

# Confronting Tyranny in a Public Health Agency Crafting a 'Philosophy of Praxis' into a 'Community of Resistance'

*Brian McKenna*

**ABSTRACT:** This article details how a community of practice came crashing down on the iron rocks of bureaucracy. I apply Brown and Duguid's theorisation of the dialectics of 'working, learning and innovating' illustrating how these three aspects came to conflict with one another, and how I worked to resolve them. As an anthropologist leading an environmental health project in a mid-Michigan public health agency, I formed a 'community of practice' and proceeded as a researcher, ethnographer and community activist for nearly three years, gathering findings to change the agency's organisational structure, as a form of 'disruptive innovation'. The community 'roundtable' of external project advisors highly supported the penultimate reports on water pollution, air pollution and restaurant health. The interdisciplinary strategies pursued resulted in valuable integrations of new knowledge in public anthropology across several thematic areas: critical public pedagogy, sustainability, citizen science, radical journalism and anthropologies of violence, trauma and transformation.

**KEYWORDS:** activism, bullying, communities of practice, environmental health, ethnography, public health, sustainability

Gramsci's philosophy of praxis is a theory of learning and education.

Jean Lave, anthropologist 2012: 159)

## Introduction

In June 1998 I was hired by the Ingham County Health Department in Lansing, Michigan to 'turn the Public Health into the Peoples' Health'. Government officials selected me to lead 'The Ingham County Environmental Health Assessment and Improvement Project' where I would research and write an 'energised description' of the local environment (complete with maps, photographs and graphics) while establishing contacts throughout this 550 square mile county in Mid-Michigan. The purpose was to catalyse the local citizenry to 'stand up and take notice' and then to

'take action' to resolve the most serious environmental problems in the region. They told me, 'do not be afraid of offending anyone – even General Motors – [the city's most powerful company] if the data leads you there' (McKenna 2010).

While they were talking I noticed a blue and white bumper sticker pasted onto the Health Director's door which pronounced, 'Lansing Works, KEEP GM', referring to a movement on the part of government officials to court General Motors and prevent them from leaving for Mexico or other environs as had happened in Flint, Michigan in the 1980s.

I had access into the inner sanctums of the public health world and absorbed the rhythms and tensions of this secretive governmental culture. It was a deep immersion with a very sharp learning curve. I knew that I would be sorely tested as I informed governmental officials that we would have to countenance



multiple controversial topics. They agreed and were not concerned. I would conduct the research with a pre-selected community group of twelve environmental experts, called 'The Roundtable', (where I was a member) who would have the ultimate authority in producing the studies. This state-of-the-art project was a strategic innovation that would assist in re-designing the Health Department's mission. Officials said that they were aware that nobody had ever stepped back to take a look at the big picture, to assess the area's overall environmental health and rank the issues according to some criteria, like the most urgent problems, and then help to resolve them. They requested 'a holistic analysis'. So they hired a medical anthropologist with organising and journalism skills (McKenna 2010).

I follow a Gramscian 'philosophy of praxis', pursuing knowledge wherever it takes me (Hale 2008; Thomas 2009). As Lave describes it, a philosophy of praxis is 'a very broad vision of the production of social life ... not just of the *mind*, or of a *historical institution*, or of *language* [my emphasis] as a thing in itself [but] ... the participation of ... [all] three in producing persons in practice' (Lave 2012: 156). As a critical theorist (Adorno 1966) I analyse the evolving history (unravelling the reified data), the essences (behind the illusory appearances) and the contradictions (the oppositions, conflicts and paradoxes) of the objects under investigation – in this instance local environmental health, local corporations, my government employer and myself.

