

Thinking the Revolution with Derek Ford: A Review Article

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This article is an extended Book Review of: Derek R. Ford *Teaching the Actuality of Revolution: Aesthetics, Unlearning, and the Sensations of Struggle* (Madison: Iskra Books, 2023), 158 pages, paperback. ISBN:13: 978-1-0880-7169-4

Talking about a revolution

In Britain, 2023, half of households experience a struggle to buy the ‘basics’, “desperate and drained”, a similar proportion daily experience the health impacts of the capital’s latest crisis (Chan et al, 2023). Overlooking the fact that what constitutes the basics in 2023 is very different from 1945, this is a position that has not pertained in my country in the postwar era, yet still none but the very, very few usual suspects are talking about, still fewer thinking the actuality of revolution. So wrapped up are we in the struggle for necessities that we have little consciousness of the underlying reasons for the cost of living crisis in parasitic capital and the polarisation of labour (Kennedy, 2022). So, let’s get serious. What will it take? And what part can be played, not directly by the material reality of shivering evenings, stress headaches, the stomach-churning glance at the on-screen bank balance – turning away and refusing to look – and all the other sharply felt pain and panic of the material reality of the conjuncture, but by the ideological, the educational, the equally material emergence of patterns of thought that rupture and burst the taut skeins of impossibility and ineffability? What part, moreover, can teaching play in pointing towards such eruptions of radical thinking, the shock of feeling the actuality of revolution?

Ford's work has an importance for those of us on the educational left, one shared by few other contemporary writers. That importance rests in part on two almost paradoxical features of Ford's (let's face it, prodigious) writing. First, its loyal adherence to communism, and the innovation of Ford's avowedly Marxist, communist scholarship on pedagogy. Second, the daring way he reads writers from within and at the margins of Marx's legacy alongside or against one another, and here I am thinking of writers who would usually be characterized as wildly at odds with one anotherⁱ. In doing so, Ford creates some very uneasy harmonics. In the spirit of Ford's own frequent musical analogiesⁱⁱ, I think of the dangerous and beautiful intervals of Bulgarian vocal harmony. Such is, for example the interplay of Althusser and LeFebvre in his latest book. When his chosen voices declaim together, creative cacophony follows – the devil's chord, indeed.

However, more significant still than these two features of his writing, Ford's importance lies in his positioning of an analysis of *pedagogy* – as opposed to say, policy, or history – at the centre of the Marxist study of education. In this, he is rare. *Teaching the Actuality of Revolution* wrestles with the pedagogical possibility of affecting communist revolution or, at least, in the more 'realistic' possibility of glimpsing now, in the current conjuncture, its potentiality through the processes of teaching. Put differently, in the concrete situation in which we find ourselves, how can the modalities of teaching become one of the material elements of the struggle towards the historic objective of superseding the system of capital? There is no need to remind the JCEPS readership how crushingly this question runs into the neoliberal educational policy objectives of the global ruling class, accelerating in the opposite direction.

I will offer a little commentary on some of the themes of *Teaching the Actuality of Revolution*, and go on to highlight what are, for me, two lacunae in this text –

mindful that this is a short work that sits within a large body of Ford's titles, some of which address these 'gaps'. This is a selective review. I largely leave the discussion of the sonic forms of unlearning – the pedagogy of listening for the unknown, Ford's chapter four – to others, and only touch on the rhythms of unlearning - arrhythmanalysis – that form the basis of the fifth chapter.

Derek Ford's materialist aesthetics of teaching

Why and how is this a book of aesthetics? The discipline may induce some nervousness on the part of the reader, but its justification is simple. We Marxists are materialists. If we are to be consistent in this regard, artificial divides between grand abstractions and the thrumming, aching, striving lives of the current conjuncture must be abolished. In this respect, the sensuous, perceptible realm is the terrain on which we struggle. We seek to transform the perceptual ecologies of capital because to do so is an intervention in the material conditions for its reproduction. In this regard, I agree with Ford on a question that may be contentious. There are those, like our late lamented comrade on the educational left, Terry Wrigley (2023) for whom new materialisms represent at best a distraction from our struggles, and a "theoretical disaster" (Wrigley, personal correspondence). Interestingly this position is shared by one of the finest Marxist writers in contemporary environmental struggles, Andreas Malm (2018, 2021). I'm not so sure. Like Ford, and Hood and Lewis (2021) on whom he draws, I find much of interest in this scholarship that is commensurate with conceptualisations of materiality within our tradition (Dietzgen, 1906)ⁱⁱⁱ. As it happens, unlike Malm, I also think it of use in formulating Marxist solutions to today's greatest material threat – the biodiversity and climate crisis.

