

## Technologies for Living Otherwise: Arts Pedagogy as Social Reproduction and Movement Building

“But even in olden times people tried to be not just man-power but creative power. Under conditions of class inequality and exploitation this was seldom achieved...all work must be creative work since it is for the creation of social wealth and culture...”

Anton Makarenko

In the recent context of the “educational turn,” an age-old tension in education has re-surfaced: between progressive education, with its primary focus on the development of experimental methods and tools, and libertarian, emancipatory or radical education, which posits pedagogy as a practice of broader social agency and protagonism, challenging the hierarchical foundation of education and the society within which education operates. In the context of “the turn,” this tension has been evident in a number of ways: between temporary, generally short-lived artistic or curatorial experiments and the long-term care work of educators engaged in the “unglamorous tasks” of critical arts education (Sternfeld)<sup>1</sup>; between named artists and “unnamed participants” (Sanchez)<sup>2</sup>; between artists’ and theorists’ conceptions of experimental education, and the reaction of social movement activists—who understand the impetus for the turn as a call to social and institutional action around the re-shaping of education, suggested by tendencies such as the Bologna Process of European Education Reform.<sup>3</sup>

As the “turn” has taken its course, the educational landscape has steadily deteriorated and the projects that have been proposed to place pressure on—or provide alternatives to—the current system of education, have made little impact. Even if we read the proliferation of education experiments generated through educational turn generously, that is as more than simple attempts to bolster personal CVs, they have largely failed to attain their goals of making another approach to education possible. Among the several reasons for this, I will consider here the lack of a deep commitment to movement building and the extent to which this is needed for effective pedagogical and political intervention by the existential territory of art. If the hope of such a turn lies in the intersection between creative experimentation and the real politics of education, how can we find a way to use the arts to progress the project of social and institutional transformation in education and more widely? What genealogies of radical education show combined commitments to social justice, creativity and the positing of post-capitalist realities?

To answer these questions, I turn my attention away from art per se toward twentieth-century experiments in radical education that had strong links to anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements. While there was some overlap between these more radical movements and the progressive pedago-

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<sup>1</sup> N. Sternfeld “Unglamorous Tasks: What Can Education Learn from its Political Traditions?” *E-flux Journal*, (March 2010).

<sup>2</sup> A. Sánchez de Serdio, “La política relacional en las prácticas artísticas colaborativas” (PhD Thesis. University of Barcelona, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> I am thinking in particular about my own experience of the Berlin gathering *SUMMIT for non-aligned initiatives*, held in 2007 in response the Bologna Process, in which social movement activists, artists and theorists encountered one another through a number of tense exchanges on the role that speculation around education should play in relation to direct actions against the process itself.

gical projects of Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, etc., the former were explicitly oriented towards social reproduction and movement building. This caused them to displace art as a detached category of production and to orient creative practices towards coordinated movements of social justice and change. They operated transversally, to convene different constituencies, and approached political, social, aesthetic and pedagogical questions together. Such genealogies seem particularly important today, when we are searching so deeply for tools to battle the violently barbed apparatus that underpins neoliberal education reform and the disaster of late neoliberalism more generally.

Here I will focus on three pedagogical moments: pedagogical experimentation after the October Revolution and the specific example of the Gorky Colony in the 1920s; the *École Moderne* Movement launched by Élise and Celestin Freinet in France in the 1940s and 1950s, and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed developed by Paulo Freire and collectives across Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s. Although there are many others, I offer these three examples as a way to chart a particular trajectory around the intersection of social reproduction, movement building and creative or cultural work that might be useful to inform the work of critical cultural producers and arts educators operating today. Considering these three intersecting interests together seems crucial at a time when the ramifications of pedagogical reform (debt-induced anxiety, a culture of competitive, individualized and yet uncertain and precarious work, growing class divisions, and aggressive urban polarization) affect our ability to survive in both productive and reproductive terms.<sup>4</sup>

