine that they got up there, because somebody needed to, but she [Stacey] wasn't really trying to include everybody." While Samantha noted there should be some inclusion of everyone's voice, she also stated that someone needed to take control. Here, Samantha relied upon a notion of needing hierarchical relationships within the space. There needed to be a leader. Ben and Joseph pulled away from the class activity and talked amongst themselves about basketball. The remainder of the class stayed in their seats and directed their attention to Stacey and Luis.

Stacey took up the authoritarian teacher role as she asked students questions and then wrote her interpretation of their statements on the whiteboard. Shawn, being a member of Luis and Stacey's usual group, came closer to the board and listened to what Luis and Stacey had to say. He followed their lead and did as was directed. Victoria attempted to speak, but the other members of the class were talking amongst themselves loudly, and she could not be heard. Luis asked the

students to abide by the classroom norms of having one individual speak at a time and being attentive to that person's contribution. The majority of students stopped speaking. A few just lowered their voices.

For the most part, the students engaged in a passive manner. Stacey and Luis guided the class. Two students, Kelly and Juliana, came to the whiteboard and added to the potential agenda. After getting most of the agenda completed, Stacey asked the class a question about how they might divide the talking points. Sofia responded, but Stacey did not understand Sofia's comment and asked her to come to the board to draw out what she was saying. Sofia tensed up, looked around the room, and as her face grew red she stated, "No." During this intra-action there was a tension surrounding speaking publicly in front of the class and also about being "right." However, the students were attempting to engage in a dialogue, but the pressure of schooling reinforced notions of correct and incorrect, mastery, even when they were just discussing ideas of what to do. Sofia later stated that there was too much attention and pressure on her at that moment.

Throughout the class time, Stacey was asking for students to contribute as Luis was circulating amongst the groups seeking their input. The students eventually started to engage with the process more, and most of them contributed to the task at hand. However, Stacey got frustrated with the students not engaging with the activity and started to be short with the other students. Stacey ultimately sat down and crossed her arms stating that she was done. The rest of the class remained quiet for a minute or two, with everyone looking around. Finally, Luis took up the activity and finished the task before Danielle came back to the classroom.

This specific class session initially left me puzzled. The students reproduced the very thing that they often enthusiastically spoke about resisting. First, there was the hierarchical reproduction of school as Stacey and Luis took on the role of teacher. This was interesting as Stacey and Luis were the most vocal supporters of Ethnic Studies and avidly critiqued hierarchical schooling. However, not all students engaged with this schooling activity. Samantha and Maria never participated in the class's activities. Initially, this could be seen as defiant or withdrawn behavior, or it could be imagined as students resisting a problematic schooling intra-action. Ben and Joseph stated they withdrew simply because they were not that into the activity. However, the rest of the class did not challenge the hierarchical relationship but participated as if Stacey and Luis replaced Danielle.

Beyond the hierarchical relationship, there was also a prescriptive engagement as Stacey and Luis were guiding the conversation while students were responding to those questions. This was not collaborative, but rather directed by Stacey and Luis. With Stacey and Luis standing at the board while the rest of the students were sitting, there was also the intra-action between active and passive, surveilling and surveilled. When given the freedom to disrupt schooling, the students reproduced the very thing they passionately advocated against throughout the year. This moment represents an entanglement of the onto-epistemological knowing in being and being in knowing of schooling. The students intra-acted with the discourse of schooling, the oppressive onto-episteme of schooling, the physical setup of the classroom lending itself towards hierarchy with the desks being oriented towards the whiteboard, the whiteboard, the agenda on the board, and the goal of producing the agenda for the Saturday activity.

Administrators, Clipboards, and Class Observations

> An administrator walked into B7. The room shifted. Students sat-up, closed their arms, tightened their legs, and stared at her. I tilted my computer screen to be closer to my chest, even though I know she was not there to observe me. The student directly in front of me, Joseph, sat-up and said, "damn." Another student, Samantha, feverishly started to tap her foot, crossed her arms, and appeared to be quite agitated. (Fieldnote, 3-4-20)

A second intra-active moment, a school administrator, with her clipboard in hand, visited Danielle's classroom. This administrator visited the class as students were working in groups discussing the significance of student voice in school. The classroom energy shifted as soon as the administrator walked in with her clipboard. The students sat up, their body language changed, and the space became quieter. Students appeared guarded, some crossed their arms, and others leaned over their work. There was a performance, and as Gabriel asserted, "When you like a teacher, yeah, make them look good in a sense. When they [teachers] are in front of their bosses, we understand that." Rather than having more open conversations, the students were leaning into their groups. As an observer and researcher, I even sat up and pulled my computer screen closer to my chest. This was my immediate response. The administrator and the clipboard evoked a physical and emotional response. I felt surveilled even though I had no relation to this administrator's work. As a former teacher, I had been observed multiple times and was aware of teacher observation protocols. This entanglement took me to Foucault's (1995) notions of surveillance and hierarchical observations while also invoking a memory of my conversation with the 2017-2018 professional learning community where the Ethnic Studies teachers talked about the administrator's use of the teacher "checklist" when they walked into classrooms with their clipboards. Similarly, it evoked memories of my own teacher observations and the anxiety produced when administrators walked around my classroom with their clipboards.

In this specific intra-action in Danielle's classroom, the tension was compounded as Samantha claimed, "It was tense because usually she's [the administrator] the one that only comes in when she's heard something about somebody … and when you have already got into altercations with staff, its going to be like, 'why are you here?'" Samantha further stated, "I think she [the administrator] went into the class with good intentions, but mix that with the fact that she's already had interactions with the students that weren't positive. It was just a little weird." Danielle later acknowledged that it also shifted her disposition, "I felt like I had to perform for her."

Within my group, Samantha anxiously asserted, "I don't even know why she is here." Joseph built upon this statement by shifting his body language and raising his voice as he stated, "She invaded our space and ruined the vibe … she just tries to get people in trouble." Samantha and Joseph then continued a dialogue on how she is always just out watching students. The administrator stood throughout her time in the class while the students were seated. I tensed up as the administrator walked towards our group. She stood above us for one to two minutes, which was visibly uncomfortable for the group. Samantha crossed her arms over her chest and Joseph leaned over his writing. As the administrator walked away, Samantha shook her head, and her leg was visibly shaking as she stated, "My anxiety is on max." Beyond Samantha, Danielle noted, "It made the room uncomfortable and tense. It made it a little hard for me to focus because it made it kind of like we couldn't fully share our ideas." As noted, this administrator was constantly writing on her clipboard throughout the class time. The clipboard was an agent and played a role within the intra-action and feelings of being surveilled. As Samantha asserted, "I don't think anybody

likes to be under pressure." For Samantha, the clipboard made her feel like she was being surveilled. As Gabriel noted, "it makes you feel like they are observing you and your behavior." The clipboard had thing-power; "thing-power gestures toward the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness." (Bennett, 2010, p. xvi). The clipboard exceeded its status as an object and had agency affecting the students (Bennett, 2010).

The administrator left Danielle the following note, "Great to see the collaboration here with students and community members. Authentic work, hearing almost every student's voice. Great engagement. Let's talk more." While this was a positive space and experience for the administrator, it was quite the opposite for the rest of the people in B7. Samantha was visibly angry for the remainder of the class, and she shut down. The day after the administrator visited the class, Samantha handed me a sheet of paper that stated:

> Often times school administrators will come in and observe teachers. There is no doubt that there are some students who have been targeted by administrators during a regular school day. On a day-to-day basis you have students that may just be going through it. Other students just might feel that school just isn't for them. Whatever the case may be, most students have been in a situation where they've felt targeted or picked out; if you've ever been in this situation well then koodas to you because its never fun and almost never ends good for the student.
>
> Now when you're in class trying to focus on schoolwork and not everything else going on in life, and then the same administrator that you were just feeling targeted by is sitting in your class watching you it, can feel really awkward. For some it may even feel like they are only focusing on you.

Samantha was not alone in feeling surveilled. Danielle stated:

> I definitely felt something. There was a shift. Their [students'] body language changed instantly. Some students were openly agitated. It felt as if they were feeling, "this is our space, why are you here?"… Now for me, when she came into class, I shifted a little bit. She came in with a clipboard. There's just the presence of an adult who doesn't belong to the community, popping into the class unannounced that shifts the dynamic.

I later debriefed this class session with Danielle, and she felt that a component of the heightened anxiety was the administrator's interactions with students in the hall. As Danielle indicated, "all day long she is caught up in the nitty-gritty of being in the hallway telling kids to take their hats and hoods off …. she is constantly nagging students without building relationships." Danielle also noted this issue of the clipboard and how she felt it was associated with being critiqued. The clipboard, along with the administrator, evoked a sense of uneasiness and impacted Danielle's way of being, along with the other participants in B7.

Entangling Entanglements

Various entanglements and responses to schooling emerge when we read the experiences in B7 through one another. For example, when the administrator entered B7, Danielle and Gabriel, to some extent, perform, playing their perceived roles within the space. Gabriel noted his performance was a tool for making his teacher look good, a resistance tool. Joseph, Samantha, and I all felt anxiety and retreated from the activity. We shut down rather than performing our roles within schooling. For me, this was due to my own experiences of feeling surveilled as a past teacher. For Samantha and Joseph, this was tied to previous experiences with the administrator and oppression of schooling within Vantage.

