

Rise: Emergent Strategies for Reclaiming Joy and Agency Against Neofascist and White Supremacist Assaultive Speech

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ABSTRACT

Since the 2016 election of President Donald Trump, there has been an uptick in the number of faculty reporting that they have been the subjects of harassment and intimidation by organizations and individuals espousing views consistent with ideologies of the alt-right, neofascism, and global White supremacy. In this new virulent environment, verbal assaults and threats of violence against progressive scholars are increasingly common, particularly in the case of women academics, minoritized professors, and those whose writing deals critically with racism and other forms of supremacy. This essay, informed by critical race theory, presents a phenomenological narrative and critical analysis of actual events in which an art education scholar was the target of assaultive speech and threatened physical harm following the publication of a book chapter critical of Whiteness. Understanding assaultive speech as an attempt to replace joy with affects of fear, paranoia, and hate, the authors examine the events that occurred in the course of performing one's duties as teachers, researchers, or concerned citizen-scholars, in detail to reveal (a) the overarching structure and life cycle of these all-too-common attacks and (b) how they affect the targeted person's mind-body. This combination of structural and embodied forms of knowledge can inspire new liberatory projects as a part of an emergent strategy for scholars, teachers, and activists interested in justice, critical pedagogy, or transformative practices to rise and reclaim joy and agency in troubled times.

KEYWORDS: art education, joy, strategy, fascism, racism, White supremacy, alt-right, critical race theory, assaultive speech, harassment, university faculty, phenomenology, democracy

I knew it was coming. After all, I had been contacted the day before by Campus Reform, an online news tabloid that targets professors who are seen as part of the “multikultis” left. But when I checked my email that rather banal weekday afternoon, I had not imagined the swell

of messages that would suddenly fill my inbox. One after another of mis-informed, derogatory, and hate-filled messages calling me any number of racist and homophobic names and slandering my work flooded my university account. Suddenly, my body felt hot, my mouth dry, and my heart was pounding so loudly that I thought it would leap out of my chest cavity. The whole thing felt like an invasion, leaving me in a precarious and vulnerable position. Immediately, I wanted to reach out to tell someone what was happening, but I was unsure whom I should contact. This feeling was coupled with an equally powerful sense of being frozen, clicking through each email, unable not to read the slander and the vulgarities. It was as if the cascade of emails hypnotized me. Then, my cell phone rang. It was the chair of my department, offering a warning that I might need to prepare myself for an attack by right wing watch dog groups. As I listened to her, I looked out my window, wondering whether or not my private address was posted on the university website....

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Shock, confusion, anger, vulnerability, fatigue, paranoia. These words seem inadequate to describe the emotional toll of being targeted by right-wing groups. Since the 2016 election of President Donald J. Trump, there has been an uptick in the number of faculty reporting that they have been the subjects of harassment and intimidation by organizations and individuals espousing views consistent with ideologies of the alt-right, neofascism, and global White supremacy (Levy, 2018). Much of the documented harassment takes place in public spaces, often in online tabloid news sites and in social media. But as the excerpt above illustrates, attacks can also be personalized and strike closer to home.

The incident Tyson described in the opening of this article happened in July 2018. It followed the publication of *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and the Arts in Education* (Kraehe, Gaztambide-Fernández, & Carpenter, 2018), in which his essay, “Art Education and Whiteness as Style,” was featured as one of 33 chapters. We believe this publication was the impetus for the harassment and violent speech he would face for months to come. We write about this incident not because Tyson is unusual in being the subject of *assaultive speech* (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). To the contrary, assaults like this are becoming rather typical, particularly for women academics, minoritized professors, and those whose writing deals critically with racism and other forms of social injustice (Matias, 2020; Veletsianos & Hodson, 2018). As graduate students, neither of us—Tyson, a White cisgender male nor Amelia, a biracial / Black cisgender female—were mentored in ways that alerted or prepared us for the kind of intimidation Tyson would encounter and Amelia would help him work through as a friend, collaborator, and member of a scholarly

community that still values academic freedom. It is likely that few have been prepared for the rise in the number of attacks against academics deemed to be threats to conservative values, though some practical tips can be found in blog posts here and there (Cloud, 2017; Grollman, 2015). We believe there is an urgent need to understand the overarching structure and life cycle of these all-too-common attacks, how they affect the targeted person's mind-body, and how the combination of structural and embodied forms of knowledge can inspire new liberatory projects that are courageous but also restorative, adaptive, and sustainable.