A few months into my research, a restaurant inspector, Carol (pseudonym) privately approached me, and arranged to meet me at a place outside of work. When we met she shared a suitcase with me. Inside was a large batch of files, discs, charts, photos and documents. I learned that the Health Department had assigned her to conduct an environmental health assessment in 1995, three years previously. No one had informed me of this. Carol told me that she had gotten far in the assessment but as she began making interesting and controversial finds she was suddenly removed from the project and it ceased altogether. She was ordered to be silent and never discuss the project with anyone or else 'suffer severe consequences'. She told me to be very careful: 'You are in danger'. Later I learned that many of her colleagues spoke of Carol as though she was crazy and about to 'go postal' at any moment. Carol was openly shunned and derided but I found her to be a very honest and capable colleague. Indeed the environmental health data Carol gave me, at risk to herself, was extremely valuable, both in its content and in the leads it gave me. She saved me several months of research (McKenna 2010).

Carol's revelation was highly disturbing. In essence, the former project director was telling me that her governmental superiors (the same people who hired me) had suppressed her work, threatened her livelihood and ordered her silent for doing the same work I was now hired to do. This revelation was environmental health data as much as any local pollution data. I developed a friendship with Carol and decided that I would recruit her as part of my community of resistance if I encountered similar problems down the line.

## Crafting a Philosophy of Praxis

The philosophy of praxis ... is the expression of subaltern classes who want to educate themselves in the art of government and who have an interest in knowing all truths, even the unpleasant ones, and in avoiding the impossible deceptions of the upper class, and even more their own.

(Antonio Gramsci, quoted in Peter Thomas 2009: 291)

My critical ethnography of a governmental health department permitted me to identify certain truths that would have never have come to light if I had just studied public health theory or academic texts in isolation. I required a situated learning environment and a critical community of practice (Lave 2012). My research methodology is highly influenced by the theories of Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci and John Dewey – I learn by doing. More so, I act (research/do) and then self-consciously reflect on what I do. In other words, in this government job I was acting and studying 'up, down and sideways' (Stryker and González 2014) in expanding circuits of discovery and re-discovery, propelling myself up the funnel of a swirling tornado so to speak, becoming a practitioner of a pedagogical art (McKenna and Darder 2011) and a threatening science (Price 2004) in a gnosiological cycle of knowledge formation (Freire 1970; Hale 2008). I approach social science as a craft (Lave 2012; Mills 1959) to *reveal* reality (Ingold 2000). And so, I became a 'walking fieldnote' (Sanjak 1990) in the everyday world of local government. Of course I was dialectically divided into three contradictory subject positions: (1) an employee, (2) a professional and (3) a citizen whose identities overlapped and conflicted (McKenna 2010). Following this holistic epistemology I absorbed a great deal of knowledge about environmental issues and the state apparatus. I was committed to share my discoveries with the public as a cultural broker, critical pedagogue and anthropologist.

A year later I learned that the kind of organisational tyranny that Carol was suffering had a name: mob-

bing (Davenport et al. 1999). I was surprised to learn that one of the three authors of *Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace* was an anthropologist, Noa Davenport. In the book's forward the women note that, 'This book came about because all three of us, in different organisations, experienced a workplace phenomenon that had profound effects on our well-being. Through humiliation, harassment and unjustified accusations, we experienced emotional abuse that forced us out of the workplace' (Davenport 1999: 14). I wondered, 'What kind of government bureaucracy is this?'

### The Official 'Community of Practice'

This particular bureaucracy – the fourth largest public health department in Michigan – was trying something new and daring, they told me. Officials admitted that its environmental bureau was too narrow and specialised and they wanted to innovate. As I came to discover, environmental workers there spent decades dedicated to the same task: water well permits, lead remediation, storage tank inspections. As I learned by shadowing them in the field, they did their jobs well. But programmes were often haphazardly connected to episodic funding sources. Administrators planned to reorganise to adapt to the changing landscape of environmental health concerns. They organised an external 'Environmental Health Roundtable', an external advisory group given independent authority to direct the research and organise community participation in the appraisal. I was directed to lead it. Health Department administrators selected the Roundtable members. Three of the twelve members, including myself, my manager and the Environmental Health Director, were Health Department employees. They were an 'internal eye' on the proceedings. The nine other members included a physician, a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality official, two members of Public Sector Consultants, an influential think tank and MSU academics in Resource Development, Agricultural Economics and two Environmental Toxicology professors. Two of the most influential environmentalists in the state of Michigan from opposite poles of the political spectrum were in the group, Dr Michael Kamrin and Dave Dempsey (McKenna 2010).

