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States of Precarity and Pains of Utopic Pedagogy:Methodologies of Hope in Times of Crises

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Drawing on personal teaching experience, this article considers the potentiality and pains of a pedagogic strategy that practises what José Esteban Muñoz calls a "methodology of hope" (2009). How can educators, particularly those located in the "enlightenment-type charade" (Moten and Harney 2013, 39) that is the university, enact a critical yet hopeful pedagogy when the "ghostly aspects" (Gordon 2008) of social life haunt both students and educators before they enter the classroom? Using Gail Lewis' (2014) defense of the reparative position within queer feminist debates on paranoid and reparative readings, I argue that Lewis' emphasis on relationality as a mode of criticality can foreground connection as a reparative mode of pedagogy. Reflecting on my own experience teaching Frantz Fanon's scholarship through a lens that confronts his homophobia and simultaneously refuses his disposal, I argue for the need for connection for both students and educator alike. The reparative stance, in this pedagogic moment, opens students to the analytical modes of Black diaspora studies, Black queer studies and queer of colour critique that thinks insurgently with and through Fanon to imagine otherwise.

Keywords

Fanon, Frantz, Neoliberal university, Paranoid and reparative reading, Queer feminist pedagogy, Queer of color critique, Utopianism

"*What does knowledge do–the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows*?"

(Sedgwick 2003, 123) **[End Page 318]**

Introduction

In an interview published in 2014 by the CLR James Journal, Katherine McKittrick is asked by her interlocutor, Peter James Hudson, about a statement she made on Twitter: "I've never glimpsed safe teaching (and learning) space. It is a white fantasy that harms" (2014, 237). In the six years since I first read this exchange, McKittrick's expansion on this statement, the incisive approach to teaching in the university outlined in her response, has arrested my interest in the potentials of pedagogy. Before my pursuit of graduate studies, before my encounter with teaching, before my idealisation and subsequent disillusionment with the Ivory Tower, its disciples and dissidents alike, McKittrick's response affirmed what I thought I had imagined: the university is not a site that has ever

been predicated on safety. Her response illuminates the violence in and of the classroom:

I call this a white fantasy because, at least for me, only someone with racial privilege would assume that the classroom could be a site of safety! This kind of privileged person sees the classroom as, a priori, safe and a space that is tainted by dangerous subject matters (race) and unruly (intolerant) students. But the classroom is, as I see it, a colonial site that was, and always has been, engendered by and through violent exclusion!

(ibid., 238)

For some of us, the university provides the spark to ignite our political consciousness, for others, it is the site where neoliberalism's racialized, gendered, classist, ableist hostilities further engender our alienation. Many can attest to how these experiences are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they are often interdependent.

An anti-racist classroom, then, orients students to the afterlives of colonialism, empire, and slavery as not external to but constitutive of the university. It is weary of the self-promotion and marketing campaigns that brand the university as a progressive sanctuary. Intentionally or not, it demystifies the "enlightenment-type charade" that, similar to philosophy of Liberalism that undergirds it, celebrates individual freedoms even as it obfuscates the violent exclusions immanent to these freedoms (Moten and Harney 2013, 24). It is attuned to how students (and educators, for that matter) already embody the social theories educators seek to expose to them. Yet, my weariness as a studentteacher is cast through a wariness of the stultifying potential of pedagogy. A stultification produced from a pedagogical approach that hinges its criticality on revealing the ubiquity of violence, particularly to students who are already subjected by the subject of study. How, then, to practice a generative, hopeful pedagogy in a moment defined by a global rise in far-right nationalisms, over a decade of national austerity, and a global pandemic that lays bare the lived and felt legacies of coloniality and racial capitalism? Drawing on my experience as a graduate teaching assistant on a sociology course focusing on race and empire, and as a doctoral student researching from an anti-racist, queer, **[End Page 319]** feminist framework, this paper considers the potentiality and pains in what José Esteban Muñoz calls a "methodology of hope" for scholarly and pedagogical practice (2009). It explores the challenges of avoiding a pedagogical instilling of "paranoid reading practices" that, although useful, can overestimate the political utility of exposing violence (Sedgwick 2003).

These dilemmas of pedagogy and epistemology in the midst of crisis guide the focus of this article. First, it reflects on how "dangerous subject matters" prefigure students' experiences before they step foot in the classroom, influence their

orientation towards the classroom and undergird their experiences within the classroom. This prefiguration can be understood within what Avery Gordon calls the 'ghostly aspects' of social life whereby the legacies of race and empire are spectral in their absence even as their presence is felt in marked and unmarked manners (2008, 2011). It is within this vein that I analyse the merit of an 'emergent' approach to these hauntings, in that they may be used to propel us towards a political project that insists on addressing the something-to-be-done that arises in the wake of social violence.

Second, it outlines the queer feminist debates around Eve Sedgwick's proposition of reparative readings, a notion at the centre of Muñoz's methodology of hope (Sedgwick 2003; Muñoz 2009). Sedgwick's now famous critique of critique endures in its impact on queer theory. The ensuing debates on the role of the critic, their motivations, their normative impulses, their reading and interpretive practices are necessary concerns for both scholarly and educational projects. While these debates are wide-ranging, I take on the queer feminist interventions on the notion of the reparative as a worthy response to addressing the *something-to-be-done* that emerges from moments of haunting (Gordon 2011). Although I take seriously Robyn Wiegman's corrective to engagements of paranoid and reparative readings that incorrectly deem them as sequential and oppositional approaches, I am more convinced of Gail Lewis's rejoinder to Wiegman's "suspicion of the suspicion of the hermeneutics of suspicion in these neoliberal times" (Lewis 2014, 35). Lewis's self-professed investment in the reparative stance as an iteration of criticality that prioritizes *connection* over interpretation can be squarely positioned within Muñoz's scholarship on the utopic, particularly his emphasis on the urgency of relationality. As such, I argue that the reparative stance endorsed by Lewis and Muñoz is, in Muñoz's own words, "spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naive but, instead, profoundly resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present" (2009, 12). It is this broken-down present that can propel us to a pedagogy that imparts paranoid and reparative positions as *both* useful and worthy in their political imperatives.

