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# Pedagogy for Revolution against Education for Capital: An E-dialogue on Education in Capitalism Today

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## **Comments**

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# Pedagogy for Revolution against Education for Capital: An E-dialogue on Education in Capitalism Today

**Peter McLaren and Glenn Rikowski**

*This dialogue between Peter McLaren (UCLA) and Glenn Rikowski (University of Central England, Birmingham) was conducted by e-mail during January - February 2001. References added.*

## ***Introduction***

**Peter:** Well, Glenn, it's great to have the opportunity for this e-dialogue with you. We've corresponded by e-mail now for nearly four years and this situation is set up well for me to bring together a number of points I would like to ask you about your work and politics, your 'project' maybe -- if you're not offended by the Blairite connotation!

**Glenn:** It's wonderful to share this platform with you, Peter, and we both owe it to *Cultural Logic* for giving us this slot. I have read your work closely over the last few years, and I have used it to try to radicalize further my outlook on education and its place in social transformation. And most certainly this is a magical opportunity to pose some questions to you with these ends in view. For me, this kind of thing is really about pushing our own views further and in new directions, to go beyond where we have gone in our published work, and also seeking to move the other person on that basis too. It's also about giving explanations and accounts of aspects of our own work, to show why we are doing what we are doing and in the style that we are doing it. On all these fronts it's about taking risks for an open future.

**Peter:** Yes, Glenn, I'm with you on your account on what we are doing here. Certainly, one thing we have both done in various ways is to have taken risks, risks that some have criticized us for -- and we'll get on to those later. Also, Glenn, despite the range of topics you address in your work, the various empirical studies you have done, there are some strange silences too. I hope to kind of 'flush you out' on some of those gaps. I'm intrigued as to why you don't write about certain issues. I first became aware of your work through that monster article you did for *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, the *Left Alone* (Rikowski, 1996) article. Your honesty in that article was exemplary. You seemed to be facing the crisis within Marxist educational theory head-on, trying to grasp the depth of the crisis resulting from the deficiencies of what you called the 'old' Marxist educational theory that was based on Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) and Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labor*. You also launched an attack on me in that article, on the more 'postmodern' moments within my work!

## ***Postmodernism***

**Glenn:** Indeed I did, Peter, as you've reminded me from time to time! Perhaps it would be useful if you could take me through where you stand now on postmodernism. I mean, without rehearsing your objections to postmodernism, which would take several articles to do the job, can you give me some of your recent thinking on the subject -- something, say, that you have not yet written about?

**Peter:** Let me begin to answer this by trying to give you a sense of where I situate my own analysis, first.

**Glenn:** Fine. It's a good way in.

**Peter:** I pretty much follow some of your ideas on where to begin my critique. I take the position that capital grounds all social mediation as a form of value, and that the substance of labor itself must be interrogated because doing so brings us closer to understanding the nature of capital's social universe out of which our subjectivities are created. Because the logic of capitalist work has invaded all forms of human sociability, society can be considered to be a totality of different types of labor. What is important here is to examine the particular forms that labor takes within capitalism. In other words, we need to examine value as a social relation, not as some kind of accounting device to measure rates of exploitation or domination. Consequently, labor should not be taken simply as a 'given' category, but interrogated as an *object of critique*, and examined as an abstract social structure. Marx's value theory of labor does not attempt to reduce labor to an economic category alone but is illustrative of how labor as value form constitutes our very social universe, one that has been underwritten by the logic of capital. As you have underscored in your own work, Glenn, value is not some hollow formality, neutral precinct, or barren hinterland emptied of power and politics but the '*very matter and anti-matter of Marx's social universe*', as Mike Neary and yourself have indicated (in Neary and Rikowski, 2000). The production of value is not the same as the production of wealth. The production of value is historically specific and emerges whenever labor assumes its dual character. This is most clearly explicated in Marx's discussion of the contradictory nature of the commodity form and the expansive capacity of the commodity known as labor-power. In this sense, labor power becomes the supreme commodity, the source of all value. For Marx, the commodity is highly unstable, and non-identical. Its concrete particularity (use value) is subsumed by its existence as value-in-motion or by what we have come to know as 'capital' (value is always in motion because of the increase in capital's productivity that is required to maintain expansion). Raya Dunayevskaya (1978) notes that '*the commodity in embryo contains all the contradictions of capitalism precisely because of the contradictory nature of labor*'. What kind of labor creates value? Abstract universal labor linked to a certain organization of society, under capitalism. The dual aspect of labor within the commodity (use value and exchange value) enables one single commodity -- money -- to act as the value measure of the commodity. Money becomes, as Dunayevskaya notes, the representative of labor in its abstract form. Thus, the commodity must not be considered a thing, but a social relationship. Dunayevskaya identified the 'soul' of capitalist production as the extraction from living labor of all the unpaid hours of labor that amounts to surplus value or profit. I think that too much stress is being placed on the market and not enough on the process of production itself. There needs to be more analysis of the fetishism of the commodity form.

**Glenn:** I agree. You see this in 'Left' educational theorizing especially. A garage full of emphasis on education markets and quasi-markets, but not much recognition of education as production or the products of education.

**Peter:** Yes, Glenn, the issue here is not simply that workers are exploited for their surplus value but that all forms of human sociability are constituted by the logic of capitalist work. Labor, therefore, cannot be seen as the negation of capital or the antithesis of capital but capital's human face. Capitalist relations of production become hegemonic precisely when the process of the production of abstraction conquers the concrete processes of production, resulting in the expansion of the logic of capitalist work. We need to move beyond the fetishized form of labor (as organizational forms of labor such as labor movements or new forms of work organization) and concentrate

instead upon new forms of human sociability. The key question that drives much of my work can be captured in the following question: How is labor constituted as a social relation within capitalism?

**Glenn:** So the key here is that teachers need a better grasp of the inner dynamics of capitalism? Is that it, Peter?

**Peter:** Yes, that's it precisely, Glenn. Living labor creates the value form of wealth that is historically specific to capitalism. What drives the capitalist machine, in other words, is the drive to augment value. We need to explore the inner dynamics of capitalism, how it raises social productivity to a level of mind-numbing enormity yet that does nothing to limit scarcity. Paula Allman talks about how capitalism's relations of distribution are simply the results of the relations of production, placing a limit on consumption by limiting the 'effective' demand of the vast majority of the world's population. She reveals, in turn, how material use values are only available in the commodity form, and how use-value is internally related and thus inseparable from the exchange-value of the commodity, which is determined by labor-time. She writes that the wealth that is constituted by capitalist societies is not just a vast array of use values (it appears as this), but value itself. Wealth in capitalist society takes a perverted form. I agree with her that capitalism is perhaps best understood as a *global quest to produce value*. We need to focus our attention on capitalism's totalizing and universalizing tendencies. Its forms of global social domination are, of course, historically specific. Allman uses some of the insights of Moishe Postone (1996) to argue some very important points. One is that while capitalist exploitation through the production of value is abstract, it is also quasi-objective and concrete. Allman notes, correctly in my view, that people *experience* abstract labor in concrete or objective formations that are constituted subjectively in human actions and in human feelings, compulsions and emotions. Value produced by abstract labor can be considered objective *and* personal. How else can you account for the 'hold' that abstract labor has on each and every one of us?

**Glenn:** I concur on that point. A lot hangs on it; the capitalization of humanity flows from that point.

**Peter:** Furthermore, Allman reveals how the value form '*moves between and binds all the social relations and habituated practices of capitalism into an interlocking network that constitutes what is often referred to as the social structure of capitalist society*'. All critical education endeavors need to address the antagonistic terrain of capital that is inherent in the labor-capital relation itself, and to lay bare the contradictions that lay at the heart of the social relations of production. The value form of labor which gives shape to these internal relations or contradictions not only affects the objective conditions within which people labor, but also the domain of subjectivity or human agency itself. This mediative role is far from innocent.

**Glenn:** This is the deep horror of capitalist reality. The difficult thing is to acknowledge that horror in a process of overcoming it -- collectively, and on a world scale.

**Peter:** Yes, at the level of individual psychology the fact that our personalities are penetrated by capital is not that appealing! Of course, many Marxist educators advocate a fairer distribution of wealth, arguing that the current inequitable distribution that characterizes contemporary capitalist societies results from property relations, in particular, the private ownership of the means of production. For Paula Allman, and others, including yourself, Glenn, this doesn't go nearly far enough. The real culprit (as both you and Paula Allman have maintained) is the internal or dialectical relation that

exists between capital and labor within the capitalist production process itself -- a social relation in which capitalism is intransigently rooted. This social relation -- essential or fundamental to the production of abstract labor -- deals with how already existing value is preserved and new value (surplus value) is created. It is this internal dialectical relationship that is mainly responsible for the inequitable and unjust distribution of use-values, and the accumulation of capital that ensures that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. It is this relation between capital and labor that sets in perilous motion the conditions that make possible the rule of capital by designating production for the market, fostering market relations and competitiveness, and producing the historically specific laws and tendencies of capital.

**Glenn:** But what about private property? 'Traditional' Marxists make a big deal of that, Peter.

**Peter:** True, private property is a concern, I don't want to downplay this. But private property, commodities, and markets all pre-date the specific labor-capital relations of production and serve as pre-conditions for it. And once capital develops they are transformed into the results of that relation. This is why you, Paula Allman, Mike Neary and others emphasize as fundamental the abolition of the labor-capital relationship as the means for laying the groundwork for liberation from scarcity.

**Glenn:** The abolition of capital, as a social relation and social force, is crucial, as you say, Peter. To get rid of private property and the capitalist without abolition of capitalist social relations clearly leaves a vacuum into which the state can enter, making for a pernicious *state* capitalism. Okay, Peter, now that you have situated your own work firmly within the Marxist tradition, how does your position enable you to criticize postmodernism? We still haven't got to my original question on where you stand on postmodernism today!

**Peter:** For me it is important to be able to help students understand various postmodern theories as contributing to a re-functioning of capital. Rather than rehearse -- even briefly -- my critique of postmodernism, I'll start somewhere specific.

**Glenn:** You are never brief, Peter!

**Peter:** Okay, right. Okay, instead of itemizing my general criticisms of postmodern theory, it might be more productive to share my recent reading of the work of David McNally, because I think he has done a tremendous job of deepening the critique of postmodern theory from a Marxist perspective.

**Glenn:** Shoot!

**Peter:** McNally has recently published a wonderful critique of Saussure, Derrida, and the post-structuralists -- as well as a celebration of Volisinov/Bahktin, and especially Benjamin -- in a book called *Bodies of Meaning* (McNalley, 2001). His basic argument, since I can't recall all the details without reference to my notes, is that economic concepts figure centrally in their approaches to linguistic science. I recall that he argued the following points. Postmodern theorists model language on their specific understanding of the capitalist marketplace. McNally makes a good case that, in the process of such modeling, formal linguistics turns language into the dead labor of fetishistic commodities. It does this by decapitating signifiers and their meaning-making process from their fundamental connection to living labor. For example, Saussure and Derrida equate the general phenomenon of linguistic value with the role of 'money' as a general

equivalent of exchange. McNally calls Derrida the philosopher of fictitious capital. Derrida criticizes Saussure for positing an invariant or transcendental signified, or what McNally calls a 'gold standard' against which signs can be measured or interpreted. Derrida, as you will recall, argues that there is only '*differance*', that unknowable form prior to language, that condition of undecidability and the very condition of possibility of that undecidability that permits the endless play of reference that Derrida famously discusses in his large corpus of work (Derrida seems enraptured by difference and enraged by sameness, norms, standards). When Derrida makes the claim that '*differance*' is the most general structure of the economy he denies the praxis and labor that ground economic relations. That's because money lacks a referent, according to Derrida. It has no material foundation; money circulates without any referents. You can, for instance, have bad cheques, fraudulent credit cards -- and these function as money. Credit and speculation become a form of 'fictitious' capital.

**Glenn:** Sounds a lot like Baudrillard. Smells like postmodern virtual spirit.

**Peter:** Exactly. Actually, McNally goes on to discuss Baudrillard, and how in his system sign values are independent of external referents, they refer, in other words, only to *themselves*. Baudrillard's is an economy of internal relations, following its own code. Baudrillard lives in a techno-crazed universe of techno-mediatic power where labor is always already dead, where political economy is dead, where everything is virtual, the economy is virtual, and where use values have disappeared. Use values do not transcend the codes that encapsulate them and give them life.

**Glenn:** Right, the sign economy. We don't have exchange value or use value in the Marxist sense anymore, we have an information economy that trades in images, and status, and all of that. It's a good story if you can get people to believe it. A lot of Internet magazines seem convinced: *Fast Company*, *Business 2.0* and the like.

**Peter:** There is something compelling about it, I admit, as long as we realize it's science fiction. Scientologists beware! You have competition for Battlefield Earth! Baudrillard maintains that we consume fictitious identities by purchasing the sign value of, say, an Armani suit, or a pair of Guess jeans. We dress ourselves up in abstractions -- literally. Contrast this with what Marx had to say, that in capitalist societies, concrete labor is reduced to a quantum of total social labor, as something translated into the socially necessary labor-time -- a process that is part of the circuit of production and exchange. The key point here, according to McNally, is that, for Marx, abstract labor is not a mental abstraction but the *real social form of labor* in capitalist society. This is an important point. It's an absolutely crucial point. When labor-power itself becomes a commodity (a special kind of commodity) in the very act of laboring itself, then this abstracting process becomes generalized. But what we are talking about here is surely more than a linguistic phenomenon and McNally is very critical of Derrida's linguistification of life. If this were just a linguistic phenomenon then we would have to go along with Wittgenstein, and maybe in the process have to concede that Marxist theory was the result of a linguistic error! *Contra* Baudrillard and Derrida, signifiers do not replace use value in a virtual economy of signs. True, capitalism entails an abstracting process, but it is one in which concrete labor is translated into abstract labor -- into a labor that resembles interchangeable bits. But this is not just a concept, or a signifier, it is a real social form within the process of production; it is, as McNally notes, a systematic process of abstraction wherein capital compels the translation of concrete labor into abstract labor. Labor-power becomes value only when it assumes a value-relation, an objective life as a commodity, an abstraction from the body-work of the laborer, and hence from the use-

values produced by the efforts of laboring subjects. This is alienated labor, the subsumption of concrete labor by abstract labor. McNally writes that no matter how abstracted things become, the exchange between money and a commodity always entails exchanges of labor. Capital is not self-birthing; it is never an independent source of value. For instance, interest-bearing capital does not escape a connection with human labor but is merely the purest fetish of them all. In their rage against Marx's obsession with decidability, post-structuralists deny the origin of value in labor, in the life-giving, toiling, body in labor.

**Glenn:** Which is why we need materialist critique.

**Peter:** Precisely. McNally describes historical materialist critique as a struggle against idealism, against the subordination of the world of bodies, nature, objects, and labor to subjectivity, and a struggle against objects being subsumed by concepts. It is a direct challenge against the autonomy of thought, that is, against objective, concrete, sensuous life being subsumed by the self-movement of thought.