The Roundtable wanted to do a wide-ranging thorough assessment. It was agreed that we would also consider 'emotional health' (surveying citizens to see how they feel about the environment) and would analyse indicators of sustainability and adopt the

broad-based World Health Organization's definition of environmental health as a guide. I would be responsible for researching hundreds of indicators regarding health exposures and health effects, environmental history and 'shadow knowledge' uncovering, 'what we know, what we kind of know, and what we don't know'. I was to pursue knowledge across several disciplines – sociology, ecology and anthropology – and employ several conflicting epistemologies – positivist, hermeneutic and critical – in this effort. Using a wide-range of quantitative and qualitative skills, I immersed myself in the data, made widespread ethnographic observations, contacted experts, forged relationships with activists and read widely. With the oversight of the Roundtable who met monthly between September 1998 and January 2000, I eventually filled the equivalent of five filing cabinets and placed scores of electronic files on my hard-drive with data and background perspectives on twenty-two targeted areas of inquiry. Environmental topics included: pesticides, water quality, urban sprawl, indoor and outdoor air pollution, citizen perceptions, enforcement status, food quality, land application of sewage sludge, lead poisoning, asthma, toxic wastes and occupational health. I dug deeply, FOIA'd (Freedom of Information Act) state documents, visited top pollution sites and factories, traced leads, read local environmental history, and within two years crafted our first report, a 135-page narrative (with thirty-two colour graphics and pictures) describing the state of water resources in the county, 'The Story of Water Resources at Work, Ingham County, Michigan'. I carried the investigation where the data (and the Roundtable) led me, and this meant, of necessity, that we confronted several controversial issues. Predictably, as with most innovative projects of this kind, a number of unanticipated obstacles arose that slowed the pace of research. For example, I had to review the literature on how to conduct environmental health assessments; explore the numerous 'sub-issues' within each of the topical areas; determine how thoroughly we should inquire into the epidemiological and toxicological literature to estimate risk; and conduct detective work to uncover particularly difficult to find data (e.g. determining the number of homes that had had a carbon monoxide incident). I learned how to make geographic information maps (GIS), SPSS, Quattro Pro Paradox. I supervised two research assistants, promoted the project to community groups, constructed a slide show, a poster and eventually designed over 30 graphics for publication, working closely with two professional graphic artists (McKenna 2010).

## Some Critical Findings

I have written extensively about the hundreds of environmental health findings in numerous reports (PEER 2001a), newspaper articles (McKenna 2002) and scholarly journals (McKenna 2010). Below I highlight five discoveries in order to help the readers gauge the significance of concern:

- General Motors owned the area's worst leaking underground storage tank plume, located at the Townsend Street plant. GM has had fourteen toxic underground LUST (Leaking Underground Storage Tanks) releases, more than any other local corporation. According to the DEQ, it was 'an immediate threat to health, safety or the environment'. This LUST is particularly dangerous because if untreated, it could destroy portions of Lansing's aquifer, the source of the area's drinking water (PEER 2001a).
- Asthma has reached epidemic proportions among African American youth in Lansing, particularly in zip code 48915 where two General Motors plants were located. The rate of preventable hospitalisations for black males, aged one to fourteen, was particularly high, amounting to 64.8 per 10,000 hospitalisations. This greatly exceeded the [federal] Healthy People 2010 goal of 10 per 10,000. Despite this, a local hospital, Sparrow Hospital, will not share emergency room disease data directly with the public or local health professionals (see McKenna 2010; PEER 2001c).
- *Farm pesticides*. Atrazine is a probable human carcinogenic pesticide banned throughout much of Europe (Fagin and Lavelle 1999: 20–1). It was Ingham County's number one restricted-use pesticide in 1997. According to the EPA, farm run-off of pesticides and fertilisers had seriously impaired the Grand River. Ciba Geigy, a corporation with an East Lansing plant, lobbied the EPA not to ban atrazine (Fagin and Lavelle 1999: 22; McKenna 2010; PEER 2001a).
- *Sewage sludge*. My research uncovered that sewage sludge, created from human urine and faeces and banned throughout much of Europe, has become the Lansing area's preferred mode of waste disposal. In 1999, 65 per cent of Ingham County's 6,345 tons of sewage sludge was trucked to local farms in the surrounding counties (PEER 2001a: 94–5).
- *Wetland loss*. New subdivisions and development have contributed to wetland loss. Ingham

County has lost nearly 90 per cent of its wetlands, compared to the state average of 50 per cent. Seventeen species are endangered including goldenseal, ginseng and the spotted turtle (McKenna 2010; PEER 2001a).

In 1999, the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), based in Washington DC, published the work of government whistleblowers across the country. In 1998, PEER mailed surveys to all 1,462 employees of Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality. PEER received 609 responses (a 41.6 return rate). When asked if employees 'experienced or know of a situation(s) in which DEQ management has re-assigned or changed the job responsibility of a staffer for doing their job "too well" on a controversial project', 54 per cent agreed or strongly agreed. When asked, if they feared 'the possibility of job-related retaliation for advocating enforcement of environmental rules and regulations', 52 per cent agreed or strongly agreed (PEER 1998). I contacted PEER and received leads on various suppressed reports in Michigan related to my Ingham County work, and I met with several DEQ respondents to that survey who educated me about the ways Michigan government coerces scientists and hides and manipulates data.

## The Official 'Community of Practice' Ruptures

For four months (March–June 2000) there was a growing political divergence between two Health Department officials and nine members of the Community Roundtable about the direction of the research with some sharp exchanges between these two blocs at the monthly meetings. The government was growing concerned about what we were discovering and started to place pressure on me, behind the scenes, not to 'go too far ahead of the curve'. To help ensure this end, they began surveillance of my activities and began pressuring me to cease exploring certain themes, despite the Roundtable's encouragement to continue doing so (McKenna 2010).

In July 2000, two years into the project, contradictions came to a head between three levels of authority: (1) the Roundtable's authority, (2) the Health Department's authority and (3) my professional authority as an anthropologist (and lead researcher and writer). I had distributed the penultimate draft of the water report, in June 2000, to all members of the Roundtable for their final corrections and review. A week later I was shaken at the dramatic discrepancy between the

responses of my Health Department bosses (government officials) and the community Roundtable (independent experts). Health Department officials crossed out almost everything that contained critical environmental health information and privately handed it to me, fully expecting me to abide by their behind-the-scenes recommendations. However, the majority of the Roundtable, which ostensibly had the ultimate authority over the 135-page publication, was in virtual agreement that it was an outstanding study. In their own careful edits they remained committed to the original plan to go where the data led us. They were unanimously excited to see it published. I was at an impasse. I could either choose to abide by the Health Department officials and self-censor most of the hard work over the previous two years or I could defer to the edits of the nine external Roundtable members. I chose the community Roundtable. This decision would come at a high price (McKenna 2010).