This paper recognizes the new virulent environment that US scholars, educators, and students engaged in progressive struggles may encounter. As the American Association of University Professors points out, for many who have reported harassment and intimidation, "the triggering event occurred in the course of their normal academic duties as teachers, researchers, or concerned citizen-scholars addressing the public" (Levy, 2018, p. 48). Our goal is to contribute to a conversation about what these events and the wounds they inflict feel like on a human scale, the larger patterns that one can expect to see, and some practical and emergent strategies we have learned from our experience that others might put into practice to protect themselves and to support colleagues and students before, during, or after an attack.

Our approach to working through these three interconnected dimensions is to use an incident that happened to Tyson as a case study. We pay special attention to his phenomenological account of what it feels like to be subjected to assaultive speech through email campaigns, aggressive blog posts, rants on conservative talk radio, and internet articles posted on tabloid news sites. Phenomenology offers rich, first-person descriptions of lived experience. When coupled with a critical race analysis of larger social, political, and economic forces, phenomenology has the unique ability to reveal what it feels like to live through a politically contentious climate as a critical scholar and educator. In other words, the case study provides insight into the pedagogy of the flesh (Kraehe & Lewis, 2018), showing what the lived, embodied flesh can teach us about campaigns of hate and anti-fascism on the level of bodily affects.

Joy as Affective Capacity for Action and Passion

From the perspective of the flesh, what becomes clear is how these attacks are attacks against joy itself. The personalization of the attacks coupled with their intensity and ferocity intentionally isolate individuals, producing the sensations of a precarious and vulnerable flesh. The burden of carrying the weight of these attacks (especially when they are sustained for months, if not years) increases the risk of

eventual burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015). The fight against burnout is therefore a fight for safeguarding the joy of being a critical scholar on the level of the flesh. As political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2011) define it, “The path of joy is constantly to open new possibilities, to expand our field of imagination, our abilities to feel and be affected, our capacities for action and passion” (p. 379). In other words, joy is the sensation of an increase in the power to act and to think that comes from an encounter with others. As the narrative below will illustrate, assaultive speech is precisely an attempt to replace joy with affects of fear, paranoia, and hate—all of which support neofascist articulations of xenophobia, nationalism, racism, militarism, and armored masculinity (Lewis, 2020) over and above more democratically pluralistic forms-of-life.

To be sure, there are more physically dangerous places in the world than the US in which to be an academic or progressive thought leader. The reality of brutal violence, imprisonment, and exile perpetrated against people with views and affiliations perceived as a threat by dominant groups and institutions is exactly why it is alarming in the US, a nation that prides itself on upholding core liberties such as freedom of expression and the right of association, to see a growing number of professors targeted for monitoring and harassment by privately funded right-wing groups. The fact is that to make sense of any traumatic event and reestablish a feeling of safety and a way forward involves substantial labor. Ridding oneself of toxic affect requires being in solidarity with others. Even the seemingly simple act of sharing one’s story allows others to help join in lifting the weight of trauma that is difficult for any one body to carry alone. In other words, self-care and restoration of joy can be reframed as collaborative acts. Our writing together about this is but one example of that.

After reflecting on Tyson’s specific case, we offer some tentative suggestions or “projects” as parts of what writer and activist adrienne maree brown (2017) might call an emergent strategy for scholars, teachers, and activists interested in justice, critical pedagogy, or transformative practices to rise and reclaim joy and agency in troubled times. “Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for” (brown, 2017, p. 3). The strategies we focus on are intentionally diverse though not divergent. They work on different scales and on different levels of intensity. Some demand militant rigor against overt neofascist and alt-right groups, while others offer more studious forms of engagement. The point is that in the fight for joy, there is no “one size fits all” strategy. Rather there are multiple, intersecting, and networked strategies, some big and some small, some short-term and some long-term, that can, when viewed together, help restore a sense of wholeness and wellbeing.

