

# REVIEW SYMPOSIUM

## Studying *On Study* With a reply by Tyson Lewis

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### Abstract

This article features three engagements with Tyson Lewis’s insightful book on studying, with a reply by the author.

### Keywords

Studying, Giorgio Agamben, activism, learning society, biocapitalism

## On Study: Giorgio Agamben and educational potentiality

Tyson E Lewis, London and New York: Routledge

### David Backer

Good philosophy of education may sometimes leave a reader asking: ‘What now?’ This is not a hackneyed call for practicality but rather a desire to be true to an idea or experience. Badiou (2009) asks that we have fidelity to inspiring events, philosophical epiphanies

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included. Good philosophy of education will inspire such an epiphany, but the reader may still ask ‘how do I stay true to it?’ Rather than critique Tyson Lewis’s *On Study*, this commentary will elaborate one way to stay true to Lewis’s claims about studying with friends.

First I summarize the arguments in Lewis’s seventh chapter, focusing on the predicateless quality of an inoperative community. Second, pivoting on the idea of infancy, I claim that dehiscence (a concept found in Lacan’s early thinking on the mirror stage) is adequate for the predicatelessness Lewis recommends. Third, looking to Freud, I claim that group formation—a prolongation of dehiscence during inter-psychical behavior—is adequate for Lewis’s predicateless community. Finally, I recommend a facilitation tactic which may increase the likelihood of that prolonged dehiscence adequate for creating a predicateless community where friends study together: waiting to speak.

### *Predicatelessness: the inoperative community*

For Lewis (commenting on Agamben commenting on Aristotle), friends share sharing itself (Lewis, 2013: 137). To share sharing is to suspend predicates that distinguish particular qualities. A ‘friend is not someone (or something, for that matter) that has a certain set of defined predicates seen as ‘valued’ qualities. . .’ (Lewis, 2013: 137). A predicate in this case is a signifier definite on an individual such that this individual is individuated by the signifier. In Quine’s (1948) formulation, being is being in the range of a variable bound by some predicate (with a quantifier). There is an X that is P, for example, where ‘. . . is P’ is the predicate. Friendship, says Lewis on Agamben, is a relation between persons without such binding signifiers.

A community of friends therefore shares ‘an im-potentiality rather than actuality (of this or that set of clearly defined predicates)’ (Lewis, 2013). Such a predicateless formation is ‘beyond any distinction between belonging and not-belonging’ (Lewis, 2013). The community of friends is therefore a community where people are ‘whatever’ with one another (extending Quine, perhaps whatever being is not being within the range of a bound variable but rather permitting variability itself to be unbound, unquantified). This ‘inoperative community’ of predicatelessness is a ‘state between subjectification and desubjectification that opens [each participant] up to a capacity to be and not to be’ (Lewis, 2013: 138).

Lewis illustrates these claims in four ways. I will mention two of them. First is prosopagnosia, or the psychological phenomenon of face-blindness (Lewis, 2013: 140). The inoperative community, without predicates, will be similar to a group of persons in an ‘indeterminate and fully generic, un-recognizable configuration’ which privileges ‘the im-potentiality of the human to be this and that (to be rather than what it has been)’ (Lewis, 2013: 140). Failing to individuate particular superficialities, the inoperative community, like the face-blind Oliver Sacks, appreciates the beauty of faces in general. We see the theme of predicatelessness in prosopagnosia because it is a psychological condition where no predicates bind the individual, yet one experiences the person nonetheless.

Lewis’s second illustration is Agamben’s conception of infancy:

infancy is the moment before the speaking subject speaks (‘not yet’) but after he or she has some sort of linguistic capability (‘no longer’). Infancy is therefore both a potentiality (to speak) and an im-potentiality (not to speak)—a privation that is not simply a lack but as a positive having of

that which is absent... infancy 'interrupts language precisely at the moment when it is actualizing itself.' (Lewis, 2013: 144)

Infancy interrupts the binding predicates that might range over a baby, which, like prosopagnosia, speaks to the theme of predicatelessness. After these two illustrations of predicatelessness Lewis then applies these concepts to dialog and discussion, citing the transcribed dialog *Towards a New Manifesto* between Adorno and Horkheimer as an example of friends studying together (Lewis, 2013: 146).

If one's group of friends happens not to include Adorno and Horkheimer, or if one's friends are neither face-blind nor (literally) infants, what might one do to become predicateless with others? I will claim that the Lacanian concept of dehiscence is adequate for understanding what exactly the inoperative community entails with respect to subjectivity and, with Freud's mass formation, working to create such a community.

