

ON LACK & JOY:

CONTEXTUALIZING EDUCATORS' SUFFERING & WELL-BEING

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From joy are born all creatures

By joy they grow, and to joy they return.

Easwaren, *Taittiriya Upanishad* (1987, p. 147)

Working in academia, I find a day commonly involves a fervor of rushing about. The years pass, and I note a perpetual inner refrain: "Oh, how I wish there were more time!" Many times, I have contemplated, am I alone in feeling this way? In such a hectic environment, I query, how can I more fully connect with the many joys of my profession, and with the joys of labor generally? How does our contemporary North American haste culture nurture or hinder our capacities for *learning and teaching as joyful*?

Literary and cultural theorist Roland Barthes (1975) described *jouissance* as an inexpressible state and action of joy or bliss one can experience upon reading a text (p. 14). The mythologist Joseph Campbell also emphasized the importance of joy/bliss. He consistently urged his students and readers to follow their bliss, as part of their own hero's life journey (Osbon, 1991). He maintained that he arrived at his "follow your bliss" mantra while contemplating the Sanskrit phrasing *sat-chit-ananda* from the *Upanishads*, among the oldest world wisdom literature. While *sat* means being, and *chit* means consciousness, *ananda* means bliss, rapture, joy. He posed that while he did not have a solid grasp of being and consciousness, he did know joy, and thus surmised that following this joy would gradually lead to ontological and metaphysical awareness of both being and consciousness. Campbell pursued his bliss, which, for him, by and large involved study. Indeed, he often maintained that his yoga was underlining sentences!¹ I sometimes wonder what Campbell's college responsibilities were from the 1930s to the 1960s, and the percentage of time available to him then to devote to the pursuit of his joy. I wonder the time that would be available to him now, in this, the twenty-first century.

Those of us within curriculum studies know all too well how modern instrumentalist logics and delimiting socio-economic grammars of efficiency, training, measurement, and technique have functioned to heighten suffering and diminish joy in school settings and other institutional sites of learning (Pinar et al.

1995). By and large, we rally against worldviews that, rather than encourage the young to find and follow their bliss, betray overt or hidden investments in their objectification and control. We tend to agree that, as Thomas Moore (1996) contends, “[o]ne of the great problems of our time is that many are schooled but few are educated” (p. 3). Attention to soul, spirit, mind, body, and the emotions—to, in other words, a pedagogy and curriculum of the heart, as articulated by Paulo Freire (1970), Thomas Moore (1996), and the Dalai Lama,² among others,³ is recognized as crucial by a comprehensive choir of voices caring about the well-being of the young. As the Vedic wisdom of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* asserted centuries ago, “bliss is the heart” (p.143).

The souls and spirits of not only students, but also educators call for nurturing. Jackie Seidel, (2006), for example, voices the difficulty of finding time to breathe as an elementary school teacher, while Cynthia Stratulat (2017), a fine arts teacher for 28 years, details her descent into *acedia*—into stress, disenchantment, disillusionment, and displacement—while teaching. Schools that do not touch and nourish the lives of those who inhabit them—students, teachers, and staff alike—are tragic places indeed. Although so many of us, by now, have attested to the necessity of holistically re-conceptualizing school curricula in order to bring forth the full potential of a multidimensional learner, the educator’s soul and spirit has received less attention, particularly in higher education.

Accordingly, I was intrigued to find Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber’s (2016) book *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* at a recent conference. An almost two decades long interest in mindfulness and contemplative education, especially as these intertwine with critical pedagogy and curriculum studies, informed my curiosity with the book’s title, the reference to “slow,” of course, markedly contrasting with prevailing currencies. The book reveals its indebtedness to the slow food movement and considers the implications of this movement for the frenetic pace of the academy. Perusing the text, I experienced kinship with the authors. Not only could I recognize their testimonies of the struggle of so much to do and too little time, but I also resonated with their English literature scholarly background and their yearnings to “become professors because of the joy of intellectual discovery, the beauty of literary texts, and the radical potential of new ideas” (p. 3).

In this essay, my aspiration is to situate Berg and Seeber’s primary themes within larger socio-historical, psychological, educational, and philosophical contexts. To accomplish this, I draw upon David Loy’s (2002) compelling *A Buddhist History of the West*, in which he argues that much of Western society’s construction has constituted a fervent if futile endeavor to compensate for a pervasive human sense of lack. He describes lack from within a Buddhist rather than more common Western psychoanalytical perspective. By this essay’s end, I hope to have shown how Loy’s comprehensive insight helps us more deeply understand Berg and Seeber’s testimonies and, perhaps, draw untapped potential from their text’s subject matter. In addition, Loy’s thought supports Berg’s and Seeber’s endeavors to identify

pragmatic, philosophical, and political possibilities of resistance, well-becoming, and transformation for educators.

Social Suffering & The Problem of Lack

What is *The Slow Professor* about? With reference to quantitative and qualitative research, its authors bear witness to all-too-silent and hidden sufferings experienced by faculty members working within contemporary neoliberal universities. Kleinman et al. (1997) describe “social suffering” as resulting from what “political, economic, and institutional power does to people and, reciprocally, from how these forms of power themselves influence responses to social problems” (p. ix). Berg and Seeber echo other scholars in identifying the shift away from the “long-honoured [contemplative] aims of higher education” (p. ix) as the consequence of the increasing influence of models of corporatization (see, for example, Giroux 2002, Scott 2006, Peters 2007). Distinguishing their work, however, is a more personal focus on testimonies, anecdotes, narratives, and stories, and a willingness to share their own vulnerabilities in ways higher education continues to largely disavow (Behar 1996). Importantly, they acknowledge their Western academic privileges of job security, flexibility, and solid wages, and yet nevertheless seek to voice university faculty members’ lack of well-being, in recognition that this suffering has wide-ranging implications, and silence only serves to reinforce the corporate model (p. x, p. 3).

