

Teacher Strikes as Education: The West Virginia Teacher Strikes Framed by a
Theory of Counter-Conduct, Performativity, and Aesthetics

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Abstract

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The success of teacher strikes is often analyzed according to tangible outcomes, such as salary gains or the prevention of privatization bills. The point of this dissertation, however, is to argue that there are significant intangible outcomes as well. Using the West Virginia teacher strikes of 2018 and 2019 as a case study, I argue that the intangible outcomes of teacher strikes comprise a political-aesthetic education that expands the possibilities for how teachers can live within a neoliberal and patriarchal context. To do this, I develop a theoretical framework using three disparate yet nested concepts: counter-conduct, as used by Michel Foucault; performativity, as used by Judith Butler; and aesthetics, including everyday aesthetics, as used by Yuriko Saito, and somaesthetics, as used by Richard Shusterman. With this theoretical framework, I analyze the West Virginia teacher strikes as both political manifestations and aesthetic experiences. I collected data on the strikes through teachers' written and spoken first-person narratives, media interviews, academic books and articles, podcasts, videos, and images.

Ultimately, I find that in their strikes, the West Virginia teachers performed counter-conduct against particular characteristics expected of them under neoliberalism and patriarchy. Even though not articulated or asserted, this counter-conduct could be aesthetically experienced through the sensuous and felt dimensions of the strikes. Teachers could feel, see, and hear the performance of alternative ways of being. This experience led to an expansion of possibilities for how teachers live as educators and as persons, even without dismantling the governmentalities of neoliberalism and patriarchy.

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Dedication

*For my parents
and
For all my teachers*

Introduction

“More than anything, the strike changed people’s ideas of what is possible.”

-Emily Comer¹

I.1 Goal of the Project

When teachers go on strike, they have clear reasons and demands for doing so. For the most part, since the teacher protests in the late 1800s organized by Susan B. Anthony,² those reasons have revolved around demands for better salary and healthcare. In the most recent waves of teacher strikes, demands have widened to oppose public school privatization and charter school expansion. Upon the conclusion of a teacher strike, it is normal for people to ask questions like, “Were teachers successful?” and “What did teachers achieve?” When they ask these questions, they are after the tangible outcomes of the strike, those palpable changes we can point to as markers of success: Did teachers succeed in gaining better salaries and healthcare options? Did they achieve policy changes, such as against proposed educational legislation? These are important questions to ask, and the tangible outcomes are often vital to education and to the life of teachers.

Beyond the tangible outcomes of any teacher strike, however, I argue that there are other outcomes, intangible ones, that have a significant impact on teachers’ identities, values, and ways of being as they exist in relation to societal powers. In particular, I examine how teacher strikes expand the possibilities for how educators live in relation to neoliberalism and

¹ Emily Comer is a high school teacher in Kanawha County. This quote comes from Eric Blanc, *Red State Revolt* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2019), 97.

² Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Anchor Books, 2014), e.g., Chapter Two.

patriarchy—two powers that greatly impact the teaching profession. These are not tangible outcomes in the way that increased salary and improved healthcare benefits are, nor do they necessarily signify a paradigm shift or consciousness raising, as a Marxist analysis would consider. Rather, I argue that these transformations occur because teachers affectively and perceptually experience the strike. In other words, the transformation I am interested in regards not understanding, but *feeling* and *perceiving*. Teachers expand their own possibilities for how they can exist under neoliberalism and patriarchy by feeling and perceiving what it is like to be on strike, and thereby inhabiting characteristics normally occluded within these systems. This examination necessitates an analysis not of the epistemic, but of the aesthetic. Thus, in this project I analyze the generative zone where the political and the aesthetic meet within teacher strikes.

From 2018 to 2019, eleven teacher strikes took place, including statewide strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona.³ This national wave of strikes took on the name #RedforEd. I could have chosen to focus on any or all of these for my dissertation. However, I focus only on the strikes in one state: West Virginia. There are several reasons for this. First, teachers from West Virginia were the first to strike in early 2018, and their efforts have been cited as inspiring the wave to follow;⁴ any of the other ten teacher strikes might not have happened without it. Second, West Virginia is unique among the other states in that teachers enacted two strikes over 2018 and 2019. This signifies a deep intentionality in teachers' organizing efforts and, I argue, an expansion of teachers' professional imaginary. In addition, the striking demands in West Virginia were complex, concerning both financial gains and the prevention of a proposed

³ See for example Eric Blanc, "The Red for Ed Movement, Two Years In," *New Labor Forum*, October 2020, <https://newlaborforum.cuny.edu/2020/10/03/the-red-for-ed-movement-two-years-in/>.

⁴ See for example the testimonies from Arizona and Oklahoma teachers in Blanc, *Red State Revolt*.

educational privatization bill. This latter demand is particularly significant because in 2018, West Virginia was one of six states without charter schools, and teachers were fighting to maintain that reality. Much was at stake. Finally, I chose to focus on West Virginia because it is my home state. I was born and raised there and educated in a public school. At the same public school, my mother worked as a speech therapist. She participated in the strikes, as did many community members and friends back home. I have been fortunate to track the strikes personally, to speak to many teachers about their experience striking, and to continue to follow the teaching profession and the consequences of the strikes through the pandemic and into the present day.

My analysis will show that the strikes brought about great feelings of unity among teachers. Theirs were peaceful strikes that fostered solidarity. I recognize that not all teacher strikes, nor all strikes in general, have these qualities. Other strikes, together with riots and rallies, can be chaotic, become rogue, involve factional violence, or involve mob behaviors, to name a few. I recognize that these types of strikes and protests exist, and my framework could be useful in analyzing them. However, my interest in this project is in analyzing the West Virginia teacher strikes of 2018 and 2019, with particular attention on the former, in part because of their uniquely positive ethos and outcome.

In what follows in this Introduction, I first paint a portrait of the 2018 and 2019 West Virginia teacher strikes and briefly explain teachers' impetus for striking and the tangible gains achieved. I will return to this portrait and to the teachers' demands repeatedly throughout my dissertation, weaving in additional details and analyzing them in greater depth. I then describe the methodology and framework of my research and defend the importance of my approach rooted in what I call the 'political-aesthetic.' I also describe how the framework of my project is

feminist in its very composition. Then, I clarify who I imagine my audience to be. Finally, I provide a summary of each of the six chapters in my project.

I.2 The 2018 Strike

No school buses ran in West Virginia on the fourth Thursday in February 2018. Public school classrooms remained empty when the bells rang out the start of the school day. Teachers, by this time normally getting their first lesson underway, instead were enacting a different kind of education—one that took place not in front of the classroom, but rather on the front lawns of their schools, the streets of the state capital, and the sprawling front steps and spacious ground floor of the gold-domed capitol building. All 20,000 teachers across 55 counties in West Virginia were on strike.

Over 5,000 teachers descended upon the capitol in Charleston, West Virginia. Outside the gold-domed building, the sprawling white steps came alive with movement, noise, and color as thousands of teachers in red t-shirts stood, linked arms, held signs, chanted, and sang. Inside the white-marbled capitol, teachers filled the ground floor from wall to wall, facing the wide staircase leading up to the state legislators' offices. The polished floor was obscured beneath an energetic sea of red-clad teachers. At times swaying, at times seemingly rooted in place, at times holding hands, linking arms, or lifting their signs overhead, the teachers raised their voices in unison—a unison that reverberated against the white marble walls and Corinthian columns of the capitol, traversing through hallways and echoing off senators' closed doors, cascading over the sprawling outdoor steps and across the Kanawha River at their base. "55 strong! 55 united!" teachers shouted, signaling the unified striking effort of all West Virginia's counties. "Country Roads..." they sang, signaling love and pride for their state. "A freeze is not a fix!" and "We will

not back down!” they chanted, asserting their demands. Could all of Charleston hear them?
Could all the state?

Perhaps they could, as the red sea of teachers overflowed the capitol, spilling into tributaries across the state. Red-clad teachers and public employees formed picket lines in front of their schools—holding signs; chanting; talking to parents, students, and community members; waving to cars passing by, honking in support; and supporting each other when confronted by people in opposition to their efforts, shouting things such as, “Get back to work!”⁵ Even against attacks, tireless teachers courageously stood their ground and raised their voices. Importantly, they were joined by all public employees. Linking arms with teachers were bus drivers, school cooks, nurses, speech therapists, and other school paraprofessionals. All public employees remained united throughout the strike’s thirteen-day duration from February 22 to March 7, 2018; nine of these were weekdays.

State legislators shamed educators for abandoning students, such as those who depended on school lunches. Yet teachers, cafeteria workers, and other school employees organized free food pickups and deliveries for all students and their families.⁶ They ensured that no child would go hungry during the strike. Despite not being in the school, teachers still demonstrated care for their students, and they still educated with their chanting, signs, and willingness to explain their fight to community members, parents, and students. In fact, this highlights a deep irony of my project: teachers halted education in the formal sense within the classroom, yet they enacted a

⁵ Elizabeth Catte, Emily Hilliard, and Jessica Salfia, eds., *55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teachers’ Strike* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018), 13.

⁶ John Bacon, “West Virginia Teachers Packed Lunches for their Needy Students Before Going on Strike,” *USA Today*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/02/27/west-virginia-teachers-packed-lunches-their-needy-students-before-going-strike/377591002/>.

different type of education on the picket lines—one that reached far more ‘students’ than those found in their classrooms.⁷

West Virginia teachers went on strike for four main reasons in 2018.⁸ For one, salaries were low and not improving alongside inflation. Teacher salary in the state ranked 49th lowest in the country, and many teachers had to take second or third jobs to survive. The government had approved a 1% pay increase for teachers the following year. However, the 1% pay increase would not cover the proposed doubling of teachers’ healthcare premiums from 20% to 40%, meaning that they would actually have a net loss in salary. Many teachers cited healthcare as their primary motivation for striking. In addition to salary and healthcare, teachers fought against privatization bills proposed by the state legislature, which would introduce charter schools and vouchers to the state. Teachers worried that charter schools, especially unlimited in number as proposed by the state senate, would divert resources from already strapped schools and delegitimize the teaching profession even further. Finally, teachers fought against attempts to increase control over their bodies. In late 2017, state legislature proposed a new health program called Go365 that would require teachers to wear a step-tracking device (such as a FitBit) to calculate their daily step count and any other health data teachers wanted to track. A minimum number of steps would be required of teachers each month; those who achieved the step-count across the span of a year would receive gift cards to retail stores, and those who did not would be penalized \$25.00 each month.⁹

⁷ I am grateful to René Arcilla for pointing out this irony. For more on the difference between ‘education’ and ‘learning,’ see René Arcilla, *Wim Wenders’s Road Movie Philosophy: Education Without Learning* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

⁸ While I provide a brief gloss of these reasons here, I provide more detail about each in Chapter Three, when I discuss the impact of neoliberalism on West Virginia and the role it played in motivating the teacher strikes.

⁹ I describe each of these points further as they relate to neoliberalism in Chapter Three.

Teachers were angry, and in their anger, they took to Facebook. Kanawha County middle school teacher and rank-and-file leader Jay O’Neal began a Facebook group for teachers in late 2017. Originally called #55United, and later WV Public Employees United, the group was a place for teachers from across the state to vent their frustrations. Eventually, it also became the place where teachers organized their walkout alongside colleagues and public employees. When the strikes were in full force, the Facebook group remained a way for teachers to stay connected and to garner support from their communities.

On the evening February 27, the fourth weekday of the strike, Governor Justice struck a deal with union leaders that would give teachers a 5% pay increase and public employees a 3% pay increase; however, it proposed only a freeze to healthcare premiums with no promise of a fix. When union leaders exited the governor’s office and announced the news to teachers on the white marbled steps outside the capitol building, they did not expect the backlash to follow. Teachers remained angry, retorting that their union had sold them out. Almost immediately they began chanting, “See you tomorrow!”¹⁰ Although supposed to return to work on Thursday, March 1 (after a day to ‘cool off’), teachers took the extra day to organize a continuation of their strike without union leadership. With rank-and-file leaders guiding the way, all 55 counties, all 20,000 teachers, remained on strike.

The 2018 strike finally ended on March 6, 2018. The agreed-upon deal put forward by Governor Justice included a 5% pay increase for all public employees, a freeze on healthcare premiums and a promise to create a taskforce to address the issue, and the killing of the proposed school privatization bill. While many teachers were still unhappy about the lackluster healthcare solution, they celebrated achieving at least some tangible gains.

¹⁰ “‘We Won!’: Teachers End Historic Strike in West Virginia with 5% Pay Raise for All State Workers,” *Democracy Now!*, YouTube, March 7, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6O3CAxGeJ8>.

I.3 The 2019 Strike

In February 2019, nearly one year to the date after the previous strike, the state legislature again pushed forward an education privatization bill to introduce charter schools and vouchers to the state. In an effort to sweeten the poison, legislators also included in the bill the public employees' 5% pay increase that they had won the previous year. In a matter of days, West Virginia teachers—all 20,000 from all 55 counties—organized and enacted another strike. This time, the sole purpose was to prevent the passing of the privatization bill, and they fought against its implementation even at the detriment to their own pay.¹¹

Teachers and public employees across the state again descended on the capitol building and again stood in front of their schools, holding signs. They again wore red t-shirts, chanted, sang, and linked arms. After only two school days, Governor Justice killed the proposed bill. The teachers had won again.

I.4 Methodology and Framework

My research methodology is hermeneutic and conceptual. I analyze stories from the West Virginia teacher strikes through the lens of a unique political-aesthetic framework comprised of three disparate yet interconnected theories. I use this analysis to argue that the experience of being on strike effected an education of feeling and perception for teachers that countered the constraints on them under neoliberalism and patriarchy.

I collected data about the West Virginia teacher strikes and teachers' first-hand experiences on the picket lines from many sources. I read news articles and blog posts, listened to podcasts, watched interviews, scoured Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, read first-person

¹¹ See for example Eric Blanc, "West Virginia Teachers Strike Again," *Jacobin*, February 2, 2019, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/02/west-virginia-teacher-strike-2019-trade-union-school-education>.

narratives of the events, and studied all the research articles and books that have been published on the topic. I also drew upon interviews conducted with West Virginia teachers for a research article I co-authored last year.¹² Altogether, my database comprises testimonies from nearly one hundred teachers relaying their experiences before, during, and after the 2018 and 2019 strikes.

To develop my conceptual framework, I bring together three disparate concepts and argue for their inherent interconnection. The first of these concepts, and the foundation for the other two, is Michel Foucault's idea of 'counter-conduct,' a term he used to describe a particular kind of resistance in a lecture he delivered on March 1, 1978, at the Collège de France. Counter-conduct is a resistance to the 'conduct of conduct' enforced through governmentality, or structural and passive powers.¹³ It is a refusal of a particular conduct and a putting forward of an alternative way of being. I argue that counter-conduct necessarily manifests through embodied performativity—it must be performed, but need not be articulated or even understood by the actors. Thus, the second concept I work with is 'performativity' as used by Judith Butler.¹⁴ Analyzing performativity allows me to examine how alternative ways of being came into existence through the embodied nature of the West Virginia teacher strikes. Because counter-conduct is performed, and need not be articulated, I argue that it must be aesthetically experienced. This aesthetic experience occurs through perception and sense, but it also occurs through feeling. Participants *see* and *feel* their counter-conduct. This brings me to the third and final concept in my framework: aesthetics. To analyze how teachers perceive and sense the aesthetic details of the strikes, I turn to literature on everyday aesthetics, drawing mostly on the

¹² The paper I co-authored, alongside Tomas Rocha, is titled "Sexism in Justifications of Teacher Strikes," and is currently under review for publication.

¹³ I provide a much more thorough definition of 'counter-conduct' in Chapter One, pages 22–32.

¹⁴ I provide a much more thorough definition of 'performativity' in Chapter One, pages 32–38.

scholarship of Yuriko Saito.¹⁵ To analyze how teachers experience the feeling of being on strike, I turn to literature on somaesthetics, drawing mostly on the scholarship of Richard Shusterman.¹⁶

I use these concepts to analyze the data collected from teacher accounts of the West Virginia strikes. Doing so allows me to consider the strikes as acts of counter-conduct against the structural powers of neoliberalism and patriarchy. Because counter-conduct manifests through the performative experience and aesthetic details of the strikes, it ‘speaks’ beyond any epistemic assertions or articulations from the teacher strikers. In other words, while the West Virginia teachers fought for clear and tangible demands, the very performance of their strike manifested an additional layer of resistance. I examine this resistance, which I am calling a ‘political-aesthetic’ resistance, by analyzing specific aesthetic details of the West Virginia teacher strikes—for example, the sight of the sea of red, the sound of the unified chanting and singing, and the image of a striking body comprised mainly of women. It is through these details, I argue, that the West Virginia teacher strikers were educated in feeling, sense, and perception in a way that expanded their possibilities for how to live under neoliberalism and patriarchy, even without dismantling these structural powers.

I.5 A Note on Feminism

I consider my conceptual framework to be feminist in its form because it focuses on the affective and aesthetic rather than on the epistemic. Feminist philosophers in the latter half of the twentieth century considered how the epistemic and affective became gendered, particularly as the distinction appears in academic language. At some point in the long history of gender, concepts such as *reason*, *the mind*, and *epistemology* took on connotations of masculinity, while

¹⁵ I provide a much more thorough definition of ‘everyday aesthetics’ in Chapter One, pages 39–45.

¹⁶ I provide a much more thorough definition of ‘somaesthetics’ in Chapter One, pages 45–49.

the ‘opposing’ concepts of *feeling*, *the body*, and *emotion* took on connotations of femininity. Writing aimed toward the former set of concepts was regarded as academic, and writing aimed toward the second set tended to be dismissed as ‘not serious.’ New wave feminists, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig, attempted to disrupt this dichotomy by writing philosophy that aimed beyond the realm of the discursive or the epistemic.¹⁷ Much of their writing sought to escape the self-confinement suffered by ‘the rational,’ and instead to convey meaning or feeling beyond what was written on the page. It should be no surprise then that many feminist philosophers, including those listed above, wrote fiction, poetry, or plays in addition to traditional academic work.¹⁸ They attempted to ‘speak to’ the reader’s affect and sense—both situated within the body—beyond appealing solely to reason. In doing so, there is a presupposition that the aesthetic, in this case the aesthetic that emerges through literature, can speak to the affective and sensual realms, which are situated in the body, beyond the realm of the discursive, epistemic, and rational. In other words, the aesthetic can speak to the affective and sensual beyond even one’s full understanding of such.

The political-aesthetic, as I see it, falls in line with these feminist philosophies. I consider it a feminist way to analyze the teacher strikes, for it takes seriously the idea of the embodied, affective, and aesthetic dimensions of strikes and considers how these dimensions can lead to transformations in identity, values, and ways of being even beyond understanding or recognition.

I.6 Audience

¹⁷ See for example Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1949); Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of Medusa,” *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875–893; Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1979); and Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969).

¹⁸ See for example Simone de Beauvoir, *The Mandarins* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1954); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Woman Destroyed* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1967).

I anticipate my project speaking to several audiences. For one, and most importantly for me, it speak to teachers, particularly those who have participated in or are interested in education strikes. I envision my analysis and argument providing teachers with a vocabulary to describe their own experiences and a greater understanding of the structural powers at play in such movements. In taking seriously the aesthetic dimension of the strikes, I also validate the significance of teachers' lived experiences while on strike. This entails taking seriously even those feelings teachers cannot put into words. This conceptual work might enable rank-and-file leaders to organize teacher strikes that better realize and utilize the aesthetic dimension of their movements. I also envision my research speaking to philosophers of education interested in teacher strikes, and to researchers interested in the connection between the political and the aesthetic.

I.7 Chapter Summary

The first two chapters establish my conceptual framework and the context of the 'political-aesthetic.' I begin Chapter One by defining 'governmentality,' or 'structural power,' and describing the contingent relationship between power and resistance. This is essential to my project because I frame both neoliberalism and patriarchy as governmentalities—powers effected through systems as well as through individuals' quotidian interactions—that have great impact on education and the teaching profession. Then, I spend time defining each concept of the political-aesthetic framework: counter-conduct, performativity, and everyday aesthetics and somaesthetics. I provide a brief literature review of each and argue for the inherent nested relationships among the three. This relationship, I argue, can take us from the theoretical to the quotidian and back again.

In Chapter Two, I turn my attention to the relationship between the political and the aesthetic. I first do this by identifying how governmentality impacts identity formation, and describing how aesthetics plays a role in facilitating that impact. I then provide a brief literature review on scholarship that connects the everyday aesthetic and the somaesthetic to the political. Finally, I discuss the aesthetics of governmentality and resistance. Per the former, I describe how neoliberalism and the patriarchy have specific aesthetic dimensions through which their power, in part, is manifested. This is important to my project because of the contingent relationship between power and resistance. I argue that because power can be actualized through aesthetics even without our awareness or understanding of such, the contingent resistance to that power can be actualized in the same way: through aesthetics even without our full awareness or understanding. Thus here, I argue for the possibility of aesthetic resistance beyond the epistemic. Further, this aesthetic resistance has the potential to impact identity formation in the same way that the aesthetic dimension of governmentality does. Ultimately, this chapter is important to my project because it argues that the aesthetics of neoliberalism and patriarchy impact identity formation without our full awareness, and the aesthetics of resistance, such as that found in the West Virginia teacher strikes, can also impact identity formation without teachers' full awareness.

This leads directly into Chapters Three and Four, where I examine the governmentality of neoliberalism and analyze how the performative and aesthetic dimensions of the West Virginia teacher strike combatted it. In Chapter Three, I begin by defining neoliberalism and the ideal neoliberal citizen, relying mainly on the work of Michel Foucault and Wendy Brown. I then describe how neoliberalism has impacted education in general, and education in West Virginia in particular. I also detail how the neoliberal agenda served as an impetus for the West Virginia

teacher strikes of 2018 and 2019. In Chapter Four, I use my political-aesthetic framework to analyze how the West Virginia teacher strikes resisted neoliberalism and expanded possibilities for their own existence. My analysis begins by examining how the West Virginia teacher strikes constituted acts of counter-conduct against particular neoliberal characteristics; in other words, the teachers on strike acted counter to the conduct expected of them under neoliberalism. Further, teachers not only performed a refusal of neoliberalism, but they also performed a putting forward of an alternative way of being that reflected democratic ideals. This refusal and putting forward were not enacted epistemically, but rather aesthetically through the embodied and sensuous details of the strike. Using examples, I argue that the democratic ways of being performed during the strike continue to influence West Virginia teachers today. I use images from the strikes to elucidate my argument.

Chapters Five and Six parallel the preceding two chapters, but with a focus on patriarchy. I begin Chapter Five by arguing that patriarchy is a governmentality, and I move into a detailed definition of patriarchy, relying heavily on Kate Manne's scholarship. I then explain how patriarchy has impacted the teaching profession as a feminized field, and how teachers face misogyny still today. Misogyny is particularly apparent when teachers strike, as I demonstrate with evidence from the West Virginia teachers strikes. In Chapter Six, I again use my political-aesthetic framework to argue that the West Virginia teacher strikers refused patriarchal expectations and put forward alternative ways of being that expanded their possibilities for how to live under patriarchy. The West Virginia teachers, I argue, performed conduct counter to that expected of them as: 1) mainly women and 2) care workers of all genders in a feminized field. This counter-conduct was performed and aesthetically experienced rather than articulated by strikers. In fact, many strikers asserted the opposite: that their efforts were not feminist and had

nothing to do with gender. Even so, I argue that the West Virginia teacher strikes were feminist in their very composition in a way that continues to impact teachers today. I use images from the strikes to elucidate my argument.

In the conclusion, I describe the current state of education in West Virginia and explain the negative legislative repercussions that arose because of the teacher strikes. Yet even so, I assert the importance of teachers' political-aesthetic education by way of teacher striker testimony. Finally, I explain limitations to my study and areas for future research.

Chapter 1: Rationale and Framework

“Though I hope to never need to live through that type of experience again, I’ll never forget how I felt in that moment: revolutionary.”

-Jacob Staggers¹

1.1 Introduction

It might sound trite, but perhaps it is worth saying anyway—acts of resistance do not happen in a vacuum. They not only happen *in* a context, but *because* of a context. To put it in more Foucauldian language, the exercise of resistance always already presupposes the existence of power, and vice versa; there is a dialectic between power and resistance, and one cannot exist without the other. Thus, when analyzing an act of resistance, it is vital to analyze the power it opposes. These powers encompass, certainly, the obvious positions—elected government officials, leaders of society and businesses, policy makers, and so on. But in many cases, the power does not originate with individuals. Rather, there are greater powers at play always already fueling their decisions. Others refer to these powers as ideologies, myths, social imaginaries, or governmentalities.² Remaining in the background, or perhaps above our heads,

¹ Jacob Staggers is a teacher at South Morgantown Middle School who participated in the West Virginia teacher strikes. This quote is taken from his personal narrative of the events as published in Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 74.

² For more on ‘myth’ as it relates to gender, see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1949); For ‘myth’ as it relates to race, see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); For more on ‘social imaginary,’ see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); For more on ‘governmentality,’ see Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (New York: Macmillan, 1978). The latter term is taken up throughout the entirety of this dissertation.

they shape not only the decisions of those in charge, but also the decisions of ordinary people—comprising their values, beliefs, desires, behavior—often (almost always) without explicit notice.

Perhaps what gives these powers their force is the fact that although they are man-made and historically situated constructions, they tend to be regarded as ‘eternal truths.’³ For example, many might consider it to be an eternal truth that the world is measured in money, or that we should value efficacy and productivity above all else, or that our individual capital comprises our worth as human beings, but these perspectives stem from the man-made systems of capitalism and neoliberalism, not from any natural fact of humans or the earth. For another example, some people might take it to be an eternal truth that women have naturally better domestic capabilities than men, are naturally more capable caretakers, and are less qualified to hold positions of power within society, but these ideas developed within a sexist, patriarchal context, not from any natural truths of biology. Of course, powers such as neoliberalism and patriarchy can co-exist, interconnect, and exacerbate each other.⁴

Michel Foucault and Miranda Fricker have put forward conceptions of such powers important to my project. To Foucault, such powers comprise a society’s ‘governmentality,’ or the overarching rationality that governs how citizens conduct themselves. Governmentality does not presuppose a top-down, hierarchical system of power, but rather a type of power that operates in a ‘grid of relations’ and that can be subconsciously internalized and reproduced through the behavior and interactions of citizens.⁵ Meanwhile, Fricker considers such powers to be structural powers, as opposed to agential ones. The latter comprises power with a clear individual subject

³ For a discussion of gender as it relates to ‘eternal truth,’ see Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 846.

⁴ For more on intersectionality, see Kimberlé Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* (New York: The New Press, 2017), and Sally Haslanger, “Why I Don’t Believe in Patriarchy: Comments on Kate Manne’s *Down Girl*,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 101, no. 1 (2020): 220–229.

⁵ See for example Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 186.

as its genesis, while the former comprises a subjectless power that comes about “as the result of a system of power relations operating holistically.”⁶ Such structural power operations “are always such as to create or preserve a given social order.”⁷ Yet because they operate at the level of the “collective social imagination,” structural powers—including identity powers such as gender—can “control our actions even despite our beliefs.”⁸

Whether called governmentality or structural power, the important matter here is that these powers exist, and two examples are neoliberalism and patriarchy. They gain their force by being woven through history, or connecting with other aspects of society, such as its economic system, or exploiting the insecurities of a population. Despite remaining largely in the background—or at least, not being explicitly realized or understood—these powers dictate much of how society runs on a grand scale. In an even more pervasive way, they influence the formation of our values, beliefs, and desires, and they dictate our quotidian ways of existing in the world as ordinary citizens, even when we do not realize it. There is, in fact, a dialectical relation between structural power and individual action: the former informs the latter, and the latter reinforces the former.

Yet while these powers are often regarded as inevitable or simply ‘the way of the world,’ this project rests upon the presupposition that they are not, and that they can be changed. Or, at the very least, the way we interact with such powers and exist within them can transform. Because power and resistance exist contingently upon each other, two faces of the same coin, they oppose each other of the same ilk. As in, if there are powers that act as unnoticed undercurrents within society, then their necessary and opposing resistance can also emerge as an

⁶ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11.

⁷ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 11.

⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 15.

undercurrent. By this I mean, it is possible to perform acts of resistance without fully realizing or understanding either the resistance itself or the power it opposes.

Concerning teacher strikes, my research is not focused on consciousness raising or paradigm shifts. Rather, it is focused on the often-covert, undercurrent acts of resistance that combat and change overarching structural powers—and the contingent values, identities, and ways of being that play out in the quotidian lives of ordinary people. Rather than considering these changes to be epistemic, I am considering them to be ‘political-aesthetic’: ‘political,’ as they exist within and affect society’s grid of power relations and the behavior of citizens, and ‘aesthetic,’ as they are enacted through an embodied performativity and experienced through sense, affect, and perception. This differs from the ‘political-epistemic,’ which concerns increased understanding or knowledge that arises from social action.

In this project, I analyze the political-aesthetic dimension of the West Virginia teacher strikes of 2018 and 2019, and in doing so, I consider them in relation and response to the structural powers at play in the particular societal context of the strikes. Specifically, I analyze the West Virginia teacher strikes in relation and response to the powers of neoliberalism and patriarchy—both dominant forces shaping life not only in West Virginia, but throughout the country and the world. I have chosen to consider neoliberalism and patriarchy because both structural powers have had a significant impact on education and the teaching profession. It has been well documented, for example, that there has been a wave of neoliberal ideology saturating educational policy, leading to the privatization of large swaths of public education, the outcome-based assessments of teachers and students alike, and the entrepreneurial focus of learning.⁹ In

⁹ For a more in-depth analysis of neoliberalism and its impacts on education, see Chapter Three. For other resources see for example Michael Apple, *Educating the Right Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2006); Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015); Henry Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); Tyson Lewis, “Biopolitical

addition, the feminized teaching profession has suffered at the hands of a patriarchy¹⁰ that has historically underpaid and disrespected women workers, and has expected of them unlimited care, self-sacrifice, and submissiveness.¹¹

Importantly, the West Virginia teacher strikers need not have discursively articulated that they were combatting the structural powers of neoliberalism or the patriarchy for this battle to be true nonetheless. In fact, strikers might refute such ideas. Regarding patriarchy, for example, the West Virginia teacher strikers generally disavowed the idea that their strikes had anything to do with gender or feminism.¹² Even so, their strikes, widely dominated by women, resisted patriarchal expectations by their very composition. Similarly, while the teacher strikers generally did not assert resistance against neoliberalism, their actions resisted the oppression of neoliberalism all the same. Albeit not discursively, teacher strikers resisted these powers by performing characteristics alternative to those expected of them under patriarchy and neoliberalism. It is through the political-aesthetic that strikers can resist structural powers through their very performance of resistance, even without articulation or awareness of such. While political-aesthetic resistance can exist layered on top of epistemic resistance, it does not require intentionality to work against structural powers. For example, strikers can protest for

Utopianism in Educational Theory,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 39, no. 7 (2007): 683–702; Diane Ravitch, *Slaying Goliath: The Passionate Resistance to Privatization and the Fight to Save America’s Public Schools* (New York: Penguin, 2020); and Barbara Stengel, “Educating *Homo Oeconomicus*? ‘The Disadvantages of a Commercial Spirit’ for the Realization of *Democracy and Education*,” *Educational Theory* 66, no. 1-2 (2016): 245–261.

¹⁰ Here I use the term ‘patriarchy’ to imply a misogynist patriarchy, as Kate Manne does in her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). This term has been problematized by some, such as Sally Haslanger who argues in her article “Why I Don’t Believe in Patriarchy” that the term ‘patriarchy’ does not encapsulate the intersectionality of gender issues.

¹¹ For a more in-depth analysis of misogynist patriarchy and its impact on education, see Chapter Five. For other resources, see for example Amy Brown and Mark Stern, “Teachers’ Work as Women’s Work: Reflections on Gender, Activism, and Solidarity in New Teacher Movements,” *Feminist Formations* 30, no. 3 (2018): 172–197; Regina Cortina and Sonsoles San Román, *Women and Teaching: Global Perspectives on the Feminization of a Profession* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015); Manne, *Down Girl*.

¹² For more on this, see Chapter Five, pages 177–181.

better working conditions, yet the performative enactment of their strike can serve to resist structural powers beyond any assertions of the strikers, such as those powers of patriarchy and neoliberalism, as I argue is the case in the West Virginia teacher strikes.

Teacher strikes historically and still today effect significant tangible outcomes through their efforts: for example, increased salaries, better healthcare, better working conditions, the blocking of performance-based pay, and the alteration of proposed educational bills. Moreover, from a Marxist perspective, teacher strikes can instigate paradigm shifts in which strikers experience a consciousness raising regarding society and the systemic injustices therein, and are subsequently inclined to incite more protests and political action in the future.¹³ While I acknowledge these alternative ways of interpreting teacher strikes, each important in their own right, I also want to clearly distinguish my project from them. Hopefully, this opening section of Chapter One has thus far provided a compelling explanation for why this is the case.

Because my project differs from typical research focused on strikes, I have developed my own theoretical framework. It is common to rely upon Marxist scholarship to analyze acts of resistance, but this scholarship tends to focus squarely on the epistemic. In order to analyze acts of resistance that speak beyond the epistemic and effect change through affect and perception, I have developed what I call a ‘political-aesthetic’ framework. In this chapter, I establish and explain this framework in detail.

I begin by building my framework on a lesser-known concept by Foucault: “counter-conduct.” While much more will be said about this concept in the next section, counter-conduct encapsulates the ideas that 1) power does not exist as a monolithic entity, but rather as a dialectic

¹³ See for example Sally Haslanger, “Reproducing Social Hierarchy (or Not!?)” *Philosophy of Education* 73, no. 2 (2021); Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Suresh Naidu, and Adam Reich, “Schooled by Strikes? The Effects of Large-Scale Labor Unrest on Mass Attitudes toward the Labor Movement,” *Perspectives on Politics* 19, no. 1 (2021): 73–91.

force within society such that ordinary people form their values, identities, and ways of being in light of it, 2) resistance can exist within and outside that power simultaneously, and 3) resistance can happen performatively or aesthetically rather than, or in addition to, epistemically. The second piece of my framework, and subsequently of this chapter, delves into the idea of ‘performativity’ as developed by Judith Butler, and explains how it is an inherent component of counter-conduct; the latter cannot exist without the former. Finally, the third piece of my framework revolves around the aesthetic: specifically, the everyday aesthetic, as defined by Yuriko Saito, and the somaesthetic, as defined by Richard Shusterman. The aesthetic gets at the heart of how alternative values, identities, and ways of being are experienced and taken in, even if not fully realized. It is also an inherent component of counter-conduct, and an inherent component of performativity.

Throughout my dissertation, I use these three nested concepts to show that the West Virginia teacher strikes, beneath the surface of their more tangible demands, enacted a resistance to the structural powers of neoliberalism and patriarchy through the political-aesthetic. I leave the discussion of neoliberalism and patriarchy for later chapters.¹⁴ For now, I define the concepts of counter-conduct, performativity, and aesthetics, and the inherent interconnections therein.

1.2 Counter-Conduct

Foucault mentions the terms ‘conduct’ and ‘counter-conduct’ in his lecture on March 1, 1978 at the College de France in an attempt to describe a particular form of resistance not aimed at demolishing any system, but rather at expanding possibilities for existence within a system. Citing his difficulty in finding just the right word, Foucault finally settles on ‘conduct’ due to its

¹⁴ I discuss neoliberalism in Chapter Three and the political-aesthetic resistance to it in Chapter Four. I discuss patriarchy in Chapter Five and the political-aesthetic resistance to it in Chapter Six.

multipronged connotations: “Conduct is the activity of conducting (*conduire*), of conduction (*la conduction*) if you like, but it is equally the way in which one conducts oneself (*se conduit*), lets oneself be conducted (*se laisse conduire*), and finally, in which one behaves (*se comporter*) under the influence of a conduct as the action of conducting or of conduction (*conduction*).”¹⁵ Ultimately, ‘conduct’ is associated with power, and the ‘conduct of conducts’ constitutes governmentality.¹⁶

Working against ‘conduct’ at each of its various turns, ‘counter-conduct’ also has multiple connotations. It signifies a force working against 1) the ‘conductors’, 2) the way in which one lets oneself be conducted, and 3) the way one conducts oneself—as in, the way one behaves. Specifically, counter-conducts are “movements whose objective is a different form of conduct, that is to say: wanting to be conducted differently, by other leaders and other shepherds, towards other objectives and forms of salvation, and through other procedures and methods.”¹⁷ In other words, counter-conduct demonstrates the desire not to be governed like this, by these people, for this purpose, and at this price. It is “the sense of struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others.”¹⁸ In this sense, counter-conduct is different from other forms of resistance that primarily work to dismantle a system of power. Rather, acts of counter-conduct remain within a system of power, yet seek to change the possibilities one has for conducting oneself within that system and seek to undermine the authority of the ones safeguarding that system or administering the conduct. Counter-conducts are internal struggles against a form of governance or a governmentality where an individual or a group opposes the

¹⁵ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 193.

¹⁶ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 186.

¹⁷ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 259.

¹⁸ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 268; see also Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* for a discussion on how biopolitics is used to control conduct.

control of conduct and their own passivity in being governed, while still situating themselves within the system.¹⁹ As political theorist Carl Death describes it, “Rather than . . . looking ‘beyond government,’ a counter-conducts approach looks *within* government to see how forms of resistance rely upon, and are even implicated within, the strategies, techniques, and power relationships they oppose.”²⁰ This is different from, say, joining a commune or cult, where members decidedly exit a system (e.g., mainstream culture) rather than resist it while still participating within it. Performers of counter-conduct can be recognized as part of a group (e.g., a religious group, a cultural group, a national group) while simultaneously disrupting that group’s power over them. In this way, counter-conduct reflects the contingent relationship between resistance and power rather than assuming one can operate without the other.

Foucault mainly situates his discussion of counter-conduct within the Medieval Ages and the rise of the Christian pastorate—what he considers to be a prelude to modern governmentality. To Foucault, the pastorate is a specific form of power “with the object of conducting men... that takes as its instrument the methods that allow one to direct them (*les conduire*), and as its target the way in which they conduct themselves, the way in which they behave.”²¹ The pastorate aims to shape the way individuals relate to themselves and to others, their ways of being, and values, and thereby it aims to shape their identities. Much is at stake for individuals living under pastoral rule. The consequences for rejecting pastoral edict were not merely mortal punishment (as one could expect from juridical malfeasance) but also eternal damnation after death. Abiding by the pastoral way of life was seen as the *only* way one would be spiritually rewarded. By dangling the

¹⁹ Arnold Davidson, “In Praise of Counter-Conduct,” *History of the Human Sciences* 24, no. 4 (2011): 25–41; Daniele Lorenzini, “From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude: Michel Foucault and the Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much,” *Foucault Studies* 21, no. 1 (2016): 7–21; Corey McCall, “Rituals of Conduct and Counter-Conduct,” *Foucault Studies* 21, no. 1 (2016): 52–79.

²⁰ Carl Death, “Counter-Conducts: A Foucauldian Analytics of Protest,” *Social Movement Studies* 9, no. 5 (2010): 240.

²¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 194.

only path toward salvation in front of people, the pastorate could assure control over their behavior—at least for those people who preferred the idea of going to heaven over hell and who preferred to remain part of the community (as opposed to being societally shunned). Thus, the control of the pastorate came not from policing actions or behavior, but rather from presenting people with the *only* path to achieve salvation and avoid damnation. The pastorate controlled the conduct of people by siphoning the possibility for success into one narrow channel.

Against the pastorate's control of conduct, Foucault cites five methods of counter-conduct: asceticism, the formation of communities, mysticism, the return to Scripture, and eschatological beliefs. Pursuing any one of these avenues would situate someone within the Christian pastorate, but it would also contradict the way of conducting oneself accepted and expected by the Christian pastorate. These acts of counter-conduct widen the avenue for spiritual salvation by asserting the possibility to adopt *other* ways of being, attitudes, and behavior within the system. They represent at once a refusal to conform to the conduct of the pastorate and a creation of new ways to conduct oneself while still aiming at spiritual salvation.

In contemporary times, there are of course other realms of governmentality outside the pastorate, such as political and economic governmentality. There are also paths toward different 'salvations'—economic and moral salvations, for example. Leaving the discussion of religious salvation to Foucault, I am more interested in economic and moral salvations. I consider the idea of 'economic salvation' as it relates to neoliberalism, which, as Wendy Brown remarks, "transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic."²² In other words, neoliberalism funnels the idea of success into one narrow path of conduct: marketizing all things, including and especially ourselves,

²² Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10.

under neoliberal values such as efficiency and productivity. Within a neoliberal society such as ours, this is the *only way* to achieve ‘economic salvation.’²³

Moral salvation, on the other hand, I relate to the supposed ‘natural order of things,’ including the natural order of gender espoused by patriarchal systems. By this I mean that morality attaches to the idea of ‘how things *should* be,’ and people often assume things *should* be the way they have historically been. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, people mistake history for an ‘eternal truth.’²⁴ Historically, there has been a gender hierarchy, which has also established particular masculine- and feminine-coded roles and duties and dispositions. When this gender hierarchy, and the concomitant gendered roles and duties, is taken as eternal truth, then ‘moral salvation’ entails preserving this hierarchy. Anyone who acts in accordance with this gender hierarchy acts morally, and anyone who acts against it acts *wrongly*. Further, anyone who acts against this gender hierarchy—or in other words, the patriarchal order—risks subjecting themselves to harm through misogyny.²⁵ While there are, of course, other types of conduct oriented toward moral salvation, the gender hierarchy represents one such path, and the most important one for our current purposes. Thus, alongside religious contexts, counter-conducts can emerge in political, economic, or moral contexts that also demand a particular way of conducting oneself. In all cases, counter-conduct implies, on the one side, “a refusal expressed by individuals who can no longer accept being conducted *like that* and want to conduct themselves *differently*,”²⁶ and on the other, a putting forward of an alternative way of being that expands the possibilities for how one can exist within a particular system.

²³ I provide a more in-depth analysis of neoliberalism as governmentality in Chapter Three.

²⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

²⁵ Manne, *Down Girl*. For more on this, see also my discussion on misogyny in Chapter Five.

²⁶ Lorenzini, “From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude,” 11.

Whether in religious, economic, or moral contexts, enacting counter-conduct is not merely instrumental. In his interview “Non au Sexe Roi,” Foucault points out that resistance cannot simply be the reverse image of power; rather, it must “activate something ‘as inventive, as mobile, as productive’ as power itself.”²⁷ As a form of resistance, counter-conduct cannot simply *refuse*; it must also *propose* a new way of being. Counter-conduct is both a refusal and an invention, a resistance and a creation. As philosopher Daniele Lorenzini puts it, counter-conduct is “the same refusal to bend to the principle of pure obedience, together with the attempt to construct an *other* form of subjectivity, to give the relationship of oneself to oneself an *other* structure.”²⁸ Political theorist Carl Death argues that in an act of counter-conduct, “new identities and subjectivities are performatively constituted.”²⁹ Furthermore, Death claims that counter-conduct is not always about political change, but rather about the “creation of autonomy, identity, and agency.”³⁰ Philosopher Arnold Davidson asserts that counter-conduct is at once a political and ethical activity that “*transforms* one’s relation to oneself and to others.”³¹ Finally, according to educational theorist Michalinos Zembylas, “Counter-conduct practices point to the possibilities for the subject to become otherwise, conduct his or herself differently, and formulate counter-narratives.”³² Those who perform counter-conduct at once refuse “the type of individuality that has been imposed on [them]” and “promote new forms of subjectivity.”³³

It is important to note that while people engage in acts of counter-conduct, they can (and tend to) do so for reasons *other than* to perform counter-conduct. That is, a person or a group can perform counter-conduct without intending to refuse a particular behavior, value, or way of

²⁷ Davidson, “Introduction,” in *Security, Territory, Population*, xxi.

²⁸ Lorenzini, “From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude,” 12.

²⁹ Death, “Counter-Conducts,” 245.

³⁰ Death, “Counter-Conducts,” 247.

³¹ Davidson, “In Praise of Counter-Conduct,” 32.

³² Michalinos Zembylas, “Affect and Counter-Conduct,” *Discourse* 39, no. 4 (2018): 633–634.

³³ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 785.

being and without intending to put forward a new one. How conscious are these ideas in the mind of a devout Christian self-flagellating, for instance? Rather, counter-conduct must be *performed*, and it need not be *articulated*. The performance itself demonstrates the interdependence of power and resistance not as binary entities, but as constructs that overlap and reinforce each other.

Carl Death provides an example of this phenomenon in his analysis of the South African youth practice of ‘pexing’ as a form of counter-conduct.³⁴ Gangs of teenagers engage in pexing by gathering for ‘contests’ that involve destroying the most expensive personal items they own; they burn shoes, pour out liquids, rip clothing, and so on, gathering ‘points’ as they go. On the one hand, this practice is a way of showing off personal wealth—if you set fire to a new pair of Louboutins, the implication is that you have enough money to simply buy another. Yet, Death argues that pexing also performs a “critical attitude towards consumption and wealth.”³⁵ In a capitalist culture where people frequently flaunt wealth in the form of expensive and designer goods, pexers push this idea to the extreme and thereby “help make evident the emptiness or superfluity behind modern hyper-consumer culture.”³⁶ Importantly, however, this critical attitude toward consumer culture (and the economic and political governmentality fueling it) is “perhaps nascent [and] frequently unreflective.”³⁷ In other words, while this critical attitude is *performed* by the pexers, it is perhaps not *understood* by them; the counter-conduct is not articulated but rather performed. Setting fire to a pair of fresh red bottoms, or witnessing such an act, can lead

³⁴ Death, “Counter-Conducts as Modes of Resistance.”

³⁵ Death, “Counter-Conducts as Modes of Resistance,” 206.

³⁶ Death, “Counter-Conducts as Modes of Resistance,” 206.

³⁷ Death, “Counter-Conducts as Modes of Resistance,” 206.

one to aesthetically experience a refusal of capitalist values and a performance of alternative subjectivities, or “ways of ‘not being like that.’”³⁸

As another specific example of counter-conduct, many theorists cite the various Occupy Movements that took place around the world in 2011 and 2012. Obviously, the Occupy Movements represented a clear refusal of capitalist values and ways of being that exacerbated social inequalities and blocked democratic flourishing. Yet the movement’s refusal went beyond refuting the capitalist powers at play and moved into the territory of how people conduct themselves within everyday life; it even refuted activist norms. Chris Rossdale and Maurice Stierl point out that the Occupy Movement generally refused to state demands. Or, as Naomi Klein remarks, it is not that the movement did not have demands; rather, these demands were not stated through discourse as the political climate would expect or accept. Instead, the movement’s demands were ‘spoken’ when protestors ‘occupied’ public space around the clock (even while sleeping), reclaimed houses for people who had been evicted, performed flash mobs in banks to disrupt transactions, created their own community schools and kitchens, and manifested horizontal (rather than hierarchical) power relations among protestors.³⁹ Says Klein, “These are ways of speaking our demands in a new language of resistance.”⁴⁰ The demands of the Occupy Movement, rather than being discursively articulated, were *performed* through various actions. To put it in the relevant theoretical language, we could say that the Occupy Movement 1) performatively rejected neoliberal and capitalist *conductors*, ways of letting oneself be

³⁸ Death, “Counter-Conducts as Modes of Resistance,” 202.