During this moment, there were a variety of bodies intra-acting. There was what Joseph labeled, a "space invader," the administrator who came into Danielle's classroom. This administrator came into the classroom to observe Danielle's teaching, and she left positive feedback, but for many of the students, that did not feel like her purpose. The students had noted how they felt she was there to surveil them. Danielle stated, "administrators are always walking around the building with clipboards assessing the students and teachers." For Danielle, the clipboard produced a notion of not only being surveilled, but also assessed. The clipboard played a role in the tension of B7. The clipboard, in conversation with the discourse of schooling and surveillance, illustrated a moment of thing-power. The clipboard was an agent intra-acting with the humans, nonhuman bodies, and discourses. This intra-action illustrates the significant negative impact surveillance can have on the minds and bodies of individuals, while also illustrating the role that various nonhuman agents can play in such intra-actions. I also recognize that the conditions for this thing-power (Bennett, 2010) to come to existence are in relation to schooling's driving onto-epistemic focus on surveillance, discipline, and compliance, which create the conditions to make this intra-action possible.

Discipline, surveillance, compliance, and hierarchical relations emerged differently when there was no administrator or adult teacher in B7. Even without Danielle or the administrator in B7, hierarchical relations and prescriptive entanglements emerged within the space, even as the youth were actively working in opposition to traditional schooling processes and practices. However, depending upon one's framing, in both instances, participants may be viewed as withdrawn, defiant, etc., or as resisting the violence of the oppressive onto-episteme of schooling. For example, Samantha withdrawing from both activities, as she stated, was not about being a defiant student, but was a resistance to oppression. Within the classroom observation intra-action, surveillance and hierarchical relations played out via the administrator observing Danielle and the youth in the space, while the participants also internally surveilled themselves, either resisting the prescriptive hierarchical entanglement (e.g., Samantha being withdrawn) or participating in the process for a variety of reasons. For example, as Gabriel stated, he performed to make his teacher look good because he knew how observations went. For him, this was about playing a role, performing as a way to resist schooling. For myself, I internally surveilled myself and brought my computer close to me. Like the students, classroom observations and clipboards played a role influencing my ways of knowing and being. On the other hand, when students were in charge of B7, they also internally surveilled themselves and reproduced traditional hierarchical and prescriptive ways of knowing and being in the classroom.

Reading these intra-actions through one another, we see that various nonhuman bodies operate differently according to the differing entanglements. However, each of these intra-actions illustrates how schooling operates as a nonhuman agent influencing the various agents. During

both examples, hierarchical relationships and surveillance—both internal and external—heavily influenced the ways of knowing and being of the participants. Students, when provided the opportunity and freedom to create a learning community of their choice, reproduced the very hierarchical schooling process they often rallied against. An administrative observation meant to provide Danielle feedback produced an outcome counter to that of the administrator's intention. The administrator saw the space as a positive learning environment, but her entanglement with hierarchical relations, surveillance, discourses of schooling, students, and the clipboard produced a space that did not feel safe for students. Even with the human participants having positive intentions, schooling played a role as an agent influencing these entanglements, reproducing a violent onto-episteme of domination.

Towards Widening our Frames – Agential Schooling

In each of these intra-active entanglements there were human (students, teachers, researcher, administrators), nonhuman (desks, clipboards, agendas, whiteboards), and discursive agents (schooling discourses, surveillance discourses, adultist/hierarchical discourses) at play, co-constituting the various agents and entanglements. Schooling, as the aforementioned intra-actions demonstrate, is not just a passive effect or outcome, but is an agent. Positioning schooling as an agent, via enactments with posthumanism, affords us the possibility to develop more textured and intricate frames of analysis by widening our analytic frames and being able to recognize the thing-power (Bennett, 2010) of agents, like clipboards, to broader explorations of intra-active entanglements between human, nonhuman, and discursive agents (Barad, 2007).

Thinking methodologically about attuning to schooling as a nonhuman agent demands that we expand our analytical frames to not only look at human, or discursive, or nonhuman agents, but also recognize how those agents are entangled and co-constitutive. As researchers, we need to explore questions that take into account the complexity of intra-active phenomena. For example, it is not just about a clipboard as passive or active agent, but also how that clipboard is entangled with discourses (e.g., surveillance, schooling, adultism, etc.) and human (student, teacher, administrator) agents. What emerges from those co-constitutive curricular entanglements? We must attune to how schooling, as an agent, is playing a role in the various entanglements.

In reading these diffractive moments through one another, illustrates how the onto-epistemology of schooling works on the minds and bodies of individuals. The very ways of being and knowing for students, teachers, and administrators are saturated in the problematic and dominating force of agential schooling. Schooling is not just the effects or outcomes of economic structures or racial domination, but rather is an active agent influencing and shaping our ways of knowing and being.

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Shaping Professional Hats

Posthumanist Affirmative Critique of Early Childhood Curriculum and Professionalism in Aotearoa New Zealand

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POSTHUMANIST THINKING CAN FRAME early childhood curriculum and professionalism to productively attend to complex ways they constitute each other. Curriculum and professionalism are powerful influences within early childhood settings, and both are concepts that are understood in diverse ways. What curriculum and professionalism do and produce matters; they make a difference in the lives of teachers, children, and their families. Posthumanist perspectives on early childhood curriculum and professionalism encompass multiple human and non-human components that co-/re-/constitute early childhood settings, teachers, children, and learning that happens. During a research study set in Aotearoa New Zealand that explored emotions in early childhood teaching, focus group participants discussed how emotions were enabled and constrained. The expression "professional hat" was used and inspired further thought about what this imaginary can do in entangled encounters with posthumanist theories, data, early childhood teachers, and researcher. This article tells a complex and messy story from some data excerpts, suggesting how enactments and understandings of early childhood curriculum and professionalism might shape each other. This introduction provides a road map to the article by briefly outlining early childhood curriculum and professionalism and then describing the research study and key methodological concepts of affirmative critique and diffraction.

Curriculum

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the early childhood curriculum is *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017). Originally adopted in 1996 and revised in 2017, *Te Whāriki* is envisaged as a woven mat; each early childhood setting weaves its own local curriculum from a set of principles and strands of learning. *Te Whāriki* is understood as a reconceptualist curriculum

(Haggerty, 2003); rather than prescribing content of learning for young children, it defines curriculum as including "all the experiences, activities, and events, both direct and indirect, that occur within the ECE setting" (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 7). This expansive view of curriculum influences perceptions of early childhood professionalism.

Within the definition of curriculum from *Te Whāriki*, everything that happens in the early childhood setting can be regarded as curricular enactment. *Te Whāriki* frames teaching and learning within four principles (empowerment/*whakamana*, holistic development/*kotahitanga*, family and community/*whānau tangata*, and relationships/*ngā hononga*) and five strands of learning (wellbeing/*mana atua*, belonging/*mana whenua*, contribution/*mana tangata*, communication/*mana reo*, and exploration/*mana aotūroa*).

Professionalism

Early childhood professionalism in Aotearoa is continuously shaped within official regulating and guiding documents and processes. These include initial teacher education, qualification, registration, and certification processes, and ongoing professional learning and guidance. How professionalism is enacted in early childhood settings is also shaped by localised contexts and relationships. Within posthumanist perspectives, professionalism can be understood as "fleeting, fluid, shifting, co-constituted and produced through processes rather than fixed within human subjects" (Osgood, 2019, p. 231). When curriculum and professionalism are conceptualised as shaping each other, continuously becoming different within entangled networks of relationships among human and non-human components of early childhood settings, then opportunities are opened for thinking differently, for combining critique with creativity.

The Research Study

This article draws on research that explored how emotions and ways of becoming are shaped in early childhood teaching. Research participants were qualified early childhood teachers in provincial Aotearoa New Zealand. I am positioned within the research as teacher educator working with student teachers in the same communities, with past relationships with some participants in this role. My understandings of emotion, curriculum, and professionalism shape and are being shaped by the research processes and findings. In this research, emotions are understood in posthumanist terms as emerging from entangled relationships in early childhood settings, experienced and expressed bodily and in language, but also sensed as intensity and significance not easily articulated or explained (Warren, 2019a).

This article uses two small data excerpts from a focus group discussion where seven early childhood teachers discussed their understandings of emotions in their professional lives. All participants were practising qualified early childhood teachers in provincial Aotearoa New Zealand: one male and six female teachers from a range of early childhood settings including kindergartens, education and care centres, infant and toddler settings, and a Pacific centre. They discussed emotions in early childhood teaching generally and then more specifically considered how teachers might experience emotions in situations such as "greeting and settling children"; "professional relationships with colleagues"; and "helping children who are sick or injured." In

this discussion, participants used the expressions “professional hat” and “professional mask” to describe how their expressions of emotions were constrained and enabled.

Affirmative Critique and Diffraction

The focus group discussions showed that participants perceived emotions, professionalism, and curriculum as entangled. Rather than trying to untangle these into their separate threads, the entanglement is explored in this article through a methodological approach comprising analytic strategies of affirmative critique and diffraction, expressed in a poetic complex and messy story. Affirmative critique is understood as combining critique with creativity, attending to issues of power and normalisation present in early childhood settings, while also asking “so what, what else, and what next?” to seek opportunities for thinking, speaking, and acting differently. Affirmative critique works well alongside a diffractive approach that takes a positive view of difference, appreciating multiple understandings rather than trying to find once-and-for-all answers to complex questions such as, “What are emotions?”, “What is curriculum?”, and “What is professionalism?” Diffractive affirmative critique will be discussed further in the methodology section, after discussion of the early childhood curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand and early childhood professionalism.

Te Whāriki and Conceptualisations of Early Childhood Curriculum

Te Whāriki has been described as a reconceptualist curriculum as it departs from positivist views of curriculum as schedules of universally agreed upon knowledge to be transmitted to learners. Haggerty (2003) links the influence of sociocultural and poststructuralist theories to the understanding of curriculum in *Te Whāriki* as contextual, constructed, contested, and complex. Such a view is supported in research by the Education Review Office (2019), which focused on how prepared early childhood services are to weave a local curriculum that responds to children’s families and local communities. The theoretical framework of *Te Whāriki* encompasses developmental and sociocultural theories, critical approaches, and Kaupapa Māori (Indigenous Māori worldview) theories. There is openness to complexity and relationality in the incorporation of multiple theories in *Te Whāriki* that makes space for also exploring what posthumanist theories can do and produce in early childhood curriculum.

