



Errant Learning for a Foam World: Glissant, Sloterdijk, and the Foam of Pedagogy

Derek R. Ford¹

Published online: 28 March 2020
© Springer Nature B.V. 2020

Abstract

Through an educational reading of Édouard Glissant and Peter Sloterdijk, this article draws out and develops latent pedagogical philosophies that bear distinct relationships to colonialism and struggles against and beyond colonialism. In particular, it identifies two related educational philosophies that propel colonization and, in turn, proposes a theory of errant learning that might undergird decolonization. It focuses on Glissant's minor remarks about different conceptions of understanding in order to identify the grasping drive (and its relationship to opacity and transparency) as the educational foundation of the colonizing apparatus. After articulating the other form of understanding he offers, giving-on-and-with (which turns away from enclosures and opens into Relation), I point to a potential contradiction in this division as it relates to his overall project. By freeing grasping from the grasping drive, I reconfigure the relationship between grasping and giving-on-and-with in a way that allows for certain kinds of enclosures. This introduces the question of pedagogical form, a question explored in Sloterdijk's sphereological investigations. Reading the colonizing phase of globalization through Sloterdijk's notion of lordly imagining—which I link with the grasping drive—the article draws out how different educational processes produce different kinds of spheres. Finally, it articulates errant learning as a pneumatic process of grasping *and* giving-on-and-with that values opacity over transparency to produce foam formations with attention to the history of inequality and injury through immune deprivation.

Keywords Édouard Glissant · Colonialism · Peter Sloterdijk · Globalization · Foam

Introduction

In *Learning to Divide the World*, Willinsky (1998) examines the role of educational projects in colonialism. The educational dynamic here unfolds in three steps: discovery and possession, exhibition, and the colonial school. Together these three steps work to produce a certain “planetary consciousness” that included “a distinctly educational fascination with the world” (p. 40). While Willinsky introduces the notion that learning might have a

✉ Derek R. Ford
derekford@depauw.edu

¹ DePauw University, 7 E. Larabee St., Harrison Hall 218, Greencastle, IN 46135, USA

connection to colonialism, he never takes this up through a questioning of what learning is as a distinct educational philosophy. Accordingly, his responses resort to content changes in curriculum, like supplements for different subject areas that would address their colonial legacies. At the same time, educational philosophers who continue to demonstrate the myriad problems with the dominance of learning have located their critiques within problems of capitalism or neoliberalism, demonstrating how learning—which has itself become a kind of economic transaction—tethers individualized subjects to the shifting needs of global capital. The *global* of capital remains implicit in this research. There is, as such, a pressing need for educational philosophy to investigate the relationship between pedagogical logics, colonization, and decolonization.

Through an educational reading of Édouard Glissant's (1990/1997) *Poetics of Space* and Peter Sloterdijk's (1998/2011, 1999/2014, 2004/2011) *Spheres* trilogy, this article draws out and develops two related educational philosophies (grasping and lordly imagining) that propel colonization. Expanding these same texts, it begins developing a theory of errant learning as an alternative educational philosophy with anticolonial and decolonial potentiality. Specifically, with Glissant's minor remarks on different forms of conceptualizing understanding, I identify the grasping drive as the educational foundation of the colonizing apparatus. I argue that the grasping drive positions opacity as a potential that *must* be realized, an orientation that ends up sacrificing opacity as such. After articulating the other form of understanding he offers—giving-on-and-with—which turns away from enclosures and opens into Relation, I point to a potential contradiction in this division as it relates to his overall project: namely, that enclosures are necessary in the struggle against colonialism. By freeing grasping from the grasping drive, I reposition the relationship between grasping and giving-on-and-with in a way that allows for certain kinds of enclosures.

The relationship between openness and enclosure introduces the question of pedagogical *form*, and it's at this point that I turn to Sloterdijk's sphereological investigations. Reading the colonization phase of globalization through Sloterdijk's notion of lordly imagining—which I link to the grasping drive—I then draw out how different educational processes produce different kinds of spheres, ones with colonizing and decolonizing potential. Finally, I articulate errant learning as a process of grasping and giving-on-with that values the air and opacity *qua* opacity to produce foam formations with attention to the history of inequality and injury through immune deprivation.

