

STRIKING THE MATCH:
A (NON-)MATERIALIST RHETORIC OF THE 2012 CHICAGO TEACHERS STRIKE

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ABSTRACT

For nine days in September of 2012, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) went on strike in wake of stymied contract negotiations, rallying around the cry, “Teachers’ working conditions are students’ learning conditions!” The echoes of segregation and institutional racism are inextricable from the language and purpose of the Chicago Teachers Strike. From the historical forces shaping current socioeconomic discord, to the demands made by the CTU for the future of public education, mapping the conditions for the teachers’ strike demonstrates the role a rhetoric of protest can play in political conflicts.

This work incorporates and builds upon various threads of materialism through the exploration of social movement formation in the context of Chicago labor politics and education policy. Corporate and elite interests have traditionally determined the direction of Illinois policy; the Chicago Teachers Union as a flashpoint for study brings together philosophical and epistemological questions over the ontology of public education.

A “sea of red” protestors brought the city of Chicago to its knees, even if only temporarily. Forms of embodied rhetoric such as this particular strike should be forefronted in order to reveal how we got to this woeful state of public education, and how to take back the classroom as a dwelling place for pedagogical development.

PROLOGUE

What would your life be like without *that one teacher*, the one who recognized your potential? Everyone should be able to instantly think back to that moment when an educator made them believe in their own ability to contribute. I think of Mr. Belluomini distributing copies of an eighth grade essay I wrote to my class as an anonymous peer example of writing to aspire to. The glow of validation when he angrily phoned my high school, demanding I be placed in a higher level of English when I moved on. Besides remedial English class, where would I be without Mr. Belluomini?

I can map the development of my sense of self-worth and agency from those moments of discovery to where I am now writing these words as a graduate student at Wake Forest. Education became the process by which my own subjectivity developed when I believed in myself and the classroom, no longer feeling fearful butterflies when raising my hand, but joy in engagement. This thesis represents a deeply personal reflection, a thank you letter to each teacher who treated me as someone with autotelic value, capable of developing the ability to create positive change in the lives of others. A thank you to the teachers who put their livelihoods and passion on the line in hopes of a better classroom for those left behind.

CTU Official Demands

1. Recognize That Class Size Matters.
Drastically reduce class size
2. Educate The Whole Child.
3. Create More Robust Wrap-around Services.
4. Address Inequities In Our System.
Students and their families recognize the apartheid-like system managed by CPS. It denies resources to the neediest schools, uses discipline policies with a disproportionate harm on students of color, and enacts policies that increase the concentrations of students in high poverty and racially segregated schools.
5. Help Students Get Off To A Good Start.
6. Respect and Develop the Professionals
7. Teach All Students.
8. Provide Quality School Facilities.
9. Partner With Parents.
10. Fully Fund Education.

Introduction

The chaotic state of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) renders students collateral damage in the battle between the Teachers Union (CTU) and the Board of Education over education reform. The 2012 school year started late after nearly 30,000 teachers and protesters took to the streets of Chicago over failed contract negotiations and the precarious state of public schools. The strike took on a spectacular quality in the larger terrain of the political struggle over public education as a “sea of red” protestors made their presence undeniable throughout the city and the larger American political consciousness.

Teachers embody the most direct interlocutor between knowledge and students; when they call our attention to the state of the classroom, we should listen. If the strike represents the spectacularization of the frustrations felt by educational labor, then the Union demands prior to the conflict depict the banality of institutional indifference:

Teachers have been noticeably absent from the debate over the direction and the future of public education. This is not because teachers don’t have opinions on these issues but simply because they typically don’t have access to the megaphone, platform, or airwaves to be heard...education policy and reform are being determined largely by people who know very little about education.¹

Public education has become a *depoliticized* object of political competition, considered only in terms of an already-agreed upon agenda of economic integration and potential.² The rhetoric of national policy programs and local district administration take the goals

¹ Pedro Negura, *Worth Striking For*. (Teachers College Press, 2015), xiii.

² Iain Thomson, "Heidegger on Ontological Education, Or: How We Become What We Are." *Inquiry* 44.3 (2001): 243

of “learning outcomes” and measured success for granted: of course we want higher test scores for students to get into better colleges! Companies such as Pearson Books and the ACT/SAT test determine what constitutes a good teacher and a good student in order to provide a universal measuring tool of intellectual merit at the top of a resume, for college acceptance, hiring practices, and as a heuristic for work ethic.

The ontological criticism of “the curriculum” dates back to Heidegger’s criticism of the “instrumentalization of knowledge,” and echoes throughout the rhetoric of the Chicago Teachers Union. Take this excerpt from the CTU Position Paper on standardized testing:

Corporate reform groups such as Advance Illinois and Stand for Children claim teachers are the main factor in student academic achievement. Recent research shows otherwise: as much as 90% of variation in student growth is explained by factors outside the control of teachers. Children who do not have access to health care, who are hungry, who are exhausted from night-time symptoms of asthma, who are fearful of violence in their communities, who do not have books or access to other informal learning at home, whose parents have limited education, whose families are constantly stressed by economic problems, and who do not go to libraries and museums in their free time are at an academic disadvantage. These factors are highly related not only to testing outcomes, academic achievement, future education and socio-economic success, but also to the racial, ethnic and class origins of individuals. The inequitable history of American society, politics, Institutions and economic relations are at the root of these relations. As a result, when academic outcomes are averaged across subgroups such as race and class, glaring gaps appear. Corporate reformers use the academic achievement gap to justify increasing the frequency and consequences of high-stakes testing. These policies have nothing to do with addressing the root causes of how such gaps arise and persist in society, nor do they improve student learning. In fact these policies typically worsen academic outcomes for students impacted by them. According to the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, Black and Latino students, especially those from low-income families, have suffered enormously from the nation’s increase in high- stakes testing and the inordinate amount of time spent on test prep. The tests have resulted in an increase in drop-out rates for these populations, an increase in expulsion and “counseling out” of schools seeking to increase their test scores, an increase in grade retention, cheating by principals, an increase in special education placement, limited course content and a decrease in access to merit- based scholarships and thus a bigger economic barrier to

attending college. It has also been shown that earning a low performance label attached to low standardized test results can discourage urban low-income students from enrolling in college.

Contract negotiations between the CTU and the Board of Education broke down over the increased emphasis of standardized testing as a measurement for effective teaching. The politics of the CTU reflect what Michalinos Zembylas refers to as the “ontological turn” in educational philosophy; forces of “being” such as socioeconomic locality, individual genealogy, and *relational embodied practices* are hidden within a student’s ACT score.³

The heart of the strike beats as resistance to what I label *the treadmill of instruction* which creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure for public education, in which “the focus of Illinois’ current education funding system is not what’s best for students – it’s who controls the flow and distribution of taxpayer money.”⁴ Corporate lobbying has given private foundations the ability to create federal and local education programs such the Common Core and No Child Left Behind, which determine the standards of measurement for success or failure for schools, teachers, and students.⁵ Despite the decades of proof that these programs ignore external realities which produce internal biases, the narrative of a “broken system” persist. Education reform and technology then becomes the savior through paternalistic rhetoric of “closing the achievement gap” and producing more efficient educational outcomes. Over \$2 billion in investment poured into educational technology in 2016 alone,⁶ while the party line for

³ Michalinos Zembylas, “The Contribution of the Ontological Turn in Education: Some Methodological and Political Implications.” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (2017): 1-14.

⁴ Ted Dabrowski, John Klingner, and Josh Dwyer. “Understanding Illinois’ Broken Education Funding System: A Primer on General State Aid.” Rep. *Illinois Policy Institute*, 3 Oct. 2013.

⁵ Joanne Barkan, “Got Dough? How Billionaires Rule Our Schools.” *Dissent Magazine*, Winter 2011.

⁶ “The Periodic Table of Ed Tech.” *CB Insights*. N.p., 31 May 2016.

austerity measures such as pension elimination and school closings has been “budgetary crisis.”⁷

This cycle clearly influences the practices of Chicago Public Schools; take the “TIF” (tax increment financing) practices that were a central point of conflict in the strike. The formula for public education funding (further explored in Chapter Three) stems from property tax revenue within the school district. The Chicago School Board determines the direction of that revenue:

In Chicago, roughly 53 cents of each dollar in property taxes is earmarked for CPS. But when a TIF district is created, any increases in property tax revenue—from, say, new developments or rising property values—are diverted to the TIF. Schools see no money from that property tax growth; instead, the entire dollar goes toward the TIF project, typically to pay private developers.⁸

Playing on the popular cereal advertisement, signs read “Silly Rich Guy! TIFs Are For Kids,” Chicago School Board member Penny Pritzker and owner of the hotel itself was the subject of the CTU’s ire. The 2012 strike spent a day protesting outside the Hyde Park Hotel, a product of \$5.2 million in TIF investment, and even Pritzker’s private home.

The space of the Chicago Public School District is not neutral. Data from the Department of Education ranks CPS as the 3rd largest public school district in the nation, with nearly 400,000 children attending CPS schools. The class marker of “free or reduced-price lunch eligibility” places 83% of CPS students on the lower end of the

⁷ Micah Uetricht. *Strike for America*. (London: Verso, 2014) 8.

⁸

socioeconomic spectrum while 90% of students identify as non-white.⁹ It would be analogous to also consider the most recent Education Trust Report which describes the dire state of resource distribution on the state level: “Illinois, with the largest funding gap in the nation, stands out for its unfairness. The highest poverty districts in the state get nearly 20 percent less per student than the lowest poverty districts”¹⁰ due to the power relations embedded within the land and history of these sites, and the politics of corporate favoritism built into the political structure of Illinois education policy.

The realities of education governance exude a sense of disdain and indifference for school districts operating in low income and racialized areas. The culture of vitriolic anti-intellectualism only strengthens and emboldens the regime of hate in power. Tying the practices of mainstream education policy to the distribution of public resources create a “complex unity that brings white supremacy and capitalist accumulation together in a single dialectic” which produces the “systematic social logics that construct and enforce racial differences as well as the violence and oppression that work through the *economies of racism*.”¹¹ Public schools cannot shed the historical bias from their student population.

Despite the criminalization of housing discrimination, schools remain as segregated as they were at the time of *Brown v. Board of Education*.¹² Many politicians and researchers refer to education policy as “the civil rights issue of the twenty-first century,”¹³ yet education reform falls short of improving academic outcomes for students

⁹ K-12 Niche Data, available at: <https://k12.niche.com/rankings/public-school-districts/largest-enrollment/>; CPS School Data, available at: <http://cps.edu/SchoolData/Pages/SchoolData.aspx>

¹⁰ The Education Trust, “Students Who Need the Most Continue to Get the Least,” available at: https://edtrust.org/press_release/students-who-need-the-most-continue-to-get-the-least/

¹¹ Anthony Brown and Noah De Lissovoy, “Economies of Racism,” *Journal of Education Policy* 26, no. 5 (2011): 596.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Duncan, available at: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/statement-us-secretary-education-arne-duncan-50th-anniversary-civil-rights-act-1964>;

in Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. Recent studies at the University of Chicago Consortium for School Improvement found that "problems related to poverty—crime, substance abuse, child neglect, unmet health needs, housing shortages, interpersonal violence, etc—were largely ignored by the school reform policies pursued in Chicago, and consequently the reforms yielded little in way of improvement."¹⁴ Education governance fails to account for structural factors that underlie inequitable opportunities for those in poverty; the language of "school choice," "*de facto* segregation," and other legally neutral terms mask the ways policy practices create class-based and racialized outcomes that can be directly correlated to ontological influences.

