



## Escape education

P. Taylor Webb & Petra Mikulan

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*Good people say that we must not flee, that to escape is not good, that it isn't effective, and that one must work for reforms. But the revolutionary knows that escape is revolutionary - withdrawal, freaks - provided one sweeps away the social cover on leaving, or causes a piece of the system to get lost in the shuffle.*

– Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 277

The aim of this short paper is to identify the conditions and political possibilities to escape education. We discuss the institutions of schooling and 'higher education' (universities, colleges, etc.). These institutions are commonly referred to as formalized learning spaces, and these spaces govern subjectivities through a variety of mechanisms, including pedagogies, curricula, syllabi, and assessments.

We briefly review several authors' views on formalized education. Then, we review the idea of escape as introduced in the epigraph. We take a moment to discuss escape in relation counter-conduct (Foucault, 2007) and 'fugitivity' - the state of being and becoming a fugitive (Harney & Moten, 2013). We discuss all of these ideas as 'acts of refusal' to the Modernist aspirations of hope that education utilizes to enact its neoliberal fantasies of reform (Ball, 2020; Clarke, 2020). We illustrate how hope and neoliberalism have combined into an attendant mode of "anti-production" that ostensibly widens education's own limits, rather than produce any appreciable improvements for students or society (Guattari, 1984). We argue that escape, fugitivity, and critique are all viable counter-praxes to the "autopoietic" processes of anti-production that education routinely expects, and through which the system widens its own limits (Luhmann, 1986).

We conclude with an overly brief discussion of the dilemma that Claire Colebrook (2013, 2017) raises about the "risks of stupidity" for educational escapees and fugitives. What is at stake with different forms of educational escape is its ethical wager, risking what other forms of thinking and thought it portends and produces.

### ***Education as pathological***

Frederich Nietzsche (2016), for one, was deeply skeptical that universities could be reformed because he believed they principally invested in the development of obedience and conformity. Nietzsche (2016) argued that obedience and conformity were designed to expand and widen education's own governing limits. Later, Deleuze (1992) argued that educational control had widened its governing limits beyond specific institutions. Idyllic ideas about 'life-long learning' are dystopian code for "perpetual training" that signalled that education had widened its limits to such an extent that traditional institutions, like schools and universities, were no longer necessary to control populations (p. 7).

Bernard Stiegler (2015) argued similarly that educational control has become so ubiquitous - through emergent technologies - that it has produced an epidemic of conformist stupidity. Like Nietzsche, Stiegler (2015) noted how investments into conformity and obedience provides education ways to expand its own limits by perpetually rectifying its own productions. Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Stiegler all agreed that education is designed to repeat its biopolitical and biocentric production in order to produce compliant, and at times, fearing, human capital.

This autopoietic production led Reza Negarestani and Mackay (2018) to argue that “the idea of education, right now, not only in Western countries but across the globe, is fundamentally pathological” (p. 17). For Negarestani and Mackay (2018), education is a social and cultural disease that over-produces solipsistic human-capital.

### ***Irredeemable education and the impossibilities of reform***

Stephen Ball (2020) has recently argued that the formalized spaces of schooling have consolidated into an irredeemable project. Ball (2020) locates education’s disrepair through a series of fallible logics that British sociology both developed and practiced during the 1930s - fallibilities which continue to steer education today. Ball (2020) identifies these fallibilities as, “... a romantic modernism – *we just have to get it right* - and a pragmatic neoliberalism – *it needs improvement* – both of which tie us, in different ways, to the tired but resilient fantasies of education policy (Clarke, 2019)” (p. 870).

Numerous others have criticized education over the decades, and this short article is not designed to provide an exhaustive review of these different criticisms. Nevertheless, we agree with Ball (2020) that the time for educational policy and educational reform is over. Modernist and neoliberal fantasies of education policy have a stranglehold on educational practice, and govern through a deleterious combination of romantic modernisms and pragmatic neoliberalism (Clarke, 2020). Sahlberg (2012), for instance, coined the acronym *G.E.R.M.* to describe the ascendancy of a global orthodoxy committed to constant educational reform (*Global Education Reform Movement*). *G.E.R.M.* is “an epidemic that spreads and infects education systems through a virus”, evidenced through the symptoms of competition, choice, and accountability (Sahlberg, 2012, np). Conveniently, educational reform is a repeating, autopoietic, and pathological economy that widen education’s own limits, neatly deflecting efforts to develop educational alternatives by disparaging ideas of escape (see epigraph).

