# Remembering the absent ones, remaking publicness

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## Abstract

This paper draws on recent scholarship that reveals the emergent fascist sensibilities of our time, while pointing to examples of aesthetic material that challenge informational capitalism's tendency to erase, distract, or anesthetize attempts at resistance (Berardi 2010; Fisher 2009). To engage in the above work, I draw specifically on the recent analysis of "our time" by education scholar Mario Di Paolantonio (2023) as well as archival "remnants" from various housing justice activists. I begin with some historical context of public commemoration and its role in housing justice organizing. Next, I reveal three interrelated predicaments: *no time, no place, and no-things*. Lastly, I explore the significance of a transgenerational activist orientation that emphasizes the "passing on" between organizer and public, and between "generations" of housing justice activists. The recovery of a meaningful public pedagogy for housing activists must cleave to Di Paolantonio's (2023, p. 3) notion of a "transgenerational sensibility," which takes up the call of the past and nurtures the tenuous hope for a possible future.

## Keywords

Public pedagogy, Memory, Housing Activism, Transgenerational

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## Transgenerational Public Pedagogy

This paper draws on recent scholarship that reveals the emergent fascist sensibilities[1] of our time, while pointing to examples of aesthetic material that challenge informational capitalism's tendency to erase, distract, or anesthetize attempts at resistance (Berardi 2010; Fisher 2009). To engage in the above work, I am drawing specifically on the recent analysis of "our time" by education scholar Mario Di Paolantonio (2023) as well as archival "remnants" from various housing justice activists. I begin with some historical context of public commemoration and its role in housing justice organizing. My analysis of the predicaments facing public pedagogy draws on interviews with past and present organizers of the Toronto Homeless Memorial as well as a unique constellation of thinkers concerned with time, place, and things. I explore the significance of a transgenerational activist orientation that emphasizes the "passing on" between organizer and public, and between "generations" of housing justice activists. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of a specific "remnant" from housing justice organizer and storyteller, Bob Rose.

While it might be tempting to apply Di Paolantonio's notion of "education" strictly to contexts of schooling such as university seminars, I find his analysis instructive and meaningful for public pedagogy and social movements. Public pedagogy is concerned with the entirety of our cultural experience as an educational force in/for the public. I am influenced by Raymond Williams (1966) notion of a "permanent education" (see Giroux 1994, p. 284), and the subsequent work(s) of theorists like Henry Giroux (2001, 2004, 2010) and Gert Biesta (2012). Housing activists are often a plurality forged by circumstance more than ideological or other community ties. As a result, the public pedagogy of such an activist movement concerns itself with Di Paolantonio's (2023, p. 80) descriptive account of education involving a "sense of co-belonging" to a non-chosen community that shapes and is shaped by the unique singularity of each of its members. The problems facing education, and public pedagogy in particular, can be distilled down to three interrelated predicaments: *no time, no place,* and *no-things*.[2] Thus, the recovery of a meaningful public pedagogy for housing activists must cleave to Di Paolantonio's (2023) notion of a "transgenerational sensibility" (pp. 3, 76). A transgenerational sensibility, in the case of activism, involves considering the heritage of past movements, struggles, and stories worth passing on to new actors—new "generations" of organizers. It is premised on relational care between activists. Such a sensibility must regard the future with a sense of hope, not in the sense of ignorant optimism or wishful utopianism, but insofar as *things could always be otherwise* (Fisher 2009; Gramsci 1971; marino et al. 1998). Transgenerational public pedagogy describes the way activists perceive and reveal the linkages between past and future. It relies on memory and archival material, iterative storytelling, as well as a stubborn commitment to *the new*. Perhaps most significantly, as the latter half of this paper will elaborate on, a transgenerational public pedagogy is premised on relational connection and care—the expression of which is to *radically pay attention* to the other.

