

Creating Third Spaces of Learning for Post-Capitalism: Lessons from Educators, Artists and Activists

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"The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear", Antonio Gramsci.

When Antonio Gramsci wrote these lines from his prison cell in 1930, he was mainly referring to morbid symptoms within the Italian left. The working class in Italy had lost faith in capitalism and the authoritarian form it had taken under Fascism. Fast forward to the third decade of the twenty-first century and the world seems to be in a similar interregnum in which political classes and parties have lost legitimacy, but where the path forward is unclear. Globally, over the last few decades, we have seen the growth of a particularly predatory form of capitalism that exhibits many "morbid symptoms". These symptoms, some relatively new and others resurgent, include, among others, authoritarian politics, ethnic and racial nationalisms, polarization and hyper-partisanship; resurgent patriarchy, religious fundamentalism, growing inequality, the financialization of capital, algorithmic control, the privatization of the public sector, climate denial, and growing social surveillance and disinformation. And all of these have been exacerbated by the spread of the Coronavirus and the economic and social disruptions it has caused and continues to cause.

But this current interregnum is not only characterized by the morbid symptoms we have elaborated here. It is also filled with the potential to usher in a new post-capitalist world (Mason, 2016; Moreno, 2021; Gibson-Graham, 2011), which does not necessarily require the projection of a utopia that has yet to be imagined. Spaces that prefigure a post-capitalist world are all around us if we know where to look. In this book, *Creating Third Spaces of Learning for Post-Capitalism: Lessons from Educators, Artists and Activists* we seek to explore counter-hegemonic social spaces, or what some call *third spaces* (Anzaldúa, 1987/2021; Bhabha, 1994/2002; Soja, 1996) that have been created largely by social, community and artistic activists to prefigure a post-capitalist, multi-racial democracy. These spaces tend to be democratic, grounded in communities, and challenge the hegemony of current forms of economic, political, cultural, and educational domination. Sousa Santos (2018), referring to such spaces as *epistemologies of the South*, argues that these spaces are emerging both within formal institutions and outside of them.

Building on these theorists, we understand third space to be a contingent, in-between location (figuratively and otherwise) that challenges binary and hegemonic forms of thinking. If *first space* represents our cultural identities and everyday lives (which are not static) and *second space* represents the hegemony of the dominant (or colonial) forces that attempt to define us, then the *third space* is a hybrid space in which to explore issues of domination, power, and emancipation. Since these are processes that are never fixed, but rather always in process, fluid, and inflected by history, third space is both a concept and a methodology that is committed to social justice and coalition politics as an alternative

space of enunciation and intervention. As a generative locus, it allows us to imagine radical new ways of working together and relating to each other and in the process, new ways of learning and being.

Our different relationships and disciplines (as scholar-activists working with participatory action research, arts-activism, human rights/the right to education, and years of community-based research) have led us to intersectional connections with various groups and organizations and new proposals for moving forward into a new political imaginary. Working in the field of education we were connected (in various ways) with a range of radical social movements, artist collectives, *autogestiones*, racial justice movements, student and youth groups, teacher organizations, and education activists. We felt that many of these spaces offered important lessons and new forms of knowledge, pedagogy, and practices that could also inform the ways we think about education - and maybe even reform our formal education system to make it more relevant to the existential crises we currently face. Within these spaces, many people are organizing against and resisting extreme market fundamentalism, authoritarianism, racism, patriarchy, and environmental devastation, among other challenges.

While some of these spaces may be in or part of “schools”, many are not often thought of as “education spaces,” they are nonetheless sites for a different kind of learning and reimagining. They are what some call “public pedagogies” (Sandlin, Schultz & Burdick, 2009), such as street art that takes over public spaces, a memory park dedicated to the horrors of American slavery and lynching, a torture center in Buenos Aires dedicated to 30,00 disappeared citizens under a brutal dictatorship, or a taken over or “recuperated” factory run as a worker cooperative. These third spaces are counter-hegemonic in that they exist surrounded by the constant drumbeat of second space public pedagogies, such as advertisements, corporate logos, corporate media, and social media sites. If we add to these second space public pedagogies, public and private schools that act as what Althusser called ideological state apparatuses, then we can better understand the need for counter-hegemonic spaces for learning in its broadest sense, both within and outside institutions.

