

## **Rage and Hope: The Revolutionary Pedagogy of Peter McLaren - an Interview with Peter McLaren**

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### Abstract

In this interview Peter McLaren clearly expresses his return to the Marxist roots, to a theory with a strategic centrality. After a period of incursions through the field of leftist post-modernism and post-structuralism, McLaren argues today that there are insuperable limitations in these approaches and criticizes the academic sycophants and their position towards these perspectives. To him, the return to the Marxist theory, as a way of both understanding and transforming social reality, is a natural process. However, McLaren stresses that Marxism should not be seen as a religion, emphasizing that he does not want to have anything to do with an inflexible perspective.

### Resumo

Nesta entrevista Peter McLaren expressa, de uma forma clara, o seu regresso às raízes marxistas como fonte, como uma teoria com uma centralidade estratégica. Após seu período de incursão pelo campo das teorias pós-modernas e pós-estruturalistas de esquerda, McLaren afirma hoje que há insuperáveis limitações nestas abordagens, além de criticar uma determinada posição servil no seio da academia diante destas perspectivas. Para ele, o regresso à teoria marxista como forma de não apenas compreender mas de também transformar a realidade social, é assim um processo natural. McLaren, no entanto, salienta que o marxismo não deve ser visto como uma crença religiosa, insistindo em não querer nada com perspectivas que solidifiquem ou endureçam a realidade.

**Mitja:** *I first became aware of your work through **Schooling as a Ritual Performance**, which combined a structuralist, post-structuralist, and Marxist analysis of Catholic schooling. Since that time your work (**I am thinking of the third edition of Life in Schools, Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture, Revolutionary Multiculturalism, Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution**) has become much more informed by postmodern theory but also has been moving – quite noticeably in your last book, **Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution** – towards a reengagement with historical materialist analysis, a critique of the globalization of capitalism, and a preoccupation with class struggle. Class struggle and other Marxist ideas seem to be outdated with the fall of the Berlin Wall and what Francis Fukuyama called the ‘end of history’ or the ‘end of ideology.’ But if we read, for example, **The Communist Manifesto**, we find some parts of it even more relevant today that when **The Communist Manifesto** was originally published in 1848. Why are Marxist ideas still haunting mainstream western educational discourse despite the apparent closure of the Marxist legacy in history’s cabinet of lost revolutionary dreams?*

**McLaren:** I agree with you, Mitja, that Marx’s ideas are still haunting Western educational discourses, but I don’t agree that educationalists in North America have been affected by these ideas to any substantive degree. Postmodern theory seems to be holding sway – at least it has become the most fashionable form of educational criticism. While many of my erstwhile Marxist colleagues are embracing postmodern theory and its post-Marxist variants, and the work of Foucault, Lyotard, Virilio, Baudrillard, Kristeva, Butler, Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, and the like, my work is becoming more centered in Marxist critique. A number of my colleagues have said to me: “Why, when postmodern theory is at the cutting edge of critical social theory, would you want to re-join the dinosaurs of historical materialism?” My answer is that one does not have to be a postmodernist to work on the cutting edge of social theory. Perry Anderson, Norman Geras, Ellen Meiksins Wood, Claus Offe, Raymond Williams, Eric Hobsbawm, Robert Brenner, and Alex Callinicos – who work in a Marxist tradition – are hardly theoretical slackers. If one follows the trajectory of my work over the last several decades one will quickly discover a constant motion. Sometimes it is a steady march, perhaps even militant; sometimes a swaying motion from idea to idea, as in my dalliance with left-postmodern theory; more often than not lumbering gestures towards a definitive line of reasoning; and on too many occasions recently I find myself staggering across the intellectual firmament like a drunken sailor after a night out on the town. I become, in other words, intoxicated by the possibilities of linking revolutionary theory to political praxis. The motion, however direct, purposeful, or erratic, is always