Finally, I draw on my own teaching experience as demonstrative of the struggle to translate reparative reading into pedagogical practice. Muñoz's adoption of Ernst Bloch's "concrete utopias" offers us a stance that may still be suspicious but nevertheless strives for *connection* in the sense outlined by Lewis. To **[End Page 320]** make my point, I analyze the dilemma of both writing alongside and teaching Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* while simultaneously confronting Fanon's homophobia through a reparative lens that refuses his disposal (Fanon 2001; Muñoz 1999). As such, this paper argues that a methodology of hope conveys the importance of considering "concrete utopias" hinged on the urgency of envisaging more just futures from positions of precarity, for students and educators alike (Muñoz 2009). A methodology of hope does not seek to reconcile the violent exclusions that structure and enable the classroom. Yet, it also does not lay its pedagogical and analytical investments in the exposure of violence. Rather, it takes

on the terrifying task of defiance towards the realities of our 'broken-down present' in order to imagine otherwise (ibid., 12).

On the propulsion towards a *something-to-be-done*

"*But it is teaching that brings us in. Before there are grants, research, conferences, books, and journals there is the experience of being taught and of teaching. Before the research post with no teaching, before the graduate students to mark the exams, before the string of sabbaticals, before the permanent reduction in teaching load, the appointment to run the Center, the consignment of pedagogy to a discipline called education, before the course designed to be a new book, teaching happened*."

(Harney and Moten 2013, 27)

My first formal teaching experience in the university began in October 2019 as a graduate teaching assistant for a 'Sociology of Race and Empire' course. The first lecture ended with a requisite introductory go-around. The forty or so undergraduate students were to briefly introduce themselves and explain their interest in the module. One by one, the students shared their names, year of study, academic and national backgrounds, and their motivations for studying race and empire. Something akin to a tendency, maybe even a pattern, emerged in their rationales. White students tended to relate their interest to an intellectual pursuit in the subject, perhaps piqued by a week on Postcolonialism or Race in another module or wanting to diversify from the otherwise racially blind or post-racial orientations of disciplines such as Government or Law. The Black and brown students, on the other hand, expressed no less of an intellectual motivation but were more transparent about the experiential nature of their interest. More common was a desire to fill the gap in knowledge of Britain's imperial history left through their schooling, to better situate their own migratory, national histories and personal experiences, perhaps a combination of both. The difference in the latter group of students' subjective investment in the subject matter, the willingness to recognise themselves **[End Page 321]** as subjected through the subject, was conspicuous even if through a cursory round of introductions.

The classroom oriented towards the "dangerous subject matters" of race, colonialism and empire may hold appeal for those students hoping to address, possibly even redress, through knowledge the violent exclusions they experience. The anti-racist classroom and its pedagogue is sympathetic to these desires, probably relates to them, but is also vigilant to how the educational site is still "a colonial site" produced "by and through violent exclusion" (Hudson and McKittrick, 2014). While McKittrick speaks to the settler-colony of Canada, this is no less true for the British context, at the London School of Economics (LSE), where I taught. The university, unsurprisingly as an elite institution at the heart of the metropole of the largest empire in history, is intimately linked to the biological

race-making that inheres the British imperial project. Beatrice and Sidney Webb, two of the founders of the university, members of the British socialist organisation the Fabian society and advocates for the establishment of the welfare state, were heavily influenced by eugenicist thought (Dilawri 2019). The Webbs' socialist ideals were intimately linked to eugenics, so much so that they believed "that the successful realisation of an efficient welfare society depended on the elimination of the 'unfit'—namely, the 'feeble-minded' and those on the social margins, the 'residuum'" (ibid.). Shikha Dilawri argues that the LSE's establishment within the project of "socialist eugenics" is symptomatic of the development of British higher education, rather than an exception to it. As such, the university that is the site of the teaching experience central to this paper is intimately tied to the "colonial divisions of humanity" that were inherent to the British imperial project abroad and its race-making projects within (Lowe 2015).

Within this frame, the spectres of coloniality and racial capitalism are bound to emerge in the classroom. Spectral not in that they linger despite their so-called end. Spectral as in their covert violence persists even as the myths of their demise are asserted by the very beneficiaries of their afterlives. As such, the anti-racist pedagogue, as McKittrick aptly demonstrates, is skeptical of the university's potential to offer refuge to students and staff alike. The classroom is a site where these spectres and their hauntings, in the sense proposed by Avery Gordon, materialise through the very constitution of the classroom: the institution that builds it, the students and educators that enter it, the marketized educational system that enables it. These students' responses represented to me a flicker of these hauntings: "an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely" (Gordon 2011, 2). These hauntings materialise in the classroom, not simply as the "dangerous subject matter" of race itself, but as the less obvious and more "oblique" moments of unresolved social violence that prefigure the entrance into the classroom and unsettle within it.

