Liquid Modernity, Emplacement And Education For The Anthropocene: Challenges For Rural Education In Tasmania

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Abstract

In spite of being relatively wealthy and resource-rich, a persistent narrative of the island state of Tasmania is the deficit framing of its regional and rural education where, under the placeless and mobile orientation of hypermodernity, the only serious option for success for its young is to leave their communities. This paper presents a counter-narrative that emerges through the lenses of social and ecological theory that draws together a critical examination of Bauman's notion of liquid modernity and aspiration alongside concepts of locality and emplacement. We situate this counter-narrative within the growing literature calling for a transformation of education as humanity grapples with the challenge of the Anthropocene, arguably the great educational challenge of our times. We conclude that regionality and rurality can be reframed as opportunities in response to the Anthropocene that offer the potential to explore fundamentally new models of multidisciplinary research that connect educational inquiry to larger questions of sustainability as well as social, economic and cultural development within regional and rural communities in Tasmania and beyond.

Keywords: Anthropocene, liquid modernity, rural education, Tasmania place

Introduction

A 2013 edition of the *Griffith Review* framed Tasmania at a "tipping point" where deeply entrenched and persistent social and economic problems were juxtaposed with cultural vibrancy and enormous unrealised potential (West, 2013). Thinking particularly about educational issues in Tasmania, it is difficult to escape equally entrenched deficit framings of Tasmanian education in both policy documents and in media reporting. We want to suggest here a counter-narrative to this drum beat by arguing that social and ecological theory can help reframe deficit discourses about rural and regional education and, indeed, about the specific case of Tasmania as an educational problem.

This paper draws together a number of threads. First, we take up Zygmunt Bauman's provocative notion of liquid modernity (2000), which is a macro-organisational conceptual framework for understanding contemporary social change. We find Bauman's conceptualisation useful and generative but limited by its failure to take full account of contemporary space and place theory and, in particular, to recognise that the experience of locality and community is still the inescapable foundation of the human condition (Malpas, 2016; Raco, 2009). Thus, we draw on the work of Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1996) to nuance Bauman's analysis.

Next, we offer a critical appraisal of the concept of aspirations, which has become a central trope in educational analysis in recent years (Hart, 2012, 2016; Raco, 2009; Seller & Gale, 2011). This

concept is used as both a psychologically oriented, voluntaristic, choice-focused framework to illustrate the importance of individual agency in educational transformations, but increasingly it is also being taken up in more nuanced ways to illustrate how differently located individuals face different aspirational sets or configurations of feasible choices. We develop the idea of authoritative aspirations to juxtapose the way idealised aspirational discourses shape the way the concept is understood in the public arena, suggesting that, in later modernity, aspirations are typically framed in liquid terms. Finally, we conclude by adding to a growing literature calling for a transformation of education for a thriving future for all. We see the concept of the Anthropocene as an organising framework that can be used to formulate what Stein (2016) calls: the great educational challenge and opportunity in history.

We apply this analysis to the situation of rural education in Tasmania, a small island state on the south coast of the Australian "mainland". As a small, relatively wealthy and resource-rich island state, there is considerable potential for the state of Tasmania to act as a small-scale laboratory, an experimental test bed (Bowman, 2013), to explore fundamentally new models of multidisciplinary research that connects educational inquiry to larger questions of sustainability as well as social, economic and cultural development within regional and rural communities (for example, Tasmania is now a member of the UNESCO Global Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) Network).

Liquid Modernity and Social Space

For Bauman (2000), liquid modernity describes the current historical period as one where rapid globalisation has conferred new ways of being that present individuals with a series of challenges never before encountered. Similar to Anthony Giddens' conceptions (1990, 1991), Bauman's concept of liquid modernity imagines a shift, not so much to postmodernity, but rather toward a different and more fluid iteration of modernity. Bauman's social actors are cut loose from the bonds and bounds of tradition and thrust into performative circumstances where nothing is certain or durable any longer. This life without traditional anchors is both frightening and potentially liberating; it is a precarious ontological landscape where one is expected to artistically compose one's own life (Bateson, 2001; Bauman, 2008).