³⁹ David Backer, et al., “What is Horizontal Pedagogy? A Discussion on Dandelions,” in *Out of the Ruins: The Emergence of Radical Informal Learning Spaces*, eds. Robert Haworth and John Elmore (San Francisco: PM Press, 2017); Dan Bulley, “Occupy Differently: Space, Community and Urban Counter-Conduct,” *Global Society* 30, no. 2 (2016): 238–257; Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Malden: Polity Press, 2013); Chris Rossdale and Maurice Stierl, “Everything is Dangerous: Conduct and Counter-Conduct in the Occupy Movement,” *Global Society* 30, no. 2 (2016): 157–178.

⁴⁰ Naomi Klein as quoted by Rossdale and Stierl, “Everything is Dangerous,” 166.

conducted, and ways of behaving—including, I argue, values, identities, and ways of being concomitant therein, *and* 2) performatively proposed new values, identities, and ways of being different from those of neoliberalism and capitalism: namely, ones aimed toward collectivity and horizontal power relations, among others.

Scholars have considered many other types of counter-conduct in addition to pexing and the Occupy Movements. Regarding the use of public space, researchers have considered counter-conduct as performed by pole dancers at a bus stop and as performed within the urban political resistance movement in Vancouver.⁴¹ Scholars who have examined counter-conduct as it relates to education have focused on topics such as students striking at universities, school leadership addressing accountability measures, teaching children philosophy within the debt economy, the implementation of critical pedagogy, and teaching children to engage in issues of human rights.⁴² For all the examples provided, one thing remains the same: counter-conduct can be performed, even if it remains “perhaps nascent, frequently unreflective”—even if, that is, it remains non- or pre-epistemic. Because it is performed and can remain non-epistemic, counter-conduct can resist structural powers, or governmentalities, that operate even beneath awareness.

Lorenzini notes that all forms of governmentality have a crucial common feature:

They can operate exclusively on the basis of an original consent (“I want”) which has to be reiterated at every moment by individuals, but they constantly re-inscribe it within the

⁴¹ Laura Fonseca de Castro, “Counter-Conduct and Aesthetic Experience,” in *IV World Planning Schools Congress Proceedings* (Rio, Brazil, July 2018), 798–800; Marit Rosol, “On Resistance in the Post-Political City: Conduct and Counter-Conduct in Vancouver,” *Space and Polity* 18, no. 1 (2014): 70–84.

⁴² Richard Niesche, “Foucault, Counter-Conduct and School Leadership as a Form of Political Subjectivity,” *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 45, no. 2 (2013): 144–158; Louiza Odyseos and Maia Pal, “Toward Critical Pedagogies of International?” *International Studies Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (2018): 1–26; Jason Thomas Wozniak, “Cultivating Oppositional Debt Ethics and Consciousness: Philosophy for/with Children as Counter-Conduct in the Neoliberal Debt Economy,” *Children & Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2020): 1–32; Zembylas, “Affect and Counter-Conduct”; Michalinos Zembylas, “The Affective Dimension of Everyday Resistance,” *Critical Studies in Education* (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2019.1617180>.

framework of a “You must” aiming at convincing them that this consent is the only choice they have if they wish to achieve salvation, happiness, well-being, and freedom itself.⁴³

Reconstituting “I want” into “You must” is already problematic within a democratic society rooted in ideas of individual agency and autonomy. This transmogrification is made even more problematic, however, by the fact that the possibility to say “I do not want” to be governed *like this* is “masked” from individuals.⁴⁴ The freedom to reject a particular way of being governed—including a particular set of values, way of being, or even identity—is often hidden. We don blinders of conduct and trudge forward unaware of them.

Against such covert governmentalities, various possibilities for resistance exist. For example, a person can be epistemically ‘unmasked,’ such as through the deliberate formation of a critical attitude.⁴⁵ Importantly to my project, this ‘unmasking’ can also occur performatively,

⁴³ Lorenzini, “From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude,” 18.

⁴⁴ Lorenzini, “From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude,” 19.

⁴⁵ Some scholars have connected the concept of counter-conduct to another of Foucault’s concepts: critical attitude. In “From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude,” Lorenzini points out that a few months after giving his lecture on counter-conduct, Foucault gave another lecture titled “Qu’est que c’est la critique?” where he uses the term ‘critical attitude,’ which Lorenzini argues represents a particular form of counter-conduct in modern times. According to Foucault, critical attitude, like counter-conduct, also demonstrates the desire to not be conducted *like that*, and to not be governed *quite so much*, yet it is distinct in that it represents resistance “conceived as an *attitude*, ‘both political and moral’” that questions the politics of truth and puts forward a new subjectivation. Where counter-conduct tends to manifest as performative acts of resistance, critical attitude manifests as a disposition, or a thought, or a question; where counter-conduct may perform a critique that is nondiscursive or unreflective, critical attitude entails the subject “giv[ing] himself the right to question truth and power.” Ultimately, counter-conduct can entail non-epistemic performance, but critical attitude seems well-situated within the epistemic. Despite their differences, scholars have connected the two modes of resistance. For instance, Odysseos and Pal (2018) note that counter-conducts “entail an ‘experience of desubjugation,’ which ‘opens up a space to question the ethical relationship of the self to itself’ through the recovery of ‘the critical attitude.’” Perhaps, then, the performative, unreflective enactment of counter-conduct might make way for a person to question their own self and the world.

Educational researchers have particularly found fruitful the connection between counter-conduct and critical attitude. Odysseos and Pal discuss how acts of student resistance, such as occupations and protests on campus, can at once work against the neoliberal values that have been wedged into the heart of higher education and, further, develop critical attitudes within students that lead to self-formation by “sanctioning the right to question regimes of truth” and power. Others point to how counter-conduct can exist in subtle, everyday practices that fuel the development of a critical attitude. For instance, Zembylas discusses how affect can play a role in acts of everyday resistance. Echoing a concern about neoliberalism in education, Zembylas asserts that creating new affective relations, different from those inspired by neoliberalism, can lead students and teachers to form resistances that “‘invisibly’ challenge modes/forms of power such as surveillance, normalization, and regulation.”

without the specific articulation or reflection of the participants. This we saw, for instance, within the performance of ‘pexing’ or within the Occupy Movements. Performative enactments of alternative ways of being resist the hidden “You musts” and open the possibilities for people to refuse a particularly governmentality and to conduct themselves in different ways. This is true even if they do not fully understand the counter-conduct. Through the refusal of the ‘conduct of conduct’ and through the performance of alternative ways of being, values, or identities—through the performance of an alternative subjectivity—participants *feel* or *witness* what it is like to remove the blinders and to live differently than they have been expected to live. They change not because of an epistemic formation of critical attitude (at least, not in the immediate sense), but rather because of their performance, and consequent aesthetic experience, of an alternative subjectivity. I will return to the notion of aesthetic experience later in this chapter. For now, I turn my attention to performativity and its inherent relationship with counter-conduct.

1.3 Performativity

The above section argued that counter-conduct need not be epistemic but must be performative in that it refuses a certain conduct of behavior and puts forward an alternative subjectivity by engaging in alternative conduct. In this section, I examine the concept of ‘performativity’ in order to highlight its inherent connection with counter-conduct. Furthermore, discussing performativity will demonstrate *how* new identities, values, and ways of being emerge in acts of resistance—especially when these new, or alternative, subjectivities resist governmentalities that remain unrecognized or not understood by those it conducts.

Originally, performativity was used to describe how new meanings come into being through language.⁴⁶ The concept stems from J.L. Austin’s examination of language, in which he

⁴⁶ Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, 120.

establishes the difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary characteristics of speech utterances. This distinction was later picked up by Butler, who defined the difference as such: “illocution refers to the performance of an act *in* saying something; and perlocution refers to the performance of an act *by* saying something.”⁴⁷ The illocutionary encompasses the stated meaning of the utterance, while the perlocutionary encompasses its ‘unspoken’ meaning.⁴⁸ Claudia Ruitenberg, one of the few philosophers of education to have written about this concept in recent years, notes that for Butler, unlike for Austin, performativity is more about a collective discourse rather than any one individual act. Framing performativity this way demonstrates the true function of the term: performativity does not signify that one performs their identity as though they were an actor; rather, it signifies that an individual is “*performatively produced* by the discourse” in which they participate.⁴⁹ Yet, this ‘performative production’ is not set in stone—we have the power, collectively and over time, to change the discourse, and thereby change our identities within it.⁵⁰

Butler moves away from a linguistic interpretation of performativity and toward the allowance of bodily speech acts and embodied performativity.⁵¹ For Butler, gender itself is performative. This means that while there are ‘regulating fictions’ that dictate gender performance, disruptions of this performance can change the limits, shape, and contours of the concept. Butler writes that because gender has no essence or ‘eternal truth,’ “the various acts of

⁴⁷ Butler as quoted by Claudia Ruitenberg, “Performativity and Affect in Education,” *Philosophical Inquiry in Education* 23, no. 1 (2015): 40.

⁴⁸ Ruitenberg provides the example of a person announcing their engagement. This announcement states that they are to be married (illocution), yet it also implies that other suitors should cease trying to woo the engaged person (perlocution).

⁴⁹ Claudia Ruitenberg, “Discourse, Theatrical Performance, Agency: The Analytic Force of ‘Performativity’ in Education,” *Philosophy of Education* 62, no. 1 (2008): 264.

⁵⁰ Ruitenberg, “Discourse, Theatrical Performance, Agency,” 264.

⁵¹ Molly Anne Rothenberg, “Embodied Political Performativity in Excitable Speech: Butler’s Psychoanalytic Revision of Historicism,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 23, no. 4 (2006): 71–93.

gender create the idea of gender.”⁵² When performativity is situated within bodily action—when there is an *embodied* performativity—something new comes into being not through spoken discourse but rather through embodied action. This can hold even if an actor remains ‘unknowing’ about their true intentions or about the meaning of their performance, which lies not in any discursive articulation but rather in “bodily significations.”⁵³ The actor need not intend or even realize how their embodied performativity puts forward something new for it to happen all the same.

Often, an embodied action of performativity will be collective rather than individual, especially when it comes to acts of political or social resistance. According to Butler, the performativity of resistance is enacted through the embodiment of a political movement—as in, a movement is comprised of assembled bodies merging within an action of collective performance. To Butler, the performativity of resistance encapsulates the actions and images of a group, the sound of what they speak, and the very possibility of their existence.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the performativity of resistance “is not only speech, but the demands of bodily action, gesture, movement, congregation, persistence, and exposure to possible violence.”⁵⁵ These non-discursive elements of an act of resistance carry meaning beyond the protestors’ stated contentions. Butler notes, “the political meanings enacted by demonstrations are not only those that are enacted by discourse, whether written or vocalized.”⁵⁶ Instead, meanings, values, and identities are also sensuously, rather than just discursively, enacted through the performativity of a movement and its “embodied form of the gathering.”⁵⁷ Embodied performativity—that is,

⁵² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 190.

⁵³ Rothenberg, “Embodied Political Performativity,” 79.

⁵⁴ Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 19.

⁵⁵ Butler, *Notes*, 75.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Notes*, 8.

⁵⁷ Butler, *Notes*, 18.

performativity enacted through and by a body or collection of bodies—thus conveys meaning and carries significance beyond discursive demands;⁵⁸ it signifies in ways that are neither discursive nor prediscursive.⁵⁹ The coming together of bodies speaks, as it were, in *another way*. As such, meanings, values, and identities come into being within the embodied performativity of resistance that are not the same as the discursive demands the act, but rather contingent upon *how* such resistance is enacted.

1.3.1 *Connection with Counter-Conduct*

Assemblies of protest enact politics discursively through chanting, signage, and interviews, among other things, yet they also perform, non-discursively, the fact that “bodies are political,” as well as particular identities, values, and ways of being.⁶⁰ Ultimately, bodies assembled in acts of resistance contribute to the “construction of alternative or new realities and practices, and to the opening up of alternative political possibilities.”⁶¹ One such alternative reality turns the “‘I’ into a ‘we.’”⁶² Otherwise dissimilar people who share the same precarity collectively experience a solidarity constructed through the very performance of a unified front.⁶³ Such solidarity is constituted at the moment of its performance, “constructing community in ways that exceed ‘the protest itself.’”⁶⁴ Frederica Castelli points out that embodied acts of resistance can *perform* “an alternative to neoliberalism, bringing into question the dichotomies,

⁵⁸ Mona Lilja, “Dangerous Bodies, Matter and Emotions: Public Assemblies and Embodied Resistance,” *Journal of Political Power* 10, no. 3 (2017): 342–352.

⁵⁹ Butler, *Notes*, 8.

⁶⁰ Frederica Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance and New Sites of Resistance: Performing the Political in Neoliberal Public Spaces,” in *Bodies in the Streets: The Somaesthetics of City Life*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2019), 190.

⁶¹ Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance,” 192.

⁶² Butler, *Notes*, 52.

⁶³ Butler, *Notes*, 52.

⁶⁴ Emily Wilbourne, “The Future of Academia is on the Line: Protest, Pedagogy, Picketing, Performativity,” *Workplace* 14, no. 1 (2007): 17.

hierarchies, and exclusions on which contemporary public space has been built.”⁶⁵ To Castelli, protests or other acts of political resistance do not simply *demand* change; “they *realize* change through new public-political formations.”⁶⁶ Even when they do not articulate the creation of new realities, protestors and strikers can *perform* them all the same.

In this opening up of possibilities, a clear relationship emerges between embodied performativity and counter-conduct. Both concepts point to the creation of alternative ways of being, values, or identities through performed action rather than through discourse. Both also allow the possibility that such creation might precede any understanding or awareness on the part of participants. Protestors need not articulate that they are a community for community to be performed nonetheless. They need not articulate that they oppose sexist societal pressures for alternative gender norms to be performed. They need not articulate that they are anti-neoliberal in order to perform an alternative value system all the same.

Furthermore, for both counter-conduct and embodied performativity, there is a simultaneous *refusal* and *invention*. The two exist against discourse and within discourse; they are acted upon and act in a new, productive way. Counter-conduct exists within the system of governmentality it seeks to change, and embodied performativity utilizes aspects of the very discourse it disrupts. Counter-conduct and embodied performativity both exist, then, within a dialectic between power and resistance. Neither is monologic; neither is stagnant.

In fact, counter-conduct seems to depend upon embodied performativity to come into existence at all. Within acts of counter-conduct, the emergence of new or alternative values, identities, and ways of being comes into existence through performance rather than through any assertions. One way to think about it is that while counter-conduct tells us *that* new values,

⁶⁵ Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance,” 188.

⁶⁶ Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance,” 192.

identities, and ways of being emerge, performativity tells us *how* they emerge. Regarding the teacher strikes specifically, teacher strikers enact counter-conduct *by* performing new or alternative identities, values, and ways of being. Their counter-conduct does not manifest through discursive assertions or articulated demands; their counter-conduct manifests through the collective, embodied performance of resistance, power, authority, community, and expertise. Through this performance, alternative subjectivities come into existence—subjectivities, that is, alternative to the ideal neoliberal citizen and the sexist ideal of the feminized caretaker.

Another way to put this, echoing both Foucault and Butler, is that counter-conduct is a *performed* desubjugation. Butler notes that for Foucault, a critical attitude “would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth.”⁶⁷ Here, Foucault uses the term ‘desubjugation’ to denote a process of stepping outside what one has come to believe is true about themselves, others, or society and questioning it; it is a process of inquiry and critique—a courageous challenging rather than an obsequious acceptance. This kind of desubjugation, consequent of a critical attitude, is epistemic. It occurs, alongside self-making, “when a mode of existence is risked which is unsupported by what [Foucault] calls the regime of truth.”⁶⁸ Certainly, in performing counter-conduct, the teacher strikers performed a mode of existence alternative to those forced by neoliberal and misogynist patriarchal governmentalities. Thus, even without epistemic realization of such, teacher strikers may put forward a performed and embodied desubjugation, which contributes to self-making in a performative sense. It contributes, in other words, to a collective *poiesis*—a concept that refers to the process of creative self-fashioning, and that exists at the heart of Foucault’s idea of

⁶⁷ Foucault as quoted by Butler, “What is Critique?” 9.

⁶⁸ Butler, “What is Critique?” 3.

desubjugation.⁶⁹ Consequently, then, the *poiesis* that takes place within the performed counter-conduct of the teacher strikes is not fashioned epistemically, but rather through and by the aesthetic. This performed, aesthetic *poiesis* may lead to an epistemic one, but in its enactment, it need not. It exists on a collective, unspoken, performed level, yet it still leads to a creative self-fashioning alternative to the ‘regime of truth’ policing society, particularly the governmentalities of neoliberalism and patriarchy. In the following section, I turn my attention to defining the aesthetic through the everyday aesthetic and somaesthetic, and to demonstrating its inherent connection with both counter-conduct and performativity.

1.4 Aesthetics: Everyday and Somaesthetic

The idea of *poiesis* leads directly into the final dimension of the political-aesthetic framework: namely, the aesthetic dimension. The idea of the ‘aesthetic’ I employ here is not the same as that found in art-centered aesthetics. I am not considering the ‘aesthetic’ as it relates to concepts representative of Western art-centered aesthetics, such as the ‘beautiful’ or the ‘good.’ Rather, I am considering the aesthetic as it relates to quotidian ways of being and creative self-fashioning as it occurs through everyday action. This kind of aesthetic comprises the sensuous elements of our daily surroundings—the color of one’s clothing, the movement of one’s body, the fluidity or tension of a collective action, the location of an event—rather than just those things found in museums. For these reasons, this project demands working with not art-centered aesthetics, but rather with two of its subfields: everyday aesthetics and somaesthetics. Everyday aesthetics provides a framework to analyze the teacher strikes as an aesthetic event experienced by witnesses and participants with an emphasis on quotidian details rather than on any

⁶⁹ Butler, “What is Critique?” 3.

‘extraordinary’ or ‘complete’ aesthetic experience.⁷⁰ With everyday aesthetics, I analyze the sensory components of the strikes: for example, the sea of thousands of teachers in red t-shirts filling the gold-domed state capitol, the chanting of demands and singing in unison, and the striking body comprised mainly of women. Somaesthetics, in short the study “of the experience and use of one’s body” as the site of “sensory-aesthetic appreciation and creative self-fashioning,” provides the framework to analyze the teacher strikes as an affective, embodied, and felt experience by participants.⁷¹

1.4.1 *Everyday Aesthetics*

Everyday aesthetics is a relatively new subfield in the discipline of aesthetics. Broadly speaking, it encompasses aesthetic experience of everyday surroundings, including environments, objects, people, and actions.⁷² Everyday aesthetics can encompass our reactions to landscapes, kitchen utensils, the feeling of scratching our head with a mechanical pencil, our social interactions with others, clothing choices, and educational curriculum.⁷³ These examples,

⁷⁰ This is one significant way that everyday aesthetics differs from John Dewey’s notion of ‘aesthetic experience,’ as described in his 1934 book *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigree Books, 2005).

⁷¹ Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 3 (1999): 302. For more on somaesthetics, see for example David Granger, “Somaesthetics and Racism: Toward an Embodied Pedagogy of Difference,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 3 (2010): 69–81; and Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and Politics: Incorporating Pragmatist Aesthetics for Social Action,” *Beauty, Responsibility, and Power* 277, no. 1 (2014): 5–18.

⁷² Sherri Irvin, “The Pervasiveness of the Aesthetic in Ordinary Experience,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48, no. 1 (2008): 29–44; Sherri Irvin, “Scratching an Itch,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66, no. 1 (2008): 25–35; Thomas Leddy, “Everyday Surface Aesthetic Qualities: ‘Neat,’ ‘Messy,’ ‘Clean,’ ‘Dirty,’” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 3 (1995): 259–268; Thomas Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2012); Katya Mandoki, “The Third Tear in Everyday Aesthetics,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 8, no. 1 (2010); Kevin Melchionne, “Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life: A Reply to Dowling,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51, no. 4 (2011): 437–442; Kevin Melchionne, “The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 11, no. 1 (2013); Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*; Yuriko Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2017); Crispin Sartwell, “Aesthetics of the Everyday,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 761–770; Andrew Light and Jonathan Smith, eds., *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁷³ In order of example: Saito, “The Power of the Aesthetic”; Ossi Naukkarinen, “What is ‘Everyday’ in Everyday Aesthetics?” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 11, no. 1 (2013); Irvin, “The Pervasiveness”; Arnold Berleant, “Objects into Persons: The Way to Social Aesthetics,” *ESPEs* 6, no. 2 (2017): 9–18; Melchionne, “The Definition of Everyday

while in no way exhaustive of the discipline, demonstrate a split from the strictly art-centered aesthetics that much of Western philosophy has focused on within this field. Everyday aesthetics is not concerned with solely the beautiful, good, or artistic, but also with those things that are dirty, messy, or unpleasant.⁷⁴ According to Yuriko Saito, whose scholarship I draw on the most in this field, everyday aesthetics comprises “any reaction we form toward the sensuous and/or design qualities of any object, phenomenon, or activity, [and].... those responses that propel us toward everyday decisions and actions, without any accompanying contemplative appreciation.”⁷⁵ In other words, everyday aesthetics encompasses not only the sensuous or design nature of things external to us, but it also encompasses how we react and respond to those phenomena.

Some philosophers argue that an everyday aesthetic experience happens only when we treat a particular aspect of the everyday as extraordinary.⁷⁶ This means that while hypothetically any object or situation could incite an everyday aesthetic experience, it is, without fail, an experience one is consciously aware of having. An aspect of the everyday is singled out as something extraordinary in itself, and in noticing this one is able to consciously reflect on the aesthetic experience.

Aesthetics”; Guillermo Marini, “An Introduction to Everyday Aesthetics in Education,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* (2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-020-09740-x_2

⁷⁴ Quote from Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 10; see also Katya Mandoki, “Terror and Aesthetics: Nazi Strategies for Mass Organization,” *Culture, Theory, and Critique* 42, no. 1 (1999): 64–81; and Margus Vihalem, “What is at Stake in Everyday Aesthetics? Looking for a New Perspective on Aesthetic Experience,” *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 25, no. 3/4 (2016): 38–61.

⁷⁵ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 10-11.

⁷⁶ Chris Dowling, “The Aesthetics of Daily Life,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50, no. 3 (2010): 225–242; Leddy, “Everyday Surface Aesthetic Qualities”; Leddy, *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary*; Dan Ratiu, “Remapping the Realm of Aesthetics: On Recent Controversies About the Aesthetic and Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life,” *Estetika: The European Journal of Aesthetics* 1, no. 1 (2013): 3–26; Dan Ratiu, “Everyday Aesthetic Experience Exploration,” in *Experiencing the Everyday*, eds. C. Friberg and R. Vasquez (Evanston: Northwestern State University Press, 2017).

Conversely, other philosophers assert that this notion of the ‘extraordinary in the ordinary’ discredits what the ‘everyday’ truly means. Instead, they argue that an everyday aesthetic experience happens within the ordinary, routine, or comfortable. Some also argue that it can happen, and perhaps only does, without our conscious awareness. Margus Vihalem states on this matter that an everyday aesthetic experience “often pops up when we do not expect it; it even often happens without being noticed.”⁷⁷ For these philosophers, the everyday stays in the realm of the ordinary, and our aesthetic experience with it is not something out of the norm, but rather inherent within the act of living.⁷⁸ Arto Haapala goes the furthest in this assertion, arguing that everyday aesthetic experiences can *only* happen discreetly with things that make us feel at home or comfortable.⁷⁹ Others, including Saito, Katya Mandoki, and Vihalem, agree that everyday aesthetic experiences can happen when we feel at home, but they need not only happen in these moments.⁸⁰ In fact, these three philosophers allow both the extraordinary and the ordinary into their ideas of everyday aesthetic experiences, asserting these experiences are ones that we could be consciously aware of or that could go unnoticed.

In analyzing the everyday aesthetics of teacher strikes, I take up this final perspective, recognizing the extraordinary and ordinary qualities of a teacher strike. Even within the extraordinary *event* of a teacher strike, the aesthetic phenomena within it remain situated in

⁷⁷ Vihalem, “What is at Stake in Everyday Aesthetics?” 54.

⁷⁸ Jane Forsey, “Appraising the Ordinary—Tension in Everyday Aesthetics,” *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics* 5, no. 1 (2013): 237–245; Jane Forsey, “The Promise, the Challenge, of Everyday Aesthetics,” *Aisthesis* 7, no. 1 (2014): 5–21; Arto Haapala, “On the Aesthetics of the Everyday: Familiarity, Strangeness, and the Meaning of Place,” in *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, eds. Andrew Light and Jonathan Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 39–55; Irvin, “The Pervasiveness”; Irvin, “Scratching an Itch”; Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*; Saito, “The Power of the Aesthetic”; Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*; Yuriko Saito, “Consumer Aesthetics and Environmental Ethics,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 76, no. 4 (2018): 429–439; Andrew Light and Jonathan Smith, eds., *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Mandoki, “The Third Tear”; Melchionne, “Aesthetic Experience in Everyday Life”; Melchionne, “The Definition of Everyday Aesthetics”; Vihalem, “What is at Stake?”

⁷⁹ Haapala, “On the Aesthetics of the Everyday.”

⁸⁰ Mandoki, “The Third Tear”; Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*; Saito, “The Power of the Aesthetic”; Vihalem, “What is at Stake?”

everyday, quotidian details: strikers' clothing choices, their occupation of public space, their synchronized movements, the speaking of demands, and the singing of songs. The extraordinary nature of the event itself and the ordinary nature of the aesthetic details therein certainly overlap and impact each other, yet they remain distinct. While the strikers are undoubtedly aware of the extraordinary nature of the strike itself, they may remain epistemically unaware of the ordinary everyday aesthetics within the movement—or at least, unaware of their full impact. Yet it is these aesthetic details that I speak to in this project, for, despite the fact that they have been neglected in scholarship on teacher strikes, they could bear great significance in considering the performance and experience of counter-conduct. This is particularly true when considering the impact that everyday aesthetics can have on our quotidian decisions, values, and behavior.

Significantly, everyday aesthetic experiences have the power to influence or inform our values, actions, or behavior, even without “any accompanying contemplative appreciation.”⁸¹ Through everyday aesthetic experiences, we might feel compelled to act in environmentally ethical ways, to better enact democratic ideals, and to eschew aspects of neoliberalism or consumerism.⁸² For example, attractive ‘green’ clothing and food options might encourage people to buy eco-friendly products rather than fast fashion or food. In addition, a public space that enables unplanned interactions and dialogue could encourage people to become more active democratic citizens.⁸³ By experiencing everyday aesthetics, we might also become more caring, thoughtful, or patient people. Saito notes, “If we detect and appreciate that we are surrounded by objects and environments expressive of care and thoughtfulness, we tend to pass on kindness and

⁸¹ Saito, *Everyday Aesthetics*, 11; see also Haapala, “On the Aesthetics of the Everyday”; Mandoki, “The Third Tear”; and Vihalem, “What is at Stake?”

⁸² Irvin, “The Pervasiveness”; Jonathan Maskit, “The Aesthetics of Elsewhere: An Environmentalist Everyday Aesthetics,” *Aesthetic Pathways* 1, no. 2 (2011): 92–107; Saito, “The Power of the Aesthetic.”

⁸³ Henrik Neilsen, “Totalizing Aesthetics? Aesthetic Theory and the Aestheticization of Everyday Life,” *Nordisk Estetisk Tidskrift* 32, no. 1 (2005): 60–75.

consideration to those around us.”⁸⁴ The same is also true, however, in the negative sense: if we are surrounded by negative aesthetics, we might be more prone to become indifferent or demoralized. Furthermore, bodily actions, facial expressions, and tones of voice—in short, behavior—also have a place within everyday aesthetics, and thus may also impact moral development. For example, aesthetically experiencing a particular value, virtue, or belief performed through the actions of another person may incite the development of the same quality within oneself.⁸⁵ Actions as simple as unwrapping a present in front of the gift-giver, eating a meal prepared by a friend, or leaving the room of a lover can demonstrate particular moral virtues (e.g., patience, care, and thoughtfulness) that a person then reflects in their own actions. It is not just *that* something is done, but *how* something is done that offers educative potential. Witnessing or feeling a moral virtue performed by someone else can develop the capacity for the same moral virtue within oneself. This is not dissimilar to Noddings’ assertion that feeling cared for can expand one’s capacity to care for others.⁸⁶

Conversely, however, the same can hold: witnessing or experiencing the unvirtuous or uncaring actions of another may instigate similar behavior in ourselves. We need not be aware of this consequential relationship for it to transpire. As such, it is not just the things we do that carry pedagogical potential, but the way we do them.⁸⁷ Saito asserts, “What people experience in daily life becomes a powerful, though subtle, vehicle for moral education, and it is facilitated by aesthetically minded bodily engagement.”⁸⁸ Through everyday aesthetic expressions of care and

⁸⁴ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 170.

⁸⁵ Yuriko Saito, “Body Aesthetics and the Cultivation of Moral Virtues,” in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 225–241; Ossi Naukkarinen, “Everyday Aesthetics and Everyday Behavior,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 15, no. 10 (2017).

⁸⁶ Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

⁸⁷ Noddings, *Caring*.

⁸⁸ Saito, “Body Aesthetics,” 240.

respect for others, we are contributing to their moral education, even if this education is never explicitly mentioned or noticed by either party.

Furthermore, through everyday aesthetics, we can discriminate between our aesthetic and epistemic sensibilities, particularly as they relate to our ethical decision-making. This is not to say that our aesthetic and epistemic sensibilities are completely separate, for they undoubtedly overlap and influence each other. This is just to say that the aesthetic and epistemic might inform our ways of being and decision-making in different ways. At times, the aesthetic and epistemic might support each other, while at other moments, they might work against each other. When they do work against each other, our aesthetic responses can trump epistemic beliefs in many realms, including as they relate to environmental issues. Tyson-Lord Gray notes that people argue against the construction of windmills on an aesthetic basis (e.g., ‘they ruin the landscape’), even while knowing that they are good for the environment.⁸⁹ Similarly, Saito proposes that people often have aesthetic reasons for not choosing environmentally friendly products, or they opt into consumerism for the aesthetic appeal of changing fast fashions.⁹⁰ On a darker level, aesthetic responses can feed racism, homophobia, and sexism. George Yancy notes how racism can happen as a bodily response (e.g., a feeling of disgust) even in someone with rational desires denouncing racism. Martha Nussbaum asserts the same reaction historically has happened upon viewing gay acts, and Tobin Siebers upon viewing disabled bodies.⁹¹ Perceived through the senses and felt in the body, these affective and somatic reactions are responses to the aesthetic dimension of our everyday surroundings. Yet they can be dangerous, particularly feelings of

⁸⁹ Tyson-Lord Gray, “Beauty or Bane: Advancing an Aesthetic Appreciation of Wind Turbine Farms,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 10, no. 10 (2012).

⁹⁰ Saito, “Consumer Aesthetics and Environmental Ethics.”

⁹¹ By order of example: George Yancy, “White Embodied Gaze, the Black Body as Disgust, and the Aesthetics of Un-Suturing,” in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 243–259; Martha Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

disgust, because while they might be a consequence of discomfort or fear, they may be used to justify systems of oppression as ‘eternal truths.’

Thus, influencing and educating the way people behave, the actions they take, and the things they value does not solely occur at the level of information. Rather, it appeals to aesthetic sensibilities as well—those sensibilities that can operate affectively and somatically. Unless people can *feel* or *see* the effects of their actions, they might be unconvinced to care about them. As Saito states, “Psychologically and pragmatically, it is difficult to act on rationality alone. How much easier will it be if we are inspired to act by the power of the aesthetic?”⁹² This foreshadows a connection I draw out more later: namely, that counter-conduct works as a pedagogical tool through the everyday aesthetic precisely because it is felt and seen rather than necessarily understood.

1.4.2 *Somaesthetics*

While everyday aesthetics theory informs how we can analyze our reactions to sensory input, somaesthetics speaks to the impact of internal aesthetic responses, including one’s affect and feeling. Proposed as a disciplinary field by Richard Shusterman in 1999, somaesthetics to define it briefly, is “the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation and creative self-fashioning.”⁹³ Twenty years after his first article on the topic, Shusterman defined the term “soma” itself as “the bodily, sensory subjectivity through which we perceive things, including the soma itself as a bodily object in the world.”⁹⁴ Somaesthetics is both a theory and a practice that aims at better thinking and better living through awareness of the body. Shusterman claims that this new field actually takes

⁹² Saito, “The Power of the Aesthetic,” 20.

⁹³ Shusterman, “Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal,” 302.

⁹⁴ Richard Shusterman, *Bodies in the Streets: The Somaesthetics of City Life* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2019), 14.

aesthetics back to its roots; when Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten conceptualized the field of aesthetics in the 18th century, he defined it as the cognitive value of sense perception oriented toward knowledge, virtue, and the good life. Awareness of our sense perception is a practice in itself, Shusterman says, that can be developed and improved through somaesthetics—itsself an embodied practice of transformative self-care. Yet somaesthetics is not purely self-regarding or self-oriented. While practicing somaesthetics aims at a better life for ourselves, it also aims “to render us more sensitive to the needs of others and more capable of responding to them with effectively willed action.”⁹⁵ As Shusterman sees it, the field is thus committed to improving our capacity to act sympathetically and ethically by cultivating our internal somaesthetic sensibilities. Castelli echoes the sentiment of Shusterman when she defines somaesthetics as “both a regaining of aesthetic experience (where aesthetics stands for ‘sensory knowledge’) and a regaining of the real-life situation, everyday experience, and relationships with the world around us.”⁹⁶ Somaesthetics, in short, is not only about internalized feeling; it is also about how that feeling incites us to interact with the world.

In many ways, somaesthetics overlaps with some of the ethical considerations of everyday aesthetics as stated above, where I described how we can perpetuate social injustices by not confronting reflexive feelings of disgust, discomfort, or fear we feel toward marginalized groups. Shusterman echoes Yancy and Nussbaum in stating that rational arguments are often not enough for people to change their behavior in issues regarding social justice. Rather, somaesthetics, in targeting the root of the affective feeling, can be an effective tool to uproot racism, homophobia, sexism, and ableism. Shusterman states, “Rational arguments for multicultural tolerance and peace always seem to fail, because the hatred is acquired not by

⁹⁵ Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and Care of the Self,” *The Monist* 83, no. 4 (2000): 546.

⁹⁶ Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance,” 179.

rational means but through discomfiting somatic feelings that, though unpleasant, are often only distractedly or implicitly felt.”⁹⁷ Somaesthetics targets the noncognitive aesthetic responses undergirding the epistemic ones. Somaesthetics seeks to make us more aware of our own somatic responses, and thus to help us understand them better. Once we have this awareness and understanding, we can consciously examine the somatic response to determine whether it is helpful or harmful to ourselves and others. Somaesthetics can incite us to reconstruct unreflective, habitual behavior. David Granger notes that in this way, somaesthetics could be a useful approach in critical pedagogy or in counteracting racism.⁹⁸

Shusterman relates somaesthetics to Foucault’s conception of the care of the self.⁹⁹ Yet while Foucault employs hedonistic pleasures to disrupt a sense of somaesthetics, Shusterman concentrates on the pleasures that can happen at any level of intensity or related to any experience, even the ones considered banal. For Shusterman, unlike for Foucault, somaesthetics is not concerned with immediate pleasure, but rather with the holistic transformation of the subject, “in which the aesthetic, moral, and spiritual improvement are all interconnected.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Shusterman does not consider somatic pleasures to be private, as Foucault seems to do. Rather, our bodies and somatic pleasures are shared as much as we share our minds with others, and shown in public as much as we express our thoughts.¹⁰¹ In fact, the public nature of somatic experience is one of the cornerstones of the field: somaesthetics highlights “public forms of embodied experience.”¹⁰² Matthew Crippen takes this further to suggest that somaesthetics

⁹⁷ Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and Politics: Incorporating Pragmatist Aesthetics for Social Action,” *Beauty, Responsibility, and Power* 277, no. 1 (2014): 9–10.

⁹⁸ Granger, “Somaesthetics and Racism.”

⁹⁹ For more on Foucault’s notion of care of the self, see Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of the History of Sexuality* (New York: Random House, 1986).

¹⁰⁰ Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and Care of the Self.”

¹⁰¹ Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and Care of the Self.”

¹⁰² Matthew Crippen, “Body Politics: Revolt and City Celebration,” in *Bodies in the Streets: The Somaesthetics of City Life*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2019), 91.

also offers a shift away from epistemic thought and toward pre-reflective thinking (echoing, perhaps, Dewey's notions of primary and secondary experience).¹⁰³

As a critical study of 'the experience and use of one's body,' and with the presupposition that we share somatic feelings, somaesthetics can provide insight into the felt experience of governmentality as well as the felt experience of political resistance. Regarding the former, governmentalities, including neoliberalism and patriarchy, are often enforced by and through the body through biopolitics.¹⁰⁴ Richard Shusterman, in his reading of Foucault, states that ideologies of oppression can be "encoded in somatic norms as bodily habits and can escape critical consciousness."¹⁰⁵ This includes the norms that both embody and reinforce gender oppression. The body acts as an essential medium through which "social norms and political power are transmitted, inscribed, and preserved in society."¹⁰⁶ The oppression that comes from the patriarchal order both greatly impacts and is effected through the feminine and feminized body. The oppression that comes from neoliberalism impacts and is effected through the marketized body. From external forces, this often takes the form of biopolitical control, including constraining or policing persons' health, bodies, or movement.¹⁰⁷ Yet patriarchal and neoliberal oppression are also effected internally: feminized and marketized bodies reproduce the external patriarchal and neoliberal oppression placed upon them. In other words, patriarchal and neoliberal oppression can be internalized.

Somaesthetics can also provide clarity to the felt experience of political resistance.

Shusterman states, "We need emotions as well as rationality for good political solutions;

¹⁰³ Crippen, "Body Politics: Revolt and City Celebration."

¹⁰⁴ For more on biopolitics, see Chapter Three, page 109.

¹⁰⁵ Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and Politics," 9.

¹⁰⁶ Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and Politics," 9.

¹⁰⁷ One such example of this in West Virginia was the proposed Go365 plan, which aimed to monitor teachers' step counts and other health data and dole monetary bonuses or fines based on whether they made their monthly requirement. I describe this in more detail in Chapter Three, pages 107–108.

solidarity, for example, so important for political action (including political resistance) is not only enhanced by bonds of feeling but is also, in large part, constituted by them.”¹⁰⁸ Here he notes the significant role that somatic feeling plays in inspiring and fueling acts of political resistance, including protests and strikes. Acts of political resistance incite somaesthetic experiences, and somaesthetic experience constitute in part political actions—particularly feelings of solidarity. Political resistance is not just about power; it is also about the *experience* of protesting, which “forces a reconsideration of politics in connection with bodies.”¹⁰⁹

Regarding the act of political resistance in the teacher strikes, somaesthetics can inform how we analyze the felt experience of neoliberal and patriarchal oppression as well as the affective, sensory, and somatic experiences teachers have in resistance to these oppressions while striking. By utilizing somaesthetics, we can better understand individual and collective bodies as sites of political resistance and creative self-transformation within the felt and aesthetic experience of teacher strikes.

1.4.3 *Connection with Counter-Conduct and Performativity*

As I mentioned before, counter-conduct can tell us *that* alternative values, identities, and ways of being are brought into existence in teacher strikes, and performativity can tell us *how* they are brought into existence. Everyday aesthetics and somaesthetics complete the picture in telling us how alternative subjectivities are *experienced* and *taken in* by teacher strikers and by those who witness teacher strikes, such as community members and students.¹¹⁰ In other words, whereas counter-conduct is focused on the significance of the experience given how it is inscribed by larger social and political forces, everyday aesthetics and somaesthetics draw

¹⁰⁸ Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and Politics,” 14.

¹⁰⁹ Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance,” 186.

¹¹⁰ While I mention that witnesses to teacher strikes can also be educated through the aesthetic experience they have with these strikes, the main focus of my argument is on the education of teachers.

attention not to what the performance signifies, but to what the performance feels and looks like to those who engage in it and observe it—to the quality of the experience. For one, strikers experience aesthetic dimensions of the strike: for example, the sea of red t-shirts, the chants reverberating in the marbled halls of the capitol building, the hands clasped together in solidarity. Yet further, taken together, these details depict a collective refusal of constraining neoliberal and patriarchal characteristics and a putting forward of alternative values, identities, and ways of being. In other words, it is through the sensuous and felt dimensions of the strike that counter-conduct is educative. By feeling and perceiving the performance of alternative ways of being, teachers experience an expansion of possibilities regarding how to live as teachers and as humans. These possibilities are normally occluded by the very nature of governmentality.

The expansion of possibilities does not entail the dismantling of governmentality. Neoliberalism and patriarchy still exist.¹¹¹ However, the way that teachers can exist within these systems expands to encompass alternative ways of being not previously felt or seen. Transformations may emerge for teachers in subtle, quotidian ways such as in their conversations in the teachers' lounge, design choices in the classroom, or ways of dialoguing with students. Taken together, these subtle quotidian decisions comprise how teachers exist in the world on any given day, reflect the things they wish to focus attention on, and constitute how teachers might come to think of themselves as teachers.

Furthermore, these quotidian decisions can in turn represent unique performances of counter-conduct in their own right, albeit in an everyday sense. To Zembylas, quotidian counter-conduct is possible when a person “resists power configurations at the micro-level,” constituting

¹¹¹ In fact, counter-conduct reinforces governmentality. For a further discussion on this, see Chapter Four, pages 147–148.

a resistance that “often becomes ‘invisible.’”¹¹² Resistance can emerge in small decisions in the daily life of a teacher, such as when they “design a classroom activity that challenges normative expectations,”¹¹³ rearrange the furniture in their classroom to inspire more democratic interactions, subvert hierarchical teacher-student power dynamics, or disrupt in some capacity gender norms.

As suggested in the Introduction, the inherent relationship among counter-conduct, performativity, and everyday aesthetics offers a lineage from theory to everyday lived experience, and back again. Counter-conduct transpires as an act of resistance against the ‘conduct of conduct’ enforced by a particular governmentality. Performativity is a necessary condition of counter-conduct, which manifests as embodied action. Finally, counter-conduct is experienced through its aesthetic and somaesthetic dimensions. It is understanding how counter-conduct feels that brings us full circle in that it inevitably leads to more counter-conduct. The three theories overlap experientially in the teacher strikes as they do in the subtle decisions that teachers may make in the classroom. Together, they point to how teacher strikes can be educative not in the sense of conscious raising but in the sense of increased freedom of self-fashioning even within a governmentality.

1.5 Conclusion

From an epistemic perspective, teacher strikes educate people on the reality of the teaching profession and its general lack of respect and economic wellbeing. From a Marxist perspective, teacher strikes incite paradigm shifts and consciousness raising among strikers, causing them to better understand systems and structures of historic oppression and labor

¹¹² Zembylas, “The Affective Dimension of Everyday Resistance,” 215.

¹¹³ Zembylas, “The Affective Dimension of Everyday Resistance,” 215.

inequity. Yet, as I have been attempting to show, a political-aesthetic perspective offers something different from either of these analyses. From a political-aesthetic perspective, teacher strikes are pedagogical in their very composition. Through their performance, they put forward subjectivities alternative to those expected of teachers under the governmentalities of neoliberalism and patriarchy. In so doing, they offer teachers an education of feeling and sense that expands their possibilities for how to live, even without dismantling a governmentality—they need not exist like *this*, but can instead live like *that*. The political-aesthetic dimension of teacher strikes can consequently weave its way into the fabric of teachers' daily lives in the classroom and beyond. In the next chapter, I discuss more the concept of governmentality and its relation to aesthetics. Then, I describe the unique power of aesthetic resistance in combatting it.

Chapter 2: The Political and the Aesthetic

“A book or a lecture cannot effectively explain, on a mass scale, ideas like solidarity or collective action; for these to sink in, you need to experience them firsthand.”

- Eric Blanc¹

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I argue for the importance of considering the aesthetic dimension of governmentality and resistance. In particular, I argue that governmentalities gain their power in part through everyday aesthetics and somaesthetics. Because governmentalities impact identity power, aesthetics also influences identity formation. This is important to my project because of the contingent relationship between governmentality and resistance. In order to describe the political-aesthetic resistance of the West Virginia teacher strikes, I first argue for the existence of the political-aesthetic dimension of governmentalities, particularly those of neoliberalism and patriarchy. In the subsequent section, I define the aesthetics of these governmentalities in more detail and argue for their importance. Then, I provide a brief literature review on the connection between the political and the aesthetic, particularly as it relates to everyday aesthetics, somaesthetics, and performativity. Establishing this connection supports the idea that quotidian sensuous and affective details can support or disrupt governmentalities by influencing the behavior of individuals. I then examine the particular aesthetic dimensions of both neoliberalism and patriarchy and discuss how these dimensions impact identity formation, including that of

¹ Eric Blanc is an education and labor researcher. This comes from his book *Red State Revolt*, page 197.

teachers. Finally, I discuss how acts of resistance can speak beyond assertions through their aesthetic qualities.

2.2 Governmentality, Identity, and Aesthetics

As stated in Chapter One, this project works with the presupposition that there are oft-hidden powers at play that dictate societal norms and individual behaviors in society. According to Michel Foucault, these powers constitute a “domain of relations,” which he refers to as a “governmentality.” Foucault defines governmentality not only as the “analytic grid for these relations of power” but also as “the way in which one conducts the conduct of man.”² This latter point is particularly important to my project. To “conduct the conduct” of others, one need not give a direct command; rather, the relations of power themselves siphon citizens’ actions onto particular paths normed as acceptable by those wielding more agential power.

Using the terminology of Miranda Fricker, governmentality represents structural or passive power, as opposed to agential or active power. The existence of structural, passive powers entails that there are relations of power at play that influence the shape of society, inform governmental, institutional, and individual decisions, and police societal norms—in other words, that conduct the conduct of citizens. Generally, these structural powers operate without the awareness of coopted and cooperating individuals. Despite this lack of awareness, however, neither structural power nor governmentality (terms which I use interchangeably, although I mostly favor the latter) remains an external force. Rather, governmentality influences our identity formation as individuals and as a collective society. Governmentality operates not by telling people what they cannot do, but rather by constricting what they need to do to succeed or to be accepted by society, even in covert ways.

² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 186.