towards Marx and the Marxist tradition. The work of Marx is continually being revisited in my work. For instance, in the new edition of *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, I updated my work on the ethnography of symbols, with a short discussion of Marx. Basically I argued that class exploitation within capitalist societies occupies a strategic centrality in organizing those very activities that make us human, including our sign and symbol systems. Volosinov and others have maintained – rightly in my view – that speech genres themselves are determined by production relations and the machinations of the sociopolitical order. This is an important assertion especially in view of the fact that, as John McMurtry notes, the market system is being applied to democracy itself, where democracy is seen as occurring at the sites that market intervention occurs the least, where abstract law overrides concrete determinations and abstracts real existence into nothingness, where distributive principles overrule concrete struggles for new freedoms, where a successful democracy is defined in terms of its ability to become self-legitimizing and self-justificatory, where the market is permitted to remain impersonal and omnipresent and is encouraged and facilitated in its efforts to totalize the field of social relations in which it has become a central force. Surplus extraction occurs through processes that are dialogical and simultaneously economic, political, and ideological. These are not ontologically privileged processes but rather become central in the way that they organize the constitutive processes of everyday life. In other words, the class struggle is also a language game. And one that in some fundamental way co-ordinates all the other language games. All language games and symbol systems are accented by class power. If this is the case, then living in a capitalist social order demands the continual affirmation of a working-class struggle not only against capitalism, but against capital itself. Marx, after all, held that capital was a social relation: the abolition of capital, then, requires us to abolish a particular form of social relation. Volosinov goes so far as to argue that the sign becomes the very arena of class struggle because the continual accumulation of capital can only continue through an unequal exchange between social agents – an exchange that favors one social agent while the other is reduced to scrounging out of mere necessity. So I have tried to amend some of my earlier insights in *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, with an engagement – however brief – with Marx.

**Mitja:** *Some scholars and researchers have remarked that Marx is returning with a vengeance to the social sciences? Why, in your opinion, isn't this the case, as you claim, among educationalists in the United States?*

**McLaren:** You could say that Marx is returning with a vengeance, yes, Mitja, I would agree. To a certain extent you are correct. While anti-capitalist struggle and Marxist analysis has an indistinct and relatively undigested place in the field of educational theory, there is some movement towards Marx in the social sciences here in North America. With

one glaring exception being the educational left in the United States, I would say that Marx is being revisited by social scientists of all disciplinary shapes and sizes – even, and perhaps most especially and urgently today, when capitalism is in a state of severe crisis. While hardly on their way to becoming entrenched and pervasive, Marx’s ideas are taking their significance most strikingly from the particular and varied contexts in which his ideas are being engaged. In the face of the cultivated arrogance and pitylessness of the post-Marxists, the unabashed triumphalism of the apostates of neoliberalism, and the tight-lipped solemnizers of bourgeois democracy as they choose to ignore the precariousness of the current triumph of capitalism over communism – not to mention the unprecedented gravity of the crisis of neo-liberalism’s death-squad capitalism – it is not easy to recover the soiled mantle of Marx from the gravesite where it had been derisively and capriciously flung in those ecstatic moments of bourgeois revelry and spiteful, tongue-wagging glee, when the ruling classes watched from their princely Western heights the ‘popular democracies’ of Eastern Europe trembling alongside the wobbling pillars of communism that were collapsing across that crimson space of historical memory we know as the Soviet Union. There have been times when I have coquetted with postmodern theory, with the voguish apostasy of post-structuralist brigandry, or deconstructionist outlawry – even to the point where I have been identified as the first to introduce the term ‘postmodernism’ into the lexicon of educational criticism (a dubious claim, but one made of my work none the less) – but I have found there to be insuperable limitations to the work, not to mention a growing confederacy of academic sycophants who these days appear to overpopulate North American and European critical studies. As Callinicos has noted, much of what we find in French post-structuralism in many ways is a continuation of the thought of Nietzsche, reformulating it by way of Saussure’s theory of language and Heidegger’s philosophy of Being. And he also notes that much of the critique of the Enlightenment undertaken by Foucault and other postmodern theorists had already been anticipated by the Frankfurt School theorists – Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, and others. This is not to disparage their work – I think it is immensely important – although I also think that, for the post part, postmodern theorists and critical theorists (in the tradition of the Frankfurt School) are too pessimistic about the possibilities of social revolution. I have found that there exists a strategic centrality in Marx’s work – the work that, as Callinicos puts it, ‘survived the debacle of Stalinism.’

**Mitja:** *Strategic centrality?*

**McLaren:** Yes, in terms of linking educational theory to a political project that can address the onslaught of globalization, in particular, the globalization of capital. However,

‘disorganized’ capitalism has become, I don’t believe that we live in an era of capitalism without classes.