**Glenn:** So, then fetishes are not a figment of the imagination?

**Peter:** No, they are tangibly real. Marx believes that they are necessary forms of appearance of alienated life. McNally brilliantly notes that in Derrida's economy of fictitious capital, our birth into language is -- how did he say it? -- right, our birth into language is detached from our origin in the bodies of others. This is very important for us to grasp. He likens Derrida's approach to language to the way that money-capital is treated as self-generating, without an origin in labor.

**Glenn:** And how do we abolish these fetishes?

**Peter:** By undressing them, and undoing them, and through revolutionary praxis, abolishing capitalist social relations.

**Glenn:** But developing revolutionary praxis surely means uncovering redemptive possibilities within the commodity form, too? I mean, you can't escape the commodity form entirely, you can't work fully outside the seductive thrall of capital, altogether?

**Peter:** That's an excellent point, Glenn. Let's follow some of McNally's observations further. He notes that Walter Benjamin realized the redemptive possibilities within the de-mythified and barren landscape of capitalism. In his work on the *flaneur*, for instance, Benjamin conveyed that everyone in capitalist society is a prostitute who sells his or her talents and body parts. We live in the charred world of capital, a dead zone inhabited by corpses and decaying commodities. Such a realization can help break through the naturalization of history and enter the terrain of historical action. According to McNally, Benjamin ruptures the myth of the self-made man. We are all dead objects awaiting the meanings we have yet to write, as McNally puts it. McNally sees Benjamin as establishing a political project in which the oppressed class must reclaim the libidinal energies it has cathected onto commodities and re-channel them into a revolutionary praxis, a praxis of historical struggle towards emancipation, towards liberation. It was Benjamin, after all, who said, '*money stands ruinously at the center of every vital interest*'. Revolutionary action involves the dialectics of remembering and forgetting, of challenging the repressed bourgeois desires linked to the rise of capitalism, and embodied in the collective dreams of a pathological culture, a society gone mad -- something we don't have time to explore here. But it is something I have touched upon in my earlier work, especially in my *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture* (1995). In other words,



we need to have a theory that helps us to resist the social practices of exploitation linked to the social relations of production, but, dialectically, our resisting also helps us to have theory. In fact, this resisting is in many ways the basis of our theory.

**Glenn:** What about modes of resistance that you and I are more familiar with in our everyday praxis: the strike, protest rallies, and the like.

**Peter:** Yeah, Benjamin writes very little about these. But in his *One-Way Street*, Benjamin does stress the centrality of physical action. According to McNally, Benjamin views the body as the site of a transformative type of knowing, one that arises through physical action. Revolutionary practice, for Benjamin, means cultivating a 'bodily presence of mind'. We need to locate new energies -- in hip-hop, in art, in protest demonstrations (like the Zapatistas) -- without being re-initiated into the giddy whirl of bourgeois subjectivity, its jacuzzi reformism, and its lap-dog liberalism. That can only happen when you have a collective political project to give direction and coherence to your struggle. For me, that direction comes from a commitment to defeat the capitalists, but also capital. Admittedly, we are consigned by history to live in the disjunction between the defeat of capital and the recognition that such a defeat is not likely to happen soon. Glenn, you have quizzed me about how I now see postmodernism, but I am puzzled by your *own* attitude towards it. I know you have critiqued postmodern theory with Mike Cole and Dave Hill in your 1997 article (Cole, Hill and Rikowski, 1997), but what exactly is your own position on it?

**Glenn:** Well, you're correct that I haven't written as much on the critique of postmodernism as yourself, or as much as Dave Hill and Mike Cole. This does need some explaining, perhaps. It's not just a case of slothfulness! In the late 1980s and early 1990s I read a shed full of material in education journals written from various postmodernist and poststructuralist perspectives. At the time I thought I could see where it was all leading: to various doors labeled 'Nihilism', 'Relativism' or 'Solipsism'. With hindsight, I think that gut judgement was validated by what actually occurred. Also it seemed that educational postmodernism was on the road to totally eclipsing Marxist educational theory by absorbing any form of potential radicalism and spitting it out as a fashion statement. But I formulated a particular reaction -- a strategy if you like -- to the situation. I decided I would stop reading all the secondary, derivative stuff and go straight to the heart of postmodernist beast by reading the postmodern Godfathers: Foucault, Deleuze, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Derrida and the rest. That was a very short phase, for I realized that Nietzsche had heavily influenced all these theorists. Thus: I needed to dive deeper to get to the real roots of postmodernism. So from 1992 to around 1996 I read most of the works of Nietzsche. Some I read twice. I pretty much continued to ignore the postmodernist stuff written after 1992 -- though for the Cole, Hill and Rikowski article (1997) I had to backtrack and read a bit in order to make my contribution to that article useful. Then in 1996 Geoff Waite published his monumental and masterly critical study of Nietzsche (Waite, 1996). Waite got right to the core of Nietzsche's *intentions*, what the philosopher with a hammer was really up to. According to Waite, Nietzsche's Project was to attempt to bring about an eternal rift within humanity between an elite (that would venerate Nietzsche as one of its own) and the mass. The mass would have the role of sustaining the elite in conditions where their creativity could remain vital and flourish -- which was why Nietzsche was obsessed with the state of culture and society in his own day. For Waite then, the Eternal Return of the Same is the Eternal Return of the elite/mass duality. The doctrine is an attempt to engineer a future where the corpse of Nietzsche would be continually rejuvenated as the elite lived an idealized Nietzschean existence and his corpus (the body of his work) venerated in the process.

That's not all. Waite explains that Nietzsche obviously needed the help of intellectuals, politicians, media people and educators to bring this about. He had to *seduce* us. Nietzsche had to write in an esoteric way that recruited us to the project of realizing his abominable Eternity. Furthermore, Waite indicates the forms and processes of Nietzschean textual, conceptual and discursive seduction; the many tactics he used, and the fishhooks and tests he put in our way. On this account, Nietzsche's corps has two main officer blocs overlaying a postmodernist infantry. First, there is what Waite calls the Nietzsche Industry -- those apologists and so-called 'interpreters' of Nietzsche who avoid or sanitize Nietzsche's real game. Second, there are the postmodern Godfathers -- Derrida, Lyotard and the rest. These are the upper tiers of Nietzsche's corps. The interpreters of postmodernism are the footsoldiers, the infantry, of Nietzsche's corps. They are legion, and they cast a huge cloak of obfuscation, denial, mind-fucking mediocrity and inverted pomposity on the question of the implication of themselves within the realization of Nietzsche's Project of Eternal Return. For me, postmodernism does not just collude with Nietzsche's project for humanity and his resurrection through his followers; it is a vital force within that project. So, through the work of Geoff Waite, I wish to simultaneously uncover the roots of postmodernism and Nietzsche's dangerous project for humanity's future. I'm more interested in exposing this -- because I think it's more important -- than just criticizing postmodernism *per se*.

**Peter:** You said there were two aspects to your outlook on postmodernism: what's the other one, Glenn?

**Glenn:** Yes, there is a second aspect of my take on postmodernism. I do believe postmodern thinking has inadvertently hit on something with its foregrounding of a de-centered, fragmented and multi-faceted 'self'. Basically, the postmodernists and poststructuralists are interesting on this. But the key task is the *explanation* of this fragmentation. Now, for me, the role theorists of the 1960s and early 1970s and the work of Erving Goffman and R.D. Laing had explanations of the 'divided self' that surpass any stuff on 'discourse' produced by most postmodernists and poststructuralists. This work is largely forgotten nowadays. For me though, the task is to explore the 'divided self' through Marxism as an exercise in developing Marxist science. Thus, the analysis of 'the human' as a contradictory phenomenon, where these contradictions are generated by value relations as they flow through labor power, is the starting point. Labor power is inseparable from personhood, though labor recruiters and personnel managers necessarily reify it as a collection of attributes in the recruitment process. This impossibility of separation is a problem for capital, as the single commodity that can generate more value than that constituted at the moments of its own social production -- labor power -- is an aspect of the person of the laborer that is controlled by a potentially hostile will. Holding 'that the will has no existence' sidesteps the issue, as acts of willing (whether there is a 'will' or not) have the same effect. The 'will' itself, moreover, can also be explored as a set of contradictory forces. Of course, I can see the inevitable objection; that whilst I have criticized forms of Marxist educational theory that embrace determinism, I have opened the door to a reconfigured determinist embrace. But I hold I've done the opposite; the clash of contradictory drives or forces within the 'human' engenders *indeterminacy*, openness. One could, of course, introduce a new determinism on the basis of some presupposition regarding the relative *strength* of particular social drives and forces as they come into contradiction within the 'human'. Not only would this be undesirable, but also for Marxist science it would avoid the problem of explaining changes in the power and strength of these contradictory drives and forces. Furthermore, the core dynamic antagonism is denied on such determinism: the contradiction between our 'selves' as labor and ourselves as *capital*, human-capital. I am capital. We are human-capital, the human-

as-capital, but this is constituted by and through ourselves as labor; we haunt ourselves in a creative loop within the constitution of our personhoods. We are inherently contradictory life forms, but these very contradictions drive us on to try to solve them within our everyday lives (including within 'ourselves'). On an individual basis this is impossible. Marxist psychotherapy is pointless. We require a *politics of human resistance*. This is a politics aimed at resisting the reduction of our personhoods to labor power (human-capital), thus resisting the capitalization of humanity. This politics also has a truly negative side: the slaying of the contradictions that screw-up, bamboozle and depress us. However, only collectively can these contradictions constituting personhood (and society: there is no individual/society duality) be abolished. Their termination rests on the annihilation of the social relations that generate them (capitalist social relations), the social force that conditions their development within social phenomena, including the 'human' (capital) and the dissolution of the substance of capital's social universe (value). A collective, political project of human resistance is necessary, and this goes hand-in-hand with *communist politics*, a positive politics of social and human re-constitution. This is the collective process of re-designing society, revolutionary socialist transformation as Paula Allman (1999) has it. We need to simultaneously engage in this as we struggle for abolition of the social domination of capital. As I see it, Marxist science and politics and a politics of human resistance to capital are forms and aspects of each other. Communist society already exists on this view; it is a suppressed and repressed form of life within capitalism.

**Peter:** And where does this leave postmodernism, Glenn?

**Glenn:** Well, Peter, postmodern thinking just becomes a liability, a block, on even raising these sorts of issues and questions, let alone getting any kinds of answers. Postmodernists don't like answers, it seems to me; as you said earlier they celebrate 'undecidability', and hence they fight shy of explanation. But this disarms us. These are big hang-ups that we can't afford. We need to move on. The development of Marxist science (a negative critique of capitalist society) and a politics of human resistance are just more important, and also more interesting, than criticism of postmodernism. Though, on the basis of forestalling a Nietzschean future, we have to expose postmodernism as the blight on humanity that it is, whilst also using it if we actually do find something worthwhile residing within it.

**Peter:** Well, your answer raises a lot of issues, questions and problems, Glenn, and I want to take some of these up later. You packed a lot of punches into a few rounds there! But where do you stand on those who have tried to leave postmodernism through Nietzsche? I have people like Nigel Blake and his colleagues in view here (Blake *et al*, 2000). You sent me an unpublished paper of yours, *Nothing Becomes Them: Education and the Nihilist Embrace* (2001a) where you lavish fulsome praise on Nigel Blake and his pals for moving from postmodernism to nihilism through Nietzsche. This seems weird when Mike Cole, Dave Hill and yourself castigated Nigel Blake in an earlier article (Cole, Hill and Rikowski, 1997) for supporting postmodernism that, on the analysis there, was on track to run into nihilism which the three of you thought was the last stop before hell! Secondly, on what you said previously, moving from postmodernism to Nietzschean nihilism looks to have thrown Blake and company smack into the arms of something far worse than postmodernism: Nietzsche's Project of Eternal Return! Where's the redeeming features of the track taken by Blake and friends? I must admit, I can't readily see them!

***Nihilism and Nietzsche***

**Glenn:** Straight for the weakest link, Peter, nice one! I know what I've said seems strange, but I'll try an explanation. When I moved *back* from reading derivative postmodern writings to reading the postmodern Godfathers and then to reading Nietzsche, this was, in my view, a kind of progression. Nigel Blake, Paul Smeyers, Richard Smith and Paul Standish have made a similar movement in their book *Education in an Age of Nihilism* (2000), though I get the impression that they didn't actually engage with the first base (the derivative stuff) as much as it did. So, by the same token, they have moved in a productive direction. It should be noted, however, that they have not moved wholly away from the postmodern Godfathers, so their *Nihilism* book is transitional. Secondly, through the concept of nihilism, they have forged a deep and wide-ranging critique of many aspects of contemporary education and training in England. They indicate how the abyss of nothingness (the de-valued values) at the core of education policy, where discussion about the purposes and goals of education is substituted by instrumentalism and managerialism, is the centrifugal (but negative) force conditioning developments in contemporary education and training. The 'crisis of value' in education is a precondition for the generation of such phenomena as the school effectiveness/improvement movements, targets, funding systems umbilically tied to outputs, the drive to produce human capital and much else in this gloomy educational landscape. Thirdly, they contrast this state of affairs with Nietzsche's affirmative attitude towards life. The quest to overcome nihilism in education parallels Nietzsche's attempt to transcend nihilism through a process of self-overcoming. Blake and colleagues seek to show how education can be made more vital, intense, interesting and worthwhile when the overcoming of nihilism radicalizes educational processes, forms and content. They aim to bring moral *commitment* back to the educational enterprise. Thus, for Blake and co-writers, education after Nietzsche is implicated in the quest to overcome nihilism by creating the conditions where new values can emerge, values that do not de-value themselves as we attempt to realize them (as did the old, tired values underpinning modernism). Fourthly, Blake and company note that they wish to *use* Nietzsche, not just interpret him, not just be part of the Nietzsche Industry. I too argue that Nietzsche needs to be used, used to subvert his own goals! I now don't go along with Geoff Waite (1996) that we should just not mess with Nietzsche at all; that gives Nietzsche too much respect. Waite seems almost paranoid, or at least fearful, about what Nietzsche's texts can do to us. After I read his book I could understand why he held this. But on reflection I think I was wrong, and that Blake and colleagues' attitude towards Nietzsche is healthier.

**Peter:** Explain why and how this is so, Glenn.

**Glenn:** Well, now, for me, it seems that Blake and associates have produced a serious and important critique of certain trends and developments within contemporary education and training that Marxist and socialist educational analysts have also highlighted. Indeed, their critique is deeper and more interesting than in some Marxist and socialist accounts. They attack the very *roots* of education policy and change -- not just the effects of these. Unlike a standard postmodern 'deconstruction' of education policies, Blake and his collaborators have a dreadful, but strangely productive, vantage point -- nihilism -- from which to illustrate the dread at the heart of contemporary education. In doing this, they make critique of today's education significant and interesting whilst offering an apparent way forward through Nietzsche. For me, this is preferable to infinite deconstruction and 'questioning of concepts' from no position whatsoever (as positions are denied). Blake and colleagues face up to the fact that postmodernism entails nihilism; they are honest. Once they face this they creatively turn this insight into conceptual dynamite for the critique of education and society.