### The Praxis Becomes Disruptive

With my decision to go forward with the Community Roundtable's leadership, I was suddenly subject to increased intimidation. Out of nowhere a host of new government officials, who had had nothing to do with the assessment, began pressuring me to ignore the Roundtable and use the government's views as I made my final edits. One, in an email, ridiculed the community Roundtable members as 'Chicken Little' professors who would frighten the public into thinking 'the sky was falling'. Serving multiple conflicting agendas, working sixty to seventy hours a week, my blood pressure, never a problem before, became dangerously high. Never had I experienced this kind of rough-and-tumble political infighting on the job. In fighting for the peoples' health, I was losing my own.

It was August and I took my planned two-week summer vacation, relieved at the break. When I returned to work on 28 August, I was just days from completing the 135-page report 'The Story of Water Resources at Work' (PEER 2001a). Within twenty minutes of arriving I was called to an ambush meeting with top management, union officials and a lawyer where I was summarily removed from the project. I was ordered to go into the government's EAP programme if I wanted to retain my job. Then I was taken behind closed doors by my supervisor who turned out the lights, drew the blinds and, pointing a finger in my face, expressly forbade me from 'saying one word about any of the environmental research' to anyone –

the Community Roundtable and the public, or risk 'serious disciplinary action against you. Do you understand what I am telling you?' Ironically, that very night I was scheduled to begin teaching about this work at MSU's Anthropology Department. In effect I was being censored by the government in every sphere of civic activity: as a teacher, researcher, writer and citizen. Within days rumours began circulating within the organisation parallel to those that were used against Carol. People stopped talking to me and worse. I was being mobbed.

Theoretically speaking, the Community Roundtable's 'community of practice' had come crashing down on the iron rocks of bureaucracy. Brown and Duguid (1991) theorise about the dialectics of 'working, learning and innovating' in an organisation, illustrating how these three aspects often come into conflict with one another. My case had become emblematic. It became a 'disruptive innovation' outside of the bureaucracy's control. The project ended with government officials suppressing the full 135-page report and its findings. All but Dave Dempsey questioned the Health Department when in December 2000 they published a high-glossed 20-page white-washed report, minus about 95 per cent of the facts, omitting me as the writer. The Health Department's official report largely sang the praises of Ingham County's water as safe and under control (Witter et al. 2000).

### A Community of Resistance

I set about organising a community of resistance, strongly supported by Dave Dempsey. Over the following months, while still employed but confined to banal tasks, Dempsey and I worked closely with Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility to prepare the report for eventual publication. In the ensuing two months (February and March 2001), frustrated at the cover-up and threats on me to stay silent, I began 'publishing' the suppressed work (about a fictionalised place in Michigan) in about twenty short articles for Michigan's Number One Environmental Listserv (Enviro-Mich, see McKenna 2010). I contacted a top employment law firm in Detroit and they agreed to take my whistleblower case, given the overwhelming evidence in my favour. I also met with the ACLU and they agreed to contribute an amicus brief on my behalf as well. But contingencies obviated my desire to pursue a legal remedy, including a family member who asked me not to sue. With government harassment escalating to an intolerable degree, and my wife,

Joyce, suddenly taking ill, I left in March 2001 to take care of her.

