2-5-2022

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Recommended Citation

Ford, D., & Esposito, M. (2021). Aesthetic encounters beyond the present: Historical materialism and sonic pedagogies for resisting abstraction. Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, 19(3), 32-55. URL: http://www.jceps.com/archives/12006

Aesthetic Encounters Beyond the Present: Historical Materialism and Sonic Pedagogies for Resisting Abstraction

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Abstract

Basing ourselves on Marx's method of historical materialism, this article builds on Marxist literature on capitalist abstraction and focuses on the struggle for differentialization. This amounts to a critique and, more importantly, an affirmation: elements of the future exist in the present. This is a future in which the force of capitalist abstraction is overcome through a new social order. This is not only a political struggle, but a pedagogical one as well in that it involves distinct educational logics with particular subjectivities, spatialities, and temporalities, which are elements of communism that exist in the present. The pedagogical gesture developed here is one of desubjectification, *through which we encounter the world and ourselves as unknown and mitigate against capitalist individualism and abstraction. In the end, we suggest that sound education offers one such path.*

Keywords: *Sound studies, sonic pedagogies, Marxism, aesthetics, Louis Althusser, abstraction, Henri Lefebvre*.

Introduction

In the chapter on money in the *Grundrisse* notebooks, Marx (1973) wrote that, with the development of capitalist exchange, "*objective* dependency relations also appear, in antithesis to those of *personal* dependence… in such a way that individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*, whereas earlier they depended on one another" (p. 164). Here, Marx is referring to *real abstractions*, or abstractions that are not only *conceptual* but have an *ontological* force. Consider another real abstraction Marx addresses, this time in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*: the individual. The individual is produced in "anticipation of 'civil society'" and it is only "in this society of free competition, [that] the individual appears detached from the natural bonds etc. which in earlier historical periods make him the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate" (p. 83). Or consider how, under capitalism, *concrete* forms of labor are *abstracted* so they can be exchanged. Distinct labor processes that produce different use-values need some common measure for exchange under capitalism, and this common basis is value: socially-necessary labor-time. Capitalist abstraction is thus a particular kind of abstraction, one that tries to annihilate differences to reaffirm capital's rule, rather than only the mental process of abstraction.

In all three instances, Marx is critiquing bourgeois philosophy, for which the individual, "appears as an ideal, whose existence they project into the past. Not as a historic result but as history's point of departure" (p. 83). The ahistorical philosophers, that is, begin with the way things *appear* and move from there, whereas Marx and the method of historical materialism are concerned with not only what *produces* appearances, not only what is *behind* appearances, but how they came to be, what functions they serve, and how they might be transformed through revolution. Not only are bourgeois philosophy's mental abstractions

incorrect, but—and partly because of such incorrectness—they reinforce the ontological abstractions of capital. Thus, the famous section of *Capital* on the fetishism of commodities, or how under capitalism our "own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them" (Marx, 1967, p. 79). When we walk into the store, we *think* we're exchanging an object (money) for other objects (food or drink), but in reality, we're interacting with the entire working-class as a whole, which includes not just those involved in production but those who land has been dispossessed, and so on.

In this article, we follow Marx's critiques while focusing particularly on its necessary supplement: the affirmation that elements of the communist future exist in the present. This is a future in which capitalist abstractions are overthrown through the creation of something new, a different and more liberatory social order. This is not only a political struggle, but a pedagogical one as well in that it involves distinct educational logics with particular subjectivities and temporalities, which are elements of communism that exist in the present. The pedagogical gesture developed here is one of desubjectification, through which we encounter the world and ourselves as unknown and mitigate against capitalist individualism. In the end, we show how sonic education and politics offer one such path.

Historical Materialism and the Communist Project

Marx's method of inquiry is partly based on what is referred to as historical materialism, or what he and Engels referred to in *The German Ideology* as the materialist method or the materialist conception of history. This was the work in which Marx and Engels broke with their former comrades, the "Young Hegelians." Marx and Engels criticized their comrades for their idealism, or their insistence that "conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness"

possess "an independent existence" (1970, p. 41). The "Young Hegelians: failed to examine connections between the philosophy and the material conditions under which they philosophized. Marx and Engels affirmed—and held onto—a different method, based on the conception that "the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men" and that "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (p. 47).

