

Radical youth work: Love and community

**Hans A Skott-Myhre and
Kathy SG Skott-Myhre**

*Our problem is to reconquer the
communitarian spaces of liberty, dialogue
and desire. To promote the alternative
ontology of the minority it is necessary to
open "communitarian spaces of liberty,
dialogue and desire"*

— Negri and Guattari (Negri and
Guattari, (1990 p. 141)

*We can be together
Ah you and me
We should be together
We are all outlaws in the eyes of America
In order to survive we steal cheat lie forge
fuck hide and deal
We are obscene lawless hideous dangerous
dirty violent and young
But we should be together
Come on all you people standing around
Our life's too fine to let it die and
We should be together
All your private property is
Target for your enemy
And your enemy is
We
We are forces of chaos and anarchy
Everything they say we are we are
And we are very
Proud of ourselves*

(Jefferson Airplane, 1969)

In the opening sentences of
A Thousand Plateaus
Deleuze and Guattari
(1987) state, "We wrote this
book together. Since each of
us was several there was
already quite a crowd" (p. 1).
In writing this article
together, based on a
workshop we gave at the
Child and Youth Care Work
Conference at the University
of Victoria in 2006, we bring
to the writing a "crowd" as
well. Who is our crowd? Put
simply — *everyone*; but for our
purposes here, we refer to all
of those young people and
adults we have had the good
fortune to get to work, live,
and love together with over
the years. This crowd,
although separated by
geography, time, and all sorts
of difference, operates as a
kind of community that
brings together many bodies
working together towards a
common purpose. That
purpose, we would argue, is to
express the force of life itself
through what we are going to
call love. Indeed, it is this
combination of bodies
expressing the force of life
that constitutes what we have
called elsewhere "radical
youth work" (Skott-Myhre
2004, 2005, 2006). Radical
youth work, as we have
defined it, is youth and adults
working together for common
political purpose. We define
political here as the creation
of new forms of community
that serve the common
desires, needs, and aspirations
of those humans currently

mis-categorized into the
separate distinctions of youth
and adults. In writing this
piece as a crowd, our goal is to
re-think this
mis-categorization. We want to
examine youth-adult relations
in regards to two terms that
are both quite traditional and
potentially transformative of
the ways young people and
adults live and work together.
Those terms are love and
community.

Visions of imagined community

Words have meanings: some
words, however, also have a
'feel'. The word 'community' is
one of them. It feels good:
whatever the word community
may mean it is good to 'have a
community', 'to be in a
community' . . . Company or
society may be bad; but not the
community. Community we
feel is always a good thing
(Baumann, 2001 p. 1).

It would be our considered
opinion that any term that
consistently holds a positive
connotation ought to be inves-
tigated very carefully. The
reason for this is that our ideas
of what is positive are satu-
rated with logic and rationality
of our current historical
moment, with all of its regimes
of domination and power. As
Deleuze and Guattari (1987 pp.
75-110) point out, we are born
into and inherit the language
structures of our age. We do
not produce the meaning of
the language we use so much
as we recycle it for different
ends and purposes. To the



degree that this recycling process is without reflection, we recycle the language of the dominant system of power, and the logic of that system.

On the other hand, we may discover that the language we are born into does not seem to accurately define our lived experience. Under this circumstance we could begin to chafe against the constraints of the language of our time. We might discover that language doesn't ever fully describe who we are or what we might become. Through this discomfort we could inadvertently stumble into the fact that language is not a field of consensual reality, but a battlefield over meaning and who controls meaning.

The ability to control what things mean is dependent upon the ability to convince us that what things mean now is what they have always meant (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Of course, acting as though words have always meant what they mean now covers over historical struggles over what things might mean. The struggle over such words as black, woman, homosexual, and, of course, adolescence are good examples of how much force words and their meanings can hold. The move to discredit such struggle by labeling it simply semantics or political correctness is an example of how important it is to the current system of power to act as though the meanings certain words have held historically doesn't matter. Keeping this in mind, we should be quite suspicious of any term that acts as though it simply means what it

has always meant. If we can't see the evidence of the historical struggle of a word, it's quite likely that it is a very important word in sustaining the current systems of beliefs and the regime of power that benefits from those beliefs. For our purposes here we would argue that community is certainly another one of these words.

