Educating for the Anthropocene (Seminar)

Schooling and activism in the face of slow violence

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Education has never played as critical a role in determining humanity's future as it does in the Anthropocene, an era marked by humankind's unprecedented control over the natural environment. Drawing on a multisited ethnographic project among schools and activist groups in India and South Africa, Peter Sutoris (York) explores education practices in the context of impoverished, marginal communities where environmental crises intersect with colonial and racist histories and unsustainable practices. He exposes the depoliticizing effects of schooling and examines cross-generational knowledge transfer within and beyond formal education. Finally, he calls for the bridging of schooling and environmental activism, to find answers to the global environmental crisis.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJaITidF7og

Good evening everybody. It's my great pleasure to welcome Peter Sutoris, who is, an, an, anthropologist, environmental anthropologist for himself at, York University affiliated York University. And, he is going to be, he's author of, educating for the Anthrop Scene. I'm holding it the right way, Ryan. Yes. And, he's going to be telling us about, well, the field work and the ideas in that book.

So I'm gonna hand over straightaway to Peter.

Thank you so much for that introduction. So I am going to start with a video, which is a two minute animation. That's a summary of the book. So, if, after afterwards I manage to make you fall asleep, at least you will have gotten sort of the basic just of what the book is about.

So, I will expand on this, but, just, just to begin with, to give you, just to give you a summary, let me, let me show this to you.

We are living in the anthrop scene, but what does that mean? It means we are in an age of unspeakable violence against our planet.

66 million years ago, an aster rate collided with Earth.

It caused the extinction of the dinosaurs and started a new era, the Paleo.

Today humans have started another era, the anthrop scene. This time, we are the asteroid.

Our disregard for nature has unleashed an environmental multi crisis, a nightmare combination of linked emergence needs from climate change to mass extinction. My book, educating for the ENT Anthropo scene, asks how education might help us prepare for life in this era.

Answering this question led me to OC in India and Wentworth in South Africa.

Going to these places felt like slipping into a time machine, a glimpse of what the future might soon look like for the entire world.

The huge dams and smokestacks around me made it clear that the face of the earth is now the face of man.

But the young people in India and South Africa also showed me just how powerful environmental activism can be.

Listening to young people and activists in OC in Wentworth helped me see that the type of environmental destruction we must rethink education.

They told me that progress starts with grasping what's at stake.

This helps us care deeply about the future. Once we care, we can imagine something better. Holding this vision, we can communicate it to others. And when we come together in action, a better future can become a reality.

Education has the power to transform the ent anthrop scene, but instead of obsessing, overgrowing the economy, it must help young people grasp and confront the crises in our culture and politics that are behind the destruction of our planet.

We must recognize activists as educators and teachers as activists. This shift is critical.

The time to imagine a better future is now find out more by reading, educating for the ENT anthroposeen and I should mention that this link, this link down here takes you to an open access version of the book, so you don't have to buy it, it's freely available for anybody. so yeah, that's the link. M mit press dot m mit, m i t edu, forward slash educating anthroposeen. That gives you the open access version.

Okay. right, so that was the summary. Now I need to switch to the slides Here. Now we share slides, sorry, down here.

and this is, is that your top slide slide? So let's go up to the top. Whoops.

Right? Is that, that's, Is that, And just do it and I think you can just move that by moving down. Okay. I think important.

Yeah, that works. Right. Okay. So let me tell you more. Obviously that was, that was just the overview. But, to, to give you, to give you a better sense of where this research came from and, and how I arrived at those arguments. I'm gonna just walk you, I'm just gonna walk you through the, through the, through the research behind this. these are, these are just some of the kind of framing quotes and some of the ideas that I, that I use in the book. And, and hopefully they will, it'll become clearer how all of these ideas, relate to this idea of educating, for the anthroposeen. So we will be, we will be revisiting this. but first, if you, if you'll indulge me, I would actually like to start by saying a few words about my first book, because really the, the work in this, in this new project, is very much an extension of, of this book, which, came out 80 years ago now. And, which was on the surface looking at a very different topic. it was looking at, India in the 1950s and the 1960s, and trying to understand the, the kind of, imagination of the future and imagination of, of development and progress that the Indian independent government after becoming independent from, from Britain, was, was taken and it was doing that by looking at, documentary films. there was this organization that was created by the Indian government right after Independence, which basically had the job of informing the country of the kind of future that the government was trying to

build. it was essentially a kind of prop propaganda machine, which created something like 7,000 short films over 30 years, dubbed into 20 different languages, screened all over the country, compulsor, in, in cinemas. And I was interested in, in understanding what do these films tell us about how the sort of ruling elites, quote unquote, of the country we're imagining the future. and I'd like to play you just a couple of minutes of one of those films, just to give you a taste of what that, what that was about. So for that, I have to switch back this computer.

Okay. So this is called our industrial age.

India has been living in villages which were once more or less economic had, its, it's blacksmith, it's carpenter, it's scanner, and its oil press.

There were simple devices for crushing sugar cane and making good and the village hand loom produced the clock that was needed, but gradually as population increased, mixed it in, they gave an impetus to trade and commerce.

This turn led to a rise in the living standards of our people and the demand for the products of the industrial age also increased ever increasing needs of the people.

The production of golds on a mass scale was necessary. For instance, millions of yards of clock were needed at prices low enough for the average budget. Fans, radios and other things of daily use came within the reach of many, but this was not enough. Production had to be increased many forward, and therefore, our country launched the first five-year plan, committed to increase our agricultural and industrial wealth.

To achieve this irrigation of thousands of acres of land was the water would also help to turn the turbin more electric construction of dam in different parts of the country received special emphasis under the effort to utilize the tremendous water of our subcontinent industries like the fertilizer factory and Ry was set up to support and sustain the program of agricultural development.

Okay. You get the idea. so I'm gonna switch back.

Sorry. The laptop. Yeah.

Great. Okay. We'll back. Excellent. Okay. So why, why was I showing you that? Um, well, my argument based on looking at a few hundred of those films was that, what they, what they reflected was a kind of polarization where you've got a group of people that are basically deciding you that India is going to take, the path of the sort of western so-called developed countries.

It's going to emulate, kind of large scale infrastructural industrial progress, which was very much at odds with ideas of, say, Gandhi, who was not at all interested in emulating the Western development trajectory.

and these films then, then become a tool for, for these, elite to basically convince everybody else that this is the right way to go. the people who were making these films came from a fairly narrow demographic.

they tended to be, living in big cities.

They tended to be western educated men, sort of upper middle class, upper cast. So very particular demographic with a very particular set of ideas about the future and about what the future ought to become. telling everybody else this is, this is what the

future is, and you've got to participate. It's, it's the right, the moral thing to do, the ethical thing to do. Now, today, we don't have laws that require cinema owners to be showing government films, government propaganda films in cinemas, but we do have education systems that require everybody to go to school.

So this new book, educating for the Anthrop scene really is, is looking at the same dynamic that I was looking at sort of three more historical lens in, in the Indian case. and he, and he is looking at that in, in the present day and, and thinking about this, this theme of polarization.

Who are the people who are shaping the blueprint for the future? And in what ways does education then, kind of pass that blueprint onto others and, sort of push others to, to participate in implementing that, that blueprint.

So that's the kind of central, central question and, and sort of central, central theme. before I say anything more, I'd like to just, just address the title. so you might have come across the word, anthroposeen, I use it in, in this book in a, in a particular way. which is, which is not necessarily in the way that is used here. I mean, this is this is the geological timescale the different geological eras.

The ent anthrop scene is the latest era that has been proposed in, in geology. many of us would've learned in, in school science textbooks would've seen the Holocene as the current era, which was the era that started when the glaciers melted at the end of the last ice age.

The idea is that the ENT anthropo scene has now replaced the holo scene, right? The holo scene has ended. The ent anthropos scene has begun. and the characteristic, trait of the ent anthropos scene, ose human, is that, humans are the kind of primary moving force, behind environmental change. when you look at the kind of things that happened in, in the past when one era ended and another era began, they tended to be large scale planetary events.

Like that asteroids that fell 64 million years ago ended one era, started another. So we have become the asteroid. That's, that's one way of interpreting, the ent anthropos thesis or the anthropos argument. but I would also like to, to acknowledge that the ent anthropos scene is not an unproblematic concept, right? There are, there are problems with this, with this idea. And, um this is a quote I particularly like, that, that I think really gets at the kind of core, issue with this, with this concept, this explanation might be sufficient for polar bears or orangutans seeking to understand what species was disturbing their habitat, right? So what this is getting at is that, basically the ent anthropos scene, the idea of the ent anthropos lumps all people into a single category, a single box as if we are all equally responsible and also equally affected by this planetary condition, right? So, if you were an oran or polar bear, that that might be good enough humans that the hu the species humans is disturbing my habitat.

