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FIRE AND DUST

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Abstract

Drawing upon a Hegelian-Marxist critique of political economy that underscores the fundamental importance of developing a philosophy of praxis, the author theorizes a revolutionary Freireian critical pedagogy which seeks forms of organization that best enable the pursuit of doing critical philosophy as a way of life. The authors argues that the revolutionary critical pedagogy operates from an understanding that the basis of education is political and that spaces need to be created where students can imagine a different world outside of capitalism's law of value (i.e., social form of labor), where alternatives to capitalism and capitalist institutions can be discussed and debated, and where dialogue can occur about why so many revolutions in past history turned into their opposite.

Fire and Dust**

Brothers and sisters in struggle, and all wayworn travelers on the road to socialism, I want to extend words of encouragement and hope to all of you at this important historical moment. We live in a world of fire and dust, where all the rhetoric trumpeted by our wartime leaders and the grinding engines of U.S. military preponderance cannot drown out the chorus of the dead: almost two thousand American soldiers and possibly over a hundred thousand innocent Iraqi civilians killed. Leaders of the imperialist states, hounded by the threat of hubris and trying desperately to rehabilitate their image as guardians of democracy who pledge to fight evil at any cost, cannot help but trip over their words that are ineluctably chafed by deceit and dripping with duplicity. The Bush cabal, ideologically nourished by the placenta of seventeenth century puritan New England and the hairy-chested dreams of the Roman emperors, is feeding its imperial drive with the blood of Iraqis and the willful abandonment of its poor. We need only witness the criminal behavior of the US military in Fallujah and throughout Iraq, and the way it has permitted its poor to suffer and die needlessly in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. When Bush remarked recently that looters in New Orleans and elsewhere in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina should be treated with "zero tolerance" we wish he would use the same standard for dealing with the CEOs of Halliburton and other transnational corporations who regularly loot the citizenry.

Even though intelligence committees gloomily warned that an invasion of Iraq would heighten the terrorist threat to Western interests, our leaders sided with the priorities of capital and the need to expand markets for the sake of 'national interests'. Their triumphalist call for the defense of freedom and democracy was enough to furnish them with a lethal cover for their imperialist agenda. Although they have rightfully condemned the recent bombing attacks in London and reached out to a woebegone public that is valiantly coming to grips with its fear, it is clear that the policy makers and administration officials in United States and the United Kingdom knew very well that their imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would spawn a new

generation of terrorists, not just in Iraq and Afghanistan, but elsewhere throughout the globe. However, their primary objectives were more centered on the quest for oil—accompanied by brutal military assaults, war crimes in Fallujah and elsewhere, geopolitical jockeying, and strategies for attaining advantages for U.S. corporations—than on the future safety and well-being of their citizens.

Poisoned by power, the truculent satraps of the Bush regime need not scruple at the corruption-fueled policies it pursues at the behest of the empire of capital. Not only has it the support of the transnational capitalist class but it also revels in its new unholy alliance with ‘God’s Rottweiler’, Pope Benedict XVI, a religious leader whose reactionary and medievalist political bearings are rabidly anti-modernist, anti-Marxist, anti-gay and anti-feminist (as Cardinal Ratzinger, the new pope urged voters in the United States not to vote for John Kerry, who was guilty of the abomination of being pro-choice, at the risk of spending eternity in the smoldering caverns of hell).

While the pusillanimous inertia of Congress and the media ensured them an easy ride, they are now confronting stiffer opposition, thanks to the consciousness-raising work of grassroots organizations and social movements that continue to shed critical light on the lineaments of our geopolitical present, one that currently witnesses 725 official United States military bases being maintained outside of U.S. soil (969 are maintained within the country).

When President Bush sneeringly comments that the United States is fighting the terrorists in Iraq so he won’t have to fight them on U.S. soil, an assertion that invariably presages more armed aggression to come, not only are many more people alerted to his patronizing smirk twisted into what appears to be a rictus of permanent impudence but they also more clearly see the tinfoil hat on his head.

As all of us know, life is going from bad to worse for those who bear the brunt of exploitation under the merciless sword arm of neoliberal capitalism and the class-racialized inequalities that continue to follow in the brutal wake of colonial history. Decisions driven by a monetary calculus—which is more so the case than ever on the part of the rich industrial countries at the center of the capitalist system that continue to use the economic surplus of the countries on the periphery to advance their own expansionist agenda and consolidate their own advantage—will only continue to reproduce the underdevelopment of peripheral capitalist countries while ensuring that the ruling classes at the core amass the vast majority of the world’s wealth. Liberals airily blame events on labor’s aristocrats and their penchant for greed. But that is a bit like blaming the sinking of a freighter by a submarine on water’s hydrogen and oxygen molecules.

For those of us who are fortunate to have some protections by means of our social capital, our daily needs are Lilliputian in comparison to those millions who barely scrape by. State violence and corruption-fueled domestic policies are a common threat to those whose lives have been declared redundant by the aristocrats of labor and the pooh-bahs of commerce who religiously adhere to the unfettered rule of market capitalism, to those who live on the wrong side of the razor-sharp racial divide, to those who suffer most from the destruction of the ecosystem’s regenerative capacities, to those who have been tragically forsaken by the political

establishment, to those who have joined Marx's reserve army of labor whose "food-free diet" isn't some fashion trend for the children of the Paris Club. Even today, decades after the so-called victory of capitalism over communism, decades after the election of reactionary Pope John Paul II, and decades after the Thatcher/Reagan revolution to abolish the welfare state, the words "there is no alternative" weighs on the brains of the living like an unspoken epigram in a horror tale about corporations who rule the world with cyborg armies of the night.

To the extent that corporations continue to acquire the rights and freedoms normally reserved for and accorded to human beings, they are wielding such rights in flagrant disregard for those whose labor-power they must acquire (by any means necessary) in order to survive. They are taking hacksaws not only to the web of planetary ecosystems and the objective conditions responsible for the generation of life but also to the covenant that once defined (however tenuously) the social commons and social democratic consensus. The comprador elite never tires of telling us that the rich are the hope of the poor, that the wealthy are the saviors of the downtrodden living in the back alleys in *casas de carton*. But in reality the rich are getting drunk on the tears of the poor, as their success only sets themselves up to be richer and wealthier. As David Korten writes:

We are told that those who make money are creating wealth that adds to the pie of society's total wealth. No one loses, so therefore no one should begrudge the wealthy their proper reward for their contribution to the increased well-being of all. Of course it's a bogus argument. Inflation of the financial bubble increases the claims of the holders of those assets against the world's shrinking real wealth far out of proportion to any contribution they may have made to real wealth. As a result a fortunate few enjoy multiple vacation homes, private jets, and exotic foods, while the least fortunate are displaced from their homes and farmlands and condemned to lives of homelessness and starvation that bears no relationship to need, contribution to society, or willingness to work. (2004, pp. 16-17)

Not only is the financial system set up to maintain the gap between the rich and poor, it is structured to keep that gap growing. We can't step backwards since we can't reverse neoliberal globalization. But we can transcend it, we can move towards a socialist alternative, we can win a new world.