### *What is dehiscence?*

The word dehiscence has two senses. The first is anatomical. As opposed to an evisceration where innards fall out of the body through an opening, a dehiscence is the opening itself. The innards do not fall out but rather are visible in a dehiscence. The botanical sense is similar. It refers to a phase of a fruit's development where the fruit is ripe enough to split open, exposing its seeds. The dehiscence in each case is an opening which exposes what is within. The concept plays on dichotomies of inside/outside and, in the case of the fruit, old and new (as well as noun/verb). When Lacan utters the word in his early work on the psyche's mirror stage (the 1948 essay (2006) and his second seminar from 1954) he means to evoke this playfulness, for dehiscence is an opening of the psyche.

Three phrases from the early essay on the mirror stage substantiate dehiscence. Lacan writes that there is a 'primal Discord at the heart of the organism,' an 'organic inadequacy,' that may be described as a 'prematurity of birth' (Lacan, 2006: 78). The 'Discord' for Lacan is between what the psyche understands itself to be and what it actually is, the latter always inadequate to the former (just as one's mirror image is never fully representative of oneself). The mirror stage is therefore a moment of premature birth: if one were maturely born, one's understanding of oneself could be adequate to what one is.

In such a moment, to which the psyche will perpetually return (we never grow out of the mirror stage, but rather over it or around it) every unity perceived in the *umwelt* dissolves. In dehiscence, either the object of attention becomes negated (what we understood as a table or democracy is no longer what it is) or we ourselves become alienated (we are no longer what we thought we were: labor for instance, or a student). Dehiscence is therefore the phasic antithesis of the colloquial tautology 'it is what it is.' Or, as Lacan phrases it, dehiscence is a process and result of the psyche's encounter with the ecstatic limit of the 'thou art that' (Lacan, 2006: 81). Building on Fink's (1995) formulation of Lacanian alienation, dehiscence may be thought of as the conditions for alienation rather than alienation itself.

What composes such a 'thou art that?' What exactly deactivates in dehiscence? Following Lacan from his early work on the imaginary to the later considerations of the symbolic order, it is the set of predicates, a subset of the psyche's total set of signifiers, which deactivate in dehiscence. Dehiscence is therefore a predicateless state of the psyche. While the concept of dehiscence may be adequate for a general theory of what's required in subjectivity for study, a special theory of group formation is required for study with friends.

### Group vs. mass

The psyche desires to understand itself. It fills its primal Discord with images, shot through with signifiers, introjecting the new elements into its fabric. Such signifiers, uniquely and idiosyncratically delimiting for each psyche that which is permitted and possible, are 'extant' in the sense that they are in place before some interaction where friends might study together. But things change when psyches get together in particular formations. One such formation is a mass. For Freud (1949), a mass forms when a series of psyches introject one and the same object, replacing their idiosyncratic and extant signifiers with a new uniform set. In the case of an army, for instance, all soldiers introject the demands of the general. Thus whatever signifiers each psyche may have (de)formed over time are deactivated and replaced by a new singular object (See Chiesa, 2007: 17). There is a moment during this process of mass formation, which Freud calls partial hypnosis, wherein each psyche, in a rapport (transference) with the leader or leading idea, deactivates its extant prohibitions. The deactivating moment is *direkt unheimlich*: positively uncanny. In that moment the extant signifiers 'go to sleep,' lifting (*aufhebung*) at the outset of mass formation. Therefore, just before the introjection of the new signifiers, there is a dehiscence; though the dehiscence ends quickly when the leader replaces the extant signifiers with the new set.

Another formation is possible, however. A leader or facilitator can discourage psyches from introjecting the new set of signifiers, and instead encourage them to introject many set of signifiers, or no set of signifiers in particular (as Agamben would write it: whatever). Group formation, rather than mass formation, occurs when psyches do not introject one and the same set of signifiers but rather many, or none in particular. Thus the predicateless dehiscence prolongs. Since hypnosis occurs through eye contact and aural contact or voice, to facilitate group formation, the facilitator (and any other participant) must not become the singular focal point of attention during the verbal form of interaction. As James T. Dillon (1990) claims, discussion must have an equality and variety in the sequence of turns taken during interaction.

### Waiting for dehiscence: studying with friends

For teachers, facilitators, and active participants in discussion it can be difficult to resist the temptation to speak at length and follow up other participants' comments. However, the inoperative community hangs in the balance: so long as no one participant of the interaction is the constant focal point of attention, all participants have the opportunity to prolong dehiscence together and linger in a predicateless inter-subjectivity. If the facilitator, teacher, or talkative person waits, there is a greater likelihood that many other voices and objects will be introjected rather than just one, and thus a greater likelihood that the extant sets of signifiers local to each participant psyche will deactivate, suspend, and remain in that state as talking proceeds. The next time the reader is leading or participating in a classroom discussion (or reading group, dinner party, or any sort of discussion), try waiting until every other participant has spoken before speaking again. With a greater likelihood of predicatelessness, the participants, as friends, can study together.

