

Autobiography, ‘Nation-ness,’ and the ‘Global Now’: Mapping the Commons of the post-9/11 American National Psyche (A Curriculum Inquiry Project)

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Introduction

The call to address curriculum in terms of the ‘local to global/global to local’ cultural and environmental commons—“those material and cultural spaces that belong to everyone” (AAACS CFP, 2009)—requires some conceptual finesse. This is due in part to the presumption inherent in this call that there are yet, in reality, ‘material and cultural spaces’ at the intersection of the global and the local that ‘belong to everyone’ in an age in which the ownership society has been taken to global scale, the bases for preserving cultural autonomy are increasingly made elusive by ‘neocapitalism’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 20), and the captains of commerce and industry are plundering the cultural and natural resources of the entire planet.

However, the need for conceptual finesse is also due to the fuzziness of the idea that cultural and environmental spaces ‘belong to everyone’ in a de facto sense: that is, in relation to an established foundation of use and/or participation rights supported by genuine and actionable public consensus. Such rights, as we know, have been the focus of struggles for access by people(s) everywhere, and *belonging* has become a major diacritic of our times. These issues form the core of concerns in this paper, since the focal point here is how the commons of nation-ness has come to be disputed in the ‘global now’ (Appadurai, 1996, p. 2) and how autobiography (Pinar, 2000/1975, 2004, 2006) may assist in understanding the fray—in this case, the fray of post-9/11 American being,

becoming, and belonging. To elaborate how such a study may serve as a curriculum inquiry project requires a few words about focus and method.

A Few Words about Focus and Method

The specific focus of this study is what might be termed the ‘civic-cultural commons’ of the (U.S.) American (hereafter simply American) national psyche following a moment of national trauma occasioned by terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (hereafter 9/11). The repercussions of this moment are with us still—that is, the moment itself is open-ended and continues to affect the American national psyche. Following 9/11, America was officially presented to the world as though united in thought and action, despite both initial and growing factionalism within this purported ‘commons.’ The focus of this study is, therefore, admittedly parochial, but since official American response to the trauma spread its effects worldwide, reaching beyond national boundaries to the global arena, the inspection of disputes within this civic-cultural terrain merit some attention in relation to the ‘global now.’ The approach taken here is conceptualized in anthropological terms in that this inspection is pursued by examining discourses as cultural artifacts (Anderson, 1991) composing an autobiography of nation-ness.

The construction of this commons is complicated by multiple confrontations and contradictions exposed in disputes over meanings of America as *nation* and notions of being American as *citizen*. Disputes in the public sphere over this commons, at least in the American context, project these two concepts onto a contested discursive terrain that is difficult to navigate, but may be opened for inspection by a research genre called social

cartography (Nicholson-Goodman, 2000, 2006, 2009; Paulston, Liebman, & Nicholson-Goodman, 1996; Paulston, 1993, 1995, 2000).

Social cartography is a comparative method for mapping ways of seeing social and educational change (Paulston, 2000). Change may be viewed from conflicting knowledge perspectives, and disputes over meaning arise in discourses, forming contested discursive terrain. The process of social cartography proceeds from analysis of this discursive terrain to a conceptualization of the ordering within the fray depicted in an image. The image portrays the dynamics of the fray to reflect implications for further arrangements of meaning, opening space for difference. The image aims to break through the surface of dispute(s) by exposing deeper tensions and layers of meaning to reveal a dispersion of ideas or claims at the core of the conflict.

The project begins with an examination of the interrelations of a field formed by texts (an inter-textual field) to probe these inner meanings as they form knowledge disputes. Dichotomies are disrupted to reveal dispersion by examining not only oppositions, but also juxtapositions, usually of truth- and value-claims in the discourses composing the conflict. The resulting image is a map that may be useful for clarification, orientation, or for re-orientation—in the case of this project, within a once seemingly familiar terrain that has “suddenly become unfamiliar” (Greene, 2000, p. 308).

Mapping, therefore, is a non-innocent practice that involves “value-laden” or “refracted images contributing to dialogue in a socially-constructed world” (Harley, 1988, as cited in Nicholson-Goodman, 2000, p. 325). Although as many views, or *vistas*, as are available to the map-maker are represented in the map, the way these vistas are configured in relation to one another through the image reflects the map-maker’s

analysis not only of the inter-textual field itself, but also of the world within which it is situated. The map thus reflects the knowledge perspective from which the map is drawn and may be used as a *tactic*, in de Certeau's (1984) sense, as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus," an analytic tool to counter strategies of power, "an art of the weak" whose space, in relation to power, is "the space of the other" (p. 37).

Further, the mapping process may serve "as a *koan*, a device from Eastern traditions that may produce an 'attitude of open attention and contemplation,' a key feature of ecological consciousness... that requires the 'direct action of turning and turning, seeing from different perspectives and from different depths' (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 10)" (Nicholson-Goodman, 2000, p. 309). The map itself contributes to a dialogue by clarifying what is being contested and why—that is, by illuminating the terrain not only "to identify key landmarks and symbols in the social territory 'out there'... but also to identify the key landmarks and symbols in the way we understand the world"" (Kemmis, 1986, as cited in Nicholson-Goodman, 2006, p. 49) and thus constitutes 'ideology-critique' (Kemmis, 1986).

The mapping project discussed here attends to truth- and value-claims being put forward in discourses that are taken to compose an autobiography of a nation in distress. The map as a representation of this autobiography provides to the reader "not a truth," but rather "the artist's scholarship resulting in a cultural portrait" (Paulston & Liebman, 2000, p. 14). The 'cultural portrait' in this study applies autobiography in Pinar's (2000/1975, 2004, 2006) sense as a method for approaching *currere*, but treats

autobiography more as a literary or dramatic, rather than a psycho-analytic, narrative of being, becoming, and belonging.

Finally, autobiography is taken here to the level of the nation. The nation is treated as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996) expressed in discourse, a locus of “social and textual affiliation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 201). What the mapping in this study portrays (see Appendix) is a multi-faceted sense of ‘nation-ness’ (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1990, 1994) opening to a schizophrenic sense of what it means to be a citizen, thus attending to the issue of how being, becoming, and belonging are conceptualized in the global now. The map disrupts the notion of the civic-cultural commons as static, portraying it instead as nomadic, deterritorialized terrain (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari evoke the image of “America as a special case,” where the important things take “the route of the American rhizome” since “America is the pivot point and mechanism of reversal” (p. 19). They note that

in America everything comes together, tree and channel, root and rhizome. There is no universal capitalism, there is no capitalism in itself; capitalism is at the crossroads of all kinds of formations, it is neocapitalism by nature. It invents its eastern face and western face, and reshapes them both—all for the worst. (p. 20)

Mapping as depicted here, then, takes a ‘lines of flight’ approach, creating “a momentary space within Empire to express difference and hope” (Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. ix) as a way to “tactically weave through the globalized corporate order” (p. 4). The image reflects positioning and re-positioning in a space that is “a fascinating, imaginative realm... wherein no one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood” (Doll, as cited in Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 4). Positioning and

repositioning within the map of this civic-cultural terrain, or ‘commons,’ tell a tale of how nation-ness and citizenship may be seen in the ‘global now’ of post-9/11 American national “autobiographical consciousness” (Grumet, 1988, p. 66), but this consciousness, as noted, is treated as a literary/dramatic narrative of a schizophrenic political culture. This narrative is offered as a vehicle for curriculum inquiry to explore the space between past and future (Arendt, 2006/1961) in the global now (Appadurai, 1996), leading to a “more anticipatory arrangement of knowledge” for the future (den Heyer, 2009, p. 443).

