

**Literature and Social Change:
Writing, Criticism and Teaching in Neoliberal Canada**

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ABSTRACT

LITERATURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE: WRITING, CRITICISM, AND TEACHING IN NEOLIBERAL CANADA

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This dissertation examines literary activism that opposes neoliberalism in Canada. I define literary activism as the use of creative writing by its authors and critics and those who teach it to think through, resist, imagine alternatives to, and build movements against hegemonic power. What is at stake in this study is whether writers, critics, and teachers will have further insight into some of the ways that language is not only affective but also effective in its opposition to neoliberalism. I attempt to make that contribution by locating literary activism in the spheres of literary authorship and reception, and by considering how writers, critics, and teachers have sought to foster resistance to transnational neoliberalism.

Chapter 1, "Writing as Activism," takes up these issues by examining Stephen Law's novel *Tailings of Warren Peace* as a political intervention. The chapter examines the actual and possible political effects of works of creative writing through close readings and through a look at this book's production and circulation. The second chapter, "Criticism as Activism," looks at instances of neoliberal era Canadian literary criticism that function as counter-hegemonic intellectual activism. I approach this issue by discussing the methods of interpretation that Canadian literary critics have used to make criticism politically effective and by examining the ways that critics have sought to bring their work to a broader public than academic publications typically reach. Chapter 3 of this dissertation, "Teaching as Activism," considers the ways leftist English teachers connect classrooms to the larger world and takes as a case study Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy*. My findings are that literary activism in the neoliberal period

has been characterized by intellectuals articulating a systemic critique of capitalism, providing conceptual tools that activists can make use of, and stimulating the public's radical imagination.

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Introduction

Words are weapons. I say this metaphorically but the power of words in neoliberal¹ Canada was clearly expressed at a press conference Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair held following the 2010 Toronto G20 Summit during which the biggest mass arrest in the country's history took place. At the press conference Blair displayed evidence designed to justify police conduct and alongside a crossbow and chainsaw, which at any rate belonged to a woodsman rather than a would-be terrorist, was a copy of *Upping the Anti: A Journal of Theory and Action*² that was apparently seized from an arrestee's home (Kraus). Words demand to be taken seriously if some of them can be as threatening as crossbows and chainsaws to the heads of international capital, the leaders of the world's most powerful states, and their local stewards on the police force. That is not to say that all words in all settings have this power but the fundamental problematic with which this dissertation is concerned is when and how they do.

Many politically active intellectuals in contemporary Canada are aware that language usage has political efficacy. Rinaldo Walcott, for example, writes that, "our task as scholars, artists, activists, and cultural workers more broadly is to think this moment in a fashion that requires more action and less sentiment" ("Afterword" 229). What is at stake in this dissertation is whether writers, critics, and teachers will have further insight into the ways that, following Walcott, language is not only affective but also effective in its opposition to neoliberalism. Such analyses are necessary because, as Larisa Lai argues, "If our imaginations do not work, then neoliberal ideology does not have to dictate what we do; rather it infects us like a virus and we speak the old, oppressive story as though we believe it and it alone, without recognizing that it lies at the root of our privations. It is not censorship; it is a much more insidious and subtle form of social control" ("The Imagination's Subsidies" 18). This dissertation focuses on intellectuals

in neoliberal Canada whose work can be described as thinking the neoliberal moment in the manner Walcott advocates and as resisting what Lai warns against. Specifically, the present study examines opposition to neoliberal globalization in the contemporary Canadian cultural-political milieu by examining those thinkers and activists who take up the task that PJ Lilley describes in her introduction to *A Creative Passion* as the “directing of anger into creativity, rather than inward disappointed bitter nihilism” (ix-xx). I do that by looking at those who attempt to counter the ways that, according to Imre Szeman, the ideology of neoliberal globalization “carries out what has to be seen as its major function: to transform contingent social relations into immutable facts of history” (“Globalization” 72). This dissertation does so by locating literary activism in the spheres of literary authorship, production and reception, and by considering how writers, critics, and teachers have sought to foster opposition to transnational neoliberalism. I provide some background for this practice in Chapter 1, which opens with a brief survey of a few historical cases of literary activism that takes place within the Canadian borders. Specifically, I consider the work of E. Pauline Johnson, Dorothy Livesay, the Popular Theatre Movement of the 1980s, and Joy Kogawa’s novel *Obasan*.

Throughout this dissertation my analysis is concerned with leftist³ activism, especially though not exclusively that which has a radical bent. The study is particularly interested in the political and economic conditions influencing the actual and potential uses of literary texts by authors, scholars, and teachers. Accordingly, it looks not only at texts but also at the state policies that shape literary production and reception and that these attempt to resist. As Naava Smolash and Myka Tucker-Abramson point out, “the production of emancipatory texts requires a commitment to institutional and social transformation, and it is this impulse that we should push

for as we work toward and honour these possibilities and potential legacies of Canadian literature” (191).

Defining Neoliberal Globalization

It is necessary to clarify from the outset what “neoliberal globalization” means. I will do so by situating my use of the term in the context of how it has been used by other scholars studying neoliberalism and its opponents. According to Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch, neoliberalism is a social formation that began in response to the economic crises of the early 1970s (4). The system is characterized by, to a greater degree than in previous periods of capitalism, states supporting private capital through such practices as privatization, de-unionization, financialization, internationalization, and cuts to taxes and social spending.

The shifts that have occurred in the neoliberal period have been constituted through active state intervention. The neoliberal state, Peter Mayo writes, “provides the infrastructure for the mobility of capital” (60). It “organizes, regulates, ‘educates’ (the ethical state), creates and sustains markets, provides surveillance” and “provides a policing force for those who can easily be regarded as victims of neoliberal policies” (Mayo 61). In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey demonstrates that neoliberal states “typically facilitate the diffusion of influence through de-regulation, but then they also all too often guarantee the integrity and solvency of financial institutions at no matter what cost” (73) such as when, for example, the U.S savings and loan crisis of 1987-88 cost American taxpayers \$150 billion (Harvey, *Brief History* 73). A more recent example of state support for the financial sector was when the U.S government “lent, spent or guaranteed as much as \$12.8 trillion” in public funds to stabilize the economy after the 2008 financial meltdown (“The True Cost”). In global transactions, Harvey shows, states intervene on behalf of specific businesses such as weapons manufacturers and offer credit to gain

political access in sensitive regions such as the Middle East (*Brief History* 71). In these ways, the state is itself a part of industry that helps “to ensure the right conditions, including the cultural conditions, for the accumulation of capital. All this goes to show that the state, the nation state, is an active player and has not receded into the background within the context of hegemonic globalization. On the contrary, in its repressive, ideological and commercial forms, the state remains central” (Mayo 67).

Gindin and Panitch write that, in the neoliberal period, states remain “the primary vehicles through which (a) the social relations and institutions of class, property, currency, contract and markets were established and reproduced; and (b) the international accumulation of capital was carried out....[F]ar from capital escaping the state, it expanded its dependence on *many states*” (emphasis in original) (17). International trade agreements are an important mechanism through which states support capital. Though such agreements are typically called free trade deals, in practice these limit democracy and enable states in the Global North to support capital in the global arena. For instance, under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)’s investor state clause, a corporation can sue a government for lost potential profits when that corporation wishes to pursue activities that violate the government’s regulations of issues pertaining to health or the environment: the Canadian government was sued by the US-based Ethyl, which makes an automotive fuel additive and is linked to ill-health and pollution, and the Canadian public had to pay the company \$20 million (Fischlin and Nandorfy 45-47). When barriers to trade are reduced and monopolistic or oligopolistic conditions remain, powerful states can exert power over less powerful ones: for example, David Harvey documents that “Taiwan and Singapore were forced to sign on to the WTO, and thereby open their financial markets to speculative capital, in the face of US threats to deny them access to the US market”

(“The New Imperialism” 70-71). In these ways, neoliberal globalization means “extracting surpluses from impoverished Third World populations in order to pay off the bankers” (Harvey, *Brief History* 74). Because of these myriad points of overlap between the state and capital, I will frequently use the term “state capitalism.” This formulation points toward how, as I have just suggested, the free market is not free. The phrase highlights that the evidence above shows how, despite claims by neoliberal ideologues about capitalism rewarding the brightest and hardest working, neoliberalism is more accurately understood as a form of state support for the wealthiest classes.

Reductions in provisions for social welfare are central features of neoliberalism. For example, Genevieve LeBaron points out that the government of the Conservative Ontario premier Mike Harris, which was elected in 1995, reduced “welfare benefits for all recipients except the aged and the disabled by 21.6 percent” (899). The federal government transformed Unemployment Insurance (UI) into Employment Insurance (EI), so that “while 88 percent of unemployed workers received insurance-based benefits through UI in 1990, this fell to 43 percent in 1997” (LeBaron 899). LeBaron shows that this change, combined with the Harris government’s policies, meant that “In Ontario, less than 30 per cent of unemployed people received EI in 1997” (899). These cuts constitute a process of primitive accumulation in which wealth that was previously held in common is privatized.

They also demonstrate that neoliberalism has a built-in gender bias. Women, particularly women of colour, are disproportionately harmed by decreases in spending on welfare programs. In 2007, 90 percent of Canadians earning less than \$15,000 per year were women as were two-thirds of those making less than \$25,000 annually (LeBaron 900). These statistics illustrate what Isabella Bakker describes as

the increasingly privatised forms of social provisioning and risk that characterise the neoliberal moment in the global political economy. In other words, the everyday activities of maintaining life and reproducing the next generation are increasingly being realised through the unpaid and paid resources of (largely) women as states withdraw from public provisioning, with the result that capitalist market relations increasingly infiltrate social reproduction. (541)

In Canada, the neoliberal era has seen an increase in the privatization of unpaid labour, which is typically done by women. This has happened through such policy shifts as the elimination in 1996 of federal money for child care, which led to most provinces ending or reducing the money they provided to child care programs (LeBaron 900). Moreover, as Bakker argues, these cuts in wealthier states in the Global North lead to a reliance on the exploitation of women from the Global South as “the gaps in social provisioning resulting from neoliberal rationalization have increased demands on transnational flows of domestic and service workers who are largely women” (551).

That is one of the ways in which neoliberalism involves racial inequality despite its rhetoric of equality. As Jodi Melamed writes:

neoliberal multiculturalism breaks with an older racism’s reliance on phenotype to innovate new ways of fixing human capacities to naturalize inequality. The new racism deploys economic, ideological, cultural, and religious distinctions to produce lesser personhoods, laying these new categories of privilege and stigma across conventional racial categories, fracturing them into differential status groups. (14)

Neoliberal ideology has, in terms distinct from those of earlier periods of capitalism, been characterized by devaluing racialized persons so as to justify their exploitation. In the Canadian context, writes Todd Gordon, the state

has sought to more deeply entrench market relations into peoples' lives and drive down the costs of labor as part of neoliberal restructuring at a time when the birth rate is too low to properly replenish the labor needs of Canadian capital. To accomplish this end, it draws on Third World migrant labor, resorting to more coercive policies that increase immigrants' vulnerability and susceptibility to exploitative relations, such as restrictions on full citizenship status, law-and-order policing, and, more recently, the "war on terror," which has put entire communities under state scrutiny. (Gordon 67-8)

While neoliberal globalization has involved increasing the degree to which capital and people traverse borders, poor people of colour do so under restricted conditions wherein they are criminalized and made subservient to the desires of capital.

Neoliberal policies such as cuts to welfare programs have had socio-cultural effects. These include an erosion of solidarity and an intense individualism. As Jeremy Gilbert writes, The belief that the irreducible individual is the basic unit of human experience . . . and that private experience and private property must therefore be accorded a privileged status in both the cultural and legal spheres, has been the central strand of bourgeois thought at least since the 17th century. It is an idea which, today, neoliberal policies go out of their way to enforce on every social scene—for example obliging public service users and providers to treat their relationship as a retail transaction.

LeBaron argues that such processes channel "individuals and relationships into forms that are more compatible with capital accumulation, reconstituting social life and relations in

fundamental ways” (899). Jeff Derksen examines the ways that this has happened in part through a text-based, ideological infrastructure in his “National Literatures in the Shadow of Neoliberalism.” He describes neoliberalism as a system wherein “subjects are asked to reimagine themselves along the matrix of neoliberal values and common sense: property rights trump human rights . . . ; forms of collectivity are repressive . . . ; and in general one must live one’s life through negotiating the market” (“National Literatures” 53). Yet neoliberal subject formation is not omnipotent. In this dissertation I look at the ways in which literary activists challenge, and attempt to build alternatives to, the forms of common sense Derksen describes. In this sense, literary activism can be a counterpoint to the mass media, which is a primary site through which such neoliberal ideology is disseminated. According to Robert McChesney, the transfers of wealth from the public to private capital that happen under neoliberalism occur with ineffective opposition in part because in mass media “Consumerism, class inequality and so-called ‘individualism’ tend to be taken as natural and even benevolent, whereas political activity, civic values, and antimarket activities are marginalized” (14). All of these features of neoliberal society, however, have been contested. The focus of this study is on the forms that opposition has taken in cultural production.

Literary Activism

My dissertation examines the ways that leftists work in and with Canadian literary culture to resist the features of neoliberalism that I have just described. These endeavours are part of what I broadly define as literary activism: the use of creative writing by its authors and critics and those who teach it to think through, oppose, imagine alternatives to, and build resistance to hegemonic power. This understanding is situated alongside the work of several scholars of Canadian literature and culture. For example, Derksen writes that while neoliberalism involves

primitive accumulation, “new cultural strategies counter this process in ways that can angle both toward explanation and toward an understanding of how social relations are determined. These strategies would collide with how neoliberalism has narrowed the imagination of the social by narrowing the definition and possibility of culture” (“Ends of Culture” 69). It is with such methods of resistance by writers, critics, and teachers that my dissertation is concerned. I locate my approach to these subjects in an examination of what William D. Coleman, Imre Szeman, and Petra Rethmann describe as social and cultural outlooks that “orient actors towards building horizontal ties and connections among diverse autonomous elements, the free and open circulation of information, collaboration through decentralized coordination and consensus decision making, and self-directed networking. These networks create broad umbrella spaces in which diverse collectivities . . . converge” (6). I employ the concept of literary activism to refer to those activities that, in Walcott’s formulation, work “against the terms upon which the neo-liberal project legitimizes itself as a project that seeks to remake the human as a function of capitalist production” (“Against Institution” 21) and that see “literature’s worldliness” as a “way that we might move towards remaking the human as a project of struggle that continues to refuse the dogmas of capital’s advocates, which turn us all into units for commodity production and consumption” (“Against Institution” 21).

Furthermore, my discussion of the real and potential activist capacities of literature follows Kit Dobson and Áine McGlynn’s argument that

the radical potential of the art object to disrupt the norm is demonstrated in the neoliberal right’s frequent protests against individual artists and their controversial works (which are often carried out, at least in Canada, in order to really attack the agencies that fund the arts in this country). To abandon art would be to abandon the possibility that the

exchange of art – be it commercial, personal, intimate, global, micro, or macro – will enable the growth of communal restlessness and productive energy. (emphasis in original) (14)

Evidence of literary culture's oppositional potential can be found in the hostility to its manifestations that occasionally emerge. The 1994 Writing Thru Race conference⁴ is a case in point in that public funding for this gathering of writers of colour and aboriginal writers was withdrawn and the conference met with rage from the mainstream media and right wing parliamentarians and comparatively polite disapproval from liberals whose universalism was being challenged (Lai, "Community Action"). Moreover, I situate my understanding of the subversive possibilities of literary culture alongside Lai's analysis of the Harper government's 2007 cuts to such programs. She reads those reductions, "particularly those aspects which allow it to be communicated to large or international audiences," as "directed at reshaping our imaginations for us, by steering us away from the capacity to make challenging art work, of course, but, more pointedly, by limiting our opportunities to see or hear it . . . and, therefore, to have a consciousness about the world that is larger than the story about hard work, God, and the economy" ("Imagination's Subsidies" 18). Literary culture creates metaphoric and physical spaces in which counter-hegemonic perspectives can be explored, the social ties necessary for resistance can be fostered and, as Lai suggests, one way to understand cuts to arts programs is as hostility to such activities on the part of state capital.

Chapter 1, "Writing as Activism," takes up these issues by examining Stephen Law's novel *Tailings of Warren Peace* as a political intervention. The chapter examines the actual and possible political effects of works of creative writing through close readings and through a look at textual production and reception. Law's novel is about the damage that mining does to

communities in Canada and Guatemala. The protagonist, Warren, traces his familial tragedy to the mining company in the Nova Scotia town where he is from. He and Meena, whom he is dating, meet a Mayan woman from Guatemala named Celina. Her sister, Lalita, died after drinking water that had been contaminated by Magma, a mining company headquartered in Toronto. Warren and Meena join Celina's activist group and undertake a variety of resistance activities aimed at holding Magma accountable for Lalita's death and at preventing the company from doing further harm. The book addresses other aspects of neoliberal globalization as well through, for example, a character named Petra who is living in Canada without legal status and who consequently is being sexually exploited. One reason this book is worth studying is that, as I demonstrate, the activities of Canadian mining companies in the Global South are a central aspect of the country's political economy during the neoliberal era. No other Canadian book of fiction deals with this subject. I show that Law's book received limited attention in the media and has not been the subject of any scholarly analysis and that most of the other literary works critical of neoliberalism that I discuss in this study were covered more extensively than Law's in the popular and academic presses. These are among the central reasons I have chosen to focus the first chapter of my dissertation on *Tailings of Warren Peace*.

This chapter looks at how the novel offers a systemic critique of globalized capitalism, which is among the book's activist functions. One way it does so is by highlighting the ways that capitalism intersects with other forms of oppression such as patriarchy, racism, and colonialism. In doing so the novel suggests that, though its focus is on one industry and one company, exploitation and oppression are not simply the result of a few particularly greedy persons or businesses but of the entire socio-economic system itself. Another discursive intervention the book makes is to represent resistance as a comprehensible, defensible activity in a way that

legitimizes such acts. Furthermore, the novel offers reflections on organizing for social justice that can be useful for people who do that work.

I also discuss the production of *Tailings of Warren Peace*. The book is published by Roseway, an imprint of Fernwood, both of whom have explicit commitments to helping build a more just world by producing books that are useful to people organizing to fight for equality. Moreover, I show that the novel is part of a larger network of support by and for people committed to building a more just world by resisting neoliberal globalization in Central America. I demonstrate that Law's novel is shaped in significant ways by his being embedded in a network of activist organizations. On this basis, I argue that the book can be thought of as being collectively authored by Canada's Latin American solidarity movement. This chapter, therefore, illustrates that the book is both a product of activism and itself an activist intervention.

Chapter 2, "Criticism as Activism," looks at instances of neoliberal era Canadian literary criticism that function as activism. In this section I answer questions such as the following: which interpretative practices most clearly facilitate a connection between reading and activism? How have critics attempted to use literary works as impetuses to non-textual forms of political action? How does the materiality of circulation, publication, and readership shape the capacity of literary critics to reach a broad public? I approach these questions by discussing the methods of interpretation that Canadian literary critics have used to make criticism politically effective. These include writing criticism that informs readers about the particular details of political issues misrepresented in mainstream news media; familiarizes readers with the logic of resistance; considers whether a given literary text is in any sense useful to social movements; massages the radical imagination by examining the utopian elements of works of creative writing; reads texts within the broader context of the entire capitalist system so as to generate critique of that social

arrangement as a whole; cites commentary by activists who are not professional intellectuals so as to help enable these perspectives to attain the social status of knowledge.

The chapter also examines literary criticism written in fora that reach a broader public than academic publications. This involves looking at literary analysis in periodicals that take the furthering of social justice movements as explicit mandates. These outlets include *Briarpatch* and *rabble.ca*. In my reading of the discussions about literature and neoliberalism that appears in such periodicals, I discuss the critical activism being done by people who are not professional literary scholars such as Mercedes Eng and Jenny Turner. Similarly, I discuss community-based projects that involve broad publics in literary criticism with a view toward fostering communal ties such as the transatlantic project *Beyond the Book*. This chapter, furthermore, looks at intellectuals who have presented literary criticism engaging with neoliberalism in venues readily accessible to non-specialists such as newspapers, social media, and public talks. I take as a case study Rinaldo Walcott and consider, among other aspects of the work he has done, his contributions to outlets ranging from the *National Post* to *This Magazine*, and the CBC to *Canadian Dimension*.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation is “Teaching as Activism.” In this section I ask: what are the strategies that critical teachers suggest for encouraging students to think critically about neoliberalism and to take political action? To answer these questions, I read a wide range of critical pedagogues and pay particular attention to the work of Patricia Bizzell, Henry Giroux, Ajay Heble, bell hooks, and Masood Ashraf Raja. My responses involve a discussion of three ways leftist teachers connect classrooms to the larger world. These include what I call activation, the development of a language of struggle, and the awakening of the radical imagination. This chapter, furthermore, talks about the uses that writings on critical pedagogy have for the teaching

of literary works. As a case study in the application of a creative text to fostering leftist opposition to neoliberalism, I look at Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy*. I focus on the aspects of the book that deal with the insidious effects of tourism in Sri Lanka and with refugees. My argument is that classroom discussions about the local effects of tourism can activate in students an awareness of the ways that people in the Global North with relative privilege are implicated in some of the more pernicious features of the lives of people in the Global South. Moreover, this chapter examines the sections of *Funny Boy* concerned with a Sri Lankan Tamil family securing refugee status in Canada in light of two non-fictional episodes, one in 2009 and another in 2010, in which a total of 575 Tamils fleeing violence in Sri Lanka arrived in British Columbia by boat and were treated hostilely by Canada's media and federal government. I explore how these events problematize the conclusion to Selvadurai's book in ways critical pedagogues can utilize to open up classroom dialogue about such matters as the obligations that, in a period of unprecedented global linkages, people in Canada have to those affected by wars that happen in faraway places.

Furthermore, I consider the concrete situations that post-secondary literature teachers face in the classroom by asking: how have critical pedagogues reconciled the aim of fostering opposition to neoliberalism with the need to encourage students to think independently? When, for example, should post-secondary English teachers express in class their opinions on specific political issues? How might professorial authority be productively deployed without stifling classroom democracy? I examine various views on these questions and then trace out the argument that it is sometimes necessary for a critical pedagogue to articulate clear political beliefs in class and that at any rate it is mistaken to imagine that teaching literary texts in a value-free manner is possible. Next I explore some strategies for how teachers can articulate

unambiguous political views without being coercive in the process. This involves a consideration of strategies for realizing the productive capacity of moments of ignorance. Finally, the chapter closes by examining material challenges that critical pedagogy faces in the neoliberal context such as high tuition fees and large class sizes.

Although this dissertation focuses on the roles that literary works play in opposing neoliberalism, it does so without suggesting that literature is autonomous from the rest of society. In the neoliberal era, artistic work has taken place under conditions where “the importance of the economic frame of cultural flows is intensified in many new ways through the rampant commodification of cultural products under contemporary global capitalism” (Coleman, Rethmann, Szeman 14). As Szeman argues, in hegemonic discourse about globalization, culture is reduced to “a commodity that contributes to economic vitality (as in Richard Florida’s ‘creative class’) or as a form whose main purpose is to ameliorate social problems through state cultural programs and national cultural policy” (79). My understanding of the relationship between cultural work and the rest of neoliberal society is situated alongside Derksen’s view that “determinations on the production end of culture, the ends towards which culture is deployed, have to be looked at as both restrictions and possibilities of what artists, writers, and cultural groups can do” (“Ends of Culture” 62). I position myself in line with the argument by Szeman that “The writer or artists as vanguardist of the good and true is definitively over. But to this we can only say: good riddance. We must welcome instead a politics and poetics that proceeds uncertainly, through half-measures and missteps, through intention and accident” (82). My view, therefore, is in accord with Dobson and McGlynn’s argument that “Cultural work takes place and agitates towards social change, but it is also, absolutely, part of the structures it contests”

(17) and that, instead of writing off such production as simply contradictory, a dynamic analysis can come from seeing it as a source of “productive tension” (17).

Chapter 1: Writing as Activism

This chapter examines how literary writing in neoliberal Canada can be a form of activism because of what happens both on the page and in the production of texts. My aim is to contribute to discussions about how contemporary Canadian literary texts have made political interventions designed to combat inequality and exploitation. Canadian literary activism has a long, multi-dimensional history. Entire books have been written examining particular shapes this has taken. For instance, Alan Filewod's *Committing Theatre* exclusively focuses on political intervention theatre and *Tracing the Lines* is entirely devoted to Roy Miki's literary activism. Thus, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive account of the history of Canadian literary activism within a dissertation that explores in detail examples of this phenomenon in the neoliberal era. Yet it is important to ground my discussion in a larger historical context so I will provide a brief overview of a few cases of Canadian literary activism from earlier periods. The examples I discuss have been selected to convey a sense of the diversity of the forms of Canadian literary activism, its effects, and the identities of its producers.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Mohawk writer and actor E. Pauline Johnson protested the treatment of Aboriginal people in her poems and performances. Though Johnson declared loyalty to the Crown (Gerson 51), her career was also characterized by resistance to colonialism. This is true in her creative and critical writing. For example, the dramatic monologue "A Cry from an Indian Wife" was published in the *Week*, an influential Toronto magazine, on 18 June 1885, as the Northwest Rebellion was taking place (Gerson 51). In this text, Carole Gerson argues, Johnson "establishes the validity of the Native claim to the land while also sympathizing with the wives and mothers of the young soldiers sent from eastern Canada to repress the rebels" (51-2). Johnson writes: "I am strong to bid you go to war./ Yet

stay, my heart is not the only one/ That grieves the loss of husband and of son” (Johnson, *E. Pauline Johnson* 14-15). In 1892, Johnson wrote articles critiquing the ways that white authors depicted indigenous women: for instance, she criticized Charles Mair and Helen Hunt Jackson for portraying Aboriginal women as subservient and unintelligent (Brant 176). Similarly, in the 1894 poem “The Cattle Thief,” Johnson mocks the colonizers. The poem is about the daughter of a murdered Cree chief who was seeking food for starving Cree people and in it Johnson “directly berates British settlers (and, by extension, Johnson’s live audience) for robbing him of land and food” (Gerson 52) when she asks, how the colonizers have “paid us for our land?/ By a *book*, to save our souls from the sins *you* brought in your other/ hand./ Go back with your new religion, we never have understood/ Your robbing an Indian’s *body*, and mocking his *soul*” (emphases in original) (*E. Pauline Johnson*).

Another example of Johnson’s writing that resisted colonialism is “The Duke of Connaught as Chief of the Iroquois,” her 1910 reconstruction of an 1869 tour of Canada by Prince Arthur, Queen Victoria’s youngest son. The context for Johnson’s piece is that in 1910, Arthur was appointed Governor-General of Canada. Johnson’s account was published in Vancouver’s *Daily Province Magazine* and can be understood as a re-writing of the story that *The Times* told about the Prince’s tour in 1869 (Stafford and Williams 88). Whereas *The Times*’ article calls the Mohawks “squaws” and refers to stereotypical images of them wearing bones as nose-rings, neither trope is present in Johnson’s account (Stafford and Williams 92). Furthermore, Johnson presents the Chief and the Prince as equivalent in status (Stafford and Williams 91), which can be understood as an assertion that the Mohawks’ society is equal to Britain’s. Jane Stafford and Mark Williams argue that the same effect is achieved when, in Johnson’s piece, Aboriginal titles “are explicitly ranked alongside and are comparable to the rank

and titles of the new Governor-General” (92). Johnson, furthermore, corrects *The Times*’ description of Prince Arthur’s “woollen beaded scarf” by describing it as “a brilliant deep red sash, heavily embroidered with beads, porcupine quills, and dyed moose hair” (Johnson, “The Duke”), which was both a badge of office and a gift (Stafford and Williams 101). In doing so, she both demonstrates the ignorance of the colonizers and symbolically re-claims from them the right to textually represent Aboriginals.

Johnson also resisted colonialism in her approach to publishing. According to Sabine Milz, Johnson “encountered the financial, material obstacles of print publication, which were European-made obstacles she circumvented by reverting to alternative methods of publication” (Milz, “Pulica(c)tion” 139). Milz uses the term “publica(c)tion” to underscore Johnson’s efforts to make “her work ‘public’ through the use of performative and print media, oral and written communication, Aboriginal and European methods. This approach emphasizes that orality and performance served Johnson not only as vehicles of Aboriginal cultural expression but especially as methods for profitably publishing her writing” (Milz, “Pulica(c)tion” 128). In this way, Johnson’s publication methods are similar to those of the contemporary press Theytus Books, which is among the few Aboriginal-owned publishers. Theytus, Milz explains, “does not discount the conventions and routines of European print publishing *per se* but uses them where applicable in the Aboriginal context, thus resituating Aboriginal stories, languages, images, texts, and publishing processes within Aboriginal control” (emphasis in original) (“Pulica(c)tion” 139). Johnson’s approach to publishing is therefore a form of activism in that it developed a model for how indigenous people can control their own narratives.

Johnson was paid little for her writing but she made a living by touring across Canada, the United States, and England “performing her poetry and stories in drawingrooms, theatres,

roadhouses, and church halls. Her performances paid the print publication costs of the poetry collections” (Milz, “Publica(c)tion” 130). Though white male poets of that era used similar tactics to make money, Johnson’s performances incorporated Aboriginal methods of storytelling and involved her switching from indigenous to European styles of dress (Milz, “Publica(c)tion” 130). According to Milz, Johnson’s choice of costumes involved an “eclectic assemblage of Aboriginal attire” that suggest she was “playing with Europeans’s expectations of ‘Indians’ and with her own hybrid heritage....Johnson’s appearance was, in particular, challenging popular White writers’ depictions and audiences’s expectations of Aboriginal women as subservient, lovelorn, and suicidal “squaws” addicted to White men” (“Publica(c)tion” 132). While Johnson’s performances were a form of resistance against colonial subjugation, she was also one of the few women writers to perform on stage at the time and thus “her decision to appear in a Victorian gown for the second half of her performances was as much conditioned by her containment in the gender roles and expectations of her time as it was by her ambivalent cultural-racial affiliations” (Milz, “Publica(c)tion” 133). In all of these ways, Johnson resisted colonial domination, as well as misogyny, in the material culture of which she was a part.

A consideration of Dorothy Livesay’s work will also provide some historical context for my discussion of the literary activism of the neoliberal era. In the 1930s, Livesay concretely contributed to efforts to build a revolutionary culture in Canada. She was a member of the Communist Party of Canada and the poems, stories, and agit-prop plays that she wrote in that period are, according to Larry McDonald, “self-conscious attempts to spread revolution in and through literature” (McDonald 223-24). In this period, McDonald writes, Livesay “followed her own revolutionary advice” and spent her time “working alongside the oppressed as a social worker and toiling for the party as an organizer, fund-raiser, speaker, and pamphleteer” (223).

From 1932-1944, she exclusively reached audiences by publishing in magazines, a medium she learned about as a member of the Progressive Arts Clubs of Canada (PAC) (Irvine 185-86). PACs were collectives of proletarian artists who produced culture for proletarian audiences (Irvine 204). Livesay worked with PACs in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, where she wrote poems, plays, and reviews for *Masses*, a PAC-published and edited magazine (Irvine 186) that existed for 12 issues (Irvine 204). *Masses* documented the “aims and activities” of art being made by groups such as The Worker’s Theatre movement (McDonald 232) as part of *Masses*’ editors’ efforts “to introduce international proletarian culture—writers, workers’ press, visual artists, theatre groups—to left-wing Canadian workers, writers, and intellectuals in order to develop the nascent proletarian cultural movement in Canada” while seeking to “discover and promote working-class voices” so as “to allow the historically repressed access to means of literary expression and production” (Irvine 187-88). Livesay’s work with *Masses* was her way of moving “beyond sympathy to activism” and “pledg[ing] herself to the proletarian cause” (Irvine 189). As Dean J. Irvine argues, in the period of 1932-1944, “the most significant consequence of Livesay’s leftism was the shift in her priorities away from the personal pursuits of writing poetry and toward the public roles of social, political, and cultural action” (199).

In addition, Livesay’s poetry was characterized by an engagement with feminism though the nature of this aspect of her career is contested (Gingell; Irvine). According to Susan Gingell, Livesay saw the replacement of capitalism with socialism as key to the abolition of patriarchy and was critical of “*middle-class*, suffragist, feminism and individualism in her *Masses* editorials” (emphasis in original) (Gingell 3). Gingell describes Livesay’s project as an attempt to try to “clear and claim more positive semantic space for women through feminist counterdiscourse and discursive reconstruction” (6). For example, in “The Unquiet Bed,”

Livesay writes about “the chains/that parents make” (*Collected* 292) which can be understood as a reference to the concepts of gender that parents teach children (Gingell 6). Similarly, the lines “the woman I am/is not what you see” (Livesay, *Collected* 292) signify a woman asserting the power and the right to constitute her own subjectivity. The speaker’s insistence at the end of the poem that the man she is in bed with “move over” and “make room for me” (Livesay, *Collected* 292) is, Gingell argues, a “firm demand” that resists “the dominant discourse’s embedded means that habitually assign women to negative semantic space” (7-8). Livesay’s speaker actively claims physical and linguistic space and in this sense offers readers a model for and method of thinking about feminist resistance to patriarchy. Gingell argues that later in Livesay’s life, she “pushed even further to expand the semantic space for women by living out and articulating a lesbian subjectivity” (Gingell 19). “Towards a Love Poem,” for instance, is about the love of a young woman and an older woman that is notable for “its celebration of difference, its embracing of otherness and multiplicity in the beloved” (Gingell 19). The 19th line of the poem contains a large void between the words “I can rejoice” and “in your differences”(Livesay, *Feeling* 34). Gingell contends that this gap “reinforces the extension of the semantic space for representing woman-to-woman relations” and that the opening “provides ample accommodation for different modes of interaction” (19). In these ways, over the course of Dorothy Livesay’s career, she made material contributions to the cultural dimension of the broader communist movement as well as discursive contributions to feminist struggles.

An examination of the popular theatre movement of the 1980s will help provide further historical context for the literary resistance to neoliberalism on which this dissertation is centred. Alan Filewod writes that this movement “was an attempt to formalize and share theatrical methods of engagement with community activism and to create a radical space in the theatre

profession for the increasingly diverse cultural practices entailed in this work” (239). In part because Canadian freelance theatre work is characterized by precarity and poor compensation, leftism and activism are common in this milieu (Filewod 240). The popular theatre movement was particularly interested in using theatre as a means of participatory education and one of the most influential people in the movement was Ross Kidd, who has been part of such educational campaigns in Botswana (Filewod 240). Filewod documents that in 1981, as part of the Bread and Circuses festival of left-leaning theatre, Kidd organized a week-long workshop of twelve Canadians and popular theatre workers from 7 African and Caribbean countries and the workshop “was the key moment in that it marked the convergence of professional theatre workers and popular theatre educators” though notably the participants were mostly male and exclusively white (Filewod 243-46). The members of the workshop proposed that a national Canadian Popular Theatre Alliance (CPTA) be established and the proposal was accepted during the Bread and Circuses Festival’s plenary (Filewod 246). The CPTA evolved to include a “broader network of community-based groups and individuals, many of whom were not theatre professionals but popular theatre facilitators and development educators” (Filewod 248). According to Filewod’s history, the popular theatre movement would include activist theatre such as *Red Tape*, *Running Shoes*, and *Razzamataz*, a play about public housing produced in collaboration with Ottawa’s Tenants’ Council (Filewod 249); *Are We There Yet?*, an interactive performance that facilitates dialogue among teenagers about sexual health and choices, which enables educators and social workers to deliver information excluded from the curriculum (Filewod 257-58); the 1987 production *Straight Stitching* portrays women from a wide-range of ethno-linguistic groups uniting and unionizing and, in the process, the play itself created professional acting work for women of colour (Filewod 258); Quebec’s Theatre Parminou,

which was founded in 1973 and was an active participant in the CPTA, has been a cooperative governed by participatory democracy, and unlike most Canadian theatre groups provides its core members with job security, a pension plan, and access to child care (Filewod 270); productions at Mayworks festivals of working-class culture that are a “meeting point of activist theatre workers and the educational programs of district labour councils and large unions” where relationships have developed that are mutually beneficial to unions and to those who work in theatre (Filewod 258)⁵. The end of the 1980s saw the CPTA end due to lack of funding and cohesion though Filewod argues that “this was not the end of a movement but a withering away of the need for an organizational structure” (251). Throughout the period in which the popular theatre movement flourished, it was characterized by a confluence of social justice activists working with and in theatre to make concrete political changes both in that arena and beyond.