**Mitja:** *There is some irony, living in the United States – in Hollywood no less! – and working as a Marxist.*

**McLaren:** Yes, many people outside the United States find it a bit – how should I put it? – strange. But it might surprise you how many Marxists I’ve met in Hollywood. More than you might think. But we are certainly outnumbered by the postmodernists! Though many criticalists in education are reluctant to descend from the topgallant of postmodern theory into the heated ‘red’ engine room of social analysis, I find that practicing sociology below-the-water line, in the ‘hatch’, so-to-speak, has its distinct advantages. Marx’s work enables me to explore with fewer theoretical constraints, in more capillary detail, and with more socio-analytical ballast, the dynamic complexity of the social totality. Marxism provides me with the conceptual tools necessary to navigate between the Scylla of positivism and the Charbydis of relativism. It also provides an approach to praxis that, in these world-historical times of the epochal dominance of capital and the reworking of forms of global capitalist imperialism, is fundamentally necessary.

**Mitja:** *What theorists have influenced your recent turn towards historical materialism?*

**McLaren:** Well, I could extend the list I gave earlier to include Marx, Gramsci, Lukacs, Althusser, Trotsky, Malcolm X, Istvan Mezsaros, Boris Kalgarlitsky, Terry Eagleton, Aijaz Ahmad, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Paulo Freire, Stuart Hall, Rosa Luxemburg, Epifinio San Juan, Slavoj Zizek, and a host of others too numerous to mention. Of course, I have learned much from Foucault, whose lectures I was able to attend (in Canada) a few years before he died. And Lyotard, certainly, and Baudrillard. I can’t deny that there was a time when the postmodern thinkers played a central role in my work. Not to mention the important work of Mauss, Victor Turner, and Pierre Bourdieu (I still follow Bourdieu’s work), to cite but three examples from the anthropological literature. Through my current reengagement with Marx, and the tradition of historical materialism, I have enjoyed the company of British colleagues – Glenn Rikowski, Mike Cole, and Dave Hill – whose work is paving the way for new generations of educationalists to encounter Marx. I have also been influenced by the Marxist Humanism of Peter Hudis and Raya Dunayevskaya, the ‘red feminism’ of Teresa Ebert, and Rosemary Hennessey, the Marxist-Leninism of Mas’ud Zavarzadeh, and Donald Morton, and the work of Canadian philosopher, John McMurtry, and others. Ramin Farahmandpur and I have been working together on a number of projects related to rethinking Marxist educational praxis.

To repeat my previous comment, Marx is being reevaluated on numerous fronts today: sociology, political science, philosophy, economics, ethics, history, and the like. It is perhaps more difficult for such a reevaluation to take place in education here in North America, mainly because his work was never very important in the education debates here to begin with.

**Mitja:** *What about the early 1980s? Wasn't there interest in Marxist analysis among critical educators in the United States during that time?*

**McLaren:** Yes, that's true, there were a handful of educationalists who incorporated some Marxist insights into their work – I am thinking of the important contributions of Henry Giroux, Mike Apple, Phil Wexler, and Jean Anyon (who are still turning out splendid work) – but the influence of Marxist and quasi-Marxist analysis (mostly influenced by British educationalists) lasted about five years. Then postmodern theory started to be taken up. And...

**Mitja:** *And?*

**McLaren:** And... well... for the most part this has led to a stress on identity politics – a proliferation of issues dealing with race, ethnic, and sexual identities and a waning and supersession of discussion around social class. The interest in identity politics is understandable enough – especially given the burgeoning migration to the United States over the last several decades.

**Mitja:** *So I take it that you are a dyed-in-the-wool Marxist.*

**McLaren:** Let me make this qualification before I continue. I am not one of those die-hard leftists who regard Marxism as a religion that explains everything that needs to be known about humanity. Marxism is not a faith; it is not a sibylline discourse. I have no truck with solifidianism – Marxist or ecclesiastic. In fact, Marxism puts its stock in good works rather than in faith. It puts an emphasis in denouncing and transforming the world, not wrapping doctrinal tentacles around its major texts, or clinging steadfastly to historical materialism as if it admitted a pristine purity or sacerdotal truth. There is a denunciatory aspect to Marxism that is crucial here. If the language of analysis that informs your work does not enable you and encourage you to denounce the world, then you would be wise to reconsider the

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language that you are using. Even Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*, admits to at least some “seeds of truth” in Marxism.

