

Revolutionary entanglements: Transversal mappings of disability in the favela

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This paper examines, complicates and contests the implicit discourse of children living in poverty as inherently disabled. Challenging the media portrayal of young people living in the favelas in Rio de Janeiro within the neo-liberal discourse of development, the article will draw on the experience of one of the author's (Ashley Do Nascimento) experience as a child and youth care worker and ethnographer in a favela in Rio. An argument will be made for re-thinking dis-ability in relation to poverty and childhood in the global south.

Keywords: Global Capitalism; Transversality; Entanglement; Disability; Favela; Brazil

Introduction

In this paper we examine, complicate and contest the implicit discourse of children living in poverty as inherently disabled. The concept of disability and its associated social practices function within a highly contested web of discourses and activities that, we will suggest might be mapped utilizing what Guattari (2010) has termed transversal diagrammatics or what Pacini-Ketchabaw (2012) has proposed as post-colonial entanglements. Such entanglements include the shifting and evolving power relations of post-modern global capital, juridical discourses related to rights for those constituted as both children and disabled, neo-liberal discourses of development and aspiration, intersectional weavings of class, gender and race as well as discourses of what it means to be poor under current regimes of capitalist production. To do this, we will draw on the experience of one of the author's (Do Nascimento) work as a child and youth care provider and ethnographer in a favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In explicating Ms. Do Nascimento's experiences through the transversal and entangled relations described above, we intend to open childhood disability as a field with significant revolutionary political constitutive force.

Mapping Capitalism: Transversality and Post-Colonial Entanglements

To write the political and revolutionary capacities of disabled childhood within the geographical location of a favela in Brazil plunges us immediately into a messy and fuzzy cartography. A mapping where the conditions of post-coloniality, with its hierarchical and taxonomic registers of control, through distinction and enclosure, intersect and overlap with the emerging maps of post-modern global capitalism. This is the virtual terrain of our contemporary economic system with its modes of infinite deferral and ever shifting fields of open coding reterritorialized on the absent signifier of the system of value of capital per se. This is the placeless place where all things make money as their primary impetus. To diagram and sketch this new and emerging social and cultural landscape requires that we deploy tools adequate to the task. As Hardt and Negri (2005) point out, in relation to the failure of traditional economic and political theory to account for the conflation of the political and economic as one fuzzy aggregate of control and domination under the new capitalist world order:

The fact [is] that none of these theories will understand the new nature of the global political body without recognizing how it is composed of divisions and hierarchies that are equally economic and political. The organs of the political body are really primarily economic divisions and thus a critique of political economy is necessary to understand the body's anatomy (162)

In his writings, Felix Guattari (2005) proposes that one cannot fully understand the limitations and capacities of a revolutionary project under the current regimes of global capitalism without accounting for the production of subjectivity. He argues that the first political task is the production of new modes of subjectivity and consciousness. To explicate this further, it is important to map the coordinates that comprise the mechanisms of control and domination that underlie and facilitate the modes of brutality lived as daily experience by much of the world's population. Such coordinates are composed of capitalism as a system of abstract code with no regard for anything living, or for that matter, for any actual material sets of conditions (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Instead, capitalism is only interested in producing itself as a system of abstract value in which money makes more money. In its previous mode, as industrial capitalism, the creation of profit was reliant on production, distribution and consumption by human beings (Negri, 1996). In short, capitalism's ability to reproduce itself as profit was dependent upon exploitation and appropriation of the material world of both living and inanimate force such as living labor and minerals, oil, gas and so on. While it sustains modes of industrial production and expropriation of labor and material resources, its emerging form is what Hardt and Negri (2005) have termed immaterial labor. Immaterial labor has distinct advantages for capitalism because the capacity to control both human wage relations and dwindling or indefinite material resources has become more contested and difficult. In turning towards immaterial labor as a site of appropriation,

capitalism aspires to side step the messy set of relations that is the material world. Instead, the site of appropriation becomes the manner in which human beings produce themselves as social beings. In other words, it is the appropriation of the social itself.