To the extent that governmentality conducts societal norms and individual behavior, it is formative of our identity. A type of structural power, ‘identity power,’ argues Fricker, can be exercised either actively or passively by social agents or purely structurally. The operation of identity power depends on “imaginative social coordination,” and it does not require the conscious acceptance of a stereotype by either party to be effectuated in personal expression or interpersonal expectation. For example, we share a collective conception of what it means to be a man or a woman in our current society, and this conception, even when not conscious, operates as identity power on individuals of all genders. Fricker notes that one example of gender identity power is when “a man makes (possibly unintended) use of his identity as a man to influence a woman’s actions—for example, to make her defer to his word.”³ For example, this can happen through patronization, such as through when a man invokes the conception of femininity as being intuitive rather than rational, but it can also happen just through his presence as a man. A woman might doubt her own ability to make decisions simply by being in the presence of a man.⁴ Importantly, Fricker notes that identity power can operate pre- or non-epistemically: “The conceptions of different social identities that are activated in operations of identity power need not be held at the level of belief in either subject or object, for the primary *modus operandi* of identity power is at the level of the collective social imagination. Consequently, it can control our actions even despite our beliefs.”⁵ Within the collective social imagination are conceptions of many intersecting facets of identity, including gender, race, and class. Each of these identity markers is operationalized through identity power. Our identities, insofar as they are comprised of such markers, thus are shaped in part by conceptions within the social imagination that we

³ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 14.

⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 14.

⁵ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 15.

participate in even despite our beliefs. Thus comes to mind Beauvoir's famous statement: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."⁶

Neoliberalism is a type of governmentality because it offers a very particular path to 'salvation'—to harken back to Foucault's terminology—or societal success. Furthermore, neoliberalism can shape identity by instilling the social imaginary with a conception of the 'ideal neoliberal citizen': the *homo oeconomicus*.⁷ According to neoliberal ideology, individuals succeed when they become the ideal *homo oeconomicus*—when they make entrepreneurs of themselves and others, when they are eminently governable, and when they convert all measures of worth and value into market-driven terms.⁸ Individuals who live in a neoliberal society thus must make particular market-based decisions to succeed. However, neoliberal ideology does not remain some external force but rather can be internalized, meaning that it not only influences citizens' decisions but also their desires and values—those things we generally take to be deep markers of identity. Under neoliberalism, a person's worth is measured by social and economic capital; thus, anyone who wants to be regarded as 'worthy' will be ushered into desiring such social and economic capital (e.g., Instagram likes and expensive cars). The governmentality of neoliberalism is not only guarded and policed by others, but it is also guarded and policed in oneself by oneself. By participating in the collective social imaginary, an individual operationalizes neoliberalism as an identity power over themselves; they internalize neoliberal norms and judge their own actions in accordance with them—a kind of internal Panopticon.⁹

⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 283.

⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, see Chapter Three, pages 95–98.

⁸ You may also want to see Foucault's definition of the *homo oeconomicus*. You can find it in his book *The Birth of Biopolitics*, especially Lectures 9, 10, and 11.

⁹ I provide a much richer analysis of neoliberalism as it relates to my project in Chapter Three.

Likewise, patriarchy can be understood as another type of governmentality with similar uptake and ramifications.¹⁰ Patriarchal ideology shapes society around a particular gendered dynamic whereby men feel entitled to take power, public recognition, hierarchical status, and money and other forms of wealth, and women feel expected to give moral goods such as attention, care, admiration, sympathy, and affection.¹¹ Such a dynamic is not only guarded and policed by external forces, but it also, and mostly, operates on a level of internalization in the sense that it influences and shapes not only decision-making, but also our deepest desires, values, and beliefs—it shapes, that is, our identities. Like neoliberalism, patriarchy is operationalized through the social imaginary, and individuals shape their behavior around such collective norms. This behavior, along with its contingent desires and values, constitutes a significant part of a person’s identity. For example, many of the gendered norms within the social imaginary comprise feminine- and masculine-coded goods deemed to be ‘natural’ to their respective genders. Many women, for example, have internalized the patriarchal belief that they naturally are better caretakers than men and thus consider it a natural extension of their womanhood to fulfill caretaking jobs in society. Importantly, another natural moral good that women ‘possess’ is that of self-sacrifice and selflessness, meaning that not only do women assume most caretaking roles, but they pursue and accept them even if they must sacrifice their own wellbeing or economic livelihood in the process.¹²

Governmentalities such as neoliberalism and patriarchy gain some of their traction and uptake through the aesthetic fabric of society. This aesthetic fabric comprises the sensuous and

¹⁰ Granted, two big differences between neoliberalism and patriarchy are that the former is rooted in economics and the latter is ascribed to biology, and that the former came about in America in response to the New Deal, whereas the latter has been dictating societies and cultures for basically all of history, although of course there are exceptions.

¹¹ Manne, *Down Girl*, the ‘give-and-take’ model, such as it appears on page 130. I analyze this further in Chapter Five, pages 152–154.

¹² I speak more on how this relates to the teaching profession in Chapter Five, pages 158–163.

design details in society, such as those found in public spaces and schools. It also comprises how individuals respond and react to such sensuous and design details, including affective and embodied responses; as argued in Chapter One, the aesthetic dimensions of our surroundings can impact our decision-making, values, desires, and conduct. A public space designed to foster unplanned social interactions might incite people to start conversations with strangers,¹³ whereas one comprising covert, yet delightful, design details might incite individuals to feel curious or playful.¹⁴ Through the aesthetic dimension of society, governmentalities exert influence on individuals' behavior within a space, including their interactions with the environment and with others with whom they share the space. As such, the aesthetic dimension also contributes to identity powers.

Conversely, there is a particular form of aesthetic resistance that confronts and combats governmentality in a way that the epistemic cannot always address: namely, counter-conduct. For example, many residents of West Virginia oppose feminism and any policy or person to the political left of neoliberalism.¹⁵ This is the case so much so that if the teacher strikes had made feminism one of their rallying cries, the protest would likely not have garnered as much support from teachers and community members in West Virginia. Any overt acknowledgement of feminist sympathies might have sunk the West Virginia teachers strikes. But that did not prevent the invocation of feminist commitments through the aesthetic and somaesthetic dimensions of the strikes. For example, one feminine-coded norm within the social imaginary is that women

¹³ See for example Neilsen, "Totalizing Aesthetics?"

¹⁴ A good example of this is Manhattan's 8th Avenue subway station on the AC line, which has a permanent art installation called *Life Underground* (2000) by Tom Otterness. The installation includes nearly a hundred cartoonish statues planted all around the station, even in the most unexpected places.

¹⁵ Currently, there is a great fear of 'socialism' in the state. Many people, however, conflate socialism with liberalism, even centrist liberalism. For qualitative evidence on West Virginia women's hesitancy to adopt feminism, or even their disdain for the concept itself, see Danielle Renee Mullins, "Weathered Mountains: A Qualitative Study of West Virginia Women and their Perceptions of Strength, Land, and Womanhood," PhD diss., (Marshall University, 2018).

should be submissive and defer to masculine-coded rationality. The West Virginia teachers strikes countered this norm through its majority-women composition. Women strikers did not abide by the expectation to remain submissive and defer to men in power; rather, they sensuously performed their power through marching, occupying, and chanting their demands.¹⁶ The same could be said for the anti-neoliberal values performed in the counter-conduct of the strikes. Like feminism, any ‘liberal’ economic ideas (e.g., any ideas that oppose neoliberalism), are widely disavowed within the state, and a vocalized anti-neoliberal stance would likely have hindered community support for the strikes. There was nothing overt about the anti-neoliberalism of teacher strikers. Yet all the same, the teacher strikes resisted neoliberal governmentality through the sensuous elements of their efforts, which put forward images, sounds, and feelings of collectivity and resistance.¹⁷ Importantly, just as the aesthetics of governmentality can influence behavior without individuals’ awareness of such, so too can individuals aesthetically resist governmentality without awareness. The manifestations and consequences of aesthetic resistance comprise the political-aesthetic dimension of the strikes.

Having established the relation between governmentalities, aesthetics, and identity, I now turn my attention to a brief literature review concerning the relation between the political and aesthetic. This section considers four categories: everyday aesthetics, somaesthetics, the aestheticization of politics, and the performativity of resistance. While I have already thoroughly defined three of these concepts in Chapter One, the focus here is on how these phenomena can impact the political realm specifically. This should clarify further how the everyday aesthetic, somaesthetic, and performative have the potential to support or disrupt governmentalities by way of participation in political movements.

¹⁶ Much more will be said on this point in Chapters Five and Six.

¹⁷ Much more will be said on this point in Chapters Three and Four.

2.3 The Political Impact of the Aesthetic: A Review of the Literature

2.3.1 *Everyday Aesthetics*

Although there is a dearth of scholarship connecting everyday aesthetics to the political, many scholars have written about how everyday aesthetics can positively contribute to ethical decision-making as it relates to social and environmental consequences. Through this, I argue, everyday aesthetics can contribute to the collective political imaginary as well as to our behavior as political agents. As Arnold Berleant notes, the significance of aesthetics “lies not only in the ability... to serve as a critical tool for probing social practice but as a beacon for illuminating the direction of social betterment.”¹⁸ In the case of everyday aesthetics, the aesthetic relation exists dialogically between a space, environment, or object (as well as its designer or curator) and the person who responds or reacts to it. Such responses and reactions inform our desires, actions, and ways of being in the world. Yet—and this is important—they might emerge without our full awareness; they might emerge through perception, sense, or affect. All the same, these response and reactions have the potential to be ethical or to embody a particular virtue. Conversely, certain environments might instead elicit responses that are unethical. As Yuriko Saito says, “Whether we like it or not and whether we are aware of it or not, aesthetics does play a crucial role in humanity’s world-making project,”¹⁹ a project with inherent political implications.

Environments created with an aesthetics of care encourage more positive responses from those occupying the space. For example, hospitals that showcase art (as opposed to empty walls) and that have windows in each room positively impact patients’ health; research has found that patients with access to windows and art have improved blood pressure and anxiety levels, require

¹⁸ Berleant as quoted by Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 197–198.

¹⁹ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 185.

less pain medication, and recover faster than patients without windows and art.²⁰ Meanwhile, regarding education, research has shown that classroom design can impact students' learning outcomes. A research team from the University of Salford in the UK, for instance, recently concluded that the three most important design features for classrooms are naturalness, stimulation, and individualization. Together, these three characteristics account for an increase in primary school learning by as much as 16% in a single year.²¹

Beyond just positive outcomes such as increased health and learning, Saito argues that there is a significant connection between the design of an environment and the potential moral formation of those who occupy it: "If our environment is good in all respects including civil, respectful, and humane social intercourses expressed aesthetically, we are motivated to pay it forward, so to speak, by encouraging ourselves to engage in caring actions for others, whether human or non-human."²² In other words, Saito argues that an environment that expresses certain moral goods can influence people within the environment to emulate the same moral goods. For example, a clean park might inspire park-goers to throw their trash in a trash can rather than litter and make ugly the pristine space; a clean subway car might do the same. Meanwhile, a school designed with an aesthetics of care for students (e.g., plenty of windows and natural light, absence of harsh fluorescent lights, intuitive and accessible spatial plans, clean air, well-kept paint, a palette of soft colors, natural materials with pleasant textures, personalized desks or lockers, etc.) may elicit expressions of care from students, care for both the environment and for their classmates and teachers. For instance, they might desire to tend to the space by keeping it

²⁰ See for example Roger Ulrich, "View Through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery," *Science* 224, no. 4647 (1984): 420–421, and Roger Ulrich, "Effects of Interior Design on Wellness: Theory and Recent Scientific Research," *Journal of Health Care Interior Design: Proceedings from the Symposium on Health Care Interior Design* 3, no. 1 (1991): 97–109.

²¹ Peter Barrett, Fay Davies, Yufan Zhang, and Lucinda Barrett, "The Impact of Classroom Design on Pupils' Learning: Final Results of a Holistic, Multi-Level Analysis," *Building and Environment* 89, no. 1 (2015): 118–133.

²² Saito, "Body Aesthetics and the Cultivation of Moral Virtues," 240.

clean, and they might be inspired to care for others by speaking to them in a kind way. Similarly, a school designed with democratic values might make it easier and more intuitive for students to dialogue with different others throughout the day. Aesthetic decisions may include flexible furniture options (e.g., movable chairs, moveable desks, different types of seats), furniture configurations that encourage visual recognition of others (e.g., arranging desks in a circle), and accessibility features that celebrate people of differing abilities (e.g., elevators and ramps that are prominent and easy-to-find rather than tucked away into the corners or sides of schools).

Aesthetic decisions of cafeterias, hallways, courtyards, and libraries might be aimed toward encouraging unplanned interactions and dialogue. These aesthetic features convey democratic values that in turn affect students' experiences, including the quality of classroom conversation and learning. Students within an environment that conveys democratic values through aesthetic features will be more likely to convey those same democratic values through their own interactions with the space itself and others within it: they will be more likely to engage in open and flexible dialogues with different others, accept and celebrate different abilities, and recognize the dignity of their classmates.

In these examples, a person within such an environment does not take up care-oriented or democratic actions because they are informed about them. In fact, such a person might not even be aware that such values are reflected in the environment, much less that they are acting with a particular ethical bent or a shift in values. We can imagine, for example, that a shy student might feel more inclined to speak in a group if everyone is facing one another, yet she might not consciously connect that inclination to the positioning of the desks. Likewise, we can imagine someone in a public square striking up a conversation with a stranger, not consciously

associating it with the inviting design of the space.²³ In other words, the motivation to ‘pay it forward’ due to an environment ‘good in all respects’ might happen at a non-epistemic level, yet still affect a person’s tangible actions. This supports the idea that the aesthetic dimension of our surroundings can impact our actions or behavior, with our awareness or not. Again, this impact does not necessarily happen because we *understand* it, but because we *feel* it or *perceive* it.

While environments and situations that are good in all respects can positively impact our ethical decision-making, Saito and Berleant caution that negative everyday aesthetics may have an opposite impact.²⁴ Negative aesthetics pertains to those everyday environments and situations and that are experienced as distressing, harmful, or unpleasant,²⁵ and it has a multifaceted relationship with the political in that it can incite individuals to reflect unethical behavior into an environment or it can alert them about a problem and incite them to improve it.

For one, because we say that a positive aesthetic experience with one’s surroundings or with other’s actions can instigate one to cultivate or develop moral virtues, this implies that a negative aesthetic experience might diminish our capabilities to act ethically. It is for this reason that many people have argued against the violence in video games, movies, and art installations, including the controversial virtual reality exhibit at the Whitney Museum in 2017.²⁶ In addition, our negative aesthetic experiences might provide dangerous justification for systemic oppression such as racism, homophobia, or ableism.²⁷ Author Malcolm Gladwell provides a rich example of

²³ Neilsen, “Totalizing Aesthetics?”

²⁴ Arnold Berleant, “Negative Aesthetics in Everyday Life,” *Aesthetic Pathways* 1, no. 2 (2011): 75–91; Yuriko Saito, “The Role of Imperfection in Everyday Aesthetics,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 15, no. 1 (2017).

²⁵ Berleant, “Negative Aesthetics in Everyday Life”; Jane Forsey, “Collision: The Aesthetic Force of the Unpleasant,” *Eventual Aesthetics* 5, no. 1 (2016): 15–24; Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Mandoki, “Terror and Aesthetics”; Mandoki, “The Third Tear in Everyday Aesthetics”; Saito, “The Role of Imperfection.”

²⁶ Alexandra Schwartz, “Confront the ‘Shocking’ Virtual-Reality Artwork at the Whitney Biennial,” *The New Yorker*, March 20, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/confronting-the-shocking-virtual-reality-artwork-at-the-whitney-biennial>.

²⁷ Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity*; Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*; Yancy, “White Embodied Gaze.”

how the negative aesthetics of a space can negatively impact how people interact with that space. Speaking of the high crime rate (and the significant negative aesthetics ‘rate’) of New York City in the 1980s, Gladwell states: “If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from building to the street on which it faces, sending a signal that anything goes.”²⁸ Albeit not in so many words, Gladwell makes the case that negative aesthetics, such as that reflected in a broken window, can express a lack of care, which in turn can influence someone to act in an uncaring way to the same environment, or even to others who share that environment. Further, this lack of care can spread from broken window to a general sense of anarchy. He discusses a similar situation regarding the graffiti that once covered the walls of the New York City subway.²⁹ This graffiti expressed a lack of care, and passengers were more likely to reflect that lack of care back into the environment, such as through crime. Alongside other strategies, the graffiti was cleaned, and rates of crime within the subway system dramatically decreased. Gladwell solidifies the everyday aesthetic connection by stating, “The impetus to engage in a certain kind of behavior is not coming from a certain kind of person but from a feature of the environment.”³⁰

Conversely, Saito argues that negative aesthetics can actually be an impetus to improve one’s surroundings.³¹ For example, living close to a factory that pollutes the air might incite someone to fight for the construction of windmills in their town. Visiting a landfill might influence someone to avoid single-use plastics. Going to a less-than-clean school might inspire

²⁸ Malcom Gladwell, *Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2000), 141.

²⁹ A good depiction of the subway graffiti can be found in the episode of *Seinfeld* called “The Subway,” Season 3, Episode 13.

³⁰ Gladwell, *Tipping Point*, 152.

³¹ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 170.

someone to spend an afternoon cleaning up litter. While negative aesthetics may in fact be quite powerful in inciting social justice activism,³² we can assume that the line between inspiring action and deflating morale is a fine one. Thus, if we want to inspire moral virtues or ethical behavior in others, it is a safer bet to design positive rather than negative everyday aesthetics.

2.3.2 Somaesthetics

Scholarship on somaesthetics demonstrates that this phenomenon also has a distinctly political quality to it, for it can address structural powers, or governmentalities, that often remain unrecognized as the source of strife or harm, such as the perpetuation of structural racism, homophobia, or patriarchy. At times, this perpetuation can be subconsciously fed by aesthetic responses. George Yancy notes how racism can happen as a bodily response (e.g., a feeling of disgust) even in someone with rational desires denouncing racism.³³ Martha Nussbaum asserts the same reaction historically has happened upon viewing gay acts, and Tobin Siebers upon viewing disabled bodies.³⁴ Given that racialized and disabled bodies and gay acts are perceived through the senses and affectively experienced, our reactions to them are largely aesthetic. These reactions can be ethically and politically dangerous, especially feelings of fear and disgust, because while a consequence of discomfort, they are oftentimes used to justify systems of oppression. Our aesthetic responses toward situations or people can be trained by our communities and historical context, even if this education happens at a noncognitive level—even if it happens in opposition to our cognitive convictions.³⁵ To put it another way, our aesthetic

³² Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 170.

³³ Yancy, “White Embodied Gaze.”

³⁴ Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity*; Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*.

³⁵ Naukkarinen, “Everyday Aesthetics and Everyday Behavior.”

responses are formed upon harmful social myths, including racial myths, sexuality myths, beauty myths, of which we might not even be consciously aware.³⁶

While these aesthetic experiences occur on a sensuous and affective level, the epistemic justifications we (wrongfully) assign them might lead to pernicious laws. Nussbaum establishes that laws have been passed, or defeated, on the basis of disgust.³⁷ This is because we unreflectively assume that our reactions—fear, disgust, and loving identification—represent a universal truth rather than a particular ‘historical matrix.’ This leads individuals to inflict injustices: their disgust, which “expresses a universal human discomfort with a bodily reality,” is used to “target and subordinate vulnerable minorities.”³⁸ We see this in objections to gay marriage as “just not right,” “unnatural,” or capable of “corrupting children.” This opposition is not necessarily rooted in a reason-based rationale, but rather in the feelings of discomfort that are conditioned by the norms of the social imaginary and created in response to the sight of aesthetic stimuli, such as two people of the same gender kissing.

Anyone committed to social justice should want to change these negative aesthetic reactions toward historically oppressed and minoritized groups, especially as they inform and uphold the systemic oppression of those groups including “worse education, parental care, and healthcare.”³⁹ To change these harmful perceptions, we must commit to “somatic and affective retraining.”⁴⁰ David Granger asserts that one way to do this would be to incorporate methods of reflective body consciousness (i.e., critical somaesthetics) into critical pedagogy practices.⁴¹ This would entail lessons that include practicing an awareness about the body’s habitual responses

³⁶ For more on the idea of racial myth in particular, see for example Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

³⁷ Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity*.

³⁸ Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity*, xv.

³⁹ Sherri Irvin, “Introduction,” in *Body Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

⁴⁰ Irvin, “Introduction,” 9.

⁴¹ Granger, “Somaesthetics and Racism,” 77.

and re-educating harmful, often subconscious, responses. Students would experience and focus on the “aesthetic dimensions of different actions by attending consciously to different bodily feelings.”⁴² This means listening to the body rather than just commanding it. Only then could students learn to put forward responses different from those they have habituated.

Richard Shusterman echoes Yancy and Nussbaum when he claims that rational arguments are often not enough for people to change their behavior in issues regarding social justice. Rather, educational strategies based on somaesthetics, in targeting the root of the affective feeling, can be an effective tool to uproot racism, homophobia, sexism, and ableism. Shusterman states, “Rational arguments for multicultural tolerance and peace always seem to fail, because the hatred is acquired not by rational means but through discomforting somatic feelings that, though unpleasant, are often only distractedly or implicitly felt.”⁴³ Individuals might not be aware of their visceral feelings or body responses that convey prejudice, even though others are able to see it manifested in their actions or body language. Furthermore, others can witness such responses and mirror them in their own actions; this is particularly true for children who witness their parents react with uncomfortable postural and facial expressions, however subtle, around particular people.⁴⁴ The reflective practice of critical somaesthetics targets the non-epistemic aesthetic responses undergirding the epistemic ones. This intentional practice seeks to make individuals more aware of their own somatic responses. With this awareness and understanding, they can consciously examine somatic responses to determine whether they are helpful or harmful to themselves and others. The reflective practice of critical

⁴² Granger, “Somaesthetics and Racism,” 77.

⁴³ Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and Politics,” 9–10.

⁴⁴ Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body*, 97.

somaesthetics can incite individuals, including students, to reconstruct unreflective, habitual behavior.

Ultimately, the practice of somaesthetics can serve as a tool to address and change structural, passive power within a society; it can address and combat harmful governmentalities, or the conducts of conduct, such as racism and homophobia. Having internalized the ‘conduct of conduct,’ a person polices others and themselves partly based on how they *feel* things should be. Practicing reflective somaesthetics can allow a person to become more somatically aware of their own internalized governmentality and to change or eradicate any problematic rules of conduct they have habitually abided by. One simple practice that heightens somatic awareness is the body scan.⁴⁵ This exercise is akin to a meditation of the body, and practicing it over time can lead to more epistemic awareness of those affective and sensuous feelings that typically occur on a subconscious or unnoticed level.

As a critical study of ‘the experience and use of one’s body,’ somaesthetics could provide important insight into the felt experience of biopolitics as well as the felt experience of political resistance. Regarding the former, governmentality often employs power through biopolitical control, or the monitoring and regulation of bodies. To resist governmentality thus entails resisting such biopolitical control. Regarding the latter point, Shusterman states, “We need emotions as well as rationality for good political solutions; solidarity, for example, so important for political action (including political resistance) is not only enhanced by bonds of feeling but is also, in large part, constituted by them.”⁴⁶ Here he notes the significant role that emotional feeling plays in inspiring and fueling acts of political resistance, including protests and strikes. In other words, acts of political resistance incite somatic experiences, such as those feelings of

⁴⁵ Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body*, Chapter 5.

⁴⁶ Shusterman, “Somaesthetics and Politics,” 14.

solidarity and unity that often arise in protests. Understanding acts of political resistance fully, therefore, entails not only understanding them rationally, but also getting at the undercurrent of feeling and affect therein that so often goes unnoticed, or at the very least underappreciated.

2.3.3 *Aestheticization of Politics*

Katya Mandoki considers the necessary link between politics and aesthetics as the ‘aestheticization of politics,’⁴⁷ a term originally coined by Walter Benjamin in reference to the rise of fascism in Germany before World War II.⁴⁸ She considers aestheticization to be a necessary part of politics precisely because politics demands appealing to the *pathos* (i.e., emotions) of its citizens, and the aesthetic speaks directly to that *pathos*. In her view, the political must incorporate the aesthetic alongside debate and reason to “enhance argumentation through its appeal to emotion.”⁴⁹ Mandoki notes that the aesthetic appeals to both affect and decision-making, as it “opens its way through the subject’s emotional self and, consequently, to his or her decisional self (the one that votes, praises, consents, resists, or obeys).”⁵⁰ In other words, the aesthetic appeals to one’s emotional self, yet in so doing, it influences their subsequent decision-making. This can occur through propaganda, military uniforms or presence, citizen dress codes, architecture, or the design and color-schemes within buildings, to name a few. For another example, Crispin Sartwell considers how the principles of America’s founding documents are reflected in the buildings constructed during that time. Sartwell also discusses how the Black Nationalism movement of the 1960s was effected through various aesthetic means.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Mandoki, “Terror and Aesthetics,” 64.

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Theories of German Fascism: On the Collection of Essays *War and Warrior*,” *Die Gesellschaft* 7, no. 2 (1930): 32–41. Crispin Sartwell argues that the connection between politics and everyday aesthetics goes back much further; he claims that Confucianism was largely based on this connection. See Crispin Sartwell, *Political Aesthetics*, Chapter 4.

⁴⁹ Mandoki, “Terror and Aesthetics,” 77.

⁵⁰ Mandoki, “Terror and Aesthetics,” 64.

⁵¹ Sartwell, *Political Aesthetics*.

Mandoki notes that this aestheticization of politics is not inherently good; in fact, she considers in particular the nefarious use of aesthetics in the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, as Benjamin did before her.⁵² For Mandoki, it is not politics that was aestheticized, but rather the “abstract ideal of the Nazi movement.”⁵³ Through propaganda, architecture, and military and party organization, the Third Reich designed each aesthetic element to represent reason, rationality, and order. Each aesthetic detail prodded citizens to remain in place. The aestheticization of society seduced citizens into revering a false sense of rationality and order instead of humanity itself—false, that is, because rational argumentation was superseded by aesthetic ideology, and “mass *pathos* substituted individual and collective *ethos*.”⁵⁴ Thus, within this aestheticization of politics—or of a particular abstract ideal within the political realm—there is the presupposition that aesthetics can appeal to the *pathos* of an individual or collective society without also appealing to the *logos*. In other words, the aesthetics of one’s environment or society may influence their decision-making without epistemic recognition of such on their part.

2.3.4 Performativity of Resistance

The political can also be aesthetic within the performance of acts of resistance, as noted by Judith Butler, Leticia Sabsay, and Frederica Castelli. As noted in Chapter One, Butler discusses how embodied and collective acts of resistance, such as found in protests, enact bodily performativity in their very assembly. In such assemblies, there is a performed identity shared among all participants rooted in their inherent precarity and vulnerability. By protesting at all—by putting their bodies literally on the line—participants declare their precarious position within society and open themselves with vulnerability not only to political, legal, or social sanctions,

⁵² See also Crispin Sartwell, *Political Aesthetics*.

⁵³ Mandoki, “Terror and Aesthetics,” 77.

⁵⁴ Mandoki, “Terror and Aesthetics,” 80.

but, more importantly, to existence itself. Vulnerability, according to Butler, is the “deliberate exposure to power”;⁵⁵ it is a kind of relationship between receptivity and responsiveness, where one is not clearly separable from the other.⁵⁶ Inspired by Butler’s definition, Sabsay considers vulnerability to be “the capacity to affect and be affected, particularly in embodied ways.”⁵⁷

Collective forms of resistance that embrace their group’s vulnerability are inherently different from those establishing their political agency by vanquishing vulnerability; the latter, Butler says, is the “masculinist ideal” of political resistance.⁵⁸ Feminist movements thus must embrace their vulnerability to subvert the masculine expectation that resistance, agency, and vulnerability cannot coexist in the same acts. By doing so, they may create “a new idea of politics out of the dynamics of traditional power.”⁵⁹ This also necessitates us, widely speaking, to recognize the possibility of political productivity on an embodied level, rather than strictly within the narrow version of politics supported by “liberal democratic or otherwise well-established scripts.”⁶⁰

Yet it is precisely this emphasis on vulnerability that makes certain acts of resistance aesthetic. Just like vulnerability, aesthetics (and ethics, for that matter) according to Butler “presume[s] that our receptivity is bound up with our responsiveness” and represents “a zone in which we are acted upon by what we find at the same time that we act upon it in certain ways.”⁶¹ The aesthetic realm, then, provides a space in which vulnerability can emerge and exist. Thus, a feminist act of resistance that embraces its vulnerability emerges, at least somewhat, through the

⁵⁵ Judith Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance,” in *Vulnerability in Resistance*, eds. Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

⁵⁶ Butler, *Notes*, 16.

⁵⁷ Leticia Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability and the Feminist Revolt,” *Critical Times* 3, no. 2 (2020): 187.

⁵⁸ Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance,” 15.

⁵⁹ Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance,” 192.

⁶⁰ Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability,” 187.

⁶¹ Butler, *Notes*, 16.

aesthetic. Sabsay says specifically that a feminist revolt must put forward a political aesthetics, contingent upon the different assembled bodies' experiences of vulnerability, which counters the aesthetics of cruelty inherent in neoliberalism.⁶² These feminist "modes of struggles... produce affectively invested sites that exceed 'what can be said' about them."⁶³ Through embracing their vulnerability, feminist acts of resistance resist political power in a realm different from that commonly accepted by political discourse—namely, in the aesthetic, embodied realm. Sabsay argues that to succeed in their efforts, feminist movements must fight at least part of their battles "at the level of the sensible and the imaginary, in efforts to expand the space of what is conceived as political."⁶⁴

Thus, any act of resistance that does not vanquish its vulnerability but instead embraces it, any act of resistance that is feminist in its very composition, operates at least in part on an aesthetic level, emerging through the embodied actions of the movement and affecting the sensible, imaginary, and affective planes of experience. The aesthetic here represents, again, the area where one can affect and be affected, where one's receptivity and responsiveness are intertwined in an ambiguous way. The aesthetic also acts as the very plane upon which embodied performativity can exist. In other words, embodied performativity can only exist aesthetically, and its significance is conveyed aesthetically rather than discursively. As Butler says,

Bodies assemble, and that the political meanings enacted by demonstrations are not only those that are enacted by discourse, whether written or vocalized. Embodied actions of various kinds signify in ways that are, strictly speaking, neither discursive nor

⁶² Sabsay, "The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability," 192.

⁶³ Sabsay, "The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability," 189.

⁶⁴ Sabsay, "The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability," 194.

prediscursive. In other words, forms of assembly already signify prior to, and apart from, any particular demands they make.⁶⁵

Embodied performances reach further than discursive or epistemic means precisely because they come into existence in and are experienced through the everyday aesthetic and somaesthetic. As such, they ‘speak to’ the sense, perception, and affect of those who participate in or witness such movements. This can occur even beyond or without epistemic recognition. The performativity of resistance expands the aesthetic and somaesthetic realm of possibility. This in turn may influence a person’s decision-making, quotidian action-taking, or somatic feeling, which all might consequently affect a person’s sense or feeling of identity.

Sabsay argues that feminist political movements, such as the Ni Una Menos movement in South America, utilize vulnerability to ‘speak’ beyond the discourse generally accepted within the political arena. Ni Una Menos, or Not One Less, started in Argentina as a response to the high rates of femicide in the country. It manifested in women’s strikes and protests, where protestors donned matching green scarves, in social media and online posts, and in mass public vigils. Sabsay says that Ni Una Menos counters the aesthetics of cruelty through its modes of struggle, which “are embodied in ways that are beyond the explicit claims that are made.”⁶⁶ The protestors within this movement, like those of other feminist movements, place great importance on the body and the embodied nature of their actions. Verónica Gago, a key member of Ni Una Menos, said, “A sound of vibrations, not the sound of words, was what brought together the massive, vibrating collective body...”⁶⁷ Ultimately, this movement conveyed the vulnerability of women’s bodies in alternative ways while situating itself within the collective embodiment of the

⁶⁵ Butler, *Notes*, 8.

⁶⁶ Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability,” 189.

⁶⁷ Gago as quoted in Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability,” 188.

women protestors. Sabsay argues that in so doing Ni Una Menos challenged contemporary notions of political discourse and aimed to transform social imaginaries. Sabsay notes, “By pointing to a change in sensibility, we can see how the form in which these claims are articulated might contribute to a radicalization of democratic imaginaries and to the production of enhanced and more egalitarian understandings of bodily freedom and justice.”⁶⁸ Importantly, it is not just the articulated claims that affect such a change in democratic imaginaries—it is also the *form* in which they are articulated. It is not just the claims, but also *how* the claims are made. In the case of Ni Una Menos, the claims are founded upon the vulnerability of bodily life, particularly the bodily life of women, and are enacted by those same vulnerable bodies. It is the form of this political movement that contributes to a change of imaginaries, and consequently, perhaps, feeds into a change in understanding around a particular concept.

2.4 The Aesthetics of Governmentality and Resistance

Now that I have provided an overview of the scholarship connecting the political with the everyday aesthetic, somaesthetic, and performative, I turn my attention to a specific relationship I analyze among these realms: namely, I consider the aesthetics of governmentality and its opposing force, the aesthetics of resistance. This is important for my project because it demonstrates that governmentality can gain at least some of its force through aesthetic dimensions. The aesthetic dimensions of governmentality impact individual and collective desires, decision-making, and quotidian ways of being. Ultimately, the aesthetics of governmentality influences individual and collective identity and self-fashioning. Frantz Fanon recognized this when he asserted that coloniality, itself a governmentality, was sustained by the

⁶⁸ Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability,” 188.

“aesthetic forms of respect for the established order.”⁶⁹ Rather than focusing on governmentalities of coloniality or race,⁷⁰ the governmentalities I am concerned with in this project are that of neoliberalism and patriarchy. In the following sections, I discuss how neoliberalism and patriarchy wield power through the everyday aesthetic and somaesthetic of our quotidian lived experiences. In the final section, I consider how counter-conduct, as a form of resistance against governmentality, can be effected through the aesthetic.

2.4.1 *Aesthetics of Neoliberalism*

The governmentality of neoliberalism, while often operating beneath individuals’ recognition, has an aesthetic presence. For example, Sabsay considers neoliberalism to put forward an aesthetics of cruelty: a political aesthetics geared toward upholding pleasure in causing suffering and harming oneself in deliberate and disavowed ways.⁷¹ In particular, Sabsay notes that neoliberalism encourages and enforces ideas of “sovereign mastery” that lead to violence and cruelty, as “attested by contemporary neoauthoritarian politics.”⁷² Instead of relying on interconnection and community, the ideal neoliberal citizen is ruled by an individual ethos that encourages a lack of concern for the suffering of others. In fact, Adriana Cavarero defines this as ‘horrorism,’ or the massive exposure and fascination with or indifference to suffering bodies in states of helplessness.⁷³ Ironically, as Wendy Brown asserts, neoliberalism also necessitates self-sacrifice: the ideal neoliberal citizen is ready to sacrifice their well-being, their employment, or their enjoyment of life for the ‘greater good’ of macroeconomic growth and

⁶⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 37.

⁷⁰ Governmentalities can, of course, overlap in what we might consider to be an ‘intersectional’ governmentality. For the analytic purposes of my project, however, I keep the governmentalities of neoliberalism and patriarchy distinct.

⁷¹ Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability,” 181.

⁷² Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability,” 186.

⁷³ Cavarero as quoted in Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability,” 189.

credit enhancement.⁷⁴ In these two cases—that of ‘horrorism’ and of self-sacrifice—neoliberalism fuels cruelty toward others and toward oneself respectively.

Sabsay’s notion of the aesthetics of cruelty echoes in many ways Gustavo Dalaqua’s idea of ‘aesthetic injustice.’⁷⁵ Aesthetic injustice, to Dalaqua, denotes harm to someone with regards to their aesthetic capacities, which, to Dalaqua, comprises their capacities to feel and imagine. Furthermore, aesthetic injustice is intimately related to oppression and feeds into epistemic injustice. To Dalaqua, oppression sustains itself through our aesthetic and epistemic capacities, “crafting them to apprehend the world selectively, and constraining our sensibility and cognition in ways that are favorable to it.”⁷⁶ To vanquish such oppression therefore necessitates confronting both epistemic and aesthetic injustice. For, if only epistemic injustice is combatted, a “residual internalization” of oppression may remain. According to Fricker, this “residual internalization” occurs when a person’s affective state lags behind their epistemic beliefs.⁷⁷ To Dalaqua, such residual internalization happens when an oppressed subject overcomes a type of epistemic injustice “without resisting its attendant aesthetic injustice.”⁷⁸ In other words, a person may change their beliefs or thoughts about a particular oppression, yet their affective and imaginative capacities might still be constrained. Such is the case, for instance, when someone does not *believe* that being gay is wrong, yet still *feels* ashamed by their homosexuality.⁷⁹

As it relates to both oppression and epistemic injustice, neoliberal capitalism fuels aesthetic injustice because “by turning competitive individualism into the ultimate reason behind every human behavior, neoliberalism makes it hard, if not impossible, for us to feel affects that

⁷⁴ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 84, 212–218.

⁷⁵ Gustavo Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 12, no. 1 (2020): 1–12.

⁷⁶ Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice,” 4.

⁷⁷ Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice,” 6; Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 37.

⁷⁸ Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice,” 6.

⁷⁹ Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice,” 6.

are dissonant from its competitive-individualistic logic.”⁸⁰ Neoliberalism makes it difficult to feel or perceive anything other than individualistic market-based competition and the continual drive for more. This can be true even in the ‘residual’ sense—even if a person epistemically disavows the values of neoliberalism, they might still *feel* the drive of the homo oeconomicus, so deeply ingrained, coloring their desires and influencing their decision-making.

Neoliberalism also fuels consumerism, which in itself represents a type of aesthetic injustice. Many stores are no longer simply stores, but rather are part of an ‘experience economy.’⁸¹ For example, think of the aesthetic qualities of an Apple store, the M&M store in Times Square, or Glossier—a powder pink store in NYC designed to be Instagrammed. Amidst the cute displays of blushes and lip balms, the delicious aromas pumped into the air, or the loud music numbing one’s senses, it is highly probable, as Saito says, that such aesthetics “stunts the development of people’s aesthetic sensibility,” for such easy consumerist gratification “does not require much discrimination, effort, or reflection” on the part of the consumer.⁸²

In addition, Castelli asserts that neoliberalism has contributed to aesthetic injustice through the desiccation of public space. Neoliberalism not only treats people like consumers, but it establishes consuming as the only vector for relationship and sociability; as such, “those excluded as consumers are also excluded *from* public space. Expulsion from the economic space is expulsion from public space; an exclusion from society.”⁸³ In other words, neoliberalism has changed the aesthetics of the ‘public space’ from being the space of the *public* to being the space of the *consumer*. Under neoliberalism, public spaces become transactional rather than community driven.

⁸⁰ Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice,” 4.

⁸¹ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 147.

⁸² Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 149.

⁸³ Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance,” 184–185.

The aesthetic injustice of neoliberalism is not only felt by citizens, however, but also reproduced by them onto others or onto the environment itself, perhaps even without their full awareness. For one, we might inflict aesthetic injustice onto others through ‘horrorism,’ as explained above, by remaining indifferent to the homeless people we might encounter on our walk to work, such that these people feel invisible, or *unseen*, in their suffering. Aesthetic injustice can also be reproduced onto the environment itself. Saito argues that consumerism directly feeds into significant environmental problems, which also have a negative aesthetic effect,⁸⁴ such as deforestation, air pollution, and massive dump yards, including the Great Pacific Garbage Patch⁸⁵—the massive islands of trash floating between Japan and North America.

Just as it does epistemic injustice, democracy inherently opposes aesthetic injustice. Yet neoliberalism directly feeds aesthetic injustice. In fact, according to Sabsay, the aesthetics of neoliberalism “seeks to reshape sensibilities and works in tandem with the decline of democratic imaginaries.”⁸⁶ If it is true that the aesthetics of neoliberalism depends upon the decline of democratic imaginaries, then any attempt to foster or grow democracy within a society should strive to combat neoliberalism and the particular aesthetic injustice inherent within it. Dalaqua states that one way to combat the aesthetic injustice of horrorism, rather than reproduce it, is to “see what we look at”—to see, for example, a human freezing outside rather than ‘just’ a homeless person.⁸⁷ Likewise, Saito argues for the importance of everyday aesthetic design in guiding our consumer-oriented decisions toward environmentally friendly choices, and Jonathan

⁸⁴ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 149.

⁸⁵ In 2014, an art exhibit based on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch opened at the Anchorage Museum. It was called “Gyre: The Plastic Ocean.” Artists created worked of art using only thrown-out items collected from the ocean, including plastic bottles, makeup containers, and sandals. For more on this, see:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-02-19/fascinating-art-inspired-by-the-great-pacific-garbage-patch>.

⁸⁶ Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability,” 192.

⁸⁷ Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice,” 4.

Maskit proposes bringing the ‘aesthetics of elsewhere,’ such as the oft-ignored garbage patch or deforestation, closer to us through aesthetic imagery so that we might curb our consumerism.⁸⁸

2.4.2 *Aesthetics of Patriarchy*

The structural power of patriarchy also gains much of its quotidian force through everyday aesthetics. There are many examples of design, for instance, that allow more freedom to men and that constrain or put women in danger. One obvious case of the everyday aesthetics of patriarchy regards the difference between men’s and women’s fashion. Men’s fashion has historically, for the most part, tended toward comfort and mobility. Conversely, women’s fashion has historically constrained the movement of women and quite literally harmed them physically. For instance, corsets, bodices, and heavily layered undergarments not only prevented women from moving freely, but they also had deleterious health effects on women’s spines, posture, and internal organs.⁸⁹ Echoing this gendered aesthetics of constraint and physical pain, foot-binding was a common aesthetic practice for women throughout much of the last millennium in China; the most desirable young women had three-inch-long feet.⁹⁰ Today, although not as garish as corsets or foot binding, high heels continue to constrain and cause pain to women, and long acrylic nails inhibit women’s ability to complete everyday tasks, such as putting in contacts or tying shoes. Perhaps the most sexist trend in aesthetic fashion today pertains not to garments but to the body itself. Today’s popular trends for women include lip fillers, face fillers, Botox, and breast enhancements, all of which require painful or uncomfortable procedures, decrease bodily

⁸⁸ Maskit, “Aesthetics of Elsewhere”; Saito, “Consumer Aesthetics and Environmental Ethics”; Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*.

⁸⁹ See for example Adriel Trott, “Fashion and Feminism,” *APA Blog*, January 15, 2020, <https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/01/15/fashion-and-philosophy/>.

⁹⁰ See for example Amanda Foreman, “Why Footbinding Persisted in China for a Millennium,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 2015, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-footbinding-persisted-china-millennium-180953971/>.

sensations, risk permanent nerve damage or numbness, and require continual upkeep, which entails regular, painful procedures and great cost.⁹¹ And these are just the most common options—the options I get advertised to me regularly on social media. Women may also consider liposuction, cosmetic plastic surgery such as nose jobs or face lifts, veneers, or jaw reshaping. Of course, these cosmetic trends are not limited to women, and in fact many men or non-binary individuals also partake in them. However, it is incontestable that women face more pressure to get these cosmetic enhancements.

In addition to serious cosmetic enhancements, women also face pressure to partake in more quotidian beauty norms. According to Alfred Archer and Lauren Ware, these beauty norms constitute an oppression of everyday aesthetics rooted in gendered expectations; the quotidian beauty standards imposed upon women tend to be much stricter than those imposed on men.⁹² Whether called the ‘beauty myth’ or ‘oppressive aesthetic obligations,’ these aesthetic ideals pertain not only to everyday details of women’s personal appearance—make-up, well-kept nails, waxing, shaving, cosmetic enhancements, threading—but also to the external appearances they are responsible for, such as the home’s decor and cleanliness, even if they share their residence with a partner who is a man.⁹³

In addition, many aesthetic details of objects or environments were designed with men in mind, rather than with women, and the consequences for the latter can be grave. In *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, Caroline Criado Perez discusses, for instance, how crash test dummies are mostly male, discounting the female body or the pregnant body in

⁹¹ See for example Deborah Rhode, “Appearance as a Feminist Issue,” in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁹² Alfred Archer and Lauren Ware, “Beyond the Call of Beauty: Everyday Aesthetic Demands under Patriarchy,” *The Monist* 101, no. 1 (2018): 114–127.

⁹³ Archer and Ware, “Beyond the Call of Beauty.” For more on the ‘beauty myth,’ see Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002).

crash test simulations.⁹⁴ She also discusses the sexism inherent in the vast majority of medical research, which bases studies primarily on men, and can even be found in product designed specifically with women in mind—the three-stone cooking stove used by 80% of people in the developing world, for example, emits as much smoke a day as multiple packs of cigarettes, which inordinately affects women, those who often do the cooking.⁹⁵

In addition to its emergence through everyday aesthetics, patriarchy is also enacted and reproduced through somaesthetics. Kate Manne’s analysis of Shel Silverstein’s *The Giving Tree* offers a depiction of the internalized somaesthetics of misogynist gendered expectations. This revered children’s story focuses on the one-sided relationship between a tree and a boy; the tree offers more and more to the boy—fruit, branches, wood—and the boy readily takes it all from the tree until she (yes, Silverstein uses the female pronoun to describe the tree) is reduced to a stump. In Manne’s analysis, this story depicts society’s gendered expectations within a misogynist patriarchal system. Women are expected to be givers, and men are entitled to be takers.

To Manne, however, these expectations are not solely, or even at all, epistemic—they are not, perhaps, consciously recognized or reproduced. Rather, these expectations are enforced and policed by others and oneself on the basis of *feelings*: men *feel* entitled to take “power, prestige, public recognition... the status conferred by having a high-ranking woman’s loyalty, love, devotion, etc.,” and women *feel* obligated to give “attention, affection, admiration, sympathy, sex, and children,” even if giving these moral goods entails harming their own well-being.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (New York: Abrams Press, 2019).

⁹⁵ “Invisible Women,” Episode 363 of *99 Percent Invisible* (podcast), July 23, 2019, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/invisible-women/>.

⁹⁶ Manne, *Down Girl*, 130.

These feelings are rooted in the history of patriarchy and the consequent belief that the patriarchal order of society is the ‘natural’ and ‘true’ one. Yet although they have their foundation in historical traditions, these expectations exist somaesthetically in individuals, even when they are not fulfilled—when this happens, women tend to feel shame and men tend to feel anger.⁹⁷ Thus, gender roles, while rooted in ideas of ‘natural order’ and historical truths,⁹⁸ tend to be reinforced somaesthetically both by others and by individuals themselves.

The governmentality of patriarchy thus has an aesthetic dimension that is both felt somaesthetically and experienced through the everyday aesthetics of design and beauty. Considering the connection between aesthetic injustice and epistemic injustice as highlighted above, as well as the role of ‘residual internalization,’ it follows that any attempt to alleviate the gendered inequalities in society must confront aesthetic injustice in addition to epistemic injustice.