In terms of material interests, research directly links educational opportunity to the cycle of poverty. One study on poverty prevention found: "Education, achievement, and family structure in one generation can therefore be determinants of family income poverty and then children's health and development in the next generation."¹⁵ Not only can wealth be passed down through inheritance, but poverty also accumulates through a historical pattern of denial and invisibility. Research increasingly connects poverty concentration to academic performance and *de facto* segregation:

In most large cities, a dual system of education has emerged: a private, well-resourced system that serves a largely white, affluent student population, and an under-resourced public system that primarily serves poor children of color. The latter schools are often chaotic, occasionally unsafe, and from an academic

¹⁴ Pablo Noguera, "Race, Education, and the Pursuit of Equity in the Twenty-First Century," in *Race, Equity, and Education*, (Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2016), 11.

¹⁵ H. Yoshikawa, JL Aber, and WR Beardslee, "The Effects of Poverty on the Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Health of Children and Youth," *Journal of American Psychology* 67, no. 4 (2012): 273.

standpoint, generally inferior in quality. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has described many urban high schools as “dropout factories”...¹⁶

Have you ever tried to really *really* concentrate in a classroom filled with more than 30 eight year olds? Public school systems are set up to fail without addressing the structural factors which shape the relational space of the classroom.

The Chicago Teachers Strike of 2012 matters. A simple argument. However, *why* it matters reveals the synergistic and dynamic relationship between the curriculum, community, and the self. As a site of social imagination, ‘the classroom’ presents the possibility for pedagogical subjects to move beyond the ideological forces of the “dominant value systems inscribed in education sites”¹⁷ through a mutually constitutive relational process of knowledge exchange within their classroom community. The inverse is also true – schools increasingly take on the economic interests of their governing boards, and the corporate interests represented by testing and text book companies.

The Artifact

Prior to the 2012 Strike, the CTU released a supporting research report outlining inadequacies in the structure and priorities of the school district,¹⁸ while framing protest strategy as a politics for the many. The extensive “Research-based Proposal To Strengthen Elementary and Secondary Education in the Chicago Public Schools”¹⁹ lays

¹⁶ Pablo Noguera, “Race, Education, and the Pursuit of Equity in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Race, Equity, and Education*, (Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2016), 5.

¹⁷ Michalinos Zembylas, “Emotions and Teacher Identity,” *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice* 9, no. 3 (2003): 214.

¹⁸ Carol Caref and Pavlyn Jankov, “The Schools Chicago’s Students Deserve,” (Chicago Teachers Union, 2012), available at: http://www.ctunet.com/blog/text/SCSD_Report-02-16-2012-1.pdf

¹⁹ Available at: <http://www.ctunet.com/quest-center/research/the-schools-chicagos-students-deserve>

out the position of the CTU in regards to specific areas of policy recommendations in Chicago schools, as well as the blueprint for resistance to the larger problems of “educational apartheid”²⁰ which are regarded as natural market outcomes of the financial and housing system. I aim to produce a (non-)materialist rhetoric of the strike by reading the demands through both an epistemological (a call for short-term reforms) or philosophical (a call for an ontological mutation in educational values) lens:

The act of demanding connotes a kind of personal investment and passionate attachment, the presence of a desiring subject behind the demand... a demand packs more of an affective charge. Demands presume a field of conflict and relations of antagonism that the language of needs, rights, and claim more often serve to circumvent, forestall, or deny.²¹

Meeting the demands would produce “The Schools Chicago’s Students Deserve,” and function as the rhetorical artifact of study for this project in order to situate the strike within a larger theoretical inquiry into the nature of subjectivity, rhetoric, and politics. The antinomy of ‘shutting down schools for the sake of improving them’ infused the movement with a sense of rebellion and an ethos of affirmative and relational politics, which Rosi Braidotti describes as “entailing the production of social horizons of hope, while at the same time doing critical theory, which means resisting the present.”²² When

²⁰ Ibid, pg. 22. “CPS schools operate in an environment of intense segregation, a culmination of decades of racist public policies and market forces that have segregated Chicago’s communities and neighborhoods. Within CPS, 69% of all African American students (and 42% of Latinos) go to schools that are “intensely segregated” — schools that have more than 90% of their student body composed of the same ethnicity. Chicago Public Schools remains one of the urban school systems that “only a few percentage points from an experience of total apartheid.... Nearly half of all African American students (71,500) and one-third of all Latino students (58,700) go to a school where more than 90% of the students qualify for free lunch. Only 3.3% of white students go to such schools. White students typically attend schools where fewer than 25% of students are free-lunch eligible.”

²¹ Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, (Durham: Duke University Press) 133.

²² Rosi Braidotti, “Putting the Active Back in Activism,” *New formations*, 44.

Rahm Emanuel and the CEO of CPS Jean Claude Brizzard implemented a longer school day and year without an increase in pay, parents and the union could not deny the process of exploitation working through students and teachers. But the strike was never *really* about money. It was about **value**.

Justification for Study

My first encounter with the teachers strike felt ambivalent at best. I had been an employee of CPS since 2010, first as an America Reads tutor, then as a debate coach at Whitney Young Magnet High School. At the time, I was also working in an office in the Loop at a non-profit organization related to urban debate leagues. Rumors swirled as the start of the school year drew closer, and it made me nervous. CPS students were not allowed to compete in extracurricular activities during the strike, and it looked as though the strike would overlap with our first tournament of the year. We *needed* that tournament, and I went on vigilant strike watch. Every morning in August I would start my day by reading reports from the Union and Chicago news. I rooted for settlement, yet the narrative drew me in.

The media utilized the personalities of CTU President Karen Lewis and Mayor Rahm Emanuel as *synecdoche* for the conflict between their organizations and the class interests at play. Their tempestuous relationship brought even more drama to the stage; headlines called them archrivals, meetings ended with them screaming “fuck you!” and other “colorful southside language,” the public ate it up. The city felt abuzz with gossip and anticipation, even by those who didn’t have a horse in the race. I was struck by the ideological differences in coverage as well: the Tribune called the strike “a tantrum;”

more liberal sources saw it as “bold” and fundamental to the democratic process. I struggled to form an opinion that wasn’t completely selfish.

We missed the first tournament. The strike felt as though it dragged on and on. And I couldn’t escape it! I took the train downtown to work and protesters in red were *everywhere*. Filling the CTA, spilling from Michigan Avenue, interrupting the center of commerce and out past the gentrified neighborhood boundaries. The affect-culture in the air was palpable, and this disruption made the first weekend of September 2012 far more memorable than any tournament could have.

The strike ruptured the city as streets turned red with teacher-protestors and forced the focus onto the systemic failure of education policy. Witnessing the rhetorical performance of the strike drew me in; I went from ambivalent bystander to sympathetic observer, and ended up spending two years reading a lot about labor politics and education policy. People overlook the absolutely foundational force childhood education has in producing individuals; teachers, students, parents, and union supporters forced dialogue through their undeniable absence from the classrooms, and presence throughout the streets of Chicago.

The failure of public education reveals the illusion of democracy as a system for equality, instead it is the distribution of rights for the sake of personal accumulation. The problem of how we prioritize and invest in the education system is not one of scarcity, but bad investments. For nine days in September 2012, CPS students experienced their teachers, not as authority figures, but fellow agents in a political struggle.

The act of refusing to work by the teachers served as a symbolic gift to the students;
when the CTU gambled their own tools of income, the material realities of education met
the immaterial values of learning to produce a (non-)material rhetoric of student worth.

CHAPTER ONE: THEORY AND SCHOLARSHIP

A series of random events made me the author of this work. After the strike ended somewhat unceremoniously, I went back to office reality and coaching debate. A year later, the non-profit ran out of money (and so did I)....which led me to working at a debate camp for a summer.... Someone pulled the fire alarm on the last day of camp, so I had almost an hour to chat with the director of the Wake debate team (spoiler alert: my thesis adviser!), Jarrod convinced me to apply, I could still study education policy and get a communications degreeand eventually I somehow ended up in a class at Wake recounting the embarrassing afternoon I ugly-cried in front of a crowd of teachers on the CTA because I should have been coaching. The story came out of me when my quantitative methods professor put the class on the spot and asked everyone to announce their final paper topic (the second class of the semester!)

I had the dishonor of going first and being unprepared (classic). In the fluster, it clicked: I decided to do a content analysis of the descriptors used to describe Karen Lewis and Rahm Emanuel in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Sun-Times*. The CTU threatens a walk-out at least once every school year, perhaps they chose September 2015 to remind me. My topic emerged from that spark.

And now here we are.

Rhetorical (non-)Materialism

In order to situate the strike within contemporary theory, I begin with the question: why have critical labor studies overlooked the process of *education* for the sake of general intellect?

My answer starts with academic narcissism. Higher education infantilizes “lower education,” a realm of pre-individuation long forgotten from the personal memories of tenured professors. Early education, how basic! Self-focused criticisms of the cannibalistic “neoliberal university” or Henry Giroux’s typewriter seem to be the only contemporary sites of critical theory focused upon learning and teaching as a discipline.

Where were you the first time someone explained a philosophical world exists outside a social studies textbook? Do you remember fumbling over Foucault’s concept of *power*? I am only writing a lowly master’s thesis and that was still 12 years of awkward memories of braces and terrible term papers ago [*cringe*]. Paulo Virno describes this subtle (and perhaps subconscious) distancing as ego-protection from our past, less-enlightened and more-vulnerable selves:

Sometimes we speak about the childishness of contemporary metropolitan forms of behavior. We speak about it in a deprecatory tone. Once we have agreed that such deprecation is foolish, it would be worth it to ask ourselves if there is something of consistency (in short, a kernel of truth) in the connection between metropolitan life and childhood. Perhaps childhood is the ontogenetic matrix of every subsequent search for protection from the blows of the surrounding world; it exemplifies the necessity of conquering a constituent sense of indecision, an original uncertainty (indecision and uncertainty which at times give way to shame...) ²³

²³ Virno, 39

The childhood classroom outside the university has become the “kid’s table” of theory, insidiously reinforcing the illusory post-Fordist divide between “labor (poesis), politics (praxis), and intellect.”²⁴ For all of Butler and Žižek’s obsession with language, Dean, Stiegler and Berardi’s focus on cognition, for every theory of “the subject,” there is a missing step: the individuation of enunciation. Philosophers and theorists precede their own theorization

My argument starts from the assumption that early education is the universal initiation into the experience of labor. Subsequently, any theory of subjectivity grounded in Marx would be incomplete without some understanding of “the curriculum” as a political object. Althusserian structuralism naturalizes “school” as an ideological state apparatus, overlooking the possibility of turning that “dominant signification” in on itself through what James Martel identifies as the process of “misinterpellation:”

Insofar as (as Foucault shows us) there is always a epistemological gap between the subject and the disciplinary regime she lives under, a less-than- perfect match even among the most ardent devotees, misinterpellation both constitutes and expands that gap; the mismatch between the claims of liberal agency, autonomy, and freedom, and the actual practices of the international global order produces endless misreadings, misunderstandings, and mistakes. These mistakes come and go all the time without taking root, without producing radical responses. But occasionally they produce effects that are so dramatic that nothing is ever the same again.²⁵

²⁴ Wark, 54, Virno,

²⁵ James R. Martel, *The Misinterpellated Subject*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017): 5.

