

APORETIC OPENINGS IN LIVING WELL WITH OTHERS: THE TEACHER AS A  
THINKING SUBJECT

by

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is a philosophical inquiry that addresses two questions: First, *what does it mean to live well with others in educational contexts?* And second, *what might the way we engage with this question mean for the possibility of the teacher as a thinking subject?* In support of this exposition, the author draws from the work of Jacques Derrida, Jean Luc Nancy, and Roberto Esposito and, to a lesser extent, Michael Hardt and Alain Badiou. This dissertation is concerned with the predeterminations and determinations that arise from particular conceptualizations of what it means *to live well with others in educational contexts* and how these may prevent or create conditions of possibility for the teacher as a thinking subject, and for the event of thinking. It responds to such commitments in education by engaging with a critique of the concept of community as one of the key concepts that animate educational practices today. It further presents the importance of the recognition of the constitutive aporetic character of community, and also of education. Such recognition, the author argues, is necessary for a conceptualization of the teacher as a thinking subject, and for the teacher as subject to the event of thought.

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*To everything eventful in life*

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Writing begins with a word. This is no divine mystery. The word comes from somewhere. These words come from a pedagogue, an instructor in the early childhood care and education department of a west coast Canadian university, now for six years. In sometimes awkward and always rich conjunction with doctoral study, this has been the birthplace of my so-called immigrant existence on the west coast of Canada. For me, both contexts and their everyday intersection have been places of recognition and exploration of, and difficulty with, Canadian ways of being, foremost as these manifest in education. They are this inquiry's ambient background, its insistent provocation and apparently inexhaustible resource. Through them, I have become aware of the pull of myriad *concepts* that ground, and may indeed limit, education. On account of these, and within them, this study arises. Education, perhaps no more than elsewhere, tends toward being both determined and predetermined by way of the concepts within which it comes to understand, legitimate and advance itself (and is understood, legitimated and advanced). As I will show, education can least abide complacency in this respect, and thus here my words assume the form of an inquiry into that which predetermines the educational project. Thus, its form as a philosophical inquiry is entirely appropriate, as I will illustrate below, to the conceptual determination particular to some constituent aspects of education. It arises from two of them, whose forms are broadly that of the *community*, and that of the *teacher*. These forms of determination are what this work responds to, so that those who inhabit them, who may *become* them, may do so more ethically, more educationally; which are, in all, more in ways we cannot yet begin to know. I would call these ways eventful ways because they are

inaugurated by an event, particularly by the event of thinking, where thinking itself opens the space for thought (Anker, 2006). In other words, it is thinking which brings the possibility of the opening for further thinking. This is a thinking not of *what is*, but rather of *what might be*.

As a philosophical inquiry, this dissertation's concerns are therefore twofold. First, what does it mean to live well with others in educational contexts? And, second, what might the way we engage with this question mean for the possibility of the teacher as a thinking subject? Informed by the late work of Jacques Derrida, this work also draws substantially on that of Jean Luc Nancy and Roberto Esposito, each of whom in innovative ways considered the problematics of community, subjectivity, and the event as that which interrupts any predetermination.

The dissertation inquiry advances in two ways. In one way, it presents a critique of community as one of the key concepts that animate educational practices today. This critical thrust aims to expose the contours of its discourses of legitimation by putting the concept in tension with the philosophical work of Derrida, Nancy, and Esposito. Secondly, this inquiry advances in a deconstructive mode. By deconstruction I understand a mode of inquiry that exposes the existence of fragmentations and what is concealed within concepts that might be taken for granted and perceived as unified totalities.

I do not understand deconstruction as a method. As Derrida (1991) wrote, "deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one" (p. 273). Rather, deconstruction is "something that occurs" (Biesta, 2009, p. 394). Considering this, I would say that the attitude with which I engage with deconstruction is one of what Biesta (2009) calls "witnessing the occurrence of deconstruction," which means "to bear witness to events

of which the condition of possibility is at the very same time the condition of impossibility” (p. 394).

Thus, the deconstructive mode that characterizes this work is intended not to dismiss the concepts but, as Derrida (2001) says, to think their “possibility from another border,” (p. 67). In addition, it exposes how concepts such as community, love, and the event exist in the very impossibility of such concepts. As Caputo (1997) writes, deconstruction is “the relentless pursuit of *the* impossible, which means, of things whose possibility is sustained by their impossibility, of things which, instead of being wiped out by their impossibility, are actually nourished and fed by it” (p. 32, emphasis in original). Sufficient here for introductory purposes, the impossible’s complement to possibility is central to Chapter 2.

This research study is located between the humanities and education, in their crossing and in the flux of their translation. Specifically, my inquiry lies in the interstices of philosophy, philosophy of education, and teacher education. It engages a conversation with authors who have addressed similar problems, challenges, and issues. This includes, but is not limited to, the work of Deborah Britzman (2003, 2009), Linda Farr Darling (2000), Gert Biesta (2001, 2007), William Pinar (1998), Anne Phelan (2009), Sharon Todd (2003, 2010) and Claudia Ruitenberg (2008). My intention, like theirs, is to enable the provocative and generative defamiliarization of education in an effort to find new landscapes from which to think about the field. Such defamiliarization we can find, for example, in Britzman’s psychoanalytical approach to education and her concern with the emotional life of learning and learners. We can also find it in Pinar’s invitation to theorize curriculum as a complicated conversation requiring teachers’ intellectual judgment. Biesta’s expansive explorations of the relationship between education and democracy echo my own concerns. The work of these

authors will be threaded throughout this dissertation to provoke what might have been taken for granted but also as a way to open up new intellectual vistas regarding the concepts studied here and to incite the desire to keep exploring such questions. The desire to contribute to and provoke the ongoing conversation is intertwined with the complexities of the time in which education lives, which might be characterized as a “nightmare” (Pinar, 2004, p. 3) This is a time marked not only by a capricious anti-intellectualism symptomatic of a market culture in which “the school has become a skill-and-knowledge factory (or corporation)” (p. 3) chained by the instrumental coupling of objectives and assessment where teaching is reduced to mere implementation (Pinar, 2011). The time of this writing is a time where what Pinar (2011) calls “the standardized test-making industry” (p. 8) silences subjectivities and ensures cultural conformity. As he writes: “the spontaneity of conversation disappears in the application of ‘cognitive skills’ to solve conceptual puzzles unrelated to either inner experience or public life” (p. 8).

### **Memory as Allegory**

When I consider the two questions that animate this dissertation, my own education comes back to me through different memories. My story is present in this work as an allegory, following Pinar (2011), who writes that “allegory tells a specific story that hints at a more general significance” (p. 4). Allegory, Pinar tells us, is structured by a reciprocity “between subjectivity and history” (p. 6). Indeed, when I think about writing this introduction, one memory insistently emerges. It is so forceful that I have decided to begin the dissertation with it. This memory takes me back to the long corridors of the private

Catholic school were I was educated until my early adolescence. Private Catholic schools for little girls in my Andean birthplace of Ecuador stand first for dogma and privilege. This was my earliest encounter with institutionalized education. Dogma and privilege marked and sustained the collective tissue within those walls. Uniformity was the intellectual diet being fed through a tasteless, generic, lifeless curriculum. Such uniformity was present from the square architecture of the school, to the white gowns of the faceless nuns, to our own uniforms. The school uniform itself was neutralized by a white robe students had to wear on top of it.

Very often, after recess, my cousin Susana would wait for me by the door of our classroom, and just before entering would empty my pockets of napkins, candy bags, pencil shavings, eraser dust, and other miscellaneous items I had found on the playground or the classroom floor. Having emptied my pockets of their mess, Susana would then straighten my white robe. I was now ready to enter the classroom. I did not fit well in such an educational context, and Susana and I knew this in unspoken ways. She would try to make me fit by pulling me into play during recess and later on straightening my clothes, trying to erase my clumsiness and anything that might appear laughable to others. In all this, Susana protected me. Yet, despite her efforts, I continued to be an ambiguous member of that school community. I continued to appear a little “too mystical” or melancholic, a little too serious or just not funny enough, perhaps. While privilege was a cradle of sorts, the reality of a divorced working mother who took her place among working men in my town was indisputable. While I was white and blond like many of the other girls, I was raised by an Italian man my mother had decided not to marry.

I remember tormenting myself with “if only...” propositions. If only I could be seen as less melancholic; if only I could be more light-hearted about things; if only I could have a mother waiting at home to help with my homework; if only I could have a father. If only I could be more like Susana.

### **Education’s “If Only ... ”**

My memories do not speak solely of the compliance and docility which entrusted me to Susana’s loving care. As a pedagogue I find in the passage above multiple thought-provoking considerations about the life of education. In the neoliberal society (see Brown, 2003) that we inhabit today, the field of education is also stopped at the threshold to be cleaned and straightened up. It is arrested before its own arrival to itself. Just as I was stopped at the threshold of my classroom, education is too, in the compliant and docile entrusting of itself to the “love” of what is familiar (legitimated, recognizable) to its project: a technical attitude and a commitment to social engineering.

As in my case, education also suffers the tormenting presence of “if only...” sentences. Pinar (2006), writing about the reluctance of the education field to abandon social engineering, articulates the liturgy:

If only we can find the right technique, the right modification of classroom organization ... if only we teach according to “best practices”, if only we have students self-reflect or if only we develop “standards” or conduct “scientific” research, then students will learn what we teach them. If only we test regularly, “no child” will be “left behind.” (p. 109)

Further on in his text Pinar writes that education might be assumed as “a complex automobile engine” in which, “if only we make the right adjustments—in teaching, in learning, in assessment—it will hum, and transport us to our destination” (p. 110), that being the “promised land of high test scores” or, for the educational left, “a truly democratic society” (p. 110). In other words, once education entrusts itself to a technological attitude (Biesta, 2001) and brings about certain ends, it can, as for me in my childhood, cross the threshold and finally achieve the fulfillment of its project. Otherwise education presents itself as difficult, problematic, deviant, even impossible. These difficulties, as Biesta (2001) writes, are co-opted instead, or tamed, as mere “hindrances ... of a ‘technical’ kind so that in principle, one day when we have found the right way to proceed, they can be overcome” (p. 386).

Susana’s need to clean my robe, to pull me together, as it were, through her act of love and protection against the violence of “not fitting in” is echoed in the field of education. So much thinking about education and the profession of teaching is marked by the anxiety to protect, to shelter from inherent vulnerabilities, impasses, and impracticabilities. Particular regimes of truth dominate educational thought, delimiting the terms within which education and the teaching profession can be prescribed (and proscribed) to exist. Discourses of mastery and certainty, of unity and harmony, mark the profession (Britzman, 2003; Phelan et al., 2006; McWilliam, 2008). No one knows this better than the teacher candidates in the early childhood program in which I teach. Finding themselves “caught between the demands of the normative (what they believe they ought to be and value) and normalisation (what professional others tell them that they should be and value)” (Phelan et al., 2006, p. 162), they do their utmost to hide their vulnerability during their practicum, to appear masterful in

the face of uncertainty of practice, and to avoid conflict at all costs. Lost is the possibility of practicum as a generative place for thinking about the difficulties of teaching and education.

Consequently, for this dissertation it becomes crucial to ask, what if education and, for this matter, also teaching, is difficult, problematic, deviant, or even more: impossible? What if its possibility is precisely that which makes it impossible? What if there is nothing to be protected? Perhaps it is worthwhile to ask what it would mean for education and the teaching profession to cross the threshold of legitimation with their pockets full of messiness and impasses.

Considering the above, the conceptual thread of this dissertation is anchored in the invitation to think education, educational contexts, and the teaching profession as traversed by an aporetic logic. In every chapter of this dissertation the guiding thread is the Derridian concept of aporia. In other words, this dissertation considers education's impossibilities (for example, in the creation of "community") as the very condition for its possibility. Such an invitation wants to join efforts already present in the academic field of education (for example Britzman, 2009; Phelan & Delgado, in press), which seek, as Biesta (2001) advises, "to think differently about what makes education possible and, more specifically, to show that what makes education difficult and sometimes even impossible, is the very condition of education to exist" (p. 386).

### **Being with Others in Educational Contexts, Grammars of Recognition, and the Event.**

The insistent memory I describe above is, among other things, a memory about a particular project of community within an educational context and, in some ways, its own

impossibilities. It is a memory of the grammar of recognition that preceded me in my being with others, for example, being white and coming from a prominent family. Such a grammar shaped what it meant to live well with others in that specific educational context. Education is not exempt from such grammars, as the social norms of any particular context haunt, as Derrida (1994) would say, the horizon of possibility of our being and becoming. Thus, discourses of what constitutes community, education, the teacher and the *raison d'être* of them all prevail in the assumed codes of communal systems.

Teachers, too, are figures on whom grammars of recognition work. From the initial entry into education, teachers learn to see themselves and their practices in the vocabularies or the systems of ideas that are available to them; they must become recognizably competent to others within their educational community. These discourses, to which Britzman (2003) refers as “cultural myths” or organizations of “superficial knowledge” (p. 6), serve to identify and ground the commonality of the teaching profession. Nevertheless, the sense and need for recognition within the “teaching body” (see Derrida, 2002, p. 68) is a strong call, one which consists in the language of this very impossibility, one of accountability and professionalism, of mastery and certainty, of coherence, harmony, and unity.

While this mastery or know-how may guarantee recognizability, it undermines the possibility of interrupting or puncturing what is already established within specific educational contexts; it constrains the possibility that something new could happen, for an *event*, for that which “tears the fabric of the possible” (Derrida, 2005b, p. 455).

I wish to show precisely how a preconceived idea of what community is or how a collective should exist and a routinized deployment of know-how within educational contexts blindly conserves the status quo and diminishes and constrains the possibilities for the event

and for thinking the event in the educative sphere. I am concerned with a status quo that can infuse teacher education with a profound lack of intellectual curiosity, where indeed it seems that thinking is seen as something auxiliary, or even held in a sort of fearful contempt because of its disruptive invitation of doubts, questions, uncertainties, and impasses. All these conditions are held as anathema to professionalism and, more broadly, as signs of not knowing how to live well because they provoke conflict and separation and unsettle the precarious collective harmony.

Thus, often there seems to be a need to eradicate these conditions from our relations with others, to order them, in some vague sense, properly. In my experience as a teacher educator in Canada, teacher education is often thought as the place for giving students strategies, rules, and principles for deciding or mediating among alternatives in a given pedagogical context. I am not arguing against these problematics, but I am concerned with how they might obscure the need to engage with the difficulties and impasses that mark thinking about education and the teaching profession.

Teaching itself is imprinted with impasses. For example, when a teacher's authority is challenged by a child's question, she may become paralyzed or when an activity does not unfold as expected and the teacher does not know how to proceed, she feels a failure. Yet, I argue, these can be openings to think differently about one's practice and one's relationships with students. Considering this, the dissertation proposes a conceptualization of the subject, particularly the teaching subject, as an *aporetic subject*. I will refer extensively to, and indeed develop, such a conception, but for now suffice it to say that by an aporetic subject I mean a teaching subject who lives within two logics. These logics are what Derrida (1992) would call the *logic of the contract*, which is the logic of what is recognizable and therefore

accountable, and the *logic of the promise*, which is the logic of what is not yet realized, of what is not already established or determined. Both logics are necessary and more importantly, valid. Both co-exist within the profession. By this I mean that the logic of the promise haunts the logic of the contract and that they share a spectral relation. The teacher faced with these two valid logics lives an impasse, or what I refer to as an aporetic experience.

Such aporetic experiences are by no means a sign of failure, or even of a doomed subjectivity. Rather, as I will explain in Chapter five, they are the condition of possibility for an event to happen, for something new to take place. Thus this work presents a conception of subjectivity intimately related to that of the event. Indeed, the aporetic experience inaugurates an event, opening up the possibility for the subject to continue the interminable movement of being (as historical subject) and becoming (as what one is not yet). The inscription of the new compels the subject to be a militant of what the event has inaugurated, and to reinscribe her subjectivity again and again. Thus, I am referring to a subject that is not pre-existent and fixed within some sort of human essence. Rather, because the subject is thought as an aporetic subject, she is always failing the process of self-constitution, and that very failure, or impossibility, is the condition for the subject to be.

## **Dissertation Organization**

In pursuing the above, the trajectory of this work proceeds in Chapter 2 with a philosophical inquiry into the concept of aporia. I begin with this analysis because, as noted above, aporia is the conceptual thread that traverses the entire dissertation. I consider aporia

in Derridian terms, that is to say, not only as a state of impasse or uncertainty about how to continue from which one must find a solution or way out, but also as an experience of the impossible—a certain impossible that generatively perturbs or disquiets what is constituted as possible. In other words, I consider that the impasses, vulnerabilities, even disharmonies that stop us in education and that characterize our lives with others in educational contexts might be the very condition of possibility of education and teaching. Thus I trace the concept of aporia from a classical perspective to a Derridian conception, considering not only its meaning but its relation with the other of aporia, or *poros*, and with thinking. In Chapter 3 I undertake a close analysis of the concept of community in its relevance to education. This chapter's purpose is to critically reflect on some of the ways the concept comes to life in educational research and discourse. My interest is in elucidating the aporetic complexities that the concept of community bears. I argue that such complexities are common strangers to thinking about community and education, and particularly community and the teaching subject. These considerations are important for this study because the interest of this dissertation is to speculate and propose questions about how the communal is thought in educational contexts and its relation to the event and to thinking.

After pointing to the multiple ways in which community has been conceived and defined in education, and having related these characterizations to the problematics of myth and desire, I move into an etymological and philosophical analysis that sheds light on the persistent struggles, failures, and interruptions of defining and objectifying community or of building something called community. Consequently, and following Nancy's and Derrida's thought, I analyze, on the one hand, how nostalgia and myth create the common and communal of community, and, on the other, I analyze the aporia of community by showing

how the very act of defining community prevents the realization of its object. It is actually in the interruption of such definitions that community may happen, if it happens at all. This analysis is an important task for the entire project of this dissertation because of the intimate connection between how community is defined and thought and the question of what it means to live well in educational contexts. It is also important, I argue, because the ways that community is imagined affect our relation to knowledge and thinking in teaching and learning contexts.

The relation that we, as communal subjects, have to community, and particularly to the recognition of the impossibility of community as a project to be built and worked upon, becomes important when thinking about educational contexts. In Chapter 4 I posit that a first movement towards recognizing the aporetic character of community would be for educators to explore the myths and nostalgic imaginaries that sustain the ways the collective is thought in educational contexts. Following Britzman (2003), I posit that a way to explore the myths present in conceptions of the collective in educational contexts would be to engage with “superficial knowledge” (p. 29), or the knowledge within which myths are organized. At the heart of such an engagement lives the question of how the collective is thought in educational contexts and of how being-with-others is projected and accessed. I am particularly interested in analyzing mythical commitments to social harmony and a certain moralization of feelings in educational contexts. In other words, I want to look closely at discourses that cast collectivity as that which is successful when finding a certain commonality, when accomplishing a mythic harmony on which the communal might be premised. My interest in this analysis is not to argue for the opposite, but to engage with the question of what becomes impossible in such understandings of the collective. To do so I point toward the relation

between the collective and a certain naturalization of the concept of love by thinking about love as something other than a harmonious unifying force. The intention of such analysis is to think a pedagogical collective where the tendency would not be towards merging in unity but as a context that conserves or proliferates multiplicities, or as space for eventual conditions.

Following these considerations in Chapter 5, my interest turns to thinking about the connections between such a thinking of the collective and the event. More specifically, the chapter springs from an analysis of the concept of event, followed by considerations about thinking, the event, and subjectivity. Here the intention is not only to engage with the event in educational contexts; instead, the focus is on teachers' subjectivity in light of Derridian considerations of the event. This chapter presents the teacher as an aporetic and thinking subject. It asks what would it mean to think of the teaching subject as a subject of the event and a subject who thinks the event. Finally, in the epilogue I close the considerations of this dissertation by returning to the questions with which I open this text.

In sum, the effort of this dissertation is to offer a series of speculations that are moved by the desire to enrich and encourage further thought regarding the question of what it means to live well with others in educational contexts. It is hoped that the considerations presented here will incite broader possibilities for the teacher as a thinking subject.

## Chapter 2: To Interrogate Aporia

*The path of thinking is not from the Known to the Unknown,  
but from the Unknown in the Known to the Unknown in itself.  
(Fernando Pessoa, 1968, p. 20)*

*Na realidade do pensamento humano, essencialmente flutuante  
e incerto, tanto a opinião primária, como a que lhe é oposta,  
são em si mesmas instáveis; não há síntese, pois, nas coisas da  
certeza, senão tese e antítese apenas. Só os Deuses, talvez,  
poderão sintetizar.<sup>1</sup> (Fernando Pessoa, 1968, p. 3)*

*The impossible is matter purified of all materiality. (Cixous,  
2005, p. 61)*

In this chapter, I analyze the concept of aporia, as it, particularly in Jacques Derrida's work on the concept and its logic, represents the guiding thread of this dissertation. Indeed, a certain aporetic logic defines my engagement with the themes that give life to each of the chapters of this dissertation, these themes being community, the event, and teachers as thinking subjects. The analysis presented in this chapter follows the spirit of a philosophical inquiry that hopes to provide, as Claudia Ruitenberg (2010) has suggested, "articulations of

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<sup>1</sup> My tentative translation from Portuguese would be, "In the reality of human thought, which is essentially in flux and uncertain, opinions as well as the ones that oppose them are, in themselves, unstable; therefore, there is no synthesis in matters of certitude, just theses and antitheses. Only the Gods, perhaps, would be able to synthesize."

particular modes of philosophical thinking, reading and writing, that are of value for the elucidation or critique of educational questions” (p. 3).

This is a chapter inked within the shadowy rhythms of long pauses, interruptions, and agonal demands. Its purpose is primarily to trace the concept of aporia from a classical perspective to a Derridian conception. This conceptual analysis considers not only the meaning of aporia but also its relation with the other of aporia: *poros*. The conceptual evasiveness of these terms is the motive behind the cautious tone that accompanies every line of this text, and the reason why it is important to dedicate time to the study of such terms. It is as if my engagement with the complexity of these concepts constantly veils and unveils their meaning, enacting the difficulty it confronts.

Writing, for me, involves experiencing interminable moments of translation, their agonizing impasses and instants of indeterminacy. A long silence ensues; I dwell in my mind, fingers paralyzed before the next key stroke, until I decide upon one word, one meaning, and thus commit my first gesture of betrayal.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why, when writing about aporias, I begin by acceding to the difficulties and impasses that are imprinted on the translation of this word, as well as other, related terms to which I refer in this chapter.

### **A Worn-Out Greek Word**

By acceding to these difficulties and impasses, I am led to begin with an inquiry into the meaning of this word, this worn-out Greek word, as Derrida (1993) calls it in his book *Aporias*. The concept bursts with semantic richness, enough to plunge translators and writers

into aporia itself. And yet, it can suffer the loss of being reductively translated, while the same reductionism may be inflicted on related words, such as, for example, poros.