The above examples show how structural power, or governmentality, can operate through everyday aesthetics and somaesthetics. Per the former, governmentality through everyday aesthetics can influence citizens’ decision-making, interactions, and actions. Per the latter, governmentality through somaesthetics can influence citizens’ identities, values, and self-fashioning. These types of governmentalities need not be decreed from individuals in positions of power. Nonetheless, they influence and control individuals by siphoning their actions onto particular normative paths of acceptability.

2.4.3 The Aesthetics of Resistance

⁹⁷ See for example Manne, *Down Girl*, Chapter 4: “Taking His (Out).”

⁹⁸ For more on seeing ‘myth’ as ‘historical truth,’ see Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 846.

Aesthetics are often employed as a tactic in nonviolent protests. In fact, aesthetic details often come to be symbolic of an entire movement, such as the raised Black fist in the Civil Rights Movement and the pink ‘pussyhat’ in the Women’s March. At other times, an aesthetic tactic becomes the protest itself; for example, during her senior year, Columbia student Emma Sulkowicz carried around the mattress upon which she was sexually assaulted to protest the acquittal of the assailant.⁹⁹ These aesthetic tactics, however, also carry the possibility of speaking beyond the demands of a protest and gaining power through their performance rather than through their articulation. For example, the climate change protest group Extinction Rebellion employs performance art in their protests. A January 2019 protest took place at the Rockefeller Center ice rink, where sixteen protestors laid on the ice in the shape of an hourglass surrounded by a circle—the symbol of Extinction Rebellion. Organizer Rory Varrato noted that this protest was intended to create a stark visual drawing attention to how climate change poses an immediate threat to life on earth.¹⁰⁰ Yet the aesthetics of the protest spoke beyond these articulated demands. While the protestors occupied the center of the rink, skaters continued their loops around them: the former symbolized immanent extinction, and the latter symbolized society’s ability to ignore the threat and continue taking pleasure in entertainment. For another example, the Russian rock band Pussy Riot staged a 2012 protest in one of Moscow’s largest Orthodox Catholic cathedrals, resisting the church’s support of Putin in his third run for president. The four women protestors wore colorful dresses, tights, and balaclavas as they occupied the front of the church, hooked up microphones and speakers, and performed an

⁹⁹ See for example, Jeremy Bauer-Wolf, “Mattress Protest and Its Aftermath,” *Inside Higher Ed*, July 24, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/07/24/media-circus-surrounding-mattress-girl-case-changed-conversation-sexual-assault>.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Osborne, “9 Arrested for ‘Die-In’ Protest at Rockefeller Center Ice Skating Rink in New York City,” *ABC News*, January 27, 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/arrested-die-protest-rockefeller-center-ice-skating-rink/story?id=60654388>.

original rock song, called “Punk Prayer,” expressing their protest sentiments.¹⁰¹ While their lyrics combatted political allegiances, the performative and aesthetic elements of their protest countered religious and gendered expectations, including piety and demureness.

In speaking beyond any discursive demands, the performative and aesthetic dimensions of resistance can combat governmentalities even beyond the objective of the protest. The political-aesthetic dimension of acts of resistance can combat the ‘conduct of conduct’ without protestors’ articulation, or even awareness, of such. For instance, although the West Virginia teacher strikers did not discursively argue against the governmentalities of neoliberalism or patriarchy, even so, the political-aesthetic performance of the strikes put forward values, identities, and ways of being alternative to those expected within these systems, and the strikers *felt* these alternative ways of being in their performance. Many West Virginia teacher strikers actively opposed feminism, yet all the same the performance of their counter-conduct allowed them to experience their own power, authority, and expertise as women and as people working in a feminized field. Many West Virginia teachers opposed ‘liberal’ economic ideals, yet even so the performance of their counter-conduct allowed them to experience an anti-neoliberal, democratic subjectivity. Through the performative and aesthetic qualities of counter-conduct, acts of resistance can work to rebuild, expand, or transform our social imaginaries, particularly those social imaginaries that have been constrained by oppressive governmentalities. In Chapters Three through Six, I expound upon and analyze this idea in detail.

2.5 Conclusion

¹⁰¹ See for example Carol Rumens, “Pussy Riot’s Punk Prayer is Pure Protest Poetry,” *The Guardian*, August 20, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/aug/20/pussy-riot-punk-prayer-lyrics>.

In this chapter, I have discussed the idea of governmentality as formative to our identities. As structural powers, governmentalities often operate passively in society in both larger systems and individual interactions and behavior. I argued that one way governmentalities exert their power upon citizens is through the aesthetics of society. There are particular aesthetic qualities to neoliberalism and patriarchy, for example, that impact how individuals behave and interact with one another, as well as what they desire, value, and believe. In short, the aesthetic qualities of neoliberalism and patriarchy in themselves play a role in individual identity formation. The aesthetic dimension of governmentalities easily goes unnoticed, or at least unreflected upon, because it is so constitutive of the fabric of society. Changes in society that only address understanding and not feeling or perception are liable to fall flat precisely because the effects of aesthetic injustice linger and impact a person's decisions or actions independently, even if to the contrary, of their beliefs.

Acts of resistance, however, also have aesthetic qualities, and here is where the hope lies. While many protestors utilize aesthetics as a tactic to advance their cause, counter-conduct as a form of protest is unique in that its resistance comes into existence expressly through the aesthetic and the performative. Further, although it can exist in its own right, counter-conduct can also arise as a layer of a protest, rather than as the protest in its entirety. The West Virginia teacher strikes, for example, articulated a clear set of demands. Their performance of counter-conduct, however, spoke beyond these demands through their aesthetic manifestation. And it was through the aesthetic manifestation that teachers resisted the governmentalities of neoliberalism and patriarchy.

Chapter 3: Neoliberalism and Education

“They’re trying to break our unions and our public education system. This is our only option—we have to shut schools down to force them to back down.”

-Brandon Woford¹

3.1 Introduction

So far in this dissertation, I have focused on establishing the conceptual framework and context for my analysis. I have argued for the importance of analyzing the political-aesthetic dimension of teacher strikes through counter-conduct, performativity, and aesthetics. I have also argued that governmentalities, such as those of neoliberalism and patriarchy, operate in part through aesthetics. Political-aesthetic resistance necessarily opposes such governmentality and is activated through the performative and aesthetic dimensions of an act of resistance beyond the assertions or even awareness of participants. Further, the political-aesthetic offers an education in sense, perception, and affect beyond understanding or belief. Regarding teacher strikes, the political-aesthetic offers an education in refusing neoliberal and patriarchal characteristics and experiencing instead alternative ways of being.

In this chapter and the next, I focus on one of these political-aesthetic lessons: namely, the political-aesthetic lesson that directs our interest away from neoliberalism and toward democracy. This claim presupposes that neoliberalism and democracy cannot coexist; thus,

¹ Brandon Woford is a K-8 teacher in Mingo County. This quote comes from Blanc, “West Virginia Teachers Strike Again.”

consubstantial with the neoliberal push of the past few decades has come a decay of our democracy.²

To make this argument, I first discuss in depth the idea of aesthetic injustice and residual internalization and explain how it affects teachers living and working within a neoliberal system. Then, I define neoliberalism, providing a brief history of the concept. I then describe the ideal neoliberal citizen, focusing on three characteristics in particular: individualization, marketization, and eminent governability. These characteristics, I later argue, are the ones that West Virginia teachers performed counter-conduct against. Then, I examine how neoliberalism has impacted education in West Virginia, and I analyze how it influenced the teachers' decision to strike.

3.2 Aesthetic Injustice and Residual Internalization

In her book *Epistemic Injustice*, Miranda Fricker points out the disparity that can arise between epistemic understanding and affect. Namely, she argues that a person's affective response can lag behind their epistemic beliefs, resulting in a "residual internalization" that may influence emotion or action contrary to any epistemic belief.³ For example, although a queer person from a conservative Christian background might *believe* that their sexuality is not sinful despite what they believed in their upbringing, they may nonetheless still *feel* shame. Or a young woman might *believe* that women are as capable as men at leading a country, yet she may *feel* distrustful of women who run for office. These "prejudicial images" stem from the larger social imaginary, and so, once internalized by individuals, their influence is difficult to identify.⁴ Fricker notes the embodied and affective nature of these prejudicial images: "Images are capable of a visceral impact on judgement, which allows them to condition our judgements without our

² See for example Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, and Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

³ I have discussed this concept elsewhere in Chapter Two, page 76–78.

⁴ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 37.

awareness.”⁵ Here, Fricker notes that images may impact our judgement even without our awareness. In other words, the residual internalization of images persists in affective and embodied form even after beliefs have changed, and they may affect a person’s judgements, actions, and behavior.

The philosopher Gustavo Dalaqua names this residual internalization that concerns Fricker “aesthetic injustice.” He argues that residual internalization occurs when an oppressed subject “overcomes a certain kind of epistemic injustice without resisting its attendant aesthetic injustice”—that is, the harm done to someone specifically with regard to their aesthetic capacities, which Dalaqua defines as capacities to feel and imagine.⁶ Aesthetic injustice, in short, constitutes oppression regarding how one aesthetically experiences the world, how they feel within it, and how they imagine alternative possibilities for existence. Because aesthetic injustice exists on an affective, embodied, and sensuous level, it can exist without a person’s full awareness, and, furthermore, it can also exist in conflict with an individual’s beliefs. From this perspective, alleviating oppressive residual internalization thus necessitates an aesthetic intervention rather than simply an epistemic one.

Dalaqua argues that neoliberalism fuels aesthetic injustice by oppressing citizens’ capacities to freely feel and imagine. He argues, “By turning competitive individualism into the ultimate reason behind every human behavior, neoliberalism makes it hard, if not impossible, for us to feel affects that are dissonant from its competitive-individualistic logic.”⁷ It is precisely because our affect is oppressed that our perception of the world, and of our own existence, is constrained. As Yuriko Saito argues, consumer aesthetics—part and parcel of neoliberalism—

⁵ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 37.

⁶ Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice,” 6, 1.

⁷ Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice,” 4.

may not only constrain people's aesthetic sensibilities, but it may actually stunt the development of such sensibilities.⁸ Further, neoliberalism as governmentality can incite aesthetic injustice that exists without our full awareness yet that shapes our experience of the world and of ourselves all the same.

In line with Wendy Brown and others, Dalaqua also argues that neoliberalism is inherently anti-democratic, which makes the consequential aesthetic injustice all the more malicious. Dalaqua notes: "The aesthetic injustice promoted by non-democratic and oppressive regimes is dehumanizing, for it denies the defining feature of human beings: the vocation of becoming more, of expanding and developing one's self."⁹ Neoliberalism constricts how we experience the world and others, and it constricts our aesthetic capacities to feel or imagine alternative ways of existing. This occurs even when it contradicts beliefs, and, in fact, our epistemic confidence may grant us permission to disregard aesthetic injustice. Mark Stern, for instance, notes that even when we *know* that neoliberal educational policy is bad, this awareness often gives us permission to "*do and feel as if we didn't*" know.¹⁰

The West Virginia teacher strikes created exactly the kind of aesthetic experience that can interrupt aesthetic injustice and diminish the residual internalization of both neoliberalism and patriarchy. The strikers achieved this through their enactment of counter-conduct, which inherently exists as a performative and aesthetic endeavor. In other words, the political-aesthetic dimension of the teacher strikes could influence teacher's ways of being, identities, and values even if their professional and political beliefs remained the same. The performative enactment of counter-conduct—and the aesthetic experiences therein—leads to an expansion of feeling and a

⁸ Saito, *Aesthetics of the Familiar*, 149.

⁹ Dalaqua, "Aesthetic Injustice," 9.

¹⁰ Mark Stern, "'We Can't Build Our Dreams on Suspicious Minds': Neoliberalism, Education Policy, and the Feelings Left Over," *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 12, no. 5 (2012): 393–394.

greater capacity to imagine alternative ways of existing within society, even in a society that remains neoliberal after the strike. To understand better the aesthetic injustice inherent within neoliberalism, and the impact it had on West Virginia teachers, I define neoliberalism as a governmentality, providing a brief history of the term and a description of its ideal citizen.

3.3 Neoliberalism: History, Definition, and Ideal Citizen

To Foucault and Brown, the scholars I primarily draw upon in this section, neoliberalism is a governmentality that often operates covertly, yet that influences the structure of society and the shape of individual decision-making. But what exactly does the ‘power’ of neoliberalism effectuate? A brief history and definition of the term, relying mainly on Foucault and Brown, will elucidate this.

The term ‘neoliberalism’ has taken several connotations since its coinage in 1938, and its meaning is still widely debated enough that the term “carries no settled definition.”¹¹ Despite this, neoliberalism has most commonly been associated with privatizing public services, reducing the social state, and deregulating capital.¹² Friedrich Hayek, one of the most prominent neoliberal advocates of the 1900s, argued against the idea of the ‘social’ in favor of the protection of traditional hierarchies.¹³ Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher, meanwhile, pushed neoliberal agendas that privatized public services, deregulated capital, disrupted organized labor, and, like Hayek’s neoliberalism, shrank the social state.¹⁴ Today, neoliberalism looks largely the same, only exacerbated and extended into new terrains of society. In fact, Brown argues that neoliberalism is no longer restricted to markets and institutions, but rather “has taken deeper root

¹¹ Brown, *In the Ruins*, 17.

¹² Brown, *In the Ruins*, 18.

¹³ Brown, *In the Ruins*, 13.

¹⁴ Brown, *In the Ruins*, 18.

in subjects and in language, in ordinary practices and in consciousness.”¹⁵ It is a “normative order of reason.”¹⁶ This makes it even more pervasive and difficult to analyze, as neoliberalism shapes not only societal structures, but also our daily quotidian actions, desires, and values. It has become a “a distinctive mode of reason, of the production of subjects, a ‘conduct of conduct,’ and a scheme of valuation.”¹⁷

There are two primary theoretical approaches in critiquing neoliberalism: the Neo-Marxist approach and the Foucauldian approach. The Neo-Marxist approach considers the tangible impacts of this economic system, including institutions, policies, and economic relations; in its examination, the Neo-Marxist perspective pits neoliberal capital against the working- and middle-class. The Foucauldian approach, however, like that of Brown mentioned above, considers neoliberalism beyond economic policy or other tangible impacts by arguing that it affects political rationality and individual subjectivity; the Foucauldian perspective analyzes how neoliberalism impacts values, behavior, and beliefs. In this chapter, and in this dissertation more largely speaking, I align my analysis of neoliberalism with the Foucauldian approach because it speaks to the ‘political-aesthetic’ lessons in a way that the more materialist Marxist approach does not.

Furthermore, using the Foucauldian approach also allows an analysis of neoliberalism as a kind of ‘governmentality.’ As Foucault defines it, governmentality is “the way in which one conducts the conduct of man.”¹⁸ It is a governmental or political rationality that establishes a ‘regime of truth’ where conduct is governed and measured.¹⁹ Governmentality constitutes a kind

¹⁵ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 47.

¹⁶ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10.

¹⁷ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 21.

¹⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 186.

¹⁹ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 118; For more on ‘regime of truth,’ see Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, Lecture 1.

of structural power that often dictates citizens' behavior without their recognition of such. Under governmentality, individual citizens make society's "ruling ways of thinking" their own, and thus, although their conduct is conducted by a structural power, citizens "come to believe and behave *as if* they were free and autonomous."²⁰ By analyzing neoliberalism as a type of governmentality, I argue that it conducts the conduct of citizens even without their knowledge of such—even thinking they are unconstrained and fully autonomous. The importance of this point will become more apparent in the next chapter, where I describe how the teacher strikes constitute a form of counter-conduct against the governmentality of neoliberalism. Before turning to this argument, I first define neoliberalism from the Foucauldian perspective.

There are three main points relevant to highlight about neoliberalism. First, it converts everything into market values. Second, it atomizes individuals, institutions, and businesses rather than encouraging them to act in accordance with a common good, thus leading to heightened competition. Third, it governs in a way that is not always recognized by citizens, and thus governs easily without resistance. These characteristics certainly overlap and are, in many ways, contingent upon one another. Together, they constitute a "formative power of society."²¹

One of the main points that Foucault makes about neoliberalism is that it calls for "the extension of economic analysis into a previously unexplored domain."²² Through neoliberalism, market principles become governing principles not only to the state, but also to other institutions, such as schools, workplaces, and health providers. Market principles dictate not only the economic sphere, but also the political and social ones. They shape what people purchase, how they vote, how they learn, and how they self-fashion. They shape the big picture structures of

²⁰ Finn Daniel Raaen, "Autonomy, Candor, and Professional Teacher Practice: A Discussion Inspired by the Later Works of Michel Foucault," *Journal of Philosophy and Education* 45, no. 4 (2011): 628.

²¹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 148.

²² Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 219.

society as well as the quotidian actions taken by individuals. As Brown says, neoliberalism “transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic.”²³ To Foucault, because the neoliberal push for marketization is so pervasive, it often influences collective structures and individual behavior even without people’s full awareness of such. One contemporary example is the marketization of social capital through social media and the currency of likes. A common tongue-in-cheek expression today is, “Do it for the likes,” which encourages people to take certain actions for the express purpose of garnering greater social media praise. However facetious this saying is intended to be, the fact is that much behavior (especially, but not limited to, those from younger generations) is shaped by the desire for likes, which increase a person’s social capital and often directly impact their feelings of ‘value’ or ‘worth’ as a human being. ‘Likes’ as measures of value and worth are relative to the number of likes others receive, thus making it an inherently competitive endeavor.

The invasive nature of neoliberalism allows it to shape our desires, beliefs, and identity. Citizens raised within a neoliberal context, through their own actions, support and strengthen neoliberalism in a kind of dialogical relationship between economic structure and individual behavior. Supporting neoliberalism through action and behavior can even be accomplished when citizens simultaneously hold opposing beliefs. One drastic example of this is CBS’ proposed show “The Activist,” which aimed to help activists raise money for their causes.²⁴ However, the reality-tv construct of the show exuded neoliberal values by pitting contestants against each other in a competitive, individualistic pursuit. Another drastic example recently took place in South Dakota, where a local company donated money to public school teachers seeking to buy

²³ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10.

²⁴ See for example Lizzy Davies, “The Activist: Reality TV Show to be ‘Reimagined’ as Documentary After Backlash,” *The Guardian*, September 16, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/sep/16/the-activist-reality-tv-show-to-be-reimagined-as-documentary-after-backlash>.

classroom supplies.²⁵ However, this ‘donation’ took the form of a competition; 5000 one-dollar bills were piled in the middle of an ice-rink, and, in front of an audience, teachers raced each other to stuff as many as they could into their shirts.²⁶

These two examples highlight another of the most prominent characteristics of neoliberalism: it encourages, fuels, and normalizes competition. For this reason, a neoliberal society veers toward the privatization of public goods, such as education, healthcare, and the criminal justice system in order to enter into and preserve that competition. This privatization maintains a sense of individualism among institutions and thus spurs greater market competition between them.

Neoliberalism does have its defenders. After all, it has preserved the morality of traditional hierarchies, heteronormative family values, and the ‘every man for himself’ mentality contributing to the backbone of the American dream. Neoliberalism celebrates and depends upon the free market, which many American people support, especially those wealthy individuals who have benefited most from this market. To those who support neoliberalism, market-based reform is the key to improving failing systems. Within education, this includes the push toward charter schools and school vouchers, which gives parents and students more “flexibility and choice.” Further, neoliberalism is often regarded as the sole motivating factor for innovation²⁷—what else could possibly drive innovation and invention, think the neoliberals, if not capital?

²⁵ See for example Rachel Treisman, “Organizers of the South Dakota Teachers ‘Dash for Cash’ are Apologizing and Paying Up,” *NPR*, December 14, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/14/1064091771/south-dakota-teachers-dash-for-cash>.

²⁶ These examples also demonstrate the connection between neoliberalism and humiliation. In converting a person’s worth into market values and social capital, neoliberalism is not conducive to the recognition and respect of human dignity. Valuing economic and social capital over human dignity easily leads to humiliation. Citizens might agree to their own humiliation because the system has starved them of resources. It would be difficult for a public school teacher to pass up an opportunity to receive hundreds of dollars for classroom supplies when they normally dip into their own pockets to pay for materials.

²⁷ Foucault made this connection in *Birth of Biopolitics*, 231.

3.3.1 *The Ideal Neoliberal Citizen*

For the purpose of this analysis, it is crucial to note that by examining neoliberalism as a governmentality, I examine neoliberalism as a way of life enacted through the quotidian behavior and values of individuals, even without their explicit awareness of such. Here I examine what those behaviors and values are. I take as a specimen the ideal neoliberal citizen, whom Foucault calls the *homo oeconomicus*, or the ‘economic man.’²⁸ His three defining characteristics echo the three characteristics of neoliberalism cited above. The ideal *homo oeconomicus* is 1) ruled by market competition, 2) individualistic, and 3) eminently governable.²⁹ It should be noted that in a neoliberal system, these values are foisted upon citizens in such a way that demands their conformity; not participating in this system risks not being able to participate in society, to succeed professionally, or even to have enough economic means to survive. For the purposes of the following analysis, I describe each of these characteristics as they would appear in the *ideal* neoliberal citizen.³⁰ This is vital to my argument in Chapter Four, where I argue that the West Virginia teachers acted counter to each of these three ideal neoliberal characteristics.

Foucault considers the ideal neoliberal citizen to be completely ruled by market competition. The *homo oeconomicus* makes “an entrepreneur of himself” and seeks to make entrepreneurs of others;³¹ he seeks to construct a “policy of society”³² that adopts neoliberalism into its “whole way of being and thinking.”³³ Everything about the *homo oeconomicus* becomes marketized and marketable. Skills, bodily aesthetics, social media posts—all are acquired based

²⁸ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 225.

²⁹ See for example Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, Lectures 10 and 11, especially pages 270–286.

³⁰ In Chapter Four, I argue that the counter-conduct of the West Virginia teacher strikers combatted each of these characteristics and instead put forward opposing ones

³¹ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.

³² Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 146.

³³ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 146.

on what would elevate one's 'worth' or 'value.' Experiences are commodified and collected just as products are, so that traveling to another country takes on similar qualities to purchasing a new eyeshadow palette from Sephora. Even social relationships are forged and maintained with the purpose of increasing one's own human capital. As Maarten Simons puts it, having an "entrepreneurial relation to the self" entails thinking about "the norms, relations, and networks as social capital that could contribute to the development of social capital or that could enlarge the productivity of someone's knowledge and skills."³⁴ The ideal *homo oeconomicus* considers it his destiny to compete as an individual in the market, both in his entrepreneurship and his connoisseurship; by not engaging in these competitions, the *homo oeconomicus* fails. As Brown puts it, the ideal *homo oeconomicus* is "an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio value across all of its endeavors and venues."³⁵

Even the act of having and raising children becomes an individualistic entrepreneurial pursuit. To the *homo oeconomicus*, having a child is "an act of enterprise."³⁶ He must find a "co-producer" with a similar or higher level of human capital to ensure the child also has a high level.³⁷ As the child grows up, the *homo oeconomicus* parent measures their life in terms of the "possibilities of investment in human capital."³⁸ Perhaps, for example, the *homo oeconomicus* enrolls their child in language classes and music lessons, not for the child's enjoyment, but rather so that they may be a better candidate for employment later in life. He is not concerned with raising a good citizen who will contribute to the collective good of society; rather, he is only

³⁴ Maarten Simons, "Learning as Investment: Notes on Governmentality and Biopolitics," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 38, no. 4 (2006): 532.

³⁵ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 10.

³⁶ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 228.

³⁷ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 228.

³⁸ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 130.

concerned with producing and raising an entrepreneur who will accumulate more human capital. The *homo oeconomicus* does not concern himself with the very ideas of democratic citizenship or society. Rather, in understanding citizenship and society in a self-interested way, the homo oeconomicus “eliminates the basis of a democratic citizenry.”³⁹

In addition to measuring his worth in market values, the homo oeconomicus reflects another principle of neoliberalism: he is supremely individualistic. Neoliberalism atomizes society, and the ideal homo oeconomicus feels that atomization and seeks to preserve it. As Brown says, this generates a “replacement of citizenship defined as concern with the public good by citizenship reduced to the citizen as *homo oeconomicus* [and] also eliminates the very idea of a people, a demos asserting its collective political sovereignty.”⁴⁰ Instead of supporting the collective good of society, the ideal homo oeconomicus acts only in favor of himself and thinks that everyone else will and should do the same. In fact, the idea of the collective good does not even exist for the homo oeconomicus, thus it is impossible for him to consider it in his actions. He thinks only of himself and his own entrepreneurship, and he thinks doing so is the indisputable way of the world. In so doing, the homo oeconomicus is inherently competitive in all pursuits. Whether it is in wealth, social media likes, beauty, goods, or lines on a CV, the homo oeconomicus pits his own human capital against others. Even when the homo oeconomicus gives his time or money to a cause, it is in order to increase his own human capital rather than to benefit the collective demos of society. Brown puts it in drastic terms when she says that the homo oeconomicus “may no longer have a heart at all.”⁴¹

³⁹ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 65.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 39

⁴¹ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 84.

A third characteristic of the ideal neoliberal citizen is that he is easy to govern. Instead of resisting neoliberal forces, homo oeconomicus is “someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment. Homo oeconomicus is someone who is eminently governable.”⁴² Perhaps, in their responsiveness, they do not even realize they are being governed; rather, they think they are intelligently responding as autonomous individuals. In thinking they have freedom and agency over their actions, in thinking they intelligently respond to their environment, they do not resist governmentality—for, they think, what is there to resist? ‘Freedom’ is still toted as a good (and for many, as the ‘ultimate good’), but the government takes on a new relationship with it, organizing and administering it, producing it, consuming it.⁴³ Freedom, within neoliberalism, becomes a siphon, shepherding people toward specific behavior, allowing them to see only ‘choices’ that support the neoliberal project.

Brown argues that consubstantial with being easy to govern comes the homo oeconomicus’ willingness to sacrifice their own well-being for “macroeconomic growth and credit enhancement.”⁴⁴ The neoliberal homo oeconomicus acts predictably in this regard: his overarching aim in life is to grow his personal capital. As long as the government plays to neoliberal citizens’ desires, they will be easy to govern, responding to even slight changes in their economic environment. The ideal homo oeconomicus has the responsibility to self-invest wisely in “a context of macroeconomic vicissitudes,” and they must also realize themselves as expendable if they obstruct macroeconomic growth. The ideal homo oeconomicus sits upon a “throne of sacrifice” they have been forced to build themselves.⁴⁵

⁴² Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 270.

⁴³ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 55.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 84.

⁴⁵ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 84.

3.3.2 Critiques Of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has many opponents. For the most part, critics condemn neoliberal ideology for twisting and constricting the most important aspects of society: democracy and education. Because I argue that West Virginia teachers' counter-conduct was directed toward democratic ideals, which would in turn loosen the neoliberal death-grip around the neck of education, I present these critiques as testimony to the necessity of anti-neoliberal, democratic ways of being, particularly for those involved in education.

One of the most damning critiques against neoliberalism is that it cannot coexist with democracy.⁴⁶ Thus, wherever neoliberalism grows, democracy decays. Brown, one of the most vocal critics of neoliberalism, argues that in regarding human beings as human capital, neoliberalism “eliminates the basis of a democratic citizenry, namely a demos concerned with and asserting its political sovereignty.”⁴⁷ Neoliberalism dismisses society in favor of individuals and families—and without society, there is no grounds for social justice. Along the same lines, Henry Giroux argues that although the power of neoliberalism is invisible, it keeps “people prisoners of its privatizing, commodifying, mutilating ode to self-interest and hyper-individualism.”⁴⁸ Neoliberalism does not recognize class, race, or gender as sites of subjectivity. At its worst, Brown notes, it feeds into Alt Right movements; in its more moderate form, it asserts the ‘eternal truths’ that “life is determined by genetics, personal responsibility, and market competition.”⁴⁹ All in, neoliberalism cultivates a deep antihumanism, antithetical to democracy, and it blinds citizens to the idea that another world is possible.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*; Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 39.

⁴⁸ Henry Giroux, “Teachers are Rising up to Resist Neoliberal Attacks on Education,” *Truth Out*, July 22, 2019, <https://truthout.org/articles/teachers-are-rising-up-to-resist-neoliberal-attacks-on-education/>.

⁴⁹ Brown, *In the Ruins*, 44.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, especially the epilogue.

Critics have also identified neoliberalism's push toward individualism and marketization as effecting many negative changes within education. Critiques generally focus on such topics as school privatization, biopolitics, homogenized curriculum, standardized testing, and the mistreatment of teachers.⁵¹ Brown argues that under neoliberalism, knowledge and thought are valued only for their contribution to capital enhancement rather than for their contribution to any conception of the 'good life,' democracy, or freedom. Barbara Stengel argues that under neoliberalism, the focus on capital gain makes it difficult for K-12 schools to achieve Dewey's vision for both democracy and education.⁵² Meanwhile, Mark Stern argues that outcomes-based educational initiatives, such as *No Child Left Behind*, control students and teachers through biopolitics, by individuating them into "test scores and holding them as sole proprietors of their success and failure."⁵³ John Drummond asserts that such measures are "technologies of surveillance and judgment,"⁵⁴ comparable, perhaps, to an education Panopticon.⁵⁵ Diane Ravitch argues that such educational initiatives are currently being proposed by "Disrupters," another word for the neoliberal entrepreneurs attempting to 'disrupt' public education by treating schools like businesses. Ravitch argues that schools have been reimagined as places of commerce and profit rather than places of teaching and learning.⁵⁶ This shift represents a neoliberal effort "to

⁵¹ See for example Vasco d'Agnese, "Dewey and Possibility: Challenging Neoliberalism in Education," *Educational Theory* 69, no. 6 (2020): 693–717; Henry Giroux, *Youth in a Suspect Society: Democracy or Disposability?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Matt Hastings, "Neoliberalism and Education," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, May 23, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.404>; Tyson Lewis, "Biopolitical Utopianism in Educational Theory," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 39, no. 7 (2007): 683–702; Tyson Lewis, "Biopower, Play, and Experience in Education," in *Marcuse's Challenge to Education*, eds. Douglas Kellner, Tyson Lewis, Clayton Pierce, and K. Daniel Cho (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 45–57; Simons, "Learning as Investment."

⁵² Barbara Stengel, "Educating *Homo Oeconomicus*? 'The Disadvantages of a Commercial Spirit' for the Realization of *Democracy and Education*," *Educational Theory* 66, no. 1-2 (2016)

⁵³ Stern, "Neoliberalism, Education Policy, and the *Feelings Left Over*," 391.

⁵⁴ John Drummond, "Foucault for Students of Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 34, no. 4 (2000): 716.

⁵⁵ For more on the idea of the Panopticon in education, see Jeff Stickney, "Judging Teachers: Foucault, Governance and Agency During Education Reforms," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44, no. 6 (2012): 649–662.

⁵⁶ Diane Ravitch, *Slaying Goliath: The Passionate Resistance to Privatization and the Fight to Save America's Public Schools* (New York: Vintage Books, 2020), 6.

change us from citizens to consumers, interested only in our own well-being, not in the common good.”⁵⁷ As John Drummond writes, “Governmentality is intimately related to the transformation of individuals into certain types of subjectivities that can be administered through the programs and technologies of power by which their identities come increasingly to be defined—the slow learner, the difficult child, the developing child.”⁵⁸ The governmentality of neoliberalism siphons educators into the subjectivity of the ‘submissive, passive, neoliberal’ teacher.

In summary, critics of neoliberalism within education have expressed concerns about its deleterious effects to democratic and justice-oriented education. They critique neoliberalism’s overarching educational orientation toward increased market values and entrepreneurship at the detriment to the idea of the ‘good life.’ As Brown argues on this point, “human life wholly bound to the production of wealth, whether laboring to produce it or hovering over its accumulation, is small and unrealized.”⁵⁹ Finally, critics also express concerns with neoliberal control mechanisms, which often take the shape of biopolitics and outcomes-based testing.

In addition to the critiques on neoliberal education above, other scholars have critiqued neoliberalism specifically for the aesthetic injustice it creates and perpetuates. The aesthetic injustice of neoliberalism has multiple dimensions. It oppresses citizens’ affect because it makes it difficult to imagine a world or way of existing alternative to that of competitive, market-oriented individualism;⁶⁰ it compels citizens to see the world and themselves through the lens of market values. This can be true even in the ‘residual’ sense—even if a person disavows the values of neoliberalism, they might still *feel* the drive of the homo oeconomicus, so deeply

⁵⁷ Ravitch, *Slaying Goliath*, 12.

⁵⁸ Drummond, “Foucault for Students of Education,” 713.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 190.

⁶⁰ See Dalaqua, who argues that neoliberalism makes it difficult to feel or perceive anything other than individualistic market-based competition and the continual drive for more: Dalaqua, “Aesthetic Injustice.”

ingrained, coloring their desires and influencing their decision-making. In addition, neoliberalism fuels consumerism, which in itself represents a type of aesthetic injustice. Yuriko Saito argues that neoliberal capitalism dulls our aesthetic sensibilities by overloading them with the aesthetics of consumerism: advertisements, new products, marketing ploys designed to keep us coming back for more.⁶¹ Further, consumerism feeds directly into environmental harm, which in itself often produces aesthetic injustice, such as polluted air and water. Frederica Castelli asserts that neoliberalism has contributed to aesthetic injustice through the desiccation of public space.⁶² Neoliberalism not only treats people like consumers, but it establishes consuming as the only vector for relationship and sociability. In summary, the aesthetic injustice of neoliberalism oppresses citizens' ability to sensually and affectively experience the world, and it oppresses their freedom to self-fashion. Even further, neoliberalism not only inflicts aesthetic injustice onto us, but also creates the conditions for us to inflict aesthetic injustice onto others or onto our surroundings.⁶³

Thus, although we might assert our anti-neoliberal convictions, without the ability to imagine, feel, or see alternative possibilities, it is nearly impossible to live any other way. The aesthetic opening up of possibilities for existence is thus vital to confront the aesthetic injustice of neoliberalism. This is achieved through the aesthetic and the affective, rather than through the epistemic. It is an embodied and aesthetic education such that people feel or perceive alternative possibilities, such as, I argue, occurred during the West Virginia teacher strikes. It is the aesthetic injustice of neoliberalism that leads me directly to the analysis of education in West Virginia. This includes discussing the role that neoliberalism played in inciting the teacher strikes there.

⁶¹ Saito, "Consumer Aesthetics and Environmental Ethics."

⁶² Castelli, "Bodies in Alliance."

⁶³ For more on this, see Chapter Two, pages 77–79.

3.4 Neoliberalism and Education in West Virginia

I now turn my attention to the specific neoliberal characteristics of the West Virginia education system that led teachers to strike in both 2018 and 2019. These characteristics are reflective of the larger neoliberal push throughout the country. However, the details of these initiatives or issues are specific to West Virginia. These include the mistreatment and disrespect of teachers, the push toward the privatization of public schools, and the employment of biopolitical control.

Neoliberalism did not begin the mistreatment of teachers. Rather, such disrespect and disregard for the teaching profession has been around since teaching became a feminized field in the late 19th century.⁶⁴ However, the neoliberal push toward outcomes and market competition has not alleviated this disrespect. It manifests in grossly inadequate salaries and healthcare for teachers. Neoliberalism fuels the cutting of financial corners to focus on economic outcomes, compromising or losing “unmarketable” qualities such as dignity and respect. Although teachers are underpaid, especially in West Virginia, they are nonetheless expected to achieve ambitious educational outcomes.

In West Virginia, teachers had been fighting against such mistreatment for decades. West Virginia teachers first went on strike in 1990 to protest their meager salaries and inadequate healthcare options. After this eleven-day strike, the West Virginia teacher salary increased from 49th to 31st ranking in the nation.⁶⁵ By 2018, however, it had reverted back down to 49th.⁶⁶ West Virginia teachers were earning on average \$45,700 per year, compared to the national average of

⁶⁴ Goldstein, *Teacher Wars*.

⁶⁵ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 7.

⁶⁶ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 18.

\$60,080.⁶⁷ The starting salary for West Virginia teachers, however, was a mere \$33,000.⁶⁸ Even though West Virginia also has a lower cost of living than the national average (it is currently ranked 17th for lowest cost of living among all states),⁶⁹ many teachers were still living paycheck to paycheck and taking second or third jobs to survive. So prolific was this problem that one teacher claimed she did not know a single teacher who did not have to take a second job, and she knew one teacher who held as many as six.⁷⁰ Said another teacher, “We have never just had teaching as a job. We take jobs at Wal-Mart; we wait tables on the weekends; we sell Mary Kay on the side; all so we can keep going into the classroom.”⁷¹ Many counties bordering other states, such as Virginia and Pennsylvania, were “bleeding teachers” who could receive substantially larger salaries across state lines. In part because of this, in 2018 there were 700 openings for West Virginia teachers.⁷² West Virginia high school teacher Michael Mochaidean reflected on this issue, saying: “The 28 years between the two strikes had slowly eroded the important gains won in 1990. Teacher pay once again failed to keep up with the times. When calculated with the rate of inflation, the current average salary for WV teachers was only three thousand dollars more than teachers’ salaries prior to the 1990 strike.”⁷³

⁶⁷ On teachers’ salary in West Virginia and across the United States, see “Estimated Average Annual Salary of Teachers in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, by State,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_211.60.asp.

⁶⁸ See for example Philip Bump, “How Striking West Virginia Teachers’ Salaries Compare with Teacher Pay in Other States,” *The Washington Post*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/03/02/how-striking-west-virginia-teachers-salaries-compare-to-teachers-in-other-states/>.

⁶⁹ “Cost of Living Index by State 2022,” *World Population Review*, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/cost-of-living-index-by-state>.

⁷⁰ See the video interview posted by AFL-CIO, Twitter Post, February 26, 2018, 1:41pm, @AFLCIO, <https://twitter.com/aflcio/status/968194296263397377>.

⁷¹ This message was conveyed in a photo posted by WV United Caucus to Facebook on March 2, 2022, 6:27am.

⁷² Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 10.

⁷³ Michael Mochaidean, “The Other West Virginia Teacher Strike,” *Jacobin*, April 9, 2018, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/04/west-virginia-teachers-strike-1990-unions>.

Not only were the salary gains eroding, but the healthcare options for West Virginia teachers were also getting worse. In fact, teachers cited this as the most pressing issue that drove them to strike in 2018. Healthcare premiums had been slowly increasing for years, but in late 2017, legislature proposed doubling them from 20% to 40%.⁷⁴ Instead of including only their own salaries into the healthcare equation, teachers would have to include salaries of anyone else under their insurance as well as compensation from other employment. This, beside a proposed 1% pay increase, “would actually result in a loss of pay” for many teachers, particularly those with families or those with second jobs.⁷⁵ The disregard for teachers’ healthcare emphasizes yet another way the state valued cutting financial corners more than teacher well-being.

The push toward public school privatization also deeply impacted West Virginia education. Both the 2018 and 2019 West Virginia teacher strikes fought against a proposal to introduce charter schools and education vouchers to the state. In 2018, the state legislature put forward the privatization bill for the first time, having written it without guidance or input from a single educator. After it panned because of the strike, legislates proposed it yet again a year later. Thus, in 2019, West Virginia teachers went on strike again, this time with the sole motivation of blocking the privatization bill. This proposal is reflective of the neoliberal push toward privatization, individualism, and market competition. Teachers opposed charter schools for several reasons: they would divert resources from their already strapped schools, employ teachers without qualifications, potentially garner money for corporations, and contribute to an educational divide between city and rural districts.

⁷⁴ Audra Slocum, Rosemary Hathaway, and Malayna Bernstein, “Striking Signs: The Diverse Discourse of the 2018 West Virginia Teachers’ Strike,” *English Education* 50, no. 4 (2018): 365–374.

⁷⁵ Catte, Hilliard, Salfia, *55 Strong*, 7.

The lead insurgent for school privatization was former Senate President Mitch Carmichael. He was the chief “villain” of both the 2018 and 2019 West Virginia teacher strikes. He is a fantastic image of a neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*, one that has not only made “an entrepreneur of himself,” but that also seeks to make entrepreneurs of others. In his proposed education reforms, he demonstrated a desire to construct an education system that adopts neoliberalism into its “whole way of being and thinking.”⁷⁶ For example, on February 19, 2019, Carmichael tweeted: “Our families deserve competition, choice, and flexibility.”⁷⁷ While “competition, choice, and flexibility” seem good by name, these three words epitomize in many ways the marketization of education. After all, Foucault describes neoliberal ideology as “a matter of making the market, competition, and so the enterprise, into what could be called the formative power of society.”⁷⁸ With this tweet, Carmichael explicitly called for making competition one of the formative powers in West Virginia public education, thus pushing forward a neoliberal agenda. Carmichael also called for school choice. The problem, as Eric Blanc explains, is that: “First, you starve public schools; then, you insist that the only solution to the artificially created education crisis is ‘school choice’—meaning privately run (but publicly funded) charters, as well as vouchers for private schools.”⁷⁹ “Choice” itself seems good, but when “choice” means privatizing education and diverting resources from public schools in order to fabricate that choice, all while potentially feeding into the pockets of corporations or individuals, choice is less about freedom and more about control of conduct. Not only that, this “choice” forces students and parents into the roles of economic agents by creating a market that they have no choice but to participate in. The same is true for the “flexibility” Carmichael touts.

⁷⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226, 146, 218.

⁷⁷ Mitch Carmichael, Twitter post, February 19, 2019, 2:18pm, <https://twitter.com/SenCarmichaelWV>.

⁷⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 148.

⁷⁹ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 28.

With public school privatization, a select group of students (those who live close to a charter school) will have more flexibility, but that flexibility will come at the cost of hindering the educational resources for rural students and teachers (charter schools were proposed only in cities), thus widening the academic divide between city and rural students and providing rural teachers more incentive to leave the profession or the state.

Perhaps most alarming, Carmichael not only championed the push toward public school privatization but also made it an issue of morality. Alongside tweets fighting for charter schools and vouchers, Carmichael wrote: “We need to reform our education process in West Virginia. This is a moral imperative for the people of our state to provide a world-class education to our students,” and, “It is a moral imperative to provide a highly functioning education system for our children, parents, and teachers. We must pass comprehensive education reform NOW.”⁸⁰ By positioning school privatization as a moral issue, Carmichael employed a manipulative strategy to control the conduct of West Virginians. If people are persuaded that school choice *is* the moral thing to do, they will monitor their own behavior to conform, lest they act immorally.

Finally, West Virginia teachers were also subject to an attempt at egregious, biopolitical control of their bodies. Months before red-bandanaed teachers infiltrated the gold-domed state capital chanting “A freeze is not a fix!” and singing “Country Roads,” unease first grew palpable among educators on December 7, 2017, when the school board announced a new health program called Go365. Starting July 1, 2018, teachers would be required to wear a step-tracking device (such as a FitBit) that would calculate their daily step count, in addition to any other health information teachers wanted to input.⁸¹ A minimum number of steps would be required of

⁸⁰ Mitch Carmichael, Twitter post, February 14, 2019, 10:31am, <https://twitter.com/SenCarmichaelWV>; January 31, 2019, 11:19am, <https://twitter.com/SenCarmichaelWV>.

⁸¹ Jess Bidgood, “‘I Live Paycheck to Paycheck’: A West Virginia Teacher Explains Why She’s on Strike,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/01/us/west-virginia-teachers-strike.html>.

teachers each month—those who made the count would receive gift cards to retail stores; those who did not would be penalized \$25.00 a month. A year’s worth of missing the minimum step-count would bump the fine to \$500.00. After immediate pushback from educators across the state, Governor Justice killed this idea, yet unrest lingered.⁸²

Although this proposal never went into effect, the very idea demonstrates an extreme neoliberal attempt to control teacher conduct.⁸³ The app would purportedly improve health by providing incentives to teachers to move more, but the act of controlling such movement shows a clear depiction of what Foucault calls *biopolitics*: “the attempt . . . to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birth rate, life expectancy, race. . . .”⁸⁴ Go365 was a prime example of a state government trying to control the conduct of educators while rationalizing their efforts through the “improved health” counting steps would elicit. Yet with this proposal, the West Virginia government overstepped how much they could get away with in the realm of biopolitics without receiving pushback.

Not only did West Virginia teachers fight against these tangible neoliberal agendas and repercussions, but they also were subject to experience an aesthetic injustice particular to their role of educators in a neoliberal context. This is an oppression related to how teachers aesthetically experience their educational contexts, how they feel within them, and how they imagine alternative possibilities for education or for their existence as teachers. Within a neoliberal system, teachers might “come to see themselves as independent and autonomous

⁸² Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 50.

⁸³ Here, as throughout this paper, I am assuming Foucault’s definition of neoliberalism, or when “the exercise of political power [is] modeled on the principles of a market economy.” Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 131.

⁸⁴ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 317.

actors, even if they are not.”⁸⁵ Teachers might make decisions in their classrooms and schools that they believe to be their own independent doing, yet that are covertly influenced by the aesthetic injustice they experience at the hands of neoliberalism—namely, an injustice that prevents them from feeling, experiencing, or imagining education in any other way except that put forward through the neoliberal agenda. Teachers might feel as though education cannot exist in any other way except one that is geared toward outcomes and standardization, for both themselves and their students, and one that can be quantified into chunks of data and reconfigured into ‘best practices.’ Or, teachers might internalize their own mistreatment and disrespect exacerbated under neoliberalism, and thus feel as though the teaching profession is one of intrinsically less worth than other market-driven professions. Or, teachers might feel atomized and isolated, as though they do not have support from their fellow teachers, their schools, or their state—and, furthermore, that this atomization is simply the way of education and cannot or should not be changed. In whatever case, aesthetic injustice often operates covertly, such that teachers feel their oppression on an embodied or perceptual level and cannot imagine alternative possibilities for educating or existing.

3.5 Conclusion

Neoliberalism has had a profound impact on education and the teaching profession. While all citizens in a neoliberal society may experience its oppressive nature, teachers are uniquely situated in that they are expected not only to adopt neoliberal characteristics themselves, but to educate and form their students to develop them as well. Such characteristics include those of marketization, atomization, and eminent governability. Moreover, neoliberalism

⁸⁵ Raaen, “Autonomy, Candor, and Professional Teacher Practice,” 629.

inflicts on citizens aesthetic injustice in occluding alternative ways of being from their imagination or feeling.

The West Virginia strikes combatted the aesthetic injustice of neoliberalism by educating teachers through sense and feeling to the existence of alternative possibilities for living as a teacher besides those forced upon them under neoliberalism. In particular, I argue that West Virginia teachers enacted counter-conduct in the act of striking that refused the three characteristics of the ideal neoliberal citizen defined in this chapter and that put forward instead democratic ways of being. In the next chapter, I analyze in detail the political-aesthetic dimension of West Virginia teacher strikes in this light.

Chapter 4: The Strikes Against Neoliberalism

“We teach democracy, but we don’t often get to really see it in action or to see tangible results. We went there. We did this... We made them listen.”

