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Sallywag Pedagogy

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Abstract

This chapter explores the dynamic between truth and deceit in 21st century transnational capitalism, emerging neo-fascist movements, and post-truth media landscapes marked by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Anthropogenic bioinformational challenge. It establishes the centrality of the concept of truth in revolutionary critical pedagogy and underscores the importance of linking true words with true actions in the formation of critical praxis. Revolutionary praxis consists of the dialectical process of self and social formation while critical educators are situated as protagonistic agents who work in and through history. Truth is therefore not about a timeless or objective state we name history. Action creates history, humans are historical beings, and truth is firmly situated within the dialectic of history. Using the work of Walter Benjamin, we show that aesthetic entertainment provided by fascist national leaders such as Donald Trump distracts the oppressed from the economic and social forms of oppression, supporting asymmetrical relations of power and privilege that repurposes the dominion of the ruling class. In response, we develop the concept of sallywag pedagogy: postdigital, ontological, epistemological, historical and revolutionary praxis aimed at ambushing oppressive power relations and transforming the world in the interests of social justice through speaking a true word.

Keywords: revolutionary critical pedagogy, capitalism, fascism, postdigital, praxis, history, truth, sallywag pedagogy

Pillow Talk at 100 Seconds to Midnight

We are at the mercy of the vilest conditions of appropriation set by the transnational capitalist class and established over generations of workers who seek justice. Sociologist Bill Robinson underscores that there are similarities but also important differences between fascist projects of the 20th and 21st centuries. He notes that the 20th century fascist project ‘involved the fusion of reactionary political power with *national capital*, whereas in the 21st century the fascist project involves the fusion of *transnational capital* with reactionary and repressive political power’ (Robinson 2019: 155) (emphasis from the original). In order to resist the dictatorship of transnational capital, the specter of the global police state and 21st-century fascism, it is necessary to build broad anti-fascist alliances led by popular and working-class forces. How is this possible in places such as the USA where Raytheon and Boeing, Lockheed and Northrup Grumman, United Technologies and BAE Systems hold corporate sway, and where half the country has pledged allegiance to Donald Trump, a master of suborning the aggrieved and creating a fascist system of intelligibility with the help of Fox News, Newsmax and One America News Network through which the working-class can shape their reality in concert with Trump’s own toxic ideological predilections, racism, misanthrope and misology?

Except for unforeseen circumstances (and we make no claim to be prophets or even free market futurists), we believe the world is headed in the direction of a disaster so catastrophic that only dystopian novels or films have managed to calibrate the increasing scale of the horrors facing humanity. Since this chapter is being written during a moment of short-lived reprieve at which time the science and security board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists approached the

Doomsday Clock and re-set it at a setting of 100 seconds to midnight (Mecklin 2020) – a metaphorical minute hand of a clock revealing a figurative hundred-second warning – we wish to affirm our commitment to avoid nuclear annihilation at any cost rather than sullenly succumb to its inevitability. In our time of the raging Covid-19 pandemic, we wish to affirm our commitment to avoid further increase of human suffering. And, as we have increasingly become aware of the inseparability between our socio-technological arrangements and the future of our planet, we wish to affirm our commitment to ensure long-term prospects of human survival of the human race.

We realize the constitutive entanglement of these phenomena, dubbed in our recent works under the over-arching concept of the postdigital condition (Jandrić et al. 2018) and several narrower concepts such as bioinformational capitalism (Peters, Jandrić, and Hayes, 2021a), viral modernity (Peters, Jandrić, and McLaren 2020), and others. We acknowledge the complex relationships between these concepts (Peters, Jandrić, and Hayes 2021b) and the need for an open, honest, and constructive postdigital dialogue (Jandrić et al. 2019) – which may well be our last chance for pillow talk at 100 seconds to midnight. We acknowledge the dialectic between theory and practice, between past, present, and future, between we-think, we-learn, we-act (Jandrić 2019), and we-feel (Jandrić and Hayes 2019). We realize that the epistemology of truth is mutually foundational with the epistemology of deceit, and that the truth about lies is mutually constitutive with the lies about truth (MacKenzie and Bhatt 2019). With these realizations we tone down our bellicosity and seek the type of dialogical engagement that our mentor, Paulo Freire, has bequeathed us, through his emphasis on critical pedagogical praxis.