The last instance of Canadian literary activism that I want to explore is Joy Kogawa’s novel *Obasan*, an intergenerational story about the internment and dispossession of, and stripping of citizenship from, Japanese-Canadians during World War Two. The novel, Julie McGonegal argues, explores “the possibility of reconciliation and forgiveness” but “nevertheless insist[s] on the importance of conditions: for instance, repentance and restitution” (58-62) when, for example, the narrator reflects on the futility of crying for her late uncle whose property was seized by the Canadian state given that “Uncle does not rise up and return to his boats” (Kogawa 238). Naomi, the narrator, also remarks that “outside, even in the backyard, there is an infinitely unpredictable, and often dangerous world” (69). This comment suggests that the trauma Japanese-Canadians endured has effects across generations. Moreover, the novel portrays racism as an ongoing problem rather than an issue that has been overcome. Naomi’s white neighbour,

Mr. Barker, says, ““It was a terrible business what we did to our Japanese”” (270) which prompts the following reflection from Naomi:

Ah, here we go again. ‘Our Indians.’ ‘Our Japanese.’ ‘A terrible business.’ It’s like being offered a pair of crutches while I’m striding down the street. The comments are so incessant and always so well-intentioned. “How long have you been in this country? Do you like our country? You speak such good English. Do you run a café? My daughter has a darling Japanese friend. Have you ever been back to Japan? Back? (270-1)

In this passage, Naomi’s critique of racism is multi-faceted. The crutches metaphor shows that she resents being consigned to the perpetual victimhood associated with belonging to an ethnic group that has been historically persecuted. That people have apparently asked Naomi if she has been “back” to Japan is racist in that it assumes a person of Japanese heritage must not have been born in Canada. The word “our” suggests that White Canadians conceive of Japanese-Canadians and Aboriginal people as their possessions. The point of this passage is to demonstrate that racism manifests itself not only in blatantly violent shapes such as the dispossession and internment of Japanese-Canadians but also in insidious forms such as Mr. Barker’s comments.

Kogawa herself was active in the movement calling for redress to Japanese Canadians (Davis 59) and, through its reception and circulation, *Obasan* helped that movement. According to Marlene Goldman, *Obasan* had

a profound impact on both the Canadian literary and political scene. The novel has enjoyed tremendous popularity, receiving praise from reviewers and numerous prizes, including the *Books in Canada* First Novel Award (1981), the Canadian Authors Association Book of the Year Award (1982), and the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award (1982). *Obasan* is now one of the most widely read Canadian

novels and the subject of numerous scholarly articles in Canada, the United States, Europe, and Japan. It is taught in most Canadian literature courses as well as in the social sciences. The text . . . was adopted as a quasi-historical document that defined Japanese-Canadian identity on the basis of loss and the demand for redress. As the entry in the 1998 edition of *Canadian Who's Who* notes, *Obasan* was 'instrumental in influencing the Canadian government's 1988 settlement with Japanese-Canadians for their loss of liberty and property in Canada during WWII.' (Goldman 364)

Moreover, when Prime Minister Brian Mulroney apologized to Japanese-Canadians on September 22 1988, NDP leader Ed Broadbent read aloud a passage from *Obasan* and that was the only voice that Japanese-Canadians had on that occasion. While Roy Miki is critical of the apology (*Broken Entries*) and Kamboureli argues that *Obasan* can be read as offering de-politicized responses to racism (*Scandalous Bodies*), it is nevertheless an achievement for the redress movement to have secured for each survivor of the Japanese-Canadian internment \$21,000 and for it to have secured additional funds given to the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and to the Japanese-Canadian national association. Therefore Kogawa's novel, to the extent that it helped facilitate this outcome, can be credited with leading to a material improvement in the lives of an historically aggrieved population.

The preceding section does not begin to approximate a complete account of the history of Canadian literary activism. I have, however, provided several examples of it to give a sense of its diverse forms and concerns in order to situate in a larger context the manifestations of Canadian literary activism that I focus on in this dissertation. These cases demonstrate that the Canadian literary activism of the neoliberal era is not unprecedented. Rather, it is the comparatively recent

incarnation of a practice with a long history in the literary culture taking place on the lands governed by the Canadian state.

Tailings of Warren Peace

In an effort to contribute to the history of Canadian literary activism that I have just sketched, I examine Stephen Law's novel *Tailings of Warren Peace* as a case study. The book's central focus is the suffering mining can cause for families and communities. The titular character is from a Nova Scotia mining town and he traces his experiences of loss and violence back to the work that is done there. As an adult in Toronto, Warren makes a living repossessing gravestones and he begins dating Meena, his Indo-Canadian neighbour. They meet Celina, a Mayan from Guatemala whose sister, Lalita, died after drinking water that was poisoned by Magma, a mining company headquartered in Toronto. Celina had learned through research of Warren's experiences and, aware that he prefers not to address these, she gets his and Meena's attention by posting serial installments of her family's story on the lampposts in the neighbourhood where Warren and Meena live. The novel looks at the ways that global capitalism harms other populations as well. Meena's co-worker Petra, for example, is a Russian living in Canada without legal status for whom migration has meant being sexually exploited. At the same time, Law's book is also about resistance. Warren joins a group of activists to which Celina belongs that fights the injustices caused by mining companies and is particularly focused on trying to make Magma accountable for Celina's death. In pursuit of that objective, Meena takes a job at Magma in an effort to infiltrate it from the inside while Warren and Celina go to visit the mine in Guatemala and pose as regulators to try to get information from Magma.

Because neoliberalism has profound effects at the level of everyday life (LeBaron; Gilbert; Harvey, *Brief History*), one could conceivably select for an examination of neoliberal

literature virtually any work written in or about such a society. By no means do I claim that Law's book is the only text suitable for this project but I will begin this section by outlining the reasons that I single it out for close attention. One reason is its critical reception. Discussion of the novel in the media and academic presses has been far from extensive but it has not been entirely overlooked. The book was shortlisted for the Margaret and John Savage First Book Award ("2014 Atlantic Book Award Shortlist"), which is one of the annual prizes given out by the Atlantic Book Awards Society. This organization is a non-profit whose mandate is "to promote and acknowledge excellence in Atlantic Canadian writing and book publishing through an annual awards ceremony and related events" ("About" *Atlantic Book Award*). *Tailings of Warren Peace* has been covered in several independent, leftist media outlets: it was written about in *Halifax Media Co-Op*, covered in the *Cape Breton Independent*, and Law was interviewed about the novel by *rabble.ca* in a piece that doubles as a review. It also received some mainstream media coverage. It was named one of the best books of 2013 by the *Charlottetown Guardian*, was the subject of a write-up in Halifax's *Chronicle Herald*, and reviewed in *Atlantic Books Today*, Saint John's *Telegraph-Journal*, and *Winnipeg Free Press*. Thus the book is hardly obscure but it would also be inaccurate to say that writing about it has been exhaustive. The reviews in the *Charlottetown Guardian* and *Telegraph-Journal* are behind paywalls, which restricts the number of readers who have access to the reviews. That these papers, as well as the *Chronicle Herald* and *Atlantic Books Today*, are Atlantic Canadian indicates that coverage of Law's book was concentrated in that region of the country and in leftist outlets.

By contrast, the other literary works critical of neoliberalism that I discuss in this dissertation, as well as their authors, have received considerably more attention in national

newspapers and outlets that are located in Canada's most populous urban centres. Nadia Bozak's novel *El Niño* was reviewed in *The Globe and Mail* (Wiersema), the *National Post* (Hobbs) and the *Ottawa Citizen* (Gesell "Rev"). Dionne Brand's *Inventory* was reviewed in *The Globe and Mail* (Walker), named one of the paper's top books of 2006 ("The Globe 100") and the paper also ran an excerpt of the collection (Brand, "Inventory Section II"). Her book *Thirsty* was reviewed in *The Globe and Mail* (Crosbie), in the *National Post* by Noah Richler, and in the *Toronto Star* (Carey). *Thirsty* was also selected as one of the *Globe and Mail*'s top books of the year (Crosbie, "The Globe 100"). When Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy* was released, he was interviewed in Montreal's *The Gazette* (Yanofsky), the *Ottawa Citizen* (Gesell, "The Genius of Teamwork"), the *Toronto Star* (Mietkiewicz), and *The Vancouver Sun* (Andrews). In addition, the novel was reviewed in the *Calgary Herald* (Fertile), *The Gazette* (Foran), *The Globe and Mail*, *The Ottawa Citizen* (Levenson), and the *Toronto Star* (Marchand). This is only a fraction of the press *Funny Boy* received. Therefore, one reason this chapter focuses on Law's novel is that, unlike these other works critical of neoliberalism, it has been under-analyzed outside of Atlantic Canada and leftist media.

Yet it is not only the volume of discussions about Law's novel that leads me to choose to focus this chapter on *Tailings of Warren Peace*. The discussions of Law's book in both mainstream and alternative media consider a narrow range of aspects of the novel. The accounts of it in *Atlantic Books Today*, *Cape Breton Independent*, *Charlottetown Guardian*, *Chronicle Herald*, *Halifax Media Co-Op*, *rabble.ca*, *Telegraph-Journal*, and *Winnipeg Free Press* all primarily consist of plot summary, blanket statements about the book's quality, and descriptions of how the reviewers or interviewers felt while reading the novel. Therefore, I have chosen to do an extensive analysis of Law's book to address features of it that have thus far been overlooked.

For example, none of the media reviews of the book or interviews with Law about it address the many points of intersection between the novel's production and the activist group in which the author is involved, an issue that I discuss at length below. While all of the media pieces that I have mentioned note that *Tailings of Warren Peace* is a critique of Canadian mining companies, all but one overlook how the book offers a critique of neoliberal capitalism as a whole as well as of inter-linked systems of inequality such as colonialism, racism, and patriarchy. *Cape Breton Independent* is the one exception though its reference to the subject of global capitalism is cursory. I examine these issues at length in this chapter.

Moreover, no analysis of Law's novel appears in the scholarly literature. By contrast, multiple academic studies have been written that focus on *Inventory* (Almeida; Barrett; Brydon, "Dionne Brand's"; Fabre; Motuz), *Thirsty* (Almeida; Fabre; Garvey; Härting; Mason) and *Funny Boy* (Bell; Jayawickrama; Jazeel; Rao; Salgado). The dearth of attention literary scholars have given Law's book calls for a corrective because it has much to offer as an object of study for critics with an interest in recent examples of Canadian literature that can be read as critiques of neoliberalism.

One reason I say this is that I have not found any other book of fiction that foregrounds the activities of Canadian mining companies in the Global South during the neoliberal period. Yet mining has been an extremely important part of Canadian economic policy during this era both within Canada's borders and internationally. Canada has "the largest concentration of mining companies in the world operating within it, with interests in over 3,700 properties" and Canadian companies now "hold the largest share of the global exploration market" (Gordon, "Canada, Empire and Indigenous People" 58). The operations of Canadian mining firms in Latin America have been particularly important. They have pushed to make the region more investor-

friendly by criticizing, for example, environmental laws in Latin American states (Gordon, “Canada, Empire and Indigenous People” 66). Twenty-seven percent of the money invested in “developing countries” by Canadian capital,

is in energy and minerals, considerably higher than other advanced capitalist countries (Industry Canada, 2004; ECLAC, 2003). Much of this investment is directed at Latin America, as the Canadian industry has moved to gain control of some of the richest deposits in the world. Indeed, after Canada, Latin America has become the region of the world where Canadian companies are most active in mineral exploration (Lemieux, 2003). Five of the top six locations for Canadian mineral investments abroad are in Latin America and the Caribbean, with investments in approximately 1000 mineral properties there (Lemieux, 2003). By 2002, Canadian companies held more than twenty-seven percent of the larger company market in Latin America (Lemieux, 2003), with seven Canadian companies among the top twenty mineral exploration investors in the region from 1989 to 2001 (Campodónico and Ortiz, 2002). (Gordon, “Canada, Empire and Indigenous People” 67)

Part of this dynamic is that elites in countries such as Guatemala, where Law’s novel is set, have adopted neoliberalism, and that has meant opening their countries to the control of international capital in mining and other sectors (Nolin and Stephens 45). Such policies have enabled Canadian mining firms to assert themselves in Latin America, and they have been heavily criticized and opposed by many people living in the region, particularly indigenous communities. A high percentage of the deposits in Latin America that Canadian mining companies want to extract are on Indigenous land, and mining threatens indigenous cultures by polluting ecosystems, destroying sacred sites, and requiring “the massive displacement and relocation of

indigenous populations. When mining projects end, environments will no longer be as productive and will likely be unable to sustain any returning indigenous population” (Nolin and Stephens

51-2). Consequently Canadian corporations

are at the centre of fierce struggles pitting poor Indigenous communities against powerful corporations who are attempting to seize their land and threaten their ecological sustainability as they expand in Latin America; and these corporations have proven willing to use whatever measures necessary to ensure they get their way, including defrauding people of their land, ignoring local referendums calling for a halt to their operations, and, in Colombia and Guatemala at least, enjoying the support of local militaries and paramilitaries who have assassinated their Indigenous opponents and union activists. (Gordon, “Canada, Empire and Indigenous People” 67)

For example, a United Nations-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification found that during Guatemala’s civil war in the late 1970s and early 1980s, people associated with the Canadian mining company INCO/EXIMBAL committed numerous human rights abuses in the El Estor region (Nolin and Stephens 37). In these ways, Canadians have a direct and substantial influence over the lives of many in Latin American, particularly its indigenous peoples. Mining is a major way that Canadians impact the rest of the world in the neoliberal era, but *Tailings of Warren Peace* is the only book of Canadian fiction to take on this important aspect of Canada’s global role. The novel therefore merits scholarly attention but has received none.

I frankly also have a political reason for selecting Law’s novel as a case study. In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I explore the activist functions of literary criticism. There I discuss the ways in which critical writing can intervene in political-cultural discourse to legitimize or popularize radical ideas. In that sense, part of why I am talking about Law’s novel is that I

largely agree with his assessment of globalized neoliberalism. Therefore, for political reasons I want to bring his book to the attention of more readers and to help more widely disseminate his reading of the current phase of Canadian capitalism and the role of Canadian-based capital in the world system. I say this because in praising, ignoring, or reacting hostilely to literary works, critics play a central role in determining how these texts are received. Works that garner critical adulation tend to get larger audiences so in this way critics have significant influence over how widely particular texts are circulated.

I begin my discussion of the book by exploring the ways that it provides a systemic critique of capitalism and forms of oppression with which it intersects such as patriarchy, racism, and colonialism. Next, I discuss how the novel functions to both legitimize political resistance and to contribute to critical reflections on activist practices. At that point, I shift to a consideration of the production of Law's book. I argue that, for Law, showing that he is involved in efforts to create greater political-economic equality and part of a network of people doing analogous work are aspects of how he attempts to establish writerly credentials. I then close this chapter with an examination of the links between *Tailings of Warren Peace* and a wide range of activist organizations and initiatives. In doing so, I argue that the book can be thought of as the work not only of a single author but of an entire network of groups involved in resisting neoliberalism.

Tailings of Warren Peace as Systemic Critique

Among the activist functions of *Tailings of Warren Peace* is that it offers a systemic critique of globalized capitalism. The novel can be read in part as a cataloguing of the ills of capitalism. This piling up of examples of the harms that capitalism causes has the effect of suggesting that the entire socio-economic system is a problem and not merely particular

avaricious or cruel individuals. This characteristic of the novel is similar to the systemic criticism that I discuss in Chapter 2: in that section, I examine literary analysis that offers a way of reading texts within a larger political system so as to illuminate how some aspect of a cultural work and a social context either undermine or strengthen each other or do some combination of these.

One way *Tailings of Warren Peace* offers a systemic critique of capitalism is by highlighting the ways it intersects with other forms of oppression. Wealth, for example, is associated almost exclusively with white men. Magma's boardroom is described as a place where "In a pale nod to diversity there was one Asian woman amongst the eleven white men" (91). Throughout the novel characters with economic power repeatedly conduct themselves in blatantly sexist and racist ways. Charlie, who oversees the site of an idle mine that Magma owns in Guatemala, says that the company expected members of the Maya community where the mine is located to welcome it as a source of employment but opposition arose because locals "sent some witchdoctors or something around telling all the Indians the mountain was sacred and if it was desecrated all sorts of fire and brimstone would come their way....Hocus pocus bullshit really" (152). Here Charlie is an avatar for Magma's colonialist attitude that presumes the Maya would welcome the destruction of their land if it means a chance to participate in wage labour for a multinational and that the Maya miss out on this opportunity because of their so-called superstitious beliefs. In the same scene, Charlie's misogyny is displayed when he "leer[s] at Celina's breasts" (152) and when he says of the Mayan community that he has "'Been working this shithole for a fuck of a long time. What can I say, beer and putas are both cheap. Watered-down versions of both compared to back home, but you can't beat the price, just the bitch.' He laughed" (152). That last statement provides a direct link between Charlie's economic standing,

his racism, and his sexism. His position as a representative of international capital brings him to Guatemala with the power to openly display his sense of racial superiority so that his sense of entitlement to women's bodies is redoubled when it comes to the indigenous population.

Another episode in Guatemala illustrates a similar point. When Charlie and Warren pass a group of Mayans enacting a ritual outside of the mine as a form of protest against it, Charlie describes the ceremony as "Goddamn voodoo shit" (181). Charlie continues on to explain that "They show up every so often, make a fuss and then we bring in the army to set them straight and get the hell out of the way" (181). He speculates that the Maya are "sacrificing little kids or virgins, like bloody Aztecs with their satanic rituals" (181). Charlie says that the Mayans claim the mine is located on "some bullshit ancient religious site" (181) but that he thinks "It's all a ploy for them to get their greedy hands on some of the gold here without having to work for it. Lazy bastards" (181). Of particular significance to my point here is that in the same paragraph of the conversation between Charlie and Warren as these last two sentences, Charlie refers to Celina as "that pretty little bitch of yours back at the guesthouse...[O]nce you're done with her, feel free to send her on" (182). Although Warren interrupts to criticize Charlie's racism and sexism, it is clear that Charlie is about to say that he is asking to use Celina for sex. The swift transition from Charlie making multiple racist statements about Mayans to sexist remarks shows that he takes for granted the right of white men to share indigenous women for sexual pleasure and illustrates the connection between these two. In this way, the novel suggests that the racism and misogyny with which white capitalist men treat economically-dominated indigenous women move so seamlessly from one to the other that these cannot be treated as disparate phenomena.

Furthermore, when Charlie shows Warren and Celina the living quarters for the staff who do work on the mine that is necessary even though the mine is inoperative, Charlie says of a

Mayan worker named Juan that he “might like to live like shit, but the ex-pat staff are used to a little higher standards. Just down there’s a pool even” (168-9). In this scene, Warren is posing as a representative of the Securities Commission named Reg so as to get access to the mine and Celina is pretending to be his translator under the alias Maria. Charlie tells Warren:

“I’ll drop Maria off at the Latin Quarter.”

“She doesn’t stay here?” [Warren asked.]

“Well, local staff are a ways down the road. They don’t like their privacy same as we do, so we have a little apartment complex for them.”

Warren turned to Charlie, anxious that he and Celina not be separated. He leaned over to Charlie as they walked out of the car. “She can stay here with me tonight, huh?” he winked.

Charlie slapped Warren on the back. “I knew that respect shit was a put on. You like a little Indian pussy yourself.” (169)

The unequal housing of Magma employees is a physical embodiment of the alliance of racism and class exploitation. Charlie presents the discrepancies in accommodation as being the logical outcome of cultural differences rather than an instance of preferential treatment given to white workers over their Mayan counterparts. In Charlie’s conception, one situation in which it is natural for that border to be temporarily breached is when an indigenous woman is going to sexually satisfy a white man in a position of political and economic power, bearing in mind that Charlie thinks Warren works for the Securities Commission.

Celina identifies these overlapping forms of oppression while getting angry at Warren because he has indulged Charlie’s behaviour in an effort to get information from him: ““This bastard and his friends have been exterminating, killing my people, my own sister. They think indigenous women are here to serve their sexual needs; they can fuck us, beat us and then bury

us” (170). She continues to say ““We are not here to be raped, or bullied, or degraded, or beaten, or killed for your or their profits and pleasures. Fuck them Warren and fuck you too if that’s what you think”” (170). These are the most direct statements on the intersections of capitalism, colonialist racism, and misogyny in the novel. The phrase “your or their profits” identifies Warren as a beneficiary of the material wealth colonizers extract from the colonized irrespective of the question of how Warren has responded, or failed to respond, to Charlie’s conduct. The point here is that even if Warren does work with colonized peoples that does not render him innocent because imperialism, capitalism, and misogyny are systemic and institutional and not exclusively about individual actions. These articulations have particular weight because they come from Celina who knows this violence firsthand and whose character is so unimpeachable throughout the book that she has to be understood as a reliable witness. For Law to have the novel’s most comprehensive, most systematic critique of global power systems uttered by an indigenous woman from the Global South has a pedagogic function: it suggests that powerful political insights come from the people most directly subject to the depredations of extant systems and that everyone else should listen to such people.

Moreover, the connections among capitalism, colonialism, racism, misogyny, and sexism coalesce with political repression when Charlie finds out that Warren and Celina are anti-mining activists spying on Magma. Charlie has them cornered and beaten by veterans of the Guatemalan military. During this scene, “Charlie turned to Celina, eyeing her with malice. ‘Normally I’d begin with you.’ He stepped toward her, then touched her face with his finger and drew it down her neck towards her chest”(207). Upon being bit on the finger by her, Charlie “slapped Celina on the side of the head with his other hand” (207) and then he tells the ex-soldiers to ““Tie her up....I’m going to really enjoy you”” (207). In the context of a novel that consistently draws

connections between neoliberalism, racism and sexism, Charlie's acts of physical violence against Celina and the rape threats he makes against her can be understood as the logical outcome of the dynamics surrounding his position as a white male custodian of capital in the Global South and hers as an indigenous woman.

Another dimension of capitalism the novel is critiquing is the propensity and capacity of the wealthy to use their power to violently put down opposition. For attempting to expose Magma's crimes and organize against the company, Warren and Celina are beaten and the possibility of being raped is held over her. The two are furthermore subject to repeated death threats while in Guatemala, the sources of which are not explicitly stated but the implication is clearly that they can be tied back to Magma. In one incident, a police officer approaches Warren and tells him to "Be careful....It's not a safe country for foreigners here" (240). Celina explains that he should understand that as a threat: "These are not idle warnings about your safety in a dangerous country, Warren. He named you, spoke in English and approached you when no one else was within earshot....Warren, the police in my country are not here to protect the citizens. They are the same ones who massacred our people during the war. A random run-in with the authorities is not to be taken lightly" (241). The aspect of the book that ties political repression to capitalism is an example of systemic critique in that it is a rebuttal of one of capitalist ideology's claims to legitimacy, which is that this system is concomitant with political freedom. What the novel suggests is that if capital perceives its interests as threatened, it is able to mobilize the organized violence of the state and para-state institutions to repress democratic activities.

Oppressions intersect in similar ways in the case of James Tyrell, Magma's chief executive. Tyrell compels Petra to sleep with him and to help spy on and blackmail Magma coworkers. Petra had been an exotic dancer until Tyrell got her a job at Magma and he coerces

her into meeting his demands under threat of reporting her to immigration. When Petra refuses to gather information on a Magma employee, Tyrell says, “Listen, you little Russian tart. You will do as I say. When I say jump, you will jump. When I say fuck, you will fuck. I do hope you understand.’ He glared at Petra. He cupped one of her breasts in his hand” (205-6). Tyrell can abuse Petra because of the triple authority he has over her because he is her wealthy employer, because he is a man, and because of his Canadian citizenship. This aspect of the book suggests that an exclusionary citizenship regime is especially harmful to migrant women without legal status, vulnerable as they are to having their precarious position exploited by men.

In all of these ways, *Tailings of Warren Peace* represents colonialism and sexism as intrinsic features of capitalism. The implication of showing that global capitalism is central to racism and misogyny is that these issues cannot be addressed in isolation. Charlie’s racist objectification of indigenous women is inseparable from his position as a white male manager for Magma in Guatemala whereas Tyrell’s sexual blackmail is enabled by both his position as a white male executive at a Canadian global mining firm and by the legal barriers to free migration enforced by the Canadian state: because of these intricacies, the novel suggests that it is not only a problem that Charlie and Tyrell are racist and sexist but also that they are able to act on these attitudes because of the institutional weight behind them and that Charlie and Tyrell have these worldviews at least in part because of the institutions whose interests they represent. It is in this sense that Law’s book provides a systemic critique of neoliberalism for the ways that it reinforces and is reinforced by patriarchy and colonialism

Illustrating these intersections is not the only way the novel offers a criticism of capitalism. For instance, environmental degradation caused by mining is featured in the book. During a trip through the site of Magma’s inoperative mine, Warren observes that the area

felt like a moonscape. . . . He thought of the abundance of greenery, what he had seen in other parts of the country, where villages existed, children played, where plants grew on brown earth. He thought about the rocks that fed the soil from the tectonic shifts of subsurface plates, releasing minerals to be taken up by plants, that died and composted or petrified and ossified, beginning the cycle again. Except here all around him was just dust and rock, the cycle interrupted. (153)

This passage highlights the adverse effects that capitalism has on the environment and how that in turn harms the indigenous population. In this segment the need to extract profit from the earth irrespective of the cost to surrounding ecosystem and communities displaces Mayan people and destroys plant life. This aspect of the book dramatizes a central feature of capitalism, which is that losses are socialized and profits privatized: the bulk of wealth generated from the mine will go to Magma shareholders while the indigenous community in Guatemala bear the costs.

The novel's systemic critique is also evident in a scene where Warren and Celina visit the Canadian embassy in Guatemala to seek assistance because of the death threats. In the office of the Second Secretary of Political Affairs is a plaque that reads "In gratitude to the Canadian Embassy for their efforts to support the Economic Development of San Jacinto del Quiché—Magma International" (222) and when Warren and Celina come out of the office "Warren's fear and insecurity returned. They were going to get no help from the Canadian government, civilians investigating the Canadian mining companies were not high on their list of priorities" (222). In this episode the Canadian state's priority is capital rather than its citizens: because of the Canadian government's links to Magma, it opts not to aid Warren and Celina while they are threatened in a foreign country for being critical of Magma. I call this systemic criticism because the implication is that the role of capitalist states is to serve capital so governments cannot be

counted on to solve the problems caused by private wealth accumulation. Thus this part of the novel suggests that there is a need to establish a new set of social arrangements that protects human welfare over profit.

A similar sentiment is expressed at the end of the novel. The narrator remarks that “Justice hadn’t been done in Guatemala, not fully, not completely, not in a way that made you believe in it, or in the systems for the rule of law, or compensation to the victims, or any way that felt the least bit satisfactory (259).” The comment on the inadequacy of “the systems for the rule of law” constitutes a rejection of the claims of the existing order to produce justice. The suggestion is that the legal system in capitalist society cannot effectively right wrongs committed against the poor by the rich. In this sense, the implication is that deep, drastic socio-political change is necessary if economic elites are to be held accountable for harm they inflict on others.

Another way in which *Tailings of Warren Peace* demonstrates systemic criticism is by drawing parallels between different groups’ experience of colonialism and neocolonialism and attendant systems such as racism. For example, a connection is made between Celina and Curtis, Warren’s indigenous co-worker. Celina tells Warren: “‘My first language is Achi...It was something they didn’t want us to learn. We only spoke it at home, or in our village. But in school, you would be punished if you didn’t speak in Spanish.’ Curtis had told [Warren] the same thing happened to his parents at the residential school, where they’d had the Cree beaten out of them” (98). I call this systemic critique because it demonstrates that there are similarities between how colonialism oppresses indigenous people whether the process is undertaken by Anglo-French settlers in Canada or Spanish colonizers in Guatemala. By drawing attention to this parallel, Law’s novel suggests that genocidal attempts to stamp out a people’s culture are inherent in colonialism and that this social order needs to be rejected full scale.

Moreover, when Petra goes missing and Meena searches for her, the narrator writes that “In the past forty years, Meena found out, more than six-hundred aboriginal women alone had gone missing in Canada” (250). This portion of the novel draws attention to the ways that women disproportionately suffer the effects of both settler colonialism and neocolonialism. We see the latter in the sense that Petra is a case study in how, while neoliberalism promises the free flow of capital around the globe, people do not have the legal rights to move across borders as freely. The systemic critique offered here is that opposition to violence against women has to involve opposing colonialism and neocolonialism to be effective.

Warren’s brother, furthermore, drove drunk and died in an accident in which he killed a family of four (78). Warren’s father, who would drink and beat him (79), died when “he’d fallen down drunk on his back and the vomit had been sucked into his lungs, leaving him with only bile to breathe” (78). As a teenager, Warren

figured out the locus of their problems with his family. It didn’t lie with his family, but with where they lived, what they were forced to do, with a mine that was at the centre of their misfortune....The mine employed his dad and brother, his grandfather. The mine caused his grandfather’s laboured death, and all the adults to drink, from fear, boredom, the blackness of the coal, and the weight that lay over their heads. The mine was ubiquitous in their lives, with its gaping holes and clockwork sirens announcing the end of shifts, day and night....Warren knew that those who came out of the mines, day after day, left something down there. They’d made a deal with the earth, that if they were able to take out the coal, the earth could keep a little piece of them in turn, and the overflowing pubs and blackened spittle were reminders there were debts unpaid. (79)

All of the suffering in Warren's family and his community can be traced to the harsh working conditions in the mines. That labour produces ill-health and the miners' alienation drives them to excessive drinking, all of which harms the women and children in Warren's community as it is a patriarchal society. In this context the phrase "what they were forced to do" is especially relevant. That is an explicit challenge to one of the central tenants of capitalist ideology, which is that in bourgeois societies labour is freely undertaken by persons entering contracts without coercion. Warren, however, recognizes that members of his community have few if any choices but to work in the mines in order to be able to access goods and services necessary for basic survival such as food and shelter. By refuting the ideology of free choice, the novel can therefore be understood as offering a systemic critique of capitalism. Sickness and violence in the community are not merely attributed to misfortune or individual failings. Rather, these are shown to be consequences of working in the mine.

Similarly, Warren recalls how growing up in a family and community of miners he had spent hours around a table at home, sitting at [his family's] feet, climbing a counter, or seated at a chair, where they would describe, over tea or tonics, injuries to neighbours from disregarded safety standards, docked pay from questioning superiors, families put to the streets when they'd had enough, and wearied workers forced to go down the pit again and again, with the expectation of blind devotion. (84)

The ideology of free choice is again interrogated here. The word "forced" specifically contradicts that. That families are "put to the streets when they'd had enough" of labouring in the mine clarifies that doing that work is essential. In this way, people work in the unforgiving conditions of the mine because capitalism effectively coerces them. There is also a rejection of capitalist ideology's claim that this system is concomitant with personal freedom as workers in Warren's

town are materially punished merely for asking questions of their bosses. The picture that emerges in this passage, especially in view of its final clause, is of a socio-economic system that curtails the individual freedom it claims to protect through the exercise of arbitrary authority.

The systemic critique offered in this passage has other dimensions. Workers are injured in the mines because laws designed to protect them are ignored. Like the episode at the Canadian consulate in Guatemala, this point about workers' safety laws being disregarded suggests that capitalism impedes democracy. Even though workers have through social struggle won the right to have safe conditions enshrined in democratically-established laws, these have no practical effect for the miners in Warren's town where the socio-political dynamics are such that capital can flout the law and workers have little recourse to have their protections enforced.

Parallel conclusions can be drawn from the account Warren gives of his own act of violence. Following his father's death and his brother's car accident and the resultant fatalities, the teenaged Warren lashed out by vandalizing the mine (80-81). He thought nobody was at the mine so he blew it up with a Molotov cocktail but a security guard who was there was caught in the explosion, badly burned, and put into a coma, and Warren finished high school in a juvenile prison (81-2). Warren "realized the mine would never be held responsible for its instigator actions, even if his own were precipitated by their particular context" (82). Instead of being a sign of individual deviance, Warren's act and the harm that it caused are consequences of personal and communal trauma brought on by labour in the mining sector. Significantly, it is only Warren who is punished for inflicting violence. Even though the mine, or more precisely its owners, is the root cause of considerable suffering in the community, Warren alone is held responsible for damage done to people living in his town. These perspectives on the origins of violence are another example of the systemic criticism the novel offers in that they suggest that

violence can only be reduced if its root causes are addressed and that capitalist institutions need to be held accountable for their role in producing social suffering.

Radical Acculturation

As much as the novel emphasizes the ways that people are exploited under capitalism and related systems, it also engages in a process that I call radical acculturation. Writing characters with such functions is a political intervention wherein resistance is represented to the book's readers as a comprehensible, defensible activity as opposed to the criminal practice it is often presented as in hegemonic culture. In Chapter 2, I discuss a related practice wherein literary critics acculturate a public to intellectual resistance to capitalist hegemony and play a meaningful part in increasing the circulation of radical ideas.

One example of radical acculturation in *Tailings of Warren Peace* is the miners in the town where Warren grew up. While the book pays ample attention to the ways in which these workers suffer because of the industry in which they are employed, it also gives attention to the ways that organized workers fight back. For instance, Warren's father

had been a union man, the one and only conviction he had in his life. Neither the sweet nor strong arm tactics of the company fazed him. The manager had come to the house, to speak with his dad, looking for a back door deal to an ugly strike. He'd come into their kitchen, and Warren felt the man's distaste masked in cologne as he sat at their table. His veneer was pleasant, taking a cup of tea, and dropping in a few cubes of sugar, but not deigning to let the cup touch his lips. When it was clear the only price his dad would agree to was the one that included all the other union brothers, the man brought in tough guys from outside to close the deal. His dad reached for a tire iron and swung at them. They backed off, but the strike lasted another four months. (30-1)

This aspect of the novel is significant because it suggests that resistance is an admirable and suitable response to capitalist exploitation. Though Warren's father is generally represented as a cruel, contemptible figure, this portion of the book suggests that his commitment to class solidarity is one positive characteristic he did have. This passage is from an early stage of the novel, before Warren has become involved in activism and developed a political consciousness, and it demonstrates that his lived experience of class provides him with insights into capitalism and the virtues of fighting that system.

These are analogous to Celina's intimate ties to resistance, which extend beyond her father. In the stories she affixes to the lampposts, Celina writes about how, during a phony consultation the mining company had with her community, Lalita "sparked the opposition" to the mine and "stood up at the meeting....She interrupted [the representatives from the company], felt what they were saying wasn't true while we all remained silent[.] She didn't believe them[.] She didn't trust them[.] She'd felt the scorn behind their tales and moved to tell them[.] We were surprised[.] They were surprised....They were not happy and they were not friendly" (21-22). Throughout the book Lalita is effectively portrayed as a martyr whose shortcomings are never mentioned by Celina. That Lalita had this history of standing up to corporate bullying and leading others to do the same is particularly notable in view of her central role in the novel. Furthermore, the campaign Celina leads to hold Magma accountable for Lalita's death is the impetus for the entire story. Rather than being merely a dramatic device or a fringe element of the plot, resistance is the foundation of the book: the novel could not exist without two activist indigenous women as its motor. In these ways, the portrayal of Lalita and Celina can be understood as instances of radical acculturation. Writing characters with such functions is a political intervention wherein resistance is represented to the book's readers as a logical, just

activity that is undertaken by admirable people as opposed to the criminal or deranged practice it is often presented as in hegemonic culture.

Other characters in Celina's life have similar effects. In her lamppost stories, she writes about how the mining company then sent a group of men to beat and intimidate her family: "They hit my brother hard....They told us to shut up....'Shut up—Stop talking about the mines or you'll die[.]' They left the table shattered, my brother bruised, all of us shaking[.] My brother went to the mountains the next morning [a]nd joined the guerillas" (26). Celina's brother's decision to participate in armed struggle is presented as a natural outcome of the experience of violent oppression to which he and his family are subject. Through this type of radical acculturation, the book familiarizes readers with resistance and its underlying logic. Moreover, Celina's ex-boyfriend, Marcos, had been both a priest and "a student leader from El Salvador, from the seminary, who'd had to flee to Guatemala after six priests had been killed by the army at the university....[In Guatemala] Marcos had joined the guerillas, had fought in the mountains" (63). As in the case of Celina's brother, Marcos' participation in guerilla warfare is represented as a direct consequence of state violence. The cause and effect relationship between the repression of capitalist state apparatuses and militarized insurgency is an example of radical acculturation's legitimation function: while armed struggle may in other contexts be understood as excessive or illegitimate, here it is represented as a comprehensible, justifiable response to oppression.

