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To cite this article: Alexander J. Means , Amy N. Sojot , Yuko Ida & Michael Hardt (2020): A dialogue with Michael Hardt on revolution, joy, and learning to let go, Educational Philosophy and Theory, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2020.1803977](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1803977)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1803977>



Published online: 10 Aug 2020.



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INTERVIEW



A dialogue with Michael Hardt on revolution, joy, and learning to let go

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ABSTRACT

In this wide-ranging conversation, Michael Hardt reflects on recent transformations within Empire. Several unique themes emerge concerning power and pedagogy as they intersect with subjectivity and global crisis. Drawing on the common in conjunction with the tradition of love in education uncovers a different path that attends to today's real political, ecological, and social needs. Finally, a focus on collectivity points to a possible strategy—collective intellectuality—for educators to revise traditional notions of leadership to encourage more ethical, democratic, and sustainable futures. Yet, what this looks like in practice remains for us to imagine.

KEYWORDS

Empire; pedagogy;
biopolitics; revolution

Introduction

Our reading group at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, which we call *Witches, Robots, and Rebels*, read Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's Empire series in 2019. Our vibrant discussions inspired us to organize this special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. We found that the concepts developed in the Empire series augmented our specific interest in pedagogy as a site of struggle and potentiality within the present moment. In November 2019, we sat down with Michael Hardt to discuss his perspective on contemporary transformations within Empire and the role of power and pedagogy within these transformations. What follows, is a wide-ranging conversation that touches on several unique and underexplored themes. This includes how the Empire series itself reflects a pedagogical process of collaborative learning with Antonio Negri; how the constitution of subjectivity reflects a pedagogical process immanent to the existential crises afflicting Empire (economic, social, and ecological); how education internalizes biopolitical conflicts over creativity within the common; and how love and pedagogy intersect with revolution. Drawing on the common in conjunction with the tradition of love in education uncovers a different way forward that attends to today's real political, ecological, and social needs. Finally, a focus on collectivity points to a possible strategy—collective intellectuality—for educators to revise traditional notions of leadership to encourage more ethical, democratic, and sustainable futures. Yet, what this looks like in practice remains for us to imagine.

The following is adapted from a conversation held on 13 November 2019 between Michael Hardt, Alexander J. Means, Amy N. Sojot, and Yuko Ida. It has been lightly edited for clarity.

Students of Empire

AS: One of the elements that has attracted readers to the *Empire* series is the creativity and potentiality of the language and concepts you develop such as biopolitical production, love, republic of property, constituent power, immaterial labor, the common, and so on. These concepts always have an analytic edge for decoding objective conditions, while they're also formulated to guide and push thinking and action beyond these conditions. We wanted to begin, since we're in the education field, to ask if you could speak about the pedagogical function of language and concepts within and across *Empire* series.

MH: One thing Toni and I have thought is that the primary concepts of our political theory have been corrupted, that a lot of the concepts that were central to us have come to seem unusable because their meanings have been changed. Democracy seems that way to us. And so, part of the task of political theorizing like ours is to struggle over the concepts. However, perhaps rather than it being pedagogical, I think what we aim to do is to create tools, tools that people can use in different ways. I think of pedagogical as being more directive than that.

AM: And can you talk a little about how over the last two decades, over the four main books, that struggle, how concepts kind of came in and out and changed over time and why?

MH: That's interesting.

AM: For instance, just one example. *Empire* sort of fades into the background. It comes up a little bit in *Assembly*, in the beginning, but it's not a central focus anymore.

MH: One of the main processes for writing these books is actually a conversation between me and Toni and the book is kind of a byproduct, which is a lovely thing, but it's also about us learning. So, I think that a lot of the shifts from one book to the next is because we have learned something. In some ways the move from *Empire* to *Multitude* was really being inspired and attentive to a sort of wide range of social movements that were going on at the time and focusing on them. In *Commonwealth*, there was, for instance, a large section about coloniality and race that we hadn't worked out before and it was a product of us learning with different perspectives and working them in. Yeah, so it's about the shift in what's going on in the world around us, but it's also about a kind of learning process for ourselves.

AM: That is interesting. The concepts emerge out of an educational process that you engage in.

MH: That's good.

AM: Then you produce a common together that emerges out of your educational process.

MH: Yeah. Right. Our own education, which we're trying to pursue. Yes, exactly. Rather than thinking ... this is a nice reversal of it. Rather than thinking of it as pedagogical, it's more like that we're the students. I like that better.

Refusing learned impossibility

AM: Let's focus on a couple of key concepts in the *Empire* series: biopolitical production and the common. These concepts seem to have a distinctive educational dimension because they're describing processes of social production and conflicts within the moments of social production. The tensions are inherent in the production of subjectivity, consciousness, and forms of life. Do you think there's a sense in which thinking these concepts educationally might enrich them in distinct ways? There are these little moments where you gesture toward this idea. Like in *Commonwealth* you discuss how the spontaneous energies of the multitude and its various social movements need to be

educated as part of a general process of political becoming. So, I'm wondering how might the common itself be conceived as an educational concept? And is that useful?