This prefiguration can be understood within the "ghostly aspects" of social life whereby the legacies of race and empire are spectral in their absence even **[End Page 322]** as their presence is felt in marked and unmarked manners (Gordon 2008, 2011). Within the educational context, they may appear through the more obvious forms of underrepresentation (attainment gaps), to overt forms of repression (censorship), to the oppressive workings of the institution itself (funding cuts, mass casualization, and engineered alienation of students and university workers). There may be attempts to mark these legacies through "decolonizing" initiatives and modules on subjects such as race and empire but are obscured through the very formation and functioning of the institution. Indeed, Rahul Rao argues that "the decolonisation agenda has also become deeply imbricated with the increasing marketisation of higher education in the UK in ways that are troubling" (2020). One of the many struggles of challenging the university under neoliberalism is resisting the co-option and sterilisation of these efforts.

In this article, I am less interested in mapping out the inevitable and myriad legacies of colonial, late capitalist and race-making logics that stratify higher education. Instead, I want to linger on the role of pedagogy within this landscape: the visions it articulates, the limits and potentials of these visions, and the tools at the disposal of those of us willing to enact them. This article is an attempt to trouble the very political and intellectual stultification I have experienced over the course of my doctoral studies. I cannot deny the role the academy has played in the development of my political consciousness by way of pedagogy and community—to paraphrase the epigraph of this section, it is teaching that brought me in. Yet, as my role within the institution shifted from (undergraduate) student to (graduate) student-worker, I have had to reckon with the limits of the university's potential as an emancipatory site. This disillusionment and its attendant immobility are, in part, due to the overwhelming awareness that precarity is not just inevitable within the academy but inherent to the functioning of the "Academic Industrial Complex" (Bacchetta et al. 2018). The institution, the department, the faculty that design modules and develop theories on the "decolonization" of the university are enmeshed with and dependent on the precarity of others. It is this subsequent stultification, particularly the potential for pedagogy to effect this even through its most well-meaning iterations, and the pains that can be taken to avoid its effects, that concerns me.

What is to be done until we patiently await the abolition of the modern, neoliberal university as we know it? Gordon elaborates that haunting "refers to this socio-political-psychological state when something else, or something different from before, feels like it must be done, and prompts a something-to-be-done" (2011, 2). Gordon's emergent, rather than fatalistic, conceptualisation of haunting asserts the utility of utopic thinking to structure our assessments of the present and visions of the future. As much an intellectual as a personal project, Gordon speculates on a path that is not simply invested in diagnoses of and bearing witness to suffering but an investment in *doing something* towards its end. Utopic as these aspirations may be, they may propel our political projects to demand more, imagine anew and offer no concessions in the process. **[End Page 323]**

The notion of utopia, and the hope that structures it, is my primary focus for this paper. I am interested in exploring the "how?" and "what then?" postexposure that lies within teaching in the university. As the students' responses described earlier reveal, an interest in the study of race and empire can stem from an experiential knowledge, perhaps not simply limited to the urge to understand racism and coloniality as historically constituted and ongoing, but rather to move towards the something-to-be-done. Alyosxa Tudor's analysis of the Radical Residency SOAS student group and their squatting of an abandoned British Museum building, for instance, demonstrates the potentials of the something-to-be-done that may be propelled in, through and out of the institution: "These students bring their amazing politics and knowledge productions to the classroom, and they take queer- and transfeminist tools from the classroom back to their activisms and knowledge

productions" (Tudor 2021, 10). This is the best that an (aspiring) pedagogue may hope for, that their teaching practice may aid students in how they intellectually organize their social worlds and compel them to collaborate to realize their political visions.

Noble as these aspirations may be, I think it is essential that we dwell on the affects and effects that undergird our pedagogic practice and habits. As I transitioned from a student to student-teacher, my own position as a graduate student dealing with financial and employment precarity and epistemic and labour exploitation made me skeptical of the overvaluation of the hypervisibility of structural violence—the exposure of hauntings without a propulsion to a something-to-be-done—in pedagogic practices. What use is "exposure" to the inner workings of social violence to students, indeed for educators themselves? My reprieve from the university was found in the same schools of thought that brought me to it: queer feminist theory. It is in this vein that I explore how feminist and queer of color interventions on hope and the reparative can be deployed in the service of what José Esteban Muñoz describes as "concrete utopias" (2003).

Finding the Reparative Turn in a Hopeless Place

"*The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds*."

(Muñoz 2009, 1)

José Esteban Muñoz's opening paragraph of Cruising Utopias, quoted in the epigraph above, is clear in its damning assessment of the present and the urgency **[End Page 324]** that entails. At face value, this may seem like a pleasant enough sentiment but what does it mean to dream of new worlds? How can one enact other ways of being in the world, envision new worlds, from within the prison house of the present? According to Muñoz, it is possible to enact utopic visions while preserving a criticality that is unyielding in its rigour. Hope as a critical methodology, he proposes, can be best understood as "a backward glance that enacts a future vision," an act of scrutiny in the present by way of an attention to the past and an investment in the future (ibid., 4). Muñoz's call for utopian futurity partially stems as a counter to the "antirelational thesis" that had gained traction in queer studies at his time of writing. According to Muñoz, while the antirelational turn challenges facile understandings of queerness, its replacement of the "romance of community" with the "romance of singularity and negativity" waived the relational understanding of queerness that is essential to the queer of colour subject's survival (ibid., 10).