Logics of Empire and their Consequences

The question of what can be said to truly constitute a global-local/local-global cultural commons in a mass-mediated world presents us with a general challenge of some significance in that this commons is produced by means that are to some extent artificial (see, e.g., Adorno, 2001/1991; Appadurai, 1996, 2000). Adorno, for instance, speaks of the ‘culture industry’ as that which “intentionally integrates its consumers from above” (p. 98), so that, while it “undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary; they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery” (p. 99). It is no secret that for many Americans, for example, Nature is something one can visit and explore on the appropriate television network or via the Internet, and culture is whatever happens to be the most talked-about feature of the television or film industry’s seasonal offerings or the latest buzz on any of various Internet ‘reality’ sites (Facebook, Youtube, etc.). If one happens to be a ‘cognoscenti’ of the political scene (Gitlin, 1993, p. 132), television news-talk pundits are available to instruct in the finer points—and the duller as well—of

the nation's ongoing disputes. This is not to suggest, however, that individual or group agency has altogether disappeared, but rather that some finesse is required to grasp where and how this agency is situated—that is, the extent to which agency can be said to be localized or locatable and to effectively interact with the global in a truly transformative sense.

Appadurai (2000), for example, sees a “double apartheid evolving” globally where “policy debates... set the stage for life-and-death decisions for ordinary farmers, vendors, slum-dwellers, merchants, and urban populations,” having “left ordinary people outside and behind” (2). He sees globalization discourse as “dangerously dispersed, with the language of epistemic communities, the discourse of states and inter-state fora, and the everyday understanding of global forces by the poor growing steadily apart” (p. 2). His concern is with “the growing divorce between these debates and those that characterize vernacular discourses about the global, worldwide, that are typically concerned with how to plausibly protect cultural autonomy and economic survival in some local, national, or regional sphere in the era of ‘reform’ and ‘openness’” (pp. 2-3). Acknowledging that “globalization is inextricably linked to the current working of capital on a global basis,” he regards this phenomenon as extending “earlier logics of empire, trade, and political dominion” (p. 3). This ‘divorce’ leads him to consider “the peculiar optical challenges posed by the global” as he addresses what he sees as a “challenge to American academic thought about globalization” (p. 3) and calls for “strong internationalization” of academic dialogue(s) about globalization and for a “deparochialisation of the research ethic” (p. 14) as it is expressed in Western research forms.

This ‘divorce’ is especially problematic where the society is a global *risk society* (Beck, 1992)—a paradigm shift engendered by the production and dissemination of environmental risks and hazards and by the industries that emerge (and profit) from risk production, risk distribution, risk assessment, and risk management. Such ‘industries’ have been treating global and local commons alike as their own private reserves to be controlled in the name of superior expertise and claims of sound ecological management of the world’s resources for some time (see, e.g., Castro, 1993; Prakash, 1995). One only need consider the extent to which the polluter British Petroleum (BP) was allowed to exercise its privilege of ‘controlling’ and ‘containing’ the damage caused by its deep-sea drilling in the Gulf of Mexico as a matter of proprietary rights over such ventures and the risks and hazards they produce.

Beck’s (1992) *Risk Society* presents us with a view of a “*catastrophic society*” in which “the exceptional condition threatens to become the norm” [emphasis in original] (p. 24). The risk society paradigm shift involves a transition where “the *commonality of anxiety* takes the place of the *commonality of need*” to such an extent that “*solidarity from anxiety* arises and becomes a political force” [emphasis in original] (p. 49). This feature of the risk society affects both social order and social behavior, including “a loss of social thinking” taken to the level of “caricature” (p. 25). Since “risks have something to do with anticipation, with destruction that has not yet happened yet is threatening,” they are “both real and unreal” (p. 33). In such a scenario “everything turns into a hazard,” so that “somehow nothing is dangerous anymore” (p. 37). The result is that “where there is no escape, people ultimately no longer want to think about it,” and what

emerges is a public vacillation between “hysteria and indifference” (p. 37) in the face of overwhelming risk and risk-anxiety.

These effects become facts of civic, cultural, and socio-political relevance in the risk society. As hazards proliferate, “*totally new types of challenges to democracy arise*,” so that the risk society “harbors a tendency to a *legitimate totalitarianism of hazard prevention*” [emphasis in original] (p. 80). Beck warns that “the continued existence of the democratic political system” is threatened as it is “caught in the... dilemma of either failing in the face of systematically produced hazards, or suspending fundamental democratic principles through the addition of authoritarian, repressive ‘buttresses’” (p. 80). Parallels between Beck’s (1992) vision of the effects of a risk society paradigm shift and America’s post-9/11 visible transition to a security state warring against any and all who might interfere with its well-being—however such threats might come about and regardless of whether they are real, imagined, or manufactured for political purposes—are startling. The fact that ‘response’ is enacted preemptively, as a matter of prevention against the “‘not-yet- event’ as stimulus to action” (Beck, 1992, p. 33) is, furthermore, deeply alarming. The civic-cultural commons, under these circumstances, is more than simply disputed; it is anxiety-ridden and, as noted, schizophrenic.

The Commons of Everyday Experiences in Post-9/11 Context

One answer to the dilemma of locating and situating cultural and environmental commons may be found in Bowers’ (2010) attention to them as part of people’s “everyday lives” (p. 9). He suggests that teachers and university professors should think about which features of people’s everyday lives might be included in commons education

as part of a classroom practice focused on revitalizing “existing community-centered alternatives to a hyper-consumer dependent lifestyle” through “intergenerationally connected activities and relationships” (p. 9). Bowers’ (2009) approach is based on an understanding that “the nature of the commons will differ from culture to culture, and from bioregion to bioregion” (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, p. 399), and is thus positioned as a “more phenomenological approach [that] will be a safeguard against universal prescriptions” (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2009, p. 400).

This ‘safeguard’ is important, since universalism lies at the core of the label “progressive” that Bowers (2004) confronts as inappropriate in his critique of Lakoff’s (2003, as cited in Bowers, 2004) framing of conservative and progressive political ideologies. Bowers repeatedly contests this (mis-)use as part of “double bind thinking” (Bowers, 2010, p. 3) as he objects to “the linguistic double bind that he [Lakoff] now wants to saddle social justice and environmental advocates with”—a bind that involves the use of ‘progress’ “as a context-free metaphor” (Bowers, 2004, p. 4). Countering the narrative of progress has been at the core of environmental thinking since the 1970s (Nicholson-Goodman & Paulston, 1996).

Bowers (2004) prefers the term ‘reactionary’ to ‘conservative’ in the contexts in which Lakoff uses the latter: e.g., vis-à-vis “how right-wing extremists have succeeded in becoming the dominant force in American politics” (Bowers, 2004, p. 1). He argues that “if Lakoff possessed a more historical understanding of the layered nature of metaphorical thinking,” his use of the terms conservative and progressive would improve (p. 2). Bowers’ (2004) response is a defense of philosophic conservatism vis-à-vis the

environmental and cultural commons, and he argues for “the many ways the different expressions of conservatism are an inescapable aspect of everyday life” (p. 5).