Furthermore, the resistances of Celina's brother, Marcos, Pablo, and Lalita render Celina's campaign against Magma legible not only as a fight against a corporation's human rights violations but also as participation in a long-running familial and communal tradition of resistance. Similarly, in view of all of Warren's experiences of and observations about how

capital causes illness and violence and restricts freedom, as well as his personal connections to histories of resistance, his role in the activists' challenge to Magma can be understood as another manifestation of the alliances of people who have been oppressed by neoliberalism that appear throughout the book.

Activist Utility

Another activist function of *Tailings of Warren Peace* is that it offers reflections on organizing for social justice that can be useful for people who do that work. The book contains multiple instances of alliances against power structures between people who have experienced exploitation in different ways. The parallels that are consistently drawn between disparate characters who have experienced violence and exploitation can be understood to have a prescriptive element. These alliances, I argue, can be read as a prefigurative model for solidarity across difference.

One example of activist utility in *Tailings of Warren Peace* occurs when Petra goes missing. Magma is presumably responsible so Meena fears they will harm her as well, which leads to Curtis and Vatu, Meena's Indo-Canadian father, storming into Magma's offices to claim Petra and Meena's possessions. Curtis describes the episode in the following terms: "we just walked past the receptionist and kept walking. Had a trail of nervous secretaries and other staff following these two Indian guys. They couldn't tell the difference, one north, one south, all the same to them" (226). Curtis' quip about the "two Indian guys" draws attention to the experience of colonization shared by Indians and the indigenous peoples living within the Crown's domain while also mocking the persistent racism that causes these two different groups to be conflated despite their myriad differences. In converging to assist Meena and Petra, the "two Indian guys" are resisting the exploitation and violence that Magma exercises against women of colour and

women without legal status. After doing so, Vatu tells Curtis about how Vatu's family was about to be a target during a Sikh anti-Hindu riot but was protected by a Sikh neighbour. Vatu says:

We watched our other neighbours next door, cowering in their house, not saying anything, not because they hated us or wanted us out, but because they were afraid. In any case, this man spoke up. My wife and I will not forget that day, not ever....And for me, I will not forget it, not because of the fear I had for my life and that of my wife and family, but because of the grace I witnessed. This man raised his voice against a mob intent on burning us in our home. That was true courage. (229)

Meena, who had recently been shown a woman's body in a morgue because the police thought it might be Petra, is in the room as her father tells this story: "Images of India collided with thoughts of Celina and Petra, and Meena pictured the body of the girl she had witnessed in the morgue" (229).

Warren too has a personal connection to colonial violence and to anti-imperial resistance. He recalls being a child and hearing "old Scottish ballads detailing battles with the British, and the heroic resistance of the settlers to the Clearing of the Highlands, when his fore-family was first put off the land" (39). In this way, he understands the coercive dispossession central to colonialism. His efforts to help Celina seek justice for her sister and to impede Magma's ongoing exploitation can therefore be read as a further instance of a character with a lineage shaped by colonial violence allying with another whose experience of it is ongoing. That "heroic resistance" is a part of Warren's background and it continues to be part of the life of Celina's family and the rest of the Mayan community in Guatemala.

Similarly, Warren has firsthand knowledge of the costs mining inflicts on workers and their communities. For example, he recalls how his grandfather

coughed and coughed, night or day, he'd cough. You couldn't drown out the sound....He could hear his grandfather try to clear his throat, as if somehow that would be enough, and the phlegm would be dispelled and allow him to breathe air free of particles that came up from his lung....Warren had to clean up the bloody black spit that came out of his grandfather's mouth. He was scared to touch it, like it was an infection" (51).

Just as Magma poisoned the water in Celina's community and the people who consumed it, mining poisoned Warren's grandfather's body.

Explicit parallels are drawn between the experiences of Warren's family and those of Celina's when the narrator says that Warren "knew they were a part of him, that Pablo was his grandfather, his grandfather could have been Amos, that it was all connected, and that they were all protagonists in the pink notices" (51). These comments can be understood as an acknowledgment of the commonalities of working-class experience. Amos was a carpenter and dairy farmer (45) whose gravestone Warren and Curtis have repossessed. Pablo was Celina's father, "a campesino all his life" (45) who struggled against the mine in Guatemala and was found "hung to dry with his own machete swinging from an avocado tree....It was a warning, to everyone, the whole community[.] He became the example they would make of all of us if we continued to resist" (46). In this sense, pointing out that Amos, Pablo, and Warren's grandfather are "all connected" serves to highlight how exploitation is the feature of economic life shared by all workers. Yet the novel does so without obscuring the different forms that takes. All three men suffer but there are qualitative differences between the forms this suffering takes: while Amos' life is in a sense erased because he and his family lacked the money to keep a gravestone for him, mining leads to Warren's grandfather dying painfully and a mining company has Pablo brutally murdered. My point here is that Amos, Pablo, and Warren's grandfather are bound by their class

positions even though their lives were separated by vast gulfs of time and space and they never met. Portraying class as a juncture at which people who have been subject to economic exploitation in various forms are linked suggests that the problem for people like these characters is not just a single company or a single industry but class itself and that the way to fight against that should be for people with diverse experiences of exploitation to build alliances that do not necessarily have to erase difference.

Another type of reflection on activism offered in the novel concerns the potential consequences of taking the risks involved in resistance activities. While the novel can be understood as a call to struggle against injustice, it does not offer an entirely romantic view of activism. Though multiple members of Celina's family and community opposed Magma and the Guatemalan state, the Mayans do not universally support the resistance. Divisions emerge in Celina's family as a result of the political situation. Her mother "blamed [Lalita] and [our] brother for [our father's] death[.] She couldn't see how the company, the government, and the army were responsible" (37). While one of Celina's brothers joined the rebels, another brother named Carlos enlisted in the Guatemalan military (66) so that Celina reflects in her lampost stories that "It pains me still [t]o think [h]e didn't understand [and that] he never could" (66). Furthermore, at the time these events in Guatemala were taking place, Celina was young and politically inactive. She left her community to go to school in the city (65) and

stopped going back to the village after awhile [sic] to the village[.] There were other things that had become important to me[.] I met men[.] Boys really[.] They were ladinos [a]nd I am indigenous[.] I was exotic to them [e]ven though our origins were mere hours apart. Indian women wearing traditional clothes[.] [w]ere discounted, ignored[.] [I]ike we were stupid[.] [t]hought less of[.] I wanted more. [I]t was as though if I wore jeans and a

t-shirt I could be different[.] So, I learned to dress like them[,] [t]alk like[.] I didn't see it as shame[,] I saw it is as opportunity. (66-67)

When Lalita went to visit Celina in the city, Lalita noted Celina's change and "She challenged me[.] [S]he yelled at me and called Carlos and me traitors[.] I yelled at her and called her many things...I told her I hated her[.] She knew I hated myself[.] She hugged me when she left and whispered [s]he loved me[.] I was still so angry I turned away" (68-9). The price for activism in Celina's family is high: their father is murdered; both brothers risk killing and being killed on opposite sides of the war; siblings alienate each other to the point that Celina's relationship with Lalita is unrepaired at the time of Lalita's death. By demonstrating the familial tensions that arise from political struggle, the novel offers a counterpoint to all of the ways that it suggests activism is a necessary and honourable practice.

Similarly, the Toronto activists' work leads to Petra's disappearance and implied murder. It also results in the suicide of Scott Liddle (246-7), a Magma executive who Warren and Celina's group has misrepresented as a spy for their group as part of a plan to manipulate Tyrell. Moreover, Warren and Celina's group members lose their friendship with Ryan because he became a mole for Magma (185). What the book offers is a realistic assessment of the costs of being involved in resistance. Insights into that constitute a helpful contribution to activists' conversations because political struggles benefit from having participants understand the potential risks involved in their participation so that nobody undertakes commitments they cannot keep or roles they cannot execute effectively.

Furthermore, the final pages of the novel contain multiple reflections on activism. After Warren and Celina and the rest of their group have exposed Magma's crimes in Guatemala, he asks,

“So, that’s it, it’s over?”

“For now.” [Celina replied.]

“But the company is still operating, the mine’s still open.”

“Warren, you have to know that there is not going to be any ‘big’ victory, no resolution to solve all these problems. That’s the thing about Westerners, you want the big solution, as if somehow there is any answer to everything. There isn’t. Maybe my children’s children will see an end to this....We’re not finished here—the struggles will go on. Our ancestors began this process and we will continue it....”

It should have felt like a success, but Warren felt deflated, almost empty. (256)

Celina differentiates what she sees as the Western view of social justice activism and her own conception, which is evidently linked to her indigeneity. According to her perspective, such struggles are generations long and may never totally succeed. Yet the sobriety of her analysis in no way tempers her commitment to working to these goals. On the contrary, the one certainty Celina does seem to have about politics is the necessity and even the inevitability of resistance.

The narrator, meanwhile, says that

The recognition of wrong-doing and the burials were all important processes. But James Tyrell sat in his comfortable chair at home, and went to work in the newly merged Magma, got manicures and massages, and received new interns in his office. He’d faced no charges, paid no costs, no restitution. And that was not right, not for Warren. The Association was going to continue, the solidarity movement marched onward. (259)

In multiple ways the ending of the novel is characterized by a tension between what the activism of Celina, Warren, Meena, and others has achieved and the ways in which the results of their work leave much to be desired. Public pressure tactics succeeded in enabling Celina’s

community to bury their dead and in exposing Magma's crimes but shaming Magma does not by itself amount to holding them meaningfully accountable and fails to even curtail the privileges enjoyed by its chief executive. Similarly, though Warren, Celina and the Mayans who demonstrate against the mine are spared further violence from Magma and the Guatemalan state, Tyrell has presumably had Petra killed. While the merger means the further concentration of capital and a corresponding increase in the power of a tiny elite, Warren and others are prepared to undertake a lifetime of activism opposing such developments. Thus the novel ends indicating that while activism can be effective at winning limited victories within the existing political-economic system, more radical approaches are also necessary. Law's intervention therefore concludes by suggesting that revolutionary change is necessary to solve injustice but that the remoteness of that objective ought not to discourage people from undertaking it because meaningful, substantial gains can be achieved even if the maximal goal is not.

Literary Value: Writing By and About Radicals

For Stephen Law, demonstrating a track record of work on social justice issues and situating oneself within a network of people with similar commitments are parts of how literary authority is established. This is one reason that I understand his novel to be writing by, about, and for radicals. The two blurbs on the back of the book are notable in that neither of these comes from people associated with literary writing. One of these is from Garry Leech, an independent journalist, an author, and a lecturer in the Department of Political Science at Cape Breton University. The list of publications on his website is characterized by writing on globalization, Latin American politics, and United States policy in the Middle East, and nothing to suggest an interest in writing fiction, poetry, or drama. Leech describes *Tailings of Warren Peace* as "A gripping tale that eerily reflects a disturbing reality in global politics. It takes the

reader on a scintillating and mysterious journey that twists and turns from Canada to Guatemala, war to peace, and loss to love. This book is a celebration of the human spirit.” On the back of Law’s novel, Leech is identified as the author of *Beyond Bogota*, which is a memoir about his experiences reporting from Colombia that, in view of Leech’s self-description on his website as a writer “whose work is rooted in the global struggle for social justice” (“Gary Leech”), can be understood as having a clear aim of helping change American policy toward that country; his webpage’s section on *Beyond Bogota* contains a blurb from Noam Chomsky that similarly praises Leech’s work in detailing the US role in the poverty and violence endured by Colombians (“Books”).

The other quote on the back of Law’s novel is from Jamie Kneen who is identified by his involvement with MiningWatch Canada, a group that describes itself as “a pan-Canadian initiative supported by environmental, social justice, Aboriginal and labour organisations from across the country” (“About US” MiningWatch). MiningWatch Canada also describes itself as “a direct response to industry and government failures to protect the public and the environment from destructive mining practices and to deliver on their sustainability rhetoric” (“About US” MiningWatch). The group says that it uses its “technical and strategic expertise” to “carr[y] out and/or suppor[t] the monitoring, analysis and advocacy necessary to affect the behaviour of industry and public decision-makers” (“About US” MiningWatch). Kneen is a researcher with the group and nothing in the MiningWatch website’s section about him (“MiningWatch Canada Personnel”) or in his Twitter account (Kneen) suggests that he has a particular interest in or involvement with literature. On the back cover of Law’s book, Kneen writes that “While the characters and the situations may be fictional, they bring to light truths too often hidden, telling of the depth of disruption and corruption engendered by mining companies’ insatiable need to

profit from the Earth's riches and the workers who extract them...[sic]A great read." Though their comments do praise the book on literary grounds, the main task of Kneen and Leech's remarks is to attest to the novel's political credibility. That Kneen and Leech are mobilized in this way suggests, especially because they are identified for their interventions as activists, a concern with shoring up Law's activist credentials as well. In this way, the function of the blurbs on the back cover is to encourage people to read Law's book because of its place in a network of people committed to working for social justice. Similarly, Law's biographical note describes him as a "writer, ecological farmer and social activist involved in campaigns exposing the impacts of mining on communities in Canada and Latin America." Here Law's work as an activist is presented as pertinent to his novel writing. The implication is that he is an authority on the novel's subject, which is the effects of mining mentioned in the biographical note, because he has been involved in working to stop mining companies from inflicting harm.

The summary of the novel that appears on the back cover leads to a similar conclusion. Part of the description is that the book is a "story of love and memory, exploring how the past haunts us and how solidarity can save us all." What is notable about this aspect of the summary is the explicit invocation of the language of social justice struggles as a way to appeal to potential readers. This effort, taken together with the listing of Law's activist credentials and the testimonials from people with similar track records, suggests that this book is by a leftist, about leftists, and primarily for leftists.

An examination of Law's publisher also demonstrates that his book is by, about, and for people committed to fighting for social justice. *Tailings of Warren Peace* is published by Roseway Publishing, which is an imprint of Fernwood Publishing. Fernwood has an avowed commitment to social justice causes. They take for granted that ideas play an important part in

struggles for equality and strive to provide information and theory to people who are involved in these efforts: Fernwood's submission guidelines state that they seek

analyses that approach environmental degradation, poverty, child welfare, and other social problems brought about by the capitalist, profit-oriented market economy, as rooted in the inequalities of class, gender, race, sexual orientation....Our books are of use to politically and socially engaged activists and to general readers who are interested and concerned about the issues addressed in our books. ("Submission Guidelines" Fernwood)

This publisher is specifically interested in writing that is defined not by an amorphous concept of social justice but by anti-capitalist, as well as anti-racist and anti-hetero-patriarchy frameworks. Moreover, its stated goal is to publish books with utility for people involved in social justice work.

Furthermore, Fernwood asserts that their books acknowledge, confront and contest intersecting forms of oppression and exploitation. We believe that in publishing books that challenge the status quo and imagine new ways forward we participate in the creation of a more socially just world. We are not afraid to take risks in this regard and are proud to publish those individuals or ideas that too often go unheard. While corporate giants act to silence dissent, we act to give dissent a voice. As an independent Canadian publisher, we also emphasize, though not exclusively, Canadian authors and the Canadian context. The quality of the books we publish and the relationships with our authors demonstrate that every member of our small team is dedicated to the publishing and political goals of social justice. ("About Us" Fernwood)

Fernwood therefore regards a commitment to building a more equal world as a pre-requisite for being a part of its staff. It takes as its explicit task the publication of material that exposes

injustice and questions the legitimacy of the social arrangements that produce these. Fernwood also aims to challenge inequality by producing texts that envision alternative ways of living. Yet Fernwood publishes non-fiction, primarily academic books, so that limits the forms that this imagining of other worlds can take.

The 2006 acquisition of Roseway allows Fernwood to expand this aspect of its missions beyond what can be done in non-fiction writing. On its website, Roseway says that it “aims to publish literary work that is rooted in and relevant to struggles for social justice. We are interested in publishing works of fiction, creative non-fiction, biographies and other literary writing that has a social justice theme” (“Roseway”). Roseway says that its decisions about whether to publish a particular text are based not solely on its perceived formal, literary qualities but also on how pertinent it is to people organizing to fight for equality. As with its parent company, Roseway invokes a utilitarian view of publishing: that they produce works that are “relevant to struggles for social justice” suggests that their interest is in texts that can be of use to efforts to create a more just world. One way that is assessed is by including in its submission guidelines a provision that asks potential authors to include “a description of the social justice issues that [their] book addresses” (“Roseway Submission Guidelines”). By explicitly stating that its books are intended to be useful to activists, Roseway leaves no doubt that its primary target audience is people who are already involved or interested in social justice organizing.

Literary Activist Networks

The Tailing of Warren Peace is part of a larger network of support by and for people committed to building a more just world by resisting neoliberal globalization in Central America. Law’s novel emerges from an extensive network of activists and by support from their institutions. In this sense, while Stephen Law wrote *Tailings of Warren Peace*, I contend that it

can also be understood as in a sense being collectively authored by Canada's Latin American solidarity movement. Because the book comes out of the context of concrete political interventions, including the large volume of such work that Law himself has done, I argue that it is itself both a form of activism and a product of activism.

On the novel's Acknowledgements page, Law mentions his involvement with Calgary's Arusha Centre. The centre describes itself as a group of people who "value social justice and are committed to building an equitable society where all life is respected" ("About" Arusha). The Arusha Centre says on its website that it "inspires and supports communities to connect, gather, and create a socially, economically, and environmentally just future" ("About" Arusha). It is "a collectively run, member-supported organisation that provides resources and initiatives on social justice and environmental issues" and that claims to help "Calgarians through community economic development and community resilience programs and offers varied practical resources, animating activities which educate, inspire and connect with and between people and projects" ("About" Arusha). The Arusha Centre pursues these goals through a wide range of initiatives which include the founding of a "complementary currency system" for Calgary residents; a series of grants "designated for social and environmental projects in Calgary"; and a variety of collaborative campaigns run by "cycling, arts, and community groups" ("Our Work"). The organization is also involved in further projects including efforts to promote more environmentally-friendly forms of energy and sponsoring the activist radio show "Soap Box Derby/Cold Smoke" ("Our Work").

According to Law's resume, which is available online, in 1990 he was Fundraising Coordinator at the Arusha Centre, and in this capacity he "designed and implemented fundraising activities and strategies with volunteer committee" [sic] ("Stephen Law"). In an interview with

Fernwood, Law says that in the early 1990s he “became involved with the Arusha Centre in Calgary and met up with the Salvadoran exile community that was supporting the armed struggle against the oligarchy. Scenes from the novel around a fundraising event in a church were drawn from some of the events from back at that time” (“A Conversation”). In this way, Law’s relationship with the Arusha Centre directly shaped his novel. The centre did not financially support Law’s writing but it facilitated relationships and experiences that helped bring his novel into being.

Another organization that is part of the network that enabled *Tailings of Warren Peace* is the Tatamagouche Centre, “an accredited, non-profit education, conference and retreat centre” that claims to be “recognized internationally for our adult education and facilitation training and programming related to transformational learning and spiritual deepening. Tatamagouche Centre is a registered charity and one of four education and retreat centres of the United Church of Canada” (“Welcome”). The centre says that for fifty years it “has been a meeting place for those who deeply care about spirituality, leadership, and social justice. From the early days of winter sessions in the 50’s and 60’s, the human relations emphasis in the later 60’s and 70’s, to current programs such as the Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network and partnerships with First Nations Communities, the Centre has touched the lives of thousands of people” (“Our History”). On Law’s resume, he says that at the centre he “Design[ed], develop[ed] and coordinate[d] experiential educational programming in social justice, leadership development and environmental stewardship programs,” while also “Facilitat[ing] programs in [a] wide-range of programming areas including conflict mediation, educational design, diversity and inclusion, capacity-building, community development, international accompaniment training, [and] youth

programming” as well as “Fundrais[ing] from wide range of institutional, labour, government and individual sources to ensure accessibility for programs” [sic] (“Stephen Law”).

On the Acknowledgements page of Law’s novel, he thanks the Tatamagouche Centre’s Community of Writers program. The program involves a writing retreat. Attendees pay \$580 for five days, with private rooms available for a further \$50, to “work independently on a manuscript, in a community designed to support writers” and to receive feedback from professional authors (“Independent Writing Retreat”). Law also expresses gratitude to the centre’s “Writers in Exile” program with Shani Mootoo, though my research indicates that he means “Writers and Exile.” That remark of Law’s seems to refer to a July 19-24 2009 writing workshop that gave “attention to cultural assumptions in a world filled with intercultural connections and collisions. Mid-week, the evening world cafe brings in former Eritrean journalist, now PEN Canada writer in exile Aaron Berhand, to look more closely at the issues” (“Writers and Exile”). The workshop therefore dealt with political concerns that Law’s novel also addresses.

The Tatamagouche Centre is a point of intersection for writers and activists. In this way, it facilitates relationships between individuals and groups who see themselves as belonging to one or both of these groups. The Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network (BTS) plays a large role in the activity around Law’s novel. BTS is

a voluntary network of people in the Maritimes who began to organize in 1988 to support the efforts of Guatemalans struggling for political, social, and economic justice.... We respond to the needs and issues defined by our partners and by other Guatemalans with whom we work.... As a community of people who share this commitment to solidarity, we undertake advocacy and lobbying; organize delegations; send interns, volunteers, and

human rights accompaniers; promote fairly-traded coffee; and raise awareness within our own communities through speaking tours by Guatemalan leaders and other political campaigns. (“About Us” Breaking)

According to Law’s resume, in 2001 he became BTS’ Trip Coordinator, Educator and Interpreter, which involved “Organiz[ing] young adult and adult delegations to Guatemala,” as well as “Coordinat[ing] and facilitat[ing] cross-cultural education and social justice awareness workshops,” and “Interpret[ing] into Spanish and English for delegation” [sic] (“Stephen Law”). In his interview with Fernwood, Law notes that he worked facilitating

at the Tatamagouche Centre on justice issues, and become [sic] connected with the Breaking the Silence Network, which eventually took me to Guatemala. I was able to go to Guatemala a number of times, leading educational delegations exposing Canadians to the human rights genocide that had occurred there, and the current reality of exploitation by mining companies and the communities which have resisted them. *Tailings of Warren Peace* is the summation of all those experiences in some way. (“A Conversation”)

While the Acknowledgements page of Law’s novel suggests that he took part in the Tatamagouche Centre’s writing program, his comments in the interview highlight the political aspect of his time there without mentioning the role of writing during his stay. Read together the Acknowledgments page and interview imply that Law participated in the centre’s writing program, became heavily involved in Guatemala solidarity work, and then combined these two dimensions of his Tatamagouche Centre experience together. That it was at the Centre that Law developed a relationship with the Breaking Silence Network demonstrates that the web of relations around the Tatamagouche Centre is part of what enabled the writing of Law’s novel.

Also relevant in this context is Law's claim on the Acknowledgements page that "Everything I know about strategy, campaigns, and passionate commitment to justice I lay at the feet of Bill Fairbairn, Kathy Price and Kathryn Anderson." These comments stand out because they specifically address activist work without noting how that relates to the book. Law is grateful for lessons he has learned about political "strategy" and "campaigns" but nothing is said to explain why that would be mentioned on the Acknowledgements page of a novel. Law is not the first novelist to thank non-literary sources in his book. That he specifically links the novel with "strategy" and "campaigns" is notable because it suggests that Law sees a relationship between the text and the practical concerns of political organizing.

Each of the people Law mentions here have extensive histories of advocating for social justice and none of them have a record of involvement with literature. Fairbairn is Program Manager at an organization called Inter Pares, which means "among equals." Inter Pares describes itself as a group that "believes in solidarity, not charity, as an approach to international cooperation" and says that it has "worked closely with courageous activists and more than a hundred inspiring organizations throughout the world to build peace, advance justice and globalize equality. Our programs largely focus on six global issues: food sovereignty, women's equality, peace and democracy, economic justice, health, and migration. We work with long-term counterparts – local and national activist organizations – in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Canada" ("About Us" Inter). Fairbairn has been part of electoral observer and fact-finding missions in Latin America and has worked with an extensive range of organizations including "the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA), KAIROS, York University's Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC), Horizons of

Friendship, “as well as “AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) and Peace Brigades International-Canada (PBI)” (“Bill Fairbairn”).

Kathy Price, the second person Law mentions in the Acknowledgements quote being discussed, is a campaigner at Amnesty International Canada whose work focuses on Latin America and particularly on indigenous people in Colombia (Price, “Lessons”; Price, “Your Activism”). She has worked on the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA) and Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice (“Kathy Price”). The ICCHRLA is a Canada-wide ecumenical body concerned with Canadian policy in Latin America (Mattews and Pratt 377). Law’s resume says that between 1995-1998 he worked as Coordinator with ICCHRLA, which means he was “Responsible for administration, program design and implementation, [and] office and financial management,” wrote grant proposals, “Assisted in the development and facilitation of the “Moral Economy” Project,” “Developed and managed a youth internship programme with Human Rights Internet,” and contributed to “publications for Jubilee 2000 campaign against the debt” (“Stephen Law”).

Kathryn Anderson, who is mentioned alongside Fairbairn and Price, is an adult educator, a diaconal minister with the United Church of Canada, and coordinator of the Guatemala “Breaking the Silence” Program at Tatagamouche [sic] Centre (“Weaving Relationships”). In 2003, she published *Weaving Relationships: Canada-Guatemala Solidarity* as part of Wilfrid Laurier University Press’ Comparative Ethics series. The book is an account of “Project Accompaniment,” which refers to an event from the early 1990s in which as an act of solidarity 140 Canadians joined many of the 200,000 Maya who were returning to their homes ten years after the Guatemalan military had driven them out during the Guatemalan state’s genocide against the Maya (“Weaving Relationships”). In all of these ways, Law’s gratitude toward

Fairborn, Price, and Anderson can therefore be read as evidence of how *Tailings of Warren Peace* emerges out of a community of activists.

Furthermore, Law writes that the book is a result of his experiences doing activist work. In the Acknowledgments section he states that his novel “really comes out of my experiences of solidarity with Tools for Peace, Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network, SalvAide, Izalco Cultural Group, Radio Farabundo Marti, CORDES, and Peace Brigades International in Nova Scotia, Toronto, Colombia, El Salvador and Guatemala.” This remark points to further activist organizations from which Law’s novel emerges. Tools for Peace was a Canadian organization formed in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua following the leftist Sandinista movement’s rise to power in 1979 and subsequent US-backed attacks on the country. At its peak, Tools for Peace had 126 committees across Canada, raised \$12 million in aid for Nicaragua, and arguably succeeded in pressuring the Canadian government to take a comparatively less belligerent position toward the Sandinista government than the United States (“Tools for Peace”). Law says on his resume that in 1989 and 1991 he was Administration Manager for Tools for Peace, which means that he “coordinated general office management, accounting and fundraising in support of projects in Nicaragua” and “organized [a] materials collection campaign, facilitated [a] development education program, and trained and recruited volunteers” (“Stephen Law.”)

SalvAide is a Canadian non-profit that says its goal is to “accompany the struggle for social justice in El Salvador and to build Canadian awareness about the Salvadoran reality and Canadian government and business policies that impact upon that reality” through initiatives ranging from “cooperative cashew farming to helping to build participatory municipal gender equity guidelines” (“What We Do”) and from offering assistance with an organic bakery to

sending election observers (“Solidarity Delegations”). The Izalco Cultural Group was named after an indigenous group in El Salvador and was an organization that advocated for a “just and peaceful solution” (“History of Asalca”) to the war between that country’s military regime and the leftist Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in the 1980s and 1990s. Law’s resume says that he volunteered with the group to promote “Canadian solidarity for El Salvador” [sic] (“Stephen Law”). Radio Farabundo Marti was a Salvadoran guerilla station. During El Salvador’s war, a group of Salvadorans and Canadians

undertook a project combining radio broadcasting and new ICTs [Information and Communications Technologies] to help bring about social and political change in Central America. Once a week a computer equipped with a 1200 bps modem would automatically call a similarly equipped computer in Nicaragua and in less than three minutes would download a zip file with a dozen or so pages of news prepared by . . . Radio Farabundo Martí. Once in Canada, the information was printed and faxed or sent by post to a network of community and student radio stations in Canada and the USA, providing hundreds of thousands of listeners with up-to-date news and analysis of Central America’s struggles from the perspective of the revolutionary movements and helping to build and strengthen solidarity between them and progressive movements in North America. (“About” Radio 2.0)

Though my research found no evidence that Law was involved with this initiative, reference to Radio Farabundo Marti indicates that the analysis the station provided of Central American affairs influenced the perspective on the region that Law brings to his novel. CORDES, meanwhile, is the Committee of Repatriated and Displaced Communities of El Salvador (“Stephen Law”). In 1987, it partnered with SHARE (“History of Share”), an organization whose

goal is to deepen “solidarity with and among the Salvadoran people in El Salvador and the United States in the struggle for economic sustainability, justice, and human and civil rights” through projects focusing on women’s empowerment, citizen participation, leadership development, and environmental sustainability (“About Us” Share). According to Law’s resume, he was CORDES’ Technical Team Economist from 1992-1993, “researched a diagnostic study on economic activities and marketing capabilities of rural communities in El Salvador,” and was “involved in resettlement of refugee, displaced and repatriated communities” (“Stephen Law”).

Finally, Peace Brigades International (PBI) attempts to resolve political conflict with approaches rooted in “the belief that lasting transformation of conflicts cannot be imposed from outside, but must be based on the capacity and desires of local people” so rather than participating in the work carried out by organizations in war-ridden countries it sees its role as “open[ing] political space and provid[ing] moral support for local activists to carry out their work without fear of repression” (“About PBI”). This strategy means that PBI takes a non-partisan approach to the organizations it works with and avoids interfering in these groups’ internal affairs (“About PBI”). PBI’s primary method for assisting human rights defenders (HRDs) who are at risk of persecution is the tactic of international protective accompaniment, which PBI says it pioneered (“International Protective Accompaniment”). Protective accompaniment involves sending “teams of volunteers backed up by an international support network to accompany human rights defenders and communities in areas of conflict” (“International Protective Accompaniment”). PBI’s view is that

the presence of international volunteers protects threatened HRDs by raising the stakes for potential attackers. It provides moral support and international solidarity for civil society activism by protecting the political space of threatened organisations, thereby

giving them the confidence to carry out their work. In addition, it strengthens the international movement for peace and human rights by giving accompaniment volunteers a powerful first-hand experience that becomes a sustained source of inspiration to themselves and others upon their return to their home countries....The premise of accompaniment is that there will be an international response to whatever violence or potential violence the volunteer witnesses. Behind such a response lies the implied threat of diplomatic and economic pressure—pressure that the sponsors of such violence prefer to avoid. (“International Protective Accompaniment”)

Law writes in his resume that while with PBI from 1998-1999 he provided international accompaniment to Colombian HRDs, wrote and edited PBI publications in Spanish, testified before Canada’s Parliamentary Standing Committee on Trade and International Human Rights, and that he “Undertook [a] two-month Cross-Canada speaking tour (January - March 2000) which included public meetings and national and local media interviews regarding the human rights situation in Colombia” (“Stephen Law”).

International accompaniment and PBI appear in the novel. When Warren and Celina successfully bring attention to Magma’s crimes in Guatemala, archeologists and anthropologists are brought in to excavate bodies. The narrator describes the presence of companions who Warren learns are “foreigners tasked with being present with the forensic team and the families of the victims, and to ignite their international connections if threats should appear. They were like lighthouse beacons who could signal at signs of danger” (237). The international accompaniment tactic plays a critical role in the story. In the scenes set in Guatemala, the threat of violence constantly hangs over the Mayans who demonstrate against the mine and over Warren and Celina because of their activism. The presence of the companions signals a

defusing of many of the novel's tensions because it indicates a significant reduction of the likelihood that any of Magma's antagonists will be attacked. PBI's function is equally significant. The narrator says that Warren "looked to the other foreigners around, the ones with uniform white t-shirts that said Peace Brigades International, they stuck close to the families....He wasn't with them, but felt like he was accompanying the process, in a way, accompanying Celina" (237). Warren comes to the conclusion that it is through groups such as PBI and tactics like accompaniment that white people from the Global North can play a useful role in helping reduce the harm their societies do to the Global South. Up to this point in the novel, Warren's relationship to activism had been ambivalent but this scene signals a shift in Warren's political consciousness. He now identifies more with highly organized, internationalized activism than with the small-scale, unstructured, and somewhat adventurist work his and Celina's group had been doing. These important components of Law's novel therefore hinge on the same groups with which he has done activist work.

In all of these ways, Law's novel was enabled by an extensive network of activists and by support from their institutions. Accordingly, I argue that while Stephen Law wrote *Tailings of Warren Peace*, it can also be understood as a collective project of multiple strands of Canada's Latin American solidarity movement. The novel emerges, furthermore, from within a vast range of material political interventions, including the extensive work Law himself has done. In this sense, the book is both a product of activism and itself an activist intervention.

This dimension of Law's novel is connected to the alternative media outlets I talk about in Chapter 2 such as *Briarpatch*, *Canadian Dimension*, *rabble.ca*, and *This Magazine*. These fora, like the networks from which Law's novel emerges, are collectives of activists engaging in intellectual resistance. Furthermore, these media outlets and the groups that Law has been active

in are related to my discussion of critical pedagogy in Chapter 3. In that section, I argue that classrooms can be embodied spaces of social justice wherein students and teachers can live relations that are more equal and more democratic than those they live in neoliberal society. The same opportunities exist for those who work with social justice groups such as those that Law has belonged to or with publications like *Briarpatch*, *Canadian Dimension*, *rabble.ca*, and *This Magazine*. This is not to say that these organizations always live up to their stated principles. Yet, at least in my years of belonging to solidarity organizations and working with each of these alternative media outlets, they frequently do provide a space in which to live a greater degree of democracy and equality than elsewhere in the neoliberal world and for me the experience has been transformative.

Chapter 2: Criticism as Activism

In this chapter I discuss the activist functions of Canadian literary criticism in the neoliberal era. Discerning and elucidating are among the central activities of criticism and as much as they have been employed to legitimize socio-political inequality, these are the practices in which some Canadian critics have engaged during the neoliberal period so as to challenge the current hegemonies and to work toward establishing counter-hegemonies.

The following is an overview of the interpretive practices that I argue most clearly facilitate connections between criticism and activism in the neoliberal context: those that inform the public about specific details of political issues misrepresented in mainstream news media; those that familiarize readers with resistance and its underlying logic; those that evaluate texts at least in part for whether they are in any sense useful to social movements; those that stimulate the radical imagination by exploring the utopian moments that can often be found in even the most straightforwardly realist literary works; those that read texts within a larger political system so as to generate critique of that entire system or its central features; and those that cite in literary scholarship the experiences and analyses of activists who are not professional intellectuals so as to enable these experiences and analyses to earn the social status of knowledge. In this chapter I will also examine how in the neoliberal period broader institutional constraints have hampered critical activity of a radical bent. This problem, however, is mitigated when critics find ways to integrate their work into broader public discourses, and I examine some examples of this phenomenon.

Para-Literary Literary Criticism

One matter that consistently concerns radical leftist literary critics is how to make their work have political effects that might help tilt the balance of social forces toward equality. This

question is a central focus of this chapter. An answer that leftist literary scholars have frequently come up with is that criticism needs to be connected to spheres beyond its traditional realms such as the university and academic publishers.

As Wayne Koestenbaum points out, some scholars believe that their work's "relative noncirculation testifies to its efficacy as sheer value, like an heirloom diamond ring only shown to family but never taken to the jeweler for an estimate" (97). This "relative noncirculation" is a problem for literary scholars who do their work with a view toward affecting change. As the American literary scholar Jim Merod writes in *The Political Responsibility of the Critic*:

Criticism currently and traditionally is an almost solely elitist academic effort without social or political commitment to people who stand outside the circle of institutional authority and political power. The way critics of a radical inclination assert themselves professionally, as morally and politically adept people, will thus determine what kind of involvement literary scholarship and critical theory can have, directly or indirectly, with oppressed and unrepresented people. This is not a small issue because humanist knowledge and oppositional critical practices will find some way to join their persuasive public energies with the plight of systematically outcast individuals and groups or will leave themselves thankfully unburdened by our militarized, wholly stratified world. (156)

Merod's point is that radical critics can either consciously choose to seek ways to make their work more concretely relevant to the struggles of inequality and oppression endured by the majority of the people on earth or they can refuse that and effectively opt out of political struggle. To refuse to work with and for people in struggle, Merod's argument suggests, is functionally the same as siding with powerful elite groups in that the latter benefit from having

their power unchallenged by people with the intellectual and institutional resources available to do so.