MH: It certainly is. One of the issues central for us is the increasing centrality of the production of subjectivity in economic and social life. That production of subjectivity as you're saying is a way of understanding the processes of education. So, thinking of education not just as the transfer of knowledge, or even just as the breadth of knowledge, or acts of intelligence, but as a broader or more substantial production of which intelligence and knowledge is part. It seems interesting to think of education in those terms as a collective production of subjectivity. Even a self-constitution of subjectivity. My hesitation though is that I'm somewhat allergic to the hierarchy of the teacher-student role in this.

AM: There are traditions in educational philosophy that decenter the authority of the teacher in order to think about the co-production of knowledge. And that is one of the really rich aspects of this question of the common that we think could find some efficacy and an audience in educational conversations today, particularly as education becomes increasingly instrumentalized, increasingly subordinated to the dictates of the market, and more about the transmission of measurable skills for the labor market as opposed to the kind of immanent collective production of knowledge and subjectivities that you are talking about. So, I think that we would stand in agreement with that.

To pose a slightly different set of questions concerning subjectivity though. One of the angles explored in the *Empire* series is to think about the contemporary global crisis and the interconnected set of emergencies that we face today, and thinking about them not just in political terms, but in terms of subjectivity. And you kind of work this out a little bit more in the new book, *Assembly*, talking about moving away from the idea of the autonomy of the political and bringing it back to the subjective elements of the crisis. Our question about this is: how have the dynamics of this subjective crisis shifted over the last two decades since the original publication of *Empire*? Here we can observe a couple of contemporary trends that maybe you could respond to. One, the resurgence of authoritarian movements, neo-fascist movements. That's one. The other might be described as the new digital battlefields. We could think of Cambridge Analytica, corporate control over social relations as they're expressed in the digital sphere.

MH: That's good. You know, I very much liked this book by Felix Guattari called *The Three Ecologies*. And one of the very nice connections he makes is between an ecology of the earth, a social ecology, and a subjective ecology, that is, an ecology of consciousness, let's say. And he was talking about a corresponding crisis in all three. And I think that might be an interesting way to think about crises of the common, that is, to think about those crises of subjectivity as being parallel to the crises of the earth and its ecosystem, along with social crises. And of course, I don't mean parallel to as like there's a 1: 1 correspondence, but that the kinds of urgencies we're recognizing and that are widely recognized, that involve the devastation of the earth are also urgent in a kind of devastation of a subjective ecology along with that of social and cultural relations. As you're saying, one symptom of that subjective crisis is the rise of racist and neo-fascist groups. Think of those as if they were poisons in the water supply. And they should be dealt with the same urgency.

There's a tendency though for people to give priority to one of these crises—the planetary crisis, the social crisis, or the subjective crisis—and subordinate or set aside focus on the others. That is what is so great about Guattari's book: he insists that we must struggle in terms of the three ecologies because they are, in fact, intrinsically linked. And it seems to me we respond to these linked crises the principles of democratic participation and decision-making, even though in the present state of crisis it always feels like one can't do that.

AM: And do you think that's partially because *Empire* educates us to believe it's impossible?

[laughter]

MH: Yeah ... that sounds plausible. I think what you're saying is right, but it's also because these problems are super difficult, or seemingly impossible.

AM: To go back to what you were talking about in terms of ecology and subjectivity, and thinking about how the subjective crisis has changed over time, also thinking about how Empire educates us to believe that real democracy is impossible, that we can't actually collectively determine our own future. Do you think that there's a kind of shift in the rhetorical landscape right now? Like the end of history is obviously dead, it never was a thing to begin with. You use the word extinction and that kind of marks what I'm getting at because I feel there's a kind of deepening awareness, of real survivability being at stake, and then you get this retreat into the protected psyche, the retreat into these racist traditionalist ethnonationalist discourses as one kind of response. My question is: do you also get that sense that the stakes are becoming more absorbed into the bloodstream of consciousness right now?

MH: I think yes and in several ways. In the one sense, I think that there is a general sense of fear and dread that takes different forms. One type of response to fear, as you say, goes through a retreat into identitarian enclaves. But there's also a kind of dread—this is what you were pointing to earlier—that assumes any real change is impossible. Like you were saying before that there is a learned impossibility, that it is impossible for us to get together and solve these problems. That it's impossible for us together to govern ourselves. But I think that sense of powerlessness, which is certainly growing, is one thing that one has to struggle against.

