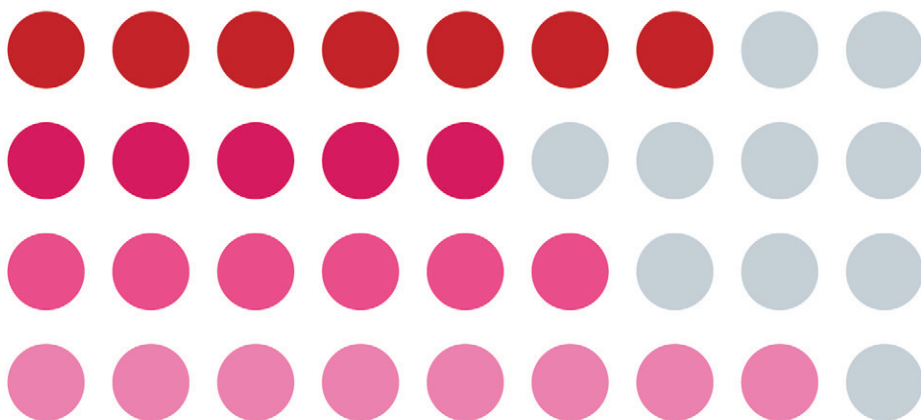
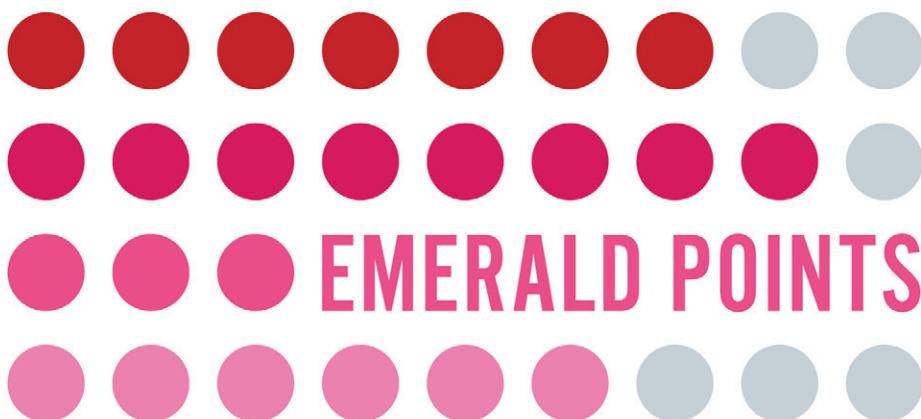




CROWD-SOURCED SYLLABUS

A Curriculum for Resistance

Leanne McRae



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A Curriculum for Resistance

BY

LEANNE MCRAE



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For Steve Redhead – a mentor and all-round excellent human being

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Leanne McRae is an independent scholar who has spent 17 years within the higher education sector as a lecturer, course co-ordinator and tutor. She now works independently to pursue research interests spanning cultural studies, critical disability studies, popular cultural studies, criminology, physical cultural studies, surveillance, and deviant leisure. Her first book published by Emerald in 2018 is entitled *Terror, Leisure and Consumption: Spaces for Harm in a Post-Crash Era*. Leanne is currently working on her third book with Tara Brabazon and Steve Redhead entitled *Moving on Up: Physical Cultural Studies*. A fourth book is also in production entitled *Secrecy, Surveillance and the State: Defining Crime, Managing Harm, and Protecting Privacy* for Rowman & Littlefield.

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Introduction

AN ULTRA-REALIST REFUSAL

It is power itself that has to be abolished – and not just in the refusal to be dominated, which is the essence of all traditional struggles, but equally and as violently in the refusal to dominate.¹

This book is about the double refusal. It contemplates the interventions, resistances and critical literacies needed to conjure the conditions where a double refusal is possible in everyday life. This stands slightly askew to how the double refusal is conventionally understood as not simply a rejection of power by those dominated, but by those who might wield power as well. The rise of right-wing leaders who appear confused about leadership and the responsibilities it entails, namely Boris Johnson in the United Kingdom, Donald Trump in the United States and Scott Morrison in Australia, characterises the refusal to dominate through incompetence, ignorance and apathy. It is this latter configuration that is skewed in this book. For too long scholarly emphasis has been focussed on the refusal to be dominated (resistance) without considering what it means to refuse to dominate. That space is now often occupied with critiques of the refusal to *lead*. This book argues that the current pathways presented through education, toward social mobility and into critical thinking as socially transformative and personally emancipatory function covertly as an initiation into domination. The crowd-sourced syllabus interrupts and rejects this outcome for education, learning and literacy.