Faced with such choices, activist critics have sought ways to make their work relevant to people whose lives are rarely or nebulously or never directly impacted by academic literary criticism, particularly persons who are systemically marginalized. One way some critics have made criticism publicly relevant is by involving in it analysis of how literary texts relate to ongoing political issues. This claim may seem commonplace but what I have in mind are works of literary criticism that devote considerable amounts of space to addressing the particulars of a given political matter so that a reader who knows nothing about that issue might conceivably read the piece and come away with an understanding of the political question *in its own right* and not *only* of its relation to literary culture. In this way, one of the tasks that such critical texts perform is pedagogic: they inform and educate readers in detail about a given political issue. Thus I argue that activist criticism often involves direct discussion of specific aspects of political events and I call this approach para-literary literary criticism.

Jeff Derksen's "Ends of Culture" includes an instance of this approach. Derksen writes about the revolutionary process that has been undertaken in Venezuela since 1998 in response to the harm that neoliberalism has done to the vast majority of people in that and other countries, particularly in Latin America. He notes that "the 'Bolivarian Revolution' . . . has renationalized the oil industry and moved towards securing resources as national common goods and towards the redistribution of national wealth. Politically there has been an emphasis on 'participatory democracy' . . . rather than a reliance on individual participation in liberal democracy" (74). Furthermore, Derksen discusses "the eruption outside the Presidential Palace that, in some part, overturned the 2002 coup attempt against [Venezuelan President Hugo] Chavez" (74).

The context of Derksen's remarks is significant. "Ends of Culture" appears in Kit Dobson and Áine McGlynn's *Transnationalism, Activism, Art*, a collection of scholarly essays about the relationships between globalization, art, and activism that is published by University of Toronto Press. Derksen brings up Venezuela in his analysis of the changing conceptions of the nation present in Larissa Lai's novel *Salt Fish Girl* and the video installation '9 Scripts of a Nation at War.' Derksen's comments on Venezuela are therefore clearly targeted at scholars with an interest in art and literature. Educating a group of readers made up largely of academics who study culture about the Venezuelan example of how a more just society can be created is an activist intervention. I make this claim on the grounds that the changes that have taken place in Venezuela prove that neoliberalism can be successfully resisted and replaced with a more equitable alternative. In that country "poverty has fallen from 42.8 percent of households [in 1999] to 26.7 percent [in 2012], or a 37.6 percent decline in the poverty rate. Measuring from 2004 [to 2012], when political stability returned . . . the decline is 49.7 percent" (Johnston and Weisbrot 26). Extreme poverty went from 16.6 in 1999 to 7.0 in 2011, a 57.8 percent reduction, and fell by 70 percent from 2004-2011 (Johnston and Weisbrot 26). Moreover, "college enrollment has doubled since 2004, with free tuition for many students" (Johnston and Weisbrot 26). Between Chavez's first election in 1998 and 2002, his government "led efforts to reverse the effects of neoliberalization on the health sector. Privatization of health services was halted and barriers to access to care were eliminated" (Mahmood, Muntaner, León, and Perdomo 818). In 2003, the Venezuelan government launched Barrio Adentro, a program designed to foster mass political participation and to improve public health that proved to be "especially popular with the poorer sections of the society...Physical accessibility to the facilities in most poor neighborhoods such as the barrios provides them easy access. Institutional availability and accessibility is

provided by the state through introducing various popular arenas of participation within communities and workplaces” (Mahmood, Muntaner, León, and Perdomo 830). Derksen’s discussion of Venezuela offers readers a case study of a social movement that in the neoliberal period has successfully exerted hegemony and used that position to increase economic equality and to expand the role that the population plays in political decision-making. This portion of his essay generates hope by drawing attention to what the Venezuelan experience can offer in the way of a model to other societies.

Para-literary literary criticism is also at work in Naava Smolash and Myka Tucker-Abramson’s “Migrants and Citizens: The Shifting Ground of Struggle in Canadian Literary Representation.” In addressing the absence of people with precarious citizenship or no legal status in literary debates about multiculturalism in Canada, Smolash and Tucker-Abramson spell out in detail some of the specific ways that the country’s migration policies have shifted during the neoliberal period. The paper includes an overview of the ways that Canadian migration laws have evolved since the 19th century as well as a close examination of the most recent developments on these fronts. For example, they explain that “Forms of precarity include the 90,000 people per year assigned various categories of ‘temporary worker’ status” and describe how, in addition to this group of people, “‘precarious status’ also refers to the social position of ‘non-status’ (also referred to as ‘out of status’ in Canadian law, and frequently as ‘illegal’ in the popular media): the estimated 200,000-500,000 people (Goldring et al. 2009, 252) living in Canada who, having usually arrived on a short-term visa, stay on to create a life . . . but aren’t granted full legal protection” (170). People in this position, Smolash and Tucker-Abramson go on to explain, “lack rights or access . . . from social institutions (health care, unemployment insurance, legal eligibility for arts council grants)” (182) even though people without legal status

contribute to these by paying sales taxes, property taxes (typically through rent), through the wealth-generating labour they provide, and, in the case of temporary workers, by paying into employment insurance and pension plans that they are forbidden from using.

One function of this part of Smolash and Tucker-Abramson's article is to explain and analyze the particular ways in which people who live in Canada with limited or no citizenship rights are exploited. Informing a readership of literary academics about specific unjust state policies, their negative effects, and the large volume of people who are impacted by them, is an example of how critics can, as Merod says above, "join their persuasive public energies with the plight of systematically outcast individuals and groups" (156). Smolash and Tucker-Abramson, moreover, explicitly connect these legal exclusions to the literary discourses surrounding citizenship. They argue that "the point is not just that new legal exclusions exist, but rather that laws produce cultural categories, and the literature that inscribes those categories within the national imaginary then helps naturalize those laws" (182). In exploring the ways that cultural discourse helps render invisible people with precarious status, Smolash and Tucker-Abramson connect literary culture to the lived socio-political experiences of people who have been excluded from cultural institutions. Underlying this aspect of their article is a call to struggle against these policies: it can be understood as an injunction to work to change this state of affairs when the authors expose the particular ways that migrants without full citizenship are exploited. When Smolash and Tucker-Abramson address how culture abets that marginalization, implicit in that is a call to change that aspect of Canadian literary discourse.

Utopianism

Resistance involves envisioning how another world could or should look. In Chapter 3, I talk about this issue in an educational context when I discuss some of the ways that teachers can

foster students' radical imaginations. As Fredric Jameson points out, however, the appeal of utopianism is at an historic low:

During the Cold War . . . Utopia had become a synonym for Stalinism and had come to designate a program which neglected human frailty and original sin, and betrayed a will to uniformity and the ideal purity of a perfect system that always had to be imposed by force on its imperfect and reluctant subjects. . . . Such counterrevolutionary analyses . . . were then adopted by an anti-authoritarian Left whose micropolitics embraced Difference as a slogan and came to recognize its anti-state positions in the traditional anarchist critiques of Marxism as Utopian in exactly this centralizing and authoritarian sense. (*Archaeologies* xi).

To this list of explanations for the decline in the popularity of utopianism I would add Nazism, capitalist technocracies, apartheid, imperialism, Zionism, or the various religious fundamentalisms, all utopian undertakings in their own right that have damaged the appeal of this way of thinking, as well as the challenges posed to it by post-modernist and post-structuralist theories. In these contexts, the first task of the utopian activist critic is therefore to defend the idea itself and to argue that utopian maps need not necessarily lead to the Gulag. Though it would sap utopianism of meaning to simply say that all belief systems are utopian, and though some political projects contain more elements of the fantastical than others, radical critics can nevertheless advocate for utopianism by demonstrating that no ideology is entirely innocent of the utopian impulse. As Ruth Levitas argues, “[A]ll political positions have embedded in them ideas of the good life, and consequently the good society and the principle on which it should be based. . . . There plainly is a vision of a good society articulated by neo-conservatives,” and overlooking this point “removes the utopian project from the realm of democratic debate” (298).

Showing that all ideologies have a visionary dimension is an important part of a defense of utopianism because the political beliefs that are currently hegemonic derive popular legitimacy from their association with such concepts as rationality and pragmatism. Association with these concepts has the benefit of conferring on an ideology a sense that its aims are achievable while its Other, utopianism, is exiled to the realm of the impossible.

A related way contemporary literary critics have contributed to utopianism is by utilizing the opportunities provided by literary texts for discussions of how dramatically contemporary ruling ideologies have failed to realize their purported aims. Literary characters who experience systemic inequality present opportunities for critics to talk about the manifold ways in which the lived realities of people in neoliberal Canada diverge from what this social system claims to produce. Studies of issues such as canonicity, textual production and circulation can similarly illustrate the gap between ideological defenses of neoliberalism that advocate it on the grounds that it supposedly produces unhindered freedom of artistic expression and the demonstrable material inequalities in how literary texts are created, distributed and received. By generating through studies of literary works a sense of the ways in which dominant ideologies are not only utopian projects but failed utopian projects, critics challenge the marriage that exists in the popular imagination between the ideological spectrums permissible within the status quo and all that is achievable as well as the popularly accepted unity between Utopia and that which can never be.

It is also true that the widely varied attempts at establishing the best of all possible worlds have yielded historic failures and have consequently thrust utopianism into a period of crisis and disrepute. This context calls for a re-examining of and experimentation with past utopian undertakings. Activist criticism can therefore contribute to social movements by changing the

connotation of the term “utopian.” Rehabilitating the concept on a broad cultural scale is important to radical left political activism because that involves advocating ideas that contain the visionary demands for a future that is otherwise. The function of anti-utopianism is, I argue, to foreclose the possibility and imaginability of virtually all systemic challenges to the status quo. Critical texts examining the varied expressions of the utopian in literary works can be understood as fora in which the idea of Utopia is reinvigorated and reimagined. Criticism can in this way contribute to social justice movements in the neoliberal era by inaugurating, spreading, contributing to, explaining, and elaborating on discussions that can enable the development of ideas of and visions for a best of all possible worlds.

One way that activist critics have pursued such an aim has been to seek out and discuss the utopian in works of literature, even (perhaps especially) those that do not readily fit into the sub-genre of utopian literature and are rarely discussed in those terms. By exploring the utopian glimpses found in literary works, some critics have challenged what is regarded as common sense, and articulated that which is seen as unspeakable so that in that process the unthinkable becomes thinkable and the seemingly impossible begins to seem possible. Cara Fabre’s analysis of Dionne Brand is an example of criticism that opens discussion about Utopia by way of a literary text. In Fabre’s discussion of the final section of *Inventory*, she writes that as Brand’s narrator

reanimates the emotional life of her readers and herself, she then invites the reader to “find her” (37) in a future, utopic world—“another life . . . without anything we know now” (35). Trading upon what Joe Bailey calls the “emotional salience” (56) of utopian visions, and “their very direct connection with society as *felt*, as well as a thought-about, phenomenon” (62), *Inventory*’s ethical lover appeals emotionally to the reader to

consider, and demand, happiness and peace as conditions of global citizenship. Her emotionally charged appraisal of our global moment is what [Yi-Fu] Tuan might call an enlarging and liberating vision. (emphasis in original) (115)

What Fabre is doing here is articulating the utopian impulse in Brand's poetry. Brand's gesture toward Utopia is in this instance somewhat obscure so Fabre's work is particularly significant because it goes beyond merely pointing out that *Inventory* has utopian sentiments. Rather, the task Fabre takes up is to flesh out this aspect of Brand's writing. She writes that Brand "offers her alternative, utopic vision in the form of a love letter, symbolizing the poem itself, to be physically taken into the body to replace or dredge up what she calls 'the gruesome things that settle/at the bottom of the brain'" (116). In discussing the implications of the utopian glimpses that Brand provides, Fabre in effect becomes Brand's co-author: the critic is taking the fragmentary glances at Utopia that the poet offers and assembling them into a coherent picture for readers to understand, and in the process the critic becomes one of the painters. Thus the notion that emerges in Fabre's article of a Utopia wherein emotional needs are satisfied, and interpersonal relationships are conducted ethically and reciprocally, is perhaps as much Fabre's creation as Brand's. In this way Fabre herself participates in the cultural conversation about how a utopian world might look. These critical activities are especially significant when they address a writer as widely read and celebrated as Brand. I say this because bringing even a fraction of Brand's readership into a discussion about Utopia has the potential to meaningfully expand the portion of people who in 21st century neoliberal Canada are thinking about what an ideal society might involve, how it can be realized even in part, and the particular ways in which current social arrangements have failed. Fabre contributes to utopian discourse by finding its expression in the work of a major author and by finding it where it is not obvious and hence is easy to miss.

That Fabre in turn elaborates on notions of what a just society might entail is why I call this portion of her work activist criticism.

Similarly, Derksen's reading of *Salt Fish Girl* finds utopian elements in a novel that is frequently understood to be dystopian. "*Salt Fish Girl*'s moment of rupture," he writes, "its revolution, marks the shift from the dystopic to the utopic by imagining an ideological and organized resistance that springs from productive forces" ("Ends" 71). Derksen's contribution is to an imaginative mapping of Utopia in that he finds in Lai's novel the idea that such a society can be worked toward through a collective resistance in which participants are linked by class. In this way, Derksen's argument functions to create a space in critical discourse about Canadian literature in the neoliberal era in which pathways to a more just world are thinkable. As Jeff Shantz writes, "Utopian visions help criticism by offering an imaginable alternative. Why criticize if there is no way to imagine a different way of doing things?" (13). Furthermore, Shantz advocates the "impulse toward creativity and a preference for imagining positive alternatives rather than (but not instead of) simply focusing on negative aspects of current social life" (13). In this conception, criticism becomes productive by moving from an exclusive focus on that which is undesirable to articulating more equal social arrangements or how to achieve them. That Derksen does so in his discussion of *Salt Fish Girl* is a central reason that I identify his writing as an example of an activist criticism that contributes to counter-hegemonic movements by exploring ideas about how a just society could be realized.

Systemic Criticism

Activist criticism under neoliberalism has involved systemic criticism, a way of reading texts within a larger political system so as to illuminate how some aspect of a cultural work and a social context either subvert or reinforce each other or do some combination of these. For this

reason, systemic criticism's form tends to generate analysis of entire hegemonic configurations and the role of cultural works within them rather than critiques of individual texts or particular socio-political happenings. Systemic criticism can furthermore be understood as being part of an ideological struggle with its opposite, which I call fragmentary criticism, a method that treats particular manifestations of the literary or the political in isolation or draws only limited connections between these that overlooks relevant implications about such formative institutions as capitalism. I argue that systemic criticism is a type of activist criticism because the former embodies an intellectual method that privileges institutional social analysis over explanations for cultural-political phenomena that treat these as disparate, fragmented parts. In this sense systemic criticism's activist function is to offer a model for how to think critically in and about neoliberalism. This critical method is an example of how to "join the everyday of globalization – the goods, the information, the cultural drifts – to the systemic" (Derksen, "Ends of Culture" 62). Stephen Law's *Tailings of Warren Peace*, which I discuss in Chapter 1, functions similarly in that it suggests the violence and exploitation its characters experience must be understood as consequences of capitalism as a system rather than as the result of the behaviour of a small group of particularly cruel people.

Part of what I have in mind when I refer to systemic criticism is Jameson's understanding of dialectical thought, which he defines as "the anticipation of the logic of a collectivity which has not yet come into being" (*Political* 286). Jameson describes "the need to transcend individualistic categories and modes of interpretation [that is] in many ways the fundamental issue for any doctrine of the political unconscious, of interpretation in terms of the collective or associative" (*Political* 68). This task requires the foregrounding, and in some cases the unearthing, of the collective contexts that in large measure explain a literary work's production,

circulation, reception and aesthetic. In Jameson's terms, this is a project in which "[the social] becomes visible, and individual phenomena are revealed as social facts and institutions, only at the moment in which the organizing categories become those of social class" (*Political* 82). To Jameson's account it needs to be added that in neoliberal globalization social class cannot be understood without an examination of such inter-related phenomena as colonialism, migration, race, and gender. Each of these are ways of governing people in collective terms that enable capitalism to function on a worldwide scale, and readings of texts that overlook or downplay these risk being one-dimensional and too economically deterministic. Despite this weakness, Jameson's argument is on the whole valuable for how it calls forth a type of analysis that explicitly makes central the logic of the social, which is a definitive characteristic of systemic criticism.

An example of systemic criticism is Benjamin Authers' "The Individual is International." In this paper, Authers reads Catherine Bush's novel *The Rules of Engagement* against a 2005 government foreign policy document called *Canada's International Policy Statement: A Role of Pride and Influence in the World (IPS)*. Authers' point is that the personal gives meaning to international relations for both Arcadia, Bush's protagonist, and for the Canadian state's construction of its citizens' subjectivity. Authers is critical of the individualism that is constitutive to the ideology of neoliberal globalization. He argues that

The considerable contextual and institutional dissimilarities between the intimately personal and the internationally political . . . question whether these concepts can be collapsed at all. Moreover, while constructing the personal as a synecdoche of international affairs might humanize seemingly incomprehensible political acts, it can also represent engagement as a narrative focused on the capacity to sympathize with

another. Rather than constructing engagement as a mutually constitutive dialogue, then, such a mode of sympathy instead consumes the Other's experience and pain in these texts either to construct Canadian compassion or to enable Arcadia's personal and political epiphany. (784)

Part of Authers' argument is that it is misguided to conceive of global politics in the framework of personal psychology or emotions. Thinking of international affairs in such a way, Authers suggests, involves overlooking the institutions that produce global conflict. This argument can be understood as an instance of systemic criticism because it rejects the individualism characteristic of neoliberalism, which involves conceiving of international political events as though they are the results of the mental and moral qualities of a few prominent people. Instead Authers' reading emphasizes the centrality of political institutions and in this way it contributes to a mode of understanding that rejects the fragmented, personality-driven ideology of neoliberalism in favour of an interpretation of politics as being primarily constituted by social forces.

Another aspect of Authers' critique that directly pertains to neoliberalism is his argument that individualism has the effect of turning the Other's suffering into a commodity. This tendency, he contends, is especially apparent when people of relative privilege in the Global North consume the violence and poverty experienced by people of colour in the Global South. His point is that conceiving of international affairs in narrowly personal terms helps create a dynamic wherein people who live in economically and politically powerful states and who have sympathy, however problematic, with people who have suffered end up objectifying those same people: his argument suggests that this first group is trapped in a logic wherein sympathy becomes another form of the economic imperialism that is a major cause of the issues about which one is sympathetic. I understand this as a form of systemic criticism in that Authers

locates the problem of commodified global suffering in the individualism characteristic of neoliberalism, and the implication of that analysis is that systemic analysis and action are the strategies best suited to rectifying the problem.

Also significant is Authers' understanding of how individualist perspectives on policy can hinder efforts to reduce conflict and resolve grievances. His claim is that the introspective tendency of individualist politics typically produces relations that are monological. What I take from his argument is that efforts to establish social justice need to be collective and that such efforts are hindered by individualistic neoliberalism. In writing about this limit to such a politics, Authers' analysis contributes to a critique of individualist neoliberalism and to an advocacy of a mass politics, which is one reason I am suggesting that his essay serves as an example of activist criticism that is systemic rather than fragmentary. I make this claim because one function of systemic approaches to social critique can be to intervene in cultural debates in an effort to generate a broader acceptance of the notion that unified, participatory, methods of rectifying injustice and inequality are required if these efforts are to be effective and ethical. In this way, Authers' essay is an example of activist criticism that is about making a case for social solidarity as the strategy for pursuing the systemic change necessary to rectify the harm done by neoliberal individualism.

Moreover, Authers' essay is systemic in form. Authers' method is to directly compare the rhetoric and ideology of Bush's novel to that of a state's foreign policy document. This approach exemplifies systemic criticism in that practicing it involves sketching the parallels and points of intersection between state utterances and cultural ones. In so far as he articulates the shared ideology of Bush's *The Rules of Engagement* and the Canadian state's *International Policy*

Statement, Authers provides a concrete instance of how an ideological state apparatus functions in practice. He writes that

in its promulgation of values as the nation's international contribution, the *IPS* . . . represents Canadians as a compassionate people, whose values engender sympathy for the pain of others. As in *The Rules of Engagement*, such responses are only marginally about engaging with one another. Rather they seek to consume, to utilize, that Other's pain in order to construct a particular narrative about the nation, and in so doing render the personal political only in the most solipsistic of ways. There is a danger in too readily personalizing the political, too easily analogizing military conflict with conflicts of the heart, or forming foreign policy from a monologic conception of values and beneficence. . . . The representation of rights discourses outside of Canada need not fall back on ideas of the nation-state as good, or on personal equations or sympathy as the sole means by which the pain of Others might be engaged with and responded to. Engagement requires a dialogue that should not simply be about the good we can do, but also, necessarily, about an obligation to 'look critically' (Razack, *Dark Threats* 166) at our interactions and to always consider the distinctiveness and humanity of those with whom we engage. (797-8)

Systemic criticism of the sort that Authers practices here is distinguished by its linking of the ideology of a particular novel to its larger political context. He identifies how this literary work is bound to the state document by ideologies of consumerism and commodification. Authers' analysis arguably suggests that part of the reason the Canadian state is able to play an imperialist role internationally is that through myriad cultural texts it has fashioned this self-image as a benign if not benevolent international actor and circulated this identity both domestically and

abroad, despite ample evidence belying this reputation.⁶ In exploring this common thread between the rhetorical performance of a cultural work and that of state policy, Authers furthermore creates a space in which to explore how the two texts operate in similar ways to construct understandings of geopolitics and the neoliberal Canadian state's role in them in ways that foreclose the possibility of conceiving of and demanding international relations based on reciprocity in which the Other is humanized and regarded as equal. In that sense his analytic method can be understood as activist precisely because it nurtures thought that focuses on questions of how textualities act in service of oppressive global relations and impedes perspectives and analysis that have a greater chance of facilitating systems with the opposite properties.

Derksen's "Ends of Culture" also offers an example of systemic criticism. In his interpretation of *Salt Fish Girl*, Derksen writes that Lai's rendering of the insurgent Sonias "carries an anti-capitalist perspective that is braced through explanation....Lai firmly places [their] exploitation within the machinations of capitalism . . . rather than as an effect of isolated corporate greed and sweatshop outsourcing that leads to an apology, a vow to shift production sources, and monitoring by an NGO" (70). I call Derksen's approach here systemic criticism because his reading of the novel attributes the exploitation of the Sonias to intrinsic features of capitalism rather than blaming their experience on the exceptionally greedy character of a particular capitalist or group of capitalists. An explanation such as the latter is what I call a fragmented analysis in that it is an approach that suggests that the problems that exist in capitalist society could be solved if only a few "bad" capitalists were brought under control. By contrast, Derksen's critique is systemic because it is an argument that suggests corporations who use sweatshops to extract wealth from the Sonias' labour are not aberrant but that these production

conditions are inevitable outcomes of capitalist production dynamics. In the last portion of the quoted passage, Derksen similarly suggests that sweatshop labour cannot be ended through reforms that are limited in scope and pressure by organizations that however well-intentioned seek to blunt the most obviously egregious forms of exploitation rather than to end exploitation as such. Implicit in Derksen's account is therefore an endorsement of strategies for ending exploitation that focus on opposing capitalism entirely rather than just its excesses. Systemic analysis of this variety makes capitalism visible. This reading de-naturalizes capitalism within a neoliberal socio-political context that characterizes itself as inevitable and desirable.

Another example of systemic, anti-neoliberal activist criticism is Smolash and Tucker-Abramson's paper. These writers argue that debates about race, identity, and belonging in Canadian literary culture have not adequately accounted for the increase that has occurred during the neoliberal period in the number of people living in Canada with precarious citizenship or without legal status. The authors examine this topic through a "close reading of four early Immigration Acts to highlight the dialectical relationship between state production and literary production of identity categories within the national" (167). They address this issue by discussing it in relation to Brand's *What We All Long For* and Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* to show how Canadian literature "points to, embodies, and encapsulates the limits of our current moment in relation to legal regimes of citizenship" (167-8). Their approach is systemic criticism in that it draws connections between the failure of Canadian literary culture to wrestle with precarious or non-existent citizenship and the proliferation of modes of exploitation and control at the state level. In doing so Smolash and Tucker-Abramson are able to demonstrate that excluding people with limited legal status from the national imaginary renders such persons culturally invisible, which enables state capitalism to continue profiting from these workers

while denying them political or social rights, including programs into which they pay such as Employment Insurance and health care.

Moreover, Smolash and Tucker-Abramson are self-conscious of the limits of criticism. They formulate their “argument through law and literature . . . to highlight the ways in which we cannot fix social problems through narrative alone, because literature does not, in and of itself, or in isolation, effect change” (168). Their method is systemic criticism in part because of this acknowledgement. By undertaking this type of reading, Smolash and Tucker-Abramson demonstrate that justice for people with limited legal status cannot be achieved exclusively through textual production and analysis because cultural discourse is just one of many features of a much larger state capitalist system.

Criticism, Activism, and Knowledges

Another, closely related issue that has been a focus for anti-neoliberal activist critics is knowledge production. Among criticism’s major functions is the generation of knowledge about culture, politics, history, and social relationships. In some instances, ideas or information that is demonstrably untrue can attain the status of knowledge: for example, the *New York Times*’ editorials in the lead up to the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq consistently suggested that Saddam Hussein’s regime possessed weapons of mass destruction (Falk and Friel); in this case, the *New York Times*’ editors produced knowledge that was directly contradicted by evidence that was available at the time. When I say “knowledge,” I use the term to signal that which is socially recognized as knowledge. I use the word to mean the ideas or information regarded as plausible by some segment of the population in which these circulate by virtue of having approximated the standards of validity that reign in that particular time and place. Most knowledge about culture fits into this latter group and in this way is contestable.

Knowledge is both the means and ends of research, one form of which is literary criticism. As Kit Dobson points out, “In the arts, both the targets and products of research can be seen as knowledge, for researchers do not merely produce knowledge; they sift through and analyze pre-existing products of knowledge to gain new ends” (“Mining” 77). Knowledge of the sort that is produced in arts research is neither fixed nor final but can be understood as one facet of a shifting, subjective set of beliefs held by a group of people about such matters as aesthetics, ethics, history, politics, social arrangements and the relationships of these.

These systems of knowledge production are necessarily processes of inclusion and exclusion in which some particular sets of facts and interpretations of these will be socially recognized as knowledge and others will not, and within the class of that which is identified as knowledge certain types of knowledge will be privileged above others. In this sense, knowledge can be understood as being neither neutral nor objective. Knowledge, as Merod writes, “is an institutional event (or set of events) that succumbs to the massed strategies of local and global institutions’ operations” (103). For this reason that which is socially recognized as knowledge often has that status in part because it either aligns with or does not significantly threaten the interests of hegemonic power.

Highlighting the complicity of knowledge with power has long been a focus of literary scholars with an interest in creating a more equal world. Heble, for instance, writes:

One of the most important tasks for Canadian criticism . . . is to interrogate the assumptions governing the distribution and legitimation of knowledge in both the academy and the public sphere. As critics and teachers, we need to expose the interests determining the “pursuit of truth and knowledge” within academies and the interests governing the media-sanctioned view of reality, both of which, under the guise of

“objectivity,” have the function of limiting what can be known or discussed. (“New Contexts” 84)

Knowledge generation can set the boundaries for a discourse and foreclose discussion about how to challenge power systems or it can broaden the terrain for such analysis. Humanistic scholarship is not in and of itself emancipatory. Rather than discussing knowledge in the abstract, activist literary scholars have as we will see often developed accounts of the character of particular forms of knowledge, how they are applied, by whom, and to what ends. As Merod phrases the matter: “*Because* knowledge can enhance or reduce human life . . . it is never disinterested in any of its forms but . . . is interested either in private or public affiliations, . . . in demoting human cooperation or promoting it. Where knowledge goes, interests are at stake. The question is *whose* interests? For *what* uses? At what costs. . . ?” (emphasis in original) (78).

Exposing the constructedness of knowledge has the potential to be liberating because it demonstrates that knowledge sanctioned by the hegemonic powers in one time and place about what is socially possible and impossible, or just and unjust, can be dismantled and replaced by new ideas, beliefs, and information about how societies can function. Consequently activist critics frequently take as their task the questioning of the ends that knowledge does and does not serve, the ways that knowledge is often dubiously conflated with authority, and the ambiguities surrounding the concept of knowledge itself. If knowledge is subjective, if criticism produces knowledge, and if all criticism refers to other criticism, it follows that one task for the radical scholar is to make interventions to re-direct this discourse. One way to do this is by citing activists who are not necessarily professional critics in discussions of literary texts. As Wendy Naava Smolash writes: “academics can read and cite the writing of racialized and migrant organizers who mobilize new discursive identities for themselves, and are well positioned to

theorize the impacts of state violence” (760). Smolash describes a practice whereby academics draw on what I call activist knowledges, the perspectives of people involved in social justice organizing on the processes and implications of that organizing as well as on the issues around which people are organizing. The term is plural because it refers to a vast, dynamic, and frequently contradictory body of ideas and information as opposed to a single, identifiable set of philosophies or data. Activist knowledges are an example of what Kamboureli calls “knowledge at the limit” (10):

at the limit in the sense that that kind of knowledge has been repressed in the Canadian national imaginary and, as a result, pushed to the edges of the field; in the sense that the emergence of such knowledge upsets inherited orthodoxies; and in the sense that its emergence does not attempt to replace by default the doxa of received assumptions with new positivisms. At once conditioned by and resistant to hegemonic formations, knowledge at the limit denaturalizes what have been constructed as the natural borders of a discipline (10).

Activist knowledges are understandings of historical or contemporary events, policies, institutions, or social relations that challenge the dominant understandings of these and in that way can be part of emergent political configurations to upset their existence. As Kamboureli notes, however, such knowledge cannot be understood as uncorrupted by the dominant ideologies shaping the society in which it is formed or as always necessarily having greater truth than other forms of knowledge. Rather the point is that academics interested in doing scholarly work that functions as a type of activism have attempted to further this goal by drawing on the distinct types of knowledge generated by activists who are not professional intellectuals.

Citing testimonials, speeches, broadcasts or writings of politically active people who are not formally connected to academia or mainstream literary production can be part of a process of enabling the insights expressed therein to attain the social status of knowledge. Discourses circulate in complex ways to establish this type of knowledge. Edward Said describes this process in the following terms:

All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretations....[Interpretations] always occur in a situation whose bearing on the interpretation is affiliative. It is related to what other interpreters have said, either by confirming them, or by disputing them, or by continuing them. No interpretation is without precedents or without some connection to other interpretations. (*Covering* 162-3)

Social knowledge, knowledge about human affairs of the sort Dobson and Said discuss, depends on the meaning assigned to facts at least as much as the establishment of those facts.

Interpretation, the act of assessing the significance or implications of information, is in this way fundamental to the production of social knowledge. Interpretation of this variety is central to literary criticism, where much of the work done by scholars involves making claims about what some particular feature of a text's production, reception, or aesthetics means or why it matters.

Arjun Appadurai, furthermore, explains the process through which academic research produces knowledge: "the research ethic is obviously not about just any kind of new knowledge. It is about new knowledge that meets certain criteria. It has to plausibly emerge from some reasonably clear grasp of relevant prior knowledge" ("Grassroots" 9). Accordingly, all knowledge can be understood to refer to prior knowledge. In literary criticism, knowledge is

produced through debates, each of which are necessarily linked by quotation or paraphrase to previous exchanges of a similar nature. This type of knowledge production can therefore be understood as perpetually referential.

Because all knowledge in some sense rests on citing already existing knowledge, it is often part of a self-perpetuating cycle wherein what is already widely cited as knowledge has the greatest chance of being referred to again, thereby further legitimating its own status as knowledge. Thus I contend that the more frequently activist knowledges are cited, the more entrenched they can become as knowledge and the more widely they can be digested. Increasing the degree to which activist thinking is incorporated into the debates that shape a culture is a way of making more room in these formative social spaces for people fighting against inequality. Treating activist knowledges as legitimate sources of learning, as meaningful tools for enabling considered reflection on urgent social and cultural matters, is a way of increasing the clout of such thinking.

Smolash and Tucker-Abramson's article is an example of anti-neoliberal literary criticism that refers to activist knowledge. They cite three documents produced by migrant rights organizations: two from No One is Illegal (NOII) and another from Justicia BC. The manner in which No One is Illegal is cited is significant. Smolash and Tucker-Abramson note that the border, in the form of Canadian Border Services Agency agents, or demands to produce identification or submit to late-night interrogations, follows people into school, work, shopping malls, and public streets (No One is Illegal-Toronto, "Stop the Raids") and into the homes, living rooms, and bedrooms (No One is Illegal-Toronto, "Deportation Canada") of people with precarious status who make their homes in Canada. (177)

Here NOII is treated as a reliable information source. Smolash and Tucker-Abramson regard NOII's accounts of the harassment of people with limited or no legal status as statements of fact. A circuit of authority is at work here. As professional scholars, Smolash and Tucker-Abramson have a degree of cultural authority and by citing NOII's account of crackdowns on migrants, Smolash and Tucker-Abramson confer on NOII some of that authority. In quoting NOII, Smolash and Tucker-Abramson enter NOII—and here I do not to mean that Smolash and Tucker-Abramson are the first scholars to do this with NOII's work—into the body of scholarship dealing with the Canadian state's record on migrant rights and racism and the implications of these for literary debates about such matters as multiculturalism and sovereignty. The authority that comes with being a credible witness in a scholarly journal is in this case the authority that comes with being recognizable as trustworthy and fair, which is particularly notable in a culture where objectivity is a (supposed) virtue assumed to belong to people and institutions holding power and activists are widely perceived to be propagandists.

Moreover, Smolash and Tucker-Abramson explicitly and repeatedly argue that literary scholars working on issues related to social justice should draw on the texts produced by activists who are not necessarily professional academics. For example, they write that

The “institutional resources” available within academic spaces in particular can be shared and offered, without strings, to community organizers “identified” (to return to Miki's observation) “with social movements outside the university's jurisdiction” (*Broken Entries* 162). In addition, “invoking,” as Jiwani proposes, “the voices of those who endure these realities daily” (*Denial* xvii) is necessary to respect knowledge produced by those who have direct understanding, both of the violence of the state and of the myriad forms of daily resistance to it that are currently being theorized and undertaken.

Furthermore, the production of social critique is strongest if it is grounded in, and grows alongside, other modes of challenging power. (191)

This argument is one of the central focuses of Smolash and Tucker-Abramson's paper. The authors call on scholars hoping to help create a more just world to engage with and treat as legitimate the knowledge produced by social movements and to do so while working with them. Collaboration between career scholars and activists who are not professional academics can, the authors suggest, lead to a deepening of ties between both groups so that their relationship is developed to the point where more academics will share what universities have⁷ with groups in political struggle. What Smolash and Tucker-Abramson offer here can therefore be understood as a call for concrete, practical forms of solidarity between those activists who are professional scholars and those who are not.

Literary criticism that quotes activist ideas is, furthermore, a way of applying to this discipline what is called in social movement scholarship "movement-relevant theory." Bevington and Dixon explain that this term refers to theory "that seeks to provide 'useable knowledge for those seeking social change' (Flacks 2004 138)" by "draw[ing] out useful information from a variety of contexts and translat[ing] it into a form that is more readily applicable by movements to new situations. . . . Movement participants can and do produce such theory. Scholars can produce movement-relevant theory as well. . . and may even be even be in a distinctly favourable position to do so" (189-90). Criticism can be a source for the generation of movement-relevant theory when activist knowledge is applied to analysis of literary texts, particularly those that deal with socio-political injustice, represent social movements or are produced by them. The experiences that are rendered in such works, as well the histories surrounding their form, production, circulation and reception are one source for precisely the sorts of diverse, context-

specific insights that at times can be translated for use in a broad range of circumstances in the manner that Bevington and Dixon describe.