The title of this work, “Striking the Match” reflects my belief that knowledge production has the potential to “spark” a political imaginary capable of bringing about what Felix Guattari identifies as “collective existential mutation.”²⁶ Rather than write a thesis which reflects the pattern of producing increasingly “specialized, narrow, technical, and obscure” knowledge, my hope for this work is to utilize the praxis of this strike as both a theoretical transdisciplinary philosophy of economics while also speaking to the reality of material struggles “out there.”²⁷ As anti-intellectualism and authoritarian politics pervade political discourse, critical education and communication studies potentially retain the tools to bring about the social imaginary articulated by the CTU demands.

Critical communication studies is largely concerned with studying how and why social/political change occurs when discourse operates through “the *space* and *motion* between experience, relationship, and consciousness, between structure and agency.”²⁸ For the purpose of this thesis, I define rhetoric as “an expression of power”²⁹ in order to establish criticism as a *process* of encountering the material and performative elements to political and cultural struggle. Rhetoric then becomes a tool of immanence, capable of producing institutional force from above, or resistance from below.

At the heart of this project is the relationship between micro-political subjectivity, macro-political structures, and the symbolic elements which mediate individuals and institutions. Rather than doing a “*philosophy of education policy rhetoric*,” I aim to start with the Chicago Teachers Strike as a rhetorical event and situate the role of human

²⁶ Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 2.

²⁷ Yasmin Nair, “The Dangerous Academic is an Extinct Species,” *Current Affairs*, April 11, 2017.

²⁸ Dana Cloud, “The Materialist Dialectic,” *Rhetoric, Materiality, and Politics*.

²⁹ Raymie E. McKerrow “Corporeality and Cultural Rhetoric: A Site for Rhetoric’s Future.” *Southern Communication Journal* 63.4 (1998): 315.

agency in moments of radical interruption.³⁰ The relationship between the power and knowledge coalesce in the process of subjectivity formation (*poiesis*) on the plane of both intersubjective and structural relations.

As a rhetorical artifact, the demands reflect a nuanced understanding of how power moves through both the state and the subject:

[power] operates materially and discursively (ideologically)...any particular operation of power has vertical and horizontal dimensions...the vertical dimension is synonymous with an institutional apparatus and the horizontal dimension, more diffuse, resembles the breadth of social life...every action and discursive exchange occurring in a classroom crystallizes a whole host of forces entering from the vertical and horizontal dimensions, and are simultaneously material and ideological.³¹

A materialist study works through the “structural, economic contexts and motivations of and constraints on rhetorical action”³² in order to demonstrate how social change emanates from the contradiction of experience between the horizontal and vertical. A (non-)materialist study takes into account the epistemological constraints, as well as the how the process of individuation is mediated by immaterial ontological assumptions, which results in “neo-capitalism’s failure to produce subjects to match its products, inaugurating the long slide in soft fascism and depression, with all its ‘pathology of

³⁰ Michael McGee, “A Materialist’s Conceptions of Rhetoric,” *Rhetoric, Materiality, and Politics*, 17.

³¹ Ralph Cintron, “The Timidities of Ethnography,” *JAC*, Fall 2002, 935.

³² Dana Cloud, “Rhetoric and economics: Or, how rhetoricians can get a little class,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 2009, 343.

subjectivity,' its racism, misogyny, and intolerance of disability.'"³³ As a response to the material conditions created by the economics of education, the demands serve as a tool to guide my analysis about the relationship between power, knowledge, and pedagogical subjects.

Literature Review: Education Policy and Communication Studies

Michael J. Hyde impacts the relationship between inclusion/exclusion and phenomenology in his book *Openings*. The question “What would life be like if no one acknowledged your existence?” instantly transports me back to my first experience working for a Chicago Public School as an undergraduate at the University of Illinois-Chicago. The fresh product of a nationally ranked suburban school district, I took on a part time job as a tutor at Medill Elementary, a school comprised only of black students, located south of Roosevelt, west of Halsted. Ms. Butler was in charge of thirty-eight third and fourth graders; her “daily know-how” was less teaching and more containing the chaos with some lessons mixed in. She certainly tried, but it was structurally impossible for her to engage every student in her classroom. Medill closed after my only year there and re-opened as a military academy for high school students. My experience was not particularly unique; the first demand made by the CTU in my artifact calls for reducing classroom size after all. Students slip through the cracks in the system so easily; and in neoliberal models of work and education, those who fail to emerge from schooling as productive skilled workers experience the “fate of social death,” or in this case, the continued cycle of poverty and the school to prison pipeline. Conversely, echoes of

³³ McKenzie Wark, *General Intellects: Twenty-one Thinkers for the Twenty-first Century*. (New York: Verso, 2017): 91.

Freire's vision of "becoming educated" converge with Hyde's concept of "dwelling place" in the CTU's hope for classrooms to come as spaces for care in the pedagogical process.³⁴

Literature Review: Confrontation as rhetorical action: Social Movement Theory

The study of social movements in the communication discipline became particularly relevant and prominent during the social unrest and political activism of the late 60s and 70s; Franklyn Haiman, and Robert Cathcart each produced foundational texts towards incorporating protest studies as profoundly rhetorical. In "The Rhetoric of the Streets," Haiman argues that the study of "rhetorical expressions" in the civil rights movement begs the question of a "new rhetoric [which] exceeds the bounds of rational discourse, a strategy of power."³⁵ People who benefit from the way political resources are distributed generally desire to maintain the status quo; protest gives counterpublics the vocabulary for a reclamation of power by marginalized people over shared experiences of exclusion. Robert S. Cathcart's "rhetoric of confrontation" similarly demanded the expansion of rhetorical study towards not just bodily expressions, but also the implications of power relationships in shaping discursive and violent conflicts. Studying "the act of confrontation that causes the establishment to reveal itself for what it is,"³⁶ brings to light ideological forces and contradictions within the system that bring about the eruption of protest in specific situations.

³⁴ Michael J. Hyde, *Openings Acknowledging Essential Moments in Human Communication*. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).

³⁵ Franklyn Haiman, "The Rhetoric of the Streets," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53, no. 2 (1967): 102.

³⁶ Robert Cathcart, "Movements: Confrontation as Rhetorical Form," *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 43, no. 3 (1978): 224.

Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook make a compelling argument for incorporating not only discourses of power, but also the way “place as rhetoric”³⁷ influences the symbolic and situated meaning of protests. “Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest,” demonstrates how incorporating a study of place “...encompasses this fluidity between the material and the discursive because they are held in places with symbolic meaning or are meant to alter or challenge the dominant meaning of a place.”³⁸ The demands of the CTU in this particular study reflect the history of class and race locations throughout the history of Chicago and enables a deeper understanding of the movement itself.

Early social movement studies in rhetoric expanded inquiry beyond isolated speech acts; more recent scholarship builds upon this development through localized analysis of specific moments of activism. The nature and means of protest have evolved with the advent of new forms of governmentality, technology, and politics. Richard J.F. Day’s book *Gramsci Is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* works through the historical trajectory of “contemporary radical activism,” while simultaneously attempting to bridge the gap between theory and praxis (something I hope my thesis will similarly accomplish). Day argues current schools of Marxist thought must move beyond conceptualizing hegemony as a singularity, as well as limiting meaningful political struggles to issues of class.³⁹

Kathi Weeks underscores the importance of the absence of teachers in the classroom for the sake of their presence in the streets in “The Problem with Work.”

³⁷ Danielle Endres & Samantha Senda-Cook, “Location Matters,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (2011): 259.

³⁸ Ibid, 260.

³⁹ Richard F. Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, (Pluto Press, 2015), 72.

Weeks traces the history of the “work ethic discourse” that has become the foundation for the larger American narrative of progress. Refusal to work as a political statement distinguishes strike as a form of protest from others; the historical connection between productive output as a reflection of moral character simultaneously generates “bad subjects who failed to internalize the gospel of work.”⁴⁰ Given the traditional characterization of minorities as lazy, the racial implications of this conflation cannot go unstated – recognizing that traditional Marxist theory limits the focus of criticism too much to differences in class, Weeks expands the conversation to include the material and symbolic power of work and the capacity to subjugate it.⁴¹

Mapping the scales of power shaping education policy bridges the theoretical gap between a relational study of the subject and a larger critique of structural power. If we accept that “discourse itself is influential or even constitutive of social and material reality,”⁴² then what role does radical political agency play when the Secretary of Education suggests school choice should be as simple as choosing between a taxi and an Uber⁴³ or when the position of the Congressional majority party is to erase free meal programs for students in order to prevent “welfare fraud”?⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 79.

⁴¹ Ibid. at 93.

⁴² Ibid, 141.

⁴³ Chris Weller, “Betsy DeVos compared school choice to taking Uber,” Business Insider, March 30, 2012.

⁴⁴ Caitlin Dewey, “A record number of poor kids are eating breakfast,” Washington Post, February 14, 2017.

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT HAS PHILOSOPHY DONE FOR YOU LATELY?

The following chapter works aims to establish the theoretical basis for ‘(non-) materialist rhetoric’ within communication studies. Rhetorical materialism works through the ways in which rhetoric mediates between economic structures and individual subjects, but falls back on tropes of academic criticisms of self-serving dogmatism. (Non-) philosophy attempts to “limit philosophy’s pretensions” while also bringing the methodology of scientific rigor into the realm of the ontological.⁴⁵

The real problem is not how to intervene in the world of philosophy, such as it supposedly subsists in-itself, or how to transform it from within. The problem is how to use philosophy so as to effect a real transformation of the subject in such a way as to allow it to break the spell of its bewitchment by the world and enable it to constitute itself through a struggle with the latter.⁴⁶

Contemporary structuralist theories of rhetorical materialism lack to provide actualizable strategies for moving beyond the model of consciousness-raising, creating the endless deferral for the workers’ revolution. Structuralism places the burden of revolution on those already stretched beyond their living capacity, while post-structuralism argues for a method outside the grasp of isolation and exhaustion, a disembodied forms of politics, resulting in the “objectification of the Real within its own self-justified terms.”⁴⁷ I propose applying a (non-)materialist approach to the Chicago Teachers Strike within the existential territories of “revolutionary realism.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Nick Srnicek, The Subject of Desire and the Subject of Capitalism." *Capitalism and Desire* (2016): 1.

⁴⁶ François Laruelle, ‘What Can Non-Philosophy Do?’, *Angelaki*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2003, p. 179.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁸ Brian Massumi. *The Power at the End of the Economy*. (Durham: Duke U, 2015): 189.

The question is not: what is non-philosophy? But what did you *do* with it, and where did it take you?

[Disclaimer: Non-philosophy is the science of how philosophy operates, rather than the traditional ‘non’-sense. Non-Marxism is not a negation of Marxism, but a study of the theory without praxis].