A complete accounting of the extent, mode and manner of such appropriation is beyond the scope of this project (see Negri, 1997; Hardt and Negri, 2005, 2009; Deleuze, 1992 for further elaboration) but suffice it to say that it involves what Guattari (2010) refers to processes of subjectification and conscientization. That is the production of modes of subjectivity and consciousness amenable to commodification and transmutation into the money form. Hardt and Negri (2009:133) discuss how under such conditions, our very ability to form relations, communicate and perform as affective bodies, becomes subject to encoding within the value system of money:

The traditional economic division between productive and reproductive labor breaks down in this context, as capitalist production is aimed ever more clearly at the production of not only (and perhaps not even primarily) commodities but also social relationships and forms of life

This can be seen, as they assert, in the feminization of labour, wherein women within the corporate work force become responsible for managing the emotions and temperaments of working teams. As Skott-Myhre (In Press) points out, this necessitates the overcoding and monitoring of female affect through the mechanisms of psychiatry and psychopharmaceuticals in such diagnoses as Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, where any negative affect that might impinge upon the smooth operations of the corporate work place are open for remediation and treatment. It also functions in the realm of unpaid domestic labor and the double workload of women responsible for roles of sustenance and nurturance in the family and the workplace.

This expansion of the realm of affective labor managed by women holds profound force within the life worlds of the global South. Here, the combination of gender specific affectively and physically nurturing work traditionally by women ‘such as domestic work, sex work, elder care, and nursing’ (Hardt and Negri, 2009: 135), expands to include jobs that require the deployment of the ‘racial stereotype of the ‘nimble fingers’ of women in the global South’ (2009: 136). For our purposes here, we might also include young people within the regimes of affective and social training and social control. The ever expanding psychiatric and psychological over-coding of affective and social subjectification of young people is a hallmark of global capitalism wherever it goes.

What is important to draw from this description of the overcoding of social relations is that capitalism operates as a system of code abstracted from lived experience and living capacity. It is a series of interlocking and overlapping codes that operate in a series of auto-referential infinite repetitions. In this, it homogenizes and flattens the richness of living production into pure abstraction, the realm of absolute lack, where all actuality is translated into an absent

signifier. This promotes the realm of the social as a sphere of what Deleuze (1992) terms infinite deferral. Because there is no *there*, there in the value system of capitalism, one can never attain anything other than a sense of frustration and futility when attempting to follow the mandates of development and progress as delineated in the ideological obfuscations of desire as distributed and perpetuated through the vehicle of the all pervasive media.

Under such conditions, Guattari's call for the ability to map emerging models of subjectivity and subjectification has a powerful resonance. Guattari's termed the mode of mapping such capacities, transversality. Transversality is a mode of cartography that refers to territories that intersect, overlap and extend into one another. Guattari deploys the term to investigate the intersectionality of what he termed institutional psychiatry and subjectivity. He defined institutions as composed of complex interweavings of 'lines of unconscious force, relation and desire' (Alex, 2008). He proposed that transversality could be used to conceptualize and open these networks of unconscious relations that comprise institutional subjectification. Within domains of postmodern capitalism, the process of overcoding social production is reliant on the capacity of capitalist code to engage living unconscious desire and turn it to its own ends. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1983), this requires a complex process whereby the unconscious as a site of infinite productive capacity is turned into a site of indeterminate yearning for what one is not. The unconscious is strip mined for its capacity to produce the social world of idiosyncratic subjectivity and creative force. The by-product of such mining is absolute lack and the propensities of the addict to always seek a solution to our sense of overwhelming emptiness.

This process operates at many levels within the world of the global south and very specifically within the lived experience of the favela. To make sense of the topography delineated by transversality, we need to distinguish between different modes of coding that create our social world. In the first instance, Guattari (2010) tells us that the unconscious is a site of contingent production. It is assembled moment to moment out of all the elements present at a given conjuncture. There is no pre-existing structure or content to unconscious desire. It is absolute creative production. The process of its code production is to encode and structure and produce a specific form and territory and then to open that territory to deterritorialization and recoding based on new elements, new conditions, new experiences and new capacities. All of this, is premised in the actuality of living force and material conditions. In the case of capitalist coding, as we have indicated above, the process is to turn the productive capacities of the unconscious towards producing pure abstraction in the form of the money sign. As Michael Hardt (1995) points out, capitalism empties the forms and functions of civil society pertaining to the needs and desiring production of living beings (family, juridical, schools, government) and replaces them with the function of making a profit. This is to produce the world as a copy of itself or, as Baudrillard (1994) would have it, a pure simulacra.

Haraway (1997), in referring to the world of post-coloniality, makes the case that capitalism operates in the logic of representation. It takes the complex entanglements of social and ecological networks and produces them by way of representations of themselves as identities and certainties of knowledge or, what might be termed, common sense ways of knowing. Rather than the messy and fuzzy transversal maps of entanglements between human beings, modes of production and desire, we have the world of taxonomies and hierarchies. Rather than indeterminate boundaries and shifting assemblages of living production, we have modes of distinction and difference premised in what we are lacking and what we fail to be.

