

April 2020

## Laying Waste to Childhood: The Affective Potential of Destruction

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### Recommended Citation

Kutner, M., & Keucker, E. (2020). Laying Waste to Childhood: The Affective Potential of Destruction. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 19 (3). Retrieved from <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo/vol19/iss3/5>

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## Laying Waste to Childhood The Affective Potential of Destruction

*Mel Kutner & Elliot Keucker*

### Abstract

This article is “posthumanist cartography,” (Braidotti, 2018) of accidental thoughts and uncanny connections that emerged in thinking about affect, waste, and education. We move between philosophical theorizations, situated narratives, and disciplinary analyses, using these as a kaleidoscopic “spectrum through which we can capture the complexity of the ongoing processes of subject-formation” (p. 36). In doing so, we explore how affective destruction can produce agency that effectuates relationships, creating potential new pasts and futures.

Keywords: affect theory, childhood, queer theory, trauma studies

### Introduction

Following similar turns in the social sciences and humanities, empirical and theoretical educational scholars have reconsidered visceral sensations and ephemeral intensities that occur in and through schooling. In this turn, affective intensities and embodied resonances are used to elaborate alternative approaches to knowing and being (see: Sobe, 2011; Fox and Alldred, 2015; Zemblyas, 2017). These projects have ethical and political teeth, and we appreciate how affect expands the ways educational theorists approach questions of subjectivity, causality, and ethics. In contrast to forms of knowing built upon a (White, Western, wealthy, able, cisgender,

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straight...etc.) knowing rational human thinker that evidences the validity of their claims through scientific discourses of “objectivity,” affect opens up to marginalized ways of knowing and feeling. At the same time, we grappled with who, when, and affect is evidenced as knowledge in educational research.

Affects effectuate themselves in bodies, but we cannot experience the visceral effectuations of other bodies. Moreover, affective intensities effect different (human and non-human) bodies in different ways, and often transmit hegemonic ideologies of race, citizenship, gender, and economic systems (Ahmed, 2004; Bradiotti, 2018; Berlant, 2011; Hemmings, 2005; Thrift, 2008). This raises questions about the ethical and epistemological implications of decentering human subjective agency, as well the possibilities of doing so, including by scholars who engage in this work (e.g., Niccolini, A. D., Zarabadi, S., & Ringrose, J., 2018; Mayes, 2019; Dernikos, B. P., Ferguson, D. E., & Siegel, M. (2019). Similarly, we grapple with what one can say and know, about affect. As Stewart (2007) eloquently stated: “Things flash up—little worlds, bad impulses, events alive with some kind of charge. Sudden eruptions are fascinating beyond all reason, as if they’re divining rods articulating something. But what?” (p. 68). To consider this question, in this paper we turn to the philosophical theorizations of affect using the ideas “waste” and “value.”

### Philosophical Affect

As technical philosophical terms, both “affect” and its cognate “affection” diverge from how the words are commonly used and understood in important ways. Moreover, while there are some shared understandings of affect in different philosophical traditions, there is no singular Affect Theory. We unpack the everyday definitions of “affect” and “affection” because it is useful in general, and because our arguments for understanding “waste” and “value” as temporal constructions depend on an understanding of how “affect” operates differently in within different theoretical traditions.

#### *Affect is an Intensity*

In its contemporary common usage, “affection” refers to positive emotion that a subject has for an object, often with the connotation of tenderness, as in, “Although I disagree with what they said, I have great affection for my cousin.” In philosophy, affects are decidedly and definitionally *not* emotions. In fact, this is the thread that unifies contemporary theorizations across philosophical traditions. Although affect is not a feeling itself, it can move bodies towards feelings. Philosophically, affect is a force that is part of a larger process of change and movement. In this sense, affect is not something that somebody has, but something that somebody does. For example, Neo-Darwinians use affect to Darwin to understand the connection between emotions and expressions and explore how these appear across various cultural contexts (Thrift, 2004, p. 64). In this model, affects serve to indicate uni-

versal norms and elaborate an idea of the essential features of what it means to be “human.”

However, for Deleuzian affect, neither affects nor percepts are linked to people—they are nonhuman intensities. The affect is a sensation, that exists in a “zone of indetermination” as a “nonhuman becoming of man” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1991/1994, p. 69). Affect is the incorporeal body of being, whose (ever changing, flexible) parameters are delineated by its ability, in a given present, to act. Deleuzian ontological affect is not about representing or explaining components of human experience. It’s not that there is no subjective agency or experiences, but that subjectivity is in a state of intransitive becoming. Moreover, in this ontology, nothing is fixed.