### Florelle D'Hoest

It seems that learning has become the educational practice *par excellence* of our lives: this is the so-called 'learning society.' Some scholars are taking a critical stand towards this

'learning apparatus:' they argue that it serves the mainstream logic of capitalism, which is the logic that currently rules our lives (Biesta, 2006; Masschelein and Simons, 2008). 'Biocapitalism' has taken over education, narrowing it down to learning: we are expected to be eternal learners, permanently updated workers tuned into the changing laws of the market. Tyson Lewis is one of these critical scholars; according to him, there are alternative educational practices that keep away from the logic of the market, and are threatened by the learning empire. In his new book *On Study*, Lewis has the remarkable merit of bringing a forgotten educational phenomenon back to life: study. At the core of his essay is the concept of 'potentiality'; drawing mainly on Giorgio Agamben's account, Lewis explores 'the implicit potentiality of studying as a radical alternative to the educational logic of biocapitalism' (Lewis, 2013: 15).

Yet potentiality is a key concept of the mainstream educational logic as well, although the difference with Agamben's account is huge. According to Lewis, 'potentiality is what must be actualized over and over again through the learning of skills' (Lewis, 2013: 5). The changing laws of the market set the frantic pace of actualization of the learners: 'they become a generic potentiality subjected to relentless actualization according to the necessities of market control and institutional capture' (p. 9). But, as we know from Aristotle, potentiality is not motion (yet), is not change (yet); whereas actuality *is* change or motion, potentiality is (merely) the *principle* of change. On this point, such an educational practice as study 'releases potentiality from its submission to future actualization/determination' (p. 114), therefore it interrupts the logic of learning. This interruption is a gesture of freedom *per se* (as Jacques Rancière (1998, 2006) would word it, a political gesture): by suspending his actualization, the studier refuses to serve the mainstream logic of biocapitalism. Indeed, while we are immersed in study, we are in no hurry to choose: we hold a bunch of possibilities together, without realizing any of them. Study is an alternative to the logic of learning, which usually expects us to master certain content, to become a doctor or a carpenter, a teacher or a student, 'this *or that*' option.

What I especially appreciate in *On Study* is this claim for a space and time of freedom, in which we can suspend the ordered set of determinations established by the logic of learning. It is only by stopping or by taking (or wasting) some time that someone might consider (and maybe end up taking) alternative pathways that were not made for her. (In my opinion, this is when Lewis's political gesture of freedom becomes educational, thanks to what he calls 'studious play.')

While I mostly agree with Lewis's apology of study, I do not share his critique of learning. In my opinion, what we should complain about and denounce is not that education in our biocapitalist era has been narrowed down to learning skills, but that the mainstream logic of capitalism exploits the concept of learning in order to rule our society. Being called to any kind of job, at any time, in order to serve our changing economy is questionable; but who would ever put down the necessity of learning all life long (even if the reason behind is to adapt our skills to the ever-changing market)? This stratagem renders certain educational features of the experience of learning invisible.

Although learning has 'its concrete cartographic inscription in the grammar of the schoolhouse' (Lewis, 2013: 95), we know that learning is neither the only object nor the property of school. Many scholars, Ivan Illich probably being the most renowned among them (Masschelein and Simons, 2013: 9), have even shown that our modern educational institutions are not the best place to learn. Learning occurs all the time, in and outside school, and is therefore not essentially related to its current wording in terms of work skills, which Lewis and other scholars timely denounce. Indeed, I will argue that learning

is closer to study than Lewis claims. In the following, drawing on the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, I will outline three features that suggest an alternative account of learning: unlearning, wasting time, and stupidity.

According to Lewis, study deals with signatures. Whereas ‘The signature is [...] not a demand for this or that type of action, conclusion, or knowledge but rather a demand to explore the freedom of this obscurity, which has no destiny of its own’ (Lewis, 2013: 93), learning ‘teaches the proper use and meaning of signs and things’ (p. 75). Drawing on Marcel Proust, Deleuze wrote: ‘Learning is essentially concerned with *signs*’ (2000: 4). But, contrary to what we might think, these signs do not immediately trigger any action or lead to any conclusion. Instead, the signs rarely lead us to what we expected to discover. That is why apprenticeship—a word used by Deleuze’s translators alongside ‘learning’, meaning ‘*apprentissage*’—involves moments of profound disappointment. Thus, learning usually begins by *unlearning*: indeed, learning always produces ‘images of death’ (Deleuze, 1994: 23), since it consists in ‘composing the singular points of one’s own body or one’s own language with those of another shape or element, which tear us apart’ (p. 196). Consequently, rather than pushing us into action or into conclusion, the signs that are to be deciphered first submerge the learner into obscurity, even threatening her with death.