Cruising Utopia does not dismiss the criticality of negativity but rather offers a version different than that of the queer antirelationist, one that challenges the cynical dismissal of utopianism as naïveté and insufficiently occupied with the material. Instead, hope as a methodology turns to utopia with pragmatism in order to be vigilant of the "paranoid reading practices" famously critiqued by Sedgwick. At the heart of her *critique of critique* is an exploration of the purpose and function of knowledge: "What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows?" (2003, 123 [emphasis Sedgwick's]). In this vein, Sedgwick, draws on psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's conceptualisation of schizoid/paranoid and depressive positions to explore how "paranoid reading" as an interpretive practice has come to dominate critical theory's, and particularly queer studies', scholarly inquiry through a "hermeneutics of suspicion." Sedgwick characterises paranoid reading as a methodology that is anticipatory; reflexive and mimetic; a strong theory; a theory of negative affects; and finally, that it places its faith in exposure (ibid., 127–8). A thorough engagement of each of these characteristics is beyond the scope of this article, but for the purposes of my own analysis, I am particularly interested in paranoid reading's faith in exposure and the risks of a teaching method that draws solely from this practice.

The paranoid position is one possible stance that a critic may take in their consideration of their object of inquiry. According to Sedgwick, the dominance of this mode of interpretation compels her to investigate the interpretive work that may be lost through the primacy given to it. The paranoid position's speculations assume that the efficacy of knowledge lies in its ability to expose violence. It therefore always assumes a suspicious stance towards its objects of inquiry to unearth and subsequently expose the oppression embedded within, around and by the object. The dilemma that is left uninvestigated by the paranoid position's "seeming faith in exposure" is that it assumes that "to make something visible as a problem were, if not a mere hop, skip, and jump away from getting it solved, at **[End Page 325]** least self- evidently a step in that direction" (ibid., 138). Due both to the limitations of the paranoid position, and its monopolistic hold on critical thought at the time, Sedgwick proposes the reparative stance as equally deserving of the critic's attention. Because, as irrefutable as the paranoid stance's adage that "things are bad and getting worse" may be, it is sometimes worth the risk of disappointment to dwell even further on the possibilities of the something-to-be-done. Similar to Muñoz, Sedgwick proposes that critics employ the reparative position, and the hope that imbues it, as one of the methodologies worthy of our intellectual attention and political conviction.

While the paranoid position works its object of analysis through negative affects such as correction, rejection and anger, the reparative position chooses to "confer plenitude" on the object in order to "build small worlds of sustenance that cultivate a different present and future for the losses that one has suffered" (Wiegman 2014, 11). The reparative position understands the inevitably of violence. Rather than

continue the cycle of critical cynicism, it risks the potentially "fracturing, traumatic" experience of hope for the possibility of "extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture" that may not serve to sustain them in the first place (ibid., 8). This is not to be misunderstood as a reformist project but rather a critical stance that attempts to imagine the future otherwise precisely because of the damning conditions of the present. These two positions are not mutually exclusive, nor are they sequential, nor are they competing. Indeed, Sedgwick argues that often reparative positions may be found in the works of critics most likely to be typified as of the "paranoid" position. What Sedgwick is, in part, concerned with is the monopolistic hold of the paranoid position on criticality.

It is within these pertinent debates on the purpose of critique, the role of the critic, and the potentiality of knowledge, that I raise my own question regarding the utility of the reparative stance in pedagogic practice. In particular, I am wary of the potential for pedagogy to reinforce the "hermeneutics of suspicion" through a criticality that vests its interest in the exposure of the ubiquity of violence, particularly to those students who enter the classroom already aware of the myriad ways they are under subjection by the subjects of study. My own experience as a student-teacher has demonstrated that when it comes to the study of race and empire, it is more likely that students are honing their capacity to more accurately name and analyse that which they already know. In our current moment we are witnessing a global rise in far-right nationalisms; overt racism, xenophobia, and "anti-gender" movements are increasingly gaining traction in the mainstream; the effects of a decade of national austerity and cuts to welfare in the UK are seen through the devastating loss orchestrated by a negligent Conservative government amid a pandemic. Where, in sum, the current disorder of things lays bare the lived and felt legacies of coloniality and racial capitalism. Amidst this, it feels not simply insufficient but perhaps even irresponsible to impart a scholarly critique that hinges on the obvious sentiment **[End Page 326]** that "things are bad and getting worse" to students who are intimately experiencing our collective worsening conditions.

It is within these concerns that I turn to the reparative stance and hope as a methodology within teaching, not as a pedagogic solution but hopefully, perhaps selfishly, to comfort myself that I may be enacting my own something-to-be-done within the confines of the Academic Industrial Complex that enabled (enables) my own intellectual and political stultification. Now, I find myself ambivalent to the institution and grateful for the community I have carved out within it. It could be argued that I have concluded to "disidentify" with this stultification as a survival strategy to survive the "phobic majoritarian" sphere of the university (Muñoz 1999, 5). My own turn to the reparative can be easily situated within the very logics of meaning-making through interpretive and critical practices that Sedgwick discusses: her reflections on what knowledge *does* "forces us to see that any mode of analysis is ultimately an expression or extension of human impulses, motives, and desires to make meaning in a particular way in the hope of producing

particular effects" (Fawaz 2019, 27). As such, I am interested in investigating the merit of reparative reading as a method capable of propelling the something-to-be-done that emerges from hauntings within and outside of the classroom. A detour into specifically queer feminist debates on the reparative position are essential to understanding my argument for a methodology of hope as a teaching practice.

In the time following the publication of *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You*, there has been a noticeable turn to the reparative in queer studies. Robyn Wiegman meticulously analyses this embrace, particularly within queer feminist thought, demonstrating the understandings and misunderstandings of Sedgwick's original essay, scrutinizing both herself and subsequent critics' impulse towards this turn. Continuing *You're So Paranoid*'s psychoanalytic terms of analysis, Wiegman re-emphasizes Sedgwick's assertion that the paranoid and the reparative are not binary personality types but rather *positions* of epistemological authority adopted by the critic. Subsequently, Wiegman proposes that the reparative turn in queer feminist criticism is as much about the critical worlds built by this scholarship as it is a quest to justify the value of the critic's interpretive work itself. This interrogation of the motivations for reparation as a critical position raises important questions regarding whether it can actually compel the political change that it claims to be invested in, and for the purposes of this frame of this piece, its potential as a pedagogic tool.