The word or translation of "determined" is important here. To "determine" is not to dictate or command without exception. Instead, to determine is to set limits and put pressures on particular trajectories (Williams, 1977). In other words, we can only think about wage-labor because we live in capitalism, but that doesn't *dictate* how or what we think about it, let alone what we do with such knowledge. What Marx and Engels did with their method of inquiry was obliterate the separation that philosophers built around their method. Philosophy, they maintained, can't be understood without historical, political, sociological, economic, and other forms of inquiry. It's not by coincidence, in other words, that Marxism as a theory developed *during* the workers' movement as it emerged in the 19th century. How could one conceive of such a movement without a working (wage-laboring) class?

When Marx writes about laws or tendencies, they aren't permanent or standardized. This isn't unique to Marx's use, as no laws or tendencies are permanent—they change over time, are interpreted differently, applied differently, modified and augmented in innumerable ways, and so on. In his historical-materialist analysis of the French uprisings of 1848-1851, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx (1972) wrote that "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (p. 15), while just a

few pages later he tells us that these dead generations could be reawakened for "the purpose of glorifying the new struggles… not of making its ghost walk about again" (p. 17). In Marxism, there are no guarantees—even in the laws and tendencies so many Marxists hold dear. Even the "*absolute general law of capitalist accumulation*" articulated in volume one of *Capital* is, Marx tells us immediately afterwards, "like all other laws… modified in its working by many circumstances" (1967, p. 603).

This leads David Lane (2020) to distinguish between "scientific" and "active" marxisms. The former "emphasizes the objective conditions of societies, particularly the technological constitution of the forces of production" (p. 1307), and the latter foregrounds "the political intervention necessary" and thus "gives human beings a creative role in history" (p. 1308). Active marxism is consistent with historical materialism, for according to Marx himself he didn't discover classes or even the class struggle. In a famous 1852 letter to Joseph Weydemeyer, a comrade who emigrated from Germany to the U.S. and fought in the Union Army against slavery, Marx (1983) wrote that bourgeois theorists before him had discovered the existence of classes and the class struggle, but that what he proved was that the class struggle can lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat, and that the 'dictatorship [of the proletariat] itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to a *classless society*' (62-65). In any case, however, Marx's predictions are always hedged. One main prediction, that revolutions would break out where capitalism and, as a consequence, its contradictions were most advanced, was incorrect. They instead broke out where capitalism was *weakest* (e.g., Russia, Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, etc.). Thus, historical materialism is opposed to those who begin with appearances and those who begin with ideas. We can only understand the present, as Bertell Ollman (2003) says, "by adopting the

vantage point of the present to view the conditions that gave rise to it—in other words, if we studied history backward" (p. 115).

There is, as such, no teleology, no totalizing structural determinism, or historicism in any of Marx's works. As Louis Althusser (2020) once put it, "every result is plainly the result of a becoming, but its becoming does not contain that result *in itself*" (p. 149). Just because we can see elements of the present in the past doesn't mean the present was determined in the past. Even capitalism, for Marx, wasn't universalizing or totalizing. Marx saw capitalism as encompassing "a vast, heterogeneous inventory and 'conjuncture' of temporalities no longer stigmatized for having been cast out of time but rather as expressions of contretemps, simultaneous nonsimultaneities… contemporaneous noncontemporaneities or uneven times, and *zeitwidrig*, time's turmoil, times out of joint" (Harootunian, 2015, p. 23). Nothing perhaps reveals Marx's temporal openness as his suggestion that surviving communes in 19th century Russia as *progressive* relative to capitalism. Particularly in his *Grundrisse* notebooks of the late 1850s, Marx "rejected any linear causality that envisaged a singularly progressive movement from one period or mode of production to the next… but rather saw the multilinear movements as taking place in different regions and among diverse peoples" (p. 48). It was these insights that thinkers in the Global South and elsewhere latched onto and developed.

To give just one example, Mariátegui's historical examination of Peru accounted for indigenous communities, forms of common ownership or cultivation, Spanish colonial feudalism, and a republican capitalism. This was made possible exactly "because Marxism was open to diverse regional historical experiences that historical materialism had to account for, instead of remaining narrowly

constrained by a singular and singularizing dogmatic discourse applied to all situations" (p. 140). Even within *Capital*, there's a constant push and pull "between capital's abstract categories and the materiality of contemporary history," which "points to incommensurate temporalities" (p. 32).