Desired Community

For us in particular, who happen to live in ruthless times, times of competition and one-upmanship, when few people seem in a hurry to help us, when in reply to our cries for help we hear admonitions to help ourselves . . . the word community sounds sweet. What that word evokes is everything we miss and what we lack to be secure, confident and trusting (Baumann, 2001 pp. 2-3).

One of the peculiar aspects of these words that show little or no sign of struggle, or put in another way, terms with an overwhelming positive connotation, is that they are often redolent with a certain tinge of nostalgia. In other words, they often signal something we no longer feel we have and that we long for and desire, sometimes desperately.

Innocence would be another such term that holds an overwhelmingly positive connotation with little sign of struggle and a bittersweet sense of loss and nostalgia. This word has particular force for us in child and youth work. We might ask ourselves how important to us is children's innocence? How many of our program rules and boundaries are structured to protect 'innocence'. Then, we might ask ourselves whether

innocence exists or ever really did. Is innocence a universal term that has always meant the same thing or is it a term that gets used by different people at different times to their own ends? We might think of the ways in which the media and politicians use innocence. In fact, we could well reflect on the ways in which we, as workers, use innocence to control young people's behavior; particularly when that behavior makes us uncomfortable. What are we afraid will happen if innocence is lost? Perhaps even more importantly what have we lost of our own innocence and why do we miss it so? The question might then be, is innocence innocent?

Terms such as innocence hold particular force through their sense of loss and their lack of substance within our current society. Community is another such term. Like innocence, it does not hold force for us because of its prevalence throughout society, but precisely because in our current global culture there is a resounding sense of loss and lack of just such community.

This sense of nostalgia for things we are losing, or feel we have lost, is trickier than it might seem. Loss always implies a lack of something and, as we know from our work with young people, the sense of loss and lack can be quite difficult. A child who feels they lack something central to their life is a needy child, and a needy child is more open to manipulation and exploitation than a child who feels secure and fulfilled. This knowledge about lack and need, which we gain from our work, ought to make us a bit

cautious about any attempt to convince us that we lack something. Indeed, we might argue that any system that would use lack or need as a driving premise will produce citizens much like the children we have worked with. In this sense then, when we find ourselves being convinced that we are lacking or needy, we could well be in danger of being inducted into a particularly nasty cycle of lack and yearning that might well be appropriated quite skillfully by the current systems of power and domination.

There is good reason to wonder about this within the current dominant system of capitalism. Capitalism depends upon its ability to sell people goods and services. The more people feel that they lack, the more stuff they will buy to try to fill that void? A secure and fulfilled populace would be a disaster for a system dependent on rampant consumerism for its social force. In this respect, the current system of domination is thoroughly dependent upon lack and yearning. One might argue, as we have elsewhere, that it functions like a system of addiction (Skott-Myhre, 2005) through a deep sense of loss and lack; that is to say, through a promise to fulfill that emptiness signified by the loss of something, we feel we desperately need.

In the case of community, we would argue that what we feel we lack is the relationship and connection with other living beings. We feel increasingly isolated and alone in the world. Karl Marx, writing over a hundred years ago, predicted this as the

logical intention of capitalism. He argued that in order to stay in control, capitalism must separate people from their work and from each other. We must be separated from our work so that capital can act as though it owns the products of our work so it can sell our own labor back to us; we must be separated from each other so that we cannot organize on our own behalf. We have argued elsewhere that this is why youth and adults must always see each other as radically separate (Skott-Myhre, 2005). Marx (1978, pp. 146-202) called this "radical alienation".