Aporia is most commonly translated as “without passage, having no way in, out or through” (Gasché, 2007, p. 332), an “insurmountable contradiction in reasoning” (p. 331), a difficult impasse, a gap, a state of uncertainty and doubtfulness about how to continue. Interestingly enough, each of these conceptions points to different intensities of difficulty. Socrates incited aporias by identifying absurd implications in arguments. Derrida locates the aporetic in such everyday concepts as the gift, hospitality, or death. In education the aporetic may arise unremarked in moments of uncertainty, confusion, or disorientation.

Often, these particular understandings of aporia are associated with a type of failure or a weakness of thought and, perhaps, in many cases, with shame or embarrassment infused with anxiety, precisely due to the poignancy of the contradiction and the apprehension of it as problematic. To be in a state of perplexity or uncertainty and hesitation is typically felt as something from which one needs a solution or an urgent departure. “Being caught up in the anxiety of indecision,” Anker (2006) says, “is usually thought of as a sign of indeterminate being, and thus viewed as a weakness of mind” (p. 34).

From very early in our lives solutions and decisions seem to mark the educated subject. We need to make determined decisions, and as fast as possible. One learns to cling to decisions; they become the scaffolds and milestones of growth; we are assessed through our expediency to decide. Decisions become the sign of our autonomy. Like a little child who hangs on to the mother’s leg to stand up, we grab onto these decisions as a sign of independence and mastery, and an identity between them and us haunts any new possibility. And perhaps, just on rare occasions, one considers the consequences of holding too tightly to

them. Rarely are we taught to think about the impossibility of a decision. It is an inconvenient consideration. Before an aporia, then, one needs, or is compelled to make, a decision, to find a poros, which is translated as a “passage,” “expediency,” a “way out,” or a “path.”<sup>2</sup>

An initial observation, or provocation, now requires the acknowledgement of how dismissive conceptions diminish and obscure the promise of aporia and poros and, I will suggest, makes problematic the task of locating a particular meaning to each of these words. It is here, then, that a silhouette of a question forms in my thinking: Have these understandings been the only ways that the concept of aporia has been thought?

A first movement, shall I say a step, into this question—and consequently into an older meaning of the word—can take place through some brief comments on a Greek understanding of aporia. I will do so by drawing from close readings of two works: *Aporetic Experience* by Rodolphe Gasché (2007) and *Beyond Aporia?* by Sarah Kofman (1988).

A significant claim comes from Gasché (2007), who writes that it is “important to remember that it was in no way an embarrassment for the Greeks to reach a conceptual and argumentative impasse” (p. 332). This citation is significant for many reasons, but for now I want to point to its stark contrast with the common and contemporary understanding of aporia to which I refer above, as weakness, embarrassment, or failure.

The Greeks considered an argumentative impasse, or aporia, as intimately related to philosophy and thinking. Gasché writes:

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<sup>2</sup> Poros is also the word root for pore, the minute opening in the skin and outlet for bodily perspiration. Regarding this connotation Michael Anker (2006) makes an interesting analogy when thinking about a pore “as passage that occurs from the inside to the outside of the body and vice versa. In this sense we usually come to think of passage as that which promotes circulation, movement, and a type of bodily breathing which is in correlation with the health of a living organism. We also tend to favor the idea that the mind should function according to principles of passage” (pp. 33-34).

Whereas the skeptics valorized *aporia* as the only possible outcome of all philosophical endeavors, the argumentative impasse or initial difficulty constitutes for Plato and Aristotle the heuristic point of departure of philosophy itself. (p. 332)

For Plato, *aporia* is the situation in which the ignorant acknowledges and becomes aware of her ignorance. Thus it provokes the search for the truth. Sarah Kofman (1988) writes that, in general terms, Plato's definition of *aporia* is a "veritable 'storm of difficulties' which has to be faced at one or another moment 'in a dialogue'" (p. 11). In Gasché's (2007) words, "we have an *aporia* whenever we are faced with two equally valid, but mutually exclusive arguments" (p. 332). Thus, discourses seem to be able to forebear and even draw nourishment from aporetic disturbances. Socrates' maieutical dialogues could be one example of such. In them, Socrates "infects" the other with the same perplexities he suffers and, as a midwife will do, he helps his interlocutor to find a *poros* and, if possible, to be liberated from aporetic pains, if only temporarily.

In Aristotle, *aporia* is the leap from which one begins one's investigations; it stimulates the person to ponder the different solutions to an impasse.

By having to confront conflicting but equally valid arguments about an issue, the thinker is compelled to sharpen his understanding of the problem and to explore various routes (*diaporia*) so as to work out a solution (*euporia*) to what appears to be an unsolvable dilemma. (Gasché, 2007, p. 333)

The Greek tradition gives light to an understanding of *aporia* that today seems to be veiled by the "weakness" and "faultiness" that attends being beset by contradiction and impasse. The Greek understanding of *aporia* as having a "heuristic, preparatory, propedeutic

function for philosophical thinking” (Gasché, 2007, p. 333) is particularly the one that I want to emphasize here. Interestingly enough, as Gasché further observes, this is also “the conception of aporia that Derrida has in mind when he refers to it as a Greek word” (p. 333), a reference to which I gesture at the beginning of this chapter.

Sarah Kofman (1988), in her consideration of the Greek conceptualization of the concept, writes that aporia takes us to dwell in a sea of perplexity, that it disorients and perplexes us. It is the experience of non-passage which drags one into the aporetic state. Kofman describes it as a state that

always arises as one moves from a familiar environment or space to a space to which one is accustomed, during a transition from below to above or from above to below, from darkness to light or from light to darkness. In both cases falling into an aporia is like falling into a well of perplexity and becoming a laughing stock for bystanders. (pp. 19-21)

So, this is a movement from the familiar and the comfort of the “I know” to the excruciating uncertainty of the unfamiliar and its estrangement. This is the movement through which the aporetic state arises.

Here it is important to note that, for Plato, there are two ways of falling into an aporetic state and one must distinguish between these two types of aporias, a good one and a bad one: philosophical aporia and sophistical aporia. It is interesting to note that, for Kofman, this difference is profoundly related to the distinction in Plato between *episteme* and *tekhne*.

Before continuing with these two different aporias, let us be reminded again that one can be grateful to the Greeks because they had a conception of aporia that did not understand the aporetic state as a weakness related to the anxiety of contradiction. Nevertheless it is also

important to note that one could trace the subsequent reduction and condemnation of aporia to Plato's very distinction between the good and the bad aporia. As Gasché (2007) writes,

Plato's verdict, in the name of philosophical truth (*episteme*), on the sophist's (and the rhetor's) amazing power and professional skills (*tekhne*) at systemically exhibiting and creating aporia is without compromise. (p. 333)

According to Plato, the good aporia is the philosophical one and the bad aporia is the one that is connected more with a certain art of inventiveness, a certain *tekhne*, which is used by sophists and thus is a sophistical aporia. The sophist sets aporias as traps; his discourses serve to disorient the other. Through discourse the sophist creates chaos.

The philosophical aporia, on the other hand, is not used to disorient; it stimulates one to find a way out of the impasse and to create new understandings:

The good, or philosophical, aporia is not, like the one of the sophist, an end in itself, a means of seduction or of subversion of the *logos* and its order. Unlike the latter it does not obstruct understanding. On the contrary it summons and is an incitement for us to find a solution, to invent a way out, and to get on to the right track. Philosophical aporia is a fertile impasse in that it forces one to seek a way out (Gasché, 2007, p. 334).

Now, Kofman (1988) argues that the characteristics of the sophist which Plato criticizes are actually not so removed from those of the philosopher; the philosopher may as well use and be indebted to the skills of the sophist. Philosophy as *tekhne* has the same objective, that is, to invent a *poros*. Kofman writes: "The wily resourceful intelligence that lies at the origin of all *tekhnes* is also one of the ancestors of philosophy" (p. 9). This kinship, she continues, "gives philosophy the same soteriological finality as a *tekhne*: To discover

*poroi* which can free men from *aporia*, from all sorts of situations from which there is no way out” (p. 9).

### **The Question of Poros**

So, the philosopher and the sophist have the same purpose, according to Kofman: to find a way out. Indeed, the aporetic state nudges one to discover *poroi*. A poros must take place. Some *mechane* or *tekhne* must be discovered.

This temporary passage out of *aporia*—*poros* or *poroi*—is a path out from indeterminacy, out from a situation defined by not having a way out. However, *poros* is not to be confused with the common path or road, which would be *odos*. *Odos* is a path on solid and stable ground, whereas *poros* is a transitory passage in the liquid quality of oceans and rivers. Kofman (1988) elaborates this quality:

Poros refers only to a sea route or a route down a river, to a passage opened up across a chaotic expanse which it transforms into an ordered, qualified space by introducing differentiated routes, making visible the various directions of space, by giving direction to an expanse which was initially devoid of all contour, of all landmarks. (p. 8)

Thus, *poros* is as a path that is found in water; it introduces different directions; it brings light and contour to chaos. *Poros* “creates a sense of temporary stability out of the context of instability, a sense of temporary order in the midst of disorder” (Anker, 2006, p. 37). Here I wish to stress temporality as a characteristic of *poros*. Furthermore, because *poros* is a path

defined as if in water (contrary to *odos*), we should note in it a particular quality: There is no trace before or after; all traces left disappear in the liquid essence of a sea and rivers.

To say that a *poros* is a way to be found across an expanse of liquid is to stress that a *poros* is never traced in advance, that it can always be obliterated, that it must always be traced anew, in unprecedented fashion. (Kofman, 1988, p. 10)

So, this route, this *poros*, is momentarily defined or fixed, “for it is always exposed to turbulence from which it arose” (Anker, 2006, p. 38). *Poros* happens always anew, it “must always be traced anew,” as an exit that appears without precedent, unexpectedly, in an always indeterminate and shifting context. *Poros* occurs as if in what the Greeks consider the aporetic place par excellence—the sea—which always is, as Kofman (1988) points out, quoting Detienne and Vernant, “widowed of routes” (p. 10).<sup>3</sup>

*Poros*, in contrast to *odos*, has an inventive form. It emerges from the untraced and boundless space of *aporia*. *Poros* is the decision that creates a new path where none existed before. From the indeterminate doubtfulness and the uncertain space of *aporia* a decision defines a trail.

Multiple questions spring from this consideration of *poros* and *odos*. Trails, paths, ways out, necessary determinacies, decisions, passages, steps, solutions, etc., all lead me, perhaps with the inevitability of their own logic, to raise questions regarding educational thought. If, for instance, one considers educational thought as a path, would it be an *odos* or a *poros*? Have the dominant tendencies of educational thought become destinations carved in

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<sup>3</sup> As much as I hear the promise of this characteristic of *poros*, I also wonder if it becomes ahistorical. Is it possible, this lack of traces, this mourning of routes? Or is this a characteristic of the logic of the impossible? Is *poros*'s lacking of traces just a momentary characteristic? For even in water the path that is made appears; it traces itself momentarily. Perhaps it is always new and yet contains the old traces that dissolve in the water.

the necessary quest for certainty? I wonder how much of our teaching happens as if we had already arrived at a destination.

### **Poros and Metis**

Not surprisingly, an important question arises: How do we find a poros? How do we find a way out from an intractable conceptual impasse that is difficult and indeterminate? How can we free ourselves from aporia? Or perhaps one should ask a different question, a more enduring question, and one that is central to the argument in subsequent chapters: Must we find a way out?

Earlier I indicated how Sarah Kofman points out that for a poros or a way out to be found, a *tekhne* must be discovered or invented. Using the myth of Metis from Plato's *Symposium*, Kofman tells us that it is Metis who helps us to discover and find a poros. The mythic Metis is Poros's mother and the first wife of Zeus, who swallowed her when she was pregnant with Athena. According to Detienne and Vernant (1991), Metis personifies the type of intelligence that the early Greeks associated with "flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism" (as cited in Gasché, 2007, p. 336). Gasché (2007) writes that such intelligence is "required by the practical arts, ranging from that of the navigator to the illusionism of the rhetors and sophists" (p. 336).

It is this wily or cunning intelligence that allows us, according to Kofman (1988), to discover a poros and depart from the aporetic impasse. It is Metis

who allows us to blaze a trail, a poros, a way, to find a path through obstacles, to discover an expedient (poros) to find a way out (poros) from a situation in which there is no way out, which is aporetic. (p. 9)

Gasché proposes an interesting critique of Kofman's argument regarding Metis and her relationship with poros and philosophy. His uneasiness with her argument lies in the reductive implications that appear when considering the tight relationship between Poros and Metis. According to Gasché (2007), Poros's filial descent from Metis implies that the

invention of answers to unsolvable problems proceeds essentially by means of *mechane* and *tekhnai*, in other words, with the help of 'technical' traps, tricks, ruses, plots, or stratagems that resort even to aporias in order to accomplish the intended goal. (p. 336)

Thus the only difference there might be between philosophy and sophistry is perhaps just a higher sophistication in philosophical argumentations and solutions to aporias. Such solutions, according to Gasché, "would only be highly cogent tricks of an art of cunning dissimulating itself, in what amounts to one more stratagem, under the mask of episteme" (p. 337). Philosophy, then, is just the masking of a wily intelligence that will be seen as episteme. And, as Gasché suggests of Kofman's argument, if this masquerade has been possible it is specifically because of the affiliation of Metis and philosophy. Gasché's critique suggests that to give such a singular importance and emphasis to a wily or cunning intelligence as the one that helps us to find a way out from aporia, a *technique* to find a poros, risks presenting a very narrow conception not only of aporia but also of philosophy. As he asks:

If, as I have suggested, philosophical thinking is rooted in aporetic wonder, or starts with a seemingly hopeless difficulty for which it must invent a solution, do we not misrepresent philosophy's achievements in claiming that all it does is invent expedients to clear a way out of a hopelessly difficult situation? (p. 338)

This is already a stinging critique of Kofman's use of the myth of Metis when thinking about the concept of aporia and its interrelation with philosophy. The part of Gasché's critique that resonates most with my thinking, however, and to which I am most grateful, lies in the following question he raises when writing:

Is the aporetic wonder in which the ignorant comes face to face with a position that contradicts his own but that seems equally valid not rather an incentive to deepen his or her understanding of the issue, and to thus give him or herself the means to solve the problem? (p. 338)

This question brings light to considering the aporetic state not just as a state from which one must find an expedient solution, a way out of the impasse; rather it invites us to think of aporetic wonder as a state where a particular thinking happens, where one goes deeper into the difficulty itself so as to understand something new. In this sense, Gasché's argument is very meaningful to finding deeper understandings of the concept of aporia, particularly when he adds that aporetic wonder

is supposed to provoke a deepening of the difficulty itself. Such a more thorough understanding is concomitant with the opening onto the philosophical and the very background against which the invention of a

solution, which is different from contrivance of evasion, becomes meaningful to begin with. (p. 339)

To steep oneself in the difficulty of the aporetic itself, and not to understand aporia merely as the impasse from where one must find an expedient way out—“a contriving evasion”—is one of the most compelling invitations in Gasché’s thinking, and one which will be echoed under different speculations in subsequent chapters. The invitation concerns an understanding of aporia as transpiring as inventive force. This “invention of a solution” (p. 339) exists not as the result of a plot to be liberated from aporetic pains, but to deepen aporetic wonder by way of a sort of commitment foremost to deeper understanding. Here again is the echo of that understanding of aporia alluded to earlier, one that conceives aporia as having a heuristic, preparatory, propedeutic function for thinking.

Aporia, otherwise a much maligned and thus obscured conceptual impasse, in this understanding becomes “rather than the ruin of thought ... the very possibility of thought itself” (Gasché, 2007, p. 331). This conception of aporia as the very possibility for thought itself excites my thinking in multiple ways. It is an excitement that unleashes itself through the questions this understanding awakens. If we understand aporia as a space of possibility, then is not this an invitation, indeed perhaps a demand, to consider aporia not just from the viewpoint of the imperative to solutionistic possibilities which might exist for it? Or, even more, beyond a transitorial passage? Can aporia be considered heuristic and preparatory for thinking, as in the classical tradition, but also as something more? And what could and should that be?

As a mode of engaging with these questions I turn to Derrida. His writing veils and unveils in my thinking, as a continuum, incessant and pernicious, as all impossibility seems to be.

### **Derrida and The Experience of Aporia**

Derrida considers aporia as inherent in the possibility of thinking, and he also respects the classical understanding of the concept, although, as Gasché (2007) points out, with important differences. For Gasché, in Derrida, aporia,

rather than being understood from the vantage point of its possible solutions, the unpassability that it signifies according to its concept is taken seriously.

An aporia is an aporia only if it is truly *amechanon*. As a consequence, the aporia cannot be made to withdraw backstage after it has provided the possibility for rigorous and consistent thinking. Instead of being a transitory phase toward thinking, it becomes, in Derrida, the very “medium” of thinking.

(p. 334)

Thus, it is the impassability which becomes the focus for Derrida. The impracticability—*amechanon*—is actually the notion through which Derrida thinks about the concept of aporia. For Derrida, to experience aporia is not about the act of overcoming an impasse, of stepping out of aporia, of crossing the aporetic limit, as much as it is an act of enduring. Aporia becomes “the very ‘medium’ for thinking” (Gasché, 2007, p. 334)—and, importantly, I would say, not only for thinking but for any new possibility—by sustaining aporia itself. Derrida’s consideration “seeks to hold out the experience of the aporia without

the temptation of giving in to the desire to get or find a quick fix, to what, by definition, ought to be an impasse” (Gasché, 2007, p. 345).

If one is to experience aporia, instead of finding a quick fix to an impasse, then would this ask for thinking differently about the relation between aporia and poros? And is this thinking of the relation differently what helps us understand how aporia is the very medium for thinking, for thinking the possibility of new possibilities?

### **The Interminable Experience**

Indeed, aporia is thought by Derrida (1993) as an interminable experience. He writes: “An aporia is neither an ‘apparent nor illusory’ antinomy, nor a dialectizable contradiction in the Hegelian or Marxist sense, nor even a ‘transcendental illusion in a dialectic of the Kantian type’, but instead an interminable experience” (p. 16). Perhaps in the conception of aporia as an interminable experience lies the invitation to see them, aporia and poros, as coexisting and not as a simple binary opposition. If aporia is neither an antinomy nor a contradiction to be overcome through dialectics, it evokes again a different thinking; as nondialectical, this thinking involves seeing aporia and poros as concepts “which continuously fold over and into one another. In fact, the folding interplay (a non dialectical movement) from one within the other gives each of them their own possibility of periodic and independent expression” (Anker, 2006, p. 35).

Poros is no longer the synthesis, the passage as a necessary step out, or an oppositional movement against aporetic anguish. With Derrida we are given to think about aporia as something more enduring, and indeed both intractable and indispensable. As he

writes when reflecting about his work on aporias, “I was trying to move not against or out of the impasse but, in another way, *according to* another thinking of the aporia, one perhaps more enduring” (Derrida, 1993, p. 13 emphasis in original).

It is precisely this necessity to endure that echoes into the concept of aporia as an interminable experience. Derrida (1993) suggests that aporia can be thought not only as the impasse that requires the discovery of a poros, or even of a dialectical move as a way out. Aporia needs to be thought as “an interminable resistance or reminder” (p. 19), as an experience that calls for endurance, or as a “passion” (p. 19). Thus it is the resistance and reminder that sustain any act of endurance, any passion from which may arise the experience of thought. Derrida asks, what if aporia “remained in a certain way irreducible, calling for an endurance, or shall we say an *experience* other than that of consisting in opposing, from both sides of an indivisible line” (p. 14).

At the risk of appearing repetitive in my argument, I want to stress that Derrida does not argue that the concept of aporia should *not* be thought through a dialectical move, as something to be surpassed or as a crossing of an oppositional line. Rather he is inviting us *also* to consider the experience aporia more patiently: “Unlike classical philosophical thought, with its eagerness to make a quick deal with aporias because it is intent on overcoming them as soon as possible, this more enduring thinking of aporias is less impatient” (Gasché, 2007, p. 345). This understanding of aporia, this other thinking of the aporia—less impatient, more ambivalent—is, as we shall see, a thinking that constantly bares its own impossibility. As Gasché suggests, it is a thinking which “models itself after, in conformity with, or along with the aporia” (p. 345). Derrida (1993) is inviting us to consider

the “experience of the aporia as such” (p. 15). This is not an issue of either/or, but rather one of a different gesture altogether, one of a certain experience of the interminable.

### **Paralysis and Excess**

Now, this experience of the aporia—this interminable experience—can be characterized as doomed paralysis, as an interminable suspension. But Derrida thinks about the aporetic paralysis in ways that are not necessarily as negative or undesirable as might be suggested by prevailing conceptions of immobility.

Derrida (1993) writes that aporia—this non-passage which “concerns the impossible or the impracticable” (p. 13)—paralyzes one

in a way that is not necessarily negative: before a door, a threshold, a border, a line, or simply the edge or the approach of the other as such. It should be a matter of (*devrait y aller du*) what, in sum, appears to block our way or to separate us in the very place where *it would no longer be possible to constitute a problem*, a project, or a projection, that is at the point where the very project or the problematic task becomes impossible and where we are exposed. (p. 12, emphasis in original)

First, and perhaps as a detour, I consider it necessary to indicate to what Derrida refers when he writes about a problem or a project that can no longer be constituted. This is necessary because it is important to indicate what Derrida understands as a problem and why he puts this word in tension with the concept of aporia. He writes about the concept of a problem by referring to its Greek meaning, as *problema*.

In *Aporias*, Derrida (1993) writes that a *problema* can signify projection or protection, a protection that can also mean a barrier or shield that can guard us. Thus, *problema* is understood as something that is in front of us, in front of oneself, as

the projection of a project, of a task to accomplish, or as the protection created by a substitute, a prosthesis that we put forth in order to represent, replace, shelter, or dissimulate ourselves, or so as us to hide something unavowable—like a shield (also means shield, clothing as barrier or guard barrier) behind which one guards oneself *in secret* or *in shelter* in case of danger. (p. 12, emphasis in original)

This understanding of *problema* and its tension with *aporia* imposes a pause to think about education and, more particularly, about teaching. Education, it seems to me, is *problematic* in the senses that the word *problema* takes in Greek. Is not education possessed by interminable projections thrown in front of itself, objects of its inquiry which it can know, secure, and guard as its problems? Education is haunted by how it projects itself as a validated and validating social-science discipline and, perhaps, in this effort, sheltering itself in the shields of “stronger” and “more validated” disciplines such as psychology with its measurements and applied research. An example of such projections and protections can be the ideas that circumscribe who is a good teacher and thus limit and mark the borders of who the teacher is allowed to be; in other words, they proscribe the limits of recognition. In my experience, both

as a teacher of student teachers and as a pedagogista<sup>4</sup>, I encounter in teachers and student teachers the anxiety to protect, to shelter from vulnerability and uncertainty through a tight demarcation of the limits of truth in which this profession ought to exist. We perhaps forget, as Britzman (2007) writes, “that all of us are subject to the radical uncertainty of being with others in common and uncommon history, and this being with other beings makes development uneven and uncertain” (p. 2).