Further, he attributes Lakoff’s reproduction of “the formulaic thinking that reduces our political categories to that of conservative and liberal” (2004, p. 4) both to the media and to “most university professors” repeatedly, claiming a generalized “intellectual poverty” as characteristic of “today’s political discourse” (p. 6). He claims that there is a potentiality yet to be realized in “the world’s diverse cultural commons” as “sites of resistance to the further expansion of economic globalization,” but sadly claims that this “is not learned in most universities” (p. 7). In 2010, it can truly be said that as “curriculum and teaching face globalization,” what they are facing is, in part, “a new kind of imaginal understanding within human consciousness” (Smith, 2003, p. 35). This ‘imaginal understanding’ may be difficult to grasp in terms that contribute to thinking about ‘commons,’ given what Appadurai (1996) calls “diasporic public spheres” (p. 21)—the migration of people and media images that not only open borders, but erode them as new ‘imaginal understandings’ lead to the creation of non-territorial communities, including terrorist groups, re-inventing public spheres in a post-national global context.

Mapping the American National Psyche in Post-9/11 Context

The mapping under discussion here was inspired, following 9/11, by the silencing that resulted from a wave of zealous patriotism as a ‘response’ to a national identity crisis (Mailer, 2003) and by the ubiquitous call for unity and the use mainstream media made of it in the face of attack, on the one hand. It was also inspired by the dissolution of

previously-held conceptions of cultural and political propriety as the Bush-Cheney administration carried out a radical counter-revolution that went largely unnoticed by the media and the public in general until it was too late, on the other. This was partially effected by the officially enunciated division of the world into ‘us’ vs. ‘them,’ or, in America, left vs. right, conservative (or reactionary) vs. liberal, with liberals being marked as un-American, even *anti*-American. Bowers’ (2004) objection is therefore a welcome departure from this false dichotomy. The mapping was initially undertaken as well in response to misunderstanding(s) of what the public was being ‘sold’ by the administration and media alike. Its aim was, in fact, to achieve perspective-oriented illumination by partnering autobiography (Pinar, 2000/1975, 2004, 2006) and social cartography (Paulston, 2000, 2003, 2005) as a way to approach curriculum inquiry (Nicholson-Goodman, 2009), as noted.

Lakoff (2006) has been instructive, however, in thinking through the rhetorical coup that was occurring as ‘freedom’ and ‘justice’ were redefined in ‘wild Western’ terms *and* in questioning whose terms were privileged and/or overturned by those Lakoff (wrongly, per Bowers) labeled ‘conservative.’ The gaze of this curriculum inquiry project was turned on public, political, and academic discourses describing vistas of *nation* and *citizen* as reified constructs in this explosive scenario. These discourses were framed as voices of difference engaged in composing, as noted, a national autobiography in this moment of trauma. The ‘cultures of citizenship’ derived from the mapping show a broad range of ways of seeing both the nation and what it means to be a citizen, thus escaping the parameters laid out by Lakoff (2003, as cited in Bowers, 2004) to reflect a dispersion rather than a dichotomy (see Appendix) (Nicholson-Goodman, 2009). As the

national psyche was thrown into a “sprawl,” reclaiming and re-envisioning a “working sense of ourselves” (Mailer, 2003, pp. 11-12) became a national obsession. The object of exploring how autobiography, nation-ness, and the global now come together to forge new parameters and new concerns for curriculum inquiry is meant to address this national obsession while situating it in a global context.

Bower’s (2009) focus on *enclosure* in his ‘classroom practice of commons education’ is particularly significant in this global sense of the ‘now,’ as he notes that in modernity, “forms of enclosure are increasingly dependent upon creating a rootless form of individual subjectivity where memory and long-term perspective are overwhelmed by the steady stream of consumer fads” (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, p. 400; see also Bowers, 2010). His rendering of *memory* and of *long-term perspective* as ‘overwhelmed’ in modernity, given their positioning as conservative and thus preserving constructs, points to a mode of thinking that might help us attend to the destructive effects of modernity impacting the civic-cultural commons in local-global/global-local relations. *Remembrance, imagination, and anticipation* are vital means for thinking our way through our existential existence as humans who have lost our traditions and are caught in the gap between past and future (Arendt, 2006/1961). This may be particularly true for those in the West who have been experiencing such an existence for a prolonged period of time.

Of special interest is Bowers’ (2009) observation that “some members of the middle class” are “adopting a life of voluntary simplicity” (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, pp. 400-401), which he sees as a positive sign that can only increase with the continuation of corporate outsourcing and the further abandonment of the social contract

(see also Giroux (2005) and Kellner (2005), whose analyses of this abandonment are not so sanguine). Addressing “the existential problem of how to sustain daily existence when sources of money begin to fail,” he also acknowledges the increasing tendency towards what he frames as “involuntary simplicity,” offering that this will lead to more television viewing, computer game playing, and depression (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2009, p. 401). Particularly noteworthy is his assertion that those faced with such circumstances endure “a life of poverty that goes beyond the lack of the material basis of existence”—that is, “their poverty includes not knowing how to participate in the activities of the cultural commons that would develop their personal talents and lead to the understanding that the more enduring form of wealth is in mutually supportive relationships” (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2009, p. 401). Bowers (2010) finds a solution, as noted, in revitalizing “existing community-centered alternatives” and “intergenerationally connected activities and relationships” (p. 9), but also acknowledges that “the forces of enclosure continue to gain ground” (p. 7).

His conceptualization of solutions is therefore not without its problems vis-à-vis the possibilities it offers for curriculum in light of new parameters for, and dynamics within, the ‘ownership society’ model that began to visibly emerge at the end of the 1970s with the advent of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005; Hursh, 2009; Porter, 1999)—a model that has not only persisted, but has grown to alarming proportions with the dawn of the 21st century. The idea that a commons still exists—whether global or local, or some hybrid of the two—presumes that, for the most part, humans still have access to cultural spaces opening out to genuine dialogue with potentiality for creating substantive change, and to material (environmental) spaces capable of sustaining life, so that

‘knowing how to participate’ in the way Bowers frames it may or may not present a viable alternative to present cultural and social-material realities faced by those trampled in the rush to modernity.

Further, the notion of a global commons is both theoretically elusive and highly problematic in practical terms, given different cultural proclivities exhibited and embraced by diverse peoples and nations, such as class/caste and gender structures, as well as environmental issues around land use and governance, regional capacity for sustainable development, and a host of other considerations. This notion of a global/local commons was recognized in the 1980s and 1990s in a wealth of environmental discourses attentive to human-nature relations, societal/planetary belonging, and sense-making related to place (e.g., Bowers, 1995; Campbell, 1988; Cosgrove, 1988; Fuller, 1988; Gough, 1993; Prakash, 1995; Robertson, 1992; Shea, 1992; Slovic, 1992; Smith, 1993). The diversity of vistas was rich, incorporating multiple knowledge perspectives (Nicholson-Goodman & Paulston, 1996). Some of these perspectives have been revisited in recent work, for instance, on curriculum and place (e.g., Chambers, 2006; Pinar, 2010; Shepard, 2010; Slattery & Edgerton, 2009).

Appadurai (2000), Smith (2003), and Kellner (2005) point out that the existence of multiple levels at which globalization takes place—including sites of capitalist colonization *and* of grassroots potentiality—complicates this conversation further, with globalization at the grassroots level (including global anti-globalization movements) heralded by some as the basis from which democratically beneficial formulations may emerge that work at the convergence of the global and the local. Sawyer (2010), for instance, advocates for situating curriculum so that it provides “a necessary location in

support of change for international democratic education” (p. 23) as students “engage in an active process of post-colonialism” (p. 35). A similar example may be found in Barber’s (2001) notion of *CivWorld* as a means for responding to concerns about global capitalism, or *McWorld*, and global terrorism, or *Jihad*.