We call our pedagogy ‘scallywag pedagogy’ after England’s secret army of guerilla fighters who, should the Nazis have successfully invaded England, were to emerge from their secret underground bunkers and attack the occupying Nazi forces as well as assassinate any English collaborators with the enemy (Carr et al. 2020). We wish to emphasize that we do not see ourselves as heroes. Far from it. We wish only to recognize the manner in which transnational capital has occupied most of the so-called civilized world and warn against the growing forces of fascism that have made themselves present over the past decade throughout Europe and North America – and the need to develop a pedagogical counterforce that both understands the dangers of a post-truth world that embraces conspiratorial rightwing ‘alternative facts’ and abandons self-reflexivity and dialogue as a key means of democratizing our social universe.

The Demonic Pact with Capital

Revolutionary pedagogy is a term that is often conflated with a similar term, ‘revolutionary critical pedagogy’ (see McLaren and Jandrić 2020a: Chap 3). It is a term that follows from a growing disillusionment with the notion that the praxis of students in public school settings can become sufficiently protagonistic in bringing about substantive social change. In other words, the focus for change is too narrow to move capitalism from its substratum, to shake capitalism at its roots. Mainstream education is a slave to capitalism; revolutionary critical pedagogy is slave rebellion. Our adoption of Freire’s concept of critical consciousness (conscientization, or *conscientização* in the original Portuguese) stipulates that *conscientização* is not a precondition for revolutionary action but rather the outcome of action. We deepen our understanding by reflecting on our actions and those of others. We tilt such action not towards windmills but in the direction of a protagonist struggle for socialism. At the same time our consciousness raising is directed at helping beleaguered constituencies most vulnerable to the ravages of capitalist injustice.

Marx reminds us that human beings revise their thinking given various changes in their circumstances, and that educators must themselves be willing to be educated. Revolutionary

practice, or praxis, has to do with ‘the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change’ (Marx 1848/1975; see Lebowitz 2017). Protagonistic or revolutionary agents are not born in a sociopolitical vacuum; they are produced by circumstances and responses to those circumstances, as one might imagine in the case with unfinished human beings. To revolutionize thought it is necessary to revolutionize society. And to revolutionize society requires a revolution in thought. All human development (including thought and speech) is a social activity and this has its roots in collective labor. We agree that Marx (1852) said it best in ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’ when he wrote his famous passage:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. (Marx 1852)

In the teeth of the pandemic, and in the thicket of unprecedented revolt against systemic racism most visible in the recent Black Lives Matter protests, trumpet-tongued Trump and his witch’s familiar, the Imp of the Perverse, peer from the darkness of an Edgar Allan Poe nightmare of his own making, delighting in the deliciousness of the destruction. Trump has emerged as the Lord of Chaos, his multi-headed hydra of reveling in the death he has incurred, slurp-lipped at the thought of bodies writhing in pools of bloody devastation. Our Lord and Master of the orange-tinged nightmare has fulminated against common sense, creating a world-wrenching apocalyptic narrative that he is protecting the United States from the evils of socialism. He has given an ‘anarchist’ designation to certain cities run by democrats, promising to withhold federal funds. What a grand fool he is. Is this not the gamification of right-wing terrorism?

We reject his empathy-devoid, fact-free assertions. We reject the theatricality by which Trump removes his mask (metaphorically and literally). We reject his ebullient stage persona. We reject his Mussolini-like preaching from the balcony. We reject his incendiary rhetoric, his vandalization of the Constitution. We reject his fever-dream presidency. We reject his seismic influence on the politically aggrieved who hide in broad daylight under the banner of Q. The pharisaism and Tartuffery that hangs like river foam from the drooling mouths of the Trump clan and their spiritually disfigured preachers spells out what this cult is all about. The neck snapping pace of this cult that has moved seamlessly through the highways and the bypaths of American politics makes it difficult to take stock of the enormity of the challenge that now faces the United States.