Earlier I was trying to express what Toni and I see as part of the value of working with these concepts. I think another thing about the kind of political theorizing that we do is that it's important to highlight the power that people already have. I mean, in some ways, you can think of this as a compensatory operation. People ... we all, especially on the left, are super aware of how bad things are, how powerful all the forces against us are, about how hopeless everything is. That is what everyone's very good at. In some ways what one has to do is to recognize, I don't mean make up or pretend that we are more powerful we are, but actually to identify the ways that people really are powerful. In some ways, this combats the sense of fatality and dread and hopelessness. So anyway, I do think that feeling, that generalized sense of powerlessness is part of what's been growing in the last 20 years like you say. And I see part of the task of this kind of work is to counter that.

Learning to let go: love, realism, and revolution

AS: I think it's interesting how when you're talking about the climate crisis, we recognize that we need democratic participation, while Alex is saying that Empire forecloses possibilities of thinking of that possibility. I was wondering, what is also the role of amplifying those voices that have constantly been fighting against this climate crisis that don't get as much attention? We have that with Greta Thunberg, and she has a lot of attention—it's really great. But what about the indigenous groups that have been doing all this fighting, that haven't gotten that attention. Because almost in a way, Empire will say that you have one subjectivity. And actually, there are all these different local subjectivities that are still thriving. So how do you amplify that? Or is it even possible?

MH: Right. One thing that is certainly important is to recognize the consistency across the globe of the indigenous groups that are not only fighting against extractive industries, but also proposing a different relationship to the earth. It's not as if there's all these isolated things. It's not that they're all saying the same thing either. It's more like if you step back you should be able to put together a kind of mosaic that creates a larger pattern of, for example, groups in New Zealand fighting, and groups in Western Canada that are fighting. One way that can amplify it is to recognize the larger patterns of struggle that fit together.

There's an older revolutionary tradition that assumed we needed some sort of centralized leadership that could bring all of these divergent movements under its wings. One could say for better or for worse, and I would definitely say for better, that's no longer a possibility. But I also think that it's not necessary. The difference in autonomy of all these different struggles doesn't have to be shifted in order to recognize the consistency among them. As we were saying before, one of the ways of recognizing the power that we already have is by connecting up and recognizing the relationship among struggles. And not only that they often have a common enemy, Exxon or huge agribusinesses like Monsanto for example. It's also that they are working with what Toni and I would say is a similar notion of the common, by which we mean here a relationship of exchange and care with the earth and ecosystems. Recognizing that the common is what is grounding them all even if it's done in different languages, or different idioms, or different ways of thinking.

AS: It's a very different relationship with the earth if you contrast it with the Western notion where you have an individualized subject who's disconnected. What these movements are doing is creating a sense of relationality, that you're responsible for the earth, the earth is responsible for you. It's almost a love that you have, a love with responsibility.

*YI: I would like to ask a question here about love, which you have written powerfully about as the basis for politics. Love is in many ways about vulnerability, about opening one's self up to the other, totally and completely. However, like the common, love also can circulate in corrupt forms and in passions for purity, possession, property, and exclusive identity. How has your conception of love changed, if at all, since writing *Empire*? This concept interests us because there is a tradition of love in teaching, learning, and education from Phaedrus and beyond. Is love a difference of kind or difference of intensity? How might we conceive love pedagogically within the multitude? This is my question.*

MH: That's great. One way our thinking has changed is in a recognition of the ways love functions in reactionary political forms. For instance, white supremacist groups often say, 'look it's not that we hate other people, we just love ourselves'. Or maybe, 'we might hate others, but that's a secondary thing'. What's really primary is loving whiteness or loving our race, etc. I mean nationalism often functions that way too. And so, it just forced us to recognize, maybe, what we've been assuming all along, that love as a revolutionary, political affect or tool has to always involve an internal multiplicity.

People often say, why don't you talk about friendship or solidarity instead. But one of the distinctions that is important politically, and I think also functions in pedagogical terms, is that love for me requires a transformation. It requires losing yourself in some way. And I don't mean losing yourself and becoming nothing. I mean, allowing for a kind of conversion, a becoming. And that is how we think about love in revolutionary processes. That love is necessary to allow for the kinds of transformations that revolution would require. And maybe the pedagogical process would require it too. You have to be willing to let go of what you are to become something different and different in relation to others—in concert with others. It's certainly possible that one could think of friendship that way. Or maybe even that one could think of solidarity that way. But love for me marks that transformative capacity.

AS: Would it then be a letting go?

MH: It definitely has to involve a letting go, you're right. Because you have to let go to become something different. I remember a certain point in the writing process maybe a paragraph where Toni and I wrote 'revolution is really only for monsters'. And what we meant was that it's not as if you should imagine revolution as creating that society where you are finally going to feel at home. Some people might wish for that, but that's not revolution. It has to be the transformation of society so that you as you were can no longer live, so that you have to become something different in order to live it. And there is something painful and monstrous in the letting go that you're talking about.