Unfortunately, Western Marxism, including educational Marxism, has often adopted a scientist interpretation of historical materialism—attributing it sometimes to Marx but more often to those like Althusser (see Backer, 2021)—which is ultimately another form of the idealism Marx and Engels criticized. Consider, for example, how the founding texts of critical pedagogy dismissed actually-existing socialist experiments because they didn't conform to predetermined conceptions of socialist societies (Malott, 2016).

Abstracting (Educational) Spaces

The way Marx overturns the relationship between reality and appearances is through historical materialism. Historical materialism, as Henri Lefebvre (1991) put it once, examines "production which embraces concrete and abstract, historicizing both instead of leaving them in the sphere of philosophical absolutes" (p. 129). Historical materialism thus inquiries into *how*, *why*, and *to what effect* concrete and abstract social relations change over time. With each change, however, there is no "sudden break" or "rupture" at any moment in time, and there is never a totalizing and universalizing transformation. Lefebvre's project was, in many ways, an extension of Marx's critique of real abstractions and the violence they do to the production of space (Ford, 2022). In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre performs a transdisciplinary reading of the history of space and its production, drifting from and between political economy, history, sociology, architecture, philosophy, art, and geography. The primary overarching claim in the

book is that space is not an empty or neutral container within which—or blank canvas upon which—social interactions take place. Rather, space is produced again and again by and through social interactions; "Space," Lefebvre (1991) proclaims, "*is* social morphology" (p. 94).

Lefebvre is particularly concerned with understanding what he calls abstract space, which is associated with the capitalist mode of producing space. Abstraction here refers to a methodology an ontological process akin to, or even synonymous with, rationalization. The abstraction of space is, to begin with, the subjection of space to capitalist reification through the rule of exchange-value. All kinds of spaces come to be experienced and known as reified, as a finished *thing* instead of a *process* and *product* of social labor and difference. Development, housing patterns, roads and transportation networks, the distribution of goods and labor, and circuits of exchange are all put to the service of capitalist accumulation. As these lived spaces come under the domination of exchange-value differences are sought out, flattened, and absorbed within capitalism.

Previous scholars have examined how the schoolhouse and education are made into real and violent abstractions. Noah De Lissovoy and Peter McLaren (2003), for example, argue that the main principle operating in standardized testing "is the reduction of learning and knowledge to a number, i.e. a score" (p. 133). Once this reduction is complete, then scores can be ranked, compared, and analyzed. The reified results are what are most often debated. This is like trying to find the truth of capital in the *prices* of commodities rather than in the *value* of labor-power. Like money, the score makes qualitatively different things quantitatively similar or makes the incommensurable (human subjectivity) commensurable (test score). The response is, however, not to uncritically celebrate the incommensurable. Turning to

Adorno's negative dialectics, they argue that "to reject the violent abstraction in standardization is not necessarily to insist on the radical incommensurability of individual consciousness. Instead, one should ask how students and teachers can find an authentic if provisional *oppositional* unity against their oppression" (p. 134).

The contemporary schoolhouse itself is an abstraction, but again one that plays the antagonistic role as a form of fixed capital and a form of potentially *differential* space (Ford, 2014, 2017). Fixed capital is literally fixed, locked in place: "one part of its value passes over to the product, while another part remains fixed in the means of labour and hence in the production process" (Marx, 1978, p. 237). With this definition, we can see that the buildings, machinery, and other infrastructure that is part of the production process can be considered fixed capital. Yet fixed capital does not have to be immobile; it can change physical place, as is the case with trucks. What is unique to fixed capital that is immobile, however, is that it "cannot be sent abroad or circulate as commodities on the world market" (p. 242). Viewing the school as a form of (potential) fixed capital, we can appreciate the fact that when critical forms of teaching, learning, and studying take place the school is not being used as fixed capital. When these educational acts take place then the school is not even part of the consumption fund but is of an entirely different category, a category antagonistic to capital. We could call it the insurrection fund. Thus, the content of teaching has a direct impact upon the circulation of capital; it can either facilitate or disrupt it. Capital looks upon such a scenario as a factory owner looks at a factory that is being used not for production but a union-organizing meeting. The regime of high-stakes standardized testing is thus implemented in order to monitor and police the productiveness of the school and to

ensure that only knowledge that is oriented toward the demands of the current capitalist economy is being taught.