**Mitja:** [laughing] *Please, Peter, you’re not saying the Pope is a Marxist, are you?*

**McLaren:** I believe in the power of salvation, but this, I fear, is asking too much of God, and of Marx, I am afraid!

**Mitja:** *What about the post-Marxist movement? You mentioned identity politics – isn’t that part of it?*

**McLaren:** As I said previously, I find the efflorescence of identity politics problematic but it is never the less understandable. The problem is that identities are often framed within a discourse of militant particularism, and there are ways that a stress on identity politics can sabotage class struggle, especially when it is uncoupled from the larger social totality of advanced capitalism. In a class I taught this summer, the students didn’t want to discuss class. They thought that issues of race and gender were more important. And while all identities are racialized, sexualized, and gendered, and located in class relations – in a non-synchronous way, as Cameron McCarthy has pointed out – I think we have forgotten how social class works in our everyday lives. I think that recovering class struggle is essential in creating wider political solidarities necessary in the current movement against global capitalism. Class exploitation is not to be ‘privileged’ over racism or sexism or homophobia -- please let me underscore that point again -- but I feel that capitalist social formations often co-ordinate and organize and reify these other, equally important, forms of oppression. It’s a more central form of oppression, but that doesn’t mean it is more important. I hope that I am making myself clear.

**Mitja:** *It’s clear to me.*

**McLaren:** Let’s move away from identity politics specifically for a moment and return to your question about post-Marxism. I find much about post-Marxist theory – and postmodern theory – to be functionally advantageous to the status quo. In fact, I find a thunderous resonance in the work of the postmodernists with that of the New Right. The work of Laclau and Mouffe is a case in point. I have great respect for their scholarship, but they tend to look at social contradictions as semantic problems whereas I see social contradictions as anchored in the objective nature of things; they are part of the structural determinations of the social. For the most part Laclau and Mouffe reject dialectical thought,

and have abandoned the notion that capitalist exploitation is linked to the law of value and the extraction of surplus value. Exploitation is not a linguistic process only – it takes place objectively, in the bowels of everyday contradictions which expel relations of equality and I do not believe that resistance has to be conscious on the part of workers in order for exploitation to take place. As the Argentine scholar, Atilio Boron provocatively notes, relations of subordination are antagonistic in relation to an ideology [a logic of capital] that rationalizes this relationship. Boron has revealed how the work of Laclau and Mouffe, far from constituting a supercession of Marxism, is, in effect, reproductive of some of the fundamental expressions of United States sociology of the 1950s, as found in the work of Talcott Parsons, for instance. Unlike Laclau and Mouffe, I do not believe hegemony is purely an articulatory device, but a politico-ideological process that is grounded in class relations.

**Mitja:** *But how feasible is class struggle today?*

**McLaren:** That is a point of real contestation among social theorists and political activists. On the one hand I agree, Mitja, that there is no guarantee that a class *in itself* will be transformed into a class *for itself*; there is no metaphysical guarantee hovering over the outcome of class struggle. There is no secret structure of predestination, no teleological certainty. On the other hand, Mitja, I agree that there is today the necessity of class struggle. It is a concrete necessity. Look at what happened in Seattle. Forty thousand young people protesting the World Bank and the global economic interests of the ruling class! I think that a new generation of young people is waking up to the injuries of globalized capitalist relations. Making politics practical is what is driving my work these days. I am not so much interested (as are many postmodern educators) in decentering capitalist social relations, relations of exchange, or consumer culture, although I do think it is important to analyze the objective determinations that have given rise to the complex ensemble of dislocated and dispersed identities that we find in contemporary postmodern necropolises – hybridized and creolized identities that have resulted from the unequal and combined character of capitalist development. I am more interested at this point in time in how education can play a fundamental role in developing new forms of non-alienated labor through the dismantling of capitalist social relations and capital itself. I am trying to develop ways of encouraging students to think of such a possibility through the creation of what I have called a ‘revolutionary pedagogy’. By extension, I am interested in the role that education can play in the wider society by dismantling capital’s law of value as a central form of mediation between human beings.