"Marxist theory," says Ford, "is predicated on the unexpected twists and turns of the movement and develops as the class struggle reflects on itself, a reflection, in turn, that depends on our pedagogical tactics and educational

philosophies.” (Ford, 2023, p.11) In part, this is right. Pedagogics form part of a material continuum, the sinews of the movement stretching and stress-testing our tactical responses. At times these may require discipline, at others an experiential looseness, but always there is the material of perceptual, sensual reality in play. So, Ford needs first to make the distinction between the processes of *learning* – ubiquitous, processual, polyvalent and easily co-optable by capital – and *education*, especially *teaching*, which interrupts, orientates, comes from elsewhere. In respect of the flow of matter, teaching represents an Epicurean swerve – I am reminded of the preoccupations of the young Marx, in his doctoral thesis (Marx, 2006) – reflecting back further unexpected twists and turns which have the potential to redirect at least parts of the struggle. Away from one tactic, towards another. The sensuous character of the material movement of educational change makes all this, for Ford, rightly the subject of aesthetic concern.

Ford explains that what education (as opposed to learning) does is to sensuously and perceptibly (re)organise the experience of the gap between this brutal, wretched, flesh-roasting world and another. It helps us to *sense* the world differently, to physically feel the unnecessariness, the contingency of the conjuncture, *politicising the qualia*. Imagine that. Wonderment at it all, Ford rightly says, is not enough unless twinned with the *felt* possibility of radical change.

We know that revolutions occurred, we are surprised to learn that they *still* occur but, paraphrasing Jodi Dean (2017), they are other people’s, never our own revolutions. To know that we can be swept up in a revolution of our making, that is something that must be felt to be believed. The rearrangement of the perceptual ecology – could we call it a gestalt? – banishes the taught impression that revolutions only ever happened in the past and to other people.

The problem of sight is one that Lenin famously wrestled with (Lenin, 1908/1948). If his ‘mirror’ argument seems archaic it is not the fault of his attempting to stay true to materialist principles, but rather his understanding of what makes Marxist materialism dialectical. For Ford, “making the social relations that collectivize us visible isn’t a matter of pulling back the curtain but of transforming our practices of sight.” (Ford, 2023, p.33) Not a mirror then, but sight as an internal relation between elements of a moving whole, where the subject of revolution actively shapes the material reality as a part of a process of actualizing revolution. Perceiving – seeing and feeling the fragility of capital’s jerry-built, fetishistic edifices – makes the aesthetics of revolution central^{iv}. Creating that recalibration educationally is something else again. Is it really the case that, for Ford, “Education’s political capacity emanates from producing encounters of sensual experiences beyond those of capital” (Ford, 2023, p.37)? My view, and I return to this again shortly – is that, despite his interest in new materialisms, there is not enough in Ford’s book which we can smell, taste and feel, not enough thinking through the embodied and emplaced more-than-human ecologies, the web of life that we inhabit, and that capital animates (Moore, 2023). And I think the reason for this is that Ford’s aesthetics seem, strangely, largely locked into an academic, indoor pedagogy. If we don’t attempt a jail-break from the classroom, there is a risk that we won’t be able to shake off the numbing stultification of capital’s an-aesthetic.