#### *Affect Has Active (to Affect) and Passive (to be Affected) Components*

In fact, both ordinary and philosophical definitions of affect imply an action. In common usage, to affect is to alter an object or influence a person’s feelings and to be affected is to be subject to such a change. One of the most often-cited definitions of affect in the social sciences and humanities is of the following passage in *A thousand plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/1987): “We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body” (p. 257).

There are two important details of this quote we want to point out. First, the “body.” For Spinoza, as well as Deleuze and Guattari, this body is not a specifically or only a human body. Rather, affects are something that emerge from and converge from human, non-human, and more-than-human assemblages. Secondly, Spinoza’s original theorization of affect distinguished between *affectus*, (the power of affecting, of doing) and *affectio* (being subject to affects), a terminological distinction that has fallen away, but is useful to return to emphasize that affects have registers that imply different possibilities. How the “body” of affects are constituted and the range of their affective possibilities varies across different philosophical orientations.

Where biological, phenomenological, psychoanalytic understandings of pre-personal affect offer different frameworks to describe the constitutive discursive-materials of subjective experience, Deleuzian affect is an ontological reframing of subjectivity altogether. For example, in psychoanalysis affects are drives that develop within individuals through a combination of personal and social histories and interactions. While “drives” is language from Freud, in contemporary psychoanalytic drives can be any want or need that directs our actions. Affect is understood in terms of its ability to satisfy a drive or interrupt a drive (Hemmings, 2005, pp. 551). Affects may be transmitted, but between humans, and “can thus be said to place the individual in a circuit of feeling and response.” (Hemmings, 2005, p. 552). The psychoanalytic model of affect shares important similarities with Deleuzian description of “affective intensities” in that it has a force that guides actions and a

relational component. However, psychoanalytic affects are ontologically reactionary, whereas Deleuzian affects are ontologically originary.

### *Affect Has Traces—Affect Thinks*

In addition, “affect” and “affection” commonly refers to something that can be observed, regardless of whether one experiences it firsthand—or even wants to be observing it—as in “public displays of affection.” Moreover, this observe-ability implies that the cause of the affectionate expression can be deduced based on contextual information, and following repetitions of similar events from which general patterns of causality can be inferred. For example, “they acted affectionately tonight” may mean something completely different if it is a statement about a set of colleagues who some suspect recently began an emotional rendezvous as compared to family members who recently had a falling out.

Thrift (2004) noted that across different philosophical orientations, “*affect is understood as a form of thinking*, often indirect and non-reflective” (p. 60). The question is, who is thinking? This question also has implications for considering inquiry practices on affect. If affect leaves its mark, how can we tell? For Deleuze, affect replaces subjectivity altogether, so affect does not describe a type of thinking, it is thought. “There never ‘remains’ anything of the subject, since it is to be created on each occasion, like a focal point of resistance, on the basis of the folds which subjectivize knowledge and bend each power” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 105). The process of subjectivation is created through “folds,” through a constant folding of the inside and the outside, which Deleuze also calls “auto-affection, the conversion of far and near” (1988, p. 118). This form of thinking resonates with our exploration of laying waste to our childhoods, which we explore shortly.

### *Waste, Value, and Deleuzian Ontological Affect*

A determination of “waste” requires that some feature of a body (human or otherwise) can be defined by fixed criteria from which their value may be judged. This evaluation also has to occur in fixed time, not only an arresting of the present, but setting the past as unchangeable and the future as knowable and inevitable. When the thing that has been wasted is a material object, studies of non-human affective agency could be used to elaborate speculative alternative possibilities for understanding the agency of the object and its interactions. For example, a student may discard a completed and corrected assignment, and we can consider it “trash” or we can follow its journey to a landfill or a recycling bin and becomes a cardboard box. Alternatively, we could imagine a different journey were the corrected paper is kept by the student, filed away in a shoebox, perhaps found years later by someone, calling up a series of yet unknown responses. Moreover, “waste” does not only modify material configurations. We can be said to waste our breath, waste our time, waste our chances.