### **Pedagogies of Life-Work**

Where many pedagogical critiques of communist education center on its lack of creative autonomy and its over-emphasis on the pedagogy of work, it is useful to return to the definitions of work articulated by pedagogists after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Building on the writings of John Dewey, Lev Tolstoy and others, thinkers like Nadezhda Krupskaya, who was Lenin's partner, a teacher and author of eleven volumes of propositions for a post-capitalist education program (mostly untranslated into English), understood education as the convening of theoretical and practical skills to realize "... a rational, full, beautiful and joyful life in society." Far from seeing work as simply industrial—and learning as a training for employment—the role of education was positioned here as "a tool for the transformation of contemporary society"<sup>5</sup> and its social relations, based in collectivity, individuality and practices of mutual aid.<sup>6</sup>

At the center of the pedagogical proposition of Krupskaya and others were principles of self-management and a micro-political attention to the relationship of students and teachers with each other

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<sup>4</sup> Social reproduction as I use it in this article refers to the suite of activities and services required to make and remake people, labor power, and the social relations in which reproduction is embedded. Within capitalism it is the work of keeping people fed, educated and ready to produce. This type of work has been highlighted by feminists at different moments, most markedly in the 1970s when reproductive work's invisible, unwaged, precarious and feminized status was brought to light through campaigns like Wages for Housework. Today, a number of social movement groups, have highlighted that while the labor of social reproduction produces and reproduces people and workers within the violently unequal relations of capitalism, it also produces "autonomous humans with the capacity and potential to resist and create change." See for example, Plan C, "Weapons of Social Reproduction" in *bamn* no.2 (2015) or C. Barbagalla and S. Federici, "Care Work and the Commons" in *The Commoner*, no. 15 (2012) <http://www.commoner.org.uk>

<sup>5</sup> N. Krupskaya. *Pedagogiceskie socinenija v 11 tomah [Educational Works in Eleven Volumes]*, vol. 2 (Moscow: APN-RSFSR, 1957–1963), 11.

<sup>6</sup> N. Krupskaya, *On Education* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1927/1957), 121.

and with the world outside of their classrooms. Recognizing that such assertions were made by many pedagogical theories but seldom realized on a large scale, Krupskaya suggested practical interventions around the organization of time in schools. “We should not overwhelm pupils,” she suggested, “...and should leave them sufficient time for independent work, rational exploration, organization of collective life in school, [...] physical work [to maintain the school] and active involvement in daily [social] life”<sup>7</sup>. While the notion of “way of life” education, that is education that would enable students to learn through life practices, was not uncommon in the preceding education theories of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Maria Montessori and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, they had not been conceived for a shift to provision of state education on such a scale, nor had they given such emphasis to a re-balancing of the relationship between production and reproductive relations, of learning to be collective, to produce a commons and to engage in both care and analysis of the community<sup>8</sup>. In her address to the Young Pioneers in 1927, she suggests a departure from party formalism and towards mutual knowledge and support of group member’s life conditions and analysis of these conditions, alongside group-building activities like singing. Krupskaya’s suggestion<sup>9</sup> that time and conditions must be altered in order to valorize the social, communal and reproductive aspects of life were indicative of her deep readings of Marx and Engels on questions of social reproduction, but also an early indication of attention to what feminists would later amplify—the concept of reproductive labor—proposing the recognition of unwaged caring and facilitative work as the “determining force”<sup>10</sup> of both capitalist labor power and post-capitalist imaginaries.

This expansion of the notion of work was not to result in the abdication nor abolition of teachers (as opposed to the current discourse of student-led teaching that is driven by cost-saving measures), but rather a re-purposing of their work to support students to “organize themselves” and their interactions within the broader society. This facilitative role was to be socially and economically valorized: teachers’ salaries were increased and their status promoted as key agents for embedding the reproductive and analytic pursuits of the school within local processes of social transformation. For Krupskaya, every aspect of the self-management of students was to be creative—both within independent exploration and in productive agricultural or mechanical labor. Drawing on her readings of Marx, she suggested that creativity should infuse all labor, and work should never be fixed into strictly “mechanistic” tendencies.