An Opening: The Grasping Drive

An expansive thinker who wrote in a variety of disciplines and forms, one major focus of Glissant's work is decolonization. Scholars tend to divide his work down the line of his 1980 Ph.D. thesis, selections of which were later translated and published as *Caribbean Discourse*. Britton (2009), for example, contends that his early works were properly anticolonial and focused primarily on Martinique, while the later works were more postcolonial and focused on the world through the lens of the Caribbean. Nesbitt (2013) has a less sympathetic take, conceptualizing the turn from “anticolonial political struggle to an autonomy of cultural production” (p. 937), which he claims Glissant realized in *Poetics of Relation*. While I'm more inclined to agree with Britton, and I do want to draw out the ways in which his anticolonial commitments show up in *Poetics of Relation*, an analysis of Glissant's *oeuvre* is outside the scope of this paper. I choose to follow Murdoch's (2013) advice, that “defining or categorizing Glissant could be said to be a function of which aspect of his

work one wants to emphasize” (p. 876). Such an approach, as we will see, is potentially more in line with Glissant’s idea of Relation, which resists any totalizing captures. In this section, I introduce Glissant’s rather quick division of understanding into two antagonistic features, which provide the beginnings of a theory of errant learning. In order to do this, however, it’s helpful to have some context about the overall project in which they appear.

Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* is a series of gestures that work collectively to reconfigure the world from system to chaos, from rootedness to errantry, from filiation to expanse, from colonization to decolonization. At a few different moments in the texts, he offers what I take up as fragments of an educational philosophy that can help us to both understand the educational dynamics of colonization and imagine an anticolonial or decolonial educational dynamic: grasping (*comprendre*) and giving-on-and-with (*donner-avec*).¹ Both of these take up and deploy a certain relationship to what Glissant refers to as Relation, the broader concept he cobbles together in the book.

Relation begins with the slave trade and the figure of the “open boat.” Glissant (1990/1997) begins with the slave ship, that container of unspeakable suffering, that terrorist vessel trafficking in human bodies. He asks us to imagine the magnitude and particularities of the torture, corruption, and depravity the slave ship contains even as they are, as he insists throughout the book, literally unimaginable. The international slave trade is a triple abyss of the cargo hold, the seas, and the separation of culture and tradition. Yet this abyss isn’t vacuous. It instead is a breeding ground of Relation:

The populations that then formed, despite having forgotten the chasm, despite being unable to imagine the passion of those who foundered there, nonetheless wove this sail (a veil). They did not use it to return to the Former Land but rose up on this unexpected, dumbfounded land (pp. 7–8).

This is where we get our first glimpse of Glissant’s open dialectical sensitivity, as evidenced by the excessive surplus of the regime of slavery, the subordination and the resistance.² The abyss of the slave-trade is both a capture and a clearing. We also approach his educational project, as the abyss metamorphoses into “knowledge of Relation within the Whole” (p. 8), which is not a set of concrete information but an orientation toward the world. Slave ships are now open boats, “and we sail them for everyone” (p. 9).

The origins of the open boat aren’t relegated to memory or irrelevance, which is why openness isn’t exactly like the rhizomatic nomadism of Deleuze and Guattari. Rhizomatic nomadism is a helpful concept in that it gets us thinking in terms of relations and extension, but it needs to be historicized because the nomad’s “freedom” is “a form of obedience to contingencies that are restrictive” (p. 12). At the same time as the open boat contains its own origins, it’s not determined or explained solely by them. In order to navigate in Relation’s waters, the open boat needs an expansive errantry rather than a restrictive filiation, to look outward and beyond rather than only down. Colonialism, as he sees it, is in part the movement, production, and deepening of roots that ground identity. This is implicit “at first (‘my root is the strongest’) and then is explicitly exported as value (‘a person’s worth is determined by his root’)” (p. 17). This colonial framework still exerts its dominance, as evidenced by either the struggle for recognition by claiming similarity or difference from the colonizer. “Decolonization,” he says, “will have done its real work when it goes beyond

¹ “Grasping” and “giving-on-and-with” are Betsy Wing’s translations (see Wing 1997, p. xiv).