- West Virginia Teacher¹

4.1 Introduction

The first day of the 2018 West Virginia teacher strike was Thursday, February 22. It had been a mild winter, and that day was no different. Wearing t-shirts and light jackets, five thousand teachers parked their cars throughout the streets of Charleston and walked to the gold-domed capitol building, arriving just before 8am. The doors opened, and into the capitol they poured. Between the white marble walls and white marble columns, red-clad teachers filled the entire first floor. Not enough space inside, red-clad teachers spilled outside onto the expansive steps below, pressing up against the Kanawha River. They held protest signs, they held hands, and they readied themselves for the first cries of their long battle ahead.

For thirteen days, including nine weekdays, thousands of educators and public employees returned to their posts at the capitol building to occupy, chant, and sing. Meanwhile, thousands of teachers occupied their individual schoolyards around the state. Holding protest signs, they waved to passing cars. In rain, shine, and snow, teachers put their bodies on the line, vowing not to return to their classrooms until lawmakers proposed a satisfactory deal. West Virginia teachers felt forgotten and taken-for-granted. This was their chance to educate the state on their

¹ This quote comes from an anonymous teacher striker, as cited in Everette Scott Sikes, “In Our Very Blood: The Use of Social Media in the 2018 West Virginia Teachers’ Strike,” PhD diss. (University of Tennessee, 2021), 128–129.

professional reality as teachers. Yet in the process, they also educated the public, and themselves, on an alternative way of being—away from neoliberalism and toward democracy.

* * *

Teachers exist within the neoliberal system, and their measure of success largely depends on their ability to conform to neoliberal values—for example, how well they can teach to the test, how well they can follow national curriculum guidelines without straying, how well they can abide by the federal and state-level educational policies and rules, and how well they can turn their students into ‘entrepreneurs’ of their own education. Neoliberalism constrains what it means to be a teacher, and this was certainly true in West Virginia, where neoliberal measures were actively threatening public education in the state through the proposal of privatization bills. Through the act of striking, West Virginia teachers enacted counter-conduct against the neoliberal governmentality saturating education and life in the United States. Striking teachers performed conduct contrary to that expected of the ideal neoliberal teacher or citizen.² Yet counter-conduct is not only a refusal, but also a creation. In refusing the characteristics of the ideal neoliberal citizen, West Virginia teachers instead put forward alternative ways of being oriented toward democracy.

This performance of counter-conduct was embodied and collectively enacted by the striking teachers, and it was experienced through sense and affect. In other words, striking teachers aesthetically and somaesthetically experienced identities, values, and ways of being that refused neoliberalism and expressed democracy. Community members, meanwhile, could also experience the counter-conduct of the teachers—although, not having participated in the strike themselves, they would not have experienced it somaesthetically. These political-aesthetic

² For a discussion of the ideal neoliberal citizen, see Chapter Three, pages 95–98.

experiences are significant because they educate teachers (and community members) in *feeling*, *sense*, and *affect*, making them prime agents to combat the aesthetic injustice effected by neoliberalism. This political-aesthetic education occurs independently of any beliefs teachers or community members held—in fact, even in direct opposition to those beliefs.

This is particularly important in the conservative context of West Virginia, where any pushback against neoliberal ideas is often dogmatically refuted.³ Whether or not teachers consciously turn against neoliberalism after striking is beside the point. What matters, rather, is that they have an *image* and an *experience* (aesthetic and somaesthetic) of realities, identities, and ways of being alternative to those of neoliberalism; what matters is that the possibilities for how to exist—even in a decidedly, yet often unconsciously or passively, neoliberal context—are expanded.

Yuriko Saito argues that *how* an individual does something matters regarding the virtues or moral values conveyed through quotidian actions.⁴ I argue the same is true for a collective body, such as a collective body of strikers; the *how* is embodied through the collective action of a group just as it is embodied in the behavior of an individual. It is not just that the West Virginia teachers went on strike—it is how they experienced the act of striking. The performance of the strike itself spoke beyond any articulated demands in putting forward a way of being alternative to that expected of the ideal neoliberal citizen. It is in the performance of counter-conduct that the aesthetic injustice of neoliberalism is confronted. It is in the counter-conduct that one can feel and perceive ways of living alternative to those expected under neoliberalism. Through their

³ West Virginia has suffered at the hands of the Trumpian ideology that has fractured all issues, no matter how nuanced, into the simplistic dualism of ‘right’ or ‘left.’ Many tenants of neoliberalism are aligned with the right, and thus are dogmatically defended by many state citizens. In fact, many state citizens are so far right and so greatly aligned with neoliberal values that they consider President Biden, a liberal centrist, to be a socialist.

⁴ I expand upon this idea further in Chapter One, pages 39–45.

counter-conduct, teachers not only refused neoliberal characteristics, but they put forward alternative ways of being that were democratic in the ideal sense of the word. This chapter is devoted to examining both components of counter-conduct—the refusal of neoliberalism and the performance of democracy—as manifested in the West Virginia teacher strikes. Throughout, I draw upon images from the strikes to support my analysis.

4.2 Analysis of Counter-Conduct Against Neoliberalism and Toward Democracy

The West Virginia teachers enacted conduct counter to the three neoliberal characteristics described in Chapter Three: being individualistic, being easy to govern, and making an entrepreneur of oneself and others (and consequently orienting one’s life exclusively around market values and competition). In their place, teachers put forward democratic ways of being, values, and identities. For one, while they refused atomization, teachers put forward an expression of unity. For another, while teachers refused being easy to govern, they put forward a willingness to resist unjust and oppressive systems. Finally, while teachers refused their own marketization, they put forward the prioritization of their own well-being and social connection. While these counter-conducts overlap, I describe each as a separate entity in detail below. Hopefully in this description, it is apparent how the three refusals and creations are interconnected.

4.2.1 Individualization

First, the West Virginia teachers enacted conduct counter to the neoliberal orientation toward individualization and away from the *demos*.⁵ In their act of resistance, teachers refused neoliberal atomization and instead put forward a collective identity that represented a unified whole and the idea of the ‘common good,’ both necessary components of a *demos*. This

⁵ I discuss this characteristic more in Chapter Three, page 97.

solidarity was inherent within the mottos of the strikes, #55Strong and #55United, which signified the collective effort of the movement: all 55 counties within West Virginia remained united throughout the duration of both the 2018 and 2019 strikes, even when union leaders revoked their approval in the former and the strike went wildcat. Further, each of these strikes comprised not only teachers, but also other public employees who contributed to schools' operations, including bus drivers, cooks, nurses, and other paraprofessionals.⁶

This unification manifested beyond hashtags through the embodied performativity of the strikes. I define four ways below, including in the collective physicality of the strike, the unification of voice, the wearing of red, and the holding of signs. In relation to the first point, teachers and public employees not only withheld their labor, but they stood together on the picket line, literally holding hands with each other and with educators from across the state (see the image below). They not only withheld their labor, but they physically occupied the capitol building and their individual schoolyards, symbolizing their resistance with the placement of their bodies. They put their bodies in the vulnerable position inherent in an act of protest, especially one that is technically illegal.⁷ They risked being forcibly removed from the premises, locked behind bars, or fired from their careers.

⁶ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*; Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*.

⁷ Attorney General Patrick Morrissey declared before the teacher strike began that it was illegal. Throughout the strike, he reminded teachers repeatedly that their actions could bring legal consequences. See for example this article from a West Virginia news site: MetroNews, "Attorney General: Teacher Strike is Illegal," *MetroNews: The Voice of West Virginia*, February 21, 2018, <https://wvmetronews.com/2018/02/21/attorney-general-teacher-strike-is-illegal/>.



Figure 1: Teachers Hold Hands Outside the Capitol Building in February 2018⁸

Together, West Virginia teachers marched on the capitol, filling the building's cavernous, marble first floor and spilling out onto the white staircase leading down to the Kanawha River. Each day during the 2018 strike, approximately 5,000 teachers protested at the capitol building, *nearly one-fourth of the state's teaching force*. They stood side-by-side, in the building itself and outside on the sprawling steps below, feeling the sublime vastness of their numbers and the intimate closeness of thousands and thousands of other teachers and public employees. During every school day throughout the strike, rain or shine, even in the bitter February cold, protestors filled the capitol and the surrounding outside area. Meanwhile, those teachers and public employees who were not at the capitol managed to link arms and protest together outside their individual schools. Together, they stood on school lawns, holding homemade protest signs and waving to cars passing by. All this served to create a tremendous feeling of solidarity among teachers and those associated with the teaching profession—a far cry from the isolation of the classroom and school.

At the capitol building, teachers and public employees chanted their demands and sang songs in unison, their voices echoing off the marble walls and columns of the building's first

⁸ "Thousands Rally in Support of West Virginia Teachers Strike," *NBC News*, February 26, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/video/west-virginia-teachers-strike-continues-1171294275799>.

floor, rising to the second floor, and echoing off the closed doors of the state senators' offices. In one voice, they shouted chants such as "A freeze is not a fix," "Put it in writing," and "We are worthy." They sang the unofficial state song, John Denver's "Country Roads," along with other tunes such as Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It" and the White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army." Together they danced, they clapped, they whooped and cheered each other on, in the way a sports team supports each of its members. In individual schoolyards across the state, teachers and public employees also cheered, chanted, and sang together—their voices in unison albeit in smaller numbers. In the image below, teachers are either mid-chant or song while occupying the first floor of the state capitol building. In either case, their voices echo off the white marble columns and walls surrounding them in stark contrast to the red of their shirts. They raise their hands in the same gesture, pointing to their eyes. A striker at the front faces her fellow educators, leading them in the gesture. The chanting or singing was accompanied by gesture and movement, making the performance of unity one of both voice and body. Teachers performed in unison inside the capitol building from morning until evening, moving together with the rhythm of solidarity.



Figure 2: Teachers Singing Inside the State Capitol Building in 2018⁹

⁹ Robert Ray, "Teachers Celebrate After West Virginia Governor Jim Justice and Senate Republicans Announced That They Had Reached a Deal to End the Statewide Teachers' Strike," *The Atlantic*, March 7, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/03/west-virginia-teachers-victory/555056/>.

The singing and chanting did not in themselves advance the teachers' demands. Teachers could have asserted their demands without such actions, and the strikes could have occurred without them; the singing and chanting were not integral to the political-epistemic dimension of the strike. However, the singing and chanting represent factors of the political-aesthetic dimension of the teachers' counter-conduct. It was through the *feeling* of singing and chanting in harmony with others, and through the *feeling* of hearing the unification of voices, that a collective spirit was both performed and experienced over many hours and days. Further, this unified chanting and singing occurred in public, meaning that teachers performed their collective identity in front of an audience of community members and, through the media, people from around the country. Through their public performance of disparate voices coming together as one, teachers refused the neoliberal expectation to remain individualistic and atomized and instead experienced a true *demos*: the root of democracy.

Mingo County teacher Katie Endicott described how she experienced the feeling of unity through the collective chanting and holding of hands during the strike. She wrote:

I remember the first time I heard the “55 united, 55 strong” chant, I broke down and cried. Because it was unity like I had never experienced. We were up in front at the capitol, near the front of the Senate chanting and I remember someone just started holding hands, my hands. And it was people from Mason County, Putnam County, people I had never met before—but these were my brothers and sisters, these were my fellow educators. And we were standing together, we were standing united. And no one wanted to be the county that made it fifty-four.¹⁰

¹⁰ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 61–62.

Here, Endicott attributes her emotional release to the overwhelming feeling of unity she experienced while on strike within the capitol building. She describes her experience as mediated through held hands and collective chanting. The sublime feeling of unity only occurred when she heard her individual voice merge with thousands of others and when she physically felt solidarity from her colleagues through clasped hands—colleagues who in the expression of solidarity became brothers and sisters. Endicott’s physical and sensual experience with unity was, I argue, more powerful than any articulation of unity on its own.

This feeling is represented in the image below. While not of Endicott, the image portrays a teacher crying, overcome with emotion. She holds hands with two of her colleagues, arms raised in the air above their heads. Her colleagues appear to be singing, sustaining an “O” sound. Having watched hours of videos from the strikes, I can confidently guess the teachers are singing “Country Roads”; most everyone raised in West Virginia knows all the lyrics, having sung them in unison at countless football games and hometown concerts, and on each road trip home as their car crosses the cusp of the state. It is a song symbolic of state pride and love, a song evoking a sense of home and belonging, a song representative of community. We can imagine this teacher overcome with the same feeling Endicott describes: the unified singing and the physicality of touch contribute to her emotional release. The sublimity of the moment comes from rejecting the individualism of neoliberalism, perhaps for the first time in her life as a teacher, and experiencing—feeling, seeing, and hearing—unity and solidarity instead. This is counter-conduct in action.



Figure 3: A Teacher Cries, 2018¹¹

The performance of a *demos* was further heightened by the teachers' decision to wear the same color leading up to, during, and after the strikes. Red was everywhere. Red, the color symbolic of both Marxism and 'Trump country.' Red, the color adopted in the early twentieth century by West Virginia coal miners on strike, who tied red bandanas around their necks (yes, this is where the term 'redneck' comes from). Red, the color that became symbolic of all teacher strikes across the country, which led to the slogan #RedforEd. Red not only filled the state capitol during the strike, but it filled individual school hallways across the state in the weeks leading up to the walk-out. On Wednesdays of these weeks, teachers and public employees wore red t-shirts to express their allegiance to each other and to the burgeoning movement.¹²

Education and labor researcher Eric Blanc considers this to have been a particularly effective way to "build workplace solidarity and momentum."¹³ During the walk-out itself, many strikers continued to wear these red t-shirts, now with slogans such as "55 Strong" and "#55United" printed across the front. At the capitol, the pristine, white-marbled interior of the building and the

¹¹ Craig Hudson/Charleston Gazette-Mail via AP, "Teachers and School Personnel Celebrate After the State Senate Approved a Bill to Increase State Employee Pay by 5 Percent at the Capitol in Charleston, W.Va., on Tuesday, March 6, 2018," *The Press Democrat*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/news/west-virginia-teachers-cheer-pay-hike-deal-to-end-walkout/?artslide=2>.

¹² Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*.

¹³ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 119.

white cascading staircase outside were flooded by a sea of red “from the chamber doors of the Senate and the House all the way back to the rotunda.”¹⁴ Jenny Craig, a teacher and rank-and-file leader of the strikes, said, “I vividly recall seeing the sea of red descend on the capitol: red ponchos, red umbrellas, signs and shirts, and this electric feeling in the air.”¹⁵ Another teacher, Leah Clay, remarked, “It literally was like a fire just catching and going.”¹⁶

One teacher reflected on her experience witnessing images of the strikes in real time on Facebook that showcased the teachers’ red t-shirts and the unity expressed therein. She wrote:

[We] *saw* pictures from up there in Charleston. It was exciting. Because we all had our *red shirts*, and you would get caught up in the moment. *You saw everybody*. It's like they came out of the woodwork and it was just exciting to know that *everybody was in unity*. You could *see how we had come together*.¹⁷

Even in not experiencing the aesthetics of the teacher strike first-hand, this teacher conveys feeling awestruck by the unity she perceived through the collective wearing of red and the great number of teachers occupying the capitol. Later, this teacher physically joined in the striking efforts, expressing that she was inspired by the image described above. Donning her red t-shirt, she stood beside her fellow colleagues and performed unity with them. The sea of red, like those depicted in the two images below, was an impetus for this teacher to reject individualism and experience instead a *demos*.

¹⁴ Sarah Jaffe, “West Virginia Teachers Walk Out,” *Dissent Magazine*, February 23, 2018, https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/west-virginia-teachers-walkout.

¹⁵ “West Virginia Strike Leader: Power Comes from the Rank and File,” *UE Union*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.ueunion.org/ue-news/2019/west-virginia-strike-leader-power-comes-from-the-rank-and-file>.

¹⁶ Jaffe, “West Virginia Teachers Walk Out.”

¹⁷ Sikes, “In Our Very Blood,” 127, emphasis added.

In addition to the red t-shirts, every morning, local news channels would update viewers on the strike by showing a map of the state with each county on strike colored red.¹⁸ Thus, every morning, the news channels would display a map of the state, entirely red, symbolizing that every county remained on strike—yet another visual representation of solidarity throughout the state, from the northernmost tip to the southern.



Figure 4: Teachers Wear Red Inside the State Capitol Building in 2018¹⁹



Figure 5: The Sea of Red on the Steps Outside the Capitol in 2018²⁰

¹⁸ Kate Doyle Griffiths, “Crossroads and Country Roads: Wildcat West Virginia and the Possibilities of a Working Class Offensive,” *Viewpoint Magazine*, March 13, 2018, <https://viewpointmag.com/2018/03/13/crossroads-and-country-roads-wildcat-west-virginia-and-the-possibilities-of-a-working-class-offensive/>.

¹⁹ John Raby, “Striking West Virginia Teachers Rally Outside the House of Delegates Chambers on Tuesday, February 19 at the State Capitol in Charleston, West Virginia,” *Vox*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2019/2/19/18231486/west-virginia-teacher-strike-2019>.

²⁰ Note, in this image, there are also a good number of blue shirts. These blue shirts were donned by members of the AFT-WV, West Virginia’s second union. The state’s bigger union is WVEA. Elsewhere, I describe these blue shirts

The collective wearing of red represented yet another way that teachers refused the neoliberal characteristic of individualization and atomization. Like the chanting and the singing, the teachers' use of red was not necessary to the strike itself, nor was it representative of the political-epistemic dimension of their efforts. Rather, the collective wearing of red was another component of teachers' counter-conduct—another contour to political-aesthetic dimension of the strikes. By collectively wearing red t-shirts, teachers performed their unification before, during, and after the strikes; this happened beyond any discursive assertions on the part of the teachers. The sea of red represented at once a refusal of individualism and a putting forward of a collective spirit—both of which manifested through the sensuous details of the strikes. In other words, through the aesthetics of all wearing red, teachers performed conduct counter to the individualistic ethos of neoliberalism, and oriented instead toward the collective ethos of democracy.

Finally, teachers handcrafted signs and made use of art and digital media to convey unification in their resistance. In an analysis of the signs of the West Virginia teacher strike of 2018, Audra Slocum, Rosemary Hathaway, and Malayna Bernstein categorized the signage into five main messages: 1) teacher as professional, 2) teacher as content specialist, 3) teacher as moral authority, 4) teacher as a valuable resource, and 5) teacher as inheritor of cultural legacies.²¹ While these signs are certainly discursive, the aesthetics of such visual forms carry greater weight; the aesthetics of the movement—including the art, media, and signage used—signal teachers' resistance beyond any discursive demands. Teachers stated that such “visual

as an accent to the overwhelming red, creating an illusion of a dynamic and deep sea. This image comes from Associated Press, “Raw: Day Four of the West Virginia Teachers Strike,” *USA Today*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/02/27/west-virginia-schoolteachers-strike-enters-fourth-day-they-protest-demand-meeting-governor-strike-co/376159002/>.

²¹ Slocum, Hathaway, and Bernstein, “Striking Signs.”

forms are extensions of our willfully waving arms and unruly tongues; they signal and stimulate our willingness to disobey, to go against the flow, to speak out and to get in the way of business as usual.”²² In other words, these signs not only conveyed teachers’ demands, but in carrying them, teachers created an image of a unified front, a relentless resistance, and a “collective disposition [of] *willfulness*.”²³



Figure 6: Teachers Hold Signs in a Group During the 2018 Strike²⁴



Figure 7: Thousands of Strikers Protest Outside the State Capitol Building in 2018²⁵

²² Erica Meiners and Therese Quinn, “Feeling Like a Movement: Visual Cultures of Educational Resistance,” *Workplace* 26, no. 1 (2016): 124.

²³ Meiners and Quinn, “Feeling Like a Movement,” 118.

²⁴ Lois Weiner, “West Virginia Teachers Are Showing How Unions Can Win Power Even if They Lose Janus,” *In These Times*, February 24, 2018, <https://inthesetimes.com/article/west-virginia-teachers-show-how-to-win-power-after-janus>.

²⁵ Image from anonymous.

The above image encapsulates teachers' counter-conduct against individualization and toward unity in each of the four ways mentioned above. Thousands of teachers stand outside the capitol building in Charleston, fill the stairs and the lawn, and spill down to the Kanawha River. Most of them are wearing red. The dots of blue scattered throughout represent members of West Virginia's AFT-WV union. The two colors do not stand in opposition, but in support of each other. If anything, the blue provides a contour to the sea of red, evoking depth and dynamism. Many of the teachers are talking, laughing, or smiling, forming friendships while protesting side by side. Not only teachers are present, however; in the front, one woman wears a shirt that read "Lunch Lady," and a sign in the middle reads "We students support teachers." Teachers, public employees, and students stand together. In front of the sign, it looks as though a child is raised slightly higher than the crowd, perhaps standing on something or being held. He co-holds a sign with a woman behind him, condemning the government for prioritizing themselves above teachers and students. Another sign, on the left, conveys that a teacher is walking out for her students; beside it, a teacher offers a humorous retort to Governor Justice, who often invokes animals when criticizing others. Each sign is held high in the air with outstretched arms, hovering over the heads of the crowd. They are held actively; their holders want them to be seen. A bit further in the background, a sign reads, "Don't talk about ____, be about ____." Even though it is difficult to make out the symbol that finishes each sentence, the sentiment echoes across the strikers. They are not simply asserting their demands; they are 'being about' them. Perhaps it is serendipitous that the statue raised on a pedestal in the midst of the striking body—you can just make it out in the back—is of a man representative of unity over fracturing. It is titled "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight."

In each of these ways—through physically occupying public space together, chanting and singing in one unified voice, wearing red t-shirts and bandanas, and holding protest signs—teachers performed counter-conduct that refused the neoliberal expectation to be individualistic and created an ethos of solidarity characteristic of democracy. Teachers performed their unification through the embodiment of the movement itself (e.g., standing together, holding hands, and singing, chanting, and moving as one) and the aesthetic details therein (e.g., wearing red and holding signs). And in this performance of counter-conduct, teachers could *feel* and *perceive* what it is like to, at once, refuse neoliberal norms and dwell within democratic ways of being. By marching together, holding hands, standing side-by-side, occupying schoolyards, and filling the first floor of the state capitol building and spilling onto the steps below, teachers *felt* and *saw* their solidarity in resistance. By flooding the white-marbled halls with a sea of red, teachers *saw* that the power of the ocean is much greater than that of a drop of water. By chanting and singing in one unified voice, which echoed across the capitol halls, over the Kanawha River, and within each individual schoolyard, teachers *heard* the great volume of their unification. By putting their bodies in the vulnerable position of illegal protest, teachers *felt* the safety and security of being one among many. By doing all these things, teachers *performed* conduct counter to that expected of the ideal neoliberal citizen. This counter-conduct was not articulated, and perhaps many protestors were not entirely aware of its presence. All the same, a unified identity—and further, the very ideas of the ‘common good’ and the *demos*—was performed and experienced through the political-aesthetic, rather than through the political-epistemic.

Through their counter-conduct, the West Virginia teachers felt, rather than simply asserted, their solidarity, itself vital to the act of resistance. Such feeling manifests through the

somaesthetic.²⁶ Political resistance is not just about power; it is also about the *feeling* of protesting, which “forces a reconsideration of politics in connection with bodies.”²⁷ Teachers *felt* unified; they *felt* as though they were part of a collective effort that, while comprised of disparate bodies, was larger than any one individual; they *felt* what it was like to fight for a common goal alongside many different others. Teachers felt the kind of power that can only arise in community. As teacher and union activist Emily Comer described it, “The most amazing part of the struggle has been the real sense of community across West Virginia.”²⁸

Beyond discursively stating their unification, teachers *performed* their unification, and they *saw* and *felt* this unification. This is important because an assertion may not alone change one’s actions—or, furthermore, their identities, values, or ways of being in the world—due to aesthetic residual internalization. In other words, a person may assert their solidarity with others, yet their actions may still be influenced by the residual internalization of neoliberal atomization, even without their awareness of such. But by performing solidarity, and consequently by aesthetically and somaesthetically experiencing it, teachers not only asserted their unity, but they felt and witnessed it through their actions. This counter-conduct may have the potential to influence teachers’ ways of being, even their very identities, more than any change of opinion or growth in understanding because it addresses the internalized aesthetic injustice inflicted by neoliberalism.

4.2.2 Eminent Governability

In many of the ways that teachers refused the neoliberal expectation of individualism, they also refused another neoliberal expectation: namely, remaining easy to govern. This

²⁶ For more on this, refer to my section on somaesthetics in Chapter One, pages 65–69.

²⁷ Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance,” 186.

²⁸ Eric Blanc, “What the Teachers Won: An Interview with Emily Comer and Jay O’Neal,” *Jacobin*, March 2018, <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/03/west-virginia-teachers-strike-agreement-budget>.

expectation is enforced on the teaching profession in many ways, both through governmental powers and through the wider social imaginary.²⁹ For one example, shortly before the 2018 strike, a post on Facebook read: “Teachers, by and large, are a passive bunch (In WV they don’t even vote in mass). There is at present no real sign of any major action on their part.”³⁰

In their strikes, West Virginia teachers performed a refusal to remain eminently governable by putting their bodies in the vulnerable position of illegal protest for thirteen days in the 2018 strike, even when union leaders withheld their support on day six, and for two days in the 2019 strike. Thousands of teachers voluntarily stood together at the capitol building and in front of their individual schools beyond the hours in a regular school day and into the night. At its height, over 5,000 teachers occupied the capitol building, nearly one-fourth of the state’s teaching force. Thousands of other teachers protested outside their schools every day. By putting their bodies on the line, teachers demonstrated a willingness to put themselves in harm’s way to fight for themselves.³¹ Because the strike was technically illegal, teachers risked being forcibly removed from the premises, locked behind bars, or fired from their careers. The ideal homo economicus is eminently governable precisely because he lacks courage and fears the risks inherent within resistance: economic risk, physical risk, and legal risk. In the very act of their *physical resistance*, teachers performed a refusal to succumb to such fears; instead, they courageously stood and occupied public space, even as lawmakers demonstrated their disgust and disagreement, even as some community members hurled insults and derided teachers.³² The strikers physically returned day after day for thirteen straight days, and in so doing, their resistance manifested literally through and by their bodies. In their *embodied resistance*, teachers

²⁹ I explain this characteristic in depth in Chapter Three, pages 98–99.

³⁰ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 39.

³¹ For more on the inherent risk within protest, see my discussion of vulnerability in Chapter Six, pages 183–186.

³² For more explanation of the backlash teachers faced, see Chapter Five, pages 167–173.

performed a refusal to remain passive and governable, and they put forward instead a willingness to courageously resist unjust power, even at risk to themselves. This counter-conduct was manifested through the embodied and sensuous nature of the teachers' physical occupation of public space.

Witnessing the physical resistance of thousands of their colleagues inspired some reticent teachers to join the strike when they originally had not. One teacher reflected on her experience at home, watching videos and images from the strikes unfolding online. She remarked:

When you *saw some of the signs* that people made or you got on and *saw the numbers* or the live videos, that really kind of made you want to be involved. *You don't want to miss out on what looks like history is being made, and you can see it.* It's not like seeing it in the paper the next day.³³

This teacher describes seeing an image like the two pictures below: thousands of teachers gathered together, holding signs. Originally, she had acted in accordance with the neoliberal expectation to remain passive and governable, not getting involved in the manifestation. Yet in witnessing the resistance of her fellow teachers in pictures and videos, she was inspired to physically join the efforts. It was the aesthetic details of these images—including the sheer number of people there and their protest signs—that led this teacher to refuse passivity and instead perform resistance. This image was the impetus, in other words, for this teachers' counter-conduct against neoliberal governability and for democratic action.

In the first image below, thousands of teachers stand on the steps outside the capitol. An array of colorful signs is spread across the crowd. Six massive, white columns stand above the protestors; a gold-encased door stands between the teachers and the legislative halls. The contrast

³³ Sikes, "In Our Very Blood," 124, emphasis added.

between the aesthetics of the law and the aesthetics of the protesting teachers makes all the more apparent their refusal to remain eminently governable and their performance instead of courageous resistance. In the second image, we see the same stark contrast, and the same courageous resistance. Yet the deep blue of the sky and the hundreds of cellphones lit up across the crowd make the image of resistance appear not only courageous, but also *beautiful*.



Figure 8: Thousands of Teachers Hold Signs Outside the State Capitol Building in 2018³⁴



Figure 9: Thousands of Teachers Outside the Capitol Late into the Evening in 2018³⁵

³⁴ Alex Flynn, "Teachers Rallied Outside of the State Capitol in Charleston, W.Va., on Tuesday," *New York Times*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/02/us/west-virginia-teachers-strike.html>.

³⁵ Associated Press, "Teachers and Union Officials Hold a Candlelight Vigil Wednesday, Feb. 13, 2019 Outside the State Capitol in Charleston, W.Va. Inside, Lawmakers Continued to Debate a Complex Education Bill Opposed by Teachers," *Forbes*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/patrickgleason/2019/02/19/west-virginia-demonstrates-how-teachers-unions-oppose-school-choice-as-well-as-tax-relief/?sh=17e0d28b60b5>.

Education researchers Erica Meiners and Therese Quinn describe how the aesthetics of a teacher strike can inspire others to take political action, just as the teacher above described, in an article called “Feeling Like a Movement: Visual Cultures of Educational Resistance.”³⁶ Meiners and Quinn write that teachers on strike:

made full use of digital technologies and social media; teachers and supporters rallied themselves and each other with a steady stream of catalyzing images: well-designed posters, tweets, funny and snarky hand-made signs, powerful photographs of seas of red-shirted protesters flooding downtown streets. Pictures of children and young people standing up for their teachers, parents rallying to prevent school closures, and bored and dismissive school board members and politicians worked to educate, entertain, and mobilize supporters. The images, art, and artifacts—memes conveying ideas—produced by teachers and their accomplices, *mobilized people because they made them feel*.³⁷

As Meiners and Quinn point out, the aesthetics of a teacher strike, through many different avenues, can inspire teachers and community members alike to join the movement. This happens through images of the strikes themselves as well as through artwork and media created by teachers. For many teachers, the strikes were a font of creativity for artifacts such as posters, memes, and social media posts. Meiners and Quinn argue that these visual images were effective in mobilizing people because they appeal to their *feelings* rather than to their understanding. Reticent teachers, like the one described in the previous anecdote, and community members may witness images of teachers on strike, and artwork teachers have created therein, and they may respond to these images by joining the strikes themselves. The aesthetics of a strike can mobilize

³⁶ Although they discuss the aesthetics of the 2012 Chicago teacher strike, what they say applies to the teacher’s anecdote above, and to the stories of many other teachers in the West Virginia strikes. Meiners and Quinn, “Feeling Like a Movement.”

³⁷ Meiners and Quinn, “Feeling Like a Movement,” 117.

teachers out of the passivity expected of them under neoliberalism and incite them to perform resistance alongside their colleagues.



Figure 10: A Teacher Holds a Sign at the Capitol Late in the Evening in 2018³⁸

The teacher in the above picture demonstrates how this inspiration can occur even years later. Her sign reads: “In 1990 my teachers taught me to value my worth. Today I LEAD by example.” In this message, she conveys having witnessed her own teachers on strike as a child. Witnessing the resistance of her teachers inspired her to refuse passivity and courageously stand on the picket lines years later. She is also wearing red, demonstrating her refusal of individualization and her putting forward of solidarity and unity. Further, she recognizes that her own students will witness her act of resistance and solidarity and perhaps be inspired to resist their own passivity and atomization when the time comes.

4.2.3 Marketization

Finally, in their act of resistance, teachers refused a third neoliberal characteristic. By removing themselves from their classrooms and physically occupying instead the capitol

³⁸ Craig Hudson, “The Focus of the West Virginia Teachers’ Strike Has Oscillated Between Teachers Deserving Better Compensation and a More General Anxiety About the Strength of the State’s Middle-Class Institutions,” *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-new-old-politics-of-the-west-virginia-teachers-strike>.

building (or even individual schoolyards), teachers performed a refusal of their own marketization, and the inherent entrepreneurship and competitiveness therein. Strikers acted counter to the conduct expected of the ideal *homo oeconomicus* who sacrifices his own well-being for the benefit of the larger market, and whose greater loyalty is the economy—not to any ideas of ‘justice’ or ‘fairness.’ Instead, they put forward alternative values that prioritized their well-being and social connection over the market.

By physically removing themselves from their places in the ‘economy of education,’ teachers and public employees acted counter to the ideal neoliberal citizen who would sacrifice their well-being for the greater good of the ‘market.’ By physically occupying the capitol building and their schoolyards instead, teachers prioritized their well-being over that of the greater market; they refused to sacrifice themselves to the market.³⁹ Teachers performed a physical resistance to the neoliberal exploitation of the teaching profession through heightened marketization, but they also performed physical resistance against the heightened marketization of the state’s public education system in general. In the creation and pushing forward of the privatization bill proposed by the state senate, teachers were silenced.⁴⁰ Thus, rather than simply protesting this bill, they physically blocked its passing, through and by their embodied performativity of resistance. This performance was all the more significant during the 2019 strike, when the sole reason that West Virginia teachers protested was to combat the privatization bill from passing. In this case, as teachers again refused to enter their schools and instead occupied the capitol building and their schoolyards, teachers physically performed resistance toward the neoliberal push toward greater public school marketization.

³⁹ About the role of sacrifice inherent in neoliberalism, see Chapter One, page 98.

⁴⁰ For more on silencing as a ‘down girl’ move, see Chapter Five, page 165.

Teacher strikers also performed a non-marketized relationship with the physical space of their protest. Each day before teachers left their striking posts to return home, they cleaned the space well so as not to leave the capitol building littered or dirty.⁴¹ In this, teachers demonstrated that they were not simply regarding their actions as a transaction between themselves and state lawmakers. Rather, they were thinking of the capitol building as a place that humans beings lived and worked. They refused the cold depersonalization of marketization and instead treated the space with care, as though they would their own homes, schools, and classrooms.

By physically standing together day after day, and by collaborating on tasks such as cleaning, teachers also refused another characteristic inherent within the marketization of neoliberalism: competitiveness.⁴² Teachers refused competition through their performance of unity. They stood side-by-side, they held hands and linked arms with other public employees from around the state, they sang and chanted in one voice. Even though there were many creative posters, memes, and social media posts, the purpose of all this creativity and energy was to give voice to a unified perspective, shared by the striking teachers and public employees. They were, if you like, speaking from the same position and moving in the same direction. By performing a unified front in the place of competition, teachers performed a prioritization of their own well-being and social connection over the isolating and demoralizing ‘rat race’ fueled by neoliberalism.⁴³

⁴¹ Personal interview with Jessica Salfia, May 31, 2021.

⁴² For more on this, see Chapter Blank.

⁴³ The competition inherent in neoliberalism has been shown to increase loneliness and decrease well-being among individuals. See for example Julia C. Becker, Lea Hartwich, and S. Alexander Haslam, “Neoliberalism Can Reduce Well-Being by Promoting a Sense of Social Disconnection, Competition, and Loneliness,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 60, no. 3 (2021): 947–965. For more on the demoralization of teachers, see Doris Santoro, *Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2018).

Teachers literally putting their bodies on the line demonstrated at once a counter-conduct against the expected dis-unification, passivity, and marketization of the ideal neoliberal citizen. Through and by their bodies, teachers refused to be atomized into fractured individuals, they refused to remain eminently governable to the powers at hand, and they refused to allow their profession and the state's public education system to be further marketized and privatized. Simultaneously, teachers performed ways of being reflective of democratic ideals: they performed a unified, collective body; a willingness to resist unjust powers; and the prioritizing of well-being and social connection over the greater market, competition, and entrepreneurship.

4.2.4 *Toward Democracy*

In the West Virginia teacher strikes, there was “a coming together of bodies that speaks, as it were, in another way,” outside the limitations of discursive language.⁴⁴ It was through the embodied performativity of their resistance—counter-conduct itself—that the West Virginia teachers created alternative possibilities for existence within a neoliberal system. As described above, the West Virginia teachers refused three characteristics of the ideal neoliberal citizen and put forward instead alternative ways of being representative of democracy.

In their collective resistance, and in their collective occupation of a public space, the teachers *performed* unity; they turned the “I” into a “we” through their individual bodies moving as one.⁴⁵ By the very composition of many disparate bodies coming together to act in concert in their resistance, and furthermore through the unification of their voices and the collective wearing of red, the teachers performed their unity and solidarity—they performed as a *demos* around a common good. In their embodied performativity of resistance, the teachers

⁴⁴ Butler, *Notes*, 157.

⁴⁵ Butler, *Notes*, 52.

“call[ed] into question the inchoate and powerful dimensions of reigning notions of the political.”⁴⁶ Teachers inhabited an alternative identity that asserted political sovereignty and resistance against injustice—attributes important to democracy. By physically putting their bodies on the line, and in harm’s way, teachers performed a refusal of passivity and a putting forward of courageous resistance. In this resistance, teachers performed the prioritization of their own well-being and social connection with others.

In its embodied performativity, the strike’s counter-conduct—both the rejection and the putting forward of alternative possibilities—was manifested through gestures (e.g., marching and occupying), through voice (e.g., singing and chanting together), through physical existence (e.g., thousands of bodies showing up and acting in concert), and through clothing decisions (e.g., red t-shirts). In other words, the performance of counter-conduct was manifested through the aesthetic details of the strike itself. These aesthetic details comprise the ‘everyday’ features of one’s surroundings—clothing choices, voices, movement—yet together, they can offer a powerful aesthetic experience. Teachers could not only perceive the movement, the sound, the color, but they could also experience *how* such movements, sounds, and colors occurred. They could not only perceive the sensuous details of the strikes but also the values and ways of being conveyed through these details.

Think of the teachers who marched on the capitol building. Aesthetically speaking, these teachers witnessed thousands of their colleagues from around the state marching beside them; they felt their arms linking with different others, come together under the same goal; they witnessed the sea of red flooding the gold-domed capitol building and cascading down the marble stairs; they heard their own voice chant, sing, and shout in unison with thousands of

⁴⁶ Butler, *Notes*, 9

others; and they experienced putting their own body on the line in harm's way, and witnessed others doing the same. These aesthetic details comprise *the way in which* the strike was carried out, which expresses at once the refusal of neoliberalism and the putting forward of the *demos*, of community, of social connection—of a democratic way of living.

Teachers thus not only aesthetically experienced the details that comprised the sensuous nature of the strikes—the thousands of other bodies, the collective voices, the red—but they also aesthetically experienced the values being conveyed through these aesthetic details: namely, in this case, those values aimed toward democratic living and aimed away from opposing neoliberal expectations. Specifically, they aesthetically experienced the refusal of individualism, and the putting forward of collectivity, *demos*, and the common good; they aesthetically experienced the refusal of eminent governability, and the putting forward of courageous resistance; and they aesthetically experienced the refusal of marketization and competition, and the prioritization of their own well-being and their social connection. They aesthetically experienced, that is, those anti-neoliberal and democratic values, identities, and ways of being performed by teachers in their act of counter-conduct.

In all of these ways, the West Virginia teachers performed what is like to be democratic, rather than neoliberal, citizens. The teachers, in their act of striking, refused the neoliberal norms they had constrained them, even if subconsciously, both in their careers and in their personal lives. Instead, they performed some of the important characteristics of the ideal democratic citizen. They witnessed, perceived, and felt what it was like to act democratically. In so doing, they experienced a way of being alternative to that forced upon them under the governmentality of neoliberalism, and they expanded their possibilities for life itself.

4.3 Continued Impact

The refusal of neoliberal characteristics and the putting forward of democratic ones is not ephemeral, nor constrained to the moments of striking. Rather, counter-conduct, in both refusing and creating, effects not a new way of existing for a moment, but a new way of *living*. West Virginia teachers strikes, through the embodiment of the *demos*, “against steep odds and with their bodies ‘on the line,’ ... begin to experience a *new way of life*.”⁴⁷ As Appalachian scholar Elizabeth Catte says, the West Virginia teachers strike “calls us to be the architects who build something different.”⁴⁸ The teachers strikes put forward ‘a way of life,’ contributed to the ‘construction of new realities and new practices,’ and the ‘opening up of new political possibilities,’ and it attempted to ‘re-shape’ societal values. Teachers did not *demand* such change, but they *realized* it through the very performance of their counter-conduct—performances that were then experienced in such a way as to impact the subsequent decision-making of striking teachers. Indeed, the true power of the teachers’ strikes was not simply the refusal of neoliberal characteristics, but the putting forward of democratic ways of existing that transcended the bounds of the strike itself.

This is not to say the putting forward of a new way of life manifests in consciousness raising or paradigm shifts, which are important considerations in Marxist analyses of labor strikes. Rather, the political-aesthetic dimension of the teacher strikes effects new ways of being, values, and identities through quotidian changes in behavior, even without full awareness of such. The aesthetic component of the experience of counter-conduct is particularly important because it addresses the residual internalization of neoliberalism—that is, the aesthetic injustice—in a way that the epistemic does not. This is because the teachers’ counter-conduct

⁴⁷ Sarah Hansen, “Bodies on the Line,” 158, emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, 55 *Strong*, 113.

against neoliberalism and toward democracy manifests an education of feeling, sense, and perception—the root of much of our decision-making. Teachers who experience this education may subsequently perceive their classrooms in a different way, experience new feelings in their role as teachers, and effect different decisions in both as a consequence of their striking, and long after the strike ended.

Teachers and public employees maintained their expression of unification, resistance, and the prioritization of their own well-being and social connection after the 2018 strike and into the present times. Because their performance of resistance combatted the aesthetic injustice of neoliberalism and put forward the feeling of democracy, teachers continued to demonstrate consequent changes after the 2018 strike. It is precisely because teachers experienced both a rejection to neoliberalism and a putting forward of an alternative way of being that they were able to so quickly, so collaboratively, and so relentlessly perform the same alternative way of being for a second time—an alternative way of being that enacted the *demos*, that recognized the power of teachers, and that resisted unjust and unfair governmental practices. While there are likely many more changes consequent of the strikes,⁴⁹ here I focus on three overt transformations in teachers' conduct after striking: teachers' ability to quickly organize, their increased political activity, and the decision-making in their classrooms and schools.

First, teachers demonstrated their lasting transformation regarding anti-neoliberal, democratic ways of being exactly one year after the 2018 strike, when they linked arms, marched on the capitol, and occupied their schoolyards a second time. In the two-day February 2019 strike, the *demos* performed the previous year proved alive and well when all 55 counties again united to withhold their labor. Once again, this walkout included both teachers and other public

⁴⁹ In the future, I would like to interview teachers to ask, e.g., five years later, how the strikes continue to impact them.

employees within education, including bus drivers, nurses, and paraprofessionals. Significantly, while the 2018 strike built up over several months, the 2019 strike manifested in a matter of days. The readiness to strike and participation from all counties demonstrates the lingering feelings of unification and resistance among teachers; it demonstrates their continued feelings of a courageous *demos*.

The 2019 strike was also significant in that it had only one impetus: to prevent the privatization bill, proposed again by the state senate, from passing. Salary and healthcare were not motivations for the 2019 strike. The 2019 bill again proposed introducing charter schools and vouchers to the state. However, as a ploy to placate teachers, the senate also included in the bill the 5% pay raise for all public employees that strikers had won the previous year.⁵⁰ Yet even with their salary increase on the line, teachers from all counties in the state swiftly went on strike to oppose these privatization measures. As Charleston teachers and rank-and-file leader Jay O’Neal said about teachers’ decision to strike, “By striking, we’re basically saying, ‘We refuse to take your pay raise under these conditions because we realize how bad privatization will be for our students and our schools.’”⁵¹

In collectively organizing quickly enough to block the bill, in hundreds of teachers physically showing up to the capitol building, and in fighting specifically against privatization measures, teachers again demonstrated counter-conduct against neoliberalism and toward democracy in the 2019 strike. They refused individualization, and performed yet again unification; they refused eminent governability, and performed yet again their powerful resistance; and they refused marketization of public education and of the teaching profession,

⁵⁰ Blanc, “West Virginia Teachers Strike Again.”

⁵¹ Blanc, “West Virginia Teachers Strike Again.”

and performed yet again the prioritization of their own well-being and that of public education in general over the greater economic market.

Second, the performance and experience of democratic values led many teachers to run for political office after the 2018 strike, and it also impacted who they and other members of their community voted for. Across the state in November 2018, more than a dozen public school teachers were on the ballot for a seat in the state house of representatives in midterm elections.⁵² One elementary school teacher even ousted the incumbent senate president—Mitch Carmichael, who had continually pushed for the school privatization bills and who had been the most vocal to morally shame teachers for their efforts—in the primary elections a year after the second teacher strike.⁵³ In addition, one of the teachers' unions in West Virginia, the West Virginia Education Association (WVEA), endorsed 115 candidates in the May 2018 primary, and 99 of these candidates won their races.⁵⁴ This included the unexpected state senate win of Bill Hamilton, who backed teachers' unions, over the incumbent senator Robert Karnes, who had loudly opposed the teachers' strikes.⁵⁵ Teachers wore red t-shirts to school the day after this election to celebrate and demonstrate their continued solidarity.⁵⁶

Not only were teachers acting upon their experience performing their power and political sovereignty, but, further, they were also being recognized as powerful citizens who could serve as political leaders. This was demonstrated by the fact that community members voted for

⁵² Dave Mistich, "School's Out and Teachers Run for Office Over Summer Break," *NPR*, July 2, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/07/02/625279409/w-va-teachers-campaign-for-public-office-during-summer-break>.

⁵³ Anthony Izaguirre, "Teacher Beats West Virginia Senate President After Protests," *NBC News*, June 10, 2020.

⁵⁴ Ian Kullgren, "'Educator Spring' Spawns Wave of Teacher Candidates," *Politico*, July 4, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/07/04/teacher-candidates-democrats-midterms-664358>.

⁵⁵ Chelsey Coombs, "How West Virginia Teachers Showed Their Power at the Ballot Box," May 9, 2018, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/bj3ged/how-west-virginia-teachers-showed-their-power-at-the-ballot-box>.

⁵⁶ Mary Ellen Flannery, "West Virginia Educators Take Their Power to the Polls," *NEA News*, May 18, 2018, <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/west-virginia-educators-take-their-power-polls>.

teachers running for office, such as the teacher who ousted Carmichael, and that they voted for the candidates endorsed by the WVEA teachers' union.

Finally, teachers expressed feeling differently about their role as educators after the 2018 strike. For many, this newfound feeling manifested in subtle changes in their own behavior in their classrooms and schools—the quotidian conduct that comprises the life of a teacher. In two specific ways, this change manifested in the continued feeling of solidarity and unification among teachers and public employees, and in the expanded possibilities teachers felt regarding their existence both inside and outside the classroom.