Ford’s application of new materialism takes him to the pedagogics of ritual, but his examples remain situated within the context of schooling: learning to labour as a material process of interpellation and discipline, the kind of thing that illustrates the origins of biopolitics and the many ways in which Foucault owed a debt to his teacher, Althusser; and from there, the Althusserian philosophy of the encounter, which Ford has previously explored in another recent book (Ford, 2022). The teacher identifies – points to – the encounter’s presence, with

challenge and encouragement. The encounter with the actuality of revolution, for Ford, is not one requiring knowledge, but again, the material process of thought. So let us imagine then that we are all Marxist educators. We say, “we love this – this is ‘true’, contingent on the stage and conditions of the class struggle, the conjuncture”. But where and when do we see this opening towards revolution in our daily practice? Thinking now of our students, when do they encounter the actuality of revolution, outside that is the moments when we might point them towards, draw them to attend to the texts for Derek Ford, or Marx? Too rarely, too fleetingly. Because the academic version of this pedagogy still requires too often that the vehicles of pedagogy are textual rather than, for example, public, industrial or actively insurrectionary.

Unlearning

Through processes of masking and manipulation favourable to accumulation, the system of capital interpolates us in ways that stunt and limit some forms of perception. The masking of our capacity consciously to read each other through olfactory mechanisms to achieve menstrual synchrony would be an example that comes to mind (Knight, 1991). Whilst, on the other hand it has hypersensitised us to other, especially visual perceptual markers – minor modifications to fenders, hemlines, the precise shape of mobile phones, the phenotypical signifiers of ‘race’, etc., all register in ways that fleeting odours do not. In doing this, the perceptual ecologies of capital generates subjects who conform to a certain modelling of perception beneficial to its growth and perpetuation. This is to say that learning in its inductive mechanisms, as well as learner are produced by the system. For Ford, presumably, since we have few early opportunities to disrupt the perceptual ecologies that shape subjectification, this situation then calls for later *un*learning. Whilst it may indeed be very difficult to prevent some of the foundations of the perceptual regime being laid in the earliest years, I think this overlooks the potential for

Marxists to make at least some interventions before unlearning becomes necessary, though I acknowledge that early education has also largely been captured by capital (Boxley, 2016). Unlearning, then, forms the basis for the second chapter of *Teaching the Actuality of Revolution*.

Unlearning is a means of prising open the cracks that hairline the architecture of capitalism, the cracks “in everything, that’s where the light gets in” (Cohen, 1992). As such, unlearning confounds the “colonial” (Ford, 2023, p.60) logic of education-as-accumulation. This is the model that dominates from the nursery to the University. However, as Ford is careful to note, the approach of unlearning represents a tactic to be emphasised only at certain conjunctures. It would do no good, for example, for this anticolonial practice to be put to the service of interrupting the transmission of indigenous modes of knowledge that form invaluable threads that bind communities to wider ecologies^v, even as those systems are attenuated to the point of eradication by capitalocene heat-stress.

Arrhythmia

The operation of the circuits of capital can be formulated as rhythmic. The metaphor, which Ford draws largely from LeFebvre (2013), can be a useful one up to a point, and chimes rather well with Ford’s use of auditory analogies, to set up a pulse to accompany his many more or less discordant harmonies. The claim, and it is a bold one, is that “We can overcome capitalist abstraction and domination through the analysis of existing rhythms and the generation of new, lived ones.” (Ford, 2023, p.101) I will not offer a lengthy discussion here of the case. It is noted that cyclical repetitions prioritize use- over exchange-values, with the return of value to reproduce conditions of production and forms of life. If Ford wants to make this case, I think there is much more work to be done here on the ways in which, for instance, the global climate and biodiversity crisis forces a rethink of the place of labour and learning within cycles of material reproduction. In general, Ford worries that the move he and others

detect from the linear rhythms of production line capitalism to the more circuitous and creative ‘cyclical’ repetitions of the post-Fordist conjuncture will not alone be enough to sufficiently disrupt the pulse. There is anyway a presentiment of this in the third volume of *Capital* as Marx wrestles with the ‘failure’ of falling profit to precipitate *Capital*’s collapse, where he sees economic crises as “only one of the possible conjunctural resolutions of its recurring immanent contradictions” (Reuten and Thomes, 2011, p.83). I am also reminded of the extensive use that ecosocialists make of understandings of the ‘cyclical rhythms’ of so-called non-renewable resources: it is not so much that these are non-renewable in absolute terms, but that the cyclical rhythms of their renewal occur at a tempo that is inaudible to us and unfathomable by the human imagination (the slow carbon cycle for example), and more importantly, that capital’s rhythms not only override, but radically fracture such material cycles. So, we must be careful to avoid lauding ‘arrhythmia’ in the abstract, or to define too loosely cyclical rhythms, both of which Ford is sometimes prone to, whilst finding ways to explore the analogy to help understand the material reproductive role of, say, education in broader cyclical processes.