**Peter:** I see, but there's a downside? I mean, I've seen some of your unpublished stuff on Nietzsche.

**Glenn:** Yes, there is. Their avoidance of Nietzsche interpretation also insulates them from the growing anti-Nietzsche. Most of all, they seem oblivious to Geoff Waite's critical analysis. The implications of their analysis is that 'the strong should be protected from the weak' in education and society as a whole. The weak masses are sacrificed to the potential for creativity and innovation of the strong, the elite whose heroic members are capable of forging new values. This becomes the ultimate *new value* of the education system. They say: *'The strong -- those who can affirm life -- need to be protected from the life-sapping nihilism of the weak, and this is not to be realized through the nostalgic restating of values, through the monitoring and rubber-stamping of standards, for these are only guises of the Last Man. It must reach its completion by passing through the Last Man, but going beyond him to the one who wants to perish, to have done with that negativity within himself: relentless destruction of the reactive forces, of the degenerating and parasitic, passing into the service of a superfluity of life'* (Blake et al, 2000, p. 63) For Marxist science and Marxist educational theory, the hope is precisely in those 'reactive forces' incorporated within the masses collectively expressing themselves as concrete forms of definite danger to the social domination of capital. In running counter to this possibility, Blake and his collaborators open themselves up to the full force of Geoff Waite's critique. Furthermore, their analysis of nihilism does not go deep enough; they fail to raise the question of the *form* that nihilism takes in contemporary capitalist society, to explore the relation between *value*, values, nothingness and meaninglessness (they tend to see nihilism in terms of meaninglessness). This work has yet to be undertaken. Thus, I am suggesting that their critique can be radicalized further through engagement with Marx, and that taking this route can neutralize Nietzsche's program for humanity as we come to grasp that there is no 'self-overcoming' without dissolution of the capitalist universe. Self-overcoming is synonymous with overcoming capital, as the 'self' is a form of capital, human-capital.

**Peter:** This last point of yours, Glenn, fits in with something that you have raised in your work, and which you hint at in this e-dialogue previously: the relation between labor power and human capital. What is that relation? Also, you have stated on a number of occasions, that education policy in England rests on human capital development. Perhaps you could illustrate how these pieces fit together.

### ***Human Capital and Labor Power***

**Glenn:** Well, I'll try. The first bit's controversial. First, although I am interested in Marx's *method* of working and in his method of presentation, I am not one of those who believe that there is a 'Marxist method' that can simply be 'applied'. I'm certainly not one of those who believe in some 'dialectical' Marxist method (deriving from a Hegelian reading of Marx) that we can take ready-made off-the-peg either. Certainly, I learnt a tremendous amount from reading the works of Derek Sayer (1979, 1987), but I tend to start from asking a simple question: what is the *form* that this social phenomenon assumes within the social universe of capital? Now, labor power is in the first instance a transhistorical concept. There must be labor power of some sort of another; a capacity to labor that is transformed into actual labor within a process of laboring -- the labor process -- for any human society to exist. However, labor power takes on different forms as between social formations. Marx talks about labor power in ancient societies based on slave labor, and the feudal form of labor power. Marx was most interested in the *historical social form* that labor power assumed in capitalist society. In capitalism, I have argued, following

Marx, labor power is a commodity. Furthermore, it takes the form of *human capital*. Human capital production and enhancement is at the heart of New Labor's education policy (Rikowski, 2001c).

But it is not strictly accurate to say that human capital and labor power are *identical*, though as convenient shorthand they can be viewed as such. The form of labor power varies between social formations, whereas human capital is a phenomenon tied to capitalist society, but when we refer to 'labor power within capitalist society' then *de facto* this fixes the form of labor power as human capital. In my *Education, Capital and the Transhuman* article I demonstrate their virtual identity in capitalism in detail, with reference to Marx's work (Rikowski, 1999).

Secondly, labor power also has the potential to be expressed in non-capitalist, anti-capitalist modes, and in the transition from capitalism to socialism it will be. This point indicates the fact that labor power can *exceed* its contemporary social existence as human capital. Finally, the possibility for internal struggle, within the person of the laborer, *against* the capitalization (i.e. the subsumption) of her/his personal powers and capacities under the domination of capital for value-creation, is a potential barrier to the capitalization of labor powers. For me, *this is the class struggle within the 'human' itself; a struggle over the constitution of the 'ourselves' as capital through the practical definition of labor power*. Today the class struggle is everywhere, as capital is everywhere. Human capital is labor power expressed as capitalist social form. As labor power is intimately linked to personhood then 'we are capital' to the extent of its incorporation within our personhoods and its expression in our lives. Thus, a really useful *psychology of capital* would be an account of our 'selves' as capital. This would be a parasitic psychology, for capital is a blind social force (created by us) that has no ego of its own (as noted by Moishe Postone, 1996), but is given life through us, as we become (are taken over, transformed into) it.

What I call 'liberal Left' critics object to this account on two main fronts. First, they argue that labor power is not a commodity as people 'are not sold on the market or produced for sale on the market', and if they were that would be a society based on slave labor, and not essentially capitalist society based on formally 'free' labor. Humans, therefore, cannot be 'capital'. Secondly, some have put it to me, in private conversations that I am quite perverse in taking the concept of 'human capital' seriously at all. After all, they would say, is this not just a hopeless bourgeois concept? Does it not just reduce education to the production of skills and competencies? And is this not what we are *against*?

**Peter:** So what are your replies to these critics, Glenn?

**Glenn:** Let's explore the first point: labor power is not a commodity. Well, labor power is in the first instance, within the labor market, the capacity to labor, not labor itself. It is this capacity that the laborer sells to representatives of capital as a commodity, *not her or his total personhood*, nor 'labor' as such. We have many skills, abilities and knowledges, but from the standpoint of the capitalist labor process, only those that are significant for value-creating labor have direct social worth, validity or relevance. Representatives of capital buy labor power, but not the whole person. However, it is most unfortunate for capital's managers that this unique value-creating power is incorporated within a potentially volatile and living body -- the laborer. There is no getting round this. The task of getting the laborer to yield up her or his special power, labor power, for value-creation, to channel the laborer's talents and capabilities into the process of generating value, is the material foundation of business studies, human resource management and other branches

of management studies. Furthermore, the sale is made only for a specific duration and the laborer can take her/himself off to another employer, subject to contractual procedures. In all of this, the fact that labor power is incorporated within the personhood of the laborer is a source of much vexation and frustration for representatives of capital. On the other hand, the flexibility that this implies, where the constitution of labor power changes with demands made upon the laborer within the capitalist labor process, is an aspect of labor power that capitalists appreciate. Management 'science' is littered with eulogies to flexibility and adaptability. Indeed, a study I made of the UK Institute of Personnel Management's and also the Industrial Society's journal going back to the First World War showed that flexibility and adaptability in school-leavers were attributes that employers were looking for in youth recruits right back to that time. They also expected schools and colleges to play their part in producing such forms of youth labor. Thus they were looking for labor power, or human capital, of a certain kind.

**Peter:** And the second point, Glenn, what's your reply there?

**Glenn:** Yes, on the second point: this is that 'human capital' is a bourgeois concept therefore we should have nothing to do with it. For me, this constitutes an abandonment of serious critical analysis of society. Marx remember, in his *Capital*, was not giving a better 'socialist' form of political economy, but a *critique* of political economy. Marx held that political economy was the most highly developed and condensed form of the expression of the social relations of society within bourgeois thought. It was society viewed from the 'standpoint of capital', as capital. The critique of political economy was simultaneously a critique of the social relations, and especially the form of *labor* (the value-form), within that society. I maintain that the concept of 'human capital' expresses something quite horrific; the *human as capital!* The critique of this concept is, therefore, of the utmost urgency. It is precisely because 'human capital' is a bourgeois concept, and one that expresses such deep horror, that critical analysts of capitalist society should place it center stage. Running away from it, like superficial liberal Left critics, gives capital and its human representatives an easier time and avoids the potential explosiveness that its critique can generate for unsettling capitalist thought and social relations. We should take the concept very seriously indeed. In fact, I would argue that human capital theorists do not take their own master concept seriously. This is because they cannot, for to do so would explode the full horror of the phenomenon the concept expresses. There is real horror lurking within this concept of human capital; Marxists have a special duty to expose it, as no other critical analysts of society seem to have the stomach for it. The politics of human resistance is simultaneously a *politics of horror*, as it includes fighting against the horrific forms of life that we are becoming. For although 'we are capital' the process is historical; it develops in intensity over time. Fortunately, the more it occurs the greater its obviousness, and the more paranoid supporters of the system (those who gain millions, billions, of dollars on the foundation of suppressing this insight) will become.

**Peter:** The thing with reading this stuff, Glenn, is that I find myself seeing your explanations of my questions and then I also find that there are further ideas that you use to give the explanations that are also interesting, and that I would like to follow up! It would be great to read more about what you say on capital as a 'social force', what your views are on the nature of the 'human' in capitalist society and what you have to say on the 'social universe of capital'. But for now, could you expand on what elsewhere you have called the 'social production of labor power' in capitalist society -- in your conference paper for the British Educational Research Association, *That Other Great*

*Class of Commodities* paper (Rikowski, 2000a). Because this seems to me to be the point where your Marxism connects directly with education, and in quite specific ways, Glenn.

### ***The Social Production of Labor Power in Capitalism***

**Glenn:** Yes, Peter, what I have called the social production of labor power in capitalism is crucial for the existence and maintenance of capitalist society today, and education and training have important roles to play in these processes of social production. For Marx, labor power is defined as the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities within a human being which they exercise when they produce a use-value of any kind (Marx, 1867). Now, the significant issue, for me, is what is included in 'mental capabilities'. The standard response is to view these as skills, competencies or the ability to draw upon different knowledges in labor power performance. But I argue (in Rikowski, 2001b, for example) that 'attitudes', personal values and outlooks and personality traits are also included within 'labor power'. I argue this on a number of counts. First, empirically, recruiters of labor search for work attitudes and personality traits above all other categories of recruitment criteria (and many recruitment studies show this). Second, the first point indicates a key feature of labor power. This is that a laborer can have three PhDs, a bunch of IT qualifications and a Nobel Prize in physics, but from the perspective of capital the key questions is whether s/he is motivated and committed to expending all these wonderful capacities and capabilities within the labor process. For representatives of capital this is the essential point -- and why I include attitudes to work and work-related personality traits within the orbit of labor power. Third, at the global level, it is essential that labor power is expended sufficiently to create surplus-value; thus not only must the 'wills' of individual workers be subsumed under their own labor power in the service of capital (value-production), but the working class *in toto* must be. It is therefore an aspect of social domination, and that indicates reconfiguration of the collective social life of the laborers on the foundation of capital. Fourth, and most important, including attitudes, values and personality traits within labor power both *radicalizes* Marx and *radicalizes* the concept of labor power.

**Peter:** But again, it could be argued that you have produced another form of determinism -- with no escape. Aspects of our very personalities 'become capital' as they are incorporated within labor power. So, what happens to agency? Where is the space for self-activity? And where does education come into this? You still have to explain that.

### ***The Problem of Agency***

**Glenn:** The incorporation of aspects of 'personality' (attitudes, values and personality traits) changes nothing. Remember earlier that I said it is clashes of contradictory forces and drives within the 'human' that make determinism impossible. These oppositional forces within personhood ensure *openness* within the social universe of capital; a universe that moves and expands on the foundation of the clashing of drives and forces within its totality. This openness does not exist within postmodernist *aporias*, or in some social spaces 'in the margins', or in the borders of this social universe. There are no such social spaces, in my view. There is nowhere to hide. The social universe of capital *is all that there is*. Rather, the openness results from the clash of social forces and drives. This partly contradicts what I said earlier, for although none of these forces and drives are inherently stronger or superior there is one that has the capacity to destroy the whole basis of the social universe of capital. This is the collective social force of the working class acting on a global scale to destroy capitalist social relations, to annihilate *capital* itself, and this is the *communist impulse* at its most vital, when there is a massive



movement of social force and energy. The capitalist social universe, whose substance is value, *implodes* when this social force to move human history on from pre-history generates sufficient pressure. In the routine running and expansion of the social universe of capital, this force is *suppressed* -- it only has virtual existence. But it is our hope for the future.

**Peter:** Yeah, but, pressing you still: what is agency in the social universe of capital?

**Glenn:** Well, first I'll get the mess out of the way. The conventional agency/structure problem, so-called, is insoluble. Basically, it's a recasting of the freedom/determinism problem within social life, capitalist social life in fact. Thinking 'agency' has the effect of dissolving 'structure' and *vice versa*. An experiment: just try to think both at the same time! Purported solutions such as Anthony Giddens's 'structuration theory' evade the impossibility of simultaneous existence of agency and structure. I explain all this in more detail in my 'Which Blair' Project article (Rikowski, 2000b), so I won't enter into it here. Agency, for me, can be understood like any other social (and it is social, not an individual) phenomenon within the social universe of capital: by inquiring into its social *form*. I haven't followed this through in detail, so I'm literally 'thinking on the keyboard' here, but I would probably argue that agency in capitalist society exists to the extent that individuals partake in a social project of human emancipation through imploding the social universe of capital. This implosion *opens up* human futures to possibilities where agency can have real (not just virtual, or repressed, or suppressed) social existence. This applies to many other 'moral' or 'social value' phenomena too, such as social justice. In the struggle against capitalist social existence, the abstract and virtual begins to take on real social form, but its substantive reality is repressed and suppressed. Thus, 'agency' and 'social justice', for example, in capitalist society, are only ever virtual. In this sense, agency in capitalism can only be the *struggle* for agency, the struggle to make it substantively *real* -- as opposed to the abstract reality (as real abstraction) it attains in capitalist society. The same for social justice: in capitalist society, social justice is *the struggle for social justice* (as I explain this in greater depth in an experimental paper I wrote a year ago: Rikowski, 2000c). Capital, as Moishe Postone tells us (Postone, 1996), is 'without ego'. There is therefore, not just an absence of any standpoint on which to base *values*, but no *substance* that can make values possible. The postmodernists and nihilists are expressing something at this point. In capital's social universe, 'values' have no substance, but value *is* the substance. Morality, is the *struggle for morality*, the struggle to make it real, and this can only be a possibility (still only a possibility) in the movements of society post-capitalism. Moral critiques of capitalism are in themselves insufficient, as Marx held (though they are understandable, and may energize people and make them angry against the system, and this anger may lead to significant forms of collective struggle). However, the *struggle to attain morality*, the struggle to make values possible, continually crashes against the fabric of society. It is this that makes struggles for gender equality, 'race' equality and so on so explosive. In capitalist society, these forms of equality (like all other forms of equality) are impossible. But the struggle for their attainment exposes their possibility, a possibility that arises only within a post-capitalist scenario.