Working as a pedagogista, I find some tendencies in educational thought and, in particular, in the way teacher education is conceived, which refuse to expose student teachers to the uncertainties of teaching. Thus, in creating borders that should not be exceeded, in the name of mastery and certainty, in the name of, dare I say, good conscience, a profession is both delimited and undertaken (Phelan et al., 2006). Such borders undoubtedly also mark how thinking should take place and what is considered valid as educational research. Thus, at the same time, thinking at those borders could be very meaningful since it is precisely at those borders that one can understand and “[call] into question the way we understand the identity of what it encircles“ (Borradori, 2003b, p. 146). By raising these questions I am not suggesting that education should not be problematic. But education is not only problematic; it is also abundant with constant indeterminacies and impracticabilities. Teaching is imprinted with aporetic experiences, or non-passages, with an aporetic vulnerability and ontological

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<sup>4</sup> A pedagogista is an Italian professional figure that has aroused much interest in the last ten years in North America, particularly in early childhood contexts, due to its pivotal presence in the world-famous Reggio Emilia pedagogical approach. A pedagogista in an Italian context is someone who has a degree equivalent to a master’s and has been educated to be involved in educational projects by working often within a team of other professionals from teachers to counselors or even doctors in medical contexts as well as working in foundations or agencies such as the Ministry of education or other government departments. The way the pedagogista works in such educational projects is profoundly contextual but generally the pedagogista is one who brings an explicitly pedagogical value to the decisions that are being made within such projects. Her training is quite theoretical in main disciplines such as pedagogy, philosophy, history, sociology, and psychology. A pedagogista, I would say, is someone who devotes herself to thinking about education and curriculum.

moments where one is profoundly disarmed. Such exposure happens in ethical situations of which there are many in education, for example, teachers who are paralyzed when their authority is challenged by a child's unexpected questioning, or by the vulnerability of assuming that authority and being its agent alone.

Ironically, perhaps the strength and durability of the multiple demarcations that shape the contour of education and of teaching are symptomatic of these aporetic experiences. Such demarcations seem to me to end up being autoimmunitary acts: They destroy what they claim to protect; the aggression comes from within.

Aporia then, as the interminable experience, is where a problem—a problema—can no longer be constituted. It is where one is exposed “absolutely without protection, without problem, and without prosthesis” (Derrida, 1993, p. 12). It is where borders or limits of any kind—state borders, ontological, epistemological, and psychological borders—behind which one can shelter succumb and, because of this, where our singularity is nakedly exposed. As Derrida writes, this exposure happens in our “absolute and absolutely naked uniqueness, that is to say disarmed, delivered to the other, incapable even of sheltering ourselves behind what could still protect the interiority of a secret” (p. 12). The absence of problems in the aporetic place is not because one can find diligent solutions but because one

could no longer find a problem that would constitute itself and that one would keep in front of oneself, as a presentable object or project, as a protective representative or a prosthetic substitute, as some kind of border still to cross or behind which to protect oneself. (Derrida, 1993, p. 12)

So an aporia, an aporetic place, touches the naked flesh of our absolute vulnerability; we appear at the limits, at the borders, without being sheltered or guarded anymore. Right there,

in the place where paralysis takes place, where one seems to be blocked, such a block becomes an appearance and not a necessity, since this place is also the very place where a problem cannot be constituted anymore. Here, the affirmation that Derrida (1993) gestures towards is to accentuate the idea that the experience of the aporia is “not necessarily a failure or a simple paralysis, the sterile negativity of the impasse. It is neither stopping at it or overcoming it” (p. 32). Parenthetically Derrida adds: “When someone suggests to you a solution for escaping an impasse, you can be almost sure that he is ceasing to understand, assuming that he had understood anything up to that point” (p. 32).

Thus, the necessity of considering aporias not as finding a way out of an impasse, not as a step to cross the limit or line or as a negative impasse that needs solution, but as—and here I reconnect to what I was writing about previously—interminable resistance at the moment of facing the opening of experiencing, patiently, the piercing of the passion for and of the impossible. This is not a difficult endurance for its own sake, but an experiencing a situation that is pregnant with generative possibilities. Perhaps I am thinking here about the difference between an educator who is programmatic in decisions and an educator who is less decisive, more inventive, when facing undecidable or impracticable moments.

I must point to the intersection I find between Derrida’s understanding and a more classical consideration of the experience of the aporia, each as something quite different from a sterile place. I think both are consonant in pointing to the aporetic place as a place of opening and supplement, and not as a place of negative suspension.

As I mentioned earlier, in Kofman (1988) the perplexity infused in the aporia stimulates one’s inventiveness to find a poros that must be traced always anew. The aporetic space might be an agonal space. This agony does not come from emptiness but rather is

infused in plenitude and fullness, which perhaps come from the perplexity itself and the voyage of exploration that it becomes, to use an exquisite expression from Kofman. In this sense, and following Kofman, I think of aporia as a space of plenitude, of infinite inventiveness, because it pushes one to generate a way, a passage that weaves and unweaves interminably, a temporary way, a way that never becomes the only way and where, perhaps one could say, thought is renewed. That the aporetic space is fecund and is manifested in being able to think again, in being able to be at once the same and new, indicates the same gesture we find in Derrida and to which I referred above as the weaving and unweaving within the aporetic experience.

As we have seen, this experience of the aporia in Derrida (1993) is not understood necessarily as paralysis or as the negative burden of the impasse. It is not about being expedient in overcoming it. Aporia is not thought of as an oppositional moment from which one must find a way out. It is thought of as the enduring experience of the impossible, as “the impossible, the impossibility, as what cannot pass (*passer*) or come to pass (*se passer*): it is not even the non-pass, the not-step, but rather the deprivation of the *pas*” (p. 23).

Here we must consider the possibility of an impossibility—of the impossible—as the thinking of the aporia. No longer the oppositional moment between these two figures (possible and impossible), but in aporia as the tormenting of the one by the other. And it is in this disquietude of the impossible and proper to every possibility that an aporetic supplement takes place.

## The Possible-Impossible and the Aporetic Supplement

The possibility of an impossibility: Can this be thought? Can the possible, what is already foreseeable, bear its own impossibility? Can this be thought at all? Or perhaps it may, but only by way of aporia? And where does the relationship between aporia and poros stand in this thinking of the possibility of an impossibility? Derrida (1993) asks:

Is this an aporia? Where do we situate it? In the impossibility or in the possibility of an impossibility (which is not necessarily the same thing)? What can the possibility of the impossibility be? How can we think that? How can we *say* it while respecting logic and meaning? How can we approach that, live, or *exist* it? How does one *testify* to it? (p. 68, emphases in original)

Here, Derrida's questioning points to how inevitably, when thinking about aporias, one needs to understand the relation between possible and impossible. Derrida has considered aporia through different concepts, as, for example, the aporias of the gift, hospitality, justice, and democracy. Here, I wish to dwell more deeply in Derrida's considerations of the relation between possible and impossible and the aporetic supplement. I will do so through what Derrida considered the aporia *par excellence*: Death—our being-for-death—we all are traversed by such an aporia. In fact, we originate marked by it.

It is not by chance that the book *Aporias* is in many ways an analysis of the concepts of *Dasein* and *death* as they are found in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Actually, it is through the analysis of these concepts that one can follow the conceptual movements that Derrida makes to consider the aporetic supplement in the coupling of the possible-impossible. And it is through this analysis, through thinking about *Dasein* and *death* that I leap toward the attempt to understand the aporetic thinking of the possible as impossible.

In his argument Derrida starts with a consideration and a critique of the meaning of possible, or of the possibility of the possible. Specifically, in *Aporias*, he initially refers to the possible as what will happen, as an imminence linked to the future, as what we expect to happen or also as an ability, a capacity or potentiality. As he writes,

this possibility of the possible brings together *on the one hand* the sense of the virtuality or of the imminence of the future, of the “that can always happen at any instant,” *one must expect it, I am expecting it, we are expecting it*, and *on the other hand*, the sense of ability of the possible as that of which I am capable, that for which I have the power, the ability or the potentiality. (p. 62, emphases in original)

Possibility happens inside the realm of knowledge and predictability, inside the realm of what has been thought and what one is able to think. Now, Derrida writes that these ways of understanding the possible are insufficient when thinking about *Dasein*. He contends that they “neglect, forget, and misrecognize the essence of *Dasein*” (p. 63) which “as entity is precisely the *possibility*, the being-possible” (p. 63). As being, *Dasein* is not an object or an entity that we can touch or that lies in front of us to be known or anticipated, it is rather *being-possible*. *Dasein* is the fact of our existence.

Thus, the *being-possible* is the being proper of *Dasein*. But also, at the same time, Derrida (1993) tells us that death is “*Dasein*’s most proper possibility” (p. 64). Thus, we have this most impelling formulation: “Being-possible is proper to *Dasein* as entity, and death is the most proper possibility of this possibility” (p. 64).

In other words, to the *possibility of being*—to *Dasein*—*death* is put as a complement, an impossible complement. It is the complement of impossibility to possibility. It is in this

complement that Derrida finds the possible being tormented by the call of the impossible.<sup>5</sup> It is where the impossible is thought as an impossible complement that never leaves in peace what is already constituted as possible. Or, in other words, it is where possibility happens within impossibility: “The impossibility adds an impossible complement, a complement of impossibility to possibility. Insofar as it is its most proper possibility, and precisely as such, death is also for Dasein, Heidegger ultimately says, the possibility of an impossibility” (Derrida, 1993, p. 68). This is death, as I pointed to before, as the most *proper possibility* of *Dasein*, and precisely as such, death is also the possibility of an impossibility. Precisely, “since being-toward-death is Dasein’s ultimate possibility, Heidegger calls it the possibility of impossibility” (Gasché, 2007, p. 345).

Here an impossible complement exists, and Derrida quotes Heidegger: “As potentiality-for-being, *Dasein* cannot outstrip the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein” (Heidegger, 1962, as cited in Derrida, 1993, p. 69). Here it is important to pause, a long pause, and ponder the kind of possibility of impossibility to which Derrida is referring. He writes of it as “the possibility of a being-able-not-to or of a no-longer-being-able-to, but by no means the impossibility of a being-able-to (p. 69). In this *being-able-not-to* we can listen to the possible-impossible complement (being able—not to) we listen to the possibility within impossibility.<sup>6</sup> Particularly, though, I dwell with this qualification: “but by no means the impossibility of a being-able-to.” The distinction is crucial. I think Derrida is pointing to a distance that the aporetic affords, a distance that, I

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<sup>5</sup> In reference to this *torment* Derrida (2005a) writes: “Why this allusion to a *torment*? It names a suffering or a passion, an affect that is both sad and joyful, the instability of an anxiety belonging to any possibilization. This would submit to being haunted by the specter of its impossibility, by mourning itself: the mourning of itself borne in itself, but which also gives it its life or its survival, its very possibility. For this impossibility opens its possibility, it leaves a trace, both a chance and a threat, in what it makes possible” (p. 88).

<sup>6</sup> If one thinks within the logic of *poros* and *aporia* then, it seems to me that this citation is precisely indicating their coexistence as a transformative both/and rather than as a binary of opposition or as a solutionistic movement where one defeats and erases the other.

suggest, sustains itself in the experiencing of the aporia. Perhaps, then, it is a distance that is an elsewhere? It is a distance but yet it is still subject to something, it is a distance without a break as a paralysis. Derrida purposely points to this distinction when he immediately thereafter writes: “the nuance is thin, but its very fragility is what seems to me both decisive and significant” (p. 68).

It is in its fragility that one can hear the absolute uniqueness of the nuance. Indeed, the aporetic complement is very thin, it constantly veils and unveils in this silence of me with me. This fragility refers to the complement that the impossible brings to the possible. It is a complement that is not impossibility per se, but rather, perhaps, one could say that it is an impossible that creates an aporetic vacuum that gives space for an excess that reserves the unthinkable—the Event.

This excess is marked or happens through what Derrida (1993) writes as “the manifestation of the possible *as* impossible” (p. 70, emphasis in original). Here, I want to underline that it is this *as* that makes all the difference. Something to be considered absolutely possible must be impossible. Impossibility is the condition for possibility. This *as* invaginates the indication of the promise of what is not, of “what cannot be accounted for, totalized, absolutized, or subordinated to the unity of one” (Anker, 2006, p. 52). I am pointing here to the excess that comes from elsewhere, from the yet to come. Thus, it is not only a paradox, it is possibility as impossibility. This *as* means

that the possibility is both unveiled and penetrated *as* impossibility. It is not only the paradoxical possibility of a possibility of impossibility: it is possibility as impossibility. What is thus both unveiled and unveiled by, for, and during a penetrating advance, is this possibility *as* impossibility, this

death as the most proper possibility of *Dasein* considered as its proper impossibility. (Derrida, 1993, p. 70)

The excess is in the impossibility and in the “yet to come” that is installed by the impossible. It is of a yet to come that is “not the anticipation of a completion or an accomplishment [but rather it is] a remaining in waiting [a] lack as remaining” (p. 70). The excess is in the waiting for something completely other, and the waiting itself is incalculable, interminable. The possibility as impossibility keeps in reserve the most unthinkable, the measureless, the possibility that is punctured by the incalculable, the measureless impossibility. For something to be called possible it must be installed by the arrival of an event that perturbs the realm of knowledge and norms, as something that is considered impossible.

The aporetic space, where the unthinkable is reserved, is also a space of opening for thought. It is in this impossible-possible, in this coexistence of poros and aporos as a transformative coupling, where the impossibility of determination becomes possibility per se. It is here where thinking becomes thinking not inside the limits of knowledge but thinking open to what is yet to come. Thought happens in the here and now “as something that is coming to be” (Anker, 2006, p. 60) but which gives itself to the future to come, and therefore, to the possibility of “always already becoming something other” (p. 60). Thus, I am referring to the “possibility of thinking something other, some-thing, a thought or thoughts, suspended in the temporality of the not yet” (p. 50). In the temporality of the event.

What I have written in these pages about aporia is at the heart of the following chapters. All the upcoming chapters engage with a certain aporetic logic or a impossibility of determination that, as I state, becomes possibility per se. Such logic is infused in what I

considered being the key concepts for this dissertation, namely: community, the event and the teacher as a thinking subject.

### **Chapter 3: To Say Community**

Considering the central presence of the concept of community in education and its relation to thinking about being with others in educational contexts, this chapter's guiding preoccupation is to reflect critically on some of the ways the concept comes to life in educational research and discourse. Such investigatory critique will pave the way for an elucidation of the complexities the concept bears. Such complexities might not be considered very often when thinking about community and education, and particularly community and the teaching subject.

The intention of this chapter is not to present a different project of community in educational contexts or to propose a more postmodern version or model of community in light of comparison with a modern version of it. Rather, I wish to join the conversation that is taking place through relevant contributions in educational thought. For example, Gert Biesta (2004) looks at different ways to understand community by exposing totalizing ways of thinking community, moving beyond modern/postmodern debates. Sharon Todd (2004), using the work of Emmanuel Levinas, writes about community as a signifying encounter with difference. Her work is particularly significant to mine because she invites the reader to consider the tensions that inhabit the thinking of community. For instance, she points to the tension between community and responsibility. As she writes, "the difficulty of thinking about community and responsibility together lies in the tension between the commonality that is assumed by community, and the attention to singularity that responsibility commands" (p. 338). Also, Linda Farr Darling (2001) has examined the concept of community by noticing the conceptual tensions that arise from the different understandings that participants

within a community of inquiry might have about community and inquiry, and how each of these understandings will translate into different degrees of involvement within community.

In slight distinction from these authors, I am interested in elucidating the aporetic complexity of the notion of community. I engage critically, even warily, with the ways in which the concept of community comes to life in teaching and learning, and its influence in opening spaces for the teacher as a thinking subject and, in particular, as a subject who thinks the event. My hope is that by elucidating the aporetic complexity of the notion of community I will complicate and enrich further considerations about what it means to live well with others in educational contexts since the configurations that our being with others can take are arranged under particular conceptions of community.

Indeed, to say “community,” to repeat the name and reinforce it in the repetition, often takes me to multiple associations. For me, the associations that emerge refer to that which is *worn out and elusive* or to something that is *exquisite (delectable) but has lost its taste after incessant mastication*. In education the concept of community is thought and defined with the same intense variations with which it is used. From “community of inquiry” to “community of learners” to “nurturing communities” to “communities of practice,” one could argue that the notion of community is presented daily in discourses about social justice, ethics, education and globalization, multiculturalism, classroom “management,” and so forth. It is as if community has become a slogan, and, as Farr Darling (2001) points out, “what is worrisome about slogans is that they confer respectability on ideas that are in practice radically underspecified or poorly understood” (p. 7).

## Educational Research and Discourse: From Object to Desire

In a variety of work in educational research that engages with notions of community and teaching, there is often an operative conception of community as a model that is proposed and/or assumed. This presupposition posits community variously: as a project to be pursued, or as something that needs to be designed, constructed, and built (Farr Darling, 2001; Lieberman, 1992; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, 1999; Palinscar, Magnussan, Marano, & Brown, 1998); as something that requires a structure (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993); or as that which gives structure by becoming a regulative idea for educational contexts (Noddings, 1992). Broadly, community-as-model is something “that organises in advance the field of our belonging and fixes our appurtenances” (Morin, 2006, p. 1). Thereby community is cast as an *object* that suffers infinite manipulations through the constant desire to make something of it, to define it in a different way, a more sophisticated way, a less merely modern one, a more postmodern one, and so forth.

Community is also thought as an object that bears multiple *projects* or as an object that, when built and designed in the right way, will answer or solve the problems of our being-with-others or will allow us to achieve better, more just, inclusive, encompassing social arrangements. In this way, community is hoped and thought as an *objection* to the general social denigration (Esposito, 2009).

The notion of community is not exempt from the prevalence of means-ends thinking in education (Phelan, 2007). This treasured object is also an *instrument* to something else. It is in the notion of community where, for example, student teachers might cultivate “an atmosphere for learning” (Farr Darling, 2001, p. 14); it is there where teachers can be socialized into teaching (Cochran-Smith, 1999); it is there where we might become better

learners (community of learners) or nurturers (nurturing communities) or inquirers (community of inquiry). It is there where, when gathered and sheltered around shared purposes and identifications, and often in a nostalgic move, we entrust and secure our hopes to avoid alienation from one another or to build a more trouble-free world (Phelan, 2007).

Community as an instrument is also seen, again, as a project for the fulfillment of an ideal. Farr Darling (2001) and Nicholson (1991) argue that the concept of community conveys an ideal of human relatedness; they show how this notion, “most influential in education” (Farr Darling, 2001, p. 10), is typically highlighted by educators. In this light, Farr Darling continues, “community is nearly an unqualified good, a safe, nurturing place where trust abounds and members treat each other respectfully, even compassionately” (p. 10). This is the model of community as instrument for The Good.

It seems that community, in its communal activities or conceptual morphologies and evolutions, is produced and sustained by desires to be some-thing (we construct, we invest, we produce, we project, we use) or by visions and fantasies that are more broadly related to cultural myths about what a community is or should be. These desires, visions and fantasies are often related to nostalgia, a hope to regain what once was or to recover ways of being-with-others that have been lost.

If desire is seen as animating the mythos which models notions of community, it may fruitfully be regarded as a circular movement; as Žižek (1992) points out, “the realization of desire does not consist in its being ‘fulfilled’, ‘fully satisfied’, it coincides rather with the reproduction of desire as such, with its circular movement” (p. 7). With this, one could think alternately of that community as not something in “itself,” but rather as the location of desire, as something that constantly wants to be fulfilled. Later in the chapter I will come back to

this point to think further about the nostalgic imaginaries and myths that sustain our being-with-others.

### **The Elusive Character of Community**

Up to this point I have gathered and named some of the ways in which community has been conceived and defined in education and coupled these characterizations with the problematics of myth and desire. Roberto Esposito (2009) identifies a telling commonality to such conceptual productions, as “something full—as a substance, a promise, a value—that does not let itself be emptied out by the vortex of nothingness” (p. 25). From this alternate point of departure, and as a way into analyzing closely the complexity of the concept of community per se, I will be considering the elusive character and impossibility of defining community. More importantly, I will attempt to indicate, in a deconstructive mode, that the *very act of defining community is what prevents it from coming to be. Or, it is only in the impossibility of defining community that something worthy of the name community can happen.* In this impossibility, I identify the aporetic character of community that results from the interminable impasse created by something (community) being possible only in its impossibility. Later in the chapter I will dwell more extensively on this matter.

Something happens in the incessant efforts to “build” community, to fulfill it in the bestowal of substance, or even when we speak about it, in efforts to define or clarify what it “really” means. It is as if such efforts would always fail. To the pedagogical imaginaries of communities, this failing might induce great frustration, disappointment, and, sometimes, paralysis. More generative responses to such failures might be thought of as constitutive of

“tensions.” Regardless of the way educational projects deal with such failure, the elusive character of thinking community remains. An elusive condition is attached, I would venture to say, at the borders of the discourses on community, one whereby “it eludes our grasp no matter what we do to attain it” (Brent, 2004, p. 213). As soon as community becomes an object of definition, its definition fails. Following Jean-Luc Nancy (1991), one could say that, for community, “incompletion is its ‘principle’” (p. 35). This is the very impasse at the heart of defining community.

Perhaps surprisingly, this notion might not create too much disruption, as many of my students have shared with me: When faced with this conception, one could, as they have, link this impasse to the idea that community is always changing, that it is this changeability that forecloses its definition. Indeed, as Jeremy Brent (2004) writes, “community continually metamorphoses undermining attempts at its morphology” (p. 220). But, as I will show, the fetish of change is inadequate as the reason for or explanation of such an impasse, as is the common perspective in education that “community means different things to people” (Farr Darling, Erickson, & Clarke, 2007, p. 135) and, further, as is even its conceptualization as “emergent” in arguing that it is impossible to define because of some systemic character of emergence.

Rather, here I would like to engage in an etymological and philosophical analysis that will elucidate, in a different gesture, the persistent struggles, failures, and interruptions in defining and objectifying community, in giving substance to, or fulfilling a model of, or indeed building something called community. Consequently, by turning to Nancy’s and Derrida’s thought, I will analyze the aporia of community by showing more fully how the *very act of defining community prevents the realization of its object*. Further, one could also

say that it is actually in the interruption of such definitions that community may happen, if it happens at all.

Thus, my analysis comprises two parts. The first considers a philosophical account of community's etymology. The second considers Derrida's and Nancy's intimations on community.

### **The Constitutive Nothing or the Nothing-in-Common**

Using etymological analysis as the occasion for philosophical analysis, Roberto Esposito (2009)—a contemporary Italian philosopher who has joined other Italian and French philosophers in efforts to propose a new reflection on community—tells us that community derives from the Latin term *munus*. He writes that, “according to the original value of this concept” (p. 25), one can understand “community's categorical distance from any idea of property collectively owned by a group of individuals—or even from their belonging to a common identity” (p. 26). Its presence “is structurally inhabited by an absence—of subjectivity, identity and meaning” (p. 26); the meaning of *munus* originally speaks not of a substance or essence or possession of commonalities but of exactly the opposite: of “expropriation” of substance (p. 26), of its seizure by what it is not. Thus, the root of community refers to a nothing-of-substance, of its deficit or constitutive absence.