What Lefebvre—in following Marx—reminds us of is that capital can only *attempt* to reduce and contain difference. "On first inspection," Lefebvre (1991) notes, "it appears homogenous; and indeed it serves those forces which make a *tabula rasa* of whatever stands in their way, of whatever threatens them" (p. 285). Upon later inspection, however, after insisting on the persistent resistance of use and difference, Lefebvre finds that this abstract space, this "space that homogenizes thus has nothing homogenous about it," for differences can never be completely disappeared (p. 307). Exchange-value needs use-value, and use-value is singular, unpredictable, and heterogeneous. This is why struggles over *public space* are so central today. "Because public space is part of the built environment," Don Mitchell (2020) writes, "it has value… but its *use* is always complex," which we can see "in the case of streets and sidewalks," which are used "from promoting the flow of traffic, people, and goods, to hosting advertising, making room for street furniture, and creating social life" (p. 99). There is no capitalism without the working class and, as such, no capitalism without *class struggle*. When abstract space is contested, it's transformed into *differential space*, spaces for differences, spaces where the formerly excluded demand their inclusion or, more radically, the demand and enact the transformation of existing structures so that their inclusion doesn't demand their own modification or abstraction (Ford, 2016a). Historical materialism insists that the past and future are here in the present.

This is in line with how Marx (1967) begins the first volume of his magnum opus: "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities'" (p. 43). Note that

capitalism *prevails* but isn't the *exclusive* mode of production in capitalist societies. This—in addition to getting away from the "individual-society" binary—is why Marx spoke of social formations rather than societies (Ford, 2016b). Multiple modes of production exist in the same social formation, with some rising and some falling, and struggles taking place between the two. There is *always* resistance.

Here we would offer one critique of Lefebvre, which is a limit to his historical-materialist analysis. If there are multiple modes of production in any given social formation, then there is no reason to denounce, as Lefebvre does, the Soviet Union for not being socialist merely because some elements of the capitalist mode of production persisted (see Ford, 2022). It's always disappointing to read, as we did in Mitchell's (2020) latest book, the offhand remark in the form of a footnote clarifying that "overthrowing capitalism will not automatically solve the problem of houselessness among some portion of the population—it did not in any of the state socialist societies that emerged after the Russian Revolution" (p. ix). Of course, Mitchell says "automatically," and it is true the process wasn't automatic: it took centralized planning and a lot of work. At the same time, the footnote includes *no* references or citations, just the dig at those who have actually tried to build socialism from those who have merely written about it. This is also par for the course in "critical pedagogy," as Curry Malott (2016) sufficiently shows based on a historical-materialist inquiry.

Rather than—or *along with*—such a denunciation, comes an affirmation: elements of the future exist in the present. This is a future in which the dialectic between inclusion/exclusion is overcome or sublated into something new, a different and more liberatory social order. It would be incorrect and unjust to declare that

exclusion is always bad, of course. For example, we should defend the rights of sovereign oppressed and formerly colonized nations to exclude whom they want from entering their borders. Some oppressed communities need or want to exclude others as part of a strategy to preserve their way of being under capitalism and settler-colonialism. Dylan Robinson (2020), for example, includes a section in his latest book that he specifically asks settlers *not* to read. And of course, the question is always: inclusion into what? This is why the right to differential space is not about inclusion but *insurrection* (Ford, 2017). The struggle for differentialization is not only a political struggle, but a pedagogical one as well in that it involves distinct educational logics with particular subjectivities and temporalities, and that, as we argue below, can be engaged through sound in education.

Sonic Pedagogies as Differentializing Space and Subjectivity

What other resources can we mine for the production of differential space? One is from Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005), who insists that, "when taught and used as a thing made, knowledge, the trafficked commodity of educators and producers of educational media, becomes nothing more than the decomposed by-product of something that has already happened to us" (p. 1). This isn't a mere *epistemological* abstraction, but an *ontological* one as well insofar as we *experience* ourselves as abstractions, as individuals. Ellsworth shows that pedagogy itself is differentializing and contingent, insofar as "the 'self' is what emerges from that learning experience… When my self and what I know are simultaneously in the making, my body/brain/mind is participating in an event that exists outside the realm of language" (p. 2). The pedagogical experience is not about *knowledge* but about *thinking*, which is, in turn, about *thinking the limits of thought*. Ellsworth reminds us "that the very possibility of thought is predicated upon our opportunities and capacities to encounter the *limits* of thinking and

knowing" (p. 25). Such experiences immerse us in the ineffability of the future in the present, which necessarily escapes linguistic representation.