Education and teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand must reflect the bicultural partnership between Māori and non-Māori established at the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Tamati and Tilly Reedy of Ngā Kohanga Reo (Māori language nests) collaborated with non-Māori academics Helen May and Margaret Carr to design and write *Te Whāriki* with widespread sector consultation. *Te Whāriki* incorporates Maōri concepts and values alongside dominant Eurocentric understandings of how early childhood education is enacted. The updated *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017) brings increased attention to Maōri values, beliefs, and concepts (Rameka & Soutar, 2019) and highlights teacher/*kaiako* responsibility to enact bicultural curriculum. However, early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand is enacted within a colonised society, and the Education Review Office (2019) notes that 51% of 362 early childhood services surveyed were unprepared to implement the updated *Te Whāriki* curriculum.

Te Whāriki has been critiqued from a position of concern for Māori self-determination and sustainability. Maōri worldview frames children as socially, spiritually, historically, and materially embedded and entangled. This worldview is based on "networks of complex and delicate relationships" (Ritchie & Skerrett, 2019, p. 73) among human and non-humans (animate and inanimate), and extending over generations, a view that resonates with posthumanist perspectives. Ritchie and Skerrett (2019) position *Te Whāriki* and early childhood education within ongoing social injustices experienced by Māori and assert that these are not addressed effectively in early childhood education.

From a posthumanist perspective, early childhood curriculum is described by Sellers (2010, 2013) in terms of multiple networked processes among humans and non-humans in early childhood settings, as "(a) milieu(s) of becoming" (Sellers, 2013, p. 26). She describes curricular performativity as "[children's] *doing* of curriculum—how they process through/with curriculum or how they go about 'curriculum-ing' or how they perform curriculum or how they make curriculum work for their learning" (Sellers, 2010, p. 574). Such expansive understandings are sought in this article by diffractively creating a complex and messy story of a curricular enactment in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. This curriculum story may prompt early childhood scholars and practitioners to reconceptualise their own understandings of curriculum and professionalism.

Early Childhood Professionalism

Early childhood professionalism is a complex and contested concept that is shaped within diverse discourses. Traditional views associate professionalism with qualifications, authority, and status, seen as a desirable aspiration for early childhood teaching (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007). A wish for early childhood teachers to be regarded as professionals remains in tension with historical maternalist discourses that position working with young children as gendered and unskilled work (Ailwood, 2007). The emotional aspect of early childhood teaching seems to be simultaneously valued and devalued within views on professionalism. In tension with maternalism, relational professionalism is understood by early childhood teachers as central to their professional identity (Dalli, 2008; Warren, 2014). Osgood (2012) makes the case for critically reflective emotional professionals who recognise and assert their considerable relational skillset, referred by Andrew (2015) as emotional capital based on phronesis or practical wisdom. Other discourses of professionalism that further complicate how early childhood professionalism is understood include managerial professionalism, which is focused on efficient management and accountability, and democratic or critical professionalism, which is concerned with advocating for social justice. Bicultural professionalism is an important aspect of early childhood teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand, where professionalism includes incorporating Māori values, concepts, and language in teaching practice.

The focus group discussion that provided the data excerpts explored in this article showed participants working with these complex multifaceted perceptions of professionalism. Awareness of tensions arose in discussion when participants talked about how they experienced and managed expressions of emotions when working with children. For example, one participant talked about masking her feelings of guilt and distress when a child was hurt on climbing equipment she had set up, instead focusing on presenting a calm and caring demeanour. Another participant talked about being unable to express her anger and frustration about the situation teachers, children, and

their parents face when children become ill at the early childhood setting, and parents are unable to leave their work to pick them up.

This article explores further what the professional hat imaginary can do, where the professional hat is understood as a means to manage expressions of emotions in ways that present early childhood teachers as professional. Sellers (2013) explains that an imaginary works affectively in multiple and uncertain, "unstable and contingent" (p. 10) ways, rather than reflecting *something* as a metaphor might. Participants used the professional hat imaginary to gesture towards challenges for teachers deciding how they experience and express emotions when working with children. These decision processes are often unstable and contingent and linked with negotiated and fluid processes of professionalism (Osgood, 2019; Warren, 2019b). The professional hat imaginary presents possibilities explored in this article for early childhood teachers to work within multiple discourses of professionalism and also within diverse theories of early childhood teaching and learning. The idea of having a professional hat that is shaped and re-shaped within complex networks of relationships among human and non-human components of early childhood settings offers opportunities to think differently and expansively about emotions, professionalism, and early childhood curriculum.

Methodology: Diffractive Affirmative Critique

Building on posthumanist perspectives on early childhood curriculum, professionalism, and emotions, the methodology that underpins this article works with diffraction and affirmative critique to explore two short excerpts from one participant in the focus group discussion. One excerpt responds to the general question, "In what ways do early childhood teachers experience emotions in their professional settings?" and was chosen because it describes negotiation of emotions and professionalism in early childhood teaching that summed up much of the focus group discussion. In the second excerpt, the teacher tells a story that might not usually be understood as "curriculum," and which encompasses emotions, professionalism, and curriculum. This excerpt was chosen because of the emotional intensities experienced within the relations among teachers, child, the sting of eyedrops, and tensions in concerns about health, safety, and well-being in early childhood settings. Both of these excerpts showed participants' understanding of complexities of emotions and professionalism. Curriculum and posthumanist theories were not discussed in the focus group discussion but were applied in data analysis processes.

Cartography is conceptualised here as a posthumanist mapping of connections, intensities, affective flows, and power relations, "a theoretically-based and politically-informed account of the present" (Braidotti, 2019b, p. 32). I present a cartography in the form of a poem that maps connections, intensities, emotions, and power relations to say something about how professionalism is shaped within a particular curricular enactment, where curriculum is understood as "all the experiences, activities, and events, both direct and indirect, that occur within the ECE setting" (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 7).

Posthumanist methodologies seek to go beyond the stance of an observer commenting on issues and challenge "the distant critic's ability to explain, unmask, and separate what is right from what is wrong" (Hohti, 2018, p. 13). From a posthumanist perspective, the researcher is entangled in the research and seeks creative responses from within situations (Braidotti, 2019b; Murris & Bozalek, 2019b; Otterstad, 2019). As researcher, I am co-implicated in the "unlikely connections between a paragraph, typed on a page, a memory, burbling up unexpectedly, and the body-

movement-expression-action" (Flint, 2018, p. 12). Such co-implication is evident in the creation of a poem that affects me and is shaped by me as researcher, which I then share with the reader, leaving space for them to be affected without imposing conclusions. This methodology puts theories, data, participant, and researcher in encounter with each other, showing how they constitute and shape each other. Four theoretical approaches are used to diffractively weave a complex and messy cartographic story.

Diffraction is positioned as posthumanist response-able methodology (Murris & Bozalek, 2019b) that carefully attends to what happens and what is produced when diverse theories encounter data where the researcher is entangled, produced, and producing, along with everything else in the assemblage. Barad (2007) contrasts reflective approaches, which try to illuminate and provide clarity and explanations, with diffraction, which explores how components such as bodies and ideas interfere with and affect each other. Rather than synthesising theoretical approaches, a diffractive approach notices differences and how they are produced. A diffractive approach is taken here where diverse theories and a researcher subjectivity that is relational, embodied, and embedded (e.g., Braidotti, 2019a) encounter bodies, words, actions, materials, thoughts, and emotions of data excerpts. Diffractive engagement in this article draws on diverse theoretical frameworks to proliferate understandings (Murris & Bozalek, 2019a, 2019b).

Affirmative critique critically attends to power relations, constraints, normalisation, and injustices, while also connecting critique with creativity and seeking openings for innovation (Braidotti, 2013, 2019b; Osgood, 2019). A diffractive methodology "puts care and response-ability back into critique" (Murris & Bozalek, 2019b, p. 882) by taking an affirmative rather than negative view of difference. Diffractive affirmative critique can notice and suggest opportunities for creative innovation, such as reconceptualising curriculum, professionalism, and emotions within posthumanist theories by "staying vigilant—ever watchful, ever attentive to the slips and crack and stutters of the moment, and also … practising a reflexive non-linearity" (Flint, 2020). Diverse theoretical approaches are used diffractively here to grow a complex and messy story of an early childhood curriculum enactment. The poem is crafted from encounters between theories and data in ways that imply critique but do not prescribe solutions; rather, the reader is invited to explore how the juxtapositions of ideas affect them and shape their thinking about emotions in early childhood teaching and about curriculum and professionalism.

Mapping a Cartography: Taking a Diffractive Approach to Affirmative Critique of an Early Childhood Curricular Enactment

This article works with two data excerpts from a focus group discussion from research into emotions in early childhood teaching using creative critique and experimentation (Warren, 2019a). Both involve early childhood teacher/*kaiako* participant Lucy (pseudonym):

Data Excerpt One

> Alison (researcher): In what ways do early childhood teachers experience emotions in their professional settings?
> Lucy: We've mostly said we experience them in a professional way and then may at times sneak in a personal way that we need to do it. You know, when we get to [those] extreme

> times when we need our colleagues to support us or we are experiencing a particularly difficult situation, that personal kind of way we experience emotions might creep in. But I think mostly we've distinguished that we keep that professional hat on and push them down and do what's best for the children.