Community, Esposito (2009) writes, “is a thing defined precisely by its ‘not.’ A ‘non-thing” (p. 27). What becomes very important to notice here is that this nothing of community concerns not what community is not yet able to be, nor problematics to be solved by being filled with some substance, meaning, or ritual. As Esposito points out,

the nothing is not the precondition or the outcome of the community—the presupposition that frees it for its “real” possibility—but rather its only way of being. In other words community is not proscribed, obscured, or veiled by the nothing: it is constituted by it. (p. 27)

Perhaps this constitution, this nothing-in-common or lack, is exactly what exasperates and provokes the need to respond to it by giving to community substance or identity or by possessing or appropriating it. But the attempt of making something of the constitutive nothing of community is also troubled by another sense of *munus* which is understood in Latin as “the gift given” and never as the “gift received” (Latin: *donum*; Esposito, p. 27). The “common” *munus* “gives itself in the gathering and as gathering” (p. 27) never necessitates remuneration. Esposito writes that:

[*munus*] is a principle that lacks “remuneration”. It means that the leak of subjective substance which it determines it stays there—it cannot be filled in, cured or cicatrized; that its opening cannot be closed by any filling in, or compensation, if it is to remain really condivided, or shared. (p. 27)

This quotation can already incite us to speculate about how *munus* has profound ontological consequences with respect to thinking about subjectivity and being-with-others. I won’t dwell on these consequences here, but certainly they will be part of future considerations arising from the present study. For now I want to stress, once again, the impossibility of filling the opening of the nothing-in-common of community. Here it is worthwhile to briefly mention a difference that exists between the nothing-in-common to which I am referring with Esposito and the nothing-in-common to which Gert Biesta (2004), following Alphonso Lingis, refers when writing about the community “of those who have

nothing-in-common” (p. 307). I would argue that the nothing-in-common in Biesta seems to be related to subjects’ identity, as a lack of commonality to underline alterity, whereas with Esposito I am pointing to the nothing as a constitutive lack, a void of being, or, to say it differently, a “primordial open” that constitutes the common and communal. Inspired by Esposito’s work, I would venture to ask whether the nothing-in-common in Biesta’s work is not already substantiated with “some-thing,” even if in the name of alterity.

Esposito (2009) argues that the very attempts to objectify community, to fill its constitutive opening or to suppress the nothing-in-common—by presuming and deploying models of community—are what provokes alienation itself, or, to use his word, are simply “nihilism.” Here it is important to point out that often the very reason why community is such a cherished concept for education is precisely because it is thought of as an antidote to such alienation; ironically, as Esposito points out, the creation of community produces the alienation it seeks to alleviate!

With Esposito (2009) I would suggest that this cyclic confusion arises from what he describes as an “ordering compulsion” (p. 28) which assumes “functionalist, decisionist, and systemic guises” (p. 29) to further an effort in defence against the original void of the nothing-in-common—appearing as it would to threaten with alienation being-with-others. In mistaking a communal identification and then attempting to secure it, a constitutive nothing is thereby transmuted into a real nihilism in abandonment of both the promise of the concept of community and its initiatory impulse. In other words, it is by manipulating and ordering the munus of community through objectifying it, through thinking of it as a means to an end or as a regulative idea that community in itself is both nullified and foreclosed.

Here, I want to notice with Esposito (2009) that “it is the forgetting of this nothingness—this void—that hands the thing over to a scientific, productivist, and nihilistic point of view which nullifies it” (p. 31). Thus, the multiple acts of defining community are precisely what prevent community from occurring.

However strong the “ordering compulsion” is to create a homogeneous continuum of the communal, the common *munus* resists, according to Esposito (2009), as a vortex “in which the continuum is one with what is discontinuous” (p. 33). The continuum is interrupted through “the limited experiences that take us away from ourselves, from the mastery of our existence” (p. 33). These are experiences where what I understand as an *event* happens, in which is accessed that “primordial open” (p. 33) or the lack of substance—the *munus*—of community. It is in these limited experiences where the primordial lack keeps leaking outside boundaries created. These evental moments are the ones that, as Deborah Britzman and Don Dippo (2000) write, oblige us to “to think within our contradictory present” (p. 33). This limited experience might be the experience of what Britzman & Dippo refers to as “awful thoughts” which “invoke self-doubt and doubting others” (p. 34) and even more,

they can break us out of the numbing routine, and remind us of what Marion Milner (1987, p. 15) called, “the capacity for doubt”, and independence from “clinging to certainty” so that our thoughts can question their own grounds. (p. 34)

These experiences can be thought, for example, as moments when the myth of the teacher as expert is disrupted by ambiguities and uncertainty, or moments when the myth of communal harmony is disrupted by dissensus. Perhaps it is possible to master and be prepared, to be an expert in the subject one teaches but I wonder if such mastery is ever possible in our living with others when being in those spaces we call a classroom? In those spaces where we come

together bringing, each of us, the complexities of our “different human background” (Sarton, 1961, p. 105)

In those eventual experiences, mastering and manipulations are broken, while desires and myths that sustain community are interrupted. As what Esposito (2009) calls “subjective dimensions of the void of being” (p. 31), such moments point to what I describe above as the aporia of community. We may glimpse this aporetic character further here in the possibility of community manifesting *as impossible*, owing, I argue, to its constitutive lack, or nothing. It is again Esposito who punctuates the point for us:

It is the absence of community—and even its desertification—that shows us its necessity, as what we lack, and even as our own lack; as a void that does not ask to be filled in by new or ancient myths, but rather reinterpreted in the light of its own “not.” (p. 35)

This absence of community might be seen solely as a loss and, as such, can create, as Nancy (1991) points out, a simulacral nostalgia for one lost, its own ghost as its more amenable stand-in: “At every moment in its history, the Occident has given itself over to the nostalgia for a more archaic community that has disappeared, and to deploring a loss of familiarity, fraternity and conviviality” (p. 10).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nancy (1991) exemplifies this lost community in paradigms such as “the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community, corporations, communes, or brotherhoods—always is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds and in which above all it plays back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy and autonomy” (p. 9).

## Community Beyond Commonality: Nancy and Derrida

Perhaps this is the sense of loss and consequent nostalgia that energizes and sparks the commitments and investment that education gathers for the concept. But as Nancy (1991) points out—and this might be crucial if considered by education—,

What this community has “lost”—the immanence and the intimacy of communion—is lost only in the sense that such a “loss” is constitutive of “community” itself. It is not a loss: on the contrary, immanence, if it were to come about, would instantly suppress community or communication as such.

(p. 12)

Here Nancy echoes Esposito’s identification of community’s constitutive nothing-in-common or lack. Additionally, Nancy invites us to consider loss instead as a constitutive condition of possibility for community.

For Nancy, if community were to fill its constitutive void or lack through a communion of identity, a sisterhood, or a fusion in love or ideals and codes, or if, through a collective enterprise arranged by “a will to absolute immanence” (p. 12), there would no longer be *relation* but *irrelation* by way of such unification. The apparent accomplishment of community is nothing other than its suppression. Such loss-alleviating communal fusion “contain[s] no other logic than that of the suicide of the community that is governed by it”<sup>8</sup> (p. 12). To put it differently, a complete fusion implies the auto-annihilation of what is being fused together.

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<sup>8</sup> As in Nazi Germany, where the logic was not only the extermination of Jewish people or “of the subhuman deemed exterior to communion of blood, and soil, but also, effectively, the logic of sacrifice aimed at all those in the ‘Aryan’ community who did not satisfy the criteria of *pure* immanence, so much so that—it being obviously impossible to set a limit on such criteria—the suicide of the German nation itself might have represented a plausible extrapolation of the process. (Nancy, 1991, p. 12)

Nancy's is a strong invitation to a thinking of community as that which resists totalization because, and as mentioned above, it has insufficiency or "incompletion" as its germinal constituent. Nancy also enjoins us to be suspicious of nostalgia for a communal being precisely because of the totalitarian form of its political expression. Seen in this way, for Nancy (1991), nostalgia as such is none other than "the desire for a work of death" (p. 17), for an arrival which can never be and whose promise delivers the journey to disaster right from embarkation.

In a similar effort, but with a different emphasis, thinking about community for Derrida (1997) invokes the necessary entailments of fraternity and brotherhood. Therefore, one must question the identification processes that determine who is included and who is excluded, who belongs and who doesn't in a community. A communal fusion in the name of sameness that is justified by a fraternal identification means, for Derrida, to include via neutralizing difference. Derrida's preoccupation with community is deeply marked by a vigilance to resist such neutralization for the sake of that which is completely other and singular. As Derrida says in the film *Derrida's Elsewhere*,

Whenever the "we" is a kind of fusional community where responsibility is swamped, I can see danger. Thus I have, with experience, contracted an allergy to any community of that type. But on the other hand I would term "we" acceptable when it is made of interruptions, where those who say "we" know that they are singularities with an interrupted connection. Not only does that not prevent us from saying "we" and talking to ourselves and hearing ourselves, but the condition for talking to ourselves and hearing ourselves is that interruption remains. (Fathy, 1999)

At this point there are two broad groups of considerations that I think are important for education, particularly for teacher education. First, Nancy's connections between nostalgia and the desire for community might provoke education to think further and more critically about the role of nostalgia when thinking about community. Second, it is compelling to ask how nostalgia for a lost community influences the conditions of possibility for the event in education, how its figuration can foreclose its possibility, and to what deleterious effects.

As Farr Darling (2001) describes in regards to the images of community that her student teachers express, in addition to sources "rooted in memories of childhood experiences and refined by examples of television, films or literature" (p. 11) a "nostalgic notion of community" is evident. Vividly echoing Nancy, she argues that this nostalgia can be traced to "the nineteenth-century small town in America which De Tocqueville described" (p. 11). According to Farr Darling, this notion "holds out the possibility for a community of hope (Bellah, 1995) in which understandings of the common good are shared with neighbors, and compassion and generosity are abundant" (p. 12).

These perceptions of community are imprinted in the student teacher. As Farr Darling (2001) writes when considering the ways her students express their notions of community, "teacher education students may be thinking about community in this nostalgic sense when they enter a cohort in which a community of inquiry is a central theme" (p. 12). Furthermore, the perception of this nostalgia is not only in the students but is also, Farr Darling continues, "supported by orientation activities and discussions that focus on getting to know and trust one another" (p. 12). Later in the chapter I will further elaborate the specific connection between the pedagogical subject, nostalgia, and community.

The second particularly fertile series of considerations for educational thought, and particularly for teacher education, I would argue, is that Nancy's, Derrida's, and Esposito's considerations ask us to be aware that imaginaries of community will always fail, are indeed rooted in failure, and that it is precisely that failure which creates the condition of possibility for community, which instantiates the aporia of nothing-in-common, of an empty space of common signification. Perhaps this aporetic recognition would loosen education's nostalgic hug that tightly embraces, and commits to, particular understandings of community, as well as to the myths that sustain their edifices.

In this light, then, it seems important to me to repeat Esposito's (2009) words and ask: What would it mean for education to think community as "a void that does not ask to be filled in by new or ancient myths, but rather reinterpreted in the light of its own 'not'" (p. 35)? What would be the implications for the political imaginaries that inform the being-with-others in educational contexts? Or further, what precisely are the myths that sustain notions of community in educational contexts?

### **The Interruption of Myth**

The relation between myth and community is a particularly important one in Nancy's thought. Indeed, myth is the way in which the drive for a totalizing community keeps filling its constitutive void. Myth is the way through which a community identifies or grounds its commonality. As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (1990) write,

A myth is a fiction in the strong, active sense of "Fashioning," or as Plato says, of "plastic art": it is therefore, a *fictioning*, whose role is to propose, if

not to impose, models and types ... types of imitation of which an individual or a city or a entire people can grasp themselves and identify themselves. (p. 297, emphasis in original)

Myth is not only the tale we transmit to new generations; also, and more importantly for Nancy, myth informs the way we live with others within the communal walls. It founds the mechanisms of identification that create community. Myth is “that to which a political community appeals in order to found its existence as such and to perpetuate that existence as the intimate sharing of an identity or sharing” (James, 2005, p. 6). According to Nancy (1991), myth thus “communicates the common ... it reveals community to itself and founds it” (pp. 50-51). For Nancy, “where there is community there is myth and vice-versa” (James, 2005, p. 7).

What becomes important to note here, by connecting with the work of Derrida, is the aporetic double movement that characterizes this coexistence of community and myth. By aporetic double movement I am referring, with Derrida (1993), to that impasse that is represented in the coupling of the possible-impossible, with that possible that keeps manifesting *as* impossible. On one hand, myths are essential to community because “of the communion that myth represents” (Nancy, 1991, p. 57) and the will of community that it promotes. As Nancy puts it, “myth represents multiple existences as immanent to its own unique fiction, which gathers together and gives them their common figure in its speech and as this speech” (p. 57). But on the other hand, according to Nancy, it is only in the interruption of myth—and of the communion that myth represents—that community can happen. This is because precisely such interruption disrupts the will of community, for Nancy ever only a totalitarian will. He writes:

It is in the interruption of myth that reveals the disjunctive or hidden nature of community. In myth, community was proclaimed: in the interrupted myth, community turns out to be what Blanchot has named “*the unavowable community*.” (p. 58, emphasis in original)

Thus, here again is the aporia of community: There is no community without myth, and it is precisely the interruption of that myth that prevents community’s auto-suppression—because it is such interruption itself which resists the drive for an absolute community. And, as I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, if the absolute community came about, for Nancy and, I would say, for Derrida too, it would instantly suppress community or communication as such. To put it differently, and to go back to the aporetic double movement of community, one could say with Nancy and Derrida that community never presents itself as something to be sure of or complete—as something possible: It is always incomplete, unstable, it gives itself always to be thought, once again, because of its own impossibility.

Such a moment of interruption occurred some years ago when a group of teachers and I were trying to think about the relations among power, authority, and classroom rules. I proposed to the teachers that we might have a day, only one day, where everything that happened would be decided by the children. With a bit of hesitation the teachers agreed. The day came and children disrupted every single assumption we had about time, about where to be, and about how to proceed. Everything we had expected might happen was shattered. The children had a very different notion of time, for example; their decisions about how and when to play, or when to eat, were very different from the usual routine. They spent most of their time outside even if the classroom was full with natural materials, clay, painting, water tables

etc. This experience opened up profound discussions among the teachers about what seemed to matter to the children, how they related to each other, to time and to curriculum, and about the role of the teacher in the early childhood classroom.

The interruption of the myth reveals the “ceaseless instability within the experience of community” (James, 2005, p. 7). It reveals what Nancy (1991) refers to as the “inoperative community” or, with Blanchot, “the unavowable community” or “unworking community” (p. 58). As Nancy writes,

Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called ‘unworking’, referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do either with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension. (p. 31)

Here Nancy points to how community cannot be built, worked, or produced; it cannot “be objectifiable or producible” (p. 31) as common conceptions, projections, and instrumentations of community in education suppose. As Nancy writes, “one does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude” (p. 31). Community, Nancy writes, “is not the work of singular beings nor can it claim them as its work” (p. 31); rather for Nancy “community is made of the interruption of singularities” (p. 31) of its suspension by an exposure to the other.

The interruption of myth is not demythologization or suppression of myth. Rather, it is a suspension. As Nancy (1991) puts it, this interruption would be more about a “passage to the limit of myth, in the passage onto a limit-point where myth would be not so much suppressed as suspended or interrupted” (p. 47). Or, as Ian James (2005) explains, interruption of myth for Nancy is “about tracing a passage to the limit point of signification

and pre-understanding with which we make sense of our shared existence in the world of our past and our future” (p. 7).

It is thus facing this limit point that brings about the interruption of myth. Nancy argues that there is an exposure, an opening, to the shared finitude of our worldly experience. Here is an echo with what I wrote previously regarding Esposito’s view of the constitutive resistance that community has against creating a homogeneous continuum of the communal. Nancy’s and Esposito’s thoughts resonate one with the other and indicate a movement toward the conceptualization of what can be called a *politics of interruption* where the communal is interrupted in a sort of fidelity to it. Nancy and Esposito write in different terms about such interruption, but for both it is characterized by an opening and exposure installed in such limit-experiences. These are experiences that remind us of the constitutive nothing-in-common of community. This nothing-in-common, or constitutive lack, is, aporetically, the condition of possibility for community to happen.

Therefore, we might say also that Derrida would join Nancy’s and Esposito’s *politics of interruption* because, for him, it is within the interruptive decision that any event—in this case the event of community—can happen, if it happens at all. And if one could say “there is community,” this “‘*there is*’ would remain aporetic under a double or autoimmune constraint” (Derrida, 2005b, p. 37, emphasis in original). This is a double constraint that is enacted by the coupling of the impossible-possible at the heart of community. Indeed, the aporetic character of community is its condition of possibility because of interminably exposing what Derrida calls the “self inadequation of every present and presentable” (p. 38) community. Such inadequation exposes the “interminable adjournment of the present” (p. 38) of community.

The interminable self-inadequation of community keeps interrupting the myths and nostalgic forces that stabilize, and grants the common and communal of community. Furthermore, the attention I have been giving to myth, its interruptions, and community's self-inadequation stresses this chapter's invitation to attend to the complexity of the concept of community, its constitutive lack and aporetic character, and consequently the impossibility of being an object or project to work upon.

Recognition of the impossibility of community as a project to be built and worked, or as something to be always filled with a meaning or substance, might give to such contexts the necessary distantiation and leave the void of meaning open so that community can happen. Moreover, the relation we have as communal subjects to such inadequation becomes, I argue, particularly important for educational contexts. To say it differently, it would be a meaningful task for educational thought, and it is one of the intentions of this dissertation, to explore ways in which the relation between subject and communal myths are manifested in educational contexts, and how such manifestations speak about how teaching and learning subjects, as communal subjects, might live the constitutive inadequation of community.

It is towards such considerations, among others, that I would like to turn the attention in the next chapter. I will continue in the company of Nancy and Derrida, but also with others who have made important contributions in education, as, for example, the already cited Linda Farr Darling.

I ask: Which would be some of the myths that sustain imaginaries of being-with-others in educational contexts? To what truths do those myths avow? What are the nostalgias within such myths? What are the relations between such myths and the conditions of possibility for the event and for the teacher as a thinking subject in educational contexts?

How do the ways we imagine community affect our relation to knowledge and thinking in educational contexts? These are some of the questions that emerge from this chapter and inspire the next.

## **Chapter 4: To Explore the Collective as a Realm for Interrupted Singularities**

### **When Love is Thought**

One of the efforts in the previous chapter was to bring to our attention the interminable self-inadequation of community and how it persists in interrupting myths and nostalgic forces which stabilize and grant as recognizable (within the politics of recognition) the communal and the common. The relation that communal subjects have to said inadequation becomes particularly important in educational contexts. As discussed in the previous chapter, the recognition of the impossibility of community—as a project to be built and worked upon and/or as something always to be filled with a meaning or substance—may lend to such work a necessary distantiation which would leave the void of meaning open so that community can happen.

I submit that a first movement towards such recognition would be for educators to explore more closely the myths and nostalgic imaginaries that sustain the ways the collective is thought (and taught) in educational contexts. When exploring imaginaries and myths of the collective, it is important to ask after the specifically collective ethos in educational contexts. What truths do such tacit projections and presuppositions avow? What are the nostalgias that might sustain such myths, and how? What are the relations between such myths and the collective they express? And also, how are those myths interrupted? For me, these interrogations are a meaningful and necessary precondition for engaging with the broader concern about the possibility of the teacher as a thinking subject.

With this intention in mind, the starting point for this chapter is the exploration of certain myths that appear within what Britzman (2003) refers to as “superficial knowledge” (p. 6). Using the concept of superficial knowledge as a lever of sorts, I explore two different conceptual avenues in efforts to defamiliarize accepted ways of thinking the collective in educational contexts. As in the previous chapter, here also I must say that my purpose is not to clear the way for the creation of a new collective, but rather, and following the intention of this philosophical inquiry, the interest here is to engage with certain ideas that might critically problematize the way the collective is thought, as a precondition for, or condition of possibility of, its being thought otherwise. By purposely using the word “collective” I am trying to engage more particularly with the social relations and dynamics of a community. Here and in the overall thesis, the intention is to advance through a double gesture, one of fidelity and one of betrayal. This, I think, is the spirit of the deconstructive mode this thesis presents. As Derrida (1997) said, “deconstruction is made of not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break” (p. 6).

### **Myths and Social Bonding: An Excursion into Superficial Knowledge**

Myth is the way through which a community identifies or grounds its commonality. Deborah Britzman has explored the relation between myth and teaching, and engages with the notion of cultural myths as a way to articulate the complexities inherent in learning to teach. Britzman (2003) offers the following in *Practice Makes Practice*:

Cultural myths offer a set of ideal images, definitions, and justifications that are taken up as measures of thought, affect, and practice. These images instantiate the characteristics of modern myth: value-laden, it is masked by a naturalized appearance that seems complete and speaks for itself. A myth makes available particular discursive practices that position situations as given without the quality of contingency; its form asserts a stable meaning despite unstable contexts by offering reasons in the guise of motives. (pp. 6-7)

When reading Britzman, one can hear echoes of Nancy's (1991) thought on the role of myth, how it naturalizes and stabilizes meaning by imposing models and types that create the mechanisms of identification, in this case, of a society's operative self-concept.

As indicated, Britzman (2003) proposes that, when considering myth in educational contexts, one needs to venture into "superficial knowledge" (p. 6). She writes:

To explore the cultural myths that summon teachers and their work requires an excursion into superficial knowledge, how it becomes produced and lived. Superficial knowledge is first of all ensconced in the situations of visceral knowing; it is made from the stuff of tacit understandings and the discursive practices that are produced and then produce and organize how educational life is interpreted and lived. Superficial knowledge makes available particular practices as it orients understanding. (p. 6)

As such, it is as "superficial knowledge" that cultural myths organize and direct our ways of thinking community. Britzman considers, for example, the identity of teachers as "overpopulated with cultural myths" (p. 6); she names as an example the myth that female teachers "carry their 'natural' abilities into the marketplace" (p. 6). I could add, as another

example, a conception of early childhood educators and elementary teachers (most of them female) first and foremost as care providers and protectors, both synonymous with domestic nurturance. These myths sustain and at the same time emerge from a broader image of who a woman is within our patriarchal society, as Grumet (1998) has pointed out.

Britzman's concept of superficial knowledge is useful also for engaging with the myths that populate conceptions of the collective in educational contexts. At the heart of such an engagement lives the question of how the collective is thought in such contexts, of how being-with-others is projected and accessed, how indeed it is rendered intelligible. Thus, the exploration of superficial knowledge helps us decipher the elements of the myths that populate teachers' identity, as Britzman points out, but also, I would add, to explore the myths that sustain the identifications of community, as well as where and how such myths might be interrupted. Thus, cultural myths in educational contexts can naturalize and structure taken-for-granted views of community and of the "visceral knowing" (Britzman, 2003, p. 29) of what is recognized and affirmed as living well with others in such contexts. At the same time, it is within the interruption of such myths that community as a space for difference can happen.