Given the complexities of addressing ‘the global’ per se as a workable construct (Robertson, 1992),¹ the focus here has been limited to excavating the production of a civic-cultural commons whose transitions often affect the world (for better and for worse) beyond its boundaries: the American national psyche. This commons is treated here as a contested civic-cultural terrain vis-à-vis responses to the confrontation between global capitalism and global terrorism that exploded into American public consciousness on 9/11. The excavation of this commons via autobiography is, as noted, treated as a means of analyzing interior spaces and events in conversation with exterior spaces and events to inform *currere*, the Latin from which the word curriculum derives, meaning ‘to run the course’ (Pinar, 2004, p. 35). Public, political, and academic ‘speech acts’ (Barthes, 1989, p. 128; de Certeau, 1984, p. xiii) serve as cultural artifacts of ‘nation-ness’ (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1990, 1994) exposing a multifaceted consciousness of the nation in this historically significant social-psychological moment. These speech-acts raise issues of being and becoming that have powerful implications for deciphering the *currere* of what would follow this change-event. The conversation as it is presented here, then, is situated in an ill-defined ‘global now’ deriving from the manifestation of uncertainty following this catastrophic moment, looking inward to inspect and encompass multiple complications, contradictions, and confrontations in this civic-cultural terrain,

which might now be realistically seen as a ‘post-9/11 American wilderness’ (Nicholson-Goodman, 2009). One issue lying at the core of this conversation is that of belonging.

Belonging, Nation-ness, and the ‘Civic’ in Global Context

The issue of belonging may be framed in terms of understanding the extent to which changing parameters of nation-ness (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996, 2000; Bhabha, 1994) and global complications of the civic itself (see, e.g., Banks, 2004; Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Richardson & Blades, 2006; Heilman, 2006; McDonough & Feinberg, 2003; Ong, 1999, 2004) have impacted the American national psyche in what Barber (2001) contends, along with many others, is an era of global interdependence. Barber, in fact, introduces the notion of *American Jihad* (p. 9) to represent the aggressive, hostile, and backward-looking so-called ‘conservative’ (or reactionary, per Bowers) movement that seeks both isolation and insulation from the global while it staunchly defends capitalism as ‘the American way,’ vaunts a triumphal narrative that prides itself on American exceptionalism, and lays claim to the power to enlighten the rest of the world by virtue of its prowess for global leadership, thus taking a contradictory stance and exhibiting extreme parochial hubris.

Barber’s (2001) vista, like those of Appadurai (1996, 2000) and Habermas (2001), posits the emergence of post-nationalism as one complicating feature of this civic-cultural terrain as a commons (see also, Sassen, 2000, whose focus is trans-nationalism). Where global capitalism is a colonizing factor and global terrorism is a horrific and destructive response to this (re-)colonization, both intrude themselves into a discursive terrain through which ideas about the nation and the citizen are re-shaped in response to

change-events like 9/11. The ‘era of interdependence’ produces a diaspora of viewpoints that differentially position both constructs—nation and citizen—within this contested terrain. Since nation-ness is a product of collective imagination narrated over time (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1990, 1994), citizenship is produced and reproduced within vistas of global-local/local-global relations impacted by the dispersion of peoples and media images on a world stage swept up in radical and devastating changes. The role of global capitalism is central to these relations, and therefore lies at the heart of the matter.

Massumi (2002), in *Parables for the Virtual*, speaks of capitalism in terms of “its worldwide trafficking in modulation” as “the stylization of power,” and views this mode of power as a usurpation of “the very expression of potential” (p. 88). He offers that “*capitalism is the global usurpation of belonging*” [emphasis in original] (p. 88). He sees this power as both “now massively potentializing, in a new planetary mode,” and at the same time, “massively delivered to proliferating spaces of containment” (p. 88). This latter tendency is consistent with new understandings of global capitalist political economy re-framed as *disaster capitalism* (Klein, 2007)—the exploitation of catastrophic conditions in such a way as to fast-track (and mask) capitalist plundering across the globe. Further, this tendency involves the plundering of the public commons of American schooling as well, as neo-liberal power and influence hold sway over educational policy (see, e.g., Giroux, 2004, 2005; Giroux & Giroux, 2005; Harvey, 2005; Hill & Kumar, 2009; Hursh, 2008; Lipman, 2004; Mathison & Ross, 2008; Porter, 1999; Saltman, 2007; Taubman, 2009). It is therefore reasonable to question the notion of the commons as a space that has been sorely compromised by an ownership society of global

proportions. Barber (2001) sees this circumstance as an outgrowth—as global society is driven simultaneously by both corporate- and terror-induced anarchy (p. 5)—of ‘wild capitalism’ (p. xxiii), or *McWorld*. This is a scenario, Barber laments, in which democracy is squeezed out of the picture. Barber’s scenario is also consistent with Bowers’ (2009) notion of how “forms of enclosure” depend upon the creation of “rootless forms of individual subjectivity” (as cited in Flinders & Thornton, p. 400).

It is therefore also reasonable to question the premise that American schooling as a public commons is fertile ground, under current conditions, for fostering agency for constructive democratic change in our times, despite calls to ‘educate for democracy’ (e.g., Boston, 2005; Academy for Educational Development, 2004; Meier, 2004) and for ‘international democracy’ (Sawyer, 2010). This premise is suspect in light of the ‘diminished’ status of schooling (Porter, 1999) and a resulting loss of educator authority and autonomy (Giroux & Giroux, 2005; Gutmann, 1999; Pinar, 2006; Porter, 1999) that has continued to advance as the distortions and displacements fostered by neo-liberalism infected educational policy in K-12 schooling and now reach into higher education (Giroux & Giroux, 2005; Pinar, 2006; Taubman, 2009). Discourses attesting to this scenario, however, are testaments to the *remembrance* of a different era, an ‘era of confidence,’ in Porter’s (1999) terms, when the situation was arguably better, but they are also critiques offered in hopes of engendering new realities in *anticipation* of future challenges, even if these new realities constitute utopian conceptions with a limited substantive basis under present circumstances.

However they are viewed, vistas of American schooling as sites of potentiality derive from vistas of being, becoming, and belonging prevailing in public discourses

reflecting the national psyche, composed of multiple ways of seeing what America means and what it means to be American. The approach to autobiography taken here, then, does not seek an authoritative version of the truth, but rather, traversing an arc between the deconstruction of an idealized past and critical anticipation of challenges posed by an intimidating future, seeks out ‘moments of truth’ that can only be found in a mental journey between past and future, conceived as a ‘thought-event’ (Arendt, 2006/1961, p. 10). This notion is consistent with Pinar’s (2000/1975, 2004, 2006) elaboration of the *regressive* and *progressive* phases of autobiography (see also Pinar et al, 1995). In order to more fully understand the nature of this process, the following are considered next: Appadurai’s (1996) thoughts about modernity and the ‘global now’; Arendt’s (2006/1961) work on the ‘thought-event’ as a phenomenon situated between past and future; and den Heyer’s (2009) advocacy of teaching and learning as ‘affirmative invention’ leading to a “more anticipatory arrangement of knowledge” (p. 443).

Contemporary Conditions of Thought in the ‘Global Now’

Appadurai: Modernity and the ‘Global Now’

“One of the most problematic legacies of grand Western social science,” Appadurai (1996) contends in *Modernity at Large*, is its continual reinforcement of the idea that the appearance of the “modern moment... creates a dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present” (p. 3). He questions the veracity of this legacy:

Reincarnated as the break between tradition and modernity and typologized as the difference between ostensibly traditional and modern societies, this view has been

shown repeatedly to distort the meanings of change and the politics of pastness.