To return to our hypothetical corrected paper, we can consider how it may be evaluated as a wasted learning opportunity if the student throws it away without reading comments. Then again, perhaps it would be a wasted learning opportunity if the comments impeded on critical thinking. This is the problematic of thinking “waste” in a Deleuzian ontology of immanence where the world and the “things” that constitute the world all have a virtual, but real, creative potential to enter into relations and become differently. Every evaluation not only has to be made in an arrested historical present, it requires the projection of fixed potential possibilities. That is not to say that we cannot think about waste and affect in Deleuzian terms. However, we may be able to amend the concept of “waste” to better align with the movements of ontological affect as an agential potential for thinking and doing by considering waste as an action of “laying waste *to*.” Attending to destruction still requires some speculative thinking, however it offers one way to trace the effectuations of incorporeal affect. In the wasteland of value, we consider the creative value of destruction through stories of our wasted childhoods.

### Laying Waste to Our Childhoods

Our childhoods were not dawdled away in idle activities or unappreciated fully in their time, but generatively laid waste to by us. We do not fall on the side of storytelling that suggests one can simply tell another what happened to them in the past, and that this past will then serve as an explanation for their adult identities. Instead, we wanted to tell stories of how a body could be formed and what it is a body could do. Taking bodily sensations as a way of knowing that includes but cannot be reduced to either individual psychological histories nor pre-individual social bodies of discourse or matter, our stories illustrate the expansively destructive ways we lay waste to our boyhoods and trouble assumptions about memory, childhood, the ability to change the past, and the malleability of the body. Our approach resonates with a comment Deleuze made at the beginning of his book on Spinoza:

What does Spinoza mean when he invites us to take the body as a model? It is a matter of showing that the body surpasses the knowledge that we have of it, *and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have it*. There are no fewer things in the mind that exceed our consciousness than there are things in the body that exceed our knowledge” (1988b, p. 18)

In one case boyhood was one of constant fear of physical and verbal abuse from an addicted mother. These circumstances became the mysterious origin points of somatic symptoms later in life, revealing that the past does not exist in a specific time and place, or even in memory, but is an affection that haunts the body. Dislodging these affective traces becomes Elliot’s project and laying waste to boyhood reveals how subjects may wield affective thinking to rid the body of its affective traces. In the other case, boyhood was eclipsed by a girlhood. This is a transgender narrative about laying waste to gendered flesh, how doing so served

and serves as an anachronistic creation of childhoods. The “typical” transgender narrative, the story that offers transgender subjects legibility and authority, often relies on a bifurcation between the psyche’s rational knowledge of a gender identity and an oppressive discomfort of the flesh. The transgender adult must disavow their “wrongly” gendered childhood, positioning it to themselves and others as wasted time, opportunities, potentials. Mel’s story troubles this normative narrative. To be very clear: this is *not* to engage in a debate the “realness” of transgender subjects or experiences. Rather, it is a reconsideration of the temporal ontology of both “childhood” and the affective-potential of embodied knowledge.

### *Evacuating Traumatic Haunts*

I have often told people that I had no childhood, without much thought or elaboration for what I meant. This is a fact that I felt suddenly embarrassed by when I recognized myself in Walkerdine’s (2003) description of one of one of her research subjects. She wrote:

Why does she ‘forget’ this part of her own history? I suggest that she forgets her history for the same reason that she claims not to have had a childhood (‘Once I broke down and cried because I said I’ve had no childhood’; ‘I think I was an adult from birth’), that it is too difficult to bear the fact that she now ‘looks down’ on that part of herself .... Far easier to forget it, claim it didn’t exist in order to better remake herself as the country lady and career woman she should always have been. (pp. 245)

When I came across this notion, it felt familiar to me and it helped me theorize that making my own new adult existence could be merely in spirit of becoming sovereign over my somatic responses to my environment, not in the spirit to remake myself in the fashion that “should always have been,” as if there is some better subjectivity to be had, or some new identity to cling to.

All I wanted was my body to be more livable, which meant toying with the past, but not denying it. Until then, I lived with “Unwanted intensities simmer[ing] up at the least provocation” (Stewart, 2007, p. 47). Lots of things sent my body into paralysis where I could not move my arms, or else sent burning and shooting pains from my chest to my fingertips. Some of the things were the smell of smoke, Lucinda William’s music, drunk people, being rejected, being scolded, hair dryers and things that sound like them, the cardboard smell of package stores, white wine breath smell, darkness and nighttime. Each of these provocations had to do with my childhood in my mother’s house. She would drink to oblivion, hit me with a belt, burn me with hairdryers, threaten to kill herself. Given that these provocations are things associated with that environment at the time, but do not present any real danger to me currently, I prefer not to be provoked by them.