² For more on Glissant and his reworking or “bypassing” of Hegelian dialectics, see Leupin (2013).

this limit” (p. 17). Crucially, this too is a historical process conditioned by contingency, rather than a call to forget the nation or to reject borders. The struggle for Relation entails the movement toward *interdependence*, “but the absolute presupposition of this interdependence is that instances of independence will be defined as closely as possible and actually won or sustained” (p. 143). Despite the decisive phrasing, the “absolute presupposition” of genuine independence is not a temporal prerequisite to interdependence, a prior state that must be achieved and then negated through sublation into another state. Instead, the struggle *against* colonialism occurs contemporaneously with the struggle *beyond* colonialism. Pursued separately, the former allows history to determine the boat’s existence while the latter idealistically feigns to forget history. To sail beyond the limit of colonialism requires both strategies.

Aside from tying the colonized identity to the roots of the colonizer through opposition, which remains under the umbrella of colonialism, filiation hinders Relation in another crucial and broader way. Filiation traces meaning and identity back through roots, which for Glissant rests on the notion that these can be known and made fully transparent. The roots and the identity and meaning derived therefrom are never fully known or revealed, but any and all uncertainty or ignorance about them are, at least as a matter of principal, structurally properties that the subject can overcome. In other words, opacity is here positioned as an obstacle to transparency. The epistemological mission of colonialism is precisely to overcome this obstacle: “If we examine the process of ‘understanding’ people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency” (pp. 189–190). This is even the case for those who advocate for the accommodations of difference in a global village, as those who do the accommodating place the other within the existing system.

The ontology of transparency frames the world as graspable, as capable of being brought into one’s own knowledge and understanding. Grasping is only explicitly mentioned five times in the book (one of which takes on a positive form in Relation). Grasping is only defined towards the end: “the very *to grasp* contains the movement of hands that grab their surroundings and bring them back to themselves. A gesture of enclosure if not appropriation” (pp. 191–192). On my reading, grasping is the pedagogical drive of colonialism, positioning the subject as one who has not only the *right* but the *requirement* to reach out and bring the world into themselves. The opacity of the world—its land, water, and inhabitants—exists only for the learner to grab it, make it transparent, and incorporate it into their understanding. The grasping drive is the educational foundation of the colonial apparatus that wages a war on opacity by positioning it as a potential that *must* be realized so it can be held onto.

Beyond Grasping and into Relation

Glissant shows us how the grasping drive itself organizes being, knowing, and relating through a colonial framework. To get at his other conceptualization of understanding, that of giving-on-and-with, it’s necessary to dive into the unfolding of Relation, which the colonial grasping drive blocks. First, one can only gesture towards this Relation. In the book, Glissant (1990/1997) gathers together fragments of openings in a poetics that can’t systematize but “is latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible” (p. 32). Second, the site through which he approaches Relation is the Caribbean, as it’s one place with particularly dense relations, as evidenced by one relational process that

begins to approach Relation: creolization. Creolization is a process of hybridization that “is only exemplified by its processes and certainly not by the ‘contents’ on which these operate” (p. 89). Glissant places the page of the book bearing the heading of “Creolizations” at the beginning of the section titled “Paths,” because creolization is a pathway into relation, not a mere representation or consolidation of it. Nonetheless, the pathway is one that’s contingently determined through actual historical processes, ones of enclosure and expanse.

Any attempt to represent Relation would necessarily reduce it, fixing it in time and place and, therefore, ultimately *deny* Relation. Because Relation is an ever-shifting totality, it’s impossible for it to be totalized. To clarify this, Glissant introduces the concept of *chaos-monde*. *Chaos-monde* is not a chaotic world, but a world full of energy. It has norms, but they come neither before nor after what takes place, neither a priori nor a posteriori; it’s “neither fusion nor confusion: it acknowledges neither the uniform blend... nor muddled nothingness” (94). When everything is relational, each movement transforms the totality of *chaos-monde*, and as long as movement takes place the totality transforms. Relation is thus a realm of challenge, exhaustion, and reinvention. The open boat offers an alternative way of encountering the world and the self as it sails the waters of the *chaos-monde*. Whereas the colonizing ships sail the waters of a world that can be grasped, catalogued, explicated, and frozen into artifacts, the open boats enter into a Relation that’s impossible to fasten or contain. That the totality of Relation is ungraspable and unknowable doesn’t mean that it’s useless or colonizing to formulate knowledge about it, only that this knowledge will necessarily be *in* and not *of* Relation. Grasping is, to be sure, only one way to approach understanding, one that gives it “a fearsome repressive meaning” (p. 26). Against grasping, Glissant offers a form of understanding as “the gesture of giving-on-and-with that opens finally on totality” (p. 192). Under this heading, understanding isn’t an act of taking something external and incorporating it into the subject, but becomes instead a generation that emerges from Relation that the subject contributes back to Relation. Because the subject exists in Relation and is composed of relations, the subject and Relation change through giving-on-and-with.