The early sections of their book sketch a disparaging scene: North American universities as becoming Mc-ified (p. 9) —administratively dominated, promulgating grammars of productivity, efficiency, competition, measurement, and ever driven up targets of excellence amidst declining resources. In this neoliberal setting, research indicates that faculty members experience higher levels of stress than CEOs (p. 2). Other symptoms of mental ill-health prevalent among faculty members include anxiety, depression, loneliness, de-moralization, burnout, senses of helplessness, alienation, guilt, and shame.

Berg and Seeber note that the ongoing stereotype of the leisured ivory tower professor does not help matters. Indeed, such widespread misperception only contributes to defensiveness, guilt, and consequential overwork among faculty (p. 2). Equally unhelpful, they maintain, is the language of crisis permeating higher education, whether among policy makers or scholars. This language communicates the sense that academic institutions must proceed urgently and efficiently, whether in the race to global excellence, or in the training of undergraduates. Even scholarship protesting corporate values and rallying for immediate transformation can promulgate crisis language and thus exacerbate anxieties and senses of powerlessness. Hence, Berg and Seeber advocate for grammars of ‘slow’ as productive interventions in these discourses of urgency, efficiency, haste, and emergency.

Throughout their book, the slow professors portray a vivid scene of lack—lack of time, resources, support and, hence, well-being. While they focus on university

faculty members, in my view, it is important to keep this dearth of well-being experienced by educators at all institutional levels in the foreground. College instructors, for example, also experience considerable lack, amidst poor job security and wages. And, Stratulat (2017) reveals how, in her long career of teaching high school drama in urban Western Canada, she directed 55 high school theatre productions in addition to teaching duties involving 100 students per day (p. 8). She states that her extracurricular work encompassed the equivalent of nine extra teaching years. She describes fourteen-hour days with little help, and no extra compensation (p. 16). Testifying to a continuity, as well as a diversity, of experiences across levels and geographies serves to illustrate a widespread North American socio-cultural reality that requires address.

Along these lines, Loy (2002) suggests we contemplate social suffering—specifically lack—within the historical construction of Western societies and their institutions from medieval times to the present-day. Rather than locate lack solely within individual experiences or within isolated external phenomena, he tracks its psychological and socially constructed origins and progression. Moreover, he does so by encouraging us to recognize lack differently and more deeply, by considering Buddhist insights.

While both Buddhism and Western psychology recognize the self as a construct, Loy highlights two valuable insights from the 2,500-year-old wisdom tradition: 1) joy depends upon our capacities to transform our human greed, ill will, and delusion into generosity, compassion, and wisdom, and 2) self is inherently interdependent. While we, as human beings, believe ourselves to possess a separate, stable, and sovereign self, in actuality, this belief is a consequence of deluded ego function. As Loy details, we have some awareness of our delusion, because alongside our confidence in a separate self, we experience a gnawing low-grade anxiety and suspicion of our unreality—a sense that, in fact, we are not what/who we commonly think we are. We experience our suffering and dissatisfaction (*dukkha*)—the anxiety resulting from our ignorance or delusion—precisely as lack, as an interminable insecurity, instability, and insufficiency (oftentimes experienced as the feeling that there is “something wrong with me” or “I am not good enough”). We seek to compensate for this experience by grounding ourselves in mental and physical constructions of our own making that work to confirm the falsehood that we possess a self-sufficient consciousness and identity.

Loy ventures that the continually returning primal repression is not only anxiety regarding death (as discussed in Western psychoanalysis), but also anxiety regarding our inability to know and realize ourselves as independent selves.⁴ We ever try to forget or repress our actual reality of fundamental ungroundedness, but this reality continually returns, haunting us. We neurotically attempt to respond to it through objectifications; that is, by rendering or projecting this unknown anxiety into fear of some concrete thing, concept, individual, or group from whom we can defend ourselves.

Having thus defined lack, Loy turns his attention to uncovering how Western institutions, societies, and nations have variably sought to overcome lack. As he describes it, his book examines “the ways our personal senses of lack have plugged into the collective unconscious of our social behavior and institutions” (p. 9). He further illustrates how societal attempts to resolve the problem of lack have in actuality exacerbated it, resulting in compounding lack objectifications that have assumed their own lives (p. 9). Specifically, he addresses Western historical ideals of freedom, individuality, and progress, as well as normative desires for fame, romantic love, and money.

I believe Loy’s text thus provides a terrific opportunity for us to dialogue more about *The Slow Professor* and the personal and social *dukkha* of teachers, instructors, and academic faculty members. Indeed, Berg and Seeber point to the importance of *understanding* more than acquiring knowledge as a true and worthy academic endeavor (p. 55). We might, therefore, support their testimonies through the project of philosophical hermeneutics, which aspires toward understanding, as Gadamer (1975) maintains, by attending to the historicity of the text. While I cannot do justice to the entirety and complexity of Loy’s research and theorization, I will highlight three themes as they appear throughout Berg and Seeber’s book, namely, the suffering resulting from: a culture of individuality, investments in progress and linear senses of time, and the dominance of market logics and a consumerist ethos.

Battlefield Logics

Berg and Seeber identify a pervasive culture of individualism, of “every academic for himself” (p. 18), as a key source of struggle among academics. Not only does such a culture promote judgment and competition—with almost every aspect of performance being reviewed and rated—but it also contributes to perceptions that winning and losing are effects of individual capacity and incapacity. Berg and Seeber maintain that this win/lose perception causes some to work even harder despite burnout in order to prove themselves in a culture that suggests that anything other than a particular prescribed excellence is failure. Pressures to do more, and be more, can make research and writing daunting and inhibiting, and can induce or heighten senses of inadequacy. Berg and Seeber discuss implicit and explicit experiences of academic shame and practices of shaming regarding not only quantity of productivity but also quality of writing as further contributors to low morale (p. 65). Referencing the work of Brené Brown, Berg and Seeber identify academic shame as:

the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we aren’t as smart or capable as our colleagues, that our scholarship and teaching isn’t as good as that of our colleagues, that our comments in a meeting or at a speaker event aren’t as rigorous as that of our colleagues, and therefore we are unworthy of belonging to the community of great minds. (p. 87)

This win-lose sink-swim mentality justifies and normalizes workaholism, and its symptoms of not only shame but also loneliness, irritability, aggression, depression, cynicism. It also detracts attention from examining the societal, systemic, and structural norms that can contribute to mental illness and dis-ease.