On this analysis, collective quests for gender and 'race' equality are a threat to the constitution of capitalist society; they call forth forms of equality that can have no social validity, no existence, within the universe of capital -- as *all forms of equality are denied except for one*. This is equality on the basis of *exchange-value*. On the basis of exchange-value we are all equal. There are a number of aspects to this. First, our *labors* may be equal in terms of the value they create. However, as our labor powers have different

values, then 10 weeks of my labor may be equal to a single day of the labor of some highly paid soccer player. Equality here, then, operates on the basis of massive substantive *inequality*. Secondly, the value of our labor powers may be equal; so one hour's labor of two people with equal labor powers (in terms of labor power quality) creates the same value. In a paper of last year, I go on to show that although these are the only forms of equality socially validated within the social universe of capital, practically they are unattainable as other social drives break these forms of equalization (Rikowski, 2000c). For example, the drive to enhance labor power quality as between different capitals, national capitals and between individuals pursuing relative 'self-investment' in their own labor powers would constantly *disrupt* any systematic attempt to create equality of labor powers through education and training. Although forms of equality on the basis of exchange-value are *theoretically* possible, the first (equality of labor) is abominable as it is compatible with massive inequalities of income and wealth, whilst the second (equality of labor powers) is practically hopeless. The outcome of all this is that struggles against inequalities in capitalist society are struggles for forms of equality that cannot exist within capitalism. Yet they nevertheless constitute struggles against the constitution of capitalist society, and also *for* equality than *can* attain social existence on the basis of the dissolution of the social universe of capital.

**Peter:** So now we get round to the 'social production of labor power' in capitalism? We seem to keep churning out new issues. In your published work, as far as I can see, you have not really expanded tremendously on this, though you have hinted that it is at the foundation of what you want to say about education and training in capitalist society, Glenn. How would you sum up what you call the 'social production of labor power,' Glenn? What are the main characteristics and features?

### ***Return to the Social Production of Labor Power***

**Glenn:** Sure! This is a big topic. First I want to summarize why labor power, and then education and training, are so crucial in capitalist society. Labor power is transformed into labor in the labor process, and in this movement value, and then at a certain point surplus value, is generated. There are two aspects to labor: it is a process of producing use-values and also value (a valorization process). There are not two separate processes going on here; they are both expressions of the one and same set of acts within the labor process. If the product is useless then value is not realized at the point of sale. Labor power consists of those attributes of the person that are used in creating a use-value (the use-value aspect of labor power), but labor power also has a quantitative, *value*-aspect too. Through the activity of the worker (labor) in the labor process, some of our personal powers (labor power) also become expressed as value-generation. Thus: labor power is the unique, living commodity that is the foundation of value, the substance of the social universe of capital. We create the social universe of capital.

Now, I have argued (e.g. Rikowski, 2000a) that education and training play a key role in the *social production* of labor power. Definite productive forms of this can be located empirically. Empirical studies I have undertaken, on apprentice recruitment for example, illustrate this. However, processes of labor power production are extremely fragmented on an institutional and organizational basis (between forms of education and training, work-based learning). Thus, we see relatively 'weak' forms of labor power production. But this misses the key historical point, which is that over the last fifty years processes of the social production of labor power have become socially defined and delineated more clearly and definitely. This is because the social drive to reduce all education and training to *labor power production* has gained ground historically. This reflects the deepening

capitalization of the whole of social life. Thus, education and training increasingly operate as systems and processes of labor power production, and it is labor power that generates value. Value is the substance of the social universe of capital. In this chain of transformation and production we can see that education and training, therefore, have a key role to play in the *maintenance and expansion of the social universe of capital*. The social power of teachers, trainers and all those involved in socially producing labor power rests on this fact.

Representatives of capital in business, state bureaucracies and government are fundamentally aware of the significance of education and training in terms of labor power production, though they call it 'human capital', but we know what that means! Indeed, read any UK Department of Education and Employment report of the last twenty or more years and they illustrate the intense concern regarding the quality of UK labor power. It is, of course, all wrapped up in such euphemisms or proxy concepts as 'employability', 'human capital', 'work-ready graduates', school kids who are able to 'meet industry's needs' and the like. Teachers and trainers have huge strategic importance in capitalist society: they are like 'angels of the fuel dump', or 'guardians of the flame', in that they have intimate day-to-day responsibility for generating the fuel (labor power) that generates what Marx called the 'living fire' (labor) (Marx, 1858, p.361). Their roles start to explain the intense efforts of representatives of capital in state bureaucracies, government, business and the media in attempting to control the labor of teachers and trainers. Teachers' and trainers' labor is channeled into labor power production, and increased pressures arising from competition to enhance the quality of labor power within nation states (as one response to globalization), spurs on efforts to do this. The implications are massive: control of curricula, of teacher training, of education unions, training organizations and much more. There are many means of such control, and empirical and historical investigations are important here. Letting the law of money loose (though education markets) is just one strategy. Attempts to control the processes involved is another, but increasingly both are used in tandem (though these strategies can come into conflict).

So, there are strong forces at work to ensure that teachers' and trainers' labor is reconfigured on the basis of labor power production. But also, teachers and trainers are in a structural position to *subvert* and *unsettle* processes of labor power production within their orbits. Even more, they can work to enshrine *alternative* educational principles and practices that bring into question the constitution of society and hint at ways in which expenditure of labor power does not take a value form. This is a nightmare for representatives of capital. It is an additional factor making for the control of teachers' and trainers' labor. And this highlights, for me, the central importance of radical or critical pedagogy today, and why your work, Peter, has such momentous implications and consequences for the anti-capitalist struggles ahead.

**Peter:** And for me, it highlights the significance of education for today's anti-capitalist movement. As you have put it, radical pedagogy and the anti-capitalist struggle are intimately related: that was also one of the messages I aimed to establish in my Che/Freire book (McLaren, 2000).

**Glenn:** Your Che/Freire book really consolidated the relation between anti-capitalism and radical pedagogy for me. You see, Peter, when I was younger, I used to think that it would be better being in some industrial situation where the 'real action' was going on, rather than in education. However, labor power is capital's weakest link, as it is incorporated within personhood. Labor power is the commodity that generates value.

And education and training are processes of labor power production. Give all this, then to be in education today is to be right at the center of the action! There is no better place to be. From other things I have said, it follows that education and training, insofar as they are involved in the production of labor power, that, in capitalism, takes the form of human capital, then they are also involved in the capitalization of humanity. Thus: a politics of human resistance is necessary *first of all* within education and training. These are the places that it goes on in the most forced, systematic and overt way. Radical pedagogy, therefore, is an aspect of this politics, an aspect of *resisting processes within education and training that are constituted as processes of reducing humans to labor power (human capital)*. On this account, radical pedagogy is the hot seat in anti-capitalist struggles. The question of pedagogy is critical today, and this is where our work productively collides.

You have written extensively on Pedagogy for Revolution (though also increasingly, and more directly on the critique of capitalist schooling in recent years). I have concentrated more on the negative analysis of Education for Capital, and said little about pedagogy, though I now realize its absolute importance more clearly after reading your wonderful *Che Guevara, Paulo Friere, and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (McLaren, 2000). Both are necessary moments within an exploration of what Paula Allman (1999) has called socially transformative praxis. My negative critique of Education for Capital exposes the centrality of the question of pedagogy, I believe. From the other direction, your work on the centrality of pedagogy for the anti-capitalist struggles calls for an exploration of the constitution of society and a negative critique of education as labor power production. This also provides an argument about the necessity of radical, transformative pedagogy as a key strategy for use in terminating the capitalization of humanity and envisioning an open future. It grounds the project of radical pedagogy; shows its necessity in capitalism today. We can contrast Education for Capital (as an aspect of the capitalization of humanity) with Pedagogy for Revolution (that transforms social relations and individuals, and seeks to curtail the horror of capital within the 'human'). I was wondering if that was how you saw it, Peter. Although we have come at things from different angles, we have arrived at the same spot. Capital is like a labyrinth.

**Peter:** That's a good way of putting it. I think you have spelled out the connections between our work from the development within your own ideas and experience. I might see it slightly differently in some respects. I think I have a stronger notion of Marxism as a *philosophy of praxis* than you have in your own work, is that fair and accurate?

**Glenn:** I think it is in the sense that is I would not place so much store by the notion of philosophy, though *praxis* is hugely significant for me. You may say the two go together. My Marxism was learnt largely through debates within the Conference of Socialist Economists, their journal *Capital & Class*, participating in the (now defunct) Revolutionary Communist Party and going to Socialist Workers Party meetings in the mid-to-late 1990s, but most of all through reading Marx. Theorists such as Derek Sayer, John Holloway, Simon Clarke and Kevin Harris were very important for me, and more recently Moishe Postone and the works of Michael Neary (Neary, 1997; Neary and Taylor, 1998). But what do you think, Peter? How do you see Marxism as, for lack of a better word, a philosophy? And how does it link up with your work on pedagogy for revolution?

***Marx, Marxism and Method***

**Peter:** Yes, Glenn, as I see it Marxism is a philosophy of praxis. This is so in the sense that it is able to bring knowledge face-to-face with the conditions of possibility for its own embodiment in history, into contact with its own laboring bodies, into contact with its forgotten life-activity, its own chronotype or space-time co-ordinates (i.e., its constitutive outside). Knowledge, even critical knowledge, doesn't reproduce itself, for to assert this much is to deny its inherence in history, its insinuation in the social universe of production and labor. But I guess that's okay with some post-structuralists who tend to reduce history to a text anyway, as if it miraculously writes itself. Postmodern theory is built upon the idea of self-creation or the fashioning of the self. Self-creation assumes people have authorized the imperatives of their own existence, the conditions in which they form or create themselves. But Marxism teaches us that people make history within, against, and through systems of mediation already saturated by a nexus of social relations, by a force-field of conflicting values and accents, by prior conventions and practical activities that constrain the possible, that set limits to the possible. Raya Dunayevskaya (1978) describes Marxism, as I recall, as a 'theoretical expression of the instinctive strivings of the proletariat for liberation'. That pretty much captures the essence for me. Paula Allman (1999) notes that Marx's efforts were directed at exposing 'the inherent and fundamental contradictions of capitalism'. I agree with her that these contradictions are as real today as they were in Marx's time. She enjoins readers to dismiss the criticisms of Marxism as essentialist and teleological and to rely not on the perspectives of Marxists but on the writings of Marx himself. After all, Marx's works constitute a critique of relations historically specific to capitalism. We need to try to understand not only the theoretical concepts that Marx offers us, but also the manner in which Marx thinks.

**Glenn:** It sounds as if there is a role for philosophers in the revolution then.

**Peter:** I think the concrete, objective crisis that we live in today makes philosophy a matter of extreme urgency for all revolutionaries, as Dunayevskaya puts it. You may not be interested in philosophy, but I am sure philosophy is interested in you. Well, the specific ideologies of capitalism that frame and legitimize certain philosophical approaches and affirm some over others are interested in your compliance, perhaps that is a better way to put it. My own interest here is in developing a philosophy of praxis for educators. The key point for me is when Marx broke from the concept of theory when he wrote about the 'working day' in *Capital*. Here we see Marx moving from the history of theory to the history of the class struggle. The workers' struggles at the time shifted the emphasis of Marx's work. Dunayevskaya (1978) notes that *'From start to finish, Marx is concerned with the revolutionary actions of the proletariat. The concept of theory now is something unified with action. The ideal and the material became unified in his work as never before and this is captured in his struggle for a new social order in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."*

**Glenn:** Certainly, the role that something called 'philosophy' plays in my own work has not been clarified -- which is ironic really, as philosophy was my major subject for my first degree and I taught philosophy in the early 1990s. On Dunayevskaya, I am a Marxist-Humanist of sorts; the problem I have with it is the notion of the 'human' and humanism, but I won't go into that here. Just to say that Marxist-Humanism is the struggle to attain an open future for humanity: that's how I see it.

**Peter:** You see, Glenn, I think that this is one of the silences in your work -- the role of philosophy. Let's recast the issue, so we come at it at an angle that more clearly does crash into your work. You have given me an idea of some of the general forces flowing

through what you call the 'social universe of capital', and I can see your points about how our work meets up, and so on. What puzzles me though is how you see all this meeting up with what some might call the 'level of appearances', or 'everyday life'. I mean, you make your living as an education researcher (though you research training processes too, if we want to make that distinction). But what are the connections between your work as an education researcher and your Marxist educational theory, or your 'labor power theory', as you might prefer to call it? Can connections be made? What is the role of 'education research' in relation to what you have said so far in this dialogue?

**Glenn:** From my perspective, those questions have colossal significance today, Peter! The connection between the phenomena structuring life within capital's social universe and 'everyday life' in capitalism has been a key issue in Marxist theory since Marx's death. The usual starting place is to make the distinction between essence and appearance, and then try to show that what we observe empirically, on the surface of society, can be explained with reference to the deeper phenomena (value, abstract labor and so on). For me, this suggests that, ontologically, there are two realms of existence: the real and the abstract, or essence and appearance. This allows some to argue that we can understand things like competition, price and money without recourse to any 'deeper reality' (value, abstract labor, surplus value, and so on). It is a short step from there to exploring 'everyday life' in terms of markets, price and competition without recourse to value, abstract labor and others ideas central to Marx's analysis of capitalism.

A concrete example of this is the work on education markets and the marketization of education. In the UK there is a massive literature on education markets, quasi-markets and related empirical studies of the marketization of schools and colleges. These studies, however, are extremely superficial in that they incorporate no sustained analysis of what the 'products' of education are. Thus, we have 'education markets and missing products', as I explained in a paper to the Conference of Socialist Economists in 1995 (Rikowski, 1995). However, I would not wish to say that production, value and labor power and so on constitute some kind of 'deeper *reality*'. I read Marx as saying that the phenomena pinpointed as key by the educational marketization writers are *phenomenal forms* of essential relations. There is no 'analytic dualism' involved here, or a Critical Realism that is founded on such a dualism, as in the writings of Robert Willmott in England (e.g. Willmott, 1999). The phenomenal forms are an *expression* of value, not some radically different ontological 'level' or order. I would want to argue that this is so even for the phenomena of 'everyday life' too. So when I say 'I am money', or "I am capital", or 'I am value' I am heralding the ways in which money, capital and value literally are 'me' and flow through my life as aspects of observable things that I do and say. But the former (capital, value, and money) does not constitute some analytically distinct level apart from 'everyday life'. 'Real life' *is* abstract. Although we can use the power of abstraction to abstract *from* reality, to indicate generalities, a really radical approach to abstraction demonstrates and indicates how concrete, 'real life' is also *abstract*. We are indeed 'ruled by abstractions', but these abstractions are not separate from lived experience; we live the abstractions through the concrete (and *vice versa*). It's as with labor. The same labor has two *aspects*: first, the concrete, qualitative, use-value aspect; and secondly the quantitative, abstract value-aspect. There are not two different acts of labor going on. Now, I want to argue that the whole of social, 'everyday life' is like that. There are concrete and abstract aspects to social phenomena in capitalist society. One of the tasks of Marxist science is to explore these aspects as 'living contradictions'. Of course, getting funding for this type of 'Marxist research' will not be easy. Furthermore, if it is to have any real value then the lessons learnt from this research must be fed into the wider anti-capitalist movement, and ways for disseminating it have to be addressed.