Leaving aside the arguable identification of the new rhythms of capital as ‘cyclical’, Ford is of course right that capital has increasingly found ways to reappropriate the new forms of less linear, immaterial production that have more recently come to the fore (Hardt, 2010). Nevertheless, I think there is a risk in this fifth chapter that Ford revisits some of his preoccupations in too rapid succession, synthesizing LeFebvre on rhythmanalysis with issues of urbanization, the questions of post-Fordism and shifts away from linearity and towards *Capital*’s maximalization of profit from polyrhythmic innovations. The danger here is that this text, whilst undoubtedly stimulating – sparkling even – carries a weight of ideas that will appeal only to dedicated readers of Ford’s

oeuvre. This would be a shame, as there is much of great interest and importance in the tumble of overlapping expressions.

Whilst it may be true that in the current “Post-Fordist” conjuncture, capital has found ways to reappropriate even the ‘cyclical rhythms’ of production that LeFebvre hoped would open ways beyond capital’s enclosure, turning non-linear patterns of novel, unexpected and entrepreneurial self-actualizing creation to profit – and perturbing its own logic of alienation – the connections with teaching become less clear here. Whilst Lefebvre himself named his rhythmanalysis a pedagogy – something that Ford relies upon to found his own analysis – a large part of the fifth chapter reads like Ford himself in the mode of *research* rather than *presentation*. When ideas follow, sometimes ambulatorily, sometimes hop-and-skip after one another, and ‘findings’ are, precisely in the spirit of LeFebvre’s *détournement*, deferred and defaulted upon, we enter the territory of “distraction” and “procrastination” (Ford, 2021b) that characterise Marx’s own exercises in research. This is an exploration of inner logics rather than an exposition as such, and this makes for sometimes hard reading. A stimulating ride, yes, but one which in attempting to stay true to its own logic of non-accumulation, non-appropriation, sees ideas slipping away in intertangling slithery streams like lampreys in a bucket.

Where I wish to rejoin the story is the point at which, for me, Ford begins feeling his way back towards *presentation*. Education, too has its rhythms, and Ford’s claim is that pedagogical approaches if deployed tactically may fracture those rhythms, breaking up time so decisively – Sunny Murray style – that capital can’t re-appropriate the experience. Not only is a space for unlearning, wonderment and freed listening so created, but so too is the subject themselves drawn into a process of disinterpellation. I imagine the student, rapt, draped across the horns of a conversation about the wage form that, as it grows, pulls apart what they thought they knew, what they thought they were. This “enduring

détournement” that refuses closure “suspends production” (Ford, 2023, p.112) creating, at least for a while, pure potentiality.

To this reader, this feels like the beginning of Ford’s moment of presentation: teaching announced as the arrhythmic puncture, holding open the caesura in the meter, whether linear or cyclical, for long enough that non-appropriative learning can take place. To extend Ford's metaphor, the air escapes from the logic of capital, and amidst the hissing, a sense, however scary of the world without its tyranny can be grasped before the hole is plugged. But, as I return to below, I wish I could see and feel this all more clearly, sense that potential in examples from Ford’s teaching, just as I have sometimes done in the most heightened moments of my own.