Data Excerpt Two

> Lucy: I was just thinking about a child I had who was sick, and he needed eye drops. And this was so traumatic for him putting the eye drops in, but we had to do it to make him better otherwise it was just going to get worse. … I found that I could if I was by myself and could get him to lie down and put his head on my knee and then I could put them in. That was ok, but once he got escalated, and I had to ask my colleague to come in my emotions started kicking in. … My colleague was trying to hug him and going, "You're ok, you're ok," and I'm like, "Oh my goodness, I'm not ok." … We just wanted to make him feel better and we knew we had to give him his eye drops, … and he doesn't want them. … We could get him to the point of lying down, but then he'd see you get the bottle, and he was like "Oh!" and he's off again. … That's always stuck with me, 'cause I keep reflecting going how could I have done that better, that's what I just fall back to, I just had to get them into his eye. … There's just no better way to do it and just get on and deal with it.

Four theoretical approaches were chosen because of what I, as researcher, thought they could do in encounter with data. They are used to diffractively weave a complex and messy cartographic story that the reader can work with in specific ways to negotiate meaning. The four approaches are: rhizoanalysis (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Lenz Taguchi, 2016; Sellers, 2010, 2013, 2015), radical pedagogy and metamodeling (Manning, 2020), expansive storying and tentacular thinking (Haraway, 2016), and storying using concepts of te ao Māori drawn on in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017; Reedy, 2003).

Rhizoanalysis

Rhizoanalysis is a cartographic approach associated with Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) concept of assemblage, which describes multidirectional networks of relationalities where bodies (corporeal and incorporeal) are continuously becoming within flows of affect. Affect is conceptualised as the capacity to affect and be affected, characterised by expressions and experiences of intensities (Deleuze, 1988). Affect does not freely flow in assemblages, as forces enable and constrain affective flows at macro- and micro-political levels. Rhizoanalysis enacts a doubled process of concurrent tracing-and-mapping (Lenz Taguchi, 2016). Tracings of forces that guide and regulate social practices macro- and micro-politically are plugged into mappings of affective flows in assemblages. Rhizoanalysis enables a process of affirmative critique by combining critique through tracing with exploration of creative opportunities through mapping to explore "new connections, or to something omitted, left out or silenced, which might evoke something completely new" (Lenz Taguchi, 2016, p. 45).

Radical Pedagogy and Metamodeling

Erin Manning (2020) proposes radical pedagogy with children that draws on concepts of tranversality, metamodeling, and becoming. She problematises maps that are constrained within limits of particular disciplines: "A discipline is a short-hand for what doesn't need to be said about how knowledge crafts itself" (p. 5). For example, assessment of children's learning is bounded within familiar concepts and theories of early childhood education and can become taken-for-granted and unquestioned. In contexts where developmental theory is dominant, assessment records what children can or cannot do in relation to developmental expectations of ages and stages, and plans teaching to close perceived gaps or to progress to what comes next. In Aotearoa New Zealand, where sociocultural theory dominates early childhood education, learning stories frame children and their learning in particular and familiar ways within *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017) strands of well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration, and associated learning dispositions. Creating a complex and messy story using multiple theories suggests that there may be other possibilities.

A transversal approach to pedagogy entails working across disciplines and being open to unexpected connections, following children's "wander lines" or unexpected directions of learning and noticing what "magnetize[s]" or influences these directions (Deligny, 1976, as cited in Manning, 2020, p. 2). Manning draws on Guattari to use the concept of metamodeling, understood as moving outside modeling that fits what is seen to what is already known and familiar. Metamodeling poses the question—what else—"what moves across experience that evades the frame" (Manning, 2020, p. 3). Taking such a transversal approach goes beyond familiar patterns, helping pedagogues to conceptualise children as "researcher[s] of life," "maker[s] of worlds" (p. 6). Children create knowledge, where knowing is understood as "a verb that worlds and as such must never be reduced to a set of retrievable operations" (p. 7). Pedagogues can engage with "childing-worlding" through Deleuze's concept of becoming-child (Manning, 2020, p. 5). Becoming-child does not involve adults returning to their childhood or pretending to be children, but rather approaching childness, for example, by "exciting [pedagogues'] sense of how else learning can happen" (p. 11).

Expansive Bag Lady Storying and Tentacular Thinking

A cartographic approach drawing on Donna Haraway's (2004, 2016) concepts of bag lady storytelling and tentacular thinking will be woven into a messy, frayed, and tangled story of Lucy, a child, eye medication, emotions, and other human and non-human components of the early childhood setting. Haraway (2016) uses Ursula Le Guin's carrier bag theory of fiction to inspire her bag lady storytelling approach. Rather than telling linear and coherent stories of human heroic protagonists, Haraway's storying wanders haphazardly among unexpectedly interconnected aspects: "Engaging halting conversations, the encounter transmutes all the partners and all the details. The stories do not have beginnings and end; they have continuations, interruptions, and reformulations" (Haraway, 2004, pp. 127–128). Hohti (2018) suggests that using bag lady storying that attends to material aspects of education with young children can maintain important relational complexities: "What if teachers told strange, fragmented, and unexpected stories as a sign of their expertise—not as a sign of failing in being professional?" (p. 14).

Tentacular thinking is a concept that can be used alongside bag lady storytelling. According to Haraway (2016), tentacularity is characterised by reaching out, exploring, "cultivating response-ability" (p. 34): "The tentacular ones make attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open and knotted in some ways but not others" (p. 31). Osgood (2021) describes tentacular researchers as deeply thoughtful, curious, entangled wayfarers. In "curious research" in an early childhood setting in Australia, Duhn and Galvez (2020) explore tentacular becoming with data. They pay careful attention and becoming attuned to entanglements of becoming-with in "high intensity encounters between children, critters, soil, and existing pedagogical practices" (p. 734). They notice tentacularity of matter-energies as diverse as children's fingers, a bird's egg, a feast set out on a tree stump, and the Moon, and consider pedagogical opportunities offered by this thinking-with.

Storying Using Concepts from a Maōri Worldview

Storying that uses concepts from a Māori worldview draws on the bicultural approach of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017), *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2009), which guides assessment framed by Māori concepts, and the writing of Tilly Reedy (2003), with particular attention to the concept of *mana* (aligned with the concept of power). Māori worldview has grown over aeons as a multi-layered and multidimensional body of knowledge, subjectivities, relationalities, and practices. As a non-Māori educator and researcher, my access to this worldview is limited and partial. A Māori worldview is underpinned by ontologies of networked relationalities: relationships among human collectives present and past; relationships of humans interwoven with the natural world, including living, non-living, and material components; and relationships with the spiritual world (Ministry of Education, 2009). The 2017 version of *Te Whāriki* uses *whakataukī* (proverbs) to articulate some of these relationalities. For example: "*Tū mai e moko. Te whakaata o ō mātua. Te moko o ō tīpuna*. Stand strong, o moko [grandchild]. The reflection of your parents. The blueprint of your ancestors" (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 17). Connections with ancestors and with local features such as mountains, rivers, oceans, land, and *marae* are expressed through the principle of *whakapapa*, which can be understood as "lineage, genealogy, ancestry" (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 67).

Mana is a multifaceted concept of power deriving from the spiritual world, from *iwi*/tribe, *hapu/*kinship group, and *whānau*/family connections, and from *tūrangawaewae*/ connections with the land (Ministry of Education, 2009). *Mana* forms a central value of *Te Whāriki*: "Mana is the power of being and must be upheld and advanced" (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 18). As Tilly Reedy (2003), one of the authors of *Te Whāriki*, states:

> [Children] are nurtured in the knowledge that they are loved and respected; that their physical mental, spiritual, and emotional strength will build mana, influence, and control; that having mana is the enabling and empowering tool to controlling their own destiny. (p. 74)

A Complex and Messy Story

The complex and messy story poem traverses disciplinary thinking of early childhood education, medical care of children, and Māori concepts and values. Manning (2020) recommends that we "work with what is there, listen to what is already moving. Don't cut too quickly what might otherwise feed the process. Be sensitive to what else is moving through it" (p. 9). The reader is invited to engage with the poem in this way, to make connections with other experiences and emotions, to think in new ways prompted by these theoretical ideas, to wonder "so what, what else, and what next?" Readers might consider multiple threads of early childhood curriculum, professionalism, and emotions that weave through the poem. Matters of social justice and power relations might also come to notice. Words from the data excerpts (**the first excerpt shown in bold,** ***the second in bold italics***) are woven with words from the text of this article that express the four theoretical approaches previously outlined. Quotes used in the story are referenced elsewhere in the text. The Māori concepts of *tapu* (sacred, set apart, prohibited) and *noa* (ordinary, unrestricted) and their relevance to the data arose in discussion with my colleague Sandra Tuhakaraina.

RE-SHAPING TENTACULAR PROFESSIONAL HATS
Shape-shifting, ragged, frayed, tangled shimmering threads trailing
Unstable and contingent imaginary
Mostly we keep that professional hat on, push emotions down, and do what's best for the children
Hats for curious exploring
Reaching out, cultivating creative response-ability
Deeply thoughtful, curious, entangled wayfarers
We experience emotions in a professional way and then may at times sneak in a personal way that we need to do it
Negotiated and fluid processes of professionalism

That's always stuck with me, 'cause I keep reflecting going how could I have done that better.

Eye drops stinging
The woven mat of *Te Whāriki*
All the experiences, activities, and events
The child as perpetually becoming and not being defined once and for all
Researcher of life, maker of worlds
This was so traumatic for him putting the eye drops in, but we had to do it to make him better otherwise it was just going to get worse

Transversal spaces
Medicine, pharmacy, prescription, education, care, curriculum, teaching, health and safety
Home, *whānau*, upbringing
Responsibility
Tū mai e moko. Te whakaata o ō mātua. Te moko o ō tīpuna

Stand strong, oh grandchild. The reflection of your parents. The blueprint of your ancestors.