Furthermore, Berg and Seeber discuss how individualism and competition, combined with the increasing role of technology in keeping educators working at-home (and always available), exacerbates workplace loneliness and diminishes collegiality, which further renders educators more vulnerable to burnout. Technology has made ghost halls out of academic halls, and traditional academic practices intended to support community, such as guest lectures, are rapidly being lost (p. 75). Increasing isolation provides less means for faculty to connect and talk honestly with their peers about their struggles. Moreover, corporatization supports conditions for viewing one another instrumentally, as objects of use in order to garner funding, for example, or as vehicles for climbing the tenure and promotion ladder. A social networking milieu in which even relationships are consumed and consumable, and colleagues are seen as resources or hindrances, can heighten workplace isolation.

Not only academics but also many teachers attest to workplace loneliness. They identify themselves as lone figures in large classrooms of students. For example, Intrator (2002), a son of two teachers and a teacher himself, details how the “isolation teachers feel depletes their heart and energy” (p. xlvi). Hewson (2015) considers the ways in which teachers, and also their students, can suffer under the “solitary instructional superhero” myth. He maintains that facing challenges in isolation, “devoid of reassurance, support, and collaborative dissonance,” can significantly undermine a teacher’s confidence and consequently he argues that school culture needs to shift toward senses of collective responsibility.

While Berg and Seeber attend to the contemporary institutional perpetuation of an individualistic culture, Loy examines the historical origins of Western individualism in the pursuit of freedom. Western civilization has long valued and defended freedom, in the forms of the Greek emancipation of reason, the Reformation’s focus on religious freedom, European and American struggles for political freedom, class struggles for economic freedom, psychoanalytic endeavors for freedom from neurosis, and aspirations of technological freedom from the constraints of nature. Loy believes this history carries the “roots of the problems that haunt us today, especially the extreme individualism that liberated greed as the engine of economic development and that continues to rationalize the erosion of community bonds” (p. 18). He interprets these historical struggles with what he calls the “freedom complex” as diverse attempts to resolve our lack. In his Buddhist-informed view, the West has worked hard to veil the reality of an interdependent, non-sovereign, and ever-changing subject-in-process among subjects-in-process through its investments in freedom.

Loy defines freedom etymologically as self-determination and the establishment of boundaries between self and no-self, self and other, self and nature. These identity boundaries reinforce the ego delusion of separateness. However, as Loy hypothesizes, the self will never be able to experience itself as free enough, precisely because it is *not* ontologically separate. Ongoing struggles for freedom thus possess the potential to heighten anxiety, and can produce counterpoint desires for security and control, which may express themselves neurotically as totalitarianism. Loy notes how the chase for security can become demonic, as can the chase for freedom. To wit, our chase for both has led to the commodification, pillaging, and plundering of the earth.

The freedom complex, as Loy discusses it, thus seems very much linked to subject-object dualism and what ecological activist Joanna Macy (2007) identifies as the “world as battlefield” *Weltbild* (p. 19). Loy describes how this worldview has led to the waning of civil society:

Our individuality means that we now view civil society as largely irrelevant to our lack, also understood solely in individual terms. Hence the overweening importance of my personal success in an increasingly competitive social environment. If my lack is now only my own problem, there is no reason for me to cooperate with others, except insofar as that helps me get the things I want. (p. 165, emphasis original)

From this perspective, we can thus recognize educational institutions as themselves participating in and perpetuating societal endeavors to resolve lack, although this remains veiled within a larger hegemonic climate of individualism. Universities not only support internal competition as individuals fight to outdo each other and are rewarded for doing so through promotion and funding structures, but they also compete with other institutions, locally, nationally, and globally, thus ever heightening demands for excellence, defined in certain terms. However, as Loy illustrates, this high competitiveness has consequences, especially given that lack itself is never directly addressed, which brings us to the sufferings of attachments to linear time and progress.

The Erosion of Progress and Time

Berg and Seeber observe that excellence results only in requirements for more excellence (p. 9), which keep faculty members racing against the clock, seeking to do more in the time available to them—working long days, on weekends, and during vacations. Academics are given advice, in self-help literature, for example, to manage their time more fully and minutely, but such advice simply plugs into this logic of doing more and tends to attribute responsibility to the individual rather than to institutions and society. Berg and Seeber describe the extent to which faculty members connect chronic work-related stress with the experience of “time sickness,” that is, the feeling that time is running out and there isn’t enough (p. 53).

Academics, as well as teachers, suffer considerably from being hurried. Seidel (2006) vividly testifies:

All morning I have been rushing and rushing. There was another organizational staff meeting at lunch, and I have a meeting after school with a parent. The teachers pass one another in the hall at top speed. We laugh about it in these public places, but in private we talk about how stressed and overwhelmed we feel, how we might burst into tears at any moment. (p. 1907, italics original)

Intrator (2002) observes that the “pulverizing time bind” in which teachers are caught leaves them wearied and frustrated and causes them to make “debilitating compromises” in their approaches to their work (p. xlv). He adds that, under such contexts, “the quality of our work is diminished, the tenor of our relationships is eroded, the ability to innovate is deflated, and our capacity to be present and connected with our students is undermined” (p. xlv). All this hardly sounds like excellence.

Berg and Seeber note that “time for reflection and open-ended inquiry is not a luxury but is crucial to what we do” (p. x). As they contend, “periods of escape from time are actually essential to deep thought, creativity, and problem solving” (p. 26). In effect, time management strategies counter the true nature and rhythms of academic work. Here I am reminded of how comparative religious theorist Guénon described modern, mechanistic civilization: “the object is merely to produce as much as possible; quality matters little, it is quantity alone that is of importance” (Herlihy 2009, p. 34).