Education is ‘presented as an unequivocally benevolent force’² for social and personal development. How and what is taught in schools and at university is defined by dominant tropes that leverage the value in knowledge to a time and place. Contemporary debates about crisis in education are bolstered by concerns about producing viable and resilient work-ready graduates. Education for employment dominates this thinking. The neoliberal subject is advanced and

employment is championed as the endgame of education. Knowledge is another commodity to be sold. The commodification of the flexible, adaptive thinker dovetails into the caches of critical thinking repertoires. Value in critical thinking as an end in itself is assigned to elitist and idle strategies of leisured learning. The purpose of resilience in emphasising personal responsibility amplifies cultures of work as the space in which the benevolence of education is recognised and realised.

The argument in this book leverages the concepts of The Event, the everyday real and the refusal to trouble these expectations of education. The relationships between information, knowledge and expertise re-align in the crowd-sourced or hashtag syllabus to navigate the gaping absences in education unable to deal with moments of eruption within accelerated capitalism. Claustropolitan times require radical thinking.³ Such skills are devalued in an education focussed on preparing students for work. Critical thinking is increasingly in service of employment priorities, and the radical or disobedient is codified as deviant, dangerous and even disastrous. This book affirms the importance of radical thinking and dangerous literacies in difficult times. Educational repertoires which cultivate skills in the professional as well as the personal are shrinking to profitable pathways. The argument in this book aims to reopen the dialogue between information, the self and society by reinserting the complex values of knowledge and expertise within everyday repertoires of knowing. The significance of the everyday real as the space where struggles over meanings are performed is centralised. An interrogation of this space is affirmed as essential to the interruption of claustropolitan consciousness. It is the crowd-sourced syllabus that permits this investigation. Within this space radical thinking makes way for an educated hope and the double refusal.

Paul Virilio asserts that we now 'live in the instant of the real, which is the acceleration of reality that completely effaces history'.⁴ This effacement is written in the ways in which 'the real' has been disconnected from everyday sense-making. Steve Hall and Simon Winlow contextualise the importance of this erasure and argue that it impoverishes intellectual endeavour by limiting the perspectives, presumptions and perceptions that generate meaning. They argue for intellectual disobedience.

What we need now is a new academic and political realism that looks coldly at the world and its problems, sizing them up carefully, drawing on the best and most up-to-date empirical data, before intervening with a view to setting us on a new course.⁵

The tools currently available to conceptualise, render and compose the 'real' are inadequate. They argue for an 'ultra-realist' approach which

destabilises ‘grand theories’⁶ that mask an ‘ability to engage with and represent the real world’.⁷ It is a rejection of ‘resistance’, asserting that this struggle accommodates rather than overturns existing power structures by replacing “‘privileged” perspectives with “suppressed knowledges””.⁸ The ultra-realist project requires a ‘rethinking’ of the principles and paradigms that determine how we make sense of the everyday. This critical ‘rethinking’ takes established knowledges to task and theorises new approaches.

*This act of rethinking means that one should countenance the possibility that orthodox positions are not just wrong, but may be actual impediments to understanding, or ideological constructions produced to ‘cover up’ reality.*⁹

This book utilises the ‘ultra-realist’ ethos as the propulsion to deploy a ‘rethinking’ of education, social mobility, resistance, digitisation, modernity and the neoliberal subject. This rethinking project spotlights the claustropolitan networking of ‘accelerated culture, foreclosure and re proletarianisation’¹⁰ that sustains the decaying and archaic principles of modernity that persist despite the myriad of ‘posts’¹¹ punctuating the post-War, post-Crash period. The endurance of capitalism and the corroding of consciousness that sustains it is at the interface of a crisis in the real. This ‘interplay between grand-scale socio-historical transformations and the ways in which they structure and mould everyday life as the material and symbolic foundations for aspirations, beliefs, desires, norms, values and all manner of sensibilities’¹² is increasingly opaque due to its complexity and the competing interests that drown the literacies and resources available to understand these intersections. The crowd-sourced syllabus re-opens the possibilities for intervention and re-imagining the variety of potentialities in the real.