Capital's extensive and intensive growth, the increasing fluidity and changeability between capital and the state, the non-territorial domination of underdeveloped countries by developed ones through brute market power and integrated processes of capitalist production (by utilizing cheap labor and controlling raw materials), the dispossession of peasants from their land, the hegemony of the dollar as world currency, the frenetic policing of all territories where capital is accumulated by the attack dogs of the military industrial complex, the alliance of market fundamentalism and religious fundamentalism-- all of these features weigh heavily on the brains of the living and strain the shoulders of the world's poor.

Bill Blum reports:

The poor people of the world fell off the cosmic agenda centuries ago. In India, the homeless are large enough to constitute fair-sized cities, the slums large enough to constitute a major metropolis; "crushing poverty" or "dirt poor" don't quite capture it; "a food-free diet" comes closer. We all know the picture. The *Wall Street Journal*, though, sees things we don't. "India's economy expanded a larger-than-expected 7 percent during the three months ended March 31," they breathlessly informed us July 5. "India's gross domestic product has recorded some of the biggest growth in the world this year." Gross domestic product ... that's a real beauty that one; you can put almost anything you want in it, like it's a garbage can; anything called a product, anything called a service. You wanna be a good citizen and increase the GDP? Burn down a building (which then has to be rebuilt), or go out and kill someone (services of undertakers, cemeteries, lawyers, etc.) As one economist has noted, marry your cleaning person, and you will make GDP drop (a paid service changing to an unpaid one). So much of it is arbitrary, so arbitrarily complex; and then the complexity is multiplied by comparing the GDP among different countries. Who knows what India puts into its particular garbage can? Is it the exact same garbage calculated in the exact same manner as in the United States? Hardly likely. But economists, politicians, the media, they all make use of their favorite Leading Economic Indicators to paint the kind of picture they want us to see; since India is waist-deep in the joys of globalization it's vital to globalization cheer leaders like the *Wall Street Journal* to paint smiley faces.

Today, in a world that has witnessed leaders of the dominant capitalist states declaring a permanent war on terror, what were once exceptional conditions are now the rule, as normal legal arrangements have been turned upside down. Anti-democratic laws which grant extra-judicial powers to hold citizens and immigrants without trial are moving modern democracies towards capitalist sovereignty congealed in the shape of totalitarianism. Recently in the United States, the Patriot Act has been extended, eviscerating basic Constitutional rights, as civil society is becoming militarized in the direction of a permanent security state, while political leaders on the right betray an unvarnished contempt for any kind of criticism of US foreign or domestic policy.

This is the perfect setting for postmodernists, who populate the subterranean interworlds of art, politics, and the academy, for they can now boldly pontificate with impunity (and even provoke the admiration of the ruling elite), deconstructing the décor of their servitude in a world where human agency is reduced to a voluble and labile collection of subject positions that disintegrate upon contact, where truth is but an effect of discourse, where university professors and the art house intelligentsia can serve as the absent guardians of disincarnated revolutionary overtures and pure contingency. But if you dare to relinquish the civilized barbarism of the educated elite, and refuse to absolutize the gap between the culture of the masses and those of the learned aesthetes and philomaths, jointly surpassing the boundaries of bourgeois legitimacy, and if you—heaven forbid—forcibly assert a praxis that challenges in the name of a socialist alternative the current retrenchment of our Constitutional rights and the rule of capital, well then, all hell will break loose.

As the events of these last few years attest, Marx's critique of political economy and materialist conception of history cannot be so easily discarded into the rag-and-bone shop of social history.

When Marx claimed that his aim in *Capital* was to expose or make visible the economic law of motion of modern society, he was seeking to reveal the inner workings of capitalist economic life—how capitalism works as a political-economic system—that gave birth to specific relations of alienation, relations that affect our lives today, not in the same way, but with the same effects—poverty, unemployment, lack of medical care, homelessness. Wage earners still sell their labor-power, that is, their capacity to labor. Labor-power, the capacity to labor, is the commodity that resides in the person of the laborer (Rikowski, 2005). Labor power—particular capabilities expressed in our labor—is transformed when we participate in commodity-producing activities. It is transformed into value, which Bertell Ollman (2004) describes as the sum of the alienated relations constitutive of capitalist labor. Value, the social form of labor, is created when our capacity to labor is transformed into actual labor as we participate in the production of commodities. In addition to producing material wealth in the form of use-value, the labor process within capitalism also is characterized by a valorization process of producing value that is stored in the commodities. Some of this value is represented in the wages that workers receive in order to reproduce themselves and their families for yet another day of service to the lords of capital. Yet workers always create value over-and-above that represented by the wage—what is commonly called unpaid labor—which becomes transformed into surplus value that makes capitalism possible. Glenn Rikowski (2005) describes labor-power as follows:

Thus the single commodity that has the capacity to yield greater value than that required for its own production and maintenance and whose expenditure is the basis for the generation of value and surplus value and the maintenance of capital's social universe is a commodity that is internal to and part of the personhood of the laborer. It is this that makes labor-power *capital's weakest link*. Workers own the power that generates value, surplus value and hence capital. Thus, they also own the power that can destroy it too as they can decide collectively to produce wealth in a form that does not entail value production.

It what sense does the above description of capitalism have any relevance for today? Does it still have some applicability in our neo-liberal universe of finance capital and what some have called the era of immaterial labor? Bertell Ollman (2004) gives an answer that is consonant with a Marxist humanist analysis of global capitalism set forth in this article. He writes:

[M]y response is that capitalism has changed a great deal since Marx wrote, and that capitalism has changed not at all since that time. What I mean is that the main structures of capitalism—that workers have to sell their labor power to capitalists in order to survive, that capitalists use their control over this labor to produce value and surplus value, that everything that workers produce carries a price and goes into the market, that these goods can only be acquired by people who have enough money to pay this price, that the state serves as the society-wide means by which the capitalist class solves the

distinctive problems it cannot handle on its own, etc., etc.—have changed hardly at all since Marx wrote. And these are the basic structures, relations and processes—essentially, what makes capitalism different from feudalism on one side and socialism on the other—that Marx devoted most of his life to studying.

Just as in Marx's day, the development of capitalism is concomitant with the growth and consolidation of commonplace understandings of how freedom of the market translates into democratic freedom. The prevailing categories and forms of thought used today to justify foreign and domestic policy in capitalist societies—such as those of 'democracy' and 'freedom'—are shaped by the social relations of the societies that employ them. And they have contributed to the perpetuation of a class-divided, racialized and patriarchal social order. These forms of thought manifest a certain universality and often reveal the imprint of the ruling class (echoing Marx's famous dictum that the ideas of the ruling class prevail in every epoch as the ruling ideas). The market as a category in the vernacular of the ruling class is not conceived of as a crucible of exploitation but as a means of opportunity, a means of leveling the playing field, a means of achieving freedom and democracy. But Marx showed that precisely what we need is freedom from the market.