Care and response-ability
Materialities of tentacular hands touching, grasping, offering, refusing, caring, reassuring, restraining, resisting
I could get him to lie down and put his head on my knee and then I could put them in
Noa means ordinary, unrestricted. Emotions are calm
But then he'd see you get the bottle, and he was like "Oh!", and he's off again
Those extreme times when we need our colleagues to support us, or we are experiencing a particularly difficult situation
Trying to hug him and going, "You're ok, you're ok"
and I'm like, "Oh my goodness, I'm not ok"
Tapu means sacred, set apart, prohibited
My emotions started kicking in

Mana is power
Children are nurtured in the knowledge
that they are loved and respected
that their physical mental, spiritual, and emotional strength will build *mana*, influence, and control
that having *mana* is the enabling and empowering tool to controlling their own destiny
We just wanted to make him feel better
Knowledge is a verb that worlds
Work with what is there, listen to what is already moving
What if teachers told strange, fragmented, and unexpected stories as a sign of their expertise – not as a sign of failing in being professional?
The stories do not have beginnings and ends; they have continuations, interruptions, and reformulations
In what ways do early childhood teachers experience emotions in their professional settings?
Socially, spiritually, historically, and materially embedded and entangled.

Discussion

This cartographic story maps connections, intensities, affective flows, and power relations to engage with posthumanist perceptions of early childhood curriculum, professionalism, and emotions. Researcher subjectivity is entangled without being expressed as an "I," and the poetic non-linear structure seeks to make thinking visible by moving "with careful attention to the worldings it activates" (Manning, 2020, p. 11). Entanglements of children, teachers, families, curriculum, and theoretical ideas produce understandings of early childhood curriculum and professionalism as fluid, negotiated processes where components continually constitute each other.

In *Te Whāriki,* early childhood curriculum is reconceptualised as encompassing everything that happens in early childhood settings. Curriculum enacted within networks of relationalities can be diffractively understood within concepts of assemblage, transversality, tentacularity, and webs

of reciprocity of a Māori worldview. Diffraction is not synthesis; convergences and divergences in the story produce uncertainty and wondering.

How the story addresses early childhood professionalism demonstrates tensions between diverse conceptualisations. Professionalism is often expressed as control of situations, including aspects like responsibility for children's physical and emotional wellbeing ("we had to do it to make him better") and control of what emotions are shown ("Mostly we keep that professional hat on, push emotions down"). A transversal view of professionalism in this story reminds us of Lucy's negotiations of "the right thing to do" across medical, care-based, and learning-focused aspects of early childhood teaching ("I keep reflecting going how could I have done that better"). Human bodies (teacher cradling child, child running away) and non-human components (eyedrops that sting, medication policy) in the early childhood assemblage affect each other. The Māori concept of *mana* (power) brings professionalism as relational and reciprocal into view, where Lucy as teacher is responsible for noticing where ordinary, calm emotions escalate into upset, high emotions that threaten the child's *mana* ("Trying to hug him and going, 'You're ok, you're ok' and I'm like, 'Oh my goodness, I'm not ok'"). Engaging with what happens in teaching and learning situations using a diffractive approach and diverse theories opens up creative possibilities to negotiate multiple understandings of early childhood curriculum and professionalism and provides alternatives to familiar categorisations and interpretations.

A curricular enactment is presented that might normally escape notice, activating an understanding of curriculum as including all experiences, activities, and events in the early childhood setting. A creative opportunity is offered here through diffractive and posthumanist perspectives to think differently about how curriculum is understood and what learning is noticed and valued. An account of how teacher, child, infection, medication, pain, hugs, and upset and calm emotions are continuously becoming in relation to each other offers opportunities to move away from a narrow focus on what constitutes learning that children may be experiencing and consider other possibilities.

Conclusion

Early childhood teachers continually shape and re-shape their professional hats, using theoretical tools available to them. Working diffractively with diverse theories can prompt early childhood teachers to expand their understandings of curriculum and professionalism and cultivate professional caring response-ability. Early childhood scholars and practitioners across many countries might productively use a range of theoretical tools to explore other ways of thinking about curriculum and professionalism, such as following Manning's (2020) plea to "work with what is there, listen to what is already moving. Don't cut too quickly what might otherwise feed the process. Be sensitive to what else is moving through it" (p. 9). The complex and messy story offered here is offered as an example of what might be produced when diverse theories entangle with data, with teachers, and with researchers.

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Material and Affective (Re)shapings within Unspeakable/Uninterrupted Territories of Violence

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AS THE VERY FOUNDATION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY is built first and foremost of land theft, dispossession, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples, unspeakable/uninterrupted acts of violence have and continue to define the parameters of life and death in the project known as the United States. Despite these insidious tendrils be(com)ing inescapable and intra-actively[1] entangling (Barad, 2007) themselves in the (lived) experiences of all human and more-than-human[2] bodies (Sharpe, 2016), there is an historical and contemporary asymmetry to how these violent contexts enfold, unfold, and refold in specific ways *for* and *through* specific bodies.[3] Within intersecting figurations of land, people, nature, things, and violence—or what Wozolek (2021) has referred to as assemblages of violence—awaits an irrevocable paradox. That is, these entities and intensities are co-constitutive, affective, and always-already inseparable and symbiotic. Whereas "relationships to land and place are diverse, specific, and ungeneralizable" (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 8), as humans create things, things in turn create people (Ahmed, 2010b). Moreover, in amplifying Syliva Wynter's work, McKittrick (2021) reminds us that people's material and discursive relationships abound with stories and storytelling that "have an impact on our neurobiological and physiological behaviors" (p. 9). Going further, Ahmed (2010a) suggests that *orientations* comprise an important frame for how matters relating to matter are taken up:

> If matter is affected by orientations, by the ways in which bodies are directed toward things, it follows that matter is dynamic, unstable, and contingent. What matters is itself an effect of proximities: we are touched by what comes near, just as what comes near is affected by directions we have already taken. Orientations are how the world acquires a certain shape through contact between bodies that are not in relation of exteriority. (p. 234)

From this perspective—and to (re)trace the commonly traversed phrase—the mattering of matter indeed matters. Extending the arc of this thought, how we orientate ourselves around matter is of great significance. These orientations, thus, become a determinant for the mattering of specific pieces of matter by affecting how and what things "materialize or come to take shape in the way that they do" (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 235). With this in mind, this work is (re/mis)shaped by the multitudinous roles that more-than-human bodies or entities—and their entanglement with specific affects—play in (re)producing ecologies of antiblackness.[4]

Returning to the opening logic of settler colonialism, once land was stolen by settlers, those same settlers abducted Black people and forced them to work (through chattel slavery) purloined landscapes—hence providing outcomes benefiting distinctly white bodies and positionalities. This information is not new, and it is not our intention to merely perseverate the obvious—although we would argue for many, the oblivious—nature of the historicities that underpin modern American life. Rather, our goal is to further complexify and perhaps hazard these problematic coordinates, by storying the assemblage[5] of affect, materialism, and antiblack violence. Here, via Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and more recently Gregg and Seigworth (2010), we are drawing on the Spinozian conceptualization of affect as being embodied, which complicates boundaries between feeling and movement by accounting for points of contact, lines of variation, and fields of potentiality that perhaps can help us understand how (violent) intensities of the world are encountered and (re)articulated (Seigworth, 2021). In what follows, we invite readers to think about how each of these registers enfold the material and discursiveness of education into a broader assemblage of violence: the various intersections and movements between time, space, and human and more-than human bodies; the liminal texture of conscious knowing and subconscious feeling that is always-already in flux; and the incalculable and perhaps unfulfilled possibilities/futures that await all encounters within the more-than-human world. From the position that forms of matter and the affects they produce can be capacious in understanding the "very boundaries in which the individual and group interact" (Zembylas, 2007, p. 63), what are the implications of these material-emotional-discursive entanglements remaining muted or unaccounted for in classroom encounters and discourses?

On January 7th, Tyre Nichols was severely beaten by three Black police officers in Memphis, Tennessee. He died three days later. In the weeks that followed, each of the officers was terminated from their positions and charged with second-degree murder. Devastatingly, Tyre became part of an assemblage of violence responsible for cutting short the lives of beautiful/brilliant people, murdered simply for being Black. George Floyd. Michael Brown. Philando Castile. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery. Trayvon Martin. And, and, and…

As social studies scholars (and beyond) who continue to try to make sense of these assemblages of violence and grapple with Sharpe's (2016) profound provocation, "how does one mourn the interminable event?" (p. 19), we turn our attention to three more-than-human bodies (e.g., cotton plant, computer, and skateboard), their entanglement with specific affects (e.g., fear, suspicion, and joy), how both *things* and *affects* have been fundamental to (re)animations of antiblackness within the context of American life/death, and the implications of these entanglements in/on education. We recognize that two of these objects, computer, and skateboard are human made, whereas cotton is not—however, it is the thingification of the cotton plant that led to the development of a human creation, the plantation, that is of importance to this work. Just as the framework of settler colonialism contains machinery that is always in motion and not simply a static epoch (Wolfe, 1999), it is our hope that this engagement with things and the affects they produce for specific communities—within the register of antiblackness—will work towards a more

imbricated understanding of the historical and contemporary undercurrents guiding the story of antiblackness in America and perhaps why/how senseless death continues to be enacted upon Black bodies time and time again.

Adjacent to our pairing of materiality and affect to complexify "the relations between bodies [that] often come into sharp relief during moments of violence" (Wozolek, 2021, p. 18), there has been sharp uptick recently in educational scholarship leaning into affect theory. There are significant schisms within affect theory, e.g., those drawing from the philosophy of Deleuze (e.g., Protevi, 2009) in contrast with the work of interdisciplinary scholars like Sedgwick (2003). This article will not outline all the possibilities and permutations of affect theory, for that is beyond our scope, but rather we will highlight a few educational scholars whose work highlights the collective and political aspects of affect.

