IMAGINING SOCIAL WORK

IMAGINING SOCIAL WORK:
ASSEMBLING INTER- AND TRANS-GENERATIONAL VISIONS OF A MODERN
PROJECT

By

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LAY ABSTRACT

This research explores changing understandings of how social work in the Canadian state context imagines and intervenes in the world. My focus is on academic social work as both educator and knowledge producer, because the university is where some ideas and practices are refined and reproduced so that they can in turn be shared more broadly. Findings include the noteworthy influence of the university on the ideas and initiatives that do gain traction, as well as a generational structural to perceptions of the possible and the desirable. Overall, this research contributes a range of resources—historical, theoretical, empirical and speculative—to the collective work of imagining and reimagining social work for a changing world.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is about the changing imaginations of academic social work in an increasingly entangled world. Broadly, my subject area is the history and philosophy of social work, with an emphasis on engagements with critical social theory. More specifically, my research explores questions of discipline, generation, and critical social theory in the Anglophone Canadian context as a means to better understand how shared perceptions of the possible and the desirable are "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988). To do so, I trace and theorize changing perceptions through a survey of educators, and through integrative interdisciplinary and philosophical knowledge work considering various dynamics of disciplines in general and social work in particular. Evoking my own generational standpoint, I raise as a collective disciplinary problematic the canonization of second generation critical social theories, and the need to engage in the collective work of disciplinary reflexivity on, and accountability to, the ways in which the conditions of existence and possibility of critical academic social work are changing over time. Methodologically, I elaborate a reparative historical practice through a slightly different genre or style of writing. This is a feminist strategy, one roughly within the (generational) turn towards showing what one combines and assembles and learns through engaging with the world as a means to invite further speculative and imaginative work. This strategy is also a means to begin to imagine a "post-expert," "post-good" and "post-progress" social work, not because knowledge and intention do not matter, but because these organizing referents have each achieved a level of saturation in what they can produce in the world. As such, this dissertation contributes some of the conditions of

intelligibility necessary for the collective work of imagining and reimagining something

akin to justice or improvement through social work after the fall of so many left and

liberal progress narratives.

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"No one wants to be a bad or compromised kind of force in the world, but the latter is just inevitable. The question is how to develop ways to accentuate those contradictions, to interrupt their banality and to move them somewhere."

--Berlant, 2009, p. 134

Introduction

This dissertation is about the changing imaginations of academic social work in an increasingly entangled world. Broadly, my subject area is the history and philosophy of social work, with an emphasis on engagements with critical social theory. More specifically, my research explores questions of discipline, generation, and critical social theory in the Anglophone Canadian context as a means to better understand how shared perceptions of the possible and the desirable are "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988), and to identify some ways in which these knowledges are shifting over time. I undertake this work so that I can reflect with greater nuance on the kinds of knowledge social work might need now, and to consider both research priorities and general curriculum in this light. Overall, this dissertation contributes some of the conditions of intelligibility necessary for the collective work of imagining and reimagining something akin to justice or improvement through social work after the fall of so many left and liberal progress narratives.

This is a "sandwich thesis," comprised of chapters written for publication as journal articles or book chapters. There are five body chapters: two already published in journals, two others currently under review, and one—Chapter two, in which I outline my conceptual framework—is not yet shaped for wider publication. Each chapter includes its

own literature and particular sub-arguments. This introduction therefore outlines a

broader understanding of the research problem and research project, and provides brief

introductions for the chapters that comprise the body of the dissertation.

Research Problem:

An Historically Modern Profession in Other-Than-Modern Times

> "Social work is a product of industrialisation, secularization and municipalization
> in Western states in the 19th century (Payne, 2005c). It emerged to deal with major
> social change, moral and ethical challenges and problems of structuring and
> managing complex societies."
> -- Payne, 1996/2006, p. 53

What does it mean to be a modern project in other-than-modern times? Modernity,

in the sense that I use it here, is the name for a way of thinking, building, ordering and

stabilizing society (Law, 1994). A central theme is that of linear progress, of today's

modern society as an ostensible break with and a noteworthy improvement over a less

developed past (Latour, 1993). This contrastive assessment of better/worse, modern/not-

modern has had radical effects in terms of colonial-imperial-extractive-labour geopolitics,

including the diminishment and eradication of lives judged to be not-modern (Byrd, 2011;

Schuller, 2018). Modern ways of thinking, building, and ordering are predicated on

particular assumptions about humans and worlds, and these assumptions are increasingly

undermined and overwhelmed by the failure of a range of modern progress narratives

(e.g., order, science, justice, democracy, rationality), and by the affective or agential

qualities of nature (e.g., global warming, natural disasters, the novel coronavirus that

thrives in the human body). My contention in this dissertation is that some aspects of historically modern professional social work have achieved a level of "saturation" (Sisken & Warner, 2010) in terms of the progressive social change they can produce, and that this saturation requires those of us in the discipline to engage in greater speculative and imaginative work in order to "renew" our knowledge and work (also Sisken & Warner, 2010). Importantly, saturation is not the same thing as being wrong and renewal is not the same thing as being right. This point will be unfolded throughout the dissertation.

What is now termed modernity is typically benchmarked to debates in elite European social thought from around the time of Bacon (1561-1626) and Descartes (1596-1650), when the figure/ground coordinates of God, Man, and Nature—between human freedom or will and something more powerful, between the finite and the infinite, the particular and the universal, the divine, organic and mechanical—were debated and causally reordered (Gillespie, 2008). As a time period, modernity is considered to have ended in the West sometime between the 1930s and 1990s. The Enlightenment is a smaller event (Foucault, 2003a) or unit within the larger unit of modernity, one benchmarked in turn to Locke (1632-1704) and ending around Kant (1724-1804).

With Kant's transcendental philosophy, Man's mature courage to use his own reason (freedom, experience, critique) replaces religious piety as the route to salvation, and faith in rational human progress emerges over time as both a secular form of superstition, and also, the moral demand that all men (sic) should work to advance human development (Gillespie, 2008; Midgley, 1992). The French Revolution (1789-1799), in which modern reason had its day and became terror, is commonly taken as the first major

cautionary event against the goodness of human rationality and freedom (Gillespie, 2008). With the two World Wars came the widespread realization that technical and moral progress are not in fact the same things (Readings, 1996). Notably, the violence of European conquest, colonization, and extraction are not typically afforded similar confidence-shaking status (Césaire, 1955/2000).

The recurrent question taken up in this dissertation, then, is a modern one: how to understand and engage inter- and intra-generational continuity and change within and through social work. The question is taken up in an other-than-modern way in that I am also problematizing the effects of ordering and infrastructural classifications (Bowker & Star, 2000; Law, 1994) in which complexity and mess is rendered down into binary pairs of better/worse, modern/not-modern, cause/effect, and because I also consider the multiple temporalities of social work. In this dissertation, then, questions of canonization and progress are historical located questions of which artifacts and ways of life are preferred; of what to carry forward and when instead to make space so something else can grow (Readings, 1996).

Of note, this enduring question of intergenerational continuity and change is organized and negotiated through formal education and disciplinary reproduction in which tradition and reason are combined through the mediating concept of *culture* (Readings, 1996). A central contention of the chapters that follow is that shifts underway from the post-modern or cultural to the post-anthropcentric or post-cultural challenge modern, humanist and justice-desiring social work in ways that must be addressed more

directly. But first, I outline aspects of these ongoing movements as they play out in the university, in the job of scholars, and in the social role of professions like social work.

1. The Modern University and the Cultural Turn

Universities are as much ideas as they are institutions. By many accounts, both idea and institution are in crisis (see Hunter, 2014), and this crisis is related to the changing relationship between the university and the state, and the state and economic globalization. The university has long trained governing elites. In the post-WWII period in North America, the university emerged as foundational to the new post-industrial society of professionals in which knowledge production and the management of complexity were the new major tasks (Perkin, 2007). The professions, and professional education, were understood as a route to wide(er)spread inclusion in the middle class, and thus, a double marker of social progress; a good thing for newly perceived clients and for new professionals themselves. With the massification of both professions and professional education, however, neither social role nor training are nowadays so elite (Burns, 2019), or, a guaranteed ticket into the middle class.

The late Bill Readings (1996) argued the university is anachronistic to contemporary society—the institution now lacks an external referent with which to justify its work. Economic globalization has undermined the role of nation states in capitalist production, and thus the once-central role of the university, that of fostering a sense of national culture in support of the capitalist powers of the state, is no longer required in the same way. Readings tracks shifts in the organizing referent of the university from medieval *theology,* to Kant's Enlightenment *reason* in negotiated relation with monarch

or state, and on to the German Idealists for whom *culture* refines reason and the diversity of multiple traditions into the unified population of the nation state. This is where cultural reproduction—culture as a mediated relation between reason (new) and tradition (old)—emerges as the two-way link between modern university and modern state.

Of note, the German tradition of social pedagogy also developed from these themes (Lorenz, 1999). Contra many iterations of professional social work, social pedagogy (youth-focused care and socialization-integration outside of formal education settings) is not anchored to the state so much as to a general humanist orientation towards intergenerational social cohesion and integration. This said, post-WWII, social pedagogy was judged too amenable to fascist sentiments, and the approach was superseded until the 1960s and 1970s by the significantly more individualized American approach to citizenship development (Coussée, Spatscheck, Bradt, & Roose, 2020).[1] For similar reasons—amenability to fascism—the *social* sciences took over in the post-war period as the branch of the university thought most able to mediate the excesses of reasoned culture (Readings, 1996). In the 1990s, the critical extra disciplinary cultural studies emerged as a more generalized challenge to the canonized and situated nature of (some) Western knowledges writ large.

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[1] My hunch is that Freirean popular education, combined with the consciousness-raising social movements of the time, helped make social pedagogy more fashionable again. This said, Freireans might consider the noteworthy limits of such universal models raised by Tuck and Yang (2012) who argue against abstracted conceptual categories of oppressor/oppressed, and the redemption promised by a third category of enlightened ally able to decode what is going on.

The problem with cultural studies, however, from Readings' perspective in the mid-1990s, is that they focus on the many exclusions from culture right at the time when culture is no longer the metanarrative of a centralized state power, and when most people – culturally marginalized or not – participate in globalized capitalist relations. Historical and structural oppressions continue, but state-backed cultural inclusion is no longer capable of mediating these forms of violence in the way it might have when the state was still the center of power to which some could appeal. Now, instead, the older coordinates of reason and culture are being replaced by undifferentiated *excellence* as the idea that grounds the work of the contemporary university. The radical and oppositional work of cultural studies is thus reduced to one of many possible university experiences sold to prospective students (Readings, 1996; in social work see Wilson, 2008). Twenty-five years after Readings' (1996) *The University in Ruins* was published, the Anglophone university is now undergoing a post-cultural or post-representational (Anderson & Harrison, 2016; Vannini, 2015) and scientific "turn" (Braidotti, 2019; Gullion, 2018; Wolfe, 2011).

Readings' conclusion was that the modern university is an awkward anachronism in which the three anchors—reason, culture, excellence—continue to influence how we imagine what the university is or could be. That said, in recent years the term "leadership" has also emerged and is perhaps overtaking "excellence." Pragmatically, Readings suggested the waning nation state with its once powerful notion of national culture was only a temporary iteration of the ongoing work of figuring out social relations we can live with and believe in and work towards. Modern questions of how we should

live together—that is, social work questions—remain "after" tradition, reason and culture, and even after the modern ordering welfare state. With a post-cultural or post-anthropocentric turn increasingly overtaking the cultural turn, these enduring questions now expand to include greater attention to complex theories of agency and of change, and to consideration of the ways in which nature and technology are also affective—that is, influential—participants in the ordering practices we call "the social." (Latour, 2005; Law, 1994).

2. The Modern Professor

> "As academics, we have been raised as 'modernists' because we are supposed to *show that we know better* than those who came before us."
> -- Bracke & Puig de la Bellacasa, emphasis original,
> thinking with Latour, 2004, p. 309

The changing status and role of the university in relation to state power and national culture brings with it instabilities in the status and role of the university professor (Anker, 2017; Best & Marcus, 2009; Love, 2010), and relatedly, shifts in understandings of what a given scholar's research practice and knowledge work can or should be able to do in the world. This includes generational shifts in morally inflected styles of academic subjectivity, in the affective style and claims of academic knowledge work, and in perceptions of what university education should foster in students as emerging social actors.

The idea of a "public intellectual," of a heroic university scholar involved with the "oppressed" masses for some larger collective and progressive end, has been outpaced by the more recent figure of the concerned and involved social science researcher engaged

with "vulnerable" sub-populations (see Murray, 2004). Shifting genres or styles of academic subjectivity can also be traced through a range of debates about the style and social role of academic knowledge work. These include discussion of the exhaustion or end of critical or progressive theory (Allen, 2016; Anker, 2017), the need to open orthodox practices of "paranoid" interpretive criticism to something more "reparative" (Sedgewick, 2003; Wiegman, 2014), and for a move to weak (Stewart, 2008) and non-representational theories (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Thrift, 2003). In the qualitative social sciences, the failure of research representing the "voices" of vulnerable/oppressed sub-populations to produce unassailable representations and satisfying levels of progressive social change can be tracked through a turn from established forms of qualitative (religious, humanist) interpretation and representation, and towards forms of post-(post-)qualitative research that focus on topics more so than individuals, on processes of thinking more so than meaning (Gullion, 2018; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; St. Pierre, 2015), as well as on the performative enactments of research "re-presentations" more broadly (Anderson & Harrison, 2010).

Shifts in the perceived role of scholars are also evident in the classroom. For example, concern has been raised that the critical extra-disciplinary studies may inadvertently be teaching students to judge the world rather than to work within it (Taylor, 2019; see also Wilson, 2008). In turn, those thinking from a location of the historically excluded caution that the critical cynicism of those teaching in professional programs closes down the emergent possibility brought by newcomers (Moten & Harney, 2004). And of course, there are the recent turns to community and online learning, which

continue to shift expectations of scholar-educators and raise questions about how and where meaningful education occurs.

The research turn in the 1990s had a number of effects on applied disciplines like social work. For example, the retired scholar-educators interviewed for this project (an absent-present chapter, which will be explained shortly) spoke to the ways in which practitioner-educators were pushed out of the university for not having doctoral degrees or engaging in research, and how the status afforded formal research was able to get on record in social work some of what was widely denied: the experience of being a client of social work can in fact be maddening, racism exists and is a problem, adult men are also deserving of care, and the environment matters. The research turn thus shifted what social work was perceived to be "about." At the same time, it had an individualizing effect, tuning scholars to their own careers and tenure and promotion evaluations, and in so doing, eroded in schools of social work the sense of a shared project tasked with education and practice in a given geographical location. These dynamics, in which competitive research and publishing systems increasingly tune scholar-educators towards meeting the metrics required for individual advancement, has also been noted in the social work academy in the United States (Teater, 2017) and the UK (Jobling & Shaw, 2019).

In turn, these broad shifts in perceptions of what universities and professor-educators are about—moral style and affective attunement, forms of labour and knowledge work, and in the perceived aims of education more generally—are interrelated with the dual claims on which the modern professions are founded. That is, claims of unique expertise or mastery, and, moral goodness (Burns, 2019).

3. Modern Professions

Professions are one of the markers of Western modernity and they combine a number of other modern markers through their work: science and technology, infrastructures or systems, some idea of the social or society, colonial administration and nation building, and in some cases, care labour (Burns, 2019). To be a marker of modernity is to be a sign of progress; to be taken as evidence of progress. This said, the semiotics of professional social work are increasingly less clear in other-than-modern times.

In the sociology of professions, similar to social theory more broadly, affirmative functionalist and trait approaches that viewed the professions as a sign of progress were superseded in the late 1960s by renewed interest in the conflict theory approaches of Marx and then Foucault (Liljegren & Saks, 2017). Since the 1980s, the second more cynical orientation, in which the self-interestedness of the professions is emphasized, has been dominated by a neo-Weberian concept of social closure (an interpretation of the enclosure of the commons) (Ageval, 2017). A number of metaphors are common to this neo-Weberian emphasis on "turf" conflicts: professions as "hierarchies" struggling to create protected "enclosures," and professions as "landscapes" or "maps" in which "boundary" creation is used to define professional fields and new frontiers (Liljegren, 2017). More recently, the sociology of professions has also begun to engage theories and metaphors of greater complexity, including those afforded by Deleuzean assemblages (for example, Burns, 2019).

From a sociological standpoint, professions still largely view themselves through the early trait focused and largely affirmative functionalist approach (Burns, 2019). Social work, for example, is described as "a humanitarian reflex action; needs have been recognized at different points of time and provision has been made to meet them through social work" (Harris, 2008, p. 663). This said, a more cynical conflict theory orientation is certainly also evident, for example in the titles of canonical social work texts: *Regulating the Poor* (Piven & Cloward, 1971/1993); *Unfaithful Angels* (Specht & Courtney, 1994); and, the just-published but likely to become canonical, *A Violent History of Benevolence* (Chapman & Withers, 2019).

Andrew Abbott's (1995) seminal work can be read today as documenting shifts in sociological perceptions of professional social work in the United States. His initial functionalist account was of a "social work of boundaries" in which social work mediates between and translates among other professions (social work as the "interstitial" profession). His second conflict-oriented account emphasized instead inter-professional competition and the "boundaries of social work" (social work as "enclosure"). Abbott's third way into thinking social work grappled with the notion of social work as having "condensed" out of a broader "turf" (social work as "coalescence"). Here, Abbott reworked his initial "social work of boundaries" as interstitial mediation and translation into "social work [made out] of boundaries" (parentheses original). In this account, people link various local boundaries together and these eventually condense into more concrete and general entities. For example, a gendered division of labour in medicine (most doctors were men) and the scientific legitimacy of psychology (also mostly men)

becomes psychiatric social work (mostly women), and the early kindergartens of the settlement houses combine with formal institutions of education, thereby exiting social work. Contra origin stories that locate the beginnings of social work in a conflict in the 1910s and 1920s between two types of organizations – the casework of charity organizing societies and the community work of settlement houses – Abbott argues the boundary or effect trajectories of what ends up being included or excluded from social work occurred earlier, before the two types of organization stabilized into the most common forms of practice. There was greater specialization before select domains were hooked together into either charity organizing or settlement work, or indeed, into what eventually emerged as professional social work. Mariana Valverde's (1993) work on the history of moral reform in Canada would support this theory of local boundaries combining first, before larger associations emerge. For example, early feminists hooked into the temperance movement as a means to intervene in domestic violence, and science and religion, at least in the Canadian case, appear to have worked together for many forms of social reform, rather than engaged in a neo-Weberian turf war.

In a canonical if these days not often read paper, Mark Philp (1979) made the Marxist-Foucauldian argument that social work has failed to take into account the discursively structured nature of the knowledge through which it works, and therefore the profession mistakenly believes it can freely and rationally choose the theories and beliefs with which it imagines and practices. The discursive structure Philp identifies is humanism: Knowledge of universal human potential, of "a universal subjectivity, one that

applies to all individuals and yet to no one in particular" (p. 91). Philp (1979) further

commented:

> The social worker does not say that the vandal did what he wanted to, for
>
> in doing so the role of the social worker would disappear. What he does,
>
> rather, is to allude to the underlying character, the hidden depths, the
>
> essential good, the authentic and the unalienated. In doing so he is
>
> producing a picture of the vandal as a subject who is not immediately
>
> visible but who exists as a potential, a possibility, a future social being.
>
> Even if he does this without hope or cynically, he does it because it is the
>
> major factor which differentiates him from the policeman, the lawyer,
>
> doctor or psychiatrist. (p. 99)

Philp's argument was that this humanism is a structural and structuring frame that

allowed social work to mediate between the "respectable" and the "deviant" within the

threatening shadow of "the mob." Growing concern regarding right leaning populism

would suggest that "the mob" has in part exceeded its historical class boundaries, and

thus also the dichotomy of respectable/deviant in ways that challenge the historically

modern mediating role of professional social work.

In a follow-up paper published thirty years later, Nigel Parton (2008) reflected on

how this universalizing relational knowledge, which he termed "social" and "narrative,"

is shifting with the growth of technology to "database" and "informational" forms of

knowledge. The question for Parton is what theory of practice might inform the work of

social workers as "informational processers" documenting the "informational patterns" of

clients (p. 263). More recent work (Caria & Pereira, 2016) has also begun to engage with what the partial collapse in the sociology of professions of traditional distinctions held between professions (expert discretion) and bureaucracies (administrative discretion) (Lipsky, 1980) might mean for how we conceptualize social work. We can also ask about the "looping effects" (Hacking, 2006) of categorical information and bureaucratic systems working back to affect what is perceived as useful (or not) training for direct social work practice (see also Bowker & Star, 2000). Or indeed, the distinctions and directional effects assumed among concepts of knowledge and information, human and technology, reason and tool, learning and practice, tradition and change.

Taken together, these various accounts of more fragile than confident origins suggest professional social work is one possible effect of changing ways of life, that things could have been otherwise, and that they may still become otherwise. Rather than a naturalized, essential entity – humanistic, trait based, evincing rational intention and expert mastery in support of optimal social functioning (or in support of justice, if conflict-attentive) – social work, similar to the professions more broadly, is a mobile and emergent assemblage (Burns, 2019).

Where does this leave us today? The history of professions is commonly chunked into an earlier era of non-regulated individuals, the organization of these individuals into self-regulating professional associations, and most recently, increasing managerialism and external regulation of previously more autonomous professions (Saks, 2017; Young & Muller, 2014). Concern in Canada regarding the imposition of standardized social work competencies are reflective of this most recent era in the history of professions (for

example, Aronson & Hemingway, 2011). Abbott speculated in the 1990s that social work in North America would remain vulnerable to inevitable and frequent shifts in government funding, and moreover, that our role and status would be increasingly threatened by information technologies able to replicate complex forms of professional knowledge. Corroborating Parton's (2008) concerns, recent scholarship suggests digital technologies are in fact fundamentally changing how knowledge is generated, accessed and used, and as a result, professions are becoming "containers" for, rather than masters or managers of, specialized knowledge (Burns, 2019, p. 262). In turn, and similar to critiques of Western modernity more broadly, Western professions are further destabilized by calls to "provincialize" (Chakrabarty, 2000) what are in fact regional understandings of the definition and social role of both professions and professionalism (Burns, 2019). These are of course all problems of other-than-modern times. There is also a third major disruption to the expert autonomy of the professions: the role of the employing organization that directs the work of a majority of all professionals (Burns, 2019; Young & Muller, 2014). Of note, while most social work literature focuses on constraints on direct practice, this disruption of autonomy includes the influence of the university as the employer of professional scholar-educators (Liljergren, 2017).

Recent Deleuzean inflected work suggests we attend to the "bundling" and "unbundling" of the things assembled to form a given profession (Burns, 2019). For example, the founding bundle of "expertise and personal/group morality" is nowadays being unbundled, with expertise alone increasingly perceived as adequate to direct and justify professional action (Burns, 2019, p. 244), or as is suggested in some social work

literature, the labour of technical administration is overtaking professional discretion and expertise (Parton, 2008). We can also consider the changing combinations expected of scholar-educators, discussed above.

Other recommendations for those concerned with the state of the professions include attending to moments of rapid expansion (Ageval, 2017), for example in the number of graduate programs, and in all levels of enrolment in social work programs in North America. Generating new metaphors, beyond the hierarchies and maps of conflict sociology, has also been suggested (Liliegren, 2017; see also Tuck & Yang, 2012). In turn, Abbott advocated back in the 1990s that social work consider how we might intentionally hook into sides of not-yet-social-work things, into not-yet-significant local boundaries, as a means to both strengthen and attempt to direct the future of the profession.

Elite and now massified modern university knowledge, expert-good modern middle-class educating and caring professionals working under social contract to the state and also as employees in organizations, and now I turn to what we might think of as "other-than-modern" problems. That is, politics and imagination in a time marked by that which both exceeds and refuses professional claims of expertise and goodness enacted in service to some understanding of a collective "us."

Other-Than-Modern Problems

The 1990s and the end of the Cold War appear in academic work as something of a turn, almost a "break," with what came before. With the benefit of hindsight, Bruno Latour (2018) argues this turn is comprised of three interrelated shifts: deregulation and

the decline of centralized welfare state-style governments; massive and ongoing increases in inequality, and; climate change denial, all in the context of global geopolitics. The global pandemic unfolding as I write this introduction is of course reworking these kinds of claims, along with the perceptions of the possible and the desirable that attend them. I will therefore simply acknowledge that there will be a pre- and post- COVID-19 in social theory, and focus my work here on two other-than-modern problems confronting Anglo social work: (1) a range of refusals signaled by terms like populism and post-truth, and (2) the recently more widely perceived environmental crisis.

1. Other-Than-Modern Refusals

> "The sobering awareness that democracy in itself is not enough to save us from its electoral majority is crucial at a historical time when the political momentum seems to be on the side of illiberal movements. We need a stronger ethical stamina to deal with this kind of pressure."
> -- Braidotti, 2019, p. 34

"Populism," often used pejoratively, is a term for a heterogeneous range of sentiments and social movements. Social work scholar Jim Ife (2018) characterizes both populism and social work as "reactions to the challenges of modernity" (p. 122) and raises for collective attention three areas of overlap between the two movements: the privileging of grassroots or bottom-up organizing; an anti-neoliberalism stance, and; uncertainty towards globalization. His concern is that social workers are not immune to anti-democratic shifts, and that we therefore need to be careful not to let "libertarian" populist interests "coopt" "social justice" social work interests.

Noticeable since at least the mid-1990s, and loosely benchmarked as starting in the years following the September 11 attack on the United States, the liberal left is concerned that right leaning populism is eroding belief in the (modern) universal, democratic ideals of the post-war period, and replacing these ideals with a more explicitly stratified orientation towards rights and entitlements (Brown, 2015; Fazzi, 2015; Ife, 2018; Nobel & Ottman, 2018). For example, Fazzi (2015), reporting on interviews and surveys with 90 social workers practicing in politically populist regions of Italy, warns that anti-democratic sentiment is already undermining the democratic ethos of the profession. That is, social workers are not somehow immune to anti-democratic and right-leaning populist sentiments. This risk is particularly high among younger and more institutionally and professionally isolated workers practicing outside of large urban areas. There is also a worrying trend among some workers towards fatalism and victimhood; a perceived helplessness in the face of anti-democratic social policies and social shifts. Fazzi concludes the anti-democratic sentiments of various populist movements may furnish overworked social workers with a rationale for scaling back service provision.