AS: *And not knowing what's going to come from the letting go.*

MH: *Yes. Right. And you might think about it, and this would be putting the love and revolutionary processes together as it's not a letting go in an individual sense, but it's a letting go in a collective process. Like a becoming.*

AS: *Rather than a letting go as negative, it is actually productive and affirmative.*

MH: *Yes, exactly. This is certainly in line with Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of becoming. Becoming for them is not oriented toward some final state. It's not about becoming 'x'. It's rather a process of transformation that doesn't have an endpoint. And so collective becomings like that, that does seem like a lovely way to me to think of pedagogical processes.*

AM: *We have to teach ourselves what the future is going to become. We can't have some diagrams in our head what the future is, we actually have to learn it together through our practices. One of the things I found so useful in the series are these questions around nationalism and identity, and how they are connected to passions for specific forms of identity that keep us trapped in these loops that don't allow us to imagine a letting go that could be affirmative. And maybe that really is a place where love can function.*

MH: *One of the dangers of talking about love, and Toni and I run into this danger all the time, is that it can quickly transform and be heard by people as, how should I say, merely sentimental. And so often people feel very uncomfortable talking about it in this context. And so I'm hesitant to do it. With certain audiences, it doesn't sound serious enough and doesn't seem properly political, and even individualized.*

AM: *Love can seem sort of naïve and romantic, or sort of hopelessly utopian, but when you actually look at what is being offered in the alternative, it seems far more realistic. What's utopian are the dead ends of space colonies offered by Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, that we're just going to colonize the galaxy with Empire as opposed to relearning how we can live on this planet together in a way that's based on love and sustainability. So that to me is far more realistic actually than, you know, the false dead end utopia of Empire.*

MH: *I absolutely think that you're right. But I think it's also true, and this might sound contradictory, but often such things can only appear to us as impossible, and yet we have to pursue them anyway. Like what's seemingly impossible turns out to be the only realistic path. That brings to mind an old slogan from 1968, from Paris and other places too ...*

AM: *Be realistic, demand the impossible.*

MH: *There you go, yeah exactly.*

Traveling pedagogy of the multitude

AS: *As Yuko was saying there is a tradition of a very full love in education, where it's not just sentimental, like oh 'swipe right or buy Valentine's day cards', it's actually a love that has to be developed from trust and responsibility. There's desire too. And you have all these elements built into knowing and learning. And I think that is where it can connect with pedagogy, a much looser concept of pedagogy. For instance, in a prior interview, a few years ago, you were talking about the difference between the global and local—and having a type of traveling pedagogy or pedagogies. I think this is interesting in thinking about our conversation on the climate crisis, where you have these groups that can amplify a love for the land and love for the earth. I want to ask a question here about pedagogy and the multitude. If the multitude is simultaneously a multiplicity and singularity, global and local, everything is happening all at the same time. It's global, local, it's becoming, then how do we conceive then of humanity acting collectively? And here I think it's complicated*

with the local, without effacing local self-determination and sovereignty. Perhaps this where love and a traveling pedagogy can start, maybe not necessarily having that as the answer, but having it as an 'oh here's a possible route?'

MH: That seems like one great way of understanding it. Let me try another one. I think they can go together. I'm doing it in a much more social-scientific vocabulary. That when we use the term and when others use the term cycle of struggles or international cycle of struggles, it's trying to designate that process that each of these struggles is intensely local and focused on its specific conflicts in its own environment. And yet, struggles elsewhere can be both inspired by and learned from the repertoire of practices, the aspirations, the forms of organization, and take them elsewhere.

AS: A tangible example in education, would be place-based education, which is intensely local because it takes in the culture of the place, and posits a new relational ethics between land and communities, and that is a type of pedagogy. But we have Empire in a sense, it wants to streamline it, to package it.

MH: Yes.

AS: So some would think you can take this curriculum and you can apply it anywhere.

MH: Right. And yet, of course, if you were going to do it in Lapland it would have to be different and relate, for instance, to the whiteness and the horizontality of the landscape. It would have to be radically different even if it's pursuing the same pedagogical mission.

AS: Yeah, so I guess what it comes to is when you have a traveling pedagogy, it seems like it's free you know, but it's still attached to the local, the intensely local, but it's still applicable. Like you can still communicate between different traveling pedagogies.

MH: Right. Yeah.

AM: Are you wondering how these different forms can be linked up? From the global to the local? Like how does the multitude coordinate across these scales?

AS: Yeah, how does it coordinate, because Empire aims to foreclose those possibilities. The linkages. And we have these traveling pedagogies, these different intensely local forms producing an affirmative vision. It's love. It's actual love for others. But there is also a constant attempt at narrowing or foreclosing of these forms of love. Like in what we can see right now with migrants. You can't travel, cutting you off.