Though not without its disagreements with Krupskaya’s formulation, a more focused example of the climate of pedagogical experimentation in this era can be read through the Gorky Colony, an educational experiment led by the educator Anton Makarenko for orphans and “juvenile delinquents”. Developed in 1920 near Poltava in the Ukraine and named after the poet Maxim Gorky,

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<sup>7</sup> *Pedagogiceskie socinenija v 11 tomah [Educational Works in Eleven Volumes]*, vol. 3 (Moscow: APN-RSFSR, 1957–1963), 44.

<sup>8</sup> My use of the commons here is specific, referring to ‘a thing made and remade through collective activity...not a resource or even necessarily a place. It is what we could call a condition of life’. See <https://www.weareplanc.org/blog/wtf-is-the-commons-ff17-input/>

<sup>9</sup> *Pedagogiceskie socinenija v 11 tomah [Educational Works in Eleven Volumes]*, vol. 3 (Moscow: APN-RSFSR, 1957–1963), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Engels’ statement, “The determining force in history is the production of and reproduction of life” is quoted by later feminists including Sylvia Federici in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (New York: PM Press, 2012).

whose work was favored by students and teachers in the school for their evening reading sessions, the project, a boarding school, became an important test site for questions of children's self-organization and the basis for Makarenko's writings on education, including *Road to Life* (1933).<sup>11</sup> Through very detailed everyday accounts, the book describes the realization of student self-management through student councils, in which young people were involved in fundamental organizational decisions—issues around pedagogy and expansion of the school's model—and the operational tasks of everyday life.

Students learned to grow crops, sew clothes, clean the school, cut wood, play musical instruments, and cook food in addition to learning industrial skills. They also learned how to be members of a collective and how to deal with behaviors that challenged the group, like stealing and lying. While the results of this learning were not always favorable (students, for example, were asked to perform “group accountability” in ways that were punishing and humiliating by today's standards), this combination of skill sets and their non-hierarchical relation to one another demonstrated an attempt to valorize a post-capitalist imaginary based in the combination of productive and reproductive life practices. Although Makarenko argued that questions should not be hypothetical but rather be linked to the possibility of realizing these social goals, some theoretical investigations were undertaken. They often related to questions of organization in the school and to the social and political aims articulated for post-capitalist life by Makarenko and the students. Groups self-organized the work with the understanding that they would engage in productive labor using the most modern technical tools possible and through their own creative interventions in the working process. In addition to this, they engaged in both “selectively performed creative work”<sup>12</sup> and community work, described as “unpaid work for the common good.” Student labor collectives were increasingly involved in decision-making about how all aspects of their labor should be organized, how to distribute wages or other forms of compensation for the different kinds of labour they performed, how to organize consumption and the care work in the surrounding community.

In this way, the school was as much a preparation for the world as it was a prefiguration of a coming society in which questions of care and community were driving forces for the production of life in all its dimensions. Far from the mantra of employability that floods the halls of European universities, the pedagogy of work promoted by Makarenko, Krupskaya and others was not training for industrial or agricultural labor in itself so much as probing the possibilities of work of producing life on more equitable grounds. Only when it is possible to question the working body in this way, Makarenko suggested, could a balanced, and “genuinely free” development of the personality emerge and a new, “socialist pattern of moral and ethical relations” be formed.<sup>13</sup>

This, however, would take time. Makarenko's concept of the “ten-year school”<sup>14</sup> was a recognition that profound educational and institutional change would require a durational commitment, as would the organization of daily life. To leave time for discussions about the direction of the colony

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<sup>11</sup> A. Makarenko, “Heroes of Social Education” in *The Road to Life*, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/makarenko/works/road1/ch10.html>

<sup>12</sup> A. Makarenko, *The Problem of Soviet School Education* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1938), 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

and for “independent” interests, students and teachers were to spend no more than four hours per day doing any kind of formal study.<sup>15</sup> Makarenko’s positing of freedom within the complex interplay between student councils and different forms of time and labor was a pedagogy based on collective negotiation. The rebalancing of social power had to be founded in the experience of living otherwise.