**Mitja:** *While you have made it clear in recent work that you are not a postmodernist theorist, or a postmodern Marxist ...*

**McLaren:** How about a classical Marxist!

**Mitja:** *Ok. A classical Marxist. You have, never the less, mentioned that postmodernism has helped deepen our understanding of the way that ethnic and racial identities have been constructed. Traditionally excluded "social groups" such as blacks, women and other minority social groups, generally defined as 'others' in opposition to the mainstream discourse, were traditionally excluded from the curriculum. How productive do you find their inclusion in the curriculum, thus making it multicultural? Following that, do you think that multiculturalism's replacing of universalism with the call for diversity and tolerance has contested the conservative agenda that disempowered and depoliticized the powerless and the marginalized? And one final question related to this issue: What do you think is the difference between 'inclusion' – the integration of previously marginalized groups into the mainstream culture on terms that secure their freedom and equality – and 'assimilation' which can be associated as its negation? How does those two practices differ in educational policy?*

**McLaren:** These are important questions, Mitja, that have to do with what has been called 'the politics of difference.' I have tried to address such a politics in a number of books that I have co-edited with Christine Sleeter, Carlos Ovando, and Henry Giroux. You are correct when you note that postmodern theory has helped educators to understand how identity formations are constructed within various social and institutional formations within capitalist consumer society. Yet much of this work locates power in discourse and 'representations' rather than social relations. The issue of mediation has been replaced by representation. Contradictions between labor and capital are replaced by issues of conflicting epistemologies. The problem with understanding discourses as epistemologies of oppression is that too often they are stripped of their historical specificity by bourgeois/postmodern theorists – what is of singular importance to the critical educator is not their formal link to Eurocentrism, but the way that they have been used by capitalists to exploit the objective world (as opposed to the lexical universe) of the working-classes. The fascism of the Third Reich has been defeated, and the communism of the Soviet Union has been brought to its knees, it seems, mainly so that transnational identities can be constructed by developed nations with the promise of a thousand years of uninterrupted shopping and watching re-run episodes of *Baywatch*. Our subjectivities are being created out of the detritus of productive forces, the expelled vomit of overaccumulation, and the bloated promise of globalized capitalist relations. The economies of desire linked to

capitalist social relations are myriad, and complex, and it would take too much time to explore them here. Suffice it to say that identity construction is a process that cannot be ignored by those of us in education. In fact, it is a key challenge. But the challenge has to be greater than surfing for identities within hybridity, and among spaces opened up by the furious clashes in the *Fight Clubs* of culture. For me, such identity construction must take into account the relationship between subjective formation and the larger totality of globalized capitalist social relations. Capitalism here must not be perceived as anodyne, but rather as a brakeless train that is smashing all that is in its path, continuing to savage the possibility of constructing free associative forms of labor and the flourishing of human capacities. But now let me move on to the other issues that you have raised about multiculturalism.

Let me address your comment on universalism. Yes, the general critique of the post-colonial theorists is that asserting universal claims is tantamount to exercising disciplinary power in putting forward a hidden particularism. There is much to be said for this criticism. But Callinicos argues, and I agree with him, that abjuring appeals to universal principles on the basis of a particular standpoint, of, say, the community, ignores the asymmetrical relations of power and privilege in local situations and in the end truncates the form of social criticism you are able to muster. Rather than dismissing universalisms as masked particularisms (which leaves you the choice of ranking your particularisms on some scale of preference), I would side with Callinicos, Eagleton, and others, in arguing that what is needed is a genuine universality in which everyone is included and there are no 'Others'. In this way, the Enlightenment project is called upon to live up to its name. This is ultimately what I believe the project of Habermas is all about. My position is that if we are to deepen the project of the Enlightenment rather than jettison it, we need to decide if capitalism has a place – central or peripheral. In my opinion, it doesn't have a place. I do not believe it is justifiable on ethical grounds or political grounds. Here we need to replace analyses by neo-classical economists with that of Marx. And we need to develop a coherent political and pedagogy theory that takes this factor into account. But I could go on....

**Mitja:** *Let me ask you how what you have been saying fits with your ideas on multiculturalism.*

**McLaren:** Let me try. Calls for diversity by politicians and educators and social reformers have brought historically marginalized groups – Latino/as, African-Americans, Asians, indigenous populations – to the center of society in terms, at least, of addressing the importance of addressing their needs, rather than *actually* addressing their needs, or addressing their *actual* needs. In other words, this call for diversity has been little more than Enlightenment rhetoric, certainly not practice. However, motivated by a lack of opposition