Differentializing pedagogies exceed representation and can only be approached through experiencing the absent future in the present's presence. Our argument here both follows from and critiques Althusser's theory of art. For Althusser (2005), the aesthetic experience is one of disjuncture. For example, consider Althusser's writing on Carlo Bertolazzi's *El Nost Milan*. The play is structured around two contradictory times: "the coexistence of a long, slowly-passing, empty time and a lightening-short, full time," yet a coexistence with "no *explicit* relationship" between them (p. 134). The first is the time of a chronicle and the second is the time of tragedy, which "is a time that abolishes the other time and the structure of its spatial representation" (p. 136). We can *sense* the abstraction of the first ahistorical time *through* the absent relation it maintains to the *dialectical* time of drama, in which the real story flashes on stage and which therefore *differentializes* the abstract time or "abolishes" it. For Althusser, art *isn't* a form of scientific knowledge. Art provides something different, rather than oppositional to knowledge. Thus, historical materialists must produce "*scientific* concepts" of art "in order to *know* it, and to give it its due" (Althusser, 2001, p. 155). By knowing it, however, we neither "pass art silently by nor sacrifice it to science" (p. 155). In other words, we let the aesthetic remain a pedagogical force.

Yet we would like to distinguish between understanding/knowing and thinking here, a distinction that turns on the division between exchange-value and use-value, between abstraction and differentialization, between capitalism and communism, between idealism and historical materialism. Understanding or knowing involves a determinate judgment that takes place when given data comes

under the mind's order and comprehension. Thinking, by contrast, is an exposure to stupor, an experience with the immeasurable concepts that the mind can never grasp. Capitalism in its flexibility can accommodate and capture all kinds of knowledge, even minoritarian ones. By examining the student rebellions of the mid-20th-century, Roderick Ferguson (2012) shows that the university is "an institution that *socializes state and capital* into emergent articulations of difference" (p. 9). He continues: "This was the moment in which power would hone its own archival economy, producing formulas for the incorporation rather than the absolute repudiation of difference, all the while refining and perfecting its practices of exclusion and regulation" (p. 12). The incorporation of difference not only blunts its oppositional force but also provides more energy to commodify. Thus, the task is not—or *not only*—to make knowledge less abstract but to move beyond knowledge into thought, a process through which we can experience elements of communism in the present and maybe even forge a collective that can finally annihilate abstract space, sound, and being.

Sound studies has recently emerged as an area with which educational scholarship can productively and innovatively intertwine (e.g., Wozolek, 2018; Ford, 2021). Thus far, literature that we might group under sound foundations has stretched educational research and practice in important ways, such as by investigating the aural dimensions of inequality and oppression, exploring teaching as a practice of conducting voices and expanding our understanding of what voices are, and who and what "has" a voice. A historical-materialist inquiry into the sonic's ability to challenge regimes of abstraction has not yet been pursued. Without doing so, we abstract the sonic as we affirm the abstraction of the individual and our space or, in Althusser's words, we subsume art under science. As a result, we refrain from

processes of collectivization, desubjectification, and the suspension of existing capitalist abstractions, for which the sonic offers unique pedagogical opportunities.

Consider, for example, Dominic Pettman's (2017) concept of the *vox mundi*, a concept he uses to refer to the voices of the world. He defines this term more carefully, specifying that it's "not a coherent, organic, quasi-spiritual gestalt but the sum total of cacophonous, heterogeneous, incommensurate, and unsynthesizable sounds of the postnatural world" (p. 8). It is important to establish that the vox mundi is not a singular voice that speaks for all of the different existences of the world. Rather, it's a collective of all the different voices of the world simultaneously existing/collaborating to create a collective voice—but one the mind can't *grasp* or *understand* because its harmony is beyond thought's limits.

Applying this to the classroom, an increased awareness of the vox mundi is critical to resistant pedagogy insofar as it can help us move from understanding to thinking, from individuality to collectivity. Pettman exemplifies this perfectly when he writes, "to posit a vox mundi is to do two important things: first, force us to reflect on what it is about our own voices that make us so confident in their exceptional status as bearer of 'humanity'; and oblige us to listen to the sound of the surround differently, more sympathetically and with a greater nuance of attention which may encourage a more inclusive notion of what counts as having presence" (p. 72). Essentially, by eliminating the boundaries for what can and cannot be learned, by moving to thought, students can experience encounters more often because more differential sonic elements circulate and suspend our conceptions of the human as atomistic and, therefore, unique. As a vox mundi, the earth, animals, humans, digital networks, and more are transformed for a moment

from forms of *capital* (raw materials, labor-power, etc.) or knowledge sources and into *elements of communism* that we might encounter as we try to experience the present beyond that historical materialism intimates.