In response to right-leaning forms of populism, social work scholars are advocating greater attention to history (Nobel & Ottmann, 2018), a return to traditional (modern) oppositional justice strategies (Ife, 2018), and revisions to all levels of social work education (Fazzi, 2015; Kemp, 2019). For example, incorporating history on the role of social work in Nazi Germany has been suggested because many of the conditions perceived to be the conditions of possibility for Nazi Germany are again widely present today (Nobel & Ottmann, 2018, p. 115). Nobel & Ottmann (2018) call for a return to

(modern) radical traditions of social work, for renewed emphasis on minority representation and economic redistribution, on human rights, and on political accountability. Ife (2018) also argues social work should return to older (modern) tactics, including creating and following heroic leaders, and using popular arts and popular education to appeal to the emotions of the masses. Perspectives on working with those espousing populist views are more mixed, with some advocating addressing the economic concerns of those included under the rubric of populism (Nobel & Ottman, 2018), and others arguing for the futility of attempts to dialogue with the explicitly and enthusiastically irrational (Ife, 2018).

In social work education, the need to develop relational, community and network building skills is emphasized (Fazzi, 2015; Nobel & Ottman, 2018) as is the need to develop "support networks" for new social workers (Nobel & Ottman, 2018). Other suggestions include fostering a cosmopolitan ethos within social work (Ife, 2018), and explicitly building knowledge and interventions into the curriculum that can support new social workers to adopt the "role of a moral and political practitioner" (Fazzi, 2015, p. 604), willing and able to act to interrupt growing right leaning populist sentiment.

These kinds of shifts and other-than-modern refusals are intensifying long standing questions of, and some variegated generational conclusions about, who we think "we" are when we make claims about the world (Davidson & Forkert, 2019)—elites, experts, the people, the public, the social, the many, us, them, the 1% and the 99%, conservatives, the left, the working class or perhaps a new precariat class (Savage et al., 2013), the local, the national, the international. As such, these shifts are challenging

modern notions of "the social" as an entity and as a unit of action and analysis amenable to social work intervention. As I will elaborate in this dissertation, I am not convinced that established modern responses to other-than-modern disruptions and refusals—often incorporating a moralizing and individualizing judgement of right/wrong—are necessarily the most useful approaches. The modern strategy of *knowing better* has achieved a level of saturation in what it is able to accomplish, and it has certainly had unexpected effects.

2. Environmental Crisis

> "What does it mean to generate knowledge in the age of climate change?"
> -- Baucom & Omelsky, 2017, p. 2

> "[I]f humans have become a geological force, how does one differentiate ground from action?"
> -- Hetherington, 2019, p. 5

On October 8th 2018, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that catastrophic climate change will occur by the end of the present century, and moreover, there is a 12-year window in which global leaders can act to reduce the scale of, but not halt, the unfolding disaster (IPCC, 2018; see also see Wallace-Wells, 2017). Canada's "Future Challenge Areas" (Policy Horizons, 2018) include the imperative to shift both policy and culture such that we begin to live within the earth's carrying capacity (i.e., radically reduce carbon emissions), and relatedly, to attend to the changing dynamics of advantage and vulnerability in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Failure to adequately respond to these identified challenges is likely to result in escalating conflicts (Policy Horizons, 2018). These shifts demand renewed attention to how we understand and care for both the social and the environmental.

How we think about the environment is deeply political and historical, forming the layered conceptual infrastructures through which social work imagines and enacts liberal inclusion and social justice, North-South and settler-Indigenous relations (Des Marais, Bexell, & Bhadras, 2016; Jeffery, 2014; see also Yusoff, 2018). Because of this entanglement, I argue social work should engage the social unrest signaled by the terms populism and post-truth together with the climate crisis. My concern with an emphasis on populism alone is that it points towards an external problem, an "elsewhere" (Dean, Johnson, & Luhmann, 2019; Orr, 2019). This is a classic modern strategy: identify and intervene in the slice that is the problem and in so doing, return the rest of us to the purified forward march of orderly human progress (Law, 1994; Shotwell, 2016; Valverde, 1993). Of course, the earlier modern approach to troublesome populations was to send these disruptions to the colonial front-line on other continents (Foucault, 2015; Stoler, 2016). What options are available to us if neither displacing nor excising the problem are possibilities? In brief, I find Timothy Mitchell's (2009) term "carbon democracy" helpful here because it identifies shared ways of life predicated on unlimited energy and expansive growth—a form of extractive entitlement—but does not externalize this problem to the "elsewhere" of populism, which is in part also an expression of interrupted perceived entitlements (but see also Yusoff, 2018). I will pick up these threads again in the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter two, and in the body chapters I will demonstrate a slightly different approach to disagreement, one that is not reliant on externalizing the perceived problem.

Social Work in Other-than-Modern Times

The literature reviewed thus far traces some of the ways in which modern legitimizing claims of expertise-moral goodness are increasingly undermined by the failure of modern liberal progress narratives, by external regulation from government and employers (via funding and job descriptions), by technological changes (let me look that up), by the ongoing massification of university education (if everyone is expert), and by heterogeneous global knowledges and ways of life that can neither be diminished (as not-modern, as ignorant) nor reduced to the same or the easily intelligible. In turn, postmodern questions of what counts as knowledge, as adequate representation and freedom, are complicated further by a range of social hostilities and refusals, and by transdisciplinary and post-anthropocentric questions of human mastery, of the porous and multiple nature of the human, of distributed forms of agency, and thus also, questions of ethics and of responsibility, of recognized entities and adequate theories of change. Modern questions of mature reason and social forces, and post-modern questions of reflexive reason and power-knowledge, are thus joined in other-than-modern times by yet another round of questions about human autonomy and responsibility, this time nuanced by ontology and even metaphysics.

Research Project:

Assembling Situated Knowledges, Building Shared Standpoints

This project began as a history of critical academic social work in Canada, because that was the only research approach I knew of that might help me better

understand academic social work. As I learned more about universities, however, the project shifted to include a kind of disciplinary reflexivity, enacted in turn through a form of reparative historical practice (more on these later). This shift was largely motivated by growing awareness of the intense individualism and pervasive anxiety of the university, and the common fear of being judged to be on the wrong side of history by being "out of date" theoretically or politically (Berlant, 2009). In response to the affective "atmospheres" (Brennan, 2004) and "moods" (Forkert, 2017) of the university I began to tune into dynamics shaping disciplinary knowledge work and knowledge claims—what on earth is going on in the university?—rather than focusing on knowledge work alone. This sort of paying attention could be called ethnographic (Star, 2010, p. 605), but I prefer the more common "being new."

Major points of bewilderment have included the question of ignorance, of who does not know about common phenomena like poverty and violence, and in turn, why so much contemporary research in the social sciences is focused on marked sub-populations. I have been unsettled by the new-to-me concept of People with Lived Experience (PWLE for short), the under-theorized normative foil against which this group is constructed, and the ways in which this dichotomy is used to structure what is and is not commonly judged as intelligible, important, or best theory-method-practice within the university. The obvious dependence of academic labour on perceived and researchable social problems is not problematized enough.

I learned from area studies scholar Kandice Chuh (2014) that the reification of ignorance in the university functions to establish new areas of expertise. I learned from

women's and gender scholars to think in terms of the "elsewheres" enacted by university and discipline (Luhmann, Johnson, & Dean, 2019). From Sarah Todd et al. (2015) and Amber Dean (2019) I learned that the widespread valorization of "community" and "diversity" by the university are relatively recent phenomena in the Canadian context, and the amplification of these "elsewheres" brings with it effects that require greater care (Luhmann, Johnson, & Dean, 2019; Orr, 2019). "Indeed, we could ask whether breaking down the borders of the academy/community divide has substituted for and deferred intra-academic interrogations of class structure among the queer [and social justice affirming] professoriate" (Brim, 2020, p. 13). In turn, I learned from Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck (2009a; 2009b) that the knowledge work of the social sciences rests on an implicit modern theory of change —that the creation of new knowledge will result in (modern) progressive social change. But not just any knowledge, it is presumably "damaged-centered research" that will allow us to judge harm and reparation towards a fairer world (Tuck, 2009b). "This theory of change, testifying to damage so that persecutors will be forced to be accountable, is extremely popular in social science research—so popular that it serves as a default theory of change, so ubiquitous that folks might think that it is entirely what social science is about" (Tuck, 2009b, p. 414). American feminists refer to this kind of damage-focused strategy as "left legalism" (Brown & Halley, 2002; see also Brown, 1995)—claims of group stratified injury resolvable (sic) through liberal-colonial state law—and caution that this now-orthodox justice practice requires greater care in terms of effects in the world. More generally, the "aboutness" of a discipline or field of study—established perceptions of what a discipline

is or is not about—is a means by which the complexities of ongoing global and historical entanglements are avoided in favour of collegial mastery within the university (Chuh, 2014; see also Nyong'o & Tompkins, 2018). I learned, too, that these ubiquitous "academic manners" (Bracke & Puig de la Bellacasa, 2004, p. 313) are not a popular topic of conversation, in spite of the influence they have on the knowledge work of those within the university, and more broadly, on the intergenerational (re)production of academic disciplines.

In the end, my dissertation research questions are not therefore so much questions of history—of what happened—but of *what is going on* in academic social work. I have distilled this "going on" into the research problem of being a modern expert-good profession in other-than-modern times that regularly exceed attempts to impose perceived progressive order. My aim in the chapters that follow is therefore to assemble a deeper understanding of the conditions of existence and the conditions of possibility of critical academic social work in the other-than-modern Anglo Canadian context so that I am not quite as "negligent" towards my own entangled conditions of existence and possibility within the university (Moten & Harney, 2004). This better understanding will in turn allow me to theorize, evoke and invite an other-than-modern situated "we" that shares a discipline and some matters of concern (Burke & Puig de la Bellacasa, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012). With these aims in mind, my overarching research questions are tuned to unfolding effects rather than to origins, and to a more minor and situated practice of immanent repair rather than the dialectical transcendence of linear, progressive problem solving:

1. What is critical academic social work in Canada about, and how is this "aboutness," this perception of what matters (Chuh, 2014), changing over time? (RQ1)

2. How might we theorize the (re)production and renewal of justice cultures in and through social work after the fall of so many left and liberal progress narratives? (RQ2)

My answer to these questions, developed over the chapters that follow, is that we must attend with greater care to the situated and generational nature of perceptions of "the possible" and "the desirable," and to the unexpected ways in which things work out over time. In some respects, this work can be understood as an attempt to imagine a "post-expert," "post-good" and "post-progress" social work, not because knowledge and intention do not matter, but because these organizing referents have each achieved a level of saturation in what they can produce in the world. Critical academic social work needs renewed ways into things that will help us grapple differently with the excessive, non-linear and non-singular happenings of other-than-modern worlds.

Of note, my focus is on Anglophone traditions of critical academic social work in settler Canada, where much of the imagination is shaped by American, UK, and some Australian literatures, and where social work is anchored to the possibilities of progress or social justice within and through professional practice in a liberal welfare state context. Thus, when I talk about "social work" in this dissertation, this is the very general social work to which I am most often referring. Similarly, when I use "we" or "us" I am most commonly imagining people who share the discipline and profession of social work in this context.

Organization of the Dissertation

Each of the chapters that follow identifies unfinished movements shaping perceptions of what critical academic social work is or should be "about" (RQ1), and each proposes ways in which we might engage these shifts together, as a situated "us" (Haraway, 1988) grappling with an historically modern project in other-than-modern times (RQ2). There are five body chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapter two, which outlines my conceptual framework, picks up and extends the research problem and project introduced in this introduction, to further nuance and explain both problem and approach. Chapter three (Surveying) reports on an exploratory survey in which educators teaching in Canadian social work departments identify texts pivotal to how they imagine social work and social justice. Asking after what we read allows me to raise the question of canonization and change -- that is, perceptions of what social work is about (RQ1) -- in comparatively less individualizing or morally inflected ways (RQ2). In Chapter four (Repair) I problematize the intense individualism of university and regulated professions to theorize generational structures of feeling in academic social work (RQ1). Here, I develop the reparative interpretive approach operationalized in this dissertation, and I advocate that we attend with greater care to embodied intra- and inter-generational differences in perceptions of the possible and the desirable, and to how these play out in different times and places (RQ2). In Chapter five (Stories), I again engage the individualism of the academy, this time to problematize dichotomous stories of social work exceptionalism commonly told through our education and scholarship (RQ1). I suggest the modern emphasis on knowing better may be unhelpful if not outright harmful

in the present geopolitical context (RQ2). In Chapter six (Trouble), I take what I have learned over the course of this project and I make my own integrative generational move, synthesizing heterogeneous traditions of critical social theory into an interpretation of some of what these ideas suggest in relation to the historically modern project of social work in other-than-modern times (RQ1 and RQ2). In the final concluding chapter, I summarize these explorations of what critical academic social work is perceived to be "about," and my attempts to theorize and evoke a situated "us" organized around a loosely shared project, and I wrap up the dissertation by considering both limitations and what might come next.

But first, recalling that the body chapters of this sandwich thesis were written to stand on their own without broader contextualization and explanation, I will introduce each chapter in a little more detail and explain how they do in fact comprise a coherent project. Then, I will turn to Chapter two and outline my conceptual framework and methodological approach.

Chapter Three: Surveying Critical and Justice-emphatic Academic Social Work in Canada

Wilson, T. E. (revised and resubmitted). Surveying critical and justice-emphatic academic social work in Canada. *Canadian Social Work Review.*

This chapter reports on an exploratory electronic survey in which justice-identified educators teaching in schools of social work in Canada were asked to identify texts and knowledge domains they consider pivotal to understanding social work and

social justice. I undertook this work at the beginning of the dissertation project, and it provided me with a helpfully concrete empirical mapping of some of what critical academic social work is about (RQ1). It also, however, emphasized an additional problem—how as a newcomer to the university might I understand and interpret what educators had to say (RQ2)? What understanding, what conceptual resources, was I missing?

All of my degrees are in applied social work, and this education has tended to treat ideas (knowledge, theory, representations of the world) in classic Kantian modern fashion, as static and bounded, to be judged as better/worse, right/wrong, in support of rational (expert) conclusions and courageous (good) action in the world. I could of course interpret educators' responses in this fashion, but this kind of adjudicating approach did not resonate as an especially useful intervention (RQ2). I therefore drafted a thematic account of educators' responses, and then set this work aside for a few years as I went exploring across the disciplines in the hopes of encountering resources that might support my desire to imagine things differently. This exploration included drafting and publishing Chapter four (Repair) before returning to this initial work. The educator survey work has allowed me to assemble and reflect at the discipline a picture of an "us" that shares a project (RQ1), and moreover, to evoke an "us" that might imagine together further (RQ2).

Chapter Four: Repairing What's Left in Social Work, or, When Knowledge no Longer Cuts

Wilson, T. E. (2017). Repairing what's left in social work, or, when knowledge no longer cuts. *British Journal of Social Work*, *47*(5), 1310-1325. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcw114

This chapter introduces my interpretive orientation in conversation with both research questions: what is social work about (RQ1), and how might we theorize something akin to justice after the fall of so many modern progress narratives (RQ2). Here, I draw on select debates from similarly justice-anchored women's and gender studies to orient on social work as a world-making project that exceeds us all. I argue the justice imaginations of justice-emphatic academic social work are at least somewhat saturated or stalled, and moreover, that we have yet to fully admit the fall of left and modern progress narratives into our scholarship and education, in spite of our engagements with poststructural critiques. I then outline and explore questions of discipline (RQ1), and the embodied nature of intra- and inter-generational change as requiring greater attention and care within the stratified relations of the university (RQ2).

Chapter Five: Social Work Stories: Situated Views and Larger Visions in Disciplinary Scholarship and Education

Wilson, T. E. (2019). Social work stories: Situated views and larger visions in disciplinary scholarship and education. *Social Work Education*. doi: 10.1080/02615479.2019.1703930

This chapter operationalizes the reparative interpretive framework developed in Chapter four to reflect on my first research question—what is critical academic social work perceived to be about—and to answer in part my second research question—how

might we imagine and theorize together something akin to justice or improvement in post-progressive or other-than-modern times. My central argument is that if social work is to find a larger vision in the wake of the failure of a range of modern progress narratives, we must engage differently with the challenge posed by multiplying and sometimes conflicting knowledge communities (RQ2). Here, I draw on feminist Claire Hemmings' (2011) work on stories of inter-generational conflict in women's and gender studies, and on Sisken and Warner's (2010) work on the historical problem of the "saturation" and "renewal" of knowledge, to reflect on the multiple temporalities shaping perceptions of what social work is about (RQ1). I suggest a number of heuristics—"generational problematic," "translational space," and "imagined communities"—as resources for exploring these disciplinary dynamics, and I then attempt to tell a story about the inevitably changing imaginations of the discipline a little bit differently (RQ2).

Chapter Six: An Invitation into the Trouble with Humanism for Social Work

Wilson, T. E. (in press). An invitation into the trouble with humanism for social work. Invited chapter in V. Bozalek & B. Pease (Eds.) *Post-anthropocentric social work: Critical posthumanism and new materialist perspectives.* Routledge Advances in Social Work series.

This final body chapter operationalizes a number of the understandings and conclusions developed over the course of wrestling with my two guiding research questions. These understandings include our inevitable participation in processes that stabilize knowledge, in spite of the fact that we also problematize the effects of canonization. That the episodic integration and simplification of sprawling, ongoing

theoretical and philosophical debates is necessary and useful, especially in applied disciplines (Torraco, 2005), while it also produces unintended effects and new disciplinary problematics for subsequent academic generations. And finally, the canonical feminist argument from Donna Haraway (1988) that situated views are in fact community views that must be *actively built* through ongoing dialogue and theorization on roughly shared matters of concern (Bracke & Puig de la Bellacasa, 2004).

Based on these broad understandings, I risk outlining one way of conceptualizing major generational shifts in sensibility in critical traditions of social work in Anglophone welfare states—as modern, as post-modern, and now, increasingly, as post-anthropocentric (RQ1). I also attempt to "show" some of the dynamics shaping academic knowledge work, and I conclude with tentative thoughts on how the discipline might begin to imagine that which is not yet easy to imagine (RQ2). In sum, the approach taken in this final body chapter is a means to operationalize the reparative interpretive orientation elaborated in Chapter four (Repair), think with help of the survey of educators (Chapter three, Survey) and in light of the dynamics unfolded in Chapter five (Stories), and to theorize answers to my two overarching research questions: how are perceptions of what matters shifting over time, and, how might we therefore theorize and renew understandings of something akin to progress or justice in other-than-modern times.

CHAPTER TWO

Conceptual and Methodological Considerations

"How do we deal with relationships that are in the shapes of intersecting spirals rather than straight lines?"
Gullion, 2018, p. 66

Introduction

Faced with a blank page and the need to draft a conceptual framework and methodology that explains what I have done with my dissertation work and why, I keep coming back to the fact that I have been old and I have been new to a number of different organizational settings. Being new means that in addition to whatever job you are hired to do, you also have to figure out the politics and possibilities of your employing organization. Whatever my particular employment outcome is in relation to the university, the context in which you work is your work and new people invariably ask questions about this context that irritate folks who've been around for a while. I've been old and I've been new, and this dissertation is the work of a newcomer who has on occasion declined interpellation (in the Althussean sense of being hailed by ideology) into established institutional, disciplinary, and professional figure/ground logics when they have not made sense to me. My methodology can as a result be understood as a practice of curious and invested persistence towards a deeper understanding of what is going on in academic social work (in part, RQ1), one founded in a perceived need to be accountable to the conditions of existence and of possibility of the disciple these days (in part, RQ2).

This methodological practice has included iterative and sprawling interdisciplinary explorations, learning from experienced social work educator-scholars, engaging with particular intellectual traditions and conversations, theorizing with the help of keywords and heuristics, and processes of committee and publication peer review. Some of these engagements have been intentional from the start. For example, engaging women's and gender studies to see how that justice-identified academic unit grapples with continuity and change, and with interdisciplinary debates about the state of critical theory as a means to better locate social work thinking within a broader context. Other engagements took a while to emerge as strategies worth pursuing. For example, the broader view afforded by history and philosophy of social science, which I encountered in science studies when I was trying to better understand academic rules around, and distinctions among, theory and method. In what follows, I outline each of these four main domains of engagement, and what they have contributed to this dissertation.

1. Interdisciplinary Explorations

In 2015 I attended a formative conference on affect theory—Affect Theory: Worldings/Tensions/Futures (AffectWTF, for short)—organized by Greg Seigworth (Millersville University, Pennsylvania) and attended by a who's-who of major Anglophone queer, affect, and new materialist scholars (wtfaffect.com): Lauren Berlant, Kathleen Stewart, Heather Love, Ann Cvekovitch, Jasbir Puar, Brian Massumi, Erin Manning, Tavia Nyong'o, Lisa Blackman, Patricia Clough, Ben Anderson, Steven Shaviro, and Lawrence Grossberg, among a few hundred others. It was like nothing I had ever seen before: people had fun and were gleefully clever, showed passion and

vulnerability, took major risks, read papers (having only been to the Canadian Association for Social Work Educationors-l'Association canadienne pour la formation en travail social annual conference, I had not known that was a thing), argued with each other, and explicitly invited others into dialogue about shared matters of concern. Particularly noteworthy, people were able to have interesting conversations because they shared at least some foundational theoretical understanding. Canonization enables as well as elides, and I therefore take the risk in Chapter six (Trouble) to render heterogeneous and evolving theories into a simpler outline in the hopes that it will foster different conversations in social work.

In turn, I had by the time of the conference collected the educator survey responses on a canon of critical social work in Canada (included here as chapter three) but had not known how to interpret or represent them. Witnessing the depth and scope of debate at this conference reassured me that my failure to know was in fact related to general ignorance of university, discipline and education in my context, rather than a more individualized failure of insight in which I couldn't figure out how to make "grounded" meaning out of the "data" right in front of me. There is much more to understanding than a problem, a data set, and an interpretive framework.

I also began the Gender Studies and Feminist Research (GSFR) Diploma in 2015, and I found this space addressed my questions about university and discipline most directly. Here, people were more likely to openly discuss the instability of their objects of study, as well as the influence of the university and ongoing social changes on a disciplinary formation anchored to the referent "justice" (Dean, Johnson, & Luhmann,

2019; Hemmings, 2011; Hesford, 2013; Nash, 2019; Orr, Braithwaite, & Lichtenstein, 2012; Scott, 2012; Wiegman, 2012). Asking questions about the project was an ongoing part of the project, and so too was thinking with one's colleagues about loosely shared matters of concern. I had not known that this way of working—that is, attention to the shifting conditions of existence and possibility of a loosely shared and partially institutionalized project—is, at least in contrast to some university spaces, a feminist way of working. I have therefore explicitly included this anchoring focus as an objective of my dissertation research (RQ2).

It was in GSFR coursework with Amber Dean that I developed my general reparative orientation towards questions of generation and change. The anchoring textbook of that class (Orr, Braithwaite, & Lichtenstein, 2012) was a keywords project (Williams, 1983) reflecting on the ways in which disciplinary perceptions were shifting over time, and on the institutional and relational contexts of these generational shifts. I published the resulting article in the fall of 2016, and it is included here as Chapter three (Repair). GSFR remains a touchstone as I continue to think about the need I perceive in social work for greater collective disciplinary attention to how things are working out over time.

Two conferences in Europe, the European Conference on Social Work Research (ECSWR) (Lisbon, Portugal, 2016) and the Trans/Weissen Network conference on knowledge travel and translation between national contexts (Trier, Germany, 2017), illustrated for me ways in which the larger national university system influences disciplinary knowledge work. These European social work conferences were

interdisciplinary, not necessarily professional-focused, included broad philosophical work as well as empirical work, and were attended by people interested and engaged in a range of shared conversations beyond their specific areas of expertise. Again, much different from the social work conversations I was more familiar with, and as such, a helpful example of the possibilities of the academy. I presented a version of Chapter three (Repair) at ECSWR, and this led to an invitation to the Trans/Weissen Network conference. This in turn helped me to better recognize and engage the methodological nationalism[2] (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) of the social work I am most familiar with, and to think in more nuanced ways about the multiple circulating temporalities of social work. Some of this learning is included in Chapter five (Stories).

A number of visiting speakers have also furthered my thinking about the ways in which the university as an historical institution and an employer structures both knowledge work and relationships (RQ1), which in turn has helped me develop my thinking on what it might take to be accountable to these conditions of existence and possibility (RQ2). These speakers include Alexis Shotwell, Heather Love, Fred Moten and Robyn Kelly, John Clarke, Mel Y. Chen, Sarah Ahmed, Nancy Fraser, and Dylan Robinson, among others. A follow-up video call with Heather Love was especially helpful because she acknowledged the race-class-gender (etc.) dynamics and "second generation" canonization I was finding so bewildering in the social justice-emphatic academy, and she provided me with early signposting and encouragement that helped me

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[2] Methodological nationalism refers to the common research practice of treating the state as a self-contained unit rather than a geopolitical entangled relation.

find my way (see also Brim, 2020). She remains an important example for me of a politicized academic explicitly and carefully engaged with her conditions of existence and possibility. Mel Y. Chen suggested I read Kandice Chuh's (2014) work on the "aboutness" of academic disciplines, and this became an anchoring keyword included in my guiding research questions (RQ1). Alexis Shotwell theorized individualizing exemptive purity politics as a common cultural phenomenon these days, and she recommended I read Susan Leigh Star's work on classification and infrastructure (Bowker & Star, 2000). Dylan Robinson named the hungriness of settler-colonizers after material resources, and academics after the knowledges of others. Nancy Fraser modeled ways of responding to questions incommensurable with her work and aims. John Clarke embodied the layered circulations of histories and memories and relationships. Sara Ahmed demonstrated the frustrations of diversity work within the university. From Fred Moten and Robyn Kelly, I gleaned the potential open-heartedness of a radical undercommons within and beyond the university (see Moten & Harney, 2004). More generally, each of these people provided examples of scholarly work, community, and conversation at its best, and they remain important touchstones as I attempt to imagine possible ways to "renew" (Sisken & Warner, 2010) ways of orienting on knowledge in academic social work.