In order to cover over the ways in which we are alienated from ourselves and our work, the forces of capital must appropriate the concept of community as a lost ideal. In doing this it can replace actual forms of living relationship with the pseudo-relations of exchange and purchase. This is the world of false relations in which the purchase of a commodity is said to link all of us to other human beings, therefore defining a community based on the brand name of our car, shoes, baseball cap or type of computer. Under these conditions you fulfill your need for community through your affiliation with a coffee shop, a particular mall, or a family friendly fast food franchise. This often fosters a community of addiction premised on alienation and lack. We have all seen it in the worlds of the young people we work with, and in our own purchasing patterns and status identifications.

However, we should be careful here. Life does not lack. In fact, it fills all spaces with its productions, connections and relations. In this

sense, perhaps, the community of addiction does not fully represent the community we might become. In fact, we would contend that it is not community per se that has been lost, but a sense of the dynamic global interconnection of bodies. It is the force of these bodies acting together that must be denied and replaced by capital with the alienated community as a system of hidden domination. Perhaps it's not that we have lost community but that we haven't yet recognized the new forms of community produced by living relationships that capitalism struggles to keep from view.

The history of community

However, we have gotten a bit ahead of ourselves and need to give an accounting of community as it was, before suggesting community as we think it might become. Let's begin by proposing that the roots of our common western conception of community begin with the colonial period of European expansion starting in the fifteenth century. The savagery that accompanied European colonial expansion across the globe produced a dual intensity of fear on both sides of the process. For the colonizer, it created an ongoing fear of revolt and retribution, while on the terrain of the colonized or exploited, it produced a fear of genocide, enslavement, disenfranchisement and cultural extinction. This fear produced a desire for safety and security from these threats. Definitions of community produced throughout the colonial period operate, therefore, on a logic of enclosure for both the privileged and the subal-



tern. Safety is to be found in the radical separation into the communities of hierarchy and taxonomy defined by the colonial process itself; race, gender, sexuality, class, age, biology, states of nature etc. We cannot emphasize strongly enough the influence this legacy has had on the field of child and youth care. As we have noted elsewhere (Skott-Myhre, 2007), these communities of hierarchy continue to divide young people and adults in subtle ways that make collaboration difficult and real relational encounter all but impossible.

This proliferation of exclusionary binaries was then deployed by emerging capitalist industrialization to produce the disciplinary enclosure and restrictions, which constitute such modern formations as the individual, the nation state, and the people¹. These formations have had significant effect up to, and including, our current time for both the regimes of power, which have been able to discipline, segregate, exclude and destroy on the basis of community affiliation; as well as for the benefit of subaltern communities who have utilized their communities as a base for mounting an ongoing struggle of resistance to domination.

So we can see that our common conception of community is not a simple grouping of people by an accident of geography or mutual regard. Instead it is a complicated set of power relations formed

historically out of the hardships and horrors of war and conquest. It is this struggle that our ideal definitions of community are designed to hide from view. Community, as an entity with its own integrity, separate from the influence of class, race, gender, sexuality and the other effects of colonial power is something we rarely, if ever encounter. In fact, community in its own right freed from the relations of domination has always been capitalism's worst nightmare. Indeed community as a shared sense of what we hold in common rather than as a site of struggle over difference and power has always been denied by capitalist interests.

For example, in capital's first birthings, in early mercantilism and then on into the colonial project of colonisation and subjugation, much effort was expended in an attempt to fully eradicate any sense of the material common as a site of shared production. In place of the common, the domain of the private and the protection of that private became integral to the development of the capitalist social. When the public was produced, it sustained itself primarily within three forms; that of the nation state or "people" and its associated forms of national governance; as a geographical location or; as an assemblage of "interests." These interests were generally associated either with the nation, the people, a trade or profession, or one of the identities

referenced previously i.e. gender, class, race, etc. Again we can see how this has influenced the field of child and youth care in the importance we place on national identity in our programs and the values of individualism and private property we attempt to instill in the young people with whom we work. The very boundary between our "private lives" and our work is built out these ideas. The fact that we identify as child and youth care workers and are struggling to be recognized as a profession is also constructed out of this history.