Claiming “non-philosophy” for the title of Francois Laruelle’s methodology is misleading, if not slightly menacing, given the density of his work. (Non) signifies then non-oppositional nature of this study in which we mutate and create words in order to encounter new rhetorical possibilities. Starting from the criticism of Hegelian dialectics, the assumption that a true opposite or cognition is possible:

Laruelle's goal is to cut through the relational thinking associated with hermeneutics that forever breaks truth in half as truth and its communication or the secret and its manifestation. We must instead "let the philosophers in on the secret;" so that they may pursue a rigorous science of truth....But what is a generalized hermeneutics? It is an "indissoluble correlation:" It is 'the undecidable coupling of truth and its communication'. In this way truth never simply stands on its own, because it always exists in a relationship of givenness vis- a-vis a human agent. The relationship of givenness is one in which truth is given over to humankind and made available for its consumption. It matters little whether truth is hidden or revealed. What matters is that truth is always already given over in advance to the possibility of being hidden or revealed. Similar to what Quentin Meillassoux has termed "correlationism;" Laruelle describes a scenario in which truth as such is only ever given over to a receptive perceiver.⁴⁹

Just as education policy does not exist to serve the interests of the students as the objects of the curriculum text, the act of producing critical theory and academic work does not work for the embodied object of study. Instead, the goal of the theorist clouds the possibilities of the text in its translation to material politics. The values necessary to reach

⁴⁹ Alexander R. Galloway Laruelle: Against the Digital. Minnesota: U of Minnesota, 2014): xxiii.

a *telos* bracket out true immanence. Just as philosophy lacks an essence, education cannot be reducible to a kernel of truth. (Non-) philosophy emerged out of Laruelle's frustration over the ways in which critical theory remained trapped within the transcendental value system of *telos*. Take his criticism of Marxism: the end goal of Marxist revolution still reifies labor and management as the means to reach a socialist utopia without disavowing humanist values of personal desire. What happens when the goal of socialism brackets out the reality of individualism? Lets ask history...

Assigning transcendental values and traits to immaterial machines and semiotics, (such as an "evil capitalism") brackets out possibilities for mutation for the sake of dialectical inversion. Instead, "the dominant signification has to be suspended for anything new to appear at all,"⁵⁰ leading to Laruelle's method of rhetorical play as "an attempt to shear immanence of any constitutive relation with the transcendences of thought, language, or any other form of ideality, thereby revealing the Real's absolute determining power—independently-of and indifferently-to any reciprocal relation with ideality."⁵¹ Laruelle's model of "doing '**(non-)philosophy**' forces creativity into semiotics and a sense of self-referentiality into the author of a text in order to reveal the *essence* of what influences the inner-cognitive process of creating a Decision. What inherent values within words cause us to find something persuasive? (Non-)philosophy reveals the moment of association within the instant of identification as the process of producing a decision.

⁵⁰ McKenzie Wark. *General Intellects: Twenty-one Thinkers for the Twenty-first Century*. (New York: Verso, 2017): 78.

⁵¹ Alexander R. Galloway Laruelle: *Against the Digital*. Minnesota: U of Minnesota, 2014): xxiii.

First - identify a form of rhetoric and an artifact to be studied, and its dialectic opposite

Education (normative) – (Transcendent Value – Productivity): knowledge produces subjects capable of being valued members of society through the demonstration of their work ethic.

In opposition to:

Pedagogy (relational) – (Transcendent value – Productivity): counterhegemonic knowledge produces subjects capable of overturning capitalism and redistributing resources for equal wealth and opportunity.

Second - Extract transcendence value -- both assume accumulation of knowledge to be productive to an end.

Third - Create the truest form of radically immanent meaning from in between the dialectic in order to transform it.

Learning (creative) –

The facilitation of learning in contrast to an instructional practice often involves ‘moments of unknowingness’ where teachers/facilitators sometimes become undone....In such moments we need to ‘confront what forms us’ our scenes of recognition, as teachers/facilitators/learners in order to interrogate the limits of our pedagogical practice so as to expand our grasp in order to support more effectively the multiplicity of learning practices and situations we encounter.⁵²

Demands within the artifact such as “educating the whole child,” and “fully fund education,” open up the possibility of a curriculum beyond a *telos* and facilitating new forms of subjectivity. Atkinson’s description of learning reflects the concept of *becoming* in which we are undone and recreated from relations and experience. (Non-)philosophy is

⁵² Dennis Atkinson, *Art, Equality, and Learning* (The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2011): 154.

concerned with the gaps and spaces of meaning in between opposing forces. Removing the logic of capital and paternalism enables us to examine rhetorical artifacts and mental processes without the (minimal) baggage of external interests. A curriculum committed to an affirmative ethic which balances productivity and creativity opens up the possibility for a transformational experience between both student and teacher. Laruelle encourages language to speak *through* us in order to form a Real dialogue. Engaging in new forms of academic relationships and practices while entangled in uninhibited linguistic relationships transcends the self and engenders the “will to matter” that emerges from the universal kernel of relational affect. The practice of (non-)philosophy is an active and performative form of scholarship which leaves the author and the final draft profoundly different than the first incantation.

Laruelle seems like he was the kind of kid who would take apart his bike so he could study the inner mechanics and put it back together. In the *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, Laruelle brilliantly makes the case for a more epistemologically and methodologically rigorous study of communication and the moment of Decision. My approach to rhetorical (non-)materialism attempts to draw from theoretical disagreements between structuralists and post-structuralists in order to produce a multi-faceted study of the relationship between “political subjectivity and critical oppositional consciousness.”⁵³

Dana Cloud envisions “the moment of politics’ as the moment of rhetorical intervention that turns a class in itself—complex and composed of diverse persons of varying beliefs—into a class *for* itself.”⁵⁴ For Cloud, the experience of material dialectic

⁵³ Rosi Braidotti, “Putting the Active Back in Activism,” *New formations*, 44.

⁵⁴ Dana Cloud, “Critical Theory’s Desertion of the Real,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, (Winter 2006), 338.

clash in the capitalist system produces class consciousness as a vehicle for political acts of solidarity and social transformation.⁵⁵ The removal of values of productivity and enlightenment from language enables a better vocabulary for formulating resistance outside individualistic humanism.

Ronald Walter Greene posits a more decentered model of agency in the process of change, beyond a dialectical model of representation.⁵⁶ “Postmodern capitalism” fractures and feeds off class and personal difference; in order to counter the destruction of solidarity-based politics, agency unfolds as a form of “affirmative empowerment, the ethical ideal is to increase one’s ability to enter into modes of relation with multiple others...towards the creation of alternatives by working actively through the negative instance by cultivating the relations that are conducive to the transmutation of values.”⁵⁷ The goal of “doing philosophy” in communication studies is to most clearly demonstrate how a theoretical interpretation of rhetoric best explains the outcome of an event or situation through the utilization of that rhetoric. The goal of “doing non-philosophy” is to understand the artifact and its antithesis in its purest form (the author interpreted it), and find the best point of synthesis between the two without the influence of ideology. In a way, Laruelle is reminding us to stop and smell the rhetoric

Without (non-)philosophy, rhetoric only exists in relation to strictly “real” ideological events or in relation to theoretical musings that have little context. (Non-) material rhetoric finds the space between the two *for the authors of their struggle*. This is a self-reflexive exercise, like all writing is on some level. In the process of writing, we

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ronald Walter Greene, “Another Materialist Rhetoric,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 73.

⁵⁷ Rosi Braidotti, “On Putting the Active Back Into Activism,” *New Formations*, 45.

tend to forget the slippage between meaning and representation, and trains us to limit both our vocabulary and how we presence ourselves. Situating this thesis upon the demands within the strike moves labor politics beyond the irritants of Marxism, where

Subjective production can be progressive. Signifying semiotics can produce things like the worker's movement. The worker deterritorialized in production could be reterritorialized in different directions, either radical or reactionary. But the party-and-union model of the labor movement, based on territorializing worker subjectivity on the dignity of labor, may have run its course. New subjective modes might have to be created. Lazzarato spends time on a strike by part-time culture workers, whose conditions of labor and life were being determined for them, without their input, by researchers, experts, the media and political spheres. Their counter slogan: "we are the experts." The strike fits a general pattern of politics that challenges the delegation of knowledge and speech to experts and the exclusion of the governed....These movements refused to let a "problem" be defined by others, rather than by the people affected. In order to exist politically one has to refuse the homogenous space of acceptable differences and force a cleavage which in turn allows a new kind of subjectivity to form.⁵⁸

The protestors of the strike, the forces creating the demands acted as the education policy experts, creating an assemblage of individuals who transformed the space of Chicago by speaking their truth. The material and the immaterial were both transformed to produce a (non-)material moment which echoes through these pages today.

⁵⁸ McKenzie Wark. *General Intellects: Twenty-one Thinkers for the Twenty-first Century*. (New York: Verso, 2017): 91.

CHAPTER THREE: POWER ON THE HORIZON

“They don't know how many children will report for school Tuesday, when they will arrive, who will accompany them or what they'll do.”⁵⁹

What an ominous description for a student-led protest over school funding policy...

Over 1200 CPS students were marked absent from their first day of school in the fall of 2008 as a form of protest; instead, they made their presence known at New Trier Township High School, a nearby North Shore powerhouse. In order to highlight the student expenditure disparity between New Trier (\$17,500 per student) and CPS (\$10,000 per student), Chicago students symbolically attempted to enroll at the high school. One organizer declared, "To protest means to stand up for your rights, but it also means not to take what someone is giving you."⁶⁰

A mere eleven miles separate New Trier and the closest CPS high school, yet the implications of this distance speak volumes about the role of geopolitics in education policy and resource distribution. New Trier District No. 203 covers students living in Kenilworth and Winnetka, where the *median* income ranks in the national top ten at \$311,902. Property tax revenue determines a significant portion of a school's budget, and the average Winnetka house prices over \$1 million in this district. The diversity of the student population at New Trier demonstrates the intersection of race and class in this context: 85% White, 3.8% Hispanic, .6% Black (Yes, less than one percent). 3.4% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.⁶¹ In contrast, 83% of CPS high

⁵⁹ Carlos Sadoi, et. al., “Chicago public school students skip class in show of activism,” Chicago Tribune, September 8th, 2008.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Illinois Report Card 2015-16, “New Trier Township HS – Low Income Students.”

school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, while the differences in racial makeup are striking: 10% White, 46.5% Hispanic 38% Black.⁶²

The student protest aimed to direct attention to the physical and material realities of public education across school district boundaries. Education policy operates as tool to express state power through the management of legal subjects and classroom curriculum. The “process of domination” feeds off the banality of school segregation and finance formulas through “broad chains of sociocultural practices”⁶³ mystified by the clinical and (race) neutral language of legalistic ordering and administration. The tension between Chicago Public Schools and New Trier serves as a magnifying glass for the ideology of education-as-accumulation. Attending to the *existential terrain*⁶⁴ of the demands reveals the way historical, material, and spatial conditions produce dialectical tensions between educational subjects and the experience of racialized capitalism.⁶⁵

Mapping the strike

The study of geopolitical power links geography to ideology in order to unmask the influence of immaterial social logics upon the production of material knowledge. Critical cartography approaches the map through the study of representation and power. Maps are the product of a “surveillant gaze,” which serve as a guide, a way to represent and know a particular terrain.⁶⁶ Mapping can also be used to subvert or resist power as a form of **(non-)mapping**. The Teachers Strike made the map of Chicago unusable for the

⁶² Chicago Public Schools, “School data.”