I also took three philosophy courses at York University, one on Foucault's intellectual context with Lorna Weir (2016), and I audited two others on modern (2016) and postmodern (2017) philosophy, both with Jim Vernon. Lorna is a queer feminist Foucauldian and sociologist (and one of the organizers of the first Pride protest in

Toronto) and Jim bridges German Idealism and French "post" philosophies and is an honest-to-god philosopher. Having learned what little philosophy and theory I knew through social work and the various critical studies, it was strikingly different to learn from traditional disciplinary scholars. I had not understood quite how social work, but also the justice-attentive extra-disciplinary critical cultural studies, were anchored to the demanding present, and because of this, significantly more conclusive, directive, and likely to make judgements of good/bad theory and claims of social relevance than at least some in the traditional disciplines (RQ1). The thoroughness and nuance of Lorna and Jim's respective philosophical and political understandings was seriously impressive, providing me with additional examples of university knowledge work and education. It was Lorna who first told me that I needed to build the conditions of intelligibility for what I cared about into my disciplinary location (RQ2). Jim, in his pedagogical turn, welcomed me into the "treacherously rewarding struggle" of loving the world while also being tuned to the human capacity for violence. They have both helped me better understand the possibilities and politics of the university (RQ1 and RQ2), which I have in turn tried to make explicit in the body chapters of this dissertation.

In an effort to understand the role and expectations of the university instructor in general, and the social work educator in particular (RQ1), I completed two teaching and learning certificates (2017) offered through McMaster University's McPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Excellence in Teaching. These workshop-style courses (totalling 100 hours of class time) introduced me to the tension between the academic freedom of tenured professors and the market-oriented university's desire to provide

measurably "excellent" education, "real world" preparation, and a highly rated "student experience." By explicitly naming and explaining the logic and claims-making that link educator, institution and student, these courses—taught by "alt-ac" staff with PhDs rather than by faculty—have helped me better understand more of what is going on in the institution as a site of formal education and job preparation, and as an employer of a large precarious workforce and a much smaller tenured one (RQ1 and RQ2). These, too, are some of the conditions of existence and possibility of critical academic social work these days.

2. Asking Social Work Educators

In addition to these interdisciplinary explorations, I also asked social work educators to talk to me about how critical academic social work in Anglophone Canada is changing over time (RQ1). This asking includes an anonymous exploratory survey requesting self-identifying critical or justice oriented social work educators to nominate texts key to understanding social work and social justice (RQ1). I began e-survey data collection in the fall of 2014 and closed the survey at the end of January 2015. This exploratory work provided a grounding initial empirical anchor with which to think, and it is included here as Chapter three.

I also attended the American "Vermont Group" "non-conference" most years between 2014 and 2020 (http://www.gptsw.net/). Organized by Stanley Witkin, the conference is something of a hippie camp retreat for adults, and the format supports prolonged conversations about social work and world. The 20th anniversary of the gathering occurred in 2019. Many of the initial organizers and attendees are now retired

or have died, and most of the longer-term attendees are soon to retire. With people coming from different universities, departmental-specific frustrations are typically left aside in favor of shared matters of concern. It is also somewhat international, with attendees from Canada, Europe, Hong Kong, and sometimes other countries. The range of national contexts present means that people are able to ask and answer questions without the same risk of perceived ignorance or moral offense. Vermont is also an explicitly intergenerational space, and something of a match made in heaven because of this: exhausted and disillusioned faculty encounter in Vermont enthusiastic and insecure graduate students who could use help negotiating the possibilities and politics of the university, as well as their particular research projects (RQ2). I presented aspects of my dissertation to the Vermont Group over multiple years, and both Chapter four (Repair) and Chapter five (Stories) are what they are in part because of Vermont. Allan Irving in particular supported my interest in unpopular ("unprofessional") emotions in disciplinary social work. Stanley nominated me as a potential contributor to the first book length collection exploring post-anthropocentrism and social work, and the resulting chapter is included here as Chapter six (Trouble). Jan Fook wrote the arms-length assessment for the post-doctoral fellowship that will follow my doctorate. Laura Béres and I chatted about life and books and discipline on the eight-hour drive back to Toronto. Vermont has provided me with a broader understanding of social work (RQ1) and an embodied or experiential sense of what it might take to renew or reassemble orientations towards social justice within and through social work (RQ2).

Finally, planned from the beginning, but carried out towards the end, I conducted life and topic focused oral history interviews with four retired social work scholar-educators who are each widely perceived to have influenced the imagination of critical Anglophone social work in Canada in some canonical fashion. Asked to reflect on their work in relation to the changing discipline, each person I spoke with expressed various ways in which their work was judged by others as "not social work," and the challenges they faced in pursing what they perceived to be important anyway (RQ1 and RQ2). Some of this work was intended to be included as a chapter in this dissertation, but the new coronavirus and associated global pandemic has been disruptive enough that I have made the decision to complete this dissertation without having written up that work. This work is, however, an absent-presence, furthering my thinking as I wrote other chapters and a friendly if also distracting promise of future work and imagining.

3. Specific Intellectual Traditions

I also read a lot, encountering disciplines and inter-disciplines, problematics and ways into things that I had not known existed. History and philosophy of science (HPS) and intergenerational conversations in critical social theory (CST) are the two broad areas I have found most enlightening because they have helped me "provincialize" (Chakrabarty, 2000) the social work I know within broader geopolitics, "situate" (Haraway, 1998) theoretical traditions in time and place, and think about the ordering practices of science and discipline with a little more curiosity and a little less depth critique (Law, 1991; Law, 2004; Sedgewick, 2003; Tsing, 2015).

Critical Social Theory

"There is a sharp inter-generational dimension at work: as if, after the great explosion of theoretical creativity of the post-World War II years, we are lost in a mournful landscape of repetitions without difference. In some ways, it is a sign of progress: what was blasphemy in the 1980s has by now become banality."
-- Braidotti, 2019, p. 20

Critical social theory is an improvement-oriented interdisciplinary tradition within a broader history and philosophy of disciplinary divisions and geopolitics, one that combines normative moral claims (philosophy) with empirical understanding (science) towards a vision of a better world and greater human freedom (variously understood). In Chapter six on the trouble with humanism for social work in other-than-modern times, I chunk this heterogeneous sprawl of traditions into three rough generations: modern, postmodern, and post-anthropocentric, and I suggest some of the ways in which social work has, and might in the future, engage with these broad shifts. I introduce an even more simplified account of these intellectual traditions now as a means to illustrate the generational moves of synthesizing and simplifying heterogeneous ways of thinking for application to differently perceived problematics (in part, RQ1). This episodic practice of condensation and refocusing is an important node of work in academic disciplines, and one that I argue in this dissertation requires much greater attention in academic social work in Canada (RQ2).

Modern critical theory is a negative interpretive science concerned with identifying impediments to human freedom, their causes and their eradication. Freedom is typically operationalized as democracy, where democracy is in turn understood as a collective relational counterweight to the alienating and oppressive effects of inhumane

capitalism. This first generation works within an Enlightenment tradition of Kantian rational maturity, positive science, and Hegelian history as the foundational ingredients for social progress and the self-actualization of (European) (hu)Man. The spirit of modern critical theory is captured by Kant's (1784) "the courage to use one's own reason," where this courageous individual maturity is constructed against the foil of the authority of church and monarchy. This "phase" of social though is tuned to macro level "social forces" -- that is, to widespread, extra-individual associations and agential patterns and effects originating from things like the "economy" and "patriarchy" (Gullion, 2018; Mannheim, 1927/1952).

In turn, the "postmodern condition" is famously defined as "incredulity towards meta-narratives," including truth, progress and justice, and it is similarly located within a broader history of tensions between science (representations of what exists) and philosophy (the rhetorical logic required to make claims about a given representation), and in relation to anxieties about the relevance of the university in technologically and economically mediated times (Lyotard, 1979). With this second major generational turn in social theory, the focus shifts to micro level experience and meaning making (Gullion, 2018). Some within postmodern critical social theory can also be classified as "anti-humanist" because they attend to the ways in which Man – also a meta-narrative – is imagined in European philosophy and science (for example, Lyotard, Foucault). Of note, however, this theoretical anti-humanism locates the problem as general, philosophical and diffused, in contrast to those who would instead name the problem of European-colonial

humanism as situated in specific relations and structures (for example, Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wynter, 1984; Yusoff, 2018).

A third major generational synthesis and refocusing is currently underway in the Anglophone academy. For example, feminist Rosi Braidotti, an especially prolific advocate for posthuman knowledge work, defines the "posthuman condition as the convergence of posthumanism on the one hand and post-anthropocentrism on the other, within an economy of advanced [cognitive] capitalism (Braidotti, 2013, 2017)…" (2019, p. 2). Braidotti distinguishes between a posthumanist challenge to European humanism's "Man," and a post-anthropocentric problematization of human exceptionalism, to locate the posthuman "convergence" between the Fourth Industrial Revolution (of technology as an entangled part of life rather than simply a tool used by humans) and the Sixth Mass Extinction (of humans). Similar to a second generation "postmodern condition," the accelerated, but also variegated, speed of change continues to challenge our capacity to maintain "critical distance" in relation to all that is going on (Braidotti, 2019; Jameson, 1991). In this third phase or generation of social theory—the ontological turn, feminist new materialisms, post-anthropocentrism, post-humanism, non-representational theory—rather than postmodern micro meaning making (discourse, power, subjectivity, the shared symbolic order) or modern macro level social forces (materialism, social control, structure), the unit of analysis is instead in-process relational assemblages of distributed agency in which nature and technology (the "new" in new materialism) are noteworthy agents rather than inert background (Gullion, 2018).

I highlight Braidotti's (2018; 2019) posthumanism here because her work is so clearly a generational refocusing of earlier thinking, one that amplifies a different combination of philosophical resources to address a somewhat different set of perceived issues. In Braidotti's particular account of this third generational wave of critical theory, psychoanalytic theory (theory focused on the experiences of an individual human subject in relation to their world) is partially displaced by the sciences and various digital studies, because established social constructionist distinctions of nature/culture are no longer perceived to be tenable (Braidotti, 2019). Instead, a Deleuzian cosmology and set of metaphors for thinking about change and directional effects (rhizomes, assemblages and immanence, contra origins, individuals and transcendence), and a Spinozist philosophy of affect as pre-personal capacity (contra reason, mind) raise pressing questions about the privileging of dominant understandings of the human in what is now increasingly understood as a more-than-human world. This more tangled and relational take on distributed forms of agency is (seriously) indebted to indigenous cosmologies diminished as "not modern" by the legitimizing machines of colonial university and legal expropriation (Gullion, 2018, Ingold, 2000; Rosiek, Snyder, & Pratt, 2020; Todd, 2016).

Rather than swear allegiance to Braidotti's intentionally affirmative and assimilative account of what is going on in contemporary critical social theory (the posthuman condition; the Critical PostHumanities), however, I prefer the more general "post-anthropocentric" as a name for a larger-scale shift in generations of critical social theory. Post-anthropocentrism is a roomier home for a greater range of approaches, many of which also engage with the work of Deleuze, with the turn to affect, with the

environment and technoscience, the crisis of representation and consequent ethical turn, and so on. More generally, it is still early days in this generational work of synthesizing, refocusing and extension.

This said, there are also a number of important critiques of the popularity and use of the Anthropocene and related terms (e.g., environment, nature), particularly the ways in which the concept folds together with a generational timeframe (Catney & Doyle, 2011; Little & White, 2017; Yusoff, 2018). Given both Anthropocene and generation are central concepts in my work, I will consider these concerns in the section on keywords below, and I then take up more of this problematic in figure/ground terms in the final body chapter (Trouble).

History and Philosophy of Science

History and philosophy of science is an interdisciplinary field indebted to earlier, and some ongoing, fields of study: historical epistemology; the history of ideas; the history of concepts; the sociology of knowledge; the philosophy of science; histories of science; ethnographic science studies; science, technology and society studies (STS), feminist science studies, material semiotics, and at times, interdisciplinary debates on theoretical "turns" (for the last, see Dirks, 1998; Hiley, Bohman, & Shusterman, 1991; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Steinmetz, 2005) A major axis of study is the historical and philosophical (Cartesian) split of nature/culture, institutionalized in the university in the form of a distinction between the natural sciences and the humanities. The history and philosophy of *social* science (HPSS) is a smaller sub-unit within this broader field, and it has an even shorter history because the social sciences are a late third addition to the

North America academy (Winch, 1958/1990). As a field of study, HPSS attends to the political and institutional contexts for what does and does not get codified as science, and what recognized forms of science produce in the world. For example, what is now commonly termed the social sciences is an outcome of Americans educated in the then-dominant German university system, who upon returning home merged German Hegelianism and Idealism with American individualism and redemptive religious progress within the ample job prospects of rapidly expanding modern universities in the pre- and interwar years (Mancias, 1987). The Anglo social sciences emerge in the USA as a third major branch of activity in the university, and this branch has gone on to amplify distinctions between qualitative (humanities influenced) and quantitative (natural sciences influenced) forms of science. Methods distinctions common in the social sciences may therefore be understood in relation to the geopolitical wrangling of two global superpowers within a much larger world and history. No wonder Haraway (1988) makes digs about what "the boys" in the human sciences think.

Debates about the social sciences hinge on distinctions among (philosophical) concepts and (scientific) empirical study, causal explanations and empirical evidence (Winch, 1958/1990), the historical development of empiricism and positivism (Benton & Craib, 2001), a distinction between continental and analytic philosophy, and among the three major philosophical camps of empirical positivism, Kantian criticism, and ontological approaches (Gutting, 2005). There are also multiple explanatory social theories (Little, 1991) and sub-branches of argument like naturalism and interpretivism, realism and holism (Rosenberg, 2016), functionalism contra historical explanations

(Gordon, 1991), and a range of overlapping dichotomous pairs like behavior/expression, object/objectivity, facts/values (Montuschi, 2002), systems/meaning, material/symbolic (Hollis, 1994/2000), epistemology/ontology, and so on. John Law (2004) calls this mess of history and elite knowledge and geopolitics the "hinterlands" of science and perceived realities.

I appreciate HPSS work because it explains some of what is going on in the academy in ways methods texts, but also some of the generational conclusions I learned from critical cultural studies, do not (RQ1). Moreover, what I learned in an applied social science as sides to be picked (name your paradigm and your method. Now justify your choice in contrast to other perceived options) HPSS, STS and neighbouring fields approach as a material semiotic practice that produces as well as describes the world imagined (e.g., Fischer, 2003; Law, 2004). Science is thus an invested cultural practice and as such, folks like Bruno Latour argue, scientific practice and conclusions must be returned to the realm of democratic debate. Of relevance to my work here, this includes disciplinary debate, though I would inflect it less as debate and more as a practice of imagining and reimagining together (RQ2).

4. Theorizing with Keywords

Philosophy entails the development of concepts like "…Aristotle's substance, Descarte's cogito, Leibniz's monad, Kant's condition, Shelling's power, Bergson's duration…" (Deleuze & Guitari, 1991/1994, p. 7). A cultural studies practice of theorizing with keywords, in contrast, is a more situated practice, one tuned to "ordinary" and "concrete" things in the everyday world (McCarthey, 2006). Initially popularized by

the British Cultural Studies thinker Raymond Williams (1983), theorizing with keywords is a way to consider what is going on in a given conjuncture (Fritsch, O'Connor, & Thompson, 2016; Lesko & Talburt, 2012). There is also a neighbouring body of work on concepts (Bal, 2012; Carey, 2009; Stoler, 2016) and boundary objects (Star, 2010; Star & Ruhleder, 1996) that explores the multiple situated uses of ordering terms, and the ways in which concepts travel and are translated from context to context (Bachmann-Medick, 2016b; Green, 2020; Said, 1982); for example, the material semiotics of "infrastructure" as a keyword (Klinenberg, 2016; Hetherington, 2019; Star, 2010), or Alexis Shotwell's (2016) theorizing of the keyword "purity." I outline Raymond Williams' approach to keywords in Chapter four (Repair) and touch on some of the scholarship on concepts and boundary objects in Chapter five (Stories), so will not repeat that work here.

My work in this dissertation is anchored to a number of keywords. These include Kandice Chuh's (2014) "aboutness" as a way into the disciplining and ordering work of academic units; Amber Dean and colleagues' (2019) consideration of the "elsewheres" evoked through university practices; the inside/outside dichotomies of social work discourse (Chambon, 1999); Donna Haraway's (1988) "situated views" as the perceptual orientations of communities or groups, and the "negligence" of eliding or disavowing one's conditions of existence (Moten & Harney, 2004). In the chapters that follow, I theorize keyword variations of my own: cutting and repairing (building on Foucault, 2003b), reparative historical practice (building on Lorenz, 2007), imagined communities (building on Anderson, 2006), translational space (building on Said, 1982, among others), and, as I will introduce now, I also develop *generation* as a pivotal or conjunctural

keyword for engaging with and pulling together various strands among the changing imaginations of disciplinary social work in other-than-modern worlds.

Generation as a Conjunctural Keyword and an Alternative Unit of Analysis

"The generational timescape is an idiomatic way of representing time, much in the same way that a genre of painting is an idiomatic way of representing space, sketching it with a certain kind of landmark and arrangement of human figures. A timescape organizes perception and imagination. It gives form and context to the known world of the past and present, as well as a template to project onto the unknown future."
-- White, 2017, p. 765

"Generation" is a central concept and unit of analysis in this dissertation because it allows me to assemble and theorize together the range of ongoing dynamics that I have condensed into the research problem of historically modern social work in other-than-modern times. These ongoing dynamics including questions of tradition and reason, education and change; the changing status and role of professions, both caring and educating; debates about science and knowledge, and; loosely shared and shifting perceptions of the possible and the desirable. My aim in theorizing generation as a keyword is to encourage us—those of us who think with critical theory and share a discipline—to understand ourselves in relation to broader and ongoing debates, rather than to exacerbate a modern emphasis on being better than those who were here before us. Generation as a keyword or heuristic is also a means to consider stability and change in the overlapping "views from somewhere" (Haraway, 1988) that contour the discipline and its reproduction, and thus the term has potential for opening up necessarily shared questions of disciplinary reflexivity and the ongoing work of building loosely shared standpoints with each other (RQ1 and RQ2).

I was surprised to find academic social work so individualizing in a moral sense. My attempts to raise mess, complexity or bewildering questions of progress for collective disciplinary attention have been met by individual narratives of responsible exemption, which are a type of what Shotwell (2016) terms "purity politics": recognition of privilege, affirmed respect for the knowledge of Others, and short-term participatory practice with the vulnerable-oppressed (RQ1). My experience of community-based social work is that it is a constrained and often repetitive job focused primarily on poor people and attended by a range of gendered and racialized particularities. Sometimes the meeting of workers and clients works out pretty well, but not always. The folks I know are quite conscious of the power and class differentials involved and view social workers with at least some caution and frustration, if not outright suspicion. Social workers are not universally popular figures. Articulate, affirmative representations about the worker-client relationship are therefore not something to be taken at face value. As such, the exemptive repetitions and remarkably articulate claims of social relevance common in the university raised questions for me about what on earth is going on that ubiquitous problematics cannot be discussed as such (RQ1). Misappropriating the late Margaret Thatcher, is there no such thing as discipline? Are there only individual scholar-educator-workers somehow transcending world and employment?

I needed a way to talk about shared, complicated things that would neither end in familiar conclusions nor exacerbate the individualism of the university and a regulated profession (RQ2). Approached as a keyword rather than a biological fact, I therefore theorize generation as a non-progressive unit of analysis in support of collective dialogue

on loosely shared matters of disciplinary concern. Not, generation as a fact in some linear or singular version of history, nor a means to categorize whom among us are or are not on the right side of history. I develop an understanding of generation instead as a heuristic towards multiple perceptual locations and relational dynamics, locations that are stabilized by the modern ordering work of universities and disciplines. For example, the repetition of responsible exemption noted above can be approached as a generational stability worthy of disciplinary attention. As I express it in Chapter five (Stories), generation, in my use of the term, is a unit of analysis that is bigger than an individual and smaller than a discipline. All of this said, generation is an increasingly popular concept because of the financial crisis of 2008, the more widely perceived environmental crisis (White, 2013), and most recently, the new coronavirus pandemic. Like all units of ordering and analysis, the term carries with it problems as well as possibilities.

Generation has been problematized as a metanarrative inclusive of both left and right ideologies on how people should live together (White, 2013). The term is also somewhat notorious for the ways in which its use can elide intra-generational differences and more severe forms of inequality (Little & Winch, 2017). It is also typically an anthropocentric concept (White, 2017), where the associated post-anthropocentric and environmental turns are similarly critiqued for the ways in which they elide intra-generational and regional inequalities in favor of some future imagined humans (Hetherington, 2019). For example, the generational logic of the environmental crisis marks the present as exceptional, which depoliticizes degrees in experience and vulnerability, and in responsibility for carbon emissions (White, 2017).

How is it that the concept of generation has achieved such "mythic" status (Barthe, 1957/2012)? In modern Western traditions, generation is conceptualized as a unit through which we can think about and assess human progress. In *the* canonical work, German-Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim (1927/1952) synthesized "the problem of generations" in relation to two main approaches, which he in turn associated with the geopolitics of particular times and places. On the one hand, the French positivist (quantitative) tradition is, Mannheim argued, present in both science and cultural domains, and linked to identification with the Enlightenment. Here, generation is a predictable pattern and duration that structures historical development, and thus, an empirical unit through which to measure things. Mannheim traces a history for this positivist approach through philosophical and practical problems. For David Hume, the question was how to think about rational choice by newcomers of their own forms of government, given political continuities. For August Comte the question was how we might understand and analyze human progress. In these accounts, old is conservative-traditional and new is reform-progress oriented. In turn, if you change the length of the average life you speed up or slow down progress. A generation is about 30 years, and this is considered a good balance between old (tradition) and new (reasoned progress). François Mentré further distinguished between the more stable generations of institutions and the more changeable generations of smaller units of sociality; for example, the ways in which the university as an institution stabilizes (some) generational situated views through the mediating concept of culture (Readings, 1996).

On the other hand, the second, German historical-Romantic (qualitative) approach, Mannheim argued, instead focused on "historical being." This was more conservative than the French positivist-quantitative approach which combined both conservative and strong reform impulses. In Mannheim's account of Dilthy's work, generation provided an alternative conceptual unit to the units of months and days. Generation is in this approach "internal" and "intuitive" time, the subjective experience of being contemporary with others, of living through the same things. Pinder contributed the observation that the same generation is not in fact universally contemporary. Although we are alive at the same time and experience the same things, there is a qualitative difference in experience based on when things occur in our own lifecourse. Thus generations are in fact "poloyphonos," comprised of multiple smaller age cohorts or generational "units" with whom we share an age-based experience of broader generational events.

Mannheim's (1927/1952) own contribution to these debates was to argue that between the fact of biological generation and the subjective experience of generation are influential *social forces* (the classic modern macro unit of analysis) that require greater attention. Generation is thus a social location much the same as *class*, and a Mannheimian approach to generations therefore similarly emphasizes inter-generational *conflict*. The German tradition of social pedagogy is an example of this perceived need to mediate between generations, between tradition and reform, so as to evoke and hold together an "us." So too is the modern university with its disciplined negotiations between tradition and reason, carried out in the name of culture and excellence (Readings, 1996).

More generally, the term generation is used genealogically (as blood, family, eugenics; benchmarked against the other of not-family), as a sociological unit of analysis, and in philosophical terms as a means to characterize the general tone of a given society in a particular moment in time (White, 2017). In political and media discourse, the term is regularly used to characterize historical periods and perceived moments of change, to evoke a comparatively less nationalistic sounding national community, and to identify stratified units in conflict in the classic Mannheimian sense (White, 2013).

Of note, there are also a number of less common terms that similarly attempt to get at something comparatively general and shared, but challenging to pin down in a positivist sense (affect theory is particularly good at cutting across common units and scales, see for example, Anderson, 2009; Hemmings, 2015). These include Émile Durkheim's "collective consciousness" as a way to think about shared social values (Durkheim, 2014; see also Lehmann, 1995); Raymond William's (1977) "structures of feelings" as shared experiences of meaning and values and structures; Benedict Anderson's (2006) "imagined communities" as a sense of "us-ness" shared by geographically dispersed national populations interpolated by stories about the world communicated via print media, and; Charles Taylor's (2004) similar "modern social imaginaries" as common ways of thinking about social life (for example, democracy, reflexivity, rights), as distinct from "pre-modern" imaginaries. In turn, feminist and queer scholarship has contributed situated accounts of the relational and even contagious nature of feelings (Brennan, 2004), of politically ambiguous and unpopular feelings (Ngai, 2005) like "feeling backward" in the context of queer mainstreaming (Love, 2007), or a

generalized sense of "left melancholy" (Benjamin, 1931/1974; Brown, 1999), "impasse" (Berlant, 2011), and "depression" (Cvetkovich, 2012) in the post-9/11 United States. Work in the tradition of British cultural studies has also productively theorized "austerity as public mood" (Forkert, 2017) in the UK, and "distant publics" in relation to claims of entitlement and progress in the United States (Rice, 2012).

I engage generation as a conjunctural keyword in light of these sprawling works on loosely shared perceptual locations and affective attunements as a means to theorize some of what is going on in critical academic social work in the Canadian Anglo context (RQ1), and to speculate on what we might therefore want to work on together (RQ2). Following Manheim's (1927/1952) summary of Mentré's contribution, the university is an institution that stabilizes particular knowledges into situated generational views. These kinds of generational stabilization can be identified through named theories, talk of "turns," and in broader generational syntheses. For example, Bachmann-Medick (2016a) synthesizes a number of turns – interpretive, performative, reflexive, postcolonial, spatial, translational – into a more general "cultural turn" across the major branches of the university. Baucom and Omelsky (2017) organize things a bit differently, suggesting we have transitioned from the first round of interdisciplinarity between the humanities and the social sciences over the 1980s and 1990s, to "interdisciplinarity 2.0" (p. 2) in which the material sciences are the new major player. In a different interpretation, Rosi Braidotti (2019) starts the clock in the 1990s and synthesizes two perceived waves of cultural studies—identity studies and more-than-human studies—as the origins of the posthumanism third wave she proposes. Non-representational theories similarly

aggregate, summarize, conclude, and suggest future work across a range of traditions and works (for example, Anderson & Harrison, 2016).

This simplification of heterogeneous happenings by aggregating scholarly activity and then abstracting back out into more general themes is a *generational* practice, one shaped of course by university hierarchy and the star-branding system, and one that typically also results in canonization (for example, the simplifications of modern, post-modern and post-anthropocentric that I reinforce in my work here). At the same time, these debates and imaginings and renderings down are how the situated standpoints of those working on loosely shared projects are *built* (Bracke & Puig de la Bellacasa, 2004). My contention in this dissertation is that we—the "we" that reads critical social theory and shares the discipline of social work in the Canadian state context—need to engage with each other and reflect on questions of discipline, on how things are working out over time, and on where we might go from here (RQ2). Situated standpoints are partially generational standpoints, and the work of imagining and evoking standpoints is ongoing. I therefore evoke and enact through this dissertation my own generational standpoint to inquire into the possibilities and politics of critical academic social work (RQ2).