to capitalist exploitation that has been fostered by neo-liberal policies worldwide, multicultural education continues to defang its most emancipatory possibilities by initiating what I believe are, for the most part, politically ‘empty’ calls for diversity – calls for diversity carried out in antiseptic isolation from an interrogation of capitalism’s center. This center is what gives ballast to the production of sameness that I call the *eternal recurrence of whiteness*. This sameness constitutes the distillate of colonialism, imperialism, and the ether of white lies that spikes the very air we breathe. It means that pluralism is secretly aligned with assimilation. To be brought ‘into the center’ without being permitted to critique that center is tantamount to internalizing the codes of whiteness (without being granted the benefits of actually assuming the ‘social position’ of whiteness). There is a parallel here with some of the debates on social exclusion in the European Union. Eurocapitalist states advance a rhetoric of social inclusion – of the unemployed, of adults who can’t read, of the disabled and other groups – that simultaneously stigmatizes the ‘excluded’ as either victims or lacking in certain skills or attitudes, whilst claiming to want to include them as *equals* (with the whole question of equality left up in the air). But this is cruel fantasy. In a sense, there are no ‘socially excluded’: everyone is included into capital’s social universe – but on differentially, obscenely unequal grounds. Possession of capital in its money form excludes people – to vastly differing degrees – from buying all manner of goods, real human need going by the board. On the other hand, capital includes us all, only to generate incredible differences between us on the basis of money. Gender, ‘race’ and other social and cultural differences are grounds within bourgeois metaphysics and ‘ethics’ for differentiating and fragmenting us on the basis of money. Capital drives us, therefore, against ourselves. Going back to postmodernism, postmodernists given over to identity politics frequently overlook the centrality of social class as an overarching identity that inscribes individuals and groups within social relations of exploitation. What identity politics and pluralism fail to address is the fact that diversity and difference are allowed to proliferate and flourish, provided that they remain within the prevailing forms of capitalist social arrangements, including hierarchical property arrangements. Of course, I agree that class relations are most certainly racialized and gendered. I do not want to subordinate race, gender, or sexuality to that of social class; rather I want to emphasize that without overcoming capitalism, anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic struggles will have little chance at succeeding. Slavoj Žižek has said that in the Left’s call for new multiple political subjectivities (e.g., race, class, feminist, religious), the Left in actuality asserts a type of all-pervasive sameness – a non-antagonistic society in which there room is made for all manner of cultural communities, lifestyles, religions, and sexual orientations. Žižek reveals that this Sameness relies on an antagonistic split. As far as this split goes, I believe that it results, at least to a large degree, from the labor-capital relation sustained and promoted by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. In other words, I do not see the central tension as one between the autochthonous and the foreign – but between labor and capital.

As you might be aware, I am very sympathetic to the movement here in the United States known as the ‘new abolitionists.’

**Mitja:** *Tell me about this movement – it relates to the politics of whiteness, correct?*

**McLaren:** Correct. Scholar-activists such as Noel Ignatiev, David Roediger, and others are calling for the abolition of whiteness, or the abolition of the white race. What they mean by this is that there is no positive value that can be given to the social position known as whiteness. The term cannot be recovered, or given a positive spin. White people need to disidentify entirely with the white race since it is constitutively premised on the demonization of all that is not-white. To seek any kind of positive identity with a white race – or political détente – is ill-conceived at best. This is because the white race was an historical invention born in the ovens of racial superiority and European caste. We have to un-invent the white race, and not re-invent it!

Theodore Allen and other scholars have noted, and rightly so, that the social function of whiteness is social control, a practice which has colonial origins that can be traced back to the assault upon tribal affinities, customs, laws, and institutions of Africans, native Americans, and Irish by English/British and Anglo-American colonialism. Such insidious practices of social control reduce all members of oppressed groups to one undifferentiated social status beneath that of any member of the colonizing population. With the rise of the abolitionist movement, racial typologies, classification systems, and criteriologies favoring whiteness and demonizing blackness as the lowest status within humanity’s ‘great chain of being’ spread throughout the United States. These typologies or myths (in Barthes’ sense) were used to justify and legitimize the slavery of Africans and ensure the continuation of lifetime chattel bond-servitude. Today “whiteness’ has become naturalized as part of our ‘commonsense’ reality. Ignatiev has noted that whiteness is not a culture. There is Irish culture and Italian culture and American culture; there is youth culture and drug culture but, he asserts, there is no such thing as white culture. He points out that Shakespeare was *not* white; he was English. Mozart was not white; he was Austrian. According to the new abolitionists, whiteness has nothing to do with culture and everything to do with social position. Ignatiev notes that without the privileges attached to it, there would be no white race, and fair skin would have the same significance as big feet.