In contrast to a great deal of the research and emphasis in comparative education studies, we are not referring to learning in its individualistic, neoliberal meaning, what Biesta (2021) calls *learnification*. As Biesta points out, without some idea of what learning is *about* and what it is *for*, it becomes part of the current human capital discourse that ties lifelong learning to one’s utility to the economy. As learnification becomes increasingly directed by international development organizations and league indicators (aided by Silicon Valley and digital forms of learning), it also becomes part of a “chain of strategies of education reform, to edu-business profit-making and to private equity investing” (Ball & Grimaldi, 2021, p.1). In other words, it becomes commodified and depoliticized and a veil is drawn over its real purposes within neoliberal capitalism. This is why we will refer to the creation of third spaces as a political project that aims at re-politicizing education so that it meets the needs of and is directed by marginalized communities.

For instance, worker cooperatives are spaces of learning about participatory governance and social solidarity (Heras & Vieta, 2020). Street art collectives are learning new social relations as collectives and also occupying public spaces with narratives of political

memory where the public can learn about past and current struggles (Grupo de Arte Callejero, 2009). Participation in social movements is another third space of learning (Torres Carrillo, 2020), particularly for youth as they struggle with what it means to be an engaged, democratic citizen (Gluz, 2013; Kriger & Said, 2017).

Such spaces are pervasive and visible globally if we scratch the surface, though some prefer to fly under the radar so as not to be shut down or commodified. In our book we provide two distinct socio-cultural contexts, to explore what we are calling third spaces within two urban contexts: New York City, located in the global north, and Buenos Aires, located in the global south. By looking across a number of third spaces within the different historical, political and socio-cultural contexts we intend to provide a sense of the diversity of third spaces of learning that exist, the wide range of challenges that they face, and how they might inform not only social policies and practices, but also current critical theories of education and social change.

As we considered the selection of sites for our study, we initially cast a wide net, which over the course of the study, we kept refining based on our analysis of data. In the end, the following characteristics seemed to be those that most third spaces had in common:

- Third spaces are intersectional spaces in which individual and collective identities are continually negotiated.
- Third spaces are not the result of top-down reform efforts, but emerge from or are embedded within political activism, community organizing and/or social movements.
- Third Spaces seek to foster critical consciousness through a counter-hegemonic pedagogy of dialogue, co-learning and resistance.
- Third spaces seek to democratize society through democratizing social relations and institutions.
- Third Spaces move beyond critique and resistance to foster radical imagination that prefigures a new social imaginary.
- Third Spaces are both cognitive and embodied multi-sensual spaces that involve emotions, desires, memory, artistic expression, ritual, social solidarity and performativity.
- Third Spaces are also physical, geographical spaces that illuminate and expose spacial injustices.
- Third Spaces embrace the notion of praxis, and are always evolving and filled with imperfections, contradictions and tensions that are acknowledged and are the focus of ongoing collective reflection and dialogue.

While those who worked in the third spaces that we studied developed a close relationship with their communities, they also developed a community amongst themselves. In our work with various sites in Buenos Aires, it became apparent that activist professionals have formed networks that share what they have learned with each other. Education third spaces are not only grounded in local communities but also in social movements that seek greater social and racial equity and quality of life for marginalized communities. In fact, these social movements are themselves often third spaces of learning. This is why they so often find themselves under attack by those who benefit from the status quo.

Third spaces are ideally sensitive to the ways that various forms of oppression are intersectional. This means that if they prefigure a post-capitalist society, then they must also strive to be post-patriarchal, post-racist, post-homophobic and transphobic, as well as raising awareness about the global environmental crisis. While many groups foregrounded issues of race, ethnicity and class, they also integrated programs to raise awareness around gender, disability, and sexual orientation. This is in part because they have diverse interests and their willingness to take up issues as they manifest means they will respond to any form of oppression or stigmatization that they themselves raise. *Learning in Post-Capitalist Third Spaces* summarizes what can be learned with and from the groups with whom we have worked, over time. While there are some books on “third space” and others on post-capitalism, few focus on third spaces that educate and that prefigure a post-capitalist society. Our approach is a cross-disciplinary look at the links between the creation of third spaces of learning to reimagining social relations in our society that prefigure what a post-capitalist world might look like; and, as educators, we are interested in rethinking counter-hegemonic learning across various sites in civil society, such as socially engaged art practices and collectives, social movements, workers cooperatives, public schools, non-government organizations, memory museums and parks. In some cases, and for some of the groups, our collaborations started much earlier than this project and will continue well beyond this book. For these reasons, we hope to share the ideas and lessons learned as a contribution to prefiguring possibilities in education beyond our current realities, and encourage continued participation in activities, activism, and *colaboración* to build solidarity networks. Finally, we position ourselves as a team of educators and lifelong learners that keep on reflecting on these themes, and therefore, will not frame these lessons as written in stone, but rather as a fluid process, that may also start transforming itself at the very moment we put it in writing.

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