Movement-relevant theory does not mean “uncritical adulation of a favoured movement...[S]uch an approach does not provide it with any useful information and does not aid the movement in identifying and addressing problems which may hinder its effectiveness. Likewise, a movement-relevant approach cannot be an uncritical reiteration of the pre-existing ideas of a favoured movement” (Bevington and Dixon 191). Movement-relevant theory aims at critical reflection on the goals and strategies that activists take up in a variety of contexts so as to facilitate greater understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. A challenge arising from this approach is that a literary critic who critiques social movement participants risks alienating them and thereby undermining the alliances that movement-relevant theory wants to create.

One way that literary critics writing about social movements have sought to mitigate the risk of undermining relations with them is by being accountable to the activists about whom they write. Smolash argues that academics who cite activists’ work can both create or intensify relationships between activists and paid intellectuals and build accountability between them. She writes that “if we wish to defend claims, implicit or explicit to ‘helping’ those we write about in [mass media, literary production, and academic research], all three must be accountable directly to those they represent. Research grounded in the theorizing of people directly affected by security policies . . . can open up options for meaningful coalition building” (760). Though Smolash’s point specifically pertains to state repression of racialized migrants, it can be applied more broadly to other sites of contestation against neoliberal globalization. Her suggestion is that a way of being accountable to people in struggle is to help create spaces in which they can speak

for themselves in elite intellectual circles by, for example, quoting them. Doing so is a way of bringing the particular concerns of communities in struggle to the attention of people in privileged positions of knowledge production and, because these are direct quotes from social justice activists, it is a way of doing so that does not purport to speak for groups in struggle or at least significantly mitigates the extent to which that can be understood to be happening.

Amplifying the voices of such activists can, in short, be understood as a form of accountability to the extent that this is done without supplanting or taking credit for their perspectives. When knowledge is produced in this way, it is collectively owned by activists who are professional scholars and those who are not. The significance of communally owning knowledge is an issue that I explore further in Chapter 3, where I consider the matter in the context of post-secondary classrooms.

Furthermore, it is commonplace among activists and writers to argue that people in positions of relative power and privilege such as professional intellectuals can express solidarity with people in struggle by taking direction from them. For example, bell hooks writes that “Privilege does not have to be negative, but we have to share our resources and take direction about how to use our privilege in ways that empower those who lack it. Let’s talk about reciprocal education. . . . Let’s talk about sharing conversation as a radical act” (hooks and Mesa-Bains 73). My understanding of hooks’ point is that merely disavowing privilege or feeling guilt for having it is unproductive and that it is far more responsible for people in positions of relative power to deploy it alongside exploited, marginalized people. Quoting people involved in movements for social justice in literary criticism is a way of speaking *with* people in struggle rather than *about* them. It is a way of following their lead in that it brings the concerns of activists to the fore in academic discussions that are commenting on injustice and inequality and

efforts to combat them. In this way, the scholarly discourse in such fields as literary criticism can, at least to some extent, be directed by people involved in political organizing. Re-configuring in this manner the conventional ways in which knowledge is produced is itself important because the ethics and implications of knowledge produced by scholarship are closely linked to the question of to whom research is accountable. Chris Dixon and Alexis Shotwell write that the issue of accountability can be approached

in terms of how knowledge itself is produced. Veteran activist and academic Richard Flacks nicely illustrates this recalling that a central slogan among radical sociologists in the late sixties was “knowledge for whom?” The question remains pressing, and it begs another: accountability to whom? One way to answer this question is to think about the communities that validate and thus structure our scholarship. With whom is our work in conversation?...We think of accountability as involving far more than a basic attention to research ethics. It is a relationship that orients our attention, commitments, and research questions.

Citing the experiences and analyses of activists who are not professional intellectuals is a way that literary critics can take direction from them and doing this is a way being accountable to the activists. I make this last claim in part on the grounds that, when an academic’s research and writing directly engages activists, connections between these two groups can be established or deepened. Quoting people engaged in political struggle is a way of keeping one’s scholarly work in conversation with them. When critics do so, they demonstrate a devotion to directing academic research and writing to people who are doing the day to day work of fostering relationships between individuals and organizations whose shared goals include resisting the various uneven ways that neoliberalism exploits and marginalizes. A consequence of

demonstrating this commitment can be the establishment of greater mutual trust, respect, personal ties, co-operation, and collaboration between activists and professional intellectuals.

A second, related approach that professional literary critics can take to ensure that their critical engagement with activist practice does not divide the two groups coincides with one of the principal reasons for building greater ties between them at all. While I argue above that citing activists in scholarly work can be advantageous to activists because it makes their knowledge socially recognizable as knowledge, I also want to suggest that closer ties to activists who are not full-time scholars can be at least as beneficial for those of us who are. Professional intellectuals' analyses profit from exposure to practices, experiences, information, interpretations, and modes of understanding developed by communities in struggle, not all of which are readily accessible to people who make a living from intellectual work that is typically university-based.

Making Criticism Public

Even criticism that makes meaningful contributions to social justice struggles is “still in the world of intellectual expertise, a world divided between those who know and who have access to knowledge and its instrumentalities and those who are disempowered, exploited, marginalized, or under-represented” (Merod 134). In such a place “the critic’s authority exists to a considerable extent . . . at the expense of those unauthorized people who have neither political nor cultural representation in the dominant hierarchy of power, privilege, authority, and values” (Merod 134). In part because of this dilemma radical literary critics often advocate making criticism a type of public good. Those who advocate that position typically do so in part on the grounds that this activity can be politically effective. Making criticism a public good is one facet of enabling the resources and skills necessary for research to be held in common in the manner that Appadurai advocates: “it is important to deparochialise the idea of research and make it

more widely available....Research, in this sense, is not only the production of original ideas and new knowledge....It is also something simpler and deeper. It is the capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one's current knowledge in relation to some task, goal or aspiration" ("The Right" 176). The idea of research that Appadurai articulates can include that which takes as its objective a development of the capacities to make use of literary texts to think about, discuss, and work for an end to exploitation and oppression. My argument here is that, because the research associated with literary criticism can contribute to broad social justice struggles in the ways I have been discussing throughout this chapter, many critics have brought this work to sites more likely to be accessed by people whose lives do not revolve around the academy. I call this process making criticism public.

Underlying this argument for increasing the public character of research activities including literary criticism is the reality that communities of intellectuals constitute only one of many segments of the body politic and that professional scholars who wish to contribute to building a more just society are best positioned to do so when they find ways of engaging other publics. Merod, for example, writes "that the critic who means to contribute to building an intellectual community beyond the stable confines of the academy must think of interpretive power and hermeneutic authority as events or enablements that do not reside only with specialized professional territories" (134). What I derive from Merod's argument is that criticism must be disseminated beyond the scholar's conventional terrain if that criticism is to affect people other than those working or studying at a university at a given time.

Len Findlay argues that, because the study of creative writing is always political, the task of the critic is to struggle to make the study of literatures in English

a source of good instrumentality, by which I mean in part traditional disciplinarity but also a set of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary connections that define more by (politicized) commonality than by difference, and that defetishize expertise and writing, at least so far as to re-empower generalists and the work of “going public” and “going native” alongside publishing in academic journals and with academic presses. I mean also a set of activities self-defined and widely recognized as forms of useful knowledge—useful today and tomorrow as enhanced communicative and interpretative skills, and invaluable over a lifetime of engaged and critical citizenship and development of new solidarities. (“Always Indigenize!” 322)

Since the study of literature inevitably has one social application or another, struggles within criticism are struggles for how criticism will be used. Findlay’s argument is that a desirable way to employ criticism is to make it public. I take that to mean that he advocates finding ways to connect this work to that vast majority of Canadian society for whom the intellectual disputes taking place in academia are of marginal importance. Findlay takes this position because he sees making criticism public as part of a process of building the social connections and consciousness that are necessary to challenge inequality and exploitation. In this sense, making criticism public is part of fulfilling the task Sabine Milz sets out when she argues that “our key task as contemporary Canadian critics is . . . to recover our sense of ‘the public’ from decades of commercialization, privatization, and de-democratization” (“Canadian University” 135).

Milz’s argument is that one way criticism is made public is by creating and circulating it outside of universities and large, commercial presses. The point being made here is that making criticism public involves more than simply reaching as wide an audience as possible with that

criticism. For such criticism to be understood as not only public but activist, it has to have political resonance.

An example of an effort to make criticism public is *Beyond the Book*, “a research project that aims to produce a transnational analysis of mass reading events [such as Oprah’s Book Club, *Canada Reads*, or the UK television show *Richard and Judy’s Book Club*] and the contemporary meanings of reading in the UK, USA, and Canada” (Fuller 65). *Beyond the Book* has been funded by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council, The British Academy, the Department of American and Canadian Studies at the University of Birmingham, Mount Saint Vincent University, and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation. Its core team consists of three scholars, Danielle Fuller, DeNel Rehberg Sedo, and Anouk Lang, as well as an administrative assistant and 34 temporary project workers and translators (“About” *Beyond the Book*). The purpose of the research is to examine “reading as a social practice, rather than privileging the investigation of reading as a hermeneutic or interpretive practice (while recognizing that these practices are imbricated: shared reading is also, in part, an interpretive process of rereading)” (Fuller 70). The scholars involved in *Beyond the Book* ask people who participate in mass reading events qualitative questions and gather quantitative data in the form of surveys (Fuller 72). The researchers do so to use participants’ “own articulations and analyses of their shared reading practices and event experiences” as a way of “seeking to understand and to analyze dominant and subordinate kinds of knowledge; that is, knowledge created, informed by, and sometimes resistant to the ruling relations of power” (Fuller 71).

Beyond the Book has overtly activist concerns. For example, one of the questions it investigates is, “Do mass-reading events attract marginalized communities, foster new reading practices, and enable social change?” (Fuller 79). Moreover, the research team has found

evidence of “readers’ desires for the connection and a sense community that can be built via public and broadcast reading events, even if the community is ephemeral, or as in the case of the *Canada Reads* respondents, imagined” (Fuller 74). Participants’ commentaries also “speak to the apparent power of reading and books to bring people together, to offer various kinds of pleasure, to change world views or mental states” (Fuller 75). *Beyond the Book* is therefore an instance of making activist criticism public in at least two senses. It generates research useful for scholars with an interest in the degrees to which literature can help build community and change people’s opinions. It also encourages participants to reflect on the range of potential political significance of public reading events and in that way can contribute to foregrounding the possible social implications of literary analysis in participants’ reading and critical practices.

While *Beyond the Book* links universities and state institutions to segments of the broader population, public activist criticism is also often produced and disseminated outside of the government-funded post-secondary system. One reason for this trend is the barriers to the production of radical knowledge within the university system that I have been discussing.

Appadurai points out that

The question of whether someone has produced new knowledge . . . requires a community of assessment, usually pre-existent, vocational, and specialised. This community is held to be competent to assess not just whether a piece of knowledge is actually new but whether its producer has complied with the protocols of pedigree: the review of the literature, the strategic citation, the delineation of the appropriate universe—neither shapelessly large nor myopically small—of prior, usually disciplinary, knowledge. (“Grassroots” 10)

The gatekeeping that Appadurai describes means that in practice it is people with significant institutional power who determine what constitutes the category of knowledge that is produced by university researchers. Moreover, Terry Eagleton writes that historically

criticism was only ever significant when it engaged with more than literary issues—when, for whatever historical reason, the ‘literary’ was suddenly foregrounded as the medium of vital concerns deeply rooted in the general intellectual, cultural and political life of an epoch...It has only been when criticism, in the act of speaking of literature emits a lateral message about the shape and destiny of a whole culture that its voice has compelled widespread attention. (107)

One way for criticism to have the effects that Eagleton describes is not only for it to be published in outlets that are produced outside of academia and mainstream for-profit publishing, but also for it to have an explicit mandate to pursue social justice struggles. Eagleton claims that the development of a new, radical popular culture “involves more than producing works which make socialist theory intelligible to a mass audience, important though that project is; such a readership must be institutionalized rather than amorphous, able to receive and interpret such work in a collective context and to ponder its consequences for political action” (113).

Alternative media outlets with a clear orientation toward building movements to both resist injustice and build an equal world are one site at which the readership Eagleton mentions has moved in the direction of institutionalization. Publishing in such venues is part of de-professionalization. Heble makes an argument about postmodernism that I suggest can be applied more generally to literary scholarship that professes a desire to contribute to building a more just society: “the very institutionalization and academicization of postmodernism has functioned to prevent us—as teachers, scholars, students, and citizens—from attending to

struggles and inequalities in the social and political world *outside* the academy” (emphasis in original) (“New Contexts” 78). Said describes such distortions as arising because of a

powerful cult of professional expertise, whose main ideological burden stipulates that social, political, and class-based commitments should be subsumed under the professional disciplines, so that if you are a professional scholar of literature or a critic of culture, all your affiliations with the real world are subordinate to your professing in these fields. Similarly, you are responsible not so much to an audience in your community or society, as to and for your corporate guild of fellow experts, your departments of specialization, your discipline. (*Culture and Imperialism* 321)

Professionalization is what happens when intellectual work ostensibly concerned with issues that shape the lives of the larger society is instrumentalized for the career advancement of its practitioners, and for the branding of the universities that employ them, so that a meaningful commitment to the people with which it proclaims solidarity fades and the social efficacy of this scholarship is lost. Professionalization means that academics’ energies are principally aligned with their universities and their colleagues and that the broader society loses out on the real or potential benefits of critical activity. I use the term “de-professionalization” to describe the opposite. The word denotes a process of doing criticism in fora that allow what is socially useful about that work, such as its capacity to nurture critical consciousness, to take place outside of the regimes of professionalization that tend to disfigure these productive capacities.

An example of important anti-neoliberal activist literary criticism that has been produced and disseminated outside of professional institutions can be found in the book reviews published in *Briarpatch* magazine. *Briarpatch* is a reader-supported non-profit that receives support from the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF), is overseen by a

volunteer board of directors, and is staffed by unionized workers. It is “not just devoted to reporting on social movements — it’s committed to building them” (“About *Briarpatch*”). In 1973 the magazine began in Saskatoon as a cheaply-made space in which “low-income earners, welfare recipients and the unemployed could articulate their views on issues that affect them” (“About *Briarpatch*”).

An instance of the critical, anti-neoliberal activism found in *Briarpatch* is Mercedes Eng’s March 7th 2013 piece “compass/check/pulse point,” a review of Cynthia Dewi Oka’s poetry collection, *nomad of salt and hard water*. Eng writes that Oka’s work “drops anchor in the transoceanic struggle of bodies against borders. Grounded in recognition of the complexities of her immigrant attempt to settle on stolen Indigenous land, where the colonial project continues through prisons and pipelines, Oka’s activist poetics provide a way for readers to understand and enact lateral solidarities in the struggle for social justice.” Eng practices the systemic criticism that I discuss above. I say that because, as opposed to understanding the figures in Oka’s poems in purely individualist terms, Eng situates them within multifaceted neo-imperialist dynamics in which migrants who experience racism in Canada can according to Eng and Oka also be read as complicit in the colonization of Aboriginal territory. Furthermore, Eng argues that Oka “foregrounds and articulates what Marx misses: coloured women’s bodied labour barbed-wired by the tense fiscal eroticism of capital.” Eng clarifies and expands on the aspects of Oka’s poetry that are concerned with what both writers deem to be the failings of traditional Marxism. By arguing that anti-capitalist movements need to be more rigorously de-colonized, feminist, and anti-racist than their antecedents, Eng and Oka contribute to discourse surrounding how the next Left might look in a publication with a largely activist readership.

Also of note is that among the categories the online review of the article is tagged as belonging to are colonization, economy, politics, and labour. This method of organizing the material *Briarpatch* produces is significant because it is an unambiguous acknowledgment of the material, political character of literary works. Underlining this point is itself a type of activist intervention in that it encourages readers to understand these texts as utterances that are both shaped by and capable of influencing social conditions, as opposed to analyses that regard literary texts as objects produced by exceptional individuals that must be revered and preserved because they in some way embody the allegedly desirable values of a given society. In that sense making transparent the inherently political character of literary works through these tags is a way of fulfilling one of the tasks Findlay sets out for the study of literature, which is to enable “The critical citizenry . . . to see or be taught to see in this living archive, and in its old and new technological modalities and mediations . . . the endlessly adroit yet oppressive management of the meanings of class, race, and gender, the endless silencing and mockery imposed or undertaken in the name of humane ideals and moral universals” (“Always Indigenize!” 323).

Another source for literary criticism that foregrounds the relation between these texts and social justice movements is *rabble.ca*'s book reviews section. *rabble.ca* was itself born of resistance to neoliberalism: it was launched immediately before the protests against the 2001 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City (“About” *rabble.ca*). The website is a not-for-profit that relies on support from individuals, organizations, and sustainers, and all of its material can be accessed for free. An example of the anti-neoliberal critical activism that takes place on *rabble.ca* is Christina Turner's June 12th 2014 review of Nadia Bozak's novel *El Niño*. One of the main characters in this book, Chavez, is a coyote who earns money transporting young boys through the desert and later labours on the soy, fruit, and chicken farms where the boys end up.

He has been hired by a well-off white woman named Honey to guide her through the desert to find Marianne, her mother, who has gone missing. *El Niño* is a book about migration in which, as Turner writes, “the border is doubly a solid line and an empty expanse that creates and defines work. Migrant boys stream across the unnamed border from south to north, chased by the faceless paramilitary figures of Control, to work for little pay on farms that need cheap labour.”

Turner’s review is notable for the explicit link she draws between the novel and current debates around neoliberal globalization: “for me this is a book about labour: who does it, who benefits from it, who suffers. It is timely that this book was released just as the Canadian Temporary Foreign Worker program came under fire.” Like Eng, Turner practices what I have been calling systemic criticism. Turner connects the particular manifestation of the contradictions of neoliberal globalization found in the Canadian Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program to the labour that takes place under capitalism more generally. I make this argument because I read the first sentence of that quote as a comment on exploitation as such, and particularly its racialized nature, in view of the way that Turner proceeds from her remark about capitalism writ large to in the next sentence speaking to the TFW.

Turner’s comments on Chavez are also relevant in this context. She writes:

Bozak doesn’t just draw attention to the problems of migrant labour by depicting the exploitation of young boys in fruit fields (although she does plenty of that). This power imbalance, in which racialized bodies toil for the pleasure of white people in the north, is addressed through the narrative and somewhat corrected by it. Chavez controls the action: he leads Honey across the desert, he finds her years later and he gets the last word. Honey and Marianne equally come to sympathize with the migrant boys and try to

help, but this is not a problem that can be solved by a single act of charity, however large.

The problem is structural, and Chavez tells us so.

This passage is an exercise in the systemic criticism that I claim is a form of activism. Turner uses Bozak's novel to argue that the kindness people in positions of power and privilege might occasionally offer marginalized people is not an adequate solution to such inequality and that it is therefore necessary to dismantle and replace the system that produces that inequality.

Turner's point about how Bozak's narrative structure "correct[s]" the power imbalance to which racialized migrant workers are subject is equally relevant here. In highlighting Chavez's securing of control of the narrative, Turner helps in the imagining of an aspect of an emancipatory politics. Moreover, Turner notes that "proceeds from *El Niño* are meant to benefit Frontier College's Labourer-Teacher program, the federal funding to which has recently been cut." Here Turner uses her review to perform an act of solidarity with migrant workers. When a novel gets a positive review, sales of it frequently increase, so if Turner's piece has that effect on Bozak's book, more money will be available for Frontier College's Labourer-Teacher program. Merely mentioning that the money Bozak makes will be used in that way will make purchase of the book more appealing to much of *rabble.ca*'s predominantly leftist readership, so this is another sense in which Turner's review helps encourage sales of *El Niño* and money for Frontier College's undertaking. This contribution to the struggles of migrant workers, notable as it is as an explicit rebuke of the state's funding reduction, is the most concrete form of anti-neoliberal activist criticism that I have come across in my research.

Rinaldo Walcott as Case Study in Critical Activism:

Rinaldo Walcott, who teaches in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education's (OISE) Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, is an example of an intellectual who

practices cultural criticism as a form of anti-neoliberal activism. For many years he has made criticism public by writing and speaking in fora accessible to broad audiences. In doing so, he has consistently articulated the interconnections between neoliberal capitalism and other forms of inequality such as racism. Walcott has made these contributions to outlets that include a range of conservative newspapers, leftist magazines, public broadcasters, and online media.

Walcott's cultural criticism frequently appears in popular presses. His first book, *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada*, is a study of black Canadian culture published by Insomniac Press. This is an independent, medium-sized publisher principally known for fiction and poetry and whose books are sold in 40 countries ("About Us" Insomniac). Deciding to publish with Insomniac enables Walcott to reach an audience beyond the academic specialists who are the main constituency for scholarly imprints. The book "launched Walcott into the spotlight" and led to him frequently appearing on television (Blackburn-Evans). Walcott's critical writing also appears in newspapers with Canada-wide readerships. For instance, he has written book reviews for the *National Post*. His first contribution to the paper was a 1999 review of John Boyko's book *The Evolution of Canadian Racism*. In the unabashedly right wing *National Post*, Walcott asserts that "Like that of any settler colony, Canadian history is a litany of racist events, injuries, and legislation." The review is activist in that Walcott promotes a book that, according to him, "undermine(s) the prevalent myth of Canada as a benevolent and tolerant state." Walcott argues that "if, as [Boyko] contends, legislation and newspapers were at one time central to the creation of a racist nation-state, then surely those resources can also be crucial to its unmaking." Here Walcott advocates an activist strategy in which cultural work is central to undoing racism and he does so in a publication that claimed at that time to have a paid circulation of 300,000 ("*National Post*").

Walcott has also contributed to publications with expressly activist mandates. His 2009 article “Reconstructing Manhood” is a case in point. The essay was published in *Small Axe*, “a Caribbean platform for social, political, and cultural criticism” whose “aim is to engage existing practices of criticism in and on the regional and diasporic Caribbean” so as to develop “their yield as much as their limits” and to foster “the critical languages in which change can be thought and alternatives reimagined” (“Project”). *Small Axe* is based at Columbia University (“Project”), published by Duke University Press (Walcott, “Reconstructing”), and its editors are almost exclusively professors with the one exception being a PhD candidate (“People”). These features of the magazine suggest that academics are its target audience. Thus it is an intellectual elite for whom Walcott articulates the following task:

When we bridge the gap between neoliberalism’s economic and cultural arms and consider the complicated politics of representation . . . and the ways in which the poor refuse to settle into being just waste, then the work for intellectuals in our time becomes more urgent, as the work of not just making life livable but making life anew presents itself as our only option. (“Reconstructing”)

In this way, Walcott’s contributions to *Small Axe* can be understood as efforts to provide political clarity to a readership with considerable intellectual authority.

Walcott has also published in *This Magazine*, a publication that says it “focuses on Canadian politics, pop culture and the arts, but in keeping with its radical roots never pulls punches” (“About” *This*), which indicates that it is geared toward progressive readers. In an article published just before the first election of U.S President Barak Obama, Walcott criticizes Obama’s neoliberalism. Walcott writes that “Obama and Republican nominee John McCain are shockingly similar in their market policies” and that “Obama buttresses the myth that those who

work hard enough can achieve what they want” (“Expect Canadian”). Moreover, Walcott argues that black people remain marginal in Canada, “a country that requires more and more immigrants to secure its continued economic health and wealth” and that for this to change “the closed-shop party systems needs to have its doors smashed wide open” (“Expect Canadians”). Thus Walcott articulates the racialized character of Canadian capitalism and, with his use of the word “smashed,” calls for fierce resistance to what he sees as in large measure a racially exclusive political system. He does so in a popular magazine that describes itself as “one of Canada’s longest-publishing alternative journals” and “oppositional” (“About” *This*).

Canadian Dimension is another magazine with expressly activist goals for which Walcott has written. It describes itself as a publication “which shows that there is an alternative to the corporate agenda and the dictates of the global market; that the dream of a better society is still alive” and which “draws on the best writers on the Left, both familiar and fresh” (“About Us” *Canadian Dimension*). In a tribute to Amiri Baraka and Stuart Hall that Walcott published in *Canadian Dimension*, he provides readers with ideas about how culture can be used to foster social change. He writes that

Through Baraka and Hall we come to see how black people’s creative, expressive and intellectual cultures work to revise and potentially remake the forms of unfreedom that are first practiced on black bodies but can never preempt those bodies from participating in the revision of all of human life. Baraka and Hall were and are significant figures of the necessary revisions of human life lived already and headed into the future. (“A Tribute” 44)

In this article, Walcott offers readers hope by suggesting that hegemonic power is never absolute and that resistance can re-make the world. He provides a conceptual framework through which to

understand the relation between intellectual work and social change in a publication striving to be “a forum for debate, where red meets green, feminists take on socialists, socialists take on social democrats, whites hear from aboriginals, activists report from all corners of Canada, trade unionists report from the front lines, [and] campaigns make connections” (“About Us” *Canadian Dimension*). Another expressly leftist publication for which Walcott has written is *rabble.ca*. In 2002, he wrote a critical review of *Bowling for Columbine* in which he criticizes filmmaker Michael Moore for portraying Canada as virtually free of violence and ghettos when

Many people of colour experience Toronto and Canada as violent, but not from the assumed usual suspects. Rather they find it violent from those in authority, like the police. Did not Moore come across all the police killings of black men and other men of colour in his research on gun violence in Canada? Or does police gun violence not count? (“Bowl Me Over.”)

During Toronto’s 2014 mayoral race, Walcott wrote for *rabble.ca* that black residents of the city should spoil their ballots because no “candidate in this election thus far has found it necessary to address Black people specifically” (“Why”). Moreover, on November 27th 2014, he wrote for the publication about the Black Lives Matter protests happening in the United States and Canada and argued that “We live in a culture that will cannibalize and monetize young black peoples’ creative innovations and simultaneously kill them for those same creative innovations with impunity” (“After Ferguson”).

Walcott has also practiced critical activism through editorial work. He served on the editorial collective of *Border/Lines: Canada’s Magazine of Cultural Studies*, a publication that saw itself as bridging the divide between universities and the general public (Genosko and Marcellus 25) and which was understood by several of its editors as a form of activism (Genosko

and Macellus 26). In addition, Walcott was an editor of *FUSE*, which “was a venue for timely and politically engaged publishing and programming reflecting the diversity of the contemporary art world. Our work fostered the exchange between social movements and the arts, featuring critical treatment of the most pressing and contentious issues in art, culture and politics from a Canadian perspective” (“About” Fuse). Walcott also brought together a group of intellectuals to found *New Dawn*, an online open access journal “dedicated to publishing scholarship that engages Black Canadian life and culture” so as “to produce forms of knowledge, both imaginary and empirical, about Black Canadians that might help to keep on with the necessary agenda of reimagining the human” (“Against Institution” 21), though only two issues were published.

Walcott also edited *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*, which he published with Insomniac. In doing so, he brings together in a book released by a popular press 11 chapters of what he describes as “politically engaged scholarship [that] seeks to complicate and push the boundaries of racial designation, but also the boundaries of the academic responses to Blackness within Canada” (“By Way” 10). Moreover, he conceives of the book’s activist function in the following terms: “The real political issue is when will those who shape the dominant cultural taste of the Canadian imaginary deal seriously with the apparent outpouring of contemporary Black Canadian expressive culture? *Rude* attempts to provoke such a conversation” (“By Way” 10). Furthermore, Walcott oversees “Beyond Blackness: ‘Other’ Canadians and the Re-making of the Nation,” a project that “analyzes work in media arts, visual arts, and music carried out by those who, because of racial, ethnic, and sexual difference, have historically been at the margins of traditional and institutional visions of the Canadian nation” (“Beyond Blackness”). The project is funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation and involves building “a multi-layered and interactive database as a living archive of text and

photographs, video, film and music clips and audio interviews from ‘Other Canadians’ from 1960 to the present” so as to facilitate “local and transnational conversations about, and research on, the impact of hybrid forms of representation for rewriting the nation” and to “provide a rich resource for educators and teacher educators working in culturally and racially ‘diverse’ schools” (“Beyond Blackness”). The activist function of this particular endeavour is therefore to provide teachers with a tool for transmitting to students the multidimensional lived experiences of Otherness in Canada.

Beyond Blackness is one of several instances of how Walcott’s critical activism extends beyond print. He has made interventions on the radio, on television, and through digital technology. In June of 2009, he was on CBC Radio’s *The Current* and advocated for the right of the pro-Palestinian group Queers Against Israeli Apartheid to march in Toronto’s Pride parade (“Pride and Politics”). On March 26th 2012, Walcott was on the same show to talk about racism in the wake of the killing of unarmed African American teenager Trayvon Martin by the vigilante George Zimmerman in Florida (“Justice”). Walcott was on the program again on May 8th 2014 to debate the merits of the anti-racist “Checking Privilege” movement. On November 25th 2014 he was a guest on *The Current* to discuss race in light of protests taking place in Ferguson, Missouri over a grand jury decision to not indict Darren Wilson, a white police officer who killed unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown (“Ferguson Reignites”).

Moreover, Walcott has been a guest seven times on the talk show *The Agenda* on the public broadcast network, TV Ontario (TVO). Video of each of these episodes can be streamed for free on the program’s website. Clips from many of the shows on which Walcott appears are also available on YouTube. Many other videos of Walcott can be found on YouTube. These include a 10:18 installment wherein he talks about racism and celebrity culture

(AsanteCimpean). In twenty seconds of footage Walcott notes the history of criminalizing LGBT people and says that “the only time the police should be in your bedroom is if you’re fucking them” as part of the “Think Twice” campaign against the criminalization of HIV undertaken by the group Aids Action Now. Another short clip, which is entitled “Environmental Migration,” features Walcott speaking at the May 2010 “No Growth Roundtable.” There is an audio recording of the February 2011 PEN Canada and Toronto Public Library event “What We Talk About When We Talk About Hate” in which Walcott participated and there is a clip of Walcott’s introduction to a forum he moderated for candidates from smaller parties running in the 2011 federal election (SupportLocalScene). YouTube enables events like the “No Growth Roundtable” and “What We Talk About When We Talk About Hate” to be preserved and accessed years after they were held. Prior to the spread of electronic technology such events were either ephemeral or, if they were recorded or transcribed, could not be replicated infinitely and instantly. With the advent of tools such as YouTube, critical activists’ interventions can be widely shared and accessed with far less effort than is involved in other archival systems. Some of the clips of Walcott have been viewed over a thousand times and others several hundred. Online media therefore offers cultural activists the advantage of making work like Walcott’s available without temporal or physical restriction.

Walcott also uses his Twitter account to make activist interventions. For instance, he repeatedly tweeted a letter he wrote to Toronto’s Power Plant art gallery. In the letter Walcott explains that he is withdrawing from his scheduled participation in an event at the gallery because he feels it shows too few black artists, particularly black Canadian artists (#writinthurrace). When Prime Minister Stephen Harper said that the practice of wearing a niqab is “rooted in a culture that is anti-women” (Chase), Walcott tweeted a picture of the Harper

family meeting with Pope Benedict XVI in which Laureen Harper's hair is covered with a veil and Walcott added the caption: "Evidence of what Harper means by anti-woman practices. Hypocrites." On the 50th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday civil rights march in Selma, Alabama, Walcott tweeted: "These USA civil right [sic] anniversary celebrations no longer make any sense to me. War criminals black and white claiming to march for freedom." On February 8th 2015, moreover, he tweeted an argument about the link between capitalism and racism that has no apparent relationship to any specific incident: "Let us always begin with: capitalism does not and cannot work for black people. Then let's see what happens." As of March 12th 2015, Walcott has 2,733 followers on Twitter and has tweeted 10,800 times. The commentary he provides on this platform reaches beyond his followers: any time one of them re-tweets a Walcott tweet, it is seen by all of their followers, including those who do not follow Walcott. Twitter-based activism therefore enables Walcott to instantly share his cultural analysis at any time with a large group of followers. As the examples provided above indicate, he frequently uses this platform to criticize racism, imperialism, capitalism, and other forms of oppression.

In these ways, Walcott's critical activist practice has been characterized by him expressing his political positions to general audiences, elite intellectual audiences, conservative audiences, and leftist audiences, across a wide range of media. He engages a wide range of segments of the citizenry in debates about culture and politics. In each of these far-reaching fora, Walcott challenges the ideologies and institutions that create and profit from inequality and exploitation, provides insight into how these might be dismantled, and offers ideas about how a better world might look.

Chapter 3: Teaching as Activism

Introduction

This chapter is about critical pedagogy in the context of post-secondary literature classes in Canada. Teachers of such courses report having students whose awareness of the socio-political world is blinkered. Arun Mukherjee, for example, writes about how her students' previous "education had allowed them to neutralize the subversive meanings implicit in a piece of good literature" (221). When Mukherjee's students write a paper on Margaret Laurence's short story "The Perfume Sea," which is about the British colonization of Ghana, they write generalizations about "humanity" (223) that Mukherjee says enable one to "hide behind a vocabulary which, on the one hand, overlooks one's own privileged position and, on the other, makes everyone look equally privileged" (225). Literature classes, however, present an opportunity to address these problems. Daniel Coleman writes that

For teachers of the Canadian literatures, it must not cease to startle those who have been teaching Kogawa's *Obasan* for the past twenty years that every year a new crop of students reports that they had never heard of the internment of Canadians of Japanese descent during the 1940s until taking this class. Nor should it surprise us that students find that reading the intimate tensions and violences in *Obasan* or Beatrice Culleton Mosionier's *In Search of April Raintree* are much more powerful experiences than reading objective sounding historical accounts about the internment or sociological reports on interracial sexual abuse. We don't have to become Arnoldians or Leavisites to see that the critical intimacy of reading imaginative texts has a remarkable power to intervene in the reproduction of sanctioned ignorance. (41-42)

Coleman's reflection highlights the power of literary texts to respond to what, in his experience, is a widespread unfamiliarity with the crimes of the Canadian state. Yet the capacities of a literary work to engage students in learning about systemic racism and other forms of oppression can remain dormant without teaching strategies that are appropriate for mobilizing these. How the affective and pedagogic power that Coleman describes can be activated is the focus of this chapter.

People who teach post-secondary literature classes will, over the course of their careers, help shape the way that thousands of people understand matters of vital socio-political importance. For many literature scholars, the classroom will be the site of their most significant political intervention because of the sheer number of people that will ingest and be influenced by the teacher's thinking. Jim Merod underscores the urgency of this issue: "Since those in the North Atlantic circle who run one of the two colossal war machines, who sometimes circulate casual disinformation, are our students—'we humanists' have our task and target perpetually before us: the next generation of leaders and the critical culture that breeds democratic citizenship" (191). Though Merod's description is too narrow in that he neglects to mention the economic elites and technocrats whose political function is in no sense less significant than the classes he refers to, his point is especially resonant in Ontario where it is standard for universities to require that, whatever a student's academic program, she or he must earn one or more credits in the humanities.

Given these stakes, how can a post-secondary literature teacher encourage a critical attitude toward authority and official dogma as well as engagement with the social and political world in which students live? In this chapter I will discuss three ways a critical pedagogue can connect the classroom to the larger world, including what I call activation, the development of a

language of struggle, and the awakening of the radical imagination. In the process, I will offer some contributions toward remedying a shortcoming that Heble identifies in much of the theoretical writings on critical pedagogy, which is that these “frequently lack sustained attention to the specificities of the teaching and learning situations they describe” (“Re-ethicizing” 148). Similarly, Bold et al write that many of these works “seem reluctant to move beyond theoretical speculation and political positioning to focus on the practical, site-specific dynamics of alternative pedagogies as they play themselves out in particular settings, courses, classrooms and the public sphere” and that there is a “need to push beyond theorizing toward the concrete example.” While the discussion that follows is largely theoretical, I take up these challenges and provide some accounts of how critical pedagogy theory can be practiced in literature classes. I will also consider the arguments put forth by critical pedagogy scholars about whether, when, and how literature teachers should make known their specific political opinions. Finally, I will examine the material challenges that critical pedagogy faces in the neoliberal context such as high tuition fees and large class sizes.