“Your a Dumbass”: An Unlikely Encounter With the Alt-Right

The harassment started in the summer of 2018. This was a tumultuous moment of mounting scandals in the Trump presidency; the disturbing separation of undocumented families at the US-Mexico border; a record number of women, Muslims, gays, lesbians, and transgender representatives of the Democratic Party running for high-profile government offices in opposition to reactionary Republican policies and judicial appointments; and a rather pathetic yet highly visible “Unite the Right 2” rally in Washington, DC organized by neo-Nazi activists. In the midst of all this, the book chapter titled, “Art Education and Whiteness as Style,” that I, Tyson, had recently written on the topic of White privilege and education suddenly and for a brief and intense moment became a lightning rod of controversy.

It started with a request for an interview from the online “journal” Campus Reform (CR). CR is a far-right news site that actively polices higher education, openly shaming and mocking individual professors they judge to be liberal or leftist (and thereby a threat to “American” values). The website was founded by the Leadership Institute (LI), which has an explicit agenda to increase the number of conservatives in government and the media. LI’s website states that the organization “increases the number and effectiveness of conservative activists and leaders in the public policy process. The Institute doesn’t analyze policy; it teaches conservative Americans how to influence policy through direct participation, activism, and leadership.” CR is part of this campaign of influence, all the while masquerading as journalism. According to Media Bias/Fact Check, CR rates as “strongly biased” toward conservative views, and is prone to using loaded words to characterize liberal or leftist professors and publishes misleading reports.

In my own case, a staff writer referring to herself as a “higher education reporter” from CR contacted me via email on July 22 at 8:27pm, less than one day before a story concerning my book chapter would go live on the CR website. Her intentions were uncertain. Perhaps she wanted to discuss the chapter with me, or to obtain a comment, or at the very least, to be able to say (at the end of the 11th hour window she had given me to reply) that the author could not be reached for comment. I declined to participate (by not responding). Giving CR and their “reporter” any response seemed to me to merely legitimize the source as a serious news outlet, and while they went through the motions of reaching out to me, this was an exchange in which I did not want any part. Without my response, CR published a critique of my chapter that was absolutely ridiculous. They clearly did not understand its discipline-specific content, and rather than researching further, they doubled-down on their misreading. The interpretation CR settled upon was so far from the actual argument of

the text that I thought it was a spoof. Yet within hours, the CR story had gone viral, appearing in alt-right Twitter feeds, blogs, and a host of other fake news sites across the internet that cater to extremist, fringe elements associated to various degrees with White nationalism and/or right-wing reactionaries. I started receiving dozens and dozens of hate emails, each clearly using CR's initial misreading as a jumping off point for their own wildly imaginative interpretations.

Still in its first day on CR's website, activity surrounding the essay did not abate, and kept amplifying to the point that by that evening, my chapter (or, at least, what my chapter had been interpreted as symbolizing for the alt-right in this moment) was featured on Rush Limbaugh's radio program. Like CR, Limbaugh had no idea what my essay was actually about, and his staff never reached out to do any fact-checking. I suspect Limbaugh himself was simply scrolling through a feed of whichever alt-right posts were getting lots of action in that moment, and there was the mention of my book chapter, trending near the top, stirring up lots of angry responses that he then magnified by bashing the paper, my education, my looks, and so on, all the while using the air time as an opportunity to repeat my name and current university position as many times as possible. This caused another round of hate mail, which flooded into my university email account and escalated to alt-right "watchdog" groups that called the dean of my college demanding that I be fired. My Academia.edu page received over 500 hits within a matter of hours, and became another outlet for people to post derogatory messages. Although I had always thought of Academia.edu as a way to share my work, it suddenly dawned on me that it was also an effective tool of surveillance by alt-right groups that had no real interest in engaging with the ideas. Seeing the skyrocketing hits on the website coupled with the obscene messages left in my Academia.edu inbox, in a moment of panic and impulsive frustration, I deleted my account. It felt safer somehow to pull the plug until the scandal subsided.