Cognitive mapping

The concluding chapter of the book opens with a section that barely feels conclusive, since further devices are introduced that will later serve to draw some of the others together, Fredrick Jameson’s ‘cognitive mapping’, married to Peter McLaren’s ‘cultural cartography’. “Cognitive mapping embraces our inability to locate ourselves within the totality and proposes to think the unthinkable: to map the totality.” (Ford, 2023, p. 122) From this starting point, the emphasis moves to the possibility of a sketch of cultural life in the gestures and rituals that represent the materialization of ideological conditions. Mapping this terrain offers the possibility of showing and critiquing the reality of this conjuncture, and the pedagogy of pointing towards such a possibility Ford calls “pointing to pointing”. In an attempt to avoid the privileging of the visual, we are to attend to all of the sensual realities of the realm of materialized ideology. In all of this, Ford is quite correct, though as I will go on to say, the openings offered by the new materialisms he earlier referenced are under-utilized here to situate our exercises in cognitive mapping within wider more-than-human

ecologies. We have hints at this possibility in the pedagogies of perceptual mapping. If we were to unlearn the perceptual ecologies capital imposed upon us, that is those sensory regimes which privilege the visual and emphasise some features of seeing over other, and instead were to construct and *feel* our own ‘alternative’ sensoria, we could sensually experience in the reality of now, the actuality of revolution.

Why pedagogy

Pedagogy works with what, in our tradition, we have usually called ideology. Pedagogy operates within and upon the perceptual and well as the cognitive schema we bear and the shapes of the material reality we experience.

Sometimes Ford’s text is quite rightly hallucinogenic. It melts, melds, bows and bends, blurs and twists the materiality of our experience of the world. Lenin’s mirrors become a fairground sideshow that reflect the comical, grotesque, convex contortions of capital’s materializations. Ideology, if we wish to call it that, shapes the experienced world. Its manipulation is uniquely powerful. So is its liberation. We think of the extraordinary efforts that the regime of Kim Jong Un goes to today to regulate the sensoria of its people through meticulously constructed pedagogies of working classization and collectivization, revolutionary ideological pedagogies (Kim, 2022a, 2022b), grounded in the Marshall’s grandfather’s writings on socialist pedagogy (Kim, 1979), a pedagogy that Ford himself identifies as absolutely central to building and maintaining the ideological foundations of communism (Ford and Mallott, 2022); and whether we like it or not, Ford is also correct in asking what lessons can be learnt for revolutionary pedagogy today from such ideological experiments in perceptual mapping. Like Ford and Mallott, Pateman notes Kim’s “regime’s conviction that ideology is the *decisive* force of socialist construction” (Pateman, 2023, p. 2) and its refusal to abandon “communist ideological education”, indeed its increased prioritisation today, given the return

of communist rhetoric (e.g., Kim 2021) . He concludes “North Korea is convinced that ideology is the driving force of socialism, and it may well be right.” (Pateman, 2023, p.15) Taking the definition of ideology that Ford borrows from Ponce de León and Rockhill as “a social process of habitual sense-making that norms perception, thought, and practice—among other things—by accustoming social agents to a shared sensorium” (Ponce de León & Rockhill, in Ford, 2023, p.29) , Ford’s pedagogical experiments contrast with Kim’s revolutionary ideological enforcement – which seal the crust against the slightest crack appearing – rather serving to hold its cracks open long enough for unlearning. Deep in those cracks bubbles the potential for an alternative ideology to erupt.

To draw this together, then, for Ford, the ability to act, including to make revolution must require not just knowledge of the coordinates within which we operate, but the generation of a new perceptual cartographies: “by teaching—or by *pointing* to—the gap between the knowledge and the object of perceptual maps the arrhythmic disruptions of alternative perceptual ecologies sound out, we form new political ideas and beliefs and construct new historically-determined ways of sensing.” (Ford, 2023, pp. 129-30)

The lacunae

I don’t know Derek Ford, but his biography reveals a communist’s commitment to organisation, activism and popular education (Rikowski and Ford, 2019).

This raises the question of lacunae in two areas. The first of these is the exemplar that illustrates the relation between the abstraction and the struggle.

The second is the place of learning and so the person of the teacher.

We know that Ford teaches towards the actuality of revolution and unlike some of his previous works, ‘teaching’ lies at the centre of this book: it represents a fizzling invocation of the pedagogies necessary to affect revolutionary thinking.