But if you are a social scientist and you're trying to make sense of this, you, you might need a concept that's maybe a little bit more nuanced. that's why there have been, lots of alternatives that have been put forward. There is the capitalist scene, which, focuses on capitalism. There is the Anglo scene, which focuses on the contribu-

tions of the English speaking world to climate change and other forms of environment in decay. There is the oli anthrop scene, which focuses on oligarchy. So there's any number of alternatives.

If you look at the literature, there literally are dozens by now. I have chosen to stick with this idea of the anthropo scene. and that's because that's not because I disagree with the criticism. I, I very much agree with it.

But I do think that when we are thinking about something like education, right, which is this sort of universal thing, for better or worse, that affects everybody, at least in Western societies, we expect everybody to go to school. it's, it's important to think about metaphors, concepts, ideas that help us, sort of articulate what the shared condition is, right? More kind of looking into the future, rather than thinking about the historical responsibility, which is not to say that the historical responsibility isn't important, it is crucially important, but when we are thinking about how we might modify education systems into the future, then I think a concept like the anthroposeen, which is more sort of forward looking, can be a helpful tool to help us imagine that and feel free to disagree with me, and hopefully by the end of today's talk, it'll become a bit clearer. You know, why, why that particular concept might be why I at least would, would argue why it is it is relevant. Okay? So what is this book about? I got this quote, which is a paragraph from the introduction, and it's the only quote I'm gonna read to you, I promise and it's quite a dense quote, and there's a lot going on in there. So I'm gonna, I'm gonna break it down and I'm gonna explain it all. Please, please bear with me.

This book then is an ethnographic exploration of schooling and activism in relationship to slow violence in the context of intergenerational legacies of colonialism, racism, and environmental degradation.

What is the relevance of such an exploration to the discussion of education's role in the anthrop? In this ethnography, we'll learn about the ways in which state run schooling seeks to depoliticize the environment, co-opting environmental and sustainability education efforts in service of post-colonial and neoliberal agendas.

These ethnographic accounts of schooling cast doubt on the idea that we can educate ourselves out of unsustainability.

So long as education means state sponsored social reproduction, they highlight a contradiction at the heart of global environmental and sustainability education policy. We are, as the British British saying, goes, putting the cat among the pigeons by trusting political regimes built on environmentally unsustainable ideologies to oversee and finance the effort to bring about sustainability through education.

Such political systems have no real incentive to encourage young people to question the regime's fundamental values, such as infinite growth.

This volume takes us into activist communities where such values are challenged illustrating the ways learning for environmental justice and sustainability occurs outside formal education systems, right? So first of all, I'm talking about slow violence.

Slow violence is the, title of a book, published by the Environmental Humanities Scholar, Rob Nixon. which I would highly recommend to anyone interested in this. his argument is that, the, the kind of environmental destruction that we are, we are witnessing tends to unfold very slowly, almost I imperceptively slowly. So it's very difficult for us to, to grasp it with our senses. something like climate change, right? You don't, you don't necessarily see climate change unfolding in, in real time until you reach a kind of tipping point when it does become very sort of viscerally, something that you feel, in a, in a very visceral way. And that makes, slow violence particularly difficult for educators. How do you, how do you educate somebody about something that they cannot, perceive with their senses? it's, it's what you might call a hard problem, right? Um, a real sort of conundrum. but what I'm, what I'm also talking about here is that when you, when you're thinking about doing this, this kind of research and, and thinking about how we might actually engage with slow violence, one way to do it is to go to places where the slow violence is accelerating, right? So places that are, like I was saying in the animation, like a time machine, right? Places that are maybe a bit further along that trajectory of environmental decay. and so here in London, we may not be experiencing some of the things that people in the research sites where I did this work, are already experiencing and if we go to places where these things are already happening, so the slow violence is already turning into fast violence, there's something we can learn by looking at how people in these spaces are engaging with that condition. How are they responding? Um, and also how are they learning about it, right? What does, what kind of environmental learning takes place in a space of accelerating violence, accelerating slow violence? That's a kind of central, question that this project is asking.

the other part of it is also thinking about what do we actually mean by education, right? So here I'm talking about how, there's this paradox, right? That we are somehow expecting that education systems run by governments are going to help us educate ourselves out of the mess that we are in, right? That somehow we'll be able to, to educate young people, future generations in ways that will make them live differently, behave differently. And that's going to be somehow part of the solution, to the problem.

When you look at a lot of sort of environmental education policy documents, that's, that's the kind of argument, that's the kind of assumption that you see.

what I'm suggesting here is that actually what this fieldwork taught me, is that that's not at all necessarily the case, right? That, the governments who are themselves perpetuating or enabling that slow violence or even the acceleration of that slow violence, don't necessarily have an incentive to then go and sensitize young people, and equip them with tools that would make them, critical of the choices that these regimes are making. So we've got, we've got another kind of conundrum here, right? Where we are somehow hoping that the governments are going to do this, but then why would they be doing it, right? Given that they themselves are failing to address the issue in the first place, and therefore, we need to look into alternative spaces. we need to

think about education more broadly than simply just schooling and formal education systems. And that's where the activism component comes in.

again, when you, when you go in, you go into places of accelerating, accelerating slow, slow violence, right? Spaces of accelerated time, these, these two research sites that I'm about to tell you more about, what you'll find is that there's a lot of environmental activism, un unsurprisingly, that, that people are picking up these fights.

They're, they're really resisting what's, what's going on. And that, becomes a form of education and alternative space of education in itself and that's another sort of central argument of the, of the book. and that in some ways, actually this idea of educating for the ent anthropo scene, right? Educating somebody in a way that is responsive to the historical moment and the planetary condition that we are in, might actually be more effective through these alternative non-formal spaces, such as activism than, the formal school, school systems.

so that's another sort of, implication of, of what I'm saying. Okay? So let me take you to these places. Chelo is, is a rehabilitation site for some of the people who were forcibly displaced, by the Indian government, about 15, 20 years ago, when Te Dam, which is what you're looking at, was, was built, which is one of the largest dams, built in India, in the northern state of ultra count in the foothills of the Himalayas. and which has displaced about a hundred thousand people, a hugely controversial project, not just because of the displacement, but also because it's built on the Ganges, which of course has a huge, religious significance. and also because it's built on a geological fault line.

So scientists have done modeling that shows that if, if there were to be an earthquake of a certain magnitude, and if the dam were to be breached, could be looking at tens of thousands of casualties, pretty much instantly downstream from them. So very, very controversial on many, many grounds. but what I was interested in was, how does, how does, the, the condition of being resettled, in this, in this way, how does that affect, the life of the people? So this is, this is one of the streets in oc, and, you can see people have built houses, but when they were initially moved here, they were just given plots of land with no infrastructure, no streets, no electricity, no sewage, no water. the, the school where I did my fieldwork is actually squatting, to this day inside an abandoned shopping complex, which is what you're looking at here, because no school building was provided by the state. so, so this also gets at this idea of, the environmental multi crisis, which you heard in the animation in the beginning. I very purposely don't use the expression climate change in this, in this book, because climate change is just one element of the crisis, right? There's, there's a wider, set of what, what I would argue are more, fundamental issues that have to do with, the culture and the politics of how we relate to the natural environment and to each other. and I think you can really see that, that kind of intersection, in a place like Chelo, where it's not just about this initial act of violence of forcibly moving a hundred thousand people, but then also how that then interacts with these preexisting patterns of exclusion and inequality, right? South Africa, you're looking at, a view from school corridor in the South African School,

where I, where I did my field work. this is in the, township of, of Wentworth, in South Durban, which has a very particular history. it is one of the most environmentally, polluted, one of the most industrially polluted, places, places on earth, with sky high, levels of pollutants in the air, skyrocketing cases of, thyroid cancer, other types of cancers, lots of respiratory conditions.