### **Pedagogies of Movement-Work**

Makarenko, with 50 communards from the Gorky Colony, went on to develop these practices at the Dzerzhinsky Commune until the mid-1930s, when his involvement was deemed to be too “radical” and “entrepreneurial”. The Dzerzhinsky Commune had exceptionally good production facilities and was protected under Stalin for a while, producing goods that included the first “Soviet Leica” camera. The context of industrial production, forced labor and nationalist preoccupations, stripped away the reproductive elements of its earlier iterations, pushing the commune closer to a labor camp. Here, Makarenko’s insistence on positive peer pressure and the re-organization of time re-combined with state-sanctioned focus on intensive, factory-based production and turned collective accountability into a tool of control and punishment.

During the same period, Élise and Celestin Freinet, who were members of the French Communist Party but rejected the Party’s emphasis on a pedagogy of work tied solely to industrial production in factories, returned to Krupskaya and Makarenko’s insistence that the school be an experimental and prefigurative site for configuring post-capitalist social realities. Following the histories of emancipatory education movements that emerged in the Paris Commune in the 1870s, and those developed in Britain, Spain and the US in the early 20th century, as well as their readings of Makarenko and Krupskaya, they decided to engage in class struggle through the reinvention of forms of life in a rural primary school in Vence.

Still very much committed to radical proletarian education, they were successful in forming the large scale “École Moderne” or “Freinet” School Movement across France. Like the Gorky Colony, students in the École Moderne Movement led councils in regular decision-making processes and learned, through testing, what Celestin Freinet described as “techniques for living”—collectively organized agricultural, creative, academic and care work. Reversing the idea that communist education must engage with the working-class site of production, i.e. the factory, they brought an industrial machine—a printing press—into the center of the school to focus literacy education on the emergence of students’ experiential readings and critiques of the world. Students started with oral descriptions of activities in the school and moved on to their imagined worlds, life in their broader community and the councils through which they organized their own activities, using the co-operatively run printing press as an impetus to make sense of their questions and observations, learning to read and write in the process. Students’ “free texts” were derived from these oral descriptions and were used as the basis for pamphlets and newspapers that would inform subsequent students about the things they had learned and the questions that had emerged. The constitution of an aesthetic for communication—the layout of the papers and pamphlets and the drawings they contained—were key issues for student councils in their collective decision-making, alongside questions of the reproduction of life at the school. The printing press also required that they organize the terms and

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<sup>15</sup> G.N. Filonov “Anton Makarenko”, *Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education* vol. XXIV, no. 1/2 (1994): 77–91.

narratives they had made and intricately connect literacy skills to practices of democratized creative production.<sup>16</sup> The operation of the creative and the aesthetic here were applied to both the narration of issues in students' environments and their production of new 'techniques for living' in the school. Here the Freinets' commitment to the ethos of communist education was combined with their interest in Bergsonian life force.<sup>17</sup>

Much like Gorky Colony, each school in the École Moderne network attended to social reproduction through daily routines and decisions about the life of the school and their community. The École Moderne network, however, which placed in hundreds of schools an industrial apparatus that served both social reproduction and movement building, marked a significant departure from previous experiments, which had been either short-lived or attributed to a single site or pedagogical auteur, like Summerhill in the UK. Having set up the union of teachers in 1926, the Freinets were seasoned organizers, and they supported students and teachers in circulating the newspapers and pamphlets generated in the schools, opening them up to their local communities and to other schools. This system of knowledge exchange among École Moderne schools enabled students and teachers to learn from each other's organizing practices and contribute to wider movement building.

The École Moderne program was developed for primary schools and did not have obvious application for adults or broader social movement politics. In the late 1950s, however, the educator Fernand Oury and psychoanalyst Aida Vasquez applied aspects of the program in urban secondary schools and in young adult life education courses. In these programs, Oury and Vasquez also worked through the councils of students and teachers, inviting them to rearrange various aspects of the school and their lives, with stronger attention to the psychological impact of addressing power relationships in this way. They coined the term "Institutional Pedagogy" to denote the ways in which institutions could be performatively and creatively made and unmade, even molded, by addressing their "hidden curricula."<sup>18</sup> Oury was connected to the youth hosteling network, through which he influenced a generation of young political organizers.<sup>19</sup>