⁶³ Bradley Levinson, et. al., “Education Policy as a Practice of Power,” *Educational Policy*, (Winter 2009), 778.

⁶⁴ Valerie Walkerdine, “Using the work of Felix Guattari,” *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2013, 3.

⁶⁵ Anthony Brown & Noah De Lissoy, “Economies of racism,” *Journal of Education Policy*, Summer 2011, 596; Dana Cloud, “Materialist Dialectic,” *Rhetoric, Materiality, Politics*, 295.

⁶⁶ Mark Koch, “Ruling the World: The Cartographic Gaze in Elizabethan Accounts of the New World.” *Early Modern Literary Studies* (September, 1998).

time they were striking by shutting down areas of the city they overwhelmed with their presence. The map of Chicago also produces subjects in the form of geospatial narratives. We all know not to go South of Roosevelt or West of Damen because the people are “scary” (/s), and the “rich” people are on the North side, and we all know what scary and rich stand for. Each day that the teachers marched involved a specific message tied to the location of their presence. Through neighborhoods affected by school closings, to the homes of the CEOs and Pritzkers of the city who made money off of expensive construction contracts (which did very little for the quality of schools), both the material and (non-)material aspects of the landscape of the strike were integral to the message and character of the strike.

Critical cartographers developed their discipline in response to academic anxiety over geographic productions which drew boundaries according to Western ideological standards. For example, maps of the Middle East used to plan military strategy in the Gulf War were created and chosen from an epistemology rooted in American militarism; a critical geography of the Gulf War would trace the assumptions implicated in the practice and location of drone strikes.⁶⁷ Scholars brought forth the concept of “counter-mapping” as a topological perspective when studying entanglements of power embedded in place and translocal assemblages.⁶⁸

This chapter creates a rhetorical cartography of the teacher strike by mapping the existential terrain of the Chicago Public School District. The spatio-temporal elements of the boundaries and practices in educational governance reveals the “complex unity that

⁶⁷ Jeremy Crampton and John Krygier, “An Introduction to Critical Cartography,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, Spring 2005, 19-20.

⁶⁸ Colin McFarlane, *Translocal Assemblages: Space, Power, and Social Movements* in *Geoforum* (40), 562.

brings white supremacy and capitalist accumulation together in a single dialectic” in the discourse of post-racial education policy and material outcomes across school districts. The demands of the CTU reflect the turn towards working through the historical and geopolitical elements of power which shape the present experience of exploitation.⁶⁹

The strike created a rhetorical event through the disruption of the normal classroom function. The conjuncture of ideology and education policy produced the conditions necessary to create moments of class consciousness and political agency immanent to the demands and actions of the teachers union. Mapping the evolution of education policy reveals the ideological turn towards a *telos* of knowledge accumulation and narrative of standardized achievement opportunity through a universalized testing curriculum.

Critical cartography operates through the Marxist assumption that rhetorical events are not spontaneous eruptions of emotion or force, but the product of the confluence between particular conditions. The role of the critical cartographer then becomes one of “mapping” the “struggle on the terrain of discourse for economic, political, and cultural hegemony.”⁷⁰ Policy represents the tool by which the State expresses power in the “school apparatus” as “a more fundamental process of *domination* – a drive that precedes and organizes familiar identities and social categories.”⁷¹ Tracing the evolution of education governance to the strike situates this event within larger struggles across raced and classed lines.

⁶⁹ Ronald Walter Greene, “The Rhetorical Subject,” in *Rhetoric, Materiality, and Politics*, (New York: Peter Lang Inc., 2009), 45.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 343.

⁷¹ Anthony Brown and Noah De Lissovoy, “Economies of Racism,” *Journal of Education Policy* 26, no. 5 (2011): 610.

“People make history, but not under conditions of their own making.”⁷² Material, temporal and spatial factors operate as intervening forces clash: a geographic focus in rhetorical materialism provides a deeper understanding of how and why change takes place in a particular landscape. Mapping should not be taken literally, the goal of this chapter is not to create a different grid system for Chicago. Maps *reveal* the immaterial as much as they represent “the real.” Working through the sociostructural forces that created the conditions for the strike illuminates the path of vertical state *power* the teacher-protesters spoke truth to.

To clarify the scope of this chapter, I turn to Stephen Ball’s explanation of what it means to map in the context of education policy:

The places and events in which the ‘past, present and potential futures of education coexist. This involves an ethnography of ‘awkward scale’ as Roy puts it. In general terms, network ethnography addresses the ‘people, places, and moments’ involved in the making and remaking of mobile policies and attempts to identify the paths and pipelines, and nodes and activities through which policy moves, and the discourses and culture which articulate the policy community it represents. We need to ask: What spaces do policies travel through on the way from place to another? How is space/are spaces reconfigured as policies move through it/them and how are policies changed as they move?⁷³

This work is by no means a comprehensive genealogy of American education policy. In a way, this chapter creates my own ‘awkward scale’ for the purpose of understanding the strike. I first became interested in education policy before the strike took place, during a course on Constitutional Law and Civil Liberties. The antinomy between the ruling in *San Antonio Independent School District vs. Rodriguez* and the discourse of liberal democracy collapses the boundary between tragedy and farce. The practice of tying local

⁷² Dana Cloud, *Rhetoric and economics* in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, June 2009, 343, paraphrasing Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 165.

⁷³ Stephen J. Ball, “Following Policy,” *Journal of Education Policy* 31, no. 5 (2016): 4.

education funding to property market performance makes the drawing of school district lines second only to Trump's wall in toxic boundary issues.

Education as Ideological Property

The Constitutional silence on educational governance speaks volumes about the value and purpose of knowledge during the earliest era of American history. Anxiety over black literacy criminalized the act of teaching slaves to read or write. White colonial subjects feared educating slaves – creating the capacity for a collective form of consciousness made mutiny a less distant reality.⁷⁴ The “thingification” of knowledge made literacy a marker of privilege and tool of domination, rather than an ontological value. Just as removing institutional barriers to integration only treated the symptoms of *legally mandated* racism; the text of the law no longer makes education a privilege,⁷⁵ but given the continued and heightened trends towards segregated schools, the texture of the law fails to recognize the right to education as equal.⁷⁶

The reality of education inequality exposes the failed universal guarantees of liberal democratic citizenship in the discourse of rights and opportunity. Samuel Chambers describes how liberalism masks the erasure of education as foundational to being:

Liberalism takes rights as guarantors of the very space of liberty that exists outside the realm of power. Rights circumscribe the individual, drawing a line

⁷⁴ Acts against the education of slaves South Carolina, 1740 and Virginia, 1819,” at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/education/docs1.html>

⁷⁵ The Supreme Court ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* held that states could not block undocumented immigrants from accessing public education.

⁷⁶ Ch. 3 works through the constitutional logic of public education funding disparities.

around the political subject that power shall not cross. Liberalism, particularly in the form of social contract theory, assumes that subjects can exist, preformed and ready-made, outside of power.⁷⁷

Because the rational subject precedes access to the social contract and the rights it guarantees, the process of education similarly existed outside the influence of power. Without an explicit recognition of education as foundational to subjectivity, the value of students will continue be tied to property tax values and produce disembodied subjects.

The Role of Precedent

Despite the growth of “critical education studies,” the geopolitical and temporal implications of education policy have been underutilized in the theoretical exploration of rights and recognition. The Supreme Court has continually abdicated its role as protecting the disenfranchised in the context of education policy. The historical force of precedent operates as “a distended force enabling certain rhetorical possibilities (while deferring others).”⁷⁸ The removal of the race barrier ignores the lack of remedy for the persistent culture of segregation:

The belief that mere “integration” is an indicator of “equality” is one example of an ideology influenced heavily by the *Brown* ruling. Symbolically, the mere illusion of progress is perhaps as important the progress itself. What matters to the courts is not whether there are segregated outcomes per se, but whether these outcomes are the direct result of segregationist intent”⁷⁹

The post-*Brown v. Board of Education* narrative of judicial intervention erases the blackened subject from the “public” served by public education for the “fiction of

⁷⁷ Samuel Chambers, “Giving Up (on) Rights?” *American Journal of Political Science* 8, no.2 (2004): 187..

⁷⁸ William Trapani, “Materiality’s Time,” *Rhetoric, Materiality, and Politics*, (New York: Peter Lang Inc., 2009), 322.

⁷⁹ Gerardo Lopez and Rebeca Burciaga, “The Troublesome Legacy,” *Educational Administrative Quarterly* 50, 5 (2014): 803.

agency” guaranteed through citizenship.⁸⁰ The *Brown* decision has been valorized as the pivotal moment in which America acknowledged and remedied its racist legacy. Because the law on-face condemns segregation and racism, the Court, and American politics writ-large, has developed a form of political complacency in which racism only deserves a remedy when social actors intentionally discriminate.⁸¹ “Neutral” democratic terms like equality and rights rooted within a positivist approach to law-making often wear a mask of benevolence; absent explicit mal intent, liberalism wishes racism away through a mythologized narrative of reform and progress.⁸²

Erwin Chemerinsky argues the Court has moved towards a “post-racial” understanding of the equal protection clause in cases related to education policy post-*Brown*.⁸³ The litigious trend of “deconstitutionalizing” education refers to the process the Court took to abdicate responsibility from education policy and devolve authority to state and local institutions.⁸⁴ Absent motivation and intended discrimination by state actors, the Court has opted not to provide remedy or strike down law.⁸⁵ In the context of school funding issues, *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* and *Milliken v. Bradley* demonstrate how “color-blind” outcomes devastate marginalized communities on the level of redressing past inequities and creating new opportunities for students of color.

⁸⁰ Melissa Deem, “Stranger Sociability,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, (Winter 2002), 444.

⁸¹ *Id.*, at 804.

⁸² Marvin Lynn and Laurence Parker, “Critical Race Studies in Education,” *Urban Review* 38, no. 4 (2006): 260.

⁸³ Evan Chemerinsky, “A post-race equal protection?,” at 968.

⁸⁴ Chemerinsky, “Deconstitutionalization of Education,” *Loyola University Chicago Law Review* 36, no. 111 (2004): 112.

⁸⁵ *Id.*, at 974.

A fundamental issue when deciding equal protection cases relates to the lack of intersectional analysis between poverty and race. The plaintiffs in *San Antonio* argued the property tax funding mechanism in the Texas education system discriminated based on class because wealthier school districts received a substantially larger pool of money to fund schools from, and as a result, quality in education (materials, qualified teachers, course offerings, etc) directly correlated to income distribution. When deciding equal protection and discrimination cases, the Court does not evaluate multiple “axes of identity” as the basis for injury claims: “Although race was formative in the creation of simultaneously separate and unequal schools in San Antonio, as in many other cities, only the category of economic class was explicitly in the tax funding structure; thus, racial discrimination could be treated as constitutionally irrelevant by the Court.”⁸⁶ Liberalist understandings of opportunity and free market grounded the Court’s decision to hold the School District to a lower standard of proof relative to discrimination claims. How can a state entity discriminate when the plaintiffs chose to live in poorer areas? Because the state of Texas did not explicitly deny education opportunities to any citizens, the financing system merely reflected how income distribution naturally settled.⁸⁷ To intervene would overstep.