Loy examines how re-interpretations of scripture and the gradual secularization of Western societies, beginning with the Papal Reformation and the establishment of law in the late Medieval age, resulted in the revaluation of time and its role. Archaic societies and also pre-twelfth century European societies seemed to embrace time organically as cyclical. It was aligned with nature and the cosmos and constituted a meaning-providing “pattern to be renewed or reenacted” (p. 54). Time and what happened within time were indistinguishable; cosmology and history were one (p. 54). In the medieval Christian sensibility, time belonged to God and community, and bells would signal periods for work, rest, prayer, and meditation in order to insure the following of divine cycles and commitments (p. 56). Time was hence experienced not as linear, but integrally and rhythmically—both in action and in contemplation.

The Middle Ages, however, constituted a time of transitions. It came to be believed that the sacred could become immanent in this world and that the world could thus be radically transformed: “The crucial step toward modern time was the notion of a future golden age not outside human temporality but *within it*” (p. 57, *emphasis original*). The notion of progress in the present and future was thus generated in the view that it could contribute to salvation (p. 50). Law and efficient administration worked toward ensuring progress and were thought to reflect divine and natural

physical laws. According to Loy, linear time and progress, and also mechanistic science and technology, all find their roots within medieval religious discourse (p. 58). However, the gradual erosion of this religious dimension and context has meant the forgetting of lack and possibilities for resolving it, although we nevertheless continue to channel our efforts into the future (p. 60). According to Loy, secular society has become “trapped in the future because that provides the only solution we can envision to our sense of lack” (p. 45). Consequently, as he discusses in a later chapter, today we largely spend our days “preparing for something that never happens” (p. 171).

Along these lines, Smith (2006) details how Western education operates within the future tense rather than with relationship to the past or the now, and this is readily identifiable in the language of continual deferral; namely, “When you complete this [course, grade, assignment, year, etc.], then you can...” (p. 25). Drawing upon Loy, Smith introduces the notion of “frozen futurism” to describe our constructed relationship to the future as an interminable, inevitable reproduction of more of the same. Within market logics, grammars of change and making a difference are continually utilized but are themselves symptomatic of the inability of the future as it has been constructed to be radically other than what it already is (p. 26).

Hence, joy is ever deferred and we experience lack as “I don’t yet have enough of” (p. 65). And, as Berg and Seeber also point out, we falsely believe more time will fill the lack. However, in Loy’s view, because time is a symptom of lack and lack is never addressed, the problem of lack and also of time cannot be resolved. With the increasing secularization of society and the domination of market logics, the pattern of a work week with Sunday as a day of rest and reverence, or the seventh-year sabbatical as a year of restoration and contemplation, all embedded in alternate understandings of time, are becoming increasingly compromised.

Marketplace Salvation

Berg and Seeber follow numerous critiques of the increasing corporatization of the university. They challenge what is being called “academic capitalism”—applications of the market models to higher education—and “research capitalism,” namely, pressures to obtain funding from governments and corporations, and pressures to produce knowledge identified as valuable by private and government sectors (p. 53). Both types of capitalism risk loss of diversity and loss of faculty members’ abilities to follow their own intellectual drives and joys.

For Loy, while other Western approaches to filling up lack have included attachments to romantic love and the pursuits of fame, the “money complex” constitutes an especially insidious, pervasive global attachment: “[t]oday our collective version of insanity is the cult of perpetual economic growth, a faith that is difficult to see through because it has become, in effect, our religious myth” (p. 82). Because we identify our worldview and values as secular, we fail to realize that economics operates as the dominant religion of our time (p. 197). Loy emphasizes that we must become more cognizant of our economic system as *unnatural*, as an

“historically conditioned way of organizing and reorganizing the world,” with its own ontology and ethics (p. 200).

According to Loy, premodern societies incorporated economic activities within general social relationships, and social cohesion, mores, assets, and standing carried more weight than material goods. However, in capitalist societies the reverse is true, with capital being master rather than servant. This reversal also began in the late Middle Ages when, in tandem with the slow decline of religious influence, profit gradually began to fuel economic progress and social structures became accordingly reorganized (p. 201). Social systems and economics became naturalized as indistinct. Loy documents Weber’s argument that monastic values were transported into worldly vocations initially in Calvinism’s belief that worldly success could encompass a way of showing God’s favor. Labor and reinvestment rather than consumption of surplus provided opportunities to prove oneself saved. Worldly success as a means of salvation, injected “a revolutionary new promise into daily life” (p. 202) and labor became future-directed. Religion thus initially undergirded economics in as much as it did perceptions of time. Gradually, as connection with this otherworldly motivation diminished, preoccupation with the values of capital and profit persisted. The new technology that marked the industrial revolution of the late 1700s beckoned the “liberation” of mass land, labor, and capital, and furthered the destruction of community and relational time (p. 203). Earth, animal, and human life became increasingly parceled, commodified, mechanized, exploitable, and expendable, valued principally on a supply and demand basis. Industry and consumption came to dominate the social order, with government interference ever encouraged to retreat. This market religion and grammar has, moreover, facilitated the depletion of moral capital and the capacities of now atomized individuals to collectively regenerate it (p. 205).

Economics today still adheres to eighteenth-century utilitarian philosophy that rationalizes and naturalizes possessiveness, personal gain, and greed. Yet, as Loy points out, the belief that joy can be acquired through satisfying one’s greed is delusory, as Buddhist wisdom recognizes. Loy argues that socio-environmental justice is not obtainable without accompanying insight into this delusion. Such insight has generally been given through traditional religious and wisdom teachings, which counter greed in their variable emphasis on renunciation, generosity, and reciprocity (p. 209). But, in secular contexts, access to these teachings is scarce.