### **Pedagogies of Culture-Work**

The aims of art, culture and creativity within these practices of an imagined post-capitalist, emancipatory pedagogy in many ways follows the high aims of the avant-garde: instead of making discrete art objects that serve movements or mandates, or creating a class of vanguard artists, creative experimentation is to be incorporated into all aspects of life, including the remolding of social practices and institutions, the organization of care and reproductive work, the technical and theoretical skills

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<sup>16</sup> F. Oury and A. Vasquez, *Vers une pédagogie institutionnelle?* (Paris: Maspero, 1967)

<sup>17</sup> Schlemminger, Gerald. "The Freinet movement: Past and present." *Plaisir d'apprendre et travail coopératif. Les méthodes éducatives et la philosophie pratique de Célestin Freinet* (1999): 17-26.

<sup>18</sup> Through analysis of this "hidden curriculum" groups were able to address relations of power and practices of convention in the school among students, teachers, administrators, cleaners, and parents. By reworking the performances that compose the school's institutions—who speaks and who listens, what is spoken of and what is not, who plays what role or performs what task—it was possible to alter both pedagogical and psychological domains against institutional violence. J. Pain, *Institutional Analysis in Encyclopédie Universelle*. (Paris: 2005), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Many young people were politicized through Freinet's and Oury's programs and those of Oury's brother Jean, who developed similar ideas in the field of psychiatry. Among them was Félix Guattari who met Oury in his local school and went on to organize politically both within education and psychiatric settings.

needed for work and the independent or self-care work one undertakes to enable participation in collective practice.

Where this may sound dangerously close to the notions of “creativity” that circulate within the current regimes of “creative economy,” Paulo Freire, referencing the work of Makarenko, outlined a more explicit articulation of the role of cultural work in the struggle against the oppressive power relations configured in capitalist and colonial regimes. Where other libertarian pedagogical practices took up the redistribution of power as their first task, Freire’s work in adult education within an anti-colonial struggle suggested that one could not easily undertake such a redistribution without a close examination of how power operates on multiple scales—in the relations between teachers and learners and the classroom and in the social relations that shape their roles. In writing about his experience of practices in which groups analyzed their shared conditions of oppression and the relations of power that underpin them, the question of “culture” became central for Freire. Although deeply marked by such relations, culture was nonetheless the apparatus through which anti-oppressive, anti-capitalist and decolonized worlds could be produced from within highly compromised institutional situations.

Freire and his students largely developed their work in the context of peasant communities in Brazil in the 1960s. They worked to overturn the program of “extension,” by which the metropolitan educational elite sought to produce literate subjects in the Brazilian hinterland. It was a program that Freire—a communist, like Makarenko and the Freinets—found similar to the prescriptions of his Party comrades’ program of education for the masses. He also found that his students largely rejected it as paternalistic. Drawing from his experiences with liberation theology, through which the powers of the church were delegated to lay priests in rural communities and the Bible was read in relation to Marxist questions regarding the distribution of wealth, he responded to student critiques and worked with the students in a process by which they drew from their life experiences and produced an analysis of power (beginning with the power of the teacher).

Freire’s outline—in chapter three of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—of the processes of group investigation into conditions of oppression relies heavily on what he describes as a movement between “codification” and “de-codification”: the materialization of power relations through images or reflections and the de-materialization of the conditions through collective dialog and engagement. This oscillation between condensation and discussion of conditions, and between representation and deconstruction, repositions the polarity posed by Euro-Western debates on art, where art is either a complete, auratic object and a domain for the enlightened learning (or buying and selling) of high culture, or a dematerialized, process-based practice infiltrating everyday life. It suggests that the political power of cultural work lies in precisely the movement between the two and in their orientation towards anti-oppressive action. While the attachment of creativity to the production of life and social processes was inherent in the break made by libertarian educators like Makarenko and the Freinets, Freire’s more explicit articulation here offers us some direction in thinking through how we might reposition the arts and its educational turn beyond simplistic notions of freedom and autonomy, in the context of the broader anti-capitalist and anti-colonial struggle. Here the questions are not so much about what we make or who makes it as what it is for, who we make it with, how it poses a challenge to oppressive conditions and what practices it proposes for a world organized otherwise.