This production of the common relied heavily on a definition of community as an abstraction which obscured from view struggles, contestations, radical disparities and the actual totality of difference. The allegiance to this abstracted community, in the form of national identity, allowed capital to deploy the nation state in subjecting life, at the level of actual lived experience, to its regimes and disciplines.² This, of course, did not fully succeed in eradicating alternate modes of community which, since the inception of capital, have utilized the actual common assemblages produced by the factory, the reserve, the homeland, the plantation, the favela, the barrio, the ghetto, the suburb, the farm, the school, etc. to mount resistance against capital and to produce alternate modes of living. To say that these sites of enclosure, produced by capital to its own

1 For an excellent explanation of these disciplinary enclosure and restrictions, see Foucault, M. (1978, 1988).

2 For a historical and theoretical discussion of this aspect of sovereignty see Hardt, M and Negri, A (2001). particularly the section on "Two Modernities".

ends, have been redeployed by those living within them in ways that have forced significant alterations in capital is by no means overstating the situation.³

The means by which capital has exploited the common has, up until recently, reinforced and even promoted a positive affiliation of lived experience among those sharing a common experience of oppression or exploitation. However, capital has recently evolved into a new global form with significant implications for the construction of the common as a site of resistance to exploitation⁴ and the community work necessary to sustain such resistance. In particular and pertinent to our concern with youth work, the current form of post-modern capitalism has exploded the false safety of the spaces of containment produced by industrial capitalism and the industrial economy. The spaces that produced both communities of privilege and communities of resistance no longer clearly delineate nor function as a reliable boundary. The spaces of the factory, nuclear family, school, nation state, neighborhood and even our sense of personal identity are either under assault or have already been exploded.

For all of us, but perhaps particularly for the young people inheriting this terrain, the old communities of resistance such as the union or the communities of solidarity based on identities such

as race, gender, class, or sexuality are badly fragmented with primacy given to capital acquisition rather than community solidarity. The nation state is largely a vehicle for global capitalism to advance its agenda's with little concern for the effects on the citizens within its highly permeable borders. Indeed the nation state's allegiance is to not the quality of life of the people living within its geographic coordinates but the abstract worship of the *economy*. We are told that if this economy is doing well the nation is in good shape.

However, there is increasingly little correspondence between the booming economy and the benefits for the majority of people who serve it with the labor of their bodies and minds (Toronto Star, 2007). Similarly, the schools hold very little protection from the depredations of the violent and corrupt world of late stage capital in spite of police guards, metal detectors, drug tests and institutional designs based on the diagrams of medium security prisons. Finally, the family can no longer be said to have as its socially mandated task the protection and nurturance of its members; not when everyone including parents and children must work all the time simply to keep an even pace with the cost of living (Toronto Star, 2007).

Of course, we must be careful not to romanticize these enclosures of modernity. They have a

dubious history of discipline and regimentation that not only served to protect and enclose, as we have described above, but also to restrain and restrict the productive capacities of those subjects living within them. The safety they offered to both the subaltern as a sight of collective resistance and to the privileged as a containment of that very resistance was at best ambivalent. They never really protected anyone.

Indeed in some sense, the belief in the community they offered covered over the brutal antagonisms of the industrial period through the belief that family, school and the nation were places where we belonged and to which we should be loyal. This loyalty to an abstract social configuration allowed these institutions to feed off the life energy and productive capacities of those people living for and through them. We can see the costs in the rates of domestic violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, and sexual violence that have been endemic within the institutions of capitalist society (Coontz, 2000). There actually was never any safety, particularly for women, children, people of color, or non-hetero-normative people. Indeed, even for those at the highest levels of privilege, life could be corroded, corrupted and alienated. In other words, community was never home.