In the, in the school where I worked, about 60% of kids were carrying asthma pumps, which, if you go to the other side of the city, just, just over the hill, about five kilometers north, drops down to about 3%. So, clearly, huge, huge impact, on the health of the populations. it's got a very particular history that some historians actually argue is at the very heart of, the entire sort of apartheid, the, the sort of development of apartheid as a, as a, as a regime. south Durban is, is home to the largest port in, in all of Africa with tons of international shipping, which goes back to the 19th century. And over time, what's happened is that, industries have been built around the sport, and particularly sort of late 19th, early 20th century, the industries were particularly dirty and polluting with terrible working conditions. In some ways, that's, that's still the case. And so what you, what what you needed as a, as a state was, basically labor, disposable labor, people whose health and, and life, frankly, you didn't care about.

and so there was, there was, again, a lot of forced displacement, a lot of, moving of people of color to the vicinity of these industries. and so, yeah, so some, some historians that have sort of tracked the development of apartheid actually argued that this is a kind of early blueprint for the kind of city planning, the kind of segregation, of cities, by, by race, that then became, becomes codified after World War ii, with the kind of formalization of apartheid. but, but, I mean, in, in the book, I use the expression apartheid of the present because the the conditions in which people live here in, in many ways haven't changed all that much. And, the, the impacts on these populations, continue. there's no easy solution because, about 10% of South Africa's g d p actually originates in this small area around the Port of Durban. So of course, it's a strategically important, area for the government, and the government doesn't necessarily want to shut down any of those industries, or even necessarily put a lot of pressure on them to, to, to sort of clean up. so yes, this is, this is different kind of, different kind of fast violence, right? So both the POC site and the Wentworth site in South Africa, they're, they're different examples of how slow violence might accelerate and how that might, impact on, on the populations, on the populations here.

So how do you actually, go into these places and how do you study, the kinds of imaginations and the kinds of impacts that living in such spaces might have on the young people here? so in the, in the field work, I, I relied a lot on methods borrowed from, from visual, anthropology, visual ethnography, one of which was, working with kids to, to produce these drawings that were trying to capture what they were imagining the, the future a hundred years into the future would look like in their community and what the past a hundred years ago would look like. And to, and then to sort of look at the two of them and see what what were the similarities, what were the differ-

ences? In what ways were they maybe drawing on the past in imagining the future or vice versa. what you're looking at here is a, is a drawing of a 12 year old boy, in, in Wentworth in, in South Urban, and how this, how this, student, this pupil is imagining the future of his community in a hundred years' time.

and I suppose it doesn't really need too much of a comment.

here's another one. again, same, same age. once again, doesn't leave much of the comment.

When you, when you look at the, the pictures of the past, they, they do look, very different I mean, there, there's a, there's a lot more, they're all more natural elements in these competitions.

the, the human figures generally seem happier. There, there, there seems to be some kind of quote unquote harmony in, in, in these, in these drawings. Here's another one. So if, if, if this was all I did, then what I would've concluded probably based on these drawings is, is that these kids essentially are doing what we as anthropologists are doing, which is romanticizing the past and despairing about the future. but thankfully ethnography does allow, kind of extended immersion in a place and, and makes it easier to go deeper. And so I used another, another kind of method, which was, which I have come to call slow participatory, video making and it's a spin on, work that, David McDougal in, in Australia has done, who's a, is an ethnographic, filmmaker anthropologist. and he's, he's done a lot of work around, working with, with young, young people, with children, and getting them to make short films about their lives, about their experiences, about their environments. his, his, sort of assumption is that, it's, it's not possible to kind of directly have a dialogue across, across generations that we as adults are not going to be able to fully understand what young people might want to tell us.

We may not be able to access their knowledge of the world directly through words and through dialogue. and therefore we need a kind of a bridge.

We need another kind of medium to, to bridge that. and so he's sort of come up with this idea of, of filmmaking, or video making to, to do that. And so I try to adopt this, in, in my own work. and basically the way this works is that, you go in, with the equipment, you, you sort of, spend a couple of months with the young people, sort of helping them become confident with the user, the equipment, but not at all thinking about the content of what they're going to do, simply just, just trying to help develop the kind of technical skills that they might, that they might need to do this. there's a particular work of this method, which is that, ideally you don't use, um an iPhone or, or a, or a sort of easy to use camera. it's meant to be a camera that's deliberately difficult to use. So professional, professional sort of, equipment and the reason for that is because it really forces, the young people to slow down their gaze.

So every time they press the record button, they have to make a series of technical decisions about focus, white balance, volume, whatnot, right? So they have to understand these concepts, and they have to really think about, how am I, how am I framing the reality? You know, what, what is, what is the, the shot that I want to capture?

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and it also serves the purpose of helping the, the ethnographer, develop a relationship of of trust with, the young people.

But, but without getting into the actual content of the film, right? So when, when you, when you run these workshops as an ethnographer, you're not telling the, the students what they should be filming or what they should be focusing on.

It's, it's all about understanding wide balance or understanding focus or understanding focal length.

and, and so that creates a space to get to know one another, to, to, to kind of create some kind of a sense of community. But, trying to kind of minimize the, the, the way that ways in which the ethnographer, in this case myself, would influence what the students might eventually end up producing, in the, in the films that they, that they make.

So what was really striking about the films that, that were made in, in both places to me, was that the, the students sort of naturally gravitated towards the activist figures in the community. In the case, this is, this is from, one of the films that was made in India. Um in this case, the, the students, basically focused virtually the entire film on talking to older people in the community who were involved with the anti dam struggle.

So they were, they were very curious to understand, what all this, what was all this sort of about, right? But also, they, they were asking questions and, and sort of eliciting conversations with older people, about what life was like before the ancestral lands were flooded and really trying to, trying to understand, how that might be relevant for them. The, the, there really seemed to be a kind of search for identity. And I should also say this is not in, in some ways, this is my interpretation and my analysis, but in other ways it isn't.

Because another thing that this method allows you to do is that once the film is made, you can then actually sit down with the, the young people who made it, and you can ask them questions about why, why they made this choice or that choice, and what did they intend here? And, and why did they juxtapose this shot with this shot? Um, and you, you are basically bringing them into the interpretation and the analysis. You, you are kind of al allowing them an opportunity to give you their own reading of their own work.

So then the analysis and the interpretation becomes also to some extent, co-produced, which is by no means to say that there's no power hierarchy or that it erases the power hierarchy or takes the power away from the ethnographer. but I, I think it's, it's, it's an attempt at, at the very least to, to, to allow that, that voice of, of the young people to also influence how, how these films are then, interpreted and what was really interesting to me was that the films that were made in South Africa, were very similar, actually. And, this is Desmond Basa, who is, one of the environmental activists in, in South Durban, in, in Wentworth, holding a, device for measuring air quality, talking to the young people about, what the activists are doing to, to try and sort of enforce the, constitutionally guaranteed right to clean environment, which is

part of the South African constitution. and so once again, there's this kind of natural draw and, and a kind of inclination, of, of the students to these, to these activist figures, almost using the film as a kinda excuse to get closer to them or to, to learn more about what they're, what they're doing. And, and I apologize, this is where it's gonna get a little bit more academic and theoretical. but, this really kinda led to this question that I'm, that I'm trying to address in this, in this book, which is how activist counter narratives of change might be shaping a reimagination of the future, right? So in other words, if we can't rely on these state run systems, and there is this natural draw that the young people in these spaces of accelerating slow violence, feel towards the activist in the community, then what kind of reimagination of the future becomes possible through that dialogue between the young people and the activists and the, the kind of engagement that they, that they have. so in the, in, in the book, i, I draw the work of, Chantel Mov, who's a French political scientist. and one of her contributions is this concept of, agonistic pluralism, which she contrasts with the idea of deliberative democracy.

So the idea is deliberative democracy is basically what we live in, in sort of western liberal democracies. it's a system where we negotiate our difference through the liberation. So, we have parliament, we have, all kinds of executive bodies, government bodies that are set up for us to negotiate our difference and arrive at some kind of common action.

Mo argues that what tends to happen in such a system is that, the, the kind of most quote unquote marginal or quote unquote extreme or radical views get excluded from the conversation that, that the, the systems within a de deliberative democracy over time tend to have the effect of kind of sanitizing, kind of neutralizing the conversation.

So, an example of that would be if you were to look at the political programs of parties just about any party in this country, but for that matter, just about any country, you will, you will really struggle to find a party, for example, which is questioning the idea of infinite economic growth on a finite planet, right? You will not find that idea. So mov would argue, well, that's because, deliberative democracy has the effect of excluding such views from, from the dialogue, from the conversation. So we, we do end up having a conversation, and there are some tensions and disagreements, but they actually are quite minor, right? and, and that actually are lots of similarities. right? So if, if you look at the conservative party and the labor party in this country, we find that actually there are tons of similarities, right? If you're using this, this, this framework, she argues that what we need, in this to kind of deal with this predicament is, this idea of agonistic pluralism, which is, a kind of, way of engaging in democracy, which, which is more aligned with how we imagine, say the ancient Greeks might have done it, right? Where you've got an agora, you've got a forum, people go to the forum, and they, they argue it out, right? They don't shy away from tension, they don't shy away from disagreement.