Over the summer of 2001 I travelled to Washington DC and met with the Executive Director Jeff Ruch and his staff of PEER for extensive dialogue, planning a national 'roll out', with press releases and media coverage on 12 September 2001. Two months after my 'constructive discharge' from the Ingham County job, I received a phone call, in June 2001, from veteran newspaperman Berl Schwartz, offering me the chance to write the Health and Environment column for his new weekly, *The City Pulse*. He had asked Jim Detjen, the Knight Chair of Environmental Journalism at MSU, and the founder of the prestigious Society for Environmental Journalism, for candidates to write the column and Detjen had recommended me. The opportunity to have a public voice was one of the most remarkable turns in this ethnographic journey. I was doing 'action anthropology' as a public writer and critical public pedagogue (McKenna 2010). But then the tragedy of 9/11 happened and PEER told us that the rollout would have to wait for another week. Finally on 19 September 2001 PEER published *The Story of Water Resources at Work* making the information available to Michigan citizens. The story stirred a great deal of interest. The PEER website got 3,000 hits the first day. In the coming weeks PEER released two other reports on air pollution (PEER 2001c) and another on food quality (PEER 2001b). The *Lansing State Journal* did a small 500-word piece favouring PEER's perspective of the cover-up (Martin 2001: 1B). WKAR, the local public radio station associated with MSU interviewed four people, including myself, conducting an hour-long taped interview at my home. But after interviewing Health Department officials the station killed the story, saying that if they conveyed what the department said about me that the public radio station would be vulnerable to a libel lawsuit from me. There were two other print stories; one was carried by the MSU State News, a student paper, but it mistakenly reported that there were no serious concerns at the GM site (Byron 2001: 1A). The other was a feature story for EJ Magazine of MSU's Knight Center for Environmental Journalism, called 'Ducking the Truth', that supported PEER (Tuinstra 2002). In all I wrote thirty-three columns for the Pulse before leaving to assume the Executive Director's position for LocalMotion, an environmental group based in Ann Arbor. In January 2002 I won an environmental achievement award from Michigan's Ecology Center, based in Ann Arbor, for my work at the Health Department and City Pulse.

## Conclusion

We need to make familiar and recognize our own everyday possibilities for 'revolutionary praxis' and then take them up in our own research practice.

(Jean Lave, anthropologist 2012: 169)

My story is a common one. In 2011, MIT-educated Marsha Coleman-Adebayo released her book *No Fear: A Whistleblower's Triumph Over Corruption and Retaliation at the EPA*. She tells how, in 1996, she secured her 'dream job' at the US EPA. The book details how Coleman-Adebayo, an African-American, suffered enormous retaliation through racism, sexism and bullying in an effort to keep her quiet after about the corruption she found, as part of her job assignment. She refused. After years of struggle, and with a strong community of supporters, she prevailed in court. Noam Chomsky wrote in the book's foreword, 'Dr. Coleman-Adebayo's work ... analyzes how the government looks from the inside . . . [and how it] resort[ed] to standard formulas to crush yet another whistleblower' (Coleman-Adebayo 2011: xiii).

A year after departing the public health job I wrote an article, in the press, which speculated – and theorised – why the government had taken the position it did. It was titled, 'Environmental Data Suppression in Lansing: Why Did They Do It?' (McKenna 2002). I isolated fifteen reasons for their actions. Here are five of them. One reason is that governments are neurotic. All governments are torn between the contradictory roles of supporting economic development and serving the public at large. The economy takes priority. The county probably had anxiety about offending local corporations, even though industry tends to treat the environment as its own 'tap and sink'. Ergo the fact that General Motors had the worst leaking underground storage tank in Lansing – an 'immediate threat to health, safety or the environment' according to the MDEQ – was not important enough to mention in the official report (McKenna 2002).

Another reason is that 'Being secretive is better all around'. Public Health officials want to keep contamination violations to themselves so that they can enjoy negotiating leverage with offenders like local restaurants. The meta-message to the polluter: clean up your operation or we will publicise your infractions in the press.

A third reason is that 'Attributing specific health outcomes to the environment would undermine the entire medical-industrial complex'. Doing environmental health research is a very radical proposition. If a significant portion of local diseases – cancer, heart

disease, asthma – could be attributed to specific environmental toxins at given sites, then the social order might be turned upside down as massive monies shifted to the victims of toxins (via litigation, legislation or other methods). That is why in the U.S. BIO-medicine is the dominant form of medicine. It focuses on BIO-logical pathology diagnosed after the fact and pretty much ignores social, psychological and environmental etiologies to illness and disease. And if the social and psychological factors are recognised, they are seldom reimbursable.