Canonization in the university of course produces effects to be wrestled with, but not imagining with each other, not building loosely shared standpoints, is, I argue, worse still. Accountability to history, to our conditions of existence and possibility, sometimes simply means that we must take care to attend to how things seem to be working out over time. This taking care includes the effects, intended or otherwise, of ubiquitous processes of canonization, and dialogue on the extent to which ideas and practices from one time

and place are able to do what we hope in other times and places (I consider this point further in Chapter four, Repair).

Towards an Adequate Knowledge of the Conditions of Existence and Possibility of Critical Academic Social Work These Days

The notion of critical or justice-emphatic social work carries with it a number of assumptions. A contention I make in this dissertation is that at least some of these assumptions do not "travel" (Said, 2000) well; they do not generalize or abstract well into universal principles that can then be taught from one generation to the next, from one location to another, in a relatively standardized form. One implication of not travelling well is that these forms of taught (modern, ordering) clarity fail social workers in practice (Wilson, 2008). Practice is another word for *movement,* and perhaps also *excess*, two phenomena that are by definition resistant to standardization and generalization into those thematic forms of knowledge most popular in the university (Bracke & Puig de la Bellacasa, 2004). John Law (1994) calls this problem of representation "the legacy of synchronistic linguistics" (p. 95); of representations that freeze into static concepts small temporal slices of things that keep on moving on in multiple durations and trajectories.

An alternative, or perhaps a supplement, to more general models of justice or progress is to attend to the local conditions of existence and possibility of a time and place, of a given job, or kind of work, or perceived problem. To not be "negligent" towards that which makes it possible for us to do whatever it is that we do (Moten & Harney, 2004). Negligence, in this sense, is another word for innocence or purity (Shotwell, 2016), for that which is denied, disavowed, made Other by professionals carers

and educators: ignorance, irresponsibility, irrationality, dependency, precarious sessional labour, massive student loans, contract custodial staff, the intense hierarchy of the university (Moten & Harney, 2004), the premium placed on "excellence" that allows for the expansion of more fragile knowledges (Readings, 1996), cognitive capitalism that allows for experimental academic work (Braidotti, 2019), the "elsewheres" we create as referents for our work (Dean, Johnson, & Luhmann, 2019), and also, the work of those who came before us, even if we might think about things differently (Bracke & Puig de la Bellacasa, 2004; van der Tuin, 2015). I therefore argue in this dissertation for the conjunctural keyword and alternative unit of analysis "generation," and I suggest critical academic social work in Canada is overdue to consider our multiple *generational* "views from somewhere" (Haraway, 1988), and what accountability to our various conditions of existence and possibility within the university might look like these days (RQ1 and RQ2).

These are, of course, all questions of "us," of who "we" are, and what "we" understand about the world. My sense is that a generational problematic for my academic generation is how to reorient on the ways in which the professional project of social work is a condition of existence and possibility for those of us invested in more specific problematics, and moreover, to figure out how we might evoke an heterogeneous "us" that shares a discipline requiring our collective attention. Stated a bit differently, my generation's problematic is to undertake the work of intentionally building a situated standpoint tuned to the ongoing nature of the world, one that perceives a shared, if differently understood, project called social work (Bracke & Puig de la Bellacasa, 2004).

My work in this dissertation is thus to assemble some of what I perceive to be shared matters requiring greater attention and care in academic social work (the "what" of RQ1), and to imagine and evoke an "us" that might work on them (the "how" of RQ2). My specific strategies or methods for doing so (also RQ2) have included the interdisciplinary exploration of disciplines, ideas and university institution outlined above; conducting oral history interviews with retired social work scholar-educators to better understand attempts to introduce the unintelligible into the discipline, and how this work can become canonical in its own time (as I have previously noted, this work was not in the end included as its own chapter, but is still present in the thinking represented in this dissertation); writing and revising to figure out how to say the things I perceive are important in ways less likely to amplify the individualism of the university; and as I now turn to, an anonymous, exploratory survey of justice-identified educators asking respondents not what counts as justice, nor what their specific work is, but rather, what they *read* to help them imagine the possibilities and politics of social work and social justice. Given the deceptive stability of representations dependent on synchronic linguistics, and given the competitive university with its linear they say/I say genre of showing we know better than those who came before us, this work is likely to be a timely reminder that canons enable as well as elide, and thus what we read, what we imagine with (RQ1), requires our ongoing and collective attention and care (RQ2).

CHAPTER THREE

Surveying Critical and Justice-Emphatic Academic Social Work in Canada

Abstract

In this paper I raise two questions for greater collective disciplinary attention: What are the conditions of existence and the conditions of possibility of critical and justice-emphatic academic social work in the Canadian university system these days? And moreover, how might we—the "we" who reads critical social theory and shares a discipline—attempt to be accountable to these shifting conditions? I engage these questions with the help of an exploratory survey in which educators teaching in schools of social work in Canada were asked to identify texts and bodies of knowledge they consider pivotal to understanding social work and social justice, as well as with the help of critical literatures. Discussing educators' responses, I identify a few nodes of thinking that would benefit from greater disciplinary attention, and I suggest one way we might orient on these shared problematics.

Introduction

What are the conditions of existence and the conditions of possibility of critical and justice-emphatic academic social work in the Canadian state context these days? Moreover, how might we—the "we" who reads critical social theory and shares a discipline—attempt to be accountable to these conditions? Academic or disciplinary social work's imaginations are multiple, developed through particular times and places, intellectual traditions and political affiliations, and sub-fields of practice. This multiplicity is structured and, in some cases, made more stable by the university, its reward systems, its genres of knowledge and claims making, and by the embodied and generational nature of turnover amongst faculty. These evolving institutional and relational dynamics play out in the intra- and inter-generational production and reproduction of the discipline over time, and as such, form some of the conditions of existence (what is) and possibility (what might be) for critical academic social work.

My aims in this paper are thus threefold: to acknowledge ways in which the university influences the knowledge work of the discipline, to reflect on the multiple justice imaginaries shaping the discipline these days, and, to advocate for greater collective attention to how our various attempts to change the world appear to be working out over time. To do so, I report on and discuss responses to an exploratory survey in which educators teaching in schools of social work in Canada were asked to identify texts and bodies of knowledge they consider pivotal to understanding social work and social justice. This survey and conceptual work will be of particular interest to social work graduate students and early career faculty finding their way within the discipline they

inherit, to faculty and course instructors involved in curriculum design and mapping, to researchers considering further research into disciplinary social work in Canada, and to scholars working in the history and philosophy of social work.

Context

A number of schools of social work in Canada explicitly affiliate with ideas of progressive, social justice-oriented, structural, or critical social work. Contributions to these sub-branchs of the discipline have included developing structural (Moreau, 1979) and critical (Carniol, 1979; Rossiter, 1997) social work, and reading continental philosophy (Chambon & Irving, 1994; Leonard, 1997) and Foucault into the profession (Chambon, Irving, & Epstein, 1999). Regrouping around critical (Leonard, 2001) and anti-oppressive (Campbell, 2003) social work has also been advocated. In turn, scholars are also intentionally revisiting now-established ideas and practices for their unintended effects. This includes the governmentality of community-based participatory research (Janes, 2016), the implications for practitioners of generalist best-practices founded in an assumption of a universal white social worker subject (Badwall, 2016), and the need to engage more fluid metaphors when considering distributions of vulnerability and advantage in specific times and places (Joseph, 2015). The ease with which critical and anti-racist claims are made within academic social work (Sinclair & Albert, 2008; Yee & Wagner, 2013), and the ways in which these claims articulate together with liberal and professional identity work (Jeffery, 2007; Zhang, 2018), have also been problematized. Read together, this literature illustrates that disciplinary understandings of social justice are neither uniform nor stable, and moreover, that the world we imagine and enact is in

fact responsive to our work—although not always in the ways that we might hope or intend.

The present paper is drawn from a larger project exploring the conditions of existence (what is) and possibility (what might be) of critical academic social work in Canada these days, and further, the question of what it might mean as a newcomer to the academy to attempt to be accountable to these conditions. In many respects these are worker questions: what is going on in this new-to-me site of employment and how might I therefore negotiate this place? They are also utopian questions: how might I attempt to change the world, if only a little, given the conditions of this location?

As a relative newcomer to academic social work, I have been struck in particular by the intense individualism of the hierarchical university and by the consequent difficulty of raising challenging questions of progress and change for collective disciplinary consideration. The genre requirements of the academy—the privileging of language and writing, debate-style talks and the they say/I say structure of claims making, bounded forms of intelligibility, and perhaps especially, the centrality of the remarkably articulate academic "I" that somehow always has an answer and is always on the right side of history—are much different from what I am used to, and because of this, stand out for the ways in which they influence relationships and knowledge work in the university.

The recent literature supports my newcomers' sense that the university is not a comfortable location for many of us. For example, investigations into the influence of changes in post-secondary education on progressive schools of social work in Canada paint a disheartening picture. Recent changes to these work environments include

intensifying institutional surveillance, dwindling full-time faculty positions, expanding workloads, an increasingly competitive and anxious work environment, and a loss of relational space for thinking with colleagues about the state of our shared project (Moffatt et al., 2018). Friction has also been noted between students and faculty favoring oppositional styles of social justice work, and those faculty who take a more collaborative approach in their work with the university (Barnoff, Moffatt, Todd, & Panitch, 2017). In turn, departments are these days required to sell their relevance in terms that are desirable to the larger market-focused university—emphasizing diversity, innovative education, and community engagement—and there is a real risk that we believe our own hype (Todd et al., 2015). This exaggerated promotional culture suppresses everyday facts of failure and uncertainty (Moffatt et al., 2018), and of particular concern to my work here, this suppression, along with the pervasive individualism of the university, no doubt also impedes the ongoing and relational work of collective disciplinary attention to how things are working out—intended and otherwise—over time and place.

Along with the evolving justice imaginations noted above, these institutional and relational dynamics are also part of the conditions of existence and possibility of critical academic social work these days. My broad questions are thus, what might accountability to these conditions look like, and further, how might we push at them so that they become a little more open and a little less individualizing? Elsewhere I have considered how university and discipline stabilize situated (Haraway, 1988) perceptions of the possible and the desirable, and some of the ways in which this stabilization of perception plays out in the production and reproduction of the discipline from one generation to the next

(Wilson, 2017). I have also advocated that we better locate social work engagements with critical social theory within a broader history and philosophy of social science, including what is now increasingly understood as a heterogeneous and expanding "third generation" in critical social theories (Wilson, in press). Relatedly, I have suggested that, given facts of too much knowledge, incommensurable knowledges, and conflicting knowledges in our geopolitically entangled world, academic social work might develop an intentionally less dualistic—a less right/wrong—approach to knowledge claims in general and to disagreement in particular (Wilson, 2019).

With the present paper, I turn to the Canadian university system to consider questions of canonization and change in critical academic social work. Written work is a central way in which knowledge is developed and ideas are stabilized and communicated within and between academic generations. *Canonical* knowledge is in turn foundational or common knowledge shared be members of a discipline. In critical academic traditions the term "canon" has typically been used to identify dominant worldviews that diminish and deny other ways of knowing, being and doing. The moral inflection that accompanies these critiques has, over the decades, made it more challenging to engage with the ways in which everyone in the university participates in processes that stabilize and amplify some knowledges over others. Canons elide, and they also allow us to talk to each other about loosely shared disciplinary concerns. Exploring some of what those who reproduce the discipline read is thus a means to reflect in a less individualizing and morally inflected fashion on stability and change in social work imaginaries at a given moment in time. In turn, my aim in reporting on this work is to invite additional

reflections on the conditions of critical academic social work these days, of ways we might be accountable to these conditions, and of where we might go from here.

Method

Survey Development

The electronic survey reported on here was drafted and revised through an iterative process with my dissertation committee, with colleagues in my School, and with a number of social work scholars known for their knowledge of social work education in Canada. The survey was then pilot-tested by colleagues for clarity, length, and technical usability, and a last round of revisions made. The final McMaster University Research Ethics Board approved survey invited social work educators teaching at the university level - whether retired, tenured, not tenured, contract, or sessional - who organize their work around concepts of "justice" or "equity" or "critical […]," all broadly defined, to complete a qualitative survey in which they identified written scholarship pivotal to their understanding of society, social justice, and critical or justice-oriented social work. The survey was organized into three sections and the majority of questions were open-ended. The first section asked about educators' own education and teaching history and included an open-ended question on their self-identified social identities. The second asked educators to populate three reading lists: "Formative readings" influential to their own thinking, "Today's readings" for their current influences, and last, "Readings for students." In the final section, educators were asked to comment on what was missing in the discipline when they were a student, and what they would like to see more of today.

Sample

Survey participants were recruited through invitations distributed by the Canadian Association for Social Work Education-l'Association canadienne pour la formation en travail social (CASWE-ACFTS) to 38 schools of social work with 297 members. Although it is not possible to know the number of people who actually opened the recruitment email, the opening rate for the CASWE-ACFTS newsletter is 45%. In turn, although the recruitment email was sent to the general membership, the invitation itself requested the participation of only those educators who self-identified as organizing their work around concepts of social justice. Recruitment began in the fall of 2014 and closed at the end of January 2015. Four recruitment emails were sent out in total, and data were collected over a period of four months. The email and accompanying letter of information outlined my interest in how social work educators have worked with and shifted the disciplinary knowledge-base over time. To be included in the final data set reported on here, educators had to answer at least two of the three reading list questions, resulting in 24 participants.

These 24 participants taught in 11 different universities in six different provinces, including two Francophone universities. For reference, 12 schools in Canada include French language instruction, and 28 express an explicit commitment to social justice in their current mission or program description (https://caswe-acfts.ca/commission-on-accreditation/list-of-accredited-programs/). Of these 28 schools, five are emphatically "justice-first" in their approach. For example, one program explicitly states that it orients to "social work as social justice work" (http://sowk.laps.yorku.ca/) (for more on

progressive or social justice-emphatic schools in Canada see Barnoff, et al., 2017; Wilson, 2017).

Analysis

Responses were reviewed for major themes and the topic of each identified work was categorized using title keywords. The disciplinary influence of non-social work authored scholarship was determined through an internet search for the first author's current departmental affiliation. I mapped this thematic work onto a temporal arc comprised of respondent age and entry into social work as a means to consider stability and change in disciplinary imaginations. I presented my initial analysis to a group of colleagues at my University, and we engaged in lively conversation about my analysis, and about what the data were and were not able to speak to. I then returned to the survey responses, explored questions arising from this initial discussion, fine-tuned the thematic coding, and re-ran frequency calculations.

Findings

Respondents

Close to half of the 24 participants identified as belonging to a racialized group, a few as Francophone, and about a third as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. A few respondents identified as psychiatric survivors or mad, gender fluid or nonconforming, or as transgender. All educators also mentioned axes of privilege. Table 1 includes an overview of participant age, education, and employment characteristics.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics (N=24)

Characteristics	Frequency
Decade of birth	
1940s	3
1950s	8
1960s	3
1970s	9
1980s	1
Current academic position	
Professor	4
Associate professor	10
Assistant professor	4
Course instructor	6
Discipline of highest degree	
Social work	14
Sociology	3
Education	2
Health	1
Interdisciplinary	1
Social welfare	1
Women's studies	1
Country where received highest degree	
Canada	13
USA	5
UK	2
Started teaching in social work	
1970s	1
1980s	6

1990s	3
2000s	11
2010s	1

Pivotal Readings and Authors/Editors

There was not much overlap in the works identified by educators. Of the 556 readings identified as pivotal to understanding social work and social justice, 384 were identified by only one respondent. Work that was identified by more than one person was most often endorsed by only two people. Table 2 includes the 12 works that received three or more nominations across the different reading lists: "Formative readings" (n=224), "Today's readings" (n=190), and "Readings for students" (n=142). The identified works are for the most part undergraduate textbooks (Mullaly, Fook, Baines), followed by canonical activist work (Alinsky, Bishop, Freire, Macintosh), and one graduate level work (Chambon et al.).

Table 2

Twelve Works Identified by Three or More Educators

Frequency of Nomination	Formative Readings (n=224)	Today's Readings (n=190)	Readings for Students (n=142)
6	…	…	Baines, D. (Ed) (2007/2011). Doing anti-oppressive practice.

4	Baines, D. (Ed) (2007/2011). Doing anti-oppressive practice.	…	…
	Fook, J. (2002/2012). Social work: a critical approach to practice.	…	…
	Mullaly, R. (1993/1997/2007). The new structural social work: ideology, theory, practice.	…	…
	Alinsky, S. (1971). Rules for radicals.	…	…
3	Bishop, A. (1994/2002). Becoming an ally.	Baines, D. (Ed) (2007/2011). Doing anti-oppressive practice.	…
	Chambon, A. S., et al. (Eds.) (1999). Reading Foucault for social work.	Mullaly, R. (1993/1997/2007). The new structural social work.	…
	Freire, P. (1968[P]/1970[En]). Pedagogy of the oppressed.	Mullaly, R. (2002/2010). Challenging oppression and confronting privilege.	…
	McIntosh, P. (1998). White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack.	…	…

Examining instead the number of nominations each first author received, across their various nominated works, provides a slightly different picture of the range of influences. Table 3 lists the 22 authors and editors who received three or more nominations across the three reading lists. In addition to the specific canonical texts and authors identified in Table 2, here we see influential scholars like bell hooks (critical race,

feminisms), Nancy Fraser and Michael Lipsky (political economy, social policy), Judith

Butler and Michel Foucault (philosophy), Amy Rossiter (critical theory and continental

philosophy for social work), Andrea Smith and Cyndy Baskin (Indigenous knowledges

and activism), Barbara Heron, Gordon Pon, and Sherene Razack (racism, whiteness, and

Canadian nationalism in helping work), Sarah Ahmed (queer and anti-racist criticism),

Steven Hicks (queer theory for social work), Aihwa Ong (geopolitics, citizenship), and

Steven Hick (undergraduate textbooks).

Table 3

Twenty-Two Most Frequently Identified Authors and Editors

Frequency of Nomination	Formative Readings (n=224)	Today's Readings (n=190)	Readings for Students (n=142)
6	Mullaly, Robert	Mullaly, Robert	Baines, Donna
5	Baines, Donna Fook, Jan Foucault, Michel hooks, bell	---	---
4	Chambon, Adrienne Fraser, Nancy Freire, Paulo Rossiter, Amy	Baines, Donna	hooks, bell Mullaly, Robert
3	Alinsky, Saul Bishop, Anne Butler, Judith Heron, Barbara Hicks, Stephen Lipsky, Michael	Ahmed, Sara Baskin, Cyndy Foucault, Michel Hick, Steven Hicks, Stephen hooks, bell	Ahmed, Sara Pon, Gordon Razack, Sherene Rossiter, Amy

McIntosh, Peggy

Ong, Aihwa

Smith, Andrea

Disciplinary Influence

Of the 384 unique works identified, 62% (237) were authored by non-social workers. Nine percent (35) were written by non-academics, typically activist-journalists or professional counselors. As illustrated in Table 4, among the non-social work authored academic scholarship, social science disciplines dominated, followed by the humanities and various critical studies. Scholarship from philosophy (39) was most popular, followed by sociology (26), and then gender studies (23).

Table 4

Discipline of First Author of the Nominated Works (n=384)

Discipline	Frequency (percentage)
Social work	147 (38%)
Non-social work	237 (62%)
Academic	202
Social sciences	68
Sociology	26
Political science	17
Anthropology	9
Psychology	9
Economics	4
Geography	3

Humanities	59
Philosophy	39
English	15
History	5
Critical Studies	49
Gender studies	23
Queer studies	8
Disability studies	5
Cultural studies	4
Equity studies	2
Indigenous studies	2
Media studies	2
Digital studies	1
Museum studies	1
Performance studies	1
Non-Academic	35

Topics

Social Work Authored Readings (n=147)

Thirty-one percent (46) of social work authored readings were introductory texts or papers, for example, UK-based Adams, Dominelli, and Payne's (2002) edited collection *Critical Practice in Social Work*. Most authors integrated some reference to general critical theorizing—critical, structural, anti-oppressive—into their work's title, for example, (UK; Canada) Leonard's (1993) classic *Critical Pedagogy and State Welfare: Intellectual Encounters with Freire and Gramsci, 1974-1986*. These broad orientations were followed by scholarship like (Canada) Razack's (2004) *Transforming the Field:*

Anti-Racist and Anti-Oppressive Perspectives for the Human Service Practicum. Social work authored literature typically oriented toward some form of practice. For example, (UK) Taylor and White's (2001) "Knowledge, Truth and Reflexivity: The Problem of Judgment in Social Work," and (Canada) Swift and Callahan's (2009) *At Risk: Social Justice in Child Welfare and Other Human Services.* This literature was followed by smaller bodies of work on history, including (Canada) Moffatt's (2001) *A Poetics of Social Work: Personal Agency and Social Transformation in Canada, 1920-1939*, and research, including Anishinaabe scholar Absolon's (2011) *Kaandossiwin: How we Come to Know.*

Extra-Social Work Authored Readings (n=237)

The extra-social work authored literature was more difficult to categorize. Much of this scholarship offered general social-economic-political critiques, followed by philosophy and theory, and some intervention literature. There was also a broad literature on processes of racialization and settler colonization. The largest theme of socio-political commentary included Polanyi's (1944) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* and Sen's (1992) *Inequality Re-Examined.* The Marxist Harvey's (2007) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* was also included here. Continental work included Derrida's (1997) *The Politics of Friendship,* and Butler, Laclau, and Žižek's (2011) *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left.* Intervention literature for policy, the helping professions, and activism included (USA) Wright's (2014) "More Equal Societies Have Less Mental Illness: What Should Therapists do on Monday Morning?" And the (USA) Incite! Women of Color Against

Violence Collective's (2007) *The Revolution will Not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*.

Work on white supremacy, imperialism, settler colonization, and racialization included (USA) Crenshaw's (1991) foundational "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color," (UK) Hall's (1996) "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," and (USA) Muñoz's (1999) "Performing Disidentity: Disidentification as a Practice of Freedom." Historical work included (Canada) Valverde's (1991) *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925,* and (Canada) Austin's (2010) "Narratives of Power: Historical Mythologies in Contemporary Québec and Canada." Research nominations included (USA) Geertz's (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures* and (Māori; NZ) Smith's (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

In contrast to the prevalence of introductory works among social work authored texts, among the extra-social work authored scholarship only 6% (15) were overview texts or anthologies. In turn, these collections were more likely to be advanced undergraduate or graduate level work. For example, (USA) Solomon and Murphy's (1999) *What is Justice? Classic and Contemporary Readings,* (USA) Harding's (2004) edited collection *The Feminist Standpoint Reader: Intellectual and Practical Controversies,* and (multi-national) Wilderquist and colleagues' (2013) *Basic Income: An Anthology of Contemporary Research.*

Overall, work identified as important by social work educators suggests we most often turn to other disciplines for our broad social-political commentary, for philosophy

and critical theory, and for a noteworthy proportion of our intervention literature. Social work publications are more likely to focus on interventions with particular sub-populations and on preparing students for practice. Scholarship explicitly referencing history, research, and ethics were less frequently identified in both social work and extra-social work authored literatures. American scholarship dominates, followed by work from the UK.

Populations of Interest

Sub-populations were identified by their explicit reference within a given title. General social welfare and counseling texts are therefore not counted here. Sixty-nine percent (266) of uniquely identified work specifically referenced a sub-population in the title. Of these, racialized peoples were most frequently identified (28%) followed by women (16%), undifferentiated marginalization and exclusion (12%), and Indigenous peoples (9%).

Contrasting sub-populations identified in the titles of social work writing with those in the extra-social work writing can help us consider what we may want more of in social work but do not currently produce ourselves. Or if we do produce some, how we supplement our applied scholarship with less common knowledge (e.g., work on mental health in contrast to that of mad studies). According to responding educators, we are most likely to look outside social work for scholarship addressing women, citizenship, racialization, disability, and poverty. We more often nominate our own scholarship when it comes to children and youth, general marginalization and exclusion, Indigenous peoples, and mental health.

What's Missing, Then and Now

Educators commented on the knowledge domains that were missing when they were in school, and what they would like to see more of in the discipline today. Many identified in their own history a lack of attention to justice and non-Western scholarship in curriculum focused on ahistorical therapeutic practice with individuals, families and groups. Most noted attention to racialization and colonization were missing altogether, while respondents either born later or who were newer to social work also identified the absence of critical disability, mad, and queer studies. Educators oriented towards the nation state and social policy wished more attention had been paid to the relationship between values and the definitions of social problems, and to political economy.

Speaking to today, a number of educators stated they would like to see deeper engagement with the complications of social justice and social work. For example, as one respondent put it: "at least try[ing] to open up social work to a stronger critique of itself and its roots," as a means to question "…the self-celebratory notion of social justice/critical social work and to reinstate [the] political nature of such [a] claim. Otherwise, the discourse of transformation and emancipation will only repeat and reinforce the same power relation this discourse is meant to rupture." Respondents also identified particular bodies of scholarship—spatial theory, queer diasporic critiques, mad studies, transnational feminism, anti-blackness, critical whiteness, political philosophy, fat studies, decolonizing and Indigenous work, spirituality, ecological theory, critical disability, postcolonial theory, non-Western epistemologies—as requiring greater attention. In particular, critical disability studies and women's and gender studies were

identified as models of critical academic practice, ones that could be fruitfully applied to our own sub-fields of child welfare and aging.

Discussion

Educators' responses indicate that the majority of writing identified as pivotal to understanding social work and social justice comes from outside the discipline, most often from philosophy and the various canon-disrupting critical studies. The few most frequently identified texts were, however, more likely to be authored by a social work scholar, were often in introductory textbook or anthology format, and many of these have had remarkable staying power, some with a second or third released since their original publication run. Some justice knowledges have in this way achieved canonical status, with structural, oppression or inequality-focused, and critical or power-focused frameworks solidifying into foundational—textbook—knowledge over the past 20-odd years.