Ultimately, Wiegman argues that those of us enraptured by reparation's potential for political potency are no less invested in the mastery that inheres the interpretive act. What "haunts reparative reading," argues Wiegman, is that "it works to reassemble interpretation's value" by insisting on its necessity, all the while "believing it has side-stepped the sovereign agencies and mastering hermeneutics that it pins on paranoid reading alone" (Wiegman 2014, 19). In **[End Page 327]** response, Clare Hemmings positions herself within this strand of queer feminist criticism and considers the ways in which this scholarship fails to attend to the potentials for paranoia and reparation to "be experienced as co-extensive" and not self-contained. Hemmings considers the pitfalls of the overwhelming investment in the reparative by (queer feminist) authors who are relatively privileged and secure within the ivory tower: "it is hard not to think of a reparative turn as a spectacular avoidance tactic, one which will do anything other than think through how privilege rather than marginality might have an institutional life queer feminist theorists may also authorise" (Hemmings 2014, 29).

As such, both these interventions on Sedgwick's original work are similarly concerned with, and problematize, the intersubjective nature of the critic's relation to its object and their broader knowledge project. Salient as these interventions are, given the focus on the affective, embodied, and intersubjective enactment of paranoid and reparative positions, there is an omission within the analysis of the so-called institutional and relational life of these practices: pedagogy. This is a

surprising omission given that these epistemological questions are raised, to an extent, within the academic institutional lives of these modes of interpretive practice by both Wiegman and Hemmings. It is this gap that interests me, specifically how the queer feminist academic, tenured or not, may impart their investments in particular modes of reading onto their students, and what may be the potentials and pitfalls of this intersubjective encounter.

This absence of the question of teaching as itself an act of interpretation and a relational act that imparts modes of reading onto pupils could very well be attributed to the parameters of Sedgwick's original piece. Regardless, insofar as the critic's teaching practice can *also* be understood as a mode of knowledge production similar to reading and writing, the aforementioned debates on the role and function of criticality are relevant to the queer feminist's pedagogic method. Thus, I argue, teaching deserves the same careful consideration given to the practices of (paranoid and reparative) reading and writing. I do think Wiegman's general thesis on the reparative turn can be extended to the pedagogic practice, in that the possibility of a teaching *through* and teaching *of* the reparative position can be a convenient justification for the academic's desire to practice within the boundaries of the university, even as the academic (I) protest/s the university as a site that produces and is produced by violent exclusions. As such, we arrive back to Wiegman's central argument: "While the pursuit of alternatives to sovereign forms of knowledge production may reorient the rhetorical pitch and hermeneutic priorities of criticism, it does not prepare any of us to explain why interpretation remains the value we resolutely cling to" (2014, 19).

Indeed, why do we cling to it? Within the broader focus of this paper—the potential for pedagogy to reckon with the emergent something-to-be-done—I find that the terms of this assessment are necessary but not sufficient in answering this question. While teaching is a form of a knowledge production, I do not think that it can be thought solely through the lens of "interpretation" in the **[End Page 328]** sense used by Wiegman. Instead, I am convinced, and moved even more, by Gail Lewis's rejoinder to Wiegman's "unsettling and severe" account of the reparative (2014, 35). Lewis's response opens with a problem. In naming this problem, she opens the possibility of a fruitful thinking through of the dilemma at hand:

I have a problem. It is a problem that is emotional, intellectual, relational and materialises in the varieties of practice that shape and are shaped by the terrains, legacies and cultures I inhabit. It is the problem of how to contribute to the work of laying bare for examination and eradication the patterns and processes which give life to and sustain the toxicity of racism, misogyny, homophobia, class hatred and disablism, whilst simultaneously remaining open to those who are 'not me' and their vulnerabilities.

(2014, 31)

This desire to "remaining open" is precisely what reparation makes possible. Lewis goes on to argue that Wiegman's compartmentalization of criticality's aim, while important in its demand for vigilance against "scholarly complacency and apocalyptic collapse," does a disservice to the potentials of the relationship between the critic and their objects (ibid., 33). Instead, Lewis counters that this conceptualization (dis)misses the pursuit and possibility of nurturing connection, "moment-by-slippery-uncertain-moment connection" (ibid., 32). For Lewis, reparation's merit lies in its capacity to surpass the narcissistic modes of knowledge production that constitute the very regimes of individualized, neoliberal, racist, homophobic, classist, colonial power that create the conditions for her, indeed our, "problem." Therefore, critical interpretation on its own is necessary but not sufficient in orienting knowledge's potential for fostering a connection that underlies our collective dependency by way of our interrelated subjection.