Beyond the conceptual differences—should there be any—between signs and signatures, Lewis–Agamben and Deleuze–Proust share the same gesture: not to ‘collect signs and things in order to reproduce them’ but rather to ‘collect signatures in order to get lost, wander’ (Lewis, 2013: 94). Thus ‘signs are the object of a temporal apprenticeship, not of an abstract knowledge’ (Deleuze, 2000: 4). Once the first moment of disappointment passes through, a long, very long journey comes. . . . For we learn ‘by the intermediary of signs, by wasting time, and not by the assimilation of objective content’ (p.22). Since learning always entails unlearning what we already know, and renouncing what we had expected to encounter; since apprenticeship is always a waste of time (not because this or that skill takes long time to be learned, but because we get lost, for we ignore where the sign will finally lead us to) we necessarily look stupid while we learn. However, this stupidity is not bad *per se*; stupidity is indeed a ‘good sign’, for it is the very condition for apprenticeship. As Lewis quotes: ‘Stupidity (not error) constitutes the greatest weakness of thought, but also the source of its highest power in that which forces it to think’ (Lewis, 2013: 131; Deleuze, 1994: 275). We are forced to think, forced to learn, by cruel signs that call upon us, promising a satisfactory end—knowledge, skill. . .—that seems to never come. This is a daunting price to pay: unlearning what we have learned, wasting time, being stupid. . . . In the end, learning may be actually closer to potentiality and study than Lewis argues in his book.

One last remark about study and actualization. According to Lewis, potentiality is study’s ‘natural environment’ or condition; however, given that potentiality always tends to actualization, so does study: ‘Studious play is the moment when melancholy becomes inspiration, when undergoing becomes undertaking, when the old is opened up again to the possibility of the new’ (Lewis, 2013: 120). Although the studier desires to remain in potentiality, he is dragged further around: ‘Studying suspends ends yet does not retreat into pure potentiality. [...] As such, studying holds within it both the pleasure of undertaking (a new project) and the interminable pain of undergoing (an indefinite process)’ (p. 147). Yet the author, who ends *On Study* writing that ‘To end a book with a small if not impotent constellation of six remnants is to end without conclusions, proclamations or even declarations’ (p.175) has *produced* a book, in which he has drawn



at least one *conclusion: to study is not to learn*. Let's say that this conclusion is the actualization of Lewis's study (it is what Lewis has learned through his study on study!). However, Lewis writes that this is not a destination, but 'a threshold that returns us all back to the labyrinth for more tinkering.' From this standpoint, I guess that my text is a—stupid—attempt of re-potentializing Lewis's signs or signatures. But then, if it is true that 'We tinker with thought when we dialogue with friends' (p.145), I can say in turn that it is by tinkering with Lewis's line of thought that I have become his friend.

## Derek R Ford

The theory of study that Lewis develops throughout his newest book takes aim at biocapitalism and its educational logic: the logic of learning. The act of studying is to be embraced because it resists the push toward actualization that defines the learning society and its attendant techniques and technologies. Instead of being located on the teleological trajectory from 'I cannot to I can', the studier dwells within the tautological state of im-potentiality, the state of the 'I can, I cannot.' This opens up new pathways for being and thinking. As he puts it in one formulation,

Studying suspends ends yet does not retreat into pure potentiality. It is the ambiguous state of recessive sway that holds within itself this or that without choosing either. As such, studying holds within it both the pleasure of undertaking (a new project) and the interminable pain of undergoing (an indefinite process). (Lewis, 2013: 147)

While Lewis develops this theory in rich and compelling ways throughout the book, there remains a certain kind of abstraction. It is not abstract in the sense that it is 'too theoretical' or 'inaccessible.' Indeed, one of the strengths of the book is the way that it makes accessible, lively, and relatable the dense, and often difficult writings of Agamben. I am referring instead to an *insufficient* abstraction. What I mean is this: the *figure* of the studier, the one who studies, is abstracted at a level of generality that does not correspond adequately to the current configurations of biocapitalism. Thus, I am led to wonder what an actually existing studier might look like. Can any body or mind study?

'The studier,' Lewis writes,

stands before a world where fragments open new paths, yet these paths are immediately left idle as further paths open. In other words, no path, codex, or encounter shines forth as any more meaningful or significant than any other. Because the grip of meaningful solicitations have waned, the studier is freed to wander, achieving a kind of maximal flexibility to explore whatever remains in the wake of nihilistic world collapse... When all ontological differences disappear, all that is left is a potentiality without a project or focal practice. (p. 35)

One of these scenes of study is the library and collection of Aby Warburg, a wealthy German art and cultural theorist who arranged and rearranged his library according to his own shifting research interests. Upon his death, the library remained cataloged the way that Warburg left it. If the collection had been rearranged according to a standardized bibliographic system, the signatures would have been normalized and captured in the name of pre-established signifier-signified relations. My question is this: As we wander through the labyrinth of the library, do we all have the privilege of being freed from ontological differences? I want to examine this question in relation to some of studying's conditions.