Years after my mom died, a strange affective event began to form when I was broken up with. In our final communications my body would react like it did

during a provocation from my childhood. My arm would have shooting pain any time I thought of this person, I had heart attack symptoms daily, and I could not eat. Desperate, I sought counseling and happened to go to someone who heard my symptoms and responded as if they were the most banal things possible. She questioned, “When was the first time you felt that pain in your arm?” I told her, I think it was when I would lay in bed at night as a child listening for my mom to slam into the hallway wall, which meant she was coming for me, but I have few details to give you about it. She would tell me not to talk too much and just to consider the idea of that scene. Then she would sit with her knees touching my knees and hold her hand in front of my face and I would follow it with my eyes, as I silently considered. I would follow for less than a minute, then we would stop. Many of these sessions happened this way, and often she asked me to think of my bodily symptoms as visualizations. Wherever the pain was, I was to picture it as an object, like fire or rock or whatever it looked like to me. Then I was to extinguish it or smash it so it could not live in my body anymore. Then I would think of a moment and follow her hand with my eyes. And within a few months, I still remembered some of the things my mother had done to me through that conceptual memory, but their traces in my present and in my body were vanished. They did not live in the present or future. I could be rejected, smell smoke, and listen to Lucinda Williams without my body going into crippling pain; in fact, my body did not react to those things in any notable fashion at all.

This was a commonplace treatment for PTSD called *Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing* (EMDR), which deploys the affect of the body to evacuate somatic responses. Affect uniquely employs potential because it lingers in a zone away from representation, meaning it is not part of the makeup of our current life, but its mere existence creates the potential for some other life. It has some other meanings to it that don’t fit with what we already know, thus affect is potential not yet realized as material. It is crucial here though to understand that affect is no less *real* for the fact that it is not representable. In Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology, following Spinoza, affects are potential that become actualized in the body as perceptions that can lead to cognitions and actions. When rendered unrepresentational, it is not simply “the ‘as yet unspoken,’” but literally “‘unspeakable,’” a distinction Mowitt was interested in within trauma studies (Mowitt, p. 272).

These concepts become useful for me understanding my “experience”; troubling the notions of what it means to be a “victim” of “trauma.” The modifications of my body have actually not erased the past, but the affects themselves opened up a world of nonrepresentational stuff that could be wasted to get toward a new potential. The wild somatic responses that live in the realm of affect tell us to pay mind to the body, and for those of us who can pay mind to the body and whose body is in a place where it could be molded, we can see waste in a way that rewrites some of the body’s response, but also rewrites what waste as a thing of creation. Rethinking the agential force of subjectivity over the affective responses of the flesh of the



body makes one move to undo the temporal disclosure that comes from valuation. Using EMDR to dis/juncture time and re-assemble some of the pre-individual aspect of affective traces that move through a body offers an example of considering the agential subjectivity that in line with a non-representational understanding of affect that still resists teleological logics of the potential of childhood.

### *Refusing and Redoubling Childhoods Wasted*

To be transgender is to be ready, at any moment, to provide an account of yourself. This is particularly true for Black and Latinx trans femmes, whose movements, affects, and language are more precariously positioned in front of the gaping jaws of justification. In *Black on Both Sides*, C. Riley Snorton resurfaces an archive of black fugitive slave narratives and reads them through a transgender analysis to “illustrate how the inhabitation of the un- gender- specific and fungible also mapped the affective grounds for imagining other qualities of life and being” (2017, pp. 58-59). For Snorton, the economic fungibility of captive bodies is exactly the paradox that allows/forces the commoditized body, and the legacy of a body that has been violently defined by its exchange-value in the post-slavery economy, to find ways to escape dominant logics. Laying waste to the expected transgender development narrative may offer a similar evasion.

There are two main venues for trans subjects to seek validation, value and social-worth, so often correlated with bodily precarity: (1) the scientific verifications of a true, unassailable natural fact of gender that located within the matter of the body—including the grey matter of the brain, and (2) the confessional narrative of a self-aware subject. These options equate knowledge and knowing to either a purely scientific or phenomenological realm. In doing so, the “original” body becomes positioned as a natural given. Moreover, shame and waste and potential all get stirred up. Take for example, the statement I have had cheerily offered to me: “oh, you had such a pretty face, such a shame to waste it!” The shame is my wasted “real” body, and concomitant gendered norms inscribed on it and the failure to actualize them appropriately.