Lewis imbues the reparative as a possible methodology of hope that may help us endure the inundation of violence in the here-and-now, so as to make conceivable the horizon of a "then and there" (Muñoz 2009, 1). This emphasis on relationality and interrelatedness as a mode of criticality, as a credible strategy for approaching our knowledge-objects, is what can aid a utopic orientation to Sedgwick's original question: what does knowledge do? I argue that the connection emphasised by Lewis, and the relationality called for by Muñoz, make it emphatically clear that there is *something to be done*. Lewis's self-professed investment in the reparative stance as an iteration of criticality that prioritises *connection* over interpretation can be squarely positioned within Muñoz's own deployment of Sedgwick's work, particularly his emphasis on the urgency of relationality. As such, the reparative stance endorsed by Lewis and Muñoz is, in Muñoz's own words, "spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naive but, instead, profoundly resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present" (2009, 12). The site of the classroom, then, saturated as it is with historical and ongoing violence, can turn into a site of pragmatic utopianism through a backward glance that, rather than being satisfied with exposure in the present, may dare to enact "a future vision" (ibid., 4). **[End Page 329]**

The university, as I have discussed previously, is as perfect a site as any to exemplify our broken-down present. The institution where I am currently undertaking my doctoral studies has, in the immediate past, undergone multiple phases of cuts through the guise of bureaucratic "restructuring," exists within a national university system that is required to adhere to repressive counterextremism measures, a national "hostile environment" that further institutionalizes border violence within the university, and is in the midst of a massive national wave of casualization of higher education labor, all of which compound the vulnerabilities of those already on the margins. Higher education is an industry haunted by unresolved social violence. What has sustained me through my (differentiated and relational) experience of this dysfunctional system is precisely the *moment-by-slippery-uncertain-moment connection* that develops,

disbands, and develops again. It has taken form through friendships, partnerships, and mentorships that were made possible in the hallways and classrooms of the institution. It materializes through collective mobilisation in the form of demands to our departments, strikes, criticisms of trade unions' exclusionary mobilizations, and strategic organising to visibilize violence inside and outside the institution. All in the hopes that something may be done towards alleviating, if not abolishing, harm and doing it with each other.

It is here that I want to insist on the merit of hope as a methodology, not as the "banal optimism" accessible only to the more fortunate. Rather, hope as a pragmatic utopianism that is as cutting in its critical assessment of the present as it is unwavering in its demands for a future. In this regard, I want to focus on a moment in the classroom where I have attempted to practice this hope as a methodology through a reparative position. Specifically, the dilemma of both writing alongside and teaching Frantz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth, while simultaneously confronting Fanon's homophobia through a "disidentifying" lens that refuses his disposal (Fanon 2001; Muñoz 1999). By teaching alongside Fanon through a reparative position I hope to impart to students the possibility of working towards "concrete utopias" that may galvanise them to imagine otherwise.

Imagining concrete (queer) utopias with and against Fanon

"Frantz Fanon "of the homosexual I know nothing". Black Skin White Masks. Then he tells us a whole lot in footnote 21. Even with his flaws he remains more relevant than most. Happy birthday Frantz you teach me everyday how to question this world."[1]

Fanon's oeuvre is necessary reading for any course that aims to teach the subjects of race and empire. Witnessing students engage with his work and think through its complexities has advanced my own understanding of his scholarship. As a graduate teaching assistant, I am privy to students' engagements first-hand, that **[End Page 330]** too with the responsibility of facilitating their discussions. Teaching *Wretched of the Earth* has been one of the highlights of the pedagogical experience. I witnessed students' orientation to the text shift from one of intimidation from its complexities to an eagerness for its continued relevancy and analytic richness. Students repeatedly return to Fanon, connecting his scholarship well beyond the points his work is assigned on the syllabus, addressing the afterlives of his work in anti-colonial thought and applying his theoretical work to question our current postcolonial conditions (Salem 2020).

As such, I want to dwell on my motivations for, and experience of, teaching Fanon during a guest lecture I delivered on the topic of homonationalism. I discuss my bookending of the lecture with Fanon—beginning with his work's relevancy for

thinking through coloniality's instrumentalization of gender and sexuality and concluding with a reparative position towards the homophobia in his work—as an attempt to use hope as a pedagogic methodology. I argue that a reparative approach to this homophobia allows for a proposal of building towards "concrete utopias" (Muñoz, 2009). Muñoz proposes concrete utopias as a response to the understandable suspicion towards utopianism and the hope that undergirds it. Rather than treat utopianism as saccharine abstraction removed from the material, concrete utopias function as a pragmatic hermeneutic working with historical consciousness. Muñoz draws from the philosopher Ernst Bloch's conceptualization of concrete utopias to argue for the urgency of utopian pragmatism: "from the point of view of political struggles today, such a critical optic is nothing short of necessary in order to combat the force of political pessimism" (ibid., 4). Accordingly, I posit that thinking with and through Fanon reparatively, and here I include teaching as a mode of thinking, offers a potential to break through the stultification I have discussed. It opens the possibility of reclaiming Fanon for the purposes of the something-to-be-done that emerges alongside the hauntings of the classroom.

My lecture began with Che Gossett's citation of Fanon in their essay in the Los Angeles Review of Books, on "Zizek's Transgender Trouble" (Gossett 2016). The starting point for my presentation of the concept of homonationalism was Gossett's problematization of gender and sexuality as categories that are "indissolubly tied to the sovereignty of whiteness" (ibid.). Rather than treat homonationalism as a novel state strategy, I began with a discussion of how the instrumentalization of gender and sexuality that structures the concept is inseparable from the imperial tradition of weaponizing gender and sexuality in the service of colonialism, slavery, and race-making. Fundamental questions such as "Who gets to assume a body? Who gets to assume the integrity and security of that body?" that were explored by theorists, in particular Fanon, are essential to understanding this concept (ibid.). The questions of the afterlives of empire and race-making were woven into in the lecture in order to emphasise how the concept is not intended to be a criticism of *bad* queer politics. Rather, it is developed within the frame of these questions to explore how some queers **[End Page 331]** are provided with bodily integrity and security at the explicit expense of others and in service of exclusionary nationalist projects.