While I had read the first few hate messages with a sense of confusion, I was increasingly appalled and distressed by the threats, intimidation, and bigotry. As the escalation continued, university leadership published a statement in support of independent scholarship and, in the end, campus police were brought in to investigate those messages that threatened bodily harm.

Thinking the episode was over, I tried to go on vacation, but to my surprise, I received an email from Tucker Carlson's Fox News producer. Apparently, Carlson wanted to do a live, one-on-one interview with me for his TV show on the topic of race, education, and White privilege. What was amazing to me was how I had risen to the very acme of the right-wing news pyramid without lifting a finger. The machinery had revealed itself to me very clearly. The Fox

Television Network was receiving its agenda from poorly researched, conspiratorially oriented, fake news sources. These questionable stories trickled up through various fringe organizations until they hit a certain maximal saturation point, at which point they appeared on Fox's radar. Along the way, scandal, outrageous charges against my integrity, and blatant misrepresentations of my work spread like wildfire to the point where my initial essay seemed beside the point.

A Typology of Hate Mail

The tone and focus of these hate emails varied, but they could be grouped in several camps. To give the reader a sense of the kinds of assaultive speech contained in these emails, I have reprinted several below as I received them. There is a danger in reprinting this kind of hateful speech, as it can further its circulation. Yet, it is also important to give the reader a sense of the kinds of assaultive speech I received. As such, we have carefully curated the emails into representative types. Here we will shift out of a narrative and phenomenological analysis toward critical discourse analysis to help elucidate the various tactics (conscious or unconscious) used by right-wing groups to assault joy and provoke the kinds of fear and paranoia outlined above.

The Simply Confused Type

First, there were a string of emails that were simply confused over the argument I was presenting in the chapter. In one example of this type of email, an individual, who subsequently followed up with a string of emails to see if I was still "intimidated" by her trolling, wrote the following:

I am trying to figure out how to approach you in this email, I am not sure if your [sic] a dumbass or if your [sic] just a manipulative liberal. How did you become a professor, what college did you go to? Did they have standards? You know math is based in numbers. . . . Numbers do not have any human or social context, it seems so simple and obvious. It is so hard to communicate with an idiot.

The confusion here is rather simple. The author of this email has confused the geometry of Whiteness with the Whiteness of geometry. I take no position on the latter thesis. Instead, I am concerned with how Whiteness itself is composed of certain lines, angles, and points. While one might think this is an obscure point of concern only for phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Sara Ahmed, I actually took my initial inspiration for this geometrical interpretation of the body from common, everyday phrases such as "walking the line," or "angle of vision," or "having a point of

view.” The vocabulary of geometry permeates our everyday ways of speaking about bodies in motion. One can often find great insight into structures of worldhood, the body, and perception right on the surface of language.

The irony is that if the author of the original CR article had understood my argument and represented it accurately, the readership might well have agreed to its basic premise. Many on the alt-right would most likely accept the observation that White bodies have their own unique geometry. The disagreement would lie with how this geometry is ultimately interpreted, with one side demanding that it be protected as a natural or innate right and the other that it be critiqued as a socially and legally constructed privilege based on a history of oppression.

Now, it might appear that this troller was attempting to reach out to me to clarify my thesis, but I do not sincerely believe this is the case. The aggressive, derogatory, and dismissive tone indicates a cynical approach to asking questions that presupposes the answer. This tone is indicative of the alt-right’s overall strategy for attacking anyone that falls outside their politically narrow world view. It speaks to a fundamental intolerance and impatience with diversity, especially when such diversity discusses matters of race generally and White privilege specifically. In short, asking for clarification from a “dumbass” is not really asking for clarification at all. Questioning becomes a form of accusing, and accusing becomes a form of intimidation.