But what it so rarely offers are the illustrations of Ford's practice in the form of exemplars of this pedagogy. In other words, the abstractions rather rarely connect directly with the struggle because we are not treated to images of the pedagogy as instances of concrete material practice. Pedagogy *is* material – indeed, as we have seen, one of the great strengths of this book is in drawing that point.

I think there is something of a paradox in Ford's work. On the one hand, he is 'torn' on the role of the school, and by implication possibly tertiary education too, as a site for progressive resistance, a barricade against capital (Rikowski and Ford, 2019). On the other, when it comes to the material activity of teaching, the discussion in this book seems still to obliquely circle around the academy. Unlike some of his other work (Ford 2016), the Party barely features here as a place of teaching, still less non-Party public fora. So, we are left wondering, searching for emplaced instances of pedagogic classroom interaction rich in the sensuous detail that would reveal their magical, material character.

To take an example, there is a short passage in his latest book where Ford says of commodity fetishism, "when we exchange our wages for commodities, we're interacting with the international working class by participating in the social character of production," and this, he goes on to say, he has "never had a hard time explaining to anyone" (Ford, 2023, p.97). In explicating that when we purchase a good, we interact not with an individual but with the whole system of capital, Ford presents an anomalous instance of a concrete classroom-type interaction, and furthermore a 'teaching-point' on possibly the central material interaction within the social system of capital – the purchase. Here, for Ford, it is straightforward – it cannot be for an individual to produce the good, set the price, operate the business; the interaction of a purchaser is not with an

individual but with the living commodity, with the play of prices. This *points* to a complex relation with profit, in turn to a further complex relation with surplus value and wages, with exploited and alienated workers whose relationship with each other is a shadow of the dynamic relationships between the living commodities, etc. Ford's example tells us something about what students need to 'know'. Unlearning and arrhythmanalysis exist as strategic manoeuvres, to be selected for maximum impact only when appropriate: there is no blanket ban on knowledge accumulation for Ford. So, his commodity fetishism example of learning and teaching is instructive. Appropriating this knowledge under the right circumstances, he imagines, is an example of Marx's reader, Ford's student acquiring the capacity for "listening" to the invisible relations that govern society, "listening" for the operation of capital within the ordinary. The auditory analogy may seem a little stretched, but it finds a way of escaping the old 'big reveal' version of Marxism. Nothing invisible is 'revealed' lurking behind the transaction. Rather, it's all there on the (synaesthetic) auditory surface, if we just listen for what we don't know. There is, in this concrete instance, a little insight, if we wish to find it, into the practice of teaching the actuality of revolution. This is what I want more of.

It must be that some of Ford's students, comrades and compañeras have come to share in thinking the actuality of revolution – some are even now publishing with Ford. I want to be a fly on Ford's wall, to see, sense, listen for how the interactions that lead to this point play out. Given that institutions from early years to tertiary education are, at least in Europe and North America, so very largely in thrall to the imperatives of labour-power production, and in essence captives of capital, it seems important to require at least a *sense* of the instances of pedagogical alternatives cracking open such unyielding and arid territory, instances such as commodity fetishism that Ford "never had a hard time explaining" and which may just point towards the actuality of revolution.

Ford speaks at one point of the practice of Althusser's teaching, his "silence" (Ford, 2023 p.90), allowing students to construct meanings; his listening to their silences, teaching his students to listen similarly. Elsewhere, he writes of Freire's pedagogy (Ford, 2023, p.49), criticising the directive nature of dialogue and decoding towards an intended meaning. What of Ford's own? How is it that he gets from commodity fetishism to students' thinking the actuality of revolution? Does this, can this happen within a class? Or in a party cell meeting? Or on the picket? Which takes me to my second absence.