Another pedagogical shift might come from Jacques Rancière's (2011) redistribution of the sensible. The idea here is that there is a predetermined distribution of the sensible that causes us to only see certain facets of the world, to function in predetermined ways, and to prioritize certain senses over others. He describes the distribution of the sensible as "what is common is sensation. Human beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together" (p. 56). Redistribution happens through dissensus, when there is a breach in the sensible and the order is disordered, and herein lies its political virtue: "it is political because political subjectivation proceeds via a process of dis-identification" (p. 73). The eye is active, it scans, seeking data. The ear is more passive and vulnerable. We can shut our eyes but not our ears. There's really no such thing as silence. As a result, we proffer that sight produces knowledge and understanding better than the ear, although it depends on our mode of listening. As Sarah Ahmed (2006) reminds us, the distribution of the sensible is historically produced in that "attention involves a political economy, or an uneven distribution of attention" (p. 32).

For us, the key is to move from hearing to listening, the former being an opening of the ear towards the known and the latter an opening of the ear toward the unknown and unexpected, or the "aural punctum," or "the voice has the potential to create a glitch in the humanist machinery, when it surprises us with the intensity or force of an 'aural punctum'—a sonic prick or wound, which unexpectedly troubles our own smooth assumptions or untested delusions" (Pettman, 2017, p. 5).

Building on Roland Barthes visual punctum, the aural punctum "prick[s] up the ears" yet what is crucial is that it can't be *known*: "What I can name cannot really prick me," he writes" (p. 46). As a result, listening for the vox mundi opens us up to the aural punctum, moving us from understanding and real abstractions towards thinking and differentialized living. One way sound catalyzes the redistribution of the sensible is by creating moments of disinterpellation that allow us to experience the world as otherwise.

Encountering Beyond the Capitalist Present

Althusser was no structuralist or determinist, and always found Marx's work a rich source for study precisely because of its openness, its silences, its doubleness, and its contingency. While this is most explicit in his writing on the encounter, G.M. Goshgarian (2019) has shown that it's a continual theme from his first book, *For Marx*. It's in his posthumously published manuscript, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter," however, where it's explored in most length (Althusser, 2006). He begins the piece like Lucretius Carus who, writing about Epicurus, produced the poem "On the Nature of Things," which "says that, before the beginning of the world, the atoms were '*falling like rain*'. This would have gone on indefinitely, had the atoms not been endowed with an astonishing property, '*declination*', the capacity to deviate from the straight line of their fall" (Althusser, 2017, p. 29, emphasis in original). Althusser (2006) similarly writes, "It is raining. Let this book therefore be, before all else, a book about ordinary rain" (p. 167). The materialism of the encounter is a historical materialism, a kind of riff on Marx and Engels' own, one that is true to their lineage in that it privileges contingency over necessity, chance over predictability.

Atoms fall parallel until there was a *swerve*, a *clinamen*, or "the *slightest* '*deviance*" being "enough for the atoms to *encounter each other* and agglomerate" (Althusser, 2017, p. 29). It is not that for Epicurus before the world there was nothing; on the contrary, before the world, there was *something*: materiality. Yet the encountering—and more precisely, the piling up of encounters, the "taking hold" of enough encounters" produces a historic event. Nothing can guarantee it, however, although there might be determinations. Capitalism itself, Althusser (2017) reminds us, "sprung from a *historic 'encounter'*" (p. 134) between the capitalist and the wage worker, and the proof is highly likely" that it "was born and died several times in history before becoming viable" (p. 135). There is no reason to explore any origins; just the fact that the serve happened. Each element itself is autonomous and conjunctural, which is why they "'conjoin' by 'taking hold' in a new structure" (Althusser, 2020, p. 33). The communist revolution is such a piling up of encounters of elements that "exist in history *in a 'floating' state* prior to their 'accumulation and 'combination'" (Althusser, 2006, p. 198).