In Bauman and Giddens' sociology, the placed individual is elided by macro-processes of globalisation only to reappear as the relentlessly mobile stranger who is now responsiblised as his or her own problem (Bauman, 1999). Rather than follow an established pattern or habitus (Bourdieu, 1984), Bauman's agents must constantly judge, choose and calculate risk (Beck, 1992). Societies and individuals alike are thus forced into the mitigation and management of risk in what is becoming an increasingly surveillance-oriented environment (Bauman & Lyon, 2012; Foucault, 1977). This simultaneous movement toward the structuring of everyday life through globalisation, and the simultaneous performative expectations of individuals who are charged with constructing themselves in increasingly individualised high stakes "risk" environments (Beck, 1992), is demonstrated in Giddens' (1993) vision of the heated-up intimacy of life in contemporary domestic partnerships. This movement in social theory toward and away from agency has important educational consequences which can be seen, for instance, in wide scope measurements of system performance, such as Australia's NAPLAN, that also function to individualise and compare the educational "performance" of children.

Simultaneously, contemporary social theory also shifts attention away from an exclusive preoccupation with structures and time, to lend attention to the spatial aspects of the constitution of society and culture (Giddens, 1979, 1990; Lefebvre, 1992; Soja, 1997; Thrift, 2007). In Lefebvre's (1992) terms, space is not a static container; it is actually created as a key feature of capitalist production. So landscapes and cities, for instance, can be seen in this vision as the ever

changing, dynamic products as the social and the spatial create and recreate each other. Such deconstructive and post-structural forms of social theory follow the work of Foucault (1980) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987). We see this way of thinking about social life as one that resituates agency, not in a simplistic or psychologistic voluntarism where people are assumed to choose their way through life unfettered; rather, agency is understood here as a situated accomplishment that is neither predetermined nor unconstrained.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987), for instance, give us the image of the nomad, who moves through shifting territory in a continuous process of becoming which is rhizomatic and largely unpredictable, confounding the neat categories and forecasts of structural social sciences. Individuals unable to navigate these changes find other more stressful, short term, fragmented and uncertain ways to organise their lives. They are required to be flexible and adaptable, to be constantly ready and willing to change or move at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret, and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability. They are, for example, the urban poor carving out disposable, temporary, liquid relationships in order to survive from one eviction to the next (Desmond, 2016). Those who do not wish to leave find limited opportunities for meaningful work in their communities. As James (2016), echoing Bauman and other mobility theorists such as John Urry (2000; Sheller & Urry, 2006), summarises: *"we all have to be 'global nomads' these days or we're failures. If we want to stay in our communities and work for the good there, we are often not able to"* (p. 32).

These disjunctions are not merely economic, nor are they new ideas. As Arjun Appadurai (1990) anticipated, the central problem of modern day globalisation is the tension between *"homogenization and heterogenization"* (p. 295); not just in the economic sphere, but also in the sociocultural sphere. For Appadurai, globalisation is a form of cultural transformation (if not invasion), which creates the fear of colonisation (and, we would add, dependency). Appadurai (1990) theorises five conceptual dimensions or "scapes" arising from globalisation: *"ethnoscape"*, *"mediascape"*, *"technoscape"*, *"finanscape"* and *"ideoscape"*. While his analysis illustrates the multiple dimensions of global change from which to understand some of the complexities of the current moment, his use of the suffix "scape" suggests that these are also cultural vistas which depend on the position of the observer and that are constantly changing and relentlessly in motion. This is the central point of Bauman's idea (2000) of liquid modernity where nothing is solid and the world is in flux.

Part of this flux is the movement of people, technology, economies, media and ideas that rub up against each other in both synergistic and antagonistic ways. For a number of social theorists, including: Deleuze and Guattari (1987); Appadurai (1990, 1996); Giddens, (1990); and Bauman (2000), a characteristic of this phenomenon is what they call a state of "deterritorialization". Here, the old certainties disappear; previously tight-knit cultural groups move away and live apart from the places they saw as home, changing and adapting to each other in the process and creating tensions between openness to global processes and the desire to retain a cultural identity of place. Under these regimes of rapid change, social forms and institutions do not have enough time to solidify and can no longer serve as frames of reference for human actions.