MH: Borders.

AS: Yeah, borders.

MH: Sometimes it works to talk about translation being the operative mechanism. And by translation I don't just mean from one language to another, or even a translation in cultural forms, or a translation in ways of relating to the earth that would need to be transformed to be reapplied. I think that's part of the traveling you're talking about. In order to travel, forms of expression have to translate, and translation can be quite complex. But that's what has to be done.

But I also agree with you, stepping back to the larger question. And this might actually have been the intuition that Toni and I started thinking about Empire with. In the face of new forms of domination having to do with capitalist globalization and various governance structures and relationships among the most powerful nation-states, it seemed to us that an appropriate political response would have to involve a new kind of internationalism. So, the kind of travel that you're talking about, with the migrant crisis, for example, migrants are at the forefront of this need for internationalism. We have to make connections and even translations beyond the local. It's not an answer, it's just posing a certain kind of task or agenda.

Leadership, co-research, and study

AM: On this idea of translation maybe this is where we can talk about the new book *Assembly*, and specifically the question of leadership. I want to point to one specific aspect, which would be intellectuals, and your critique of public intellectuals as figures standing over and above movements. This also goes back to our questions about pedagogy and the relation between teachers and students, knowledge as a co-production. In the book, you offer some examples of contemporary social movements, like Black Lives Matter, that resist traditional forms of hierarchical or charismatic leadership. Here in Hawai'i we have the protector movement on Mauna Kea, which is about indigenous land rights and self-determination. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about these questions we have been discussing of concerning relational ethics, translation, and the role of leadership and the role of intellectuals and pedagogy. Can you link these up?

MH: I think it's important to recognize over the last 50 years how centralized decision-making and leadership within social movements have been critiqued and rejected for many good reasons. Insisting on democratic forms within movements. But that doesn't (or should not) lead to a refusal of organization, or even an absolute horizontality of the movements. This is where Toni and I started this question, by thinking what is or should be the role of leadership in these movements and not as some sort of absolute refusal of leadership. And then what does that imply for the constitution of the multitude. It does seem to us, that in social movements, in revolutionary movements, and political movements, there is a role for leadership. We suggest that leadership should function tactically, that it should function in specific occasions for specific time periods when certain kinds of experts are needed and a certain type of time urgency is required. And I was wondering if that could be tied together with these different specialized roles you were talking about, like for translation, or for other specialized demands. What's much harder I think is the other side, which we formulate, is that the multitude should be capable of strategy, which poses the question: how can we together find democratic forms for making decisions together about the most important, the most pressing issues?

AM: And how do we conceptualize intellectuals and the function of pedagogy here?

MH: The allergy that I have of a certain notion of intellectuals functioning in public, or in political movements is I think something that you all have already resolved, because it corresponds closely to my allergy of a certain notion of pedagogy, you know the certain role, the traditional conception of the master and the pupil. I think in a similar way we would have to think about the question of the intellectuals. What I'm working against is the notion of the public intellectual that is the one who knows and is able and is necessary for him, usually him, to communicate that to the masses. Along with that I think, is the assumption that there's this division of labor in which intellectuals think and activists act. Instead—and I think it would be useful to think this parallel to the kind of pedagogy that you're involved with—there's no such division of labor between intellectuals and activists, and there an important kind of production of theory that goes on in movements, that goes on among activists. Activists in movements work on the same theoretical problems that do intellectuals in libraries. And I don't mean to say that intellectuals working in libraries are unimportant. I love libraries. But that one has to recognize the kind of intersection between and complementary nature of these two registers of theorizing. I think that if you were to translate that, you could say it better than I by translating that into your thinking of forms of pedagogy. Here I would rely on thinking about this as a kind of co-research. It's not that intellectuals are useless, but that they're useful within a context that recognizes these productions as being multiple and pursued together. So, I don't mean by this to discount the role of intellectuals, but rather to expand the spaces in which and subjects who pursue these intellectual functions.

AM: Some in our field are experimenting with study as a pedagogical concept that performs that work. If we imagine learning as something that is prescribed, usually from above, learning is a process of dictating a knowable and individual end. Study is something that is open-ended and it can

be collectively entered into with co-researchers within a practice of co-production of knowledge. It's open-ended and it's not prescribed. It is creative and views education as a collaborative expression of creativity without end.