Ball (2020) smartly eschews efforts at educational reform, and instead, advocates for concerted practices of Foucaultian critique to escape the governing practices of education and educational reform. Harney and Moten (2013) also argued that Modernity is irredeemable when he stated, “I ... know that what ... is supposed to be repaired is irreparable. It can’t be repaired. The only thing we can do is tear this shit down completely and build something new” (p. 152). As context, Harney and Moten’s (2013) notion of irreparability is located a bit more broadly than just education reform, and in relation to possibilities for, what he discussed as, “biopolitical populations” (i.e., racialized and gendered populations; Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 53). For Fred Moten, fugitivity, the state of becoming fugitive, is the only response available for many (Harney & Moten, 2013).

Foucaultian critique and fugitivity are not dichotomous ideas, and we note that Ball (2013) has discussed counter-conduct in relation to biopolitics and racilogies explicitly elsewhere. Our point is that different forms of counter-conduct, escape, and fugitivity denote how acts of refusal are disproportionately arranged, sensed, governed, and importantly, disciplined and punished. Given education’s irredeemability, we also advocate for others to escape the rationalities that govern education, and govern its predictable and aggrandizing cycles of reform.

Next, we briefly review Foucaultian critique, and as a direct replacement to ‘value-laden’ forms of critique that enact the subsumed values of Modernism and neoliberalism.

### ***Educational critique and Counter-Conduct***

Ball (2020) correctly, to our thinking, asserts that it is time to practice Foucaultian critique in relation to the governing rationalities embedded within the morally determined logics of reform and improvement. Foucaultian critique is an ethical practice that identifies unrecognized forms of power in people’s lives, and develops critical or counter practices to these control attempts. In

this sense, Ball (2020) understands that institutionalized education largely controls educational subjects through romantic desires for a Modernist future, engineered with neoliberal desires manifest as a set of technical reform initiatives.

Foucault's (2007) notion of critique is adamantly juxtaposed against normative forms of critique designed to identify errors or faults, and, subsequently used to levy judgements (e.g., in order to develop a 'fix'). It is designed, again, to identify how forms of power and control are constituted, and as a result, to develop a set of counter-practices to such forms of control. Arnold Davidson (2011) discussed these counter-practices as "... movements characterized by wanting to be conducted differently, whose objective is a different type of conduction, and that also attempt to indicate an area in which each individual can conduct himself, the domain of one's own conduct or behavior ..." (p. 27). Foucault's (2007) idea of counter-conduct is part of a larger project of ethical self-formation that works against command-based ethics and against objectively formulated rules, laws, morals, and other forms of power (e.g., racilogies, 'gender', etc.). In a nutshell, critique is a broad set of activities designed to "not being governed like that and at that cost" (Foucault, 2007, p. 45).

Foucault and Deleuze (1980) together discussed the self-serving sanctimonies of reform. Both believed that reform simply privileged a select few (i.e., 'representative intellectuals') which reproduced the very problems that were intended to be altered. In this sense, critique is routinely subsumed and employed as a servant "under an already constituted category" and rarely identifies the "occlusive constitution of the field of categories themselves" (Butler, 2001, p. 2). In other words, educational reform is rarely an antidote to whatever ails democracy, but rather, a subsumed and neoliberal pathogen.

We can understand how educational critique is subsumed to Modernist values and neoliberal pragmatics through the epigraph that introduces this article. Deleuze and Guattari (1977) observed that the idea of escape is generally chastised as a viable praxis. The negative attitude towards escape - conversely, an inability to let go - subsumes political possibilities for counter-conduct in favour of heroic discourses enacted towards reform and improvement. Nevertheless, escapees and fugitives reveal the 'wait-times' expected through reform efforts because they "are no longer waiting for the ideological debates of equality to be resolved..." (Webb & Gulson, 2015, p. 77). Escapees reveal the privileged positions of those who can afford to hope and who can afford to wait. But in so doing, many escapees become pariahs and outlawed fugitives.