Interpretosis and Disability in the Favela

The question of how to make sense of and engage in significant ways with young people, more specifically young people who might be read as disabled, is comprised in important ways through capitalist codes of taxonomy, hierarchy and lack as well as by the alternate capacities indicated by the possibilities of alternate mappings of living force.

This is clear in the work one of the authors, Do Nascimento, did as a youth worker and ethnographer in the favela in Rio de Janeiro Brazil where the taxonomic and hierarchical entanglements of race, gender, disability, poverty and age are woven deeply into the fabric of everyday life. The disjunction between the media discourses about young people, poor people, disability, race, and gender were jarring and disconcerting at best. The ways in which the popular press and governmental discourses represented the actualities of existence coded human life in the favela as inherently dangerous, precarious and marginal (Daily Mail, 2016) within the story of Brazil's neoliberal aspirations to the world stage. The favelas and the people in them were depicted as a problem to be solved, a roadblock on the way to inclusion in the global capitalist economy.

The reality is far more complex and the lived experience of young people in the favela defied and contradicted this dominant discourse on a daily basis. In Do Nascimento's experience, there is a complex double narrative of competence and frustration in the daily lives of favela dwellers. As Richardson and Skott-Myhre (2012) point out in their work on the Hood as a dwelling space, what happens on a daily basis in areas determined to be economically marginal, is mostly the day to day tasks of daily survival. This includes activities related to housing, nutrition, education, play, sociality, cultural events, and so on. This narrative is one of competence and pride in the performance of survival under difficult circumstances. As Holt (2009:205) notes, 'it is in the everyday practices that dominant identity relations are produced. It is also in these quotidian practices that alternative identity performances can be forged which contest hegemonic social relations'.

A contested and entangled narrative is produced when people living daily lives in the favela come in contact with the contentious relations necessitated by the neo-liberal capitalist

economy. Here we find the contradictory role of the underground economy of drugs and gangs and the complex role they play in the security of the favela, both physical and economic. In addition, there is the complicated relationship with the police and recent efforts to pacify the favelas by engaging in armed conflict with the gangs amid efforts to colonize and gentrify certain favelas. The representation of those living in poverty as inherently socially and educationally deprived has spawned a minor industry of programs to assist and remediate the harsh living conditions of the favela. However, the groups such as the Catholic Church and NGOs do not come without their own colonial ambitions to produce modes of subjectivity and consciousness amenable to their own ideological ambitions.

The emergence of Brazil as an aspiring force within global capitalism (Throssell, 2010) has highlighted the messy entanglements of actualities of poverty, racism, sexism, and disability in Brazilian society. The dominant narrative, as reported recently by the BBC, is that Brazil's economic inclusion in global capitalism has promoted democracy, virtually eradicated racism, gender inequity and poverty. As the BBC put it: 'Democracy and democratic institutions have been strengthened...Poverty has been significantly reduced, and 31 million Brazilians lifted into the middle class, which in turn has brought about a rapid expansion of the domestic consumer market' (Throssell, 2010)

The reality on the ground, particularly in areas of economic marginalization, is significantly different. This disjunction between life in the favelas, as Do Nascimento experienced it, where race, gender, disability and endemic poverty are the rule, is an embarrassment and an impediment to the dominant narrative. As a result, it is important that the people living under such conditions be convinced that they are responsible for their own individual destiny and development into the ever-growing middle class. In fact, it would be an economic disaster if the low wages and contingent employment of favela dwellers were to disappear. The neo-liberal economy relies heavily on this sector to produce its economic miracles.

In this sense it is important to recognize that what is happening to the economically marginalized population in the favela is a global effect. As Hardt and Negri (2009) point out, capitalism has generalized the perverse mechanisms of unevenness and inequality everywhere:

Global apartheid is not simply a system of exclusion, as if subordinated populations were simply cut off, worthless disposable. In global Empire today, as it was in South Africa, apartheid is a productive system of hierarchical inclusion that perpetuates the wealth of the few through the labor and poverty of the many (166-67)

As we have noted, to perpetuate this degree of global inequity requires a discourse about the poor as being, in the most reductive sense, inherently disabled, incapable, and lacking. This framing is even more powerful in the case of marginalized populations within those living in poverty, such as those perceived to be disabled or experiencing 'mind-body-emotional

differences' (Holt, 2009), young people deemed developmentally incapable or women, read as less capable than men.