Trumpista media compels us to disparage socialism – a deeply inculcated cultural artifact that has provided political ballast for the right – while we secretly recognize it to be the only hope for the future. We yearn for socialism to be rebirthed, and fear fascism and Trump’s racketeering-style governance more than the insane cults that would have lizard people robed in ritual garments and sporting richly decorated diadems chomp down with retractable teeth on the cherubic flesh of infants prepared for a Satanic banquet. We don’t believe the global elite led by George Soros are harvesting children’s blood before they are given over to demons. (We don’t even believe in the global elite—rather we acknowledge the existence of the transnational capitalist class!) We

don't believe Angela Merkel is Hitler's granddaughter, Justin Trudeau is Fidel Castro's son, Vladimir Putin is the reincarnation of Rasputin, or that Bill Gates is planning to use invisible ink to tattoo vaccination status into children's skin. We don't brandish AR-15s in our political advertisements. Does that make us weird in your batshit crazy Republican eyes?

Regrettably, that makes us suspect in the eyes of at least 70 million Americans who voted for Trump. A day of reckoning is coming untethered by your theatrical Trumpian charade. The working-class are going to come calling. So we ask: Who belongs to the working class? The answer: A worker who does not own the means of production or play a supervisory role for those that do. And there are three billion of us. And that should terrify Trumpista America. But it doesn't because they have managed to secure the ideological allegiance of much of the working class. We failed our Golgotha moment when our politicians refused to stand up to Trump, when the Democratic National Convention made sure Biden would be the presidential candidate over Bernie Sanders. This is because in the main the Democrats themselves have fallen prey to the massive ideological assault in the media against socialism, beginning in the post Second World War years. In doing so, we re-crucified Jesus with teflon nails, transferring his salvific grace to Lady Luck's slot machines, all lined up like tin soldiers in some shiny Vegas casino. We made our demonic pact with capital.

Escaping the *auto-da-fé* imposed by the Never Trumpers and clinging to his witch's familiar, the Imp of the Perverse, and other transmundane demons, Trump braces himself beside the crenelated parapet of some crumbling stone brick medieval Trump Tower. When Trump feels energized by his spittle-flecked counsel of quislings, he can be heard braying from the dark edges of his everyday Wagnerian opera, barnstorming electoral battlegrounds in frenetic 'scampaign' rallies, stoking public distemper, ginning up public convulsions of fear and rage, whiplashing the public with his stentorian voice, cartoonish hand gestures and robotic dance moves while lurching towards insanity. Trumpism and justice have always made for an antiseptic cleavage in the same manner in which Trump and compassion have always had a major dispute. Decency turned its back on Trump long before he became president. Trump's brainpan has always been an ideological gravesite, where truth goes to die. So we expect his actions to be inherently regressive and repressive, ensanguining the public discourse with the blood of tyrants. We expect winning at all costs to be his great desideratum for governance, as he infiltrates the morality of gangsters with unmistakable relish, emerging time and again as the country's Mobster-in-Chief.

True Words Require Actions

Much has been written about Trump's online antics and his blatant disregard for truth and human decency¹. Only in 2020, we criticized Trump's relationships to Alt-Right movements (McLaren and Jandrić 2020b), his disregard for the environment (Jandrić and McLaren 2020), his poisonous relationship to religion and especially to his Evangelical Christian voter base (McLaren 2020a, b), and few other themes. We may be scribomaniacs, yet Trump's ability of spitting nonsense surpasses even the quickest of writers. Mainstream media, far-right media and social media reify and legitimize Trump's reality and make it a compelling alternative to fact-based reporting. While Trump is not the US president anymore, being succeeded by Joe Biden in yet another bizarre episode in which Trump stubbornly refused to accept the loss of elections, poisonous seeds of Trumpist logic will nevertheless not disappear the moment he steps down from his golden throne.

¹ See, for instance, Special Issue of *Postdigital Science and Education*, 'Lies, Bullshit and Fake News Online: Should We Be Worried?', edited by Alison MacKenzie and Ibrar Bhatt. <https://link.springer.com/journal/42438/volumes-and-issues/2-1>. Accessed 15 December 2020.