Although perhaps tempting to see affect on an individual level, it is beyond a singular encasement of flesh. As Helmsing (2014) summarized:

> Whereas affect*ions* are particular sensations and feelings located in those who are affected, or perceive to be affected (when I "feel" boredom or I "perceive" anger), Deleuze and Guattari—using examples from art, cinema, and literature—showed that affect*s* are not located in a single individual's point of view but, rather, move around and outside of the subject. (p. 129, emphasis original)

McKenzie (2017) aptly described collective affective conditions linked to policies; specifically, how/why *affective bodily encounters* interact with policy documents, meetings, data, and policy actors. There are registers of collective affects of people entwined with places, such as the "affective atmospheres" (Sellar, 2015, pp. 141–142) of in-person meetings, "which influence the reception of policy approaches (McKenzie, 2017, p. 196).

As an embodied and visceral constellation of "shuttling intensities" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2), affect is entwined with power relations. In this way, educational research benefits from critical emotional reflexivity (Zembylas, 2008); for example, Brown's (2016) development of a Race Critical Researcher Praxis entangles critical emotional reflexivity with a "bricolage lens" that includes critical reflexivity on race and Black political thoughts, as well as positionality reflexivity. This framework invites researchers to "actively attend to how emotions and research intertwine when centering race in one's critical reflections of the process" (p. 188). Such considerations can run parallel to "the affective symptoms of precarity elicited by neoliberal policy" (McKenzie, 2017, p. 192) as well as precarity in Butler's (2004, 2009) sense of it in relation to vulnerability and grievability—and as performative instead of representational. Zembylas (2016) clarified the difference:

> Butler theorizes affect and emotion from a 'performative' rather than a 'representational' perspective; the latter falling into the trap of trying to figure out what a subject really means or feels, while the former frames affect not in terms of an essentialized inner reality but rather as a force that cannot ever be entirely transparent to us. (p. 203, see also Braunmühl, 2012)

Like other conceptualizations of affect, it is relational, but for Butler (2004, 2009), it is also notably historicized as well as political, such as the disparities in who is mourned or grieved among the public. According to Zembylas (2016), the methodological implications of this conceptualization

of affect for educational research is the need to "critically evaluate the conditions under which people live their lives, acquiring certain subject positions based on regulatory norms of social and political affect" (p. 206). Scholars who study race need to account not only for emotions, but also specifically how emotions are racialized (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). Emotions have "socio-historical underpinnings and are relational and group-based" (Tichavakunda, 2022, p. 424). One can be moved, for example, both emotionally and geographically as well as emotionally and sonically (among other interlocking affects and contexts) in these socio-relational ways (e.g., Gershon, 2019; Hirsch, 2021).

Helmsing (2014) brought emotional and affective entanglements into the realm of social studies educational research. Specifically, he invited educators to consider the effects of pride and shame in the contexts of civics and history. Having been asked by a student why he "hated" America after presenting examples of racism in popular culture from the era of Jim Crow, Helmsing (2014) considered how interrogating emotions and affects of students and teachers is key to understanding historical social formations and their ongoing reverberations. Extending Helmsing's (2014) work, Jones (2022) highlighted the significance of foregrounding emotions, specifically fear, in history education. By analyzing Virginia's U.S. history standards and social studies framework for moments that traverse how Black and white people encountered/experienced fear, Jones (2022) found that while "discourses on white fear are explicit, essentialized, and weaponized within Virginia's U.S. history standards and framework" (p. 456), engagements with Black fear are non-existent. Here, Jones (2022) works to highlight the complexity of affect—specifically fear—and how, within educational contexts, affect is always-already affinitive:

> for fear of being labeled racist, for fear of white kids feeling guilty, for fear of coming to terms with white violence, writers of the standards would rather omit Black emotions and accentuate white fear instead of displaying how white violence against the historized Other produced emotions such as fear. (p. 453)

Explicitly considering what lies beyond the human entangles affect further between human and nonhuman entities. Wozolek (2021), for example, brought attention to how power and violence are "nested and knotted" (p. 15) within the co-constitutive agency that Barad (2007) identifies as intra-actions between the human and non-human. Such intra-actions do not require awareness or intent, and so approaches based solely on rationality fail to address the complicated and entangled nature of affectual domains.

Positionality/ies

In pausing our journey down the material and affective path, we want to acknowledge that our attunement to our educator and scholarly positionalities matters greatly to this work. These identities are nested and knotted within settler colonialism and structural racism and impact all aspects of our entrance/departure to/from pastpresentfuture (Varga, 2022) accounts of antiblack violence. Importantly, we acknowledge that, while "description is not liberation" (McKittrick, 2021 p. 44), remaining silent flattens any attempts at cultivating *thick* solidarity (Liu & Shange, 2018), which is "based on a radical belief in the inherent value of each other's lives despite not being able to fully understand or fully share in the experience of those lives" (p. 190). Going

further, being attuned to the role our identities play in all attempts to (re)articulate sensibilities beyond our own lived experiences works towards an orientation of swarming solidarity (Varga & Ender, 2023) that is open, active, and always-already becoming. For as Mitchell Patterson (2022) asserts, "*solidarity* is a verb; it's an action that requires critical analysis of systems of oppression, empathy, listening, visioning, sacrifice, learning, or more important, unlearning" (p. 38, emphasis in original).

We are writing this article at a time when antiblack racism is both highly visible and yet nonetheless left intact. Historically white colleges in the United States continue to treat Black bodies as property (Dancy et al., 2018). Indeed, an anti-Black spatial imaginary permeates U.S. social institutions, including educational spaces (Jenkins, 2021). Thus, even the contexts that sustain our writing of this article are imbued with contradictions and (perhaps irresolvable) tensions. As part of our continued unlearning process as white scholars, we understand solidarity as calling for the unveiling of often overlooked (historical) conditionalities embedded within assemblages of violence that sustain antiblackness (Varga et al., 2022). We believe this understanding traverses simplistic forms of analysis insofar that our efforts to put materiality and affect in direct conversation with antiblack violence—through storying—paves (educational) inroads that perhaps might lead to deeper understandings of historical and contemporary assemblages of violence and how/why affects experienced/registered by some groups of people are prioritized over others. Just as Mitchell Patterson (2022) emphatically noted, "to put it plainly, anti-Black racism has been here, is here, and ain't going nowhere unless we truly reckon with it" (p. 33), we view our collective efforts with this work to be a form of reckoning that is guided by our commitments to justice, joy, love, care, community, and respect.

Traces of Affective In-Between-ness

More often than not, accounts of violence are undertheorized and oversimplified (Varga & van Kessel, 2021; Wozolek, 2021) with the story's *ending* ending affective, material, and discursive opportunities to understand why/how (violent) outcomes—within the context of antiblackness—materialized. Moving beyond framing these encounters as distilled events, (re)imagining assemblages of violence as stories reveals a (re)new(ed) cast of more-than-human characters contributing to the materialization of each individual/collective violent outcome. According to McKittrick (2021), "thinking through the interdisciplinary interplay between narrative and material worlds is especially useful in black studies, because our analytical sites, and our selfhood, are often reduced to metaphor, analogy, trope, and symbol" (p. 10).

We understand affect as be(com)ing the connective tissue between (violent) story and materiality. Hence, the theoretical traces of this paper are concerned with cultivating an attunement to the way things are imbued with different intensities that become *used* to produce specific embodiments of affect. Taking a cue from Ahmed (2019), "use offers a way of telling stories about things. We can ask *about* objects by following them *about*" (p. 22). Weaving ourselves into the assemblage of violence that resulted in the murder of Tyre Nichols, we theorize how affect can be generative in historicizing more-than-human bodies (e.g., cotton plant, computer, and skateboard) that (re)produce unspeakable/uninterrupted territories of violence.

Gregg and Seigworth (2010) suggested that "affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and to be acted upon" (p. 1). From this perspective, affect is not a register that can be defined, but rather a sensibility that seeks to account for how intensities of the world

are encountered, embodied, and responded to. Going further, affect lacks passivity and is agential (Barad, 2007), considering how affect resides *within* intensities that can shift, slip, and move across/between various human and more-than-human bodies (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). These affective becomings can produce unique resonances that are by nature pluriversal and multiplicitous. Here, we acknowledge that the more-than-human bodies we are highlighting in this work (e.g., cotton plant, computer, and skateboard) do not produce the same affect(s) for everyone. Quite simply, affect is not monolithic, but rather unstable and unpredictable. Importantly, this facet of affect is significant to our work considering the *stickiness* of affect with the context of difference (Ahmed, 2010b); affects stick and, thus, get stuck in kaleidoscopic ways for/across variegated bodies. Whereas as some objects produce certain connections between ideas, cultures, sensories, perspectives, ethics, and values, they can (and do) produce something alternative for others. Following the work of Massumi (2002), affect can be understood as the "feeling of anticipation" or the "registering of potentials" (p. 92), which can be embodied viscerally and/or reside in territories beyond consciousness. In sum, engaging with affect adds texture to the assemblage of violence by accounting for the undulations, expansions, contractions, and rhythms that "mark the passages of intensities (whether dimming or accentuating) in body-to-body/world-body mutual imbrication" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 13).

Material and Affectual Tetherings

Next, we present three stories that tether more-than-human bodies to specific affects. These tetherings put affect theory to *use* by unveiling how more-than-human bodies are *used* (Ahmed, 2019) to (reproduce) particular embodied intensities that are implicated within contexts of antiblackness. In this way, we believe affect is "*becoming useful as becoming part*" (Ahmed, 2019, p. 11, emphasis in original), and it is our hope that historicization of each entity will work to resist human logics, patterns, and politics that disavow "most of the material conditions for the emergence of its objects (human societies, practices, cultures) and its own functioning" (Snaza, 2019, p. 3).