In the four years since the 2018 strike, West Virginia teachers have continued to express their feelings of unity with their colleagues and other public employees from around the state. One way this sense of unification has continued to manifest after the strike has been the wearing of red t-shirts on designated days so that teachers can express their solidarity. After the senate elections in late 2018, teachers donned their red t-shirts when a senator who opposed teachers' unions was ousted. In early 2022, West Virginia teachers wore their red t-shirts again to demonstrate solidarity in resistance to the proposed anti-CRT legislation.⁵⁷ In addition, general #RedforEd days are occasionally organized still to this day to remind teachers of their unity across the state, and even across the country.⁵⁸ Another way this sense of unification has continued to manifest has been in the creation and activity of the West Virginia United Caucus, a group for rank-and-file members of both West Virginia teachers' unions: WVEA and AFT-WV.⁵⁹ The Caucus has remained active since the teacher strikes by hosting regular events and having a Facebook page where caucus organizers post about political and educational issues. The

⁵⁷ For more on this, see the Conclusion, page 216.

⁵⁸ For example, see the WV United Caucus page: <https://www.wvunitedcaucus.org>.

⁵⁹ "About," *WV United Caucus*, <https://www.wvunitedcaucus.org/about>.

page has over 9,000 followers, representative of nearly half the state’s teaching force. The Caucus was particularly active throughout the pandemic, as West Virginia teachers struggled against a lack of safety precautions and information manipulation from state leaders.⁶⁰

On January 3, 2021, I attended one Caucus event on Zoom alongside 297 teachers from around the state who attended to discuss the possibility of striking during covid. Education labor organizer Ellen David Friedman also attended. At this meeting, teachers expressed their fear of returning pre-vaccine to the classroom amid rising covid rates across the state. Despite their fears, one thing was apparent: teachers felt like they were fighting the battle together, and like they had to stand up for themselves, once again, to the state legislators. Said one of the event’s organizers, the goal of the gathering was “just to be heard, and for a sense of solidarity.”⁶¹ Friedman chimed in, “When you’re together, you don’t have to be afraid.”⁶² Most recently, the Caucus has hosted events and posted information about a new anti-CRT legislative proposal called SB 498, which would restrict race and identity teaching. West Virginia teachers widely disapprove of this bill.

Teachers have also expressed a difference in how they saw their role as educators, and even how they saw themselves as people outside their schools. While this difference manifested in many epistemic ways (e.g., teachers realized the power of labor movements), it also manifested largely through feeling. Teachers expressed *feeling* “revolutionary,” *feeling* a greater “sense of community,” and *feeling* “worthy.”⁶³ Said O’Neal after the culmination of the 2018

⁶⁰ See for example Phil Kabler, “Justice Takes Offense at Claims State is Manipulating COVID-19 Risk Maps,” *Charleston Gazette Mail*, September 28, 2020, https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/health/justice-takes-offense-at-claims-state-is-manipulating-covid-19-risk-maps/article_3040710f-4bbc-569b-bfdd-9bbb42dcc7b3.html.

⁶¹ WV United Caucus Meeting, January 3, 2021.

⁶² WV United Caucus Meeting, January 3, 2021.

⁶³ In order of example, Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 74; Blanc, “What the Teachers Won”; and Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 31.

strike, “I’m excited, I’m thrilled, I feel like my life won’t ever be the same again. It sounds like hyperbole, but it’s not. Going back to my classroom won’t be the same now.”⁶⁴



Figure 11: A Handmade Sign in the 2018 Strike⁶⁵



Figure 12: Teachers Hold Handmade Signs in the 2018 Strike⁶⁶

Many teachers recognized the political-aesthetic education they effected for others, particularly their students, through the performance of their strikes. Teachers recognized themselves on the picket line as role models for political action. This is evidenced from the two

⁶⁴ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 94.

⁶⁵ Kacy Shafer, “Students, Students, What Do You See?” *Teen Vogue*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/west-virginia-teachers-strike-protest-school-privatization-lawmakers-message>.

⁶⁶ KAGSTV, “Teachers in West Virginia Receive One of the Lowest Teacher Salaries in the Country,” *Study Break*, February 27, 2018, <https://studybreaks.com/uncategorized/teachers-strike/>.

images above. Each images depicts a teacher holding a sign that acknowledges that students are watching, and that demonstrates a desire to be recognized as a courageous protestor fighting for their students. After the strikes ended, many of these signs adorned classrooms. As Catte put it, “In the corners of classrooms are signs and artifacts from the strike, reminders of the unbreakable bond between teachers and their students.”⁶⁷ These signs represent political-aesthetic artifacts from the teachers’ strike and serve as continued inspiration not only for teachers to remember the feeling of their collective resistance, but for students to perform their own collective resistance in the future. Further, they symbolize teachers’ motivation to fight for a better education for their students. The ‘unbreakable bond’ formed during the strike between teachers and students also works counter to the teacher-student relationship in neoliberal education, which supplants care with seeable outcomes.

During the strikes, students were indeed inspired to join the efforts. Students organized a strike in support of their teachers, and on March 2, 2018, they marched alongside them. Students too held signs, stood side by side, linked arms, chanted, and sang, as demonstrated by the image below. They too participated in the refusal of neoliberal characteristics and the putting forward of democratic ones. Even after the strike’s conclusion, students continued to organize their own acts of resistance. Jessica Salfia noted that her students organized a walkout of their own shortly after the 2018 strike.⁶⁸ Said Boone County high school teacher Careena Rouse, “My students learn more in this strike than I think we’ve ever taught in the classroom. They’ve learned they can walk into [the capitol] place too.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 112.

⁶⁸ Personal interview with Jessica Salfia, May 31, 2021.

⁶⁹ “The West Virginia Teachers’ Strike Is Over. The Fight Isn’t,” *VICE News*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiKGS2u47KM>.



Figure 13: Students Strike in Support of their Teachers on March 2, 2018⁷⁰

4.4 Conclusion

The West Virginia teachers' counter-conduct did not dismantle neoliberalism. In fact, according to Foucault, acts of resistance, such as counter-conduct, actually reinforce the powers they resist. In the case of the teacher strikes, this was apparent. State senators who had opposed the teacher strikes, such as former state senate president Mitch Carmichael, did not change their minds. Rather, they dug their heels in even more. In 2019, this led to the proposal, yet again, of an educational bill that would introduce charter schools and vouchers into the state. Teachers again went on strike and were successful in blocking the bill. Yet that did not prevent the senate from once again pushing forward a similar bill yet again two days after summer break had begun later that year—strategically at a time when teachers could not withhold their labor in opposition. The bill, called the Student Success Act, was passed.⁷¹ It allows for the creation of an unlimited number of charter schools in the state. These charter schools would not be required to offer teachers PEIA insurance, nor would they be required to offer transportation to students.

⁷⁰ Billy Tobin, "Some West Virginia Students Joined Their Teachers During the Multi-Day Strike," *CNN*, March 5, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/27/health/west-virginia-students-on-teacher-strike-trnd/index.html>.

⁷¹ See for example Wendy Holdren, "West Virginia Senate Passes Student Success Act," *The Register-Herald*, June 3, 2019, https://www.register-herald.com/news/west-virginia-senate-passes-student-success-act-updated/article_1d28a66b-781f-5ad7-b6ea-e3a33b900360.html.

Attempting to gain favor with the teachers for passing a bill they worked so hard to block, senators also included in the bill another pay raise for teachers and school service personnel.

The state government went on to further contain and constrict teachers' unions. The 2019 bill, for instance, also included language that would "prevent counties from being able to facilitate a work stoppage."⁷² This attack was further heightened in February of 2021, upon the third-year anniversary of the 2018 strike. The conservative-leaning state senate swiftly proposed and passed a bill that directly criminalized work stoppages. Specifically, the bill stated: "Public employees in West Virginia have no right, statutory or otherwise, to engage in collective bargaining, mediation or arbitration, and any work stoppage or strike by public employees is hereby declared unlawful."⁷³ Here we see the side that opposed the teacher strikes doubling down on restrictive measures. It would seem that Foucault is right: the resistance on the part of teachers reenforced state power.

While the West Virginia teacher strikes did not dismantle neoliberalism, and in fact might have served to reinforce the state's neoliberal powers, the teachers did effect an important education by engaging in counter-conduct. In other words, teachers expanded the possibilities for how they might live within a neoliberal system. This is educational because such alternative ways of existing are often obscured under the governmentality of neoliberalism.⁷⁴ Further, even if they were not obscured, the aesthetic injustice inflicted upon citizens by neoliberalism might prevent the imagination of such possibilities independently of a person's beliefs or convictions.

⁷² Holdren, "West Virginia Senate Passes Student Success Act."

⁷³ Brad McElhinny, "Senate Passes Bill Clarifying that Teacher Strikes are Unlawful in West Virginia," *WV Metro News*, February 22, 2021, <https://wvmetronews.com/2021/02/22/senate-passes-bill-clarifying-that-teacher-strikes-are-unlawful-in-west-virginia/>.

⁷⁴ For more on this, see the discussion on neoliberalism in Chapter Three.

Thus, an education in perception, sense, and feeling is all the more important for combatting directly this aesthetic injustice.

By aesthetically experiencing their own performance of democratic values, teachers are educated in the feeling, sight, and sound of democracy. There is a felt democracy, even if it is yet to be cognized as one. Moreover, teachers are able to reflect these democratic feelings back into the world in their own actions and interactions, even long after the strike's conclusion. With the neoliberal opposition still strong, the education effected by the West Virginia teacher strikes is all the more important, for even remaining under a neoliberal system, teachers expanded the possibilities for how they can exist in democratic ways.

Chapter 5: Patriarchy and Education

“We do feel abused and sometimes taken advantage of because we’re women... we want to step in... but at the end of the day, if we don’t do it, who’s gonna do it?”

-Tega Toney¹

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that patriarchy can also be analyzed as a governmentality that has great impact on the teaching profession and that played a significant role in the West Virginia teacher strikes. As a governmentality, patriarchy conducts the behavior of individuals, as much as it influences societal norms and structures. Further, it does this without the full recognition or understanding of citizens. Some call this an ‘internalization’ of patriarchy.² Within a misogynist, patriarchal society like our own, the behavior, values, and identities of people of all genders are created within the confines of sexist expectations and norms. Using the terminology of Michel Foucault, patriarchy as a governmentality operates as a “analytic grid” for “relations of power,” and the procedures of patriarchy are “micro-powers.”³

Like neoliberalism, the governmentality of patriarchy is covertly oppressive and invasive. For one, it incites epistemic injustice against women, trans women, and gender queer peoples. Even more, it incites epistemic injustice against those who demonstrate predominantly feminine

¹ Tega Toney is an eleventh grade social studies teacher in Fayette County and the Vice President of AFT-WV. This quote comes from Nancy Weiss Hanrahan and Sarah Amsler, “‘Who’s Else is Gonna Do It If We Don’t?’ Gender, Education, and the Crisis of Care in the 2018 West Virginia Teachers’ Strike,” *Gender Work Organization* 29, no. 1 (2022): 12.

² See for example Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*; Butler, *Gender Trouble*; and Manne, *Down Girl*.

³ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 186.

characteristics, regardless of gender identity; even among those who identify as men, those who express themselves with more feminine characteristics suffer epistemic injustice at the hands of those who express themselves with more masculine characteristics. Those people who identify as women or who express themselves in a more feminine manner are more often epistemically disregarded than those who identify as men and who align themselves with masculine qualities.⁴ Some studies even show that women who exhibit feminine personality traits are less likely to gain employment than women who exhibit masculine personality traits.⁵ One example of this is the dismissal of opinions deemed ‘too emotional’ to be taken seriously, especially when these opinions come from women.⁶ This is true even in academic job market applications, where Karen Kelsky asserts that “overly emotional” and “highly feminized” language “sabotage[s] your chances.”⁷ Even when not ‘too emotional,’ however, a feminine pitched voice is taken less seriously than a masculine pitched voice when it comes to matters of leadership.⁸ These are clear examples of what Miranda Fricker calls ‘testimonial injustice,’ where a person is “wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower” due to characteristics of their identity.⁹ As another example, when women are in positions of power, they are viewed as more likeable and

⁴ Manne, *Down Girl*; and Kate Manne, *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020).

⁵ See for example Nick Drydakis, et al., “Masculine vs Feminine Personality Traits and Women’s Employment Outcomes in Britain: A Field Experiment,” *International Journal of Manpower* 39, no. 4 (2018): 621–630.

⁶ See for example Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, especially Chapter 1.

⁷ Karen Kelsky, *The Professor is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your Ph.D. into a Job* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2015), 168.

⁸ For example, this led former Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes to shift her voice to a more masculine register. For more on this particular point, see Lauren Dundes, Madeline Streiff Buitelaar, and Zachary Streiff, “Bad Witches: Gender and the Downfall of Elizabeth Holmes of Theranos and Disney’s Maleficent,” *Social Sciences* 8, no. 6 (2019): 175, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8060175>. For more on the phenomenon in general, see Elin McCready and Grégoire Winterstein, “Testing Epistemic Injustice,” *Investigationes Linguisticae* 41, no. 1 (2018): 86–104; and Andrew Peet, “Epistemic Injustice in Utterance Interpretation,” *Synthese* 194, no. 1 (2017): 3421–3443.

⁹ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 20.

trustworthy when they also remain community-focused and other-regarding. Men in positions of power do not have to demonstrate such qualities to be taken seriously.¹⁰

Yet, beyond fostering epistemic injustice, patriarchy is oppressive in that it also incites aesthetic injustice. People of all genders experience limited capacities to feel or imagine a way of being, values, or identity alternative to those expected within a patriarchal system.¹¹ The aesthetic injustice of patriarchy even affects those people who consider themselves to be feminists. Although 68% of women ages 18-29 consider themselves to be feminists,¹² in the past few years, this same age group has sought “mini” plastic surgeries at a skyrocketing rate. The popular procedures currently are lip fillers and Botox injections. Women who get these procedures often justify the decision because it makes them feel more confident. However, that women’s confidence is tied to unnatural beauty norms, which cost both time and money and that pose health risks, however small, is a direct effect of longstanding misogyny at the root of our patriarchal system. So even though they may consider themselves to be feminist—and they may consider their reasons for getting plastic surgery to be reasons of ‘female empowerment’—they are nonetheless constrained by the misogynist expectations for women’s beauty. We can consider this type of aesthetic injustice to be a ‘residual internalization’ of misogynist oppression—that is, oppression that is still experienced through aesthetics and affect even in opposition to any epistemic convictions.¹³

¹⁰ Madeline Heilman, et al., “Penalties for Success: Reactions to Women Who Succeed at Male Gender-Typed Tasks,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89, no. 3 (2004): 416–427.

¹¹ I discussed this idea in greater length in Chapter Two, paying particular focus to the aesthetic injustice experienced by women manifested through everyday aesthetics and somaesthetics.

¹² Amanda Barroso, “61% of U.S. Women Say ‘Feminist’ Describes Them Well; Many See Feminism as Empowering, Polarizing,” *Pew Research Center*, July 7, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/07/61-of-u-s-women-say-feminist-describes-them-well-many-see-feminism-as-empowering-polarizing/>.

¹³ For more on this, see the discussion of aesthetic injustice and residual internalization in Chapter Two, pages 76–78, and Chapter Three, pages 87–90.

In this chapter, I argue that the West Virginia teacher strikes put forward a political-aesthetic education that combatted misogynist patriarchy through the aesthetic, even without full epistemic awareness of such. In other words, the strike educated teachers, and community members, in such a way as to combat the oppressive aesthetic injustice faced by women, and consequently those working in feminized professions such as teachers. To do this, in this chapter, I first define ‘patriarchy’ and ‘misogyny,’ drawing primarily from the work of Kate Manne. I argue that patriarchy is a governmentality, and I describe characteristics of the ideal patriarchal woman. Then, I discuss how these phenomena impact education and the teaching profession. After, I examine how misogyny is especially present when teachers go on strike, and I put forward much evidence from the West Virginia teacher strikes. In the next chapter, I turn my attention to how the West Virginia teacher strikes combatted patriarchy through their act of resistance and performance of counter-conduct.

5.2 Defining Patriarchy

Kate Manne, in her book *Down Girl*, defines the patriarchy as perpetuated not only through obvious social structures, but also through expectations in the social imaginary regarding what men are entitled to take and what women are obligated to give. These expectations are manifested in everyday actions, and they also contribute to people’s identity and value system. While some people do not regard patriarchy itself as the problem (e.g., they may question if a matriarchy might hypothetically give rise to similar phenomena), Manne argues that the patriarchy upon which Western culture is based is upheld and enforced via misogyny. Thus, at least in terms of how *our* patriarchy is perpetuated, it is a misogynistic system that has oppressive ramifications for women, and for the ‘feminine’ more widely speaking.

Simply put, the patriarchy is a system in which men have more power than women. To preserve this order, gendered norms and expectations have arisen and been maintained throughout history. Manne describes such patriarchal norms with what she calls a ‘give and take’ structure. Women are obligated to give certain goods, whereas men are expected to receive them. Manne lists the obligated and expected items as such:

Hers to give (feminine-coded goods and services): attention, affection, admiration, sympathy, sex, and children (i.e., social, domestic, reproductive, and emotional labor); mixed goods, such as safe haven, nurture, security, soothing, and comfort; versus *His for the taking (masculine-coded perks and privileges):* power, prestige, public recognition, rank, reputation, honor, “face,” respect, money and other forms of wealth, hierarchical status, upward mobility, and the status conferred by having a high-ranking woman’s loyalty, love, devotion, etc.¹⁴

Women are obligated to give feminine-coded goods, yet they are also prohibited from having or taking masculine-coded goods away from men, especially dominant men. Yet even further, women are supposed to give such feminine-coded goods in a *loving, caring, or enthusiastic* way.¹⁵ It is not enough that they perform these services; they must also do so in a way that demonstrates they are genuinely happy to be performing them. Misogyny upholds these gendered obligations and expectations; misogyny is about “the enforcement and re-establishment of patriarchal order and the protests when it gets challenged.”¹⁶

Women who do not fulfill their obligations, fulfill them in the ‘right’ way, or take what is rightfully that of man risk misogyny ranging from life-threatening violence to subtle signs of

¹⁴ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, 130.

¹⁵ Manne, *Down Girl*, 46.

¹⁶ Manne, *Down Girl*, 69.

disapproval:¹⁷ an example of the former is the homicide rate in domestic relationships¹⁸ and the ‘incel’ movement, which has inspired multiple shooting sprees against women within the past decade,¹⁹ and an example of the latter is when people are slightly taken aback by women asserting themselves in the workplace, even if their reaction comes from a subconscious level. Women who transgress these give-and-take norms may also face social, economic, or political harm. Manne argues fervently that misogyny played a big role in Hillary Clinton’s loss in the 2016 election.²⁰ Clinton, in trying to take power from a more dominant man, was criticized and derided; people derided her as ‘crooked’ and demanded that she be placed ‘behind bars.’²¹

Manne views misogyny as invoking *dispositions*, or tendencies. Misogyny need not be actively manifested in negative actions toward a particular person in order for it to be said to exist. It may, instead, lie latent or dormant as a backdrop to life. A person need not be intentionally misogynistic to partake in upholding the patriarchal order. As such, patriarchy can be analyzed as a governmentality. It may operate covertly, in the background, and it may not express itself at all times. However, it nevertheless enforces the contours of both societal structures and quotidian interactions and expectations. It ‘conducts the conduct’ of individuals by shaping their behavior, values, and identity to fit its norms and expectations, such as the identities of ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ Viewing patriarchy as a kind of governmentality helps explain

¹⁷ Manne, *Down Girl*, 47.

¹⁸ Manne begins her book with an explanation of how most domestic homicides of women occur via strangulation; women are literally silenced to death.

¹⁹ It does not feel nice to use shootings as data points. However, Manne analyzes in *Down Girl* the 2014 shooting of college students in Isla Vista, California, that originally sought to target sorority girls. The perpetrator recorded a manifesto about how his shooting was justified because women had not given him the attention and sexual gratification he ‘deserved.’ Another example of a recent shooting that targeted women occurred in three Atlanta massage parlors in 2021. This tragic incident has the added dimension of racial targeting, as mostly Asian women were killed.

²⁰ See Manne, *Down Girl*, particularly Chapter 8: “Losing (to) Misogynists.”

²¹ Anecdotally, I have noticed that since the term ‘crooked’ was so readily applied to Clinton, people use it more freely to describe other women they disagree with.

how misogynist norms and expectations reify themselves in covert ways. Gendered norms come to be viewed as what is natural or right, and disrupting these norms entails disrupting ‘eternal truths’ of existence or the world.²² Thus, even though today many overtly patriarchal social structures have been dismantled (e.g., women can vote and be elected to public office), patriarchy in contemporary times is perhaps most immanent in the way that Foucault describes power: as playing out in “everyday relationships including economic exchanges, knowledge relationships, sexual relationships, etc.”²³ Patriarchy plays out in the quotidian interactions, in identity expressions, in gendered norms and expectations, in values, and in aesthetics. It is “everywhere and it is nowhere,” and it is enforced by “everyone and yet no one in particular.”²⁴

Examples demonstrating the pervasiveness of patriarchal expectations as played out in quotidian interactions are everywhere. It is a well-documented phenomenon, for example, that women academics are asked and expected to perform more service than their colleagues who are men.²⁵ Further, student evaluations are harsher to women professors who do not demonstrate the expected feminine-coded goods of care, patience, and so on, whereas professors who are men, are not judged poorly for such omissions.²⁶ For another example, it is also a well-known phenomenon that fathers who complete ordinary child-rearing tasks are more likely to be praised than are mothers who complete the same tasks.²⁷ Women are expected to give care; men are praised for it. Finally, there is much literature on the disparity in affective, cognitive, and even

²² Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 846.

²³ Catriona Macleod and Kevin Durrheim, “Foucauldian Feminism: The Implications of Governmentality,” 2.

²⁴ Sandra Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, eds. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 74.

²⁵ See for example Cassandra Guarino and Victor Borden, “Faculty Service Loads and Gender: Are Women Taking Care of the Academic Family?” *Research in Higher Education* 58, no. 1 (2017): 672–694.

²⁶ See for example Kristina Mitchell and Jonathan Martin, “Gender Bias in Student Evaluations,” *Political Science and Politics* 51, no. 3 (2018): 648–652.

²⁷ See for example Francine Deutsch and Susan Saxon, “The Double Standard of Praise and Criticism for Mothers and Fathers,” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (1998): 665–683.

hermeneutic labor between men and women who share a home or parenting duties.²⁸ Women, for example, are much more likely to plan grocery store runs and summer camps for their kids; they are also much more likely to notice housekeeping details, such as when the bathroom soap dispenser is empty, and act upon them, such as refilling the dispenser.²⁹ These phenomena are enforced by no one in particular, and yet are expected of women all the same—by others, and by themselves.

In this sense, patriarchal norms have been internalized by men and women alike,³⁰ such that their coercive quality often remains implicit.³¹ As Sandra Bartky writes, “In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other.”³² Patriarchal norms can be implicitly enforced in many ways: for instance, through narratives of women’s natural proclivities and preferences, and through “valorizing depictions of the relevant forms of care work as personally rewarding, socially necessary, morally valuable, ‘cool,’ ‘natural,’ or healthy (as long as women perform them).”³³ Combined with the idea that men, not women, are entitled to receive power and wealth, it is no wonder that many professions reflective of ‘women’s natural proclivities’ are

²⁸ On affective labor, see Kathi Weeks, “Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics,” *Ephemera* 7, no. 1 (2007): 233–249. On cognitive labor, see Allison Daminger, “The Cognitive Dimension of Household Labor,” *American Sociological Review* 84, no. 4 (2019): 609–633. On hermeneutic labor, see Elle Anderson, “Hermeneutic Labor: The Gendered Burden of Interpretation in Intimate Relationships Between Women and Men,” *Hypatia* 38, no. 1 (forthcoming, 2023).

²⁹ One woman tweeted about this common gripe: “My friend & her husband lived in an apartment that had a soap dispenser installed on the edge of the kitchen sink. When they moved out after two years, he marveled to her: ‘it’s amazing how that dispenser never ran out of soap in all that time.’ Women’s work is truly invisible.” @robinschaer, March 22, 2019, 10:17am, <https://twitter.com/robinschaer/status/1109096787682492417>.

³⁰ I recognize that many people are gender queer, gender fluid, non-binary, or trans. However, I am uncertain whether we could say that people with these gender identities have internalized patriarchal norms to the same extent. It might be the case that while they may have internalized such norms at some point in time, they have subverted these norms in their very expression of identity.

³¹ Manne, *Down Girl*, 46.

³² Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity,” 72.

³³ Manne, *Down Girl*, 47.

notoriously underpaid and disrespected—but more on this as it relates to education in a later section of this chapter. For now, suffice it to say that misogynist gender norms have historically oppressed women regarding political, social, and economic rights, and they continue to do so today—if not through overtly patriarchal social structures, then through the continued, covert ‘conduct of conduct’ playing out in our everyday interactions, and in the consequent development of our individual value systems and identities.³⁴

As a consequence of the long history of patriarchy, women have experienced many types of oppression. While many overtly patriarchal structures have changed in the past century, the aftereffects linger in quotidian interactions. Part of maintaining the patriarchal order involves invalidating the voices of women. This constitutes a form of ‘epistemic injustice,’ per Fricker. This may come about particularly through ‘testimonial injustice.’ Women may be regarded as less competent or less trustworthy in their recounting of events or information; their stories or concerns may be dismissed because they are too ‘emotional,’ ‘naïve,’ or ‘missing the point.’³⁵ Women may also experience ‘hermeneutical injustice,’ which comprises difficulty in interpreting their own experiences due to a lack of conceptual vocabulary in common language.³⁶

Women may also experience ‘aesthetic injustice’ caused by the patriarchy.³⁷ Aesthetic injustice may spur feelings of guilt that prevent a queer person, raised in an anti-queer religious

³⁴ While Manne’s research in novel in many ways, she draws upon a great number of feminist philosophers who have come before her. See for example Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*; Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Irigaray, *The Sex Which is Not One*; and Catherine MacKinnon, *Are Women Human? And Other International Dialogues* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). For an intersectional feminist approach, see for example Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2019); bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2000); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984); and Maria Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742–759.

³⁵ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, see especially Chapter One.

³⁶ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, see especially Chapter Seven.

³⁷ For a definition of aesthetic injustice, see Chapter Two, pages 76–78, and Chapter Three, pages 87–90. Gustavo Dalaqua would argue that the patriarchy, and its misogynist enforcement system, inflicts aesthetic injustice upon both the oppressor and the oppressed. For the purposes of this argument, however, I am more concerned with the experiences of the oppressed—in this case, women, and consequently people of all genders working in feminized

context, from expressing their sexuality even after their own epistemic convictions have changed to accept queerness. It also may spur women to have feelings of distrust for women political candidates, even in those who believe in equality among the genders.³⁸ Because aesthetic injustice feeds into epistemic injustice, it must be alleviated in order to truly liberate a person from oppression. It is difficult for women to feel or imagine that they may adopt ways of being, values, and identities alternative to those expected of them under patriarchy. Even actions undertaken to breed confidence or female empowerment tend to reify the patriarchal order and further constrain women's aesthetic capacities. For example, the recent move for young women to embrace micro-cosmetic procedures only reifies the misogynist expectation that women must artificially 'enhance' their natural bodies to remain attractive. When women do embrace natural aging, they are often either derided or called brave,³⁹ but in either case they are 'othered.'

Women *feel* as though they are obligated to give feminine-coded goods: for example, attention, affection, care, and reproductive goods. Further, women have historically been made to feel that these are *natural* proclivities of women; not performing them may cause women to feel like they have failed in their womanhood, which itself proves an existential risk. Should they not give these feminine-coded goods, and should they not do so while remaining genuinely caring and enthusiastic, then they risk feeling guilt and shame, and even un-womanlike, in addition to

professions people of all genders who align themselves more with the feminine. The patriarchy inflicts aesthetic injustice on women by constraining their capacities to feel and imagine. It enforces and policies the patriarchal order, including the give-and-take dichotomy, yet it covertly operates because it has been internalized and regarded as 'natural' or an 'eternal truth.'

³⁸ Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 37.

³⁹ Sarah Jessica Parker described the derision she faced for sporting her naturally greying hair while out to lunch with friend Andy Cohen. The derision was made more notable by the fact that Cohen, a man, also has grey hair, yet no harsh comments were directed his way. Ironically, after Parker defended her choice to go naturally grey, Cohen and others have commented on Parker's bravery. If you'd like to read more about this, here's one (of many) articles on the incident: Ale Russian, "Sarah Jessica Parker Defends Her Gray Hair and Blasts People Who Criticize Aging Beauty," *Women's World*, November 12, 2021, <https://www.womansworld.com/posts/celebrities/sarah-jessica-parker-gray-hair-defense>.

the many other consequences they may face (e.g., economic, social, political, physical, and so on). Women are thus aesthetically and somaesthetically constrained in how they act, what they value, and how they express their identities; seeking an alternative way of being would pose many risks, including the existential threat to their very womanhood, as internalized under the patriarchal order.

5.2.1 Effects on Education and the Teaching Profession

The misogynist, patriarchal norms and expectations described above are echoed within the education system because the teaching profession has long been a feminized field. In the United States currently, about 76% of K-12 teachers are women. For elementary schools, that number jumps to 90%.⁴⁰ In West Virginia, these ratios are comparable, with 74.6% of all K-12 teachers being women.⁴¹ One might guess, given the history of American feminist movements, that we have been trending, especially recently, toward greater numbers of male teachers in the United States. But in the two decades between 2000 and 2018 there was an *increase* in the overall percentage of elementary and secondary American school teachers who are women.⁴² Conversely, the percentage of women superintendents is nearly inverted; only 27% of superintendents nationwide are women, although that number has been steadily rising in recent years.⁴³ In West Virginia, however, currently 40% of acting superintendents are women.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ “Characteristics of Public School Teachers,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, May 2021, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clr>.

⁴¹ “Schools and Staffing Survey,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_2013314_t1s_002.asp.

⁴² “COE: Characteristics of Public School Teachers,” *National Center for Education Statistics*, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clr> (data for public school teachers only); See also Richard Ingersoll, et al., “Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force – Updated 2018,” *CPRE Research Reports*, https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1109&context=cpre_researchreports.

⁴³ See for example Andre Perry, “Education Needs More Ambitious Women,” *Hechinger Report*, August 18, 2020, <https://hechingerreport.org/column-education-needs-more-ambitious-women/>.

⁴⁴ Information gathered from “State of West Virginia – Local Education Agencies,” *West Virginia Department of Education*, September 1, 2021, https://wvde.state.wv.us/ed_directory/County-Superintendent-List-9-01-21.pdf.

Teaching has been a feminized profession in the United States since the mid-1800s. During this time, education reformers Horace Mann and Catherine Beecher (a “lifelong opponent of women’s suffrage”⁴⁵) argued that women were ideal teachers for two interconnected reasons: one, they were more naturally predisposed to care for children, and two, they would do the job for less money than men. Mann and Beecher, in their efforts to feminize the teaching profession, argued that teaching was “women’s true calling, one that would take advantage of all her natural, God-given talents as a nurturer, whether or not she had biological children of her own.”⁴⁶ Further, hiring women would save states a significant amount of money each year, for their ‘natural goodness’ made them willing to work for less money than male teachers had been paid. In arguing this point, “Mann depicted these cost-effective female educators as angelic public servants motivated by Christian faith; wholly unselfish, self-abnegating, and morally pure.”⁴⁷ Thus the myth was perpetuated that women would agree to be paid less because of their unselfish, caring, self-sacrificing dispositions—not taking into account that women had few other options for employment and little bargaining power. Using Manne’s terminology, women as teachers were expected to ‘give’ without being entitled to ‘take,’ a perfect recipe for professional mistreatment and exploitation.

Yet women themselves often remain ignorant of their own exploitation in care work professions, such as teaching. When teaching became a feminized field, it was viewed less as a ‘profession’ and more as a ‘vocation’ or ‘calling.’⁴⁸ Still today, these terms are commonly applied by and to teachers.⁴⁹ While the idea of teaching as a vocation or a calling is not wrong in

⁴⁵ Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars*, 18.

⁴⁶ Cite this from *The Teacher Wars*, 26–27.

⁴⁷ Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars*, 26

⁴⁸ Brown and Stern, “Teachers’ Work,” 8–9; Goldstein, *Teacher Wars*, 31. See also Sari Knopp Bilken, *School Work: Gender and the Cultural Construction of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995).

⁴⁹ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 24; David Hansen, *The Call to Teach* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995); Goldstein, *Teacher Wars*, 31.

itself—and, in fact, can be admirable—professions seen predominantly as a vocation become all the more easily exploitable. In their study on Catholic Spanish educators, for example, Regina Cortina and Sonsoles San Román demonstrate how the idea of ‘vocation’ is presented to women teachers as “a kind of predestined path requiring a spirit of sacrifice toward others.”⁵⁰ This idea prevents women teachers from feeling exploited despite a lack of job prestige, low salaries, and “moral strictures placed upon them.”⁵¹

In regarding teaching as a vocation, there is an expectation that people, particularly women, will assume this role even at the expense of their own self-sacrifice by way of low compensation, disrespect, and mistreatment.⁵² Even strong defenses of teaching as a calling, such as in the work of David Hansen, acknowledge the risk that a misguided understanding of vocation can be used to “justify low salaries and diminished pedagogical authority, an injustice doubled by the fact that most teachers in schools have historically been women.”⁵³ Chris Higgins agrees, arguing that the expectation for teachers’ altruistic ‘self-sacrifice’ easily collapses into an expectation for unjustified asceticism. “The ideal of service,” Higgins warns, “has foreclosed the very question of the desires, needs, and aspirations of teachers.”⁵⁴ When ‘vocation’ and ‘wholesale self-sacrifice’ become conflated, as they often have within the teaching profession, teachers might feel more willing to forego their own well-being, not to mention a sense of self-cultivation, in the name of ‘service,’ ‘care,’ or ‘duty.’⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Cortina and San Román, *Women and Teaching*, 28.

⁵¹ Cortina and San Román, *Women and Teaching*, 29.

⁵² See for example England, Budig, and Folbre, “Wages of Virtue.”

⁵³ David Hansen, *Reimagining the Call to Teach: A Witness to Teachers and Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press), 6.

⁵⁴ Higgins, “Teaching and the Good Life: A Critique of the Ascetic Ideal in Education,” *Educational Theory* 53, no. 2 (2003): 140.

⁵⁵ I am indebted to Tomas Rocha for the ideas in this paragraph, which comes from Hardman and Rocha, “Sexism in Justifications for Teacher Strikes.”

The risk of exploitation is also contingent on the relationship between womanhood and caring. Historically and still today, society views being caring as a gendered trait more inherent to women than to men.⁵⁶ As such, many women view the act of caring, especially for children, as a characteristic fundamental to their womanhood.⁵⁷ Thus, any act deemed ‘uncaring’ toward children is also an act deemed uncharacteristic of women and, furthermore, immoral on the grounds of selfishness or on the grounds of not maintaining the ‘natural’ social order.⁵⁸ Because teaching is a feminized profession, teachers are expected to adopt an ascetic, ‘self-less’ stance toward themselves while ensuring the well-being of their students. In other words, teachers are discouraged from being concerned about their own well-being, or even their own dignity; they must remain other-regarding rather than self-regarding to be considered moral.⁵⁹ This expectation traps teachers (of all genders) within a misogynist, patriarchal system by exploiting a characteristic taken to be intrinsic to womanhood and demanding, or expecting, self-sacrifice for the continuation of social reproduction and/or the ‘natural’ social order.

Misogynistic expectations of obedience and deference then work to further control teachers (of all genders) by making opposition to proposed school reform legislation (mostly written by men) seem *prima facie* immoral.⁶⁰ Teachers, who are often not consulted as experts

⁵⁶ England, Budig, and Folbre, “Wages of Virtue,” 457; England and Folbre, “The Cost of Caring”; Manne, *Down Girl*, see for example pages 46-47; Alison Reiheld, “Just Caring for Caregivers: What Society and the State Owe to Those Who Render Care,” *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (2015), doi:10.5206/fpq/2015.2.1; Ronnie Steinberg, “Social Construction of Skill: Gender, Power, and Comparable Worth,” *Work and Occupations* 17, no. 4 (1990): 449–482.

⁵⁷ See for example Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), especially pages 104–107; Cortina and San Román, *Women and Teaching*; Goldstein, *Teacher Wars*.

⁵⁸ Manne discusses how misogyny can be enacted by people of all genders in the attempt to police or safeguard a patriarchal social order.

⁵⁹ For a discussion on how the expectation to remain ‘other-regarding’ factors into teacher strike discourse and moral justifications that teachers give for striking, see Hardman and Rocha, “Sexism in Justifications of Teacher Strikes.”

⁶⁰ Goldstein, *Teacher Wars*; Kevin Kumashiro, *Bad Teacher! How Blaming Teachers Distorts the Bigger Picture* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012); Doris Santoro, “Cassandra in the Classroom: Teaching and Moral Madness,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 36, no. 1 (2017): 49–60.

for such legislation, often oppose these efforts when they constrict and debase the teaching profession and undermine education for their communities and students. This happened, for instance, in West Virginia, when the state legislature wrote the privatization educational bill without consultation from a single educator; teachers, of course, opposed it. While teachers' concerns about such legislation may be both self- and other-regarding, state legislators and the media tend to characterize teachers who oppose school reforms as purely self-regarding and therefore immoral—and, furthermore, not to be listened to.⁶¹

Due to the feminization of their profession, teachers face many external oppressive measures, such as inadequate salaries and healthcare, the silencing of their voices, and the expectation for them to listen rather than contribute their perspectives on statewide educational policies. Yet teachers, especially women teachers, also face internalized oppression, which transpires through individual feeling and affect and constitutes an aesthetic injustice. For instance, take the Spanish teachers described above. These teachers, although grossly underpaid and disrespected, did not consider themselves to be exploited because they felt that they were fulfilling their natural womanly callings of self-sacrifice and care. They did not, or perhaps could not, imagine a way of being a woman without also 'giving' the feminine-coded goods required of them, even at a consequence to their own well-being; to imagine not giving would threaten their very idea of what it means to be a woman.

This aesthetic injustice might manifest as feelings of guilt or shame that influence teachers' decision-making beyond or even in opposition to their epistemic rationale. It is not just that they experience the aesthetic injustice of being a woman in a misogynist society; it is that

⁶¹ See for example Terry M. Moe, "Reform Blockers," *Education Next* 3, no. 2 (2016), <https://www.educationnext.org/reformblockers/>; this paragraph comes from Hardman and Rocha, "Sexism in Justifications for Teacher Strikes."

they experience the aesthetic injustice of being a teacher in a misogynist society. Teachers face somaesthetic oppression by feeling constrained to act in certain ways that might harm their own well-being. For instance, teachers are often only morally recognized if they remain other-regarding rather than self-regarding,⁶² that is, if they put the well-being of others (e.g., their students, the administrators, the community) always before the well-being of themselves. Otherwise, they risk experiencing what Doris Santoro calls “moral madness,” or the feeling that arises when an individual’s moral claims are not recognized as moral. Yet all the same, even if not epistemically realized, teachers may *feel* their oppression just the same. As one West Virginia teacher striker and organizer said, “As a woman you just feel the oppression. I was never able to define it because I questioned myself... I knew I was missing something within but I couldn’t tell what and I didn’t have the courage to push boundaries.”⁶³

Finally, it should be noted that importantly, teachers of all genders are subject to many of the same oppressive dimensions inherent in the feminization of the teaching profession. That means that teachers who are men are also subject to disrespect and exploitation, such as through inadequate compensation and healthcare benefits and through expectations to remain submissive or silent to educational policy edicts from on high. It seems likely, however, that the misogyny within education affects women teachers more than men teachers, but I have not found any research specific to this question.

5.3 Misogyny in Teacher Strikes

Misogynist measures of control tend to be overtly enacted during teacher strikes. This is consistent with Manne’s argument that misogyny is a method of policing and enforcing the

⁶² For more on this, Hardman and Rocha, “Sexism in Justifications for Teacher Strikes.”

⁶³ Tithi Bhattacharya, “Bread and Roses in West Virginia,” *Verso Blog*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3669%2Dbread%2Dand%2Droses%2Din%2Dwest%2Dvirginia>.

patriarchal order; when women step outside that order and threaten the give-and-take gender dichotomy, they are more likely to face misogynist backlash. When teachers strike, they threaten the give-and-take dichotomy by withholding their ‘giving’ and demanding more ‘taking.’ The teacher strike wave across the United States between 2018-2020 incited much misogynist rhetoric against teachers. Such misogyny is also consistent with governmentality and the ‘conduct of conduct.’ Patriarchal governmentality is enforced through quotidian interactions or covert structural expectations perhaps more than it is enforced in overt ways, and it was particularly active during the teacher strikes.

Manne argues that the patriarchal order is routinely enforced in coded ways to criticize women with ‘down girl’ moves: not reflections of how women are viewed much of the time, but rather “forceful maneuverings... [that] put women in their place when they seem to have ‘ideas beyond their station.’”⁶⁴ While these moves may happen in any number of ways, Manne generalizes them as such:

Adults are insultingly likened to children, people to animals or even to objects. As well as infantilizing and belittling, there’s ridiculing, humiliating, mocking, slurring, vilifying, demonizing, as well as sexualizing or, alternatively, *desexualizing*, silencing, shunning, shaming, blaming, patronizing, condescending, and other forms of treatment that are dismissive and disparaging in specific social contexts.⁶⁵

Such ‘down girl’ moves are prolific in discourse around teacher strikes. Legislators, community leaders, and ordinary citizens have called striking teachers “disrespectful” and

⁶⁴ Manne, *Down Girl*, 69.

⁶⁵ Manne, *Down Girl*, 68.

“disappointing”;⁶⁶ “disgraceful,” “selfish,” and “passé”;⁶⁷ “greedy”;⁶⁸ “lazy”;⁶⁹ “a public menace”;⁷⁰ “intoxicated by their own demands”;⁷¹ “immoral,”⁷² and “like teenagers.”⁷³

Remarked a teacher activist in Philadelphia, “You could not get away with...stereotyping construction workers with the same kind of laziness, the same kind of stupidity...[and] you could never get away with being so demeaning to police in that way.”⁷⁴

Along similar lines, teachers unions have been accused of “using” students rather than helping them,⁷⁵ of acting to “damage the social fabric of school communities,”⁷⁶ of being “about power, not students,”⁷⁷ and of “holding kids hostage to union demands.”⁷⁸ In 2020, when some

⁶⁶ Jake Jarvis, “Senate President Says WV Teachers on Strike are Being ‘Disrespectful,’” *WV News*, February 26, 2018, https://www.wvnews.com/news/wvnews/senate-president-says-wv-teachers-on-strike-are-being-disrespectful/article_0664fca2-1504-58a3-8321-f21472fb5bf4.html.

⁶⁷ Sara Malm, “Going on Strike is Disgraceful, Selfish, and, Quite Frankly, Passé,” *The Independent*, April 13, 2012, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/sara-malm-going-strike-disgraceful-selfish-and-quite-frankly-passe-7643118.html>.

⁶⁸ Eric Blanc, *Red State Revolt* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2019), 367; Jack Kelly, “Greedy Teachers: Taxpayers are Getting Tired of Paying Ever More for Ever Less,” *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, September 16, 2012, <https://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/jack-kelly/2012/09/16/Greedy-teachers-Taxpayers-are-getting-tired-of-paying-ever-more-for-ever-less/stories/201209160227>; Brad Polumbo and Patrick Hauf, “In the LAUSD Teacher Strike, the Union Chooses Greed Over Students,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, January 14, 2019, <https://www.dailynews.com/2019/01/14/in-the-laUSD-teacher-strike-the-union-chooses-greed-over-students/>.

⁶⁹ Caroline Cho, “A Kindergarten Student Told Me Teachers are ‘Lazy, Greedy,’” *HuffPost*, May 27, 2014, https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/caroline-cho/bc-teachers-strike-2014_b_5394463.html; see also Kristen McConnell, “I’m a Nurse in New York. Teachers Should Do Their Jobs, Just Like I Did,” *The Atlantic*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/I-m-a-Nurse-Teachers-Should-Do-Their-Jobs-Like-I-Did.-The-...>

⁷⁰ Abhishek Kar, “The Teachers Union Has Become a Public Menace,” *Newsweek*, February 3, 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/teachers-union-has-become-public-menace-opinion-1566296>.

⁷¹ Frederick M. Hess and Grant Addison, “Oklahoma’s Striking Teachers are Intoxicated By Their Own Demands,” *The Hill*, April 7, 2018, <https://thehill.com/opinion/education/382059-oklahomas-striking-teachers-are-intoxicated-by-their-own-demands>.

⁷² Ben Johnson, “5 Reasons the Chicago Teachers’ Strike is Immoral,” *Acton Institute*, October 30, 2019, <https://www.acton.org/publications/transatlantic/2019/10/28/5-reasons-chicago-teachers-strike-immoral>.

⁷³ Bhattacharya, Blanc, Griffiths, and Weiner, “Return of the Strike: A forum on the teachers’ rebellion in the US,” 2018, 157.

⁷⁴ Brown and Stern, “Teachers’ Work,” 180.

⁷⁵ Jason L. Riley, “Teachers Unions Don’t Really Strike for ‘the Kids,’” *Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/teachers-unions-dont-really-strike-for-the-kids-11548201544>.

⁷⁶ Liv Finne, “Teacher Strikes Hurt Students and Divide the Community,” *The Seattle Times*, September 1, 2015, <https://www.seattletimes.com/opinion/teachers-please-dont-strike-again/>.

⁷⁷ Janine Yass and David Hardy, “Teacher Strikes are About Power, Not Students,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 18, 2019, <https://www.inquirer.com/opinion/teacher-strike-denver-los-angeles-union-students-20190218.html>.

⁷⁸ Tillie Elvrum, <https://www.the74million.org/article/west-virginias-teacher-strike-held-kids-hostage-to-union-demands-with-more-walkouts-likely-school-choice-is-more-important-than-ever/>

districts threatened to strike against unsafe school re-opening measures in the midst of a global pandemic, one critic wrote that teachers were “killing students with their selfish demands.”⁷⁹ And in 2018, Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin said that teachers going on strike “left children vulnerable to sexual assault.”⁸⁰ One is reminded here of Florida Governor Claude Kirk’s message to educators who, in 1968, participated in the first state-wide teachers strike in American history: that they were abandoning their children, unable to concern themselves with their students for an “unselfish moment,” and doing “irreparable harm” to themselves not only as professionals but also as individual human beings.⁸¹

The West Virginia teacher strikes of 2018 and 2019 saw similar misogynist language, mostly employed by state legislators, including the governor. State senators were the most vocal, given that the teachers were in direct opposition to an educational bill the senators were trying to pass. It should be noted that at the time of the teacher strikes, 31 out of 34 state senators were men, and the governor was also a man. In the state legislature in general (including the state’s house of delegates), 86% of legislators were men. Many of these legislators employed ‘down girl’ moves to put the teachers ‘in their place’ in the patriarchal order, as givers rather than as takers. Elsewhere, I have referred to these moves as ‘tactics of shame,’ as they aim to make

⁷⁹ Libby Emmons, “Teachers Unions are Killing Students with Their Selfish Demands to Keep Schools Closed,” *The Post Millennial*, January 25, 2021, <https://thepostmillennial.com/no-matter-what-the-selfish-teachers-unions-demand-open-schools-now>.