Clearly, we need to see the transient nature of this repressive moment through a militant commitment to changing the rational institutions of democracy that enable a fascist repression of the social contract as much as they help to defend the pursuit of freedom and justice. Andrew Feenberg writes:

Lukács argued that when societies become conscious of the social contingency of the rational institutions under which they live, they can then judge and change them. ... Lukács believed that a revolution from below would overthrow reification and create a socialist alternative to capitalist modernity. That revolution would not reject reason and its fruits but would reconfigure rational institutions in response to the needs of the oppressed. (Feenberg 2014)

It is precisely this type of revolutionary praxis that can help us to combat the deceit and lies of the current authoritarian political systems. We take our everyday social relationships and practices and try to examine their contradictions when seen in relation to the totality of social relations in which those particular relations and practices unfold. Thus, we have a backdrop against which we can read the word and the world historically. This enables us to live in the historical moment as a subject of history and, like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, to see that human 'progress' has left a world devastated by violence and destruction. In so doing, we link our own history to the struggles of oppressed groups. This process is not simply an effect of language but pays attention to extra-linguistic forms of knowing, forms of corporeal and praxiological meanings that are all bound up with the production of ideology.

Meaningful knowledge is not solely nor mainly the property of the formal properties of language but is enfolded (McLaren 1986) – it is sentient, it is lived in and through our bodies, the material aspects of our being. It is neither ultra-cognitivist nor traditionally intellectualist. Knowledge, in other words, is embodied in the way we read the world and the word simultaneously in our actions with, against and alongside other human beings. We can't transform history solely in our heads! But language is at the same time of crucial importance. As Freire (1972: 87) notes: 'Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.' True words require actions.

Revolutionary praxis is an attempt to integrate both philosophy and theory into social justice initiatives and political intervention. Philosophy's concern with self-examination and challenging fixed truths, that is, with seeking to grasp 'the thing itself' (Kosik 1976: 1) can be appropriated in our attempts to interrogate critically the categories that underlay human cognition (Hudis 2004). This fusion of theory and philosophy creates the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a praxiological dimension in which thought refuses to take its premises for granted and is thus able to engage in actions designed to challenge and transform asymmetrical relations of power and privilege. This enables protagonistic agents of social justice to develop new categories of critique that can both illuminate the logic of capital and provide a critically conscious awareness of the content of a socialist alternative to capitalism. For instance, the term 'socioeconomic status' is one that too often legitimizes the capitalist system, whereas the term 'objective class location' can be more readily used to challenge the capitalist system.

This awareness arrives with an understanding that socialism has never to this moment fully existed because it cannot exist in one country, and especially absent real democracy, and with a

realization that there have existed only pseudo-socialist regimes with state capitalist tendencies within free market capitalist democracies which required statist authoritarianism in order to survive. As McLaren concludes:

Here, philosophy and theory, as they join together in a unity that permeates our very mode of being in all facets of our existence (in a manner 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. ... The search for justice through transformative praxis cannot be satisfied by appeals to reason, principles, or even a commitment to faith or belief but must be grounded in the cries of history's victims, our solidarity with them, and our commitment to transforming the world. (McLaren 2015: 248)

We employ theoretical discourses dialectically to help us better understand our self and social formation within the constraints and possibilities of austerity capitalism. We use these discourses as '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.' (McLaren 2015: 247) Here we appreciate how spontaneous self-activity or mass practice such as the recent Black Lives Matter uprising sparked by the murder of George Floyd are also potential expressions of new theoretical developments as well as new strategies and tactics so that we can observe how the movement from practice is also a form of theory.

For instance, Black Lives Matter protests helped to illuminate the failure of capitalist democracy to protect African Americans from being excluded from the social contract and how they were disproportionately persecuted by the criminal 'justice' system, especially under conditions of a global pandemic which saw African American communities also suffer Covid-19 fatalities disproportionately to the white population. Here we come to recognize the extension of reification into the depths of social life, as democracy begins to crumble before our eyes through the racist policies and activities of the Trump administration. Here we can deploy theory to justify the philosophical conclusions (in this case drawn from Marxist humanism) that undergird our political project.

Theoretical debate can help to ensure that we do not take our philosophical premises for granted and can help us ascertain why a collective, social subject can most fully appreciate the values of philosophy. McLaren (2015: 248) writes: 'Here, philosophy and theory, as they join together in a unity that permeates our very mode of being in all facets of our existence (in a manner 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.' In his theory of revolution, Marx claimed that those antimonies relating to epistemology and ontology as well as morality and politics could be transcended by social revolution, reconciling (through the disalienation or dereification of social life) individual and society, moral responsibility and self-interest, and that it could also unite subject and object, thought and being, man and nature (Feenberg 2014).