Like counter-conduct, escape and fugitivity designate an attitude, perhaps even a set of virtues (Butler, 2001), concerned with ethical self-formation. Deleuze (1990) frequently discussed his idea of escape in relation to ethical self-formation as 'counter-actualization'. Escape and counter-actualization are acts of fleeing, eluding, or leaking away from forms of subjective control manifest through enacting different 'desires'. Similarly, fugitivity is a broad nomenclature for additional transgressive forms of ethical self-formation. Halberstrom (2013) explained that fugitivity

... is not only escape, "exit" as Paolo Virno might put it, or "exodus" in the terms offered by Hardt and Negri, fugitivity is being separate from settling. It is a being in motion that has learned that 'organizations are obstacles to organising ourselves' ... and that there are spaces and modalities that exist separate from the logical, logistical, the housed and the positioned. (p. 11)

We discuss escape and fugitivity next.

### ***Escape, fugitivity, and refusing educational subjectivities***

Fugitive (n.): *one who flees, a runaway, a fugitive from justice, an outlaw, fugitive slave, deserter.*

*Escape*, a *line of escape*, or a *line of flight* are idiosyncratic terms that are used interchangeably by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Massumi (1980) noted that, "*Fuite* [escape] covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance..." (p. xvi).

Acts of escape and fugitivity signal similar but nuanced forms of retreat from the control exerted through educational institutions. Harney and Moten (2013) argued that, “governance is generated by a refusal among biopolitical populations” and it “is provoked by the *communicability of unmanageable racial and sexual difference*, insisting on a now unfathomable debt of wealth” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 53; italics in the original).

As opposed to leisured forms of escape - a practice reserved for privileged, White and sovereign subjectivities - biopolitical refusal is always already fugitive, a praxis that rarely ‘gets outside’ the constitutive conditions of its outlawed difference. As such, escape and fugitivity signal similar practices designed to flee, but in relation to unequal opportunities and disproportionate impacts that these respective acts afford. For our purposes, educational escapes are differentially arranged and practiced, but amplify all of the fugitive acts already refusing education daily, if not hourly.

Educational escapees, educational fugitives, and forms of educational counter-conduct are all viable praxes directed against the sanctimonious desires produced through Modernist idealism and neoliberal pragmatism. They are directed to leave or flee (a) the idyllic figures of ‘teacher’ or ‘educator’ embodied in hollow rhetoric about the ‘social good’, and (b) elude the pragmatic economies of neoliberal education policy that capitalize on such rhetoric. Allen (2015) emphasized the subjective conundrum of escaping education when he stated:

Towards this end, the educational cynic is indispensable, having the strength to bring into question her entire identity as a caring professional. This rhetorically inflated figure, which trades on an increasingly hollow commitment to the social good, would be confronted and disposed of (p. 12; as quoted in Ball 2020, p. 878).

Allen (2015) directs our attention to escaping the Modernist desires that constitute many educated subjectivities. These subjectivities are present in students and educators, but increasingly evident through heroic sensibilities of philanthropists, ‘disruptors’, “neoliberal shibboleths”, and reform-minded economies produced through global reform industries (Clarke, 2012, p. 49). In this sense, escape is one way to dispose of the inflated figure of a caring professional that, literally, invests desires within the self-aggrandizing pragmatics of neoliberal education. Again, escaping the self-aggrandizing desires of educational professional are not proportional acts. For some, these acts of refusal generate opportunities to become something different; while for others, they are constituted as outlawed fugitives.

### ***Escape the repressions of educational anti-Production***

We are particularly interested in the political possibilities to escape the inherent fallibilities of education that are routinely capitalized upon by neoliberalism and transformed into entire industries devoted to its reform. In this sense, educational escape is committed to fleeing all of the governing industries of neoliberal reform, e.g., school reform, university reform, G.E.R.M., etc. More emphatically, educational escape is committed to fleeing all of the ‘minor industries’ of neoliberalism, including all of the private, autopoietic, and entrepreneurial activities enacted through hollow commitments to some social good (Brown, 2015; Lazzarato, 2014).