These discourses of lack and incapacity are what Bayliss (2009), following Deleuze and Guattari, refers to as interpretosis. He argues that the reading of bodies as broken, premised in theories of physiology, neurology, psychology and so on, construct the body as a 'univocity, a one to one isomorphism of the signifier and the signified' (283). In this reading of the body, mind-body differences are inducted into taxonomies and hierarchies that collapse individual lived capacity into a single description in which capacity is always exceptional and unexpected.

In the favela, Do Nascimento saw the extent and pernicious effect of interpretosis in the entangled transversal descriptions of race, age, gender and disability. In one instance, the discourses of race, gender, and poverty intersected with an anticipation of disability when a well-meaning adult, from outside the favela, expressed surprise that a young man of color could read and provide sophisticated answers on a job application. In the obverse, it was devastating to see children break down in tears during government mandated standardized testing because their schooling had not given them the tools to even read the testing materials. This double pincer movement that controls unruly bodies through the complex entanglement of neo-liberal expectations and inadequate resources, allows for interpretations and the reading of bodies in the favela as inherently disabled and marginalized.

Hardt and Negri (2009) point out that these readings and interpretations of young bodies in the favela is belied in the fact that:

The strategies of survival themselves often require extraordinary resourcefulness and creativity. To the extent that social production is increasingly defined by immaterial labor such as cooperation or the construction of social relations and networks of communication, the activity of all in society including the poor becomes more and more directly productive . . . the poor embody the ontological condition not only of resistance but also of productive life itself (131-133)

The question of ontological resistance or the capacity to produce communities of alterity that defy, by their very persistent existence, the logic of global capitalism, is perhaps the fundamental political movement of our current age. The living force of economically marginalized bodies subject to the interpretotic codings of global capital as broken and incapable, we would argue, holds a powerful degree of political potential for revolt. Ballard (cited in Holt, 2009) echoing, in the register of disability, Hardt and Negri's (2009:203) commentary on the power of the poor, remarks on the 'emancipatory potential of theorizing identities as dynamic interconnected social and corporeal becomings'.

Perhaps there is no greater indicator of the revolutionary possibilities of those deemed disabled economically, physically, emotionally, neurologically, biologically, or developmentally than the array of modes of capture and obfuscation deployed within Brazil to de-potentiate and smooth over the capacity for rupture and resistance. These include efforts to turn the desiring force of production within the favela into a complicated and overlapping set of modes of discipline and control that operate at the level of abstract code and ideological obfuscation. Do Nascimento experienced how this functions in the day-to-day lives of children within the favelas as what Deleuze (1992) refers to as a system of control premised in infinite deferral. While this system of control operates at a number of different levels of constantly shifting and mutating codes, we will delineate those Do Nascimento observed in her work.

The first of these is the notion of democracy and rights. Brazil has been put forward on the world media stage as an exemplar of emerging democratic practices within the Global South. In terms of disability, it adopted the United Nations Resolution on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2008. However, in a recent analysis of the impacts of the UNCRPD in Brazil (Kirakosyon, 2013), we find implementation riddled with contradictions, deferrals and neo-liberal agendas. Kirakosyon (2013) points out that, much like other rights initiatives, there are problems with implementation in that there are both insufficient resources devoted to monitoring, and what monitoring there is, remains largely ineffective. This was certainly true in the favela referenced in our writing here, where there was no evidence that any attempt was being made to either monitor or implement the UNCRPD.

Kirakosyon (2013) noted that there is an inherent conflict between the attempts to implement provisions related to rights that have juridical and civil implications. In the areas of representative democracy and legislative action, there appears to be significant progress. However, if this is measured against the actual living conditions in the areas of economic, social and cultural well-being, there is still a very long way to go. In the UNCPDR, there is a distinction made between those who are considered impaired as defined by existing modes of medical or psychiatric structural oppression, and those who have not been captured or subjugated formally within these systems. As Kirakosyon (2013:40) notes, 'If the aim is to change oppressive social structures and attitudes, it would make sense to protect all people with impairments, rather than those already oppressed'.

As we have noted here, the demarcation and cartography of disability within the global South is composed of levels of impairment that function at the cultural, social, and economic levels as well as at the level of those experiencing mind-body-emotional difference. Indeed, as Kirakosyon (2013) notes, economic conditions constitute a major obstacle to implementation of the UNCRPD. Particularly problematic is a lack of solid educational foundations. The program, in which Do Nascimento worked as a youth worker, was focused on just such remediation. The program attempted to provide basic educational support to supplement formal schooling for the children and youth in the favela. Do Nascimento noted that there

were significant educational deficits and lack of fundamental resources in all areas of educational skills. Learning disabilities were not at all uncommon but testing or medications were either unavailable or beyond the means of parents and families.