Related challenges were posed by Lukács and Marcuse. According to Feenberg (2014: 64), this suggests the philosophy of praxis assumes a 'wholly original *ontological* position' in which human action is philosophically relevant in all domains. The 'absolute historicism' of these philosophers of praxis can be best understood by means of a metacritical approach to the history

of philosophy. For these theorists, reality is fundamentally historical ‘and history itself is to be understood as in essence an object of human practice ... Action takes on a universal significance, going beyond the social world to affect being as such.’ (Feenberg 2014: 66)

History, therefore, has ontological significance, an insight by Marx that enabled him to claim imperatively that there is no dichotomy between being and history, between naturalism and humanism. Marx declines to posit human essence as an ethical ideal and refuses to accept the dichotomy of fact and value, between is and ought, thus refuting abstract idealism and futuristic utopian thinking in favor of the living contradiction of ideal and real, that is, the dialectic of ideal and historical reality in comprehending the tendencies within the present (Feenberg 2014). Hence, the dialectic of existence and essence becomes, for Marx, ‘a demand of reason, a methodological precondition of rationality, and not...an ethical ideal’ (Feenberg 2014: 86). Capitalist alienation and human suffering are given an ontological status, as an essential problem of reason that can be historically transcended (*Aufhebung*). Marx is concerned with the manner in which philosophical ideals take on human form, so that they can be transcended historically through ways that enable social action to intervene, that is, through the sublation of the current form of objective being by means of revolutionary praxis. Therefore, Marxist inspired critical pedagogies grounded in a philosophy of praxis differ from neo-Weberian, left-liberal, and politically domesticated versions of critical pedagogy that are content with seeking educational reform within the confining and suffocating parameters of the capitalist state.

This intricate interweaving of theoretical issues with practical activities with the aim of resolving their contradictory tendencies is fundamental to revolutionary praxis, searching for the moment at which the conditions for action are still available, possibly even ripe for intervention. Here the challenge revolves around seizing the *augenblick* such that radical conceptions of learning and being prefigure the horizon of the possibility of transformation. There have been numerous moments identified as *augenblick* moments – Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, the Greek Anti-Austerity movement, Black Lives Matter protests that began in Minnesota, USA – but arguments favoring socialism over capitalism did not achieve hegemonic ascendancy among the vast swaths of the people.

Revolutionary Critical Praxis

One of us (McLaren) was fortunate to meet Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez while working on a project of building up the university programs in critical pedagogy. Chávez was convinced that in order to create the conditions of possibility for socialism, socialists need to be made; that is, socialists are produced through practice. Michael Lebowitz writes:

‘Socialists have to be made,’ he explained on *Aló Presidente* in 2007. ‘A revolution has to produce not only food, goods and services it also has to produce, more importantly than all of those things, new human beings: new men, new women.’ Agreeing with Che’s point about the necessity of simultaneously developing productive forces and socialist human beings, Chávez insisted that the only road was practice: ‘We have to practice socialism, that’s one way of saying it, have to go about building it in practice. And this practice will create us, ourselves, it will change us; if not we won’t make it.’ (Lebowitz 2017)

Che Guevara famously championed the creation of the ‘new man and woman’ through education that brings together mental and manual labor. Che also emphasizes that the revolution is a force that takes place ‘in our habits and our minds’. He elaborates as follows:

Our task is to prevent the current generation, torn asunder by its conflicts, from becoming perverted and from perverting new generations. We must not create either docile servants of official thought, or ‘scholarship students’ who live at the expense of the state — practicing freedom in quotation marks. Revolutionaries will come who will sing the song of the new man and woman in the true voice of the people. This is a process that takes time. ...Our scholarship students do physical work during their vacations or along with their studies. Work is a reward in some cases, a means of education in others, but it is never a punishment. A new generation is being born. (Guevara 1965)

Revolutionary praxis consists of self and social formation. For Chávez, this was sought in the creation of associated producers, working within the structure of communes where protagonistic agents can transform both themselves and surrounding circumstances. Again, Lebowitz (2017) writes: ‘For Chávez, the necessary road was protagonistic democracy—in the workplace and in the community—as the practice that transforms people.’