The Solidity of Place and Practice

Abbott-Chapman (2011) argues that the neoliberal discourse of the global nomad makes the search for independence more acute and the risk of failure greater, particularly for young people from rural or low SES backgrounds, whose life experience may not adequately prepare them to assess the positive and negative risks involved in their life decisions. She suggests that the taking of high-risk approaches may mean that *"do-it-yourself"* biographies may become the *"breakdown biography"* (p.8) for some students. Copying current models or embarking on precarious

pathways will not provide even short term, let alone medium or long term, outcomes for students. For students whose "commodity bundles" (Hart, 2016) do not include support for navigating the corridors of higher education, "pathways" may be ontologically distant, particularly for young people who wish to (or who are forced to) remain grounded in their homeplace.

Those who appear to gain the most from liquid modernity are youth who both desire and benefit from the opportunities afforded by globalisation; rural youth who possess the requisite commodity bundles to aspire to mobile practices like elite forms of higher education (Hart, 2016). These are considered as "aspirational" young people who live flexible, highly mobile lifestyles and who aim toward highly paid, if fluid, international futures. They are the privileged global nomads, happy to travel around the globe, often without a permanent home or job and with their ties to their place of origin loosened or even willingly discarded. They aspire within the idealised landscape of the neoliberal imaginary. As Brennan (2015) notes, most Euro-Anglo "pathways" may work for this elite minority but do not build equity.

The contemporaneous dominant culture of late modernity, with its dominant neoliberal ideology, is the latest in a line of assaults on disadvantaged people, especially those in rural communities. In the case of rural Tasmania, there has been a body of research dating back two decades that has revealed the complexity of educational and career decision making (Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick 2001; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Gabriel, 2002, 2006; Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman 2000). These tensions and conflicts play out at the micro scale level in Tasmania as much as anywhere else, and they have a direct impact on how young people, and the communities in which they live, regard education. Previously, low density and mostly rurally-based Tasmanian populations enjoyed a relatively high level of employment, which meant that isolated communities tended to remain close/closed and many saw no reason to leave. Even when times became hard, rurality often meant that alongside levels of social disadvantage, robust community and kinship networks and a strong sense of place and belonging connected youth with various employment and subsistence strategies (Corbett, 2001, 2014; Howley & Howley, 2010). Being known, valued and connected is a critical factor in human wellbeing and happiness, and this, in part, accounts for the resilience still observable in many rural communities, hardships notwithstanding (Jensen, 2002; Sherman, 2009). Thus, unlike the ethereal nature of liquid life described by Bauman and other linguistically and psychologically-oriented social theorists dealt with in the section above, the traditions in Tasmania have been durable and solid until quite recently.

In the immediate lives of rural families, the solidity of the land, farming, community life and family represent an anchor, albeit uncertain, in a sea of change wrought by late modern globalisation, liquid life and risk society. In many communities, young people are still needed to work locally to boost the family income, to work on or off-farm, or even to care for younger siblings. Access to even low levels of short term economic capital is often seen as more important than adding to their cultural capital through education. Participation in broader geographies and economies may not be seen as important, let alone engaging with "the mainland" (i.e., mainland Australia), or the wider global community (Cranston et al., 2014). Hence, a rural community can operate as both a material resource and a corporeal limitation to the establishment of mobile, flexible biographies (Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Corbett, 2001, 2009a).