Activation

The concept of activation is rooted in Merod’s comments about how pedagogues can link their work to a wider political context by challenging the broader ideologies and modes of conduct encouraged by state capitalism and necessary for its smooth functioning:

The teacher’s purpose, especially the oppositional teacher’s purpose, is to promote an intellectual identity in students who in large measure are vulnerable to the *pacifications* of the common culture that organizes capitalist reality....The teacher’s job is to breed the kind of critical capacities that allow students to resist such *disabling* forces. (emphases mine) (Merod 128)

Merod's principal claim here is that the classroom is a space where teachers can combat those aspects of state capitalism that function to keep large segments of the population obedient and uncritical. This argument is central to my purposes. Critical pedagogies aimed at linking students' critical consciousnesses to a broader socio-political context can be thought of as a process of activation, of nurturing those tendencies toward resistance that often merely lay dormant. Activation means in the first place fostering in students an awareness that social-economic inequality exists on an enormous scale and that this is undesirable, and in the second place an awareness that hegemonic systems are neither fixed nor eternal and can be changed through organized opposition. Activation is in this way a necessary antecedent to mobilization. Activation involves pedagogues and students collaborating to name dominant ideologies, describing in detail how they operate, and critiquing them.

The concept owes a great deal to Freire's notion of conscientization. As Myra Bergman Ramos notes in her translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, conscientization "refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (17). Activation has a similar focus. Yet activation is not merely another word for conscientization. The distinctions between conscientization and activation relate to the gap between the circumstances for which Freire's strategy was devised and the conditions that exist in neoliberal Canada. It would be a mistake to assume that the critical pedagogy scholars I discuss throughout this chapter simply graft Freire's pedagogy, which was initially developed in 1960s Brazil, on to North American societies in the decades that followed. Activation aims to help bridge the gaps between these two times and places. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is about educating illiterate adults (Shaul 11). Freire writes that conscientization "introduces or begins to introduce women and men to a critical form of thinking about their

world” (*Pedagogy* 85). On the other hand, teaching literature in contemporary North American post-secondary schools means working with young people who have reading, writing, and critical thinking skills that are developed to a point that most of them will have been at least relatively successful in high school. Nurturing their capacity and desire to be politically engaged in the ways articulated in writings on critical pedagogy will thus necessarily need to be done somewhat differently from the ways Freire advocated working with students. A major task for educators in Freire’s context was equipping mass numbers of people with foundational literacy skills that had been denied them and, following a 1964 military coup, doing so under a violent dictatorship that made education one of the “prime targets” for its crackdown (da Silva and McLaren 36-7). These are the barriers faced by teachers in Freire’s Brazil and they are plainly dissimilar from those that educators face in neoliberal Canada. Below I discuss in greater detail the socio-economics of teaching in a neoliberal society but here I will note that one way in which these manifest themselves is in widespread student complacency toward politics (Barrows 29-37), which constitutes a major challenge for critical pedagogues. In the discussion that follows, I will make clear that attempting to resolve this problem is a central feature of activation. By contrast, much of Freire’s work took place during “a brief period of intense popular agitation and participation demanding reforms” (da Silva and McLaren 36), a “climate of intense political radicalization” preceding the coup (da Silva and McLaren 36). In addition to the divide between Freire’s circumstances and those that exist in contemporary Canada, there are differences in the approaches and perhaps also the aims of activation and that of conscientization. An important example of these is that in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire says little about how conscientization might address racialized and gendered divisions of labour whereas in my

discussion of activation these are understood as central aspects of encouraging students to scrutinize how neoliberal society operates.

Strategies for activation need not be overly complex. bell hooks, for instance, describes how “when students return from breaks I ask them to share with us how ideas that they have learned in the classroom impacted on their experience outside. This gives them both the opportunity to know that difficult experiences may be common and practice at integrating theory and practice” (*Teaching* 43). She is writing specifically about teaching white students who may recognize racist tendencies in members of their families but this exercise can be just as useful for students who belong to any other dominant group or for students whose lives are marked by exploitation and marginalization. Moreover, hooks describes how, when teaching Toni Morrison, she has her students write

an autobiographical paragraph about an early racial memory. Each person reads that paragraph aloud to the class. Our collective listening to one another affirms the value and uniqueness of each voice. This exercise highlights experience without privileging the voices of students from any particular group. It helps create a communal awareness of the diversity of experiences and provides a limited sense of the experiences that may inform how we think and what we say. (*Teaching* 84)

Similar activities can be done to allow students to reflect upon their experiences with patriarchy, class, heteronormativity or any other instrument of domination. hooks’ exercises enable students to recognize that their lives have one relationship or another to oppressive institutions, beliefs or practices and that they endure these, benefit from them or some combination of both. hooks’ suggestions enable students to develop the concrete applications of the critical ideas and methodologies that radical leftist teachers aim to nurture. These approaches

can activate students by helping them realize particular aspects of their lives in which they can intervene to challenge inequality.

Another dimension of activation relates to the substantial attention that critical pedagogues have paid to the distribution of power between teacher and student as well as among students, and the methods by which knowledge is constructed and circulated during educational activities. This approach is at least as concerned with epistemological questions as it is with the content of the knowledge in question. Heble, for example, writes that “we must, as teachers, critics, and citizens, actively work to interrogate and alter the forces that shape the production, maintenance, and distribution of knowledge” (“New Contexts” 82). Furthermore, as Shor reminds us, “knowledge is not neutral. Rather it is the expression of historical moments where some groups exercise dominant power over others. That domination in school includes a traditional curriculum which interferes with the democratic and critical development of students. After years in passive classrooms, students do not see themselves as people who can transform knowledge and society” (28). Razack, furthermore, points to Elizabeth Ellsworth’s insight that professors and students need to “critically examine what we share and do not share, that we work from the basis that we all have only partial knowledge, and that we come from different subject positions” (47). These accounts share a recognition that politics is largely about struggles over what constitutes truth or knowledge and that a challenge to one is a challenge to the other. From this perspective activating in students an awareness that professors have no monopoly on knowledge and can and should be challenged about their claims can be an important part of emboldening students to interrogate all truth claims, to unmask those assertions of expertise that function as ideological pretexts for control and unequal distributions of wealth and power among

hegemonic intellectuals in the media, the state, private industry, the university and the many points at which these sectors overlap.

Writings on critical pedagogy consistently put forth of a view of a radically democratized classroom in which power is shared between professors and students. For example, Shor explains that “The classroom discourse is democratic in so far as it is constructed mutually by teachers and students. Students have equal speaking rights in the dialogue as well as the right to negotiate the curriculum. They are asked to co-develop and evaluate the curriculum” (33). Among Paulo Freire’s central insights is that an education aimed at liberation, a pedagogy of the oppressed, must reject the traditional approach to learning, the “‘banking’ concept of education in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits [of knowledge made by the teacher]” (53). This teaching strategy is monolglcal and it encourages and depends on passive students. As an alternative to the banking model, Freire offers a vision of learning that insists on “critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action” (47).

These claims that Freire makes are central tenets of critical pedagogy. To talk *at* students about the necessity of engaging in the world so as to change it, to lecture *to* them about their capacity to help facilitate a shift toward a more equal society, is to undercut content with form, to encourage precisely the types of qualities that de-activate. The classroom can be thought of a site to nurture these qualities. This is part of that branch of critical pedagogy theory that is concerned with what I call education as an embodied social justice practice. In this conception, the classroom is a social microcosm and the dynamics that exist within it must be subject to constant interrogation and aimed at procedural and formal equality. This view stresses that the processes by which the classroom environment is moulded need to be democratically shaped by the

students and the instructor and that these arrangements need to always be open to debate and re-figuring.

Working to create this dynamic means cultivating in students a healthy distrust of authority figures. A radical leftist teacher plainly cannot demand that students be skeptical of the alleged expertise of people in positions of state and corporate power while at the same time implicitly or explicitly suggesting that the professor's rule of the classroom is beyond question. The creation of democratic, dialogic relations between teacher and students depends on eradicating the myth of the professor as oracle. Critical attitudes in students can be fostered by encouraging them to recognize that the professor is not an omniscient figure to which they must submit. One way to do so is to establish syllabi and methods of evaluation democratically. It is far from certain that students who are empowered within the classroom will invariably proceed to take part in broader political struggles, and it is by no means true that students who are exclusively subject to authoritarian teachers are incapable of developing a critical consciousness. Yet the critical pedagogy scholars I have been discussing suggest that radical leftist teachers who aim at activating their students are far less likely to succeed if there is a disconnect between medium and message.

One argument critical educators consistently put forth for maintaining such continuity between form and content is that an emancipatory education must be forged collectively, a process that necessitates a practice of equality to the greatest extent possible between teachers and students. This means regarding education as characterized by an unending, multi-directional process, one that is defined by its ceaseless questioning or what Freire calls problem-posing, rather than by a student's linear movement from a position of ignorance to a position of wisdom that can be measured by whether or not they reach a particular pre-determined goal. Shor

explains that a problem-poser is one “who asks thought-provoking questions and who encourages students to ask their own questions. In this pedagogy, students experience education as something they do, not as something done to them” (26). Shor’s articulation directly points to the issue of activation. Activating students means creating in the classroom a space wherein they can act rather than be acted upon, a space for them to make a departure, however limited and partial, from the passivity inculcated by consumer culture and the highly limited form of political participation that exists in a representative democracy. It means forging an education of liveliness to “resist the culturally reproductive work of institutionalized education in producing good and docile citizens” (Bold et al). Having a classroom function in this way is central to an education that is an embodied practice of social justice. I say this on the grounds that a communal classroom environment at once de-mystifies the authority of the professor and also provides students with opportunities to live the equality and participatory democracy that are not afforded to them by hegemonic structures. The hope is that taking part in an organization that operates collectively will activate students so that they insist upon similar relations in other classes and in socio-economic institutions more generally.

As much as communal education is about ensuring that the voices of different groups and individuals are heard, it is also about interrogating capitalist property relations. A radical teacher, according to Freire,

does not regard cognizable objects as his private property, but as the object of reflection by himself and the students. In this way, the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms [her] reflections in the reflection of the students. The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher

presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. (61-2)

The emphasis on property is notable for at least two reasons. First, this view suggests that to have the authority of the professor upset, to challenge the terms on which conceptions of knowledge are arrived at, it is necessary for ownership of that knowledge and of the means of its production to be held in common. Second, if education is to be an embodied practice of social justice, the classroom needs to be an environment that challenges the institution of private property. If knowledge is the primary good produced and consumed in the classroom, it is important that this be something to which students and teachers have equal access to make use of and to create. Activation involves, in part, establishing a space in which students can live social relations different from those experienced through the dominant institutions with which they typically interact and so opening up to them alternative experiences with property relations is one way to help encourage in them the desire and the will to live an economic life of mutualism and solidarity.

Group assignments are one tool that critical pedagogy scholars have identified for enabling students to call into question capitalist property regimes. For example, Heble writes that collaborative work “forces students to move outside the individualism and isolationism fostered by more traditional kinds of academic assignments (term papers, tests, exams etc.). In place of pedagogical efforts geared towards a narrative of autonomy . . . we need, moreover, to encourage our students to confront the networks of power and privilege that make self-sufficiency even thinkable” (“Re-ethicizing” 153). The view that Heble critiques of people as purely self-willed socio-economic beings is one of liberal capitalism’s foundational assumptions. Within currently hegemonic ideologies, the notions that individual property rights are absolute, and that equal

opportunities are to be ensured but not equal outcomes, are both predicated on the beliefs that every person is solely responsible for his or her financial success or failure and that those who do not accrue material comfort are to be disdained for their presumed ignorance or lack of effort and as such are entitled to no more than a subsistence living that a society's economic winners provide out of benevolence. The experience of group work in which all members make decisions democratically, contribute equally, and share equally in the same outcome of the work (their grade), can demonstrate to students that production is inter-dependent, despite the isolated forms of work that humanities students typically experience and despite the hegemonic economic ideologies that I just described. Instead of leaving these matters implicit, professors can discuss with students the ways that group assignments differ from individualistic ones as well as how this work can serve as a model for economic production in general. Group assignments can function as exercises in counter-hegemony in that students might find that democratically-run labour provides rewards because it bonds workers and makes labour a more humanizing, rewarding process. Assignments undertaken in collectivist forms in this sense allow students to live education as an embodied practice of social justice that has the potential to activate their sense of the advantages of arranging production in these terms, and to activate them to struggle for this form of labour at other sites of educational and economic work.

Carrying out education in a communal form in this and other ways strikes at the core of conventional models of education. hooks argues that

Since the vast majority of students learn through conservative, traditional educational practices and concern themselves only with the presence of the professor, any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged. That insistence cannot simply be stated. It has to be demonstrated through pedagogical practices. To begin, the

professor must genuinely *value* everyone's presence....Seeing the classroom as a communal place enhances the likelihood of collective effort in creating and sustaining a learning community. (emphasis hooks') (*Teaching* 8)

Conventional pedagogical approaches are teacher-centric in that the professor is regarded as the sole or primary actor in the educational process, a notion that is reinforced by practices such as monological lectures. If the radical leftist humanities classroom can be understood as a social microcosm, it is worth considering with which institutions that classroom shares characteristics. Conservative approaches to education, where one person in a position of comparative power and privilege stands up and addresses a captive audience, resemble the clergy preaching at the congregation, the sovereign directing the governed, the employer instructing employees, the warden instructing the inmates. These are all sets of relationships which insist upon obedience, and a pedagogy following the same model is also at risk of rewarding docility and deference to authority. Traditional, teacher-centric pedagogy is education as an embodied practice of inequality and authoritarianism. Embodying classroom equality, as opposed to merely telling students that they are valued, involves radically reconfiguring the dominant educational model. This is what I take out of hooks' comments. Her point is that pedagogical practices need to clearly and consistently demonstrate that education is a collective undertaking. The classroom, she suggests, can function as a counter-space relative to other social institutions and as such it can be a place wherein students become activated through the lived experience of an education that is an embodied practice of social justice.

One way to embody classroom equality, rather than simply stating to students that this exists, is to have some fraction of students' grades be composed of peer-evaluation. This can work by having students participate on a voluntary basis in a process wherein they grade each

other's assignments, blindly where this is possible, and the grade for that assignment is made up of some combination of the average mark assigned by peers and that assigned by the professor. Peer evaluation operates on the same assumption as the peer review process employed for scholarly publications, which is that one's colleagues are well-positioned to judge the quality of each other's work; in the pedagogical application of this principle, a professor treats students as equals in that the professor allows his or her students' work to be judged by the same methods as her or his own work. It is a form of power sharing that demonstrates to students that their knowledge is valued, gives students a part in shaping their educational experience, and has the potential to activate them to struggle to have similar cooperation and horizontal power relations in other aspects of their political lives.

Yet one must question the degree to which it is actually possible for professors and students to be equals in the classroom. hooks concludes that such an arrangement cannot be arrived at in absolute terms. She says that her goal is to create a class in which she and her students can be "for however brief a time, a community of learners together. It positions me as a learner. But I'm also not suggesting that I don't have more power. And I'm not trying to say we're all equal here. I'm trying to say that we are all equal here to the extent that we are equally committed to creating a learning context" (*Teaching* 153). hooks' argument is that while there are aspects of the pedagogical experience in which teachers and students can be equals, for example in contributing to the production of knowledge, efforts to create a scenario in which professors have no more power than students are unlikely to be realized. For example, a teacher may believe that assigning numbers or letters as a form of evaluation is an arbitrary practice that inculcates capitalistic values of individual competition but that teacher will be required by the education system to give out these grades. Most students in turn value high grades because these

impact their prospects for further education and employment. Grading is accordingly a form of power that cannot be erased by any one critical pedagogue or by a small group of them because radical leftist classrooms do not exist in a vacuum. Similarly, whatever efforts teachers make to de-construct the social power afforded them, it is naïve to assume that what a teacher says in a classroom will not be accorded special weight in comparison to what students say.

A simple way to nevertheless embody classroom equality to the maximum possible extent, which is mentioned with surprising infrequency in writings on critical pedagogy, is to ask students which approaches to engaging with the ideas under consideration works best for them and to then establish through dialogue as close to a consensus as possible on how this can be worked toward collectively. In my classes, students consistently say that they benefit from having key definitions and central concepts visible as part of a slide show during class discussion and available to them online afterwards. In order to make this a communal undertaking, I often have the students prepare these slides with me in class, as opposed to my arriving with a series of pre-made slides for them to passively consume. Depending on the nature of the material under consideration and the size of the class, this can be done as either one large group or by dividing the work into groups. This may not be an especially visionary idea but it is one practical way of proving to students that they own the cognizable objects that are produced and consumed in the classroom. It is a concrete way of de-mystifying the professor's authority and of re-distributing a share of their power. In the social microcosm of the classroom, this is part of an activation strategy because for students it is an exercise in intervening in knowledge production.

Brydon's concept of "cross-talk" offers a practical example that is helpful in this context, particularly because it offers some guidance for creating classroom dialogue that is not unduly professor-centric. She defines cross-talk as "those moments when the normal circuits of give-

and-take discussion get broken” (“Cross-Talk” 68). Brydon elaborates by writing that one tactic for facilitating this dynamic is

the assignment of short response pieces or position papers that students may choose to deliver on the first day that a new set of readings are assigned. Several of these replace the traditional seminar. By having a group of students present their responses in sequence before opening discussion to the class, it is possible to stage contradictory readings in such a way as to open further discussion rather than forcing the premature taking of sides. With four radically different readings of a single text unfolding in sequence, it becomes easier for the presenters and listeners to entertain alternative possibilities to their own earlier certainties without getting caught up in the kind of competitive rivalries that a formal debate or paired seminar and previously assigned seminar response encourage. (“Cross-Talk” 68-9)

In the social microcosm of the classroom cross-talk is an embodiment of rhizomatic debate, a chance for students to live the experience of contesting knowledge, and of participating in democratic control of the means of the production of this good. Particularly important is Brydon’s point that this approach to class discussion undermines the tendency for debates to be ego-driven and treated as zero-sum games: in this way, the exercise counteracts the antagonistic individualism central to the neoliberal society in which students live and enables a form of collaborative dialogue in which knowledge is collectively produced and contested by and for the benefit of all; whereas competitive debating is a performance of capitalist ideology, cross-talk is a performance of democratic anarcho-socialism. Cross-talk also has the related advantage of fostering debate in which the professor is not the focal point and so it can be understood as a way of reducing his or her power and augmenting that of the students.

Razack, however, points out that teachers who have an interest in developing a classroom with an embodied practice of social justice should not assume that this can be achieved exclusively through strategies such as those that I have been discussing for shifting power dynamics within the learning environment. Razack says in her discussion of Ellsworth that it is necessary to “name inequalities in the classroom and devise ground rules for communication” (47). One way to address this is by adopting speaking guidelines designed to ensure gender and racial parity. For example, principles can be established under which two males cannot speak consecutively without a female being heard from, or two white people cannot contribute until a person of colour has, though the numbers can be adjusted to reflect the make-up of a given class. In her description of a research team in which she is involved, Brydon notes that “the principle of having gender parity works efficiently to counter the token woman problem” (“Globalization” 9) and the problem of visible minority tokenism can also be addressed by having speaking rights parity. Without doing so, there is a danger that participation in class discussions by speakers who are females or minorities will function as merely a brief pause in contributions from students who belong to dominant groups or that those with marginalized identities will be seen as the spokespersons of the segments of society to which they belong. Unless concrete steps are taken to address these problems, Razack and Brydon’s comments suggest, attempts at encouraging a participatory classroom as a vehicle to an education as an embodied practice of social justice risk re-producing the structures they aim to challenge.

Another practice that recommends itself to critical pedagogy classrooms is anti-oppression training. Such training sessions are designed to build an awareness of language and behaviours that are oppressive to women or minority groups, sometimes in ways that are not obvious to the persons speaking or acting out in this manner. As Heble writes, “teachers need to

impress upon our students the need for them to take serious responsibility for what they say in class (and, by implication, out of class). Students need to recognize that seemingly offhand or ‘neutral’ remarks can be profoundly oppressive and debilitating” (“Re-ethicizing” 152). Having an experienced anti-oppression facilitator lead a class early in the semester is one way to set a tone that encourages an equal, safe learning environment for the rest of the term. This kind of workshop is useful because many forms of oppressive behaviour are invisible to those conducting themselves in this way and because students bring to the classroom a lifetime of immersion in a society that sanctions a range of domineering conduct. Nor is oppressive classroom conduct always straightforward. For instance, I have had a student make what he seemed to think was a progressive argument against homophobia by asserting that sexuality is merely a matter of taste and that a man who is sexually attracted to men is “no different than a guy who wants to sleep with fat chicks.” This student’s political consciousness is such that his argument seemingly in favour of LGBT rights both trivializes sexual orientation and affirms patriarchal assumptions about what women’s bodies. This is precisely the sort of instance that anti-oppression workshops can help avoid in that these strive to build in participants awareness that a far wider range of statements and actions are marginalizing and unethical than mainstream culture suggests.

One of the functions of a teacher is to license or discredit particular modes of conduct. Anti-oppression workshops signal to students specifically which classroom behaviours are condoned and which are not and they impart lessons that students can apply in other aspects of their lives. Likewise, anti-oppression training has the benefit of demonstrating to students who have experienced domination that, despite the hegemonic institutions of society’s explicit or implicit endorsement of such values and behaviours, these beliefs and conducts are in no sense

fixed and can and should be resisted. By both discouraging students inclined toward oppressive conduct and ideologies, and empowering people who are subject to these, anti-oppression workshops can themselves be forms of activation. None of this is to say that I think the classroom should be a conflict-free zone. On the contrary, my reading of critical pedagogy theory is that it typically advocates classrooms where intellectual and political positions are perpetually open for contestation. Anti-oppression workshops can, however, guide the quality of these conflicts so that they are characterized by vigorous debate and an exchange of ideas rather than disagreements that reproduce domination. Activating students involves encouraging their adoption of a politics that could cause them to be harassed and punished elsewhere in society but the classroom is not a space to subject them to these by way of preparation. Rather, the university classroom can be a place where students who will by and large not have had experience with developing the critical skills necessary for oppositional politics can develop these attributes in an environment that nurtures the requisite confidence. Students cannot be expected to engage in the open dialogue that is necessary to activate them if they feel that their personal identities may be attacked, and having anti-oppression exercises take place in class is one way of guarding against such an atmosphere. If the classroom is a social microcosm, anti-oppression workshops and the speaking guidelines noted above are two ways of building a form of education that is an embodied social justice practice. If the classroom can be understood as a social microcosm, it follows that radical leftist teachers aim to build in the learning environment a world consistent with the social justice principles she or he would like to see practiced beyond that context.

A Language of Struggle and the Radical Imagination

Another related way that teachers can connect students to urgent socio-political questions is by helping them develop the conceptual and linguistic tools required to do so, what I call a language of struggle. A language of struggle means a terminology that makes resistance utterable. As Merod writes, “The job of the teacher is to put students into intellectual crisis so they must *digest* texts, *transform* information, *question* intellectual positions, *read* the institutional world, and begin to work out a way to *name* reality” (emphasis Merod’s) (141). Each of these tasks involves facilitating students’ capacity to act upon language in a way that empowers them to intervene in the world. As opposed to a view of language as stable and neutral, here it is subject to contestation. Students need not merely receive language from professors, pundits and other elites but as part of an activation process can challenge its ideological uses and misuses, de-construct and re-construct its propagandistic functions.

Developing a language of struggle is in one sense an act of recovery. It involves recuperating a political vocabulary that has been corrupted by hegemonic culture. I think, for instance, of a culture where a word like “Marxism” and its variants are widely understood to mean “Stalinism,” where “anarchism” has come to mean chaos and wanton violence. A language of struggle also means a vocabulary that is scarce in the institutions through which students will primarily have come to acquire the words and related concepts with which they understand and communicate about the world such as the education system, mainstream news media, and popular culture. Few students in Anglo North America arrive in universities using such words as “solidarity” or “patriarchy” or “resistance,” “hegemony” or “reification” or “interpolation,” and at its most elemental developing a language of struggle means teaching students to speak and think in such terms that enable thinking about and acting upon social and political institutions.

In hooks' experience of teaching students from oppressed groups to which she does not belong, she has suggested to her class "that if I bring to the class only analytical ways of knowing and someone else brings personal experience, I welcome that knowledge because it will enhance our learning...[F]undamentally I believe that combining the analytical and experiential is a richer way of knowing" (*Teaching* 89). hooks' argument is that academic knowledge ought not to be regarded as superior to experiential knowledge, the understandings of the world that students have acquired through their daily lives. To this I would add that no airtight distinction between these two ways of knowing is tenable and it would be a mistake to assume that professors have no embodied knowledge or that students will always be entirely without academic modes of knowing. Rather, hooks' argument is that the classroom cannot be an egalitarian space if the professor's variety of knowledge is privileged over that of the students and so in one sense her argument here is another facet of the discussion surrounding the need to de-mystify the professor and for the professor and students to share power. Given that much of the writing on critical pedagogy, and much of what I have written in this section, focuses on reducing the role of the pedagogue, one might reasonably ask: what then, *can* a professor do without being oppressive? In particular, what can someone like me who is an able-bodied heterosexual white male with a high level of formal education do to activate students whose subjectivities carry less power than my own? hooks provides one of many possible answers by pointing out that teachers can aim to supplement the embodied knowledge that students have with the academic ways of knowing with which professors are equipped and my argument is that fostering a language of struggle is an important part of this process.

Providing students with a grasp of the terms and concepts associated with theoretical knowledge is integral to lending them the conceptual knowledge that hooks describes. My aim is

not to wade into sticky debate over the relationship between thought and language but I do not think it will be overly controversial to say that if one accepts that an understanding of the world in systemic terms is necessary to begin to change it, and if one accepts that such understanding cannot be severed from the language to which it is linked, then it follows that one way a teacher can help students develop a critical consciousness is by providing them with the language that is useful for such thinking. Furthermore, political contestations are always played out in part on an intellectual terrain. Socio-economic institutions require philosophical and ideological justifications to maintain their continuity and counter-hegemonic groups need rationales of their own to challenge these and to earn popular support. Part of the purpose of higher education in the humanities is to empower students to partake in these debates. Nurturing a language of struggle can accordingly be an exercise in activation in that it arms students with the linguistic and concomitant philosophical tools that will at times be useful in intellectual conflict over socio-political matters.

Yet, when I say that critical pedagogues can aim to help students develop a language of struggle, I refer to something bolder and more optimistic: the capacity to articulate that it is possible to live otherwise and also what this would entail, which forms it may take, and how we might get there. This means teachers and students “searching for, locating and internalizing particular vocabularies of hope” (Halpin 34). A vocabulary of hope is one that foregrounds possibility and contingency while disavowing inevitability. Hope, in my estimation, is a precondition for political action: one will not intervene in the world unless she or he believes there is some chance that it can be altered. For all the criticism of the current social order that radical leftist teachers nurture, foreclosing all possibilities of a more just world will likely leave many students so pessimistic that engaging in political movements seems pointless. Hope that an

injustice can be rectified and that an equal relationship can replace an unequal one is what activates. Modes of expression that enable students and teachers to enunciate hope for another world are for this reason a goal at which critical pedagogues should aim.

In this sense, one purpose of a language of struggle is to find a lexicon adequate for creative thinking about political matters. Giroux provides insight into the links between language, the imagination, pedagogy and social justice:

Part of the challenge of linking critical pedagogy with the process of democratization suggests constructing new locations of struggle, vocabularies, and subject positions that allow people in a wide variety of public spheres to become more than they are now, to question what it is they have become within existing institutional and social transformations and to give some thought to what it means to transform existing relations of subordination and oppression. (*On Critical* 73)

Giroux's emphasis on the significance of the linguistic to the transformative and the novel is important. Activism, including activist pedagogy, entails a breaking away from discourses and structures of inequality and the creation of something fresh. Questions of what forms this newness may take and what modes of resistance may enable its realization are crucial, and for this reason the imagination needs to be conceived of as an explicitly political category. As Haiven and Khasnabish suggest, the "Imagination represents a . . . rich, complex, agent-driven and ongoing working-out of affinity. It is a crucial aspect of the fundamentally political and always collective (though rarely autonomous) labour of reweaving the social world. . . . [T]he imagination speaks to our ability to create *something else*, and to create it together" (emphasis in original) (iii). Similarly, Ian McKay underscores the centrality to activist practice of envisioning alternative social structures. To him this means that it is important for leftist radicals to carve out

spaces of freedom from the alienating world of capitalist production and other forms of social inequality so that they have a realm in which “to criticize the everyday world and to project alternative worlds into the future” (18). For McKay,

knowing what this living otherwise entails means struggling to make the possibility a reality. We can abstractly imagine a world in which the lines of power and wealth are drawn very differently. Over time, if our projection is in fact something possible within a feasible and not simply a ‘candy mountain’ fantasy, it can become a kind of reality, as more and more people mobilize around it. (19)

Imagination, McKay suggests, tends to precede political action: to articulate a demand, to advocate for and act on it, involves envisioning the possibility that a different state of affairs can be brought into existence. Or, in Giroux’s terms, “We need to think otherwise as a condition for acting otherwise” (*On Critical* 9). Imagination activates in that it can energize; it can mobilize people around visions ranging from the reformist to the utopian and, as McKay suggests, by this process it can morph its own abstract character into concrete reality. The erosion of such imaginative capacities can lead to what Freire calls “The death of dreams and utopia, a consequent extension of the death of history,” which “implies the immobilization of history within a reduction of the future to the permanence of the present” (*Pedagogy of Indignation* 110). That nurturing the radical imagination is important in these ways is one reason that, as I discuss in Chapter 2, activist literary critics have taken up this task.

If the imagination is a political category, radical leftist teachers awaken, massage and feed the radical imagination of their students. Radical imagination means that aspect of the imagination that enables one to consider the roots of socio-political problems and to think of how a new world that would abolish these would look and how it might be brought into being. Merod

makes the point that a pedagogy which aims at leading students to participate in the “long-drawn-out effort to create resistance to domination and cultural indoctrination” will face as its first obstacle “the relative ignorance of most students about anything that could be considered an alternative vision to capitalist reality” (129). Just mentioning to students that the society in which they live need not necessarily be a capitalist one can awaken in many of them a set of imaginative possibilities foreclosed by the dominant culture in which most have lived their entire lives. In so far as the radical imagination enables thinking about how a better world might look, it also fosters an awareness of the contradictions, inconsistencies and outright lies of propaganda systems. Chomsky writes that “it is the responsibility of teachers, of citizens, and of ourselves to liberate the creative impulse and to free our minds and the minds of those with whom we deal from the constraints of authoritarian ideologies” (177). Far from being a tool of unrealizable pipe-dreams, the imagination is in Chomsky’s conception an antidote to the concrete problem of hegemonic ideology. The radical imagination may be a way of temporarily stepping away from the material world of domination and inequality but, in contrast to escapist fantasies, it does this so as to re-emerge with fresh, far-reaching thinking on how that material world can be re-made. By contrast, pedagogies that train students in narrow areas of technical expertise have the consequence of producing students ready to take their assigned roles in society as obedient producers and docile consumers of capital, and as passive subjects of the state. Freire argues that whereas we need educational practices that “challenge our creative capacity and curiosity....[T]he ideal within a conservative-political option would be an educational practice that, while ‘training’ the learner’s capacity as much as possible in the technical domain, maximized that learner’s naiveté vis-à-vis his or her way of being in the polis—technical efficacy, ineffectual citizenship, both at the service of the dominant minority” (*Pedagogy of*

Indignation 111-12). The traditional model of education Freire describes dulls the imagination and stifles the creativity necessary to identify and analyze complex social problems and come up with solutions to them.

How, then, can a teacher can awaken the radical imagination? Are there particular exercises that facilitate “world discovery and reinvention” (*Pedagogy of Indignation* 111)? No methods for achieving these goals are simple or guaranteed to succeed. Among the vast range of possible strategies for stimulating the radical imagination are collaborative creative writing assignments built around solving social problems and envisioning another world. This is one exercise in the problem-posing education that Freire advocates, a process wherein socio-political problems are outlined to students who then come up with solutions for how to resolve the issue in question so that “people come to feel like masters of their own thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 105). I am suggesting giving students creative writing assignments that are similar to Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed technique. Boal’s method is to outline oppressive situations as prompts for performers who then act out scenes with the goal of creating a more just arrangement for their characters. What I advocate is giving students a scenario characterized by inequality and asking them to write a story in which the situation is resolved equitably. Doing such an assignment can activate in that it compels students to identify with oppressed peoples, to develop an investment in them, to occupy their headspace in however limited a way, and to recognize that there are ways out of oppressive socio-political arrangements. It is an exercise in applied radical imagination in that it requires students to invent solutions to unequal power arrangements.

Another idea is to ask students to write works of utopian short fiction in groups.

Collaboratively writing fiction is an uncommon practice but in practical terms it can be done in a manner similar to the way that joint production of academic or non-fiction writing is undertaken: for example, students can brainstorm ideas for their stories, themes and characters, and can take turns writing and re-writing these, or each student can write a separate section of the story, and in all cases editing can be undertaken collectively.

Halpin's comments on utopianism speak to the rationale of such an exercise. He writes: utopianism holds out to optimists of the will the promise of them being able better to reconsider critically [sic] their opinions about the most desirable ways in which the economy, society and the state should be organized....[Utopias] entail a form of positive escapism into a world uncontaminated by common sense where it is possible simultaneously to imagine and anticipate radical alternatives to the status quo....[Utopias] redirect our conservative attention away from the taken for granted towards something new, innovative and progressive (34).

Writing utopian fiction inherently involves thinking about what values an ideal society would be built upon, how decisions in such a world would be made, how this differs from the current social order, and possibly how such a scenario can be worked toward. In this way having students collectively sketch out utopias can awaken the radical imagination and can activate in them an awareness of society as human-made, historically contingent, and as such subject to revision. Such an assignment is also the embodiment of an alternative to neoliberalism. Neoliberal ideology, as Freire points out, involves "denying dream and utopia, and by dulling education reduces it to mere empiricist training" (*Pedagogy of Indignation* 116). In so far as neoliberal education privileges the training of experts in the allegedly practical skills desired by

the market economy, the act of writing, talking and thinking about utopia is a refutation of the so-called common sense and practicality governing neoliberal models of education and social organizations more generally. If the university classroom can moreover be understood as a social microcosm, asking students to write utopia enables them to live the power of re-making a world on egalitarian terms, an experience with the capacity to activate them to seek out this power in the material circumstances in which they live.

Literature and Critical Pedagogy

Teaching literature is an inherently political act. To suggest otherwise, to claim that the act of teaching creative writing takes place in a rarefied space unconnected to the social, is an assertion whose implications are especially political. Decisions about which texts will be taught, which modes of interpretation and methods of evaluation will be used, and how the material will be delivered all have far-reaching consequences. These choices determine whose stories will be told to, and deemed worthy of the attention of, young scholars, which understandings of literature and of culture more generally are legitimized, and which forms of critical and educational work have value. Among scholars of the relationship between literature and social change, it is uncontroversial to point out that it is politically significant whether a student understands literary texts as masterpieces created by geniuses who have special insights into an allegedly fixed “human nature” or whether that student regards these texts as having unstable meanings that can function either to reinforce or challenge hegemonic assumptions or to do both at the same time. My central point in this section is that literary works have much to offer critical pedagogy in that they are imaginative renderings of the particularized experiences of how individuals and communities are affected by political systems such as neoliberalism that can

facilitate dialogue and exercises that activate students, enable them to develop a language of struggle, and stimulate the radical imagination.

The pedagogical approaches to literature that can best be described as activist are those that make explicit links between literary texts and the world beyond the classroom walls. I come to this position in part from an assessment of Paulo Freire that I share with Henry Giroux, which is that among Freire's major achievements as a critical pedagogy theorist is "mak[ing] visible a politics that links human suffering with a project of hope, not as a static plunge into a textuality disembodied from human struggles, but as a politics of literacy forged in the political and material dislocations of regimes that exploit, oppress, expel, maim, and ruin human life" ("Paulo Freire" 180). My understanding of the link between critical pedagogy and the larger society in which it takes it place is informed by Ira Shor's remark that in a radical education "Students do not simply memorize academic information about biology or economics or nursing but rather face problems from their lives and society through the special lens offered by an academic discipline" (31). This is to say that each branch of educational work offers its own tools for interpreting, relating to, and modifying the larger nexus of social enterprises of which education is a part. As Ajay Heble points out, the work of teachers of literature classes "has to involve a radical intervention into the processes and the politics both of the academic institution in which we work and everyday life" ("New Contexts" 82). This approach implies that, in Sherene Razack's words, "a radical or critical pedagogy is one that resists the reproduction of the status quo by uncovering relations of domination and opening up spaces for voices suppressed in traditional education" (42). For me that points to a teaching process wherein texts are used as opportunities to teach students about various forms of inequality so that, for instance, an affective moment in a novel that highlights the links between poverty and racism is used as an

opportunity for teachers to discuss not only the function of literary texts in aiding or resisting poverty and racism but the specific past and present policies and institutions of state capitalism that explain how and why people of colour are disproportionately poorer than white people. What these analyses from Giroux, Shor, Heble, and Razack suggest is an interdisciplinarity on steroids wherein teachers accelerate and intensify the frequency with which they glide between literary works and not only critical theories or generalizations about the links between creative works but also the particular names and dates and facts and figures that demonstrate inequality and its causes independent of whether such information is obviously or directly connected to a given novel, story, poem or play.