Giving-on-and-with entails a radically different pedagogical orientation than grasping, a difference that I believe hinges on the association between transparency and opacity. Insofar as grasping positions the world as transparent, giving-on-and-with positions the world as opaque and transparency as impossibility. Indeed, if Relation is a constantly transforming totality that morphs with each movement, any attempt to render even one part of Relation transparent would not only be partial, but would itself again change Relation. Glissant shows this dynamism with a few words about what a language of Relation would look like:

One can imagine language diasporas that would change so rapidly within themselves and with such feedback, so many turnarounds of norms... that their fixity would lie in that change. Their ability to endure would not be accessible through deepening but through the shimmer of variety. It would be a fluid equilibrium. This linguistic sparkle, so far removed from the mechanics of sabirs and codes, is still inconceivable for us, but only because we are paralyzed to this day by monolingual prejudice (‘my language is my root’) (p. 98).

Relation is opaque through and through because it can’t be divided into its aliquot parts at any moment in time. There are no prime or elemental components of relation because each and every element is itself the product of and in relation to the relations that comprise Relation; the particularities of Relation are, in other words, cut across by internal and external relations that are always changing. This doesn’t mean that giving-on-and-with eschews knowledge or condemns transparency. Nor does it mean that we should throw up

our hands and *give up* understanding altogether. On the contrary, in Relational understanding the desire to know is driven by the impossibility of fully knowing some foundational truths. Even Relation and its opacity isn't a demonstrable truth. "Relation," Glissant writes, "cannot be 'proved,' because its totality is not approachable. But it can be imagined, conceivable in transport of thought" (p. 174). Totality is never fixed and so can't be grasped, but we nonetheless can aim for it. We aim for it, knowing beforehand our inevitable failure, aware of the inescapable opacity of Relation. Always partial, temporary, uncertain, and unsure of itself, knowledge is a kind of imagining, something that might and might not be.

Murdoch (2013) formulates the connection between opacity and decolonization succinctly: "The notion that one can recognize otherness, and be complicit with it in a positive way instead of attempting to challenge, appropriate, erase, or assimilate it, is an idea that breaks with longstanding universalist and imperial practices" (p. 887). As such, for Glissant (1990/1997) decolonization must entail the "right to opacity," which is distinct from the right to difference. The right to difference is progressive relative to the denial of difference, but it remains trapped within the pedagogy of grasping. We have to push beyond the right to difference and "agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity" (p. 190). Note that Glissant isn't against the right to difference but insists that this right is *also* recognized with the right to opacity. Just as interdependence is tied up with independence, so too is opacity tied up with difference. Thus, it's important that we also historicize the right to opacity rather than uncritically celebrate it.³ If we rearrange difference such that it's necessarily opaque, then each act of national independence is the creation of a new relay in Relation rather than the re-establishment of a former pure origin. Newly independent nations collect, produce, and disperse new relations. Or, as Glissant formulates it, "every (self-)determination" is "a generative distancing" (p. 153). The pursuit of independence and interdependence would occur simultaneously as the colonized identity is mobilized to assert its right to difference *and* to opacity.

The Glissant of *Poetics of Relation* is sensitive to the history and power that's brought us to Relation via colonization and creolization—by oppression and resistance. From this imperative, he theorizes different (and seemingly antagonistic) processes concurrently. Yet this isn't quite maintained with his division of understanding into grasping and giving-on-and-with. While grasping encloses Relation, at one point in the book he notes that imagination "helps us to grasp the (not prime) elements of our totality" (p. 170). Grasping here isn't after the base or raw materials of totality, as it proceeds with a conception of an indivisible Relation. This particular appearance of grasping in the book is, I hold, one that has been liberated from the grasping *drive*. Grasping itself is still an act of reaching out and bringing in, and so it's still an act of enclosure, but because of its orientation to opacity, the enclosure isn't ever complete. We might visualize the grasping drive as reaching out, grabbing with the hand, closing the hand, and returning the hand to the subject, whereas grasping freed from the grasping drive would reach out, grab with the hand open, bending the fingers toward the palm but keeping them separated, and returning to the subject. Grasping, as a practice of errant learning, is an act of partial and temporary enclosure, one that would still allow the subject to give-on-and-with Relation at the same time as they focus on their own enclosures and protections; a relationship that's consistent with the simultaneity of independence and interdependence, self-determination and interrelation. In this way, errant

³ For more on this, see Ford and Lewis (2018).

learning exists in Relation but facilitates certain forms of enclosures within Relation. As a result, the question of *form* is key for errant learning, and it is to this aspect that I now turn with the help of Peter Sloterdijk's sphereological provocations.