According to Kirakosyon (2013), the response has not been to provide more comprehensive educational resources, but to provide vocational training for disabled youth and adults. However, such training founders on the lack of fundamental educational skills. With 24% of the population defined as impaired (by all accounts this number is unreliable but the best available) only 1% of this population is employed. The neo-liberal proposal for this problem is entrepreneurship, which seems unlikely to have significant benefits for the populations of the favelas, unless we count the illegal drug trade as an entrepreneurial enterprise.

For Deleuze (1992), these contradictions and failed social policies are not the accidental by-products of poor implementation or monitoring but designated strategies for social control under global capitalism. As he notes when speaking to what he calls the emergence of societies of control:

Just as the corporation replaces the factory, perpetual training tends to replace the school and continuous control to replace the examination. Which is the surest way of delivering the school to the corporation...In the society of control one is never finished with anything...Many young people strangely boast of being motivated, they re-request apprenticeships and permanent training (5-7)

For young people and their families in the favela, this world is the social reality of neo-liberal incursions into the life world. The grand mythology is that education and training will provide a pathway out the favela. Unfortunately, that pathway seldom emerges in any truly accessible way. Instead, as Hardt (1995) points out, we have the institutions of civil society only as representations of themselves without any actual capacity to function for the majority of the citizenry, much less disabled children, youth, and adults of marginalized economic status. As to the ability of the neo-liberal democratic Brazilian state to deliver upon its promises of a just and equitable society, we have the exemplar of the World Cup with all its contradictions and antagonisms. As Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 107) presciently note, 'What social democracy has not given the order to fire when the poor come out of their territory or ghetto?'

Revolutionary Entanglements

Do Nascimento is reminded of a young man she met while working in the favela. This youth had some form of undiagnosed and untreated physical disability that significantly reduced the usage of his left arm and leg and made it impossible for him to utter articulable speech. What

she found noteworthy was the fact that he was not only fully included in the activities of the community center where she worked by the acceptance of his peers, but also by his own insistence that he be included. He was always there to help set up chairs and tables even though this was quite physically difficult for him. There was a matter-of-factness about how he managed his contributions to the community center and its cultural and social activities. He simply did what he could do as an expression of capacity. He was integrated into the activities of the community and his peer group and Do Nascimento never heard anyone remark upon him or his activities as unusual.

If there is a politics that stands the possibility of challenging the dominant system of over-coded rule that is global capitalism, it may well be founded in the capacity to act within the living world of mundane day-to-day social relations. If capitalism is aspiring to over-code our capacity to form living relations, then our modes of resistance may well reside in our ability to form functional relations premised in the actual material struggles of our quotidian relations. This was, of course, the first lesson of Marx (1978). The goal is not to interpret the world, but to change it. In a political situation in which the dominant system of rule is working very hard to produce the majority of us as inherently composed of lack, impotence, and frustrated desire, the key to revolt may well lie with those subjects who have already spent their lives resisting being told they are incapable and broken. It is those who experience mind-body difference defined as disability, who may be able to lead the way for those of us more recently disenfranchised and marginalized by the proliferation of new and emergent codings of emotional, medical and biological disability. Kirakosyan (2013) reports a disability rights activist from Brazil noting: There is a saying, “without action there is no right.” We have a long way to walk in the defense of rights, of struggle, of denouncing, of militancy, to attain those changes, so that people with disabilities can live their lives with dignity (45)

Conclusions

We have argued here, that disability in Brazil is composed of a complex entanglement that is increasingly inclusive of all of us. This is not to diminish the particularities and specificities of struggle and hardship for those experiencing mind-body-emotional difference. It is instead to build solidarity and to recognize that although there are significant differences in the levels of hardship, struggle, pain, and danger for different people in different locations and under distinct circumstances, what is happening to those young people designated as disabled in the favela in Rio de Janeiro is both relevant and crucial to all of us. In that, it is important to recognize that while the mechanisms of domination and control are similar everywhere, our particular modes of resistance and revolt are constructed locally and idiosyncratically out of the rich entanglements that compose material living relations. In those relations, there is no disability, just an infinite capacity for action rooted in our common purposes and idiosyncratic capacities. In this, the life world of the favela opens a transversal cartography,

where the desiring unconscious production of the favelas of the global south overlaps, intersects and opens lines of flight across all contingent geographical points of collision producing new worlds and new peoples to come for all other sectors of the globe.

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