First, the racial conditions of study: George Yancy recently came to my university and, in his brown bag talk, commented on how, as a Black professor, the movement of his hand toward a book of modern philosophy is often a strange occasion. He gave the example of Kant. Here is a mighty philosopher, he said, who thought of Black people as incapable of true education, as ‘trifling’, as without ‘any mental capacities to be self-motivated and successful.’ This fact literally *disrupts* the movement of his hand toward the book, a disruption that is not present when my hand does the same. I wonder: can professor Yancy study in the same way as me? Now, it may be the case that, as Lewis says, professor Yancy is then able to pursue and study this contradiction. In this sense, then, yes, professor Yancy can study in the same way as me. But our experiences studying will be radically different because the weight of history and the present bears down on us differently. We study in a racist world and, as philosophers, we study from and in a discipline with a history—and a present—of racism. It may be easier for some to be freed from the pre-established signifier-signified relations than others.

Second, the air conditions of study: The ontological fact of identity, while complex and constantly changing, will permeate and structure the space and act of study. It is, quite literally, in the air. Consider the modern ventilation systems that heat and cool, humidify and dehumidify, direct, filter, and purify the air. The foundational elements of these systems were developed in elite US universities during the 1920s and 1930s by upper-class white men. Michelle Murphy (2006) writes about these research studies into the ‘comfort zone’ by members of the American Society for Heating and Ventilation Engineers. White men (in boxers) were placed in boxes, and air—with a certain temperature, humidity, and flow—was pumped in. The comfort zone was generated through the comparison of inputs and outputs: ‘The artificial climate made within the environmental chamber was the input. The output was comfortable and productive labor as indicated by such physiological measurements as those of pulse, weight loss, “metabolism” (exhaled breath), and body temperature’ (p. 25). These measurements then became generalized and inscribed in a whole host of technologies upon which our contemporary built-environment depends and, through this, white, male, upper-class norms of comfort were universalized. Moreover, as these identity-laden notions of comfort are generated in some spaces, air elsewhere becomes heated and polluted. This common air, then, becomes highly striated and struggled over, structuring spaces of study in radically unjust and unequal ways.

The point that I want to make in relation to Lewis’s book is this: there are a host of social and material elements and processes—a political economy—that structure (and, in some ways, determine) one’s ability to study at a given moment and in a given space. The point of this is not to negate in any way the theory of study, or even to ‘complicate’ it; the point is rather to begin to deepen the exploration of the dimensions of studying, bringing them to an appropriate level of abstraction. This is a critique that has been leveled against Agamben previously. Catherine Mills (2008), for example, ends her book on Agamben by stating that his work ‘begs the question of what significance race, gender, sexuality, class, and other determinants of political subjectivity and power have within the context of global biopolitics’ (pp. 135–136). I believe that this critique must be constantly attended to as we dwell within the educational im-potentiality of Agamben.

Finally, the political conditions of study: I had the pleasure of reviewing this book for *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, and I ended that review by questioning Lewis’s embracement of Bartleby, writing that



Bartleby, ‘preferring not’ to eat, eventually starved to death in a prison in lower Manhattan. And in a world where millions of children starve to death each year not because they “prefer not” to eat but because they have no access to food, I hesitate to embrace Bartleby as radically as *On study* does. (Ford, 2014: 111)

And, in his thoughtful response, Lewis replied:

Although Ford’s observation is a pointed provocation, it is nothing more than a provocation because the two cases are completely unrelated. The starving child finds himself in a condition of radical impotentiality divorced from any potentiality to eat whereas Bartleby is in a condition of radical im-potentiality (he can and cannot eat simultaneously). The difference here would be between starving from simple lack of food versus going on a hunger strike. (Lewis, 2014: 115)

Yes, it is absolutely true that the two cases are different, and Lewis makes this clear. While they are different, however, they are *not* unrelated. Seen within the actually existing context of global biocapitalism, there are complex interactions of a whole host of mechanisms of international politics such as tariffs, border policies, bank loans, fertilizer technologies, labor unions and class relations, supply chains and cold chains, state legislations, military interventions, and so on that make it so that particular groups find themselves ‘in a condition of radical impotentiality divorced from any potentiality to eat’ while others find themselves ‘in a condition of radical im-potentiality,’ where they can and cannot eat. In actually existing biocapitalism, studying has its conditions, and I have briefly touched on some of its spatial, racial, and air conditions. One way in which to keep these conditions in mind is to hold studying in tension with recent work in critical pedagogy that has sought to foreground global political economy (e.g. McLaren, 2005). In this way, we can work to ensure that studying is not a privilege afforded only to a select few, but can become a common condition of the global multitude.

## Samuel D Rocha

Brevity may be the soul of wit, but it also can be the root of oversimplification. In this short review, then, I would like to limit my remarks to a series of repetitions, orbiting similar themes and ideas.