Educational Forms: From the Smallest to the Biggest

For Sloterdijk, human being is necessary a being-*in*, and the question of what it is that humans are *in* is one that, according to Sloterdijk, philosophy hasn't explicitly considered. His answer, which takes the form of a speculative grand narrative of history and philosophy, is that humans are always in spheres, which are protective immune systems that are constantly created and recreated. Spheres are both actual and metaphorical containers, material and conceptual, both literal spaces like wombs and houses, classrooms and cities, and figurative ones like families and collectives, subcultures and clubs. As he shows in his three books—*Bubbles*, *Globes*, and *Foams*—different spheres have different histories, ambitions, dispositions, and capacities that can help us think more clearly about the educational form of errant learning and distinguish between different acts of enclosure. In turn, further fleshing out errant learning adds a new pedagogical conceptualization of spherical formations, highlighting the ways in which they are always necessarily educational projects.

Bubbles serve as immunological containers for humans, small scale “air conditioning systems in whose construction and calibration, for those living in real coexistence, it is out of the question not to participate” (Sloterdijk, 1998/2001, p. 46). They're literal-figural encasings we work again and again to create and recreate in order to provide a protective film between an outside and us. Take, for example, professional academic associations. What are they if not encompassing interiors that enable us to exist in a particular way, and in which we condition each other and ourselves (through shared languages, sources, methods, habits, journals, conferences), calibrate and re-calibrate in response to internal changes (like new interests and commitments, which can be accommodated in the form of Special Interest Groups) and external changes (such as changing political conditions that influence our conference themes, or budget allocations that shape our fees and attendance). We can scale the example down to the advisor-advisee relationship, seeing it as a protecting bubble in which the same processes happen, an inside that protects against and responds to an outside.⁴

As elemental forms of being-in, bubbles seek to expand. As the microsphere expands into the microsphere, a new educational philosophy is birthed: lordly imagining, a grasping that takes the spherical form of an enclosure, as the microsphere expands into the macrosphere. This growth process is one in which the microsphere brings that which is outside into the interior through incorporation, inclusion, and neutralization.⁵ Extension augments the immunological qualities and capacities of the sphere, protecting the inside while prospectively looking to the outside. The growth of cities is an example of spheric expansion that highlights the role of lordly imagining in globalization. The development of walled-in cities demonstrates this principle: “the outside world increasingly ceased to be an ungovernable environment, opening up more and more as the

⁴ For the classroom as a bubble, see Ford and Zhao (2018).

⁵ It's worth (foot)noting that for Sloterdijk (1999/2014) this lordly imagining and the resulting spheric expansion only developed in full in China, India, and Greece (p. 159).

private world of the first lords who touched, explored, described and comprehended it” (Sloterdijk 1999/2014, p. 290). Importantly, as cities grow so too does the thickness of their walls. Along these lines, the transition from microsphere to macrosphere is one driven forward by the drive to detail, catalogue, and ultimately own the outside, and in this way works against the unfolding of Relation.

If we appreciate the role of lordly imagining in macrospheric extension, we can understand the shift from celestial to terrestrial globalization as the logical outcome of the grasping drive. The pursuit of measuring the immeasurable led to the discovery that the earth itself is a star and that, like all stars, it has a finite life expectancy. Aesthetically speaking, the sublime of the heavens gave way to the beautiful of the earth. Or, as Sloterdijk puts it, “terrestrial globalization was the victory of the interesting over the ideal. Its result, the earth made known, was the unsmooth orb, which disappoints as a form but attracts attention as an interesting body” (p. 772). Terrestrial globalization, in other words, was the grasping drive internalized from the dyadic orbs to the one earth orb. “Discovery” itself becomes synonymous with grasping, as it.

denotes the epitome of practices whereby the unknown is transformed into the known, the unimagined into the imagined. With regard to the still largely unexplored, undepicted, undescribed and unexploited earth, this means that procedures and media had to be found to bring these into the picture as a whole and in detail (p. 862).