Virno (2004) has written, "Today all forms of life have the experience of 'not feeling at home'

3 For a full discussion, see Negri, A. (1996)

4 We are following the works of Hardt M. and Negri A. (2000, 2004), Virno, P (2004), and Negri, A. and Guattari, F. (1990).



... No one is less isolated than the person who feels the fearful pressure of the indefinite world ...

The people are one, because the substantial community collaborates, in order to sedate the fears which spring form the circumscribed dangers. The multitude, instead, is united by the risk which derives from "not feeling at home," from being exposed omnilaterally to the world." (p. 34)

In this brief quote, Virno is suggesting that the ability of the old forms of community to "sedate our fears" no longer functions. Community can no longer be premised on safety. He, along with others (Hardt and Negri, 2004), have proposed a new form of community which, following Spinoza, has been termed "the multitude". This new community is a community that welcomes risk and is willing to abandon home. It is a community that lets go of the modernist binary classification of safety and security, and is willing to engage the world and life itself in its actuality. The outcomes of fear continue to be war, genocide, mass ecological destruction, starvation, exclusion, hatred etc. (Hardt and Negri, 2001). The illusion that one can create an environment safe from life and its risks has been concomitant with the same results. As we have noted, the productions of global capital have, in many respects, destroyed or threatened our modernist communities of enclosure and containment. To form a new community such as the multitude, premised not in safety but in the actual struggles and relations of bodies working together, takes a certain abdication

of the logic of fear. Put simply, if we are to form new communities as youth workers, we must become fearless. How do we become fearless? We would argue through the force of love.

Love

At the risk of seeming ridiculous let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love.

— Che Guevara

We have to begin by acknowledging that the kind of love we are interested in, here, is a political form of love. That is to say love as a force that frees us or allows for the maximum expression of our unique and idiosyncratic capacities as beings. In this sense, we are more interested what love can do rather than what love is. For us, love as politics is the field of struggle where we fight for the capacity to become.

The three forms of western love that we are most familiar with, including love as eros, phillia and agape, need to be interrogated to see if they, in fact, hold the possibility for advancing our freedom to become. We must see if these forms of love are similar to community in being contested arenas of struggle, which are once again obscured by the overall positive association we give to love.

As the Beatles said, "All you need is Love", but what is love exactly? Is it simply an emotion that we all share or is it a cultural construction that gives meaning to an affect with political overtones and problems? Jean Luc Nancy (2001) argues that the western

forms of love are quite problematic in the ways they have been constructed socio-culturally, particularly if we are interested in love as a form of liberation or becoming. He argues that Eros or romantic love and agape or spiritually based love are both problematic because they subject one to the rule of another.

Agape

In the case of agape, one submits to the paternal love of God for man and of man for God, which is extended to include a brotherly love for all humanity as in "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5) and loving "thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18). Right away we have a love that can be commanded into being through the mandates of an all powerful God. Such a love, in its initial formulation as commandment, requires absolute devotion or subjection to an outside force. Love, then, is to be directed and commanded into certain kinds of affections and attachments. One is not free to love as one desires, but must love those subjects according to the terms of theological law.

Even in this, the Deist mandate is to love generally or abstractly. One is to love all of humanity or God per se. Of course, loving all of humanity is an absolute abstraction. One cannot encounter or know all bodies in the world, much less love them in any concrete way. Similarly, to love God in any concrete sense is rather difficult as well. The proviso is that one should

love God by loving one's neighbor as one's self, but this is also rather difficult, since there is an extremely limited amount of guidance given as to what it means to love one's self. Does this mean that if I don't like myself very much I should apply my feelings about myself to my neighbor and if I did, who is my neighbor exactly? We are not arguing here that agape does not have merit, and that these questions are not worthy of deep and profound exploration. However, the very fact that love is commanded into a certain form of desire and affiliation makes it problematic as a political force of becoming.