While materialist analyses of matters such as canonicity, genre and print culture can clearly activate in students an understanding of the role that culture itself plays in creating and maintaining imperialism, the class system, hetero-normative patriarchy and other forms of injustice, even seemingly old-fashioned concerns with plots, themes and characters can be part of the activation process. This approach involves discussing such topics not in New Criticism's terms, which suggest that these features of a literary work exist in hermetically-sealed masterpieces created in isolation by geniuses who have timeless universal insights into humanity. Instead this approach involves discussing how plots, themes and characters can function as case studies in how ideologies and their concomitant policies impact the lives of individuals or communities in specific circumstances. For example, Brenda Carr Vellino argues that at times it can be useful to take advantage of literature's "ability to evoke subjective contexts to the readerly imagination and, in so doing, awaken empathy and solidarity with the character/protagonist [']s actions which the reader is called into relationship with" (143) instead

of “seek[ing] to disrupt the phenomenon of character identification so common in the first readings of texts” (143).

This approach to teaching literature can be understood as a complement to one that is outlined by Kathleen McCormick. She contends that one aim of teaching English should be to enable students to “theorize their own reading positions” (176) so that they become aware that they respond to a text or situation in a particular way because they are influenced by some particular theory of reading. They are invited to become thereby part of a debate about how meanings are constructed, and about how dominant and alternative meanings might be developed and advocated. This process of developing an incipient awareness of the theoretical underpinnings of one’s reading of texts relates to the wider educational practice of enabling students to begin to recognize the general ideological constraints—and also empowerments—within which they live. (177)

McCormick offers an understanding of one of the ways that literary works can be situated in a broader context of ideology critique. Her comments provide an example of how critical pedagogues working with literary texts can facilitate conversations that foreground how hegemonic ideologies connect to the world beyond the classroom. This activity employs literary texts in ways that demonstrate that no method of reading is neutral. Developing during class discussions an understanding that ways of interpreting such works are shaped by material and ideological circumstances can be part of showing students that many social practices central to a political system are historically contingent. Students can accordingly become activated, critical thinkers by coming to conceive of hegemonic discourses and practices as constructed and therefore changeable.

Using Literary Texts in Critical Pedagogy Classrooms: *Funny Boy* as a Case Study

Critical pedagogues can use Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy* as a tool for critiquing neoliberal globalization and for developing resistance to this system. Tourism is one aspect of neoliberal globalization with which the novel deals, albeit not at great length, and teachers can use this portion of the book to open up discussions of this economic regime. The book's narrator, a young boy named Arjie, says that a new government has come to power in his country, Sri Lanka, and that this means a transition to "something called 'free economy' and 'the end of socialism'" (99). Immediately after noting this shift, Arjie describes being taken to a hotel and learning that it is now owned by his father and a business partner and that the father has left his job as a banker (100). The hotel business, the novel suggests, is one of the quintessential enterprises of globalization. Many states in the Global South depend on tourism for large portions of the revenue they generate. Worldwide travel has become commonplace to an unprecedented degree under neoliberal globalization though this activity has mainly been undertaken by the relatively privileged segments of various nations, principally those in the wealthier states of the Global North. Tourism has for critical pedagogues working in these societies the advantage of being something that many students will have experienced firsthand. In particular, many students in a given university classroom are likely to have travelled to the Global South and participated in that specific form of tourism which is characterized by spending all or most of one's time on a secluded beach resort, interacting only with those members of the local population who are employed at the resort and typically doing even this in a circumscribed way. The portions of *Funny Boy* that deal with tourism can therefore be used to engage in critical examination of the negative features of this important aspect of globalized neoliberal economics.

States that are overly reliant on the tourism sector tend to endure numerous undesirable outcomes as a consequence such as an increased economic dependency on foreign powers, a de-

skilling of the local workforce, as well as the exploitation and often outright de-basement of the domestic population to create the experience desired by tourists, which Terri A. Hasseler describes as “the promise of tourism (escape, lack of accountability, and exoticism)” (21). The portions of Selvadurai’s novel dealing with tourism can enable class activities and discussions geared toward activating in students, if not a sense of global solidarity, then at least an awareness of the costs that travel can have for people in the Global South. For example, the narrator says, “Our hotel was about a three-hour drive to Colombo and was one of many in the area. The people in the town near it were poor and lived in very small houses. Some of them made their living by selling trinkets to tourists. Others worked in the hotels. The only rich person in the town was the Banduratne Mudalali, who owned most of the hotels” (165). Part of what this section of the novel does is present teachers with an opportunity to highlight how, with the exception of a small number of local elites, most of the people living in financially less well-off states that, beholden to the forces of global capital, have large portions of their economic activity devoted to tourism will tend to live in poverty and to spend their working lives serving comparatively wealthy tourists. Literary accounts of service workers in the tourism industry in countries in the Global South enable teachers to pose to students questions about how travelling to such states impacts the labour market for local residents including the following one that Hasseler raises:

who and/or what makes possible [the] freedom, pleasure and carelessness [that tourism promises?]. . . . With some prodding, students question ‘who’ makes th[e] physical beauty [of resorts] possible. . . . Revealing the hidden presence of the labour of tourism sets the stage for . . . discussions on the missing voices of the poor and women. Many students

comment that it also makes them more conscious of the disconnect between production and consumption zones. (23)

Such discussions have the capacity to foster in students self-consciousness about their own tourist practices, or the type of tourism in which they hope to partake. Developing in students through classroom dialogue a tendency to critically examine features of neoliberalism such as tourist-based economies is a necessary step for the radical leftist teacher of literature who hopes to foster in students a commitment to opposing this system so as to struggle for an economically more equal world.

Teaching this part of *Funny Boy* in this way can be part of achieving what Kathleen McCormick identifies as one of the goals at which English teachers should aim. Pedagogues, she argues, must help students to “become able to analyze how they themselves are culturally constructed as subjects-in-history—this is, how they are both constructed by (or ‘subject to’) larger cultural forces and how they are also capable of taking autonomous action within these forces” (9). McCormick’s insight is that literary works can be understood as one component within a broader project of generating in students an awareness of how neoliberal notions of individualism and self-sufficiency rely on untenable assumptions about autonomy from social and cultural processes that mark and shape people’s lives. For example, class discussions that begin by being about tourism in *Funny Boy* and expand to include western tourism in the Global South more generally demonstrate to students that this activity must not be thought of as something that a traveler undertakes in isolation but as ventures that have costs for many people, most of whom students will never meet or see or know. Yet equally important is McCormick’s point that literary works can help illustrate how social restrictions on subjectivity, ideology, and political action are by no means determinant and that these can be resisted. The point here is that

classroom conversations about Selvadurai's novel and tourism can be a source of activation provided that these emphasize and explore how systems of oppression and exploitation, as well as the discourses that legitimize them, are not so all-powerful and all-encompassing that they cannot be dismantled.

Returning to *Funny Boy*, the narrator tells a story about a conversation he observed between his hotel owner father and a family friend named Jegan. The episode highlights another aspect of the ugly side of tourism in economically less wealthy countries:

Jegan leaned forward in his chair and looked keenly at something on the beach. My father regarded him, curious. Jegan turned to him and said, "Is what is happening what I think is happening?"

I turned to look down the beach now, wondering what Jegan had seen. There was nothing out of the ordinary. As was usual at this time, there were many foreign men around. A lot of them were talking to young boys from the village.

"Yes," my father said.

"And they come back to the hotel?"

My father shrugged. "Sometimes."

"You don't mind?"

"What am I to do? They have paid for the rooms. Besides, if I tried to stop it, they'd simply go to another hotel on the front."

"But isn't it illegal?"

"I don't see any police out there, do you?" He poured himself another drink. "It's not just our luscious beaches that keep the tourist industry going, you know. We have other natural resources as well."

He held his glass up to Jegan. “Cheers.” (166-7).

That tourism-dependent countries in the Global South frequently see increases in child sex tourism is another negative consequence of this economic arrangement. This problem is especially pronounced in Sri Lanka. According to the *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, “Sri Lanka is renowned as a pedophile’s paradise and their numbers increase every year. Tourist resorts of the country are well-known in the western world as easy and cheap sources of young boys, and one can find names and addresses of agents and children in publications” (Huda 379). This is worth discussing in a literature class based on principles of critical pedagogy because it illustrates some of the less visible consequences of globalization. The point can be made to students that child sex tourism is a direct consequence of the neoliberal economics that causes states in the Global South to be in such dire need of money and consequently so beholden to travellers that even such things as pedophilia become countenanced in the name of revenue-generation.

From here several more questions about this dimension of Selvadurai’s book can be raised so as to facilitate classroom dialogue. This portion of the novel is the ideal place to ask students, for example, whether they see neoliberal globalization as another form of colonialism. The radical leftist English teacher can ask the related question of whether Arjie’s father should be understood as a local elite who, like his counterparts in earlier forms of colonialism, enables and profits from imperial powers’ exploitation of the population in countries in the Global South. A critical pedagogue, moreover, can ask students if they think it is ethically permissible to disavow child sex tourism without doing the same with regard to the political systems which give rise to this phenomenon.

The goal of this undertaking is not to make students feel guilty for having been or wanting to be tourists. Rather, it is part of what Masood Ashraf Raja calls “teaching the world”—by which I mean teaching our students about the struggles and aspirations of people outside of the . . . industrial nations” (33). Raja points out that in his classrooms,

literary texts do not constitute an end in themselves, but are rather instrumental in teaching the world. . . . [That] implies an attempt on my part to encourage an ethic of global solidarity, by which I simply mean encouraging a mode of identification with the plight of the others who may be different but still share the same planet. Such an ethic aims to encourage our students to look at their own everyday practice in a critical manner and, if needed, change their practices to facilitate a greater degree of good for the rest of humanity. (33)

In working with this aspect of *Funny Boy*, critical pedagogues can “teach the world” so as to develop “an ethic of global solidarity” that aims to activate in students an awareness that people in the Global North, at least those with lives of relative comfort and stability, are implicated in ways that are not always obvious in the more pernicious features of the social, economic, and political lives of people in the Global South.

Another part of Selvadurai’s novel that can be of use to critical pedagogues is the book’s ending. As Tamils in Sri Lanka, Arjie’s family has been subject to racialized violence by Sinhalese mobs and the book concludes with their departing for Canada, where an uncle has helped them secure refugee status. The family is able to do so with little difficulty and just in time, and Canada is presented as a place that is unequivocally welcoming to refugees. Let me qualify this statement by adding that Arjie fears his family will be “penniless refugees” (302) and that he says that “to be in a foreign country, living off the charity of somebody I hardly know”

will be “terrible” (302). Yet, while Arjie worries about the financial hardship of being a refugee, at no point does he or his relatives express concern about being subject to discrimination in Canada. Two incidents, one in 2009 and another in 2010, in which a total of 575 Tamils fleeing violence in Sri Lanka arrived in British Columbia by boat, problematize the conclusion to Selvadurai’s book in ways critical pedagogues can discuss. The context for these events is that in 2009, the government of Sri Lanka was in the final stages of a bloody, decades-long battle with the insurgent group the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). During this campaign, Sri Lankans were subject to large-scale arbitrary detention, torture, internal displacement, “the government’s indiscriminate shelling of civilians and the LTTE’s use of thousands of civilians as human shields” (“World Report 2011”). Furthermore, Human Rights Watch notes that over the course of the war “Hundreds of people, primarily ethnic Tamils . . . ‘disappeared’”; that in the final months of the conflict 7,000 civilians were killed; that the government carried out “indiscriminate shelling of civilians, including packed hospitals, and the blocking of humanitarian assistance to the trapped and desperate population in the war zone”; and that “the government locked nearly 300,000 civilians fleeing the fighting in closed camps” (Bouckaert).

That these are the circumstances under which Tamils fled Sri Lanka is crucial to understanding the way they were received by the Canadian government, media, and much of the public, all of which can be explored in a critical pedagogy classroom studying *Funny Boy*. Those who arrived in Canada on the ships the *Ocean Lady* and the *Sun Sea*, in October 2009 and August 2010 respectively, were subject to widespread hostility. These persons were seldom “described as refugee claimants or potential refugees. Instead, much of the media coverage and certainly the bulk of the government’s public commentary . . . talked of illegal migrants, queue jumpers, mass arrivals, and smuggling” (Neve and Russell 40-1). For example, Public Safety

Minister Vic Toews and the editorial board of the *Globe and Mail* publicly associated the Tamils on the Sun Sea with the LTTE, which the Canadian government considers a terrorist organization (“Keeping”). In October 2010 government officials stood in front of the Ocean Lady in Vancouver and introduced a new bill that allows the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to “designate an arrival of a group of migrants . . . as irregular, thereby subjecting all designated foreign nationals in this group, including children, to mandatory detention for at least one year and other penalties including a [five] year bar from applying for permanent resident status even once determined to be legitimate refugees” (Labman 58). My point is that Tamils were fleeing a dangerous, repressive situation and in Canada they both had the seriousness of their plight denied and were demonized.

In light of these events, radical leftist teachers can use *Funny Boy* to demonstrate both that political events shape how literary texts are received and that the Canadian state’s self-fashioning as a benevolent sanctuary for the marginalized of the world is a self-serving myth. Interrogating this image is particularly important for teachers who are critical of neoliberal globalization given that this system has been characterized by higher than ever migration flows. As Labman points out, “A globalized world means that even Canada’s once relatively inaccessible borders are now more easily accessed” (57). Consequently there has been an emergence of new forms of anxieties among privileged sectors of populations in the Global North over supposedly threatening foreigners attempting to enter these wealthier countries legally or otherwise. In this context, Selvadurai’s novel can facilitate dialogue about such matters as how and why it is that the rights of refugees and migrants to move freely across borders remain circumscribed under neoliberalism, particularly as compared to the much more free flow of capital in this period. Classroom discussions of the relationship of *Funny Boy’s* ending to the

events surrounding the arrival of the *Ocean Lady* and the *Sun Sea* present an example of how texts can build Vellino's notion of "literary citizenship" (136), which "beckons the reader to consider the politics of her own locations in body, community, nation, and world from the perspectives of the politics of others' locations invoked through the imaginative transference of the literary encounter" (136) so that students learn "to read the diversity of social experience in the Canadian context in both a local and global way" (136). If students can imagine themselves as being in some, even if only tenuous, way like Arjie or members of his family, or if students come to feel any form of affinity with them, this increases the chances that they will sympathize with Tamils who came to British Columbia by boat instead of seeing them as intruders.

Moreover, during a study of *Funny Boy*, teachers can generate discussion by asking students some of an endless range of possible questions such as: who is responsible for people displaced by conflict? If we believe that there is an imperative to accommodate people in such situations, what can we do to challenge the forces that reject this view? Were Arjie and his family to come to Canada today, how might they be treated? If we agree that they are likely to be subject to the same hostility as those who came on the *Ocean Lady* and the *Sun Sea*, what can we do to challenge this response? Here a teacher can also point to the case of the *St. Louis*, a ship filled with 900 Jewish people fleeing persecution in Germany in 1939, which was denied permission to land in Cuba, the United States and Canada. The ship was forced back to European countries that were soon occupied by Nazi forces, and many who had been aboard the *St. Louis* were killed in the Holocaust (Neve and Russell 39). This example can then enable a teacher to ask what obligations, particularly in our current period of unprecedented international linkages, do middle class people in Canada have to those affected by wars that happen in faraway places? All of these questions can be part of an activation process in so far as they generate dialogue that

enables students to see themselves as political actors with rights to claim as well as a responsibility to struggle for social justice and to advocate with aggrieved peoples. Through such discussions teachers and students can participate in the collective construction of knowledge about precisely which forms these rights and responsibilities take in particular circumstances and how they can be won. In this regard, one way in which to understand the function of the literary text in the practice of critical pedagogy is as one circuit in a larger network of conversations aimed at enabling students to recognize that they are political agents who have the capacity and the obligation to collectively undertake a re-authoring of the world. Literary works can in this way be part of what McCormick describes as the teacher's responsibility to "communicate to students that that they are both interdiscourses, the products of the various competing and often contradictory discourses that permeate their culture . . . and also *agents*, capable not of transcending these discourses, but of negotiating, resisting, and taking action within them" (emphases in original) (8).

Critical pedagogues can employ *Funny Boy* in other ways as well. Nicholas Hengen Fox's article "Teaching is Not Activism" includes several examples, which I will modify here so as to apply them to Selvadurai and which I think can be used for any number of authors whose writing is explicitly political. Fox describes a question that he poses to students on a mid-term about Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*: "If you were writing a political novel today, in the fashion of [Selvadurai], what would you focus on?" (17). This question, as Fox points out, "asks students to see themselves, like [Selvadurai], as people with political commitments and, even more, as people who might turn those commitments to a kind of literary activism" (17). This exercise does all three forms of critical pedagogy that I have been discussing. It activates students by asking them to consider which political issues are of concern to them, which they feel they understand

and which they want to know more about, and what in this world strikes them as unjust. It can help develop a language of struggle by enabling students to think about how their political concerns might find linguistic articulation in the form of a novel and to consider which of these approaches is best suited to the issue that ignites them given the political context in which they live. The assignment, moreover, starts to stimulate the radical imagination in that it begins a process whereby students conceive of the myriad ways in which the political conflicts they care about materialize in the daily lives of particular people, or in this case fictional renderings of them, and crucially of possible courses of action that can be taken to reach solutions to these.

Another assignment Fox suggests for his students that would also be useful for radical leftist teachers working with politicized literary works is as follows: “Pretend that what we read was the manuscript of [*Funny Boy*] and you are the editor. You acknowledge, as we have in class, that [Selvadurai’s] novel is explicitly political. Write him a one-to-two page letter in which you make specific suggestions about how to make it a ‘better’ political novel. Suggest specific changes, cuts, or additions” (18). This exercise has the capacity to activate students by immersing them in the process of how literary works can be refined so as to make them effective political tools in a given set of social, cultural, and economic circumstances. It can help them develop a language of struggle by requiring them to reflect on how rhetorical strategies and literary conceits can be used to affect social change. As Fox writes, the assignment has the benefit of “encourage[ing] students to refine their ideas about how to speak politically....[T]hese approaches focus students on not just the idea of literature as political, but of literature as a political tool that they can deploy to an audience beyond the classroom” (18). This pedagogical activity can help stimulate students’ radical imaginations. By involving them in debates over how the work under consideration can best achieve its political aims, the assignment has the

ability to nurture in students the desire to partake in creative practices of their own as parts of efforts to achieve a greater degree of equality in the realms that animate them.

Furthermore, Fox mentions a question that he raises with students in connection with studying Langston Hughes's poetry that can also be useful to radical leftist teachers working with *Funny Boy* and many other texts: how might this novel be used in your own lives "to help friends see race in new ways, as fodder for campus newspapers, websites, blogs, or social networking sites?" (20). Because globalization is a racialized practice, it is worth noting that the question Fox asks here is of particular interest to critical pedagogues with an interest in the role that literary texts have to play in critiquing and opposing worldwide neoliberalism. The assignment can activate students by engaging them in thinking about the various forms of activism that they can undertake, a process that seems to me an important precursor to taking political action. It has the potential to be part of developing a language of struggle because it requires students to concentrate on how particular literary devices can be employed under specific conditions to attain political ends. The exercise can feed the radical imagination by directing students toward particular sites of activism and to a consideration of how creative writing can be used in these contexts.

Fox, moreover, suggests asking students to "'publish' a poem of their choice somewhere, whether making copies to post around campus (or, better, around town) on a Facebook group, or anywhere else they can imagine" (21) so as to help in "encouraging them to build patterns of activism" (21) and to help "them conceive of how they might participate in [practices of literary activism] in the present outside of the classroom" (21) and to see literary works as "(potential) actors in the political struggles of the present" (21). The same can be done with short stories and Fox's project could be especially potent if it is expanded so as to include literary writing that the

students themselves have authored. Fox's assignment and the variations I suggest can activate in that they directly involve students in either the production of literary works or their distribution for explicitly political ends. Unlike the essays and exams that are written exclusively for teachers under traditional pedagogies, this assignment involves direct participation in a community larger than that which exists in a classroom. Furthermore, as an exercise in developing and deploying creative works toward political ends, the assignment is a concrete exercise in nurturing the radical imagination.

The last two exercises I have discussed, and possibly all of them, can be undertaken as group assignments. By following this approach, the knowledge created by these assignments is both produced collectively and remains the collective property and responsibility of the students involved in its making. Doing such overtly political exercises in groups, moreover, also presents the possibility that students will in the process of activism forge the collective alliances and networks that are necessary for these undertakings to succeed.

I consider everything I have said about Fox's ideas to be instances of how literary texts can function, in Raja's terms, to mould a student's "public identity [which] includes those aspects of our students' sociopolitical identity that allow them to make sense of the world around them not just in personal terms but also in terms of their sociopolitical associations with others" (33). If one accepts, as I do, Raja's claim that studying literary texts is part of that which shapes students' public identities, an urgent question for critical pedagogues is, what forms will this study take and in which types of identities will it result? Will these works be studied in such a way as to foster atomization and isolation? Or will they, as Raja suggests, enable a discourse through which students come to identify as part of larger social units rather than merely as individuals whose connections and responsibilities do not extend beyond themselves, their

friends and their families? The outcome of this process depends not only on the form, content and history of a given text but on the approaches to teaching being used, the nature of the questions being examined, and the types of assignments and criteria by which students are evaluated on their understanding of a text.

University as Re-education Camp

A critic of what I have been saying might charge that, despite my rhetoric of classroom democracy, my proposals could mean, in practice, turning the university into a re-education camp. Such a claim is hyperbolic but in critical pedagogy theory there is indeed a tension between enabling students to think for themselves and convincing students to read the cultural and political world in the same way as their professor.

Not only will critical pedagogy not necessarily ensure that students will become active in struggles for equality, radical leftist teaching methods in no way guarantee that students will morph into people who value social justice at the levels of conscience and ideology. For some students the experience of a critical pedagogy classroom will recede into a memory once the relevant course has ended and their lives are overwhelmed by dominant ideologies. Other students will, upon being intellectually empowered, nevertheless conclude that patriarchy, racism and homophobia are social problems of the past that have been overcome or that capitalism is the economic model that ensures the greatest degree of freedom. Is it possible to combat this outcome without necessarily practicing a left authoritarianism that discourages critical thinking and suspicion of authority, the habits a critical pedagogy aims to develop? Is it responsible when, so as to avoid imposing his or her views on students, a professor insufficiently counteracts the sexism, heteronormativity, racial prejudice, classism and colonial thinking that many students will bring to class? My point is that in critical pedagogy theory there is at times a contradiction

between the impulse to have democratic relations between students and teachers and the desire of radical leftist teachers to advocate for particular analyses, methodologies, and values at the expense of others. Heble, for example, asks how do “we negotiate between, on the one hand, a genuine insistence on and valuing of student expression (itself an ethical move?) and, on the other, our ethical responsibility to promote forms of inquiry and models of knowledge-production which challenge oppression, suffering and injustice?” (“Re-ethicizing” 147). These are urgent questions that, it seems to me, have not been sufficiently answered in writings on critical pedagogy.

In this section I will address in sequence the underlying issues that are at play here. First, I will consider whether radical leftist teachers should make their specific political opinions known to students, whether these professors ought to attempt to persuade students to adopt similar positions, and whether professors should take sides during in-class debates between students as well as debates between or within various course texts. My argument is that it is both necessary for a critical pedagogue to do so and misguided to think that value-free teaching is possible. Having discussed that topic, the second underlying issue I will address here is how radical leftist teachers can make these interventions responsibly so that the classroom does not, in effect, become a re-education camp. Along the way, I will introduce several concepts that I hope will be useful in wrestling with these questions, including that of the classroom as a “space of democratic convictions,” the radical leftist professor as an “expert in de-legitimation,” “activation by example,” as well as the critical pedagogue as modeled on the activist workshop facilitator.

The case against teachers explicitly stating their political views in class and trying to convince students to share them is not without merit. Allow me to provide a brief overview of

this argument, which I call the anti-interventionist school of thought. One concern is that what in other settings may be a mere expression of personal beliefs can in the context of a university classroom easily become conflated by students or teachers themselves with a set of unquestionable dogmatic truths and, by virtue of that, a closing off of alternative perspectives. Another is that the mere fact of professors self-identifying as politically leftist is no guarantee that what they believe stands up to intellectual scrutiny or that their notion of how the world ought to be is necessarily desirable. A third proposition is that students must be at the centre of learning and knowledge production and the professor should help direct this process without making undue intrusions. Professors who do make such incursions, this line of argumentation goes, behave in an authoritarian manner by using their position of power to impose their views onto students. Finally, the anti-interventionist school of thought critiques interventionism on epistemic grounds in one of two ways. The first of these insists that radical leftist beliefs are overly biased and politicized. The second is that when radical leftist professors express political views in class they are exerting power over the diverse ways of knowing and of being in the world that students will bring to a given class. In my estimation, these are all important concerns with which any argument for teachers directly expressing their political beliefs in class must honestly reckon, and I aim to do this in the arguments I lay out below.

From the outset, it might be valuable to consider an example of the case against teaching that in some sense involves an overt effort to persuade students to adopt their teacher's worldview in part or in whole on one or more socio-political issues. Diana Brydon has a clear commitment to ethical, politically-inflected pedagogical practices and her work has produced many important insights on the subject. I disagree, however, with some of what she writes on the question of whether professors ought to overtly aim to change students' worldviews. In "Cross-

Talk, Postcolonial Pedagogy, and Transnational Literacy,” she argues that “postcolonial pedagogy does aim to change minds and change the world, yet it cannot fall into the pedagogical assumptions that once made conversion such a potent ally of imperialism....Education is about responsible mind-changing yet has so often been imbricated in pedagogies of coercion and irresponsible persuasion” (64). My concern with Brydon’s argument is largely rhetorical. By invoking imperialism and religious conversion, she establishes parameters for her discussion within which it is almost impossible to disagree with her. Brydon’s critique is of a straw pedagogue in that presumably no advocate of changing students’ minds to help facilitate progressive social change will point to imperialist conversions as a model. If anybody does so explicitly or implicitly, Brydon does not name them. Her argument also suffers from vagueness and over-simplification. Aside from referring to forms of mind-changing that would be endorsed by no critical pedagogy scholar I have ever read, she gives no clear picture of what the form of teaching she warns of would look like. Reading Brydon’s comments, one might get the impression that there are piles of books and articles on critical pedagogy that argue for imitating the missionary approach to getting people to think differently about politics, or that such practices are currently widespread among radical leftist teachers, but she provides no evidence to demonstrate that this is the case. Although she concedes that teaching for social justice involves changing students’ minds, Brydon’s rhetoric implies that the mere act of trying to change a student’s mind will tend to be imperialistic without due consideration of the multiple ways that this can be approached, some of which are desirable and some of which are not. In this sense her critique is focused exclusively on the form of teaching at the expense of any consideration of the content. She writes as if the substance of what exactly it is that students are being persuaded to believe is of little consequence so that, for example, teaching that imperialism is an abhorrent

blemish on human history is collapsed into the same category as missionaries invading the Americas and violently forcing indigenous peoples to adopt European social and cultural practices.

Brydon continues her discussion in a manner that is no less troubling. She writes that teachers “should not be in the business of producing converts to a cause, however worthy, because all causes can be perverted” and that one must avoid establishing a “fixed program because there is an inherent tendency in any form of fixity to become oppressive” (“Cross-Talk” 64). I am in qualified agreement with what Brydon says here. As a warning against the dangers that sometimes come along with building social justice movements and in particular with teaching that shares similar goals, Brydon’s comments serve as an important caution against concentrating too much power in the hands of particular professors. Given that teachers already have substantial power over students, a dynamic wherein teachers double as messianic leaders ready to usher in a just world is to be avoided. One reason it is to be avoided is that such a dynamic will undermine the democratic character necessary to build and sustain the inclusive, vibrant, classrooms that are necessary components of efforts to build a new world. A related risk is that teachers who primarily function as preachers, even for movements deserving of support, can create cults of personality and leadership around themselves in the social microcosm of a classroom. Far from nurturing in students the sceptical, combative impulses that are necessary for activating them, efforts to convert them in a quasi-religious manner risk producing passive obedience to authority figures. Even where students uncritically accept ideas that support just causes, intellectual and social movements on behalf of these face the danger of being stultified in the long-run by submissive tendencies and will benefit more from the energy and dynamics fostered by creative, interrogative minds. My reservation with what Brydon says is that the latter

part of the second quote is so strong and so broad that it can be read as an argument against principles in general: the mere fact that these can and often have become corrupted in no way means that they are inherently undesirable.

While it is certainly true that what a professor says in class carries considerable authority, it does not follow that a teacher who takes a stance on a political issue necessarily exercises undue coercion in having done so. The question of whether professors should intervene in classroom debates or make known their own political positions need not be framed as though the mere act of expressing a view is tantamount to giving students low grades should they not conform to every letter of a particular political platform. A teacher who in an effort to establish classroom democracy opts against taking sides in a debate infantilizes his or her students and in this way undermines the egalitarianism he or she aims to create. Classroom equality involves professors treating students as equals. Accordingly, critical pedagogy scholars such as Giroux, Heble, Shor, and Bizzell suggest that, instead of assuming that students' intellects and convictions are too fragile to withstand a professor who openly disagrees with them, professors do not need to conceal their views.

Giroux criticizes the notion that teachers should act as allegedly neutral referees during in-class debates between students or among the texts being studied:

refusing dogmatism does not suggest that educators descend into a laissez-faire pluralism or an appeal to methodologies designed to 'teach the conflicts'....[I]t suggests that in order to make the pedagogical more political, educators afford students with diverse opportunities to understand and experience how politics, power, commitment, and responsibility work on and through them both within and outside of schools. (*On Critical* 81)

Approaches to pedagogy that, in the name of anti-authoritarianism, advocate merely “teaching the conflicts” are in danger of immobilizing students. A professor opposed to taking sides in debates being taught, or in disagreements between students in the classroom, risks suggesting to students that anti-racism is not necessarily superior to racism or that gender equality is not intrinsically better than patriarchy or that economic equality is no more desirable than inequality. This approach to enabling student debate and dialogue might in some sense embody classroom democracy, but, just as teaching subversive subject matter through the banking method of education is a contradiction, a pedagogy that is radical in form but not in content is illogical. If every statement and ideology is regarded as being as legitimate as any other, then the knowledge produced in the classroom will be so relativistic that students may be rendered inactive. If students come to regard all sides on a political initiative as equally sound, it is difficult to imagine that they would want to advocate for or against one position or the other.

In contrast to the fence-sitting approach to classroom debates, Giroux argues that part of the task of the critical pedagogue is to demonstrate to students that, far from being passive consumers of educational products, they are both subject to and potential agents of political-economic power within the university and its larger social context. Here Giroux’s position is that ends such as these can best be achieved through a combination of course content and course form, and through teachers providing material and in-class commentary that opens up criticism of dominant ideologies while also ensuring that the course is itself an embodied rebuke of and an alternative to these ideologies. Giroux’s argument is that in the space between a teacher-as-dictator model and a situation of perfect equality among a professor and her or his students are opportunities for radical leftist teachers to use some aspects of their power to ends that are not inherently coercive or disempowering. He emphasizes the importance of “recognizing that

teaching is always an act of intervention inextricably mediated through particular forms of authority that *can* offer students . . . a variety of analytical, diverse historical traditions, and a wide ranging knowledge of dominant and subaltern cultures and how they influence each other” (italics in original) (*On Critical* 80). What I derive from Giroux’s argument is that the right kind of knowledge taught in the right way can be part of a broader effort to create a more just world. Since the superior power of the teacher cannot be entirely abrogated within the existing education system, his suggestion is that it is necessary to ensure that this power be exercised in a manner that is likely to curtail rather than enable oppressive beliefs or conduct and to embolden rather than inhibit impulses to resist inequality.

Giroux offers important insights into and raises necessary questions about what leftist literature professors can do with the authority they possess. Given that limitations to absolute classroom equality currently exist, the question becomes, what is the most responsible manner in which literature professors can exercise their surplus of power? What ends will this power serve? Who will it benefit? Giroux’s argument suggests that part of being a politically responsible teacher is ensuring that the quality of her or his store of knowledge is such that it can be emancipatory. For him, this means familiarizing students with suppressed historical and contemporary narratives, with how and why some people come to dominate others ideologically and materially, as well as with analytical tools that assist in the development of critiques and praxes to alter such imbalances.

Gramsci’s writing also provides insight into the questions I have just raised. For example, he describes intellectuals as “experts in legitimation” (Merrington 154). His argument is that through activities such as criticism, art, or journalism, the social function of the intellectual is to cast the interests of either a ruling or ascendant class as being in accord with the general welfare,

morality, natural “human nature” or some combination of these. In bourgeois society, Gramsci argues, most intellectuals are expert in legitimizing ruling class hegemony. My argument is that one strategy for the radical leftist teacher is to strive to be an expert in de-legitimation. This is not necessarily to propose that professors can completely break free of the categories that Gramsci describes and somehow not serve any particular segment of society. On the contrary, my reading of the critical pedagogy scholarship I have discussed throughout this chapter is that it advocates for radical leftist teachers functioning on behalf of those classes that are exploited and oppressed. My suggestion is that one way to do so is by being an expert in de-legitimizing ruling class ideology. For me this involves consistent, forthright exposition of the contradictions and harmful outcomes of these doctrines as well as enabling students to develop the skills required to do so themselves. Since most students will have spent their lives immersed in hegemonic ideologies, positions that align them with these are likely to prevail if insufficiently challenged. Hegemonic ideologies have the advantage of feeling familiar to students, of being in accord with the worldviews with which they are comfortable since, through mass media and commercial culture, “neoliberal ideas have permeated society and are transforming what passes as common sense” (Hall and O’Shea 11). Critical pedagogues can use their authority to act as a counterweight to the power that dominant ideologies have. In a society that celebrates allegedly outstanding individuals in every field, a professor automatically garners a certain amount of deference from most of her or his students, even if it does not always seem this way. This is one of the few varieties of authority in neoliberal capitalist society that can plausibly be used to help discredit the institutions and belief systems from which it is derived.

By arguing for professors to be experts in de-legitimization, I am purposefully defining this task in negative terms. I do so because this is preferable to spelling out for students in the

manner of a re-education camp a detailed set of ideological laws that the professor deems preferable to existing mainstream beliefs or a blueprint of how a better world should look and of how to get to and maintain such a situation. Yet I also recognize that criticizing particular ideologies will often function as endorsing others so a professor who is an expert in de-legitimization is not innocent of advocacy. De-legitimization can also involve endorsing social justice movements through, for example, de-bunking hegemonic class propaganda designed to discredit such movements. An expert in de-legitimizing, however, primarily involves a critique of prevailing dogma rather than advocacy. A teacher who practices de-legitimization can activate students by providing them with one professor's views about what is wrong with the current socio-economic system, the tools to determine this themselves that are developed by having a dialogue with the professor about her critique and possibly, to the extent that a given student is in agreement with the professor, a desire to act to change current political arrangements. In my view, this practice is one way that radical leftist professors can take clear political positions without indoctrinating students or stultifying their curiosity.