Tethering 1: Cotton Plant and Fear

Scientifical known as *gossypium*, the cotton plant has played a significant role in the cultivation of antiblackness in the United States. While the origin of the plant's arrival to the Americas is often debated by scholars/historians, perhaps a suitable entry point for untangling its contentious relationship to Black life/death is the year 1850. Signed into law by Congress on September 18, 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act required that slaves be returned to their "owners" even if, spatially, they were existing in "free states." Essentially, this law—which was part of the broader Compromise of 1850—bolstered the federal government's role in (re)animating the movements of both white and Black people by underscoring the acceptability of white people owning Black people to work plantations that grew, in many cases, cotton. Going further, this law impacted plantation logics insofar that, "if escape was not an issue, then there would be no associated effect on [cotton] prices" (Lennon, 2016, p. 671). Despite this adverse economic framing, prices of cotton were in fact impacted by the reinforced plantation mentality and operation. Accordingly, "by 1850, 1.8 million of the nation's 3.2 million enslaved people were

growing and picking cotton. By 1860, enslaved labor produced over 2 billion pounds of cotton each year" (National Park Service, 2023, para 1). To get an idea of the economic wealth that was generated for white bodies during this period, in 1860, cotton was worth 10 cents a pound but later skyrocketed to $1.89 a pound between 1863-1864 (Dattel, 2008). Subsequently, the developing (and insidious) relationship between white and Black bodies, white economic growth, and cotton nested itself within the broader context of timespacebody(ing).[6] As a result, the state of Mississippi—a leader in cotton production—experienced a surge in white and Black bodies from 1850 (606,526 total people) to 1860 (791,305 total people) (Bruchey, 1967).

However, what these increases do not reflect are the affective implications of all these upward statistical trends across populations, production, and price. Embedded within these relationships is an accumulation of feeling that directly intensifies both (white) becomings and (Black) un-becomings "becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between 'bodies' [bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect]" (Siegworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2). In this sense, perhaps thinking with/around/under/through affect can be generative in understanding the different bodily relationships both *at* and *in* play during this time and beyond. As Ahmed (2004) emphasized, "emotionality as a claim about a subject or a collective is clearly dependent on relations of power, which endow 'others' with meaning and value" (p. 4). Important to this thought is control and how those in power maintain the positionings necessary for dictating, manipulating, and stratifying certain affects for specific peoples (Jones, 2022).

To help us understand the relationship between cotton and *fear*, Jackson's (2020) work on antiblackness, matter, and meaning is especially relevant. Jackson (2020) replaces notions of denied humanity and exclusion with bestialized humanization towards Black people. This argument abounds with opportunities for discourse on enslavement and animality—which is capacious in/for thinking about the roots of fear. Jackson's (2020) framing implicates temporality and opens discursive perforations into how the cotton plant was used by white plantation owners to produce and reproduce sensibilities and embodiments of fear—which, we would argue, still lead to modes of extreme violence enacted upon Black people.

Returning to the aforementioned statistics with/around/under/through affect reveals that timespacebody(ing)s are undergirded by a particularly insidious form of racial capitalism and exploitation. As plantations and populations grew, so too did white wealth. White plantation owners not only wanted to protect their investment but also govern the way fear was embodied. Here, fear becomes a prismatic intensity that is both the afflicted and the encountered, or, put into Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) terms, fear becomes "a capacity to affect or be affected" (p. xvi).

As documented in writing by the Slave Codes from 1667-1880, whites inflicted fear upon slaves with brutal beatings, bestialized working and living conditions, and persistent surveillance through Slave Patrols. These patrols—which are the basis of modern-day U.S. policing institutions—thrive off *mapping* fear onto Black bodies through terror and violence. In particular, and according to Potter (2013),

> slave patrols had three primary functions: (1) to chase down, apprehend, and return to their owners, runaway slaves; (2) to provide a form of organized terror to deter slave revolts; and, (3) to maintain a form of discipline for slave-workers who were subject to summary justice, outside of the law, if they violated any plantation rules. (p. 3)

Put simply, these patrols and countless laws that supported their violent tendencies, such as the Negro Act of 1740 passed in South Carolina, were *composed* to *impose* subjection and obedience and preserve the racial ordering of society—a society built around the emotional, physical, and financial well-being of white bodies. Moreover, not only was this abhorrent governance legal, but the deployment of extreme violence to cultivate fear by enslavers was financially encouraged. As noted by Alexander and Alexander (2021), "in many colonies, like Virginia, the public treasury was even required to compensate enslavers if an enslaved person was killed while resisting or running away" (p. 103). Paradoxically, these productions occur because of an inverted register of white fear (Jones, 2022): fear of Black movement, fear of Black organization, Black worship, Black justice, Black resistance, Black hope, Black joy, and Black life. Bridging historical and contemporary contexts of the white monitoring of Blackness, Browne (2015) contends:

> Dark sousveillance is also a reading praxis for examining surveillance that allows for a questions of how certain surveillance technologies installed during slavery to monitor and track blackness as property (for example, branding, the one-drop rule, quantitative plantation records that listened enslaved people alongside livestock and crops, slave passes, slave patrols, and runaway notices) anticipate the contemporary surveillance of racialized subjects, and it also provides a way to frame how the contemporary surveillance of the racial body might be contended with. (p. 24)

Amplifying Browne's (2015) thought (and reality), this form of historical and surveilled fear has cast an indelible shadow on contemporary life. Who could forget Amy Cooper, a white woman who in 2022 called the police on Christian Cooper, a Black Man who was simply bird watching in Central Park or the story from 2020 of Lolade Siyonbola, a Black graduate student in African studies at Yale, who after falling asleep while working on a series of papers was accosted by authorities when Sarah Braasch, a white student, called the campus police to report a "serious incident" (Rogo, 2020). While these are just two examples, Dr. Paul Butler (as quoted in Victor, 2018), a Georgetown University law professor, reminds us that such instances happen "so frequently to people of color that we don't often think of it as a big deal or as particularly newsworthy" (para 4). Furthermore, such situations can be even more invisible for Black girls in schools (Wun, 2014), where disciplinary practices become a "popular theater of cruelty" (Sexton, 2010, p. 197). Both instances were driven by fear and produced emotional trauma for the victims—sadly, there is also another outcome, death, which is the result of another complex intensity, *suspicion*.

Tethering 2: Computer and Suspicion

From the perspective that feelings and emotions are sticky and always-already in a state of becoming (Ahmed, 2004), they often get stuck onto other affects. That is, feeling begets *more* feeling. Thinking about affect in this way directs us to consider the pluriversality of feeling and how feeling becomes currency *and* is circulated to various bodies. Fear in this sense is not an affectual invariable and sticks itself to a range of other possible outcomes: ambivalence, avoidance, and suspicion.

Zeroing in on the last register, *suspicion*, we wish to overlay its tendrils onto another object, computer. As mentioned earlier, thinking through fear allows for a more entangled understanding

of how policing and surveillance is underwritten by white supremacist logics stemming from chattel slavery in the United States. Importantly, thinking materially about fear and racism also creates a line of flight that arcs towards and unveils acts and actions relating to the shape-shifting nature of white supremacy. Here, we follow Wozolek's (2021) orientation that "using assemblages of violence insists that any one iteration of violence is not singular; it is always necessarily dependent on sociocultural norms, histories, and other interactions of violence" (p. 66). Suspicion—as an affective category—can be, therefore, understood as being underpinned by traces of fear that have been programmed into racist machinations of technology (e.g., computers). Framing technology through what Benjamin (2019) refers to as "The New Jim Code" decodes the multifarious ways that computer *and* suspicion animated the actions resulting in Tyre Nichols' murder.

As Benjamin (2019) asked, "what do 'free will' and 'autonomy' mean in a world in which algorithms are tracking, predicting, and persuading us at every turn?" (p. 32), the officers responsible for Tyre's death were part of the SCORPION[7] unit—a specialized police squad tasked with intimidating, harassing, and, in this case, deploying lethal violence against citizens of Memphis, Tennessee. The movements of the SCORPION unit are not happenstance, but rather highly intentional and informed by computer algorithms to spatially profile specific urban areas and make predictions of potential crimes. A closer look at the Memphis Police Department reveals the use of a (unspeakable/uninterrupted violent) computer algorithm, developed "in cooperation with the University of Memphis and two corporations [IBM and local company SkyCop]" (Tulumello & Lapaolo, 2022, p. 452). We know already from Wozolek (2021) that intra-actions do not require awareness, and so Benjamin's (2019) insights graft the layer of algorithmic unintentionally onto an irrevocable and entangled web of forces.

Racist algorithms dictating life/death in the United States are nothing new. As computer programs developed more complex ways to analyze/process data, bodies often have been stratified and racially coded. As one of countless examples, in 2009, it was revealed that computer giant Hewlett-Packard (HP) had developed face localization software that failed to recognize or track the faces of Black people, despite accurately tracing the movements of white faces (Sandvig et al., 2016; Simon, 2009). More broadly, computer algorithms curate communication and media, which enables the transfer and sharing of culture (Gillespie, 2012; Ziewitz, 2015) as well as what advertisements are sent to our devices (Bermejo, 2007). According to Coleman (2009), in many ways race can be read *as* technology:

> A notion of race as technology, however, moves toward an aesthetic category of human being, where mutability of identity, reach of individual agency, and conditions of culture all influence each other. As a tool, race can be used for ill as well as for good; it may become a trap or a trapdoor. I base this turn from tool of terror to mechanism of agency not on magical thinking, but rather on the ethical choices that one may make every day. If race possesses no value without context, then we must choose to act courageously when faced with oppression—our own or somebody else's. (p. 181)

Whether trap or trapdoor, when entangled with technology, race becomes something much more than a static way of sorting/organizing bodies to fit into coded tiers imbued with (white) power(s) and privilege(s). Race *is* always-already violence and a technology in and of itself, while what we call "technology" in a more conventional sense becomes an apparatus for maintaining race's unspeakable-ness and uninterrupted-ness through an automation of antiblackness. Regarding

entanglements of racial logics and technological designs, Benjamin (2019) directs us to consider how "race itself operates as a tool of vision and division with often deadly results" (p. 36). Race as a technology sorts Black bodies in the classroom and beyond, including the statistics that shape school funding and opportunities, even when programs and initiatives are intended to thwart discrimination (see Beratan, 2006).