Eros

Another form of love that Nancy (2001) addresses is that of eros. Eros is of course romantic and passionate love. But Nancy argues that this love also requires that we give ourselves up to another kind of rule. In this case, our obligation is to the beloved. Love as eros commands that we become devoted to the object of our desire, even going so far as give our selves up to serving them. In our work with families and young people, we have all seen the dreadful consequences of this extreme form of love.

As we can see, both eros and agape require giving up one's self to another, and they require an idealization of another — either the beloved, God, or the other as a manifestation of God. In a politics of becoming, this is quite problematic. This is because the political force of becoming is produced out of the idea that new worlds become possible through the free and unfettered expression of the

idiosyncratic constitutional capacities of each singular body in collision with other bodies. Any mandate to feel a certain way towards a particular subject as an ideal form of affect restricts and restrains the expression of the body in a way that limits its potential capacity. Put in another term, because you are giving yourself over as a subject to a ruler, whether that's a lover, a spouse, or a God, you cannot be simultaneously freeing yourself to become whatever you might become through the force of love as an un-mandated force.

Indeed, in order to give oneself over in this way, one must place the other above oneself. This requires that in some sense we idealize the other as more perfect than ourselves. We put them on a pedestal. Of course, pedestals are notoriously dangerous places, in which the fall from grace can be quite violent and disruptive. Certainly, we have all seen the effects of this in intimate relationships of all kinds. In another register, the death of God proclaimed in the twentieth century was extremely disconcerting to the social fabric of western society. Part of the problem with idealizing someone is that you cease to "deal" with them; you cease to struggle. This is what happens, of course, when we idealize young people, or young people idealize adults. We cease to deal with them as real people.

Philia

The last form of love in the western cannon that Nancy (2001) addresses is philia. Philia might well be defined as love between

friends, equals or in another term, loyalty to family, political community, job, or discipline. As such it seems to be more on target for the kind of youth work we are proposing here. After all, we are suggesting that love be a force that operates in a manner that expresses each body's capacity, and certainly friendships might well allow such a kind of love. However, as Nancy points out, it has problems as well. In the first place, it is kind of a weak force and, even when it is strong, it has a rather nasty history of being used to oppress and exploit through loyalty and an appeal to common identities (nation, state, ethnicity, family). In this sense, even philia requires that you give yourself up. You give up your identity to the national or family identity.

This affiliative love of country, ethnicity and institution can play itself out in the politics of youth work through the kinds of choices youth workers are sometimes forced to make between the youth and the policies of the agency for which they work. The agency often fosters a sense of loyalty to the organization rooted in the relations between staff that, in some instances, can form the staff as an insular formation that feels it owns the institution and must maintain control of it without relinquishing control to the youth. This kind of oppositional politics can form a "brotherhood" of staff against the "barbarian invasions" of the youth. In many cases, the power for this kind of institutional arrangement is maintained through deferral to agency rules and policies rather having staff



take personal accountability for their own decisions that affect the youth in care.

Phyllia and CYC work

An example of this was when one of the authors (Hans) was clinical director of a large runaway and homeless youth shelter. As director, he removed all of the rules and asked staff to negotiate decisions about program and difficult behavior with the youth on the basis of relationship. The staff found itself paralyzed and unable to function for nearly six months before they began to realize that they could talk with young people just like you would talk with anyone else about what they wanted, liked or disliked, or found offensive.

In another instance, perhaps more directly linked to the question of love, a number of agencies have instituted a "no touch policy." If one maintains ones affiliation with the staff and agency, one feels compelled to be loyal by following this policy. On the other hand, to do so often places the worker in conflict with their own best sense of practice, which may be to touch, hug, or hold clients in crisis. Here phyllia as love that is loyal to the agency or other staff forces a crisis for those who would violate that loyalty.

Towards a political love

As an alternative to the three types of love we have outlined thus far, we would argue for a redefinition of love that frees it from any from any limited articulation and puts it within the realm of the act. Love in this sense is full

expenditure. If you want someone to know you love them, give of yourself not as a subject but as full creative force. That is to say, give them the most creative fearless becoming being you are capable of and allow them the same opportunity.