## Memorialization and Publicness

Approximately one thousand five hundred names of people who have died from a lack of housing in Toronto have been remembered at the Toronto Homeless Memorial. A sudden surge in the numbers of deaths in the late 90s now pales in comparison to the numbers we witness today. The crisis has only worsened, despite constant calls to action from organizers, concerned citizens,

[1] As Mario Di Paolantonio (2025) has recently expressed, contemporary fascism is not a mirror image of 20th century fascism. Rather, fascism today directs its hostility toward the very idea of "passing on" or handing over a repertoire to future generations, and thus is constituted by a disavowal of responsibility for a world (and worldly inheritance, as such) which we might tend for, and leave to, others.

[2] I am adopting Di Paolantonio's (2023) hyphenated articulation of "no-thing(s)" for this paper, which emphasizes the idea of absence/erasure, while highlighting the *thingness* that is missing in our 'cloud-based' world.

friends, and family members. On the second Tuesday of every month, for 25 years, the Toronto Homeless Memorial has met in Trinity Square to remember, to grieve, and to say that *this is not okay*.[3] Other related commemorative movements pre-date the memorial as we know it today: it initially started with organizers like Bob Rose marching to city hall when someone died on the streets, but this soon became untenable given the amount of deaths. Ultimately, the project emerged from a desire to make visible a crisis—the preventable deaths of thousands across North America—resulting from severe cuts to welfare and public, co-op, and/or subsidized housing. The memorial is at work sustaining what I have come to understand as a spirit of publicness—a revivification of the public realm, as imagined by Hannah Arendt (1958). These two dilemmas, the decline of the public realm and the crisis of dehousing, are intertwined; they are, I argue, central casualties of an emergent neoliberal rationality over the last 40 years. I found myself asking, what is the role of commemoration in reinvigorating the public realm?

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt reveals her division between the private and the public realm. For Arendt (1958), the private realm demarcates the spaces for the cultivation of one's interiority, a safe retreat away from the "bright light of the constant presence of others" (p. 51) where citizens recuperate from the work they contribute to the world, and the acting and speaking done in public. Elsewhere (Martin, 2022), I have written about what is at stake when citizens are prevented from accessing private spaces of safety and retreat, being forced to "live in public" as a result of dehousing processes. Here, I draw attention to Arendt's notion of a public realm, defined as the space for action and speech, where citizens engage in deeds worthy of remembrance. Arendt remarks on the Greek *polis*, which was constituted not by the city wall, but by "the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together" (p. 198). The *human condition* itself, for Arendt, is the reason that the public realm, this "space of appearance" (p. 200) for acting and speaking, is of utmost importance. The human condition is that of *natality*, the "miracle" (p. 178) of *the new*. As will become evident later in this paper, the public realm's significance, and the role of a transgenerational public pedagogy, is to confront our banal present, where we cannot *imagine otherwise*. An important way to engage in public pedagogy is to take up the task of *organizing publicness* with the purpose of uncovering new ways of being in the world.

As people retreat into homogeneous echo chambers, fuelled by algorithms and devoid of any wonder, any capacity to listen to the "other side," we cultivate increasingly inhospitable conditions for public life. Through the defunding of public housing and other "public things" (Honig 2017), neoliberal policies have led to (and been reliant on) what organizer Gigi Grant (2022) has called "the class of non-being." That is, the financialization of housing and the rule of unhampered markets have led to what I have called the "absent ones"—people whose erasure in public life has been so absolute that their deaths have ceased to "matter" (both in the sense of lacking importance, but also material, tangible markers of their loss). And further to the loss of public things, following Bonnie Honig (2017), there are fewer "things" around which people can constellate and cultivate their democratic sensibilities, their shared responsibility for things in common. And *where* citizens constellate, the plural assembly is difficult to achieve when certain others have been so categorically disappeared.