The Illiberal Type

Another group of emails targeted me less for the particular argument I was presenting in the chapter and more as a representative of the liberal bias of the university writ large. One particularly enraged troller wrote the following:

The geometry of whiteness? Is there a reason that you just don’t teach instead of trying to indoctrinate mentally vapid students? To actually believe your drivel means that the students at your institution of liberal learning don’t actually think for themselves. I bet you’re for safe spaces and will picket any speaker that may be conservative. Good job Mr. Lewis. Your administration is as clueless as you if they continue to promote and facilitate your intellectual laziness and bias.

The assumption here is that university education ought to be a neutral enterprise. I should “just teach” rather than indoctrinate students. Somehow teaching about Whiteness is neither fair nor balanced. I would disagree strongly with this. Introducing students to the research on Whiteness, having them reflect on how Whiteness

permeates their lives, and having them discuss the potential effects of Whiteness on their teaching is not a bias in itself but rather a way to get students to reflect on *potential* biases they might be unconsciously carrying with them. As such, it would be no different than unsettling biases concerning learning or teaching. Using the troll’s own logic, could we not make the argument that *discussing* Whiteness in pre-service teacher education is precisely a way to promote “fair and balanced” teaching—teaching that is not biased by the privileges of Whiteness? At stake here is clarifying that discussing Whiteness is not the same as indoctrinating students into a certain ideology. Indeed, in my classes it is the exact opposite, as students often leave feeling overwhelmingly anxious that they no longer know what to think or how to act.

The Anti-intellectual Type

Another variant of this kind of attack is best illustrated by Rush Limbaugh himself, who seemed less concerned with the argument, which he openly admitted he did not understand, than with my mode of address. He appeared most agitated by the technical language, which he associated with liberal elitism. Hearing his comments made me wonder if he would have the same reaction to reading a technical paper published in the *American Journal of Physics* or *The Journal of Mathematical Analysis and Application*, which are also full of their own, highly specialized jargon.

It seems as though there is a general misunderstanding that everything an academic in education or the social sciences writes ought to be for the broadest audience, and that any deployment of specialized language is automatically an attack aimed to make people like Limbaugh feel inadequate. The handbook chapter that was the focus of CR’s criticism is meant for scholars and researchers familiar with critical race theory and phenomenology. Because of this, it makes an easy target for paranoid, alt-right pundits looking for evidence of elitism in the academy. Yet with minimal research, Limbaugh could have found articles written by me that focus on similar issues but address a different, much broader audience of pre-service teachers.

The Unabashedly Racist Type

Other emails were overtly racist. Here is one example out of dozens, titled “Commie Faggot”:

Why don’t you move down here to New Orleans and enjoy the diversity of black savage behavior. A little cock sucker like you would really enjoy these thick lipped savages on a daily basis and they like commie philosophy, you know-taking from the productive and giving it to them. But I know you snowflake

fags stay inside your college walls with the rest of you clowns.

Additional racist emails attempted to appeal to me on intellectual grounds, recommending readings that could help my classes become more “fair and balanced.” Take for instance one email that suggested I read the works of Comte Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, a 19th century French aristocrat who is infamous for attempts to legitimize racism through scientific means. The concerned citizen conveniently photocopied and scanned several pages of texts by de Gobineau and even underlined passages including the following except concerning the so-called Aryan race:

Everything great, noble, or fruitful in the works of man on this planet, in science, art, and civilization, derives from a single starting point, is the development of a single germ; . . . it belongs to one family alone, the different branches of which have reigned in all the civilized countries of the universe. . . . History shows that all civilization derives from the white race.

. . .

Such emails speak to a deep desire to seek out “intellectual” and “scientific” proof of White superiority as a historical fact, even if this means rejecting all evidence to the contrary (Harding, 1993). The mere fact that this troll is citing a 19th century essay as “evidence” of White racial superiority indicates a lack of scientific literacy and a desperation to support an unsupportable thesis.