There is a, there is a, there's a kind of direct, layer of engagement that doesn't necessarily go through that kind of sanitizing mediating presence of the deliberative

democratic model. it's different from, it's, it's not anarchy and it's not direct democracy move argues that there's still a need for rules of engagement. in agonistic pluralism, you don't see, the person whom you disagree with as an enemy to be destroyed. You, you see them as an intellectual adversary, somebody whom you're trying to convince, and you and you both share a commitment to a kind of democratic setup.

So the, the argument that I, that I end up, making, making in the book is that what these activists spaces are, are doing, and what you see, to some extent, manifesting in these, in these films that the students made is, is a kind of space of agonistic pluralism. It's a, it's a space where the kinds of things that might be unspeakable, within the framework of, in this case the Indian state or the South African state, um it would be unspeakable to say that building Japan was a terrible idea.

it would be unspeakable to say that the industries in South Durban that contribute 10% of South Africa's GDP should pick up and move, right? These are things that are not allowed. They, they're beyond the pale, within the, the, the local democracy.

But the activist spaces make these conversations possible. They, they create a space for that. So, so they become a kind of agonistic pluralistic space, for, for debate, which is quite different from what you would find in the government, in the government schools, which are part of that deliberative, democracy, setup. I also linked this to the work of Hannah a who is, most famous for her work on the origins of totalitarianism. She's, she was particularly interested in, Stalinist Russian totalitarianism 20th century Europe.

So particularly interested in Nazism and Stalinism.

What was it about those societies that enabled such unspeakable violence, in the 20th, in the 20th century? And I sort of put forward this, this argument that in some ways, the, the fast violence of the concentration camps and the gulags of the 20th century and the slow violence of the ent anthropos scene, that that, that the roots of those might in some ways be, parallel and, and, and similar. our end talks about the idea of bureaucratization, the idea that we become bureaucratized, meaning that, we allow ourselves to turn into cogs in a machine, where we no longer question the kind of larger moral, ethical, sort of goal or effect that the machine is having on the world.

We are just sort of satisfied with being part of the machine and not questioning that larger, that larger frame. So when I wake up in the morning, I, I don't sort of purposely decide to go out and destroy the planet, and yet by participating in the system, just, just by being alive, really, I am, I am kind of an, an unwitting, accomplice right in this, in this, slow violence and accelerating slow violence. Um in, in a similar way, I'm sure there were lots of people in Nazi Germany in the 1930s who didn't wake up in the morning and decide that they wanted to be contributing to a society that was sending people to gas chambers, right? So, so that theme of, being an unwitting accomplice seems to be a recurring one and there seems to be, there seems to be something about this idea of bureaucratization that applies to our, our, to our current predicament. And, um the reason I'm bringing this up is because when you, when you look at what

our end has to say about what can we do about this, she talks about the idea of action as a kind of antidote, to, to bureau democratization.

Our end makes a distinction between action and behavior.

Behavior is something that is programmed predictable something that we are expected to do by virtue of the, the kind of cultural and political systems that we are engaged in.

Whereas action is something that's unpredictable, original, novel, different and again, in, in, in the book, I sort of end up making this argument that, what these activists are doing in some ways is action, right? They're, they're, they're coming up with these kind of unpredictable ways of engaging with the world, whereas what the school is encouraging young people to do is to behave in a certain way, right? Certain kinds of behaviors. And so both on the agonistic pluralism front and on the action front, there's clear distinction between the activists and the formal school school systems. And also in, in Han Aaron's theory of action, agonistic pluralism is a kind of prerequisite to action, right? You, you need to engage action is never possible in isolation, right? That's, that's what Aaron says. You need to engage, in, in a certain kind of tension, productive tension with another person in order for action to become possible.

and so, so I'm, I'm sort of really, in not a very subtle way, I guess, saying that, that, these, these activists groups and, and movements that I, that I was looking at are in many ways, actually, potentially a representation of the kind of thing that Chantel Mov and Hannah are, have been, have been calling for. Okay.

So I just wanna spend the last, last bit of the talk on thinking about the implications of all of this and kind of bringing it back to earth and, kind of practically, right? What, what, what can we do and what does this tell us about how we can think about education differently? Um, so I think the first point is if we can, if we can recognize that schooling and education are not the same in public conversations, we tend to equate those two things, but actually they're not the same.

I would argue that the young people I worked with in India and in South Africa during this project are actually, learning more in some ways, about planetary predicament, not through school, but through informal spaces of learning. So, so there is an, there's a kind of education that's happening, but it's not schooling. if we do want to look at the, the formal systems and how, how we could change or reform those systems, I think a lot of the, a lot of the, the things that I learned from, from the activist and from the young people are telling me that the current direction of travel, for certainly the uk certainly the us I'd say much of the Western world in some ways is actually in the opposite direction from what would be helpful for the planetary predicament, right? Um, we have, a strong trend of, neoliberal globalization in education where curricula are merging.

So when you look at the textbooks that are being used in the classroom in OC and the textbooks that are being used in the classroom in Wentworth in South Africa, they're actually very similar. There's, you will not find anything about Terry Dam in the, in the textbook in India, and you will not find anything about the, the, the

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racialized history of South urban in the textbook in South Africa. So so I think we're, we're very much running away from the, the localization of curricula and engaging with the local, which again, is something that the activists, do. then there is this question of bureau democratization and democratization. And, and again, we are, I would argue, currently witnessing a trend where teachers are not really seen as educators. They're, they're more, sort of just there to to kind of make sure that the kids are in the classroom and they're, and they are using the tablet or whatever it is that they're but actually in a, in an education system that would be emphasizing the bureaucratization, you would expect to see teachers being given lots of agency, being, being trusted, to, to, to make choices, to model certain ways of being, to create spaces for things like agonistic pluralism. There's very, very little space for any of that currently and that's also partly due to quantification, right? I mean, we, we are trying to quantify everything in education.

You cannot quantify agonistic pluralism.

You cannot quantify radical imagination of the future, right? I mean, those are not quantifiable, concepts. another kinda implication slash finding is that, what I picked up on quite, quite strongly when I did this fieldwork, was, was a high degree of distrust between the educators and the activists, right? So the, the activists will tell you teachers they're, they're part of the problem. they're working for the state, with the state, and then the teachers will tell you, well, the activists they're far too radical, but we don't want to engage with them.

We don't wanna talk to them. We don't wanna bring them to school, because they're, they're problematic. so I think there, there's something to be said for removing barriers between educators and activists, but also, also maybe for encouraging kind of hybrid identities.

I have also come across, and if, if you do get a chance to look at the book, you'll, you'll find there's a section called Outlier Teachers, where I look at this, this phenomenon of what I call activist educators and educational activists, people who actually do kind of have a foot in both worlds, and they, they, they do exist. So I think as I spend more time on this project, I also realized that some of my own assumptions, about activists and teachers being separate categories, sort of got problematized as a result of the field work that I, that I, that I did. so what does educating for the anthrop scene mean then? Well, it means recognizing that we live in the ent anthrop scene, recognizing the implications of that thinking with and through deep time, thinking about planetary boundaries, steward of the planet, a more radical definition of sustainability, political imagination, action, all of the things that talks about earlier and I just want to sort of end by contrasting these, these thoughts with this model of 21st century learning, which is a, is a, is a fairly influential, idea in education. you will probably find on, on lots of institutions, I would imagine ucls website as well. You would find if you, if you look at the sort of mission statements and so on, you'll probably find 21st century learning mentioned somewhere, right? The idea that we are preparing people for life in the 21st century, and then there's something different about the 21st century

from the 20th or the 19th, and that's what we are responding to. And that's, that's our job as educators. So if, if you replace the 21st century by the ent anthrop scene and that forces you to confront the, the sort of deep time, then I think it becomes very clear just how arbitrary this idea of the 21st century is, right? I mean, I think the difference between the 20th and the 21st century really pales in comparison to the difference between the holo scene and the anthrop scene. but, b, besides that issue, I think it's also important to, to sort of problematize this, right? Because the kinds of education that I describe in the chapters of the book that talk about schooling, where I've gone into classrooms and I looked at what is actually happening in these, in these spaces, um are done in the name of 21st century learning and when you look at these, these words, I mean, on, on the, on the face of it they, they look very, they look good, right? They, they make sense critical thinking, medical recognition, creativity how can you disagree with that, right? But actually, what I end up kinda arguing in the book is that these, these concepts, however well meant, or well, well-meaning the people who put these in place were maybe initially they have sort of become captured by, corporate interest, I suppose.

I mean, essentially the, the goal of this is to, is to create a graduate, create a worker who is going to be employable, right? So you want people to be thinking critically in the sense that they, you want them to be able to solve problems that they might in the jobs, in the in, in the occupations they go into.