Gert Biesta (2012) offers a kind of typology of public pedagogy, discussing how such pedagogical work can be done in a direct, communicative manner—the pedagogy *for* the public—a participatory, co-produced manner, or what he calls the pedagogy *of* the public, and in a third way, which occurs by cultivating an atmosphere for public exchange. It is this third way, which Biesta (2012, p. 685), influenced by Arendt, describes as the capacity for "interruption," that I apply to

[3] In this italicized rendering, I acknowledge a common phrasing of memorial organizers, including (but not limited to) those involved in my doctoral research: Greg Cook, Rayna Slobodian, Bob Rose, Cathy Crowe, Janice Towndrow, and Gigi Grant.

the memorial. To put it a different way, if as a society, we are stuck in this rut of social conformity, echo chambers, and limited forms of democratic engagement, then we require educative environments that *interrupt* these very processes. We require, in the words of Arendt (1958), "a kind of organized remembrance" (p. 198) that can assure us that human action "and stories which are their outcome" (p. 198) will indeed be immortalized. In the politics of dehousing, citizens must resist the disappearing act of neoliberalism, whereby unhoused people are stripped of their citizenship and humanity; the moment the hegemonic consensus is reached that they are no longer valued market actors, they become part of what Gigi Grant (2022) calls the "exclusion zone." To return to Biesta, then, the very fabric of the pedagogical relation needs to be challenged: who can speak and who can't? Whose grief matters and whose doesn't? This is a public pedagogy that restores publicness itself—rendering visible and audible all participants, making room for the contingent, for *the new* to appear.

## Education and democracy at the end: No time, no place, *no-thing*

In *Education and democracy at the end: The crisis of sense*, Mario Di Paolantonio (2023) comprehensively examines the impasse we have reached, wherein education fails to make (emit) any sense. The book traces the interwoven relationship between education and democracy. Education is premised on a non-chosen community, concerned with the past, charged with developing the capacities to shape (better) the future. Democracy, in Di Paolantonio's analysis, is shaped by and with citizens as they wrestle with the boundaries of the *demos* (a non-chosen community) and the way power is negotiated, shared, or "passed on" (p. 28) to the future. Education and democracy today face a crisis of sense as they are subjected to a disconnection from our past inheritances and a foreclosure of possibilities through a seemingly "futureless future" (p. 144)—leaving citizens adrift in an "eternal present-Same" (p. 49). The Toronto Homeless Memorial, and grassroots public commemoration generally, is an effort to help citizens come to terms with the past, its bearing on the present, and the contingency of the future. Di Paolantonio draws on theorists like Franco "Bifo" Berardi, Mark Fisher, Walter Benjamin, and others who have articulated the numbness and thoughtlessness that run rampant amid catastrophism and loneliness. With the rise of informational capitalism, our senses are constantly bombarded, and yet we are isolated from the touch of, the exposure to, and dialogue with the other. We are left with the feeling that there is no time:

> We are admittedly living amid unnerving times that give no time for the time required for thinking, no time for the solidarity that sustains it, no time for sensing the weight and pull of the things that bring us together in the world. Overwhelmed by the sense that we are running out of time, we have no time to attune our sensibilities so that the significance of democracy, in all its contingency, can be sensed as something more than an autopoietic regime that resigns us to the present-Same. (Di Paolantonio, 2023, p. 49)

For the "absent ones," those entirely abjected from public, opportunities to be exposed to the other are curtailed. There is no time for solidarity. No time required for thoughtful consideration of the other. Political vitality requires a capacity to linger, in togetherness.

A second dynamic we are presented with in the neoliberal city is the privatization and commercialization of public space. Just as we are faced with the feeling that we have no time, so too are activists confronted by a logic of no *place*. This has been poignantly felt by the dehoused community activist, as the public square is increasingly surveilled and cordoned off to all but a certain kind of citizen, the self-sufficient *consumer* (Sandlin, Burdick & Norris 2012). This is why activists have noted the importance of Trinity Square, which, as Gigi Grant (2022) says, is a "hidden" site of "non-consumer" relations—part of what they term "an urban land resistance movement."

