Pedagogy of the Digitally Oppressed: Anti-Colonial DH Pedagogy as Care Work

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Pedagogy of the Digitally Oppressed started as a collective practice on the territories of the sovereign Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples (colonially called Victoria, BC). As we further this work and share it with participating folx at this year's CSDH/SCHN conference, we acknowledge that a number of us will (re)connect with each other online from various sovereign Indigenous lands. We recognize that many of the digital infrastructures we use are built on Indigenous lands, remain inaccessible to Indigenous communities, and that our responsibilities to Indigenous lands and life extend into the digital realm. At the time of presenting this paper, we would be 14 months into the COVID-19 pandemic.

As scholars of colour with contingent access to and precarious movements within privileged academic spaces, we began this anticolonial DH collective because we were witnessing the colonial, white supremacist, and upper caste oppressions built into mainstream computer systems and, relatedly, replicated in the field of mainstream digital humanities (DH). Engaging with and guided by the work of Black, Indigenous, racialized, queer, feminist, and disabled scholars who are writing and speaking out about these issues—Ansloos (2018); Bailey (2016); Benjamin (2019); Brocke (2020); Duarte (2017); Francisco-Menchavez (2018); Freire (1970); Hamraie (2018); Kim (2018); McKittrick (2014); Noble (2018); Phillips (2016); Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018); Risam (2015); Wemigwans (2018)—we hoped to foster a community of thinkers who sought to work together to imagine-into-being a liberating "otherwise" for DH, and to support one another through the challenges of creating that "otherwise" — an otherwise that nurtures the ethics of what these citations might bring into the classroom, of what their material entanglements might do to projects, and of where and with whom we might practice our scholarship. In this paper, we center three reflections on learning and teaching that embody our anti-colonial DH praxis and its affirming foundations, connections, and locations. We ask: how can DH refuse capitalism and colonialism and be kinder, more ethical, and more caring to all involved participants?

The first of these narratives is a reflection on care, outlining the impossibility of conceiving a post-pandemic world that continues to bring so much pain and precarity, particularly to BIPOC, lower-income, and disabled communities — and locating the emerging form and method of DH work, therefore, in critical reflections of self, in caring for oneself and each other. We have been talking about and reflecting on care work and how to bring care work into DH practice — indeed how to ensure that our DH practices are rooted in and emerge from places and acts of care work — guided by writings about care work from BIPOC folx like queer and racialized disability justice organizer Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha.

At the opening of the book *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (2018), Piepzna-Samarasinha explains how, as a disabled educator and organizer, "Writing from bed is a time-honored disabled way of being an activist and cultural worker [...] writing from my sickbed wasn't me being weak or uncool or not a real writer but a time-honored crip creative practice" (17). Care work honours and celebrates this practice and creates communities and spaces that ensure that this practice is supported and nourished. That is, care work provides and creates collective spaces where all community members are nourished, where everyone's access needs are met and "centralized at the beginning dream" without question or hesitation, and where everyone can live their truths unapologetically (76). To teach and create with care work at the forefront is inherently relational, for care work is "a model of solidarity [...] — of showing up for each other in mutual aid and respect" (41). Care work is "[l]ove as an action verb" (78). What, then, would, could, and should anti-colonial DH care work look like? How have we been creating accessible care spaces for one another in the online environments we have inhabited during this past pandemic year?