**Peter:** But have you done this, Glenn? I mean have you actually examined particular social phenomena in capitalism in this way? And if you have, how have you done this?

### ***Aspects of Labor Power***

**Glenn:** Yes: labor power. I have attempted to uncover various aspects of labor power: the use-value, exchange-value, value aspects in particular, but also the collective and subjective aspects (Rikowski, 2000a). And this work shows that it is not a case of 'applying' concepts to reality; aspects of capitalist social life are expressed in such a way that these ideas are produced in thought at the moment of grasping the aspects and essential relations. In capitalism, social reality writes itself through us, as *ourselves*, as we live its forms and aspects. There is no determinism involved here; as there is no duality. The phenomena are not separate in capital's social universe (its totality) in the way that determinism in the classical sense presupposes. Causality also has no purchase either on this outlook; the phenomena are aspects and forms of each other within the totality. There is no separation of phenomena as in bourgeois social science. What is required is a communist scientific language adequate to the expression of movements, transformations and metamorphoses of phenomena within a social universe whose substance is value. Thus, we talk of totality, social universe, infinity, relativity, process, transformation, movement, metamorphosis, morphing, aspect, contradiction, generation, form, intensity, density, force, implosion, explosion, dissolution and other concepts, that explain social transformations and relations. The processes of labor power formation or surplus-value generation, when examined through these ideas, rather than notions of cause/effect, determination, base/superstructure and the ideas of what Moishe Postone (1996) 'traditional Marxism', are *radicalized*. Unlike 'postmodern thinking', this process truly unsettles through exposing the bareness of capitalist social relations as we live them. The gap between lives lived and lives theorized about closes.

**Peter:** A couple of points. First, this must make the social production of labor power a tricky process! If labor power incorporates various 'aspects', as you call them, presumably these are in contradiction. Secondly, what's the role of empirical research? Do Marxists do that? Is there any point to it? After all, will not analysis of our own lives be sufficient? Why research anyone else when we can research ourselves with the same degree of validity?

**Glenn:** Yes, the social production of labor power is made difficult by the fact that labor power incorporates aspects: use-value, exchange-value, value, collective and subjective aspects -- that do express a whole bunch of contradictions. Schools are in the business of producing a living commodity that incorporates contradictions! You can see the enormity of what they are up against! This conditions contradictions in education policy; state functionaries have to try to make sense of the absurd. Result: education policies that reflect the contradictions, or skip around from one prong of the fork to the other. Of course, sometimes they are suppressed too. This is fascinating stuff, as you can see these contradictions playing themselves out within people's lives, within government policies and thinking -- everywhere! Empirical studies can give these insights power and relevance. Secondly, the social production of labor power, *as a process*, crashes against social *re*-production and maintenance of laborers and their families through the wage form. I show this contradiction in relation to the phenomenon of the student-worker, nominally full-time students who work to survive (Rikowski, 2000d). Education policies are riddled with contradictions flowing from these considerations also. Mainstream academics attempt to make sense of, to rationalize these concepts, these processes, at

war! Empirical and historical studies are crucial for uncovering the forces that we are up against.

And this gets on to your second point, Peter, the point of doing empirical research. First, it's true that 'researching ourselves' can get us a lot further than previously envisaged. Autobiography attains importance; we can locate the contradictions within our own personhoods as they are transformed and flow throughout our own lives. However, the *intensity* of some of the contradictions within personhood as capital and between persons and groups varies. Sometimes these living contradictions can be illustrated and demonstrated more easily by exploring the lives of others, rather than merely examining your own 'self' as contradictory social entity. But most importantly, from what I have said previously, the concrete is also the abstract, so an empirical exploration of some aspect of education is never just empirical and concrete. There is a place, therefore, for Marxist research in education and in other areas of social life. The obvious problem is getting resources and time to do this work. In the UK, the school and college effectiveness and improvement are being driven increasingly strongly from the centre through the Department for Education & Employment (DfEE). The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the premier funding body for serious social science research, is under increasing pressure to narrow the limits for 'acceptable' education research. A National Educational Research Forum is being established which is dominated by the school/college effectiveness/improvement industry. Of course, you can try to get something through this system -- but it's getting extremely difficult. There are more big programmes (such as the Teaching and Learning Research Programme) and the establishment of megabucks research centers through the DfEE that make any critical research program difficult to get off the ground in any substantial manner. There are ways round this; hidden agendas and so on, but it's tough. I'm reading Russell Jacoby's book, *The Last Intellectuals* (Jacoby, 2000) -- the new edition -- and he's great at showing the processes through which even mildly critical research, let alone any Marxist research, gets squeezed out, and how Left academics get marginalized, victimized and worse.

**Peter:** You said that empirical studies can give us insight and also relevance into the ways that contradictions within personhood and within processes of the social production of labor power itself -- within which education and training are implicated heavily -- through empirical studies. On the 'relevance' aspect, what did you have in mind exactly?

**Glenn:** *Political* relevance, principally. In my pamphlet, *The Battle in Seattle: Its Significance for Education* (Rikowski, 2001c), I show how the WTO agenda for education is related to New Labor's education policy. However, for me, the really important part is the second half of the book where I explore the significance of education for anti-capitalism post-Seattle. At that point, the links between labor power, radical pedagogy and the need for organisations that can seriously take on the kind of politics of human resistance to processes of our capitalization -- in particular, the key role that education plays in these processes, these links can all be made. They can be made for political strategy. That is the full force of the 'relevance' I am thinking of. In England, sadly, I have received criticism from some who hold that we should not mix up writing about Marx with writing about something like the WTO's education agenda and New Labor education policy -- and these criticisms from the Left too! These criticisms come from elements within what I call the liberal Left, and they induce us to separate theory from empirical study, radical pedagogic practice and education politics (and politics in general). I have been called a 'radical poser' (and worse) on the basis that I dare bring Marx up front into education analysis and politics. It will 'put people off', I am told, and I 'will make a fool of myself! Obviously I care about 'putting people off'. My answer is



that in education theory, analysis and politics we really ought to be trying to *radicalize* Marx, to make him more relevant and *exciting*. That is a project for writing, analysis, critique and practical politics to demonstrate. As to 'making a fool of myself', let history decide! Marx didn't seem to worry about that very much; he took tremendous risks with his own personae and public image -- on the basis that he believed that it would be for the good of the movement. Surely, the goal is to bring Marxist analysis, theory and politics together within the sphere of education together -- I argued this years ago (Rikowski, 1996). Marx is neither an embarrassment nor an idol. He is there to be used, as still the greatest critic of capitalist society today. Anyway, I tried to bring this all together in *The Battle in Seattle* booklet; to give a materialist analysis of today's new anti-capitalist movement that would indicate how social movements are engaged in *one fight, one struggle* -- for only on this basis can they win out.

**Peter:** Establishing the unity of diverse struggles is important, surely. Seattle brought that to the fore with tremendous practical force. The key point is that we collectively crash through the walls of capitalist society.

**Glenn:** Yes, Peter, but in what direction is it possible to move in order to transcend the entrapment of capital? In other words, in what direction should we labor?

**Peter:** There are specific modes of production, some of which are historically bound up with capitalism. Not all modes of production are capitalist. A core feature of the capitalist mode of production is that the labor that is operative within it contains a duality, as use value and exchange value. Living labor therefore incorporates concrete and abstract labor. Abstract labor, for capital, is the foundation of value. Bruno Gulli (1999) mentions the fact that labor is an ontological power, a creative power, which is why capital wants (must have) it for its social existence! Living labor is turned into productive labor because of its special relationship with objectified labor. Peter Hudis (2000a-b) poses the crucial question: What kind of labor should a human being do? It seems to me that strategizing against capital means working with those in the technologically underdeveloped world, and part of the challenge stipulates that we go beyond empirical treatments of categories developed by Marx and engaging them dialectically. Capital, as Marx has pointed out, is a social relation of labor; it constitutes objectified, abstract, undifferentiated -- and hence alienated -- labor. Capital cannot be controlled or abolished through external means without dispensing with value production and creating new forms of non-alienated labor. Creating these new forms of non-alienated labor is the hope and promise of the future. This is something that you have talked about in your own work, Glenn.

Let's consider for a moment the harsh reality of permanent mass unemployment, contingent workforces, and the long history of strikes and revolts of the unemployed. It is relatively clear from examining this history that the trajectory of capitalism in no way subsumes class struggle or the subjectivity of the workers. We can relate this to the work of Raya Dunayevskaya and Peter Hudis and bring Hegel into the conversation here. What for Hegel is Absolute knowledge (the realm of realized transcendence), Marx referred to as the new society. While Hegel's self referential, all-embracing, totalizing Absolute is greatly admired by Marx, in its, never the less, greatly modified by him. For Marx, Absolute knowledge (or the self- movement of pure thought) did not absorb objective reality or objects of thought but provided a ground from which alienation could be transcended. By reinserting the human subject into the dialectic, and by defining the subject as corporal being (rather than pure thought or abstract self-consciousness), Marx appropriates Hegel's self-movement of subjectivity as an act of transcendence and

transforms it into a critical humanism. The value form of labor (abstract labor) that has been transmogrified into the autonomous moment of dead labor, eating up everything that it is not, can be challenged by freely associated labor and concrete, human sensuousness. The answer is in envisioning a non-capitalist future that can be achieved, as Hudis notes, after Dunayevskaya, by means of subjective self-movement through absolute negativity so that a new relation between theory and practice can connect us to the idea of freedom. Hudis (2000b) argues that the abolition of private property does not necessarily lead to the abolition of capital. We need, therefore, to examine the direct relation between the worker and production. Here, our sole emphasis should not be on the abolition of private property, which is the product of alienated labor; it must be on the abolition of alienated labor itself. Marx gave us some clues as to how transcend alienation, ideas that he developed from Hegel's concept of second or absolute negativity, or 'the negation of the negation'. Marx engaged in a materialist re-reading of Hegel. In his work, the abolition of private property constitutes the first negation. The second is the negation of the negation of private property. This refers to a self-reflected negativity, and what Hudis refers to as the basis for a positive humanism.

Bruno Gulli makes a similar point when he notes that the 'both/and' bourgeois logic used to resolve contradictions is not an alternative to capital. The possibility of change does not reside in a 'both/and' logic but rather can be located in a 'neither/ nor' logic. He writes that

In reality, the *both/and* modality enjoyed by the few is the condition for the *neither/nor* modality of a growing majority. *Chiapas* is an example of this. The possibility of a change does not reside in the acceptance of the *both/and* mentality but in the creation, out of a double negation, of a new radicality, one in which the having become of becoming is resurrected again to return to the immediacy of its subject . . . The logic which breaks that of capital is a logic of *neither/nor*, a logic of double negation, or, again, a logic of double resistance and absolute affirmation. Through this logic, labor returns to itself, not posited by capital as valorizing labor, but posited by itself as *neither productive nor unproductive* labor: as living labor or form-giving fire (Gulli, 1999, note 28; paragraph 35).

**Glenn:** Absolute negativity in this sense is a creative force.

**Peter:** Yes. Of course, Marx rejects Hegel's idealization and dehumanization of self-movement through double negation because this leaves untouched alienation in the world of labor-capital relations. Marx sees this absolute negativity as objective movement and the creative force of history. Absolute negativity in this instance becomes a constitutive feature of a self-critical social revolution that, in turn, forms the basis of permanent revolution. Hudis raises a number of difficult questions with respect to developing a project that goes beyond controlling the labor process. It is a project that is directed at abolishing capital itself through the creation of freely associated labor: The creation of a social universe not parallel to the social universe of capital (whose substance is value) is the challenge here. The form that this society will take is that which has been suppressed within the social universe of capital: socialism, a society based not on value but on the fulfillment of human need.

**Glenn:** This brings us together, facing a common enemy in order to struggle for the realization of those human needs. At this point, the question of social movements asserts itself: different struggles it appears, but do they form just *one* struggle from the perspective of anti-capitalism? For me, the social movements have a common enemy: capital -- and the ideologies (especially neo-liberalism) that sustain it. But what is your

perspective on social movements, Peter? You indicated by e-mail some while back that you were rethinking the significance of social movements. What are the problems with social movements?

### ***Social Movements and Critical Pedagogy***

**Peter:** I find the creation of multi-class formations exceedingly problematic for a number of reasons, several of which I would like to mention, without excessive adumbration. Others have gone into this in capillary detail but for the purposes of this discussion I want simply to mention that, for the most part, such movements serve mainly the petit-bourgeoisie and their interests. Secondly, these groups rarely contest the rule of capital. The laws of motion of capital and social relations of production do seem the central objects of their attack, and, frankly, too often they are not even regarded as the central issues around which their struggle coalesces. Their efforts are too often reform-based, calling for access to capitalist forms of democracy, for redistribution of resources. Thirdly, in their attempt to stitch together a broad coalition of groups, they often seem rudderless. Should we be for 'social justice' that works simply to re-institute capitalist social relations of production? Of course, these are issues that we need to debate in schools of education. The whole issue of rights-based justice is predicated on capitalist right to property. Can we shift the focus to the abolition of private property? I don't see these discussions occurring with any consistency within the tradition of critical pedagogy in the United States.

**Glenn:** How so?

**Peter:** What seemingly gives them ballast -- emotional, conceptual, political -- is their all-encompassing rallying cry for 'counter-hegemonic struggle at all costs' without, as it were, ever specifying what they mean. There is a lack of contextual specificity in tying their interests together. In other words, is all counter-hegemonic struggle a good thing? It reminds me of the clarion call of the multiculturalists for diversity, for social justice. Is the struggle for diversity always transparent, always self-evident? I think not. Today the great benefactors of diversity are the multinational corporations. Especially when you consider that we have arrived at a point in our history where democracy and social inequality proceed apace, in tandem. In today's global plantation, diversity -- ethnic, gender, sexual -- functions in the interests of capital accumulation. The questions we need to raise are: Diversity for what purpose? In whose interests? By what means? Who benefits? Just look at the Republican Party and the calls for diversity during its national convention. Diversity for 'compassionate' conservatism? Diversity for boosting big business? For taking money from the poor and putting it in the pockets of the rich? Is this what we mean by 'diversity'? Is this what we mean by counter-hegemony? What are we countering, precisely?