I consulted Hal Draper's excellent *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, State and Bureaucracy* (Draper 1977), to characterise a more fundamental reason: Government is obsessed with bureaucracy and hierarchy, leaving little room for democracy. I wrote about Marx's view on the 'bureaucratic essence' of government:

With the best will in the world, the keenest humanitarianism and the strongest intelligence, the administrative authorities are unable to do more than resolve temporary and transitory conflicts. ... The essential relationship is the bureaucratic relationship, inside the administrative body as well as in its connection with [in] the body administered. ... The state exists as various bureau-mentalities connected by relations of subordination and passive obedience where the chief abuse becomes hierarchy. (McKenna 2002: 17, cited from Draper 1977: 488–9)

Hierarchy was a watchword that my anthropology mentor Harry Raulet often used. A life-long Marxist, Harry despised MSU administrators for converting the university into a 'Disney Theme Park'. He relentlessly questioned authority. Harry died during my time at the Health Department, in 2000, and afterwards Harry's wife gave me his unfinished book-length manuscript, titled 'Hierarchy'. I have been practicing Harry's lessons in my life's work.

A central lesson I learned through practice is that 'holistic perspectives [– the essence of anthropology –] are loathed by administrators and governments' (McKenna 2002). As I wrote then:

Health and environmental agencies, in particular, are dominated by a regulatory approach, focusing on one incident, one disease or one type of intervention. This prevents officials from stepping back to take a look at the big picture. Holism requires that we ask how all the broken pieces of Humpty Dumpty fit together – politics, economics, and old secrets. But all the King's horses and all the King's men can't put Humpty together again, as the rhyme goes. Governments can crack eggs but cannot fix them because they are major players in environmental politics. When good studies are produced, governments often suppress them.

Governments have too many conflicting interests to tell the straight story. It takes critical scholars, investigative journalists or enlightened citizens to do the job of researching the local environment in an honest and thorough manner. (McKenna 2002: 17)

My philosophy of praxis in the Health Department taught me how to become more attentive to the micro-processes of power, bullying and hierarchy everywhere. My identity was transformed by my *inability* to be subordinate to this corrupt hierarchy. As I teach my students, under the 'terror of neoliberalism' (Giroux 2004), anthropologists must become better educated on the methods, possibilities and risks of doing a kind of cultural activism that 'studies up' in their communities and converts private pain into a public issue, as C. Wright Mills instructed (Mills 1959). Activist anthropologists must learn how to develop communities of resistance to sustain them as they challenge authoritarianism in their own jobs.

## Acknowledgments

I thank scores of anthropologists and activists for sustaining me in difficult times especially Joyce McKenna, Carl Maida, Sam Beck, Harry Raulet, Peter Rigby, Scott Whiteford, Dave Dempsey, Jeff Ruch, Eric Wingerter, Henry Giroux, Antonia Darder, Tim Wallace, Jim Detjen and Jane Sheldon. They have exemplified the truth that, 'to exist, you must resist'. Cheerful robots we will not be.

**BRIAN MCKENNA** is an anthropologist and journalist with three decades of experience working for non-profits, government, public health and NPR's Fresh Air. He received an environmental achievement award from Michigan's Ecology Center in 2002; was "Faculty Member of the Year" in 2009; and received the Rudolf Virchow Award, Honorable Mention, in 2014.

## References

- Adorno, T. W. (1977) [1966], *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum).
- Brown, J. S. and P. Duguid (1991), 'Organizational Learning and Communities of Practice: Towards a Unified View of Working, Learning and Innovation', *Organization Science* 2: 40–57.
- Byron, S. (2001), 'Environmental Group Claims County Misrepresented Water Quality Facts,' *State News* (East Lansing, MI), 1A, 27 September.