For example, critical digital pedagogy and scholarly networks have often pointed out how mandatory attendance in a virtual classroom can be sexist, ableist, and classist when we learn and teach both online and remotely, across time zones, and particularly during a pandemic. The prevalent social, technological, and public health inequities necessitate that we value flexibility and asynchronous class participation and communication across multiple platforms. Pandemic engagements should also offer people the option to keep their cameras off or to turn their cameras on during Zoom calls, and to participate in these calls either via the chat function or the audio function. Furthermore, ASL interpretation, closed captioning, and visual descriptions must be promoted and adopted as regular aspects of and practices within digital gatherings. Open access course readings; recording classes for students to view or re-visit in their own time; transparent and mutually established anti-oppressive protocols if a Zoom call is "Zoom-bombed;" shortening classes so that students can rest their eyes, minds, bodies, and spirits; refusing to assign late marks on assignments because we are all just trying to survive as best we can during this time; and the expansion of departmental policies to provide precarious educators with the proper infrastructures to smoothly teach online courses from home: these are some of the practices that we have witnessed and taken up this past year to try to make the online teaching and learning environment more accessible, comfortable, and gentle for students and educators. At the same time, what are the limitations to these practices and approaches? How have academic institutions prohibited us from offering care throughout the pandemic? How have we, or how haven't we, addressed the reality that not everyone has ready access to digital technologies and online infrastructures?

The second of these narratives extends concerns for care into critiques of safety and safe space. Given the systemic failures of higher education pedagogy that this pandemic and public health crisis are making urgent for lives already vulnerable and precarious, we ask: what do the messages of safety or "be safe" mean in the context of anticolonial DH pedagogy as we move our classes and community-based connections entirely online? How can we overlook the

hostility of already popular online spaces to targeted bodies and anti-racist, anti-casteist, and anti-patriarchal conversations? What constitutes the "essentials" of online and remote learning in this pandemic so that our pedagogies are not merely mediated by elected (or enforced) web platforms but instead are always critical of their capacities for and claims to provide a "safe space" for learning and teaching?

In an interview with Peter James Hudson on "The Geographies of Blackness and Anti-Blackness" (2014), Katherine McKittrick states, "In my teaching, I try very hard to create classroom conversations that work out how knowledge is linked to an ongoing struggle to end violence and that, while racist or homophobic practices are certainly not encouraged or welcome, when they do emerge (because they *always* do!) we need to situate these practices within the wider context of colonialism and anti-blackness" (238). McKittrick offers a radical critique of the much prevalent discourse on, and assumptions of, safe classrooms, or even more forthrightly, that we should ever achieve a safe classroom given that many of the participants—students, faculty, and non-academic community partners—already navigate unsafe and precarious lives. In another piece entitled, "How to #DecolonizeDH: Actionable Steps for an Antifascist DH" (2018), Dorothy Kim locates her pedagogical critique specifically in academic calls to "decolonize DH" that cannot, and will not, look past their representational, epistemological, and structural defaults. She writes, "Currently, DH is not a safe or comfortable space for most scholars who are not white, cisgendered, able, Christian, and upper middle-class males. And considering the current rise of late-fascism and the involvement of the 'alt-tech' sector intersecting with white academic supremacy to help create the nexus of what is called the 'alt-right,' we have to move beyond a discussion of diversity and inclusiveness to move into discussing DH justice and equity" (482).

With Pedagogy of the Digitally Oppressed, we argue that grounding our digital, online, and remote classrooms in anti-oppression thinking, and specifically at the intersections of place and power connected to anti-colonial work, is essential. Without such a grounding, we will continue to reproduce and populate these spaces with normative bodies, tools, and methods. Dorothy Kim draws attention to how the tools and methods of DH have already been co-opted by the "alt-right" to not only minoritize specific groups, but also remove the possibility for any of these groups to ever experience full personhood in and with the digital. And yet, following McKittrick, "practical activities of resistance, encounter, and anti-colonial thinking" (238) matter.

We suggest that, in contrast to the university's current colonial-capitalist use of digital technology for pandemic learning and knowledge production, or even co-optation of critical digital discourse in the name of everyday care, scholars and educators could assume a dodgy or counter-institutional presence such that: a) digital projects may start from and remain with groups not defined by the academy; b) digital engagements can "talk back" at disembodied scholarship on new media objects and things; and c) DH praxis could center both historical and genealogical analyses of digital tools to help produce counternarratives and openings within established systems. The use of the term "dodgy" is intentional and significant for those of us

who elect to be with or within the academy whilst also surviving it (Buchanan and Patel 2018). The way we engage with digital technology and work to build, organize, and nourish communities of action against colonizing logics matters. The way we practice greater support, kindness, and sustained care for one another — both in the present pandemic, but also in and for our mutual long-term futures matters equally.