### **Myths of Commonality, Pedagogical Narratives, and Educational Thought**

When Farr Darling (2001) writes about her student teachers' conceptions of community, she points to a preponderance of reference to social harmony and the good as predominant ideals. Important to such an exploration as this, these ideals are based on a wary respect for both the personal and the other. Farr Darling writes:

Overwhelmingly, students emphasized the personal, affective qualities of a cohort community. Their sentiments came across in descriptions such as: the community is “close knit and caring” and “warm, collegial”. There is a “strong and supportive network” and opportunity for “more personal and rewarding interaction”. Even when commenting on low spots in the life of the community, students acknowledged, “it’s not perfect, but it is our community”. (p. 7)

Farr Darling’s account mirrors my own experiences when talking with educators and early childhood student teachers on the west coast of Canada about assumptions of the collective. References that populate such discussions indicate community and its collective as a project to be built where values are shared, a shelter is erected, and people gather under a unifying vision of what it means to live well with others. When thinking about symbols that could represent community, students choose hearts, a multicultural group of smiling, scissor-cut children holding hands in a circle, or a group of people hugging the terrestrial globe. These symbols represent, in part, the superficial knowledge such educators and students hold in terms of community and the collective.

Discussions with student teachers and teachers typically circle around the concepts of harmony, care, and love. Here it is important to point out that, because of the commitment to harmony, love in these discussions is usually understood as love for the same and recognizable, a love that does not perturb the collective universe, but rather is its unification. As an instructor, I live with my own tensions with the term; even as I question the term, I too am enticed by the warm feeling that is attached to the notion of a harmonious collective, by the reassurance of the romanticization of such thinking about community.

For years, as a PhD student in a Canadian university, I have been part of academic conversations caught within a certain politics of niceness, a profound concern for the personal, and the superficially affective (or the visceral of Britzman's superficial knowledge). When confronted, it is typically a politics legitimated as respect for difference and otherness. When thinking the collective in such ways, one would be led to believe that the well-being of such a collective is registered as the warmth of its relations as indicative of the commitment to the harmony of its inclusive diversity. This leap from diversity to harmony results in a suppression of dissensus or conflict as inimical to the communal index, in therapeutic efforts to maintain a usually precarious harmony. This harmony is often translated as a vital, or successful, concern for the other, or is cast as a sign of respect for the other—indeed as an explicit measure of the moral success in a community's self-confirmation.

The implications of such processes abound in education and curriculum, for example, they are in the popular movement towards teaching conflict resolution by promoting it as a characteristic of the good citizen and giving tools for problem solving regarding social issues (Bickmore, 1997) or by presenting conflict resolution as a skill “that will effectively respond to bias” (Prutzman & Johnson, 1997, p. 27). Such implications are also present in education in values based in care and empathy (Jackson, Boostrom & Hansen, 1993; Noddings, 1992; Nucci, 1997) and/or in the curriculum for the early years in efforts that go into teaching social skills. Looking closely at such discourses, living well with others is cast as that which is successful when finding a certain commonality, when accomplishing the mythic harmony on which the communal is premised. What is also interesting in such discourses is that there seems to be an intimate connection between these “harmonizing” approaches and the

dominant approach to politics and democracy in the context of education. I am referring here particularly to my experience in the context of early childhood education, but I also think this concern is echoed by scholars outside early childhood. Such echoes can be found, for example, among the educational scholars that form the research group called Studies in Conflict, Culture and the Political in Education<sup>9</sup>. I join these scholars in pointing to how this approach privileges a deliberative view that emphasizes the importance of rational dialogue and deliberation, leading to democratic agreement and thus guaranteeing efforts towards collective harmony, against a more agonistic approach (e.g., Mouffe, 2005) which understands dissent and disagreement not as counter-productive ways of being in a collective but as vital to the democratic public sphere. In education, the preparatory corollary of the deliberative approach, for example, is to focus on children's communicative capacities.

What I have been trying to illustrate here with respect to the commitments to a certain ideology echoes what Todd and Säfström (2008) point out when they write:

Everything diverse and unique risks being contained within the same normative frame of reference: Differences between us become less important than the goal to create a unified “we”.... As suffocating as this unconditional “we” can be for any conviction that is constitutive of a particular identity, it also has a tendency to embody, in our view, a certain arrogance, for it assumes that in accepting the normative discursive rules of liberal democracy, one is, by necessity, seeking to rise above the very differences—the very complex

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<sup>9</sup> SCAPE was created by educational scholars such as Gert Biesta, Sharon Todd and Claudia Ruitenberg. This group is interested in conceptualizing the constitutive role of difference and disagreement in a vibrant political sphere. They bring forward a critique to deliberative approaches that see conflict as counter-productive to democratic dialogue. Instead, these scholars believe that some kinds of conflict are not only inevitable but also necessary for and constitutive of democracy itself.

dimensions of human pluralism—that play such a central role in any democratic project. (p. 3)

Todd and Säfström then continue their argument by focusing more specifically on dissent, which “therefore, is seen as something to be surmounted since it cannot be tolerated fully within the rules of rational communication” (p. 3). Thus, what would be considered respect for difference seems to me to suffer from a process of autoimmunization, on which I will dwell in a subsequent section. Indeed, the concern for the personal and a consequent fear to offend makes of difference sameness and of otherness unification, but it also creates a certain moralization of feelings where some feelings are more acceptable and validated than others. It is worthwhile asking whether this is not precisely the normalization of difference, the homogenization that Todd and Säfström see as antidemocratic? One might further ask, more alarmedly, whether this is not what Nancy (1991) regards as a “logic of suicide” (p. 12), because the apparent accomplishment of collective life (i.e., finding a common substance) concurrently precipitates its suppression. How one can think about such autoimmune logic, I would argue, becomes relevant in this exploration, so I dedicate part of this chapter to this question.

### **The Collective Between Two Avenues of Speculation: Love and Autoimmunity**

Whether it is inscribed in the superficial knowledge of educational contexts or in more formal pedagogical efforts, the commitment to such myths that sustain the ways we think the collective life in teaching and learning requires attention in order to understand how these myths might structure the collective, as well as to find, if possible, ways to critique and

defamiliarize from such structures. A number of scholars (Biesta, 2005; Ruitenberg, 2008; Todd, 2010) have undertaken efforts to consider such issues in relation to important themes in education such as democracy and ethics. Examples of such efforts are found in Claudia Ruitenberg's (2010) analysis of a conception of democracy that treats disagreement as necessary rather than as a problem to be overcome. Indeed, following Chantal Mouffe, Ruitenberg argues for disagreement to be fostered as a democratic capacity and not to be suppressed. As she writes: "In fact, I would consider it a failure of democratic political education if young people learn to avoid conflict or regard it as a breakdown of democracy" (p. 48). Such an understanding of democracy is what, according to Ruitenberg, would change political education. Sharon Todd (2010) also argues for agonistic interactions that can inform education in promoting better ways of living together. For this to happen, Todd argues, one needs to understand the difficulties of pluralism and be able to question the ways we reflect on the political dimension of such difficulties.

Here I want to join these scholars by asking and, at the same time, evoking the question already present in the first chapter: What becomes impossible within imaginaries of being-with-others such as the ones I have been outlining here? Furthermore, how do such imaginaries, which are organized within superficial knowledge, prevent the conditions of possibility for what Derrida, in the film *Derrida's Elsewhere* (Fathy, 1999), names "singularities with an interrupted connection," that is, the condition for talking to ourselves and hearing ourselves? But I would also like to pursue a different gesture, in hopes of enriching and complicating ongoing educational discussions, by taking inspiration from Derrida's work to speculate and focus on his logic of autoimmunity, which I have suggested is present in thinking the collective in the way I have described.

Therefore, I will pursue two avenues of speculation. In the first, I continue to explore issues related to love and the collective, and I address the set of questions I outlined above. I consider the relation between the collective and love, understood as a political concept, in an effort to problematize a certain subordination of love to ideas that privilege uniformity and harmony. The intention here is to critically engage with the moralization of feelings, which I understand as an expression of what Mouffe (2005) calls a “vocabulary of morality” (p. 75). Such a vocabulary, I argue, is used to express the complexities of being-with-others in collectivities.

The second avenue considers the logic of autoimmunity (as theorized by Derrida) in thinking the collective. This, as we shall see, is a logic to which such mythical commitments to social harmony are particularly susceptible. Its consideration additionally gives rise to questions such as these: Is there an antidote to such autoimmune logic? Should the collective in educational contexts avoid such logic? Is this possible? Or, alternatively, is there another way to think about autoimmunity and the myths it vouchsafes, so as to avow community differently? As we shall see, these are profoundly educative questions.

Recall that the point of departure for these two avenues is the concept of superficial knowledge as the site for considering some of the myths that sustain the way the collective is thought in educational contexts. I follow this elaboration here in introducing a set of concepts (the collective in relation to love as a political concept, and the logic of autoimmunity within the thinking of the collective) to provide critical resources for engaging with new considerations of the collective in an educational scene (as, for example, and from the previous chapter, the recognition of the *constitutive lack* of community). These critical

resources allow us to further engage with the broader questions of how the thinking of the collective affects, for example, the possibility of the teacher as a thinking subject.

### *Love as a Political Concept*

Why love? How does conceptualizing love as a political concept in educational contexts deepen the discussion? As I have indicated, as a PhD student and an instructor, often in my encounters within their collectivities the assumption and articulation of what it means to live well with others is commonly by way of concepts of care for the other, harmony and love. This is love understood as for the same and recognizable, for the known. As I have written above, such understandings of love and care constitute what I call a politics of niceness, one legitimated by a tolerance for difference and otherness. This commitment to a harmonious conception of love suppresses dissensus or conflict; it proscribes a naturalization of feelings (the presumed medium of harmony) as morally correct within such collectives, and excludes others as incorrect, or, in more common parlance, ‘inappropriate’. The idea of love that circulates when thinking about living well with others in educational contexts is one that comes with a guarantee. This is, for instance, the guarantee of not offending, of not offending intellectually. But here lies a pressing question: does love survive its conscription to guarantees? As I write these lines and every time I come back to these thoughts I am visited by the memory of a moment in my doctoral studies where, as a Graduate Academic Assistant, I helped organize a roundtable that provoked great debate among the participants; the room was packed with students and professors, ideas and questions were debated in stimulating ways. The experience of the roundtable discussion

became a critical moment in my intellectual life at the time. It was even lauded as the best event in the history of the PhD program by its Director. Days after, when considering and evaluating the event with my fellows academic assistants, my partner and I were accused of having created a painful and traumatic situation for many during the event, leading, some implied, to the subsequent heart attack of one professor. Ironically the professor who had ostensibly been the victim of the roundtable discussion was the very director who had appreciated it. This is an example, in my view, of the priority of harmony as the moralization of the feelings associated with love.

As an instructor and pedagogista, I commonly find love likewise engaged in the government of bodies, of feelings and behaviours. Here, the harmony of a supposedly loving community is visited moralistically on the very young as the regulation of discourse. For example, consider the everyday encouragement in early childhood settings to communicate frustration, or desire, or fear. This is accompanied by the forewarning of a respectful way of communicating, one which always serves first to tie up the feeling, or behavior, or person within the knot of their community's standards, whose preemptive guarantees invalidate the complex responses they are evoked to manage. I contend that such instances of effectively living well with others find their root in what Michael Hardt (2009) calls the corrosion of love in its communal form.

Hardt (2010) posits love as a political concept.<sup>10</sup> His arguments regarding the different forms through which love as a political concept have been corroded or subordinated are of great interest here. I am particularly attentive to how one might recognize such corrosion within the collective in educational contexts. This analysis is relevant to my work because, as indicated above, one of my concerns is with discourses (or superficial knowledge, with Britzman) that support, influence, and generate what is defined as a *we* in educational contexts. Put differently, I am referring here to those naturalized and often unspoken discourses and values that influence the ways a *we*, as a collective identification, posits and circumscribes the question *What does it mean to live well with others?* Or, to say it with Patti Lather (2007), “what is being brought into being through the elaboration of particular practices?” (p. x). I am interested in the consequences that the predetermination of the answer to this question has, or that the guarantees appended to love in a collectivity have, for the possibility for the teacher as a thinking subject, particularly a subject that thinks the event.

Hardt (2009) begins with the inability people today exhibit to understand love as a political concept. For him, the modern conception of love is almost exclusively limited to romantic or familial love. Broadly, his concern rests with how, in liberal societies, love has

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<sup>10</sup> Hardt is not alone in thinking about love as a political concept. Other contemporary authors such as Eve Sedgwick (1998), Lauren Berlant (2011), within queer theory, make important contributions in this regard. As well, there is the feminist work of Chela Sandoval (2000). Paulo Freire (1970) considers love the impetus of a humanizing education. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire analyzes the lovelessness of oppression and writes: “It is—paradoxical though it may seem—precisely in the response of the oppressed to the violence of their oppressors that a gesture of love may be found. Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love. Whereas the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human” (p. 56). However, for Freire love is to be understood as a love for the people. Within this conception Freire seems to enact the supremacy of agape over eros whereas in Hardt’s perspective for love to be a political concept it must see agape and eros as intertwined.

become a strictly private affair, and with what such privatization prevents. The consignment of love to the private sphere, through its exclusivity to the couple or family and its harmonious ethos therein is, for Hardt, one of the ways in which love as a political concept is corroded. The corrosive characteristic here is the understanding of love as that for the same, or the alike, the filial or *already affiliated*. Hardt (2009) expresses this as follows:

The “segregation” or “confinement” of love into love of the same, love within the family, or even extending further, love of the race ... love of those like yourself has destroyed the possibility of love as a more generous and positive political concept. (p. 812)

Quite connected to such corrosion is another form, which Hardt identifies as *love understood as union or fusion*. As Hardt (2010) writes, “the dominant contemporary notions of love do indeed conceive love as such a process of fusion or merging” (p. 2). This is, for Hardt, the Hollywood romantic comedy paragon, where a couple merges into a complete oneness, and in a long-lasting union.

Hardt is not alone in regarding this distantiation from love as fusional. In his paper “Red Love” (2010) Hardt connects with Nietzsche and Lacan to support his argument. He points to how Nietzsche’s Zarathustra “contributes to such alternative theological traditions when he preaches that higher than love of the neighbor is ‘love of the farthest,’ which celebrates the encounter of differences” (p. 4). Here, in terms of the reference to love for the neighbour,<sup>11</sup> one needs to point out that for Hardt, love thought of as love for the same, as identitarian fusion, corresponds to the Christian mandate to love one’s neighbour, which is often translated as love for the closest, the most similar and familiar. Indeed, it is in a love

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<sup>11</sup> This is an extremely complex concept. For the sake of my argument I will limit my discussion to Hardt’s indication of the reductionist view of the concept.

for the stranger, or for alterity, where Hardt finds an anticorrosive substance for love as a political concept to exist.

Referring to Lacan, Hardt (2010) recognizes “the vigilance against the destruction of differences” (p. 4) as “the great virtue of Lacanian psychoanalysis” (p. 4) and how Lacan’s famous sentence “love is impossible” stands for love as that which is impossible to merge into union. In Hardt’s understanding of Lacan, “if love were possible all differences would be lost, fused together in the whole” (p. 4).

Thus, Hardt cautions, love understood as for that which is recognizable risks the promulgation of evil forms of collectivity, such as racism, religious fundamentalism, demagogic populism, and ultimately totalitarianism; here we can find echoes of a similar concern I exposed when pointing in the previous chapter to Nancy’s thinking about community. These all “operate according to the logic of merging: destroying singularities and creating a unitary identity” (Hardt, 2010, p. 2). This destruction of singularities is Hardt’s primary concern when thinking about love. Also, it is relevant to point out with respect to such evil forms that, “rather than being driven by hatred, as they are often characterized, these political formations are primarily based on love ... love of the race, love of the nation and love of the people” (p. 2). As in my examples above, these forms of love are some of those which Hardt regards as “politically destructive” (p. 5). One might even say, similar to Hannah Arendt (1958), that such forms are entirely apolitical, the very opposite of political (here of a love within a collectivity). Perhaps paradoxically, they represent that which is lost to publicity in the “modern discovery of intimacy” (Hardt, 2010, p. 69).

If love is considered to be apolitical, it may be justifiable to ban love from politics by way of the separation of public and private. This is, according to Hardt (2009) “the standard liberal defense against this danger” (p. 5), the danger of apolitical love becoming political. Hardt, in exploring another corrosion, indicates that such division or separation of public and private has a close relation to the Christian theological tradition of the separation of Eros and Agape, where Agape is related to a public or communal form of love and Eros is associated with the couple, or family. Hardt points to different attempts to overcome this divide, although for him such attempts are further corruptions of love as a political concept. He analyzes the Catholic attempt to overcome the division between private and public love by disciplining Eros to Agape: “Eros is only legitimate when it operates under the dominion of Agape” (p. 7). In an inverse attempt, Hardt claims that Freud submits Agape to Eros. In Hardt’s words, “Freud seeks to interpret the public realm and social life as manifestations, sometimes repressed and diverted, of Eros” (p. 9). According to Hardt, these attempts to overcome the divide both fail because they continue to submit love to the domination of the distinction (of the subordination of Eros to Agape, or of Agape to Eros), one which leaves “politics to a question of authority” (p. 9).

Hardt (2009) finds it necessary to trace such forms of corruption in order to articulate his project in a clearer way. He points out how

a project to discover a political concept of love is thus left with a dilemma.

The liberal solution preserves politics by banishing love from the public realm whereas illiberal strategies, like those of Pope Benedict 16 and Freud, unite the public and private realms by reducing politics to a question of authority.

The only two alternatives seem to be that love be either apolitical or antipolitical. (p. 12)

Hardt's project is to think love as a political concept in a way that "does not segregate private love from public, eros from agape" (p. 12), is not the fusion in unitarian identity, but is rather "the interaction and even proliferation of multiplicities" (p. 12). Thus, he intends to preserve the transformative and productive force constitutive of love. Such transformative force is promise and risk at the same time. It is the promise of something new but, at the same time, the risk of never knowing what that might be. Indeed, for Hardt, love as a political concept is not passive, is not something that happens to us but is rather an action, an act of creation in a realm of difference and differentiation, and therefore is love understood as the creation of singularities. Later in the chapter I shall return to this important point by connecting it with some of Alain Badiou's (2003) thinking of love, for his work offers rich ways to think about the connection between love, subjectivity in the collective, and thinking.

Hardt's projection of love as a political concept, and its realization as such, is still in an embryonic state. However, when thinking about the question of what it means to live well with others in educational contexts, it has been significant to expose different forms of love's corrosion as a political concept especially because I think that such corruptions threaten to shatter the conditions of possibility for the teacher as a thinking subject and for the event of thinking. In what follows, I want to underscore some significant points of speculative connection with Hardt.

As I have pointed out previously, one of my preoccupations when thinking of community, and indeed when thinking of the collective in educational contexts, concerns the apparent accomplishment of community and the collective as a project, and specifically as a

project of union and fusion. If community were to fill its constitutive void or lack through a communion of identity, a sisterhood, or a fusion in love or ideals and codes, or through a collective enterprise arranged by “a will to absolute immanence” (Nancy, 1991, p. 12), there would no longer be *relation* but *irrelation* by way of such unification; there is nothing to be related to within a unified body. One needs to question the collective as an entailment of fraternity and brotherhood or as a fusion through identification. Such forms of fusion, Derrida (1997) cautions us, are nothing other than attempts to create an inclusive collective at the cost of neutralizing difference.

In this chapter I started by engaging with the concept of cultural myths (Britzman, 2003). I did so as a way to consider some myths that might substantiate and create certain understandings of the collective in educational contexts. I pointed to the complex ways in which instances of superficial knowledge can give substance to the question of what it means to live well with others in educational contexts. I particularly wanted to consider how superficial knowledge presents itself as a natural fact, or naturalizes the idea of care or concern for and within the educational collective as that which is bound by harmony, or by a project for coming together, based in that which is recognizable and similar. I have outlined how such a commitment to a naturalized harmony and commonality may take different forms in educative contexts, such as in deliberation focused on reaching agreement, or in efforts to normalize the other as identifiable in the collective, or in the dominant discourse of “positive thinking” in education (see also De Castell & Bryson, 1997).

I think that what is important to notice for those concerned with education is that not only that there is a risk to naturalize love in the collective as a love for the same and recognizable, but further that, as Alenka Zupančič (2007) argues, such naturalization “is

itself a politico-ideological process par excellence” where “the imperative of happiness, positive thinking, and cheerfulness is one of the key means of expanding and solidifying this ideological hegemony” (p. 7). Such harmonic imperatives create a moralization of feelings, a “bio-morality” (p. 5), where certain feelings are a sign of success and others are “perceived more and more as moral faults” (p. 5) or a lack of civility.

In terms of my research, it becomes important to consider how this moralization of feelings, and its relations with a naturalization of a certain concept of love in the collective, affects the way educational collectives such as the teaching body or even a single classroom come to address or suppress the question of collectivity, and how such addresses allow or prevent the emergence of a multiplicity of singularities. To put it otherwise, what would be the conditions of possibility in such contexts to “develop, in contrast to the notion of merging in unity, a concept of love that conserves or even proliferates multiplicities, that operates by experimenting with differences” (Hardt, 2009, p. 12)? Further, what would be the connection, if any, between such proliferation and the creation of conditions of possibility for the teacher as a thinking subject? I am also interested in asking how one might think about love in an educational collective in ways that love would exceed its definition, primarily, as care for the other.

### ***The Logic of Autoimmunity within Love and the Collective***

I would like to start this engagement by indicating a necessary distance from considering the concepts of love and the collective through a solution-oriented mode of thinking, as an argument that presents itself as a better, fuller, or more complete way of thinking the collective and love, and one which, in turn, invites fixing strategies. This is not my aim. My argument is that Hardt’s work on love as a political concept, in addition to other

contributions concerning love, such as Derrida's or Lacan's, where love is not understood as unification and fusion, would lose its promise if considered as the new ideal to follow within educational contexts, as something to be learned or a project to develop. I would like to follow a different path. It is one that first tries to indicate the aporetic nature at the heart of concepts such as love and the collective, an irreducible aporetic state inherent in their constitutive autoimmune logic, one which permits such concepts to always be rethought and reinscribed. And second, with Badiou, it will indicate what is inaugurated in the collective by *love* and its profound implications for teaching and learning subjectivities within a pedagogical collective.

What would it mean to think that at the heart of an educational collective and its naturalization of love—as a love for what is similar and recognizable—there is an aporia of (auto) immunity always operating? This is to think of an aporia that, interminably, installs what one could call a representational unsettling, so that both concepts are interminably being rethought again and again. I am referring here, for example, to those moments in education where love presents itself as incoherent<sup>12</sup>, ambivalent and ambiguous—an ambiguity that may lay precisely in the recognition of the impossibility of totally grasping the other or ever fully knowing the other (Todd, 2003). Or in those moments where concern and care take a risk to be expressed outside what is conventionally recognized as such (Todd, 2003). Or those moments that are not necessarily a repetitive response aiming at keeping a culture of niceness and harmony within educational contexts such as early childhood (see Hard, 2006) but the many moments of disruption that happen within that culture and that can inaugurate an openness to what is other.

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<sup>12</sup> See Berlant (2011) on love and incoherence and her invitation to imagine affective incoherence of the subject, “political pedagogy that deals with incoherence.”