Marx demonstrated how the formal equality of political rights can exist, hand-in-hand, with brute exploitation and suffering. The separation of economic rights and political rights is the very condition of the impossibility of democracy, a separation that liberals have been stunningly unable to challenge in their discourses of reform. In fact, as Ellen Meiksins Wood (1995) and others have pointed out, the constitutive impossibility of democracy in a society built upon property rights significantly accounts for why democracy can be invoked against the democratic imperatives of the people in the gilded name of the global imperium. Property and the market must be served by ensuring that there is too little, not too much, democracy and this cause can be advanced by leaders by making sure that the world exists in a constant state of conflict. This, of course, can only occur when citizens are convinced that 'freedom is not free' and that war will always be necessary to defend it (presumably even 'preventative wars' waged against those who are deemed to be a threat sometime in the near or distant future). This is precisely how the United States secures its suzerainty, by ruling through the market, by allowing limited autonomy to nations who adhere to the rules of the market, but who agree to keep their populaces subjugated as cheap labor. And by sending its warrior class into furious battle in those recalcitrant arenas where there is resistance to the rulers of the market as well as the market rules, and hence to the conditions of freedom and democracy and its imperial agents and guardians. This is the real meaning of the freedom of the market. The market generates the conditions for the 'winners' to create the necessary ideologies for justifying violence on the grounds of 'us-against-them' theories of 'inherent' competition and violence within the human species. And it provides them with the most formidable weapons available to carry out such violence and, in the case of the United States, to achieve the status (at least for the time being) as the organizing center of the world state.

Here, in the world's imperial heartland, education has become an epicenter of debate over the meaning of citizenship and the role and status of the United States in world history. Science is under attack in the high schools, theories of evolution are being challenged by those

of creationism and intelligent design, and privatization is destroying what is left of public schools.

An emphasis on testing resulting in a teaching-to-the-test mania, strict accountability schemes, prepackaged and scripted teaching for students of color, and a frenetic push towards more standardized testing—what Kozol refers to as “desperation strategies that have come out of the acceptance of inequality” (2005, p. 51)—have been abundantly present since the mid-1990s. But what has this trend produced? As Jonathan Kozol (2005) point out, since the early 1990s, the achievement gap between black and white children has substantially widened, about the same time as we began to witness the growing resegregation of the schools (when the courts began to disregard the mandates of the Brown decision). This has lead to a what Kozol calls “apartheid schooling”. Kozol reports that in 48 percent of high schools in the country’s largest districts (those that have the highest concentrations of black and Latina/o students), less than half of the entering ninth-graders graduate in 4 years. Between 1993-2002, there has been a 75 percent increase in the number of high schools graduating less than half of their ninth grade high school class in 4 years. In the 94 percent of districts in New York State where the majority of the students are white, nearly 80 percent of students graduate from high school in 4 years. In the 6 percent of districts where black and Latina/o students make up the majority, the percentage is considerably less—approximately 40 percent. There are 120 high schools in New York (enrolling nearly 200, 000 minority students) where, Kozol notes, less than 60 percent of entering ninth-graders make it to the twelfth grade. Such a statistic record has prompted Kozol to exclaim: “There is something deeply hypocritical about a society that holds an eight-year-old inner-city child ‘accountable’ for her performance on a high-stakes standardized exam but does not hold the high officials of our government accountable for robbing her of what they gave their own kids six or seven years earlier” (2005, p. 46).

For many evangelical Christians the history of the United States is deeply providential. For the increasing ranks of Americans who profess to serve no other king but Jesus, they see themselves as moral stewards of a country preordained by God to save humanity. Besotted with the white man’s burden of uplifting the ignorant masses of the Third World so that they might join the ranks of the civilized, evangelical Christians (including and perhaps especially those ‘power puritans’ and ‘opportunistic ayatollahs’ who serve at the helm of the Bush administration) betray a Messianic vision rooted in bad theology and rapture politics and the covenant God has apparently made with consecutive White House administrations throughout history (no doubt more favorably rewarding Republican administrations). With so many professed Christians braying about how important moral values are the United States, it might come as a surprise that

In 2004, as a share of our economy, we ranked second to last, after Italy, among developed countries in government foreign aid. Per capital we each provide fifteen cents a day to official development assistance to poor countries,. And it’s not because we were giving to private charities for relief work instead. Such funding increase our average daily donation by just six pennies, to twenty-one cents. It’s also because Americans were too busy taking care of their own, nearly 18 percent of American children lived in poverty (compared with, say, 8 percent in Sweden). In fact, by pretty much any measure of caring for the least among us you want to propose—we come in nearly last among the

rich nations, and often by a wide margin. The point is not that (as everyone already knows) the American nation trails badly in all these categories, categories to which Jesus paid particular attention. And it's not as if the numbers are getting better: the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported last year that the number of households that were "food insecure with hunger" had climbed more than 26 percent between 1999 and 2003. (McKibben, 2005, p. 32)

The attack by the Bush administration on public schools is in part a condemnation of ungodly secular humanism that is seen as robbing the moral authority of the state of its imprimatur granted by Jesus, the King of Kings. The same callow calculus cloaked in a sacred rage has had a hand in defining what is to be considered unpatriotic and anti-American, especially after September 11, 2001.

What we are seeing in so-called progressive, critical classrooms throughout the United States is not a pedagogy steeled in opposition to oppression, but rather an ersatz critical pedagogy, a domesticated approach to Freirean teaching that stresses the centrality of engaging student experiences and histories. This situation provokes the following sempiternal questions: Are these histories and experiences self-evident? If not, how are the histories of the oppressed written and who writes them? How are experiences interpreted and whose interpretation counts the most? What languages of critique are employed at understanding the formation of student subjectivities? What languages of possibility? Experiences, after all, are the "effects" of discursive regimes which, in turn, are given birth in a vortex of contending social forces, cultural formations, linguistic fields, ideological structures, institution formations, and overdetermined by social relations of production. Those pedagogies that affirm (through dominant narratives and discourses that unproblematically valorize democracy and freedom) student experiences but fail to question how these experiences are produced conjecturally in the formation of subjectivity and agency, accept a priori the sovereignty of the market over the body politic, and this, in turn, helps to re-secure a pliant submission to the capitalist law of value. And they are often the soft-focus pedagogies of the give-advantage-to-the-already-advantaged, self-empowerment variety. These dominant pedagogies systematically negate rather than make meaningful alternative understandings of the relationship between identity-formation and social relations of production. They are not only reflective but also productive and reproductive of antagonistic social relations, dependent hierarchies of power and privilege and hegemonic strategies of containing dissent and opposition.

A Pedagogy for Life

We live at a time so brutal and unforgiving that one has to continually question whether or not you are dreaming. Yet even as we despairingly acknowledge the pain and desperation of so many living in a state of national and international disequilibria, and recoil at the scale of capitalist exploitation and environmental degradation in our contemporary world, we still remain hapless prisoners of the illusion that we live in the best of all possible worlds, if not grotesquely superabundant, then at the very least satisfactory. This Panglossian illusion (named after Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide*, who responded to all unfortunate events with the comment: "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds") have led us to blunder into an erroneous justification for perpetual war against 'evil doers' and the uncritical acceptance of

global capitalism. This attitude has been given ballast not only by our messianic conviction that we have been ordained to be always on the right side of history but also by the adroit connection of our belief in the unflappable virtue of free market capitalism with the type of construction of national identity that pervades the corporate media (i.e., a toxic admixture of triumphalist statecraft, a providential version of Manifest Destiny, and garage sale apocalyptic mysticism): we must carry the torch of democracy to the far corners of the globe as our God-given duty, even if it means preemptive military strikes and imperialist aggression. True, it may be difficult for mortals to appreciate now but it's good for the cause of freedom in the long run, and we must trust God and our political leadership (who alone possess the oracular capacity to see that far into the future) that this is so (McLaren and Jaramillo, 2005). And if we find it too solemnly difficult to trust in God, then we should trust in the death-dealing power of our military to make it so.