Those made absent in the "exclusion zone" are given no place to exist. Planned community drop-in centres are proposed and subsequently cancelled when housed citizens complain. Desperately needed shelters are blocked by city councillors. Encampments are raided by police, but residents are given nowhere to go. An urban land resistance movement is about a movement toward *presence*, in a world stripped of places for political appearance.

Lastly, in a world where tangible things have been traded for non-corporeal bits of information, we lose the material referents that bring us into contact with one another (Di Paolantonio 2023). We are living in a cultural moment with *no-thing*—a virtual environment shaped by "digital informational tools run by corporations" (Di Paolantonio 2023, p. 55). These corporations do not care to offer common things with which we might collectively orient ourselves in the world; they are here to sell us commodities, or more accurately, "the *flow* of information" (Di Paolantonio 2023, p. 55). Or worse, in Shoshana Zuboff's (2019) analysis concerning "surveillance capitalism," our very behavioural patterns are being measured and sold. As Di Paolantonio (2023, p. 147) summarizes, these new forms of "extraction" are "inwardly mining, usurping, and reaping our interiority, our innermost thoughts, feelings, and dreams." This amounts to "the total colonization of the lifeworld" (Di Paolantonio 2023, p. 147).

## The Toronto Homeless Memorial as a thing

At the Toronto Homeless Memorial, participants are greeted by a volunteer. The audience is reminded that they are there to grieve those who have died without housing and to declare in and through this gathering that *this is not okay*. A list of the names of those who have died (and those whose deaths have been reported) in the last month are read aloud. Some names are unknown (or are withheld for confidentiality reasons by the city's shelter system) and are left as John, Jane, or J. Doe. Many names are contextualized, with drop-in centres or shelters that an individual "was known to," or with a short write-up written by family or friends. There is always an opportunity for attendees to come to the microphone to share. The names are read, followed by a moment of silence. A musician is usually invited to share a song. The volunteer concludes the memorial and makes any relevant announcements.

The Toronto Homeless Memorial is small and simple. There are two *things* that stand out to me, when I attend the memorial. The first is the signpost, which has been reconfigured by various community members over the years, and beside which the gathering occurs. The second is the microphone, placed at the front of the gathering, usually by the steps that lead up to the Church of the Holy Trinity, bordering the causeway of Trinity Square. I draw attention to the microphone not as a source of sonic amplification, per se, but rather the microphone as a kind of aesthetic and temporal "anchor" for the event. It is as if the signpost tells a story through the designs of participants: the wrought iron lettering, the "memory marbles" that were once glued to it, the pages with the names of the dead that used to inhabit its plexiglass "case," and its current iteration, a fantastic mural-style painting. On the other hand, the microphone is the monthly invitation toward the contingent acting and speaking of attendees. Time stands still; the memorial lasts as long as there are people who want to speak and be heard. The microphone becomes the place where community members (sometimes for the first time) hear of a loved one they have lost. The microphone becomes the place for singing, for poetry, for lamentation. Its echoes reverberate around Trinity Square, off the walls of Toronto's Eaton Centre.

Up against the frantic temporality of informational capitalism, Di Paolantonio (2023, p. 54)—drawing on the work of Byung-Chul Han (2022)—observes that "[t]hings are life-stabilizers. They arrest the overwhelming flow of time." Having identifiable points of reference that outlast fleeting human mortality, we are given "a sense of *duration* and *orientation"* (Di Paolantonio 2023, p. 54), which offers both a connection with a shared past and the hope of possible futures.