The first thing that cannot be overlooked is the sheer ambition of this book, most evident in the fact that it seems to be a study of study. This also reveals one of the key challenges facing the sort of thing that Tyson Lewis intends to describe when he invokes the operative term, ‘study.’ Consider the following senses of ‘study’: to study *x* (To study a rock); a study of *x* (A study of a person’s oeuvre); to study for *x* (To study for an exam); to study as a general expression for examination, perception, or thinking (To study a situation); study as a field or discipline (Cultural studies). These examples ought to show that a study of study is not a clear way to understand this book, or any other, without a more careful understanding of what, exactly, is being treated. A notion or theory of study, then, can only be achieved after the term itself has been operationalized and used consistently. While I would not say that Lewis is inconsistent, I would say that the way the term is used across the book seems to assume that ‘study’ as a term is far less complex than it really is in ordinary language and this, in my view, reveals something important about the sort of study that Lewis is elucidating.

The terminological issue also opens a further question about what this book is trying to study (in the sense of studying something like a rock). I think it is clear in the performance of the prose and scholarship that this is not a study of other studies of study; nor is it a study of a notion of study. Instead, we see what I would call a reading of 'study' through the lens of Agamben's political theory. There seem to be two possibilities here. On the one hand, there is an *ontological* sense of study as a world or a horizon of sorts; in this version, study is something like an ontological condition or mode of being that can be understood phenomenologically. On the other hand, there is a *genealogical* sense of study in relation to the constitution of the modern subject; in this version, study is something that depends on a particular, genealogical understanding. In both cases im-potentiality is key. Lewis offers significant insights in each of these senses, but the inability to account for their differences is a categorical weakness that also raises the difficulty of trying to combine ontological and genealogical methods of analysis into a single philosophical thread.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book is unrelated to a precise notion of study. Lewis joins a growing number of contemporary philosophers of education in critiquing 'learning.' In fact, Lewis seems most clear in his understanding of the problems of learning when he juxtaposes it from a richer sense of im-potentiality, which becomes the *sine qua non* of his book. His reading of learning as a biotechnical resource invites, and perhaps even demands, his own theory of study as play, that avoids the 'untapped potential' theories of learning.

Another significant aspect of Tyson's treatment of im-potential is the apophatic approach, read through the denials given by Bartleby in Melville's short story, *Bartleby the Scrivener*. Here a cartoon might help show what Lewis is able to bring much-needed attention to.

There is a crucial scene in the animated film *Kung Fu Panda*, when the master finally breaks through in the training of the protagonist, the underperforming panda. Rather than rely on the rigor of traditional exercises, the master opts for a rather behavioristic use of food as an internal motivator. In the final stage of this initiation the panda shows his mastery by fighting for and winning a dumpling and then, triumphantly, choosing to *not* eat it. He wins the prize from his master by fighting, but by tossing it back to him, he reveals that he has truly won and become a Kung Fu master.

What is interesting about this scene (and film in general) is how well it fits Lewis's argument: that study (unlike the 'logic of learning') is not about self-actualization in the sense of production or outcomes. This is not about the 'amen': giving affirmation and providing metaphysical reasons and evidentialist arguments to support it. Nor is this a complete reversal, verging on nihilism. Instead, Lewis offers a productive reading of Melville's Bartleby, who gives the apophatic reply 'I prefer not to.' This reply is precisely what I read in common with *Kung Fu Panda* and Lewis's theory of study, which is to me more closely related to an apophatic theory of *unlearning*, leading towards a particular notion of the self, which I hope he will take up in another book-length exploration.

Here it is important to note that Lewis's reading of Bartleby is augmented, much later in the book, by his thoughts on Occupy Wall Street (OWS), as an example that the political implications of this apophatic theory of potential are not detached or apolitical. Here he moves from 'I prefer' to 'We prefer.' Bartleby is not lost; rather, he becomes 'the first to occupy Wall Street.'

I would argue that OWS, as a political movement, lacked the negative and productive denial of Lewis's description of Bartleby as a student or studier. A better, but less

fashionable, example would be the *'huelga,'* the strike of the workers movement conceived in the political theology of Cesar Chavez. The difference is between an occupation and a walk out. The gathering of *obreros* and *campesinos* is the sort of activism that I see more clearly in Lewis's tinkering with study. Furthermore, the *immanentized* eschatology of Chavez involves the risk of the Incarnation in a way that OWS and even Bartleby does not. In this respect, I think Lewis is right to compare the two—Melville's Christology of Bartleby lacks the passion of the Passion—but this also points to the fact that the im-potential within Agamben's messianism sits asymmetrically in relation the cited example of Tiananmen Square, and Calvary.

Another example of this can be found in Lewis's claim that tinkering is a 'pure means,' dwelling within what he calls, echoing Agamben's notion of 'pure mediality,' 'the messianic now.' What this lacks, in erotic terms, is consummation. Consider the mad *eros* of the Cross: 'It is finished.' It is precisely this moment that Agamben and Lewis seem unable to account for. We can find this moment, of course, in any site of true suffering, as James Cone has shown (in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*) and wherein Liberation Theology has anchored its eschatology. If this study without end, however, could be more than the study that is an eternal means, but, instead, a study in a world without end (*in saecula saeculorum*) then I think that Lewis's theory is, perhaps, strengthened.