Engaging Resistance & Transformation

Berg and Seeber represent their book as potentially transformative, as a manifesto of sorts. For them, remedies to the current state of campuses require the activism of tenured faculty members. Again, with inspiration from the slow food movement, they offer numerous possibilities for resistance, informed by an understanding of slow as less ‘slow versus fast’ and more as ‘attention versus distraction’ (p. 89). Critically, slow is not contrary to hard work. Rather, it signals a *way* of working (p. 90).

Among their recommendations, Berg and Seeber suggest that faculty members counter battlefield market logics through community-building initiatives, such as reading the work of their colleagues in recognition that “the open-endedness of thinking is connected to an openness to otherness” (p. 60). Community-building, they maintain, entails seeing one another as a “whole person, not as a ‘position’ on an academic question or as an instrumentalized networking ‘contact’” (p. 88). The slow professors also advocate for more face-to-face engagements (rather than online classroom teaching, for example). They reference research that highlights intelligence as contextual and learning as benefitting from the pedagogical integration of brain, body, and emotions (p. 35).

Not only do positive emotions experienced by students and educators increase creativity, intellect, and resilience, thereby constructively influencing work outcomes, but Berg and Seeber also note how affect is generated *among* bodily encounters and is smelled more often than seen (p. 38). While emotions are transitory, “affect is the lingering and pervasive residue of emotions” (p. 39). This olfactory dimension “challenges Western beliefs that we are separate and bounded individuals whose emotions are connected in our own skins” (p. 38). Additionally, Berg and Seeber suggest establishing “holding environments” of trust and support attuned to the important emotional dimension of work (p. 15). As Loy similarly observes, “networks of trust continue to be eroded by our tendency to commodify everything, including human relationships” (p. 167) and, hence, these networks need to be re-established. Along these lines, Berg and Seeber draw upon a study that indicates that social support is more important than blood pressure medication (p. 84).

With regard to lack of time, the slow professors advocate a greater protection and embrace of timelessness, in which time loses significance, rather than a focus on time management. They recommend rebellion from the rushed language of productivity (prodspeak) (p. 53) and the utilization of a generative slow—ecological and ethical—vocabulary that honors engrossment, immersion, ideas, and insights, and provides more room for an unfolding of “who I am as a thinking being” (p. 59). Moreover, particularly in the humanities, faculty members can do more to emphasize research as a process of acquiring understanding rather than as output. Slowing down entails “asserting the importance of contemplation, connectedness, fruition, and complexity” (p. 57). It involves letting thinking and research breathe, and valuing times of rest and idleness, recognizing them as imperative to research creation. Moreover, instead of preoccupation with annual reports, they recommend re-directing focus toward what is intellectually robust and sustainable over the long haul (p. 57). Crucially, they contend that creative and restorative time needs to be made a vital part of the *infrastructure* of humanities research.

As Loy persuasively shows, contemporary societies are dangerously motivated by “an unconscious drive for being, for a grounding that can never be attained in the way we seek it” (p. 122). He continues:

[The] objectification of our lack into impersonal 'secular' institutions means that basic questions about the meaning of our lives—the central spiritual issue for a being that needs to understand and resolve its own sense of lack—have become alienated into a 'not yet enough' that can never be enough. (p. 122)

Because modern societies have become unaware of lack and its objectifications, they support institutions and systems that take on "lives of their own which subordinate us to them" (p. 211). Loy calls for the re-cognizance of civil society as the site for working together for social change and justice in ways that do not "objectify greed, ill will, and ignorance in institutions, but instead empower us to understand and address our lack" (p. 170). Loy thus equally attends to transformation but, for him, it is imperative that we engage in deeper ontological and historical investigations and explore our lack more fully—what it encompasses, and how it might be addressed and channeled, if not overcome. As he writes, "without an answer to that question, we cannot really know how society should be organized" (p. 151). In my view, this is an essential insight for educators interested in transformation and sustainable well-being.

For Loy, any solution to lack identified within the frame of either/or dualism and instrumental rationality will not work (p. 188), and here I am reminded of Audre Lorde's (1984) recognition that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 110). Instead, he suggests we begin by identifying terms of solidarity. Historically, as he has illustrated, this unifying force was based on a robust religious vision. While such a Christian vision may no longer be fully persuasive to many, particularly in global times, Loy cautions that consequently depreciating all religious perspectives entails the risk of not "being able to account for the spiritual (or ultimately existential) concerns that still motivate people" (p. 169). His book details how, in medieval times, a covenanted project to transform this world replaced a transcendent, otherworldly solution to lack. However, the failure of this religious project produced a more "secular understanding of the 'inner light', which transformed from grace to conscience and then to a rationality that our self-interest could employ instrumentally" (p. 169). This transformation has unsuccessfully addressed our lack. He concludes that any solution to current problems would, therefore, necessarily consist *also* of a spiritual dimension. Instead of chasing:

this worldly-goals with a religious zeal all the greater because they can never be attained... the solution to the environmental catastrophes that have begun, and to the social deterioration we are suffering from, will occur when we direct [our] repressed spiritual urge back on its true path. (p. 210)

Following from this assertion, however, Loy asks a key question: given that modern, largely agnostic or post-secular societies generally no longer accept the myth of an alternate reality, what responses might then be available? During the Axial Age (800-200 BCE), Greek, Indian, Asian, and Middle Eastern cultures variously explored a

transcendental vision that emphasized awareness of lack and respective solutions. These solutions involved three dimensions: observance of a sacred reality, an ethical requirement to follow universal values, and a critical, intellectual capacity to rise above (transcend) the everyday to be able to observe and transform it (p. 212). Several of the world's major wisdom traditions descend from this vision. But, what to do in recognition that the secular world has lost faith in the first two dimensions?