The Cloaked Type

It was also interesting to note the various strategies that some trolls employed to get me to read their emails. While some of the most offensive indicated as such in the subject headlines, others were much more innocuous. For instance, many of the emails used deceptive titles such as “financial aid question.” They, thus, masked their hate speech under the guise of a student question concerning academic programs at the university where I teach. The frequency of this strategy was surprising and seemed to indicate to me that there was a formula that was shared among the alt-right as a way to infiltrate the “liberal academy.” The strategy was, sadly, rather effective insofar as I became increasingly paranoid about opening emails from individuals I did not know personally. When viewing my inbox, I would often pause before clicking on a seemingly innocent sounding email. This was particularly frustrating as I was, at the time of the incident, a graduate program coordinator whose main task was to field questions from possible applicants.

It was also surprising to me how many of the emails referred to me as a “liberal snowflake.” Considering the vicious attacks I received

over one book chapter, a chapter it seemed none of the attackers had actually read and was merely advocating that White pre-service teachers think about the implications of Whiteness on their teaching, I do not think I am the snowflake here! Until this incident, I had no idea how sensitive the alt-right is to the mere mention of White privilege. In short, the tsunami of outrage was disproportionate to the claims made in the handbook chapter and indicates that if anyone needs a trigger warning it is the alt-right.

Forming an Emergent Strategy

Left to ponder implications of this event and how to best proceed, we, Tyson and Amelia, who is one of the editors of *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and the Arts in Education*, began what became a series of discussions that at times included co-editors Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández and B. Stephen Carpenter, II, about follow-up action plans. Those of us who wanted to issue statements directly to CR or Fox News saw this as an opportunity to speak back and set the record straight. Others of us felt that any engagement with alt-right or tabloid news sources would only grant them a legitimacy they did not deserve. As long as they had “final edit,” it seemed unlikely that much clarifying would come out of any engagement with them. Instead, it would add fuel to their fire.

We also had concerns over the safety of the other contributors to the book project, several of whom were our former students now in their first years of teaching as visiting professors and/or tenure-track assistant professors. Exposing them to increased levels of scandal seemed risky. But this discussion left us in a double bind. No one wanted to give in and simply remain silent. This felt like letting neofascist and alt-right groups “win” by silencing dissenting voices. At the same time, the stakes were high, and no one wanted to make a false move.

On a human level, I, Amelia, was surprised, disgusted, and angered by the assault on Tyson. As a friend and colleague, I wanted to support him anyway I could as he worked to process his immediate shock and overcome feelings of isolation. But I was also outside his direct experience and initially felt a degree of helplessness. Many questions pressed into the foreground of my thoughts: *Why were Tyson and his chapter targeted? Why not any of the other authors or chapters in the handbook? Was it significant that he was targeted given that he was one of only a few White authors in the handbook?* My initial surprise soon gave way once I started to see this traumatizing event within the context of US racial history.

As a critical race scholar, I found Tyson’s encounter with hate speech to be both unique, in that he was the target of individualized threats

that caused him real harm, and also not unique, in the sense that it fit into well-established historical patterns. His private experience needed to be understood in relation to the privation experiences of Black and Brown people living in the shadow of White racism.

The fact is that Black Americans experienced more than 200 years of bondage followed by another 100 years of homegrown fascism and apartheid, otherwise known as Jim Crow. Throughout the nation's history, when people have tried to reckon with the legacy of slavery and challenge systems that uphold a sense of normative Whiteness and privilege, they have frequently become the targets of censure and violent backlash. Equally important is the realization that a person does not need to be engaged in justice work to experience what Patricia Williams (1991) calls *spirit-murder*, damage to a person's wellbeing that arises from structural racism and other forms of human disregard.¹ In their day-to-day existence, Black and Brown people, children included, are routinely regarded with prejudice and suspicion such that even joyful expression—laughter, play, music—may be met with physical, verbal, and psychological maltreatment. To protect from the injuries of spirit-murder requires historical awareness so that one can recognize individual instances of abuse as belonging to a larger pattern and structure of power, as well as a broad array of flexible methods for resistance.