Ignatiev further notes that identification with white privilege reconnects whites to relations of exploitation. The answer to this plight, is, of course, for whites to cease to exist as whites. He claims that the most challenging task is to make it impossible for anyone to be white. This entails breaking the laws of whiteness so flagrantly as to destroy the myth of white unanimity.

What is also needed – and here the work of Marx becomes crucial – is an acute recognition of how the ideology of whiteness contributes to the reproduction of class divisions--particularly divisions between working-class Anglo-Americans and ethnic minorities – in order to reinforce existing property relations and reproduce the law of value as a mediatory device *par excellence* in reifying and fetishizing social relations in general.

Along with efforts to abolish the white race (not white people, there is, of course, a distinct difference) we must mobilize efforts to abolish capital. Capital is a social relation, as I noted earlier – not a “thing”. It is a relation between all of us (not just those in work, at work) and value, which is the substance of capital, its lifeblood. The very existence of the capitalist class rests on surplus value; unrequited labor-time, our sweat, our mental processes, and our domestic labor (to bring up and maintain the next batch of laborers), our education (as generator of the attributes of labor-power: capacity to labor) and every other sphere of social life. Capital is a global virus that finds its way (mediated by our labor – that is the tragedy) into all areas of contemporary human life. It is nurtured by the New Right and all those who stand to gain millions, billions of dollars from the expansion of this demon seed. We need to reclaim human life from capital.

**Mitja:** *What about the politics of globalization? How does that feature in your work?*

**McLaren:** The richest tenth of households in the United States own 83 percent of the country’s financial assets, while the bottom four-fifths own about 8 percent. As Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Roque exclaimed recently: Are the 4.5 billion human beings from underdeveloped countries who consume only 14 percent of the world’s total production really as free and equal as the 1.5 million living in the developed world that consume the other 86 percent? What are we to think of the globalization of capitalism when the combined assets of the three richest people in the world exceeds the combined GDP of the 48 poorest nations; and when the combined assets of the 225 richest people is roughly equal to the annual incomes of the poorest 47 percent of the world’s population? What indeed! I link globalization – or what has been described as ‘capitalism with the gloves off’ – to it’s governmental bed-fellow, neo-liberalism. We have seen neo-liberalism at work in the oppression by the state of nonmarket forces, in the dismantling of social programs, in the enthronement of a neomercantilist public policy agenda, in the encouragement of social life – almost every inch of it! – to be controlled by private interests, in the scrapping of environmental regulation, and in its interminable concessions to transnational corporations. While globalization has been used to describe social, political and economic shifts in late capitalism, such as the deregulation of the labor market and the globalization of liquid capital, I prefer a more close-to-the-bone definition that links it to a form of imperialism. This might seem a rebarbative exaggeration, but I see it as a recomposition of the labor and capital relationship that subordinates social reproduction to the reproduction of capital.

**Mitja:** *How would you assess the politics of resistance in opposition to the conservative obviousness of predatory culture?*

**McLaren:** Mitja, I like the way that you framed that question. The obviousness of conservative culture is precisely why it is so hidden from view. Much like those who controlled the *paradis artificiels* of everyday life in the film, *The Truman Show*. I am struck each day by the manner in which predatory capitalism anticipates forgetfulness, nourishes social amnesia, smoothes the pillows of finality, and paves the world with a sense of inevitability and sameness. I am depressingly impressed by what a formidable opponent it has proven to be, how it fatally denies the full development of our human capacities, and inures us to the immutability of social life. In other words, it naturalizes us to the idea that capital is the best of all possible worlds, that it may not be perfect, but it certainly is preferable to socialism and communism. Many leftists have unwittingly become apologists for capitalist relations of domination because they are overburdened by the seeming inability of North Americans to imagine a world in which capital did not reign supreme. To address this situation, I have turned to critical pedagogy.