As several authors have noted, education is deeply invested in expanding its own limits. It does this through a general process that Felix Guattari (1984) described as “anti-production”. Felix Guattari (1984) defined anti-production when he observed,

It is impossible to separate the production of any consumer commodity from the institution that supports that production. The same can be said of teaching, training, research, etc. The State machine and the machine of repression produce anti-production, that is to say signifiers that exist to block and prevent the emergence of any subjective process .... (p. 34)

Matthew Clarke (2012) also noted how educational reform produces repressed subjectivities. He noted,

The hollowness of [educational reform] produces the repressed split subject, whilst simultaneously prompting the restless revolutionizing and ceaseless change that we see manifested in various forms, including capitalism's excesses and crises, the ever-shifting bureaucratic performativity requirements of contemporary accountability regimes, and the lifelong learning demanded of today's always unready educational subjects. (p. 53)

Importantly, anti-production should not be confused with non-production. As Clarke (2012) noted, anti-production generates 'productive' repression which is re-invested back into educational institutions. Educated repressions become financed capital that is re-invested, what we think of as an autopoietic system or *Sisyphian economies* in education. Sisyphian economies are the heroic enactments - and re-enactments - within the predictable failures to reform education (and/or predictable failures to reform some aspect of society with education, e.g., anti-poverty, anti-racism, anti-sexism, etc.). Sisyphian economies mobilize an army of heroic labour designed to ameliorate democratic decomposition, but in effect, generate an army of repressed split subjects, evidenced through a steady unemployment rate conferred through a global proliferation of diplomas, certificates, and degrees.

Predictably, Sisyphian labour is forestalled, but productively liquidated into various informatics that feed educational neoliberalism: predatory audit cultures, vapid award schemes, sycophant hirings and promotions, aggrandizing institutional rankings. Like the constant printing of money to finance debt, the international proliferation of diplomas, certificates, and degrees are redolent of education's deficit spending within the inflationary deserts of Modernity. Education easily markets these inflationary deserts because it knows full well that the resulting repressions from these depreciated promissory notes are future investments into its own autopoietic growth.

Anti-production, then, is a viscous cycle of educational control - a pathological educational process that affirms and reenacts 'caring professionals' and 'committed students' but only as participating elements in their own aggrandizing repressions. Of course, there is no shortage of things to fix or reform today, and these neoliberal repressions are proportionally calibrated to the accelerating decomposition of Modernism. Anti-production is the economization of educational desires liquidated into lifelong repressions. Anti-production simply widens the limits of education institutions when these repressions return home - a process, that as Deleuze (1992) noted, has become 'lifelong'.

At one time, a single degree was required for 'lifelong employment'. Today, any number of degrees, certificates, and diplomas are needed to navigate the precarity of lifelong employment. At a bare minimum, educational escape and educational fugitivity can simply be a matter of refusing to contribute to the anti-production of educational repressions.

### ***Thoughtful assets of stupidity***

For us, escape, fugitivity, and counter-conduct are completely viable responses to the anti-productions of Modernist and neoliberal education. These responses are manifest through different acts of fleeing, eluding, or disappearing from the subjective economies generated by educational anti-production. In other words, continued educational practice governed by romantic Modernism and neoliberal pragmatics is a morally dubious and increasingly unethical site of relations.

Claire Colebrook (2013; 2017) has examined the implications involved with educational escape. For Colebrook (2017) educational escape will inevitably produce inherent risks of "stupidity". She stated,

Education is at once necessary to bring forth a future distinct from what we already are, and yet that orientation toward a world of relations that is not oneself comes with the essential risk of stupidity [...] (p. 649)

Elsewhere, Colebrook (2013) noted that stupidity "is at once the death of thinking but also its life" (p. 31). The necessary risks of stupidity that inevitably follow any educational escape are, for

Colebrook and many others, assets in thinking otherwise (C.f., Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). Stupidity is an important aspect of 'letting go' and a viable alternative to the normalizing procedures and practices of contemporary education.

What is at stake with different forms of educational escape is its ethical and political wagers, risking what might be produced through other forms of thinking and thought. In this sense, escaping education and embracing 'stupidity' would produce a necessary kind of intensive thought that "would allow learning to be something different with every event of education" (Colebrook, 2017, p. 655).

Escape education, and accelerate all of its fugitivities.

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P. Taylor Webb and Petra Mikulan

Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia,  
Canada

 [taylor.webb@ubc.ca](mailto:taylor.webb@ubc.ca)