In order that our social amnesia remain resolutely unacknowledged, we hide behind an almost puritanical fear of any pedagogy that insists on unbolting the door to doubt and squaring our shoulders against unquestioned orthodoxy, and on recognizing our entanglement in the larger conflictual arena of political and social relations and how such an entanglement is itself deeply ensconced in merging religiosity into political ends. Our merciless silence is deafening, and threatens the longevity of our social history. If we wonder how it is that here in the twenty-first century we are witnessing the steady erosion of human rights and civil liberties as well as the devastation of our ecosystems we only have to examine the extent of our political denial and its implication for mis-educating our citizenry.

Motivated by a desire to anchor their students in a coherent worldview and provide them with an enduring stability, teachers especially become an easily breached conduit for the official narratives of the state. The moral panic surrounding the meaning of patriotism in the post 9/11 United States has produced confusion among teachers and students alike—proclivities easily leveraged by the Bush administration through the corporate media that amplify, echo, mirror and appease official government narratives at times of national crisis.

At this moment in history, the work of Paulo Freire threatens to explode the culture of silence that informs our everyday life as educators in the world's greatest capitalist democracy, a key overarching saga of which has been the successful dismantling of public schooling by the juggernaut of neoliberal globalization and the corporatization of the public sphere. Critical pedagogy's conscience-in-exile, Freire sought through the pedagogical encounter to foist off the tyranny of authoritarianism and oppression and bring about an all-embracing and diverse fellowship of global citizens profoundly endowed with a fully claimed humanity. Yet instead of heeding a Freirean call for a multi-vocal public and international dialogue on our responsibility as the world's sole superpower, one that acknowledges that we as a nation are also changed by our relationship to the way we treat others, we have permitted a fanatical cabal of politicians to convince us that dialogue is weakness, an obstacle to peace, and univocal assertion is a strength.

Possibly the greatest reproach that Freire addressed to the authoritarian culture of his time was the devitalization and devaluation of human life, the fragmentation and commodification of subjectivity, and the erection of barriers to freely associated labor, joyful participation in social relations, and the self-development of the subject—an indictment that we

must extend to all of capitalist society. It would be difficult for progressive educators in the United States not to interpret Freire's message as a call to overthrow the political curates with whom most Americans took refuge after 9/11, priests of disorder who dragged the country deep into some sulfuric swampland populated by church-going elementals and hairy-knuckled demons clutching Bibles—an inferno fit for politicians that even Dante could not imagine. It is surely striking how Freire's eviscerating pedagogical commentary, by planting the seed of catharsis and thereby placing in our hands the responsibility to overcome the political amnesia that has become the hallmark of contemporary teaching, cannot be officially welcomed into the classrooms of our nation by the guardians of the state. For they have witnessed the unnerving intimacy and camaraderie Freire was able to forge among his admirers worldwide and the extent to which they were challenged by the disseminating force of his liberatory language of hope and possibility. And while teacher education programs have not been able to root him out of the philosophy of teaching, they have cannily managed to domesticate his presence. They have done this by transforming the political revolutionary with Marxist ideas into a friendly sage who advocates a love of dialogue, separating this notion from that of a dialogue of love. Hence, the importance of reclaiming Paulo Freire for these urgent times. Freire was critical of teachers who, while turning their podiums in the direction of history, refused to leave their seminar rooms in order to shape it.

Of particular significance for teachers is one of Freire's last books, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*. It is significant because it serves as an exhortation to a mindfulness of where we are going as educators, of what kind of world we are living in, of what kind of world we would like to see in its place. I would like to reflect upon some of the themes of this book as a way of addressing the challenge we face as citizens in a desperate and uncertain future. One of the central themes is the importance of a pedagogy powered by love.

For Freire, love is preeminently and irrevocably dialogical. It is not an attachment or emotion isolated from the everyday world, but viscerally emerges from an act of daring, of courage, of critical reflection; love is not only the fire that ignites the revolutionary but also the creative action of the artist, wielding a palette of sinew and spirit on a canvas of thought and action, its explosion of meaning forever synchronized with the gasp of human freedom. Freire writes:

We must dare in the full sense of the word, to speak of love without the fear of being called ridiculous, mawkish, or unscientific, if not antiscientific. We must dare in order to say scientifically, and not as mere blah-blah-blah, that we study, we learn, we teach, we know with our entire body. We do all of these things with feeling, with emotion, with wishes, with fear, with doubts, with passion, and also with critical reasoning. (p.3)

On the topic of love, Freire also writes:

[T]o the humility with which teachers perform and relate to their students another quality needs to be added: *lovingness*, without which their work would lose its meaning. And here I mean lovingness not only toward the students but also toward the very process of teaching. I must confess, not meaning to cavil, that I do not believe educators can survive the negativities of their trade without some sort of “armed love,” as the poet

Tiago de Melo would say. Without it they could not survive all the injustice or the government's contempt, which is expressed in the shameful wages and the arbitrary treatment of teachers, not coddling mothers, who take a stand, who participate in protest activities through their union, who are punished, and who yet remain devoted to their work with students.

It is indeed necessary, however, that this love be an "armed love," the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce. It is this form of love that is indispensable to the progressive educator and that we must all learn. (40-41)

Even the most imperturbably disposed Marxist educators might well respond to Freire's focus on love with an acute sense of alarm. For some materialist critics, love does not mix with Marxist science and should not form the basis of a socialist pedagogy. But John Somerville can help even the most captious critical educator and committed materialist put the concept of love in the proper perspective:

Take, for example, such a phenomenon as love. The materialist's attitude is not that it should be belittled or discouraged as an activity, emotion, or feeling, unless, of course, it is being pursued in some destructive way. Neither is his [sic] attitude the cynical one that "love does not exist," or that it is not necessary to take seriously the question of standards, values, and ideals in relation to it. His [sic] attitude is that love is obviously a very important part of life but that its importance is as an emotional fact, not as an explanation. More explanation does not mean less love, neither does more love mean less explanation. Man [sic] needs more of both. (2005, p. 15)

In addition to the quality of lovingness, Freire adds to the characteristics of the progressive teacher those of humility, courage, tolerance, decisiveness, security, the tension between patience and impatience, joy of living, and verbal parsimony, often inflecting some of these terms with nuance and poetic meaning. For instance, Freire denotes humility as the characteristic of admitting that you don't know everything; for critical citizens it represents a "human duty" to listen to those considered less competent without condescension, a practice intimately identified with the struggle for democracy and a disdain for elitism. Another example is that of tolerance. For Freire, tolerance is not understood as "acquiescing to the intolerable" or "coexistence with the intolerable" nor does it mean "coddling the oppressor" or "disguising aggression". Freire claims that tolerance "is the virtue that teaches us to live with the different. It teaches us to learn from and respect the different". (p. 42)

Freire elaborates:

On an initial level, tolerance may almost seem to be a favor, as if being tolerant were a courteous, thoughtful way of accepting, of *tolerating*, the not-quite-desired presence of one's opposite, a civilized way of permitting a coexistence that might seem repugnant. That, however, is hypocrisy, not tolerance. Hypocrisy is a defect; it is degradation. Tolerance is a virtue. Thus if I live tolerance, I should embrace it. I must experience it as something that makes me coherent first with my historical being, inconclusive as that may sound, and second with my democratic political choice. I

cannot see how one might be democratic without experiencing tolerance, coexistence with the different, as a fundamental principle. (p. 42)

Teachers as Cultural Workers is a book about according professional recognition to authentically dialogical teaching and learning. But it is anything but the mundane connotation we have come to associate with the term “professional recognition”. As Peter Mayo notes, “By professional, Freire is not referring to the excesses of the ideology of professionalism...based on the trait model of professionals...that often results in the following arrogant posture: I know what’s best for you. Freire is using *profession* in the sense of people who are competent, both in terms of the subject matter taught and in terms of pedagogical disposition, and who engage in very important work that demands respect and adequate remuneration” (2004, p. 84).

And while *Teachers as Cultural Workers* unpacks critical pedagogy as a profession, it dialectically weaves into its discussion of teacher responsibility profound philosophical insight. Freire teaches us that truth is never about unmediated reflections of a real object –something resolutely immutable and transparent. Rather it is always dialogic, always about the self/other. In our spontaneous orientation to everyday life, we do not apply critical reasoning and such knowledge made from experience often lacks epistemological rigor. And while such knowledge should in no way be dismissed as unimportant, it is necessary to understand the importance of knowing the world systematically, by distancing ourselves from it so that we can come closer to it epistemologically and thus be offered what Freire calls “another kind of knowing” and which he describes as “a knowing whose exactitude gives to the investigator or the thinking subject a margin of security that does not exist in the first kind of knowing, that of common sense” (p. 93). Freire argues that both the “innocent” knowing acquired through experience and the systematic knowledge acquired through critical reasoning “implies a debate over practice and theory that can only be understood if they are perceived and captured in their contradictory relationship” (p. 93). Hence, Freire warns us that neither type of knowledge is mutually exclusive and both types of knowledge must be seen in relation to each other. While we must avoid the theoretical elitism that denies the validity of common sense or experiential knowledge, we must at the same time avoid an anti-intellectualism that denies the importance of theoretical knowledge acquired through critical reasoning. On this note, Freire makes clear that “there is never only theory, never only practice” (p. 93). He writes:

Thus the sectarian political-ideological positions—positions that, instead of understanding their contradictory relationship exclude one another—are wrong. The anti-intellectualism denies validity to the theory; the theoretical elitism denies validity to the practice. The rigor with which I approach objects prohibits me from leaning toward either of these positions: neither anti-intellectualism nor elitism but practice and theory enlightening each other mutually. (p. 94)

This dialectical movement that informs theory and practice also informs our identities as social agents. Here, a dialectical tension exists between “what we inherit and what we acquire” (p. 70). According to Freire,

At times in this relationship, what we acquire ideologically in our social and cultural experiences of class interferes vigorously in the hereditary structures through the power of

interests, of emotions, feelings, and desires, or what one usually calls “the strength of the heart.” Thus we are not only one thing or another, neither solely what is innate nor solely what is acquired. (p. 70)

Freire’s dialectics of the concrete (to borrow a phrase from Marxist philosopher Karil Kosik) is very unlike the methodology of the educational postmodernists who, in their artful counterposing of the familiar and the strange in order to deconstruct the unified subject of bourgeois humanism, mock the pieties of monologic authoritarianism with sportive saber slashes across the horizon of familiarity and consensus. Whereas postmodern ‘resistance’ results in a playful hemorrhaging of certainty, a spilling forth of fixed meanings into the submerged grammars of bourgeois society, remixed in the sewers of the social as ‘resistance’ and rematerialized in the art house jargon of fashionable apostasy, Freire’s work retains an unshakable modernist faith in human agency consequent upon language’s ineradicable sociality and dialogical embeddedness. What Freire does have in common with the postmodernists, however, is a desire to break free of contemporary discourses that domesticate both the heart and mind, but he is not content to remain with the postmodernists in the nocturnal world of the subconscious, rather he is compelled to take his critical pedagogy to the streets of the real. Freire writes:

To the extent that I become clearer about my choices and my dreams, which are substantively political and attributively pedagogical, and to the extent that I recognize that though an educator I am also a political agent, I can better understand why I fear and realize how far we still have to go to improve our democracy. I also understand that as we put into practice an education that critically provokes the learner’s consciousness, we are necessarily working against myths that deform us. As we confront such myths, we also face the dominant power because those myths are nothing but the expression of this power, of its ideology. (41)

Freire sees the role of teachers not as “coddling parents” or aunts who live in a pristine world devoid of ideology, of racism, of social classes, but rather as social and political agents who “challenge their students, from an early to a more adult age, through games, stories, and reading so that students understand the need to create coherence between discourse and practice: a discourse about the defense of the weak, of the poor, of the homeless, and a practice that favors the haves against the have-nots; a discourse that denies the existence of social classes, their conflicts, and a political practice entirely in favor of the powerful” (p. 15). In order to achieve this, Freire vehemently opposes both “teacher proof” curricula and self-proclaimed specialists who hold in contempt the critical capacity of teachers to exercise a critical praxis in a coherent manner.

Ultimately, Freire’s work is about establishing a critical relationship between pedagogy and politics, highlighting the political aspects of the pedagogical and drawing attention to the implicit and explicit domain of the pedagogical inscribed in the political. While Freire extolled the virtues of socialism, and drew substantively from various Marxist traditions, he was also critical of dogmatic, doctrinaire Marxists whom he saw as intolerant and authoritarian. In fact, he chastised the practice of some “mechanistic Marxists” whom he claimed believed “that because it is part of society’s superstructure, education has no role to play before the society is

radically transformed in its infrastructure, in its material conditions” (p. 67). In fact, Freire argues that by refusing to take education seriously as a site of political transformation and by opposing socialism to democracy, the mechanistic Marxists have, in effect, delayed the realization of socialism for our times.

As deeply religious as Freire was, nowhere does Freire say that we should act solely in the faith of our certainty and the certainty of our faith, a faith untempered by critical analysis. Freire criticizes those who embrace scientism as intolerant, “because they take science for the *ultimate truth*, outside of which nothing counts, believing that only science can produce certainty. Those immersed in scientism cannot be tolerant, though that fact should not discredit science” (p. 42). Freire offers a blanket admonishment to the Left, arguing that they have played into the hands of the reactionary Right. The Left’s cardinal mistake, according to Freire, “has almost always been their absolute conviction of their certainties, which makes them sectarian, authoritarian, and *religious*. In their conviction that nothing outside of themselves made any sense, in their arrogance, in their unfriendliness toward democracy, the dominant classes had the best medium for implementing and maintaining their “dictatorship of class” (p. 14).

Political choices and ideological paths chosen by teachers are the fundamental stuff of Freirean pedagogy. Freire goes so far as to say that educators “are politicians” and that “we engage in politics when we educate” (p. 68). And if it is the case that we must choose a political path, then let us, in Freire’s words, “dream about democracy” while fighting “day and night, for a school in which we talk to and with the learners so that, hearing them, we can be heard by them as well” (p. 68).