Loy suggests that dharma wisdom (i.e. the Buddha's teachings, and also the experiences and realities these teachings narrate) offers an answer. He notes that Buddhist scripture is ambivalent in its discussion of salvation. While it does support a transcendental dimension, it also allows for an only and entirely here and now liberation from lack: a) in realization of a present reality obscured to us through our attachments to greed, ill will, and delusions; and b) in awareness of emptiness—namely, a this-worldly transcendence of egoistic self in cognizance of the nondual interdependence of all phenomena (p. 214).³

In this regard, Loy appears to follow Campbell's (2001) assertion that we need new mythologies for today and points to the possibilities of a nondualistic embrace of interdependence and interpermeation, in which "I realize that I am not other than the world: I am what the world is doing right here, right now. This is liberation because it frees me from the self-preoccupation of always trying to ground myself" (p. 214). On such terms, there is no need for us to ground ourselves, to make ourselves feel real, as we are always already fully established in the totality (p. 214). In my view, this awakening opens us to joy.

Returning to Joy

I began this paper referencing the ancient wisdom in the *Upanishads* of *sat-chit-ananda*, that is, consciousness and being as fully established in joy. Returning to the subject of joy, then, I wonder more fully: how do and might we variably understand it, where and how does it circulate in Western society, and what does connecting with it have the potential to open up? While fully addressing these questions is beyond this essay's scope, I cannot help but wonder whether joy within the West is generally regarded as something of which to be suspicious and, if so, why. In my own view, in as much as the natural environment is manifestly diverse and human beings are manifestly multidimensional, it seems sensible for us to recognize and embrace myriad affects and emotions—a plurality of human experience—which would, perhaps especially, include joy. Yet, as Ladner (2004) notes, positive emotions have been given short shrift in Western society: "one could go through many years of Western education without learning how to develop positive emotions" (p. xiii). Indeed, much Western art and thought, as Humphries (1999) maintains, seems preoccupied with the interminable "work of mourning for some indeterminate loss" (p. 27). Given Loy's discussion, might this preoccupation precisely be the nature and consequence of Western individual and societal anxieties and incapacities to understand and resolve lack?

Günter Heisterkamp (2001) gives specific attention to Western psychoanalysis and debates whether it is a “cheerless profession” —whether it holds a taboo against joy (p. 839). He notes that joy (*Freude* in German) receives only three entries in Freud, and none in Jung, and that, in psychoanalytic textbooks and journals, entries for joy are frequently absent (p. 845). It is solacing to note that Heisterkamp thus devotes his research to the reclamation of joy—the reclamation of *joie de vivre* and zest for life—as an integral part of Western psychoanalysis, with primary reference to the twentieth century psychoanalyst, Heinz Kohut, who, he asserts, alone “merits the distinction of having described the psychoanalysis of joy” (p. 840). Heisterkamp (2001) understands joy as a basic form of resonance, the complement to anxiety: “whereas anxiety reflects psychic distress in connection with problems of structuring, joy is the expression of successful (re)structuring: it is the feeling of self-discovery, of a new beginning, and of self-renewal (p. 839). Following Kohut, Heisterkamp observes the vitality of joy to the cultivation and restoration of a cohesive, stable self (who possesses empathy, creativity, humor, and wisdom): “[t]he psychological position of joy lies at the pivot of psychic transformation, where the scope of psychic self-articulation and self-regulation expand” (p. 858). When the patient and analyst mutually express joy, they establish intersubjectivity: “We consider our patients to be on the right track when they can enjoy their work and are proud of what they have accomplished” (p. 865).

Heisterkamp signals a generative orientation for Western psychoanalysis, but, for this essay, let us briefly explore joy and its ontological, epistemological, and ethical openings more deeply with reference to ancient Upanishadic wisdom and Buddhist psychology, not only in keeping with Loy’s project, but also in awareness that these insightful traditions have to-date been minimally taken up in Western scholarship. The dharma emphasizes joy as central. The Buddha maintains in the *Dhammapada* teachings: “We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. /When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves (Easwaren 1987 p. 78). Further, in Chapter 15, he several times repeats the refrain and invitation, “let us live in joy,” by which he means, according to Easwaren’s interpretation, a life freed from hate, possessiveness, greed, and fear, among other neuroses (p. 138).

As Easwaren contends, the highest inner “joy is attainable on this earth when a person purges himself of all impediments” (p. 137). Abiding joy thus attends enlightenment: it accompanies embodied awareness of ceaseless change and the non-static interdependence and interpenetration of everything. Perhaps contrary to Heisterkamp’s view, it illuminates and celebrates no-self, or groundlessness; that is, intersubjectivity without attachment to stability or sovereignty, in awareness that all is interminably in flux. As such, for Humphries (1999), whose writing is informed by Buddhism, the Western preoccupation with loss is only preliminary to the final stage of enlightenment (p. 27). Enlightenment, as Macy (2007) contends, recognizes participation in the world not as small separate-self and battlefield, but as large Self: as ever changing but ever-present diversity-in-unity (p. 28). And, O’Sullivan (2014) remarks (while drawing connections between Spinoza and Buddhism), in this illumined context, “all the world is a joyful encounter, in fact, where there is a sense

of identification with the world, a veritable beauty" (p. 268). In accord with the sages of the *Upanishads*, the Buddha recognized joy as an unconditioned/unconditional native state, and, in this sense, significantly different from happiness and pleasure (Easwaren 1985, p. 137). Indeed, Easwaren (1985) accordingly contends that pleasure or worldly happiness is a house of cards:

[R]eal joy can be found within that very stream of change. If one truly understands that life's very nature is change, then the burning desire to wrest permanence from a world of passing sensations begins to die; and as it dies, the mind begins to taste its natural state, which is joy: not a sensation, but a state of consciousness unaffected by pleasure and pain. (p. 136)

Joy thus constitutes an awakened state of consciousness, and is essential to living fully, wholly, and vibrantly—with *joie de vivre*.