Further questions remain about the balance between classroom democracy and explicit professorial intervention in debate. For example, if one key aim of the project of radical teaching is to reduce the authority that professors wield over students, then what is to be done in cases where students take positions that implicitly or explicitly involve a defence of socio-political inequalities? In addressing this issue one must keep in mind that, not only are classrooms places where matters of political relevance are studied, they are also sites at which political disputes play out. As much as university courses involve coming to grasp with understandings of the forces at play in various socio-cultural contests, the environments in which these processes take place are themselves spaces where such matters are fought over. Since the debates that occur in

universities play a significant role in legitimizing or de-legitimizing competing political analyses of the past, present and future in the rest of a society, at times they will necessarily be tense and emotionally-charged. Heble reflects on an especially fractious class that featured white males behaving in a sexist and racist fashion and asks,

Is it possible . . . *not* to take sides when students are literally yelling at one another across the floor in the classroom?... [I]f I . . . see everything I do in the classroom as being informed by my commitments to social justice, then pretending to remain neutral in the midst of fractious classroom debates just doesn't seem a viable option.... Not only did the polarized settings force many of us (myself included) to make judgments and announce commitments, but, perhaps more importantly, they taught me that students and teachers alike need to work on sharpening and invigorating our understanding of the way in which our judgments and commitments are grounded in complex patterns of social and historical relevance. (emphasis in original) ("Re-ethicizing" 151)

Maintaining neutrality during class discussions on the grounds that this is a necessary part of an ethical pedagogical practice is virtually a logical impossibility, and perhaps also a practical one, in situations such as the one that Heble describes. Heble's experience suggests that it is misguided for a teacher to, in the name of a commitment to anti-authoritarian education, allow one group of students to assert the validity of an oppressive discourse and enact it in the process of doing so thereby denying their peers a democratic learning environment. Teachers will from time to time face moments of significant political import where one student's supposed right to be discursively and perhaps physically oppressive irreconcilably conflicts with another student's right to not be oppressed. If the classroom can be conceived of as a social microcosm, a refusal by professors to take clear stances on pressing political questions contradicts the goal of having

education function as an embodied practice of social justice that is consistently expressed in the critical pedagogy theory I have been discussing.

The question of whether critical pedagogues should take sides in classroom debates is also in a sense an academic one. In the first place, moments of pitched conflict often by themselves clarify the qualitative differences between antagonistic positions and have a momentum of their own that compels the taking of positions. Secondly, the notion that a professor can somehow trick students for an entire semester into not revealing her or his deeply held convictions seems to me a false one. Even if neutrality were desirable, the ways that we use our bodies and our words, particularly at moments of discord, tend to be marked in ways that express preferences, demonstrate assumptions, reveal ideological parameters and generally undermine efforts at maintaining completely value-free speech. As Bizzell writes, “everything I do in the classroom is informed by one or another element of my world view, thus potentially conflicting at every turn with other elements in the students’ diverse world views and, because of my institutional position at the head of the class, potentially undercutting their values” (284). The anti-interventionist approach to classroom debate is flawed in that it is premised on the notion that discourse can take place in a neutral space unmarked by power and material inequities. Underlying the claim that teachers should not make explicit their political views in class is the assumption that some forms of knowledge and opinions are politicized and therefore biased as compared to those that are neutral or natural or value-free. I am not persuaded that the latter category can exist, at least not in literature classes, and this is another reason that the anti-interventionist position can be rejected.

How, then, can a professor take sides in the classroom on politically fraught matters in a way that it is democratic rather than tyrannical? What are some ways to call into question the

ethical positions students take without shaming, punishing or banishing them? Which in-class activities characterize a pedagogy wherein the role of the teacher is to be neither an authoritarian preacher nor someone who sits fecklessly on the sidelines when a particular student or group of them adopts an oppressive politics and behaves accordingly toward their peers? Bizzell offers some insight into these concerns. She writes that she will openly state her positions and acknowledge that they are “constructed by my social, cultural, and historical circumstances, and, in effect, warn students in advance that if they come to me, this is what they will be getting. Thus at least I cannot be accused of imposing so-called ‘political correctness’ on hapless students or of duping them into exposing themselves unawares to my persuasive approaches” (288). This strategy has several dimensions. In the first place, it can be an instance of activation by example. When a professor clearly articulates her political values and attempts to change antagonistic minds, she is providing an illustration of precisely the sort of critical engagement that radical leftist teachers want to encourage in their students. The hope here is that students will understand that no special qualities are required in order to be an advocate of social justice since this is practiced by their professor, who in the critical pedagogy classroom is repeatedly exposed as mere flesh and blood, so that students will in turn feel the confidence that is necessary to be an activist. If it is fair to say that education can be an embodied practice of social justice, perhaps it is also reasonable to argue for the radical leftist teacher to aim at being an embodiment of an activist. Having a professor forthrightly argue for social justice positions in class is a way of doing so that is premised on the hope that seeing a professor take positions that they feel are right, even if they are unpopular, will activate students in such a way that they will do the same on matters that they regard as urgent.

Moreover, among the reasons that pedagogical efforts to change students' minds are sometimes understood as brainwashing is the perception that teachers attempt to do this by a sleight of hand in which one set of analyses are passed off as universal truths. Bizzell's method allows her to address that legitimate concern. By pointing out that her opinions are, like anyone else's, shaped by the circumstances in which she lives and not transcendental, she also alleviates the risk that professors who forthrightly express political views in class will do so in a domineering way. Offering the qualifications that Bizzell does demonstrates to students that opinions offered by the professor that conflict with those held by the students are neither intrinsically superior nor inferior from a moral or intellectual standpoint. Yet Bizzell also stops short of claiming that because her beliefs are subjective they can inherently be no more true, valid or desirable than anyone else's. What she does here is create a discursive and physical sphere in which she can articulate her political opinions without either making grander claims for them than she can defend with evidence and logic or capitulating to the idea that her own opinions have no more merit than those of a Holocaust denier or a supporter of the Klu Klux Klan. I call such a sphere a space of democratic convictions to denote a rhetorical framework wherein a radical leftist teacher can firmly and clearly take political positions in class while somewhat tempering these by noting the historical contingencies that to some extent affect all knowledge and beliefs.

Another reflection of Bizzell's provides insight into how professors can use rhetoric in a self-conscious way to make explicit their political views without imposing them in a dictatorial manner:

I want to encourage my students to imitate my exercise of rhetorical authority. I have to allow them to try to persuade me . . . and to persuade other members of the class....I have

to devise pedagogical mechanisms whereby everyone's access to rhetorical authority could be realized in our work together, for example, through finding ways for students to change the agenda of a course in progress or to take its lessons out into non-academic contexts. (293)

These remarks suggest that questions of whether and how professors should make clear their political views cannot be divorced from other pedagogical questions, particularly those pertaining to the methods by which knowledge is exchanged and produced in the classroom. The surest way a teacher can guard against lapsing into authoritarianism while taking such positions is by doing so in the context of a classroom that is characterized by dialogue, by collective control over the means of knowledge production and communal ownership of its product. While I have acknowledged above that it is impossible under present political conditions for a teacher to have exactly the same amount of power as a student, this is not a black and white question. To say that one teaches a class as either a tyrant or in a state of perfect equality with students obscures the many positions in between. One of these is a position at which critical pedagogues can aim: a state of perpetual striving for maximal equality with students; an endless grasping that, however unobtainable this goal, leaves everyone richer for having made the reach.

I dwell on this point of process because what I take from Bizzell's comments is that the structure of a class based on principles of participatory, active, communal, critical education and the maximum possible degree of power sharing will, by virtue of this form, mitigate the risk of having a classroom resemble a re-education camp. If the dynamics of a class are such that student knowledge is demonstrably valued and that the professor's authority and knowledge have in practice been subject to scrutiny and contestation, then statements of value that a professor makes lack much of the coercive character present when teachers do the same in a classroom

based on conservative principles of education. A class with such a structure has a built-in safety mechanism that guards against one of the ever-present risks that anti-interventionists worry about: what a professor believes is sometimes misinformed or misguided. Radical leftist classes involve teachers being held accountable for what they say so those proffering views that are flawed face maximal likelihood of having them exposed. Indoctrination is therefore a considerably more serious problem in a traditional classroom. In that setting a professor's value statements are subject to an insufficient degree of open questioning because these opinions function as uncontested truths deposited into students. Far from stifling opposition, when a professor in a class that is radical in form takes explicit political positions, the effect can be to increase debate and dialogue. In this way the practice that is sometimes identified as authoritarian in writings on critical pedagogy can be a method of activation because it sharpens contradictions in the classroom and, when the classroom is one that encourages student dissent, invites challenges to the professor.

Bizzell's emphasis on rhetorical authority is worth underscoring. Her comments suggest that one way for a radical leftist teacher to take clear political positions and attempt to convince students to agree with them without turning the classroom into a re-education camp is for that teacher to come right out and say that, "When I offer you my opinions on a given subject, pay attention to not just what I argue but to *how* I argue." When a professor presents and defends her or his political views, this can be useful to students because it offers them a rhetorical model that they can employ when engaging in intellectual debate to defend positions of their own. Thus in the act of presenting views, even if they are a complete anathema to students, a teacher can provide them with a tool useful in their critical development. This strategy limits the degree to which a professor can be understood to be brainwashing when she tries to change students'

minds in that they are also learning rhetorical skills in the process. The approach can also activate students because, if it helps refine their ability to argue persuasively, they are more likely to be inclined to have the confidence necessary to advocate for particular socio-political changes.

Shor, furthermore, describes another strategy for how radical leftist teachers can take forthright political positions in ways that cannot be understood as an attempt to brainwash students. He writes that “The teacher who relates economics in society to the knowledge under inquiry in the classroom cannot impose her or his views on students but must present them inside a thematic discussion in language accessible to students, who have the freedom to question and disagree with a teacher’s analysis” (30). Shor’s point is that, when teachers overtly express political views, it is necessary to do so in readily comprehensible language. Teachers who use a jargon-heavy approach when differing from students’ opinions are exercising excess power over them. To employ this device is to signal to students that professors are, by virtue of the character of their discourse, more intelligent than students and as such more likely than students to be defending a justifiable position. This strategy frames the debate in linguistic terms in which students cannot reasonably be expected to compete. None of this is to condescend to students by implying that they are incapable of using theoretical language and this issue certainly applies less to graduate students and upper year undergraduates than to students who are in the early stages of post-secondary education. One does not acquire the jargon of critical theories in elementary or secondary school or in popular culture and to disagree with students in a way that in effect shames them for this is an authoritarian approach to taking political positions. On the other hand, disagreeing with students in the language they use is a way of treating them as equals in that it means entering into a debate with them on a terrain on which they can reasonably be expected to

be able to defend their arguments and respond to the professor's. By taking this approach, professors can act on the responsibility to intervene without undermining their responsibility to foster a democratic educational climate.

Brydon offers another concrete way to handle these dilemmas in her account of how to respond to and make use of the ignorance that some students will bring to the classroom. In this context ignorance refers not to the absence of knowledge about an academic subject but to beliefs that rest on hegemonic ideologies and stereotypes. Brydon writes that "We need to find ways of eliciting and sharing ignorance that remedy that failing without stigmatizing the person [who holds such views]... We need to be able to turn [demonstrations of ignorance] toward examination of how ignorance is itself actively produced and how certain forms of ignorance actually receive social sanction" ("Cross-Talk" 67). While it may be misguided for teachers to sanction through their silence a student offering oppressive viewpoints, attacking the relevant student could cause them to feel like a victim of professorial tyranny and to retreat into a hardening of their positions. Embracing the value of ignorance, Brydon suggests, is an approach that professors can take to the retrograde opinions that students will sometimes bring to a class that enables the teacher to challenge these perspectives without doing so in an autocratic way designed to chastise or humiliate the student in question. This strategy can be pursued by as gently as is reasonably possible pointing out the flaws in a student's regressive comments and quickly shifting attention to the origin of the misinformation underlying these statements. Conversations can in this way move from the shortcomings in the ideology of one or more students to a much more productive and important critique of the disinformation campaigns that produce ignorant misconceptions about people who belong to segments of society that are comparatively lacking in socio-political clout.

The critical pedagogue can be understood as being much like the guest facilitators whom activist groups will often bring in to run workshops to help disseminate an understanding of histories and modes of critique and action that are systematically denied by hegemonic culture, news media, and education. In these settings, the guest facilitator has a quality and quantity of knowledge about a given subject that organizers and attendees feel will be beneficial to them: if all present had precisely the same type and amount of knowledge, there would be little point in arranging for a guest facilitator. To simply acknowledge that a given person may know more about a particular subject or know it in a different way than another is not to necessarily privilege the value of that knowledge and accordingly it is not inherently oppressive to recognize that such differences exist. A guest facilitator in an activist workshop generates and directs dialogue so as to create a collective learning experience wherein knowledge is presumed to be produced by and to belong to the facilitator as much as everyone else present but there is no pretense of denying that the guest facilitator has an especially useful breadth of understanding of the relevant issue or that other participants feel they can learn from the facilitator. That social justice activists, people who tend to be attuned to unjust hierarchies, find this form of pedagogy valuable suggests to me that the facilitators who are brought in to work in such settings offer a suitable model for how to share detailed knowledge in non-authoritarian ways with those who wish to learn that teachers working in formal educational settings can apply.

The Neoliberal University

At times the universities can be a laboratory of and sanctuary for radical leftist thinking. As Keefer writes, “despite their larger role in legitimizing current government policies” (24) universities “have worked, in a very limited sense, towards a wider distribution of power.” Yet this is not without risks for critical pedagogy. Among the social functions of the university is

also its capacity to absorb ideas aimed at creating radical leftist political change and to in effect turn them into the private stock of an intellectual elite. According to Said,

Multicultural disciplines have in fact found a hospital haven in the contemporary . . . academy, and this is a historical fact of extraordinary magnitude....The irony is that it has been the university's practice to admit the subversions of cultural theory in order to some degree to neutralize them by fixing them in the status of academic subspecialties. So now we have the curious spectacle of teachers teaching theories that have been completely displaced—wrenched is the better word—from their contexts....[T]heory is taught so as to make the student believe that he or she can become a Marxist, a feminist, an Afrocentrist, or a deconstructionist with about the same effort and commitment required in choosing items from a menu. (*Culture* 321)

While the teaching of oppositional modes of analysis has the virtue of widening their circulation, the institutionalization of radical leftist ideas within universities can declaw them. Though associating subversive ideas with the knowledge generated in universities can legitimize these concepts and make them more palatable to more people, making a radical idea respectable can sap it of its energy to mobilize and of the threat it poses to the status quo. In post-secondary institutions these theories are at risk of becoming frozen as mere ideas or objects of study so that their potential application to socio-political problems becomes lost. As Len Findlay writes, part of “the power of academic institutions [is] to keep the world safe from critical ideas by keeping all of us endlessly busy refining them” (“Western Feminism” 160). Far from mobilizing people to resist, radical academic discourses can act as jargon in which highly educated professionals traffic amongst themselves for career advancement and to the exclusion of most others, including

the people these discourses claim they aim to liberate. This contradiction remains a major challenge for critical pedagogues.

Debates over particular approaches to critical pedagogy remain merely intellectual exercises unless they take account of the material conditions in which these are practiced. Institutions of post-secondary education are part of a complex of social relations in which power is distributed unequally between teachers, students, university administrations, the state, private capital, and the general public. These affect campuses and classrooms in ways that profoundly shape the radical leftist teacher's prospects of teaching for political change. As Jeffrey Williams argues, "The university is not by any means an ivory tower isolated from the economic determinations of the world, but functions as a crucial institution reflecting and abetting the present reconstitution of the public sphere" (300) and as such "[t]he parameters and effects of academic-intellectual work are not autonomously governed by intellectual self-definition or desire, but mediated through and negotiated within the space of their socio-institutional and professional situation" (303). Neoliberalism, as an ideology and a set of policies, is a major challenge facing radical teachers today. In this section I will look at how education under neoliberalism fosters values and creates material conditions that hamper efforts to practice critical pedagogy. These include high tuition fees and increased class sizes. I will then close this chapter with a consideration of how educational arrangements that are advantageous to radical leftist teaching might look.

Said describes the university as a place where "the conventions of society are suspended" in a world that can be characterized by "a ceaseless quest for principles and knowledge, liberation, and finally justice" ("On the University" 36). Universities are among the few spheres in neoliberal society where some value is attached to that which has little short-term direct

capacity for wealth-generation. Yet their social functions are contradictory. Michael Keefer's account captures the paradox:

Universities . . . enable society to reproduce itself but with a difference—or rather, with a myriad of differences. For if in one (or many) sense they help to legitimize the social order we already have, making possible the perpetuation and reconstitution of even its most apparent defects and injustices, they also provide a space within which discourses committed in various ways to the critical analysis and transformative renewal of that order can flourish. (22)

On one hand, universities house a great volume of intellectuals who create, legitimize and disseminate rationalizations for all forms of inequality. Elite educational institutions help produce one generation after another of self-interested leaders of politics, commerce, and culture. Universities are enmeshed with destructive, frequently violent, practices such as the development of counter-insurgency strategies or the knowledge required to create advanced weaponry. Universities have, however, been foremost among the few (particularly under neoliberalism) social locations that foster critical thinking. Campuses have also been incubators for a huge range of social justice movements that have won important gains for exploited and marginalized sectors of the population. Yet the functions mentioned in the last two sentences are threatened by neoliberal policy.

It is necessary to formulate a clear sense of what neoliberal education entails by pointing to a few features of contemporary post-secondary education in Canada, and specifically in Ontario. Since the 1990s, universities in Ontario have experienced significant reductions to public funding. The province's universities lost in excess of ten percent of their operating budget between 1992 and 1994 while in 1995 the government of Ontario cut that by another 15 percent

(Keefer 32). The same trend is visible on a national scale. For example, the Canadian Association of University Teachers estimates that per capita government funding for university students across Canada decreased by 17% between 1991 and 2001 (qtd. in Drakich, Grant and Stewart 250). One key development during that period was that in 1995 separate transfer grants were merged into one source of block funding, which is called the Canada Health and Social Transfer and, as Adam Davidson-Harden and Suzanne Majhanovich point out, “aggregate funding for the transfer was cut in constant 1998 dollars relative to the amounts of the previous two grants in 1994/95, amounting to a cut of over \$5 billion (271).

These reductions in public funding help create conditions that are inhospitable to critical pedagogy. According to a report by Angelika Kerr for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, an agency of the provincial government, one way universities have dealt with the limited resources given to them is “by increasing average class sizes. In 2009, about two thirds of Ontario universities reported that 30 per cent or more of first year courses had more than 100 students. The average number of FTE students per full time faculty has increased from 17 in 1987 to 25 in 2007” (2). Critical pedagogy works best in intimate environments that allow students to develop the comfort level necessary to articulate their ideas, to draw on their lived experiences as sources of knowledge, and to challenge the professor’s authority. For many students it is harder to feel secure enough to take part in this style of learning in a class of, for example, seventy-five students than in a class of twenty-five. Even if a professor manages to foster in all or most students a desire to participate in an over-sized class, it is impossible for a large volume of them to be able to do so in the limited time available.

In this respect, temporality is a material challenge that neoliberalism poses to radical leftist teachers. As Giroux observes, “time is a central feature of politics and orders not merely

the pace of the economic, but the time available for consideration, contemplation, and critical thinking. When reduced to a commodity, time often becomes the enemy of deliberation and thoughtfulness and undermines the ability of political culture to function critically” (*On Critical* 113). As the underfunding of universities leads to increases in class sizes, all faculty become over-worked in that the more students a teacher is responsible for, the more hours they have to spend grading. Critical pedagogy frankly requires greater time and effort than traditional approaches to education. Recycling lectures semester after semester is less taxing than subjecting one’s work to endless self-criticism and to critique from students. Teachings dispensed from a pulpit to be consumed by whichever group of students happens to be in a particular class are less labour intensive than teaching in an interactive fashion in accord with the particular dynamics of each class, which means constantly revising pedagogic strategies.

Giroux makes a distinction between public time and corporate time. Corporate time is an acceleration of the pace of labour that “measures relationships, productivity, space, and knowledge according to the dictates of cost-efficiency, profit, and market-based rationality” (*On Critical* 116) whereas public time is a slowing of pace in “an attempt to create the institutional and ideological conditions that promote long-term analyses, historical reflection and deliberations over what our collective actions might mean for shaping the future” (*On Critical* 114). That the pressures of corporate time undermine public time is manifest in, for instance, the nature of exercises assigned to students. Feeding a Scantron sheet into a machine to grade multiple choice tests is quicker than providing substantive feedback on creative assignments. A scarcity of time, energy and other resources provides considerable incentives for exhausted educators to use these more convenient methods at the expense of pedagogical approaches that foster critical thinking and an awareness among students of their capacity to make interventions

that can effect political change. Adherence to neoliberal ideology and implementation of corporate-style education policies therefore creates the conditions in which corporate time is the dominant temporality in contemporary universities at the expense of public time and its concern with nurturing participatory political culture.

High tuition fees are another feature of neoliberal education that entrenches corporate time and corporate culture in universities. Vijay Prashad writes that, generalizations about the laziness and short attention spans of today's youth aside, students who fail to live up to expectations in post-secondary institutions do so not primarily because they are slackers but because of "a contradiction between the goals of the corporate-university and the pedagogical urges of the vast mass of the youth who are excited to learn, but find they have neither the time nor the money to challenge themselves" (248). Learning does not occur in a vacuum and the neoliberal era has been marked by ever-rising tuition fees: for example, in Canada they rose by 126% between 1990 and 2001 (Drakich, Grant, and Stewart 254). Moreover, a study of twenty-five Canadian universities finds that in 1987-88 fifteen percent of their operating income came from tuition but that figure rose to thirty-four percent by 2009 (Stone 79). Consequently students have incurred higher than ever debt loads (Davidson-Harden and Majhanovich 275) and because of the interest paid on students' loans, students ultimately pay even more for their education than they are charged in tuition. In this context, students are compelled to devote more and more time to doing paid work outside of school. According to a Canadian University Survey Consortium study, in 2011 56 per cent of undergraduates in Canada report being employed while attending university (26). Of these, students report "working about 18 hours a week on average" and 1 out of 6 say they work full-time while in school (26). Furthermore, among students who are employed, "2 in 3 say they rely on their current employment to finance their education" (36).

Being employed while studying frequently has negative effects: 1 in 3 working students report to the Canadian University Survey Consortium that employment has had a negative impact on their academic performance (26). There are other, unseen consequences as well. Some of the most important, critically-oriented learning students undertake occurs outside of the classroom, where they are free to follow ideas in whatever direction their curiosity leads. This variety of education takes many forms, including self-directed, isolated acts in a library but sometimes also attending community events put on by activist organizations. It is learning that often involves consuming alternative art and media rather than reading institutionalized scholarship or creative works. These endeavours in effect support efforts undertaken by critical pedagogues by providing narratives that run counter to official dogma and by encouraging collective political action. In these ways such extra-curricular activities can re-enforce (if not outdo) classroom activities that strive to produce these attitudes and modes of conduct. Through these extra-curricular learning processes students can come to make the discoveries, and adopt the modes of thinking, which make them feel political resistance is necessary and political change possible. For example, Said describes his dual experiences as learner. One part was the colonial education in formal institutions of schooling where he studied but the second part saw him engaged in “self-education . . . to satisfy the other self that was excluded. That almost always produced a rebellion of one sort or the other” (*Power* 282). Opportunities for such pursuits dry up, however, as students are required to spend increasing amounts of time on paid labour.

In his description of the material conditions of neoliberal education like those that I have been discussing, Henry Giroux writes that

Neoliberal ideology emphasizes winning at all costs, even if it means ruthless competitiveness, an almost rabid individualism, and a notion of agency largely constructed within a market-driven rationality that abstracts economics and markets from ethical considerations....In this paradigm, students are educated primarily to acquire market-oriented skills in order to compete favourably in the global economy. This type of pedagogy celebrates rote learning, memorization, and high-stakes testing, while [according to Martha Nussbaum] it ‘produces an atmosphere of student passivity and teacher routinization’ (*On Critical* 9).

Giroux’s comments suggest that neoliberal education obscures the difference between training and learning so that it becomes possible to de-value the latter to the extent that the former is regarded as the only form of post-secondary study that is worthwhile. Giroux’s remarks suggest that neoliberal education policies are based on the premise that the purpose of post-secondary schools is to turn students into workers who will address the labour needs of the state-capitalist sector. According to Giroux, this encourages passivity among both post-secondary teachers and students: where neoliberalism succeeds in inculcating both parties in the belief that post-secondary education must overwhelmingly be oriented toward learning to perform particular tasks that capital seeks, a teacher’s role is understood as being to transmit, in the manner of a flesh and blood instruction manual, incontestable information to students who accept that their task is to rigidly internalize this without subjecting it to scrutiny. As John McMurtry argues: “Because an educational process is required by its nature to reflect upon and question presupposed patterns of being, its absorption into one of these patterns, the global market system, must leave society in a very real sense without its capacity to think” (214). Moreover, Coleman and Kamboureli argue that neoliberal education is characterized by “an ideology of forgetting,

the production of knowledge workers evacuated of the cautions and complications of cultural memory and therefore free to invest themselves fully in a new, technology-guaranteed future....[T]he knowledge economy has involved a pedagogy that has a . . . clear-cut goal: to fashion citizens capable of servicing and advancing capitalism” (18-19). As an approach to learning and teaching, the neoliberal approach to education is in these ways antithetical to critical pedagogy’s methods and desired outcomes.

In this context, Keefer asks, “do we wish to retain some measure of public control over the contributions our universities make to the reproduction of our social order and to the production and dissemination of knowledge, or are we willing to allow these functions to pass ever more completely into the power of corporate interests?” (37). Given that universities have the capacity to exacerbate inequality or to generate challenges to injustice, or to do both of these at the same time, who controls them and to what ends shapes which of these features is accentuated and which is diminished. Under neoliberalism, as I have shown, the prevailing political climate erects barriers to building education based on teaching for social change. Thus better conditions for critical pedagogy can only emerge if political shifts take place. Education and social change travel on constantly overlapping and mutually-influencing nexuses. Neoliberal universities are not omnipotent behemoths against whom resistance is futile, yet radical leftist teachers face a paradox: critical pedagogy is part of an effort to resist neoliberal education policies but critical pedagogy is also, as I have shown, constrained by neoliberalism. For this reason, one direction research would benefit from taking is toward an examination of how radical leftist teachers can engage students in questions specifically about the social function of universities and of where these questions fit within the broader context of the ongoing debates among critical pedagogy scholars.

Conclusion

In *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King writes that he and his deceased friend, the Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish writer Louis Owens, “wrote knowing that the none of the stories we told would change the world. But we wrote in the hope they would” (92). Here King asserts that stories do not bring about a new world but ironically undercuts himself in the next sentence. This tension between denying that stories can change the world and hope that they might runs throughout the text. While he repeats his claim that stories will not re-order the world, he ends each chapter of the book with a variation on the way he concludes the section about Owens’ suicide: “Take Louis’s story, for instance. It’s yours. Do with it what you will. Cry over it. Get angry. Forget it. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (119). Despite King’s insistence that stories will not change the world, the warning in the last two sentences of this quote leave open the possibility that they might. This possibility is also signalled by the context of King’s reflections. That the affective power of narrative is the focus of King’s Massey Lectures, and of the book based on them published by a popular press like Anansi, is itself an indication that stories have social significance beyond their function as objects of private consumption. These contradictions, however, do not necessarily invalidate King’s skepticism about the likelihood of narrative changing the world.

Donna Palmateer Pennee takes a position analogous to King’s. She argues that “the literary can perform work that cannot be performed elsewhere in the social with the same degree and kind of affect and freedom. The fact that the literary is less powerful in neo-realist terms than, say, the International Monetary Fund, does not mean that we should give up on the literary as a form of knowledge or intervention” (79). Her position is that while literary culture is far

from the central force shaping global capitalism, literary texts nevertheless can be politically affective and effective. Daniel Coleman, similarly, notes that

Although I understand and appreciate the restlessness that makes people dismiss the ivory tower as preoccupied with otherworldly matters that are utterly irrelevant to the real world, the longer I work in the humanities the more I am convinced that what we do as writers, critics, teachers, and cultural producers is crucial to intervening in the Canadian trance of civility⁸. Rather than making me less committed to the disciplines of close reading, historical research, archival reclamation, and the development of precise, attractive writing that are fundamental to literary and cultural studies, the persistent exclusions and violences in our civil society makes me more committed to them. (41)

Coleman claims that there are links between the aspects of literary culture that he describes and the oppressions he mentions but these connections are not always readily apparent. His suggestion is that reading, research, and writing can contribute to reducing violence and inequality.

The question that remains after Coleman's reflection, Pennee's argument, and King's paradoxical statements on the power of stories to affect change is: how can these be deployed? Investigating this question in the specific context of resistance to neoliberalism is this dissertation's central concern. My research leads me to four conclusions about how literary activism works in neoliberal Canada. My first finding is that literary power⁹ is materialized by working through institutions. The second conclusion I have drawn is that Canadian literary activism in the neoliberal era articulates the notion that inequality and violence have systemic causes. My third research finding is that this form of activism is characterized by literary intellectuals doing work that has utility for activists. The fourth conclusion I have arrived at is

that Canadian literary activism in the neoliberal period involves attempts to nurture the radical imagination.

Each chapter in this dissertation demonstrates my conclusion that literary power is manifest in the materiality of circulation, publication, and readership. My research shows that Canadian anti-neoliberal literary activism works through both institutions that reach broad segments of the population and through the building of organizations closer to the margins of public discourse. For example, Stephen Law's novel *Tailings of Warren Peace* is published by Roseway, an imprint of Fernwood, both of which are unabashedly interested in contributing to oppositional leftist movements. At the same time, the book is also award-winning and it did receive multiple reviews in mainstream media outlets. Critical activists have likewise contested neoliberalism in prestigious academic journals and also contributed to alternative media outlets such as *Briarpatch* and *rabble.ca*. The work of Rinaldo Walcott is a case in point: he critiques racism, capitalism, and patriarchy in the *National Post* and on CBC as well as in progressive alternative media like *Canadian Dimension* and *This*. Universities, moreover, are an important site at which literary texts are received and the third section of this study considers the ways that neoliberal educational policies affecting matters like class size and tuition fees constitute a barrier to the radical leftist literary teachers who wish to challenge this system. Yet in that chapter I also look at writings on critical pedagogy that offer ideas for making classrooms into spaces for an embodied practice of social justice where students and teachers can live more justly than elsewhere in neoliberal society.

My second research finding is that Canadian literary activism in the neoliberal era articulates the idea that personal and social suffering have systemic causes. This is evident in all three chapters of this dissertation. Through characters such as Celina, Lalita, and Petra, Stephen

Law dramatizes the ways that intersecting forms of oppression combine to harm indigenous women and women without legal status. Similarly, writers like Naava Smolash and Myka Tucker-Abramson exemplify how literary criticism functions as a forum for analyzing the interconnections between multiple varieties of violence and exclusion. Moreover, texts about critical pedagogy that I discuss by authors such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Jim Merod, Masood Ashraf Raja, and Sherene Razack all explore methods for encouraging students to understand the ways that the material conditions in which people live have social causes and are not merely determined by individual choice.

Furthermore, the third conclusion my research has led to is that Canadian literary activism opposed to neoliberalism is characterized by intellectual work that has clear applications for activists. There is evidence for this claim in every chapter of this dissertation. In *Tailings of Warren Peace*, Celina and Warren provide reflections on resistance strategies. Critics such as Cara Fabre and Jeff Shantz explore the ways that literary works and analysis of them attempt to mobilize effective opposition to capitalism. Similarly, scholars who write about critical pedagogy including Ajay Heble, Nicholas Hengen Fox, and bell hooks offer practical suggestions for how leftist teachers can encourage students to think critically about neoliberal society and to consider participating in efforts to build a more just world.

My fourth research finding is that Canadian literary activism that resists neoliberalism involves fostering the radical imagination. In *Tailings of Warren Peace*, the partial victories of the movement for solidarity with Mayan victims of Canadian mining companies are examples of how, as Dobson and McGlynn write, “Revolution may take place in the realm of ‘real life,’ but it can be productively imagined and rendered first” (14). Analysis such as Benjamin Authers’ reading of *Rules of Engagement* or Derksen’s interpretation of *Salt Fish Girl* exemplify that, as

Szeman argues, literary criticism has a role to play in generating alternatives to neoliberalism that includes “shock[ing] us into recognition of reality through ideological critique” (79) and “spark[ing] the imagination so that we can see possibility in a world with apparently few escape hatches” (79). Moreover, a critical pedagogy classroom can use a novel like Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* to, as the editors of *Not Drowning But Waving* put it, create “spaces that will enable the unfolding, the swell of thought and outrage and hope and need that will bring new groups of women into creative feminist activity” (xx) and other varieties of activism.

When I undertook this research, my habit was to approach the question of when and how cultural work can be considered a form of activism by looking for examples of literary culture that directly and concretely produce social changes. The findings that I have just discussed suggest that this initial approach suffered from an overly narrow conception of activism that privileges spectacular moments of direct action at the expense of the organizing involved in establishing networks of people committed to creating a more equal world and to moulding public opinion so that a strike or protest or occupation can have enough support in the broader population to be effective. My original approach to this research also misguidedly assumed that activism is only successful when a causal link can be shown between it and a policy change. While cultural activism in the neoliberal period has not led in a measurable way to a dramatic broad-based improvement in the material circumstances of the less privileged people living within the borders of the Canadian state—I am, after all, writing this dissertation in a Canada that continues to be neoliberal capitalist—my research leads me to conclude that literary activism in this period is one component of the many ways in which challenges to the status quo find expression. New social formations have been and continued to be experimented with in the institutions that shaped *Tailings of Warren Peace*, in publishers and news outlets with avowed

commitments to social justice movements, and among radical leftist literature teachers seeking to activate in their students an ethos of struggle. In these places, literary activists seek to win new forms of intellectual hegemony, and harness words into metaphoric crossbows and chainsaws.

Notes

¹I provide an extended explanation of this term starting on the bottom of page 2.

²I am currently a member of the advisory board of *Upping the Anti*.

³Some readers might object that conceptualizing politics as having a left wing and right wing is vague and unhelpfully polarizing. The term “leftist” is indeed ambiguous and contested. It is helpful, however, to attempt to distinguish between leftist activism and rightist activism where they have qualitatively different objectives: for instance, in crisis-ridden Greece, both the right wing party Golden Dawn and the left-leaning party Syriza are activist movements but Golden Dawn blames migrants for the country’s economic problems whereas Syriza wants to grant migrants amnesty. I use the term “leftist activists” to refer to people who work to create *substantive*, as distinct from merely formal or procedural, economic, social, and political equality. I am aware of no right wing political party, think tank, or intellectual whose goals include *substantive* economic, social, and political equality. I do not claim that there are never any intersections between left and right or that all political activity neatly fits into one category or the other. In this dissertation, however, I use the word “leftist” because I exclusively discuss activists who struggle for substantive economic, social, and political equality. For the sake of precision it is helpful to have a word to signal that these are the concerns of the people I am talking about and I remain unconvinced that there is a decisively better word than “leftist.”

⁴In 1994, the Writers’ Union of Canada held a conference in Vancouver that limited enrollment to Aboriginal writers and writers of colour. Journalists Robert Fulford and Michael Valpy wrote separate articles in the *Globe and Mail* comparing the event to apartheid, which generated a backlash against the conference that led the Department of Canadian Heritage to withdraw funding (Lai, “Community Action” 119) as was demanded by Member of Parliament Jan Brown

of the right wing Reform Party (Lai, “Community Action” 121). Liberal authors such as Margaret Atwood and Pierre Berton argued that organizers have a right to put on the conference but should not receive public funding and both of them made personal donations to the conference (Lai, “Community Action” 122-3).

⁵Labour arts have been used in union membership drives and they help unions by disseminating pro-labour ideology (Filewod 258). Theatre groups have benefited because the unions have instilled in the artists a sense of themselves as workers with rights and unions have sometimes funded theatre such as the United Steelworkers’ 1995 underwriting of a play put on by the Nova Scotia company Two Planks and a Passion, which dealt with the effects of the 1992 Westray mining disaster (Filewod 258). Other unions that have been involved with theatre at the Mayworks festival include the Auto Workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers (Filewod 258).

⁶A more accurate characterization of Canada’s role internationally is to say that it is an imperialist state that typically plays a supporting part to the lead roles undertaken by the United States, the United Kingdom, or both. For detailed examinations see Yves Engler’s *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy* or Todd Gordon’s *Imperial Canada*.

⁷To me this list could include space, extensive libraries, audio-visual or IT equipment, people with research, writing, and public speaking skills, and possibly money.

⁸Coleman defines this trance as a “quasi-mystical state” that engages English Canadians “in the repetition of a mantra that affirms membership and meaning, a mantra that asserts that Canadians are more civilized than others on all levels—from large-scale international politics to everyday domestic arrangements” (25). He says that the list of groups English Canadians have seen

themselves as superior to both in the past and the present includes Americans, the 9/11 terrorists, Aboriginals, and non-white immigrants.

⁹ I owe the term “literary power” to Dr. Alan Filewod, one of my dissertation supervisors, who introduced it to me.

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