The textbook plays a pivotal role in social work education in North America (Wachholtz & Mullaly, 2001). Introductory textbooks in particular have the unenviable task of plotting generally agreed upon overviews of disciplinary objects (e.g., social justice, the state), problematics (e.g., inequality, exclusion) and methods (e.g., advocacy, recognition) as a means to provide students with their initial orientation to the field. As a result of being so general, they are likely to be *both* relied upon and found to be insufficient by members of a discipline. For example, textbooks work with simplified, "popularized" theory and as a result tend to promote categorical thinking while rarely engaging with alternative or conflicting understandings (White, 2009; see also Wachholz

& Mullaly, 2001). Introductory textbooks are also typically slower to adapt to change than more focused work. For example, the common textbook practice of amplifying faith in the "heroic agency" of social workers to effect change in the world has been flagged as requiring greater care in light of the geopolitical entanglements and practice contexts of the last 30 or so years (Marston & McDonald, 2012). In the survey reported on here, the expanding range of knowledges identified by educators as important to our justice imaginations, along with concerns expressed about how easy it is to make justice claims in academic social work, similarly suggests a desire to further nuance current critical disciplinary common sense.

These shifting dynamics among more and less common knowledges are one influential aspect of the conditions of existence and possibility of critical academic social work, and indeed all disciplinary configurations. The question thus becomes, how might we engage with and attempt to be accountable to these uneven conditions as they continue to move and change over time and place? In light of the intense individualism of the hyper-competitive and hierarchical university outlined in the introduction to this paper, I would advocate that social work might, at least sometimes, put a hold on zero-sum judgements of *who is more right* and instead attend to *what is going on* in university and world. I will illustrate what this shift in focus can help us consider in this final section of the paper.

Knowledge claims in the university are typically founded in the modern belief that new and/or more correct knowledge will lead to progressive social improvement (Tuck, 2009a; 2009b; see also Bracke and Puig de la Bellacasa, 2003). This linear, comparative

model— of a gap/to be filled, of knowledge x vs. knowledge y—assumes increasing

understanding and consensus, and in so doing, risks missing the ways in which multiple

ideas and investments are always circulating and recombining. At the same time, modern

Western thought typically also assumes the originality and insight of individual authors,

along with a relatively direct transmission of an author's published ideas to their readers –

the idea that, for example, if two people read the same book, they can be expected to end

up with pretty much the same understanding of original authorial intent. In contrast to

these more linear assumptions about authors and origins, consensus and progress,

postcolonial scholar Edward Said (2000) argued instead that ideas are changed through

their "travels" in the world (see also, Bachmann-Medick, 2016; Foucault, 1994/2003;

Haraway, 1988).

In social work, Payne (2002) has traced this kind of change in relation to the

different trajectories taken by systems theory in the US and the UK (see also Harris, et al.,

2014; Köngeter, 2017). In the Canadian context, we can also think about the ways in

which Marxist theory traveled here in part via British cultural studies (primarily the

subcultures and mugging groups), and generative engagements in the 1970s UK among

cultural studies, sociology and critical criminology, youth and deviance studies, and

social work (John Clarke, personal communication). Over time, this sprawling,

experimental work has been focused and refined in the Canadian state context into the

more general conflict theory textbook knowledge common in undergraduate education.

These dynamics—in which the lively and ongoing imaginings of a particular time and

place are lifted out of history and focused so that they can be communicated to those of us

who were not there—is a main way in which less common ideas become more common. And of course, the limits of these now more common things then also become something to be wrestled with.

Another example: the popularity of critical social work in Canada may be, in its own turn and similar to other contexts, a reaction to the certainty of our iteration of Marxism (see Fook, 2001). Critical social work typically combines select themes from conflict theory (the German-Prussian philosophy of Marx thinking with Hegel, that is in turn reworked by thousands of scholars in other times and places) with select themes from a particular generation of French philosophy (e.g., Foucault, Derrida) and some identity knowledges (often but certainly not exclusively North American feminisms and critical race theories), to help us think about the relational nuances and subjective implications of agency-based social work practice in a liberal democratic welfare state context. These expansive political imaginaries from which "critical social work" is distilled continue to circulate and interact globally, along with a million other ways of perceiving and engaging the world. In turn, these circulations and reworkings are visible both in the literature on critical social work that introduced the work of this paper, and in the range of foci participating educators identify as requiring greater consideration in social work these days.

This uneven circulation among perceptions of the possible and the desirable also shows up as *less* attention to things that were once perceived as central. For example, although some work in social work has mapped more broadly the challenges of post or late modern times for the modern project of social work (e.g., Leonard, 1997), responses

from participating educators suggest that this macro state focused scale of imagination has not been taken up and extended in the same way as the more micro practice focused work. This includes minimal explicit reference to social welfare policy work, though it was once considered central to professional social work. This is no doubt due to the partitioning of policy work from social work within the academy (Chambon, 2012), and it has also been attributed to the priority given by the Canadian Association of Social Workers to professional advancement over advocacy (Jennissen & Lundy, 2011). I suspect, however, that it may also be a more general outcome of the shift from building a welfare state to repeatedly restructuring one, with many of us now struggling to imagine how we might engage with a state that sanctions our profession but fails to be reliably or enduringly responsive to democratic process in a globalizing world. More generally, it has been suggested social work is simply overdue to reconceptualize established understandings of policy work for contemporary social work (Marston & McDonald, 2012).

One final example of considering *what is going on* rather than adjudicating *who is more right*: participating educators made little reference to anti-oppressive practice (AOP), even though it is central in a number of schools of social work and even in the policies of some social service organizations in Canada. My hunch is that the popularity of AOP in Canada—another traveling knowledge from the UK academy—was a generational response that can be located within a broader embodied history of politics and critical social theory. Namely, the challenge posed by an expanding range of social movement and identity-anchored knowledges that were strengthened by the emergence of

the critical studies into the 1990s in North America. An AOP umbrella, similar to the "structural" (conflict) and "critical" (power) umbrellas, was as a pragmatic strategy for acknowledging heterogeneous and evolving political movements, and as such, provided a kind of "neutral" territory perceived to be able to house the various investments and theoretical allegiances of justice-desiring social work. If my hunch is in fact correct, a current disciplinary problematic may therefore be to assess how AOP, as a pragmatic strategy amplified over the past 25 or so years, is working out over time.

Of note, both the strength and the weakness of AOP as a tactic in support of the larger strategic project of amplifying a community of affiliation—a justice-identified "us" that shares a general understanding of the world and a general orientation to practice—is that its generalist territory resonates with generalist social work, and the specificities of particular justice investments resonate with the sub-population divisions of our funded knowledge work and paid employment, such that they become difficult to distinguish from one another. Sometimes things are able to achieve traction because they fold together relatively easily with existing infrastructures of thinking and doing (Bowker & Star, 2000). This kind of traction and slippage is also a condition of existence (what is) and possibility (what might be) for critical and justice-emphatic academic social work.

The world *is* responsive to our work, just not always in the ways that we intend or might hope. We—the "we" that reads critical social theory and shares a discipline—need in our own turn to be responsive to the funny side-stepping ways in which the world, and our multiple perceptions of it, keep on moving. Attending, at least sometimes, to questions of what is going on rather than who is right is one strategy for amplifying

shared disciplinary problematics over modern notions of origins, ownership, and individualized authorial insight. In turn, reflecting contributions from the critical literatures together with responses provided here by educators, and with my own impressions as a relative newcomer to the academy, I would advocate that this responsiveness, this accountability to what is and what might be, include greater attention to and care for our various embodied experiences of more and less common knowledges within the intense individualism and high-stakes claims making of the hyper-competitive and hierarchical university.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

There are a number of limitations to this work. These include most obviously the small sample size, that Indigenous educators did not participate as respondents, and that French Canadian social work is not represented here. The survey was also designed for a larger imagined sample, and as a result the data gathered could only support the more general thematic reporting included in this paper. In turn, although this was an anonymous survey, there is a power difference between tenured, non-tenured and sessional instructors and this may have influenced who completed the survey. This exploratory work does, however, provide a useful anchor for further investigation into the changing imaginations of justice-emphatic social work.

Future research might therefore revise or extend the present survey, explore additional data sources such as course syllabi, work with students to understand what they make of canonical understandings of social justice, and engage faculty in in-depth interviews about their experiences working to change the discipline they themselves

inherited. Recent work on disciplinary "threshold concepts" (e.g., Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) looks especially promising for organizing the collective work of disciplinary reflexivity and renewal, as does emerging work focused on theorizing shared keywords for their multiple uses these days (e.g., Garrett, 2018; Park, Crath, & Jeffery, 2020).

Conclusion

My concern is the noteworthy structuring influence of competitive individualism and promotional practices on both relationships and knowledge work in the intra- and inter-generational production and reproduction of critical and justice-emphatic academic social work in the Canadian state context. A strategy for better understanding and negotiating these working conditions has been to ask folks what they read and imagine with, and to reflect this anonymous imagining at the larger discipline. Educators' responses provide us with a snapshot that includes both textbook stabilities and expansive investments and knowledges tuned to different perceptions of the possible and the desirable. My discussion has in turn illustrated how a shift in inflection from *who is more right* to *what is going on* can help us raise shared disciplinary problematics for greater collective attention.

Canons limit and they enable. Ideas circulate and change through their travels. Progress and change are disorienting questions whose answers tend to shift over time. All of these dynamics contribute to the conditions of existence and possibility of critical and justice-emphatic academic social work. In addition to greater care for the influence of the geopolitically situated university on knowledge and relationships in academic social

work, my own more general take away from this work is that the discipline is due for another major round of integrative philosophical work, including engagement with alternative theories of change, and with the challenge for problem solving social work of entangled relations that can be engaged but not resolved. This integrative knowledge work can be expected to foster new possibilities while also contributing to new constraints and additional unexpected effects, and these dynamics will in turn continue to play out in the intra- and inter-generational relations that comprise academic social work. My hope is that the work represented in this paper will therefore support different kinds of claims and conversations about critical and justice-emphatic social work within the Canadian university system, including greater speculative, imaginative and collaborative work on how things seem to be working out over time, and further, on what this working out might mean for our research, education, and practice now and in the years to come.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Repairing What's Left, or, When Knowledge no Longer Cuts

Note: The chapter that follows is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in the *British Journal of Social Work* following peer review. The version of record is cited above.

Abstract

In this paper I take as my problematic the reproduction and renewal of justice cultures within social work after the fall of left progress narratives. My point of departure is the question of how our applied discipline might imagine and practice and teach justice when there are no guarantees that we are actually good people or that our justice work does not cause harm. Orienting to social work as a world-making project that exceeds us all, I weave scholarship from social work historians together with contemporary debates among the left to propose a form of reparative historical practice that might stimulate the justice imaginations of our field. Anchoring this discussion around the concepts of keywords, structures of feelings, and disciplinary desire, I theorize some of the ways in which the histories and justice imaginations of individuals and generations converge within our discipline. Emphasizing the relational nature of this proposed historical practice, I argue social work must make into a productive knowledge the fact that it is impossible to act in the world without ever causing harm. Allowing ourselves to be cut by this knowledge is necessary if we are to repair what is left in social work.

Introduction

What is it that we imagine, when we imagine social justice? Although the principle of social justice is a cornerstone of the social work Code of Ethics, in the Canadian context in which I write, older distinctions between justice traditions have largely collapsed into each other, a seemingly endless array of divergent interests make use of the same justice vocabularies, many universities actively encourage established forms of justice work (Dean, 2015; Todd et al., 2015), and explicit reference to some type of justice project is included in the mission statements of a number of our schools of social work. At the same time, many of the critiques now common in justice-oriented social work are directed out at the world or at some foil of mainstream social work, and as long-term activists have noted, established justice practices have shifted sideways into forms of privileged individual self-improvement (Smith, 2013).

More broadly, contemporary debates about justice revolve around the ways in which the keywords of liberal philosophy—democracy, rights, freedom, equality—subsume difference as a means to imagine a vision of a better future, and this assimilative strategy underpins both conservative and radical work (Mahmood, 2008). This affinity between justice ideals and conservative projects is unsettling both the established academic left (Hemmings, 2011) and social work practitioners (Wilson, 2008). For example, as black feminists and feminists of colour regularly have to reiterate, a feminist vision of freedom and equality is used to justify Western imperialism and to establish which subjects can know what is in the best interests of others (Mahmood, 2008). Similarly, work on homonationalism tracks the ways in which LGBTQ rights movements

based on liberal notions of progress and development justify fuller access to citizenship for some but not others, and much like women's rights discourses, are used to justify Western expansionism (Puar, 2013). In turn, the normalization of queer is enabling "pink washing" where affirmations of acceptance are regularly used to distract from or increase other forms of violent stratification (Paur, 2013). Rights based claims anchored in legal recognition reinforce the idea that there are actually deserving and undeserving people (Bassichis & Space, 2014), and arguing for the inclusion of one group can make us culpable in the oppression of another (Smith, 2006). In our contemporary historical moment, social movements are faced with the question of who they leave behind amid their variegated successes (Love, 2007), and the same can be said for social work amid the now-ubiquitous use of justice vocabularies and our tendency to imagine progress in sub-population specific terms.

Foucault (1971/1994) famously argued that "…[k]nowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" (p. 360). These days, the knowledge of our field is not cutting back on itself all that much, suggesting our justice imaginations are at least somewhat stalled. Although this paper could be about the mainstreaming of critical theory, the neoliberal co-option of justice knowledges, or the corporatization of the university, I would argue that none of these knowledges cut close enough. Instead, I take as my broad problematic the reproduction and renewal of justice cultures within social work after the fall of left progress narratives—namely, the repetition of a narrative that insists that if we think right and work right the future will be more just than the past. My point of departure is the question of how our applied discipline might imagine and

practice and teach justice when there are no guarantees that we are actually good people or that our justice work does not cause harm.

The importance of our justice imaginations cannot be overstated. Social work theorist Adrienne Chambon (1999) works in a Foucauldian tradition to emphasize the ways in which our knowledge helps produce the world we imagine. Walter Lorenz (2007) has drawn on feminist work to make similar arguments, proposing we orient to "social work as historical practice" (p. 609). For Lorenz, "practicing history" is the on-going relational hermeneutics of engaging both our contemporary historical moment and the historical nature of our interventions. As a means to stimulate our justice imaginations, in this paper I suggest we take the long view and reorient on social work as a hundred year old world-making project that exceeds the priorities of any one group, generation, knowledge, or justice endeavour (Chambon, 2012; Chambon, 2013), and I engage with this project through the disciplinarity of academic disciplines. This orientation is a way to reflect on how each of us as students, practitioners, and academics engage with the possibilities of the social work we encounter, and to emphasize the historical locatedness of this encounter. Overall, this work can be understood as an attempt to develop a relational form of historical practice from which to engage with each other, and with what our discipline helps produce in the world.

I turn for help in this thinking to other politicized impulses within the academy, most notably to re-visioning debates in Women's and Gender Studies, and to widespread conversations in which the foundational justice keywords and assumptions of the established academic left are revisited in light of social and political change, and in light

of the disciplinary functions of academic disciplines. I engage first with the concept "structures of feeling" and discuss the ways in which the collective feelings of a time-space influence whole fields of justice-oriented scholarship. Here, I argue that it is not just foundational ideas we inherit and teach within justice-oriented social work, it is feelings too. I then explore the disciplinary influence of privileged objects, including the highly desirable object "justice," and I suggest our established justice objects are keywords that have been lifted out of history and rendered down into orthodoxies over time. Orienting in these two ways to our intergenerational world-making project, I argue social work must make into a productive knowledge the fact that it is impossible to act in the world without ever causing harm. This rule makes no exceptions for our justice work, and thus allowing ourselves to be cut by this knowledge is necessary if we are to develop forms of relational historical practice that might repair what is left in social work.

Keywords

"Cut" and "repair" are used here as keywords, and this idea of keywords is central to the work of this paper. Raymond Williams (1976/1983), one of the founders of cultural studies, established the relevance of keywords to political projects in his book *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*. A vocabulary rather than a dictionary, *Keywords* includes discussion on the multiple meanings attached to each of the keywords Williams proffers, the relational nature of these keywords, and the ways in which keywords perpetually shift in meaning across time and place. Case in point, Williams' vocabulary includes a discussion of the once-popular keyword "progressive" but not the somewhat more recent "justice," "criticism" but not the now ubiquitous "critical." Williams' aim in

Keywords was to invite the left in to reflect on the inherited, shared, shifting meanings of the words and ideas it holds dear, and to encourage re-theorizations of these powerful keywords as necessary. Creating new keywords with which to theorize—cutting, repairing, practicing history—is also an option.

At the same time he invited engagement and adjustment, Williams emphasized that these temporary meanings, whether inherited or re-theorized or newly wrought by a current iteration of the left, are part of the idea or problem they attempt to explain. Theorizing and metacritique are thus meant to go hand in hand as a means to recognize how the ground on which we stand is very much part of the world we critique (Crowley, 2012). In a simplified sense, keyword-anchored theorizing is more often oriented to a particular problem (e.g., inequality), while metacritique tries to get at foundational assumptions about the problem itself (e.g., what is assumed by "inequality"). Both types of work can cut, but foundational metacritque tends to cut more closely as it includes our own implication in performing the problem into being while rarely offering clear direction for solving this implication.

A canonical example of metacritque would be the on-going upheaval in Women's (and now also Gender) Studies following Judith Butler's deconstruction of gender back in 1990. As a category and a critical keyword, "woman" has been immensely productive for feminist organizing, but many have also experienced a dichotomous definition of gender as constraining if not outright harmful. Twenty-five years later, the deconstruction of gender has enabled new forms of life considered much more liveable. The category "woman" is certainly still used by many within feminist, queer, and trans communities,

but it is typically a more careful use that attempts to not presume quite so much. As this and the earlier examples illustrate, work accomplished under the rubric of justice produces both political traction for some and harm for others, where this harm is a knowledge that cuts in helpful, if often also bewildering, ways at the idealized justice foundation of our field.

Feminist historian Joan Scott (2011) calls this kind of metacritical work the work of double agents: doing politicized work at the same time we question how this work gets done. Working in this "double register" is an attempt to be accountable to what is produced by our actions in the world (Ahmed, 2000). It is a way to practice history. In arguing for a vocabulary rather than a dictionary, Williams invites an on-going conversation, involving both theorizing and metacritque, about how the meaning of keywords that matter to justice imaginations keep changing—shifting out from under us, failing to do the work they were established to do—where this recognition of perpetual change confounds professions and disciplines mandated to define, operationalize, and act with some certainty in the world. This paper therefore introduces a number of concepts and keywords as a means to initiate different kinds of conversation about the reproduction and renewal of justice cultures through social work scholarship and schools of social work, though many of these ideas also apply to the inter- and intra-generational groups similarly found in community organizations.

Structures of Feeling

The role of feelings in political work is increasingly being emphasized through overlapping conversations about "the politics of the negative" and the affectively tuned

nature of critical academic practice. The concept "structures of feeling" comes from

Raymond Williams (1977) who highlights the ways in which meaning is lived and felt,

and argues that feelings and meaning link-up with institutional structures. There are many

structures of feeling at play in any given time, and they include different parts of the

population; structures of feeling are variegated and partial rather than universal. The

experience of a nascent structure of feeling is almost always taken as individual rather

than common or social. It is only later that the structure's pervasiveness becomes clear,

and people talk and theorize about its shared meaning. Williams argues that the very

general structures of feeling of a time, its overall tone, changes from generation to

generation. Many justice-identified schools of social work in Canada emerged from the

confident structures of feeling of the 1960s social movements, and there is bewilderment

and sometimes conflict between those of us anchored in that traditional sense of

possibility and set of justice best practices, and those of us anchored in other embodied

understandings. The point being, when we teach justice, we also teach the structures of

feeling of a particular time-place-people. Within the loose domain of affect theory, those

who never experienced first hand the utopian structures of feeling of 1960s social

movements or the paranoid structures of feeling of the 1980s AIDS crisis, and those

whose contrary feelings exclude them from the progress narratives of the more traditional

and liberal lefts, are theorizing differently the connections between feelings, politics, and

academic scholarship (Cvetkovich, 2012; Love 2007; Wiegman, 2014).

What gets called "the politics of the negative" is an on-going conversation among

the left about the ways in which the narrow range of permissible emotions (confident and

righteous ones, like anger, that propel action) have a disciplinary effect on justice-desiring peoples who do not feel the way the progress narratives of left politics suggest they should (Love, 2007). Wendy Brown (2001) argues that while left progress narratives have been theoretically interrupted, the desire for a totalizing critique and a totalizing solution remains. This desire results in an unadmitted and ungrievable loss, one that leads to feelings of helplessness, where helplessness shifts sideways into political moralism. Urgent calls to action are, Brown argues, actually a cover for political immobility.

In a notorious paper titled "Resisting left melancholy," Brown (1999) explores "left melancholy" as one aspect of the crisis of the left. This keyword comes from Walter Benjamin who in his scathing essay original published in 1931 was taking on the leftist who clings to preferred ideas, and the identity work those attachments include, at the expense of actual possibility in the present. Subsequent critiques of this paper have called out Brown for dividing feelings from politics and prioritizing the political at the expense of feelings, for suggesting that certain types of feelings are a problem for the left, and for urging that we get on with the work of grief as a means to get over what has been lost and move on (Love, 2007). At the time Brown wrote the paper, however, it was ground breaking to raise feelings as a problem of the left (Cvetkovich, 2012). Left melancholy and the action-oriented moralism and denial of feelings that attend it is an established structure of feeling shared by many. In social work, this melancholy works through forms of mandatory optimism paired with canonized justice practices to discipline which feelings and knowledges we are allowed to admit and explore. My concern is that the disavowal—both generational and professional— of contradictory and unpopular feelings

is an impediment to the reproduction and renewal of justice cultures because it avoids a range of a/effective knowledges that would absolutely cut at the idealized foundations of our field. For example, this mandatory optimism makes it more difficult to admit into conversation the ways in which one type of justice work can harm another, or, call into question the rewards afforded to initiatives that make use of now ubiquitous justice vocabularies (Dean, 2015; Todd et al., 2015). In the same vein, the largely universal desire to feel like we are good people doing good work can result in defensive and/or soothing reactions towards challenging knowledges, reactions that more often result in a rush to problem solve rather than in a deeper and more cutting metacritique of our presumed goodness (Ahmed, 2012; Wilson & Beresford, 2000).

Generational standpoints are as influential as other types of experiential standpoints, and they deserve greater attention when reflecting on a field or discipline (Plummer, 2011). Benchmarked against the debates and possibilities of a time, these standpoints rarely last longer than 30 years, but they cause ripples of conflict across the various generations as world events and additional standpoints continue to proliferate with their own debates and priorities and sense of possibility (Plummer, 2011). Hence the need to reorient on social work as a world-making project that exceeds us all. Of course, the circulation of ideas in academia and across locations is certainly not uniform, and thus the concept of generation is not strictly temporal (Henry, 2012). Within social work, established and emerging justice knowledges are often shaped by different generational and embodied structures of feeling and their relationship may in some cases be one of alterity. For example, the commonalities and distinctions among feminist, critical race

and Indigenous scholarships, or, the desire for normative liberal inclusion contrasted against the various refusals of anti-normative queer, disability and mad studies. Operating at the intersection of social maintenance and social change, there is always a lot going on within our applied, generalist discipline. The reparative orientation I propose here would put the affective life of this historical convergence into conversation as a means to theorize more deeply the complications of justice work.

Social work is certainly not alone in needing to reflect on the ways in which the affectively tuned nature of established justice knowledges shape the imagination, scholarship, teaching, and practice of our field. In an essay formative to what are now called the overlapping reparative and affective turns, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) cautions that paranoid reading—unmasking the bads we all already know exist—has become the orthodox form of critical interpretive scholarship. Sedgwick articulates her concerns about what is produced by this paranoid orthodoxy using two archetypal positions theorized by the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein: the schizoid-paranoid and depressive positions towards the object that trouble one's ego. Sedgwick transposes these two positions into an assessment of contemporary forms of critical interpretive practice, and she argues that we need more depressed work. The paranoid practice stance is alert to the dangers of the world, it is anxious, feels envy, and acts to avoid the humiliation of being surprised by how bad things are. The depressive practice stance calms anxiety by focusing more on love, repair, and trying to build something sustaining out of the dangers and failures of the world. This depressive stance is thus a reparative one. Psychoanalytic theory understands that all sorts of conflicting and guilt inducing feelings occur at the

same time (hating what we love, for example), and thus reparative-depressive and paranoid stances are in fact facets of the same experience (Sedgwick, 2003). Paranoid and reparative stances to critical interpretive scholarship are in these ways affective theories, where affective theories selectively scan for evidence based on their motivation; avoid the pain of being surprised (paranoid) or search out shelter that might sustain you (reparative) (Sedgwick, 2003). Paranoid work tends to position itself as an insightful critique located outside of the problem it identifies, while reparative work typically reads itself into the inevitable failures of the world.

"Repair" and "reparative" are now well established critical keywords within the various extra-disciplinary studies, and the work of this paper falls within this tradition. Sedgwick concludes by pointing out that the unmasking work of the paranoid approach made sense in the 1960s when the pastoral power of the welfare state was a useful target of critique. Now, however, liberalism is a bad word and the violence of the state is often intentionally overt. Her point is not that corrective, get-the-bads-on-record paranoid work is unnecessary, but that its canonization into the preferred form of academic practice diverts us from forms of reparative critique that may help us figure out, in modest ways, how to live on amid the bads. In social work, while I would not recommend we do away entirely with paranoid criticism—we are too normative a discipline to be able to give that up—I would advocate that we too direct greater care and attention towards living on amid the limits and failures of our justice projects, the conflicting investments and structures of feeling at play in our declining welfare states, and towards the impossibility of acting in the world without ever causing harm.

I should note that my point is not that feelings are the real truth of the matter; feelings are certainly not innocent or outside of history. Indeed, we live in a world reverberating with a seemingly endless array of normative and colonial violences. Rather, I am advocating that we admit the existence of a wider range of feelings and the standpoints and investments from which they arise, deindividualize and theorize their influence on our discipline's justice imaginations, and engage with affect as part of any metacritique of our justice foundations. History, feelings, and theory are inseparable, and in the progress-dependent domain of justice work, they converge into affect saturated stories about the past, present, and future of a field, where these stories are motivated by our divergent investments and affective anxieties about the present (Hemmings, 2011, Wiegman, 2014). The reparative orientation to historical practice I am proposing would attend to the affective histories that so profoundly shape how we each come to understand and define justice, and how in turn we each resist and reproduce the discipline we inherit. Importantly, this reparative stance is a means to orient to foundational metacritique from the inside rather than the outside. Progress narratives always require the past to have been undeveloped, and so we should be cautious about benchmarking our own desire to be an improvement against a temporal location that will soon be our own.