Arendt (1958, p. 182) shared these concerns for "the world of things…which physically [lie] between [people]." Extending Arendt's ideas amidst the neoliberal defunding of public things, Bonnie Honig (2017, p. 5) has argued that we require public things "to deliberate about, constellate around, or agonistically contest." Things, material elements of the human artifice, have the capacity to lie between distinct individuals, "stabilizing" (Arendt 1958, p. 182) the relations between people. The commemorative "thing"—the memorial sign in the public square, in this case the site of a monthly gathering—can also be thought of as Gert Biesta's (2012, p. 693) "incommensurable element," which is "an event, an experience and an object—that can act both as a test and as a reminder of publicness." In this way, the Toronto Homeless Memorial as thing, as aesthetic object, interrupts the gateway to one of Canada's largest commercial thoroughfares by a process that "tests" the degree to which those rendered absent can be together in grief, in collective resistance, as citizens, as a politically engaged plural assembly.

## Cultivating a transgenerational sensibility

To address these three central impasses, Di Paolantonio urges for a sense of responsibility that extends beyond "our" time. That is, we must reach backward to see ourselves as "implicated subjects" (Rothberg 2019), to use Michael Rothberg's phrasing, understanding the task of remembrance and the complex histories we have inherited. This process also involves familiarizing ourselves with what is *worth* passing on. We decide together what bears repeating, what stories or ways of being should be reinvoked. Simultaneously, we must also grapple with the possibility of a future that is fragile and unknown to us, and for which we are called to extend our care "forward." He writes,

> [The] obligation…to what is non-present…furnishes the political community (the *demos*) with an expansive *temporal sensibility* (a way of registering the transgenerational *charge*), which helps tend to *the possibility* (continuation) of the world beyond the confines of any self-enclosed present configuration of "being" or any violent claim to its realization. (Di Paolantonio 2023, p. 40)

It is in and through social and political movements that Di Paolantonio's (2023) notion of "passing on" becomes vivid. For Di Paolantonio (2023, pp. 10, 76), the "*educational* in education" is a matter of passing time together to cultivate the "transgenerational sensibility" inherent in meaningful educational (and democratic) endeavours. By offering a regular meeting place for remembrance, the Toronto Homeless Memorial fosters the *appearance* of what organizer Gigi Grant (2022) described as "ghosts in the landscape." The cultivation of a transgenerational sensibility involves both bearing witness to those who have died, while also maintaining the conditions for a plural assembly to appear together to imagine a future. It involves working and reworking stories, songs, and material from past "generations" of organizers, which bear witness to the violence they (and others facing housing precarity) have been exposed to. This is what Grant means when they describe "ghosts in the landscape"—not just the dead who are grieved, but their family members, friends, community members; these are *the ghosts who remain*. Holding onto the promise of a shared, public world, attendees are invited into this relational event as beings "temporally bound to one another" (Di Paolantonio 2023, p. 3), resisting "the loop of the eternal-present-Same" (Di Paolantonio 2023, p. 49) and the foreclosures of a neoliberal tempo that is nerve-wracking, futureless, and banal.

The "beautiful risk" (Biesta 2014) of "passing on" in education (Di Paolantonio 2023, p. 77) occurs through the relational encounter that allows us to forge a common world. In deciding together what requires repair or renewal, we move from learnings as items to be deposited, toward dialogical togetherness that animates democracy and thinking. What is notable, when it comes to the Toronto Homeless Memorial, is how the memorial itself has changed and been "renewed" over the years

through those involved in gathering around this public thing. An example of this *renewal* is found in Gigi Grant's description of the movement from advocacy to ceremony.

## From Advocacy to Ceremony

This movement, or renewal, can be explained with a few examples. In the early years of the memorial (and in the years that pre-date the current memorial site), in the wake of the death of a community member without housing, activists such as Bob Rose would march to City Hall or host a speak-out event involving local media outlets. While these types of events still happen, there has been an increase in events or aesthetic interventions with the goal of making space for grief. For example, in 2016, artist Rebecca Houston teamed up with memorial organizers to host an event called "Stone and Glass; We are all transient." This multifaceted, multi-modal event cultivated an atmosphere of listening and care, of solemnity and wonder, for all who engaged or were exposed to the installation and/or performances. Houston's website describes,