The second gap, I have alluded to earlier, Ford's 'indoor pedagogy'. For me, reading Ford, it is as if the aesthetics of detournement, unlearning, disinterpellation arise solely within the seminar room. This surely cannot be what he envisages, so it may be an oversight that in this book he makes so few references to the sites of education. If "the revolutionary teacher does not merely arrange for encounters: they arrange for encounters that might advance the class struggle" (Ford, 2023, pp. 79-80), then the aleatory possibilities are thrown far wider open, and the chances of that crucial encounter greatly enhanced if the pedagogy is taken to the sites of the most heightened struggle. The university or schoolteacher may not be best placed to facilitate such encounters, which begs the question, who is the teacher of the student of the protest camp, the occupation, or the picket line? Teachers of the actuality of revolution, as Ford well knows, may be organisers or partisans like himself, but they may just as well also be an 'encounter' among the jostling crowds, a speaker at a teach-out or a worker in dispute on the line (Boxley, 2022b). If we can think in these terms of the teacher in *Teaching the Actuality of Revolution*, a wider vista appears. But it's one I think Ford barely touches upon.

There are a couple of instances where Ford hints at this horizon. On the penultimate page of the book, Ford encapsulates perfectly our aim as Marxist

educators, “to effect a perceptual shift in ourselves and others such that we emerge from the text or protest, classroom or rally, as subjects with different relations to the capitalist totality and the communist struggle.” (Ford, 2023, p.130) Collective actions are indeed perceptual educational experiences, or at least they can be. But these challenge the notion of ‘teacher’ and ‘teaching’ in unlearning and disinterpellation, whilst somehow holding open the process of education. Importantly too this is achieved collectively, for example through debate, dialogue, radical democratic process, and mass sensory immersion, in contrast with the individualised and accumulative ‘learning’ that characterises capitalist schooling. I want to give more thought to this, especially in light of Ford’s insights in this book, for it would be beneficial to all of us who often find ourselves on the picket line, rally or protest to rethink how these – sometimes mundane, sometimes uplifting – experiences might better play their part in the processes of perceptual (re)mapping, listening for the unknown and arhythmanalysis. Sometimes, just occasionally, it feels that revolution is a reality, not quite within our grasp of course, not yet, but cloudily present in its actuality. As such, it is as if collective action can hotwire the overlabouring of academic brainwork, eliciting a sensual shuffle in perspectives, such that the city backdrop is loosened of its ties to commerce, its steady throng and hum phasing and reforming into the cries of solidarity and socialised production, an aesthetics of the communism to come.

Perhaps more difficult to achieve, I would also like to think about how the experience of the more-than-human-as-teacher also offers the possibility of perceptual and ideological shifts of these kinds. Here again, I agree with Ford that thinking seriously about our materialism, and learning from recent developments in this field might help. But I would want to go further in working through some of the processes that Ford proposes in this book to

enable interactions with agencies beyond the human to become the material means to thinking the actuality of revolution. But that's for another article.

Conclusion

Do students or teachers need to understand the theory in this book in order to be able to think the actuality of revolution? Plainly no, not at all, for if they did, revolution would never be made. What then are the abstractions in this book doing? Who are they organising and how? I don't mean these questions flippantly. This book, like some of Ford's others has a real significance to all of our practices. In preparing course materials in recent days, I have subjected them to scrutiny, asking myself how and when they might elicit pedagogical interventions towards unlearning and disinterpellation, and when they might close off that possibility. This book does indeed make educators like myself think again about our pedagogy. No doubt. And in doing so I think it genuinely hints at the possible ways in which we might point towards thinking the actuality of revolution. Whilst I think there are, perhaps inevitable limitations in the sometimes slippery formulation of the research and presentation, I hope this book is read widely and that its readers take the time to knit together its multiple elements into a fabric, the experience of which serves them well in the struggle.

EndNotes

ⁱ Ford is as comfortable harmonising with Kim Il Sung (Ford and Mallott, 2022) as he is with Lyotard (Ford, 2021a).

ⁱⁱ Ford dedicates a large part of Chapter five to the use and function of music within the neoliberal phase of capitalism - I will resist the temptation in this article to enter into discussion of this, albeit fascinating question.

ⁱⁱⁱ And this is the position I have adopted under the term Red Biocentrism (Boxley, 2019)

^{iv} Lenin may seem archaic on this point, but we can look further back within the tradition for contrasting accounts of perceptual ecologies, in the work of Dietzgen (2010)

^v Ford's point here echoes the longstanding debate between critical pedagogy and advocates of eco-justice pedagogy, substituting 'unlearning' for 'ecopedagogy'.

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