

# Antipode

**Responses to the Participatory Geographies Research Group's 'Communifesto for Fuller Geographies: Towards Mutual Security', September 2012**

## **Responses to a Communifesto**

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Welcoming a Communifesto

I am confronted by  
crisis,  
angst and  
disappointment.

I feel for distant colleagues in the land of my birth<sup>i</sup>,  
embattled and staunch,  
needing this statement of solidarity and  
inspiration.

I am saddened by the loss that weeps  
out of its bounded rationality.  
Its 'strategies' and 'tactics'  
borne, no doubt,  
by years of individualisation  
and corporatisation.

Things are not so different here in the 'other' Antipode.

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Neoliberalisms reach even into this fish's mouth<sup>ii</sup>,  
wrenching out the guts of those compelled  
to prove their significance  
and to compete for ever-decreasing resources.

Yet, here, the impacts wrought within our walls  
have also been inflected by deeper seismic shifts<sup>iii</sup>.

I hear of colleagues struggling  
to teach in tents and  
to defend their 'studies' as neoliberal agendas deem them  
irrelevant  
to projects of reconstruction.

Courageous,  
they deal with repetitive aftershocks and chaos  
as their cherished city and academia  
lie in ruins.

And outside of our no-longer ivory towers,  
too many, predominantly Maori and/or poor, children  
attend school without food.

Hungry, unable to learn...<sup>iv</sup>

Surrounded by such instability and injustice,  
I wonder  
where to put my energy,  
how to find more energy?

I, like Doreen Massey, believe we are the struggle<sup>v</sup>.

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This informs my scholarship.  
Yet when re-reading this Communifesto  
I feel overwhelmed  
and put it  
aside.

A few days later  
and the anniversary of Gandhi's birth.  
I return to my task with a  
renewed conviction.

“Be the change you wish to see”, he reportedly said<sup>vi</sup>.  
So I persevere with this response  
not sure where it will lead;  
what or whom it might affect.

Re-engaging this Communifesto  
I find myself again  
Unexpectedly  
resisting what I thought I wanted.  
Resisting what I have,  
in part,  
helped to create<sup>vii</sup>.

While empathetic, I am cautious.

I am tired.

I wonder if I am alone.

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While collaboratively espousing,  
     the ‘communiversity’ and ‘acadavism’<sup>viii</sup>,  
 I may be far too comfortable in my  
 middle-class and middle-age.

After all, I’ve been in the job nearly 20 years.  
 I’m practically institutionalized.

Or (worse still, and perhaps because of this institutionalization),  
 I may have become  
 too good a neoliberal subject:  
     Enjoying the guilty pleasures and  
     illusion of self-importance that  
     long work-hours,  
         never-ending demands  
             and international citations paradoxically produce.

Reading the evidence  
 of peer esteem  
 in my ‘Evidence Portfolio’  
   may have gone to my head.

I don’t want to disrupt  
 the fantasy of the coherent academic self  
 that speaks out from its pages<sup>ix</sup>.

Or perhaps (and more likely),  
 this Communifesto  
 is a painful reminder  
 that my work/life  
 is

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out of balance.

Giving birth to a PhD and two boys  
while meeting performance-targets  
has been demanding.

Most of my labour,  
birthing and activist,  
doesn't 'count'  
(yet)<sup>x</sup>.

Except to those beyond these walls.

I don't have much energy left over for the kinds of  
'strategies' and 'tactics'  
advocated for here;

Even if I need them.

I put this Communifesto aside  
Again.

A few more days later and more loss:  
Neil Smith is dead.  
Web-based messages express sadness, gratitude, and memories  
of a geographer  
Warm, generous and inspiring<sup>xi</sup>.

I wonder how he would have responded to this Communifesto.  
With an erudite analysis?  
Or perhaps a song?

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Re-reading ‘A Communifesto’

a call for relationality speaks louder to me now,  
alongside loss.

Not replacing it,

But sketching more compassionate cartographies,  
more affective encounters;  
more playful possibilities  
for academic life.

Fuller subjectivities perhaps?

I reflect on those who’ve taken time  
to craft this Communifesto,  
and on others whose contributions have  
enabled these responses.

I feel appreciation and connection.

I am not alone.

I am more hopeful<sup>xii</sup>.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> I am a native of the West Midlands and have lived and worked outside of the United Kingdom since 1990, returning periodically for conferences and research leave.

<sup>ii</sup> In the understanding of many Maori (Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand), the North Island (Aotearoa) of the country is a fish that was hooked up and brought above sea level by the ancestor Maui. Wellington or Te Whanganui a Tara, where I live and work has a

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harbour, which is said to represent the mouth of that fish (*Te Ara, Encyclopedia of New Zealand* [www.teara.govt.nz](http://www.teara.govt.nz) [last accessed 2 October 2012]).

<sup>iii</sup> In 2010 and 2011, Christchurch in the South Island was hit by large earthquakes and many aftershocks. Canterbury University and the city as a whole were badly affected. For a very insightful analysis of the personal, professional and public implications of this disaster, see Cupples J (2012) Boundary crossing and new striations: When disaster hits a neoliberalising campus. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37(3):337-341

<sup>iv</sup> See <http://www.3news.co.nz/Lunchbox-differences-in-decile-1-and-decile-10-schools/tabid/367/articleID/269617/Default.aspx> (last accessed 17 September 2012).

<sup>v</sup> Bond S and Kindon S (2012) Working with Doreen downunder: Antipodean trajectories. In Featherstone D and Painter J (eds) *Spatial Politics: Essays for Doreen Massey*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell

<sup>vi</sup> There is some debate about whether Mahatmah Gandhi did utter this phrase. See <http://www.compassionatespirit.com/Be-the-Change.htm> (last accessed 2 October 2012).

<sup>vii</sup> Since Rachel Pain, Mike Kesby and myself fielded the first call for papers for a session on participatory geographies at the Glasgow IGU in 2004, I have contributed remotely to the emergence of the Participatory Geographies Research Group (formerly Working Group), most recently offering some reflections on authorship and referencing associated with this Communifesto.

<sup>viii</sup> See mrs kinpaisby (2008) Taking stock of participatory geographies: Envisioning the communitarity, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33(3):292-299

<sup>ix</sup> Earlier this year, I participated in the third iteration of the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF), which required all academics to write a coherent narrative of their research labour over the previous six-year period. This narrative was titled an 'Evidence Portfolio' and consisted of entries under three categories: research outputs; peer esteem; and contributions to the research environment. Julie Cupples and Eric Pawson discuss the some of the disciplining effects of this exercise as well as some of the potentially radical effects it opens up - Cupples J and Pawson E (2012) Giving an account of oneself: The PBRF and the neoliberal university. *New Zealand Geographer* 68:14-23

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<sup>x</sup> Klocker N and Drozdewski D (2012) Career progress relative to opportunity: How many papers is a baby worth? *Environment and Planning A* 44:1271-1277

<sup>xi</sup> See <http://pcp.gc.cuny.edu/2012/09/neil-r-smith-1954-2012/> (last accessed 9 October 2012).

<sup>xii</sup> Lawson V (2005) Hopeful geographies: Imagining ethical alternatives - A commentary on J.K. Gibson-Graham's 'Surplus possibilities: Postdevelopment and community economies'. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 26(1):36-38