But you don't want 'em to think too critically.

You don't want 'em to think so critically that they would start questioning something like the wisdom of infinite growth on the finite planet, right? So, so there's a, so there's a kind of, limit and a kind of capture, and you could say almost the kind of double speak, to some of, to some of these, some of these things. And so that's why what I, what I, try to, right? So as you can tell, I'm against this, in case that wasn't clear. and so so what I, what I try to sort of suggest, is as you saw, as you saw in the animation, is this model of grasp care, imagine, communicate, right? Um, and, and really doing that, in a, in a, in a way that allows for that kind of friction, as I was saying earlier, Hannah RNs insight, right? That action is only possible.

It's never possible in isolation. Action is only possible when we've got people, different people who come together. the idea of grasping what is at stake care as the emotional response, which again, is very sort of countercultural. we don't tend to think, much of emotions in the way that we design education systems.

It's all about cognition and, and rationality and knowledge and facts.

but actually we know from research in psychology that care is critical, to any kind of meaningful long-term change in how people engage with the environment. If you don't care, if you don't have an emotional stake in, in what you're doing, then it's, it's, it's gonna be very superficial. and yet somehow we don't think about emotions when it comes to education. the idea of imagination, right? Being able to imagine alternative futures, which I would personally argue is, is something that we are born with. I think if you talk to to kids, you will find that they do that kind of instinctively. but it's not

something that our education systems encourage. and then of course, the ability to, to communicate that vision to other people and, and through that, to arrive at some kind of action. And, what I should, what I should also point out is that this is, this is meant to be a kind of dynamic, iterative process. So once I have communicated with somebody else, I might realize that perhaps there was something I didn't grasp fully, which makes me care differently or makes me care about something else and alters my imagination. So this is a this is a kind of ongoing, dynamic, dynamic process and it's also meant to be a kind of model or, or set of ideas which are, really not revolutionary, really not all that different from ideas about learning and education that have been around for hundreds of years, right? You, again, you go back to the ancient Greeks and the, the wisdom of no thy self, right? In a way, that's all this is, right? Grasping, caring, imagination, communication. These are things that are innate to us as humans.

This is not any kind of artificial construct that, that is being imposed on people. When a baby is born, one of the first instincts is to grasp, right? Um, caring, imagination, communication comes soon after. So, so it's, it's all about simply just harnessing what's already in us. I mean what you might call humanistic education, which, yeah, to me, just based on this work and having spent six or seven years working on this, and then six or seven years on the previous book, which kind of led to this, that's the conclusion that I, that I come away with. and that's what I wanna share with you and, and leave you with and do feel free to disagree or critique or I, I look forward to questions. Thank you and just a minute, Robin, I, I'll just set this up.

So we've got our friends from Zoom, that's why we have to go to the, well, we need to mic check. We've got some, let's, we need to mic check.

Wonder around With that.

we, yeah. If you can help and you need to move it to where it's, and we can ask it, not mute. Yep.

Where we, we've got, yeah, we want, we want it to be able to speak and just so that zoom, people can hear. Peter, do you wanna come in the box? So sure. People can see you. I'm just gonna, so right. Anybody on Zoom wants to ask questions, put your hands up, please. Oh, Well, yes, thank you for that. It was, it's interesting to see what people have been able to do working with, communities that are under the heel of, of, of, of more, more extreme, more destructive forms of oppression than in, than we experienced, as you've said in London. And, I would like to go back to, the point you made, as it were in passing you, you, you talked about how, in today's world we're, or, or particular stressed communities are faced with, slow violence. And you contrasted this briefly with, the path, the violence of particular periods in the past and this certainly makes sense, but I think to bring this out, bring this down to a single point.

Where does this violence come from? And it's the word that I was waiting to hear from you, which didn't come up and that's capitalism. And it's capitalism that gives us this violence.

Capitalism is based on violence.

It was brought into the world through violence.

It can only continue existing from day to day through the continuous exercise of violence and until we take on capitalism as such, and not this or that minor manifestation, epiphenomenal manifestation of capitalism, then there will be violence both slow and fast for everyone and at the end of your talk, you said these ideas are not revolutionary and I'm afraid that's, so, I mean, first of all, tinkering with the education systems where you didn't mention where the reason education systems can exist is because they're a capitalist states that finance them and so the whole question of state finance and whom the state chooses to employ as teachers comes into it and I've seen this in, in education and in many other areas of life over the last 50 years, how people come up with, with well and nice humanistic notions of what we can do to improve the situation and the moment that somebody in state authority thinks it's either a dangerous challenge or just irrelevant to the state's needs, it would just get swept away until you dealt with the underlying issues of this society. It's that these things are, are, are, are, are just marginally. And, and at the end I was horrified that you should have relied on all people that, that Hannah a, I mean, Hannah Aand takes her philosophy, including her political philosophy off the shelf from her lover, high digger, who had certainly had a conception of the organic structure of society, but not the kinda organic society we'd like to live in. So I think this, this whole notion, we, we won't get a proper education for the anthrop or a better skill, an education for humanity until we've got rid of the capital system and so ideas like this, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid they're very much put in the car before the horse.

Okay. alright. Right. Okay. Slide back. Okay. right.

Quite a few things in there. okay. So, I mean, I'm not I'm, I'm not gonna defend Haida girl for sure. but I, but I would say that Hannah made some valuable contributions and I, I tend to look at the quality of the, of the individual ideas. They're not not everything that she brought I would agree with necessarily, but bureaucratization to me makes a lot of sense. and so I, I'm not gonna discredit that just because of her personal relationships or because of her sort of life life story. but on the, on the larger point on, on capitalism I have had versions of this question before, and it is something I, I think about a lot. I think part of the, part of the problem with structuring the question around kind of abolishing capitalism, is that, yeah, I mean, like, on, on, on some level I agree with you that that's what we ultimately that's what we need to do. but at the same time, pragmatically, right? I mean, there's, there's, there's, there's radical change and there is incremental change and I think for a long time, right, there's been, there have been efforts to, to come up to, to deal with this problem through radical change and I mean, as you can tell by my accent, I'm not, I'm not from around here.

I was born in Ze Slovakia, and, being quite familiar with, the, the history of the way that people try to abolish capitalism in a radical way in that part of the world, right? Sort of just gives me some pause, when I think about whether that's the way to go. and that's why I tend to think about incremental change as well, as an alternative way of, of, of trying to, trying to do this. Now when you, when you come out and you

say, capitalism is the problem, in my experience, what that tends to, tends to do is you'll end up with people who agree with you, and they tend to be people who agree with you before you said it and then the people who don't agree with you, they're not gonna be convinced by it. Right? Um, and that's partly because I think people actually misunderstand what capitalism is. and I, I really liked, Jason Hicks new book, less Is More where he really very clearly makes a distinction between, markets as something that human societies and, and economic structures have, have had for thousands of years and capitalism as a, as a particular system of, of accumulation. and so when you, but I think the problem is that the two really get confused in public discourse and so when you say capitalism is the problem, people tend to think, oh, okay, so you're, you're talking about total attorneys and we're talking about taking away our freedom. You're talking about taking away, like cracking down or our ability to trade freely or exchange freely or talk freely. And so it, it then descends into kind of culture war, which I just think is not very productive. and that's why I choose not to frame it in that way, but I fully respect your choice to frame it that way. Yeah.

Okay.

Any follow up? Not necessarily from Robin. Anybody, anybody else? Chris, did you wanna say something? Um, go for the, oh, no, Vicky, go for it.

Liz.

Oh, sorry. Liz. Liz. Oh, sorry. I'm getting so sorry.

I'm, I'm not a, an, and maybe my views are coming from a more simplistic way, but capitalism is at the crux of it. Because like, for example, in, in your South African study, if you've got a, a relatively big group of people who are benefiting from Catholicism, so they can take their kids to the doctors and they've got, got the wherewithal to pay for it, they're not going to want to get rid of that.

But there's nothing that's being, there's, there's not an alternative. So you, you're not going to get those people who are going to be radical and do anything about it. Cause they've got a lot to lose. So until something is, is given, that's an alternative and that's an alternative to capitalism.

So capitalism is the, the, the, the crux of it and also the anthrop anthrop scene.