Moreover, joy is significantly transformational. Echoing the *Upanishads*, joyful experience accompanies moving society toward aliveness and well-being in as much as its expression signals awakened individuals and societies. Joy within oneself and societal opportunities to experience it can reverberate outward. As Easwaren (1987) maintains, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* suggests that "as joy expands, one's (perceived) need to exploit others—to get something more out of life contracts" (p. 135). Indeed, he observes that one might identify a "ladder of joy" that extends from "oneself, to one's environment and community, to all of humankind" (p. 135). The expansion of joy within the self not only reverberates but also facilitates greater generosity and charity. In other words, joy includes responsivity/responsibility toward others; it is not unmitigated freedom of ego. Indeed, as Loy has well-illustrated, we need to recognize that we are not free, and to stop chasing this notion of boundless freedom that is destroying the earth. Joy, in the *Upanishads* and in Buddhist wisdom, is essentially connected to service and compassion-in-action. As Loy remarks, "a life devoted to helping others turns out to be more joyful than a life devoted to helping oneself" (p. 214). Concurrently, and here perhaps I am negotiating an East-West in-between view, how each individual might most fully contribute to the service of the whole is brilliantly diverse, and is connected with an individual's enriching gifts, talents, and passions.

Transformational Educational Joys

If joyous living is most connected to service, then it would seem that educational institutions, based on many of their mission statements, should be highly joyful places. Yet, in as much as Heisterkamp (2001) debates whether psychoanalysis is a cheerless profession, so too has this essay explored suffering within the education profession and pondered the absence of joy in sites of learning. Significantly more research remains to be done (joy, alas, has also not been the subject of much current study), but, as some contemporary education scholars have observed, schools that model the factory or corporation stifle joy. In the societal quarters that house educational institutions, joy's expansiveness and vast potency appears, by and large,

tragically cramped. Like Heisterkamp, however, these scholars variably recognize that joy has much to offer, and that attention to it in educational contexts needs to become more foundational (Finney & Sagal 2017, Noddings 2013, Leggo 2004, Liston 2001).

Berg and Seeber also discuss joy and its transformational capacity. They recommend that educators give voice to the politics of pleasure and recognize pleasure as a right, and here, I am reminded of Heisterkamp's (2001) assertion that "some people have yet to discover that their own joy in living has the right to exist" (p. 859). They observe that pleasure is possibly the best predictor of learning outcomes and that the quality of teaching is heightened if educators are less pressured and able to teach what affords them delight: "when one enjoys teaching, one does it well" (p. 33). As the educator is lost in engaging what they love, slow time paradoxically passes swiftly: "timeless time...fosters creativity, original thinking, and, as a bonus apparently, joy" (p. 27). Moreover, Berg and Seeber observe that the courses most pleasurable to teach are those in which there is a deepened sense of connection with others. This quality of engrossment applies equally to research and writing, and the cultivation of deep thought. As part of their manifesto, Berg and Seeber recommend the deployment of contemplative language, or even phrases such as "I am in joyful pursuit of..." (p. 57). Additionally, they suggest redefining our expressions of time, by understanding and conveying time as an ethical "relationship to myself and others" (p. 58) and as "becoming" (p. 59).⁶

For me, joy recognizes work-life balance as dualistic, as too readily separating work from living. To participate in joy is to engage in work, play, and life as one integral whole. And again, acknowledging individuals on their manifold creative as well as wisdom-guided ways to generative insight, service, and solidarity, individuals might seek their career and life pathway as educators because they realize they connect most with joy, and this joy is most ambitious and boundless, when in the service of research that has them most curious, and/or when conversing about their knowledge and learning, and/or when working with communities, and/or when showing leadership in administration, and/or when engaging young people. These joys can thrive when they are institutionally supported and nourished in their diversity rather than exhausted through demands of large class sizes, or lack of preparation time, or homogenous expectations, for example. They also thrive when we, as Berg and Seeber maintain, "protect a time and a place for timeless time" (p. 28). And, they are sustained when they can be shared with other joys imbricated in well-being, such as time with family, time outdoors and in nature, and, certainly, time and opportunity to explore dimensions of consciousness and being, particularly lack and its remedies. As Loy observes, "[a]ll the frantic and obsessive activity of daily life, in whatever country, under whatever ideology, is a defense against full human self-consciousness" (Becker, qtd. in Loy, p. 123).

Moreover—and here again perhaps departing from Berg and Seeber—while pleasure, to which we gravitate and attach, tends to invoke its opposite, pain, from which we run, Buddhist and Upanishadic wisdom make clear that the language of

joy is one of nonduality and interdependence. It is, therefore, not disconnected from everything else. As Campbell contends, following one's joy or bliss as part of the hero's journey does not mean a life without any suffering. Hattam (2008) similarly observes, quoting Chögyam Trungpa, "awakening one's heart involves living with the 'tremendous sadness' when 'we open our eyes to the rest of the world'" (p. 116). Barthes (1979) also notes that textual engagement, while indescribably blissful, can also be potentially unsettling and discomfiting as it may challenge historical, cultural, and psychological assumptions (p. 14). However, within this challenge, we may find meaningfulness and deeper openings to self, others, and environment. In their own way, Berg and Seeber also observe that enjoyment is "not superficial...but rather a matter of finding meaning and significance in "ordinary events" and even "within adversity" (p. 40).

In sum, the *Upanishads* and Buddhism, with their emphasis on the vast pervasiveness and possibilities of nondual embrace, provide a compelling way of approaching and understanding the suffering and also pleasures that Berg and Seeber detail. Also key to this wisdom is the awareness that joy cannot be manufactured or enforced: it remains to be abundantly discovered, accessed, nourished and abided in. As the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, which marked the opening epigraph to this essay, wisely asserts: From joy are born all creatures/By joy they grow, and to joy they return (Easwaren, 1987, p. 147). Joy, thus, is ontologically *a natural way of interdependent being as well as essential to growth and transformation*. That said, in as much as a seed requires sunshine, rain, and fertile soil in order to flourish, so too can the conditions for the identification and flourishing of joy be invited and nourished. Loy (2002) has made wonderfully evident that access to joy is often obstructed in Western contexts by not only individual but also institutional and societal greed and ill will, and by delusions that serve to forget, repress, veil, deny and compensate for the reality and anxieties of our inherent ungroundedness; in other words, by individual and societal incapacities to address lack. Perhaps these obstructive contexts and incapacities to engage lack also explain North American suspicion of joy.