This is the central challenge of Freire’s work and one that, especially at this difficult time in world history, requires a dauntless courage, a hopeful vision and a steadfast commitment as we struggle within and against these troubling times.

Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Pedagogy

On a recent trip to Caracas, Venezuela, to support the Bolivarian revolution, I had the opportunity to reflect upon what a socialist pedagogy might mean for the deepening development of a Freirean-based critical pedagogy. At Miraflores Palace, President Hugo Chavez offered me and my colleague, Nathalia Jaramillo, some brief words of hope. Initially he cautioned us that a monster was living in Washington, a monster that has been a disaster for the entire world; in order to bring about a better world we must remain united in our attempts to defeat this monster. While thanking us for the pedagogical work we have been doing he never the less implored us to work harder, and to be inspired by the example of the Bolivarian revolution. By enfranchising Venezuela’s vast working-class through an attack on neoliberalism and a channeling of increased oil revenues into social projects aimed at increasing educational opportunities and medical treatment for the poor, Chavez is creating the conditions of possibility for a robust push towards socialism.

A few days later we were present at a taping of *Alo Presidente*, Chavez’s weekly television address to the people of Venezuela, and were sitting next to the great Nicaraguan poet of the revolution, Ernesto Cardenal. Responding to an attempt by President Chavez to imagine a

new relationship of solidarity and anti-imperialist struggle between people of good will in the United States and those in Venezuela, Cardenal called President Chavez a prophet who was proclaiming a desire for a mystical union among people from opposing nations based on love:

Mr. President, you have said some things that are very important and moreover are also prophetic ...when I was a monk my teacher prophesized that one day the people of the United States and the people of Latin America were going to unite but not with an economic union, nor political, nor military, but a mystic union, of love, of two peoples (or nations) loving each other. I have now heard this from you and I want this to be revealed because it is something that hasn't been heard. I have heard it from my teacher and now you have made it a prophecy. [translated by Nathalia Jaramillo]

How Freirean, indeed!

What is needed now are pedagogies that connect the language of students' everyday experiences to the larger struggle for autonomy and social justice carried out by groups in pursuit of genuine democracy and freedom outside of capital's law of value, organizations working towards building socialist communities of the future. That is something taught by Bolivarian educators who are struggling to build a socialist future in a country deeply divided by class antagonisms.

In our pursuit of locally rooted, self-reliant economies, in our struggles designed to defend the world from being forced to serve as a market for the corporate globalists, in our attempts at decolonizing our cultural and political spaces and places of livelihood, in our fight for antitrust legislation for the media, in our challenges to replace indirect social labor (labor mediated by capital) with direct social labor, in our quest to live in balance with nature, and in our various efforts to replace our dominant culture of materialism with values integrated in a life economy, we need to develop a new vision of the future, but one that does not stray into abstract utopian hinterlands too far removed from our analysis of the present barbarism wrought by capital. Our vision of the future must go beyond the present but still be rooted in it, it must exist in the plane of immanence, and not some transcendent sphere where we engage in mystical union with the inhabitants of Mount Olympus. It must attempt to "speak the unspeakable" while remaining organically connected to the familiar and the mundane. We cannot deny the presence of the possible in the contradictions we live out daily in the messy realm of capital. We seek, therefore, a concrete utopia where the subjunctive world of the 'ought to be' can be wrought within the imperfect, partial, defective and finite world of the 'what is' by the dialectical act of absolute negation. Terry Eagleton makes a similar point when he writes:

We cannot legislate for the future, not least because it is not ours, but the people's to create. Dreams of the future, as the Frankfurt School reminded us, too often confiscate the very political energies that are necessary for their very realization. Yet there is still something to be said for trying to speak the unspeakable. For the fact is that any authentic future must be to some extent in line with the present as well as discontinuous with it. If it is not—if the future is not somehow inherent in the material forces of the present—then it is just wishful thinking, a vacuous, purely gestural kind of politics. An authentic future must be feasible as well as desirable. Otherwise we will persuade men

and women to desire uselessly, and so, like the neurotic, to fall ill of longing. In fact, we could claim that utopia is inherent in the present in at least this sense: that without some dim notion of justice, freedom and equality, we would have no standard by which to judge the present, and so would be incapable of identifying its defects. The future is already potentially present in the shape of the blind spots and contradictions of the present—in its silences and exclusions, its conflicts and fragmentations. (2005, pp. 21-22)

The future is very much inherent in the way that we grasp our needs and our capacity to fulfill them. We need to work toward a transformation of the social through a form of concrete as opposed to metaphysical transcendence, through entering into the subjunctive mode of “what-could-be.” But in doing so we must not extend the concept of “what-could-be” to some mystical or ethereal Beyond but place it squarely in the terrain of the “what-is” (Gulli, 2005). We do so in order not to delimit the empirically given as a world of alienation (Gulli, 2005) nor as a staging ground for hope. We do not venture beyond the given and therefore our quest for the transformation of the present into a new social order is not utopian but concrete-utopian. To avoid the folly of utopianism, the realm of the “what-is” must be inclusive of the “what-could-be” (Gulli, 2005).

Not only must we understand our needs and our capacities—with the goal of satisfying the former and fully developing the latter—but to express them in ways that will encourage new cultural formations, institutional structures and social relations of production that can best help meet those needs and nurture those capacities to the fullest through democratic participation. Equally important is realizing through our self-activity and subjective self-awareness and formation that socialism is a collective enterprise that recognizes humankind’s global interdependence, that respects diversity while at the same time builds unity and solidarity. These very principles underlay the ongoing work in Venezuela’s literacy and educational programs taking place in the barrios. Meeting several of the leaders and coordinators of these programs in barrio La Vega, Sector B, emphasized for me the importance of working towards socialism as an endpoint, but not in some teleological sense. Rather, the struggle could best be animated by the words of Antonio Machado’s (1962, p. 826) poem: *Caminante no hay camino, se hace el camino al andar* (traveler, there is no road. The road is made as one walks).

In revealing the messy contradiction between universal human rights and the particular interests of specific groups—i.e., the ideological appearance of the universal legal form and the particular interests of the white, bourgeois individual of property that effectively sustain it—criticalists must be careful not to dismiss the notion of the universal as merely a ruse of the dominant social order (it is that, of course, but it is also more). Žizek points out that even the form of the universal has symbolic efficacy and can set into motion important political demands. We should neither reject the universal as a pre-political space outside of the contingency of history, nor reduce it to a fetish of concrete historical processes (Žizek, 2005). We must fight for the “right to universality” for everyone, that is, we must fight for the right of a political agent to assert its radical non-coincidence with itself, that is, its non-coincidence with a particular identity ascribed to it, i.e., as an electrician, plumber, teacher, artisan. Individuals must assert the right always to be supernumeraries, that is, agents with no ‘proper’ place in the

social edifice since they are agents of the “universality of the social itself” (Zizek, 2005, p. 12). A “universal ‘meta-political’ human rights” must therefore form the backdrop of any discussion of the concrete political rights of citizens—hence, universal human rights “designate the precise space of politicization proper” (2005, p. 12). Bruno Gulli describes this as a movement “toward the open space of the universal and common without...renouncing subjectivity” (2005, p. 179). We strive to bring about changes in the economic, social and cultural order not by emptying out subjectivity but by making possible the full development of human capacities for the benefit of all. (Gulli, 2005). Labor must cease to be exploitative and compulsory and become “productive at the level of a fundamental and general social ontology” (Gulli, 2005, p. 179). Thus, labor must cease to become a means to an end (as a means for the augmentation of value) and move beyond the realm of socially necessary labor to become, in Marx’s terms, “the prime necessity of life” (cited in Hudis, 2005a).