Disciplinary Desire

With a mandate to be both expert and unique, academic disciplines are notorious for the way in which they privilege particular objects and methods of study, canonize the ideas of a particular time-space-people into enduring universals, police their boundaries, and constrain the thinking and practice of members (Osborn, 2015). The work of a

discipline is largely defined through attachment to particular objects, and the theories-methods through which these objects are explored (McCarthy, 2006). In a simplified sense, these disciplinary objects and methods are founded on the classic Cartesian split between mind-subject and world-object. The knowing practitioner (subject) can act (theory-methods-practice) upon the world (object) and so understand and change it. For example, sociology takes "social reality" as its object and comes to know it through ethnographic practices. Social work in Canada takes as its object the normative wellbeing of various sub-units of "the social," with core undergraduate courses addressing each sub-unit: the state, the community, the group, the family, the individual. Social work subjects understand and act upon the world through forms of practice developed out of particular understandings of these proper objects (e.g., need, risk, rationality, responsibility). In addition to primary objects like those just listed, areas of scholarship will have their own secondary objects. Among the academic left, standpoint based "experience" and various iterations of "justice" are common objects. Experiential truth is typically realized through voice-centric methods, and justice through forms of activism, legal recourse, and advocacy. There is, however, more to the disciplinary objects we inherit than their status as shared conceptual foundations through which we collectively work.

The objects of established justice-oriented scholarship, objects like "woman's experience" and "intersectionality," are infused with our political desire for justice (Wiegman, 2012). Feminist theorist Robyn Wiegman argues we hang our hopes for justice on these objects; that our work and the work of our justice-oriented fields, if only we think right and work right, can produce justice through and for our objects. The

problem with justice objects is that we are disciplined by them, by the cluster of foundational ideas and distinctions that comprise them, and also by the desires we invest in them—by our need for them.

> To be sure, the structure of this ongoing relation is confoundingly circular, as political desire propels identity's academic formation and shapes the field imaginary that comes to define critical authority, primary objects, and privileged methodologies as part of the priority of doing justice, all while producing practitioners who take their relation to the field not as discipline but as political investment—most often by taking the political as what we bring to the field, not what the field demands, cultivates, and hones as its primary discourse and disciplinary relation. This is not a diagnosis of complicity, since that diagnosis is staked to the possibility of arriving into a conceptual if not material relation where complicity is not. (Wiegman, 2012, p. 89)

What Wiegman teaches us is that object-anchored work reproduced through the disciplinary structure of the academy is in fact disciplining those of us who attempt to practice it. Our fields—including our justice sub-fields—privilege particular objects and methods as a way for subjects to act on and so change the world. But we created these objects, and they work back on us so that we reproduce them. Wiegman argues our attachment to our preferred objects may be less about big transcendental social change and more about our own embodied need to survive in the present. Our objects—say, "anti-oppressive" practice in social work—provide us with comfort in the face of enduring social inequalities by helping us maintain a sense of progressive movement

within the stalled but hyper vigilant impasse of our everyday lives (Berlant, 2011). The problem of course being, as diversity workers regularly note, when we reproduce comforting progress narratives of acknowledgement and reparation that do not cut nearly close enough (Ahmed, 2012).

Objects hang together in reinforcing sets, and these clusters of objects become the normative way to do justice within a field. These clusters are often generational and they form the content of competing stories told by members about the work of their discipline. For example, in Women's and Gender Studies, the objects of "activism," "women's experience," and "the community" are often a set (see the edited collection by Orr, et al., 2012). Conflict within and between generations typically involves some members failing to believe in what is promised by established objects, or arguing for new objects, and either way, facing the normative, disciplinary peer pressure of those who still believe in the possibility of traditional objects (Orr, 2012; Orr, et al., 2012; see also Ahmed, 2010). We are thus disciplined in cyclically reinforcing ways by our object-anchored inheritances, the pressure we put on each other when we canonize proper objects, and by our own object-anchored desire to change the world.

Cutting uncomfortably close, Laurent Berlant (2011) theorizes the keyword "cruel optimism" to explain attachment to objects we think will help us but that in fact cause us harm. In her work, she focuses on the cruel optimism of the intensely normative and now highly anachronistic object of the American-style "good life" that rests on a belief in merit and hard work and engagement with the nation state. The structures of feeling of left melancholy is a type of cruel optimism in that we exhaust ourselves repeating

established justice practices that are unable to accomplish what they were founded to do. In social work in Canada, we might theorize the cruel optimism of teaching a normative "just life" that rests on belief in a correct critical knowledge and associated feelings, hard work, and quite often, appeal to the nation state (the ultimate unit of our discipline's main object, "the social"). This privileged object of the just life disciplines us all through a mandatory optimism that denies the lessons of history (see McGregor, 2015), too-often collapses justice criticism into sub-population specific forms of expertise (Wilson & Beresford, 2000), and side-steps the fact that no matter how hard we work or how insightful our criticism, our privileged object "the social" will fail to produce for us a world that cares for all that it contains.

Many established justice objects are often also long-standing justice keywords (e.g., "community"). The difference between them is that objects are canonized and lifted out of time into orthodox definitions, practices, and goals, while keywords instead maintain the looseness of a continually historicized vocabulary of terms whose usefulness to justice imaginations is understood to fluctuate over time. Reflecting on feminism's history and the difficulty of imagining the future of that field, Scott (2011) argues we must loosen ourselves from objects that no longer do the work that made them so attractive to us (in her case, "woman," and soon "gender" too). Rather, Scott argues in a Lacanian tradition, we must admit and engage the intense, restless, critical desire for something other than this, for something unknown, that propels critical and justice-oriented work. The inter- and intra-generational move from one disciplinary object to the

next is driven by this desire, by the inevitable failure of our objects to continue to satisfy this restless desire across all time-space (Wiegman, 2012)

Talk of the crisis of the field, the crisis of the left, the crisis of social work, is talk about the failure of orthodox objects (e.g., the state, the social) to keep doing their founding work in different times. Everything wears out. Crisis talk tells us that canonization has happened in social work, whatever we might say about our lack of a formal textual canon, and it suggests there is work to been done to step back from our current dictionary limits and return to vocabulary range, from our foundational objects to historicized keywords with which to again directly engage the world-making capacities of our applied discipline.

Double agents do political work while also engaging in foundational metacritique. I am proposing we be *reparative* double agents attentive to the Cartesian set-up of disciplinary object relations, ubiquitous processes of canonization, and the overlapping cruel optimisms of left, national, and professional progress narratives. Adopting the concepts of "repair," "structures of feeling," and "disciplinary desire" as critical keywords for social work would provide us with vocabulary around which we might practice history and theorize together how shared, overlapping, and conflicting object-anchored feelings manifest in the inter- and intra-generational relations and justice knowledges of our field.

Cutting and Repairing What's Left

Following her death, interpretations of Sedgwick's work on paranoid-reparative scholarly stances have read in this work her desire to have been a teacher who caused no

harm, to have perhaps put less paranoid work out into the world, and this reading of her asks that we de-idealize the role of the teacher (Love, 2010). This is a reparative move, one that is more patient with the inevitable failure of those who welcome us into the world, and one that recognizes we will each also fail in our own turn. A reparative stance acknowledges the anxiety of having caused others harm, and the impossibility of predicting all the outcomes of our work (Love, 2010). This is an obvious knowledge, and one that social work of all society maintaining disciplines should be able to understand. The progress-dependent nature of our applied discipline, however, too often simplifies harm into a failure of knowledge or of individuals. We are disciplined by, and we discipline each other with, the fear of causing harm, of betraying our proper objects. This fearful structure of feeling propels the creation of defensive-protective justice objects and methods that we hope can save us from ourselves. We have yet to make the knowledge that our attempts at repair will likely also cause harm into an effective knowledge from which to renew the justice imaginations of our field. Engaging with social work as an intergenerational project of world making is a means to loosen the hold of overlapping progress narratives, canonized knowledge, and proper objects. It is also an attempt to be accountable to the changing past, present, and future of our project.

Women's and Gender Studies has been called a "site of convenience" because it provides space for political work that likely would not be possible in other sites (Maparyan, 2012, p.19). This is an apt description of justice-oriented social work as well, and a way to understand the range of people and investments that enter our field. We can understand this shifting range as part of the on-going practice of social movements

articulating themselves through social work and across national boundaries (Chambon, 2012), and thus this range should be understood as essential to the justice imaginations of our field. Two points follow from this: First, as is likely palpable, this does not make it an *easy* site in which to pursue one's desire for justice. Second, *who* enters the discipline and with what understanding of justice changes over time.

Canada is a settler colony founded in genocidal assimilation practices and racist, ableist, and class stratified immigration policies, and this influences who enters social work, and when. Similarly, the deinstitutionalization of people labelled as impaired in various ways has slowly increased the numbers of social workers with a patient's critique of the helping professions. At the same time, the credential inflation of a knowledge economy and the normalization of student debt mean that overall, more low income people are gambling that a professional degree like social work will lead to financial stability. The who and what of justice work in social work are in these ways generational, they converge in many instances into generational standpoints and these overlapping standpoints sometimes find each other incomprehensible.

In Canada, for example, a painful bewilderment orbits privileged objects like our shrinking welfare state, with older white activists melancholically attached to this nostalgic justice object, and many aboriginal social workers instead experiencing it as an enduringly violent and untrustworthy colonial power (Smith, 2015). And then of course, there are our young social work students who were born into a neoliberal world and so do not find the "new" changes of the past 40-odd years especially shocking. The highly ordinary exceptions within our schools of social work and sites of practice bring with

them a more complicated understanding of the orthodox objects of our discipline, an understanding that is creating over time a different generational standpoint and set of priorities that asks after the cost of privileged disciplinary objects. This variegation in the meaning of orthodox objects, as well as contexts in which justice vocabularies are in widespread use across interests, oftentimes results in social workers bewildered by the failure of justice objects we have been taught to love (Wilson, 2008). It is these kinds of generational shifts that require us to return our established disciplinary objects to a less powerful keyword status and theorize and metacritique them for where they come from, who uses them and for what purposes, and for what they can and cannot help justice-desiring social work to achieve, and for whom. This includes "the social" that is regularly violent, and "help" that does not preclude harm. Our applied discipline rests on a powerful canon of justice orthodoxies, and we have yet to fully admit the fall of left progress narratives into our imagination, our practice, or our teaching.

I have advocated in this paper for a reparative orientation towards disciplinary inheritance and change, one that bothers to know the affective histories through which we each come to desire particular kinds of justice, attach to generational objects, and reproduce and resist aspects of the project of social work. Neither justice work nor social work can be reduced to a correct knowledge practice. To deny us our complex personhood (Gordon, 2008) is to deny the life making of individual and collective histories, as well as the influence of the resources and logics of a time-space on getting things done (Scott, 2011). I have therefore nominated "structures of feeling," and "disciplinary desire" as productive keywords for social work around which a reparative

historical practice of disciplinary metacritique and renewal might gather. This is a way to practice history, where this practice attends to the relational and intergenerational nature of world-making, to a much broader range of feelings and the standpoints and histories and knowledges from which they arise, to the consequences of canonized object-keywords on the disciplinary imagination, practice and teaching of our field, and to the impossibility of acting in the world without ever causing harm. I hope that what I have proposed might cut a little and repair a little, and that it might reanimate discussion of justice as a question and a keyword rather than a given as we continue to work the convergence of discipline and the restless desire for something more.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Social Work Stories: Situated Views and Larger Visions in Disciplinary Scholarship and Education

Note: The published paper cited above is the Version of Record. The text included below is the Accepted Manuscript, that is, the version that has not yet been formatted and copyedited for publication.

Abstract

This paper is about the changing imaginations of social work in an increasingly entangled world. It is also about the ways in which literatures shared across time and space encourage us to identify with larger collectivities. My central argument is that that if social work is to find a larger vision in the wake of the failure of a range of modern progress narratives, we must engage differently with the challenge posed by multiplying and sometimes conflicting knowledge communities. Thinking with contemporary debates in transdisciplinary critical social theory, I nominate and explore a number of alternative heuristics—'generational problematic,' 'translational space,' and 'imagined communities'—in support of future work on the uneven temporal and spatial communities of affiliation that reproduce and change what social work is, or could be, about. I conclude with theoretical suggestions, and some thoughts towards how social work education might better support incoming generations to locate themselves within the broader life-course of the discipline and profession.

Introduction

> Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions— of views from somewhere. (Haraway, 1988, p. 590)

This paper is about the changing imaginations of social work in an increasingly entangled world. In the opening epigraph feminist science studies scholar Donna Haraway calls for 'situated knowledges,' that is, knowledge that accounts for the shared perceptual locations through which we orient to the world. Applied disciplines like social work are however more likely to individualize responsibility to reflect on the influence of one's particular combination of social locations and experiences, because our task is to produce ethical, autonomous practitioners (Buraway, 2005; Chambon, 1999; Jeffery, 2007). My aim in this paper is therefore to re-emphasize the pivotal question of situated *disciplinary* vantage points (Lorenz, 1994; Powell, Lovelock, & Lyons, 2004), and further, to consider the ways in which disciplinary views are in turn structured by generational views (Brandt, Roose, & Verschelden, 2016; Wilson, 2017). Making these three units—individual, discipline, generation—more explicit in our teaching and our scholarship is a way to reemphasize the historical and contextual nature of social work thinking and practice. It is also a means to provide a more thoroughgoing welcome to incoming generations who will have to grapple with what they inherit in their own time.

Social work is a response to the social question, to the question of how we might live together (Chambon, 2013). In a global reality of ongoing wars and economic

polarization, events like the Brexit vote, the election of Donald Trump and growing social unrest all challenge the modern liberal dream of social solidarities within and between nation states (Brown, 2019; Fazzi, 2015; Ife, 2018; Noble & Ottmann, 2018). In turn, the newly perceived climate crisis radically undermines established ways of thinking about and responding to this foundational question of how we might live. My argument is therefore that if social work is to find a larger vision in the wake of the failure of a range of modern liberal progress narratives and associated assumptions, we must engage in greater shared disciplinary reflexivity on what the project of social work is, or could be, about. This is inter- and intra-generational work.

As a long-time community worker and now a doctoral candidate faced with the responsibility of recreating the discipline from one generation to the next in the Canadian settler context, I have struggled to locate myself as an individual within the discipline, and within and among broader situated and generational knowledges. Distinctions common in academic social work only sometimes overlap with my own tangled understanding of the world, and my investments and concerns are not all that common. This is not to say that one understanding of social work is necessarily better or more correct than another. Rather, it is to argue more generally that if newcomers are to shape the utopian impulses of the discipline they inherit to the world they inherit, more must be done in our education and our scholarship to foster a historical sensibility towards social work itself (Lorenz, 2007). I am, in short, seconding Brand, Roose, & Verschelden's (2016) call for greater attention to generational differences in the perceived aims and methods of social work research and education.

This conceptual paper therefore introduces three heuristics in support of greater disciplinary reflexivity—'generational problematic,' 'translational space,' and 'imagined communities'—and then puts them to work in conversation with a paper on critical social work that I have found particularly meaningful as a student in social work education. Thinking along with debates in transdisciplinary social theory, I argue dichotomous social work stories, stories of being for/against, of insight/ignorance, are a saturated genre, and I offer some thoughts on where we might go from here. This work is likely to be of interest to graduate students and early career faculty finding their way within the discipline they inherit in Western welfare states, to faculty and course instructors involved in curriculum design and mapping, particularly in Anglophone Marxist traditions, and to scholars working in the history and philosophy of social work.

In Support of Collective Disciplinary Reflexivity

Academic disciplines are organized around particular objects and methods of study. I was unaware when I began my doctoral studies, however, that the objects of the social sciences are notoriously unstable (Harding, 1986; Harding, 2008; Herrnstein Smith, 2005; Manicas, 1987; Montuschi, 2003; Winch, 1990). That the worldviews of academic disciplines are structured by a kind of embodied generational knowledge or generational attunement (Durkheim, 2014; Manheim, 1972; Williams, 1977) or that this generational structuring can in part be traced through wider theoretical and methodological turns within the academy, and along with broader social and cultural shifts.

Trained to look out at the world for a problem in need of a solution, it has taken me some time to learn how to ask questions of disciplines. I arrived at the doctoral level

with little understanding of academic disciplines or universities, and I struggled (and still do) to ask good research questions: manageable, problem-oriented and puzzle-solving questions that can be expected to contribute to concrete, measurable impacts. I have worked in social services long enough to know that contemporary claims to innovation or action in my context are in many (but not all) instances a reorganization of longstanding issues, or they are a reified reaction to the consequences of some other change in policy. Progress is a tricky question and a moving target, largely dependent on what we include or exclude from our assessment. Of when we start the clock or what we take as our benchmark. Social work problems are not always problems of insufficient knowledge or skill.

I have found working with heuristics a particularly generative way into these kinds of problems—problems that are more speculative than either basic or applied—because the approach helps me to remember that the concepts I think with are placeholders for complex phenomena that exceed what a given concept can in fact represent. Concepts-as-heuristics are a place to begin rather than end, and by remaining open to additional interpretation they can support the collective work of disciplinary reflexivity. In Haraway's terms, heuristics invite dialogue among views from somewhere and larger visions, and back again. In what follows I nominate three heuristics, three placeholders for complex phenomena, in support of greater engagement with the changing imaginations of social work.

1. Generational Problematics

'Generational problematic' is a heuristic and unit of analysis for considering the situated standpoints from which we orient on a given change or shift. Take, for example, the common argument found in the social work literature that we are facing a crisis. As a unit of analysis, generational problematic supports reflection on the non-crisis state that is taken as stable, normative or good, such that change is perceived as bad, as crisis. Generational views of stability/crisis become disciplinary views when a given way of life or social arrangement is perceived in a similar way within the discipline (e.g., the welfare state). These orientations are stabilized and transmitted from one generation to the next through social work scholarship and education.

Generational problematic is not, however, a synonym for age, nor is it intended to amplify dichotomous notions of outdated versus contemporary social work. Physical age and scholarly age are not necessarily the same, and the circulation of knowledge among universities, regions, and national contexts is far from uniform. More generally, Canada is a settler colony and the same intellectual tradition will have traveled through and been changed by multiple routes and contexts prior to arrival (Said, 2000; in social work see Chambon & Köngeter, 2012; Harris et al., 2013; Köngeter, 2017). As a unit of analysis this heuristic emphasizes the fact that there are situated generational aspects to understandings of problems and solutions, and indeed, to perceptions of what is desirable and possible. At the same time, it is intended to be a non-linear, a non-progressive, concept. Generational problematic as an anchor rather then a benchmark, one that fosters curiosity towards the ways in which claims and allegiances arise within specific times and

places, and in so doing, encourages greater disciplinary, rather than individualized, reflexivity.

2. Translational Space

Social work is a 'translational space' in which situated views converge and broader visions are negotiated. Applied disciplines are integrative disciplines in that we synthesize and extend social theory for use with our particular disciplinary concerns (Brekke, 2014). We can as a result trace when generational views become disciplinary views by considering major waves of integrative theoretical work and related disciplinary debates, and the extent to which national conversations are picked up internationally. Earlier concerns—Do we have a unique knowledge base? A signature method? Are we an art or a science?—appear to be mellowing at least somewhat alongside the broader turn towards interdisciplinarity. The idea of a singular knowledge base, one not always already tangled up with other knowledges, appears especially strange from my generational standpoint.

The global proliferation of critical social theory since the 1990s (Keucheyan, 2014) presents social work with a new generational problematic. Not only is there too much knowledge to know, these knowledges are often of a different *scale* of imagination, scales that disturb social work's rootedness in methodological nationalism (Good Gingrich & Köngeter, 2017; Zhou, 2013) and the modern 'middle range' theories (Loewenberg, 1984) and conceptual units developed within this analytic frame (e.g. non-citizen/citizen; micro, mezzo, macro). The generational problematic thus shifts, at least in part, from claims to expertise and arguments for one intellectual tradition over another, to

the question of what can in fact count as expertise and how we might stay in dialogue with people who think differently from us. This expansion in international worldviews requiring acknowledgement within national contexts will require social work to engage in integrative knowledge work that does not gloss over the ambiguities of shared vocabularies and conflicting investments, or forget what is made and lost in this translation of ideas across time and place (Said, 2000). Integrative work is an essential contribution to knowledge in applied disciplines (Brekke, 2014; Torraco, 2005), and it is perhaps particularly important in North America given the ways in which the inherited modern specializations of our universities—and sites of practice—circumvent broader discussion and disagreement, while also eliding how our various investments are in fact tangled with each other and with broader global histories (Chuh, 2014). For example, in Canada undergraduate social work education includes a single course on Indigenous 'perspectives,' and feminist and anti-racist movements are regularly converted into weekly 'topics' in our classrooms. This disciplined inclusion is a negotiated response to a particular generational problematic: the problem of singular views in social work. A new generational problematic is that this response cannot expand forever, and that in some instances it allows us to avoid conflicting views because they are not our particular area of expertise (Chuh, 2014).

There is a similar dynamic with our journals. I submitted a paper to a top social work journal a few years ago and one of the reviews asked, since I was working with feminist theory, if the work might be a better fit for a feminist journal. The existence of a feminist social work journal holds space for feminist work to grow; the existence of a

feminist journal justifies decentering feminist work from social work. A new generational problematic is thus the question of when we separate things out to help them grow stronger, and when we recombine them again so that they complicate each other in ways that contribute to disciplinary imaginations. Translation work is rarely straightforward and it does not always work out as planned.

3. Imagined Communities

In his seminal work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson (2016) argues national communities are imagined rather than natural. National communities developed through print capitalism, that is, the widespread distribution of the same newspapers and novels that repeat a narrative structure linking individual biography to a larger 'we' of the nation. As a result, people separated by geography come to share a similar temporality or generation—a sense of 'us' grounded in shared stories about the world. In Haraway's terms, this 'we' is a situated view. Anderson's argument is not that these 'imagined communities' are necessarily bad, but that we should attend to how they develop and to what they amplify.

Academic disciplines also develop imagined communities via literatures shared across wide spans of time and place. For example, in women's and gender studies, Claire Hemmings (2011) identifies three common temporal narratives in Anglophone feminist journal articles: stories of poststructural 'progress,' of Marxist 'loss,' and of new materialist 'return.' Imagining and evoking a particular proper feminist subject, each rhetorical-theoretical community uses their imagined others as foils against which to articulate an 'us.' These feminist accounts mirror those in critical social theory more

generally, and they are, Hemmings argues, both overly simplified and dangerous. The danger with imagined communities is that they can amplify exceptionalism: the present over the past or the past over the present, this ideology or theory over that, nationalism, and so on. They function as a kind of progress narrative where 'we,' whomever we might be, are on the right side of history.

As Hemmings explores through her work, this 'grammar' enables an articulation between feminist and nationalist claims that amplifies imperialist projects. Social work was established, and continues to work through, these kinds of disconcerting articulations (Lorenz, 1994; Stoler, 2016). Rather than more common tactics of producing corrective or multiple accounts, Hemmings concludes feminist scholars must instead 'tell stories differently.' We must take greater care with how we imagine and tell stories about who we are and about what social justice through social work is, and, following Hemmings, attend to the 'amenability' of our stories to other forms of exceptionalism.

As placeholders for complex phenomena, then, 'generational problematic' encourages attention to a broader view than that of our own particular moment and location, 'translational space' tunes us to the everyday relational work of negotiating multiple views and larger visions whilst standing on an unstable foundation, and last, 'imagined communities' emphasizes the dynamic nature of collectivities and situated knowledges, as well as the ways in which the communities we imagine are stabilized and undermined, amplified and suppressed, through disciplinary stories told in our writing and our education. These three heuristics are, in short, a means to operationalize Haraway's point that larger visions require ongoing engagement with situated views.

My argument in this paper is that in an historical moment in which the social question is again being re-defined, often in terrible ways—as harder borders and higher walls, through post-truth-post-facts and proliferating sub-units of sociality captured by the term populism—social work education must attend with greater care to the stories we tell about who we are and about social justice in and through social work. In this historical moment, amplifying more stories of exceptionalism, of yet another group possessed of greater insight than other perceived groups may in fact be harmful. This is not to say that there are no sides to be taken, or that social work should not take sides. Rather, it is to argue for more careful engagement with how we think, educate, and write about processes of social change and ways in which we might affect them, about individual and collective responsibility in different times and places, and also, how we imagine those people who take different sides. In sum, if we are to find a larger vision in the wake of the failure of a range of modern liberal progress narratives, we must tell social work stories differently. In what follows, I put these three heuristics to work in conversation with a paper on critical social work from my context, and I attempt to tell a story a little differently.

An Example: Generational Views in Social Work Education in Canada

I have been educated in a critical social work tradition that benchmarked itself as an improvement against a mainstream or canonical form of social work. One outcome of this rhetorical positioning is a new generational problematic: how to critique a critique of a canon, when this critique is now canonical in its own turn? I will consider this enduring trans-generational problematic of knowledge that has become too stable with the

assistance of the three heuristics introduced above, and with a paper written in my context that has helped me to negotiate my time in social work: Amy Rossiter's (2001) *Innocence lost and suspicion found: Do we educate for or against social work?* Although my example is from Canada, inter- and trans-generational dynamics of stabilization and change are common to the broader international academy.

Rossiter's paper is a meditation on the traditional distinction made in social work between care and control, refracted through the Foucauldian insight of both, always both, and Rossiter dwells with the biographical implications for helpers of recognizing that an innocent form of practice will always be out of reach. I encountered this paper for the first time towards the end of the final semester of my undergraduate education, and it explained for me a problem that I had not known how to express: critical social work was being taught to me as a form of exceptionalism (Wilson, 2008). Moreover, Rossiter let me in on a secret: social work educators themselves were uncertain about what to teach students in light of arguments from critical social theory and they were hiding this uncertainty from their students. For Rossiter writing at the turn of the 21st century, teaching critical social theory is a fraught enough prospect that she is glad she has tenure. For me, reading the paper a number of years later, critical social work is taught as an enlightened improvement over earlier and mainstream forms of social work.

Read as a *generational problematic*, Rossiter's piece is an example of the challenges of *translating* critical social theory into social work. She is thinking with Foucault's work, where this work is, at the time of her writing, more than 20 years 'old' and had already achieved canonical status in some disciplines. Ideas do not circulate

between disciplines or within disciplines in a uniform manner, and this is especially true for work in languages other than English. Rossiter also discusses how *imagined communities*, in this case those amplified by professional discourse in social work education, suppress or disavow conflicting understandings by assuming the authority to define what social work is or is not about. Translating something new to social work into social work is no small accomplishment. In turn, my own initial reading illustrates how we identify with the authors we read. It also points towards the ways in which a given critique can combine with other things (say, an increasingly competitive postsecondary education market) to become something unexpected. In this case, a new form of exceptionalism, a new imagined community of critical social workers, and a new generational problematic of canonized critical theory.