In delivering this lecture, I was adamant not to conclude on a cynical note of queer complicity and collusion as inevitability. This resistance can partly be attributed to my own political investment in thinking through "queer refusals" (Khan 2021), partly to my own wariness of imparting and reproducing the political cynicism of which I have grown weary and partly because this is an obvious eventuality (recall the aphorism: "things are bad and getting worse"). My attempt at teaching through this dilemma was to conclude my lecture with what I hoped was a constructive confrontation with Fanon's homophobia. In this vein, I began my conclusion with a tweet posted by Rinaldo Walcott on Fanon's birthday, quoted in the epigraph of

this section. Walcott's affecting tribute offered a chance to share with students what Gail Lewis argues cannot be achieved through critical interpretation alone – connection.

Walcott references the infamous footnote 44 in Chapter 6 of *Black Skin White Masks* (Fanon 2008, 139). In it, Fanon states that he has "never observed the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique" (ibid.). He continues to note that although gender-transgressive-men exist in Martinique, they "lead a normal sexual life" (read: heterosexual). He does, however, observe the presence of Martinicans who "became homosexuals" in Paris ("always passive"). The footnote has been analysed as an "'it's a white thing' dismissal of queerness" (Mercer 1996; Muñoz 1999). Why teach this? And through what lens? Broadly speaking, I think there are three main paths to reading and teaching this footnote within the frames discussed thus far. The first is avoidance: Fanon's homophobia can be bypassed as unnecessarily tainting his anticolonial contributions, or an imposition of anachronistic criticality on gender and sexuality, or indeed both. Not only would this be an intellectually lazy move, but it would also reproduce the violent exclusions to which we (ought to) attune our students. The second path could be to teach via the hermeneutics of suspicion. A paranoid reading of Fanon, and possibly of past anti-colonial movements more generally, may impart on our students the lesson to pre-empt bad feelings from encountering homophobia (for example) by always already expecting an out of touch worldview on gender and sexuality from anti-colonial movements and straight, male intellectuals (for example). I am not wholly against this position, and there is a long tradition of Marxist feminist and anti-/post-colonial feminist organising and scholarship that challenge these exclusions (but do not simply exist as a gender-and-sexuality-sensitive corrective to Marxist and anti-colonial thought). However, my questions of why teach this at all and through what lens are co-constitutive and cannot be addressed *solely* through the hermeneutics of suspicion.

In my lecture, I chose what I see as the third path, a reparative reading of Fanon and his footnote that can enable the-something-to-be-done that is at the heart of this paper. Rather than stop at Fanon's homophobia or dispose of Fanon **[End Page 332]** (perhaps in favor of the aforementioned feminist thought), a reparative lens can offer a Fanon as part of a historical consciousness that can be put towards honing an "educated hope" (Munoz). It opens up students to the modes of Black diaspora studies, Black queer studies and queer of color critique that thinks *generatively through* and *insurgently with* Fanon in order to imagine concrete utopias that envisions all our vulnerabilities and potential for freedoms as interdependent. Kobena Mercer argues that reworkings of Fanon by queer critics operates on an "element of hope" whereby they insist on the "interminable struggle to live with the thing that thinks" (1996, 129). Keguro Macharia, although in disagreement with aspects of Mercer's overall analysis of Fanon's sexual politics, is also critical of Fanon's inability to desire the same freedoms for the "woman of color or the homosexual" but is still insistent that Fanon offers to his reader

something invaluable and indispensable: "From him, we can learn that our abilities to experience pleasure and love are attenuated by oppressive structures, and we can learn to yearn for something more, for the world in which we can say, 'Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity'" (Macharia 2019, 59).

I ended my lecture with Muñoz and his discussion of Fanon in the introductory chapter of *Disidentifications*, where he similarly argues for a Fanon "who would not be sanitized; instead, his homophobia and misogyny would be interrogated while his anticolonial discourse was engaged as a still valuable yet mediated identification" (Muñoz 1999, 9). Through an engagement with these interventions, I hoped to pre-empt reproducing the political immobility students and educators alike encounter in and out of the classroom. I am not interested in affirming the obvious statement that all our intellectual heroes are imperfect. Further still, I think it is important to think with students about where our fantasies of intellectual purity come from and what they may prevent. Instead, with these deliberate choices of orienting Fanon through these Black queer, diasporic and queer of color interventions, I hope to teach students how to think and plot alongside and against Fanon towards a future vision.

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which my desire to avoid imparting political immobility onto my students was successful. Indeed, I am skeptical about imposing the language of achievement onto this pedagogic dilemma. My compulsion to take on this approach is formed through the always already collapsing boundaries between the personal-political and the tricky, immaterial bind between political consciousness, imagination, and mobilisation. The task is rendered even more difficult within institutionalised parameters. University cuts translate into shorter lecture hours which means abbreviated classroom interactions. Further, my role as a GTA limits which students I can engage in extended discussions (the students registered in my tutorial). The setting of the tutorial classroom is itself fraught with constraints—the marketized higher education landscape transforms students into customers who are expected to maximize the use-value of classroom time as preparation for assessments and in service of the commodity. Their education is increasingly framed as a transaction **[End Page 333]** whereby they are being sold a degree (a sentiment that is encouraged in the evercontested site of pedagogic objectification that is course evaluations). Students' immediate reactions in the subsequent tutorial discussion can be characterised as mixed at best: some were befuddled at the relationship between Fanon and homonationalism; some grappled with the concept of homonationalism itself; and some reflected on my staged confrontation with Fanon.