I mention that these comments are offered with good-nature, because in my experience they are. Even “progressive” folks, allies (self-proclaimed and those that show up in action) who want to affirm my gender identity, who want to be corrected, want to know when they can do to do better; often just as badly they want to *know* more than that as well. While most people are polite enough not to ask about another person’s genitals, there is a desire to know “when” and “how” the transgender subject becomes. Perhaps because if I can give an adequate accounting of myself, my confidence in my own gender may be enough to also assure the cis-gender person about their own. The “pleasure” or affective transmissions of desires that invokes this tale follow their own logics that also intersect with teleological notions about childhood potential.

Optimally in my confession, I can tell you that from a young age I simply knew that I was in the wrong body. If I can trace the knowledge back to childhood, as a cisgender listener, you can be rest-assured that the threat to your own gendered body has sufficiently passed. In addition, or in lieu of that storyline I can also choose to invoke an innocent childhood body wrecked in misery by providing a long list of embodied and psychic despairs that wretched my childhood before I was saved by having a name to give to what I had previously assumed was my own private deformation. In an inversion from our typical developmentalist notions of children's limited knowledge as compared to adults, transgender adults are often granted more legitimacy if they indicate that they were certain of their true and essential gender identity as children.

I never carried the narrative or ideas that I was always boy trapped in a girl's body, my childhood was not one marked by the knowledge that it was the 'wrong kind' of childhood. However, as I began laying intentional waste to a particular type of feminized body I also was compelled through social norms and individuals' curiosities to develop a narrative, an evaluation, of my childhood that provided—or was the same as—the valuation of my subjectivity in a present. Riding the spikes and waves of pre-personal affects, I was coaxed and bursting to confess a litany of gender-transgressions. Something funny happened in this process, I found that crystal clear memories of a boyhood were presenting themselves to me. For example: health class where I was horrified by the idea of menstruating; co-ed soccer teams and schoolyard games; my Batman-themed kindergarten lunchbox and 5<sup>th</sup> birthday party; the deeply textured memory of wanting to have a short haircut and a different name when I was 4 years old, sitting in the mustard-colored room of the house of a preschool classmate, who I had not thought of once until the story was spilling out of me. These moments are all true, or rather real. However, they are not instances that point to the higher truth of my boyhood, whose potential for actualization was wasted.

Nor was my "girl"hood a waste. There may have been shame, but it was not a waste, a weight shed simply through laying waste to my body. Queer theorists noted that we should be wary on being seduced too deeply into unproblematically repeating the narrative of the "plasticity" of transgender bodies, which can risk to appear transgressive when in fact it is constitutive of the logics of neo-liberal market economies that a the subject to efficiently and independently produce their selves (Halberstam, 2004; Puar, 2017). We do well to heed cautions for how easily notions of embodied agency can slip into hegemonic logics. Instead, I focus on how the act of laying waste to the flesh affectively created a boyhood I never had by laying waste to the flesh of my "girl"hood, and changed my embodied and rational affective powers and disrupts the chronological and teleological of "childhood" itself.

With the removal of my chest, I became awash in new memories of my past. I say new because it was not like I had forgotten something, like where I put my keys or my friend's birthday. Rather, I thought, felt, and remembered things I had

never experienced. For example, the flush of embarrassment and shame when I remember having to use communal showers in summer camp, and the dawning realization of how intensely I had disassociated from parts of my body. In look at photos, I looked in the mirror and saw fleshy bits of myself for first time, coming into focus right along with the blind and blurry spots that only appeared after they were gone. I had no idea what a body could feel, in how it could create itself.

It wasn't until I had top surgery that I had access to the knowledge of my body. By this I am consciously not using the term "gender-confirming" surgery, resisting the idea that my gender was indeed confirmed. I did not free my essential self from their fleshy cage, revealing the "real" me there all along. There were though, of course, physical changes that are notable for the way they changed my powers of affecting and being affected. I had less chronic pain. I was cold more often and overheated less because I wasn't wearing four layers every day. It was rarer for me to spend a half hour trying on seven different shirts to decide what to wear, or to have found myself unable to move from where I lay on the bed, overwhelmed because everything I tried unleashed a crawling of my flesh that seemed to have started in and set bone-deep. This is a quick survey of sensation and pre-personal intensities, of the physical, social, and psychic terrains that constitute a becoming-subjectivity. I want though to resist the pull to demarcate the "before" and "after" times of surgery, were "before" was a floundering miserable wasting and the "after" a liberatory self-actualization. Instead, I continue to return to different versions of my childhood to lay waste to them, and see what they are made of. In rejecting the idea of a newly-minted co-constructed "lost boyhood," I am finding new emergent versions of girlhood and boyhoods. Once I laid waste to the body, knowledges and pasts emerged; not an exposure of wasted time nor a liberation from wasted experiences but a creation, a re-doubling.