Redefining love so that it works politically means seeing love as the act of giving fully and completely of oneself without the worry that one would run out of oneself; with the knowledge that you are infinite in your creative capacity to produce yourself. We are talking about a love that promotes, enables, or gives impetus to all potential creative force. In this sense, love is genealogical; love doesn't come from only you, but all the love/creative force of the generations that allow you to produce yourself. This goes far beyond the western notion of the individual. When first nations people call on their ancestors and all their relations to be with us and support us, this is the kind of love we are talking about.

Such love is driven by what we hold in common, which is the ability to produce ourselves as radically different. It is this complex relationship of commonality in difference that allows for the fullest form of political love. When we realize that what each of us brings to any encounter is our difference and that is through the creative combination of these differences that the fullest political force and activity can be produced, then we can step aside from the forms of love that require our subjection to the other and meet them instead as fully creative force. It is in this sense, that youth

work or that encounter between adults and youth might hold, through difference, tremendous political potential. Love as creative force or radical difference, then becomes the expression of the aching desire to actually live life as it is without mediation, subordination or domination. That is to say as a creative encounter between bodies that differ without the mediation of the agency, the nation or the family, or the slavish worship of the idealized other or the subservience to an outside code of law or custom.

Radical Youth Work: A Praxis of Love

As a practice then, radical youth workers strive to build community without using tactics of exclusion or domination/discipline. They do not form their practice through an adherence to codes of loyalty to the law proscribed from the inside of culture or the outside of the divine. Instead, radical youth work seeks to amplify creative force through the process of mutual transformation. We want to be quite clear that such a practice does not exclude either spirituality, erotic or romantic desire or the possibility of affiliation with others; instead we are simply proposing that each of these kinds of love be met in the actuality of lived relations between bodies without the proscriptions and restraints of law or domination.

This means that we must seek to trust and risk simultaneously. Trust ourselves to be able to love without the seduction of domination. We must come to realize that any act of love that exploits or restrains the creative capacity of

the other reduces both ourselves and the other. Risk through the overt acknowledgement that law seldom prevents or controls but usually acts after the fact to punish; in this acknowledgement we enter into the willingness to engage life as risk without the comfort of the illusion of safety. This then moves beyond the comfort zone of bourgeoisie reform and into the realm of revolutionary possibility. In this, we embrace love as struggle and resistance that refuses the structures of illusory safety such as rules, organizational and professional hierarchies or disciplinary practices.

Love as unbounded community

Instead we seek to amplify creative force through mutual transformation of youth and adults together. In one agency where the authors worked, there was a weekly meeting held called "decolonizing our conversations." The purpose of the meeting was to challenge the ways that we, as workers, almost unconsciously, replicate the systems of domination and discipline that have formed the colonial project of global capitalism. One of the mechanisms that we used to help us unpack or deconstruct our own complicity in systemic oppression was holding clinical conversations in which we were not allowed to discuss young people in terms of how we would change them or how successful our program was in altering their troublesome behavior. Instead, we were asked to reflect on how our encounters with young people helped us to understand our own inclinations towards colonial behavior; in short

how our confrontations and troublesome interactions with young people might have capacity to transform us in our practices and beliefs. Through this kind of self-reflective work the process of encounter becomes mutually transformative and creative.

In this kind of practice, radical youth workers seek the power of love as the community of all life force, as it creates itself as difference in each moment of lived experience. That is to say not just life within the confines of the agency, but love for the families, community, and even the ecological system of life in which we and the young people we encounter live.

In this sense our work exceeds the bounds of traditional youth work and engages with economic, medical, emotional and ecological concerns of the youth and community in which we have chosen to participate. When we begin to see our work in this way, such community becomes, not a series of problems and crisis to be intervened upon, but an infinite web of possible connections between types of life put to common purposes for our own well being and quality of life, as well as for the other bodies we encounter in our work. This is what we mean when we say that radical youth work seeks to bring community into being as a political project of liberation.