Before terrestrial globalization, discovery named the process of taking the cover off an object. Under this definition, discovery is “an exposure of the known;” after colonialism, it denotes “the finding of something unknown” (p. 868). In educational terms, colonialism is a war on opacity in the name of a final transparency.

This final transparency undergirds the movement of capital across the globe. Only if something is known and delineated can it be owned and transferred. Rendering something transparent enables one to secure a return on investment. Maps, as records of discoveries, were means of acquiring and transferring land and its inhabitants (That the “new” lands conquered often had pre-fixes of “new” or “south” attached to them is a telling linguistic connection between colonialism and filiation): “Europeans enjoyed the prerogative of semantically cloning their own world and appropriating the distant and foreign points through the lexical recurrence of the same” (p. 886). Despite its pretenses and self-assurances of objectivity, the lordly imagination can’t get outside of itself. Cartography and geography are object lessons through which we can get a sense of the operations and outcomes of the lordly imagination’s macrospherical expansion. Artists and writers communicated the newly discovered knowledge in ways that had more popular appeal than maps and land deeds, rounding off the edges of more specialized discourses.

While Europeans thought they were bringing the world inside of their monosphere, something quite different was happening. Instead of deepening their roots and centrality, they were engaged in expanse and decentralization. This is what accounts for the fact that the Western mass media has only recently been struck by the need to consider globalization, this process that’s been underway since the first cosmologists looked to the sky. Now that globalization is over, the West is finally forced to come to grips with the fact the socialist, national liberation, and other anti-imperialist and decolonizing struggles of varying sizes collectively popped so many holes in the macrosphere. Terrestrial globalization was “a spatial revolution into the outside” (p. 791) that transformed places into locations on maps through an equivocation of different distances and a symmetricalization of space; the dominant colonizing cities and states lost their centrality and claims to rootedness.

Decolonization teaches the colonizing world the lesson of terrestrial globalization as the open boat sails on the seas, on which traffic now runs (at least) two ways.

Errant Learning-in-Foams

If celestial globalization ends with the dethroning of the ideal by the interesting, then terrestrial globalization ends with the exhaustion of the outside. The fully circumnavigated globe takes on a new form that “is produced simultaneity, and it finds its convergence in things that are current” (p. 939). Foams are the remnants of imploded projects of producing the singular Earth macrospheric bubble, formations that contain multiple simultaneous bubbles. After the efforts to produce a solid and fixed macrospheric container for humanity fails, after the impossibility—and with that, hopefully, the disagreeability—of the search for a final monosphere is revealed, we see the need to reconceptualize our sphereological imperative reality with the form of something lighter, more flexible, and less permanent. Orienting ourselves in this direction, however, will remain impossible without alternative pedagogical form. In this final section, I draw together the educational–political observations produced through the paper to formulate how errant learning produces foam formations, which in turn allows us to understand the dynamic relations between grasping and giving-on-and-with of errant learning.

If we picture ourselves on the stern of Glissant’s open boat as we sail the waters of the *chaos-monde*, we can see the foam forming white caps on the waves of our wake. The slave ships of colonialism in their search for the rationalization and domination of the Earth through the construction of the one orb, can’t help but produce a new spatial morphology. The foam is a collective of co-mingling bubbles, as liquid film envelopes air (which in turn makes bubbles light, allowing them to rise to the surface). If we keep on looking, we’ll see the foam’s ephemerality, as the film thins and pops, and the air escapes. Foam has “no life expectancy of next generation, all it knows is running ahead into its own bursting” (Sloterdijk 2004/2016, p. 31). Ignorant of all filiation, foam bubbles don’t set down any roots, rejecting fundamental and stable ground in favor of pneumatic expanse (and collapse). Relation takes the form of foams, “where the dreamers and agitators are at home; one will never find the adults, the serious and those with measured behavior there. Who is an adult? Someone who refuses to seek stability in the unstable” (pp. 30–31).