And with these framings, we turn to reflecting on the very format and future of the online conference in and beyond the COVID-19 era. Over the last year, a good majority of the conferences that were supposed to take place in traditional and physical venues have either been cancelled or moved online. Long before the current pandemic, disability justice organizers such as Aimi Hamraie emphasized the importance of providing online conference participation options for disabled and financially precarious scholars, as well as for scholars who may not be able to travel safely or easily due to citizenship status or the inability to be away from home for extended periods of time. As well, scholars like Zoe Todd (Métis), Portia Roelofs, and Joseph Nevins — and online spaces like #AcademicTwitter and #NativeTwitter, utilizing hashtags including #nomoreflying — have spoken out and raised awareness about the environmental issues of air travel, thereby highlighting the sustainability offered through the online conference format. For these reasons, online conferences hold ethical and anti-oppressive potential, and it is frustrating, disheartening, elitist, and ableist that it took a global pandemic for institutions to finally provide this type of conference accessibility. However, despite the important ways that online conferences can open up accessibility and sustainability, we worry that the current widespread institutional method of doing online conferencing exacerbates colonial violences.

One of the ways in which we propose analyzing how online conferences are often operationalized is by using "Johari Window" as a heuristic. We notice:

Good Presenter, Good Infrastructure	Good Presenter, Bad Infrastructure
Bad Presenter, Good Infrastructure	Bad Presenter, Bad Infrastructure

That is, there is often a tethering of the media infrastructure to the presenter that occurs, where the presenter's reliability (Can you hear me now?) and trustworthiness (Oops! Sorry, I have a faulty connection!) are tethered to the fidelity of the media infrastructure. So rather than the virtual conference championing the socio-economically underprivileged students, it will stratify and stultify conferences evermore. The virtual presenter/student/worker is yoked to their media infrastructure in a way that they lose their agency and they are only as good as their network connection and the fidelity of that relationship with the media service provider. In order for precarious workers and graduate students' virtual presentations to go right, the hardware has to work right, the software has to work right, the network connection has to work right; if and only if all these media architectures nod their heads in harmony, can they deliver their presentation. Moreover, what is troubling is the likelihood that the state of exception becomes the new norm.

In other words, in the already proliferating discourses on a post-COVID-19 world, we see that Covid-austerity measures are already being implemented, at which time, the graduate student or contingent worker funding to attend conferences will be clawed back, with only the virtual presentation option dangled as a cost-effective option; one in which the precarious worker will be expected to do all the work and receive none of the benefits.

In this paper presentation, we spoke about our pedagogical concerns in some detail with an understanding that the entanglements of the embodied, the infrastructural, and the institutional will continue to structure our call-to-action to foster critical DH communities. Through deep care work and critique, we have the ability to not only dismantle capitalist-colonial systems and capitalist-colonial responses to sociocultural, socio-political issues, but also to honour embodied technologies and lived realities in the production of classroom-based DH learning.

In thinking about these concerns and asking these questions, we seek to challenge the university's current capitalist-colonial use of digital infrastructures to pressure students and faculty to go on with "business as usual." Through the widespread move of university courses online, we witness in rapidly emerging ways the need for accessible anti-colonial DH praxis. We must challenge how institutions are using digital technology to enable the continuation of the capitalist-colonial norm, both during this global pandemic and in the future-beyond. We seek to engage with digital technology in ways that help to build, organize, and nourish communities of support, kindness, and care for one another. We seek to foster DH communities that, through deep care work, have the ability to dismantle capitalist-colonial systems and capitalist-colonial responses to sociocultural and socio-political issues. To our readers and ourselves at this conference we ask: how have you — how have the collective we as digital humanists and educators — witnessed the university's capitalist-colonialism anew during this pandemic? How have you — how have we — been complicit in and participated in this pandemic push to go on with "business as usual"? How can you — how can we — practice deep care work within digital communities, pedagogy, and scholarship?

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