While there is a significant distinction between his work and the more pro-neoliberal analysis of Giddens or Beck, Bauman's notion of liquidity seems to assume that capital is inevitably and ubiquitously mobile and deterritorialised. The resources involved in many rural industries and life practices represent the heavy, solid materiality of lives on the margins of late modernity, and the place-based capital generated in those lives may not be transferrable beyond a specific locale, and young people may be personally invested in residual and declining forms of employment (Corbett, 2001). For example, young men may aspire to futures in legacy industries, such as

manufacturing, mining and logging, that are no longer locally available but around which local identities have been shaped. As a result, the ambivalence towards the value of educational attainment is contested, because, while it potentially opens opportunities for employment in rapidly changing times, it may simultaneously be perceived to lead to what Appadurai (1990) called deterritorialisation or even a kind of "expulsion" that is not entirely dissimilar from that experienced by peasants and others still rooted precariously to land (Sassen, 2014; Scott, 1985, 1999). As Canadian sociologist Ralph Matthews (1986) concluded about threatened rural communities in Newfoundland, success is often defined as the ability to remain local and failure means having to leave. The work of James Scott (1985, 1999), Paul Theobald (1997), bell hooks (2008) and Wendell Berry (1977) present, in different ways, essentially the same argument about rural place, stewardship and belonging.

Liquid Aspirations

The low levels of educational attainment seen in parts of Tasmania (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) can be viewed as an artefact of disadvantage for those who find themselves outside the normative patterns and frameworks that inscribe an increased insistence of more and more education in/for late modernity. Those who are educationally disadvantaged or who do not achieve well are less able, according to human capital theory, to participate fully in a contemporary economy (Becker, 2009). Cranston et al. (2016) assert that, in this rapidly changing and challenging world, staying in post-compulsory education is not only highly desirable but essential. Economist Saul Eslake (2016) echoes the central tenets of human capital theory, arguing that Tasmania's historic and current economic stagnation can only be arrested by improved educational outcomes. Ramsay and Rowan (2013) agree, stating that education beyond Year 10 for Tasmanian youth is critical for "*social cohesion and social prosperity, for economic competiveness, for employability, health and well-being of citizens*" (p. 2). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013) further notes that:

> *Graduating from upper secondary education has become increasingly important in all countries, as the skills needed in the labour market are becoming more knowledge-based and as workers are progressively required to adapt to the uncertainties of a rapidly changing economy.* (p.42)

These authoritative discourses situate education as a crucial marker for the modernisation of societies but also as the requisite individual capital that is theoretically achievable by all. This achievement and the capital it accrues to the individual can then be transformed into other kinds of capital that support individual and collective prosperity. The goal here is to achieve the status of the autonomous neoliberal subject whose way of thinking about time, space and place are aligned with Bauman's liquid sensibilities; for liquid modernity is not simply a way of describing social patterns, but also a way of framing a reflexive and even artistic psychological orientation to creating and recreating the self (Bateson, 2001; Bauman, 2008).

One response to low levels of educational achievement are structural adjustments to the educational system. The most recent of which are raising the school leaving age to 18 (Rockliff, 2016), extending small Tasmanian government high schools to Year 12 beyond the currently common Year 10 offerings, and the introduction of an earlier school entry age for children. Yet to stay in education beyond Year 10, many rural youth need to either endure long bus rides, or leave home at age 16 and relocate to a regional, urban-based upper secondary college, often at considerable financial pressures to families, (Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Cranston et al., 2016). This educational trajectory often results in the young person returning home, even if their community offers limited means of stable employment (Cranston et al., 2014).

In addition to structural arguments, there are also authoritative arguments around the need for the culture of education to change in Tasmania. Proponents of cultural change argue that structural change is either insufficient or inadequate for improving educational outcomes in the state. This line of thinking is congruent with human capital arguments, particularly when it speaks to raising aspirations of individuals. We will not expand upon the various debates and nuances of critical aspirations theory here because this is taken up in other pieces in this special issue with respect to rural education (cf. Corbett , 2016; Corbett & Forsey 2017; Gale & Parker, 2015; Gore et al., 2015; Hart, 2016, 2012; Seller & Gale, 2011). Rather, we simply state that most contemporary educational aspirations analysis is not spatially sensitive, nor does it take into consideration problems of place and the way that it inflects identity and decision-making (some notable exceptions are: Byun et al., 2012; Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2011; Zipin et al., 2015). In other words, it assumes that the most valued types of aspiration are, and should be, significantly liquid in character. This assumes that an appropriate, or rather valued and high-status, educational orientation for a successful neoliberal youth subject is to either reject strong connections to place and quite literally follow the money, or alternatively to understand rural places (farms, for instance) primarily as sites for capital accumulation and concentration.