Collective intelligence and affective labor

AS: Yes but Empire also requires creativity to sustain it, to fuel economic production. But at the same time, creativity is abundant, it's affirmative. Too much creativity can pose a threat. It's an excess, I guess. Similarly, love and care in educational spaces are becoming instrumentalized in ways that then maintain Empire's ever-evolving structure. An example is the OECD doing a very long study from early childhood and beyond, where it's specifically looking at social-emotional learning and you know, controlling, managing one's emotions. It is somewhat framed within a say, oh 'it's for the holistic well-being of the child and the student', but then it becomes couched in economic terms. It's trying to make the better worker, the worker that doesn't question what's going on. Affective labor and the production of emotions and sensations are central to Empire. So how might forms of creativity, love, emotion, and affection that resist reduction to Empire's foreclosing be nurtured and expanded educationally and politically?

MH: In some ways what you're describing is a capitalist process of commodification in the sense that the production of affects becomes a commodity that's bought and sold. It's a form of containment and extraction of value from these processes. You're also right to point out that the production of affects always exceeds the use of what capital makes of it. It could be interesting just in conceptual terms, one could think of that excess as the potential of disruption. But that's not very satisfying. I think your question is asking for a much more material response. What kinds of refusal can be powerful in this context? And it's not at all clear. I mean, or rather, the traditional forms of labor refusal are in some ways curtailed. You know like workers in the factory when they refused to produce the automobiles that can in a relatively straightforward way wield a weapon against the boss. But if you were to refuse the affective relationship with your students, who suffers is not the boss, but it's your students and it's yourself, in the same way that healthcare workers find it very hard to go on strike. Maybe refusal has to take a different form in this context.

AM: I like the notion of excess here. There's a common that's produced within our educational institutions. And there's always a surplus to this common. There's value that can't be extracted. There are affects and social relations and possibility and creativity, like in this precise moment right now, that can't be commodified or controlled. So that surplus, it seems to me, how does that surplus get intensified and amplified? How does that become the moment? That to me is how I tend to think about it.

MH: I was thinking about Fred Moten and Stefano Harney writing about this. And they would think about this in I think in terms of fugitivity, or a certain kind of escape. That excess might provide a way of subtracting one's self from the discipline of the educational institution or something like that. You know, fugitivity in that sense. And interruptions created by flight, that is a certain kind of refusal. So how do we create spaces that might escape the kinds of discipline of the educational apparatus? I'm definitely all for that. I would also like, and this is where I was stuck with the question before of thinking about ways not only of flight or subtraction, but also of a direct refusal that's parallel to a direct industrial strike. I mean, of course, teachers can go on strike too and that's been in the last few years a really important and powerful weapon. But I was thinking about it and trying to cast it in a different context.

AS: I'm wondering then if those classroom spaces then become even more localized, or maybe that's where it starts from or can occur. If you can close your classroom door, the principal doesn't have to know.

[laughter]

AM: That's one form, but also just the recent student-led climate strike. That was an educational strike led by students globally.

MH: Right.

AM: Maybe there's different forms that need to be linked up. And I wonder too being folks who think about education, coming back to this idea of the public intellectual and study. It just seems like our entire notion—and also Amy's question, the OECD locates education as the production of affects so that you can deal with your precarity as a unit of human capital that then can promote GDP. That's that model. And for me, at least, how I think about this is that we need education as a production of mass intellectuality. And I know in autonomist theory there is a very specific linking back to Marx's Grundrisse and the notion of the general intellect, a very specific type of history or genealogy. But for me, it's not public intellectuals, but mass intellectuality as a way in which we can teach ourselves this future we need because it's our only realistic option.

MH: That's an excellent point: rather than thinking about the public intellectual as one very smart person who goes on tv or does something else, we should talk about public intellectuality—and I know it's an awkward term, intellectuality—but I think you're right to transform it into a question about collective intelligence. That's where I'd be. You know in my own weird preoccupations I would start thinking about bees or ways that there are collective forms of production of knowledge that are superior to individual and separated forms. That seems to be the operation you were just doing, which is to say rather than refusing the public intellectual it should be transformed and collectivized and thought of as public intellectuality in the affirmative. How you actually do it is not super clear to me. So, it seems like a great challenge: what would it mean to be or create a kind of collective, public reasoning?

AS: It seems like it would also require a lot of untangling of things that were taught. Like, 'Oh I'm not in school, so I can't be an intellectual'. You know, these types of problems that remain.

AM: Yeah like the elitism of the intellectual.

AS: You know, like when you have the teacher in a classroom who's doing a type of refusal by not following curriculum, in a way that actually is activating those moments, those points, those different forms of resistance and refusal where it doesn't have to be just one thing.

MH: Yeah, that's a good point. Right.

Blurred boundaries: from control to cooperation

AM: So collective intelligence. Mass intellectuality. One of my preoccupations is to think about those concepts in relation to collective intentionality. Because, again, just going back to that trope about what's utopian and what's realistic today. To think about the multitude sort of co-evolving and learning in ways that can reveal a kind of intentionality toward a future which is livable and survivable. We wanted to ask you a question about co-evolution that maybe speaks to some of those issues.