I should think that the strategic centrality of counter-hegemony very much depends on what you are attempting to counter. I would much prefer to see the various new social movements linked by a singular commitment towards a protracted, all-embracing assault on capital, not just capitalism. Wouldn't it be more productive for the center of gravity in such a project to be the struggle for mass, collective, working-class struggle, for proletarian hegemony? So that we can create conditions that captures Marx's concept of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.' As Marx and Engels noted, our concern cannot merely be the modification of private property, but its abolition, not the amelioration of class antagonisms, but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of society but the establishment of a new one. This is no easy task but it

requires working-class internationalism at a time of a powerful diversity within the international division of labor.

**Glenn:** I would see things slightly differently. Whilst I agree with you that the struggle against capital is *the* struggle, the critical engagement, I don't think this is a majority position within the post- Seattle anti-globalization movement. However, I do think its appeal is growing within that movement, as the various fragments come to realize the impossibility of finding real solutions within the framework of capitalist society. For me, the issue is to bring the anti-globalization movement towards its constitution as an anti-*capitalist* movement. The arguments for that transition have to be continually made. But Peter, backtracking a tad, you said that critical pedagogy has the potential to become a challenge to private property rights, and a challenge to the domination of capital itself. It can also articulate social injustices as they relate to education and the wider society. Yet, for you, it is clear that the so-called Critical Pedagogy School has to date signally failed in realizing its potential. The issue of critical pedagogy is where our contributions meet up -- as I indicated earlier. My work on labor power shows that critical or radical pedagogies have the potential to disrupt the smooth flow of the social production of labor power by raising issues of social justice and inequalities in capitalist society. Further, radical pedagogy is an essential moment within revolutionary social transformation; it is at the heart of truly revolutionary transformative praxis, as Paula Allman (1999) convincingly argues. So what, Peter, in your view, has gone so wrong with the Critical Pedagogy School? I am afraid if we don't center our question on pedagogy now then we might not have time enough to do it justice. Specifically, where is the problem with critical pedagogy in the United States?

**Peter:** I like to say there exist critical pedagogies, in the plural, because the few of us who write about it, and practice it, have definite ideas about what makes a pedagogy critical, or vulgar and domesticating, or reproductive, or what I have been calling of late, revolutionary. I won't give a nuanced rendition of these debates, but offer you my simple but straightforward impression of what's wrong.

**Glenn:** Okay, just the outline of the tragedy then.

**Peter:** Critical pedagogy has, in the main, been defrauded of its legitimacy, defunded of its revolutionary potential, at least the critical pedagogy that I am thinking about. In my discussions last year with my dear comrades in Finland, Israel, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, and Taiwan, I noticed that there was a great enthusiasm surrounding the possibilities of critical pedagogy, and a misperception that it was finding its way into the classrooms of the United States. In the United States, it has been sadly vulgarized and emasculated to what I call 'the democracy of empty forms' -- seating arrangements in circles and semi-circles, teachers serving as 'facilitators' and promoting informal discussions of students' experiences, and the like. On the one hand, when critical pedagogy is taught in university settings it is dismissed as being elitist. There are constant attacks on the language of critical pedagogy as it is used in the academy, for instance. On the other side of the debate is populist elitism. This is a heavily-charged feeling among some activists that the closer in proximity that you are to the oppressed (that is, if you are a teacher in South Central or Watts or East Los Angeles) then the closer you are to the 'truth' of the teaching enterprise. It also puts you nearer to interpreting the experience of students. Hence, professors who teach critical pedagogy are accused of being ivory tower intellectuals who offer theoretical approaches that make little sense in actual classroom situations.

**Glenn:** The 'ivory tower' no longer exists, if it ever did. Studies of higher education show that it too is increasingly under the truncheon of capitalist social relations. I have David

Harvey's excellent article in *Capital & Class* in mind here (Harvey, 2000), but also I also have in view important work in this journal by Teresa Ebert, Deb Kelsh and others.

**Peter:** Absolutely, Glenn, but on the specific issue of classroom teachers, I do believe that this proximity gives the teacher a unique vantage point for interpreting their experiences, but I don't think it guarantees the truth of their own experience or that of their students. There are a lot of teachers and students who work in the barrio who don't betray -- or strive for -- what might be called 'critical consciousness'. We can apply the same criticism to professors of education, of course. But I do think that the teachers and students from aggrieved communities have the potential to build a powerful revolutionary movement. The pressing question for me -- whether we work in inner-city areas in classrooms or whether we work in the precincts of the academy -- is whether or not our approach to making sense of experience is a dialectical one. That is, that it locates students, schools, curricula, policies and pedagogical and social practices within the larger social totality or social universe of capitalist social relations. My focus here is not on analyzing schooling from the perspective of social relations of exchange or consumption as much as it is analyzing the schooling process and the formation of students within it from the perspective of the social relations of production. Behind the exchange of things -- knowledge, information, and commodities -- there is always a relationship to production. Students are not only consumers, they are also casualties of a perverse production process. They therefore become casualties of history. When I talk about interrogating our experiences as learner- practitioners or teacher-learners, I am trying to find ways of forging a collective revolutionary praxis and creating contexts where students can shape history through their own actions in, through and against the world. Language and experience are not pristine, unmediated, fully transparent, or sealed off from society but rather are refracted by dominant values as well as stabilizing and conventional discourses. Experiences need to be both affirmed and critically interrogated, but the point behind our affirmation of and challenge to the 'common sense' character of our experiences is the commitment to transform our experiences. We need to make a connection between our collective revolutionary aspirations and personal experiences of oppression. But our attempts at the transformation of social relations of exploitation must pay attention to the appropriate forms that our cultural action should take as a mode of revolutionary praxis. Paulo Freire underscored the notion that cultural action in order to be transformative must also be a preparation for cultural revolution. And such a revolution is most fully developed when we are engaged in the struggle to bring about the dictatorship of the proletariat. The point I want to make here is that we can't be passively bound by our experiences -- even populist ones (perhaps especially populist ones when you consider the fact that it is a form of populism that is currently informing the politics of George W. Bush). This is because critical knowledge means an encounter with dialectical analysis in order to smash the oppressor within. Paula Allman reads Freire brilliantly -- and 'bodily' -- when she notes that '*dialogue enables us to experience the alternative or certain aspects of it for a period of time and in a specific context*'. The structure of society resides in the structure of experience. We carry this in our musculature, in our gestures, our emotions, in our dreams and desires. Our subjectivities are commodified (a process that Lukacs described as 'reification').

**Glenn:** This was a central theme of your *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* (McLaren, 1999), was it not?

**Peter:** Yes, I was trying to find a way of exploring the link between labor and the language of symbolic gesture, between knowledge and the commodification of desire. Unfortunately I was not schooled in the work of Marx as much as I should have been

when I wrote that book. But let's get back to the idea of commodification. The whole process of commodification should be more central in discussions and practices of pedagogy. These commodities, these reifications are not illusions but objective social processes. Commodification regulates our social lives. We can't just 'think' away the commodification of our subjectivities, our 'structures of feeling' as Raymond Williams put it. We need to find our freedom in our actions, in new sets of actions that explode the prison-house forged out of the grammar of capitalism. Our truth will be found in our actions, in our praxis. Marx wrote, *'man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice'*. That is, the truth of our ideas exists only in practice. Lukacs quotes Lenin thus: *'the concrete analysis of the concrete situation is not an opposite of "pure" theory, but -- on the contrary -- it is the culmination of genuine theory, its consummation -- the point where it breaks into practice'*. Lukacs follows this with the remark: *'Without any exaggeration it may be said that Marx's final, definitive thesis on Feuerbach -- "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point, however, is to change it" -- found its most perfect embodiment in Lenin and his work'*. In other words, Lenin's revolutionary struggle is illustrative of what is meant by a philosophy of praxis. All critical educators need to become philosophers of praxis. So that to summarize and give you the gist of my argument, and I fear that I have been meandering terribly, here, Glenn -- I believe that critical pedagogy needs to focus on interrogating and transforming the constituent results of the complex and concrete social totality. We need to explore the 'fertile dungheap' of capitalism's contradictions, through which all of us live and labor. We need to get back to this messy work of historical materialist critique in order to build momentum in our revolutionary praxis. This is so especially given the often grave misperceptions about Paulo Freire's pedagogy that have proliferated over the last several decades, following in the wake of what has been a steady domestication and embourgeoisment of his work.

**Glenn:** This is a key element in your Che/Freire book, Peter (McLaren, 2000). You exhibit the tragedy beautifully but with an obvious sadness of heart.

**Peter:** Yes, Glenn, what I aimed to show in that book was why a dialectical critique of capitalism needs to underlay the development of critical consciousness. This point is essential, and, in part, it can be achieved through the act of decoding everyday life, and, in the process, liberate students to deal critically with their own reality in order to transform it. Students need to understand that they do not freely choose their lives, that their identities, their dreams, their actions in and on the world, as well as their objects of consumption are adaptive responses to the way that the capitalist system manipulates the realm of necessity. Commodification regulates social lives. Something Paula Allman points out is exceedingly important: that Freirean educators are unwaveringly directive. Paulo confirmed this in numerous discussions with me. Teachers have something to say, something to offer in creating the context for students to name their world, and through dialogue come to creatively reshape their historical reality. Freire did not approve of attempts to turn teachers into passive facilitators. To ask students to 'read the world' critically in order to transform it in a way that will foster humanization is, after all, prescriptive. To demand that the world needs transforming and that education should play a critical role in this effort is, again, prescriptive. Educators should use their authority that comes from their own critical reading of the world as well as their understanding of Freire's philosophy of education in their work with students. As Paula Allman asks: Isn't the most facilitative, non-prescriptive and non-directive form of progressive teaching doubly prescriptive in the sense that it is a prescription for non-prescription as well as for political domestication and adapting successfully to the social universe of capital and the law of value? Freirean educators direct and prescribe, but do so in a spirit of co-operation

and mutuality, with an eye to collective action and with a Marxist grasp of the fact that the truth of thinking exists only in practice.

**Glenn:** I detect a deep disappointment in what you say, Peter, and this flows from your account of really existing critical pedagogy as, more or less, a renunciation of its *criticality* so that it has become more of a liberal pedagogy. That is, it is severed from the social drive of the working class to transform society. Is that correct?

**Peter:** Critical pedagogy must be tied irrevocably and implacably to our faith in the ability of the working class to shape society in the interest of freedom and justice. How do we enjoin our students to create conditions for escaping from the capitalist compression that necessarily splits value-preserving labor (that reproduces use value) from value-creating labor (exchange-value that gives shape to capital)? It seems to me that we need to focus with students on how they can become active social agents in shaping the sphere of revolutionary political praxis. How can we get them interested in anti-capitalist political praxis: including mass strikes, establishing workers' councils, overthrowing the state, and establishing a revolutionary party? These are questions that are currently challenging my thinking and my praxis. How can we make the anti-capitalist project (the struggle for working-class hegemony) a salient, coherent, and viable project, one with a force that will make history explode? How can we generate new horizons of experience, language, and struggle? These are issues that brush against the grain of most efforts at establishing critical pedagogy projects in classrooms.

**Glenn:** Although you emphasize the collective moment here, Peter, yet, at the same time, I get the impression that, for you, truly radical pedagogy is also a very *personal* thing. I have in mind your work on Che Guevara's pedagogy in your *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (McLaren, 2000) -- and also the stuff on Freire too. The co-operative moment, the mutuality that you speak of is manifested through the lives of individuals. So, although Che did not write huge tomes on pedagogy, his life was lived as pedagogic form for others. We just have to know how to 'read' it, and that is where radical educators come in. Is that how you see it, Peter? Of course, at that point, personal histories, biographies become the 'texts' of the collective learning that aims to transform social existence. How does the personal life link in with life as critical educator? Perhaps you could say a bit on this in relation to your own trajectory.

### ***Personal History, Intellectual Life, and Education***

**Peter:** My intellectual life had lowly origins; my body kept getting in my way of my mind. No, I'm not talking about a preoccupation with sex, but with the 'event', with the fusion of idea and action, argument and activity. Pivotal ideas meant that you crouched on them and used them as a springboard for action. Sometimes they were too slippery or too narrow to get a good footing. But reading Malcolm X, and Frantz Fanon lit a fire under me and I leap-frogged into the streets. Those two figures built a launching pad for urban action that was as large as an aircraft carrier. And Che Guevara, well, his was a platform the size of a continent. At the end of the 60s, my activities became more bookish, starting with attempts to engage the existentialism of Sartre, really. Merleau-Ponty was a strong influence for years, as was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, especially in my early engagement with Catholicism and Catholic mysticism, and, for a brief period, the theosophical tradition.

**Glenn:** Are you serious?

**Peter:** Yes, all that bourgeois muck, as they say. And I felt no sense of shame in luxuriating in the metaphysics of Krishnamurti and indulging in the self-scrutiny of Thomas Merton with an unappeasable frenzy, but in the case of Merton, I was starting to sniff a little Catholic triumphalism in the air and so I backed off.

**Glenn:** We were all young once, I suppose.

**Peter:** Don't tell me, Glenn, that you have never thumbed through a deck of Tarot cards! Or I suppose you used them as bookmarks in your readings of *Capital!*

**Glenn:** Well, there was the ouija board thing, and that put me off the Tarot. Okay, what was next?

**Peter:** Then the pastoral tradition of liberation theology swept through my life like a Kansas tornado. That is what spirited me away in the 1960s and 70s. Then I was introduced to Althusser and Balibar. There was not much of a link for me at that time with the tradition of Hegelian Marxism, although I was alerted to Lenin's shift to a Marxian dialectics, and encouraged by friends to indulge his ideas with some serious reading. From Althusser it was a brief engagement with Lacan, at first through the influence of Anthony Wilden's work. I worked my way back to the dialectic through the Budapest school, Lukacs, Heller, and, of course, Korsch. There was little discipline attached to my reading here, but I recall a rather dutiful engagement with the Frankfurt School, Fromm and Marcuse mostly, and only later Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin. Of course, Gadamer, Habermas, Ricoeur, they all made an impact. By that time I was working in education and had to engage Dewey, which was quite a worthwhile endeavor. But not as worthwhile as discovering Freire. Of course, Foucault came next, followed by Eco; next up, the post-structuralists and the intellectual high fashion at the time -- what a competitive enterprise it was! -- and still is -- and then, well, I've pretty much rehearsed that part of my intellectual history elsewhere. I think most people will find this boring, so let me conclude by saying that my journey back to Marx, and hence my journey forward politically, carefully sidestepped rational-choice theory and analytical Marxism -- to which I was temperamentally averse but begrudgingly respectful -- as I made an effort to re-engage the Hegelian Marxist tradition. I read Karil Kosik, and Lenin, and Luxemburg, and, of course, the great Marxist-humanist, Raya Dunayevskaya. Of course, I am leaving out the Birmingham School here, and my subsequent engagement with the cultural turn brought about by a specific reading of Gramsci; a turn which I now find highly problematic, and believe it to be a significant vulgarization of Gramsci's radical politics. Suffice it to say that I am still very much a student of Marx and the Marxian tradition. Just when you think the old bearded devil is down for the count, he rises up stronger than ever. Marx was uncannily prophetic -- and eerily prescient -- about the internationalization of capital. But there is more to Marx than his ability to anticipate crisis. I am currently very much impressed with the work of Terri Ebert, E. San Juan, James Petras, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, Ellen Meiksins Wood, Terri Eagleton, Alex Callinicos, well, I will stop there because if I try to list everyone, I'll inevitably leave some important names out.