Emplacement: The Solidity of the Land

The second thread of this paper examines the idea of emplacement in the context of the Anthropocene and considers how liquid modernity has caused deep ruptures within previously stable rural communities. The transformation of capitalism from a set of relationships bound within territories of the nation state and predicated on strong tariffs, independent fiscal and monetary policy and regulatory protections, has been supplanted in recent decades by relatively fluid exchanges in an increasingly globalised political economy (Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1998; Harvey, 2006; Held, 1999). The effects of this on the daily lives of individuals in advanced capitalist and "emerging" economies alike, have been variously described as *"fast capitalism"*, the *"runaway world"* (Giddens, 2002), *"hypercapitalism"* (Graham, 2005) or *"hyperreality"* (Baudrillard, 1994), and the *"great acceleration"* (Stein, 2016).

Most analyses recognise the ideology of neoliberalism underpinning deregulation and fast capitalism, which are accelerated by advances in digital and other technologies that transform the material world. The Australian Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA) plays directly into this agenda:

> *Extraordinary technological change is transforming how we live, work, communicate and pursue good ideas. We need to embrace new ideas in innovation and science, and harness new sources of growth to deliver the next age of economic prosperity in Australia.* (NISA, 2017, para. 1)

The impact has been that 21st century people are increasingly cast as atomised individuals within the discourse of the global free market economy. Here, progress and success are aligned with conspicuous consumption, entrepreneurship, innovation, risk, competition and the "do-it-yourself" biography (Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Bauman, 1999, 2008). This is a view in which human dignity finds expression in economic freedom, and free markets are the path to individual and social virtue and, collectively, to increased standards of living for all.

In the fast capitalism neoliberal vision, growth is constructed as the central good, the central organising goal and value that drives postmodern ethics and morality (Bauman, 1993, 1995). Postmodern ethics and values might be described as a retreat from both ethics and morality, generating a social theory that ignores relentless commodification as the central problem in contemporary capitalism (Jamieson, 1992). What is problematic for us though, drawing on what

we might describe as the "invested" critiques of scholars like James Scott, Frederic Jamieson and Raymond Williams and many (but not all) representatives of the critical pedagogy tradition, is that in Bauman's liquid modernity there seems to be little space for hope. We think though, that what postmodernity also opens up is the actual possibility of genuine moral and ethical choices not bound up in established traditions and hierarchies, which Bauman recognises but does little to support.

In the transition to a political universe where the rules have changed and the old anchors have been cut adrift, tensions and stress are generated. The Brexit vote, the 2016 election in the United States, and the election of a number of "anti-politicians" to political office all serve as examples, and typically these movements are supported by marginalised rural populations who often serve as high profile examples of good people left behind by social and economic change forces. Drawing on Jurgen Habermas (1975), Stein (2016) argues that the dominant ideology of the past 40 years has seen foundational institutions of government, finance and education suffering from a crisis of legitimacy that has resulted in the deterioration of the basic principles upon which public culture and trust are founded. A sense of shared purpose or ethical worldview is fading and *the resources of the lifeworld (for meaning-making and identity creation) have become almost as depleted as the resources of the natural world"* (Stein, 2016, para. 7). This crisis of legitimation has ushered in sharp and growing disjunctions and resistances between those who have benefitted from these developments and those who regard themselves as marginalised and falling behind.

In the shockwaves of globalisation, the neoliberal landscape looks shaky, yet disaffected, and marginalised outsiders seek both a voice and someone to speak for them. This rift is characterised within the economic sphere by increasing inequality, wealth disparities (Piketty 2013; Stiglitz, 2013), increasing GINI indices as jobs move from developed to developing economies, and towards increased automation. For some theorists, globalisation is a cause for celebration. Khanna (2016), for example, sees infrastructure superseding and replacing military strength in the sphere of geopolitics with claims that humanity is accelerating into a future shaped by radically enhanced connectivity. For Khanna, humanity's new maxim is *"connectivity is destiny"*, where the most connected powers and people will prevail. For the others, this hyper-connected world is not as rosy. For the millions left behind, this utopian vison is unattainable and in the light of increasing global insecurities and anthropogenic climate change, this Utopia seems naively optimistic.