> This community event called Stone and Glass; We are all transient took place at the Toronto Homeless Memorial on March 9th 2016 as part of the Myseum Intersections Festival. The names of almost 800 people who have died homeless in Toronto since 1985 were projected on the wall while the Smoke Trail Singers drummed the traditional traveling songs. Drawings of faces by Jim Houston were projected inside the Church of the Holy Trinity while an audio memorial listing all the names with stories told by people who knew some of those lost was played inside a make-shift tent. (Houston 2016)

This was Gigi Grant's first time attending the memorial, having just moved from Montreal in 2016. They note how interesting it is that such an aesthetic intervention led, in its own way, to their own work as one of the primary organizers of the memorial just a few years later. Grant (2022) would go on to facilitate the memorial in the manner they describe as "ceremony." Organizer Bob Rose (2025b) articulates that the cultivation of a "spirit of connection" by events that go "deep to the place where many voices [are] heard…and remembered for a long time" is essential to community organizing. The movement from advocacy to ceremony is also noticeable in organizer Greg Cook's (2022) recognition that the Toronto Homeless Memorial is one memorial out of many—part of a "multiplicity of memorials." What Cook elaborates on is the way in which graffiti, notes on bathroom stalls, alternative personal obituaries, etc. form the basis for a much larger and more ephemeral commemorative project that is ongoing throughout the city—a larger architecture of remembering and "saying 'we can't forget'" (Cook 2022). And while early memorial gatherings would have featured more speeches from politicians and advocates, the memorial has become a place—what Greg Cook (2022) calls a "gravestone"—for community members to gather and find mutual support. Cook adds that this idea of a gravestone is also about achieving a level of visibility, for those whose deaths are often overlooked, and whose remains are typically buried in unmarked graves outside the city limits. Commemoration, in other words, emphasizes what I call a radical manner of paying attention.

And, as mentioned, the thing itself has changed. The monument around which the monthly memorial event gathers has been part of a community-led, iterative aesthetic practice that reimagines what "thing" might best host the plural assembly. It is as Bonnie Honig observes, that the public thing allows the plural assembly to take shape around it also because they can debate and deliberate over the way the thing itself should appear in the world. This is why I frame the (commemorative) aesthetic object as public thing, which the public is brought into relationship *around*, but also through the imagining of the object itself. Some examples of its various iterations include a mosaic of marbles embedded above the list of names of those who have died, in honour of Michael Mallard (affectionately known as "Duckie") who used to hand out "memory marbles" to those in attendance at the memorial events. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the monument

was reimagined and redesigned by Indigenous artist and residential school survivor, Sam Boucher, who has expressed how his painting seeks to emphasize how "we have a responsibility to take care of others" (*Church of the Holy Trinity was live: Toronto Homeless Memorial January 2023* 2023, 54:00-54:10).

The transgenerational sensibility of activist communities is one that renders public pedagogic work both a matter of "passing on" between organizer and public, but also between generations of organizers grappling with "futureless futures" we confront—the coinciding results of informational capitalism, neoliberalism, and/or fascism. It is my intention here to draw attention to this second mode of/for public pedagogy, one that insists upon an activist heritage worth renewing, passing on, and updating with/between fellow organizers in the struggle for housing justice. I conclude by examining a particular "remnant" in the form of a story, which helps illustrate the transgenerational work that occurs *between* activists.

## Bob Rose and transgenerational activism

Bob Rose is an outreach worker-musician-activist-storyteller who has been organizing for the right to housing since the 1990s. Bob led some of the first marches to city hall. He still creates artistic interventions for housing justice rallies and organizes for the rights of tenants and unhoused citizens. For Rose, the act of storytelling occurs through a thoughtful consideration of a variety of factors, from the teller to the audience, the media form (including what news outlet, etc) to the situation of people's oppression—"situation" in the sense expressed by Paolo Freire (1984). This he describes as "attention to both the subjective components of experience as well as its objective colours" (Rose 2025a), to which the oral storyteller at a housing rally must respond. Thus, for Rose (2025a), the oral telling "is [and] is not spontaneous…but is prepared via curiosity…practicing and intention."