The case of *Milliken v. Bradley* similarly upheld the Court’s unwillingness to intervene absent explicit and intentioned discrimination related to education equity. In 1970, the Detroit School Board approved a plan to redraw attendance lines in order to increase the integration of black students in predominantly white schools.⁸⁸ Black parents

⁸⁶ Camille Walsh, “Erasing Race, Dismissing Class,” *La Raza L.J.* 21, (2011): 137.

⁸⁷ *Id.*, at 165.

⁸⁸ Mark A. Green and Terrance L. Gooden, “The Shaping of Policy,” *Teachers College Record* 118, no. 3 (2016): 7.

feared the policy would only serve to improve white schools that included black students while primarily black schools would continue to languish. White parents feared integration would diminish the quality of their schools.⁸⁹ Shortly after, a reactionary law offering a loophole permitting students transfers repealed integration efforts.⁹⁰ The NAACP filed a lawsuit against the state of Michigan, the Michigan Board of Education, the Detroit Board of Education, the Detroit superintendent of schools, and Governor William Milliken over the lack of equal protection for racial discrimination in achieving equitable education.⁹¹

Similar to *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, the Court refused to rule on the equal protection clause and upheld that absent explicit codified discrimination, the Court could not regulate Detroit School Board policy.⁹² Terrance Green and Mark Gooden argue

...that the goal was to maintain the choice of the innocent white parents over the removal of the vestiges of separation. The preserving of segregated schools and thereby maintenance of the inequitable status of the black district in Detroit is apparent in the remedy. What is less apparent is why. Consider the contradiction that develops on the question of how restrictive the remedy should be as the Supreme Court held that the remedy should be limited to Detroit-only, and should not include the other districts. This implies that all school districts are in some ways separate and independent from the state, which is contrary to

⁸⁹ Id, at 8.

⁹⁰ Id at 9.

⁹¹ Id, at 8.

⁹² *Milliken v. Bradley*, 18 U.S. 717 (1974).

Michigan statutes. The Supreme Court confirms its contradictory belief that Michigan is made up of independent and autonomous districts.⁹³

The same logic of a “hands-off” approach to remedying education inequality played out in the *Milliken* decisions – the Court refused to intervene in equal protection suits because it wasn’t a federal responsibility. Without considering historical, structural, and other intervening factors determining resource distribution, white school districts continued to be insulated under the guise of natural market effects and free choice. The narrow categories and standards by which the Court considers discrimination and intent made federal litigation a hopeless path for civil rights activists.⁹⁴ The decisions in *San Antonio* and *Milliken* focused on property rights as the neutral determinant of *de facto* segregation in order to place the remedies necessitated by discrimination to be outside the jurisdiction of the Court.⁹⁵ However, this vision ignores the way Whiteness governs and reproduces the ideology of accumulation: disembodied and oppressive education policy manifests itself as a property – through historical accumulations of wealth,⁹⁶ access to resources, and other institutionalized privileges that control what choices are available to individuals.⁹⁷

The assumption that the neutral text of the law maintains the ability to transform the unequal and discriminatory texture of opportunities effectively left students of color to fend for themselves against the tyranny of the (white) majority. Despite its steadfast

⁹³ Mark A. Green and Terrance L. Gooden, “The Shaping of Policy,” *Teachers College Record* 118, no. 3 (2016): 14.

⁹⁴ Carter, “The Paradox of Political Power,” at 1126.

⁹⁵ Mark A. Green and Terrance L. Gooden, “The Shaping of Policy,” *Teachers College Record* 118, no. 3 (2016): 14.

⁹⁶ A Research Report by the Urban Institute found, “In 2010, whites on average had two times the income of blacks and Hispanics, but six times the wealth.” Mckernan, et al, “Less Than Equal: Racial Disparities in Wealth Accumulation.”

⁹⁷ Mark A. Green and Terrance L. Gooden, “The Shaping of Policy,” *Teachers College Record* 118, no. 3 (2016):.

belief in color-blindness, equal guarantees in law do not guarantee equal opportunities because the narrative of racial violence projects onto the future

The historical narrative of a systemic racial wealth divide entrenched by decades of racially restrictive covenants, employment discrimination, school segregation and unequal taxation and finance policies continues. This historicization could have made the statistics showing dramatic overrepresentation of black and Latino children in low income households and school districts.⁹⁸

Post-racialism assumes the absence of discrimination can be equated to equality; the rhetoric of choice and free-market absolves the Court of responsibility to continue to remedy the structures of white supremacy left in place by the painful history of segregation. Instead, because Americans have moved on and progressed from racism, racial remedies should be left to the political process and local control.⁹⁹ The narrative and myth of progress assumes that society will naturally self-correct away from its racist past now that the law applies equally to all. Critical race theory provides the counterpoint to this perspective; rather than making race an invisible happenstance in the lives of those in poverty, the historical connections of racism, geography, class, and subsequently education must shape and inform policy decisions.¹⁰⁰ The Harvard Law Review identifies the progression of education policy litigation towards devolution as a result of the Court's reluctance to "...venture into the weeds of education policy, citing concerns about the separation of powers, local control, and judicial competence."¹⁰¹ Arguments in favor of

⁹⁸ Camille Walsh, "Erasing Race, Dismissing Class," *La Raza L.J.* 21, (2011): 164.

⁹⁹ William M. Carter, "The Paradox of Political Power," *Emory Law Review* 61 (2012): 979.

¹⁰⁰ Laurence Parker, "Critical Race Studies in Education," *Qualitative Inquiry* 21, no. 3 (2015): 268.

¹⁰¹ "Education Policy Litigation as Devolution," *Harvard Law Review* 15, no. 3 (2015): 2.

devolution support localized knowledge, however; the trends indicate local democratic control does not create progress or meaningful investment in impoverished communities.

New Federalism and Mayoral Tyranny

The history of segregation and racialized violence haunts the geographic and affective space of Chicago. Education disparities between small geographic distances that reflect stark differences in race and class demographics demonstrate the ways white supremacy maintains its grip on the Windy City. Specifically,

It is also important to remember that housing segregation was neither accidental nor the simple result of innocent individual choices to live near others who are like us. Neighborhood segregation was state-sponsored and promoted by specific public policy choices, including “local zoning laws, racial segregation in public housing, and the purposeful exclusion of African-Americans from federal mortgage lending programs.”¹⁰²

As demonstrated by *San Antonio* and *Milliken*, housing policy and education policy implicate opportunities, resource distribution, and upward mobility. Demands made by the Chicago Teachers Union forefront the “the apartheid-like” nature of schools within Illinois, with 90% of Chicago Public Schools being designated “hyper-segregated”¹⁰³ and suburban schools spending on average 51 percent more per student than CPS.¹⁰⁴

By devolving authority to lower levels of jurisdiction, the Court enabled an executive takeover of Chicago Public Schools that has tied the fate of students to the

¹⁰² Ibid, 7.

¹⁰³ Micah Uetricht. *Strike for America*. (London: Verso, 2014),108.

¹⁰⁴ In 2011, Chicago’s public schools spent \$7,946 per pupil for instructional purposes; the New Trier school district, spent \$12,043, or 51 percent more. Miller, “US Needs Strike Over Inequities in Public Education.”

corrupt interests of major business. Jim Carl traces the history of mayoral control as a uniquely Chicago phenomenon: the 1995 Chicago School Reform Act gave then-Mayor Daley and current Mayor Rahm Emanuel the ability to “embrace educational positions that were as much about marshaling votes and winning the support of corporate Chicago as much as they were about improving the schools.”¹⁰⁵ This set-up would likely stand up to a constitutional test under the equal protection clause. Integral to the message of the Teachers Strikes were protests of austerity measures meant to create a “privatization scheme for creating a ‘market’ in public education.”¹⁰⁶ Since 2001, 88% of the students affected by school closings were black.¹⁰⁷ The confluence of race and class magnifies inequalities in the Chicago education system while reproducing disposable subjects in the school-to-prison pipeline.

¹⁰⁵ Jim Carl, “Good politics is good government,” *American Journal of Education* 115, no. 2 (2009): 326.

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth Saltman, *The Gift of Education*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 151.

¹⁰⁷ Micah Uetricht. *Strike for America*. (London: Verso, 2014), 109.

CHAPTER FOUR: PEDAGOGICAL SUBJECT OR EDUCATIONAL LABORER?

America was never great in the realm of public education; a comprehensive report ranking the performance of global school systems ranked the U.S. 14th out of the 20 industrialized nations considered.¹⁰⁸ In evaluating the list, Stephen Lurie explains how astonishingly bad the United States compares to its peers:

By the report's latest edition, in 2012, the United States education system sits at 17th place out of 40 countries, and it's not just behind those socialist Scandinavians. In addition to the classic northern European bloc—Finland (1st), Netherlands (7th), Denmark (9th)—the superior contenders also come from Asia (2nd through 5th), Oceania (New Zealand, 8; Australia, 13), the rest of Europe, and indeed, even Canada (a respectable 10th). **Each of the countries ahead of the U.S. has a fundamental commitment in common, one that the American doesn't: a constitutional, or statutory, guarantee of the right to education.** By centralizing education as a key focus of the state, these countries establish baseline requirements that set the frame for policy and judicial challenges, as well as contribute to what the Pearson report calls a **“culture” of education: where “the cultural assumptions and values surrounding an education system do more to support or undermine it than the system can do on its own.”**¹⁰⁹

The current state of contradictory and vitriolic political discourse speaks volumes about the assumptions and values embedded within an American “culture” of education.

Because education cannot be reduced down to kernel of universal truth in the form of fundamental right, it lacks an internal/autotelic value, and is then undervalued by its culture. Knowledge can only be conceptualized in terms of worth in relation to other objects, particularly capital and exchange (for grades/scores).

Producing research that inspires activism is a noble, but self-aggrandizing goal which fetishizes the relationship between knowledge and action. Ingrid Hoofd's text *Higher Education and Technological Acceleration* works through the contradiction of an anti-capitalist knowledge economy. Educational laborers have increasingly taken to the

¹⁰⁸ “Which countries have the best schools?” <http://thelearningcurve.pearson.com/index/index-ranking>

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Lurie, “Why Doesn't the Constitution Guarantee the Right to Education?” *The Atlantic*, October 2013.

practice of producing internal criticisms of the “corporatized university” through the ideological “revealing” of precarity as the socio-ontological and legal-economic condition of knowledge production. The policies and practices of academic institutions form the means of creation and consumption in the metaphysical realm of intellectual exchange; [t]ruth becomes commodified as scholarship through an entanglement with capital, and subsequent circulation throughout the knowledge economy. Tenure, peer review, departmental funding distribution, even RateMyProfessor.com operate as management tactics to produce both a transcendent ideal academic subject and to denigrate those who fall short.

The vampiric narrative of the neoliberal academic-industrial complexes produces an “immanent contradiction” in the professional performance of anti-capitalist critical theorists:

(The illusion of) progress through the scientific and philosophical discussion and production of knowledge has indeed become ‘productive’ in the economic sense...at the heart of the university lies a fundamental aporia that expresses itself exceedingly today, in a curious reversal of its humanist values and stakes, as a more obvious pretence or hypocrisy. This leads so-called knowledge workers at many contemporary universities today to find themselves confronted with contradictory feelings and schizoid situations: like, for instance, teaching students the ills of social hierarchisation through education, while also sorting them in hierarchical (alpha) numerical slots according to academic performance.