**Mitja:** *You are very much identified with the field of critical pedagogy. How would you define critical pedagogy? What is your position within this field today?*

**McLaren:** As you know, Mitja, critical pedagogy has been a central liberatory current in education of the last two decades. Critical pedagogy has served as a form of struggle within and against the social norms and forces that structure the schooling process. Most approaches to critical pedagogy are limited to disturbing the foundations upon which bourgeois knowledge is built, placing the term ‘schooling’ itself under scrutiny. Questions that arise in critical pedagogy often have to do with the relationship among schooling and the broader array of publics constructed by the marketplace and brought about by the secularization and the internationalization of the politics of consumption. In other words, critical pedagogy most often deals with cultural manifestations of capital, and the norms and formations that are engendered by means of relations of exchange. This is a good strategy as far as it goes. However, the revolutionary pedagogy that I advocate, that I have built from the roots of Freire’s and Marx’s work and the work of many others, such as the great revolutionary Che Guevara, involves the uprooting of these seeds of naturalization – planted through the reification of social relations and the subsumption of difference to identity by means of the law of value – and this means undressing the exploitative, sexist, racist, and homophobic dimensions of contemporary capitalist society. But it also means

more than simply ‘uncovering’ these relations, or laying them bare in all of their ideological nakedness. It stipulates – and here it is important not to mince words – the total uprooting of class society in all of its disabling manifestations. Revolutionary pedagogy refers to taking an active part in a total social revolution, one in which acting and knowing are indelibly fused such that the object of knowledge is irrevocably shaped by the very act of its being contemplated. That is, the very act of contemplation (I need to emphasize that this act of contemplation is collective and dialogical) shapes – and is shaped by – the object under investigation. The knowers are shaped – through dialogue – by the known. Revolutionary pedagogy attempts to produce an excess of consciousness over and above our conditional or naturalized consciousness, to create, as it were, an overflow that outruns the historical conditions that enframe it and that seek to anchor it, so that we might free our thought and, by extension, our everyday social practices from its rootedness in the very material conditions that enable thinking and social activity to occur in the first place. In other words, revolutionary pedagogy teaches us that we need not accommodate ourselves to the permanence of the capitalist law of value. In fact, it reveals to us how we can begin to think of continuing Marx’s struggle for a revolution in permanence. A number of thinkers have helped to unchain the revolutionary implications of Freire’s thought in this regard – Donaldo Macedo, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor, Peter Mayo, among others. I have attempted to do this by iterating the protean potential of his work for social revolution and not just the democratizing of capitalist social relations. So much contemporary work on Freire has inflated its coinage for transforming classroom practices but devalued its potential for revolutionary social change outside of the classroom in the wider society. Revolutionary pedagogy requires a dialectical understanding of global capitalist exploitation. Freire is often brought in to illuminate debates over school reform that are generally structured around the conceit of a dialogue over equality of opportunity, which rarely go beyond momentous renunciations of corporatism or teeth-rattling denunciations of privatization. But such debates studiously ignore the key contradictions to which history has given rise – those between labor and capital. Such debates are engineered in the United States to avoid addressing these contradictions.

**Mitja:** *What do you see as the most important challenge in the future for educational researchers?*

**McLaren:** The key to see beyond the choir of invisibilities that envelope us, and to identify how current calls for establishing democracy are little more than half-way house policies, a smokescreen for neo-liberalism and for making capitalism governable and regulated – a “stakeholder” capitalism if you will. I do not believe such a capitalism will work, nor am I in favor of market socialism. We need to chart out a type of positive humanism that can ground a genuine socialist democracy without market relations, a Marxist humanism that

can lead to a transcendence of alienated labor. Following Marx, Eagleton claims that we are free when, like artists, we produce without the goad of physical necessity; and it is this nature which for Marx is the essence of all individuals. Transforming the rituals of schooling can only go so far, since these rituals are embedded in capitalist social relations and the law of value. There are signs that research in the social sciences might be going through a sea-shift of transformation. I think we need to take the focus away from how individual identities are commodified in postmodern consumer spaces, and put more emphasis on creating possibilities for a radical reconstitution of society. I like the new public role of Pierre Bourdieu – a role that sees him taking his politics into the streets and factories of France, fighting the structural injustices and economic instabilities brought about by capitalism and neo-liberalism – fighting what, in effect, are nothing short of totalitarian practices that are facilitating the exploitation of the world’s workers. Bourdieu realizes that we haven’t exhausted all the alternatives to capitalism. If that is the case, we need, as researchers, to bring our work to bear on the seeking out of new social relations around which everyday life can be productively and creatively organized. In my view, this is social science – and politics – the way it should be practiced.

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