Deleuze and Guattari trouble the normative idea that there is a type of pure childhood that sits within a distinct adult self. Instead of being informed by a pure idea of the past. Rather, the child is the contemporaneous occurrence "of the adult and the child, their map of comparative densities and intensities, and all the variations on that map" that co-exist to create the subject, or the "body without organs" (1980/1987, p. 164). Which furthermore, is "never yours or mine. It is always a body, no more projective than regressive. It is an involution, but always a contemporary, creative involution" (1980/1987, p. 164). For both of us there is potential in thinking of the agential temporality of affect, laying-waste to flesh and bodies, rupturing and reconfiguring past.

### The Threat of the Child's Potential

The third strand of thinking that informed this article is an affective anxiety that appears to haunt education, writ large. The potential of wasting students' potentials seem to lurk in the language during conference presentations and in journal articles,

buzz underneath conversations in preservice teacher education courses, and justify educational policy (“No child left behind,” “every child succeeds”). This is not surprising, as the idea of schooling is itself emerged in Western philosophy to respond to the theorization of the child as an innocent subject; the result of humanism and Romanticism and a departure from the notion that all children were born already blemished by original sin, and therefore in need of discipline and cleansing (Singer, 2005; Davis, 2011). As Edelman (2004) noted, the figure of the child has become a “privileged emblem” in contemporary Western world, as an image that is also a promise that upholds a naturalized system of values in moral economy (p. 58).

The responsibility for education to safeguard and ensure childrens’ potential runs through all models of education and schooling. As Singer (2005) noted, even progressive and emancipatory forms of education that seek to re-inscribe students with agency can find that their programs “deteriorate into rigid methods and orthodoxy” (p. 616) in a frantic determination to ensure that their students will develop into the “right” type of fully-formed adult. In light of the prevalence of developmentalist and teleological model of childhood in education, Greteman and Wojcikiewicz (2014) suggested that the figure of a coherent child offered a “site of resistance” wherein one could embrace incompleteness, thus forcing the idea of coherence into question (p. 559). Deleuze and Guattari also drew connections between affect, children, and a disruptive potential of thinking in new ways.

In *A thousand plateaus* (1980/1987) Deleuze and Guattari commented, “children are Spinozists” and “Spinozism is the becoming-child of the philosopher” (p. 256), because children approach the world by understanding its components not as a series of categorical attributes, but as a series “of active and passive affects in the contexts of the individual assemblage it is part of” (p. 257). Furthermore, for Deleuze and Guattari, this understanding of affect has the potential to break with representational thinking and its assumptions about a subject’s essential features and teleological possibilities, “to solve a problem from which all exits are barred” (p. 259). This potential, they argued, is overlooked by psychoanalytic understandings of affect and subjectivity, which would return us to the more common usages of the term discussed earlier: as the emotional or feelings that a person is subject to.

## Conclusion

Thinking with and about affect in education could start with considering what seems too precious to lose and play with destroying it anyways, to see what may emerge. For example, Burman (2019) recently advocated for “‘childhood as method’ as an ‘a specific application of postcolonial theory to educational studies’” (p. 5) by considering how “the cultural-historical and material conditions for the formulation of theories and models of childhood” are imbricated in particular “ethical-political practices involved in the crafting, interpretation, and application and reception of research” on childhood/children (p. 6). In a similar vein, Dumas (2018) used Afro

Pessimism and its re-temporalizing of Slavery as the contemporary and affective dimension of Anti-Blackness, to rethink “the ontological position of Black people” at large, as well as within in educational policy (p. 13). In doing so, he lays waste to the narratives of racial progress. Focusing on the ways that Black bodies are and have been laid waste to, Dumas (2018) also reframes problems of inequity and racism as impossible situations that can nevertheless open up to generative new analytics.

We in no way deny the reality that children often come under great harm. Indeed, one of our childhoods reflected that reality. Nor do we believe that it is simple to disentangle the affects that create vulnerable bodies from the effectuated violences they are subject to. If the limits of a body are its ability to affect and being affected, laying waste to a body (human, non-human or more-than-human) is an experimentation with its limits and opens the potential to think and therefore create something radically new as well.

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