Reading the paper today, almost 20 years after it was published, I perceive an additional generational problematic identified right in the title: *do we—those of us who work with critical social theory—educate for or against social work?* This is a generational question and Rossiter's generational answer is to be 'suspicious.' '[T]o maintain ethical vigilance over the inevitable trespasses of our work' (par. 9). In our own generational turn, should we (those of us reading the present paper), be for or against Rossiter's answer? When I first read Rossiter's paper I found the suggestion of suspicious vigilance helpful because it expressed something of the crushing sense of responsibility I felt in the face of the limits of my work with homeless young people. I suspect other readers, then and now, find resonance with Rossiter's paper for similar reasons. I also think, though, that the broader generational and disciplinary problematic of being for or

against, and thus also the generational answer to pick one side in contrast to some other

side, has shifted over the years since Rossiter's paper was first published. I will explain

further in the final section of the paper.

Telling Social Work Stories Differently

A less linear way of thinking about change that I find helpful because it does not

carry the same individualizing and moralizing implications of being 'in time,' or not, with

one's discipline (Wiegman, 2004), is the concept of saturation. Particular combinations of

thinking and doing allow for particular kinds of work. A genre of thinking and doing,

over a span of time, can become saturated and this saturation undermines the aims of the

genre (Sisken & Warner, 2010). For example, in Rossiter's paper, the traditional modern

dichotomy of rational choice—to be for or against social work—ends in individualized

vigilance towards one's self. This genre of Man, Kant's heroic subject, is saturated; it no

longer has room to move (Sisken & Warner, 2010). An alternative problematic that

resonates with me today as both shared and generational is thus: *how do we – those of us*

who work with critical social theory – refuse the dichotomy of being for or against social

work? Of being for or against suspicious self-monitoring? In short, how might we tell

stories that allow for something more vulnerable, curious and creative than a dichotomy

of professional cynicism or negligent optimism (Moten & Harney, 2004)?

In social work, Brandt, Roose, and Verschelden (2016) argue generational

differences and generational claims require greater attention in our research and

education, and they take as their example established scholars' expressions of dismay at a

perceived lack of activism, a lack of engagement with structural factors, among

newcomers to the project of social work. In Hemming's terms, this is a story of loss. It is also an example of an imagined community thinking itself against some other perceived community, and moreover, an illustration of how the labour of translation sometimes shows up as a lack of engagement with established disciplinary objects and methods. Brandt and colleagues are concerned that newcomers are not part of these disciplinary debates, and thinking with Walter Lorenz's emphasis on the importance of historical consciousness to the disciplinary imagination, they advocate that we keep a closer eye on the generational nature of claims made about the goals and methods of social work. We can also think about this intergenerational tension in terms of saturation.

Structure is a metaphor with a history. In social work the term usually refers to policies and institutions that shape lives and life chances. Structure as foundation, infrastructure, support, or the absence of such. However, structure, as concept and metaphor, is not social work's alone. The term is shared among ongoing transdisciplinary and transnational debates about how to think about the dichotomous units of analysis regularly taken as foundational to thinking and research in the social sciences: structure/agency, science/nature, material/symbolic, state/citizen, and so on. These debates are gaining traction across a number of disciplines, and in so doing, are shifting the established objects and methods of critical social theory within and beyond the social sciences. I am suggesting, in short, that dichotomous choices that demand dichotomous answers are an increasingly saturated genre. But saturation is not the same thing as misguided or wrong. Saturation points towards a limit reached with what a particular way

into things can help us imagine and do. In academic disciplines, saturated genres are forms of disciplinary common sense taught from one generation to the next.

A related example of a saturated dichotomous genre that cuts across university and everyday cultures, at least in North America, is what Shotwell (2017) terms 'purity politics.' Purity politics are hyper-individualized attempts at purifying ourselves of implication and contagion. To be ideologically and ethically pure. To think right and act right and consume right, such that we are no longer implicated in the various bads of the world. As Rossiter notes in her paper, social work has a long history with this desire for purity or innocence (see also Valverde, 1993). Stories of progress, loss and return are similarly stories of purity, of imagined communities located on the right side of history. Shotwell's answer to the dangers of purity politics, of this individualized self-exemption from the bads of the world, is to be 'against purity' without needing to know what we are instead for. She refuses the logics of dichotomous genre and in so doing refuses stories of heroic exceptionalism.

As a generational response to an especially saturated trans-generational genre, Shotwell's work is one example of a broader turn within the academy towards more speculative, transdisciplinary, and in some cases, reparative work. Are there reasons to be cynical, grim, pessimistic? Absolutely. We can however still work to get unstuck from saturated ways of knowing and doing, and from stories composed out of questions that already know their own answers. Scaling shifting between smaller views and larger visions, between national specificities and broader shared questions of discipline, as I have done here, is one way to loosen things up.

If social work scholarship and education is to engage with these broader shifts in Anglophone critical social theory, a next major round of integrative, translational knowledge work will likely grapple with the limits and consequence of liberal humanism, including the figure/ground distinctions of modern social theory (e.g., symbolic-cultural/material-structural, state/world). This work includes widespread reconsideration of now-orthodox practices of heroic academic criticism (Anker & Felski, 2017), work in feminist new materialisms (Coole & Frost, 2010), reflections on the state of identity knowledges in relation to dominant critical social theory (Weheliye, 2014; Yusoff, 2018), as well as literatures on theoretical and conceptual travel and translation in a world stratified by power asymmetries (Bachmann-Medick, 2016; Chakrabarty, 2000). Explicitly transdisciplinary, these sprawling conversations can be identified by their concern for multiple temporalities and modernities, and by their consideration of the ways in which things rarely add up into a reassuringly coherent or stable whole (e.g., emergence, assemblage, articulation). Social work might consider science, technology, and society (STS) studies as a place to begin, because the field provides a thorough set of conceptual metaphors for negotiating complexity (e.g., Bowker & Star, 2000; Law, 2004). Feminist science studies in particular has fruitfully negotiated inherited modern distinctions between science and culture, past and present, structure and agency (e.g., Tsing, 2012).

An increasingly entangled world and proliferating knowledges tuned to different investments and units and scales of analysis undermine dichotomous genre like expertise/ignorance, exception/problem, and associated calls in social work for either

greater consensus or greater pluralism. Social work education will need to develop a different relationship to the generational problematics of too great a volume of knowledge crisscrossing national borders, of contradictory knowledge, and of disagreement and conflict. The objects of the social sciences are notoriously unstable. Genres of thinking and doing become saturated. The question of progress is a bewildering one on a good day, let alone on a warming earth, and it deserves greater care and attention in our scholarship and in our teaching.

There is a kind of intergenerational ethics to grappling with the possibilities and limits of social work as a world-making project that exceeds us all. Rather than teaching temporarily correct knowledge we might instead explore the multiple temporalities of social work and the social question with our students, and support these newcomers to locate themselves as individuals among generations and within the life-course of the discipline and profession. This is, in short, one way to tell social work stories differently. Graduate education can also engage students more directly in questions of university, discipline and generation, and cycles of stabilization and change in views and larger visions. The heuristics discussed above may be useful here, particularly if paired with closer engagement with the history and philosophy of social sciences and with differences among various nation-based social works.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of a range of failed modern progress narratives, widespread instability in the social question, and an environmental crisis quite literally undermining many of the foundational assumptions of social work, I have argued for greater shared

disciplinary reflexivity on what social work is, or could be, about. Thinking with debates about saturation and change in contemporary social theory, I have nominated three heuristics for putting situated views into conversation as a means to develop broader visions. Generation is a unit of analysis that is bigger than an individual and smaller than a discipline. Translation is the work of expressing and of perceiving something not yet common, with unpredictable effects. Imagined communities are evoked through the stories we tell in our teaching and our writing about who we are and what social work is. Thinking these heuristics with the help of a seminal paper from my own education, I have suggested saturation, rather than progress or exceptionalism, as a means to think about generational problematics and generational responses, and of where we might go from here. All three heuristics cut across the established units of nation (Canadian and also…), theory (critical and also…), and domains of disciplinary labour (education and also…) in ways that I hope are helpful to encouraging newcomers to speculate, with curiosity and with vulnerability, on the possibilities and politics of social work in different geopolitical times.

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CHAPTER SIX

An Invitation into the Trouble with Humanism for Social Work

Wilson, T. E. (in press, expected late 2020). An invitation into the trouble with humanism
for social work. In V. Bozalek and B. Pease (Eds.) *Post-anthropocentric social
work: Critical posthumanism, new materialisms and affect theory* (chapter three,
24 pages). London: Routledge Advances in Social Work.

Abstract

As a means to support wider engagement with the trouble with humanism for social work,

this chapter provides an advanced overview and signposting that locates the post-

anthropocentric turn in relation to traditions and debates in critical social theory that are

likely to be more familiar in Anglophone traditions of social work. There are three parts

to the paper. Part one gives a general overview of humanism, anti-humanism and post-

anthropocentrism in theory and in social work, and includes a table in which these

overviews are further located. Part two considers the particular/general dichotomy of

humanist hierarchies in relation to the social question that organizes social work and

speculates on how this organizing question is changing with the environmental crisis. Part

three identifies a few promising ways into the logic and stakes of these debates. Overall,

the chapter is intended as an invitation into dense and ongoing transdisciplinary debates

that are not yet common in social work.

Introduction

This chapter aims to contribute to the conditions of intelligibility required if more of us are to grapple with the trouble with humanism for social work. My strategy is to map connections between this latest theoretical turn—post-anthropocentrism—and traditions of critical social theory in social work. Of note, I write from the Canadian settler state where structural, feminist, critical and anti-oppressive social work are established enough to have achieved a level of consensus on their major objects and methods, questions and answers, and where these traditions are articulated against the foil of a mainstream or dominant social work (see Wilson, 2017). Similar to the broader academy then, in social work in my context the post-anthropocentric turn can be understood as a third wave or generation of critical social theory: from structural (functionalism and conflict) to poststructural (postmodern, postcolonial, some identity knowledges), and now the range of conversations captured under the rubric of the post-anthropocentric (posthumanism, new materialism, the affective turn, Indigenous philosophy, a decolonial pluriverse, among others). These are not discrete traditions and none of them are 'over.' They are also structured by the geopolitical and cultural politics of the university, and shifts in which branch—natural sciences, social sciences, humanities—is currently valorised (see Readings, 1996). As a means to invite greater engagement with the call for post-anthropocentic social work, I therefore provide an advanced signposting of some of the contexts, debates, and interlocutors of these traditions, and identify a few of the ways in which they are in relation with each other.

There are three sections to this chapter. First, I give a brief account of the umbrella terms humanism, anti-humanism and post-anthropocentrism, and include a table in which these accounts are located in relation to additional contexts and shifts. This is a highly simplified account; a map that is not the territory. I then briefly touch on humanist hierarchies and the enduring disciplinary desire to be somehow post-racial. In the final section of the paper I suggest a few general anchors from contemporary critical social theory that are helping me to begin to imagine social work differently on a damaged planet.[3]

A Map that is Not the Territory

Humanism, anti-humanism, and post-anthropocentrism are names given to three massive, ongoing conversations about who "we" are and about how we might live. Academic disciplines enter into and extend these debates based on their particular disciplinary objects and aims, and scholars further inflect these disciplinary engagements with the geopolitical nuances of their specific locations and systems of education and research. In what follows I briefly map aspects of these terms, and in Table 1 I signpost additional anchors for those wanting more.

Humanism

In a very general sense, European humanism is a kind of love letter to an idea of a human species and human potential. Foucault (1984) argued humanism is a shifting

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[3] Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt (Eds.) (2017). *Arts of living on a damaged planet.*

"theme" in contrast to the "event" of the Enlightenment (p. 52). The two overlap in that positivist science operationalizes aspects of secular humanism as research methods (for example, rational man), and both European science and secular humanism stand in contrast to religious cosmologies that center god's will as the major causal explanation. As a philosophical sensibility, liberal European humanism is developmental and universalizing, emphasising human rationality and self-actualisation, the dignity and worth of all men (sic; there will be a lot of "man" in this chapter), freedom and inalienable rights, and the social nature of humankind. Marx's argument that the imposition of a class structure alienates man from his true self is a humanist argument, as are ideas of consciousness raising and empowerment. Payne (2011) has contributed an introductory text emphasizing humanist themes in social work, and he gives this basic definition of humanistic social work: "[I]t is a practice that seeks human and social well-being by developing human capacities; personal growth; and social relationships of equality, freedom, and mutual responsibility through shared social experience" (p. 31). These familiar ideas are interwoven with institutions like the state, democracy, human rights law, social welfare redistribution policies and service provision.

Anti-humanism

With the post-anthropocentric turn, debates captured by a modern/postmodern contrast are increasingly reconsidered through a somewhat more focused contrast of humanism/anti-humanism (for example, Braidotti, 2013, 2019). This reworking carries forward many of the same conversations, extending them as they relate to philosophies of the human and the more-than-human world. For example, the destabilized, dependent,

and perpetually out of reach subjectivity of poststructural linguistics contrasted against Kant's modern philosophy of man's essential and dichotomous nature (Derrida, 1982; Foucault, 1984; Deleuze & Parnet, 1977). Additional destabilizations of the human subject include Foucault's argument against the individuality, originality and insight attributed to authors, suggesting instead that both author and reader experience something more collective (Foucault, 1979). This understanding is also developed in feminist scholarship on the situated and shared locations from which we perceive and make meaning (Haraway, 1988). Canonical figures in anti-humanist philosophy include Heidegger (1947), Sartre (1946), Fanon (1961/2004), and Foucault (1984), and various arguments developed in relation to the philosophies of Husserl and Hegel (see Han-Pile, 2010), and Marx and Freud (see Canguilhem, 1998). In turn, each of these authorial anchors is associated with philosophical traditions like phenomenology, existentialism, and structuralism.

More overtly "anti" than these philosophical debates, social movements have also challenged normative European humanism. Here, both universalizing claims and contradictory exclusions are critiqued for the ways in which their colonial logics rationalize the destruction of ways of life (Braidotti, 2013, 2019; Clare, 1999; Wynter, 1984, 2003). For example, the Indian Residential Schools in Canada and national apologies in which "therapeutic reconciliation" elides ongoing colonial relations (Million, 2013, p. 158), feminist cross-cultural work that is also colonial work (Mohanty, 2003), or the ways in which critical social theory and imperialism can fold together in the rhetoric and analysis of center/periphery relations (Byrd, 2011). Relatedly, queer theory has

articulated a politics of anti-normativity against the foil of sameness, and solidarity against the stratified inclusion of the rights-bearing liberal subject.

In social work, poststructural arguments have been engaged as a means to reconsider the material semiotics of disciplinary imaginaries and perceived social problems (see Chambon, Irving, & Epstein, 1999). For example, the ways in which professional critical imaginaries are built from progress narratives in which present social work is somehow a heroic and insightful (rational, linear) break from the bads of past social work (Chapman & Withers, 2019). This said, social work more often leverages the contradictions between liberal humanist ideals and actual practices to make the case that marginalised peoples should also be "included," have "access," and be "participants" in the developmental potential and perfectibility that universalising European humanism imagines (Philp, 1979; see also Schuller, 2018). This interpretive work to include a perceived margin within a perceived center is institutionally structured by established strategies of legal advocacy in which an essential rights-bearing subject demands recognition and repair for harm done (see Brown & Halley, 2002). Gayatri Spivak's term "strategic essentialism" is often used to describe this kind of intentional group-based and group-making work. Anti-humanist critiques and liberal humanist justice strategies are in these ways often collapsed in social work.

Post-anthropocentrism

Post-anthropocentrism is also an umbrella for multiple traditions and debates, this time emphasizing those that afford greater attention to technology, science and/or the natural environment, and to the constitutive relations among these conceptual buckets.

This work is sometimes captured under the moniker of the ontological or new materialist turn, in contrast to the preceding epistemological or cultural-linguistic turn (see Coole & Frost, 2010; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Kirby, 2017) and if it is critically oriented work then it is often also feminist work. For example, Rosi Braidotti (2019) theorizes the "posthuman condition" or "predicament" as the "convergence" of two main critical traditions: *posthumanism,* which she defines as a synthesis of a range of critiques of modern man (roughly, some feminist and Continental philosophy, civil rights and social movements) and *post-anthropocentrism,* which problematizes human exceptionalism (roughly, Indigenous philosophies, environmental and animal studies, the digital and environmental humanities).

This third major generational turn in critical social theory is interrelated with a general intensification of transdisciplinarity across the major dividing branches of the university, a turn to the natural and biological sciences, and various attempts to reimagine the humanities (see Braidotti, 2013). The specific focus of post-anthropocentric work is generally related to the author's disciplinary location, and to the other disciplinary locations to which they turn, though these are themselves rough distinctions. For example, Donna Haraway works across science studies and feminist cultural studies, Karen Barad quantum physics and queer theory, and Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (2018) among decolonial, indigenous and science studies. My degrees are all in social work and I first encountered aspects of this turn in the (post-) post-qualitative social science literature, where the discipline of education has a strong voice (for example, Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre). These days I hang out in cultural studies,

reading more about mushrooms (Tsing, 2012) than string theory, and these disciplinary locations (the humanities rather than physics or animal studies) are evident in the account I give here.

The philosophical canon is reweighted again with the post-anthropocentric turn. Marxian economics, the Freudian unconscious and the universalising accounts of Saussure's structural linguistics (among others), the biopolitics and subjectivities theorised through Foucault on power and discourse and Derrida on difference and deferral (among others), are reworked in the post-anthropocentric turn with Deleuze and Guattari's relational assemblage, Spinoza's affectus and Whitehead's process philosophy (among others). Puar's (2012) *I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess* and Braidotti's (2013) *Posthuman humanities* provide overviews of select debates among these three domains, and read together, they also helpfully illustrate some of the differences in inflection between American and European scholarship. The introduction to Cool and Frost's (2010) *New materialisms* gives an overview of the analytic implications of moving from a Newtonian ontology to that of quantum physics, and the collection as a whole maps how this turn is "new" through conversation with the "old." In social work, Nigel Parton's (2008) *Changes in the form of knowledge in social work* rethinks Philp (1979) to track the broader shift from humanism (the social, the universal) to something more post-anthropocentric (the informational, the technocultural). Table 1 includes further signposting for these three big conceptual buckets, and in the section that follows I turn to the enduring problem of humanist hierarchies.

Table 1: A Map that is Not the Territory		
	Modernity **Humanism**	**Postmodernity** **Anti-humanism**	**The Anthropocene** **Post-anthropocentrism**
When, where, what	• Colonisation, industrialisation, science, technology, emergence of professions and social sciences	• Post-WWII, decolonisation, globalisation, the Cold War (among others), social movements, welfare states • Theory wars, science wars	• Global warming, now but not new • Politically, perhaps from the end of the Cold War or 9/11
Emphasis	• Positivist science, truth, knowledge, facts, method, experience • Discovery, mastery • Universal laws • The lab, the field • Ordering, planning, managing, administering • Ideology critique	• Epistemology, discourse, language, subjectivity • Turn to cultural analysis and texts • Location, perspective • Power-knowledge • Discipline, training, habit • Différance • Deconstruction	• Ontology, matter, becoming • Posthumanism, new materialism and post-qualitative methods • Process, assemblage, networks, relational ontology, hybridity, porosity, globality, pluriverse • Creativity, vitality, intensity • Complexity, mess, excess • The uncanny, speculation
The problem	• The pre-modern savage of colonial imaginations • Immaturity, lack of courage (Kant) • God given hierarchies • Ignorance of structural factors shaping everyday experience (Marx) • Knowledge work that does not clearly translate into real world action and social change	• The postmodern condition (Lyotard) • Failed progress narratives, alternatives to capitalism • Hierarchies of rationality, self/other dualisms • The 'banality of evil' (Arendt) • The 'crisis of representation' (Marcus & Fischer, 1986) • Loss of critical distance between self and world from which	• The posthuman condition (Braidotti) • Human exceptionalism, speciesism • Global warming • Science and technology • The limits and dangers of abstract, universalising Western philosophy • Denial of the entangled constitution of knowledges, ways of life, and the more-than-human world

		to ground awareness and action (Jameson, 1991)	• Critique that does not also dwell with possibility
Generations of critical social theory	• Bacon, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche… • 1st gen Frankfurt School with Horkheimer and then Adorno • Emancipatory projects and social movements (labour, anti-slavery, women, peace, ongoing civil wars)	• 2nd gen Frankfurt School with Habermas and 3rd gen with Honneth • Poststructuralism and postcolonialism • Cross-disciplinary appropriation of theory and methods (Clifford Geertz's "blurred genres," the cultural turn) • Social movements, student uprisings, identity knowledges shaped through state law	• Expansion of the geopolitical locations from which theory is authored (see Keucheyan, 2014) • Indigenous and decolonial traditions gaining more traction (for example, Eve Tuck; Kim Tallbear) • Multiple humanisms (for example, Chuh, 2019), a decolonial pluriverse (see de la Cadena & Blaser, 2018; Reiter, 2018) • Remixing theory across disciplinary divides and generations
Progress	• New scientific knowledge and technological innovation will advance civilisation • Ideology critique, consciousness raising	• Incremental inclusion, rights, participatory parity (Nancy Fraser) • Social critique and deconstruction (contra scientific knowledge) towards limited freedom within liberal governmentalities	• Reconnection of things falsely divided in modernity • Modest forms of survival • Affirmative, speculative, creative, care-full, reparative
The human	• Most advanced life form • Essential, autonomous, rational, mature, singular • Developmental, perfectible	• Historical, socially constructed • Cultural, performative, reflexive • Disciplined, habitual • Fragmented, divided, multiple, changeable	• One of many entities that matter • Porous, contagious, symbiotic, parasitic, dependent, conditional • Assembled, hybrid, cyborg, relational, affected and affecting

Humanist Hierarchies

If social work engages more deeply with the post-anthropocentric turn it will be because the environmental crisis radically undermines what has previously been taken as given by modern, nation-based social work (see Wallace-Wells, 2017). The scope of the now more widely perceived crisis is such that there is renewed hope that particular sedimented relations will shift; for example, that states will work together to reduce carbon emissions in spite of the cost to markets, economies and some ways of life. Or, that the threat of human extinction might finally foster a species "us" over the conflicting units of allegiance and analysis captured by the rubrics of states and peoples, races and identities. This hope, that "we" will, finally, all be on the same side requires careful engagement because of the ways in which it can fold together with a desire to be somehow post-racial or beyond the marked identities that structure the politics and labour of social work.

There is an enduring friction between what can be very roughly classified as general critical social theory and those critical traditions developed through experiences of group-based stratification and violence. By general, I mean work with concepts that are thought of as comparatively widely shared. By group-based stratification, I mean work focused on the relation between a particular sub-group and something larger or more powerful. For example, sociology in contrast to women's studies, poststructuralism in contrast to postcolonialism, and Foucault's subjectivity in contrast to Fanon and Wynter's ontogeny-sociogeny (for the latter, see McKittrick, 2015). Some post-anthropocentric work is in a similarly general/particular relationship with Indigenous scholarship (Rosiek,

Snyder, & Pratt, 2019) and with genre-defying scholars like Sylvia Wynter (see

McKittrick, 2015). This relation plays out in citational politics, rhetorical gestures

towards a radical break with past ideas, the valorisation of particular knowledges as the

route back to progress or salvation, and in which ideas are subsumed within other ideas

(that is, the general umbrella term under which specific traditions are located). The

present chapter is no exception. In social work this general/particular relationship shows

up in the reshuffling of terms like progressive, critical and radical social work; structural,

feminist, anti-racist and anti-oppression social work; postmodern and social

constructionist social work; and, Indigenous, decolonial, decolonising and environmental

social work. These general/particular relations are structured by the intensely hierarchical

and competitive university, the institutionalisation of the canon disrupting extra-

disciplinary studies, and by the inter- and trans-generational relations of more and less

established knowledges and social movements in specific state and institutional contexts

(for example, see Wynter, 2006). These reshufflings are often taught in social work as

things to be affirmed or disavowed (sides to be picked, dichotomies of good/bad,

true/false) rather than as broader, shared and situated sensibilities into which we are

socialized and socialize others (Wilson, 2017).

In Canada, many social work faculty who retired over the past decade came of age

in the 1970s, and were raised on ideas of "progress" achieved through nation-based party

politics, policy change, consciousness rising groups, and student and labour organising. I

came of age around the turn of the last century and was raised on an understanding of

"social justice" as accountability to entangled histories of stratified violence. I began paid

work amidst the mainstreaming of grassroots community organisations, the rise of expert research and advocacy (the evidence-based turn) over popular democratic process (Laforest & Orsini, 2005), and the "left legalism" of access and equity work (Brown & Halley, 2002). The environmental crisis is reorienting these kinds of broad generational sensibilities towards a more future-oriented intergenerational ethics concerned with global species survival (but see Catney & Doyle, 2011). These broad shifts in scale and sensibility are in turn reshaping the social question and humanist hierarchies that social work organises, and is in turn organised by. In Table 2 I suggest one way of conceptualising these broader shifts in the social question over the lifecourse of the discipline and profession. I then turn in the final section to select anchors that are helping me begin to find my way into something akin to post-anthropocentric social work.

Table 2: Social Work and the Social Question		
Modernity **Humanism**	**Postmodernity** **Anti-humanism**	**The Anthropocene** **Post-anthropocentrism**
Building society: how might we live together? • Surplus populations (in Europe), and social distance and public health (in urban life) as social problems • Research, outreach and infrastructures to turn strangers into neighbors and	Maintaining society: how can we improve how we live together? • Democracy, participation, community, human and civil rights, development, access, inclusion, choice, reflexivity, equality, diversity, equity, difference, Nancy Fraser's redistribution, recognition and representation, Spivak's	Staying with the trouble" [4]how will we live and die amidst the unpredictable catastrophes of a warming planet and the radical upheavals of entangled economies and wars? • What will count as access, inclusion, equity in a time of necessary scaling back? In relation to massive displaced populations?

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[4] See Donna Haraway's book of the same name.

communities, coloniser-migrants into a nation, and children into healthy and productive adults	strategic essentialism, anti-normativity, sovereignty • Adding to and correcting the historical record • Deconstructing what counts as truth, identity • Strategies and effects of left legalism	• Is it possible to rework human rights and codes of ethics in light of post-anthropocentric critiques? • Can we re-theorize the social in post-anthropocentric terms? • How might we intervene in ongoing crises that chip away at established ways of life with no hope of a return to "normal"? • In what ways will predictable and unpredictable disasters destabilize the perceived subject in need of social work intervention? • What onto-ethico-epistemological work is needed if social work is to participate in the radical cultural change work ahead?