(Appadurai, 1996, p. 3)

In today's world, a world in which "modernity is decisively at large, irregularly self-conscious, and unevenly experienced" (p. 3), he questions the nature of this 'modern moment,' since it represents a "break with all sorts of pasts" (p. 3). His theory of rupture based on "electronic mediation and mass migration" as complicating features of the 'global now' is, he acknowledges, a theory "of the recent past (or the extended present)" in that only recently have these two factors "become so massively globalized ... across large and irregular transnational terrains" (p. 9).² His theory is, he grants, thus "explicitly transnational—even postnational," since it moves away from "the architecture of classical modernization theory," a "fundamentally realist" notion that "assumes the salience, both methodological and ethical, of the nation-state" (p. 9). What he questions, in part, is the meaning and place of the nation and of nationalism itself in this global now as he warns against trying to imagine "that the global is to space what the modern is to time" (p. 9), since

For many societies, modernity is an elsewhere, just as the global is a temporal wave that must be encountered in their present. Globalization has shrunk the distance between elites, shifted key relations between producers and consumers, broken many links between labor and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments. (pp. 9-10)

As a consequence, the global now is both a realist construct in the modernist sense, and yet elusive in terms of its 'spatiotemporality,' a scenario that leads Sassen (2000), for instance, to examine overlaps between the national and the global for the

purpose of discerning whether “frontier zones... likely to be marked by operations of power and domination” (p. 216) can be detected. One possible outcome of such overlaps between the global and the national, according to Sassen, “is an incipient and partial denationalization of domains once understood and/or constructed as national” (p. 216). These ‘frontier zones’ have profound potential implications for a changing sense of American ‘nation-ness,’ indicating a rupture where a once-authoritative account—an orthodox view of America in which exceptionalism is treated as established doctrine—opens to alternatives, such as an Enlightenment-based view of America where society is shaped and re-shaped by reason and representation as mediating practices with the passage of time, or newer configurations pointing to perspective as a feature intruding itself into public consciousness with the changing influence of space.

Appadurai (1996) considers the ‘diasporic public sphere’ (p. 11) as an element of this space-time feature of the global now as he reflects on recent struggles “heating up (again)” (p. 11) in the U.S. over English as a national language and the rights of immigrants. He cautions that these “intense battles” are not “just one more variant on the politics of pluralism,” but are rather “about the capability of American politics to contain the diasporic politics of Mexicans in Southern California, Haitians in Miami, Colombians in New York, and Koreans in Los Angeles” (p. 11). He sees “the widespread appearance of various kinds of diasporic public spheres” as constituting “one special diacritic of the global modern” (p. 11). This diacritic is central to issues of being, becoming, and belonging and to the questioning of the commons as a space capable of ‘containing’ a dispersion of civic-cultural understandings. Without some consensual sense of who we

are as a nation, how do we prepare our young to enter into society as citizens, to relate to others and to the world?

Arendt: The 'Thought-Event'

The crises of authority and of education are not new. These crises have, however, emerged in current configurations from enormous shifts in thinking—ruptures produced by and in modernity (Arendt, 2006/1961) and amplified by globalization (Appadurai, 1996, 2000). Arendt (2006/1961), for instance, suggests that the crux of the problem lies in the human condition in the moment where tradition began to fail, in the fact that we abide in the gap between past and future in an existential sense. She explains that existentialism arose “when it began to dawn upon modern man [*sic*] that he had come to live in a world in which his mind and his tradition of thought were not even capable of asking adequate, meaningful questions” (p. 8). In this scenario, “action, with its involvement and commitment, its being *engagée*, seemed to hold out the hope, not of solving any problems, but of making it possible to live with them without becoming... a hypocrite” [emphasis in original] (p. 8).

Arendt offers that “the discovery that the human mind had ceased... to function properly” sets the stage for her examination of what it meant to *think* for those living in an “odd in-between period” where they became “aware of an interval in time... determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet” (p. 9). These ‘intervals,’ Arendt argues, “may contain the moment of truth.” (p. 9). To consider “the established relationship between experience and thought” (p. 9), Arendt turns to Kafka’s work, which she sees as a “thought-landscape” harboring “all the riches, varieties, and

dramatic elements characteristic of ‘real’ life,” and she credits him with an “uncanny gift of anticipation” (p. 9). What she derives from Kafka’s “battleground on which the forces of the past and the future clash with each other” is the “thought-event” (p. 10)—a cognitive moment represented by movement between *remembrance* and *anticipation*. She suggests that because we live in this gap between past and future, our “insertion” into this ‘in-between’ time-space causes “the forces to deflect... from their original direction,” resulting in the emergence of a ‘third force’: “the resultant diagonal whose origin would be the point at which the forces clash and upon which they act” (p. 11). She sees in this “diagonal force... the perfect metaphor for the activity of thought” (p. 12).

Arendt supplies a tentative metaphorical language of imagery for “contemporary conditions of thought” (p. 12) in modernity. This ‘thought-event’ comes from the act of traversing an arc, as noted, stretching from remembrance to anticipation and back again, to “save whatever they [forces of the past and future in conflict] touch from the ruins of historical and biographical time” (p. 13). She surmises that we are “neither equipped nor prepared for this activity of thinking, of settling down in the gap between past and future,” a gap which she conceives historically as being “bridged over” by tradition (p. 13). She contends that with the advent of modernity, the ‘bridging’ provided by tradition and its narratives wore thin, then “finally broke” so that “the gap between past and future ceased to be a condition peculiar only to the activity of thought and restricted as an experience to those few who made thinking their primary business” (p. 13). Rather, “it became a tangible reality and perplexity for all; that is, it became a fact of political relevance” (p. 13).

Arguing that the politically relevant “fighting experience” acquired by the one who “stands his ground between the clashing waves of past and future” is “an experience in thinking,” she concludes that such battles can only be “won... through practice” (p. 13). She provides “exercises in political thought” where “the problem of truth is kept in abeyance” so that “the concern is solely with how to move in this gap” (p. 14). Her exercises are both critical and experimental, justified in her thinking because of the “element of experiment in the critical interpretation of the past” (p. 14). She sees the “chief aim” of such interpretation as discovering “the real origins of traditional concepts” as a means to “distill from them anew their original spirit which has so sadly evaporated from the very key words of political language—such as freedom and justice, authority and reason, responsibility and virtue, power and glory—leaving behind empty shells with which to settle almost all accounts, regardless of their underlying phenomenal reality” (p. 14)

Her exercises in political thought, then, are aimed at gaining experience in “*how* to think” our way through this gap [emphasis in original] (p. 14). This ‘thought-event’ is both political and philosophic, however—a product of the rupture of tradition in modernity, but also of our existential human condition as beings always caught between past and future and the narratives offered by tradition. The “autobiographical consciousness” (Grumet, 1988, p. 66) derived from autobiography as a method to inform currere may be instructive, then, since it embraces this movement between past and future not only to inform, but to enrich and enliven our grasp of the present.

Den Heyer: Education as Affirmative Invention

Looking to the future, den Heyer (2009) considers “a need to design curricula that open up the channels through which teacher and student energies might nourish and animate our affirmative capacities for inventions rather than our equal capacity for despair,” even as he acknowledges that such despair is not necessarily unwarranted in our times (p. 444). He works with Badiou’s notion that what is called for is a ‘truth-process’ based on the conviction that “truths consist of the material traces (in speech, art, or social movements) a ‘becoming-subject’ produces through a singular truth-process instigated by an ‘event’” (2001, as cited in den Heyer, 2009, p. 442). The curricula he advances would “honor ‘the truth of human aspiration and dreaming’” (Smith, 2000, as cited in den Heyer, 2009, p. 444). He finds in Badiou’s work an “ethical basis for a more anticipatory arrangement of knowledge” as he questions “what kind of curricular arrangement of knowledge would enable a ‘truth’ to break through in the classroom” (p. 443).