The colonialism of terrestrial globalization entails the deepening of identity roots as they spread throughout and map the world, attempting to produce one united sphere by positioning everything that’s other in relation to the rooted identity. Decolonization fractures this united sphere, as new nations and identities achieve independence, decaying the spread roots. The decolonizing potential of foam rests in its ability to merge independence and interdependence, autonomy and dependency in shifting ways. In turn, foams help us understand the contemporaneity of enclosure and openness, showing how grasping and giving-on-and-with can be part of the same educational praxis. As spatialized self-determinations, each new bubble is a unique interior in which groups work on themselves in a protected surround that’s both common and exclusive. The walls of the bubble are shared, and therefore serve to both divide and unite at least two microspheres. This creates what Sloterdijk refers to as a “paradoxical interior” where “the great majority of surrounding co-bubbles are simultaneously adjacent and inaccessible, both connected and removed” (p. 54). Because foam is necessarily acentric, bubble generation reconfigures foam, making new spaces, without appeal to a central rooted identity.

This kind of generation, to be sure, doesn't mean that foams are powerless and ahistorical spheres. Although Sloterdijk's sphereology is not without political deficiencies, he is certainly aware of and concerned about the historical injustices relative to the distribution of resources in foams, as he notes that within foam formations today there exist "highly divergent temperature settings and great inequalities in the levels of animation, immunization and pampering" (p. 281).⁶ And as Sloterdijk observes at the end of *Globes*, living in thin and transient walls isn't particularly enticing for many people and groups; in the same way interdependence might not be as exciting for those without genuine independence. Addressing and alleviating these injustices, however, cannot but take place in the relationships between shared walls of Relation, as "the foam metaphor draws attention to the fact that there are no isolating means which are completely private property—one always share at least one partition with an adjacent world-cell" (p. 565). The political response might entail an affirmative action that redistributes more comfort resources to those with newly attained independence or still struggling for genuine independence.

It might seem contradictory to discuss walls within Relation. Glissant (1990/1997) certainly doesn't discuss walls, opting instead for vectors and arrows. Yet I maintain that walls are crucial to affirming his historical sensitivity of Relation. This is most apparent in his concern for languages of Relation, which mix and intermingle but aren't subsumed into an indeterminate mixture. It is what he calls "the implacable consensus among powers between profits and controls" that moves this subsumption forward. "Not every disappearance, however, is equivalent" (p. 96). In the same way, not all foamed walls are equivalent, and we have to distinguish those that "become foreign, monumental and impervious to empathy," and that "only a privileged few succeed in assigning them to an interior of their own" (Sloterdijk 1999/2004, p. 214). Walls differ in their history, quality, orientation, aspiration, and duration, and we can posit a relation between these characteristics and the educational processes engaged in foam construction. Foam walls constructed through the grasping of lordly imagining aim for permanence and an exclusive expansion, while the thin walls constructed through errant learning presuppose their ephemerality even as they expand, enlarging only to pop.

Errant learning—as an educational practice that abjures any ultimate and decisive transparency—constructs foams without any solid foundation or final ground. The reason the foam appears white in the open boat's wake is, after all, because this opacity reflects the light of the sun; it's not that the foam is white, but that we can't see inside the foam, which remains withdrawn and uncoverable. Produced through the contradictory relations of co-division and co-isolation, life in bubbled foams assumes a fundamental opacity:

Every point in the foam offers glimpses of the bordering ones, but comprehensive views are not available—in the most advanced case, exaggerations are formulated inside one bubble and can be used in many neighboring ones... For theory that accepts being-in-foam as the primary definition of our situation, final super-visions of the One World are not only unattainable, but impossible—and, correctly understood, also undesirable (Sloterdijk 2004/2016, p. 58).

Totality is literally unimaginable and ungraspable. The bubble walls represent a border zone between the known and unknown, the truth and its outside: "truth is neither a secure store of facts nor a mere property of statements, but rather a coming and going, a current

⁶ Hopefully the present article demonstrates the progressive potential of Sloterdijk's sphereology. Detloff and Bernico (2017) provide another example in their article about the Flint water crisis.

thematic flashing-up and a sinking into the athematic night” (p. 399). One knows the same wall but not of what lies on the other sides. When the wall collapses, something new is known—like, perhaps, who and what lived beyond the wall—but because of the collapse something else is lost, irrecoverable and forever unknowable. The resulting configuration of foam, accordingly, occasions a fresh Relation to live in and learn.