These problematics have a particular inflection in rural contexts. Farrugia, Smyth and Harrison (2014) use the term "emplacement" to refer to the deep interconnectedness and place attachment of many rural youth. Drawing on Aboriginal traditions, Somerville (2010) points out that the relationship to place is strongly constituted in local stories and other representations that place learning as local and embodied, occurring in a contact zone often characterised by contestation. Farrugia (2016) explored the identities of young people in an Australian rural town in relation to contemporary discussions of place and social change. Farrugia's research revealed a deep and often romantic attachment to place. Narratives about imagined future lives articulated classed and gendered competencies and dispositions acquired in and through place, and expressed in life planning practices. While substantial social changes reshape youth identities across rural places, young people's responses to these changes tend to be forged in located identities and reflexive orientations towards the future (Farrugia, 2016).

For young people, particularly in some rural, remote or disadvantaged urban areas, dominant educational messages, such as those stimulated by human capital perspectives and competitive neoliberal discourse, conflict with competing identity orientations which are intimately tied to community. Echoing a fair swath of recent and established literature in rural education, Farrugia, Smyth and Harrison (2014) note the importance of local community connections for young

people's orientation towards their future in work. They argue that young people in rural-regional areas tend to imagine their futures around established community connections and ways of life. This applies even to those whose imagined futures take them beyond the boundaries of their local communities.

While local schools encourage young people to plan their own futures, the lives of relatives and other community members, such as sports coaches and other role models, continue to shape youth desires and perceptions of what is possible for them (Schmidt, 2015). For people living in relatively isolated rural communities or in disadvantaged urban areas, these known networks operate as both resources and limits for aspirations. The resources they offer may not provide opportunities beyond the locale, and young people may be personally invested in forms of work that reflect the history of their community rather than its future. Additionally, established expectations about suitable work may not reflect actual existing opportunities available to local youth. While these aspirations may appear misguided and "out of synch" with modernity or contemporary developments in rural capitalism, they can nevertheless be resilient forms of masculinity that shape life choices (Corbett, 2009b; Kenway & Hickey-Moody, 2006; Laiore, 2001, 2005).

Farrugia (2016) notes that, as a consequence, young people must re-evaluate who they are and who they can become. This re-negotiation of personal identity is a key aspect of navigating changing labour markets in areas of high youth unemployment. The availability of better and potentially more stable employment, education and career opportunities may exist but at a considerable distance from the home community of emplaced rural youth. This can lead families and youth who live much of their lives in local social networks to equate higher education with leaving their home places (Abbott Chapman, 2011; Carr & Kefalas, 2010; Corbett, 2001, 2013; Farrugia, 2016). Thus, precarious employment conditions are compounded by the spatial organisation and concentration of emerging opportunities that require further study. Farrugia (2016) believes that these powerful shifts are not adequately recognised. Youth unemployment is a complex policy issue and simple approaches based on individual employability are destined to fail. To be successful, education and training programs must work with local communities alongside investment in regional economies aimed at creating new employment opportunities when established industries leave. In this way, education and employment policies can support young people to navigate regional Australia's changing labour markets.

Actual labour market conditions in some rural and remote communities may bear little resemblance to emerging urban spaces that have transitioned more fully to postproductivist and knowledge economies. So, while at the level of the national labour market, higher education is required for a successful career, this many not be apparent in some rural locales. In addition, rural youth may not imagine themselves in the same economic landscape as the one educators and others try to help them envision. For instance, educational, economic, media and social policy discourses typically contain assumptions about emerging knowledge-oriented labour markets which may or may not be visible to many youth in particular rural locales which are in transition or which are resistant to change (Corbett, 2015; Corbett & Baeck, 2016; Corbett & Forsey, 2017). While there is much emphasis on post-industrial transformations, young people growing up in small remote and rural communities may encounter an established set of visible and locally available career options (Corbett, 2001).