But how does such autoimmunity operate? In terms of the concept of community, Derrida (1998) argues that in every community there is the effort, under a sovereign move, to create identitarian forces, like corporeal antibodies, to immunize, to protect against the unrecognizable, the other, the proliferation of differences. To say this with the words of Italian philosopher Rosella Bonito Oliva (2006), “the immune makes it possible to expel the outsider.... Immunity can be a sort of negative community that draws up its defensive boundaries, withdrawing itself from every contamination with what is foreign” (p. 76). Such immunization occurs even before contact with the stranger, the different or other; one can identify in such immunization the process that sustains in the collective what Nancy (1991) considers as the irrelation of unification, to which I have previously referred in the chapter. Thus one could argue that

the modern community is thought and instituted exactly as the organism is for medicine, which is to say, premised in preventing infection even before the bodies come in contact, in the flattening of the relational dimension of the human being. (Bonito, 2006, p. 76)

In this light, and having in mind Hardt’s considerations on love, one could argue that, in the collective, the subordination of love to what is similar and recognizable is a symptom of such immunization. It is additionally, and perhaps more importantly, relevant that love itself suffers a similar immune logic recognized in its individuation as a harmonic, merging, or fusional force of protection (foremost from any differentiation interruptive of its circulations of unitary fusion. )

Furthermore, for Derrida (2005a), every process of immunization inevitably harbours an autoimmune logic. Here it is important to notice, as Michael Naas (2006) writes, that for

Derrida “autoimmunity is not opposed to immunity but is, as it were, secreted by it; it is a self destructive ‘force’ produced by the immunizing gesture itself, a weak force that undoes the force of power or sovereignty” (p. 34). Thus, typical of an *aporetic move*, autoimmunity is possible or installed by the immunizing process itself<sup>13</sup>. As it happens with autoimmune diseases, the development of such autoimmune logic “is determined precisely by a coactive repetition of mechanisms whose purpose is to defend the body in the absence of infection” (Bonito, 2006, p. 76), hence it is a logic that is “protecting itself and so compromising itself, compromising itself by protecting itself” (Naas, 2006, p. 22). Derrida names it a *self-destructive force*. And yet, for Derrida, this self-destructive force is a vital one; he points to it when writing about the autoimmunity of community:

No community [is possible] that would not cultivate its own autoimmunity, a principle of sacrificial self-destruction ruining the principle of self-protection.... [T]his self-contesting attestation keeps the autoimmune community alive, which is to say open to something other and more than itself: the other, the future, death, freedom, the coming or the love of the other. (Derrida, 1998, pp. 50-51)

This principle of self-destruction disables totalizing and sovereign moves of unity and self-preservation, and this is what allows the community to be *alive*, because it is open to *relation* by the possibility of relating to something other than itself, therefore, creating a *vitalizing interruption* in the “flattening of the relational dimension of the human being”

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Naas (2006) writes: “Derrida quite explicitly inscribes autoimmunity into a series of other terms from undecidability and aporia to double bind and difference in order, I would argue, not to relativize or neutralize this term but to make it comprehensible and give it a force of rupture” (p. 26). Derrida (2005b) writes that he can inscribe “the category of autoimmune into a series of both older and more recent discourses on the double bind and the aporia” (p. 35) and then he specifies that while “aporia, double bind and autoimmune process are not exactly synonyms ... what they have in common, what they are all precisely charged with, is, more than an internal contradiction and undecidability, that is, an internal-external, nondialectizable antinomy that risks paralyzing and thus calls for the event of the interruptive decision” (p. 35).

(Bonito, 2006, p. 76). This logic of self-destruction interrupts what, for example, I referred to earlier in the chapter as the harmonic imperatives which sustain the common substance of a collective in educational milieux, or the naturalization of love as love for the same and recognizable<sup>14</sup>. Indeed similarity and recognition—any self-identity—according to Derrida are open to its undoing because it is constitutively autoimmune. As Derrida (2005b) writes, “autoimmunity is the autoinfection of all autoaffection” (p. 109).

To push this argument further, I find it meaningful to relate Derrida’s considerations to Roberto Esposito’s (2007) work on immunity. Although each philosopher approaches immunity and autoimmunity in a different way, Esposito’s work is a stimulating supplement to Derrida’s. Such supplement comes through the ways Esposito approaches immunization as coextensive to the concept of community and as historically related to the rise of modernity. As Bonito (2006) observes, Esposito’s thought is preoccupied on one hand with how the immunization of the subject in modernity is an annihilating weapon against living with others, not only because of its lack of entailment of a relation with what is different, but also because of its generalized antipathy toward the complexities and contradictions of human affairs. On the other hand, Esposito’s thought insinuates, or “inserts,”

the necessity of a contamination in which the differences, which like pathologies are inevitable given the body’s natural exposure and its original vocation for contact, occasion a relation in which the organism of the

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<sup>14</sup> It would be an interesting project to examine the connections between love as a political concept and Derrida’s concept of hospitality. This is not the remit of this dissertation. However, I think it is important to notice here that hospitality in Derrida is the radical openness to the arrival of the Other. Hospitality in Derrida is foremost about the guest, a guest for whom one does not even know the time of arrival or encounter. Perhaps one can infer such a sense of openness in what I have been writing about love as a political concept and yet, I think, that the emphasis, and certainly my interest, is less in the unconditional openness to the demand of an Other and more about our relation to conceptualizations of love as a transformative force and as an eventual site. And perhaps, this is what Derrida’s concept of hospitality and the ways I am trying to engage with the concept of love have in common: their eventfulness.

individual, the community, and life itself might grow through expansion and not reduction. In immunization, the energy of life requires relations, and all attempts to preserve life independently of individuals, bodies, and subjects are not only sterile but testify to the sense and quality of life. (p. 77)

I pause here to acknowledge an important invitation for education in Esposito's and Derrida's work, one which connects with my earlier considerations. Rather than proposing a new project by which to reengineer the collectivities within educational spheres, or trying to proselytize for a transformative applicability in considering love in such contexts, an appropriate invitation would be for such collectives and those who populate them to consider and acknowledge the fears of contagion that characterize them, the related processes of immunization, the sterile inherency of self-preservation, and the attendant logic of autoimmunity. In other words, an invitation not to dwell on the fusional concept that might characterize such collectivities, but rather to consider the ways in which its proper manifestation is simultaneously undercut and sustained.

According to Derrida (2005b), it is autoimmune logic itself that enables and opens the space for something other. Naas (2006) is precise on the point: "Autoimmunity at once destroys or compromises the integrity and identity of sovereign forms and opens them up to their future—that is, to the unconditionality of the event" (p. 22). Thus autoimmunity is thought of as that logic which compromises any foundation or guarantor of identity, and which consequently opens the space or void for what is yet to come, for "the unconditionality of the event." In the following chapter I will consider the concept of the event at length, for it is emerging here as a central figure, and also how its thinking is a matter of educative concern. For now, it will suffice to say that Derrida (2007) thinks the event as that which is

*completely other*, which is incalculable and unpredictable or as an “impossible” which “tear[s] the fabric of the possible” (p. 455), disrupts and alters what is normal or conventional.

Autoimmunity, as a logic that haunts concepts such as the collective and love, is described by Derrida (1998) not only as *threat*, but also as *chance* for them; it is their acceptance and opening to what is not recognizable, what is singularly other and multiple. To put it differently, the chance is given as a threat because “it destroys or neutralizes the incommensurable singularity to which it gives effective access” (Derrida, 2005b, p. 53). In fact, Derrida, using a biological parallel, tells us that autoimmune processes are also characterized by “the positive virtues of immuno-depressants destined to limit the mechanisms of rejection and to facilitate the tolerance of certain organ transplants”<sup>15</sup> (pp. 72-73). Inspired by Derrida, I argue that community, the collective, and love in education are intrinsically or constitutionally autoimmune; they are permanently marked by this autoimmune logic which is an *aporetic logic* of, at once, threat and chance. Concepts such as the collective and love are infinitely inadequate to themselves. This inadequation unleashes the opening to the future and to transformation because even when one says “this is community” or “this is love,” the *is* remains open to a reinscription because it is always haunted or bothered by its own impossibility. It remains always “aporetic, under a double or autoimmune constraint” (Derrida, 2005, pp. 36-37), therefore never reaching completion, and, in some ways, always being impossible as a complete and totally realized possibility. Perhaps then, to recognize the infinite inadequacy constitutive of concepts such as love and

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<sup>15</sup> An example of autoimmune rejection and then opening and acceptance which, I would say, inaugurates an event is the case of many pregnant women whose bodies can violently reject the newcomer through an array of symptoms. The immuno-suppressants work to help the body not only adapt and accept the child but also nurture the new body until the event of birth.

the collective is an important movement towards unburdening the question of living well with others, mainly because it opens it up to the legitimation of incompleteness, ambiguity or even incoherence and thus to the loosening up of determination. And finally, the creating of an opening for what is yet to come.

### **Love as an Evental Circumstance**

The task I set for myself when writing this chapter would be incomplete if I did not indicate a very generative connection between what I have been exposing here above and Alain Badiou's singular work on love. I consider this connection not only as an enriching move within the body of my argument, but also as a fecund point to be developed in further thinking and as a gesturing towards one of the intellectual endeavours that might spring from this dissertation. If concepts such as the collective and love are thought in the ways I have been considering here, and if we connect such considerations to the work of Alain Badiou (2003), one might begin to articulate what Badiou calls *evental circumstances* in the conditions of love and the collective.

For Badiou, love (together with art, science, and politics) is one of the "conditions" of "truth processes," an "arena for new truths" (Badiou, 2008). Here it is important to say that what is truth for Badiou is not what we commonly understand by truth. Indeed, as Kent den Heyer (2009) writes, "for Badiou, 'truths' are not actualities to acquire, properties of interlocking social regimes, temporalized ideals or authenticities, derivable from moral precepts" (p. 28). Also, truth or a truth process for Badiou is "absent of prespecified content (as articulated by any number of religious orders or present appeals for our necessity to believe in the 'free hand' of the Market)" (den Heyer, 2009, p. 28). Rather, truths for Badiou

“consist of the material traces (i.e., in speech, art, and social movements) a ‘becoming subject’ produces in ‘fidelity’ to a singular ‘truth-process’ instigated by an ‘event’ ” (p. 28).

When considering the above in connection with the concept of love in Badiou’s thought, love is thought as a procedure by which one becomes a subject (to truth—the only subjectivity worthy of the name for Badiou). There is a resubjectivization inaugurated by love because the subject is never a given, but is only the result of an event, in pursuit of its “undecidable” consequences.

Interestingly, Badiou acknowledges that love is inherently threatened by an evil, which for him is represented by the danger for love to turn into a force of fusion. He writes that “the romantic idea of full, fusional love, under the purified sign of the One, is exactly the Evil of love” (Badiou, 1990, p. 200, as cited in Hallward, 2003, p. 186).

Nevertheless, even facing such evil, love is, for Alain Badiou, one of the few identifiable domains where events take place, or where, more properly, they sunder place into new configurations. Love originates in an encounter: “the encounter is the originary power of the Two, thus of love” (Hallward, 2003, p. 187). This is an encounter that is not union in the *One* (community, romantic fusion, etc.) but which subsists within the “law” of the *Two* (i.e., self and other). As Hallward (2003) writes, for Badiou, it is thus a “fundamental scene of difference” (p. 186).

According to Badiou, from this scene, this encounter, the subject, compelled and dislocated, begins “an investigation of the infinite (of everything that touches our love)” (Hallward, 2003, p. 186) without any guarantee or index of validity, without any correspondence. For Badiou (2003), rather than love being for the same, or as the support of

a harmonious collective bound by the care for the other, love is the “inauguration of innumerable common practices or shared investigations of the world” (p. 50).

This conceptualization of love is of potentially profound significance for education, opening as it would seem to into infinite unnameable possibilities. Badiou’s conceptualization of love accords with my previous question concerning how to think about love in a educational collective in ways that would exceed its definition as care for the other and be also an encounter with that which lives in the *with* of being-with-others. Badiou vitalizes the act of coming together in educational contexts, not only because he reminds us that there is an interminable gap between the subjectivities involved in the encounter, but also because he reminds us that there is something beyond the face-to-face that must matter in such contexts. Specifically, this is the inauguration of a labour that takes the form of a shared investigation of the world by incomplete, indeterminable, nonsymmetrical beings in a common condition of decision—to decide the undecidable. In this way Badiou also vitalizes education against the multiple immunizations that isolate such contexts from the world by neutralizing it or “reducing it to a mere scenario” (Bonito, 2006, p. 76), because when love is thought as *the arena for new truths* or the *inauguration of a shared investigation of the world*, love is not any more, in a romantic abandonment, split or cast away from thinking because of its apparent irrationality in (usually tellingly absent) transports of passion. Rather, love has the force to inaugurate a labour that would create a new relation to the world, in a sense that is its purpose, its “truth.” This labour is characterized by a militant disposition, where love is not understood as a passive process of undergoing something, but as a practice, an active march of investigation into the very terms of subjectivity and the world, a world, or worlds, never an object to be understood or grasped because it is always, and constitutively,

incomplete. In Badiou, love and thought enlist each other in a truth procedure, thus, one might say that *love is the arena for the event of thought*.

After engaging with Hardt and Badiou's ideas one might pause and ask then, what it means *to think lovingly*. Perhaps then, and going back to the moments in education to which I referred previously, one might say that such thinking requires first no search for guarantees within the relationality. It is a thinking that happens within an encounter of differences and which gives itself to the proliferation of differences, accepting the risks this might entail. Such thinking inaugurates a *shared investigation* as Badiou posits, and I would add, an investigation, particularly, of aporetic moments in education. Those moments where desire and constraint meet. But, more important, to think lovingly would be to let oneself be seduced by the possibility of what is not yet, that which appears as a creative promise in the very act of the shared investigation and which requires a leap of faith because it is a leap towards what one can not know in advance: that which one might call the event in education.

The interest of this chapter has been to critically engage with the concept of the collective within educational contexts. At the heart of such an engagement live the questions of how the collective is thought in such contexts and how being-with-others is projected and accessed. How indeed is it rendered intelligible? And, more broadly, how does this thinking of the collective connect, as a response, to the question of what it means to live well with others? The chapter also tries to point toward the relation between the imaginary of the collective and a certain naturalization of the concept of love by thinking about love as something other than a harmonious unifying force. This provocation is done in the name of opening a space of possibility for thinking a pedagogical collective where its tendencies would not be towards merging in unity but as a context that conserves or proliferates

multiplicities, that experiments with differences, and, perhaps more importantly, as a space for evental conditions, as Badiou invites us to think. Considering this, the effort in the following chapter will be to engage more closely with the concept of event in relation to thinking and to the teaching subject.

## Chapter 5: To Think the Event

*Every day things happen in the world that cannot be explained by any law of things we know. Every day they are mentioned and forgotten, and the same mystery that brought them takes them away, transforming their secret into oblivion. Such is the law by which things that can not be explained must be forgotten. The visible world goes on as usual in the broad daylight. Otherness watches us from the shadows. (Bernardo Soares, 1991, p. 195)*

The intention in Chapters 3 and 4 has been to engage with the guiding questions for this dissertation: what does it mean to live well with others in educational contexts? And, what might the way we engage with this question mean for the possibility of the teacher as a thinking subject? By means of a critical analysis of the concept of community in educational research and discourse, I pointed to the aporetic complexities that the concept of community bears and to my concern that such complexities need to be considered when thinking about community and education, and particularly community and the teaching subject. I also addressed how community may happen in the interruption of such definitions, precisely there, in the persistent struggles, failures, and interruptions of defining and objectifying or building community. From these more abstract considerations of community I then focused in Chapter 4 on questions of how the collective is thought in educational contexts and of how being-with-others is projected and accessed. I particularly pointed to the relation that we, as

communal subjects, have to the question of what it means to live well in educational contexts. I did so by elaborating on Britzman's concept of superficial knowledge, which I took to be a useful way to engage with the myths that populate conceptions of the collective in educational contexts. I was particularly interested in analyzing discourses about collectivity as that which is successful when finding a certain commonality, and to engage with the question of what becomes impossible in such understandings of the collective.

The previous chapter concluded with an invocation of educational contexts as a space for evental conditions. Pursuing this idea further, and following from the considerations above with respect to the collective, I want to bring into the conversation the relation between event and subjectivity. This intention draws the question of living well with others toward the intimate connection that Jacques Derrida, as well as Alan Badiou, make between event and subject, a connection which aligns the teaching subject with the event of thinking.

This chapter begins with a consideration of Derrida's concept of the event, including, in part, a conversation between his ideas and those of Badiou. I then consider the relation between the event and the subject such that my preoccupation, the teaching subject, may enter the discussion. Here, through four moments, I sketch a conceptualization of the subject of the event, to whom I refer as an *aporetic subject*.

### **Teaching Subject and Determination**

The coupling of the questions: what does it mean to live well with others in educational contexts and what might the way we engage with this question mean for the possibility of the teacher as a thinking subject issues the invitation to think about the

determinations implicit in engagements with the question of living well with others. How determined are we by grammars of recognition that pre-shape such engagements and, more specifically, how determined is the teacher as a thinking subject by what is already fixed within the social norms of a particular collective? These questions are the starting point of this chapter and also those by which I wish to join the conversation already started by scholars such as Anne Phelan whose work considers issues of recognition, autonomy and determination in education. When thinking, for example, about recent efforts to professionalize teaching in Canada through the creation of professional designations, Phelan (2010) writes that “professional bodies hope to ensure public recognition by adopting professional designation in the form of post nominal letters, indicating earned qualifications and adherence to ethical standards” (p. 319). She points to how professional designation “reflects an idea of the professional as prerecognized and pre-saturated with significance prior to any particular encounter with others be they teachers or students or members of the public” (p. 319), thereby rejecting the reality of recognition in all its “intersubjective riskiness” (p. 319). It is this “pre-saturation of significance,” to borrow Phelan’s words, with which I am concerned when thinking about teaching subjectivity that thinks that which is outside determination, in other words, who thinks the event. Following Phelan I want to focus on those moments of “intersubjective risk,” those moments when recognition fails, and so might create the conditions for the event of thinking.

## Memory and Mourning

How reciprocally determined are we by that which we consider known or certain? This question has accompanied me since I was a child. It was born in the long desolate corridors of a Catholic school, as if emerging from their shadows in the bustle of habits. This question confronted me when I tried to hide from the violence of the determination and certitude of a faith tradition, and an education that conveyed that there was nothing further to be thought; in both the limits of truth were demarcated with me vouchsafed within them, “if only” I were to assume my proper place. Such determinate knowledge was mute like stone, with each to be transmuted likewise into something leaden, inert. One day, however, all determinations were shot through with a phone call: My father had disappeared. Are the details important? No. Only the question is important. The question that, as an event, has rent me ever since, the question that became an infinite act of mourning: Where is he? Where is the body? Where do I lay these tears? Where is the body, the testimony that determines the beginning and the end? Where is the certitude of the loss sealed by the burial? *Desaparecido*. The absence of his presence as the presence of his absence, a constant indeterminacy and uncertainty marked paradoxically by the most certain circumstance of all: Death. But this, my father’s death, was a death that became an impossible death. It became a death that was not actuality because there was no body presented to be mourned. This absence that has been the most present event in my life became a remaining-in-waiting for what was and remains for me the unthinkable. This unthinkable lives silently carved in a *perhaps*. A perhaps that, if it were to become a possibility, I would never be ready for. This perhaps has become another way of addressing what was already, of apprehending the extant. It permeated me; I carried it, and as a parasite, quietly, it inhabited the educational tower of certitude. I remember an

impasse of being. On the one hand, I was being educated in the name of, and within, conventional determinations and, on the other, I was feeling that *the only way I could survive* such displacement and lonesomeness was through the impossible couplet of mistrust and promise installed by this impossible perhaps.

This vignette not only speculatively touches on what may be thought of as our human condition, but it is where I can start if I am to address the concept of the event and the teaching subject within the broader question of living well with others. In this narration the gaze of order and mastery, represented by the nuns, and the shelter of certainty and knowledge, represented by Catholic education and social capital, were intersected, punctured and disrupted by the singular event of my father's disappearance. And there I was, me, being determined, being subjected, by the event-ness of this event. This vignette will be amplified, or magnified, by a conceptual analysis of that which is subtracted from determination, which disarms the realm of knowledge and necessity and is that which will be called the event, if, as Derrida consistently says, indeed there is such a thing.

### **The Order of Being and the Aporetic Structure of the Event**

Derrida and Badiou both emphasize that the event is that which occurs within, and yet is from without, the order of what is constituted as possible, actual and conventional. It happens within grammars of recognition and established social bonds and yet it is from without such orders. In Badiou (2006) the event is immanent to what he calls a *situation*, which is the word he uses to designate “the multiple made up of circumstances, language, and objects, wherein some truth can be said to operate” (p. 124). In other words, a situation is

“the place of the taking-place” (Badiou, 2007, p. 24) and consists of a *structure* of that which is presented. This structure is the result of what Badiou calls the operation of the *count-as-one*, which presents the constituents of the situation and their orders.

Importantly, the situation is also made of the *void* which is, for Badiou, the true name of *being*; where being is understood as the *pure multiple* and not the consistent, implicitly counted, presentation of the structure of the situation. This is being not as that which is presented in a situation but rather as the void of every situation, both its lacuna and phantom. Put differently, “the void of a situation is not simply what is not there, but what is necessary for anything to be there” (Feltham & Clemens, 2005, p. 12). In an interview with Simon Critchley (2006), Badiou describes the event as “not about what is full in the situation but what is the void of the situation” (p. 4). According to Badiou (2006), it is at the edges of the void that an “evental site” (*site événementiel*) exists, which has a peculiar and unsettling fragility “which exposes it to be in some sense ‘wrested’ from the situation” (p. 101). It is at the restlessness or vulnerability of the evental site that an event happens as a supplement to the situation. Thus, the event happens within the situation, but as a supplement, a rupture in the orders of a situation, such as in the domain of knowledge, and thereby effecting change or transformation.

If for Badiou an event is not about what is full in a situation but more about the void in a situation, for Derrida the event is not about what is possible in a situation but more about what is impossible. As Derrida (2002) writes, “if all that arises is what is already possible, and so capable of being anticipated and expected, that is not an event. *The event is possible only coming from the impossible*” (p. 74, emphasis added). The event is not the repetition of what is already considered as constituted or as possible, but rather it emerges from the

impossible. This is an impossible that is understood as the condition for something to be completely other. This impossible is not to be thought as a negative. More important, it is not even the opposite of possibility. It is rather to be considered aporetically, that is, as that which lodges in possibility, that which “must be at the heart of the possible” (Derrida, 2005b, p. 460) so that it introduces into the possible a restlessness provoked by what its presentation excludes. In this sense, the impossible is neither understood as impossibility *per se* nor as the binary obverse of the possible.

Indeed, rather than being oppositional concepts, they co-exist as a coupling such that for something to be considered absolutely possible it must be impossible. This is an aporetic coupling because of the impasse the coupling must sustain. In this coupling, the impossible brings an indispensable complement to the possible. It is marked by a complement where what is deployed as possible, as actual, is interminably solicited by that which indicates the inadequacy of what already is, or, to put it differently, what is possible is interminably bothered by the impossibility of its adequation. For example, and going back to the notion of recognition, one could say that recognition is always haunted by those moments that are subtracted from prior identification. The complement that the impossible brings to the possible is the aporetic structure from which the event emerges. This is where the possible manifests *as* impossible. And it is this *as*, possible as impossible, which is bursting with the promise of what is not yet, with the excess that comes from the yet to be, and of a thinking of the future<sup>16</sup> as fundamentally and necessarily incomprehensible.