⁸⁰ Veronica Stracqualursi, “Kentucky Governor Says Teachers’ Strike Left Children Vulnerable to Sexual Assault,” *CNN*, April 15, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/14/politics/kentucky-matt-bevin-teachers-strike/index.html>; Bevin later apologized for this statement.

⁸¹ I am indebted to Tomas Rocha for this final point, which comes from “Open Letter to the Teachers of Florida,” February 17, 1968, Series 960, Claude Kirk Documents, Carton 1, File Folder 12, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL. As quoted in Jody Noll, “For the Students: The 1968 Florida Teacher Strike,” (USF St. Petersburg Campus Honors Program Theses, 2012).

women feel guilty or ashamed of their actions, which represents a particular kind of ‘down girl’ move.⁸²

West Virginia state legislators, most prominently former Senate President Mitch Carmichael, often employed tactics of shame to persuade teachers that by striking, they were harming their students and disrespecting their calling. This tactic is particularly salient for women teachers, for whom caring is viewed as a natural inclination. By shaming teachers for not caring about their students, legislators attacked a characteristic that many women view as fundamental to their womanhood. For instance, Carmichael accused teachers of “depriving students of the one hot meal they receive each day,”⁸³ even though teachers worked hard to provide meals for all free and reduced lunch students every day of the strike, including weekends.⁸⁴ In addition, Carmichael stated that he thought teachers should not have left their schools. “I am disappointed someone would leave [the] incredible responsibility [of educating our children] to come to the Legislature to lobby...” he said. “That disappoints me and I hope that disappoints those counties and schools affected by that.”⁸⁵ Carmichael also said he thought the protesting teachers were “being disrespectful to our students, to our parents—all those associated with providing an education to our students,”⁸⁶ and during the 2019 strike, he tweeted that “locking our students out of schools” was an “embarrassment for our state.”⁸⁷ On top of his acidic rhetoric, Carmichael enacted a non-verbal tactic of shame that affected teachers deeply;

⁸² Sara Hardman, “The West Virginia Teachers’ Strike as Counter-Conduct: The Fight Against Neoliberalism from a Feminist Perspective,” *Philosophy and Education* 76, no. 1 (2020): 35–49.

⁸³ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 58.

⁸⁴ See for example Bacon, “West Virginia Teachers Packed Lunches.”

⁸⁵ Andrea Lannom, “Senate Unanimously Passes Teacher Pay Raise Bill,” *Register Herald*, February 2, 2018, https://www.register-herald.com/news/senate-unanimously-passes-teacher-pay-raise-bill/article_d31c2c5c-7824-56e8-91a3-9d5b078b5be6.html.

⁸⁶ Jake Jarvis, “Senate President Says WV Teachers on Strike are Being ‘Disrespectful,’” *WV News*, February 26, 2018, https://www.wvnews.com/news/wvnews/senate-president-says-wv-teachers-on-strike-are-being-disrespectful/article_0664fca2-1504-58a3-8321-f21472fb5bf4.html.

⁸⁷ Mitch Carmichael, Twitter post, February 18, 2019, @SenCarmichaelWV.

Berkeley country high school teacher Jessica Salfia says she will “never forget the way Senate Majority Leader Mitch Carmichael strolled out of the Senate chamber to look down on the chanting teachers waiting in the chamber hall and sneer, his lip actually curling in disgust.”⁸⁸ Each of these moments demonstrates a ‘down girl’ move: Carmichael was employing language and facial expressions to shame teachers for disrupting the give-and-take patriarchal dichotomy, by withholding their ‘giving’ and demanding to ‘take’ more.

In addition to these ‘tactics of shame,’ other misogynistic language was used to discredit the teachers. For example, during the 2018 strike, Governor Jim Justice called the teacher strikers “dumb bunnies,”⁸⁹ at once likening teachers to animals and using condescending and patronizing language. Said Logan County middle school teacher Melissa Turley about the comment, “He underestimates us. He doesn’t think we’re as smart as we are.”⁹⁰ Governor Justice also likened striking teachers to “the town redneck.”⁹¹ By other legislators, striking teachers were called “cheerleaders” and “honey.”⁹² Many state legislators actively ignored and avoided the striking teachers, and when they did interact with them, they were often patronizing and demeaning, employing techniques of ‘mansplaining.’ Salfia relayed the following:

While meeting with lawmakers in the Capitol, I heard male lawmakers say things like “who can think with the shrill voices chanting in the halls?” and “are the cheerleaders still here?” These comments were usually accompanied by an eyeroll or a dismissive

⁸⁸ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 12–13.

⁸⁹ See for example Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 48.

⁹⁰ Brad McElhinny, “‘Dumb Bunnies’ in WV Teacher Crowds Protest Comment by Governor Justice,” *MetroNews: The Voice of West Virginia*, February 25, 2018, <https://wvmetronews.com/2018/02/25/dumb-bunnies-in-wv-teacher-crowds-protest-comment-by-governor-justice/>.

⁹¹ Lauren Angel, “The West Virginia Teachers’ Strike and the Power of Grassroots Change,” *The Activist History Review*, March 2018, <https://activisthistory.com/2018/03/26/the-west-virginia-teachers-strike-and-the-power-of-grassroots-change/>.

⁹² See Salfia’s longer quote below.

hand gesture. I was laughed at, called “honey,” handed a 4-inch-thick state budget binder and asked “now do you think you could understand all that?”⁹³

Such language is condescending and patronizing, as well as belittling and humiliating.

Lawmakers employed the common misogynist trope that women who speak up have ‘shrill voices,’ and they patronized and sexualized women by calling them ‘cheerleaders’ and ‘honey.’

In saying these things and using patronizing body language, lawmakers were discrediting women’s intelligence, dismissing their concerns, and mocking the movement itself. Another teacher relayed the following incident regarding a union member and a senator:

We remember one of our members who was very well spoken and literate, and she kept up with the issues. She went in to speak to the state senator from our area, and he never would answer her questions. He just ignored everything. He would answer other people’s questions but not hers. And finally, she said, sir, why are you ignoring me? And he said, I don’t talk to women who wear makeup. What a mindset, you know?⁹⁴

Here, the misogyny is blatant and brutal. The senator first intentionally ignored this teacher, then he justified his silencing because she wore makeup.

Lawmakers’ condescension was also relayed by Olivia, another West Virginia teacher, who said, “We have heard so many comments from senators... ‘I don’t know who is controlling you, who is feeding you these lies,’... as if we don’t do our own research, that don’t look at statistics or go to town hall meetings. It is as if we are little animals hopping around.”⁹⁵ Here, senators invalidate teachers’ concerns by claiming they are based on ‘lies.’ During the 2019 strike, Senator Carmichael delegitimized teachers in a similar way by suggesting that “teacher

⁹³ Jessica Salfia, “Hillbilly Strength,” *WV United Caucus*, February 12, 2020, <https://www.wvunitedcaucus.org/post/hillbilly%2Dstrength>.

⁹⁴ Sikes, “In Our Very Blood,” 131.

⁹⁵ Bhattacharya, “Bread and Roses.”

union bosses... have lost their grip on reality.”⁹⁶ Rather than taking teachers’ concerns seriously, these lawmakers treated teachers as though they were crazy. Each of these examples highlights how teachers were subject to ‘down girl’ moves from state legislators while they were on strike—while they were, in other words, disrupting the patriarchal order.

Another aspect of misogynistic, down girl moves is the expectation for teachers to remain other-regarding rather than self-regarding. In order to be morally recognized or supported, teachers often feel pressure to justify their actions as caring for others rather than as caring for their own well-being.⁹⁷ This pressure comes from external sources as well as from internalized misogyny. This aligns with research that shows that there are biases against women in positions of power, yet that those biases tend to dissolve if a woman is perceived as “exceptionally oriented to helping and serving others.”⁹⁸ Albeit not in so many words, one West Virginia teacher voiced her frustration with several down-girl moves faced by teachers, including the pressure to remain other-regarding, when she said,

We carry a tremendous amount of guilt as educators and as women for, you know, not only should we not ask for a pay raise or better working conditions, but we should wait to be told when it’s okay to ask... So I feel that there’s this kind of multilayer oppression that we, and we perpetuate that, you know, whenever we talk to each other—we can’t, it’s about the kids.⁹⁹

Another women striker shared a similar frustration: “And because we’re women, in a classroom, I think... probably, whether it’s acknowledged, unacknowledged, realized, or unrealized, many

⁹⁶ Matthew Schwartz, “West Virginia’s Education Bill Dies as Teachers Strike,” *NPR*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/19/695856032/w-va-teachers-go-on-strike-over-state-education-bill>.

⁹⁷ For more on this, see Hardman and Rocha, “Sexism in Justifications for Teacher Strikes.”

⁹⁸ Kate Manne, “Women Can Have a Little Power, as a Treat,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/28/opinion/biden-vice-president-woman.html>.

⁹⁹ Hanrahan and Amsler, “‘Who Else is Gonna Do It if We Don’t?’”, 11.

of our male lawmakers probably somewhere... have the belief that we will continue to extend ourselves in all ways that we do as women for our students. Because that's what women do."¹⁰⁰

The teachers' voices were silenced by legislators throughout the 2018 strike, including in its resolution. When Governor Justice finally agreed to settle some of the teachers' demands, he did so in a way that gives further evidence to the invalidation of teacher voices. Protestors rallied at the capitol for thirteen days; they chanted and sang until they were exhausted and hoarse; they clearly stated their demands. Yet in addressing what made him acquiesce to these demands, Governor Justice didn't attribute his decision to the teachers who had tirelessly rallied. Instead, he attributed his decision to a sixth-grade boy named Gideon.¹⁰¹ Governor Justice said he had finally decided to give West Virginia teachers a 5% pay increase after having a conversation with Gideon where the child spoke on behalf of the teachers. While this may seem like a kind and caring end to the strike, by not crediting the teachers with his decision, Governor Justice invalidated the voices and efforts of thousands of teachers from all 55 counties who had been shouting their demands for thirteen days, and he championed instead the voice of a boy. Even in his acquiescence, Governor Justice maintained power over the mostly women teachers by refusing to credit their voices and hard work.

Even more, women are expected to be more submissive in the patriarchal order. They are expected to listen to the authority of those in power, typically men, and to do as they are told rather than resisting. This gendered power dichotomy is reflected in the expectations placed upon teachers regarded school reform. In West Virginia, state legislators (again, the overwhelming majority of which were men) put forward an educational bill that would introduce charter

¹⁰⁰ Hanrahan and Amsler, "Who Else is Gonna Do It if We Don't?", 9.

¹⁰¹ CNN Wire, "6th-Grader Persuades Governor to Give WV Teachers a Raise, End Strike,"

WTVR, February 27, 2018, <https://wtvr.com/2018/02/27/6th-grader-persuades-governor-to-give-west-virginia-teachers-a-raise-end-strike/>.

schools and vouchers to the state, yet they wrote this bill without input or guidance from any educators. Even so, teachers were expected to accept this educational bill without question or resistance. As Amy Brown and Mark Stern note, “Women, or those engaged in ‘women’s work,’ such as teaching, do not make policies, but become responsible for the labor of carrying them out.”¹⁰² Teachers were not treated as experts in their field, but rather as those who should blindly follow the ‘knowledge’ of the men in charge.

Both Doris Santoro and Kevin Kumashiro point out that teachers who disagree with any kind of school reform, even if they have legitimate reasons, are cast as immoral.¹⁰³ So it was with the West Virginia teachers, the majority of whom opposed the proposed educational bill. While resistance to this bill was a significant reason they went on strike in 2018, it was the *sole* reason teachers again went on strike in 2019. In both cases, as evidenced above, lawmakers questioned the morals of teachers and decried them as selfish. Teachers were supposed to remain submissive and yielding to the authority of men. When they did not, lawmakers enacted ‘down girl’ moves to force teachers back into ‘their place.’

5.4 Conclusion

The down girl moves against West Virginia teachers included moral shaming, patronizing and condescending language, likening teachers to animals, discrediting their intelligence, silencing their concerns, and forcing them into submissiveness, among others. These down girl moves represent the enforcement of the patriarchal order; in other words, they embody misogyny. Even though most of these down girls moves came from people in positions of power, the misogyny itself does not exist through the dissemination of hierarchical power—as in, the

¹⁰² Brown and Stern, “Teachers’ Work as Women’s Work,” 185.

¹⁰³ Kumashiro, *Bad Teacher!*; Santoro, “Cassandra in the Classroom.”

patriarchal order is not preserved or demanded by edict or law. Rather, the misogyny present in the teacher strikes was enacted through the social relations and interactions of disparate parties involved in the strike; it was enacted through a ‘grid of power’ seeking to preserve ‘natural’ patriarchal norms and expectations, seeking to ‘conduct the conduct’ of the teacher strikers.

As a governmentality, patriarchy controls the behavior of individuals, attempting to fit such behavior into the give-and-take dichotomy proposed by Manne. Quotidian misogyny is utilized by people as an enforcement mechanism to keep others in check. Women are expected—or, to put it in stronger terms, policed and forced—into the role of a selfless, self-sacrificing, submissive, silent givers of care, even to the detriment to their own well-being. Most, although not all, West Virginia teachers are women. Yet even so, these misogynist expectations apply not only to women, but also to those people of all genders working within feminized fields, such as teaching. Thus, all teachers on strike were subject to the same misogynist policing and enforcing.¹⁰⁴ They were expected to conduct themselves according to how the ‘ideal’ woman *should* conduct herself given the patriarchal order of society.

By not behaving in a way that upheld the patriarchal order—by not behaving in the way expected of women—the teacher strikes acted counter to the conduct expected of them. In other words, they enacted counter-conduct against the patriarchy. In the next chapter, I will describe in more detail the specific political-aesthetic elements of the West Virginia teacher strikes that made counter-conduct possible, as well as the potential long-term impacts on teachers.

¹⁰⁴ Even so, I suspect that teachers who are women were subject to greater misogyny than teachers who are men, but I do not have data on this. I also am unsure whether nonbinary or trans teachers would face greater or lesser misogyny than teachers who are women.

Chapter 6: The Strikes Against Patriarchy

“I wanted the public to know this movement was and is about respect, about quality of life, about love. We were standing outside our schools because we love our students, because we love our schools, because we love West Virginia.”

-Jessica Salfia¹

6.1 Introduction

The first day of the 2018 West Virginia teacher strike was Thursday, February 22. It had been a mild winter, and that day was no different. Wearing t-shirts and light jackets, five thousand teachers, mainly women, parked their cars throughout the streets of Charleston and walked to the gold-domed capitol building, arriving just before 8am. The doors opened, and into the capitol they poured. Between the white marble walls and white marble columns, red-clad teachers, mainly women, filled the entire first floor. Not enough space inside, red-clad teachers, mainly women, spilled outside onto the expansive steps below, pressing up against the Kanawha River. They held protest signs, they held hands, and they readied themselves for the first cries of their long battle ahead.

For thirteen days, including nine weekdays, thousands of people working in the feminized profession of teaching returned to their posts at the capitol building to occupy, chant, and sing. Meanwhile, thousands of others occupied their individual schoolyards around the state.

¹ Jessica Salfia is a high school English teacher in Berkeley County. This quote comes from Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, page 13.

Holding protest signs, they waved to passing cars. In rain, shine, and snow, teachers, mainly women, put their bodies on the line, vowing not to return to their classrooms until lawmakers, mainly men, proposed a satisfactory deal. West Virginia teachers felt forgotten and taken-for-granted, common experiences within feminized care work professions. This was their chance to educate the state on their professional reality as teachers. Yet in the process, they also educated the public, and themselves, on an alternative way of being—away from patriarchal expectations and toward power, assertiveness, dignity, and authority.

* * *

In this chapter, I examine how the political-aesthetic dimension of the West Virginia teacher strikes worked against the governmentality of a (misogynist) patriarchy, which has impacted the teaching profession since its feminization. This is particularly important because the West Virginia teachers did not assert that their strikes were feminist or related to gender, which I discuss in the next section of this chapter. Even so, teachers performed counter-conduct against misogynist expectations demanded of women and teachers of all genders working in the feminized profession. I examine three characteristics of counter-conduct in particular: teachers refused submissiveness and performed power and assertiveness; they refused self-sacrifice and performed dignity; and they refused deference and performed authority. I then discuss how this counter-conduct was experienced through the aesthetic and somaesthetic, even beyond full awareness or articulation of such. Finally, I examine in more detail the alternative ways of being, identities, and values inhabited by the striking teachers and discuss implications for the future.

6.2 The Strike Was Not Feminist in the Political-Epistemic

Most teachers in West Virginia did not view the strike as a feminist act, nor as having anything to do with gender.² In general, teachers were hesitant about using the word ‘feminism’ in regard to their striking efforts. Many made conscious attempts to frame the strike as an ‘educator’s issue’ rather than a ‘women’s issue,’ and the “vast majority of women strikers did not regard themselves to be feminists.”³ Their signs, demands, and chants were free of language related to gender, womanhood, or feminism.⁴ Nancy Weiss Hanrahan and Sarah Amsler, who interviewed women teachers on strike in West Virginia, noted their own surprise in finding so little influence from feminism on the way teachers discussed their striking efforts, even though many of them did feel that the problems and responses of the movement were gendered.⁵

Several West Virginia teachers have pointed out the gender disparity between themselves and those in power. Berkeley County high school teacher Jessica Salfia wrote that while striking, she discovered that many state delegates and senators had little respect for public educators, and she wondered if this related to gender:

Some [legislators] seemed genuinely shocked to find that I was smart and articulate, and that I actually cared deeply about my job. I was dismissed, laughed at, and avoided all together. I have to wonder though if this had as much to do with my profession as it did my gender. The majority of teachers in America are women, and women were at the forefront of this movement. There was a clear gender divide between the red-clad folks chanting in the halls and the suit-clad folks sitting in the chambers making decisions about schools they had never seen and students they didn’t know. I believe that some of

² This echoes the sentiments of teacher strikers from across the country. For instance, Amy Brown and Mark Stern interviewed teacher activists in Philadelphia and found that they hesitated to consider their work as feminist or as originating from a gendered critique. See Brown and Stern, “Teachers’ Work as Women’s Work,” for example page 186.

³ Bhattacharya, “Bread and Roses.”

⁴ See Slocum, Hathaway, and Bernstein, “Striking Signs,” not for what it says, but for what it does not.

⁵ Hanrahan and Amsler, “Who Else is Gonna Do It if We Don’t?”, 12.

the stubbornness of the West Virginia Senate was because there were several men in those offices who didn't like being told what they should be doing by a bunch of women. I thought about this when a few Senators refused to talk to me. I was actually turned away from a local Senator's office—he wouldn't even see me.⁶

In this narrative, Salfia—arguably one of the state's most vocal teacher activists with an incisive political awareness—expressed her recognition that men in positions of power likely refused to listen to teachers because most of them were women. Albeit not in so many words, Salfia noted how lawmakers preserved patriarchal norms by silencing or ignoring the women strikers rather than treating them with dignity and respect, and rather than regarding them as experts in the field of education. The strikers were instead treated as though they were not intelligent enough to understand how government or law works.

Salfia is just one teacher who noticed the gender divide between teachers and lawmakers and wondered about its implications for the strike. Yet even so, this did not prevent many strikers from continually dispelling the idea that the strike was feminist or that gender had anything to do with it.⁷ For example, Charleston teacher Azareen Mullins noted, “One of the reasons that they have been able to keep our pay levels so low is that it's a female profession, largely. If it were a male-dominated profession, I don't think we'd be treated in the same manner. Looking in the sea of faces during the strike, it was mostly women.” Yet she continued, “A lot of activism we've seen is not necessarily feminist, but it's female driven.”⁸ This simultaneously wondering about gender and refusal of feminism can be further exemplified through the narrative of Olivia, a West Virginia teacher on strike. She said, “It has occurred to me many times if this was a Capitol

⁶ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 12.

⁷ Bhattacharya, “Bread and Roses.”

⁸ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 25.

full of men would they [the state delegates and senators] be fighting this hard?” Yet she also made clear that she did not “see the strike as a woman’s issue” but more as “an educator’s issue.”⁹ Writer and researcher Eric Blanc noted on this point, “When I asked strikers about the particular challenges facing female teachers and strike, they almost always responded by pivoting the conversation, insisting that the salient feature of the movement was that it united all educators, all public employees, or working people generally.”¹⁰ This was also reflected in the fact that in general, the teachers did not see their movement connected with that of #MeToo or with the campaigns of high profile women politicians.¹¹ The recognition of the gender disparity was there, but the feminism was not.

On the one hand, strikers frequently attempted to dispel harmful gendered stereotypes about women, yet on the other, many articulated an essentialist perspective of womanhood that could undermine these attempts. Per the former, Hanrahan and Amsler found that many teachers took pride in rewriting the narrative of the ‘weak’ woman. Said one teacher, “We’ve battled... women are emotional, women can’t lead... well, screw that, we obviously can, and we obviously can be successful with it.”¹² Yet per the latter, Hanrahan and Amsler note, quoting a striking teacher: “Women’s assumed ‘nurturing side’ and ability to care even or especially while being taken advantage of for doing so is regarded as a source of strength: ‘we do feel abused and sometimes taken advantage of because we’re women... we want to step in... but at the end of the day, if we don’t do it, who’s gonna do it?’”¹³ This mentality was also reflected in the fact that at the end of each day striking, the teachers made sure to clean the space well so as not to leave the

⁹ Bhattacharya, “Bread and Roses.”

¹⁰ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 64.

¹¹ Hanrahan and Amsler, “‘Who Else is Gonna Do It if We Don’t?’”, 13.

¹² Hanrahan and Amsler, “‘Who Else is Gonna Do It if We Don’t?’”, 12.

¹³ Hanrahan and Amsler, “‘Who Else is Gonna Do It if We Don’t?’”, 12.

capitol building littered or dirty.¹⁴ For many teachers, there was a tension in how they viewed womanhood: it was both a source of oppression and a source of strength. But even within this tension, the perceived strength of women reifies the patriarchal order because it still casts women in the role of self-sacrificing caretaker. In analyzing their interviews, Hanrahan and Amsler assert, “As long as teachers continue to do this work ‘because no one else will,’ or because refusing it would violate a trust they take on as both educators and women, the extraordinary burdens of care they have assumed will continue to be normalized.”¹⁵

This reflects in many ways the general feeling toward feminism in West Virginia, for people of all genders. While many women support the idea that women and men should be paid equally for work, many also subscribe to gender essentialism, considering some jobs to be better suited to women and others to men. Women in West Virginia make only \$0.71 for every dollar paid to men (whereas the national average is \$0.82),¹⁶ women and single mothers are significantly more likely to live in poverty in the state than elsewhere in the country,¹⁷ and women filled only 14.9% of seats in the state legislature in 2015.¹⁸ In fact still today, this latter point holds true: currently, 84 out of 100 state delegates are men, and 30 out of 34 state senators are men.¹⁹

Further, many women take pride in what they view to be natural characteristics of womanhood, finding strength within traditional gender roles. Danielle Renee Mullins wrote in her dissertation on West Virginia women, “Mainstream feminist narratives are perceived to

¹⁴ Personal interview with Jessica Salfia, May 31, 2021.

¹⁵ Hanrahan and Amsler, “‘Who Else is Gonna Do It if We Don’t?’”, 14.

¹⁶ “State: West Virginia,” *National Women’s Law Center*, <https://nwlc.org/state/west-virginia/>.

¹⁷ In West Virginia, 17.7% of women live in poverty, compared to the national average of 12.0%, and 46.7% of single mothers live in poverty, compared to the national average of 35.6%. “State: West Virginia,” *National Women’s Law Center*, <https://nwlc.org/state/west-virginia/>.

¹⁸ “Status of Women in the States,” *Status of Women Data*, <https://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/themes/witsfull/factsheets/factsheet-west-virginia.pdf>.

¹⁹ See the State Legislature Directory on the West Virginia Legislature website: <https://www.wvlegislature.gov>.

reject notions of their strength within tradition and illicit strong, negative reactions from the community, thus negating Appalachian women from identifying as feminists.”²⁰ Mullins argues that mainstream feminism has not gained traction in West Virginia because women have had to “work within a very dominant patriarchy”; the most effective way to gain traction within their relationships and communities, therefore, is to comply to motherhood and gender roles.²¹ Perhaps this is also one reason why the teachers on strike emphasized their role in caring for their students. By justifying their act of resistance through other-regarding care rather than through self-regarding need, teachers were able to strike while still maintaining gendered norms. In such other-regarding justifications, teachers may inadvertently reinforce the governmentality of patriarchy.²²

It is for exactly this reason that it is so important to examine not only the discursive assertions and epistemic impacts of the teachers strikes, but also the aesthetic experiences they evoke in strikers. In the next section, I analyze the impact of the teacher strikes on West Virginia feminism and womanhood by arguing that teachers on strike *performed* a way of being women alternative to that expected of them under misogynist patriarchal norms—and this happened beyond any assertions of such.

6.3 Combatting Patriarchy Through the Political-Aesthetic

The West Virginia teachers performed counter-conduct against the misogynist, patriarchal order of society—against, in other words, the governmentality of patriarchy.²³ This counter-conduct spoke beyond the assertions of the strike and put forward an alternative way of

²⁰ Mullins, “Weathered Mountains,” 67.

²¹ Mullins, “Weathered Mountains,” 20.

²² See Hardman and Rocha, “Sexism in Justifications for Teacher Strikes.”

²³ For a more extensive analysis of counter-conduct, see Chapter One, pages 22-32. For a more extensive analysis of patriarchy as governmentality, see Chapter Five.

being reflective of feminist values. The relevant counter-conduct of the West Virginia teacher strikes lies not just in the actions of the teachers, but in the very gender composition of the striking body itself. This means that while the actions comprising teachers' counter-conduct against patriarchy echo in many ways the actions comprising their counter-conduct of neoliberalism, the former has the added aesthetic layer of these actions being enacted mainly by women. The strike was mostly comprised of women strikers. As such, the performativity of resistance occurred not just through teachers' actions, but through and by women's bodies. This was important because women have historically been barred from taking or expressing power. Even in the history of labor movements, union strikes began and have mostly occurred in male-dominated fields, such as mining and automobile manufacturing,²⁴ and women have historically acted as caretakers for or supporters of the striking men and their community.²⁵

Echoing what I have said about the field elsewhere in this dissertation, everyday aesthetics pertains to those small aesthetic details of the teacher strike—the red of the t-shirts, the sound of the chanting, the great number of teachers in the capitol building—but it also pertains to the teacher strike as an aesthetic phenomenon in itself.²⁶ For the purpose of this chapter, the most important aesthetic detail was that the striking body was comprised mainly of women's bodies. The striking body was at once feminine and feminized. The chanting, singing, and demanding took place in the feminine and feminized voice. The red t-shirts adorned the feminized body, and protest signs were held by feminized hands. *How* the strikes transpired and were experienced was through the teachers' embodied and feminine performativity of resistance.

²⁴ Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars*.

²⁵ See for example Jessica Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018). This is not the case, however, in the history of teacher strikes, which have been primarily women-dominated since the profession became feminized. However, there have been far fewer women-dominated strikes than men-dominated strikes overall.

²⁶ For more on everyday aesthetics, see Chapter One, pages 39–45.

In the following sections, I show how the strikes manifested feminist resistance and resisted patriarchy through the political-aesthetic. First, I explain how striking teachers embraced vulnerability, a feminist tactic in itself. Then, I describe how teachers performed counter-conduct that refused misogynist, patriarchal expectations and put forward instead alternative ways of being. Specifically, I argue that teachers refused submissiveness and performed instead power and assertiveness, that they refused self-sacrifice and performed dignity, and that they refused deference and performed authority. I analyze images and narratives from the strikes to support this argument.

6.3.1 *Vulnerability*

The West Virginia teachers did not assert that their strike was a feminist act. Even without explicit awareness or articulation of such, however, the teacher strikes were a feminist act through the very manifestation of resistance by and through the bodies of women; their resistance also carried distinct power through the expression of feminine characteristics. One such ‘feminine’ characteristic is that of vulnerability, which has elsewhere been employed as a feminist protest tactic.²⁷ Butler defines vulnerability as the “deliberate exposure to power, [and] part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment.”²⁸ Vulnerability is not a “subjective disposition,” but rather a “relation to a field of objects, forces, and passions that impinge on or affect us in some way.”²⁹ Butler considers vulnerability to be feminine because it avows dependency rather than aiming toward masculinist ideals of independence.³⁰ When a

²⁷ One example is the Ni Una Menos movement, described in more detail in Chapter Two, pages 73–74.

²⁸ Butler, *Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance*, 22. Butler also argues vulnerability belongs to an ambiguous region where receptivity and responsiveness are not separable from one another. Interestingly, she claims that aesthetics occurs in the same ambiguous space in presuming that receptivity and responsiveness are bound up with each other (*Notes*, 16). Thus, for Butler, there is an inherent connection between vulnerability and aesthetics in that they both occupy the same realm that binds receptivity and responsiveness.

²⁹ Butler, *Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance*, 25.

³⁰ Butler, *Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance*, 21.

political subject establishes agency by vanquishing its vulnerability, this is the masculinist ideal. But when collective forms of resistance embrace their vulnerability, this is when power and femininity reinforce each other rather than oppose one another, as it normally established in the patriarchal binary.³¹

The West Virginia teachers embraced their vulnerability in three ways. First, in the most basic sense, teachers risked the physical toll of inclement weather, such as rain, snow, and freezing temperatures. Even in such conditions, they protested in front of the capitol and alongside roads. This is evidenced by the two images that appear below.



Figure 14: Thousands of Teachers Outside the Capitol in Cold and Rainy Conditions³²



Figure 15: Teachers in Tucker County on Strike in a Snowstorm, March 2, 2018³³

³¹ Butler, *Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance*, 15.

³² Amber Wood, "Historic Teacher Strike Shuts Down West Virginia," *Socialist Alternative*, March 3, 2018, <https://www.socialistalternative.org/2018/03/03/historic-teacher-strike-shuts-west-virginia/>.

³³ Holly Crickard Rinehart, Facebook Post, March 2, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10213739965470622&set=a.4340966319590>.

Second, the strike was technically illegal, meaning that teachers risked being fired, fined, or arrested for their efforts. The day before the 2018 strike began, State Attorney General Patrick Morrissey made a statement where he called the impending work stoppage ‘unlawful’ and warned that specific parties have the power to “seek an injunction to end an unlawful strike.” Further, he said, “Our office is prepared to support any relevant state agency or board with legal remedies they may choose to pursue to uphold the law.” Throughout the strike, Morrissey continued to warn teachers of the potential ramifications for their unlawful strike. “We’re prepared to act,” he said midway through.³⁴ Striking teachers were vulnerable to this very real threat of legal action from one of the most powerful men in the state. One woman, present in the image below, directly confronts Morrissey’s threats through her sign, which depicts a drawing of Rosa Parks and the words “This was once illegal too.” She also ‘tags’ Morrissey’s Twitter account.³⁵ In this, the striker acknowledges her own vulnerability, yet embraces it as a performance of resistance, emblematic of Parks herself.

Finally, teachers embraced their vulnerability by inviting misogyny. Any time a woman disrupts the patriarchal order, they risk the enforcement and policing mechanisms of misogyny, which could comprise anything from “subtle social signs of disapproval” to “life-threatening violence.”³⁶ This threat is compounded for a woman in a femininized career; the expectation for her to maintain the patriarchal order is twofold: once for her gender, and once for her profession. By striking, the mostly women teachers disrupted the patriarchal order in this twofold way by fighting for more wealth and asserting their power. As a consequence, striking teachers faced

³⁴ WSAZ News Staff, “W.Va. Attorney General ‘Prepared to Act’ in Teacher Strike,” *WSAZ*, February 21, 2018, <https://www.wsaz.com/content/news/WVa-Attorney-General-releases-statement-declaring-work-stoppage-illegal-474758253.html>.

³⁵ For this woman, who is also Black, the vulnerability of striking is compounded, for protesting while Black carries even greater risk. While I do not analyze race in this project, I appreciate the added risks that protestors of color faced.

³⁶ Manne, *Down Girl*, 47.

misogynistic policing mechanisms. Many of these instances were evidenced in Chapter Five, where I outlined the misogynistic language, tactics of shame, and other ‘down girl’ moves utilized again the West Virginia teachers.³⁷



Figure 16: A Teacher’s Sign Speaks to Morrissey’s Threats³⁸

6.3.2 Counter-Conduct

It is not just *people* protesting that puts forward a counter-conduct against patriarchy; it is that *women* and those working in the feminized profession of teaching protest. It is not just that people march, chant, and sing; it is that women and teachers raise their voices and bodies in resistance. It is not just that people refused to enter their classrooms and schools, but that women and teachers refused to remain submissive to state legislators. It is not just that people went wildcat when union leaders revoked their approval of the strike, but that women and teachers refused yet another opportunity for submissiveness, to abide by the authority of the union leaders, who were both men. It is that the performativity of resistance is happening through and

³⁷ See Chapter Five, pages 164–173.

³⁸ Craig Hudson, “Thousands of Teachers and School Personnel Demonstrate at the State Capitol in Charleston, West Virginia, on March 5, 2018,” *The Nation*, March 12, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/the-west-virginia-teachers-strike-shows-that-winning-big-requires-creating-a-crisis/>.

by the feminine and feminized body. If it were the case that a group of primarily men were protesting, their embodied performativity would not enact counter-conduct against the patriarchy because men are expected and entitled to demand more wealth, power, and moral recognition,³⁹ although these men-dominated protests may very well enact counter-conduct against other governmentalities.

Through their counter-conduct, teachers did not dismantle the governmentality of patriarchy, just as they did not dismantle the governmentality of neoliberalism. Yet even so they expanded the possibilities for how to live within a patriarchal system.⁴⁰ Through their *embodied* performance of resistance, teachers *felt* and *experienced* an alternative way of being a woman or a person working in a feminized field. In the very act of striking itself, teachers acted counter to the conduct expected of them in a way that could subvert and redefine feminine and feminized ways of being. Teachers, in their counter-conduct, refused characteristics of the ‘ideal’ patriarchal woman (or person working in a feminized field) and put forward instead alternative characteristics, even at the risk of misogyny.⁴¹

Had teachers fulfilled the ideal roles of women within a misogynist, patriarchal society, their actions would have differed from those of reality. The ‘ideal’ teachers would have remained

³⁹ For more on this, see Chapter Five, pages 152–159. It might be the case that the queer, men-dominated protests, such as the Stonewall protests, are an exception to this. However, it could be argued that queer men are regarded as more ‘feminized,’ yet are also regarded as ‘entitled’ to demand masculine-coded goods.

⁴⁰ Note, counter-conduct can be layered. The first of these points—that teachers refused submissiveness and performed unrelenting power—echoes a previous point made in analyzing how the teacher strikes enacted counter-conduct against neoliberalism. In this case, I discussed how teachers refused to remain ‘eminently governable’ and instead performed resistance. Here, I argue that there is an added dimension to that counter-conduct. Namely, teachers not only refused their own governability, but they also refused, as women and those working in a feminized profession, their own submissiveness. Similarly, the second point—that teachers refused being entirely self-sacrificing and performed their own dignity and respect—also echoes in certain ways a previous point: namely, that in their counter-conduct against neoliberalism, teachers refused turning themselves into the ideal *homo oeconomicus*, someone who will sacrifice their own well-being for the good of the market, and who does not consider human dignity and respect as worth pursuing or upholding.

⁴¹ For more on the characteristics of the ideal patriarchal woman, see Chapter Five, pages 152–159; for more on the misogyny teachers faced while striking, see Chapter Five, pages 164–173.

submissive to the edicts of those in power. For instance, they would not have tried to refute the educational privatization bill, nor would they have refuted the implementation of Go365, the proposed FitBit-esque device to monitor teachers' step counts. The 'ideal' teachers might have recognized their low salary and insufficient healthcare benefits, but this recognition would have prompted them to remain even more committed to their career, for they thrive upon self-sacrifice for the benefit of others; their role is to give care rather than to take money. The 'ideal' teachers would have doubted their own expertise in education and deferred instead to the recommendations proposed by men in positions of power. Finally, the 'ideal' teachers would have done all this in a loving, caring, and enthusiastic way.

The teachers' actual actions differed greatly from those expected of them under the governmentality of patriarchy. In the following sections, I describe three patriarchal characteristics refused by the striking teachers, and the alternative ways of being they performed instead. First, teachers refused submissiveness and performed power and assertiveness. Second, they refused being entirely self-sacrificing and performed dignity. Finally, they refused self-doubt and performed authority and expertise.

6.3.2.1 *Submissiveness versus Power and Assertiveness*

Through their striking, teachers refused submissiveness and performed power and assertiveness in several ways. For one, bodies in alliance, literally on the line, exhibit their "value and [their] freedom in the demonstration itself, enacting, by the embodied form of a gathering, a claim to be political."⁴² In their very nature, these embodied demonstrations go against the misogynist patriarchal order because as submissive 'givers,' women are not supposed to take masculine-coded goods, such as power and political clout. By showing up to the capitol

⁴² Butler, *Notes*, 18.

building and by occupying their schoolyards, teachers physically put their bodies on the line, illustrating the existence and force of their political power. Further, this embodied gathering comprised femininized signs of affection not normally seen in strikes or other ‘claims to be political.’ For instance, see the image below.



Figure 17: Women Teacher Strikers Hold Hands⁴³

Here, teachers and public employees, many of them in red, stand outside the capitol building. They hold hands, a gesture not normally seen in strikes in masculine-coded fields, and they raise their held hands with outstretched arms above their heads. Whether they know the person beside them or not, they form an intimate bond with their clasped hands. The gesture ripples from the protestors in the front to those at the very back alongside the river. Raising one’s fists in the air symbolizes power; raising two arms symbolizes not having a weapon. In raising held hands rather than fists, teachers perform a feminine power, one built with affection and intimacy. In raising two hands in the air, clasped to those of others, teachers symbolize their

⁴³ Chris Dorst/Charleston-Gazette Mail, “Striking Teachers Demonstrating Outside the West Virginia Capitol in Charleston on Monday,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/02/opinion/west-virginia-unions-teachers.html>.

unified vulnerability. A red bandana symbolizes the coal miners who went on strike in the previous century, grandfathers of the striking teachers. Grasped between two held hands, the bandana evokes the power of the coal miners mediated through feminine affection. The strikers seem to be in the middle of a song or chant, and across their faces, deep emotions play. Several of the teachers appear truly joyful; the left- and rightmost strikers in the front row bare wide smiles. Normally symbols of care, affection, or deference, these teachers smile while striking, painting their performance of power with a feminine tint. One striker in front, the second from the left, closes her eyes and scrunches her forehead as though on the verge of crying. Before the capitol building, before all the journalists taking pictures, she performs her emotional release for the world to see. She mixes her performance of power with tears, themselves a feminized phenomenon. The performance of power as mediated through the feminized gesture refuses the characteristic of submissiveness without refusing to be woman.

In addition to a physical submissiveness, a vocal submissiveness is expected of women and teachers in the misogynist, patriarchal order. When she does not remain silent, she will be silenced, such as by putting words in her mouth, threatening her for testifying or speaking, or treating her words as hollow, meaningless, or ‘crazy.’⁴⁴ In their strikes, the West Virginia teachers faced silencing from state legislators in many ways: legislators ignored them, demeaned them, questioned their intelligence, smirked at them, implied they were crazy, and discredited them on social media and in interviews aimed to the general public.⁴⁵ Despite facing these ‘down girl’ moves, the West Virginia teachers acted counter to the expectation to remain silent through the very exercise of their voices. The teachers chanted protest slogans and strike demands, such

⁴⁴ Manne, *Down Girl*, 4.

⁴⁵ For more on this, see Chapter Five, pages 164–173.

as, “Words mean nothing, put it in writing” and “We’ll remember in November.”⁴⁶ One of their chants asserted, “We’ll get louder,” making clear their refusal of silence.⁴⁷ Teachers also sang songs of resistance and state pride, such as “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” and “Country Roads.” They shouted and yelled their demands into the cavernous hall of the state capitol building, echoing off the doors of the state senate offices. Teachers spoke to legislators, to media, to community members. On schoolyards, they cheered when passing drivers honked in support. They cried in frustration. They laughed in joy. A common message on teachers’ handmade signs conveyed, “We will not be silenced.”⁴⁸ In all these ways, teachers refused to remain silent and instead performed the existence of their voice, their willingness to speak up, and the power and assertiveness that comes from publicly exercising one’s voice and demanding others to listen. They were, in all senses of the word, *loud*.

One teacher commented on the volume of the strikers and connected it with the feeling of power. This was apparent to her both through videos of the striking teachers shared on social media and through her first-hand experience protesting within the capitol building. She said:

You know, you *feel* like when you *look at those pictures* or you *see those live feeds* on Facebook and *people are singing and chanting and doing all the things, it's just really empowering*. It *feels* like you’re experiencing history in the making. The capitol was just

⁴⁶ See for example Jake Johnson, “West Virginia Teachers Chant ‘Put It in Writing’ as Lawmakers Reach Pay Raise Deal,” *Common Dreams*, March 6, 2018, <https://www.commondreams.org/news/2018/03/06/west-virginia-teachers-chant-put-it-writing-lawmakers-reach-pay-raise-deal>; Kristen Uppercue and Mary Alvarez, “West Virginia Teachers Inspired a National Movement. But Will They ‘Remember in November?’” November 3, 2018, *WV Public Broadcasting*, <https://www.wvpublic.org/news/2018-11-03/west-virginia-teachers-inspired-a-national-movement-but-will-they-remember-in-november>.

⁴⁷ You can see this chant in action: “West Virginia Teachers on Strike, Stages First State-Wide Walk-Out in Protest of Pay Raise,” *TIME*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwN16KCznzE>.

⁴⁸ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 18.

packed full of people, lots of shouting, cheering, chanting. *It was a really inspiring feeling being there.* We came out of there with ringing ears. It was *very, very loud.*⁴⁹

Here, the teacher begins by describing the feeling of witnessing the strikers raising their voice in protest through images and videos. Even removed from the physical manifestation of the strikes, this teacher *feels empowered* simply through watching and listening to the strikers. Her experience with the pictures and videos bleeds into her aesthetic experience in the capitol building. She has joined the strikers, perhaps inspired by the images and videos. At once, she comments on the ‘very, very loud’ ‘shouting, cheering, chanting’ and the ‘inspiring feeling’ being there. Albeit not in so many words, this teacher conveys her experience *hearing* the voices of those expected to remain silent and *feeling* inspired and empowered; the feelings seem born from the noise itself.

Another teacher described a similar sentiment of empowerment attached to the exercise of her voice. She said:

I never realized until [going on strike] that *my voice* mattered; that I have the power and authority to voice that, *to scream and yell* and to say to those in a position of authority, “you can’t do this, that’s not what the people want.” So that has changed me. And I don’t think I was alone in realizing that. And that realization that yes, there is power. There is power.⁵⁰

This teacher conveys her experience in feeling what it is like to scream and yell at those in power, of hearing the sound of her own voice rise in resistance. Because of this feeling, because of what she hears, this teacher comes away changed. Her refusal to remain silent and instead her

⁴⁹ Sikes, “In Our Very Blood, 120, emphasis added.

⁵⁰ Hanrahan and Amsler, ““Who Else is Gonna Do It if We Don’t?””, 10, emphasis added.

putting forward of assertiveness in voice led her to feel, perhaps for the first time, her own power—a power tied to her performance of counter-conduct.

The teachers' courageous vocalization demonstrates an act of *parrhesia*, or 'fearless speech,' which manifests when someone speaks the truth with frankness, at risk to themselves.⁵¹ Even at the risk of misogyny,⁵² teachers refused to remain silent and instead asserted their truths not just in any voice, but in the feminine and feminized voice. This voice, comprised of a chorus of mainly women's voices, is generally of a higher register than the masculine voice, a difference which has incited common demeaning remarks about the feminine voice being shrill or difficult to listen to.⁵³ Yet it was this voice that spoke its fearless truth about the mistreatment, undervaluing, and disrespect doled upon teachers. It was the feminine (and feminized) voice that fearlessly demanded more respect, dignity, recognition, and financial support. Parrhesia is illustrated, for instance, in the image below, in which teachers appear to be mid-demand. Two of the strikers look angry as they shout, and several fists are raised in the air among the crowd. There are some strikers who are men toward the back of the crowd, but it is women strikers who raise their voices at the front, closest to the senators' offices and to the journalists recording the events. Not only are these women teachers courageously shouting their demands, but they are doing so while conveying anger, an emotion generally condemned in women. The emotional conveyance of anger only heightens the risk of misogyny and thereby makes the women's public performance of voice all the more courageous.

⁵¹ I am grateful to David Hansen for originally drawing this connection to my attention. Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001).

⁵² For examples of the misogynistic name-calling, see Chapter Five, pages 164–173.

⁵³ For an example how this transpired during the West Virginia teacher strikes, see Chapter Five, pages 169–170.



Figure 18: Women Teachers Shout their Demands⁵⁴

6.3.2.2 *Self-Sacrificing versus Dignified*

Teachers also refused the misogynist expectation to remain self-sacrificing, and instead they inhabited a way of being that emanated their own dignity and right to be respected. The misogynist expectation to be self-sacrificing has been an inherent characteristic of teaching for as long as it has been a feminized profession, and it is still prominent within the profession today.⁵⁵ Even though teachers in West Virginia had the second-lowest salary in the country in 2018, even though their healthcare premiums were increasing at alarming rates, and even though it was commonplace for teachers to hold second or third jobs, they were still expected to put the needs of their students and communities first even to the detriment of their own well-being. To put it more crudely, they were still expected to keep their heads down and work, reinforcing the idea that women are naturally ‘givers,’ and therefore should provide care even when they themselves

⁵⁴ Tyler Evert, “Teachers Rally Outside the Senate Chambers in the Capitol in Charleston, West Virginia on 5 March 2018,” *The Guardian*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/feb/19/west-virginia-teachers-strike-education-bill>.

⁵⁵ For more on this, see Chapter Five, pages 159–162.

are not cared for.⁵⁶ In fact, the West Virginia teachers experienced many misogynist ‘tactics of shame’ from state and federal lawmakers guiltting teachers back into ‘their place’: one of giving rather than taking.⁵⁷

In the face of such ‘tactics of shame,’ teachers’ refusal to remain self-sacrificing was all the more courageous. Teachers performed an action counter to the misogynist expectation to remain self-sacrificing through their very act of walking out of schools and occupying the capitol building and their schoolyards. Again, this act of counter-conduct is not simply dependent upon the act of walking out; it is necessarily bound up with the fact that it was mainly women who walked out. This refusal to be self-sacrificial continued through the embodied occupation of the capitol and the schoolyards each day the teachers refused to enter their schools.