The literature concerning aspirations seldom discusses the issue of leaving home, identity and/in place, rurality and sustainability, community development, or other spatial questions. The tension between needing to leave in order to succeed can be either an unproven hypothesis or an ambivalent prospect for some families. Indeed, some "bright" young people may wish to remain in their community, to retain their sense of belonging to place and to find meaningful work and cohesion there (Howley, 2009; Schafft & Biddle, 2015).

Policies targeted at young people are also located within the neoliberal worldview, paralleling those imposed on "developing" countries, by focusing on increasing educational retention and attainment with the promise that young people will find professional work (Pickering, 2009). Intentionally or not, neoliberal policies and frameworks ignore the reality of the forms of work available in different local communities. Work will never exist for all young people, no matter how work-ready they may be, especially those living in areas with high youth unemployment (Pickering, 2009; Standing, 2014). As Monbiot (2016) has summarised:

> Culture is not working. A worldview which insists that both people and place are fungible is inherently hostile to the need for belonging. For years we have been told that we do not belong, that we should shift out without complaint while others are shifted in to take our place. When the peculiarities of community and place are swept away by the tides of capital, all that's left is a globalised shopping culture, in which we engage with glazed passivity. Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chainstores. (para. 9)

These compelling issues and their critical impact on society in general and education in particular (Smith, 2007) are now the subject of scrutiny. Stein (2016) argues that we now live in a time of a mass identity crises. He contends that humanity is not capable of fully understanding its place in the biosphere; as he puts it, *"our identity crisis is coinciding with the climax of the Anthropocene"* (para. 8), and that *"it appears the Earth is in our hands, and we are not prepared for the responsibility"* (para. 3). New questions are being asked about the relationship between the human and non-human world, and calls for the decentering of the sovereign human subject are gaining strength as a result of philosophical and social science movements such as: poststructuralism (Foucault, 1980); the new materialism (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2010; Malafouris, 2013); critical realism (Scott, 2010); actor network theory (Latour, 2007); and posthumanism (Wolfe, 2009). What all of this reintroduces into educational conversations, and indeed into social science and philosophical conversations generally, is materiality which has been side-lined not only by the "linguistic turn" of the late 20th century but also in the liquid, individualised and psychologised sociologies, like that of Beck, Giddens, and we would argue, Bauman as well. Bauman writes about the shift to responsibilisation and the ascendancy of agency, while simultaneously ignoring its democratic possibility to step outside the liquid modern machinery he constructs.

While rural education should, we think, speak to the materiality of land and bodies in a way that problematises how the educated subject is relentlessly mobilised, deterritorialised analysis in the field is still firmly located within the neoliberal worldview, predicated on notions of growth and industrial/technological progress as well as established binaries that separate human from non-human beings and objects. As Orr (1999) has argued, Western education continues to:

> Prepare students almost exclusively for an urban existence and dependence on fossil fuels and global trade. Children are taught from an early age how best to compete with each other rather than how best to work towards and live in a sustainable society. (p. 166)

Beyond Liquid Modern Aspirations: Toward Deep Educational Change

Thus far, we have argued that in rural Tasmania we find that liquid modern sensibilities and aspirations are not necessarily dominant and that this is instantiated as an educational problem. We also find a place-based focus and evidence of leadership that supports those who wish to stay rather than leave. Here we introduce an additional thread in our analysis, that is, consideration of the Anthropocene, we begin to see ways in which local sensibilities may be not only valued and strengthened, but act as a counter to the rampant displacement, disruption and

liquid modern ecological destruction. The Anthropocene represents a new phase in the history of both *"humankind and of the Earth, when natural forces and human forces became intertwined, so that the fate of one determines the fate of the other"* (Zalasiewicz, Williams, Steffen, & Crutzen 2010, p. 2231). The malign effects of human activity on climate, species and habitat depletion and various forms of environmental degradation are now well established (IPCC, 2014).