Den Heyer sees a need for educators to “create a space for students to consider ‘the possibility of new possibilities’” (Cho & Lewis, 2005, as cited in den Heyer, 2009, p. 444), reasoning that “students deserve, and democracies require, the opportunity to generate a range of options beyond letting ‘things sort themselves out’” (p. 444).³ Further, he cites Smith’s argument for the enactment of teaching as “*truth seeking, truth discovering, and truth sharing*” [emphasis in original] (2000, as cited in den Heyer, 2009, p. 445). Smith characterizes the “standardized classroom” as existing “in a state of ‘frozen futurism’” that can only be understood “within a Christian eschatology cum economic Free Market interpolation of Education ‘in which what was expected to be revealed *has* been revealed, and that what the revelation discloses is that the future will

always be more of this, a perpetual unfolding of more and more of this” [emphasis in original] (2000, as cited in den Heyer, p. 445).

Noting that Smith neither believes “that education need be this way” nor that “the future is *in fact* frozen,” den Heyer considers alternatives, contrasting Simon’s ‘ethics of remembrance,’ which is “based on a hermeneutics of hope,” and Badiou’s ‘ethic of truths,’ based on an “affirmation of invention” [emphasis in original] (p. 445). He thus juxtaposes critical attention to the past, on the one hand, and hope-seeking for the future, on the other, to get at “the possibility of continual regeneration” (pp. 445-446). Both approaches are connected in den Heyer’s thinking to “an ethics of encounter and event” (p. 445). Simon’s notion of ““public time,”” he offers, “signifies ‘a dimension where the collectivity can inspect its own past as a result of its own actions, and where an indeterminate future opens up as a domain for its activities’” (2005, as cited in den Heyer, p. 446). He sees this “merging of past, present, and future” in terms of its potential as a “pedagogical encounter” to disrupt “conventional thought” in response to “the address of another” (p. 446). This type of encounter is, in his thinking, a means to “identify practices in which the historical traces (or artifacts) of past tragedies instigate educative opportunities to move those present beyond a voyeuristic or ‘spectatorial sensibility,’” that is, towards Simon’s ““summoned sensibility”” (2005, as cited in den Heyer, p. 446). Den Heyer sees in Simon’s summons an engagement “in a ‘transactional sphere of public memory’” (2005, as cited in den Heyer, p. 446) where “educative encounters open up both present and future social relations” (p. 446).

Den Heyer affirms that “Simon’s use of testimony, witnessing, and the summons of the Other” is “hopeful and redemptive... where traces of the past arrive ‘asking,

demanding something of us” (2005, as cited in den Heyer, p. 447). Simon’s ‘futurity,’ however, can only provide “a secondary and indeterminable effect of remembrance practices rather than an explicit imaginative generation of future probabilities” (p. 447). Den Heyer concludes that “to question desired outcomes is the ethical contemplation needed to forge futures that might differ from present situations dominated by interlocking think tanks, lobbying groups, militarized research agendas, corporate press, and the textbook and standardized testing industries” (p. 447).

Despite the hopefulness of Simon’s pedagogy, it is Badiou, den Heyer contends, who “provides an alternative philosophical basis for a more anticipatory arrangement of knowledge” (p. 459) where “the proper subject of teachers’ work is a ‘becoming-subject” (2001, as cited in den Heyer, p. 459). The differences between Simon’s vision and that of Badiou notwithstanding, together they represent, as den Heyer demonstrates, ways in which we might ‘think our way’ through the gap between past and future, a much-needed thought process in/for the global now that addresses the notions of being and becoming as past, present, and future are merged.

The Global-Local /Local-Global ‘Commons’ Revisited

In a globally-construed commons, the local is always breaking in—mini-narratives ‘stand their ground’ against meta-narratives that are or have become oppressive—even as the global intrudes its presence and its power to transform. We inhabit the amorphous space of the ‘global now’ even as we struggle to remember or strive to imagine how things were and/or how they might be otherwise, to escape the ‘*es muss sein*’ as we search for alternative visions and understandings (Greene, 1988, p. 10).

We are thus engaged both in looking backward *and* in looking forward, peering into an as-yet unknown future even as we cope with the challenges we face today, which result from our actions, as a nation, in the past. We peer into this past with a critical eye, yet know that critique of a remembered/forgotten history, a history that must therefore be narrated for us (Anderson, 1991), is experimental at best. We persist in an effort to make sense of how the now is a product of this remembered/forgotten past, even as it stretches towards an unknown future.

In America, we must learn/remember *who we were*; re-imagine in the global now *who we are*; and anticipate, for an unknown tomorrow, *who we will become*, no matter how disputed or disorienting the terrain. *Remembrance* should call to mind histories of difference vis-à-vis race, gender and gender-identity, class, ethnicity, ability, generation, and geographic place. *Anticipation* should lure us towards the utopian vision, no matter how idealized, in order to prepare us to envision the possible (Greene, 1995) and discover potentiality (Massumi, 2002) for the future. Imagining, therefore, may bridge past and future, once remembrance and anticipation have entered the scene of the ‘thought-event’ (Arendt, 2006/1961), but imagining is neither immune to the vicissitudes of the local, nor of the global, and both have their histories of oppression.

Awareness of the present within which we find ourselves situated, then—in this study, the civic-cultural terrain, a contested, multi-faceted *imagined* commons—must somehow bridge past and future. At the level of the nation, both the local and the global affect our “working notion of who we are,” which must remain “stable” (Mailer, 2003, p. 11) because “democracy is existential,” changing all the time (p. 16). A constant is needed, and Mailer finds this constant in a pro-democracy stance strong enough to

withstand what he refers to as “a pre-totalitarian situation” (p. 105) after 9/11. He highlights his concerns by asserting that “we don’t control our country,” that “corporate power is running this country now,” so that “the notion that we have an active democracy that controls our fate is not true” (p. 104). Mailer offers his own vista of a future that may come to pass, threatening even greater turmoil ahead:

If we have a depression or fall into desperate economic times, I don’t know what’s going to hold the country together. There’s just too much anger here, too much ruptured vanity, too much shock, too much identity crisis. And, worst of all, too much patriotism. Patriotism in a country that’s failing has a logical tendency to turn fascistic... (p. 105)

Looking backward, he notes that “our belief that Americans are free individuals has suffered erosion in the last ten years from too much stock market and the greed it inspired” (p. 107), and that those years “have done a lot of damage to the country’s character”—“it’s not as nice a place as it used to be” (p. 108). The question of who we say we are, or who we say we are becoming, is central here.

Mapping the Commons? The National Psyche and the Problem of Propaganda

When the curriculum inquiry project partially elaborated here was undertaken, in 2001, many Americans saw the changes Mailer spoke of, felt the tremor of disbelief reverberating throughout discourses about the nation, and questioned what it meant for the notion of citizenship. The impetus for this mapping project was to question the manipulations that led to the silencing of better alternatives for a clearer sense of America’s future. Extending the use of autobiography as a form of curriculum inquiry to

the level of the nation seemed to hold promise for broadening its trajectory from the psycho-analytical towards the political. The political potentiality of the national autobiographical project (which is always ongoing) needs now, more than ever, to be fully employed in the project of re-imagining and re-fashioning contours of a curriculum for the global now, however elusive those contours and the space-time involved might seem. Such imaginative praxis must continue, despite feelings of despair emanating from frustration and alienation.