Radical youth work: New love creating new community and a new politics between youth and adults

In the end, we are suggesting that radical youth work produces

communities of struggle in which collisions of difference are put to common purpose. Such collisions between youth and adults are made up of productive antagonisms in which our differences are not necessarily harmonious, but made up of the real lived struggles experienced by all of us living within the world of contradiction defined as late stage capitalism. In this sense, we are suggesting that community becomes a forum designed to liberate fully the creative capacities of life itself through the production of a political community of all being. This community of all being, we would argue, is a move toward a new communism in which radical youth work seeks to establish a new global common that puts difference to work in building new worlds that seek to produce themselves through the force of life itself.

One final note

Often times the question arises in our work of whether or not we should tell young people that we love them. The question of whether or not to tell anyone you love them is, of course, not limited to our work. It is always a risky proposition when taken seriously. To the degree that it calms a trembling heart and provides a safe haven for a frightened soul — a refuge from the brutal predations of postmodern life — we can forgive it its inevitable sovereign demands. But we must be careful not to turn a momentary refuge into a prison camp of the heart. To love politically as full expenditure means to always release love into flight at the first available



moment, so that it enters into a full becoming that extends the network of creative force to all life.

References

- Baumann, Z. (2001). *The community: Seeking safety in an insecure world (Themes for the 21st century)*. Oxford: Blackwell Press.
- Coontz, S. (2000). *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap*. New York: Basic Books.
- Daly, R. (2007). Rich Poor Gap Widens. *Toronto Star* May 27.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Foucault M. (1988). *Madness and civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Trans. by R. Howard) New York: Vintage
- Foucault, M. (1978). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (Trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith). New York: Random House/Vintage.
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2001). *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2004). *War and democracy in the age of empire*. New York: Penguin.
- Jefferson Airplane We can be together. *Volunteers* (RCA, 1969)
- Marx K. (1978). The German ideology. In *The Marx Engles reader 2nd ed.* New York: W.W. Norton.

- Nancy, J.L. (2001). Love and community: A roundtable discussion with Avital Ronell and Wolfgang Schirmacher. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/nancy/nancy-roundtable-discussion2001.html>. (retrieved July 16 2006).
- Negri, A. (1996). Twenty Theses on Marx: Interpretation of the Class Situation Today. In S. Makdisi, C. Casarino and R. E. Karl Eds. *Marxism Beyond Marxism*. New York: Routledge.
- Negri A. (2004). *Negri on Negri*. (Trans. M.B. DeBevoise). New York: Routledge p. 23.
- Negri, A. and Guattari, F. (1990). *Communists like us*. (Trans. M. Ryan) New York: Semiotexte
- Skott-Myhre, H.A. and Gretzinger, M. (2006). Radical youth work: Creating mutual liberation for youth and adults, Part II. *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work*. 20 pp. 110-127.
- Skott-Myhre, H.A. (2005). Captured by Capital: Youth work and the loss of revolutionary potential. *Child and Youth Care Forum*, 34,2 pp. 141-157.
- Skott-Myhre, H.A., SkottMyhre J.D., Skott Myhre K.S.G. & Harris R. (2004). Radical youth work: Creating and becoming everyone. In T. Strong and D. Pare (Eds). *Furthering talk: Advances in the discursive therapies*. Hingham MA: Kluwer Academic Press.
- Virno, P. (2004). *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Trans. I. Bertoletti). New York: Semiotexte

Hans Skott-Myhre is associate professor of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University and adjunct faculty at University of Victoria School of Child and Youth Care. His book *Youth and Subculture as Creative Force: Creating New Spaces for Radical Youth Work* will be available this fall (2007) through University of Toronto Press.



Kathy Skott-Myhre is a youth worker and feminist psychologist with a particular interest in working collaboratively and politically with young women. She is an adjunct professor of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University.



Copyright of *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice* is the property of *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice* and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.