In other words, I think Lewis succeeds in 'tinkering' with study, with playing with and being friendly to it, with all the words and thoughts and sorts of foreplay one might expect from a serious study that seems so absent in the present regime of school-learning, but I am less than sure that his strongest claim—that study must dwell in an ontological site of a purely mediated eschatology, a messianic means with no end—is weak enough to succeed. I suspect his reply would be that this lack of 'success' is precisely the effect he meant to achieve, but, then, he would subvert that claim by pointing it out.

I am left wondering about a blank book, or a silent conference session, an exercise of study that resembles Yves Klein's Monotone-Silence Symphony. John Cage? Perhaps Lewis has imagined a study that is itself not yet, swinging in that limbo that can only be called purgatory, which, of course, carries the 'not yet' guarantee of salvation. In this respect I find Lewis's theory of study through the work of Agamben to best understood through Dante's *Comedia* and the fantasy of his love for Beatrice described in *La Vita Nuova*. This may not be a route for a direct or precise ontological or genealogical notion of study, but it does have the direct effect of creating an ecology of study in the most literal sense of placing into existence the conditions for the possibility of free and cacophonous thought.

To the extent that one might wish to find a theory of study, for immediate practical application, Lewis's book is most instructive and blunt: stop and be stupefied by study; embrace the collision *in absentia*; reject the logic of learning. This alone merits serious and extended attention and, dare I say, *study*.

## Tyson E Lewis

### Response

In the postscript to *Stanze: La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (2011), Giorgio Agamben argues that the value of the book is not simply its explicit content so much what it does not say. Every act of creation, writes Agamben, is also an act of decreation (*atto di decreazione*), which gives the work its life. In this sense, the weaknesses of my *On Study* are precisely the points of potentiality that remain within what has been said, or what could have

been said otherwise. Ford, Backer, D'Hoest, and Rocha have all entered into this weakness in order to tinker with it and thus continue the act of study. They all tinker with weaknesses in the book, giving the book another life beyond itself.

Ford's attempt to theorize the "conditions of study" is helpful for understanding certain particularities of biocapitalism. But I wonder if specifying the conditions of study makes the sketch of study I provide *too strong*. In other words, can a theory ever specify conditions of possibility and impossibility? My move toward minimal or "insufficient abstraction," as Ford says, was strategic on my part, for maximal abstraction all too easily lends itself to prediction and anticipation. Take for instance the multiple studiers in Jacques Rancière's book *Proletarian Nights: The workers' dream in nineteenth-century France* (2012). Here he chronicles the subaltern lives of workers who, I would argue, study at night when they are supposed to be sleeping. Rancière seems to warn us that understanding the limitations of the political economy of the French worker is precisely what obscured Marxists from recognizing studying. In all cases, it is not clear to me what conditions these disparate studiers were working under that unite them beyond a rather general condition of biocapitalist investment into bodily productivity, and it might be dangerous to create a list of possible conditions precisely because it forecloses upon the surprise of study when it happens. So what this comes down to is not simply the kind of abstraction necessary to understand the conditions of study but also the *use* of such abstraction for calculating when study will likely happen, how it will happen, and who will be a studier. In short, I worry that Ford's list of conditions might all too easily lend itself to prediction or, even worse, management of who should be studying, where they should be studying, and how they should be studying.

This leads me directly to Backer's comments, which are also related to questions of conditions. I do not want to take issue with Backer's analysis of dehiscence as a further specification of suspension. I think this is invaluable, as is a move toward thinking about the nature of the exchange when friends study with one another. But what I want to focus on is his desire to organize educational moments so as to promote study. My worry here is that such an approach to study submits it to the world of learning, which is obsessed with planning, enacting, actualizing, and evaluating. If the book supplies examples, these examples are not meant necessarily to produce any set of "techniques" for facilitating studying (indeed the only mention of the teacher is to give the rather vague if not amorphous "advice" to leave open the space, time, and materials of study). While my book is full of examples of study, these examples intentionally break with the use of the example in most educational philosophy where the example illustrates a theory and then produces a series of pedagogical recommendations. For me, these examples *suspend* the move toward prescription ("teachers need to do *this* in order to *achieve* that"), and in turn, they do not merely illustrate theory but rather create a recursive or rhythmic structure that sends us back to the theory. Thus there are no real suggestions that come out of my turn toward Bartleby, who, as an example of study, is neither inside of educational theory nor outside of it, and as such *prefers not to* easily submit itself to being an illustration or prescriptive "lesson" for further improvement of a particular practice.