The impossible that is at the heart of the possible “introduces into the possible, it is its *usher today*: it gets it to come, it gets it to move according to an anachronic temporality”

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<sup>16</sup> Future understood as *avenir*, which in French and other Latin languages reads as *to come*. This is a more radical future, one that can not be foreseen or anticipated.

(Derrida, 2005a, p. 91, emphasis in original). It is that which torments what takes place from within so that, through such torment—the torment of the impossible—an opening remains for something completely other to take place. In other words, the possible—what already is—is haunted by what is not already, what is yet to come. This haunting of the yet to come brings the event since the normal “deployment of a potentiality or possibility that is already there will never make an event or an invention” (Derrida, 2005a, p. 87). Thus, what is specifically new to a situation, what we have been calling the event, is always induced by what is foreign to a situation, so much so that it cannot even register within it as a possibility.

As this is a complex and somewhat elusive idea, let us return to my vignette to consider an example. The possible of my situation, my life at the time, prior to my father’s disappearance was, as I have shown, rigidly and comprehensively determined. I knew where I was, and where I was going. Yet we cannot say that this was a possibility that was not haunted by impossibility, by the specter of indeterminacy—which, I might add, was very likely the motivating impulse behind and power of the situation’s determinations! When the event of my father’s disappearance occurred, the impossible took place, that which could not have been anticipated came to pass, and what had haunted the situation previously erupted as a change which introduced a whole new regime of determinations—with their own impossibilities—for me.

The event in Derrida is not to be understood as a presence or as what exists, or appearing in the order of a situation like a fissure as at Badiou’s evental site, but it is rather that which provokes us like a call, an inciting spectral call. This call is “perfectly capable of being described as a ghost, as shade or specter, a demi-being, not real enough to do anything but able only to haunt us in uncanny possibilities, above all, the haunting possibility of the

impossible” (Caputo, 2003, p. 15). Caputo here, in a compelling distinction, is pointing to that which is powerless because it is not real, and yet forceful because of what it evokes. Thus, the haunting of the possible by the impossible is that spectral structure which, in Derrida, is essential for an event to happen because it is that which prevents something from being complete; it creates a spacing, an opening to an indeterminate future to come. This spectral structure leaves a space for something to be always open to becoming. Here one can hear echoes of a similar structure at the heart of the concept of community I presented in Chapter 3 where I posited that imaginaries of community are rooted in failure, and that it is precisely that failure which creates the condition of possibility for community.

One can find similarities between Badiou and Derrida with respect to the spectrality of the event. In Badiou the void is that which is not present, is not a presence, in a situation, as is the impossible in Derrida (one could say they are both the unrepresentable). In both cases as well they are necessary for anything new to happen. Now, let us consider further the event in Derrida in order to realize it more fully for present purposes. Derrida (2005a) writes,

When the impossible *makes itself* possible, the event takes place (possibility of the impossible). That, indisputably, is the paradoxical form of the event: if an event is only possible, in the classic sense of this word, if it fits in with conditions of possibility, if it only makes explicit, unveils, reveals, or accomplishes that which was already possible, then it is no longer an event. For an event to take place, for it to be possible, it has to be, as event, an invention, the coming of the impossible. (p. 90, emphasis added)

The event must “tear the fabric of the possible” (Derrida, 2007, p. 455), as I said before, it doesn’t arise from the simple deployment of what is already constructed or constituted. The

event must be impossible. Thus, the structure of the event in Derrida is not only spectral but also paradoxical. It is always characterized by the aporetic coupling of the possible-impossible. The aporia of such an impasse is far from being an infertile moment, or a space of paralysis. This is precisely because it never presents itself as something to be sure of, but rather it opens the space for the mode of thinking of the maybe–the perhaps–to which I will refer extensively later. As Michael Anker (2006) writes “the ambiguous non-passage of an aporia is thus not a lack or deficiency, but a potentiality and possibility within the fabric of an event to come” (p. 33). The aporetic coupling of the possible-impossible harbours the possibility and the promise of the yet to come. As the ‘otherwise’ of the aporetic thought, it is this ‘yet to come’ that interests me when thinking about the relation between the question of living well with others in educational contexts and the conditions of possibility for the teacher as a thinking subject. Which is to say for the event of thinking in education.

### **Impasses and Event**

Interestingly, as for Derrida, for Badiou it is an impasse, an aporetic moment, that brings the event. Badiou (2006) considers the event that point in which what has been determined, or what he calls an “ontological field” is “detotalized or caught in an impasse” (p. 100). One could say that for Badiou and Derrida without aporia there is no possibility for the event to happen, as the new is predicated on aporetic suspension.

Let me return now to the opening vignette in this chapter and I think about impasses, those which I would say mark our human condition, and those which were suppressed in my circumstances. To the determining powers, and their dominant orders, it was as if impasses

were an existential stain that needed to be cleaned up, ritually scrubbed away by relentless disciplines in what was called learning. Indeed, they were my original sin, which called for violent eradication from my Christian soul. In what seems now a kind of perverse moral hygiene, my thoughts needed to be certain, ‘clean’ and free of the undecidability characteristic of impasse and aporia. They needed to be as clean as my stylized white uniform, free as the confidence of a perfect order, and resonant with a future entirely foreordained.

Yet I was stained by so many impasses, always incomplete, sundered, belated. I want to say something more than stained...I was simmered in impasse and something was restlessly simmering therein. My “sin” as a child played a crucial role in my formation as a pedagogista. There, evil, if of evil we must speak, was precisely what Badiou (2006) describes as such, as the omnipotence of the true, the desire for “everything-to-be-said” (p. 50). If I then amplify these considerations to the broader field of education, I would suggest that this cleansing, this attempted suppression of impasses and their undecidability, is not just the endeavour of religious education, it is the disseminated morality of many different forms of education. Consider education as a project which implicitly assumes the future as if it were determinable, as if every determined action or thought would lead us to a related and a determined outcome, a project of the determination to determine, one might say. (This is also the morality of the matter: the enforcement of an assumed *already-knowing*.)

I am not arguing here for an eradication of, for example, plans and programs or standards—after all, disruption presupposes that something must be there to be disrupted. Rather, I am trying to point out that the purpose of such determination may be to distract us from, for instance, creating spaces which accord value to uncertainty, as a “resource for

understanding the great conflicts within which the field of teacher education “absorbs, creates, and lives” (Britzman, 2007, p. 2). Thematizing and developing an understanding of such uncertainty is, in my view, the centre of the educative project, and is constitutive of teacher subjectivity.

However, much educational thought is preoccupied with concepts like planning or programming (Biesta, 2010) and it is when education is reduced to just the unfolding of such planning that the possibility of the event is effaced<sup>17</sup>, subsuming its impossibility within the endless recapitulations of the possible. Such determinacy stands at odds with the indeterminacy of the future. Further then, and in the name of accountability and expertise, does it not appear completely natural that the teaching subject, as a faithful inheritor of a certain understanding of who the teacher should be, becomes expert in masquerading and managing aporetic moments and their constitutive undecidability? Perhaps such ways of thinking, of “managing,” are none other than a sort of implicit response to existential finitude, to what is misperceived or felt or lived or learned as nothing other than a problem.

## **Subject and Event**

As much as we may presume to manage impasses and events, they overtake us; they overflow and defeat our existential containments. As Caputo (2003) writes of Derrida’s conception of the event:

It is not so much that we are bothering with it as that it is bothering with us.

For it is calling us, provoking us, disturbing our sleep.... We find ourselves

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, for Caputo (2008) “the task imposed by a theory of the event...is to track the movements of the event, to flag all the constraints that would prevent the event, in order to make the way open to the coming of the event” (p. 7).

always already in the train of its solicitation, disturbed by a call that calls upon us before we call upon it...it calls because it promises. (p. 14)

We are solicited by the call that inhabits the impasses or moments of undecidability lived by a subject. Such a call disturbs—torments—our structures of interpretation and our ways of being. For Derrida events are not predictable, they are not inside the “I know” or the “I will,” actually the event defeats our will, and especially the will to power. The event is outside the horizon of expectation, it falls on us. This is pointed to by Derrida (2007) when he writes that a “predicted event is not an event. The event falls on me because I don’t see it coming” (p. 451).

Perhaps here we could point to an impasse and double movement regarding the subject and her relation to the event. On one hand, the subject cannot predict an event or foresee it, and yet, on the other, the subject of the event is solicited by a call—a promise—which is pregnant with the unforeseeable, the indeterminate, the completely other. Indeed, and particularly in Derrida, the subject—to be a subject of the event—must be an aporetic subject. This is a subject that experiences moments of impasse and undecidability. S/he is a subject that sustains the ongoing and spectral relationship between the *contract* of what is already constituted, recognized, decided, or thought and the *promise* of what is yet to come, yet to be decided, and yet to be thought.<sup>18</sup> This ongoing spectral relationship is not unfamiliar to teachers. In what follows I will present my first sketch toward a conceptualization of such subjectivity and its relation to the event. I will follow four considerations to do so. These conceptual considerations will indicate a subject who *begins by a confession, who is a militant of the not-faithful-enough, who thinks with the mode of the perhaps and whose*

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to notice that this endurance also points to a conceptualization of the event that does not propose an idealization of a subject free from the already existing structures of interpretation in order for the event to happen.

*ontology is an agonal passion of indeterminate becoming.* Within these considerations I will continue with the parallel analysis of Derrida's and Badiou's theories, and also pause to consider some of the implications of this emerging conceptualization for the teaching subject especially in regard of the question of living well with others in educational contexts. It is important also to note at this point that in most of these considerations we find different tensions and emphases regarding the relationship between subject and decision, subject and agency. These, I think, may be construed as "signposts" of sorts for teacher subjectivity, whose thinking is itself a constitutive commitment.

## **Confession**

My first consideration of the subject of the event as I have been elaborating it begins, as Caputo (2008) does, with the notion of confession. He writes that when thinking about the event and its subject we must start with a confession of the "human condition." This is a confession that we are *lost*. Surely he does not consider this condition "in some grimly Calvinistic sense of being condemned to a future of burning brimstone of our sins, but in the sense that being astray, disoriented, lacking 'knowledge of the way' in some deep sense" (p. 8). This being lost is the confession of the aporetic subject, who encounters the undecidable, the lacking of the way, who is taken by perplexity, and for whom there is not a pre-determined path being drawn in that moment of undecidability. When a path arises as a way out of an aporetic moment, the subject of this confession knows that this path is just momentarily defined because it is always threatened and exposed by the disorientation from

which it arose.<sup>19</sup> Here I am reminded of Patti Lather's (2007) elaboration of getting lost as method, and also of her earlier consideration of the task of critical pedagogy as situating "the experience of impossibility as an enabling site for working through aporias" (1998, p. 34)

Caputo (2008) links this understanding of confession to Derrida's concept of *destinerrance*: "a certain wandering or errancy about destiny, or being destined to wander" (p. 8). A destiny of wandering for the aporetic subject is also a destiny of wondering, precisely because of the perplexity and lack of a pre-fixed way. Such disorientation that the aporetic subject undergoes arises not just from the indication that there is no predetermined way but also from the exposure of the limits of knowledge which characterize preexisting ways and, importantly also, her subjection to them. Such limits are nakedly exposed in an aporetic situation.

Particularly significant is the realization that this confession does not win an absolution, or better said, its promise is not salvation: "the confession does not have a pay back or a pay off, which assures us in return that we are saved. Nothing makes us safe, and there is nothing saving that is not just a peril or a danger" (Caputo, 2008, p. 10). There are no guarantees, no possibility for the sin of indeterminacy to be absolved. One simply must experience such a condition. It is not one for which relief may be sought without significant cost. For it is from this being lost, it is from this common *destinerrance*, from the wandering of the aporetic subject and her undecidable moments that the inventiveness of a decision or of a new way may arise. It is where the event, if there is such a thing, might emerge.

In education and particularly when thinking about the education of the teaching subject we are far from such confession and its groundless affirmation. This distance is

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<sup>19</sup> Here I am referring to path as having the characteristics of *poros*, which I have previously considered in Chapter 2.

abundant in my memory of a Catholic schooling, and coincides with my present as a pedagoga and teacher of student teachers wherein lost are only those who are doomed, those who *haven't got it* and yet must *get it* because, after all, the teaching subject must be accountable, thus, responsible. *Destinerrance* was for my schooling the stigmata that the unfaithful would wear, the ones that still wondered and doubted, the ones caught between the love for God and the earthliness of their being. *Destinerrance* is that feeling that many of the educated subjects I teach keep wanting to eradicate at all cost. “How do you do this?” and “What do you want from us?” they ask me. The consistency and the response to regulations required of the teaching subject are the antidotes for a being destined to wander marked by moments of undecidability. Perhaps, such an antidote is powerful enough to abort the possibility of the inventiveness of a new way, and then powerful enough to forever inter its insistent questions in silence.

Interestingly, also for Badiou it is just when the subject lives a moment of wandering and undecidability that the inventiveness of something new—an event—may take place. He writes that the undecidable “does not so much constitute a ‘limit’—as it is sometimes maintained—as a perpetual incitement to the exercise of inventive intuition” (Badiou, 2006, p. 54). Here intuition, in Badiou’s terms, means decision and re-decision, in an impossibility which is always only the chance of a beginning.

### **Badiou’s Militant of Truth**

This second movement engages with the concept of decision and its relation to the subject and event. I suggest that it is regarding the concept of decision and autonomy where

Badiou and Derrida part ways with respect to the event. Of course, here I am referring to ethical and political decisions, and thus pedagogical decisions. Although both philosophers have a similar conceptualization regarding what a decision is, they have different considerations regarding the relation between decision and event. I will argue that for Badiou, in contrast to Derrida, an event begins in a decision.

Badiou (2006), in a similar fashion to Derrida with respect to the concept of decision, suggests that one cannot take place “using the rules of established knowledge” (p. 46). A decision is not calculable within the situation or, following Derrida, one would say that “to make a decision when the path is clear, when knowledge points the way, when a rule applies is...to follow a program and calculation, not in fact to make a decision at all” (Leitch, 2007, p. 20). Faced with undecidability a decision must be made, and this is one Badiou calls a *wager*. Until this point one might say that there are strong similarities between these two philosophers, but one important instance of difference may be drawn out from this from Badiou (2005):

On the basis of the undecidability of an event’s belonging to a situation a wager has to be made. This is why a truth begins with an *axiom of truth*. It begins with a groundless decision—the decision to say the event has taken place. (p. 46)

Here Badiou writes of truth because for him an event is what inaugurates the process of truth. Truth appears in its newness when an event interrupts repetition in the ontological stability of the givenness of a situation, of everything that appears there as a presence. For this process to be inaugurated there must be a subject who decides to recognize and affirm the event. Furthermore, for Badiou the subject has not just to recognize the event, but also has to remain

faithful to it through a process of redecision, a “truth-procedure” (Badiou, 2006, p. 21). A subject, then, is a *militant of truth*.

For Derrida if there is such a thing as a decision that characterizes an event, such a decision would be at the same time, on the one hand, what neutralizes the event and, on the other, what Derrida (2007) calls the “decision of the other” (p. 445). Derrida does recognize a certain decision is required “to make the event” (Derrida, 2005c, p. 68). In this sense, then, one could say that there is a similarity with Badiou, but for Derrida that decision also, and at the same time, neutralizes the very eventfulness of the event. Derrida’s decision is also the event’s negation, its fall into itself, if you will, into the determination of its nomination or representation. Not only is a decision the event’s neutralization, but also a decision taken by the aporetic subject is, for Derrida, characterized by a certain *passivity*, for it must be what he calls the *decision of the other* in order to be a responsible and ethical decision. As he writes,

My decision can never be mine; it’s always the other decision in me, and in a way I am passive in the decision-making... I am responsible for the other and it’s for the Other that I decide. (Derrida, 2007, p. 445)

For Derrida, this is a passive decision because of what precedes me and because of the other that has not arrived, and which exceeds me. Perhaps this is why he refers to this decision as “an originally affected decision” (p. 68). Affected by structures of interpretation that subject us, affected by the Other that precedes me and by an other that can be understood as a subject or as the other within me or as something completely Other. This is a decision disarmed before the unpredictable arrival of the other—of the event—and never fully pure in that it also neutralizes the arrival of the other. It must be a decision that will recur always itself as an event because for Derrida, if I am the master of my decision, if there is a set of

presumptions that allows me to say that I am the one who decides, then the

decision that I am capable of and that expresses my possible does not interrupt anything, it does not tear the fabric of the possible, disrupt the course of history, as a decision ought to do, it's not a decision worthy of the name.

(Derrida, 2007, p. 455)

This decision must interrupt the normal course of what is constituted but, at the same time because it is the decision of the other, it is never an assertive decision but rather, one could say, is always the decision of the mode of thinking of the perhaps. This complex disposition may be thought as a heuristic, a way by which a teacher extends her practice into the unknown, the unfounded, the experimental. It is less therefore, a matter of expertise or intuition or creativity than a response to a condition, an assumption of subjectivity in the aporetic condition. This thinking is, perhaps counter-intuitively, actually less obscure than intuition, or expertise or creativity in that it founds itself in the existential condition I have been outlining here. Its faithfulness is a nuanced and rich address to the existential problematics of the teacher as a thinking subject, as a subject of the perhaps.

### **Derrida's Militant...Perhaps...Not Faithful Enough**

My third consideration continues with the way in which Derrida connects decision and event. He links them through the mode of thinking of the perhaps. This is the mode of thinking proper to the aporetic subject. It is a mode of thinking that is powerless because it never presents the object of its thought as certain and fundamental. It is nevertheless a soliciting and provoking force because it is a thinking that creates a fertile delay in

determination and certitude, a spacing for what has not yet been thought, for what remains to come. Thus, it is a hesitation hospitable to the event.

Perhaps one could say that if in Badiou the subject is a *militant of truth*, then in Derrida the subject is a *militant of the perhaps*. However, this militancy will be the one of a weak force, one that, as its mode of thinking, does not enforce or does not react as power, or is conceived so as to resist such appropriation. As Caputo (2003) writes, the perhaps “calls without the worldly wherewithal to enforce its demands or to be enforced, to create the concrete entitative conditions in the world in which its unconditional appeal would be realized” (p. 16). The aporetic subject that thinks in the perhaps does not enforce or command through a predetermined framework. The perhaps does not present itself as an assertive possibility but instead arrives as a promise, a promise of what is not yet, and might be.

But here we have to be cautious: this lack of enforcement and determination does not mean that such a subject lives in eternal suspension of undecidability, as in an infinite paralysis or lack of agency. The “limited assurance of the perhaps” (Derrida, 2005c, p. 29) needs, as Derrida beautifully writes,

to hold its breath in an ‘epoch’, to allow what is to come to appear or come—  
in order to open up, precisely, a concatenation of causes and effects, by  
necessarily disjoining a certain necessity of order, by interrupting it and  
inscribing therein simply its possible interruption. (p. 29)

There must be a suspension of the perhaps, it needs to ‘hold its breath’ so that the coming of an interruption through the risk of something completely other would take place. The indeterminacy that comes when thinking with the perhaps “supposes a certain type of

resolution and a singular exposition at the crossroads of chance and necessity” (p. 30). What should then be considered the form of this resolution which tolerates and sustains a thinking of the perhaps? In an echo of the subjectivity of Badiou’s militant of truth, but of a different quality altogether, that of the perhaps requires a decision. The decision of the aporetic subject is characterized by a double movement. On one hand, it interrupts determination by deciding to engage with the perhaps. On the other hand, as Derrida (2005c) writes, “nothing is ever decided and nothing takes place without suspending the perhaps” (p. 67). This means that the same decision “must interrupt the very thing that is its conditions of possibility: the *perhaps* itself” (p. 67). Thus, and this is the aporia of the perhaps, its suspension must itself be suspended, its decision must both affirm and inveigh against itself.

So we have a subject that takes a decision that is a determination, and also, paradoxically, suspends that determination. This is the nuance and the promise of the perhaps—it is a less determinate thinking, one of the order of the *as if*, or even better, of the *what if*, and not of the order of the *it is* or *must be*. Derrida calls this thinking “another way of addressing oneself to the possible” (p. 67). The *as if* creates a spacing within what is presented as possible. And thus the *as if* allows possibility always already to become something other. In the words of Peggy Kamuf (2005) it allows “a present without limit, which is also and *at the same time* the limitless future of a promise” (p. 1). It is the promise of the *event*.

## The Passion

According to Derrida, there is no event that is not preceded and followed by its own perhaps, by its own *as if*. He writes that the event “arises like the coming of the impossible, at the point where a perhaps deprives us of all certainties and leaves the future to the future” (Derrida, 2005a, p. 84). In this relation between the perhaps and the event, the subject lives her vulnerability when assurances and presumptions are lifted, a vulnerability accompanied by an anxiety characteristic of the aporetic subject. Anxiety occurs in the open space of an opening, one that exists when the future is left to the future, when there is no measure or identification adequate to it. This subject is then a subject that lives a certain passion, here understood as the condition of the aporetic condition in itself. In this I detect an echo of what Ellsworth (1997) calls the “coming up against stuck place after stuck place” (p. xi) within the impossibility of teaching.

I ask before further delay: What would it mean for the teaching subject to leave the future to the future? What would it mean for educational thought—for pedagogical thought—to think *as if*, what kind of events would this bring? Indeed, anxiety and vulnerability are most uncomfortable, particularly to the teacher who ought to appear as possessing a certain mastery, or at least minimally as obscured by the semblance of a professional competence. Further, conceiving the teacher as an agonal subject is quite uncommon, and even less common is the teacher who teaches through vulnerabilities, and especially who shares them. Such vulnerability can be thought in many ways; consider, for example, the vulnerability inherent in the impossibility of teaching as Freud argued, or as that articulated by scholars such as Shoshana Felman (1997) and Deborah Britzman (2009). I am aware of such vulnerability just before starting a class. I walk into the classroom, I see the students and I

feel the conspiracy among anxiety and the questions that accompany it: what am I doing here? Or how is it possible to teach a course on ethics? Or how are these ideas going to be taken? These moments of awareness are not unfamiliar to my being an instructor and still, often, they take me by surprise.

I will argue that this agonal space is not only intrinsic to an aporetic subject, but is also necessary for the new to come about; because confronting indetermination not only creates the discomfort of anxiety, but is precisely the fraught condition which maintains openness to the yet to come. This agony is connected to the “constant and simultaneous opening/closure of all the various possibilities around the act of decision” (Anker, 2006, p. 79). Confronted with a decision, we face a multiplicity of possibilities, but at the same time with each decision, we lose a multiplicity of potentialities. This is one of the agonies of the undecidable moment, one marked by a decision that must be taken and yet also by all the possibilities that such a decision aborts (and here, to make matters even more challenging, one may again consider the neutralization of the event to which I referred earlier).