Revolutionary critical pedagogy is a socialist pedagogy but one that does not seek a predetermined form or blueprint of socialist society. Neither does it endorse the idea of the spontaneous self-organization of the multitude. It’s praxiological reaching out is similar to what Michael Steinberg refers to as a “negative politics.” Steinberg writes:

A negative politics...is grounded in the fact that our mutual self-constitution continues regardless of the ways in which we construe our experience. It opposes certainties and assurances of knowledge, but not in the name of either a different certainty or of a human characteristic that is presumed to lie beneath the social. It has hopes, not of a world that it already knows how to think about, but one that will not claim to be the culmination of time and that will not hold to ideas, ideals, or even values that seek to arrest the endless transformation of our lives together. It looks not to the perfection of detached knowledge but to an expanding attentiveness to embodied understanding. It is a path not to the future but to a deeper experience of the present. (2005, p. 180)

I want to make the argument that critical educators need to move beyond the struggle for a redistribution of value because such a position ignores the social form of value and assumes a priori, the vampire-like inevitability of the market. We need to transcend value, not redistribute it since we can’t build a socialist society on the principle of selling one’s labor for a wage. Nor will it suffice to substitute collective capital for private capital. As Hudis (2004a) argues, we are in a struggle to negate the value form of mediation, not produce it in different degrees, scales or registers. He goes on to argue that we need freedom, not to revert to some pristine substance or abstract essence prior to the point of production, but the freedom to learn how to appropriate the many social developments formed on the basis of alienated activity, the freedom to realize our human capacities to be free, to be a self directed subject and not merely an instrument of capital for the self-expansion of value, and the freedom to be a conscious and purposeful human being with the freedom to determine the basis of our relationships (Hudis, 2004a). Here, subjectivity would not be locked into the requirements of capital’s valorization process.

Revolutionary critical pedagogy works within a socialist imaginary, that is, it operates from an understanding that the basis of education is political and that spaces need to be created where students can imagine a different world outside of capitalism’s law of value (i.e., social form of labor), where alternatives to capitalism and capitalist institutions can be discussed and

debated, and where dialogue can occur about why so many revolutions in past history turned into their opposite. It looks to create a world where social labor is no longer an indirect part of the total social labor but a direct part of it (Hudis, 2005, 2005a), where a new mode of distribution can prevail not based on socially necessary labor time but on actual labor time, where alienated human relations are subsumed by authentically transparent ones, where freely associated individuals can successfully work towards a permanent revolution, where the division between mental and manual labor can be abolished, where patriarchal relations and other privileging hierarchies of oppression and exploitation can be ended, where we can truly exercise the principle ‘from each according to his or her ability and to each according to his or her need’, where we can traverse the terrain of universal rights unburdened by necessity, moving sensuously and fluidly within that ontological space where subjectivity is exercised as a form of capacity-building and creative self-activity within and as a part of the social totality: a space where labor is no longer exploited and becomes a striving that will benefit all human beings, where labor refuses to be instrumentalized and commodified and ceases to be a compulsory activity, and where the full development of human capacity is encouraged. It also builds upon forms of self-organization that are part of the history of liberation struggles worldwide, such as the 1871 Paris Commune or Cuba’s *Consejos Populares* formed in 1989, or those that developed during the civil rights, feminist and worker movements and those organizations of today that emphasize participatory democracy.

Michael Lebowitz (2005) talks about the possibility of ‘another kind of knowledge’ that might exist in a world that is able to transcend capitalism—a socialist world. He urges us to think about what it would be like to operate in a world by means of a direct social knowledge that cannot be communicated through the indirect medium of money: a knowledge tacitly based upon recognition of our unity and solidarity:

It is a different knowledge when we are aware of who produces for us and how, when we understand the conditions of life of others and the needs they have for what we can contribute. Knowledge of this type immediately places us as beings within society, provides an understanding of the basis of all our lives. It is immediately direct social knowledge because it cannot be communicated through the indirect medium of money. (2005, p. 64)

This is a knowledge, affirms Lebowitz, “which differs qualitatively and quantitatively from the knowledge we have under dominant social relations” (2005, p. 65). It is different precisely because knowledge is no longer treated as a scarce commodity; there is no longer a monopolization and restriction on knowledge as private gain. This type of knowledge, writes Lebowitz, has to be based on certain values, values that are, he notes, enshrined in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, especially Article 299 that is based on “ensuring overall human development” and in Article 20, that stipulates that “everyone has the right to the free development of his or her own personality”, and Article 102, where the focus is upon “developing the creative potential of every human being and the full exercise of his or her personality in a democratic society” (2005, pp. 66-67). Such development can only occur through participation (as set out in Article 62) in democratic social formations that enable self-management, co-management, and co-operation in many forms (as set out in Article 70). Lebowitz’s example of Venezuela and its Constitution is a good one, and one that critical

educators everywhere would do well to consider for deepening their approach to their own particular struggles.

We are currently living in what Antonio Gramsci called a ‘war of position’ – a struggle to unify diverse social movements in our collective efforts to resist global capitalism—in order to wage what he called ‘a war of maneuver’, that is, a concerted effort to challenge and transform the state, to create an alternative matrix for society other than value. Part of our war of position is taking place in our schools.

Critical Pedagogy for a Better Society

While there is much talk about labor today, and the decline of the labor movement, what is important for educators to keep in mind is *the social form that labor takes*. In capitalist societies, that social form is human capital (Rikowski, 2005). Schools are charged with educating a certain form of human capital, with socially producing labor power, and in doing so enhancing specific attributes of labor power that serve the interests of capital. In other words, schools educate the labor-power needs of capital—for capital in general, for the national capital, for fractions of capital (manufacturing, finance, services, etc.), for sectors of capital (particular industries, etc.), or for individual capital (specific companies and enterprises, etc.), and they also educate for functions of capital that cut across these categories of capitals (Rikowski, 2005). General education, for instance, is intentionally divorced from labor-power attributes required to work within individual capitals and is aimed at educating for capital-in-general. Practical education tries to shape labor-power attributes in the direction of skills needed within specific fractions or sectors of capital. Training, on the other hand, involves educating for labor-power attributes that will best serve specific or individual capitals (Rikowski, 2005).

It is important to note that Rikowski has described capital not only as the subsumption of concrete, living labor by abstract alienated labor but also as a mode of being, as a unified social force that flows through our subjectivities, our bodies, our meaning-making capacities. Schools educate labor-power by serving as a medium for its constitution or its social production in the service of capital. But schools are more than this, they do more than nourish labor-power because all of capitalist society accomplishes that; in addition to producing capital-in-general, schools additionally *condition* labor-power in the varying interests of the marketplace. But because labor-power is a living commodity, and a highly contradictory one at that, it can be re-educated and shaped in the interests of building socialism, that is, in creating opportunities for the self-emancipation of the working-class.