The characterization of the university as an objective space for the rational exchange of ideas begs the question of a hidden *telos*. The paradox of creating anti-capitalist

scholarship for the purpose of thriving within a capitalist institution threatens and dilutes the essence of supposedly radical philosophy. You can labor for your radical anti-capitalist cake and ethically consume it too!

Revolutionary and embodied tactics are lost in favor of “specialized, narrow, technical, and obscure” theories and methods when the parameters and possibilities of academic work become constrained by the goal of becoming a “good scholarly subject.” Hoofd cites the “chasing of the Enlightenment ideals of democracy, transparency, emancipation, and knowledge” as the driving force behind the contradiction and failure of philosophy. Situating the ‘neutral space’ of the transcendent public school upon the theoretical foundation of liberal humanism makes academic research ‘autoimmune’ fruit of the ‘poisonous and self-interested’ tree.

The irony of my sarcasm is not lost on me, given the form of this masters’ thesis, the hyper-privileged space in which I wrote it, and its critical content. What is an exhausted graduate student supposed to do? No. That’s the wrong question. What’s an exhausted graduate student supposed to undo? The demands of the CTU were produced out of the rejection of a growing trend towards the administrative classroom. Teachers were increasingly becoming alienated from their labor through the teleological practice of “teaching to the test.” The act of demanding represents the transformative moment of *class consciousness* in the process of undoing toxic capitalism; those implicated in the classroom, students and teachers, became a class *for* itself through the articulation of what they needed to thrive and persist.¹¹⁰ The *social imaginary* created through the

¹¹⁰ Dana Cloud, “Critical Theory’s Desertion of the Real,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, (Winter 2006), 338.

articulation of the demands identifies the classroom as both the physical site of schooling and the metaphysical space of subjectivization, or “the process of ‘becoming-subject.’”¹¹¹

These divergent visions of schooling practices speak to the ontological disagreements between the Teachers Union and the district administration over the purpose of education. For technical rationalists, students are already worker-subjects who need instruction on how to apply problem solving skills repeatedly to hypothetical situations. A model of education in the sense of producing a subject operates as what Felix Guattari describes as a territory of existence:

Territories of existence . . . drift in relation to each other like tectonic plates under continents. Rather than speak of the “subject,” we should perhaps speak of components of subjectification, each working more or less on its own. This would lead us, necessarily to re-examine the relation between concepts of the individual and subjectivity, and, above all, to make a clear distinction between the two. Vectors of subjectification do not necessarily pass through the individual, which in reality appears to be something like a “terminal” for processes that involve human groups, socio-economic ensembles, data-processing machines etc. Therefore, interiority establishes itself at the crossroads of multiple components, each relatively autonomous in relation to the other, and, if needs be, in open conflict.¹¹²

On a physical level, the classroom is the material representation of economic power. Wealthy high schools have smart boards, nice computers, and other advantages of the

¹¹¹ Dennis Atkinson, *Art, Equality, and Learning* (The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2011): 68.

¹¹² Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 25.

facilities. But (non-)materially, the classroom also operates on the level of interpersonal relations; class determines the material reality, but something ineffable produces the type of subject that emerges from knowledge acquisition.

A relational theory of the classroom characterizes teachers and students as pedagogical subjects operating through the “will to matter” through the process of how one acquires subjectivity, which translates ‘persistence in being.’¹¹³ Political subjectivity (or agency) emanates from a situated understanding of one’s place in the world, the ability to affect and be affected by others.¹¹⁴ Teachers and students exist in a mutually constitutive relationship which produces the pedagogical subject. A curriculum dedicated to the development and production of affinity-based pedagogy creates the possibility for shared experiences of recognition and a sense of mattering within the classroom as a space for the social collective.

In contrast, the administrative approach to education practice treats knowledge as a commodity to be consumed and reproduced, rather than created. The individual is blamed for inefficiencies or imperfect reproduction, instilling a sense of competition rather than solidarity amongst educational laborers. The failure to correct answers/accumulate wealth strips students/citizens of their productive value to society, culminating in the “hyper-segregated” nature of Chicago neighborhoods. The will to matter, the possibility to create, is destroyed in the zones of invisibility. School district boundaries become impenetrable from both outside and within; “moments of

¹¹³ Nathan Stormer, “Enconium of Helen’s Body,” in *Rhetoric, Materiality, and Politics*, (New York: Peter Lang Inc., 2009), 224. The will to matter is defined as “a desire to continue to be embodied in the world. It speaks to the performative impulse for reiteration in that to persist, a thing must become itself gains and it is never the same for the effort.”

¹¹⁴ Rosi Braidotti, “Putting the Active Back in Activism,” *New formations* 16, no. 68 (2010): 45.

unknowingness” become moments of fear and isolation without an educational experience.

INTERLUDE—THE ENERGY TRANSFORMATION OF THE MATCH

Total energy remains constant in a closed system, but it is possible to change the form in which this energy occurs. Lighting a match illustrates this principle.

A match moves through the air when struck, eventually rubbing against some surface. The friction produces enough heat to light the match. Thus the mechanical energy of the match's movement is transformed into heat energy.

The chemical energy stored in a match is an example of potential energy, or inactive energy that has the capacity to do work if the conditions are right. Kinetic energy is the energy of moving objects. Heat energy is an example of kinetic energy since heat is basically the movement of molecules. So burning a match involves the transformation of potential energy into kinetic energy.¹¹⁵

The following chapter is a version of a final paper I wrote for an Organizational Communications course. Rather than try and finish this thesis with an attempt at a profound solution for Chicago, I would like to share with you something personal. Very personal. A cathartic paper that felt like a journal or confessional with footnotes. Please don't take this the wrong way – I loved my time at Wake and the relationships I formed and will be eternally grateful for the experience. But something else, an ineffable compulsion to give yourself to your surroundings, exhausts you in the process. I'm tired. I think the teachers were tired too. But that exhaustion had a paradoxical effect of producing an outpouring of energy once you can't give any more to the present. You force your future into being, even if only temporarily. You make fire.

The mechanical energy needed to maintain the daily school function caused the conflict between the CTU and the Board; this brought the kinetic energy of the union roaring out of the collective. The material realities of the school system and the radical imaginary on the other side of the demands, a world in which every student has a physical, emotional and intellectual support system, are in tension as well. A potential energy exists in the space between the real and the imaginary – the (non-)material – that can create a transformation in a closed space of an individual or a collective. This is what Felix Guattari is referring to when he speaks of "collective existential mutation." The

¹¹⁵ <http://sciencing.com/energy-transformation-match-7348200.html>

strike was never about the contracts. The strike was about forcing the city to witness their radical imagination, to be transformed by something that does not exist and what comes before meaningful material change: the (non-)material, the “complex eternal object:”

The potential released remains in reserve, as what Whitehead would call a “complex eternal object”: a pure potential for the mutual inclusion of a diversity of contrasts, minus the requisite conditions for its determined return (Whitehead 1978, 271). After a suspensive interval, the potential is certain to reactuate, perhaps at a far- flung taking-place, at a time- taking of the next event’s making. That is: if the conditions are given, again.¹¹⁶

The fire of the strike extinguished years ago. But not the potential energy of the witnesses, like myself. We’re waiting. We know that “collective existential mutation will have the last word!” It’s just a question of what the word is.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Brian Massumi. *The Power at the End of the Economy*. (Durham: Duke U, 2015): 88.

¹¹⁷ Felix Guattari, *Chasmosis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 25.

CHAPTER FIVE: TOWARDS A MORE PERFECT.....

To what end are students being educated?
How can *quality* of education be measured?
What use should schooling be to students?
How do material interests influence the curriculum?

Graduate school represents a rite of passage, a way to “weed out” the weaklings not cut out for the grind of academia. An honor, they told me. A prestigious opportunity and any aspiring professor would happily take my place. As academics, we spend our time in school looking outwards, diagnosing societal problems and proposing solutions – shouldn’t we look inward as well? The field of Communication studies focuses on exchange of knowledge and production of meaning; my experience as a graduate student at Wake Forest University has shown me that there is a subtle system at work to maximize the output of graduate students while minimizing the institutional investment in these educational laborers.

Brian Massumi’s work on affect and the economy, as well as Ralph Cintron’s gentle prodding over the course of my edits, helped me through this process. Economic rationality is not a singular, evil force; when the terms of exchange are subject to human emotion, we project the affect of the one making the rules onto the system.¹¹⁸ Consider it economic (non-)rationality. Stormer’s term “will to matter” refers to his reinterpretation of *conatus* as the force behind the relational component of human interaction:

¹¹⁸ Brian Massumi. *The Power at the End of the Economy*. (Durham: Duke U, 2015): 189.

The will to matter is defined as “a desire to continue to be embodied in the world. It speaks to the performative impulse for reiteration in that to persist, a thing must become itself gains and it is never the same for the effort.”¹¹⁹

We desire not only to affect and be affected, but in ways that bring us happiness—to *thrive*. Economics mirrors this logic, but rationality is the antithesis of affect. Unions are the space where economic rationality and human affect negotiate. I wish I had had one throughout my experience in graduate school.

The struggle of academic life feels like a forced choice, and one without remedy. The Wake program particularly makes things impossible – four semesters goes by quickly when you are too busy to stop and assess the situation. Multiple professors have told me “get in and get out, take your degree and run with it.” But my quality of life matters, even if my time here is just a layover. This phenomena of fatigue is not unique to Wake Forest, nor am I the only academic worker who feels exhausted and undervalued.

On August 23rd, 2016, the National Labor Review Board ruled in favor of the Graduate Workers of Columbia, overturning precedent and designating research and teaching assistants as recognized employees of private universities.¹²⁰ The NLRB has been unable to make a truly lasting statement on the matter of graduate student labor unions; deciding for the unions in 2000, against in 2004, and back again in 2016.¹²¹ These litigious oscillations reflect the political nature of both the Board and labor unions.

Clinton appointees made the first pro-union decision, subsequently G.W. Bush

¹¹⁹ Nathan Stormer, “Enconium of Helen’s Body,” in *Rhetoric, Materiality, and Politics*, (New York: Peter Lang Inc., 2009), 224.

¹²⁰ NLRB.

¹²¹ Sheldon D Pollack, S., and Daniel V. Johns. “Graduate Students, Unions, and Brown University.” *Labor Lawyer* 20.2 (2004): 244.

orchestrated the first pro-University decision.¹²² Most recently, Obama's appointed NLRB board reversed labor's luck, but the Trump administration ironically does not appear favorable to workers.

For the time being, the NLRB decision has galvanized student activism at private universities across the country; in a time when organized labor has been all but extinguished by both fascist tendencies on the Authoritarian right, and the technocratic Left. The rhetorical agency demonstrated in the demands of graduate student unions represents the possibility for academic workers to unite over class dissatisfaction and express power over the production of their epistemological labor.¹²³ Academic theory is most often criticized for its social isolation by divorcing theory from praxis; what better way to evaluate the process of social change in the workplace than exploring the antagonism between student advocacy and profit-based academic administration?

This chapter is a critical inquiry into the ways in which profit-based economic interests have created a hostile environment for graduate teaching assistants. The current "post-truth" political state reflects the toxic effect anti-intellectualism has on the public sphere; higher education cannot maintain its potential for intellectual innovation without the recognition of the critical labor graduate assistants provide. Analyzing the expression of power exercised in the demand for better working conditions highlights the possibilities for rhetorical agency in an alienating work environment.