AS: And I think it speaks to what were previously discussed in terms of forms of ecological thinking where it actually becomes a type of method or analysis. Throughout the *Empire* series, there is a consistent rejection of what Silvia Federici describes as mechanical philosophy, the Cartesian binary between mind and body—which we see a lot here in education—and also society and nature, where it's a bifurcation between self and other. And with what Alex is saying, which is really interesting, how does multitude attend to the co-evolution with technological systems, particularly given the evolution of AI where it's a real question now, it's not just some science-fiction question.

Actually, it's reality and we have to think about this. And then also how do we approach this in relation to natural systems in a deeper ecological approach? What does the common look like when human/nonhuman binaries are increasingly becoming blurred, is this what we might simply understand as a posthuman, or new materialist common of the Anthropocene?

MH: My instinct is to think of those blurred boundaries or the way those boundaries are melting away as an opportunity, but one should probably treat the human-machinic and the human-nature questions separately. On the one hand with machines, I think the first step has to be to recognize that, how would I say it, that ontologically there's no difference between the human and the machine. Humans are always already machines, considering the tools we use to build, like the structures and tools we use to think—thinking itself is a machinic process. I think we're integrated with machines already. It doesn't mean that all machines are good, of course. Rather than the struggles have to take place with how those machines are used and who controls them.

AS: So some approaches already say that there never was that boundary in the first place. There never was that ordering. But now since we have AI you have to start thinking about what is the subjectivity of what people previously saw as machinic. It's developing or has the potential to develop its own agency. So, what would the common look like when you have these blurred boundaries between human and nonhuman? But I think it also speaks to a different type of relational ethics. Because it's relating. How do you relate to things that weren't previously considered as something that has a status to relate to?

MH: Right ... I don't know.

AM: That's fair.

[laughter]

AS: I know. We don't know either!

AM: We've been thinking about this emergence of AI, which is a kind of distributed intelligence, but which is technological in the sort of traditional sense. But also thinking nature itself as being a technology, but of a different order perhaps. I'm not sure. The language here gets tricky, but let's just say that it's a different order. And of course, the human being itself, which is always an assemblage of differences and relationalities. How does the multitude metabolize this new form of intelligence with what we recognize as nature's intelligence and our own? Maybe that's one way of putting it? I'm not sure.

MH: I have a way of approaching it from a completely different angle.

AM: Okay.

MH: Sometimes when I get lost in the philosophical questions, practical thinking can help. So, I'm fascinated with the efforts of organizing platform workers. You know, Uber drivers, Deliveroo, the various delivery people, and stuff like that. There are all kinds of difficulties with this type of organizing because they're designated as independent contractors, they don't see each other very often because they aren't congregated around a machine the way that the industrial worker is. But, the other thing peculiar about this and fascinating about it, is that they are primarily confronted with a machine, but an intelligent machine. The algorithm that controls all the pricing of Uber and that delegates things.

And so, one thing that I've found inspiring was reading about two years ago about a strike of Deliveroo drivers in Belgium. And one of their demands was that they should control the algorithm, get control of the algorithm. I was thinking that in some ways they were repeating the demand of industrial workers who were saying they wanted control over the means of production. Like, we want control over the factory. And trying to translate that to this digital machine, and in particular,

like you're saying, Amy, a digital machine that has this kind of recursive ability to constantly change, the way the algorithm does. I think it's a very fruitful way of posing that struggle but it's also super complicated because the algorithm isn't just a neutral machine. It's one that already has embedded within it, through its processing of data, all kinds of hierarchies, even racial and gender hierarchies that are now embedded within the algorithm itself. I mean I guess one could just say machines are never neutral. The way it seems to come back to our question was that you could think of the algorithm that controls these platform workers or gig workers as a kind of intelligent machine, a form of artificial intelligence. And one that could be reappropriated by or struggled over. Maybe that's the way of saying it. You know, that labor struggles can focus on the machines in the same way. But one also has to recognize the difference of these machines. That they're not the same as the mechanical machines that we were previously used to. All I'm really doing so far is illustrating differently the problem I think you're leaning toward.

AS: Yeah, but I think it helps. Because already ... sometimes, I think that with the normative or assumed relational hierarchy is that it's humans, then machines. It a model or binary of control. But how you're talking about the algorithm, perhaps it isn't so much that workers are trying to control the algorithm. In a way, it's about cooperating with an algorithm. So just by changing it from control to cooperation, I think is already changing the relationality, the binary. I guess just trying to think of different ways between when you start thinking about that, that maybe things have their own power, or you have to start considering giving these algorithms a space at the table to 'talk' ... which I might regret saying that at some point, because you know, we'll have Skynet!