**Glenn:** Yes, Peter, but how much of what you have read has informed, or continues to inform, your activism?

**Peter:** Glenn, the issue isn't what you've read. I've often been asked what influences have been vital to my intellectual formation, as if they all appear in the pages of a book. It really is a question of *what you actually do with the knowledge that you have*: what concrete events you helped shape, but also what concrete events helped to shape the



contours of your subjectivity, of your action both in and on the world, within the social order and against it. I remember in the 1960s when I was arrested for the first time. After being thrown against a black-and-white, I was taken to the police station, and into a cell, alone, and beaten with a flashlight by a sadistic cop. It was that sense of feeling the arm of the state (literally and concretely) on my skull that helped to shape the direction of my life. And wearing the scars of the encounter months later was a reminder, as was -- and is -- the memory, still. I had similar experiences in school -- the strap, of course, on the palm of my hand -- but my most powerful memory of corporal punishment is the slashing metal ruler brought down in hacking motions on the top of my hand, below my knuckles, by a sadistic industrial arts teacher.

**Glenn:** Given the current context of global capitalism, how would you describe your current contribution to educational debates and struggles in the US? I'm thinking of a quotation from your *Preface* to Paula Allman's new book:

*The vagaries and vicissitudes of capitalist domination and the conceptual apparatuses that yield our means of rationalized it are unceremoniously exposed. It is revealed as a world-system, an abundant and all-permeating social universe that, in its endless and frenetic drive to expand, co-operates in implacable and irreparable denials of social justice and shameless practices of exploitation. Such is the pervasive reach of capital that no aspects of the human condition are left untouched. Indeed, our very subjectivities are stuck in the 'muck' of capital. And the momentum capitalism has achieved makes it unlikely that it can be derailed without tremendous effort and sacrifice. It constitutes a resplendent hemorrhaging of the labor-capital relation, where commodities vomited up from the vortex of accumulation are hungrily consumed by tormented creatures, creatures who are deliriously addicted not only to new commercial acquisitions, but to the adrenaline rush of accumulation itself. Here the individual 'essence', in Gramsci's sense, is equivalent to the totality of social relations within global capitalist society (McLaren, in Allman, 2001).*

**Peter:** If you'll permit me to express myself -- with decidedly less dramatic flair -- let me share the fact that, unlike many postmodernists, I don't believe that humanity has entered a qualitatively new epoch. I don't subscribe to the picture that we are breaking away from the (Fordist/industrial) era of modernization and entering the new world of globalization where the economy is operating at a transnational level and where the nation state is no longer the political formation seeking to regulate the economy. I don't maintain -- as do many left-liberal educationalists -- that the major actors can be found in the realm of civil society in the form of new social movements and NGOs who work to expand, extend, defend, and strengthen civil society, as well as to render it more inclusive. In other words, I don't assume that civil society is relatively autonomous from the state, capital and the market, even when you consider the ongoing informal and non-formal efforts of the new social movements and their accompanying NGOs, to advance the cause and the practice of citizenship. It is misguided to view the arena of civil society as a space where public policies of social justice can be pursued in a spirit of co-operation and civic participation, and where a critical education approach can be enacted within a reform-oriented politics of inclusion, influence, and democratic accountability. Those of us who have attempted an activist politics in the domain of civil society know it isn't inherently benign. It's not a warm or co-operative space of dialogue and identity-formation. John Holst correctly notes that civil society is not antiseptically removed from the social relations of production. In fact, it is perfectly compatible with the emphasis that the free marketeers place on self-sufficiency, enterprise zones, 'capacity building' and grassroots

empowerment initiatives. But what is worse is that it simply transfers the costs of structural reform onto civil society. Radical pluralists, for instance, in arguing for personal and community responsibility, in schemes like the self-management of public housing and public schools and the privatization of welfare, derail the guaranteeing of basic social services by the state. My recent work has been an attempt to challenge the reformists from a classical Marxist position. Thus, I have of late been trying to re-ignite politically and conceptually some old debates that need to be exorcised from the musty North American vaults of the educational imagination. I suppose that if I am making any kind of contribution to the field, and I dare say it is a modest contribution at that, then it's in the area of challenging this radical pluralist/radical democracy school (you can also read this as the postmodernist school of educational criticism) in terms of its considerable and ongoing impact on critical theory and critical pedagogy. I would like to re-route educational theory away from its secure precincts in civil society and back to Marx. Well, actually, it really hasn't made much of an engagement with Marx to begin with there are scattered about the field some good Marxist educators, but for the most part the field is pretty much empty of Marx. But I would say that my work -- especially recent work with Ramin Farahmandpur -- is attempting to spark an interest among educators in Marx and the Marxist tradition. There are others, like Richard Brosio, and Holst, and a handful of others in the United States, who are writing against the liberal grain. I suppose, then, what I am attempting to do is to renovate educational theory in terms of Marx's value theory of labor and to make some Hegelian Marxist incursions into the educational literature.

**Glenn:** Your Che/Freire book has made a significant impact, Peter. I know that it has been reaching young readers in their early twenties and readers in their teens. They are relating to your work, I think, on a number of levels, and are initially drawn to your work by the way you present yourself. You mentioned to me recently that you read a book review that attacks you personally for the Che tattoo you display in the author's photo but also for the prefaces to the book written by distinguished scholars.

**Peter:** That's right. In failing to deal substantively with the ideas, concepts, and arguments in the book, Ken Zeichner, a teacher educator, focussed instead on my physical appearance, as well as on the series editor's preface and a preface by an internationally respected Latin American scholar -- two prefaces that, I might add, were published word-for-word, and title-for-title, exactly as they were sent to the publisher (mercifully, he omitted any commentary about the Foreword written by Nita Freire, Paulo Freire's widow). Prefaces of introductions by a series editor are standard fare in academic publishing and in this case the editor, Joe Kincheloe, complimented my writing style. My unorthodox style has received quite a bit of critical commentary over the years because it is considered by some educators to be overly literary and too esoteric to be of much practical use for teachers or pre-service students seeking to improve the educational system. I guess Zeichner feels that I should have asked the publishers to halt the presses so that Joe could have time to write a less-flattering preface, maybe asking readers to put the book down and read something by somebody who professes to have more humility, somebody perhaps like Zeichner. Zeichner also found it self indulgent of me to be in a book graced by a second preface, written in the form of a poem by Chilean Marxist, Luis Vitale. Vitale entitled his poem 'a salute to Peter McLaren' (a poem, by the way that mentions me only once). Webster's Unabridged New Universal Dictionary defines 'salute' as 'to greet or welcome in a friendly manner.' So, in Zeichner's mind, to be 'greeted' by a respected Latin American Marxist in a poem that mentions the author only once, and to be complimented on one's writing by the series editor somehow illustrates a character

flaw in the author. Zeichner finds the ultimate index of my lack of humility in the fact that a tattoo of Che Guevara is visible on my arm in the author's photo.

**Glenn:** So what should you have been wearing in your author's photo?

**Peter:** Whatever Zeichner wears, I guess. Maybe a tweed or corduroy sports jacket and a turtleneck? A patch pocket blue blazer with an embroidered gold wire crest from a private university? Coffee-stained Dockers and button-down cotton Levis shirts? A shark skin suit? I have never seen him so I have no idea what he wears and, frankly, don't care, but I'd put money on the fact that he doesn't wear leather pants or sport a tongue stud. You can tell he doesn't live in Hollywood. Here I pretty much blend into the crowd. The point is that if you take Zeichner's logic about glowing prefaces a bit further then even blurbs about one's book should equally earn censure for self-indulgence. That would apply to every author whose book is festooned with the usual endorsements.

**Glenn:** Or a tattoo.

**Peter:** My advice to authors: cover those arms and keep the blurbs tame.

**Glenn:** In addition to commenting on your appearance, Zeichner infers that you rarely leave your university campus in Westwood so you couldn't know the real world of teachers and teaching.

**Peter:** I am not impressed by Zeichner's knowledge of Los Angeles. It might be interesting to put him in my shoes for a week, and see how he holds up. Then again, maybe that isn't such a good idea, he might not feel comfortable wearing Doc Martens.

**Glenn:** The point of the Che/Freire book then?

**Peter:** The point of the Che/Freire book was to launch an all-out critique of capitalism from an historical materialist perspective and to encourage educators to consider socialist alternatives. The global restructuring and retrenchment of capitalism should be the starting point for any serious analysis of and engagement with teacher education. My work since the Che/Freire book has gone even further in postulating what this might mean in terms of revolutionary class struggle.

**Glenn:** For some, this might sound a bit 'fundamentalist'. I mean, I have heard it said by some educators in the United States, that in your work, in particular, critical pedagogy at its best is too preoccupied with issues of social class. Your Marxism in your current work swamps concerns with 'race', gender -- with the social movements in general. Is there any truth to this?

### ***Too Much Class?***

**Peter:** I am glad you raised this question, Glenn. What do we mean by social class? That's part of the issue. You, Dave Hill, and Mike Cole all have objected strenuously -- and courageously -- to the way that the official classification of social class in Britain is based upon status and associated consumption patterns and lifestyles. If you say somebody is upper class and then designate somebody else as lower class, the assumption is that there is a middle-class and the upshot of this classification system is the naturalization of the notion of progress within capitalism. All you do is too lend credence to the myth that it is possible for everyone to move up the ranks on the basis of hard work, fortitude, and perseverance. This justifies the social division of labor and class differentiation and mystifies the agonistic relation among the classes. When we talk about

'white collar' and 'blue collar' workers, we hide the existence of the working class and the fact that this class has common class interests. We hinder the development of a common class-consciousness among fractions within the working class. I prefer the term 'ruling class' or 'capitalist class' on the one hand, and 'working-class' on the other.

**Glenn:** Okay -- so not much room for the predominant neo-Weberian view of class there. I'm totally with you on this. Last summer I went to a conference at Kings College London on education and social class and all the presentations presupposed a neo-Weberian stance that reduces 'class' to status, income and consumption groups (with the usual cultural overlay -- which is important in England). Anything approaching a Marxist class analysis of education was lacking, sadly. I think there are serious problems in Marxist class analysis. Marx never left us a developed class theory. *Capital* volume three ends with, well, basically a neo-Weberian 'box people' approach that today's sociologists of education feel very at home with. But Peter, I do feel you have sidestepped the issue of an apparent prioritization of social class in your work -- above gender, 'race' and so on. I'll press you on this one!

**Peter:** Well, it is important that we continue this discussion. But let me shift here to your comment about privileging class oppression over other forms of oppression. I hold that in general class struggle modifies the particularities of other struggles, that there is a strategic centrality to class struggle in that capitalism is the most powerful and far-reaching process of commodification imaginable. I hold, too, that the working class does pose a credible threat to the viability of the capitalist system. The charge that I privilege class exploitation over other forms of oppression is usually leveled at me by bourgeois left-liberals (some with pretensions to neo-Marxism). These people claim that advocating for anti-capitalist struggle is mere rhetoric. They also maintain that a stress on class detracts from anti-racist efforts in education, or efforts to de-claw patriarchy. This is an insult to feminists and to activists of color who have historically played an important role in the struggle against capitalist exploitation. I see an indissoluble link among 'race', class, and gender forms of oppression.

**Glenn:** I totally agree on this, Peter. I indicated earlier in our dialogue that it is difficult to make the links, but we shouldn't duck the responsibility for making them.

**Peter:** Yes, Glenn. My point is that capitalism will find ways to survive the challenge of multiculturalism and feminism by co-opting these struggles. Many of the new social movements are seeking resource re-distribution, not the overthrow of capitalist social relations. That's my point, plain and simple. I support projects that undress the conspiracy between capitalism and racism, and capitalism and sexism, and capitalism and heteronormativity. But there is a strategic centrality to my work that I won't deny, or apologize for, that seeks to unite new social movements with the old social movements, so that anti-capitalist struggle becomes a unifying priority.

**Glenn:** This is interesting, on how the social movements relate to the anti-capitalist struggles of the future. It touches on the old, but still significant debate about reform *versus* revolution and the 'problem of centrism'. This debate is playing itself out in the emerging anti-capitalist/globalization movement post-Seattle. Furthermore, there are problems of leadership and strategy, and these problems are being discussed within the anti-capitalist/globalization movement throughout the world. How do you see things, Peter? Can social movements congeal into a force for anti-capitalism?

**Peter:** I find the creation of multi-class formations exceedingly problematic for a number of reasons, several of which I would like to mention, without excessive adumbration.

Others have gone into this in capillary detail but for the purposes of this discussion I want simply to mention that, for the most part, such movements serve mainly the petit-bourgeoisie and their interests; secondly, these groups rarely contest the rule of capital. The laws of motion of capital and social relations of production do not seem the central objects of their attack, and, frankly, too often they are not even regarded as the central issues around which their struggle coalesces. Their efforts are too frequently reform-based, calling for access to capitalist forms of democracy, for a redistribution of resources. Thirdly, in their attempt to stitch together a broad coalition of groups, they often seem rudderless. Should we be for a form of 'social justice' that works simply to reinstitute capitalist social relations of production? Of course, these are issues that we need to debate in schools of education and elsewhere. The whole issue of rights-based justice is predicated upon capitalist rights to property and entitlement to the extraction of surplus value in measures unimaginable. Can we shift the focus of such a struggle to the abolition of private property and the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production? To new social relations, political cultures, and forms of free, creative, and collective association not trapped within the social universe of capital? I don't see these discussions occurring with any consistency within the tradition of critical pedagogy in the United States.

**Glenn:** But this, for me, is not just an issue for the United States. In your own work, Peter, you have continually stressed the international dimension when thinking through how critical pedagogy, social movements and anti-capitalist struggles relate.

**Peter:** Yes, this is important, absolutely essential. What you see, for instance, in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is not a disappearance of the hidebound and monolithic structures of power, or the disappearance of the previous socio-economic orders -- i.e., centrally planned socialism -- of the old regime, so much as its transmogrification: the capitalist consolidation of power over markets and property -- i.e., via spontaneous privatizations or voucher privatizations, and the like; power over the means of the extraction of surplus value; the power to merge civil society more fully into capital; the power to increase dependence on Western economic systems; the power to legitimize what amounts to a swapping of elites in the name of democracy. A capitalist revolution without capitalists, a bourgeois revolution without the bourgeoisie, as some commentators note. Attempts at integration to the capitalist world economy have increased misery and poverty -- through a vertical international division of labor -- on a world-historical scale, and this also relates to Latin American economies in general. In fact, in light of the restoration of the comprador elites, many of the present-day Eastern European countries, by means of their prolonged austerity and increasing unemployment, the exacerbation of the rifts between the ruling class and labor, and the deepening of class divides, are beginning to resemble the peripheral capitalist countries of Latin America. Here the dreams fuelled by the consumer promise of a better life in capitalism fall and shatter on the pavement of hard truths: that the so-called 'transition to democracy' will see the authoritarian regimes of Eastern Europe come in through the back door. A class system riven with such disparities -- even when overhauled by neo-liberalism -- cannot afford a real participatory form of political representation, but must rely more and more upon brute state repression or authoritarian populism. Witness also recent events in Spain with respect to government policies on immigrants.