When bubbles burst, the “air returns home to the general atmosphere while more solid substance disintegrates into drops of dust. What is almost nothing becomes what is almost not” (p. 29). Rather than ground, air is the element that sustains foam. The heavy gives way to the light. Atlas’ sunken shoulders, burdened with the weight of the orb, no longer point to any access to truth. Sloterdijk refers to process as uplift: “Anti-gravity can now be understood as a ‘fundamental’ vector, or rather as the tendency that strives against the dimension of a foundation” (p. 687). As bubbles inflate, they move outward and upward in expanse, rather than down through filiation. This is both a reality and a project: “While realistic seriousness has always purported to be and to know what is the case, future realistic thought must start from the realization that anti-gravity is more serious than anything ever formulated about the supposedly ‘fundamental’ by the consensus” (p. 687). As such, I propose that the right to opacity entails a pneumatic struggle against rootedness, an educational project that can move beyond the limits of colonialism by escaping the colonial framework while attending to the historicity of power. The move to the air isn’t a move away from the claims to land that remain central to struggles against colonialism, settler-colonialism, and imperialism.

The Windbag: An Errant Conclusion

On my reading, lordly imagining is a grasping drive that thickens and fastens ever-expansive walls. Militating against those forces that still possess monospheric intentions therefore requires different forms of imagination and understanding. It is for these purposes that I’ve offered the pedagogy of errant learning. Errant learning grasps from the impossibility of any final grasping movement in which all is revealed and known, constructing bubbles in foams that move forward only to change. After the circumnavigation of the globe becomes routine, life as foam construction extends horizontally, composing and recomposing Relation. As such, errant learning in foams isn’t about growing up into adulthood but growing outward into childhood again and again, re-calibrating the fluctuating air conditions of bubbled foam, air that necessarily has to come from the outside and that, after a time, will return to the outside. Learning in and for foams must be errant for this reason: there are no secure trajectories or proper courses to follow, and nothing it truly singular and unique, transparent and isolable.

One figure of the errant learner is the windbag. On a set of bagpipes, the windbag is the skin that fills, holds, and expels the air that channels through the chanter reeds and drones to produce sound. As a pejorative subject, the windbag is someone through whom air passes to vocalize without meaningful content. This is similar to but distinct from the boaster (through whom “hot air” passes as they pump themselves up in front of others) and the actual bagpiper (whose agency determines the flow of air to achieve predetermined tones, pitches, cadences, and so on). The windbag, on the contrary, is a pneumatic envelope with openings that allow it to inflate and deflate. Yet this doesn’t intimate that the windbag is without meaning, intention, or politics: the content that passes through the windbag works to determine—in a non-determining manner—its form and substance. The windbag

grasps for air that, although it will pass before any absorption or assimilation takes place, will still give sustaining shape to it for a certain duration. As an errant learner, the wind-bag follows educational content, creating temporary enclosures in a pneumatic exodus of expanse.

References

- Britton, C.M. 2009. Globalization and political action in the work of Édouard Glissant. *Small Axe* 13(3): 1–11.
- Detloff, D., and M. Bernico. 2017. Atmoterrorism and atmodesign in the 21st century: Mediating Flint's water crisis. *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 13(1): 156–189.
- Ford, D.R., and T.E. Lewis. 2018. On the freedom to be opaque monsters: Communist pedagogy, aesthetics, and the sublime. *Cultural Politics* 14(1): 95–108.
- Ford, D.R., and W. Zhao. 2018. Toward an educational sphereology: Air, wind, and materialist pedagogy. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50(5): 528–537.
- Glissant, É. 1990/1997. *Poetics of relation*, trans. B. Wing. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Leupin, A. 2013. The slave's *jouissance*. *Callaloo* 36(4): 891–901.
- Nesbitt, N. 2013. Early Glissant: From the destitution of the political to Antillean ultra-leftism. *Callaloo* 36(4): 932–948.
- Murdoch, H.A. 2013. Édouard Glissant's creolized world vision: From resistance and relation to *opacité*. *Callaloo* 36(4): 875–889.
- Sloterdijk, P. 1998/2011. *Spheres I: Bubbles: Microsphereology* (trans. by W. Hoban). Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Sloterdijk, P. 1999/2014. *Spheres II: Globes: Macrosphereology* (trans. by W. Hoban). Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Sloterdijk, P. 2004/2016. *Spheres III: Foams: Plural sphereology* (trans. by W. Hoban). Los Angeles: Semiotext(w).
- Willinsky, J. 1998. *Learning to divide the world: Education at empire's end*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wing, B. 1997. Translators introduction. In *Poetics of relation*, ed. É. Glissant, xi–xx. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.