In refusing self-sacrifice, teachers did not perform selfishness in its place. Instead, they continued to demonstrate care. Striking teachers went to great lengths to ensure that all students, especially those on free and reduced lunches, had free meals available for pickup at their schools or delivered directly at their homes.⁵⁸ Teachers also cleaned up after themselves at the end of each striking day, ensuring that the capitol building and grounds were free of debris.⁵⁹ As such, teachers did not deny their role as caretakers, but they did demand moral recognition not normally given to women who attempt to ‘take’ masculine-coded goods, such as higher salaries, better reputations, and greater political clout.

It is critical to my argument that teachers performed this refusal in full view of community members, students, legislators, and people across the country watching the news.

⁵⁶ For an excellent argument on why teachers should receive care from society, see Yibing Quek, “Teachers’ Enactment of Complete Care in Times of Difficulty—and Why the Public Should Support Them,” PhD Diss. (Teachers College, Columbia University, 2022).

⁵⁷ For specific tactics of shame and down girl moves against the West Virginia teachers, see Chapter Five, pages 164–173.

⁵⁸ Bacon, “West Virginia Teachers Packed Lunches.”

⁵⁹ Personal interview with Jessica Salfia, May 31, 2021.

They did not refuse to be self-sacrificial secretly or discreetly. They performed this refusal on the streets, at the capitol building, and in front of schools. They performed in front of journalists from state and national news organizations, knowing that their efforts were being broadcast to millions. As their protest continued across nine weekdays, teachers' performance of this refusal garnered increasing numbers of invested viewers from across the country. In enacting resistance overtly and in garnering witnesses from across the country, teachers performatively demanded to be *seen* and *heard* as both teachers and as human beings—the cornerstone of dignity. To be respected and treated with dignity, one must first be seen and recognized as a person. In being recognized, a person with dignity is “understood as an end in themselves, rather than as a mere means to others' ends.”⁶⁰ A philosopher of education who has written much about teachers and teaching, David Hansen considers the dignity of individuals in the role of teacher to be significant. He asserts the important connection between dignity and sight in saying, “The primacy of dignity comes to light through bearing witness.”⁶¹ Teachers, in not hiding away their resistance, courageously performed it in the public eye, demanding community members, legislators, and students to bear witness to them in their resistance. Their bodies, gathered in protest in the public space of the capitol building and schoolyards, “are demanding to be recognized, to be valued, they are exercising their right to appear, to exercise freedom, and they are demanding a livable life.”⁶² In their refusal to remain self-sacrificial, hidden away in systems exploiting their well-being, teachers courageously appeared in the public eye, and in so doing, they aesthetically demanded the public to witness their dignity.

⁶⁰ David Hansen, *Reimagining the Call to Teach: A Witness to Teachers and Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2021), 78.

⁶¹ Hansen, *Reimagining the Call to Teach*, 80. For more on Hansen's idea of 'bearing witness,' David Hansen, “Bearing Witness to the Fusion of Person and Role in Teaching,” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 52, no. 4 (2018): 21–48; and David Hansen, “Bearing Witness to Teaching and Teachers,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 49, no. 1 (2017): 7–23.

⁶² Butler, *Notes*, 26.

To Hansen, dignity also encompasses human relation and conduct, as well as persons and their practice.⁶³ Teachers performed a demand to be regarded as ‘ends in themselves’ rather than simply as caretakers or people who exist solely in the service of others. Yet in their continued care for their students (for example through food deliveries, protest signs, and unofficial classes in Panera⁶⁴) and in their solidarity with all public employees, teachers demonstrated a commitment to relations with others and a dedication to the practice of teaching. Teachers performed an alternative subjectivity demonstrating that caring for others and having dignity are not mutually exclusive—that teachers can, in fact, care for their students without sacrificing their own well-being, and that they can educate while demonstrating their inherent dignity as persons. This is conveyed in the teacher’s sign in the image below, which states: “Students, Because you’re mine, I walk the line. #55strong.” Here, the teacher physically asserts herself in a public space, demanding to be recognized, yet she does so while relaying a message of care to her students.⁶⁵ She maintains her teaching practice and relations with her students even while striking, performing her dignity as teacher and person in the process.

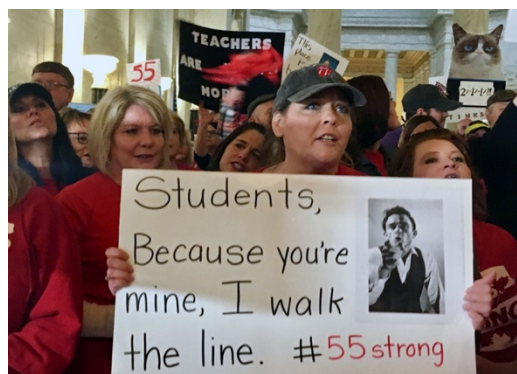


Figure 19: A Teacher Holds a Sign in the 2018 Strike⁶⁶

⁶³ Hansen, *Reimagining the Call to Teach*, 79.

⁶⁴ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 78.

⁶⁵ For a study on how Chicago teachers demonstrated care for their students during their 2019 strike, see Yibing Quek, “An Interpretation of the 2019 Chicago Teachers’ Strike Through the Ethics of Care,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 40, no. 6 (2021): 609–627.

⁶⁶ John Raby, “Jennifer Hanner, a Teacher from Harts, W.Va., Center, Holds a Sign Last Year,” *Education Week*, February 18, 2019, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/west-virginia-teachers-are-going-on-strike-again/2019/02>.

Teachers' performance of dignity was also inherent within the act of striking itself, as is the case with most strikes,⁶⁷ such as the coal miner strikes in West Virginia throughout the twentieth century. Many striking teachers referenced gaining inspiration from their grandfathers or great-grandfathers who had participated in these mining strikes; they viewed labor movements as part of their heritage.⁶⁸ However, in the 2018 and 2019 strikes, women subsumed the roles previously dominated by men. When men strike, they often assert their dignity and respect, but they do not enact counter-conduct against the patriarchy while doing so because it is *expected* that men will 'take' more power, money, and reputation. In fact, for much of the striking history in Appalachia, women acted as 'givers,' or helpers to striking efforts rather than as strikers themselves.⁶⁹ While this is an important role, and many claim the strikes would not have been successful without the support of women, it too reifies the patriarchal order by positioning men as those seeking power and women as those seeking to support men. So, when women, inspired by their grandfathers, performed their own strike—and thereby performed their own power, dignity, and respect—they inherently performed counter-conduct by virtue of women acting counter to how they are expected to act given the patriarchal order.

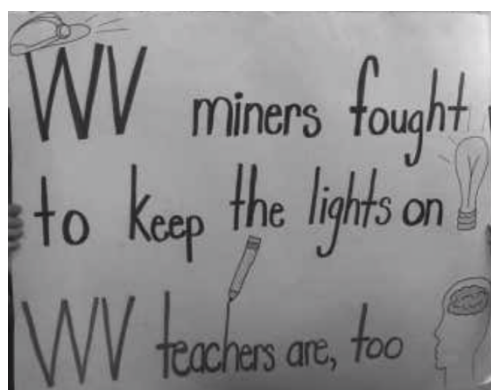


Figure 20: A Sign from a West Virginia Teacher in 2018⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Jane McAlevey says, for instance, that dignity and respect are “the root cause of every serious labor struggle.” See her book *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶⁸ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*.

⁶⁹ Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*.

⁷⁰ Slocum, Hathaway, and Bernstein, “Striking Signs,” 372.

West Virginia teachers' dignified demands for respect were present everywhere in the 2018 strike, both in the political-aesthetic, as described above, and in the political-epistemic. Per the latter, teachers openly discussed their demands for dignity and respect in interviews and narratives about the strikes. Said Jessica Salfia, "I wanted the public to know this movement was and is about respect, about quality of life, about love."⁷¹ Mingo County high school teacher Katie Endicott said, "It is our hope that the fire neither dims nor burns out but instead burns bright in educators across the US as we stand with pride and declare, 'We are worthy!'"⁷² Shepherdstown Middle School teacher Mark Salfia noted, "This work stoppage was about standing up as a state and telling our leadership what we value. We value ourselves. We value the blue collar, gritty WV worker. We value the coal miner, the truck driver, the teacher.... This movement was about being valued."⁷³

Teachers also handcrafted protests signs that conveyed their unwillingness to self-sacrifice and their demand to be treated with dignity. Some signs reflective of this include ones that position teachers as valuable resources or as moral authorities. Examples of the former include signs that conveyed messages such as, "We're Valuable," or "Don't undervalue me!"⁷⁴ Examples of the latter include teachers conveying messages such as "I AM teaching today's lesson: Fighting Injustice and Standing up to Bullies," and "I practice what I teach."⁷⁵ These latter messages subvert the expectation for self-sacrifice by asserting that teachers could, paradoxically, continue educating their students from the picket lines, in a deeply profound way.

⁷¹ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 13.

⁷² Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 31.

⁷³ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 43.

⁷⁴ Slocum, Hathaway, and Bernstein, "Striking Signs," 370.

⁷⁵ Slocum, Hathaway, and Bernstein, "Striking Signs," 369.

In other words, teachers need not acquiesce to their own exploitation in order to educate or to care for their students.

The signs themselves overlap the discursive with the visual, the epistemic with the aesthetic. Yet the wielding of the signs—the wielding of messages asserting their worth and value, of alluding to symbols of feminine power, of subverting expectations—this itself was an act of counter-conduct. Teachers refused the misogynist expectations to be self-sacrificial, and instead they performed their existence as both teachers and human beings. In physically occupying public space, chanting, and shouting in full view of state legislators, community members, students, and people from around the country watching the news, and in forcefully raising protests signs in the air to be read by lawmakers and broadcast by media outlets, teachers were demanding to be *seen* and *heard*. They were demanding the public to bear witness to them. In so doing, they were performatively demanding to be recognized as persons with dignity. As Hansen says, “To recognize and act on the dignity of others is to help realize—literally make real—justice itself.”⁷⁶ Teachers, in refusing self-sacrifice and publicly performing instead their dignity, were seeking to conceive justice.

6.3.2.3 *Self-doubting versus Authoritative*

The third misogynistic expectation that the West Virginia teacher strikes refused was that of deference to the judgment of men in positions of power at the diminution of their own expertise. To preserve the patriarchal order, men should be treated as ‘experts,’ even when women have more experience.⁷⁷ This dichotomy was clearly on display in the West Virginia teacher strikes. Part of the reason teachers went on strike in 2018, as mentioned, was the fact that

⁷⁶ Hansen, *Reimagining the Call to Teach*, 78.

⁷⁷ For a longer description of this point, see Chapter Five, page 153–154.

many teachers believed the educational bill proposed by the state senate would threaten public education by introducing charter schools and vouchers to the state.⁷⁸ Further, it was written without any consultation from educators. In other words, a group of mainly men without any educational experience wrote an education bill without seeking guidance from teachers. The ‘ideal’ women would have deferred to the judgment of men in power and continued, quietly, to dole her feminine-coded goods, and the ‘ideal’ teacher would have kept working without questioning the authority of those in charge. However, the West Virginia teachers acted counter to this expected conduct by making it a specific aim of their strike to fight against this privatization bill. This counter-conduct was all the more significant during the 2019 strike, where teachers’ sole aim was to oppose the privatization bill, pushed forward a second time by the state senate. In both strikes, teachers refused to defer their judgment to men in power, and they refused to remain epistemically submissive. Rather, they put forward an alternative way of being where they embraced and asserted their own expertise, and where they performed their authority.

The West Virginia teachers also performed a refusal of deference by subverting misogynist language that alluded to teachers’ lack of understanding. In particular, they weaponized Governor Justice’s term ‘dumb bunnies’ that he used to describe the striking teachers.⁷⁹ Instead of succumbing to this vitriol and doubting their own expertise as educators, teachers donned bunny ears and shirts that read “Dumb Bunny Club” and continued their strike. Notably, only women teachers wore these ears and shirts. Through this aesthetic decision, they subverted a misogynist, ‘down girl’ move and used it to symbolize their refusal to remain deferent.

⁷⁸ I go into greater detail about this in Chapter Three, pages 105–107.

⁷⁹ For more detail on this, see Chapter Five, pages 169–170.

The two images below depict this subversion. In the first, four women teachers stand in the capitol building. They wear headbands with white-and-pink bunny ears attached. On their shirts is an image of a bunny attempting to complete a basic math problem and failing. Underneath reads “Dumb Bunny Club.” You can almost feel the laughter in these teachers’ smiles. They seem to feel a joy in subverting a misogynist comment attacking their intelligence. In the second picture, three women hold signs. The one on the right conveys a dense message for a protest sign; it reads, “The term ‘Redneck’ is often used for a rural poor person of the Southern United States. Yes, we are poor, but we are not ‘dumb bunnies.’ Please work with us to improve our students, state, and status. 55 United.”⁸⁰ In a political-epistemic move, this teacher appeals to the rationality and understanding of Governor Justice; she attempts to reason with him. Yet strikingly, directly behind her, another teacher stands, solemnly wearing bright blue bunny ears atop her head. Her protest sign does not reference the ‘dumb bunny,’ depicting instead a hand drawn frog telling lawmakers to “Hop to it!” The image of her wearing blue bunny ears speaks beyond what the other teacher’s sign has stated. The image not only conveys the teacher’s refusal to internalize the demeaning term, but also her willingness to play with it. Rather than feel shame in the term, this teacher, as well as the teachers in the first image, laugh at it and embrace it. They refuse the self-doubt that can arise from demeaning language, and they put forward instead a subversive playfulness that in itself depicts a commanding confidence over their own narrative.

⁸⁰ On another occasion, Governor Justice had likened the striking teachers to ‘the town redneck.’ See for example “W.Va. Governor Talks Work Stoppage in Wheeling Town Hall,” *WTRF*, February 26, 2018, <https://www.wtrf.com/news/education/w-va-governor-talks-work-stoppage-in-wheeling-town-hall/992616486/>.



Figure 21: Teachers Wearing ‘Dumb Bunny’ Ears and Shirts⁸¹



Figure 22: Teachers Address ‘Dumb Bunnies’ in Signs and Costumes⁸²

Teachers further inhabited authority by evoking connections to women’s empowerment movements through images and phrasing on posters. For example, several signs depicted Rosie the Riveter, an image of women’s professional power. One such sign said, “I Fight For Your Kids Everyday. Will You Do The Same For Us?”⁸³ A different sign alluded to another image of

⁸¹ Brad McElhinny, “Teachers from Logan County Wear Bunny Ears and T-Shirts Focused on a ‘Dumb Bunny’ Comment by Gov. Jim Justice,” *MetroNews: The Voice of West Virginia*, February 25, 2018, <https://wvmetronews.com/2018/02/25/dumb-bunnies-in-wv-teacher-crowds-protest-comment-by-governor-justice/>.

⁸² Craig Hudson/Charleston Gazette-Mail via AP, “From Left, Teachers Kim Hundley, Jamie Heflin and Susan Brewer Demonstrate at the Capitol Building on the Fourth Day of Statewide Walkouts in Charleston, W.Va., on Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2018,” *Yahoo! News*, March 7, 2018, <https://finance.yahoo.com/photos/west-virginia-teacher-strike-slideshow-wp-183622131/p-striking-teacher-hold-united-photo-183622715.html>.

⁸³ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 94.

powerful women in quoting a slogan from the 2017 Women’s March: “They tried to bury us. They didn’t know we were seeds.”⁸⁴ By drawing on these images and mottos, teachers evoked the larger fight for women’s rights. They inhabited a place of authority supported by the rich history behind them.

In refusing self-doubt, teachers *witnessed* and *felt* newfound authority and power where they had previously been expected to remain deferential, such as in interactions with state legislators. When interviewing West Virginia teachers about the moment they first felt a sense of power during their strike, Blanc notes that many cited confrontations between teachers and legislators. One such notable story comes from teacher Ashlea Bassham:

My favorite moment of the strike was on the second day. Me and seven of my coworkers were waiting in a hallway where we hoped we’d be able to corner Senator Karnes, the vice chair of the Education Committee—and a real reactionary. Eventually, Karnes comes out and we start asking him things like “Why are you being anti-teacher?” He responded in this really arrogant way, interrupting us and tell us made-up things like that our average class size was fifteen.

Eventually, my coworker goes up to him and says “Why do you keep talking over people? It seems like that’s the one thing you’re good at.” Keep in mind that my coworker is *not* an outspoken guy and he’s generally very polite. So I really wasn’t expecting him to speak up; it was great to see that bit of empowerment. It felt like we were finally starting to stand up to the bullies who run our state.⁸⁵

In this anecdote, both misogyny and counter-conduct are at play. First, although Bassham does not note the gendered implications of it, she describes how Senator Karnes employed misogynist,

⁸⁴ Catte, Hilliard, and Salfia, *55 Strong*, 82.

⁸⁵ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 91–92.

‘down girl’ enforcement mechanisms to override or discredit teachers’ testimonies: he avoided and ignored teachers, interrupted them, and ‘mansplained’ their own classrooms to them in an inaccurate way. Yet importantly, Bassham also notes that her coworker, a normally polite and quiet man, confronted these down girl moves with confidence and authority. Not only did this teacher express his power in a previously uncharacteristic way, but Bassham *witnessed* such empowerment, which became her ‘favorite’ moment from the strike. In witnessing this moment, Bassham *felt* as though teachers were finally expressing their authority as experts of their own classrooms and of education more generally. They were refusing to remain deferential to the opinions of those in charge, especially when those opinions were inaccurate. Instead, like Bassham and her coworker, teachers witnessed and felt their own confidence and authority in the very act of questioning and refuting such inaccuracies.

6.4 An Education of Feeling

Even though the West Virginia teacher strikers did not epistemically consider their strike to have a gendered or feminist dimension, they aesthetically experienced themselves and their colleagues acting counter to the conduct expected of them within a misogynist patriarchy through the refusal and putting forward of the three characteristics analyzed above. In other words, the West Virginia teachers aesthetically experienced the performance of their own counter-conduct. Teachers not only experienced thousands of voices chanting, singing, and demanding in unison, but they also experienced *how* these voices chanted, sang, and demanded—and how they did so was with the feminine voice. Teachers not only experienced the thousands of bodies marching, moving, wearing red, and occupying, but they experienced *how* these bodies marched, moved, wore red, and occupied—and how they did so was with and by the feminized body. Teachers not only aesthetically experienced the sensuous details of the strike,

but they aesthetically experienced a group of mainly women refusing to be submissive, refusing to be completely self-sacrificing, and refusing to doubt their own expertise. And, at the same time, they aesthetically experienced a group of mainly women performing their own power, dignity, and authority. Even without asserting that their strikes were feminist, teachers *felt, saw,* and *heard* alternative ways to exist as women and as teachers.

This political-aesthetic education of feeling, sense, and perception is important in combatting the aesthetic injustice of patriarchy. Unless internalized patriarchal oppression is combatted, a person will experience a ‘residual internalization’ even if it opposes their beliefs.⁸⁶ Albeit not in so many words, Leticia Sabsay, in her analysis of feminist movements, speaks in support of the political-aesthetic when she says that at least part of the battles of protests “must be fought at the level of the sensible and imaginary.”⁸⁷ Teachers, in their embodied performance of counter-conduct, both put forward and experienced an expansion of the sensible and the imaginary; they felt what it is like to refuse misogynist, patriarchal expectations and to inhabit instead alternative ways of being. Specifically, teachers felt a refusal of submissiveness, and instead felt assertive and empowered; they felt a refusal to be self-sacrificial, and instead felt their own dignity; and they felt a refusal of self-doubt, and instead felt authoritative. These feelings disrupt the constraints of the misogynist, patriarchal order and educate teachers, through experience, in ways of being, identities, and values alternative to those expected of them under patriarchy.⁸⁸ The teacher strikes, as disruptive to patriarchal expectations, do not threaten to

⁸⁶ I have discussed this in more detail in Chapter Two, pages 76–78, and in Chapter Three, pages 87–90.

⁸⁷ Sabsay, “The Political Aesthetics of Vulnerability,” 194.

⁸⁸ Further, feminism has enabled alternate forms of knowledge, such as embodied knowledge. Thus, even taking seriously the somaesthetic can itself be considered feminist. For more on this point, see for example Castelli, “Bodies in Alliance.”

eradicate the concept of ‘woman,’ but simply to expand what it means to live as such. They do not threaten the concept of gender, but rather the effects of misogynistic patriarchy.

These experiences of striking combat the aesthetic injustice of patriarchal oppression, even independently of recognition or awareness of such. Teachers can consciously maintain that they are not feminist, or that they are skeptical of feminism, as many people of all genders in West Virginia do. Yet even so, these felt experiences expand the realm of possibility for how striking teachers live within a patriarchal system; they alleviate aesthetic injustice by enhancing teachers’ capacities to feel and imagine alternative ways of being. Women and teachers need not be submissive, self-sacrificial, or self-doubting, but can instead be assertive, powerful, and authoritative. They need not be ‘dumb bunnies,’ but can instead live with dignity.

6.5 An Alternative Subjectivity

In his work on counter-conduct, Carl Death asserts, “An analytics of protest asks: what forms of person, self and identity are presupposed by different forms of counter-conduct, and how do protests bring new identities and subjectivities into being?”⁸⁹ This is exactly what I have sought to demonstrate here, with emphasis on how the West Virginia teacher strikes impacted identity and subjectivity as they relate to womanhood, gender, and feminism. In their strike, West Virginia teachers performed an act of counter-conduct that refused the governmentality of misogynist patriarchy and the ‘conduct of conduct’ therein. Simultaneously, these teachers brought forth alternative ways of being a woman and a teacher. Instead of performing the submissiveness of the ‘ideal’ woman, teachers exercised their power and demonstrated their unwillingness to be silent. Instead of succumbing to expectations to remain ‘givers’ willing to sacrifice their own well-being indefinitely, teachers performed their own dignity and demanded

⁸⁹ Death, “Counter-Conducts: A Foucauldian Analytics of Protest,” 241.

respect. And instead of deferring to the judgement and opinion of men in power, teachers gave voice to their own educational expertise. It is through their act of striking that West Virginia teachers inhabited a way of being alternative to that expected of the ‘ideal’ patriarchal woman, and the ‘ideal’ patriarchal teacher.

The West Virginia teacher strikers put forward ‘a way of life,’ contributed to the ‘construction of new realities and new practices,’ and the ‘opening up of new political possibilities,’ and attempted to ‘re-shape’ societal values. These occurrences did not happen through articulations. Teachers did not *demand* change regarding womanhood, gender, and feminization, but instead they *realized* such change through the very performances of their counter-conduct—performances that were then aesthetically and somaesthetically experienced in such a way as to impact the lives of striking teachers, and even of ordinary citizens who watched the strikes unfold. Teachers felt, saw, and heard their own power, dignity, and authority in the act of marching and chanting against the men-dominated state legislature; in experiencing these dispositions, they are more likely to access them again in the future beyond the strike’s conclusion. Citizen bystanders, seeing and hearing women and teachers perform such characteristics, witness and can respond to the dignity and power of women and teachers alike. After all, witnesses did not simply *know* that many women and teachers were striking; they *saw* thousands of women and teachers tirelessly filling the state capitol day after day and *heard* their voices chanting and singing in unison. They saw and heard women and teachers stand up to the state legislators, 84% of whom were men, and to Governor Justice himself, heard them act as experts on their profession, and witnessed their power when they took their strike wildcat.

These expanded feelings are evidenced in the words and actions of teachers from around the state. Said one teacher after the 2018 strike, “Educators *saw* that they have power. They’ve

realized that they're exploited and that they have structural power. And in this walkout, they made their power *felt*.”⁹⁰ One of the lead strike organizers, teacher Jay O’Neal, remarked in the middle of the strike, “I *saw* that people, my coworkers who had *felt* powerless for so long, now after four days of striking *felt* their collective power.”⁹¹ Not only did these teachers take note of the newfound power experienced by educators, but they used aesthetic and somaesthetic language (which I have emphasized in italics) to describe this transformation. Teachers *saw* and *felt* their power; they witnessed power in each other and felt it in themselves.

Since the 2018 West Virginia teacher strike, teachers have had ample opportunity to enact their newfound feelings of power, dignity, and authority. Of course, one such exercise of this power was the two-day 2019 strike, which was quickly mobilized across all 55 counties when the state senate again attempted to push through the privatization education bill. Teachers did not doubt themselves, nor did they remain deferential or self-sacrificing. Rather, without hesitation they inhabited once again feelings of power, dignity, and authority in resisting the legislative proposal. Another exercise of these alternative ways of being has been the formation of the West Virginia United Caucus, a group of rank-and-file members from the two education unions in the state: AFT-WV and WVEA.⁹² The caucus was particularly active during the first year of the pandemic. The caucus organizers would regularly update teachers on accurate covid information and statistics at a time when the state government inaccurately portrayed numbers. Organizers also held meetings on Zoom attended by hundreds of teachers from all counties across the state who discussed the state government’s misinformation, fears for their own safety, and the potential of organizing another walkout. I attended one of these meetings and witnessed

⁹⁰ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 97.

⁹¹ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 93.

⁹² For more on the WV United Caucus, see <https://www.wvunitedcaucus.org>.

firsthand the willingness of teachers to question how much they were willing to self-sacrifice for their jobs. They asserted that their well-being as persons was important, and they resisted the idea that they should sacrifice their own lives to care for others. Importantly, there was also a general sentiment that even in refusing to be self-sacrificial, teachers were not being selfish, but rather were practicing care and dignity simultaneously. Said one teacher about the potential to strike during this time, “We’re not doing it selfishly. We’re doing it for ourselves, our students, and our communities.”⁹³ She saw her role as teacher as bound up with her dignity as a human. Indeed, teachers’ willingness to question their own self-sacrifice might not have existed had teachers not performed and experienced their own dignity in the act of striking the previous two years—had they not, in other words, both enacted and experienced the feminist, anti-patriarchal political-aesthetic lesson.

Teachers also expressed feelings of newfound power, dignity, and authority in increased political engagement after the strike. In fact, after the teacher strikes, there was increased political engagement of women in general across the state of West Virginia, not only among those who are teachers. For example, in November of 2018, ten months after the first teacher strike, over a dozen public school teachers and more women than ever before ran for political office in the West Virginia primary elections.⁹⁴ Inspired by the teacher strikes, a group called the Mountain Mamas formed, which comprised of twenty women running for state legislature positions, mostly for the first time.⁹⁵ And in 2020, for the first time in history, all of the

⁹³ WV United Caucus meeting, January 3, 2021.

⁹⁴ 100 Days in Appalachia, “Meet the W.Va. Women Challenging the Political Norm for Female Candidates,” *West Virginia Public Broadcasting*, November 5, 2018, <https://www.wvpublic.org/news/2018-11-05/meet-the-w-va-women-challenging-the-political-norm-for-female-candidates>; Dave Mistich, “School’s Out and Teachers Run for Office Over Summer Break,” *NPR*, July 2, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/07/02/625279409/w-va-teachers-campaign-for-public-office-during-summer-break>.

⁹⁵ Krystal Ball, “Krystal Clear: West Virginia Teachers Strike Inspires 20 Women to Run for State Office,” *The Hill*, July 23, 2018, <https://thehill.com/hilltv/rising/398371-krystal-clear-the-mountain-mamas-are-turning-west-virginia-blue>.

Democratic nominees on the state's congressional ballot were women.⁹⁶ In addition, citizens of West Virginia seemed more likely to recognize the power, dignity, and authority of women and teachers. This is evidenced by the fact that one of the teachers' unions in West Virginia, WVEA, endorsed 115 candidates in the May 2018 primary, and 99 of these candidates won their races.⁹⁷ Citizens were willing to put their trust regarding matters of politics in the hands of the largest teacher union in the state.

6.6 Conclusion

The West Virginia teachers' counter-conduct against the patriarchy could only have been achieved through the political-aesthetic rather than through the political-epistemic. Teacher strikers did not so much fight for feminism as they *performed* it. They *performed* counter-conduct against patriarchy. And as such, teachers brought about a public education in feminism. Through their counter-conduct, teacher strikers educated themselves and others about gender politics by performing an identity antithetical to the misogynistic 'myth' of womanhood. Teacher strikers educated us to conceive of women as dignified, authoritative, and powerful. Teachers participating in the strike felt the of power and authority of striking, demanding, and resisting in a society that frequently demands from them only deference and submissiveness. They felt their own dignity as teachers and persons in publicly putting forward their bodies and voices in an act of resistance in a society that frequently demands from them only self-sacrifice.

In having such an experience, the West Virginia teachers expanded the possibilities for how women and teachers are to exist within the constraints of patriarchy. Such possibilities have the potential to impact present and future teachers' lived experiences in their schools and

⁹⁶ Josh Croup, "West Virginia Women Make History on 2020 Congressional Ballot," *WDTV*, October 30, 2020, <https://www.wdtv.com/2020/10/30/west-virginia-women-make-history-on-2020-congressional-ballot/>.

⁹⁷ Kullgren, "Educator Spring."

beyond. They direct us all to recognize teachers and women as political agents, as professionals with pedagogical expertise, and as persons with dignity.

Conclusion

“Who made history? We made history!”

-WV teachers’ closing chant of 2018¹

C.1 Reinforcing Governmentality

Neoliberalism and patriarchy were not dismantled in the West Virginia teacher strikes. In fact, the teachers’ counter-conduct might have reinforced in some ways the governmentalities they opposed. In Chapter Four, I described how this happened regarding neoliberalism. The teachers’ counter-conduct incited a backlash from state legislators who continued to put forward, and eventually pass, the education privatization bill. Called the Student Success Act, this bill allows an unlimited number of charter schools to open in the state. In November 2021, the first three charter schools were authorized. As teachers feared, these charter schools are slated to open in three of the wealthiest counties in the state, close to or within three of the state’s biggest cities: Morgantown, Martinsburg, and Charleston.² The first of these schools is expected to open in August 2022. Further, these legislators also passed a bill in 2021, upon the third anniversary of the 2018 strike, that criminalized public employee work stoppages.³ Both of these bills indicate a heightened embrace of neoliberalism from those in power in response to teachers’ acts of resistance.

Teachers’ counter-conduct also reinforced the governmentality of patriarchy as operationalized by those in positions of power. This was evident by how the state government

¹ This is relayed by Eric Blanc, for example, in *Red State Revolt*.

² Brad McElhinny, “First Three Charter Schools Approved for West Virginia,” *WV Metro News*, November 10, 2021, <https://wvmetronews.com/2021/11/10/first-three-charter-schools-approved-for-west-virginia/>.

³ For more on this, see the conclusion of Chapter Four, pages 146–148.

treated teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic: as care workers expected to serve others even at the risk of their own well-being and dignity.⁴ In fall of 2020, West Virginia adopted a color-coded map system for tracking COVID-19 cases from the Harvard Global Institute. On any given day, counties depicted in green and yellow—e.g., those with low COVID-19 rates—would hold in-person education. Those counties depicted in orange and red—e.g., those with high COVID-19 rates—would hold education online. Governor Justice and his administration repeatedly changed the map, adding in a new color, ‘gold,’ and tweaking infection count data to keep schools open, even against their initial metrics.⁵ Said WVEA president Dale Lee, the state government enacted “manipulation of the map to put people in a harmful situation.”⁶ In late 2020 when a COVID-19 surge was hitting West Virginia, Governor Justice announced that all schools would return to in-person learning in January 2021 regardless of their county’s infection rate. The re-openings would happen before teachers were fully vaccinated. Without proper health and safety precautions in place and with changing regulations, teachers were scared, and they felt as though they were not being respected as people with dignity, but rather simply as ‘glorified babysitters’ and as means to an end.⁷ They felt like they were expected to sacrifice their own well-being for the economic benefit of leaving schools open; many questioned whether in-person learning was best for their students and communities given the surge in infection rates and the public’s general unwillingness to mask and socially distance. Nearly 300 teachers from around the state gathered on Zoom to discuss this topic, an event organized by the West Virginia United

⁴ This phenomenon, of course, was not limited to West Virginia teachers, but it did impact them.

⁵ Emily Allen, “Governor Changes COVID-19 Map to Reopen Schools in Five Counties,” *West Virginia Public Broadcasting*, September 15, 2020, <https://www.wvpublic.org/news/2020-09-15/governor-changes-covid-19-map-to-reopen-schools-in-five-counties>.

⁶ Brad McElhinny, “Latest Challenge to Covid Map Hits Courtroom, with Teachers Union Saying It’s Been Manipulated,” *WV Metro News*, October 22, 2020, <https://wvmetronews.com/2020/10/22/latest-challenge-to-covid-map-hits-courtroom-with-teachers-unions-saying-its-been-manipulated/>.

⁷ West Virginia United Caucus meeting on January 3, 2021.

Caucus.⁸ Said visiting labor organizer Ellen David Friedman to West Virginia teachers during this meeting: “It won’t work to call your governor. They are not interested in your opinion or in your attitude. They are only interested in one thing: opening the buildings for the economy. It is not about research. We would all like to believe it is about research, but it’s not; it’s about power.”⁹ The governor and his administration were prioritizing the good of the economic market over the well-being of teachers; they were expecting teachers, as mainly women, to care for their students and communities even at great risk to themselves and their own families, and even as the government demonstrated willingness to manipulate the data.

With charter schools established and with COVID-19 concerns abated, West Virginia teachers are currently facing yet another concern: the proposal of anti-critical race theory (CRT) mandates. On March 2, 2022, the state senate passed Senate Bill 498, the “Anti-Racism Act,” which would constrict how public school teachers discuss race in their K-12 classrooms.¹⁰ Among the edicts was that no one should feel “discomfort” because of their race and that no one is “inherently racist or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously,” by virtue of their race.¹¹ Students and parents can file complaints when they feel the law has been violated. Teachers regarded this proposal as further evidence of disrespect from state lawmakers. A statement from the West Virginia United Caucus on the issue read, “We’re professionals and this law both micromanages and undermines us.”¹² In this statement, teachers convey feeling controlled and disrespected by the government; they feel the need to again assert their professionalism, and thereby their authority as educators. This law is yet another way to

⁸ For more on this, see Chapter Four, pages 142–144, and Chapter Six, pages 209–210.

⁹ West Virginia United Caucus meeting January 3, 2021

¹⁰ Before the bill goes into effect, it still must be passed by the House and might change in the process.

¹¹ Associated Press, “W.Va. Lawmakers OK Bill Barring ‘Brainwashing’ Race Teaching,” *WSAZ*, March 14, 2022, <https://www.wsaz.com/2022/03/14/wva-lawmakers-ok-bill-barring-brainwashing-race-teaching/>.

¹² This comes from an image posted on the WV United Caucus Facebook page, March 2, 6:27am.

denigrate their respectability and professionalism and to force teachers into submissiveness and eminent governability through heightened control measures.

C.2 Expansion of Possibilities

The political-aesthetic education within the teacher strikes was all the more important because of the bolstering of neoliberal and patriarchal expectations on the side of those in power. While not dismantling either governmentality, teachers' performance of counter-conduct expanded the possibilities for how they can live even under neoliberalism and patriarchy. This expansion of possibilities occurred because teachers felt, saw, and heard a refusal of neoliberal and patriarchal characteristics, and instead they experienced, again through feeling and perception, democratic and empowered ways of living that honored their dignity as persons and teachers. Indeed, the political-aesthetic education of the West Virginia teacher strikes would not have transpired without its unique performative and aesthetic qualities.

This political-aesthetic education is well summed up in the following concise reflection from a striking teacher. She said:

It just felt powerful for so many of us to be there for a cause... We teach democracy, but we don't often get to really see it in action... We went there. We did this... We made them listen.¹³

In her reflection, this teacher describes the feeling of power that came from being in the midst of thousands of teachers fighting for the same common goal, and she remarks on how the experience of *performing* democracy is so different from *teaching* it. What the teacher does not say, however, is that through the very performance of democracy, teachers were in fact 'teaching' it—not with textbooks or information, but with sight, sound, and feeling. Teachers

¹³ Sikes, "In Our Very Blood," 128–129.

could only ‘teach’ this lesson of democracy, and power for that matter, precisely because they ‘went there’ and ‘did this’— only because, in other words, they physically showed up to the capitol and to their schoolyards, only because they marched, chanted, sang, held hands, wore red, and raised their protest signs high. Further, this teacher conveys that the performance of power and democracy was not only experienced by teachers, but it was put on display for all the public to see—by teachers going there, doing that, and making others *listen*. Teachers were simultaneously enacting and undergoing a political-aesthetic education; they were painting a vision of democracy and women’s power for all to see, and for themselves to feel.

The expansion of possibilities that came about from teachers’ counter-conduct has played out in different ways after the teacher strikes. For one, there was the creation of the West Virginia United Caucus, which still today acts as a space for teachers from across the state to discuss issues pertaining to education and to organize small- or large-scale political action; the group also still organizes #RedforEd days, where teachers are encouraged to wear their red strike t-shirts to school.¹⁴ In expressing unity and championing the political power of each teacher, the caucus represents an extension of teachers’ counter-conduct against neoliberalism and toward democracy. For another, teachers have become more politically active after the strikes; in late 2018, over a dozen teachers ran for political office. In addition, teachers have become more active members of their unions, and union leaders have orchestrated more events, as well.¹⁵ Further, teachers are speaking out more against proposed legislative changes, such as the anti-CRT legislation. This heightened political activity is representative of teachers’ refusal of both neoliberal and patriarchal characteristics, such as being eminently governable and submissive, and a putting forward of alternative ways of being that express their assertiveness and power.

¹⁴ For more on this, see Chapter Four, pages 142–144.

¹⁵ Sikes, “In Our Very Blood,” 114.

During the pandemic, teachers questioned the state government's decisions regarding education and spoke up to defend their own well-being in conditions where they felt unsafe. In this, teachers demonstrated a continuation of their counter-conduct against patriarchy because they refused to remain submissive and self-sacrificing and instead put forward an alternative way of being that questioned authority and asserted the importance of their own well-being.

Yet beyond these bigger scale changes, I expect the political-aesthetic education of the strikes to have impacted teachers' quotidian behavior as well. Perhaps conversations in the teachers' lounge now feel more friendly, reflecting teachers' newfound sense of unity. Perhaps teachers feel empowered to speak up more during school board meetings or in opposition to district administrators, reflecting their heightened feeling of assertiveness and authority. Or they might engage with their students differently; having refused their own marketization, teachers might be more inclined to refuse the marketization of their students, even in small ways. Perhaps teachers will encourage their students to respect their own dignity and the dignity in others, and to resist their own eminent governability. Perhaps teachers continue to enact quotidian counter-conduct each day in their teaching.¹⁶ More qualitative research needs to be done on this topic, but for now I hope that my project at least points the way.

Of course, the manifestation of the strikes not only impacted teachers, but it had the potential to impact anyone who witnessed them. This includes students. In fact, many educators have reflected on the education their students received in witnessing the teacher strikes, even while not being in the classroom.¹⁷ This harkens to the deep irony undergirding the entirety of this project: while on strike, teachers leave their classrooms, their typical posts of teaching; yet in

¹⁶ See for example Zembylas, "Affect and Counter-Conduct"; and Zembylas, "The Affective Dimension of Everyday Resistance."

¹⁷ For further details about this, see Chapter Four, pages 144–146.

so doing, they enact an alternative kind of education on the picket lines, perhaps in some ways more powerful than any lesson they could dole from inside a school.¹⁸ One teacher said the following about her students' education:

When we got back to school, we asked our students to do a reflection on the days that we were out. So many of them used the word 'unity'. We have this young woman who said that *watching thousands of teachers stand up together taught her to use her voice*. She said, the teachers taught me that my voice matters. That was the most wonderful part of walking back into our classroom, realizing that our students had indeed learned a lesson from their teachers standing up as one.¹⁹

Students *witnessed* their teachers on strike; they *saw* the unity of teachers and public employees across the state, and they *heard* their voices chanting, demanding, and singing in unison. In so doing, students witnessed their teachers reject characteristics of neoliberalism and patriarchy and perform instead democratic ways of being and feminine power. Many students actually joined the teacher strikes to show their support; they linked arms with their teachers and experienced first-hand the feeling of being on strike. Not only did these students witness democracy and power, but they too performed them.²⁰

Even further, because the West Virginia teacher strikes received much media attention, people from across the country witnessed the teachers' efforts. This includes other teachers who faced similar problems in their own states. Teachers in Arizona and Oklahoma watched the West Virginia teacher strike of 2018 unfold and were inspired to organize strikes of their own. One Arizona teacher remarked, "People in Arizona were scared to rock the boat—and then West

¹⁸ Again, my thanks to René Arcilla for first drawing my attention to this idea of irony.

¹⁹ Sikes, "In Our Very Blood," 134, emphasis added.

²⁰ For more on this, see Chapter Four, pages 144–146.

Virginia happened. All of a sudden, the catalyst was there. ‘They’re doing it, why can’t we?’”²¹

This teacher expresses feeling empowered precisely because she witnessed the teachers of West Virginia walk out. Without witnessing the West Virginia teachers on strike, teachers from other states might not have felt empowered to organize their own efforts, and any of the subsequent ten education strikes to follow might not have happened. This inspiration is depicted in the image below, which shows a teacher from Arizona on strike, holding a sign that says: “Don’t make me go all West Virginia on you.”



Figure 23: An Arizona Teacher on Strike References the West Virginia Teachers Strikes²²

C.3 Limitations and Future Research

Because this project is largely hermeneutic and conceptual, its most significant limitations regard its lack of first-hand qualitative data. While I read, watched, and listened to dozens of teachers relay their experiences striking, this project would be stronger with qualitative data collected from teacher interviews. Doing so would allow me to specifically ask teachers

²¹ Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 5.

²² Ross D. Franklin, “In This Wednesday, March 28, 2018 File Photo, Arizona Teachers and Education Advocates March at the Arizona Capitol Protesting Low Teacher Pay and School Funding in Phoenix,” *Tucson*, April 26, 2018, https://tucson.com/dont-make-me-go-all-we-t-virginia-on-you/image_fe7668a2-49a1-11e8-896c-13abee0d793.html.

about the aesthetic dimensions of the strikes and the qualitative experiences therein. In the future, I hope to enact such research. In particular, I would like to interview West Virginia teachers five years after their initial strike to discuss how they feel their experience striking has continued to impact their lives as teachers and as persons. Such research would work to validate the hypotheses and conceptual arguments that I have put forward here.

Another limitation to this project has been the lack of teacher strike witness testimonies. For this reason, I put forward, but was unable to fully flesh out, the idea that witnesses to teacher strikes also undergo a political-aesthetic education. More research in this area could include interviewing community members who have witnessed teacher strikes, but who have not participated in them, on how the strikes impacted their perceptions of teachers, democracy, and patriarchal norms.

C.4 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have argued for the existence and importance of the political-aesthetic education manifested within the West Virginia teacher strikes. This is an education of feeling, sense, and perception that works against governmentalities by expanding the possibilities for how one can live within them. This act of resistance, called counter-conduct, is performative and aesthetic, and it can be layered on top of resistance with clearly articulated demands, such as during the West Virginia teacher strikes. In 2018, West Virginia teachers fought for higher salaries, better healthcare, and the prevention of school privatization bills. In 2019, they fought exclusively for the latter. Yet beyond these articulated demands, teachers enacted another layer of resistance against the structural powers of neoliberalism and patriarchy, two governmentalities that have deeply impacted, and continue to impact, the teaching profession.

In the very manifestation of their strikes, teachers acted counter to three foundational characteristics of the ideal neoliberal homo oeconomicus: they refused their own atomization, marketization, and eminent governability. In place of these characteristics, teachers performed instead alternative ways of being, which contribute to identity and value formation. Teachers put forward a unified front, a willingness to resist those in power, and a prioritization of well-being and social connection over the greater market. These alternative ways of being reflect democratic ideals. Thus, in their counter-conduct, teachers at once rejected neoliberalism and inhabited instead a democratic way of life. While counter-conduct need not be epistemic, it must be performative, and because it is performative, it manifests through the aesthetic, which encompasses quotidian sensuous details as well as felt bodily responses—both the everyday aesthetic and the somaesthetic. The West Virginia teachers need not have been aware of their rejection of neoliberalism and their performance of democracy. Rather, through the embodied performativity of their act of resistance, teachers experienced their counter-conduct through feeling, sense, and perception. They *felt*, *saw*, and *heard* what it was like to refuse neoliberal characteristics and perform democratic ones instead. This education of feeling and perception is formative because it combats the aesthetic injustice inherent under neoliberal systems. This expansion of feeling can impact teachers' future behavior, desires, and identity; it can impact the quotidian decision-making they undertake in their lives as teachers and as persons. Thus, in both enacting and experiencing this political-aesthetic education, even without dismantling neoliberalism, teachers expanded the possibilities for how they can exist within it.

The same is true of teachers' counter-conduct against misogynist patriarchy. In the very manifestation of their strikes, teachers acted counter to three characteristics expected of the ideal woman in a patriarchal society—characteristics expected of teachers of all genders working

within the feminized profession. Specifically, teachers refused submissiveness, self-sacrifice, and self-doubt. In place of these characteristics, teachers performed instead assertiveness and power, dignity, and authority. In their counter-conduct, teachers rejected the misogynist expectations of women and feminized others within a patriarchal society and put forward alternative ways of being. Teachers performed this counter-conduct even beyond their recognition or awareness of such—and in fact, often despite their assertions; many teachers actively refuted the idea that their strike had anything to do with gender or feminism. Yet all the same, teachers’ enacted counter-conduct against patriarchy through the very performance of their act of resistance. This counter-conduct, while not necessarily epistemic, manifested through the embodied and sensuous details of the strike in a way that could then be aesthetically experienced. Teachers felt, sensed, and perceived a refusal of patriarchal characteristics and a putting forward instead of their own power, authority, and dignity as women and as teachers. Again, this political-aesthetic education expands teachers’ experience of the world and of themselves as persons and as teachers. Through an expansion of feeling and perception, teachers experience an expansion of possibilities for how they live within the classroom and the world. This political-aesthetic education against patriarchy can impact teachers’ ways of being, identities, and values, and it can influence their future decision-making within their classrooms and beyond. Even without dismantling patriarchy, teachers and women expanded the possibilities for how they can exist within it.

On the evening of March 6, 2018, the West Virginia teachers finally came to an agreement with Governor Justice. Rank-and-file leaders announced the deal to the sea of teachers, clad in red, filling the white marble capitol building and spilling across the white marble stairs, all the way down to the Kanawha River below. They decreed the strike over. Thousands of teachers, many of whom had been present at the capitol all thirteen days of the

strike, cheered, laughed, and cried all at once. They hugged their fellow strikers, many of whom they had been strangers before the strike, many of whom had become close friends throughout their fight. And against the white façade of the capitol and over the Kanawha River reverberated the teachers' final chant: "Who made history? We made history!" History, I argue, but not merely history.

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