Virilio argues that ‘history is accidental now, instantaneous, it cancels out ... the tripartite division of past, present, and future’.¹³ In this context collapse, we are increasingly affronted and confronted with eruptions and destabilisation within the social where meanings spill out and beyond the normalising interfaces that limit and contain knowledge. These interruptions cascade on Twitter as a space for accelerated communication where disruption and disagreement are normalised. Appropriately called ‘bursty dynamics’¹⁴ the uneven, eruptive nature of Twitter mirrors the emergence of discontinuity in the real. It becomes the instrument for the accidental and instantaneous real to be deployed, ‘hashed-out’ and re-interpreted.

As the dominant folksonomy on Twitter, the hashtag permits peculiar networking of knowledge. A hashtag is not just a keyword. Its original operation in telephony was

...to confirm the entry of telephone numbers, account numbers or credit card numbers – its purpose, that is, was to signal the end of meaningful data and issue a command to send this information.¹⁵

A hashtag simultaneously opens and closes potentialities within the digitised space, making its ‘bursty’ nature an ideal tool for exchange of information, experiences and ideas in accelerated interactions. This simultaneous opening and closing, possibility and contention enables the space for a double refusal. The crowd-sourced syllabus is an indexing of possibilities – a simultaneity of the real and a mobile memory archive of potential ways of being, knowing and understanding. It maps an evolving, living, changing, colliding and reforming real as it projects into the past, within the present and for the future. Knowledge is dislodged from official educational oeuvres and the hashtag permits collision of possibilities.

The first crowd-sourced syllabus was created by Marcia Chatelain following the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown Jr., in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Chatelain leveraged her Twitter followers to gather resources to help teach the tragedy in her classroom. This call for resources indicates that contemporary educational repertoires were inadequate to her teaching needs. The eruption caused by Michael Brown Jr.’s murder provided a fulcrum for negotiations over ‘the real’. Her initiative precipitated multiple imitators that leveraged the utility of the hashtag to curate and cultivate contested knowledges into a radical rethink of the real. These syllabi draw on the expertise of theorists, academics, teachers, activists, journalists and others who contribute articles, photographs, oral histories, polemics and films to readings lists and resource archives. Their contributions are submitted and distributed using the # symbol. Users can search Twitter to find these contributions and offer their own. The deployment of the hashtag in this manner is different to the activist tags that circulate to ‘rapidly amass large numbers of protesters with a common goal’,¹⁶ as seen in the Arab Spring or Occupy Wall Street. The outcome of the syllabus is not pre-configured; rethinking rather than resistance is the objective. The syllabi do not have key graduate outcomes, assessments or assigned credit. They are askew from the criteria of standardised education and not akin to MOOCs or short courses aimed at lifelong learners leveraging freemium models of internet commerce to sell knowledge. The crowd-sourced syllabus unfurls the present by leveraging the past, pre- and post-educational repertoires, and precarious knowledges in a dialogue deploying the tropes of deep thinking to reassert knowing as radical social practice. These syllabi conjure pasts, moments and memories that have been forgotten, hidden, masked and deprioritised in the contemporary educational milieu. Within these complexities alternatives to

current consciousness are conjured. Refusal is realised, situated and deployed. Its nuance situates where the potential of the refusal to be dominated is visualised as well as the refusal to dominate.

Jon Savage's maxim that '[h]istory is made by those who say "No"'¹⁷ reveals the productivities of refusing. This is not about being 'against', but how one might refuse to dominate as an act of consciousness as well as praxis. Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren express concern about defeatism in the refusal.¹⁸ The argument in this book affirms the importance of the hesitation and the critical space the refusal enables. Educated hope is in place of nihilism and presents possibilities for a radical re-imagination of knowledge and the efficacy of expertise. Instead of polarising education – either as a neoliberal tool for marginalising students into work-ready drones for a crisis-laden economy, or as politicised pedagogues ready to enact critical thinking and radical learning to resist and rebel – educated hope activates literacies of transformation.