We turn now to where we sit in the current moment at the time of this writing and disclose a fluid and emergent strategy for recouping joy in the face of an affective attack on democratic flesh. Here, our personal narratives give way to an effort to think collectively. We, thus, conclude with suggestions or “projects” for professors, universities, and organizations that have come out of our ongoing discussions with each other, the Handbook's co-editors, as well as other colleagues and friends.

Our suggestions are by no means definitive or complete. Rather, we view them as potential starting points for a much broader set of discussions that we hope this incident sparks. As such, we want to extend our thinking outward from a singular narrative toward actions that can be taken both individually and collectively in the face of trolling and intimidation. As brown (2017) argues, an emergent strategy is adaptive, tenacious, interconnected, fecund, and iterative. It privileges nonlinear and interdependent forms of resiliency that creates possibilities for a joyful form-of-life. The projects below are vectors of this fractal and insurgent strategy, promoting collaborative

¹ In addition to racism, Williams (1991) discusses other forms of spirit-murder, stating “cultural obliteration, prostitution, abandonment of the elderly and the homeless, and genocide are some of its other guises” (p. 73).

and multidimensional approaches to scholarship, teaching, and activism.

I. Cultural Projects

We encourage our students to take seriously the reading of primary visual, literary, and philosophical texts. Yet, how often do we engage seriously with the primary sources of the far right and other extremist groups? We think it is time to dedicate efforts to reading and interrogating the visual and literary texts that are currently forming the background of alt-right and White supremacist movements in the US and abroad. If Franz Neumann (2009) once complained fascist philosophy is devoid of any redemptive qualities, then the same might be said of its literature. And yet it is important to read the texts that galvanize the right-wing collective imagination. Themes of manifest destiny, scientific racism, and the fetishization of pure bloodlines run throughout this literature and inform its visual culture, but what we want to emphasize here is the way these texts rest between utopian dream and dystopian paranoia—a mixture that is complex and demands careful analysis, especially in the ways that it attempts to appropriate and exploit joy for anti-democratic ends.

II. Pedagogical Projects

Although we have actively taught social justice, critical pedagogy, and transformative educational courses in the past to both undergraduate and graduate populations, we have never considered teaching about how to respond to these kinds of attacks. It now seems imperative that we tell such stories and arm students with emergent strategies that will empower them when they, too, are trolled. It is high time we focus not only on how to teach about race, class, gender, and sexuality with philosophical rigor, curiosity, a sense of deep responsibility, and dialogical openness, but also that we take responsibility to impart to future educators, scholars, and activists the strategies necessary to protect their wellbeing while doing so.

III. Institutional and Organizational Projects

In addition to teaching how to respond to attacks from the alt-right, it is also important to lobby organizations and universities to take a stand against such intimidation and advocate safety for members and faculty (Lawless, Rudick, & Golsan, 2019). The University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign has a simple website and attending brochure dedicated to addressing trolling attacks against faculty. It clearly recognizes the problem (trolling attacks are becoming increasingly prevalent) and proposes simple actions that faculty can take to protect themselves and their students including a warning against responding to attacks, a call to preserve as evidence all

messages received, and so forth. But beyond practical advice, the very gesture of posting such a brochure in the first place indicates that the university is being proactive in supporting faculty, and thus promoting a sense of intellectual safety for faculty. It is important that all universities who support critical work publicize similar information.

Likewise, it is important for organizations to take a public stand against acts of intimidation and violence while also actively supporting members struggling against discrimination, oppression, and hate-filled, reactionary politics of any kind. Exemplary in this respect is the public statement made by the Art Education Research Institute against assaultive speech and other forms of intimidation targeting critical scholars. Such statements can be used as a shield to deflect criticism away from individuals and, thus, interrupt a primary strategy of the alt-right and neofascist groups bent on isolating victims.

IV. Ethical Project

We cannot speak for everyone; yet we think that sharing Tyson's phenomenological and narratological description is important and revealing for determining a starting point for thinking through the ways we might respond when we hear that colleagues or students are going through similar experiences. Initially, Tyson was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of emails. It was not that any one particular email was, in itself, more intimidating than any other. It was rather the wave of emails that felt oppressive. Sitting at his desk, spending hours forwarding emails to his university's public relations officer made Tyson feel exceptionally exposed. At first it was even difficult to describe the event to others. He did not have an articulate way to bring together unfolding events and the sensation of utter shock and confoundment.