But perhaps there is another way of approaching this issue that moves us away from questions of how teachers ensure that study will happen. What is really needed for teachers is not a list of conditions but rather a kind of redistribution of what can be seen and heard in the classroom so that they do not mistake study for learning. When students get lost in something, teachers trained to look for and evaluate education in terms of learning might see

and hear this activity in terms of learning discourses, and thus devalue study. In short, a redistribution of educational perception is needed here so that learning is put in its place and the moments when study happens can be allowed to open up, move about, and dissipate as they occur.

If Ford provides a tentative list of negative conditions resisting study and Backer provides a positive recommendation for facilitating study, then D'Hoest takes a slightly different approach: reassessing the conditions of learning. I greatly appreciate D'Hoest's careful reading of Deleuze and his theory of learning. It clearly demonstrates that learning cannot be reduced to the biotechnological field of assessment within which we find ourselves today. And I also hope that through her review, D'Hoest and I have become studious friends! Such is the nature of study. But I would like to take this opportunity to make a small but important point clear. In my book *On Study*, I do not reject learning *as such*. Indeed, I argue that the real danger is when learning becomes a kind of dominant logic of biocapitalism, thus excluding alternative notions and practices of education. Where D'Hoest and I differ is that her project attempts to reclaim learning from its dominant doppelganger, whereas I attempt to create a diagonal line of flight beyond the question of learning. I find both projects important for destabilizing the taken-for-granted nature of what has come to be known as the learning society. And yet, if D'Hoest hopes to save learning from its fate within biocapitalist training, actualizing, and assessing, she has not asked an important question: What is it about learning that so easily lends itself to capitalist appropriation in the first place? While D'Hoest chooses to focus on the similarities between studying and learning, here I would like to suggest that their *differences* are precisely what make learning a choice for capitalist production. Learning, even when it involves substantial unlearning, even when it wastes time, and even when it is most stupid still emphasizes *production*, which in turn can be *measured*. Perhaps it is only in relation to study that this productivity of learning can be redeemed, and thus be saved from biocapitalist forces and relations. Likewise, it might very well be the case that through its rhythmic relation to learning, study can avoid the fate which Bartleby suffered in the end.

Finally, I would like to thank Rocha for his compelling and lyrical set of comments. For instance, I find his turn toward the *huelga* important for thinking through the politics of study, and for reminding me of the paths not taken. In an attempt to respond to his multiple questions and proposals, I will focus on only two. First, Rocha is concerned that I have theorized a *particular* kind of study while making broader claims concerning study in *general*. In response, I would suggest that I am attempting to provide a weak analysis that connects study back with its fundamental im-potentiality. All ontic expressions of study, at their base, are studious because they share this fundamental relation to im-potentiality. Take my own book *On Study*. The im-potentiality of the book manifests in three ways: it is *neither* a complete/definitive philosophical treatise *nor* an incomplete collection of unrelated fragments; it is an educational book *as not* an educational book; it is a text that *prefers not to* abide by the analytic distinctions which Rocha seems to want to impose upon it (such as "success" or "failure"). My hope would be that this minimal description (predicates that prescribe nothing and thus interrupt the very act of predication) of study in terms of *neither...nor, as not, and prefers not to* can help estrange educators from everyday usage of the concept of study (as in "I am studying for the exam") in ways that make us reflect on the nature of such activities. In turn, this reflection might very well release us from reducing study to either (a) mere useless activity or (b) another name for learning.

Second, Rocha asks whether or not my methodology is a confusion of genealogy and ontology. I see the concern here, and thank him for opening up a space where I can try to examine the philosophical *conditions* informing the writing of this book. First, I do see the book as outlining the traces of an ontology of study, which are found in Agamben's treatment of im-potentiality. Study is an im-potential state of educational being. If there is an historical/genealogical component to my argument, it rests not in relation to study but rather the rise of the modern will and its connections to nihilism. My claim is not that study depends on a certain genealogical understanding but rather that the *theory* of study only becomes possible at a certain historical point wherein the meaninglessness or destitution of being becomes a general symptom under biocapitalism. As such, it is not a coincidence that suddenly study has appeared on the educational horizon as a concern. Unlike Foucault, who would most likely chart the fine-grained differences in historical manifestations of study, I offer instead an ontology whose saliency only appears in destitute times.

In short, these reviews concern conditions (positive and negative, enabling and disabling) for understanding study. What I find most encouraging is that each author has taken up this small, quiet, yet persistent concept and "tinkered" with it. This tinkering has not made the concept more operative but rather has produced—at least for me—even more obscurities, more conditions of theoretical and practical inoperativity. These conditions are neither simply conditions of impossibility (as in Ford's analysis) nor conditions of possibility (as in Backer's analysis). Rather, they are conditions of suspension, or moments of de-creation. The generative aporias which emerge in such moments are indeed a testimony to study's peculiar status as an *educational signature* which makes possible multiple lines of inquiry, even as it itself remains indeterminate.

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