Surely it would've been better to, to focus on, did you say at the beginning Yeah. That that would've maybe been a better, a better direction to go, because chemical is the, the, the crux of all the problems. But that's coming from a, I'm not an anthropologist. Yeah, yeah. It's coming from a very, that's A perfectly valid Yeah, it's a perfect, I mean, again, I mean, I would just come back saying, look what's, what's our theory of change here, right? how are we actually, if our objective is to get rid of capitalism, how do we get rid of capitalism? Right? Do we get rid of capitalism by, saying that we have to implement educating for the capitalist scene, which is on the already kind of on the label even before anything else about it, is gonna be incredibly offputting to a whole lot of people. and in a place like, in a place like, like Wentworth in, in South Africa, you, you will hear a lot of people say, well, look, this, yeah, this is, this sucks. You know, it sucks that we are getting sick. However, if these factories

were not here, if they moved, we'd have no jobs and we would starve, right? And so, so I think the, again, there, there's a kind of tension there between, the kind of ideal utopia and what's, what's in the short run possible, right? Because I think I fear that if we say, okay, let's just abolish capitalism and let's not care about the consequences, then in the short run, what's gonna happen to those people? Are, are we gonna let them start, right? But by the time that the systems have adjusted and changed and made it possible for them to make a living in a different way. So there's a kind of pragmatic question here. yeah, Chris, you want Anybody on Zoom? Chris is gonna have a question, then anyone on Zoom would like to, Um, as you speaking, I kept on with, with you. and especially interested in what you say you learned from the actors in the two places where you did your field work. and, and, and then of course, you, you then, kind of within that framework, you check up, you, you put your own view, I think, which is this need for agonistic tourism, which I think I can understand.

But I suppose the critical point you're making all the way through, which again, a good, very good one, is that we need radical imagination then.

That that's something which again, you got from your activist in the, that you've worked with. I suppose I've got a very simple question. What, what is your, imagined alternative future? Okay. I have not been asked that. Interestingly, interestingly. Interesting. Yeah. look, I mean I, I'm, I'm, I'm one of the, people who are behind the new de-growth journal that just published its first issue. so I subscribe to de-growth. I, I believe that it's a, it's a good, way to, to think about the, the problem. and, um and, and, and everything that, that, that, that entails. And I think again, it's, it's a range within, within the growth, there could be a kind of very utopian perspective. And I would, I would take that perspective, but I would probably say that you probably do need to allow a good chunk of time before you can, before you can get there. So I suppose the answer to your question depends on the future, when, 10 years from now, a hundred years from now, thousand years because I do, because I do think that if we say, like, I was saying to earlier question, if we say, okay, we wanna have this de-growth world and we wanna have it tomorrow without thinking about what that is going to kind of dislocation that, that is going to do, then aren't we kind of doing the same thing that the people who build that dam are doing right? Say, well we want to create a certain kind of world.

We don't care. We're just gonna shut these people aside, because we want it quickly and we want it tomorrow. so, so yeah.

So I would say that ultimately I, I would imagine a future where we don't measure progress by economic output. We we don't attach, more value to a dead tree than to a living tree. we don't emphasize materialistic, um consumption and, and, and, and, and status symbols through our, through our education. Um we, we have a culture that, that attaches value to different, different kinds of things that, that, that values things like care, for example. so, so yeah, that's, that's the kind of world that ultimately I would, I would, I would like to see, and just, it's a slight tangent, but I think it kind of speaks to all of these questions.

One of the things that I, that I do say in the book, which has been somewhat controversial, which I, I forgot to say, is that actually I, I do in the conclusion kind of come out saying, look, maybe it's not actually realistic to reform education systems, to change education systems by incorporating these ideas from activists.

Because there is a history of, of people trying to do that where you take ideas from the margins and you try to mainstream them and of course, then those ideas end up losing their teeth, and they, like, with the 21st century skills it just becomes this, double speak, for for something totally different. and that actually, maybe there is, part of the answer to this is this idea of educating for the anthropo scene, or capitalist scene, or whatever we call it, is recognizing that, that yeah, actually people learn outside of schools and, and that we just need to create space for that. And so maybe, maybe in practical sort of policy terms, it means, look we just actually ask kids to be spending less time in schools.

We create more space and more opportunity for them to be doing things outside of schools.

Maybe we recognize that some of these non-school non-formal education groups, and that's not just activists. I mean, that could be religious groups, that could be all kinds of I mean, there are people doing parallel research on sort of spirituality and environment and learning. Um may maybe we, we allow possibilities for redirecting some of the funding that currently goes into education systems to go to these spaces. so, so something, something, along, along the lines of, somewhere between radical and Change. I'm sorry. Oh, yeah, you finished? I'm finished. You're happy? Yeah. Yeah. Arif, you, I think you should go next and then we'll come back to Cheers. Thanks, cam. yeah, firstly, I have to apologize, Peter, I only saw the last, sort of, 15, 20 minutes of the talk.

I arrived a bit late. so apologies if you've sort of covered this previously, but I am interested in, in, really the limitations of the concepts of the Anth Anthrop scene.

particularly the fact that it sort of erases human diversity.

and it actually, you're talking about alternatives, it actually erases the alternatives that actually exist. there's 2.5 billion people on the planet in indigenous and local communities who aren't part of the anthrop scene, in the sense that they're contributing to, global emissions, et cetera. and yeah, I also worry it's also a, a hugely sort of colonial, it, it comes from western science. so it's colonial concept, and I worry about applying this to the global south. as I say, I, I didn't see how you applied it, so I can't comment on the specifics. and Al also, just a second question, a sort of maybe a bit controversial one, following up from, the, criticism around capitalism.

I wonder if also a reason why you and perhaps other, sort of, sort of anti-capitalist, researchers can't talk about capitalism, is because you have to deal with neoliberal sort of universities and you have to get funding through them. so is that perhaps another reason why you have to tone down your, your language and, and unfortunately come, come up with something that's not, not quite as radical as a lot of us would like.

Okay, thanks. Thanks for that. Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah, so on the first, on the first question yeah, I, I talked about it a little bit in the, in the, in the, in the beginning. And, and yeah I, I totally, acknowledge and, and agree with that, that criticism about diversity and homogenization and, and also yeah, the, the colonial, the, the colonial origins of it, I mean, know Katherine ER's book billion Black Anthropos are None, is, is a great sort of expose of the colonial history and colonial sort of, nature of geology as a science, actually. but yeah, I guess just to, to go back to what I was what I said kind of in the beginning is that I think it's, it's a, it's a question of emphasis, right? Um, we could be placing emphasis on where this came from, and who is, who is responsible, and those are very important questions. but again, if I'm thinking about, a a kind of, again we go back to that question of radical versus incremental change. If I, if I accept that we live in a world where there is an education system, and that it's not gonna go away tomorrow, no matter what I do, it's not gonna go. You know, so, so I, so if I try, if I wanna find a way to influence it, right? I wanna find a way to influence it and influence the the people within it. And I, and I don't think that the people within it are entirely homogeneous and that they all fully buy into capitalism or that they, that they're all equally kind of on the same wavelengths, right? I mean, that, there's that section in the book again about sort of activist educators and educational activists. I, I do think there's a range. And so if, if I want to reach the people who might be open to this, to this argument, they're going to be, I think, in my experience, more interested in a forward looking idea of like, okay, so what is the predicament? What is the historical moment? Um, and, and that's, I think where the ent anthropos can do some, some, some, some work, right? Because it, you can, you can say, this affects everybody, right? In different ways. But we are not equally responsible for it, and we are not equally affected, but all of us, in one way or another are going to be affected. And therefore, if we are going to have a education system, which in itself is a kind of universalism, and you could argue is a colonial construction, but again, it's not going away tomorrow. So if we're, if we're gonna have that, then we can try to, to create some kind of incremental change by, applying another universalism to that universalism, right? So the universalism of education and the universalism of the ent anthrop scene, I think can create a kind of bridge, in conversations about this and, and the, and the role of education. and to the second question, um I mean, it's, it's, I think, I think you are getting at something important there, and it certainly is true that the, the, the funding, the funding landscape is pretty dreary for sure in this country, when it comes to doing research and, and, and doing work that, goes against government priorities or government policies or certain, certain kinds of, unquestioned truths. You know, I mean, I, I like to think that, those of us who do ethnography which is a pretty low cost research method, right? who don't need to rely on massive grants and who don't need to kind of beg the research councils for money, that, that we do actually have a degree of freedom. I, I certainly don't feel that by openly coming out against capitalism, I, I would be putting my job at risk or or that I wouldn't be able to do what I do. I think there probably are people who feel that way the ones who, who really

depend on sort of large grants from the government, and that, that could be true. for, for me, like I was saying it's, it's, it's, it's partly to do with, um growing up in a, in a totalitarian socialist and then post socialist country, and having, having seen the history of that place and, and how an attempt to radically overthrow capitalism went south, in a pretty horrible way. that's where I, I think my hesitancy comes from when it comes to thinking about radical versus incremental change, and, and capitalism.

Yeah. And yes, you wanted to interview then I'd like to have a little go.