### **Knowing and Becoming: An Abyssal Structure for the Event of Thinking**

Now, continuing with my fourth consideration, the subject of the event, given to confession and who thinks in the mode of the *perhaps* (or enacts a sort of militant fidelity if one prefers Badiou) and experiences the passion of aporetic moments, has a relation to knowledge which is neither provisional nor permanent. For, in thinking with the perhaps, knowledge has no stable ground, it is not an end in itself but rather a medium of sorts. In this sense, one could say that the structure of the claim “I know,” if there is one, would be an

abyssal structure, as is the structure of the event. This ungrounded knowledge gives itself to a movement and activity of being something that is at the same time always becoming something else. With this I am not arguing for an autonomous subject, free from being subjected to the determinations of structures of interpretation, social imaginaries, implicate orders, or specific forms of knowledge emerging from regimes of truth. Rather, I am presenting the subject of the event as that who, facing and being faced by undecidability, critically, and through the mode of thinking of the perhaps, assumes the responsibility of an engagement with the limits of knowledge, with the question of its nature and authority, and with questions respecting the category of the true. Here I am opening the back door of this chapter to Foucault. With him I want to underline and insist on a conceptualization of the subject not as transcending its structures of interpretation, but yet defiant of them by the “art of not wanting to be governed quite as much” (Foucault, 1997, p. 45).

As Butler (2002) writes, such a subject is one who would engage with, and indeed champion, “alternative possibilities of ordering the world” (p. 214) and yet who resists fleeing the world and its contingencies. The perhaps has the force to torment the certainty and determination of present forms of knowledge so that the possibility to think otherwise, the possibility for the event of thinking, is not foreclosed. As Caputo (2003) writes, the perhaps, this *peut-être* is “threatening to irrupt from within and to disturb the conditions of *être*. The dangerous perhaps of the possibility of the impossible that solicits us from afar” (p. 16). This solicitation from afar is not from without the world, and yet it calls for what is yet to come. It arises within aporetic moments and it is within such moments that thinking “will be open not to what we already know but to perhaps what is yet to come” (Anker, 2006, p. 55). Such solicitation is the principle of ruin in any act of knowledge. This approach to

knowing does not encapsulate thinking inside limits. Thought happens in the here and now “as something that is coming to be” (Anker, 2006, p. 60) and gives itself to the future to come. The movement and activity of such thought is one that induces an opening to thought itself. Thus, an opening that is not for this or that determination, but rather to an ungrounded indeterminacy whose name is the event. Such movement continues ad infinitum provoked by the undecidability and indeterminacy of aporetic moments. As Anker (2006) writes it “must never halt in the stability of absolute and totalizing recognition” (p. 63) there is always a destabilizing force that exceeds any determination in thought, such force is the event of thinking.

Such movement and activity induce the ontological indetermination and uncertainty of the aporetic subject. They affirm the continuous movement characteristic of the subject of the event: the movement of always becoming. This is a becoming that is determined in its indetermination, or indeterminacy; for any determination that permits the subject to say *I am* is at the same time always punctured by an excess of what eludes its determination, punctured by the failure of its determinate totalization. One way to think about this point in relation to teacher subjectivity is going back to Anne Phelan (2010) through what she calls “the limits of identity.” As she writes when considering teaching and issues of recognition, “human beings constantly exceed and frustrate prior identifications, often contradicting their own expressed and deepest commitments” (p. 317). It is this same excess and frustration which are relevant to those moments when a teacher might face the contradiction between who she or he wanted to be as a teacher and the reality of who she or he seems to have become, or the tensions among institutional identities and the teachers who inhabit them. The almost limitless ways teachers can be or become in their lives as educators, their

commitments and identifications, are nevertheless invariably insufficient to subjectivity as it may be construed in the aporetic condition, or to the event.

The subject of the event is a being that has the capacity of becoming other because of indetermination, and yet also necessarily never knows what this other would be. Agonal and decisive, such a subject is “established progressively, laboriously, nevertheless imperfectly” (Derrida & Roudinesco, 2004, as cited in Leitch, 2007, p. 18), never finished and always in flux, the subject of a haunted resolve.

The subject—and this echoes *destinerrance*, a subject destined to w(a)onder—cannot be completed and remains open to the future to come. As Phelan (2010) puts it, “uncertainty and incompleteness are inevitably aspects of living and teaching so the question becomes how we prepare ourselves for and open ourselves up to the surprises that will emerge and confront us” (p. 324). Considering the logic of the event, one could say that there is no possible preparation, and the issue becomes then rather the thinking of their (surprises, confrontations) medium, that is the thinking of subjectivity. Or, for it is here the same thing, a subjectivity that is a thinking.

Perhaps thus one could argue that as the subject is, she or he should always be open to becoming, or thinking the event. This is a becoming that happens while coming to be, as someone different to come. This is a subjectivity that is marked by being interminable in becoming, and not subject to a determination in the name of a knowing. How then can one consider *being interminable in becoming and not subject to determination* within the teaching profession, a profession where who the teacher is allowed to be is determined in grammars of recognition (Phelan, 2010)?

Before moving towards the last section of this chapter, I am compelled to ask who would then be the teaching subject that does not claim to be in possession of knowing who s/he is, that keeps his/her distance from modern and liberal conceptions of the self? My question repeats Shoshana Felman's (1997) consideration, which here I quote at length, concerning a pedagogical approach,

which makes no claim to be in possession of its own knowledge, [which is], of course, quite different from the usual pedagogical pose of mastery, different from the image of the self-sufficient, self-possessed proprietor of knowledge, in which pedagogy has traditionally featured the authoritative figure of the teacher. This figure of infallible human authority implicitly linked to a God, that is, both modeled on and guaranteed by divine omniscience, is based on an illusion: an illusion of a consciousness transparent to itself. (p. 30)

I read this quotation and I think that given that so much has been written as a critique of this approach and this teaching subject, why do I keep engaging with it? How is this relevant when thinking about the event and education? Perhaps, I think, this is just the haunting of my past, of the tower of certitude and its proprietors who mark me still. But then immediately my memory becomes present and I think of the teacher candidates who when in practicum *must know who they are and what they are doing*, or I think of my 11-year old friend who tells his father that the only thing he wishes from his teacher is that he would talk to him. This is a wish for acknowledgement in more than what the teacher subjectivity allows. Perhaps, even more, it is a resistance that comes in the form of a wish. A resistance to the limits prescribed to him by his teacher. Or I also think about the teacher with whom I work as a pedagoga and who tells me of her fear of showing her impasses and doubts because parents “*expect a*

*self-possessed teacher.*” One may consider these examples as superficial knowledge (Britzman, 2003) of mastery and self-possession; they instantiate superfluity in the subjectivities of teachers and students. In thinking these moments, Phelan’s (2010) questions are not only compelling but ethically significant. She asks whether it could be that professional bodies, in their pursuit of recognition, try to take an excessively firm grip on teacher identity, an excessive investment in having teachers’ acts reflect and express who the professional body already assumes itself and teachers to be? In doing so, could professional bodies feed modes of action that try to suppress or manage worldly unpredictability? One may be recognized as ‘teacher’ or ‘professional’ but what does that knowledge do or fail to do for teachers? Indeed, what does it make of education, particularly within the horizons (aporetic, ontological, eventual) I have been exploring here?

These considerations, the weave of arguments concerning the aporetic subject and their resonances in my life as an educator, reinforce my inclination to follow Derrida in elaborating *another address to the possible*, which Badiou calls another “logic of change”—at the quixotic risk of unrecognizability, or even to the extent of heresy, to which I will refer in what follows.

## Epilogue

Helene Cixous (2008) said that she “does not write with an end in sight but always for other beginnings” (p. 56). Turning to these last pages, this sentence arises in circulatory ways. It compels me, its whispers disturb a particular silence, the one that permeates the spaces of my thinking after the intellectual travail of this work, after the torturous affair one lives with the text that one creates and whose halting maturation one witnesses daily. Now this silence speaks, it gazes at me and asks: What now? This “what now” demands turning the gaze to where one has been, to the questions “What does it mean to live well with others in educational contexts?” “What might the way we engage with this question mean for the possibility of the teacher as a thinking subject?” These questions now interrogate me and ask me, as a pedagogue, why they matter. After much consideration, this final section takes the form of an epilogue. In keeping with the spirit of the dissertation, these pages are not inked in conclusive thoughts but rather, following the “essence” of an epilogue, they are nothing else than the closing pages of this work. As such, this epilogue is symptomatic of the writing that precedes it.

The significance of my questions relates to the teacher as a thinking subject. I have explored the limitations of a preconceived idea of community or how it should exist, and when teaching becomes nothing more than implementation. I have asked what becomes impossible to think within a certain superficial knowledge in education that organizes the myths that see “living well” as synonymous with social harmony, or when living well means finding a commonality premised in certain harmony. I have tried to problematize the correlated naturalization of feelings such as care and love, where love often is thought as love

for that which is the same and recognizable, and have argued for the recognition not only of the aporetic experiences with which teaching is imprinted but also, and perhaps foremost, the constitutive aporia that traverses any community. Thus, I have tried to elucidate how the aporetic complexity of the notion of community complicates considerations about what means *to live well with others* in educational contexts, and how the very possibility of living well is incubated in the impossibility of its adequation. Such elucidation might be what Biesta (2009) refers to as “witnessing the event of deconstruction in education” (p. 400) because such witnessing, according to Biesta, tries to “point at those moments where conditions of possibility and impossibility ‘cross’ each other and in their crossing provide a deconstructive opening” (p. 400).

Thus, perhaps if we want to keep open the conditions of possibility for the teacher as a thinking subject, we must recognize the impossibility that haunts the question of living well with others in educational contexts, and what defines its *we*. Perhaps we must listen more carefully and hear the call that comes from within it, a call that is present in every impossibility to answer such questions, a call that keeps returning interminably precisely because of our difficulty to respond. And perhaps this is one of the questions that remains: how to *respond* to the question of living well with others in educational contexts? How does one respond so that the generative problem of the thinking subject remains open? In other words, how does one respond responsibly to the ethical demand of such a question? Following Derrida, I would say that the ability to respond *responsibly* might begin in the recognition that there is an aporia at the heart of the question of living well with others in educational contexts— an aporia of responsibility itself. Such aporia is installed by two logics or imperatives (Derrida, 1992) that traverse the grammars of recognition within

educational contexts. One I have identified as the logic of the contract, of what is already determined or conditioned, and the other as the logic of the promise, of what is yet to come, indeterminate or unconditional. As I have described elsewhere (Phelan & Delgado, in press), the teaching subject, who in the previous chapter was presented as an aporetic subject, is always in between these two imperatives or logics. Responsibility, according to Derrida (1992), consists in “renouncing neither of these two imperatives” (Derrida, 1992, p. 44). Hence, as I will try to argue here, it is precisely from the co-existence of these two imperatives that a responsible, and thus ethical, subject acts and decides. It is from these two imperatives that the teaching subject engages responsibly with the question of living well within educational contexts.

It is perhaps because contemporary education is so profoundly infused with and implicated in systems of recognition and accountability that the logic which comes to characterize the educational endeavour is the logic of the contract. Teachers’ responsibility seems to be understood as that which is regulated within principles of reason and accountability. As such, teachers are “subjected to principles of calculability, possibility and decidability. An educator’s ethical obligation becomes little more than ‘a technology’ as standards of conduct and competence invite escape from, rather than engagement in, judgment” (Phelan & Delgado, in press). Teaching, in this case, is subordinated to acts that portray the teaching subject as self-possessed and certain in the pedagogical decisions taken. But also such acts often emerge from, on the one hand, decisions that are the mere repetition of a program, or of the normal routine and, on the other, from a sense of pure duty (to a system, an administration, to other teachers, to curricular expectations, to a sense of a recollection of an education experienced, to a social or national body, to vague ethical

precepts, the list goes on...), leaving little space for acting beyond claims such as *I ought to do* or *I must do so*.

It is no surprise then that when I started working as a pedagoga in Vancouver that some teachers with whom I was working complained to their Union. One of the reasons the teachers gave for the complaint was that they were “overwhelmed by thinking too much” and that it required from them a commitment that was not described in their contracts, it was beyond their duty as ‘care givers.’ Not only was the call to think outside daily routines of the program, it rendered an identity for the early childhood educators that was unrecognizable.

With Derrida, I argue that when one acts by following a proscribed sense of duty and when one’s actions or decisions are no more than following program routines or a contract, such decisions and actions cannot be considered ethical—in both senses of the concern of this study: of living well with others or for the teacher as thinking subject. Here it is particularly important to indicate that such deployments of a duty are what prevents anything new from happening, for they constrain and even forbid the event. As Derrida writes,

If I act out of pure duty, *because I must do so, because I owe it*, because there is a debt I must repay, then two limits come to taint any pure ethic or pure morality. On the one hand, I subordinate my action to a knowledge (I am supposed to know what this pure duty is in the name of which I must act). Yet an action that simply obeys knowledge is but a calculable consequence, the deployment of a norm or program. It does not engage any decision or any responsibility worthy of these names. On the other hand, by acting out of pure duty I acquit myself of a debt and thus complete the economic circle of an

exchange; I do not exceed in any way the totalization or reappropriation that...the event itself should exceed. (as cited in Borradori, 2003a, p. 133)

Responsibility and what Derrida considers an ethical decision must be beyond knowledge and calculability, they can be neither the automatism of retroaction from presumed consequences nor the projection of a presumably truthful knowledge. Here I want to repeat, to listen again, to ponder again what Derrida is saying: “an action that simply obeys knowledge is but a calculable consequence, the deployment of a norm or program. It does not engage any decision or any responsibility worthy of these names” (as cited in Borradori, 2003a, p. 133). Thus we must go beyond duty, we must exceed the simple application of what guarantees recognition—of a norm or a know-how. One could say we must exceed the logic of the contract in the name of the logic of the promise. But here Derrida is very cautious, and he repeatedly points to the double injunction of responsibility, for “to go beyond does not mean to discredit that which we exceed” (as cited in Borradori, 2003a, p. 133). So a responsible decision or more particularly, a responsible response to the question of how to live well with others in educational contexts must happen as a *transaction* between what is already determined, to which I referred earlier as the imperative of the contract, and what is yet to come or the imperative of the promise. As Derrida writes, this is a decision that happens “between order and its beyond” (as cited in Borradori, 2003a, p. 133). This is the impasse that any responsible decision or action must bear. This is the aporia of responsibility.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Derrida (1992) indicates the aporia of responsibility by writing that “saying that a responsible decision must be taken on the basis of knowledge seems to define the condition of possibility of responsibility (one can’t make a responsible decision without science or conscience, without knowing what one is doing, for what reasons, in view of what and under what conditions), at the same time as it defines the condition of impossibility of this same responsibility (if decision-making is relegated to a knowledge that is content to follow or to develop, then it is no more a responsible decision, it is the technical deployment of an apparatus” (p. 24).

Hence, one could say that pedagogical responsibilities as “political, juridical, and ethical responsibilities have their place, if they take place, only in this transaction—which is each time unique, like an event” (Borradori, 2003b, p. 130). They must pass through the ordeal of a transaction that is not an automatic repetition of previous transactions, but is each time singular, unique, and as the decision that happens between *order and its beyond*, between contract and promise. I believe such transactions are present in teaching although their presence is often co-opted to a masquerade and obscured by the trials of the day-to day. For example, consider a teacher who doubts the proved efficiency of repetitive strategies to “guide children” and engages them beyond a management-behavior mode, in a more singular and contingent way. For a teaching subject who must be coherent and accountable, it might seem impossible to sustain what would look like a contradiction because of this transaction: responding to two different laws, the one of the contract and the one of the promise. There is no doubt that this might seem impossible, but, as Derrida (1992) writes

There is no responsibility that is not the experience of the impossible....

[W]hen a responsibility is exercised in the order of the possible, it simply follows a direction and elaborates a program. It makes of action the applied consequence, the simple application of a knowledge or know-how. It makes of ethics and politics a technology. (pp. 44-45)

As I have been saying, although ethical, political and thus pedagogical responsibilities must recognize their already constituted and inherited understandings, they *must also exceed them*. They may not look back to previously given assurances. They must come through the ordeal of undecidability as a wager or a leap. This is, in part, why an elaboration of the aporetic subjectivity of the event is important, because responsibility is inherently and necessarily

impossible, and its question must be preceded by that of the subject, which follows in turn from that of the event.

Considering the Derridian notion of responsibility, then, one can argue that the teaching subject who acts responsibly takes the risk not only of unrecognizability, but also of appearing as an *irresponsible* subject. One would look irresponsible not solely because decisions would have what Gasché (1994) called “the allure of irresponsibility” in being “singular, untranslatable...never in its own, or arriving at itself always only beginning” (p. 248) but also because absolute responsibility, according to Derrida (1992), demands a betrayal—a transgression—of what is commonly considered an ethical duty. Although this transgression happens while confirming and recognizing what one transgresses<sup>21</sup> “there is no responsibility without dissident and inventive rupture with respect to tradition, authority, orthodoxy, rule, or doctrine” (p. 27). Thus we can say, *there is no responsibility without the rupture that comes with an event*. Consider here a teacher who must decide to remain with what future teachers of their students require (a common force of pedagogical security and curricular conformity in schools) or invent something which responds to the contingencies of the moment or an emergent undecidability and, in so doing, to betray programmatic, legitimated, expectations without assurance of a commensurable result. There is a deep tension in education of this sort of an ethic, in this clash or professionalisms, and thus the need for its exploration, the need for the articulation of its stakes—such is the purpose of this work.

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<sup>21</sup> The example Derrida (1992) uses to illustrate this is Abraham’s parable. Abraham must assume absolute responsibility for sacrificing his son by sacrificing ethics, but in order for there to be a sacrifice, the ethical must retain all its value, the love of his son must remain intact, and the order of human duty must continue to insist in its rights (p. 66).

Therefore, and considering what I have been writing, I argue that this notion of a responsibility which risks appearing irresponsible is a necessary *heresy*. For the teaching subject to be responsible, and particularly to respond responsibly, such must be *heretical*. With Derrida (1995), I understand heretical

in the sense fixed in the vocabulary of the Catholic Church and made more general since, namely, departure from doctrine, difference within and difference from the officially and publicly stated doctrine and the institutional community that is governed by it. (p. 26)

An act of responsibility must depart from and exceed the doctrines that constitute the horizons of our existence. Thus, it must be heretical in that these are canonical expressions of contingent determinations of being. The heretical teacher is the one who responds to the call of the event, the call that calls but doesn't exist, and thus remains the call of the impossible. This response, in order to be a responsible one, can take place only outside calculability, and only when this response is marked by a decision that is an absolute decision and not just the repetition of a program or the mechanical deployment of a routine. As Gasché (1994) writes: "One has not even yet begun to respond if all responses are already foretold...that is a response not already pre-calculated and pre-programmed" (p. 237). Only when one embraces the risks of such a response or decision can one say one is responding responsibly to the singularity of the question of living well with others within educational contexts. Thus here the ability to respond is not measured as the answering to a system of accounting (or, indeed, one of any kind) but rather in "thinking or acting that answers a call [of the event] and presupposes a consent" (Gasché, 1994, p. 229). This presupposed consent may be the heart of ethical pedagogy, may be the greatest thing a teacher could be capable of assuming, of

teaching. Such a heretical teacher is not an ideal; heretical teachers are many of the teachers I have encountered over the years that facing undecidability have risked to take a decision in the name of something that is not necessarily recognizable. For example some of the early childhood educators with whom I have worked in the past years and who have tried to think about their work with children not only as a service but as creating a space for childhood and for spaces that reflect children's engagements with the world.

However, here I want to indicate that when one responds responsibly to the singularity of the question of living well with others and to all that which will be eventful within such engagement, at the same time that one *promises* or *pledges oneself* to it (as *spondere*, the Latin root of responsibility will suggest), it is itself also neutralized because, as I wrote above in reference to decision, a response from, for example, the teacher as a thinking subject to the question of living well with others will always neutralize the singularity of the event itself. My response will set the law that the event lays down. On the other hand when I respond, when I say *yes* to the event, that response will be haunted by the threat of becoming mere repetition. This is because, as Gasché (1994) writes, my *yes* can “indeed become a mechanical and servile repetition, one that from the start lacks the genuine aspects of a response...the yes...is always haunted by the possibility of mechanical reaffirmation” (p. 241). This is a risk that Derrida invites us to take, a risk that we must take because this threat is inevitable. Maybe this is a way for Derrida to say that the yes that affirms and responds ethically must be a *double* yes. There is a first yes, the one that always already exists because of the presence of the other, what we can call the minimal yes. This yes must be confirmed by a repetition that reiterates what it promised. This yes, yes—the double yes—that the

teacher as a thinking subject reiterates is not dogmatic, it only asserts itself in the mode of thinking of the perhaps.

The heretical teacher who takes the risk of responding *yes, yes* to the ethical call of living well with others, is thus heretical with a *vocation*. What do I mean by vocation? Vocation is the answering to a call. Certainly, vocation was the ritualized word that characterized my early years in a Catholic school. My teachers were the chosen ones, they had a vocation, understood indeed as the response to a call. They answered to the call of God. But above all, this call was marked by being defined by a *divine plan* that they obediently had to follow, and in which they had to be indoctrinated. Their call came as the call to follow the predetermined path of perfection that God had created for them. Their response was the response of the faithful. This is a faith understood as the blind commitment to the doctrine and dogma.

Now, the conception of vocation for which I want to argue here is understood as the response to a call, but a call that has no predetermined plan, is not a sovereign call or the call of a divine and omnipotent sovereign, one that never manifests itself as a program, and which never imposes as any totalization whatsoever. It is a call that keeps our being restless, always solicited in the name of what is yet to come. The response to this call is a *heretical response* characterized by a decision—a mad decision (as Kierkegaard would call it)—because it is without measure or pre-determined conditions and is undertaken in the name of the indeterminate and unforeseeable which are not yet presented as possible and for which a place must nonetheless be kept.

Here I am as close as one can be in order to be far, far away from the conception of vocation that was infused in the religious teachers to whom I have been referring in this

chapter. The heretical teacher, I argue, is the one who understands *vocation* as Caputo (2008) does, as the one who is called, as the one who comes under *the calling of the event* and particularly as the one that makes her/him self answerable to such a call. This vocation is characterized by the double answer I have been considering. It does not just *answer to* the call of the event as I have being indicating, but, at the same time, it *answers for* the call of what might be outside what one recognizes in our being with other, of what is eventful. This second answer, the answering for is a response that, inspired by the nature of the call, incites the subject to also raise questions, to ask and be suspicious of the event itself. This answering for is what keeps the subject alert through the Derridian being faithful... but not faithful enough. This responding is the response of a subject as the one that is restless in the awareness that “the conditions that constitute the world threaten to close things down, to program us, to make the world the totality of what is, which makes it impossible to dream what is not” (Caputo, 2008, p. 14).

And so we are left with a scandal. The scandal is the answer the questions I ask cannot provide. With respect to how to live well with others in educational contexts and for the teacher as a thinking subject they prescribe nothing of the heresy with which I contend they may only be truly answered. But in this difficulty lies the aporia of my conclusion, of the uncrossable gap between my answers and my questions, of the teacher as a thinking subject and a thinking which must be decided unknown, of a community without a centre, and finally of an inquiry which confronts its own inadequacy as a heretical ethical affirmation, one on which education and its teaching subjectivities, its over-determined communities, must be nourished if they are to remain vital, alive and worthy of their deeply paradoxical conditions. And it is also here that I have lived.

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