We agree with Marx that it is always wise to move beyond sharing common grievances against capitalists (creating *a class in itself*) in order to create a critical consciousness of ourselves as an anti-capitalist class (*a class for itself*). Such creation would not result in the classical version of the proletariat, but would refer to all those who recognize that great transformations will need to occur among the entire population if we wish to win people to the cause. Accordingly, we will need to offer the people reasonably unreasonable answers to what socialism as a systemic alternative will look like if we apply our most creative faculties to answering this question, without shying away from the strife and struggle this will necessarily entail.

Critical educators are protagonistic agents who work in and through history on behalf of those who disproportionately suffer from socio-economic injustice and they believe that education can be a source for revolutionary praxis. The work of critical educators has inspired creative pedagogical reflection, encouraged educational activism, and stimulated critical theoretical discourses surrounding our understanding of the political dimensions of pedagogy and the pedagogical dimensions of the political throughout the global landscape.

The possibility for moving beyond a political revolution to a general social revolution is only available for those who have no place within the existing civil society, for those who have been excluded from the social contract. This is what makes the revolution universal in character, with the potential to bring down the system of class exploitation and racism responsible for the alienation and reification that now plagues civil society. However, praxis demands that there must be a unity between consciousness and action, and in order to achieve this ‘[w]e must extract the practical essence of the theory from the method and its relation to its object’ (Lukács 1971: 2).

Supporting this idea is Marx (1843) who writes: ‘It is not enough that thought should seek to realize itself; reality must also strive toward thought.’ Marx had identified the form that revolution must take: socialism. But there was still a form-content distinction that had to be overcome (Feenberg 2014: 173) with respect to reason itself. Rather than continue with a formalistic concept of reason, Marx explored the exigencies of reason in the context of transferring its formal attributes to the concept of need, and charging need with the function of rationality. The subject and object of need is internally related. This makes the alienation of labor not just a major social problem but a fundamental philosophical problem. The social contradictions discovered by Marx are, in effect, ‘philosophical antinomies reconstructed in a domain where they can be

resolved through social action' (Feenberg 2014: 206). The purpose of philosophy is not only to understand the world but to change it.

The working class has enjoyed a powerful legacy of non-cooperation with capitalist social relations. But capitalism has also enjoyed an equally powerful history of restructuring the production process and the division of labor every time the working-class chooses not to cooperate. In this way the elite class of high net-worth individuals—which we refer to as the transnational capitalist class – has been able to reassert its control over the working-class. The history of capitalism is largely a narrative of how the reconstitution of the working class based on new productive relations has been able to successfully respond to former protests from the working-class. Capitalism is able to retain value-production in each and every case, making it impossible for socialism to overcome capitalism's production of alienated labor in which remuneration is based on *socially-necessary* labor time. The retention of value-production would render 'socialist' society unable to overcome capitalism's power to dominate society with alienated labor.

What is important in this argument is that alienated labor is not a consequence of market-exchange relations but a precondition for such relations (Hudis 2013). This is the case because, as Hudis (2013) makes clear, the social relations of capitalist production – capitalism – is itself is a congealment of alienated (and *abstract*) labor. Workers have direct connection to the means of production. Well, what about communism? The communist regimes of the 20th century did not give workers common possession of the land and ownership of the means of production. On the contrary, in their opposition to 'free market capitalism' they changed wage-and property-relations creating a form of government ownership of the means of production that Raya Dunayeskaya (1958) called 'state capitalism'. There were also forms of 20th century serfdom (pre-capitalist ownership) in the Soviet Union.

Truth in The Dialectic of History

For Trump supporters, including the magical-thinking evangelical Christians who adore Trump and who have been conditioned to exhibit bloodthirsty Pavlovian reactions at any mention of socialism, facts do not intrude on the painful reality that we are not merely facing a new stage of capitalism but witnessing its world-historical systemic crisis. They recursively flee from the brute realization that our political superstructure is in terminal decay. This follows from a motivated amnesia surrounding the dangers of fascism and irrational deliberation and a willful ignorance regarding the consequences of market anarchy and steps that need to be taken to reclaim the tattered vestiges of democracy. Their embodiment of Rush Limbaugh's 'four corners of deceit' (2013) – science, government, academia, media – have primed them to spend their lives in the only spaces left for them – those of religio-political cults led by a charismatic leader. Those of us on the left need to move beyond the idea that socialism is about social planning for the redistribution of value since the capitalist system can no longer revolutionize the means of production in ways that will bring about the changes necessary to provide a decent life for masses of people. We need to develop a new concept of socialism that is adequate for the challenges of the present.