There are currently no shortages of scholarly critiques of modernity and neoliberalism or, for that matter, of attendant critiques of modern and neoliberal education. But Loy has offered us readers something novel and intriguing: a study of the Middle Ages and modernity read through the lens of lack. As educators contemplate transformation and greater well-being in schools, colleges, and universities, the clear implication of Loy's text is the critical need to consider ontological lack more fully, to further examine social suffering created by historical and contemporary failures to speak to it, to become more observant of specific processes and practices of "institutional lack" (p. 122), and to envision possibilities for addressing lack in the present and future—individually and collectively. As Loy contends, "to overcome one's own *dukkha* is to become more aware of the *dukkha* maintained by unjust and unnecessary social arrangements. To overcome that institutionalized *dukkha*, we need to work collectively" (p. 152).

Concurrently, the importance of individual initiatives cannot be underestimated. Loy notes that “unequal and oppressive social relations are maintained by coercion. But that coercion could not be maintained without the cooperation of our own self imaginations” (p. 151). Thus, intimate attention to the inner/personal and the outer/systemic are equally called for—especially in recognition that these are precisely not separate (Eppert et. al. 2015; Eppert 2010; Eppert & Wang 2008). As Loy advocates, the challenge—internally and outwardly, individually and societally—is to direct attention toward transforming our own greed, ill will, and delusion into generosity, compassion, and wisdom. In this context, as educators, following Loy, we might mindfully explore personal as well as societal neurotic endeavors to make ourselves feel real and establish boundaries between self and other, whether through attachments to money, power, fame, freedom, or a host of other possibilities.

Finally, such awakenings may be intertwined with and result in deeper connections to joy. As we investigate institutional suffering, so too might we story practices, expressions, and experiences of care, kindness, generosity, and compassion—all contributors to joy—within North American society and institutional contexts. I, for one, can identify numerous instances when I have witnessed expressions of these in academic and other education contexts. Also, the plethora of research and teaching currently centered on transformation towards more just, compassionate, and sustainable societies is inspirational to say the least, as is the vast dedication, creativity, and resourcefulness of educators everywhere. I believe we can benefit significantly from more inquiry into, identification of, and creation of opportunities, time, and spaces for joyous consciousness and interdependent insight to flourish. Joy is transformational—although it has not been commonly regarded as such. As Leggo (2004) asserts, “[a] curriculum of joy is a lived and living curriculum, always generated by questing and questioning, by searching and re-searching (p. 32). And, as Easwaren (1987) critically and wisely reminds, “personal fulfillment and social good: They are not in conflict” (p. 135).

Concluding Thoughts

In conclusion, I find Berg and Seeber’s *The Slow Professor* a much needed, brave, and bold text that seems to be opening up rife conversations across institutions. Their referencing of slow as a process “whereby everyday life—in all its pace and complexity, frisson and routine—is approached with care and attention... an attempt to live in the present in a meaningful, sustainable, thoughtful, and pleasurable way” (Parkins and Craig, qtd. in Berg and Seeber, p. 11) importantly contests narrow neoliberal educational grammars and structures and carries implications for not only college and university but also school environments. At the same time, as I have sought to illustrate, Loy’s *A Buddhist History of the West* wonderfully invites aspiring slow educators everywhere to go deeper into understanding not only the historical roots of much contemporary personal and social suffering but also the ontological, psychological, ethical, and metaphysical explorations that need to be an indelible part of transformational initiatives. Having read both texts with much engrossment, along the lines of Barthes’ *jouissance*, I have also briefly sought to contribute to them with reference to ancient wisdom from

Buddhism and also the *Upanishads*, which emphasize the benefits of greater attention to nondual joy—for self, other, and environment. In closing, I wonder how we might further dialogue about lack and joy in schools and higher education: how can we address both more fully and deeply? I end with reference to questions from Mary Oliver's (1992) evocative poem, "A Summer Day," which has long been a staple of my own wondering and wanderings.

*Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?
(p. 94)*

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Notes

¹ Interestingly, in his youth, Campbell withdrew from graduate studies at Columbia University precisely because he was not able to pursue his growing interest in Sanskrit studies and modern art. He thus read independently for several years. This hiatus launched the knowledge and devout scholarly activity from which we have much benefited, and which returned him to a college position and a prolific career.

² www.dalailamacenter.org/educate-the-heart

³ I first began teaching a graduate course I titled “Towards a Curriculum of the Heart” in January 2016. It was inspired by these authors, and also by Terrance Hilary Selmer Fossen’s (1997) doctoral dissertation, *A Curriculum of the Heart: Training the Transformational Leader* completed at my home institution.

⁴ Loy’s work exemplifies burgeoning interest in resonances and differences between Western psychology and Buddhist wisdom. See, for example, Germer et al. (2013), Safran (2003), Welwood (2000), Epstein (1995).

⁵ Loy is among a wave of scholars recognizing Buddhism’s multidimensionality and adaptability – its flexibility as it establishes itself more fully in the West. Additional scholars include, for example, Stephen Batchelor (1997), who advocates for a contemporary creative re-envisioning, one that moves away from religious contextualization and embraces individuation and social engagement (p. 111). And O’Sullivan (2014) with reference to Deleuze, Spinoza, and Badiou, draws attention to invigorating new possibilities of a dharma for the contemporary West forged “on the sharp edge of experimentation and development” (p. 276).

⁶ Here we also see resonances to di Nicola’s (2018) discussion of “slow thought”: <https://aeon.co/essays/take-your-time-the-seven-pillars-of-a-slow-thought-manifesto>