Dewey's (1991/1927) concern for the 'eclipse of the public,' where there is a lack of 'shared experience' that might transform the 'Great Society' into a 'Great Community' (p. 142), and Arendt's (2006/1977) concern with the use of 'consistent lying' to the public as a feature conceivably indicating a shift from authoritarian to totalitarian rule (p. 253; see also Smith, 2006), speak to the crises America is facing today, resounding with relevance for our times. Dare we ask: *Has America's civic-cultural 'commons' been colonized by a global neo-liberal ownership-conscious class at war with the rest of us for control of the planet's resources, both cultural and material, both past and future?* The American public has yet to imagine, let alone comprehend, the magnitude of a militant ownership-conscious class operating at the highest echelons of the global political economy, taken to unprecedented scale (Klein, 2007) and seeking to preside not only over the public commons of schooling, but also over the whole of the public educative experience of past, present, and future, both at home *and* abroad.

Given the scope of social, cultural, political, economic, and technological changes sweeping across the globe, it is not surprising that we have yet to coherently articulate the contours of a curriculum that might be meaningful for our times. How could this nascent

elite global consciousness *not* prove meaningful for making sense of disputes over vistas of *nation* and *citizen* in our civic-cultural ‘commons’? How could this consciousness *not* prove relevant in considering those forces battling for control over schooling? Perhaps most salient and instructive, in this regard, are two specific realms of discourse, both of which merit continued exploration. The first realm is found in post-national and post-colonial discourses, which have the potential to help a nation still aspiring to democracy (West, 2004) and still puzzling over the meaning(s) of freedom (Greene, 1988; Lakoff, 2006) to get its bearings in geopolitical terms—that is, to think through its place in the world as seen from the global-local perspective of others.

The second, as noted, is Beck’s (1992) elaboration of a global shift in the socio-political frame for civic-cultural response in a risk scenario impacting the local/national American context. Where the ‘not-yet-event’ (always impending) consistently serves as a stimulus to action (Beck, 1992, pp. 33-34), it may not contain within its scope of vision the kind of ‘thought-event’ Arendt specifies as beneficial to understanding ourselves, our world, and our times. Beck’s (1992) theorization of the risk society provides an overview of the internal dynamics of change—vis-à-vis social thinking and social order—in the civic-cultural commons too often still thought of in quasi-traditional terms in America. It is in many ways an apt portrayal of a post-9/11 American wilderness.

In this wilderness, these dynamics of change have exerted their influence in some unexpected ways (Nicholson-Goodman, 2009). It is of particular importance, for instance, to pay attention to new tendencies towards fascistic collective discourse and action in reaction to unsettling changes and new uncertainties about America’s place as a nation in the world, while also acknowledging that these reactions derive, in part, from

very old antagonisms and from primordial fears, especially fear of the ‘Other,’ reflected both in antagonism towards its first African-American President and in intensified xenophobia as ‘others’ increase in numbers (and thus potential influence) inside the nation.

While these tendencies neither necessarily nor exclusively derive from the reification of the global under neo-liberal rule, they are produced at the intersection of imagined traditions embraced by the so-called right wing, on the one hand, and perceived imminent threats to those ‘traditions,’ which include threats posed by globalization, on the other. The presence, power, and visible manifestation of fascistic tendencies in the (extreme?) right wing of American politics suggest the usefulness of Adorno’s (2001/1991) analysis of psycho-analytic tendencies supporting fascist propaganda. This analysis might serve as a toolkit for thinking about what was experienced in the wake of 9/11—a catastrophic event that became a global-local debacle of dramatic proportions affecting Americans’ senses of themselves as a nation, the impacts of which are not only ongoing in the domestic realm, but threaten the entire world, including the global environmental commons, since oil became an issue of major significance in America’s response to terrorism.

Adorno (2001/1991) provides two main considerations for our inspection vis-à-vis ‘the pattern of fascist propaganda’ (p. 132). His analysis may be drawn from the past, but it reverberates throughout the present and promises threat to the future as well. He considers “the nature and content of the speeches and pamphlets of American fascist agitators,” pointing out that “fascist propaganda material in this country is little concerned with concrete and tangible political issues” (p. 132). Rather, he contends, “the

majority of all agitators' statements are directed *ad hominem*" and are "based on psychological calculations rather than on the intention to gain followers" (p. 132). He warns that "the aim of the agitator" is to "transform... people into 'rabble,'" to foster the creation of "crowds bent on violent action without any sensible political aim, and to create the atmosphere of the pogrom" (pp. 132-133). He asserts that the "universal purpose of these agitators is to instigate methodically what... is commonly known as 'the psychology of the masses'" (p. 133). We have recently seen shades of this phenomenon in the American Tea Party movement as midterm elections approached, but it is too soon to tell just what this signifies yet.

The second feature attends to "the agitators' approach," which is intimately connected to political purpose: "the abolition of democracy through mass support against the democratic principle..." (p. 133), involving, in Gutmann's (1999) terms (see also Gutmann & Thompson, 1996), the democratic principles of *non-repression* and *non-discrimination* (p. 72), both of which are once again under attack in American reactionary politics. The moment of national trauma under study here should therefore be treated as the beginning of an 'event-space' (Massumi, 2002) Americans are (perhaps) unwittingly occupying, displacing the commons of tradition—with all its faults and failings—Americans once believed they occupied, even if only nostalgically so (Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1994). That this 'risk society' is a catastrophic society operating under the sway of the "not-yet-event as stimulus to action," that is, as a "risk content" (Beck, 1992, p. 33), suggests potential contours of a curriculum. As curriculum theorists, we should try to understand such contours as they relate to issues of being, becoming, and belonging,

and connect them to the multiple ways of seeing and being-in-the-world that compose the American national psyche.

As we continue to labor under the vicissitudes of social change(s) sweeping the globe, we often retreat to familiar refrains (Deleuze & Guattari, 1989) that lull us into a false sense of normalcy, hindering the prospects for pursuing democratic aspirations in the face of global imperialism (West, 2004), under the shadow of ‘the terror of neo-liberalism’ (Giroux, 2004). Just as old, familiar refrains are depicted in the map, so are new refrains that may or may not reach their potential in our times. Some beckon to the past, while others lay claim to the present or hold promise for the future (see Appendix). Why not, then, look *within* for a place to begin to understand this ‘imagined community’ we call a nation and think of as a commons?

The Post-9/11 American National Psyche: Discussion of the Map

The American sense of ‘nation-ness’ in this post-9/11 moment involves dissonant refrains of the nation, reflected in multiple vistas of nation and citizen in contested discursive terrain. Key signifiers of the conflict are: a) differing foundations for citizenship (*Orthodoxy*, *Reason*, and *Perspective*); and b) varying sensibilities about where the locus of power should be situated: that is, modes of civic engagement reflecting preferred power relations between the State and the people (*Control*, *Representation*, and *Activism*). Mapping the interrelations of these varying vistas of being and becoming as a nation and of belonging as citizens by juxtaposing these key signifiers is a way to acknowledge Dewey’s (1991/1927) insistence that “a subtle,

delicate, vivid, and responsive art of communication” must take hold to “breathe life into” “...an organized, articulate public” (p. 184).