- Coleman-Adebayo. M. (2011), *No Fear: A Whistleblower's Triumph over Corruption and Retaliation at the EPA* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press).
- Davenport, N., R. Schwartz and G. Elliott (1999), *Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace* (Ames, IA: Civil Society Publishing).
- Draper, H. (1977), *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, State and Bureaucracy* (New York: Monthly Review Press).
- Fagin, D. and M. Lavelle (1999), *Toxic Deception: How the Chemical Industry Manipulates Science, Bends the Law, and Endangers your Health* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press).
- Freire, P. (1970), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press).
- Giroux, H. (2004), *The Terror of Neoliberalism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers).
- Hale, C. R. (ed.) (2008), *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (Los Angeles: University of California).
- Ingold, T. I. (2000), *The Perception of the Environment* (London: Routledge).
- Lave, J. (2012), 'Changing Practice', *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 19, no. 2: 156–71.
- Martin, T. (2001), *County Water Report Challenged*, Lansing St. J., 22 September, at 1B.
- McKenna, B. (2002), 'Environmental Data Suppression in Lansing: Why Did They Do It?', *From the Ground Up* (Ann Arbor, Ecology Center) 33, December/January: 15–17.
- McKenna, B. (2010), 'Exposing Environmental Health Deception as a Government Whistleblower: Turning Critical Ethnography into Public Pedagogy', *Policy Futures in Education* 8, no. 1: 22–36.
- McKenna, B. and A. Darder (2011), 'The Art of Public Pedagogy: Should the "Truth" Dazzle Gradually or Thunder Mightily?', *Policy Futures in Education* 9, no. 6: 670–85.
- Mills, C. W. (2000) [1959], *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Price, D. (2004), *Threatening Anthropology McCarthyism and the FBI's Surveillance of Activist Anthropologists* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).
- Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) (1998), 'Preliminary Results, 1998 PEER Survey of Michigan DEQ Employees', [http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/surveys/1998\\_mi\\_deq.pdf](http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/surveys/1998_mi_deq.pdf) (accessed 27 June 2015).
- Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) (2001a), 'The Story of Water Resources at Work, Ingham County, Michigan, Washington, D.C.', 130 pages, 19 September. News release: <http://www.peer.org/news/news-releases/2001/09/19/suppressed-water-quality-report-released/> (accessed 27 June 2015). Full report: [http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Ingham\\_co\\_water.pdf](http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Ingham_co_water.pdf) (accessed 27 June 2015).
- Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) (2001b), 'Food Quality Indicators, Ingham County, Michigan, Washington, D.C.', 20 pages, 26 September. News release: <http://www.peer.org/news/news-releases/2001/09/26/suppressed-report-shows-nearly-a-third-of-lansing-area-restaurants-fail-inspections/> (accessed 27 June 2015). Full report: [http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Ingham\\_food.pdf](http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Ingham_food.pdf) (accessed 27 June 2015). Appendix A: [http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Food\\_Appendix\\_A.pdf](http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Food_Appendix_A.pdf) (accessed 27 June 2015).
- Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) (2001c), 'Air Quality and Asthma Indicators, Ingham County, Michigan, Washington, D.C.', 62 pages, 31 October. News release: <http://www.peer.org/news/news-releases/2001/11/01/asthma-epidemic-among-young-blacks-in-ingham-county/> (accessed 27 June 2015). Full report: [http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Ingham\\_air.pdf](http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Ingham_air.pdf) (accessed 27 June 2015). Attachment 1: [http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Ingham\\_co\\_air\\_table.pdf](http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/mi/Ingham_co_air_table.pdf) (accessed 27 June 2015).
- Sanjek, R. (ed.) (1990), *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
- Stryker, R. and R. González (2014), *Up, Down, and Sideways: Anthropologists Trace the Pathways of Power*, foreword by L. Nader (New York: Berghahn).
- Thomas, P. (2009), *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism* (Leiden: Brill).
- Tuinstra, K. (2002), 'Ducking the Truth', *EJ Magazine* (Winter).
- Witter, S. G., Glandon R., Godbold R., Paulson S., Kamrin M. (2000), *Ingham County's Surface and Groundwater Resources* (Lansing: Ingham County Health Department) December.