The onset of the Anthropocene epoch is now considered by far the most serious challenge to an education system already confounded by liquid modernity and emplacement (Greenwood, 2014). Rigby (2017) notes that any improvement in regional provisioning of education and employment are overshadowed by the ongoing deterioration of key biophysical indicators, especially biodiversity loss and climate change. The recognition of looming catastrophic climatic and environmental change (Rigby, 2017) that now poses an existential threat to the future of humanity and life in general, juxtaposed with the internationalisation of economies and other changes that accompany globalisation, have brought about a paradoxical re-emergence of the local (Hess, 2009). Hess notes that a significant but largely unstudied aspect of local-global relationships is the growth of localism, which seeks to reclaim economic and political sovereignty at smaller geographic scales. While Hess acknowledges that localism is not a panacea in the context of globalisation, he positions it as a crucial ingredient in projects to build more democratic, just and sustainable systems. We contend that some of the building blocks for this re-emergence are already in place in rural areas in Tasmania and that these offer pathways forward for both rural and urban communities within the age of the Anthropocene, acknowledging the tensions inherent in any movement that focuses too exclusively on the local.

The requirements, skills, needs, responses, mitigation and adaptation to living in the Anthropocene are not likely to be met by business-as-usual models of education and the liquid modern aspirations these models tend to support and reward. Many key skills necessary for addressing contemporary post-neoliberal challenges may still to be found in the material, emplaced practices that persist in rural communities, representing not deficits but strengths, know-how and resilience (Argent, Tonts, Jones, & Holmes, 2013; Corbett, 2013; Howley & Howley, 2010). As Stewart and Abbott-Chapman (2011) note, many rural students, both male and female:

> *… could turn their hand to anything practical and gain skills they would not have gained in the city. Most were capable with motors and machinery and [some] had experience of paid work – on farms shed handling, hay collecting, cattle work, fencing, hotel work, abalone lease work, gardening, waitressing, post-office assistant, supermarket shelf work and child minding.* (p.9)

It is not uncommon to encounter support for a radical re-thinking and restructuring of education for the Anthropocene era. We argue here that critical educators, interested in how we might address the collective challenges of the failure of neoliberalism and the urgency of the ecological implications of the Anthropocene, might return to the land and to places like Tasmania which have retained some elements of an older, land-based community sensibility. Rural communities could be re-framed as hubs to provide the insights, training and skills needed for a sustainable future. We suggest attention to contemporary material theories, aboriginal perspectives, and engagement with bioregionality and rural place (Green, 2015; Greenwood, 2009, 2014: Roberts & Downes, 2016; Somerville, 2010, 2013, 2017). Green (2015), for example, argues that in a lifeworld subject to rapid change and instability, rural education is better reformulated as education for rural-regional sustainability:

> *… explicitly embracing formal, informal and non-formal sectors, and considering schools therefore within a larger, more comprehensive view of educational practice addressed to the task of educating the public. Education thus understood is a crucial resource for developing informed, active citizenship and community regeneration in the Anthropocene age.* (p. 36)

In this paper, we have argued that deeply entrenched assumptions about education in rural and regional areas can be challenged by social and ecological theory through which deficit discourses are reframed. Solutions lie, we think, in an approach to rural/regional education that respects non-urban lifeways and complex ecologies. Education and labour market policies must, we think, go beyond a focus on individual young people's liquid modern aspirations and work with/in rural places in genuine partnerships for community development (Eversole, 2014).

We believe that far from being the deficit outliers of modernity, Tasmania's rural schools, and the communities they are part of, can be re-imagined and re-purposed as sites for intellectual engagement; indeed, we can imagine them as places that could serve as important educational sites for urban youth whose material reality may not be particularly well attuned with natural rhythms, cycles, processes and problems. Here, strengths and skills are once again valued, new social possibilities are considered and inevitabilities are challenged. Communities can begin to find new ways to work together to solve the problems facing their children and themselves, and to allow new stories to emerge about our humanity.

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