"The forms in which communist elements appear in capitalist society," Althusser (2020) writes elsewhere, "are countless. Marx himself names a whole series of them, from forms of children's education combining work and schooling…the proletarian community of life and struggle… joint-stock companies… and so on, to say nothing of the 'socialization of production'" (p. 64). Yet these are "elements *for* communism," elements that communism will sublate, modify, adapt, and so on. There is no guarantee they will take hold. The entire Marxist project is to work towards the building up of encounters and differentializations by advancing the class struggle to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and ultimately create a classless society without capitalist abstraction. As Marx and Engels (1970) tell us in *The German Ideology*, "communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be

established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself," and is instead "the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of this." Moreover, "the conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence" (pp. 56-57).

Tyson E. Lewis (2017) has theorized disinterpellation as the pedagogical mode of Althusserian philosophy and the practice of the seminar in particular. The seminar is where teachers, students, and objects take up and produce spaces—sonically, visually, kinesthetically. Through the seminar, we "enter into a constellation of forces that destabilize and thus open up a space and a time wherein a new kind of educational life beyond the subject temporarily forms" (p. 316). Whereas interpellation brings the subject into the existing world and counter-interpellation pushes back against that world, disinterpellation suspends the world and opens it up radically otherwise, allowing for encounters. Disinterpellation "makes the subject unfamiliar to itself and thus open to its own dissolution through the encounter with an outside. Since the swerve of the encounter is never predictable and never reducible to the logic of learning a specific lesson of the teacher" (p. 317).

There is no lesson learned nor is any lesson taught. Rather than the transmission of *knowledge*, there's the transmission of *affects*. "The origin of transmitted affects," Teresa Brennan (2004) remarks, "is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come via an interaction with other people and an environment. By the transmission of affect, I mean simply that the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or de-pressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another " (p. 3). As an affective experience, disinterpellation disobeys the boundaries between the abstracted included and excluded subjects of education, allowing us to encounter elements—including sonic ones—that can work against the abstraction of capitalism and help us experience the communist future in the present

so that we may work toward creating more encounters and, ultimately, a revolutionary rupture. The aural punctum and *listening* for the vox mundi can help break down the atomistic and abstracted spaces and subjectivities in education, opening the world up to new and unforeseeable possibilities beyond our current social formation.

A Final Gesture: Sonic Political Pedagogies of the Street

One interesting effort to mobilize and organize sonic struggles against capitalism is the Rude Mechanical Orchestra (RMO) that, since at least 2004, has provided sound tactics of resistance to different social struggles. In her reflections on the efforts of RMO—of which she is a member who plays the snare drum—Abigail Ellman (2020) denotes two different ways this happens: chant support and sonic disobedience. They use lightweight instruments that don't need electrical power. The sound "trespasses over property lines without. Respect for legal ownership status, seeps through rational delineations of public and private, and claims space without regard to political boundary or jurisdiction" (p. 240).

Chant support takes place with organized mass marches. They can be tiring, and so music can rejuvenate and reenergize the crowd. Here, RMO looks inward to sustain the protests themselves. The main goal is not to "confuse onlookers and participants. As a solidarity project, our aim is to excite the crowd and amplify the clarified message of the day" (pp. 241-242). Chant support is about being part of the crowd and sustaining crowd dynamics. They produce rhythms and grooves that the crowd can access and include a "chant break," or a "section where the horns cut out and the voices of the crowd move to the foreground in the musical texture" (p. 242). Sonic disobedience, on the other hand, purposefully seizes on sounds ability to traverse and trespass over physical property in the capitalist urban environment. While it's

part of organized protest efforts, it's disobedient in that disrupts passersby. "The sound polarizes," she says, "it simultaneously unifies demonstrators in agreement" while it "draws a line in the sand, preventing neutral onlookers from remaining passive" (p. 242). This is particularly useful with private or more "hidden" labor, and she uses RMO's work with Damayan ("helping each other" in Filipino), a group of immigrant workers primarily employed as domestic laborers.

Both chant support and sonic disobedience use properties unique to sound, particularly its ability to betray private property, through confrontational tactics. This forced encounter, however, is only a *détournment*, an opening. Ellman writes that it's "not the *oeuvre* itself. The *oeuvre* is what we create anew, in its place" (p. 248). In other words, their sonic strategies that might lead to appropriation. Yet particularly because sonic disobedience enters the "private" domains of the capitalists that super-exploit workers, they "cast a sonic spotlight on the worker's private mistreatment and exposed the situation to public scrutiny" (p. 244). In other words, they force an encounter between the private and the public, allowing us to hear the dislocation between the two realms. If we listen for the encounter, we might hear and experience the sonic pedagogical force of disinterpellation.

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