When we examine the concept of truth it means that we must do so historically. Feenberg's (2014: 274) assessment of Horkheimer maintains that 'a truth may be historically bound without being falsified by history'. Truth and the object of truth must always be historically mediated. We must judge all concepts of truth in the context of the historical period in which they appear, that is, in terms of the historical system of categories of their time, paying close attention to their cognitive patterns. Feenberg (2014: 271-272) follows Horkheimer in arguing that '[k]nowledge rests not only on corroboration by the facts, but also on the validity of its concepts within the

prevailing categorial system. On the other hand, that system of categories is historically relative to evolving social and economic conditions.’ But this does not mandate that we dismiss their claims as mere relativism because ‘because there are no eternal truths setting a higher standard they fail to meet’ (2014: 272). Truth here remains relative only insofar as it is inconclusive. But it is also absolute, according to Feenberg, since later correction in no way should render the former truth as untrue. Feenberg (2014: 273) summarizes Horkheimer as follows: ‘Judgements of truth are objectively valid even if historically relative and retain their validity even after history has moved on and replaced one set of categories with another.’ Thus, truth may in one sense be judged on its own terms yet at the same time truth does not escape the dialectic of history.

We are interactive social beings, that is, we exist through intra-actions with each other and as such we do not preexist them; rather, we come into existence through and as part of our entangled, mutually constitutive relationships with each other. Each of our interactions iteratively reconfigures our historical being, and praxis can become a means of taking us towards a socialist future. Action creates history, and we humans are historical beings. History is the object of our human practice, it is through us that history is created. Revolutionary action can, through praxis, that is, through the disalienation and dereification of social life, create new socialist human beings able to sublate the contradictions between being and the objective social world, between the ideal and the real, between existence and essence, between social action and capitalist alienation and human suffering and alienation (Feenberg 2014). But socialism will not automatically arrive on the doorstep of praxis. It will not arrive by Amazon courier, even if Benjamin’s Angel of History can find no other job than delivering for Federal Express.

Marxist inspired critical pedagogies grounded in a philosophy of praxis differ substantively from neo-Weberian, left-liberal, and politically domesticated versions of critical pedagogy that are content with seeking educational reform within the confining and suffocating parameters of the capitalist state, in a like vein to many progressive educational reformers. If wish to push back at the escalation of ludicrous racist discourse from above – such as the ginned up public convulsions and distempers stoked by Trump and other authoritarian leaders aimed at ushering the members of the white working-class sector into a racist and a neo-fascist understanding of their condition – then we educators have much work to accomplish. Some critics see such efforts as too late to effect Trump’s base, that the carrots are cooked on this one, that the condition is done and dusted, that the majority of Trump’s base is likely to remain actively white supremacist for the foreseeable future. If that is true, it places a great deal of responsibility on our educational system to develop anti-racist curricula, to address the current crisis of capitalism, and to be willing to focus public debate on the issue of racism and white supremacy, restorative and racial justice, LGBTQIA+ equality, transforming these issues into militant imperatives. Otherwise we will be ensanguining the streets as violent clashes emerge from our culture wars and cult leaders such as Trump continue to suborn members of the aggrieved white working-class to continue their assaults on people of color.

What we need is a scallywag pedagogy, creating coordinated bunkers of anti-racist activists in schools, corporations, factories, churches, libraries, community centers, who are able to establish networks to resist the normalization of white supremacy currently spreading through authoritarian regimes such as the United States and elsewhere. While such a scallywag pedagogy is grounded not in World War 2 bunkers spread across the English countryside but in a philosophy of praxis, it has the potential to challenge the rebirth of neo-Nazi ideology that could very well become a serious threat to those countries struggling for a democratic future. Here we see examples of scallywag pedagogy in the efforts of British educators Dave Hill, Mike Cole, Glenn

Rikowski and Alpesh Masuria who have been at the educational forefront of socialist struggle in the United Kingdom.