When he did begin to open up, he was relieved by the number of supportive emails and phone calls he subsequently received, while at the same time rather unnerved by certain colleagues who seemed to have a perverse fascination with his case. For instance, several White colleagues who perceive themselves to be "radical intellectuals" expressed a strange kind of jealousy, as if being attacked in this way gave Tyson authenticity or the kind of *bona fides* perhaps they felt they lacked. We might refer to this as "White radical imposter syndrome." But more generally it was difficult to tell the story over and over again, thus putting the self and all its faults on display.

As such, we think it is important for all of us to embody an ethic of patience, support, and solidarity, letting individuals know they are being heard and are not alone while at the same time not pressing them to take specific actions or make public statements before they are ready. Within emergent strategies, there is plenty of room for decentralized and iterative processes that are overt and covert, political and scholarly, educational and ethical.

V. Political Project

We believe strongly that defending the freedom of thought is an urgent political project that grows out of the activities of learning, studying, and teaching. This does not mean that politics trumps education or that education is somehow an instrument of politics. Instead, it means that certain political commitments can and do emerge out of educational commitments as necessary for safeguarding education as a space for free, critically informed thinking. Some of these commitments might mean that we focus our attention on protecting institutional norms against White supremacist, alt-right attacks while others might mean we take to the streets to march for Black lives or join anti-fa movements. Some might become advocates for students undergoing similar attacks, while others might form study groups to read and engage with anti-fascist literature. Still others might engage in what Claudia Ruitenberg (2018) has called a “public pedagogy of insurrectionary speech” (p. 498), which risks ongoing trolling by making public statements about online violence in order to defiantly demonstrate “it is possible to survive” (p. 499) these attacks. As stated above, there is room here for multiple, intersecting, and emergent strategies that swells out of one’s educational and philosophical projects.

If Donald Trump has targeted credible news media as the number one enemy of the people, then universities are most assuredly not far behind on his list. Already he has lambasted critical race theory, *The New York Times’s* 1619 Project and its curriculum, and the teaching of diversity awareness to federal employees. These actions seek to undermine critical thought at all levels. Indeed, thinking itself is under attack, and if our prognostication comes true, then it will potentially affect academics writ large. Distinctions between fact and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity are now front and center of a larger political struggle in ways that far surpass recent historical examples in the US (Coppins, 2020). It is of course common knowledge that politicians put a “spin” on reality to suit their ideological needs, but Trump’s willful rewriting of history as well as its erasure escalates mere spin to a new, highly problematic level that, in turn, “teaches” a generation of cynical followers that anything and everything can be fake news. In this sense, it might not be long before those concerned with “pure” epistemological questions (i.e., none of this race, class,

gender, and sexuality stuff) could also be subject to trolling. In short, there is no escaping the present climate of attack. Our stance is not pessimistic but realistic about the need to be proactive in the face of increasingly emboldened forms of hate speech and orchestrated campaigns of disinformation that will, either directly or indirectly, involve us all.

And When We Rise

To conclude, these emergent strategies should not be taken on all at once or by a single individual alone. Some induce pain and suffering, potentially prolonging various affective injuries. Because of this, we suggest collaborations and forms of solidarity that help us find joy even in that which hurts. We also suggest strategic reflection on who is best suited for which strategies at which times. Here, individual mentoring is important as well as broader forms of solidarity. In the end, what is paramount is a recognition that the struggle for joy is a collective, multitudinous, democratic project. While neofascism desires a body that is cold, hard, and manipulative, the democratic body politic is hot, pliable, and creatively inventive and insurgent. In other words, it is joyful, but only in so far as we innervate the flesh and its affectivity through our emergent strategies.

To rise is to fight for empowerment to think and act together.
To rise is to declare yes to democratic life and no to neofascism.
To rise is to express joy in emergence.

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