Freire's notions have found use among artists working in social movements including those of the community artists in Europe in the 1970s<sup>20</sup>, anti-colonial and non-aligned projects like Third Cinema<sup>21</sup> in the global south and artists working in the struggle for the commons today. Here I do not propose a total return to such moments, but a pause to consider how cultural workers understand their pedagogical and political roles at a time when questions of social reproduction and care, questions of learning and commoning are once again becoming prominent in social movements and the arts alike. While we see many of the motifs of pedagogical and collaborative production in art today, it is in the politics of circulation and reception of work, in the longevity of care and commitment, and in the accountability to struggle that we can broadly mark a difference between these past moments and the present.

## For Today

There are certainly reasons why we might be skeptical of the examples I have discussed and why their experiences are not perfectly adaptable to current conditions. We can now see how ideas like the pedagogy of work, student-centered learning and the tools outlined in the pedagogy of the oppressed have been molded to the rationalization of education, participatory corporate training, and the state's ushering in of "popular" policies that progress corporate interest. (One thinks here of the participatory programs by which city councils falsely "consult" the people on issues that have clearly already been decided by corporate elites). We can also hear in the demand—put forward by all of these examples—for a creative re-working of life and the prefacing of linguistic change, a faint echo of what Boltanski and Chiapello have cited as an excessive reliance on the "artistic critique" rather than the "social critique" of the '68 generation.<sup>22</sup>

Where these various co-optations differ from the genealogies that I have considered here is at the level of commitment: commitment to the production of post-capitalist imaginaries qua realities at the micro and macro scales of social relations. This qualitative difference can also be identified in other areas: the time and energy required to implement change, such as setting up the ten year school; the mutual development of social practices of care; and attempts to use education to build the power of anti-capitalist movements that challenge the persistence of colonial and center-periphery paradigms. The way in which the creative and the aesthetic are mobilized in such committed genealogies lends some insight into the kind of arts educational movement we need.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, the founders of the Art of Change, Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn, created print and video workshops within anti-gentrification and health care campaigns throughout the 1970s in the UK, analyzing the power relations of, for example, the editing process and gallery exhibitions, often seen by community participants as key opportunities to encourage solidarity with their struggles among middle class audiences. See this link for information about the hospital campaigns engaged in East London: <http://cspace.org.uk/category/archive/bethnal-green-hospital-campaign/>

<sup>21</sup> The work of art and creativity here is understood as part of a project in which discrete works are placed within liberatory pedagogical processes. Jose Sanjines with Grupo Ukamau, key proponents of Third Cinema, suggest in their manifesto *For a Practice and Theory of the Cinema of the People*, that their films should not be screened without facilitation of an audience who can use it to "awaken ... a concern which... will extend to the period of reflection, bringing [the audience] to the point of analysis and self-criticism." J. Sanjines, "Revolutionary Cinema: The Bolivian Experience," in *Latin American Filmmakers and the Third Cinema*, edited by Zuzana Pick (Ottawa: Carleton Univ. Film Studies Program, 1978), 84–85. Other examples such as Anand Patwardhan's *A Time to Rise* (1981), made with Indian farm laborers in British Columbia, supported national migrant union organizing efforts by ensuring the length of the film (with time for post-film discussions) would fit into the workers' lunch break.

<sup>22</sup> L. Boltanski and E. Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, (London: Verso, 2005), 167–216.



What would an educational turn that took these as central commitments look like?

Having worked with such commitments and genealogies over the last decade in one of the great epicenters of neo-liberal and colonial art and violence, I am under no illusions that this work is simple. But in our time, where social movements are facing massive challenges, pedagogical projects that take place in the form of temporary and fleeting experiments are often nothing more than glimpses in the circus-mirror corridors of dissociated practices. We must constantly mark the difference between these passing interests and those that place themselves in the trajectory of a sustained, committed movement, regularly cultivating collectively articulated social aspirations and seeking to fulfil them. What re-orientations of our work does this entail, and what kind of post-capitalist social reality is this work contributing to?