Yes. thank you for a lot of things, and I was kinda on, on province camp in a lot of different ways, but, I'm thinking, okay, let's think change, let's not think what's wrong.

Let's think what we can do, which is really what we do in rag, we create an altern this space. But again, this is a very privileged space.

It's a privileged space for people like us that can spend a 20 night room for everyone. Say, well, all people who have internet access, who have having computers zoom and the time to be in the, this space. Yeah. Yeah. These are all very, very privileged alternative spaces, not spaces for the people that need it most. alternative spaces are, I don't know, after school clubs and things like this, which mother has got, now the, the money that time there's the capital system whether we like it or not, doesn't allow for care, doesn't allow for grandparents to retire to help with childcare. So how do people access this alternative spaces what can we do other than, not only incremental change, but literally inal tiny little changes, which of course, all they round up to a lot. But when it comes to systemic changes, whether we do incrementally or not, which government is gonna make the decision to allow for these alternative spaces. One, because they don't want them.

Cause they don't want you to think, I mean, I, I come from a, now from an art background, or definitely even before in a humanities background, all these spaces are being sharp, or the degrees are being sharp. The, the alternative spaces of degrees. We shouldn't have never been degrees anyway, because that's in itself that the computer prioritization and a quantification or something. Cause you've got to be an employable, mental, productive member of society that you shall have a degree in preposterous.

But this is kind of incremental Yes, but systemic and which government is gonna make a decision. You know, and I thought somebody put in the chat earlier, but kind of not really properly about the agency of teachers, what agency of teachers, Lilly. Yeah. You know, I know of teachers in Italy and, and certainly from colleagues in America that are constantly being threatened with fines, with suspension, or even in their own tiny little classroom space, slightly diverging from what is the gun the post can, ? Um, so okay on a, on a positive then what, what do we do? Because at some at some point it is well Chris favorite word is revolution type other than creating sort of a revolutionary kind of movement where everybody thinks like you are coming and preaching for the converter.

Yeah.

You know? Yeah, yeah, yeah.

No, yeah, I agree with you. I mean for me, that question sort of goes back to again what, what's, what's the theory of change here, right? Like, how, how does one kind of break that vicious circle? Um, and I mean, in what you were saying, there was a kind of assumption that that is, it's the government who has to be the first actor, right? That the, the government has to do something. And so it has to come from the top. I, I mean, I like to think it sort of goes back to that age old sociological tension between structure and agency, right? I mean, do we have any agency within the structure we're part of? I like to think that we, that we do, and that, and that I mean, a lot of, a lot of these, a lot of these, trends, I'm, I'm, I'm now like thinking particularly about India, which is a country that I've been working in for a long time. And, and I have actually seen the education system change and, and, and evolve not in the direction that I would, that I would personally. Like.

I mean it's gone more in the kind of neoliberal efficiency kind, right? But, but when I look at why did that happen, right? Sure.

The government had something to do with it. Sure, the corporation had something to do with, but I also think there is a certain culture particularly among middle class people in, in that country, a certain set of expectations and what people want for their kids, um the kind of education they want their kids to have, the kind of careers they want their kids to have, the kind of lives they want their kids to have, which I think has changed and I think that is, that is a cultural change, which then puts pressure from the bottom up to accelerate some of these, some of these trends. And I could, I could easily imagine a world where it would put pressure in the opposite direction, right? Um if, if you go with this this idea of neoliberal consumer choice and whatnot, and that I, as a parent, for example, can, can vote by where I sent my hit to school and that if I have the option of sending my kid to an alternative school, which does things very differently, and I'm not primarily motivated by, whether my kid is going to get a job at Microsoft or whatever, then I'm making a choice. And if, if a critical mass of people make that choice, then that, that's culture change, right? Who's got that choice? I mean, look at, I'm looking at Britain and Italy.

I'm an Italian immigrant. I've been here 30 years in Italy, we've had 50 years of school reforms that have gone from worse to worse, to worse to worse. Where nobody's got agency, the parents have a lot of agency. The, the, the, the the teachers haven't got agency, the teacher's heads haven't got agency, nobody's got agency to make choices.

Then I've come here and I've seen people and we've got a grand sheet that's been writing about this, and it's before, like, well, what's writing hundred years ago more. And, and here when I, I've had I've dealt with, kids are going to school and stuff like that, great.

Who can send their kids to Steiner School, who start the time to choose the schools. You know, people, people are struggling to even get their kids into their local school where they don't have where, where if their kids don't got the money to to go on the bus or anything.

So it's like, it's kind of a thing. It's a little bit deeper talking with, we're thinking about, there's so much else on that needs to be patched up on the side that has to do with capitalism. Who's got who's got that great choice to send them kids to on, on incredibly low income? Well, not everybody is on incredibly low incomes. I mean, there are people who are not on low incomes and who still, again, when you're talking about culture change, I think it is, it is about numbers of people, but also people who have a certain cultural and, and, and social capital and who are able to influence the, the, the kinds of collective assumptions that we make as a society. and I, I would, my answer would be, sure not everybody does, and maybe not a lot of people have that choice, but I think more people have that choice than maybe they think they do. And, and more people could be making that choice. They currently are not. And that, to me would be one mechanism through which you can at least do something.

Okay. thank, thanks for contribution.

So Ian is gonna go and then Ron it, following Ian. Okay.

If you on mute. Thanks, Ron. It, Yeah. all I like to say I really warm.

Yeah, really enjoy it.

I think there was an opening line that got me up the runway disregard for nature. This was the problem.

I think you can, and it's in Sense, it's Coming back to what if we see it in terms of development of class, societies and capitalism.

Then fundamental missions is disregard, well, historically disregard for people the have never had a different from nature.

They've just seen it as another thing. They, oh, that is what they do in Wentworth or, or, or, or in the dam that is just their ownership of the world related to that imagination.

It's not so much that we need a, a theory of change, it's that we've had two generations now who have no experience of winning anything.

So we don't have any practice of change and until that shifts, we are condemned to imagine that it's easier to imagine the end of life this world than it is to imagine a different world, a different way of being. Mm-hmm.

Yeah. Yeah. I know, I, I, I, I agree with you on both points. And I, I guess the only thing I would say, I mean, yeah, I point taken on the disregard for nature, I suppose it partly depends on how we define nature. And I, I tend to think of people as part of nature. So disregard for nature implies disregard for people.

I don't see as a kind of dualistic kind of separate, separate two separate things necessarily. but yeah, on the, on the second point, yeah, I, I think that is, that is you, you're getting at something very important which is that yeah, if you, if you don't have a living memory of actually successfully challenging the status quo, and that's, that's a problem.

I think, again, partly because of where I come from and, and identifying with South Africa and, and having worked there there, I think there is maybe a more recent, right, like the sort of 1989 moment in Eastern Europe and the 1993 moment in South Africa,

the election of Mandela and so on. You know, you, you, you've got some living memory of some, some, changes.

and, and I, and it has been very interesting for me to, for example, see, I mean, the guy you saw in one of the photos, Desmond Baa, the environmental activist in Wentworth he used to be an anti-apartheid fighter, and when apart had ended, he then became an environmental activist. So, and there are quite a few people who follow that trajectory.

So you've got an environmental movement which is, kind of fueled by that, that memory of, I don't know if you would call it successful. I mean, they, they would, they would argue that it hasn't been as successful as they would like it to be in terms of the democratic transition. But certainly some, some victories and, and yeah, and I, I wonder if there's, again, if there's a way that those of us in a place like this can tap into that experience, um if we haven't had it ourselves, right? Is there something we can learn, some, some way we can keep it alive by looking at other countries, other parts of the world? Yeah. Thanks.

I've got Ronette ronette online. Yeah. Ronette.

Yeah, sure. thank you very much. thank you very much for the talk as well, Peter. I just had a quick questions touching on the question a few moments ago, which is that knowledge is, well, we can't decontextualize knowledge from the social, cultural, and political a axis from which they're created. and so in that sense, even these alternate spaces, even rag to a degree, for example, are always in some way linked to capitalism, because for something to be alternate, they have to deviate from some sort of thing to begin with. so my question following that would be, is it possible to have a truly radical imagine imagination? Um, or will we always be imagining an alternative to capitalism rather than something in, in and of itself? Um, yeah, Yeah. Well, I, I mean, I have to be a little bit careful here cuz I don't want to go sort of overboard in my answer, but I, in my personal experience working with, with children and I have worked with children of various ages, and you really do see that. and that, that, that's, that's what I meant when I said that I think that we are born with the, the, the capacity for radical imagination. You, you do see in the, in the younger children who have spent less time in that education system, I think you see more of a tendency, more of a propensity to not just be imagining alternatives to whatever is is around because they haven't fully internalized that yet potentially. And, and therefore really kind of giving their imagination a kind of free reign. I have certainly seen that happen and I have also seen how as you go further up the chain and you get into secondary school and so on, that, that propensity, perhaps that capacity diminishes.