[laughter]

AM: On this question of technology there are a couple of models emerging on the left, or tendencies that people are thinking with. One we might call luxury communism, which would be this technological model of cooperating with algorithms to produce a kind of sociotechnical, egalitarian society. The other is Indigenous resurgence, a model based on the proliferation of multiple epistemologies and self-determination, and I think that these two models also get back to a lot of the things we've been talking about linking up, relational ethics, and pedagogy, and things like this. Do you see these two models in tension? Could they be complementary? And also, your conceptualization of alternative modernity, could that provide a mediating framework, or a different pathway forward?

MH: The alternative modernity that Toni and I were developing is trying to think through that notion, like you say, of multiple epistemologies and forms of knowledge. And what we're really struggling against is this notion that in order to contest the dominant rationality and colonial reason one has to affirm its opposite, or stay in constant tension to it. I think that coincides with what you're saying and my instinct too, or at least my first attempt, would be to think about these two together rather than in contradiction. You know, there's no reason why with what you're pointing to with this fully automated luxury communism that they have to be separate. Currently, processes of automation are being used as weapons against workers, and promises of the reduction of the time of labor never appear. And in fact, the more automation there is, it turns out the more and more we have to work. But there's no reason it has to be that way. The machines could be used differently. They could, in fact, reduce time required of labor, and expand nonwork time. It seems to me that expansion of nonwork time or even separating us from work as a defining element of our existence can go perfectly with, or even is a necessary refusal of colonial reason. The extent that capital and coloniality are mutually constitutive, irrevocably intertwined, that the processes of getting an anti-capitalistic resistance and a noncolonial existence could also be intertwined. I guess that's where I would start with it and it would be fun to think of together because they don't in their first appearance seem to have anything to do with each other. The one seemingly technophilic and the other seemingly anti-technology.

AS: I think you're right. It's made to seem like a binary.

MH: At least one avenue that this question of fully automated luxury communism suggests is how our separation from work could become a stepping stone for our separation from capital. Work, and all its attendant discipline, is one thing we have to separate ourselves from. And it's not easy. But I think that's the crucial element of that, I wouldn't even call it a hypothesis, almost that utopian instinct I take with that concept. Expanding nonwork time as a way of discovering a noncapitalist existence within the existing society.

AM: And there's no reason why indigenous struggles can't appropriate emerging technology to circulate multiple epistemologies and struggles to serve decolonial projects.

AS: And that's been happening. It's happening right now with Mauna Kea.

Creativity and joy amid the ruins of Empire

YI: I'm interested in literature and art education and through my teaching experiences I have learned that all children are like minor Kant's, they have creativity, but the current educational system appears specifically designed to destroy that creativity. In my own case, studying literature at university helped me to unlock and further cultivate my imagination and desire and I found that multiplicity exists within myself. I would appreciate your thoughts on how do you think that literature and the arts education today help cultivate desire and imagination for multiplicity, for transforming the young people into minor Kant's so that would help them produce themselves and the common differently? What's the role of literature and arts education today?

MH: In a way, we were saying earlier that the methods of the humanities, in general, literature and the arts and creativity are maybe at the center of this, are central to a certain stream of capitalist development. Capital needs a certain level of creativity. Capital needs a certain level of problem-solving abilities. In some ways for capital's own good, they should stop closing down all the humanities departments. But what one still has to say how is it that one can cultivate in a pedagogical context that excess, the ways in which that kind of creative thinking will not become merely instrumental to, or productive of a certain capitalist environment. I guess what we were saying earlier, or what you guys were saying earlier, that I found intriguing, or convincing is that one has to think in terms of, to focus on that excess, to focus on what can't be commodified or instrumentalized. It's funny to talk about creativity being instrumentalized, but I think that's actually the way a lot of that kind of economic production works today. I guess I would say then that teaching the creative arts is not a guarantee of a mode of resistance the way it may have once seemed. In fact, one has to discover a mode of resistance within the creative industries and the creative arts.

YI: Thank you so much. This is the last question. We live in a moment where it is all too easy to give in to despair or fatalism. One of the most inspiring aspects of the Empire series is in its insistence that things do not need to be this way. So, given the dire circumstances, we find ourselves in, what continues to sustain you, teach you, and give you hope and joy? What's your passion to keep teaching and continue writing?

MH: One thing that I find continually remarkable and inspiring is that people continue to revolt. Throughout the world, each year there are more really incredible forms of resistance and rebellion. The fact that people revolt, and the fact that people continue to revolt, sustains the faith that transformation is possible. Yeah, for me it doesn't even feel like hope. It feels more like a recognition that because people struggle things will continue, or that things will become, or that a better world is possible because people continue to struggle despite the horrible circumstances in which they find themselves.

YI: Thank you so much.

AS: Thank you.

AM: *Thank you so much. We so appreciate your time. It's been lovely to talk to you.*

MH: *Lovely to meet you.*

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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