The recorded work of Rose offers material artifice to be "passed on" to new generations of housing activists, but it is also Rose's pedagogical approach that he is determined to "pass on" to others interested in "what ought to be" (Di Paolantonio 2023, p. 50) amidst the unnerving foreclosures we face in our time. To quote Bob Rose at length:

> "…activism stories can be captured in in many ways … such as visual art, poems, songs and community organizing that goes beyond meetings or town hall for example. With respect to community organizing it is an approach that produces "coming together events" based on collaboration around themes put forward by the people seeking more than… …and by this I mean, the spirit of connection, a good time vs a bad time, and the curiosity and supported bravery to create…" (Rose 2025b)

## The Pathway of Life

In an old story of Rose's (n.d.), entitled *The Pathway of Life*, he tells of his relationship with an old prospector named Walter. The piece, like much of Rose's writing, is not published in a literary journal (though it deserves to be), but rather is shared and re-shared through networks of friends and community organizers—and it is an honour[4] that it has come to be shared with me. What is striking about the story is its attention to what Di Paolantonio (2023, pp. 3, 77) calls "passing on." Rose draws the reader's attention to the importance of *things*, even amidst the danger of mass consumption.

At the outset, Walter, a quintessential hoarder, is on the verge of being evicted from a dilapidated rooming house in the Parkdale neighbourhood of Toronto. His apartment has been stuffed full of things, with one room rendered inaccessible, on top of his four storage lockers which are draining

[4] (Even though I can hear Bob Rose laughing at this effusive language).

his social assistance payments. Yet, when Rose first connects with him, he brings him a new suit: "So when I went back to visit three days later, I took a brown pin stripe suit with me. It was a peace offering, a gift to message my respect for the values of his age and generation" (Rose n.d., p. 3). Indeed, one of the themes of the story is the inter-generational connections that are forged—from Walter's touchpoints with northern traders and historical figures like Grey Owl (Archibald Belaney), to his influence on a younger Bob Rose and Rose's (even younger) children. These connections are forged in and through the "stabilizing force" of things, even as collecting things threaten to destroy Walter's access to reliable housing.

What Rose does, which is revolutionary not just in his capacity as storyteller but also as community outreach worker, is sense the significance of things for Walter, beyond seeing them as an evil, or merely a threat to be dealt with. He writes, "My heart told me it might be important to surround yourself with objects if you felt alone in the world. The things we find and keep can provide us with comfort" (p. 2). Later, he adds, "…what we gather may have another very practical purpose. It can fill up empty space and protect us from strangers who might try to come through our door" (p. 3).

Walter is a prospector by trade, and by nature. He is one accustomed to engaging slowly with the world, attending to the things he encounters, and imbuing them with value as durable objects which can be shared and passed on. Rose observes, "[h]e was by nature a treasure seeker, but having looked for gold all his life he had also learned to notice and recover many other things along the way. He was interested in what could be found through close attention to the ground over which he walked" (p. 6). Quoting Walter, Rose draws attention to his uncanny ability to see what the world put before him, rather than younger prospectors who "had eyes" only for gold: "He mused. *'They missed so much because they never looked for anything else. They couldn't see there are lots of other important things of value under their feet. They didn't pay attention.'"* (p. 6)

When Rose is later brought to Walter's storage lockers, he observes the following:

> Walter unlocked and inspected each locker carefully as if he was looking for something he could not find. He explained this storage depot and what it was for. Everything he had found and brought here was to be transported back to his old mining home near Red Lake. The goods he had purchased or rescued from garbage disposal would be given out to the people living up there. They were poor and had little. He was saving everything for them because he knew they were needed. He was going to make their life better. (Rose, n.d., p. 9)