Happily Ever After is Often a Modern Story

The novelist Amitov Ghosh (2016) speculates that the future will name our present the "Great Derangement" because of our inability to comprehend the times in which we are living. This inability is, he argues, a failure of imagination and culture, and he traces the origins of this failure through colonial history and popular narrative forms. Bourgeois stability and the bite-sized problem solving of colonial builders and the social

sciences have all fostered trust in incremental rather than catastrophic change, in statistical probability over the uncanny (see also Mitchell, 2009). Anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli (2016) similarly observes that established questions of sovereignty and biopolitics, of life and death, are all increasingly proceeded by the qualifier "*insofar as*"—insofar as this part of the earth continues to support that way of life. These small words, *insofar as*, are a radical disruption to the established questions, scales and units of analysis that structure social work's disciplinary imaginations and knowledge work. The post-anthropocentric turn thus marks a shift in perceptions of the possible, and in so doing raises a new generational problematic: how do we begin to imagine that which is not yet imaginable?

A common theme in this latest turn in critical social theory is a call for greater complexity in contrast to certain methodologically structured simplifications. It is also associated with a distinction between positive and negative science, where positive science discovers and builds and negative science deconstructs how such discoveries and constructs are made. Both of these distinctions are part of ongoing conversations in the history and philosophy of science (see Manicas, 1987, Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Winch, 1990). "There is complexity if things relate but don't add up, if events occur but not within the process of linear time, and if phenomena share a space but cannot be mapped in terms of a single set of three-dimensional coordinates" (Mol & Law, 2002, p. 1). Stated otherwise, complexity is all the stuff that mucks up attempts to understand and represent the world. Foucault used the term "dividing practices," Latour "purification," and McCarthy (2006) "the politics of scale" to express the scholarly expectation that we

convert process and mess into a more fixed, manageable and therefore representable and administrable account of the world (see also Law, 2004).

This administrable knowledge is modern knowledge, and it is predicated on particular kinds of certainty and belief that are radically undermined by both the environmental crisis and practices and effects of technoscience (Mitchell, 2009). The middle range theories and problem→intervention→outcome structure common in social work are this kind of administrable knowledge work. Work with discrete units of analysis that is able to produce concrete recommendations for policy, research, education and practice that also works through these same units. The disciplinary and area divisions of the modern university similarly break up entangled histories and knowledges into general/particular relations and domains of expertise that elide constitutive complexity and facilitate avoidance among conflicting knowledges (Chuh, 2014). One way to begin to imagine our way towards the unimaginable would therefore be to engage more closely with causal and complexity theories in the broader history and philosophy of social science, and perhaps even develop an understanding of non-administrable social work knowledge.

A second way into the not yet imaginable: Poststructuralism challenges universalizing knowledge claims and argues instead for a politics of situated knowledges. With the post-anthropocentric turn, poststructural theories of subjectivity (the knowing subject) and agency (freedom) are extended into an even more fundamentally destabilizing reconceptualization of theories of the human, and thus of agency and change in more than human worlds (see Braidotti, 2019, among others). This scholarship is

daunting for a few reasons—complexity, vocabulary, unfamiliar philosophical traditions—but may achieve wider appeal if initially approached as promising recourse for retheorizing the notoriously constrained agency of practicing social workers. There is also a related body of work on infrastructures that could provide a comparatively accessible bridge into some of the ways in which the material world pushes back (see Berlant, 2016; Bowker & Star, 1999; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2016).

A last way into the trouble with humanism for social work, and into beginning to imagine that which is not yet imaginable: theories of change in the human sciences are built from figure/ground dichotomies in which an object of interest is conceptualized as somehow distinct—divided, purified, abstracted out—from everything else. This includes longstanding and often circular debates about structure/agency, nature/culture, theory/action, ontology/epistemology, facts/values, and description/interpretation. Here, I have found science studies particularly helpful because the field explores this kind of figure/ground relationship as a means to theorize the ways in which the methods we use create our objects of study as objects. This said, one aspect of the post-anthropocentric turn that is likely to be challenging for social work in liberal humanist welfare states is that in addition to affording much greater attention to the more-than-human world, it also includes either a move away from, or a more complex engagement with, modern and postmodern understandings of identity. American queer theorist and literary scholar Heather Love (2017) has contributed a particularly helpful triangulation among Bruno Latour (general science studies), Donna Haraway (feminist science studies) and Gayatri Spivak (postcolonial deconstruction) that maps some of the logic and stakes of these

ongoing figure/ground, particular/general distinctions that is likely to be helpful to social work, given how much of our work structures and is structured by identity and sub-population divisions.

In the university, engagement with philosophical debates about the units of analysis and theories of change of the social sciences often shakes out in strategic compromises between getting things *right*, which is often a high-stakes question of intelligibility within an established system of knowledge, and getting at things that *matter*, as a more speculative, perhaps less systematic or generalizable, and likely less common or intelligible, kind of work in which the stakes can be just as high. Both forms of struggle require greater *care* (for these distinctions, see Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The post-anthropocentric turn is an impossibly prolific ongoing conversation. The account I have glossed over here is both highly simplified and easily debated. I risk it anyway because I know that in my context we are not typically trained to scale-shift among specific investments and work (figure) and this kind of larger entangled universe (ground). The present chapter could perhaps be used to structure a graduate level seminar. If social work is to change, however—and it matters that we change—we will need to engage more closely with these sorts of shifts in contemporary critical social theory, and with the fundamental challenge "*insofar as*" poses to the established objects, methods, and units of analysis of our modern humanist project.

On Always Being in the Middle of Multiple Ways of Life

It takes about 20 years to introduce something new to social work into the discipline (Coates & Gray, 2018). It takes me a good five years to develop enough of a

sense of something to attempt to express it in writing, and then of course there is the process of peer review and questions of intelligibility and discipline. That's 25 years—a generation—and it is a longer relational duration than the short-term intervention-time that more often structures our disciplinary imaginations. My aim in this chapter has therefore been to contribute to the conditions of intelligibility required for more of us to engage with this latest generational turn in critical social theory. I have provided a keyword and citational signposting of some of the ways this turn hooks into other turns and contexts, and breadcrumbed a few ways into these sprawling transdisciplinary debates. This mapping is anchored to the social question and humanist hierarchies that social work organises and is in turn organised by, and to the ways in which the more-than-human-world pushes at us to reweight how we understand these anchors. The shift from linear human causality and progressive problem solving to constitutive complexity and an unpredictable relation with more-than-human worlds has radical consequences for our loosely shared modern project, and as such, requires far greater care and collective attention.

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CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

"Intuition is where affect meets history, in all of its chaos, normative ideology,
and embodied practices of discipline and invention."
-- Berlant, 2011, p. 52

Introduction

Walter Benjamin's (1955/1968) poetic suggestion was that every generation is given a "*weak* Messianic power" (p. 254, emphasis original), the hint of having redeemed something of that which came before, and the chance to possibly redeem, or see redeemed, a bit more over our respective lifetimes. We can only ever know history through this redemptive lens, yet this lens is founded on the destruction hidden behind modern narratives of social progress. Benjamin's argument was that if we attend to the oppressed of history, we would see that our time is not in fact in crisis, but instead that what some of us perceive as crisis is for others how it has always been. His conclusion was that we should be suspicious of cultural accomplishments because they mask "barbarism" (p. 256). Instead, we might "…brush history against the grain" (p. 257).

I initially approached this dissertation as a question of the history of critical Anglophone traditions of academic social work in Canada—as a question of what happened—because I could not successfully raise questions of discipline, canonization and change in the intensely individualizing spaces of the university in which "aboutness" is regularly defined through progress/problem dualisms like anti/oppression. History had *already* been "brushed" and the findings converted into justice best-practices, into intelligible question/answer pairs and expected professional performances.

The two main options on offer, affirmative professionalism and negative criticism, have been around for a while, and have, as I argue in Chapter five (Stories), reached a level of genre saturation in terms of their ability to mediate and renew knowledge (Sisken & Warner, 2010). I perceive a need for an alternative genre, a different way of engaging with and renewing knowledge in academic social work, and I have tried to imagine, evoke and invite some of what an alternative could look like through my work in this dissertation. My strategy has been a feminist cultural studies one of focusing on the conditions of existence and possibility of critical academic social work *these days*—that is, on what is going on, on how things seem to be working out over time, and on the more and the less common or intelligible in our loosely shared project—and to consider what these shifts suggest about further work that needs doing. Brushing history against the grain, and also, imagining and inviting possible situated standpoints built from the actual existing places in which we are (more and less) employed.

Two speculative questions have guided this work: What is critical academic social work in Canada about, and how is this "aboutness," this disciplined perception of what matters (Chuh, 2014), changing over time? And, how might we theorize the reproduction and renewal of justice cultures in and through social work after the fall of so many left and liberal progress narratives? Evoking my own generational standpoint of inquiry, I have elaborated a number of ways into these questions, and I have also developed a writing practice that tells social work stories a little bit differently. I hope both style and contents will invite others into the ongoing and embodied work of creating and renewing

knowledge, that is, of *building* situated standpoints organized around loosely shared matters of concern.

1. What is Critical Academic Social Work About and How is this Aboutness Changing?

One challenge I faced as a doctoral candidate trying to understand social work as a discipline was that I did not have an established referent to grapple with. A critical/mainstream dichotomy, along with the ubiquitous language of justice, made it difficult to raise questions of discipline and change as phenomena requiring collective attention across domains of scholarship, education and practice. My recourse has been to evoke my own generational standpoint of inquiry and to then put this standpoint into conversation with other perceived standpoints. The exploratory survey reported on in Chapter three was a means to collaboratively and anonymously establish a referent with which to make questions of discipline and canonization more intelligible and, hopefully also, a little less individualizing. As I outline in that chapter, there are both textbook stabilities and proliferating shifts among perceptions of what critical academic social work in Anglo Canada is or should be about, and both help to illustrate the embodied, generational nature of perceived problems and ways into the world.

In Chapter four (Repair), I apply learning from ongoing conversations about discipline, objects, and methods in women's and gender studies to argue for a reparative historical practice of collective disciplinary reflexivity within critical academic social work. In Chapter five (Stories), I draw on the history and philosophy of science to propose we engage more directly with the multiple temporalities of social work and with

the notorious instability of disciplinary objects. In Chapter six (Trouble) I propose my own simplified generational synthesis of what is going on in world and social theory, and I raise questions about, and nominate a few possible ways into, these perceived generational problematics. My central claim across the chapters is that the "post-cultural" turn underway in critical social theory, combined with the more widely perceived global environmental crisis (and also relatedly, the current global health crisis), are radical disruptions to a modern humanist desire to order and organize life into relatively predictable paths and trustworthy patterns of progress or improvement. We need to engage with more complex theories of change, beyond the middle-range theories so popular in our pragmatic, problem-solving professional discipline. This is a situated problem in a particular history of (elite) knowledge work and knowledge renewal more so than an abstract or general problem in philosophy or epistemology (Sisken & Warner, 2010).

2. The Inter- and Trans-Generational Work of Theorizing Justice After Progress, of Imagining Care and Education in "Post-Professional" and Other-Than-Modern Times

In Chapter three (Survey), I draw attention to shifts in social theory evident in social work scholarship in Canada, and I emphasize dynamics in the university—promotional culture and intense individualism, in particular—as problems for the collaborative inter- and trans-generational work of disciplinary reflexivity. I also suggest critical academic social work in Anglo Canada is due for a another major round of integrative philosophical work (a point taken up and extended further in Chapter six), and

I make a plea for greater speculative, imaginative work on what changes in perceptions of the desirable and the possible could mean for the discipline.

In Chapter four (Repair), I argue we have not yet fully admitted the fall of progress narratives into the discipline, and I propose a reparative historical practice within the discipline as a means to more carefully engage with the embodied nature of knowledge and with changing perceptions of the desirable and the possible. Relational knowledge, combined with an historical sensibility towards perceptions of the possible and the desirable, is in many respects a more promising kind of knowledge in a world that regularly declines modern ordering and managing practices like those common to the professions – both caring and educating.

In Chapter five (Stories), I speak with what Y. Rachel Zhou calls my "cultural capital in the field," that is, my years in low status front-line community work with poor folks, my interest in philosophy and disciplinary divides, and my current generational status as a doctoral student learning about university, discipline and change, and I tell a different kind of story about social work, one intended to help incoming generations locate ourselves and our investments within a larger discipline and a broader history. I warn in particular against heroic stories of exceptionalism and petition further for a less individualizing and less moralizing discourse on, and a more curious and speculative approach to, the multiple temporalities of social work in a world that far, far exceeds modern professional claims of expertise and goodness.

In Chapter six (Trouble), I map a rough generational schema of modern, postmodern, and post-anthropocentric shifts in perceptions of the possible and the

desirable from the situated generational location of professional critical academic social

work in settler Canada these days, and I think this together with the social question that

anchors social work. I found the work of organizing and speculating and writing the

chapter quite helpful to my own thinking, and I hope it is also helpful to others figuring

out their own way into the discipline and the work they hope to do through it. The

scholarly side of the shared academic-professional project has a lot more work to do to

grapple with and problematize the current conjuncture for the discipline as a whole.

Again, this is not about consensus, but about creating and assembling resources and

referents with which to imagine, and with which to participate in building loosely shared

and situated standpoints. I am hopeful that people in academic social work will be

annoyed with the Trouble chapter—things missed, mis-represented, mis-weighted—and

write in response to it. This would be a conversation I would be glad to elaborate.

Contributions of the Dissertation

This dissertation makes a number of contributions to academic social work in the

Canadian context, and to the broader discipline that thinks with critical social theories.

My work responds to and intervenes in the disciplinary division of knowledge labour

within the university, in the changing nature of the university as both employer and

educator, and in what can be roughly classified as modern and postmodern generational

standpoints on the objects and methods and practices that contour what social work is and

is not perceived to be about. My central claim is that changing geopolitics and shifts

underway from the "cultural" to the "post-cultural," much like the variegated

reorientations from the "modern" to the "post-modern" that came before it, radically

destabilize many of the founding premises of what can be glossed as "first generation" modern, nation based, humanistic social work, but also, aspects of "second generation" postmodern or critical social work imaginaries too. In short, I am asking the discipline to shift the scale at which we typically imagine social work, to provincialize or situate our own locations and investments, and to reorient on social work as a world making project that exceeds us all.

Drawing on sprawling transdisciplinary debates about knowledge and geopolitics, however, I also make the claim that this problem is a problem of the "renewal" of knowledge (Sisken & Warner, 2010) rather than a problem of truth or progress. That is, the problem is a specific historical convergence and "saturation" (Sisken & Warner, 2010) in critical academic social work in the Canadian context, rather than a more general problem of philosophy and epistemology that can be overcome if only we could find ourselves "another French Messiah" (Hayot, 2013) (though arguably Deleuze is filling this role these days. I find him good to think with, too). In cultural studies terms, the problem is a "situated" and "concrete" problem rather than a universal or abstract one (McCarthy, 2006). Brushing against the grain of *recent* history—including theoretically affiliated stories of progress, loss and return in the justice-emphatic academy (Hemmings, 2015)—thus draws attention to the ways in which our sites of employment, and our embodied conditions of existence and possibility within them, affect the relationships and knowledge work that produce and reproduce the discipline from one generation to the next.

The significance of this work is conceptual, relational and addressed to the discipline: what are the conditions of existence and possibility of critical academic social work in Canada these days, and what knowledge work and practice might we therefore want to engage in in an effort to be accountable to these conditions? My aim has not been to present a "representative" account of critical academic social work, but to learn and story and ask questions that might capture disciplinary imaginations enough to evoke a situated standpoint, an "us," open to considering the historical problem of the saturation and renewal of knowledge, and of where we might go from here.

One generation's thoughtful intervention can be expected to contribute to unintended effects for another generation. For example, the ways in which community-based research—a generational intervention into questions of voice and representation in academic research—has over time contributed to new problems (Janes, 2016). While I have no particular quarrel with pragmatic or strategic interventions like community-based research, problems arise when we treat our interventions as adequate or durable responses whose effects do not become differently inflected over time. Here, I find the high-level gloss "settler-native-slave" (Tuck & Yang, 2012) helpful because it points towards an obvious justice problem while also suggesting vast, historically embedded relations that necessarily exceed adequate representation or once-and-for-all understanding and problem-solving. Settler-native-slave is enduring relationship, it is also a dynamic and situated one, and more care needs to be taken with how things work out in actual existing times and places (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Similar arguments can be made about the "respectable/deviant" relationships that social work mediates. Again, this is less a

problem of universal philosophy and more a problem of a particular historical conjuncture due for greater theorizing in support of the renewal of knowledge and imagination.

Methodologically, the reparative historical practice I have elaborate through a slightly different genre or style of writing is a feminist one. It is also roughly within the (generational) post- post- post- turn towards *showing* what one combines and assembles, showing how one thinks and imagines and learns from the world. I have found this reparative practice helpful for side-stepping habitual ordering units and associated assumed directional effects: clients, workers, students, teachers, education, learning, practice, research. I have, moreover, argued for greater care for the unfolding effects of these kinds of simplifications in the context of shifting geopolitics and the more widely perceived environmental crisis. Now, writing this conclusion in the second month of an officially declared global pandemic and associated national shutdown, the fragility of this ordering of people and activity appear even more stark. If the anticipated global economic crash is in fact worse than the (Western) Great Depression, these units, and the claims making that depend upon them, are likely to be even more radically undermined. Historically modern social work in other-than-modern times will need to develop alternative ways of imagining and ordering the world.

Here, I find María Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) work promising for ordering (yes, ordering) impossibly entangled histories and unfolding events and sensibilities. Puig de la Bellacasa takes the Latourian (2004) generational gloss of a perceived need to shift from modern "matters of fact" to a flattened – symmetrical or equal – postmodern(-ish) "matters of concern," and she extends these arguments into a third generational anchor of

more ambiguous, implicated, and situated side-taking form of critical equity work she terms "matters of care." This is a side-taking that dwells with the question of "what caring knowledge politics could mean in more than human worlds" (p. 18), one that extends Joan Tronto's work on a feminist ethics of care (care as "ethics-work-affect" p.13) to amplify attention to "caring knowledge politics" (p. 18), that is, to "the material effects of our thought" (p. 17). Attention to caring knowledge politics asks us to consider the implications, rather than the linear causes, of the ways in which we imagine the world. This is, I think, a particularly promising way into the ongoing relational work of building loosely shared situated disciplinary standpoints in justice-desiring academic social work.

Pedagogically, my work has clearest implications for graduate level curriculum. Given the masters level in social work is a professional degree rather than a disciplinary one, however, these implications most clearly apply to the doctoral level. This of course raises all sorts of questions about what those tasked with reproducing the discipline from one generation to the next think a discipline is, what a professional job is, and, what the outcomes of doctoral education can or should be. In terms used in women's and gender studies, what do we imagine when we imagine "passing on" (Braithwaite, Heald, Luhmann, & Rosenberg, 2004) a critical or justice-emphatic social work project through the disciplinary structures of the university? More generally, does the fact that our masters level is a professional rather than disciplinary degree mean we might adapt our doctoral level to foster greater engagement with the inter- and intra-generational dynamics of disciplines and perceptions of the possible and the desirable? I would argue that this is indeed warranted.

Recent international social work literature supports my claim that there are in fact loose generational structures to be found in departmental imaginaries. For example, in recent years some scholars have managed to engage differently established debates about the science of social work in the American academy (Brekke & Anastas, 2019; Kemp & Samuels, 2019), and have made arguments that the discipline must change what it thinks it is about to include greater consideration for the environment (Coates & Gray, 2012; Kemp & Palinkas, 2015). There are also calls for doctoral education to include more nuanced engagement with history and philosophy of social science (Kemp, 2019), and a perceived need to directly train students to negotiate the changing university, as well as participate in trans-disciplinary and trans-national research collaborations (Kemp, 2019; Nurius, Kemp, Köngeter, & Gehlert, 2017; Moor, Martinson, Nurius, & Kemp, 2017). Of note, a number of these recent interventions were only made possible through intentional collaboration over a sustained period of time in specific national contexts (Cnaan, 2017).

Social work has existed as an academic unit for a little over 100 years in the Canadian context. Doctoral level education began in the 1950s, and the number of programs available has doubled since the turn of the last century because of an influx of federal government funding for graduate level education (Rothwell, Lach, Blumenthal, & Akesson, 2015). Of course, this influx of funding is a geopolitical move in a perceived competition among major global powers, and this funding is also a condition of existence for folks of my academic generation. Early social work education was closely aligned with, and indeed regulated by, the American education association, with the Canadian social work education association and scholarly journal both emerging in the 1970s

(Jennissen & Lundy, 2011, p. 219). Many of these changes are all still within living memory.

In turn, little published work on social work doctoral education in Canada exists. In 2015, Rothwell, Lach, Blumenthal and Akesson were able to identify only three pre-existing studies (the last published in 2003), and have since, in different authorial combinations, contributed a few empirical reflections. Comparison of doctoral theses between countries suggest the methods and paradigm options available and encouraged are heavily influenced by university and supervising faculty (Braganza, Akesson , & Rothwell, 2017). In a review of Canadian doctoral theses published between 2001 and 2011 (Rothewell, Lach, Blumenthal & Akesson, 2015), a period that follows the (variegated) evidence-based practice turn in social work, the authors found the majority of work to be qualitative, involved the generation of new data, and employed general thematic forms of analysis rather than more specifically named methods. Quantitative and intervention research were less common, and only three dissertations over the 10 years examined focused on the topic of research methods.

Closer examination of a smaller sub-set of dissertations making use of grounded theory found a (perceived) troubling lack of distinction among concepts of theory generation, interpretation, exploration and so on, leading the authors to raise provocative questions about whether theory generation should in fact be a goal of doctoral dissertations in social work, and if so, what this theory generation might in fact entail (Akesson, Braganza, & Root, 2018, p. 210). In turn, the particular inflection of grounded theory—the qualitative method that received most attention across the dissertations—was

judged to be an epistemological concern of constructivist versus positivist epistemology, and the recommendation was therefore that "doctoral faculty engage students in dialogue about the variety of epistemological options and debates that inform the profession" (Braganza, Akesson , & Rothwell, 2017, p. 544). The studies also note pragmatic concerns regarding the coverage possible in general research methods courses, and the available expertise of faculty and committees. Given that doctoral students are the "future 'stewards of the discipline'" (Rothwell, Lach, Blumenthal & Akesson, 2015, p. 48), the authors advocate for much greater collective attention to doctoral education in Canada.

This is important work. It is also an example of "second generation" irritation between perceived dichotomous "paradigms" of "critical" and "scientific" methods, which in turn maps back in the Canadian context onto a broader geopolitical history of engagement with British (cultural studies, as noted in Chapter three) and American (positivist science) social imaginaries. The pivotal question of what theory is and what other aspects of knowledge work are, and how we should therefore think and practice, are still, I suspect, more likely to find sides than reconsideration or renewal.

Religious and secular humanism, positivist and empirical science, critique, these are all ways into things, and they have all had effects in the world. The modern question, the professional question, the question that emphasizes "right/wrong" distinctions is not, I submit, the question that most needs to be asked in critical academic social work these days. More generally, I know my own problem in doctoral studies was less limited training in research methods or understanding of epistemology and more general ignorance of what is going on in university and discipline, and in history and philosophy.

One of the central questions of doctoral education is, I would think, the question of what kinds of knowledge work the discipline needs these days and, in the days to come. This is not and should not be treated as first and foremost a question of methods. Nor should it be treated as a question of sub-population focused interventions or outcomes. There needs to be room for speculative imagining and dialogue towards building situated standpoints that share a loose project called social work in a particular time and place. Pragmatically, the inclusion of a relatively thorough course on the history and philosophy of social science at the doctoral level could ameliorate aspects of this concern, if it outlined geopolitical histories and debates and philosophical logics that underpin recognized research methods. In so doing, it could better prepare doctoral students to engage questions of discipline and knowledge and theories of change writ large, before focusing in on their specific projects.

I do think there needs to be more future work attentive to questions of discipline and change, and the intergenerational relations and ethics of reproducing the project of social work from one generation to the next. For example, tracing established knowledge and ways of thinking about things through an examination of course syllabi and undergraduate textbooks, and then engaging broader history and philosophy of science and interdisciplinary shifts in critical social theories to reconsider, re-inflect and renew this knowledge. There is a lot more going on than a difference between positivist and interpretive approaches to research. At the same time, as I have found through the work of this dissertation, figuring out how to *show* this difference requires a fair amount of background bridging work for it to become more widely intelligible. Similar topic-focused work might therefore also trace particular areas – say, theories of the human,

consideration for the environment, ideas about justice – in the history and philosophy of social work. The work on disciplinary threshold concepts in education that I point to in Chapter three also holds promise for collaborative and imaginative work of building shared standpoints.

In turn, there is much more work to be done to expand disciplinary understandings of and approaches to non-coherence and disagreement. Asking a given piece of work to apply across domains of research, education, and areas of practice is often asking too much. This is perhaps especially so in applied disciplines where so much of what we say and do is a strategic compromise aimed at getting something done in particular circumstances, rather than what we actually think or understand about the world. More thoroughgoing engagement with non-coherence might also help us consider ways in which we might show up for each other, even if there are aspects of our investments that are incommensurable with each other (e.g., state social work and Indigenous sovereignty). Mapping out some of these conflicts directly, perhaps extending some of the figure/groundwork in Chapter six (Trouble), might also help us look at disagreement in potentially less circular or conclusive terms.

Finally, as I nod towards in Chapter six (Trouble) there is promisingly generative work that could be undertaken to cross a Science Technology and Society Studies (STS) consideration of modern distinctions between science-reason/technology-tools (the classic thinking/doing dichotomy) with the notorious limits of social work practice, and perhaps contribute a generational follow-up to the imaginative work tracked in Philp (1978) and Parton (2008) on the forms of knowledge in social work. This work could be extended

even further through additional consideration of nature as much more than the background to human action in other-than-modern times.

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In and amongst histories of major events in the development of welfare states and heroic figures in the development of social work, amongst additive histories and corrective histories, claims of expertise and of moral goodness, perceived social problems and recognized ways of discovering more about them, there are also questions of imagination and desire, and of the relational work both of building shared standpoints and of provincializing ourselves within a broader understanding of geopolitics and world. This relational and imaginative work is, I contend, also what social work is about.

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