

## Flannel and pearls; revolution and laughter ... Radical possibilities indeed

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There's a flannel shirt and over-sized jacket missing, matched to a set of pearls

Classic Anyon-wear, Graduate Center Chic

Her shirt threaded with brilliance andchutzpa

Buttoned with love of Jessie, Marx, theory and her students

Patched with Bourdieu, flashbacks of Newark, existential weight of Occupy, labor struggles and the convictions of her daddy

...

A suit jacket pressed in theory, scent of wine, sounds of laughter and texture of warm comfort; flannel of distinction and warmth, signature of her commitments and her down-to-earthness

...

Pearls strung like conjoined beads of revolutions, past and yet to come

**T**hrough the late 1980s, and into the 90s, on many Friday afternoons Jean and I would share bottles of wine, exchanging insights/incites from our ethnographic wanderings in disinvested urban schools. I was struggling to make sense of my weeks at Brandeis High, a few blocks from her apartment, anticipating *Framing Dropouts* while she was designing the stunning theoretical and political architecture for *Ghetto Schooling*.

Fast forward a decade, I had moved to CUNY from Penn and the Urban Education Program at the Graduate Center was allocated its first new faculty line. In strategic synchrony, Stanley Aronowitz and I knew we needed to seduce Jean out of her beloved Rutgers, to cross the Hudson. She deserved doctoral students and they her.

In the dozen years since, Jean has mentored cohorts of stunning activist scholars theorize and organize against the corporate assault on public education, launching intellectually and politically provocative projects that help us see, understand and connect the capillaries of capital and schooling, and still imagine what must be.

For decades she exposed the intimate details of political economy laced into the bowels of curriculum, teaching, learning, facilities and policy; she insisted that her students do no less. She pressed them hard, forced them to read theory, write and re-write, and then she would query them about love, relationships and the intimacies of life. Like the sweet soft curls that would circle her gentle smiling eyes, the rhizomic twirls of theory and gossip wrapped around all who pleased in her

company.

From her sustained “comradeship” and “momtoring,” new lines of analysis, chapters, books of radical import sprout from her office, her classes, embroidering theory and on the ground resistance, circulating out from Zuccotti Park where she and students shouldered signs that read TAX THE RICH. She cradled her students with the warm embrace of good talk, bold ideas, lots of drafts and the eventual thrill that “Jean thinks I’m smart.” She cared for them mind, body and soul. And they adore(d) her.

She held open the doors of Urban Education at the Graduate Center as a public space, for meetings of NYCORE (New York Coalition of Radical Educators), young poets, research collectives of young people, and a student-run online journal for radical thought and critical writing...

Over the past few years, Jean’s humor and political acuity sharpened. Her international reputation swelled, her books broke out of the literary corner of teacher ed programs and could be found throughout the popular reading sections of bookstores. Our friendship deepened through cumulative cases of wine, dissertations, theory, writing and reading, watching children grow up, dinners with Wendy Luttrell and Ofelia Garcia, visits with Lois Weis, laughing and delighting in the wisdom and vibrant creativity of the next generation, whether on picket lines, in classrooms, in text, blogs, bars or at dissertation defenses.

Just a few weeks before she passed, Jean

told Madeline Perez and me the story of her name. Her father, a Marxist who taught at Penn, had apparently been arrested during the McCarthy era. When the police asked his name, he said, “I could be anyone.” And so they dropped the e, and settled on Anyon.

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On Tuesday evening, after Saturday when she left us, forty or so friends, colleagues, students, staff gathered in a circle, in the hub of the Urban Education program, because we needed to huddle as a collective, in grief and shock to re-member Jean.

“How can someone so brilliant be so down to earth?” a student asked at the memorial

“She held my hand as we spoke, and I thought, Jean Anyon is holding my hand.”

“Knowing that Jean thought I was smart was life transforming, just transforming.”

“She told me she wouldn’t sign off on my dissertation until it was really strong, and it wasn’t. I wasn’t very happy but I re-worked it, and was so proud finally that it met her standards.”

Three of her most precious graduate students—now-university faculty told a sweet story of legacy. “We as bent down gently to kiss her goodbye, for the last time, we turned to leave, and she said to us, ‘Goodbye, professor, professor and professor.’”

Radical possibilities indeed; footprints, goodbyes, torch passings and an insistence

that we carry on...

As tears fall and lovers of Anyon mobilize conferences, blogs, scholarships, websites, dedicated dissertation rooms and academic volumes, we could all hear her encouraging us to “keep on doing the work...”

My book shelves are beginning to sag, long held up by *Ghetto Schooling*, *Radical Possibilities*, *Marx and Education*...

It’s hard to imagine where critical educational studies would be if it were not for Jean, and her bold insistence on political economy, on theorizing class, race and contradiction, her full bodied love for educational justice movements, her willingness to speak difficult truths and her laughter.

If she were at the gathering, she would have told us that struggles for educational justice, like books, theories, love of her daughter, the passions of her students, and even her flannel shirts never die; that it is our duty to keep the absent present, to make visible the invisible, to tell the story of structural relations from under the steps, to expose dominant lies and to create theories and movements soldered in critique, solidarity and possibility.

In all the years I have known Jean, she only got one thing wrong.

She’s not anyone.

The hole is huge, the work continues. We are forever beholden to her brilliance, commitments, humor and her breath-taking intellectual and political legacy which permeates universities, public schools, activist

organizations and the popular imagination through her writings, her lectures and her stunning students.

As we retire her flannel shirt, and hang up the pearls, we honor Jean for a mind, spirit and body of work that gave so much to so many, for ideas that will outlive us all.

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