Still, I am less invested in holding the expectation of an immediate response to this intervention and more interested in the possibility for sustaining a connection with Fanon with my students. Rather than treat my reparative reading/teaching of Fanon as an isolated moment, I situate it as one of many instances where I have found the

reparative position useful in challenging the appeal of political cynicism for myself and my students. My attempts to enact a reparative position in my pedagogic practice gained meaning in connection (slippery, uncertain, moment by moment) that were found in and out of the classroom. Sometimes, this emerged through students' continued engagement with Fanon in their knowledge production, or in meetings with students asking for further readings on queer of color critique. Other times, it was prompted through welcoming the challenge of collectively thinking how concrete utopias may be actualised beyond abstractions within the classroom discussions. Political compulsion is ephemeral and need not be understood solely through the interactions contained within the institution. And yet, in the parameters of my role inside the institution, I am committed to thinking through *how* provocations in the classroom can lay out the potential for political compulsion. A reparative stance (and indeed, a paranoid stance) is but one of the many strategies of relation that have helped me enact connection in the face of political despair.

On the topic of teaching race, Stuart Hall explained that "social science is about deconstructing the obvious, it is about showing people that the things they immediately feel to be "just like that" aren't quite "just like that'" (Hall 2021, 127). According to him, the role of educators is to "undermine the obvious" (ibid.). Pragmatic utopianism and the relationality that inheres it, I have endeavoured to argue, is one approach we may take in our pedagogic quests to undermining the obvious. Alongside showing students that things are not "just like that," it is asking them: what could the world look like, now that we know that things do not have to be the way we know them to be? In the spirit of applicability and practicality, I want to argue that educators endeavour to demystify the utopic and take seriously the practice of exercising worldbuilding with our students. It is to propose to our students: "let us fight over a vision because our demands must spring from somewhere" (Olufemi 2020, 9). How can we distill theorizing into the concrete? What material demands can be made towards a utopic horizon? It is to share these questions with our students as welcome terrains of contestation, struggle and, ultimately, relation.

Fanon's work may be haunted by exclusions that are still unresolved. But these tensions can be a starting rather than an end point of our engagement. **[End Page 334]** Fanon teaches us, in Walcott's words, how to "question this world." His work, like any intellectual project, is rife with the endlessly contradictory relationship between knowledge and power. Rather than receive this ambivalence with immobility, we would do well as students of Fanon and teachers of his work to embrace this perpetual negotiation and the something-to-be-done borne from it. Hope is but one such methodology to refract this to-and-fro into a potentiality or connection. Our methods may be disparate, they may fall within the confines of the university, they may reject the university completely, but there is always the hope that they may actualise something different than our broken-down present.

Conclusion

I am writing this conclusion the evening before I am due to teach my weekly class, for the same course, at the same institution, for the second year in a row. This time, the teaching occurs under vastly different circumstances. A few hours ago, I replied to a student's email inquiring about alternatives to attending class in person. Their flatmate is exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms and their household needs to self-isolate while they await the test results. This is rapidly becoming the standard, as COVID-19 infections continue to rise amongst students as they are forced to return to campus. Under these circumstances, administrative, custodial and teaching staff are expected to continue their work despite the impending "second-wave" of the pandemic, with the assurance of precautionary measures such as ventilated classrooms, on-campus tests and copious supplies of hand sanitizer. The university is in crisis. The university is a site haunted by social violence.

A government report published in June states that Black people and people of color in the UK are twice as likely to die from COVID-19 infection than white people (Public Health England 2020). Currently, there are fears that the National Health Service (NHS), the UK's healthcare system, may be at the brink of becoming overwhelmed from the rise in infections. Businesses are largely being kept open across the country, save for case-by-case local lockdown measures, and workers are being forced to risk their lives and the lives of their loved ones for the sake of the economy. This deliberate disregard for human life that we are witnessing is unsurprising. The globally choreographed prioritisation of capital, as states are bound to do, throws in relief what we already know: our vulnerabilities, although differentiated, persist under the spectres of coloniality and racial capitalism.

Hope as an affective or a methodological tool for the classroom may seem an inane proposal at the moment. Many of our students, indeed many of us, are experiencing anger, disappointment, fear and grief. Yet, the problem that Gail Lewis outlined persists: **[End Page 335]**

how to contribute to the work of laying bare for examination and eradication the patterns and processes which give life to and sustain the toxicity of racism, misogyny, homophobia, class hatred and disablism, whilst simultaneously remaining open to those who are 'not me' and their vulnerabilities.

(2014, 31)

This problem has always existed but it is hyper-visible, perhaps more than ever, under the pandemic. It prefigures our students' return to the university, their home lives, their experience of the classroom. A criticality hinged on the ubiquity of violence seems redundant under the current circumstances. It is the unease with this redundancy that has motivated the thesis of this paper. I have argued for the reparative, and the pragmatic utopianism it may be used towards, in order to pause

and take stock of what our knowledge practices, "the having and exposing of it," ultimately *do* (Sedgwick 2003, 123). A methodology of hope is proposed as one such survival and teaching strategy that may propel both student and (student-)teacher towards the *something-to-be-done*. There is an understandable apprehension that a political conviction hinged on utopic thinking is naive, that it is disconnected from the material. However, I have argued that the reparative may compel us to take on the gamble of an educated, utopian hope and remain open to the possibility of disappointment. This is a gamble that must be risked in order to realise the connection—*moment-byslippery-uncertain-moment connection*—that is necessary to endure our collective yet differentiated vulnerabilities. I remain convinced that utopic thinking can be purposeful and strategic, it can be willful in its schemes for new and better pleasures and new and better worlds.

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Notes

1. Rinaldo Walcott, Twitter post, July 2019, 1:22 p.m., https://twitter.com/blacklikewho/status/1152554388201857024.

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