*the possibility for transforming hope and politics into an ethical space and public act that confronts the flow of everyday experience and the weight of social suffering with the force of individual and collective resistance and the unending project of democratic social transformation.*¹⁹

Educated hope is a form of militant optimism that recodifies how we are 'informed about the limits of the present'²⁰ so that radical praxis can be enabled. The crowd-sourced syllabus fuses politics and hope erupting out of the moment or 'the event' where meanings become destabilised. In offering space for refusals the hashtag is the conduit through which this eruption is visualised and rendered via 'the real'. The crowd-sourced syllabus operationalises the potential for double refusal by conjuring contested and contestable ways of knowing, being and understanding in curated exchanges.

This book utilises the crowd-sourced syllabi to rethink the relationships to knowledge, hope, refusal and radical change. The chapters that follow move through these potentials, flowing and hesitating to consider the complexities that coincide to navigate the claustropolitan conditions that limit and restrain unpopular modes of thinking. In these spaces resistance relinquishes to the refusal. The potential for the double refusal is seductive and seditious because it presents the possibility for radical thinking and change. The syllabi are not just tools for teaching and learning. They are also a meditation on how knowledge, knowing and knower occupy discrete places within the negotiation of the everyday real. By understanding these components and how they interact, rethinking becomes possible, unhindered by claustropolitan urgencies.

Chapter 1 upsets the familiar refrain of educational crisis in the neoliberal era. Instead of treading the well-worn arguments about the decline of educational standards and the rise of the corporate university, this chapter considers the dilemmas of expertise. This chapter refuses to normalise the accusation of racism, sexism and stupidity of voters who elected Donald Trump, affirmed Brexit and side with populist movements. The assertions of ignorance when more people than ever are enrolling in education, are credentialed and have reliable access to the reams of online information on the internet and the web sit awkwardly in this debate. Literacy offers only one explanation. This chapter suggests that the reification of reactivity over reading is part of a corroding educational terrain where alternative knowledges are being struggled over.

Chapter 2 revisits Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour* to argue that the lads presented possibilities for a double refusal. The working-class lads in Willis' study have been frequently exemplified and his study lionised as an intellectual crucible demonstrating how working-class lads choose to sabotage their opportunities in life, and how educational institutions assist them in this project. Critical pedagogies that came after Willis reshaped educational landscapes by considering how pedagogy could intervene in institutional meanings. This chapter instead suggests that the lads were enacting a double refusal. The social mobility that is the desired outcome of education involves the adoption of principles of personal improvement through rational thought and civilising procedures. The lads recognised they were being asked to trade one form of domination for another. They exemplified Baudrillard's maxim that 'the masses aren't stupid enough to let representation, power and responsibility be palmed off on them'.²¹ The lads embraced subversion in their schooling to create space for refusal.

Chapter 3 connects digitisation to Alain Badiou's configuration of The Event. Via an understanding of disintermediation suspicion of expertise, decline of trust and rejection of scholarship are filtered through the emergence of an edited public culture. The Event is a radical upheaval but its causes and consequences remain obscure because the meanings defy the structures that already exist to manage 'the real'. The crowd-sourced syllabus is a navigation of evental moments. Eruptions that cannot be contained within accelerated capitalism quickly appear on and through social media (Twitter) where reactions congregate and cohere. The potential evental nature of this eruption is negotiated in the creation of the crowd-sourced syllabus which draws together resources to help make sense of the eruption. The stimulation of this intellectual labour is framed by the gaps and absences within contemporary education to provide the raw materials to investigate and render the everyday 'real'. The disruption in accelerated capitalism that cannot be explained away as resistances are configured as refusals which open the possibility for a double refusal.

Chapter 4 begins the case studies that exemplify the potential for the double refusal. The #FergusonSyllabus marks the beginning of the crowd-sourced syllabus movement when Marcia Chatelain asked for fellow teachers to help build an archive that could provide the materials responsive to the context, moments and memories of violence in Ferguson as they emerged. This temporally responsive resource network was built upon radical knowledge and refusal to be uninformed.