Literature Review and Theoretical Approach

¹²² Brimeyer, Ted M., Andrea V. Eaker, and Robin Patric Clair. "Rhetorical Strategies in Union Organizing: A Case of Labor vs. Management." *Management Communication Quarterly* 18.1 (2004): 50.

¹²³ Robert Walter Greene, "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37.3 (2004): 194.

My work exists at the intersection of organizational communication studies, critical labor and cultural studies, as well as social movement theory. I agree with Dana Cloud and George Cheney in their call for critical organizational studies to expand its scope towards exploring the “material and symbolic realities of power” in the workplace, as well as the possibility for rhetorical agency in sites of capitalist exploitation.¹²⁴ Connecting the contingent struggle of graduate student workers to larger structural antagonisms between employers and workers lays the groundwork for the possibility of generative dialogue and organizational change through the pursuit of self-valorizing labor and a system of support.

My review begins conceptually with the *topoi* of the educational laborer; the lived experience of graduate student workers reflects the struggle of the university to operate within a capitalist value system. The conditions of exploited workers in the academy reveal systems of management, control, and valuation at work in the graduate curriculum. In order to move the scholarly conversation surrounding rhetorical materialism and theoretical discourse towards emancipatory political practices, the affective response to the corporate management strategies of universities should be put at the front of academic inquiry.

Academic Labor and Affective Valuation

The NLRB decision played out as a discursive struggle over the designation of teaching assistants as either employees or students.¹²⁵ The linguistic and symbolic

¹²⁴ George Cheney, and Dana Cloud. “Doing Democracy, Engaging the Material: Employee Participation and Labor Activity in an Age of Market Globalization.” *Management Communication Quarterly* 19.4 (2006): 505.

¹²⁵ NLRB

distinction between the terms demonstrates how language has material outcomes for workers who occupy a liminal space in their organization. If the NLRB had ruled graduate assistants were not employees, the decision would communicate that students were powerless to determine the condition of their labor while denigrating the time and commitment it takes to achieve a higher degree.

Graduate students provide the labor that keeps universities running by making large courses manageable, research contributions, and other skills, yet frequently they are paid below a living wage, while working three jobs: learning, teaching, and researching.¹²⁶ At Wake Forest, debate assistants do the same labor as many full-time debate coaches by preparing for and traveling to tournaments which require 14 hour work days, while completing their thesis and coursework. The stipend of \$860 per month puts these workers nearly \$3000 below the federal poverty line, not including the \$1200 health insurance charge each semester. The contract for the assistantship requires students only retain employment through Wake Forest. This enforced poverty has the effect of excluding students who do not have financial assistance or the anxiety that accompanies living paycheck to paycheck.

These forms of fiscal management have come to structure the bottom line of the academic process, while the *telos* of knowledge production has become wealth accumulation. In this pedagogical model, quantifiable profit and economic rationality determine the value of education. Disciplines that train workers to produce surplus value on the free market similarly receive higher levels of administrative investment: biology,

¹²⁶ Rosalind Gill, "Academics, Cultural Workers and Critical Labour Studies." *Journal of Cultural Economy* 7.1 (2013): 13.

chemistry, and physics teaching assistants make \$1800 per month in their stipends, while English, religion, counseling, and communication graduate workers make \$860. This hierarchy establishes a process of violent physiological stress and overload for the academic workers at the bottom, in turn produces the desperate conditions and collective effect of rage necessary for the impetus to demand change.

David Harvey explores the ways in which the economic determination of teaching as a form of unproductive labor alienates educational workers from their efforts. Referring back to Althusser's ideological theory of interpolation, teachers are forced to "to generate and install in individuals the dominant system of values and ideas" when they are held to capitalist standards and denied agency over the creation of the curriculum and evaluative metrics.¹²⁷ Dana Cloud justifies the importance of labor unions through the notion of agency; workers are given the ability to provide input over the structure and organization of the academic environment.¹²⁸ Granting graduate students a seat at the bargaining table affords them rhetorical agency through the ability to challenge power and influence the symbolic and material reality of their academic labor.¹²⁹

The product of teaching cannot be measured by economic determinism. The term "affective labor" contributes to the conversation about the purpose and valorization of pedagogy through the distinction between material and immaterial forms of industry. Hardt and Negri define affective labor as a form of intangible production:

¹²⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

¹²⁸ George Cheney, and Dana Cloud. "Doing Democracy, Engaging the Material: Employee Participation and Labor Activity in an Age of Market Globalization." *Management Communication Quarterly* 19.4 (2006): 507.

¹²⁹ Robert Walter Greene, "Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37.3 (2004): 194. Cloud, 272

Unlike emotions, which are mental phenomena, affects refer equally to body and mind. In fact, affects, such as joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking. Affective labor, then, is labor that produces or manipulates affects.¹³⁰

Graduate students and teachers produce forms of affective labor through the communicative exchange and development of knowledge, but the climate of the organization influences whether this process is one of positive or depressive affect. The long work hours and exhaustive course load, the strain of carpal tunnel, “bulimic binge and purge” work cycles contribute to the conditions of affective alienation I have experienced at Wake Forest.¹³¹

My attachment to debate, the love of academic competition and interpersonal connections override the economic irrationality of working for far less than minimum wage. My stipend amounts to \$4/hour if I average a 50-hour work week, which is realistic given an average work day at a debate tournament begins at 7AM and ends around 10PM. I live in university housing for graduate students; it should be affordable for all Wake graduate students given the rhetorical designation of “graduate student housing,” yet, I am left with \$276 to cover a full month of expenses outside rent and utilities. The stipend for graduate students in this department has not increased since the early 90s; undergraduate tuition costs have gone from \$10,000 in 1990 to its current price tag of \$44,000. This clearly communicates a profit-based value system institutionalized at

¹³⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, (Randomhouse, 2005): 108.

¹³¹ Rosalind Gill, “Academics, Cultural Workers and Critical Labour Studies.” *Journal of Cultural Economy* 7.1 (2013): 13.

Wake Forest; despite the increase in capital input, the university has not changed its investment in graduate students' living funds.

Theories of Institutional Change and Class Struggle

The present organization of labor for graduate students creates tension between an affect of creativity and enjoyment, and a process of exhaustion and financial anxiety. This forced choice of exploitation creates the motivation for action amongst graduate student workers who share a collective feeling of frustration and desire for change. In the context of management studies, the perspective of “organizational becoming” puts forth an ontological theory of generative change through the negotiation of resistance and management.¹³² Organizations such as private universities and academic departments function through patterns of behaviors and interactions, and changes to operational norms is an “endemic unfolding process” present in any institution.¹³³ The role of communication in critical organization studies is to facilitate dialogue between institutional actors operating in an antagonistic power relationship.

Critical organizational scholars Dana Cloud and George Cheney call for scholars to analyze the role of rhetorical agency in corporate capitalism. Despite the graduate students' dependency on the university as their source of income and education, the risk of unionizing demonstrates the radical act of eschewing economic rationality (the safest choice would be to put your head down and make it through the system) for the possibility of an organization oriented towards “life-affirming constitutive power that

¹³² George Steinmetz, “Regulation Theory, Post-Marxism, and the New Social Movements,” 35.1 (1994): 176

¹³³ Rukhsar Sharif, “Opposing Forms of Power Through a University Student Labor Union’s Advocacy for Its Student Members,” *Critical Literary Practice*. Springer Singapore, 2015.

embodies creativity and cooperation.”¹³⁴ The collective leverage of a potential labor strike makes clear the power of the marginalized to halt the functional output of the more powerful administrative authority.¹³⁵ Organizations must provide its members the resources to thrive, not flounder, or else members will interpret the lack of a support as a message of denigration.

As economic constraints, political ideologies, technological innovations, and forms of social conflict inevitably evolve, theory must also follow the contours of interests and struggle in order to retain its relevance and explanatory power. Studying social movements through the lens of Robert S. Cathcart’s “rhetoric of confrontation” directs the organizational study toward the implications of power relationships in shaping discursive conflicts. Studying “the act of confrontation that causes the establishment to reveal itself for what it is,” and brings to light ideological forces and contradictions within the system that bring about the eruption of protest in specific situations.¹³⁶ Confrontation and negotiation go hand in hand as well. Because conflict and change are a given in organizations, we should analyze the way dominant powers resist demands for change from below. In the case of NLRB litigation, the argument against graduate students communicates how little the quality of life and work matters to administrators. I don’t believe the time I spend working in the field of communication studies should be quantified as monetarily less than half the value of a physics’ student’s time. However, debate is not a spectator sport and does not provide any revenue to the university, so it

¹³⁴ Robert Walter Greene, “Rhetoric and Capitalism: Rhetorical Agency as Communicative Labor,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 37.3 (2004): 201.

¹³⁵ George Cheney, and Dana Cloud, “Doing Democracy, Engaging the Material: Employee Participation and Labor Activity in an Age of Market Globalization,” *Management Communication Quarterly* 19.4 (2006): 503.

¹³⁶ Robert Cathcart, “Movements: Confrontation as Rhetorical Form,” *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 43.3 (1978).

worth less institutional investment. These structures make clear the bottom line of Wake Forest and many institutions of higher learning: economic growth over affective flourishing.

Conclusion

Academic scholar Rosalind Gill engages critical labor studies to demonstrate how the structure of academic work makes for a toxic work environment, particularly for graduate students who exist at the bottom of the hierarchy. She writes:

Anyone who has spent even the briefest time among academics during the last decade cannot help but be struck by a profession stretched to a breaking point....very high stress levels, considerably higher than average, are increasing year on year, along with disorders of anxiety and depression. The one thing that is perhaps the biggest source of dispute, anxiety and stress in academia is time. This is a structural issue about the spiraling overall demands of the job of academic, which in the last decade or so have increased dramatically....¹³⁷

When time translates to the capital necessary to sustain life in the structure of the free market, undervaluing someone's labor constitutes a form of violence and isolation. My peers at Wake Forest University hail from a variety of social locations and identity markers, yet we continually find strength in one another when we commiserate in our exhaustion and depression. Our solidarity should be a source of rhetorical agency expressed in the form of demands for a living wage, fairly priced housing, free access to the undergraduate cafeteria, lighter course requirements, and other basic forms of compensation for the essential work we do in achieving the end of producing knowledge and developing students.

¹³⁷ Rosalind Gill, "Academics, Cultural Workers and Critical Labour Studies." *Journal of Cultural Economy* 7.1 (2013): 13.

Graduate students find collective social agency in our common experiences as academic laborers. Risk and confrontation are the forces necessary to demand the attention of dominating institutions. Throughout this work I have demonstrated how a critical analysis of the structure of the graduate program at Wake Forest stifles resistance through exhaustive measures and the repression of affect. Unions provide the ability for workers to take back agency over their labor through mutual recognition, rhetorical demand, and self-care. The NLRB decision acknowledged the value of graduate student labor; in order to counter the alienation experienced by overworked graduate assistants, the university must recenter its priorities at the purpose of education and community, not measures of profit. How do you solve a cognitive/prefigurative problem? Not with material. In order to live differently, we have to know differently. In order to know differently, we have to learn differently. In order to learn differently, we have to value differently. Something has to give. Something has to mutate.

Something existential.

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