The cultural portrait represented by the map reveals the contested autobiography of a nation under duress as it risks losing its foundational principles and faces new constellations of meaning in light of global change(s) and local/national reactions to them. Discourses selected for the mapping project include, as noted, public, political, and academic ‘speech-acts’ (Barthes, 1989; de Certeau, 1984, p. xiii) appearing in the wake of 9/11, cultural artifacts reflecting dispersed senses of nation-ness in a traumatic moment where America’s vulnerability in the ‘global now’ became fully exposed. The mapping incorporates, per den Heyer (2009), Badiou’s notion that what is called for is a ‘truth-process’ that takes as its basis the conviction that “truths consist of the material traces (in speech, art, or social movements) a ‘becoming-subject’ produces through a singular truth-process instigated by an ‘event’” (2001, as cited in den Heyer, 2009, p. 442). The map reflects as well Arendt’s (2006/1961) notion of our existence as beings caught in the gap between past and future.

The map shows ‘cultures of citizenship’ emerging from the juxtaposition of an epistemological continuum reflecting differing foundations of citizenship, on the one hand, and an axiological continuum reflecting variations in our preferred modes of civic engagement, on the other (see Appendix). At the convergence of a particular foundation of citizenship and a particular mode of civic engagement (e.g., *Orthodoxy* and *Control*), we find a pairing of ‘cultures of citizenship’ displaying subtle differences even as they each embrace the same signifiers. These cultures of citizenship include: *triumphal*,

voyeurist, vigilant, pluralist, globalist, reparationist, communitarian, and hypernational.

A brief highlighting of essential characteristics of each follows:

* *triumphal*: the culture of American exceptionalism embodied in the ‘one true narrative’ of the nation as God-fearing and therefore blessed, selfless, and righteous; here the call emerges for faithfulness to prevailing doctrines to reap the blessings bestowed upon the nation by an approving God;

* *voyeurist*: the submissive, acquiescent, seduced, and/or indifferent culture of an overwhelmed, uninformed, apathetic, and/or insecure citizenry who expect their leaders to guide them through troubled times, as they passively watch (or not);

* *vigilant*: the sanctioning, but *not* submissive, culture of citizens who seek protection and security, but who nevertheless hold their leadership and experts accountable and keep an actively-watching eye on them;

* *pluralist*: the culture of citizens who realize that there is more than one narrative of the nation in play, that there are ‘counter-stories’ to be told (Lopez, 2002), and who esteem difference and perspective as elements of ‘the American way’;

* *globalist*: the culture of citizens who acknowledge the interconnectedness and interdependence of all peoples, see the nation as a ‘global citizen,’ and appreciate that its historic role in the world is implicated in the present chaos;

* *reparationist*: the culture of citizens who argue that in order for the nation to move forward, i.e., to become the ‘beacon of freedom’ it proclaims itself to be, amends must be made for the wrongs that have been committed;

* *communitarian*: the ‘solidarity’ culture that emphasizes the need to address inequities and injustices in unity and to transform society in those terms; and

* *hypernational*: the coercive culture of citizenship that serves as a support to the triumphal, seeking to castigate as internal enemies and traitors all those who fail to display solidarity with the ‘one true narrative,’ the triumphal. (Nicholson-Goodman, 2007, 2009).

What is visible as we think about the civic-cultural commons as a space that ‘belongs to everyone’ is an apparent lack of consensus about how the nation is constituted and how the citizen should be situated in relation to the power of the State. It is important to note that *Reason* and *Representation* are located at the center of the map, indicating the Enlightenment tradition underpinning America’s founding. In the discursive space(s) of nation-ness in America’s global now, what becomes clear is that a “working sense of ourselves” is missing, a sense that Mailer (2003, p. 12) claims, as noted, is essential to stability. Given the dispersion of vistas of nation and citizen in America’s contested and disorienting national autobiographical project, it is apparent that the nation is suffering from schizophrenia, a condition that tends to pull us apart rather

than bringing us together. Unity, however, is equally problematic, in that its general tendency is a move towards the hegemony of a civic-cultural orthodoxy and whatever associated doctrines might emerge within a specific zeitgeist. As Mailer (2003) noted, in our times this hegemonic turn may lean towards fascism, and shades of this scenario have appeared on several fronts, both in a radical transitioning into a security state during the Bush-Cheney years and in the corporate-led reactionary movement branding itself as the Tea Party during the Obama administration.

Bowers' (2004) notion of "revitalizing what remains of the cultural and environmental commons" (6) involves both a backward look—towards preserving what progress has been made in protecting these commons—and also a forward look—towards conserving the commons for the benefit of those who will share them in the future. His (2010) admonition to revitalize "existing community-centered alternatives" (p. 9) to a lifestyle geared to over-consumption may make for constructive change where such alternatives are feasible. The idea of accomplishing this through "intergenerationally connected activities and relationships" (p.9) is also salient, since this is one way of bridging past and future. Such an approach may offer hope, since we abide in the gap between the two. As curriculum scholars, we need to continue to explore how an authentic notion of these commons might be realistically approached, but also to bear in mind the range of difficulties complicating the situation.

Facing 'modernity at large' (Appadurai, 1996) and the global reach of 'wild capitalism' (Barber, 2001) in an 'era of uncertainty' where the project of schooling is 'diminished' (Porter, 1999; see also Nicholson-Goodman, 2009), it is difficult to embrace the idea that a commons still exists—especially in schooling—as a viable space for

much-needed change. What is apparent is a dispersion of civic-cultural understandings so far-flung as to make consensus on what is to be done elusive at best. One possibility is a turn towards “autobiographical consciousness” (Grumet, 1988, p. 66) created in the space(s) found in-between deconstruction of an idealized past and anticipation of a challenging future—that is, as Americans imagine the nation as something other than, something better than, what it already appears to have become.

Perhaps, sadly, as environmental and man-made catastrophes continue to take their toll across the globe, Americans will be inspired to see themselves, and others as well, simply as members of a common species dependent upon the preservation of the planet that all inhabit together. Perhaps this understanding will play out in interrelations within localities, within and between nations, and on the global (planetary) plane. Perhaps comprehending the political relevance of the human existential condition in modernity, existing in the gap between past and future (Arendt, 2006/1961), will move us towards new understandings of what might be gained as the struggle for survival opens us to “the possibility of new possibilities” (den Heyer, 2009, p. 444) in the social evolution of the human species and in the preservation of other species upon whom our survival depends. We can only hope, and work to engender hope, as we try out new ‘affirmative inventions’ (den Heyer, 2009), resisting despair. Perhaps we might work, in Taubman’s (2009) words, to “create a clearing where eventually alternatives may come to be” (p. xii).

Appendix

[Insert Figure here]

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¹ Robertson's (1992) *Globalization: Social theory and global culture* provides a thorough analysis of the roots of theorizations about the global in an interdisciplinary fashion, reflecting on its locatedness in modernization theory, world systems theory, international relations, cultural studies, and serves as an excellent introduction to the thinking that has led to current understandings of globalization as a multi-level and multi-disciplinary subject of study.

² While Appadurai is writing these words in the 1990s, they are even more salient now, given our new understanding(s) of how interdependence has emerged globally and of the extent to which the 'global now' is an extension of a very recent past that has, in actuality, accelerated interdependence with the de facto expanded reach of capitalism as a globally dominant socio-political, cultural, and economic force.

³ This is a reference to a quote from an article in the *Edmonton Journal* by McLean (December 5, 2006), citing Alberta premier Ed Stelmach, who continued, in den Heyer's words, a "lack of planning" originating with the prior premier of Alberta around "the myriad effects of the tar-sands oil-based boom" (den Heyer,

p. 444). Stelmach was quoted in the article, “Stelmach Won’t ‘Brake’ Oilsands Growth: Quebec Nation Debate Sparks Call for Same Rights in Alberta,” as saying that the problem “will sort itself out” (den Heyer, p. 444).