Um I mean, I know, I mean, just, just recently I was having a conversation with somebody who runs a, an environmental studies program in one of the American universities who was basically telling me, look in our program, essentially we think of the entire first year of what we do with our undergraduates as de-schooling, right? That we try to kind of get them out of all the brainwashing that that went into their primary secondary educations and to kind of get them back kind of to square one. so

I I get a sense that there is a certain kind of recognition that that there is. And, but again, I, I wanna be careful not to overstate it, right? Because there is also the kind of romantic romanization of, of childhood and and, and, and sort of making it, making it seem like we should sort of make it kids jobs to, to, to save us, right? So that's not what I meant. That's not, not what I mean to say, but I, but I do think that capacity is there. and I do think that there are, there are ways to, to revisit it and I mean I would, I would love to see some psychological research on that, for instance, but very few people are working on it. So yeah. On that, Hello. so I really, I really liked your, the kind of model of education and how it was almost broken down into curriculum content as well as the process. could I explain how I kind of understood it? Sure.

So in the graph section, this is kind of them understanding all the complex interconnected crises from all over the world, all the different issues, how they're interconnected.

Then at the care stage, this is understanding themselves, their emotions, maybe their group dynamics, maybe connections, their natural world, something like that. And then after care we go into the dreaming.

So that's the radical imagination, thinking of different futures and then into the communication vision and then action. And so I, I think that the action and then getting a group of students together to imagine a future, even just for their school, their community, and then doing that action and having an experience of successfully collaborating together on a project as small as like gross vegetables or something can be, I think what you're referring to, like these small successes, these small wins, that then they can then go around this like again, maybe go some of these different crises deeper into their connection to sell to each other, to the environment, their community, and then try maybe a slightly bigger project, a bigger action. and I dunno, I just, I, when I was seeing this, I just thought it was, yeah, a really nice platform model and system of how we could build up these capacity that young people to maybe eventually make bigger and bigger actions that's good to potentially even be in the nation level country.

Yeah, yeah. No, I, I, yeah, I, I, I appreciate that interpretation. I guess one caveat that I would say, this is from an earlier piece of research, which is not really in this book.

It was another paper I wrote a while ago. I was looking at, something called the hand print, which, was an approach to environmental education that was quite popular, some sometime back. Um which was the idea was that we don't wanna be talking to kids about the footprint because that's depressing, and then they just go into climate anxiety and then it messes up their, their mental health. So let's focus on the hand print. You know, the hand print is the thing that you can do with your hands the, the actions, the things that you can do and then I went around and I looked at a bunch of schools that were implementing this approach, which again, like on paper sounded great, but, but what I discovered was that, it was it was implemented in a very particular way and so something like growing veggies or fixing the leaking tap in the bathroom, or switching of the light when you leave, that's hand print you're using

your hands to do something, but then writing a letter to an elected representative or writing a placard and taking that on, on a march or a demonstration or a protest that that's not hand print because you're not directly addressing this yourself, you're asking somebody else to do it.

So there was a kind of individualization of responsibility and a kind of depoliticization. so I think you could really see how, there were these preexisting patterns of individualization and, and, and people politicization that exists in the school system. The hand print, the notion comes in and it becomes kind of captured, right? And it, and it becomes again, almost like double speak, right? That it's, it's like we are teaching kids that they can only affect, their kind of immediate surrounding immediate microcosms, and there's no point coming together and, and realizing the kind of political dimension of your, of yourself.

so I think what you're saying is right, but I suppose it's, it's not an automatic it's when you keep moving on the circle, it, it doesn't, you can get also stuck, right? Um and, and so I think there is a danger that you don't actually kind of go to those more sophisticated, larger scale, larger level actions, but you just, you just get stuck and you get taught that I'm, I'm just talking a machine, and then it becomes a kind of bureaucratization. So I suppose it's, yeah, it sort of depends on how you do it and and, and what kinds of actions you encourage and what you, what do you define to be as sort of acceptable or desirable in terms of the outcomes of that process. So I guess, yeah, there are a few more variables to, to think about. Yeah.

Thanks. Dasha, do you wanna put in, I think you are one of the last questions I'd like to say a little bit as well, but dash again? Yeah. thank you, Peter. I think your work, could benefit by what's happening in the global south. Arturo Escobar has written about this for some time. Any, has maybe been the instigator, but others too, on of possibility studies a new field of study. and they are, really rooted in the indigenous ways of peoples of, honoring the, the PLE verse, they call it the multiple ways of being rather than the capitalist, modernist, approach to making everybody the same and treating everyone the same.

So I think, there are so many, so much wealth of knowledge, such a great wealth of knowledge around the world among indigenous peoples.

80% of the biodiversity is, saved or under their direction, in 20% of the land that they control and it's the elders in those societies that have this vast knowledge and know so much, and have so much to teach. And the modernist culture ignores elders, right? Because you, you love the youth. So we have to kind of reverse our understanding, and I think, we have to get back to localization, which in that plural verse, a variety of ways of being, because every landscape on earth requires a different kind of tender care, a desert, landscape versus a, plains or a, bog, landscape and the indigenous peoples know how, at least traditionally knew how to, to live well in those places and I think more of that is needed. we can't just put it on the young to, as you said, to, to come up with things with their imagination. The elders have the vast imagination, and of course, the young children too, which I study. so anyway, so I would, advocate for

including the global south, the indigenous perspectives, and all the wealth of wisdom already in existence. so we don't have to think ourselves, how to do it because they're there and they're, they're doing it, and we're doing, I'm doing right now where, where I live, we're doing no Moe right, to, help the pollinators exist, the bees and the, the wasps and the flies, because we are destroying the insect populations on the planet and so we each can do our part wherever we are, and I think we have to get back, put our hands in the earth as you, suggested, and, do our thing wherever we are now. Thanks.

Yep. No, I mean, absolutely. I mean, I, I, I agree with everything you said. I, I suppose the only, the only comment I would make is that, obviously there, there, there is that tension again between the kind of universalism and the particularisms, right? So the indigenous ways of, of being, of knowing, of learning, of engaging, they are localized.

and, I think that, that there's been a sort of a fair amount of, in including in education.

You know, there's been some interesting, interesting work done on can you actually take some of that and can you mainstream it or can you sort of transfer it to another place? You know, and, and, and to what extent can you, can you, can you sort of do that without the contextual cultural political social factors? Um, so, so I think what you're saying is, is, is right, yeah, I guess it's, it's, it's also then a question of how we do it and how do we pay attention to the, to the context, of, of each locality.

So, yeah, so part of it is honoring the natural world around you.

So every one of us can do that.

So we can do it in our local space so we, we can learn, we have to relearn how to do that, right? So that's the universalist approach is to honor nature here and now.

Yep. Yeah, I would agree with that.

I'm gonna, jump into fit. I, I dunno if there's anybody else, but I just jump into, I like Ian, I've warmed a great deal to Peter's fresh perspective. You know, she's had a lot of of comeback here, which has beaten, maybe some people think it's too it's ignoring some of the large parts of the problem.

But I think there's ways in which he's, he is going to very powerful this model, as you said, very, very powerful aspects of human nature that as Dash is talking about, we need to tap into things that are really part of the grain of human nature to affect change. And in particular, when we're thinking of the geological timeframe of Anthrop scene, where we can consider against that the geological timeframe of evolution and there is a lot now going on in evolution in psychology, developmental psychology literature applied to evolution on who actually does teaching and learning, and what they're coming to is that actually children teach children. And that is the big motor of change, probably is the big motor of change through many parts of human evolution. so that this, this is saying something would be talking to a lot of what, what Peter's model is, is saying here and then we need to consider marrying that with yeah, global aspect, universal aspects of what are our human, our evolved psychologies, our human nature, coming

out of Sarah Hardy's, cooperative childcare models and intersubjectivity models and all of that.

marrying that with the local, we, we were watching, I mean, it was fascinating to watch, Peter's photos of the, of the kids taking their films and then going straight away to those elders that Dash is talking about to the people that they know, know about the local ecologies and the local histories and that is what evolutionary development psychologies is saying, is that that circuit was highly operative grandmothering grandparenting with peer learning of the young children as a driving force of, of, of human cultural transmission and cultural accumulation and, and, and kind of creation of human culture.

This has been one of the most thought provoking talks for, and brought out so many thoughtful questions and everything.

So thanks to Peter.

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