In developing a friendship with Walter, Rose first attends to the things that mark Walter's life as significant, as a process of paying attention, of passing on. In his quest to save Walter from his "great danger" (p. 7), Rose recognized in Walter the urge, the *tendency* contained within what was otherwise a self-destructive behaviour. It was a tendency, or what Byung-Chul Han (2022) and Di Paolantonio (quoted in 2023, p. 54) might call an "orientation" or regard, that perceived in things the possibility of being passed on to meet the needs of others. Rose writes,

> Within his collection of objects lay the story of what they represented, the people who would use them one day and the life he had lived. He was still out there prospecting, but with a purpose adapted to the circumstances he found himself in. He was holding on to what had been the [principal] direction of his life and true to his philosophy he was finding all kinds of valuable things in his travels. But he had not found the gold he was looking for. I thought to myself. *People are gold. Relationships are gold.* (Rose, n.d., p. 9)

While so far I have been commenting on what Rose's narrative notes *about Walter*, here we see that the orientation of *Bob Rose*—and indeed the orientation guiding his approach to community organizing more broadly—is dedicated to what Hannah Arendt (1958, p. 184) called "the web of human relationships." In the tangible, in things, Rose notes the capacity they have to represent

stories, the collector's capacity for generosity, and for sustaining the "prospector's" learned habit of paying attention to the world. In a world increasingly void of attention, full of technologies that distract, that make abstract, leaving us adrift in a world of non-things (Han 2022), Rose—via Walter—returns us to the notion that things matter. Yet, it is also in the intangible—not fleeting non-things, or what Di Paolantonio (2023, p. 55) describes as "the immaterial vastness of the infosphere," but in human relations, togetherness, and care—that Rose locates this poignant metaphor: these intangible elements are *gold*. This is why so many of Rose's stories bring to life that intangible dimension (alongside the things and places where relationships are brought to life). In *The Pathway of Life*, the narrative goes on to describe Walter's entryway into the Parkdale Activity – Recreation Centre (PARC) community, leaving his isolation to attend meals, events, and even PARC's annual camping trips.

What many organizers and outreach workers have noted, and what I too have observed, is the diminishing sense of *family* among unhoused and precariously housed communities—particularly affecting youth (Grant 2022). If we take Rose's approach to community organizing seriously, we must make efforts to stitch together human relationships if we are to adequately rally together against the defunding of public housing and the social safety net. We must "pass on" the reminders that things matter, and that they can facilitate generosity and togetherness. For Rose, and for many organizers, the sharing of meals and camping trips is not incidental to the work of collective resistance—it is the very essence of organizing. Last year, in a bar across from PARC, I reminisced with Bob Rose about the euchre games I used to play with folks in the drop-in where I used to work. I made some comment like, "so many silly card games!" and Rose looked at me with his trademark grin, a serious glint in his eye: "You were organizing," he said.

## Conclusion

In response to the tripartite concerns of no time, no place, and no things, the activist as public pedagogue responds with a concern for relationality, which I have described, following Mario Di Paolantonio (2023, p. 3), as a "transgenerational sensibility." Such relations are guided by a posture that acknowledges the passing of time, and our capacity to usher in possible futures, while leaning on old ways, old stories, old things, that are worth passing on. In seeking new ways of ordering society, we must see ourselves as co-arbiters in what is worth keeping, attending to, fostering, and illuminating from the past. Sometimes this involves *unearthing* stories, memories, and ghosts that have literally or figuratively been buried—*remembering the absent ones*. Such a process is reliant on our capacity to organize—to orient ourselves at card tables and dinner tables, memorials, public rallies, and any other places—with those we share the world with. The transgenerational sensibility must allow for, and be attuned to, the passing on of material between organizer and the public, and between/across generations of activists, in the struggle for a world with time to linger, places in which to gather, and things worth keeping. In other words, the organizer must facilitate what Bob Rose (2025b) calls the "supported bravery to create" by attending to what has come before. In doing so we might remake publicness itself.

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