Chapter 5 examines the #NewFascismSyllabus and interrogates the anxious precarity of this syllabus in its reaffirming of elite understandings of education and the function of knowledge. It straddles difficult terrain in assuming a critical literacy in its readers while also diversifying its resources to present a reified knowledge network for understanding terror, deviance, violence and resistance. The refusal embedded in the #NewFascismSyllabus is of lazy thinking. The merits of difficult thinking are enfolded throughout with assumptions about literacy peppering the material. Nevertheless, the syllabus also permits practicalities and praxis to inform its approaches to diversify the ways of knowing via an educated hope.

Chapter 6 examines the most detailed and diversified syllabi of the case studies with the #StandingRockSyllabus. The materials that are cohered constitute an archive of endurance and present a direct challenge to the tropes of resilience that have come to punctuate contemporary educational efficacies. The memory of the Oceti Sakowin transcends the educated resilience of neoliberal subjectivity. The protesters at Standing Rock do not deploy resistance. They activate ways of knowing and being that have endured. This is a timeless refusal of generations and an ongoing reaffirmation of connection to land and water rights as the colonial settler project consistently seeks to strip them of their ways of knowing. The presence of the double refusal is palpable and powerful.

Chapter 7 interrogates the refusal of consent. Stimulated in response to *The New York Times* exposé on Harvey Weinstein that outed him as a serial sexual predator, the #MeToo movement visualises the routine and regular exploitation of women's bodies in their everyday real. The rape culture syllabus was aggregated via the #NotOkay hashtag that asserted a clear rejection of the bodily incursions normalised in women's experiences. Consent is a site for struggle, and the syllabus coheres challenging ways of knowing gender, corporeality, violence and sexuality required for meanings to be navigated and destabilised.

Chapter 8 diverts into the sanctuary movement to question the assertion of power and its invitation into the everyday to define and shape 'the real'. Sanctuary cities and campuses in the United States are sites of struggle over the power wielded by the office of the president and Donald Trump

specifically. A sanctuary campus offers an educated hope and a refusal to obey presidential directives aimed at undocumented residents and students. The power of paper to track, legitimate and assert power is affirmed but also questioned by the sanctuary campus movement via a refusal to aggregate and deploy documents identifying ‘illegals’ to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. These struggles are based at the heart of constitutional and presidential power, and the educational literacies that enable and visualise refusal.

The final case study coheres disability, race and gender to investigate the creation of the Black Disabled Woman Syllabus. Embodied binaries between able and disabled constructed in Vilissa Thompson’s narrative of the creation of this syllabus identify how the intellectual labour of people with disabilities remains obscured. The routine refusals that must be enacted by people with disabilities as their human rights are rewritten and denied form a site where repressed truths rise up. The disabled body is a site of contestation over what is ‘real’, right and true. The medical and social models for understanding and representing disability contest in these spaces. The syllabus takes the terrain of representation as critical space for rethinking, re-imagining and re-knowing disability.

This book is punctuated by the figure and fallibilities of Donald Trump. Many of the syllabi selected for study were created in response to his nomination as Republican Party candidate or his eventual election to the presidency of the United States. The role of #BlackLivesMatter in popularising resistance via social media has also formed a foundation for the interrogation of the relationships between rethinking, evental eruptions, and ‘the real’ in this book. As of writing, the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis has resulted in widespread rioting in the United States as the coronavirus marches onward and upward of 100,000 deaths from the disease. These happenings are ripe for evental intervention. Police power and government authority is being burnt in the streets. Radical thinking is rebelling against the staid structures of the old. Educated hope reinforces the debates and discussions about violence, rebellion, social change, policing and racism. There is an arrival of intellect and a celebration of knowing. Rhetoric and evocative oratory is populating newsfeeds and archives. This is not a time of ignorance. It is a time of anger and a time of refusal. The double refusal bubbles in anticipation as the times of Trump conclude and the evental potentiality of the eruptive present manifests in crowd-sourced syllabi that reorder and reanimate ways of knowing that encircle and entreat education. The hope of radical rethinking opens possibilities for new ways of configuring power that might present pathways for a double refusal.