**Glenn:** These facts point to some of the tasks ahead for the anti-capitalist movement. People like to point to Seattle, Washington, Prague, Nice and so on -- but in some countries the anti-capitalist movement and working-class action are at lower levels. Basically, though, are you optimistic about the future?

## *The Future*

**Peter:** Occupying the horizon of the future -- the immediate future, at least -- is the continuation of life as warfare, of war against the poor, against women, against people of color, against gays and lesbians and transgendered peoples. I lament the continuing contempt that the ruling class betrays towards those who do not mirror its values. I mourn daily for the revolution that has not yet come to pass. How can one not recoil from the refuse of history that litters the charred path to emancipation, to freedom? So much agony, so much bloodshed and misery. I may not be able to summon optimism, but I still hold on to hope, as fragile as my grasp might be. I am careful to reject a facile optimism, so prevalent in the current craze of bourgeois self-fashioning, yet I refuse to be burdened by a politics of despair. Nor do I seek to aestheticize despair and turn it into a coffee klatch therapy session for academics, or to make it an art-form -- or forum -- to succor more bourgeois self-indulgence for the metropolitan art scene crowd. Now is the time to become intoxicated with the struggle for freedom, to get drunk on the possibility that comes from the horizon of the concrete. Look at the general strikes that have occurred in countries all over the world. Look at Seattle, Washington, and beyond. Look at the revolutionary movements that continue to forge a new politics of the possible. But before we in the North become drunk by such anticipation we need to become awakened to the tasks ahead. The tasks that Freire, Gramsci, Lenin, and Luxemburg have put before us. If we accept the terms of capital, then one has already conceded defeat at its hands. That's where critical education comes in and that is where I believe I have been granted a special gift. The gift of being able to work with teachers and students from all walks of life, and being given the privilege to fight along side of them for working-class power.

**Glenn:** What about the struggle, the pragmatics of it. Take the Zapatistas. You have written about their struggle and admire it. But does it go far enough?

**Peter:** You mean, are the 'cuernos de chivo' just postmodern props today? No, the ammunition is ready to be chambered, if necessary. The question is this: Is it the correct time? That depends, of course, upon where you happen to be standing when you are asking that question. Take the recent split between the Revolutionary Party of the Insurgent People (ERIP) and the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) in Oaxaca and Guerrero.

**Glenn:** You have written about them in a recent book, correct?

**Peter:** Yes. I am also encouraged in hearing about the Armed Ecologist Group who are defending communal forests from timber exploitation, and the National Indigenous Guerrilla Triple Alliance (TAGIN), a joint command of three armed groups in the Sierra del Sur, Morelos, and Mexico state: the Indigenous Campesino Revolutionary Party (ERIC), the Nationalist Army of Insurgent Indigenous Mexico (ENMII) and Armed Capesino Command of Indigenous Liberation (COACUAUHTLI). There is an interesting and informative article on all of these groups by Bill Weinberg in a recent issue of *Native Americas*. A major concern Weinberg identifies is the whole issue of the drug war as counterinsurgency. Here the Pentagon has played a role in advancing what it has called 'Guerra de Baja Intensidad' or low-intensity warfare that consists of limited and protracted politico-military struggle designed to put economic, psychological and diplomatic pressure on insurgent groups. The Pentagon has imparted this doctrine to the Mexican National Army. Weinberg notes, for instance, that 1,500 Mexican military officers received training from 1996 to 1997. The training is supposedly for counter-drug interdiction operations, but it is obvious that it is for counterinsurgency against the

guerrillas. There are clear signs of tension between and within some guerrilla factions. For instance, the ERPI basically split from the ERP on the grounds that the ERP was becoming too militantly orthodox, too messianic. The ERP and Comandante Jose Arturo refuses to dialogue with the Mexican government and criticizes the Zapatistas 'armed reformism'. The ERPI wants to operate in a bottom-up fashion, with the direction coming directly from the people. They want to be the Army of the People, not the Army of the Party. The guerrilla command should obey the will of the people, and not the other way around. The question of organization is crucial, and always will be. Weinberg cites an exchange by Arturo and Subcomandante Marcos. Arturo criticized Marcos by arguing that 'poetry cannot be the continuation of politics by other means' followed by Marcos's reply: *'You fight to take power. We fight for democracy, freedom and justice. It's not the same thing. Even if you are successful and win power, we will go on fighting for democracy, freedom and justice'*. This really reflects a lot of the debates around issues of organization, of how revolutionary movements can become authoritarian and despotic once they take power. On the other side of the issue is the difficult task of achieving real, structural change by operating in the civil sphere. This brings us to the debates around the relationship of civil society to the state.

**Glenn:** Where do you stand on this issue, Peter?

**Peter:** It has a lot to do with the issue of how hegemony is forged. Radical pluralists, neo-Marxists and post-Marxists rely a great deal on the democratizing potential of civil society. They wish to portray civil society as largely free from the tentacles of the state. Like Marx, I view civil society as an arm of the state. Hegemony is forged there, too, as well as at the site of production. Individuals consent to the dominant ideology because of the position the dominant group in the world of production attains. The class that constitutes the ruling material force in society forges the dominant ideology. Gramsci, as far as I know, didn't use the concept of counter-hegemony because it speaks overwhelmingly to a reformist politics. I think that operating in the civil sphere alone is problematic. I believe that as a result of each and every solution that is put forward by liberal democratic pluralists, or NGOs, or liberal or left-liberal multiculturalists, to the suffering of labor, labor will continue to suffer, precisely because these solutions don't directly challenge the rule of capital.

**Glenn:** You can, of course, trace this back to Hegel.

**Peter:** Yes, for Hegel the state becomes the site where alienation experienced in civil society is overcome. But Marx criticized Hegel's notion of civil society and the state as an imaginary idealist relation. For Marx, the state was another form of alienation, a central site of ruling class oppression. The state becomes a means for civil society to create the natural cosmopolitan citizen. John Holst has some provocative things to say about this. According to Holst, rejecting as outmoded and romantic Lenin's dream of taking over the state, and skipping around Marx's project of overthrowing capital, radical pluralists merely champion the cause of the new progressive social movements and organizations dealing with feminism, anti-racism, sexuality, and environmental issues whilst leaving capitalism intact. Nevertheless, they view this as a necessary defense of the lifeworld and a courageous deepening of democracy through their engagements with civil society. On the other hand, notes Holst, revolutionary socialists seek alliances between the old (community-labor organizations/trade unions) and new social movements. They reject, for the most part, the new social movements as the center of progressive change on the basis that they cleave away from the basic tenets of classical Marxism, especially when read directly against the work of Marx and Gramsci.

**Glenn:** And what's your view on it, Peter?

**Peter:** I believe that forging a counter-hegemonic bloc with new social movements could be problematic, and should be encouraged only when the primacy of working-class struggle against capital remains the overwhelming objective. Of course, let me say without further qualification that I believe today's dialectics of liberation, of self and social transformation, must include all forces of revolution: proletarian, women, gays and lesbians, people of color. Of course, Marx famously put it that 'labor in the white skin cannot be free so long as labor in the black skin is branded'. But I believe fervently that such forces should always be united against capital. I think it is possible to address the heterogeneities and differences in society based on, for example, race, gender, age, ability, locality, religion, culture, and the like, and still concentrate on class struggle. This brings us -- does it not -- to the inevitable discussion of Antonio Gramsci, and don't all educational roads always seem to lead to Gramsci?

**Glenn:** Well, for me they never did! Gramsci has played virtually no part in my intellectual development. Peter, we come from very different intellectual traditions, and that has to be acknowledged. I think that gives our conversations a certain edge. In the States, it seems that critical/radical pedagogy came principally through Gramsci and Freire, with Dewey sometimes in attendance. In Britain, the critical/radical pedagogy phenomenon has always been very much weaker as compared with the United States. Direct reading of Marx, labor process theory, Marxist critiques of education policy and Marxist historical writings on education (I have the work of the legendary Brian Simon in mind here) have been the main referents.

Furthermore, I don't really go along with the notion that we have to work only with the 'maximum program' (abolition of capitalism). I've seen too much of what happens with that in England. The key issue is how you build for anti-capitalism, and I'm not convinced that 'taking the message neat' necessarily works best. I witnessed the early history of the Revolutionary Communist Party (as the Revolutionary Communist Tendency in its early years) as indicating the weakness of the 'all or nothing' approach. Maybe I'm being unfair. But please go on, Peter, on Gramsci.

**Peter:** We shall take those points down-line, Glenn, for sure!

**Glenn:** Okay!

**Peter:** We, all those involved in anti-capitalist practice, need to discuss these vital issues. But yes, back to Gramsci, and I believe this is something we both agree on. It is important to expose those left liberals and radical reformists who have emasculated and vulgarized the political center of gravity that informs Gramsci's revolutionary theories, thereby distorting his legacy as a committed communist.

**Glenn:** Yes, absolutely with your there, Peter. In both our countries the liberal left approach to critique of education policy is dominant.

**Peter:** Right, Glenn. The crucial point is this: John Holst's reading of Gramsci is similar to the position held by British scholars such as Paula Allman and John Wallis (1995). Allman and Wallis contend that Gramsci did not have in mind loose coalitions of social movements when he spoke of creating an historical bloc in civil society. The war of position and the creation of proletarian hegemony means that the majority of the working-class population needs to be mobilized by class alliances. And this mobilization is directly undertaken to challenge the state. It is crucial to locate Gramsci within the



historical context of his attempt to forge proletarian hegemony. He was interested in bringing forth a revolutionary class. We need only examine his emphasis on the pedagogical dimensions of the revolutionary party. Holst re-situates Gramsci -- including his ideas of the state, the political party, organic intellectuals, spontaneity, hegemony, and alliances -- within Marx's problematic. Gramsci saw civil society as a fundamental aspect of the state. I realize there are major debates on this issue but even if we should concede that Gramsci saw private, civil society as distinct from the state, or political society, we have to agree that he saw both as the domain of ruling class economic power and political interest. The ruling class exerts its authority over the social order in the arena of civil society. So while I agree that you can't foist socialism on workers, I have not abandoned the notion of the vanguard. The issue for me is what such a vanguard should like. Ideally, the entire people should comprise the vanguard.

**Glenn:** Right, I think we are nearer on the account you are giving now, Peter.

**Peter:** For me, Glenn, the key issue is the central role that can be played by education. Socialism must first be 'embodied' or 'enfleshed' by workers in a type of struggle-in-motion, a collective internal dialogue, one directed towards emancipation from capital. After all, as Gramsci notes, historical acts can only be performed collectively. And this is to occur through the creation of a cultural-social unity in which toilers who reflect '*a multiplicity of dispersed wills*' are welded together on the basis of a heterogeneous, single aim: that of '*an equal and common conception of the world, both general and particular*'. This is the future that inspires and powers my work and life.

**Glenn:** Well, from Europe, the notion of vanguard party building has perhaps a different resonance. In Britain, we have witnessed the fortunes of many far left groups that have in one way or another subscribed to the notion of a 'vanguard party' deriving from Leninist principles of organization. Examples are the Workers Revolutionary Party, the Revolutionary Communist Group, the Revolutionary Communist Party, Workers Power, and the Socialist Workers Party -- and many smaller groups. On the whole, the results have not been impressive. We have seen examples of brilliant critique and analysis (the early writings of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency -- their *Revolutionary Communist Papers*, for example, stuff by the Revolutionary Marxist Tendency, which I still use now). There have been some fantastic campaigns and solidarity building (around many strikes), and so on. But no real big anti-capitalist party or group has emerged that has posed a really substantial threat to the British state and capital. The Leninist model has not been that successful in enabling these parties and groups to hold on to members either. The Socialist Workers Party has clearly been most successful, and I have great respect for them. When Ruth Rikowski and Howard Bloch were victimized by the managers of Newham Library Service in the mid-1990s (both were librarians at the time), the SWP's campaigning was impressive. At the college I worked at up to 1994 (Epping Forest College), it was the SWP members who were really great at organizing the fightback against management -- over new contracts, staff appraisal and other issues. Maybe, Peter, I have not made the distinction you might wish to make between a vanguard *party* and vanguard anti-capitalists, where the latter are not necessarily members of a particular party.

A concrete example may help develop this last point. Last weekend (4th February) Ruth Rikowski and I attended the 'Globalize Resistance' Conference in London. What impressed us was the way that the SWP were becoming a part of the anti-capitalist movement, rather than trying to dominate or get it 'oriented' in classical Leninist mode. In terms of the future, that Conference demonstrated that there is indeed 'something in the

air': it brought the Greens, the SWP, Workers Power, the Revolutionary Communist Group, the environmental movement, Jubilee 2000, Drop the Debt and other organizations together to work for what Kevin Danaher calls the 'People's Globalization'. There was a wonderful finale with a speech by a striking London Underground worker being cheered to the rafters! I admit that there are problems and debates around the organization of the movement against capitalist globalization. Ruth Rikowski summarizes the event in *Link-up* (Rikowski, R. 2001 -- a journal for Third World information workers) and argues that the movement has come a long way in a short time. But obviously, it needs to attend further to organizational and democratic forms, and left political parties are in a process of discovering their role *vis-à-vis* this rapidly developing movement. The SWP in particular are really trying hard to do this. People talked about a 'new politics' in relation to postmodernism, and in relation to Blair's New Labor. The former was a kind of anti-politics, the latter a continuation of Thatcherite neo-liberalism with a homespun gloss. But the rising anti-capitalist movement is a genuinely new politics; it places the future of capitalism itself on the chopping block of history. The anti-capitalist movement that has developed throughout many countries in the last five years also -- given a massive boost post-Seattle -- points towards an open future. This is a future no longer dominated by capital. It is a future worth fighting for. More than that: we are *driven* to fight for this future by capitalist development itself. We must not fail; the survival of our planet depends on the success of the anti-capitalist movement and the abolition of capital.

**Peter:** There are clearly issues requiring further discussion, Glenn, especially in relation to the notion of vanguardism. I've enjoyed this e-dialogue and look forward to further discussions with you.

**Glenn:** It's been great, and I feel that I've clarified and deepened some of my own ideas. I have also deepened my understanding and appreciation of your work, Peter. In addition, I've also got a clearer grasp of where our work interlocks most strongly for the project of human liberation. I look forward to developing our dialogue some more in other contexts



with this project in view.

<http://eserver.org/clog/c/4-1/4-1.html>

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