Labor-power, as the capacity or potential to labor, doesn’t have to serve its current master—capital. It serves the master only when it engages in *the act of laboring for a wage*. Because individuals can refuse to labor in the interests of capital accumulation, labor-power can therefore serve another cause—the cause of socialism. Critical pedagogy can be used as a means of finding ways of transcending the contradictory aspects of labor-power creation and creating different spaces where a de-reification, de-commodification, and decolonization of subjectivity can occur. Critical pedagogy is an agonistic arena where the development of a discerning political subjectivity can be fashioned (recognizing that there will always be socially-and-self-imposed constraints).

Revolutionary critical pedagogy (a term coined by Paula Allman) is multifaceted in that it brings a Marxist humanist perspective to a wide range of policy and curriculum issues. The list of topics includes the globalization of capitalism, the marketisation of education, neo-liberalism and school reform, imperialism and capitalist schooling, and so on. Revolutionary critical pedagogy (as I am developing it) also offers an alternative interpretation of the history of capitalism and capitalist societies, with a particular emphasis on the United States.

Revolutionary classrooms are prefigurative of socialism in the sense that they are connected to social relations that we want to create as revolutionary socialists. Classrooms generally try to mirror in organization what students and teachers would collectively like to see in the world outside of schools—respect for everyone’s ideas, tolerance of differences, a commitment to creativity and social and educational justice, the importance of working collectively, a willingness and desire to work hard for the betterment of humanity, a commitment to anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic practices, etc.

Educators as Philosophers of Praxis

Drawing upon a Hegelian-Marxist critique of political economy that underscores the fundamental importance of developing a *philosophy of praxis*, revolutionary critical pedagogy seeks forms of organization that best enable the pursuit of *doing critical philosophy as a way of life*. And that means finding time to read Marx, Hegel and other major thinkers, and developing a coherent way to live out our findings and discoveries and rearticulate them for the very specific times that we live in and for the unique struggles that lie ahead. I very much support the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, and this is one of the aspects that I am interested in: examining the pedagogical practices of Bolivarian educators as a way of developing a broader philosophy of praxis. What are the specifics of this revolution, and how is it possible to develop a coherent revolutionary pedagogical approach? Obviously we can’t transplant revolutionary critical pedagogy—North American style—in Venezuela, since it will emerge among the Bolivarian educators there with very distinct attributes and characteristics—as well with as a specific trajectory and tendency. But we can be part of a collective effort, and what we learn about pedagogical struggle there we can also introduce here so long as we are careful to reinvent—and restate—such pedagogical knowledge in the contextual specificity of our own struggle.

The discourses we use to understand our subjective location in history’s conjunctural present must not only serve as a means of describing in capillary detail capitalism’s torsion of anguish and hydra-headed barbarism that confronts on a daily basis the poor and powerless in all manner of pain and despair, or even of interpreting it, but must be a whole structure of thinking for collective freedom, for transforming the present. To achieve this we need a dialectical approach: to intervene in the project of our own self and social formation by viewing the present as the future of our past, which is in the process of becoming the past of our own future. Such a dialectical approach is best conceived within the framework of a Marxist humanism. As Peter Hudis (2004) has remarked, Marxist humanism is not the only approach to appreciate the importance of spontaneous self-activity or to argue that mass practice gives rise to new theory or that the experience of resistance on the streets are, in effect, expressions of theory. But Marxist humanism is unique in many important respects. Hudis notes, for instance, that Marxist

humanism maintains that the movement from practice is actually a form of theory and that theory is not the same as philosophy.

Hudis makes an important distinction between philosophy and theory, and urges that we attempt to integrate both into everyday praxis. Philosophy is appropriated without adopting the contemplative standpoint that defines much traditional theory. It does this by penetrating and grasping what Karel Kosik (1976, p. 1) calls the “thing itself.” In other words, philosophy is positioned away from its traditional concern with inner life by bringing the ideas of mental and manual, philosophy and reality, together as a praxiological dimension of the committed intellectual as critical pedagogue. According to Peter Hudis (2004), philosophy “is distinct from theory in that it recognizes the profound relation between the subject and the world in seeking to grasp the ‘thing itself’”. By ‘thing itself’ Hudis (2004) refers, like Kosik, to “not only...external objects but also to the categories which underlay human cognition.” He goes on to say that

Philosophy is different from theory as it is traditionally understood in that it does not take its premises for granted. Philosophy is not about “accepting” certain fixed truths which one then simply projects without further self-examination. Philosophy subjects everything to self-examination, even its own premises---not for the sake of just tearing things down (that would be sophistry) but as part of creating something new.

Hudis reminds us that while philosophy is a qualitatively superior form of cognition, it doesn't mean that we dispense with theory. This is because the practice of philosophy means taking part in rigorous theoretical debate and discussion. Because only through theoretic work can philosophical conclusions be adequately justified. But theory is, in itself, insufficient. In fact, what is necessary, according to Hudis, is a Marxist-Humanism that stipulates a qualitatively new approach that fuses theory and philosophy so that “thought ceases to take its premises for granted” (Hudis, 2004). While we continue to justify our philosophical conclusions theoretically, we need to understand that cognition is not only about using theory to justify certain assumptions and claims—those must continue to be critically examined. A critical fusion of theory and philosophy prevents fixed conclusions from being projected by holding onto certain assumptions. Ideas themselves must, after all, be developed to their logical conclusion. Marxist-Humanist philosophers, however, are able to redefine the image of thought as the way that we think. Hudis asserts how Marxist-humanist philosophy and its fusion of theory and philosophy is able to free thought “from a contemplative or formalist relation to reality by posing the reunification of mental and manual abilities in the individual.” Here, philosophy and theory as they are joined together in a manner that enables their unity to permeate our very mode of being in all facets of our existence (in a manner that is faithful to Hegel's absolute method) are interpenetrated by voices from below enabling at the same time theory and practice to be concretized in each living individual. This gives each and every individual the capacity to become philosophers and to exercise such a capacity in the interest of understanding the meaning of contemporary life in order to change it. Here theory and practice are not formally opposed, but are unified and concretized in living and breathing individuals of history.

The philosophy that is needed at this important time in history is Marx's philosophy of 'revolution in permanence' expanded to its next stage of dialectical development. This message is one that should not be lost to critical educators.

To use Bertell Ollman's description of the Marxian dialectic in a somewhat different register, we must learn to see the result of our own preconditions as social agents as the precondition of what will become its result and its own negation. And in doing so we must become active agents willing and capable of intervening in such a history so that one day the capitalist exploitation currently driving humanity into an abyss will be seen as the prehistory of a socialist present.

Notes

**This essay draws from comments made recently in a seminar at the Bolivarian University of Venezuela, July, 2005, and from remarks prepared to be read at a meeting of socialist activists, educators, and scholars convened by Movement for a Socialist Future, London, England, 2005, and finally, from a Preface (in press) to the paperback edition of Paulo Freire's *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters To Those Who Dare Teach*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998.

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