To summarize, the neighborhood in which Tyre Nichols was driving and eventually pulled over was under suspicion for "violent criminal activity" because of racist algorithms processed by a computer—developed by an academic institution and guided by policies and practices founded on fear, suspicion, and antiblackness. Despite many sources covering the murder dismissing the act as being non-racial, we would argue that the Black identities of the officers who beat Tyre Nichols to death are evidence of the complete permeance of both fear and suspicion within the architecture of police culture. Being Black does not make you immune to antiblackness—especially considering the underpinnings of organized policing and countless examples in the United States of Black life being deemed disposable. As James Baldwin (1998) prophetically stated, "the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do" (p. 723).

Tethering 3: Skateboard and Joy

Just as "the assemblage is an ever-knotted thing, always in motion" (Wozolek, 2021, p. 66), nested within assemblages of violence are threads of joy. Tyre Nichols was a father who loved skateboarding. And, although skateboarding culture has been shaped by predominantly white bodies, being a skater is inscribed with historical accounts of *refusal* of societal politeness and conformity—perhaps what Weheliye (2014) refers to as a racialized assemblage. According to *Mostly Skateboarding* podcast host Patrick Hunter:

> Every skateboarder has experienced some sort of frightening or traumatizing experience dealing with either police officers or security guards. I remember the first time I got lined up with a bunch of my friends for skating at a loading dock behind a photo studio. There was something bizarre about it, in that we all knew what to do—you sit on your hands, you don't say anything, nobody talks out of turn, and ideally, they let you go. I've had friends who have been slammed into police cars, friends who have been arrested and detained—I've certainly been handcuffed, I've been stopped and frisked. (Haidari, 2023, para. 5)

Despite this struggle, Tyre Nichols found immense joy in skateboarding. In a tribute to his legacy, community organizer Aaron Wiggs spoke about how a deck of wood with metal trucks and rubber wheels, covered in sticky tape holds the potential of leveraging personal joy into communal hope and action: "The beauty of skateboarding is you become allies with anyone who's on a skateboard—you can go anywhere in the world and meet someone with a skateboard and you become friends. Your sense of community is stronger." (Haidari, 2023, para. 11).

Drawing our attention to the generative capacity of refusal as an intensity, Halberstam (2011) suggests that acts of refusal "may lead to forms of speculation, modes of thinking that ally not with rigor and order, but with inspiration and unpredictability. If we begin anywhere, we begin with the right to refuse what has been refused to you" (p. 10). In the context of Tyre Nichols's murder, we (the authors) refuse to linger within the assemblage of violence without underscoring

unwavering joyous lines with/around/under/through Tyre Nichol's life. Put differently, despite Tyre Nichols' life being tragically cut short by an assemblage of violence underwritten by cotton and fear, computer and suspicion, his life was not defined by the assemblage of violence. Here, we believe it is of the utmost importance to hazard the weight of antiblack grief/loss/murder by (re)positioning joy to be in close proximity with these (heavy) registers.

While we produce scholarship within the field of social studies that is concerned with refusing normalized mutings of death (Varga et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2023, we follow the lead of Duncan, Hall, and Dunn (2023) who declared that "if social studies is supposed to help students understand the full range of the human experience, the field's preoccupation with Black suffering must give way to curriculum and curricular materials that include a fuller picture of Black experiences" (p. 2). Duncan et al. (2023) continue:

> Centering Black joy in social studies curriculum requires that teachers shift their mindsets about Black histories and communities, as well as what topics of study are worth dedicating classroom time toward. Most importantly, centering Black joy in the social studies curriculum allows Black students to see their own humanity as they learn that their ancestors consistently found joy alongside their struggle. (p. 7)

This shifted mindset has many personal and collective benefits. Tichavakunda (2022) asked the question: "Why discuss joy or agency, for example, in a country founded upon a totalizing system so violently racist as chattel slavery?" (p. 424). Drawing from Johnson (2003, p. 28), Tichavakunda (2022) responds that then "scholars might simultaneously understand enslaved people and their lives, as 'fiercely determined' yet 'insistently transcendent,' producing solidarity, culture, and a creative, vibrant life" (p. 424). In this way, there is a recognition of the many and reverberating effects and affects of enslavement while simultaneously honoring that no one's life can be reduced to their or their ancestors' enslavement or responses to enslavement.

We find joy and hope in the words of Kelley (2002), author of *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, who noted that the relationship between refusal and liberation demands "the mind's most creative capacities, catalyzed by participation in struggles for change" (p. 191). Importantly, and according to Spaulding et al., (2021) "this is the work that must be done to freedom dream" (p. 8).

And specifically, as educational researchers, we find joy and hope in Mitchell's (2022) articulation of Black Queer joy as a qualitative research lens. Such a lens can attend to formations of "Queer and Racial Battle fatigues," but with "the additional resonance to consider … how institutional violence is based in a continuum of colonialist fear around the inability to ever fully control the spirit of Queer Black joy and overall desire" (p. 957). This joy, "realized through the realms of the arts, survivance, ridicule, and sustenance," benefits the Queer Black community and also "radiates beyond the community" (p. 944), particularly when not appropriated or encumbered by white supremacist, heteropatriarchal hatred and fear that results in what Love (2019) refers to as "spirit murdering."

We leave readers with one last joyful coordinate. Remember Christian Cooper, the birdwatcher from Central Park who was forced to endure Amy Cooper's fear and suspicion? Well, he will be starring in his own show on National Geographic TV, called *The Extraordinary Birder*, which will be released in the summer of 2023. Thinking again with Johnson (2003) and Tichavakunda (2022), Christian Cooper is entangled with hateful effects and affects of white supremacism while simultaneously being so much more than that experience.

Coda

So where does this leave us? How might a more particularized accounting of historical/contemporary materials and the affects they produce work to rupture educational assemblages of violence? How might educators talk to students about these unspeakable/uninterrupted territories of violence? And how might we dream otherwise? Perhaps when acts of violence do become visible, a nudge towards the material and affectual can be generative in helping students *refuse* historically censored, sustained, and whitewashed frames and forms of quotidian violence that drag our attention towards registers of inevitability and predictability. Here, we are thinking of what Springgay (2023) calls the *imponderable extraordinary curriculum* that refuses to accept a status quo approach to teaching, learning, pedagogy, and curriculum—and the ethico-onto-epistemological implications therein. Perhaps in this sense, our use of violence and the assemblage of bodies that become entangled within are indeed *queer.* Ahmed (2019) teaches us that "queer uses, when things are used for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended, still reference the qualities of things; queer uses may linger on those qualities, rendering them all the more lively" (p. 26). By this logic, when conceptualized as an assemblage, violence *and* education do indeed become lively and reveal myriad lines of flight for teachers and students to think about how human and more-than-human bodies and intensities contribute(d) to historical outcomes and contemporary be(com)ings.

In closing, our argument rests upon the position that thinking with things and affects can lead to potentially more complicated *and* relational understandings of violent contexts through an accounting of how things become controlled/leveraged to produce deliberate intensities that, more often than not, perpetuate and sustain ecologies of antiblackness. As we all continue to grapple with these thoughts in the context of a pastpresentfuture world (Varga, 2022) shaped, misshaped, and reshaped by injustice, it is our sincerest hope that this article serves as a reminder that we must come to understand how present and future violence is predicated upon the problematic past of American society and institutional culture and, perhaps most significantly, education's role in allowing these configurations of violence to continue (Jones, 2022). Becoming attuned to affective saturations embedded within objects offers a slightly alternative angle for us to unknow ourselves;

> the unhinging opens up a different conversation about why we do what we do, here, in this place, that despises us—not focusing on reparation of the self, alone, but instead sharing information and stories and resources to build the capacity for social change. (McKittrick, 2021, p. 16)

Material and affective change is (beyond) overdue.

Notes

1. According to Barad (2007), intra-action can be used to conceptualize the unique way(s) that various bodies can exist in states of be(com)ing that are contingent upon encounters, thus, registering bodies as co-constitutive.
2. We use the category more-than-human to describe bodies and matter that are *other* than human. Following the lead of Pugliese (2020), our orientation of *more* is meant to affirm that such entities transcend human characteristics, but also are entangled within the human experience (i.e., our use of -'s to connect the words).
3. Throughout this work, we conceptualize bodies as be(com)ing "forces that overlap and relate to each other" (Hultman & Lenz-Taguchi, 2010, p. 529).

4. In step with Vargas (2018), we write antiblackness as such to amplify the difference between the broader and nuanced condition of Blackness that extends beyond Black history/ies.
5. Our understanding of assemblage is underwritten by an arc of scholarship that suggests the concept itself is a multiplicity that articulates "bodies, actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 88). Moreover, we understand assemblages as being communal and agentic (DeLanda, 2006), dynamic and material (Grosz, 1993, 1994), affective and intersectional (Puar, 2007, 2012), and fleshy, physiological, and racialized (Weheliye, 2014).
6. Here we adjust Barad's (2007) concept of timespacematter(ing) that collapses time, space, and matter(ing) into a singular concept to account for our framing of matter as being situated and em*bodied*.
7. SCORPION unit stands for Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace in Our Neighborhoods and was shut down after the murder of Tyre Nichols.

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