How would scallywag pedagogy look in practice? Let's look at the curriculum. First, education must be focused on creating socialist alternatives to capitalism – from remnants of post-feudal times to present instantiations of financialization. Society, culture and social relations of production must be seen as interconnected. Systemic racism must be understood as it is inextricably linked to the legal system and the criminal justice system. Capital-perpetuated settler colonialism, sexism, racism, homophobia, misogyny, misanthropy and misology must be examined for their interrelatedness, including the historically generated myths that have served to legitimize them. It is imperative that students deal with the issue of climate change and scarcity, and technology-enabled extraction of natural resources. We could continue but the point we wish to underscore is the generative issue driving the curriculum for liberation: understanding the various systems of mediation that have produced us as 21st century compliant and self-censoring human beings who appear defenseless in the face of nationalist calls for war, for ethnic chauvinism, for narratives championing imperialism and the coloniality of power. Equally important is a study of revolutionary social movements that have challenged these systems of mediation, and why some groups succeeded and why many of them failed.

We have only scratched the surface here. Clearly we need an education that can move groups from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself – that is, to a class that actively pursues its own interests following the imperatives of critical-dialogical deliberation. Certainly we need a mass movement from below to counter the much more advanced digitalization of today's entire global economy and society which has utilized the application of fourth industrial revolution technologies led by artificial intelligence (AI) and the analysis of 'big data' (machine learning, automation and robotics, nano- and bio-technology, quantum and cloud computing, 3D printing, virtual reality, new forms of energy storage, etc.). That will not be an easy task. But it is a necessary one, since we will be struggling against the formation of a global police state.

The sociologist William Robinson (2020) has warned that in the time of the pandemic we are able to see the acceleration of digital restructuring 'which can be expected to result in a vast expansion of reduced-labor or laborless digital services, including all sorts of new telework arrangements, drone delivery, cash-free commerce, fintech (digitalised finance), tracking and other forms of surveillance, automated medical and legal services, and remote teaching involving pre-recorded instruction'. Hence, the giant tech companies and their political agents are able to convert great swaths of the economy into these new digital realms. Robinson (2020) also notes that the 'post-pandemic global economy will involve now a more rapid and expansive application of digitalisation to every aspect of global society, including war and repression'. We have an enormous task ahead of us. If we can make postdigital science work in the interests of the oppressed, rather the corporate guardians of the transnational capitalist class, then we would be foolish not to try to strengthen our communal immune system.

In the case of the United States, we are reminded here of Sheldon Wolin's (2008) concept of 'inverted totalitarianism' and 'managed democracy' by which he refers to distinct political tendencies or trajectories that influence how power is legitimated, one means of which involves overriding existing constraints established by constitutional democracy, and exploiting weaknesses in the democratic system through the use of fear. Inverted totalitarianism uses forms of institutional management to consolidate power, absent of considerations of the common good. Propaganda is organic to corporate institutions such as the press who manage dissent and keep it within certain parameters, rather than being concentrated within the state. Practices considered

corrupt, such as lobbying, are normalized, and economic interests override political interests. Trump deviates somewhat from this model in that his attempts at consolidating power involve more overt acts such as firing officials tasked with ethical oversight and his attempting to overthrow the 2020 presidential election on the bogus basis that there was mass election fraud.

Sallywag Pedagogy

Those of us who recall the history of fascism and the devastation that it has inflicted worldwide have viewed with increasing concern Trumpian attempts to make America Great Again his rallying cry. Such a call echoes that of America First in the early part of the twentieth century. The term ‘fascism’ entered the American lexicon in 1922 when Mussolini took power in Italy and was used interchangeably with America First (previously used by Woodrow Wilson, Warren Harding, and Calvin Coolidge), and the Ku Klux Klan. In the 1940s, it was used mainly to identify Hitler’s sympathizers. After the Biden victory in the 2020 presidential election, there were calls by some Trump supporters to institute martial law, declare the presidential vote null and void and order the military to undertake a national re-vote as a result of baseless accusations of fraud. A number of pro-Trump lawyers, far-right media personalities and even a former military general and National Security Advisor have been calling for the United States to suspend the Constitution and embrace fascism (Henderson 2020).

Paul Street (2020) provides us with thirteen ‘fascistic characteristics of the Trump regime and its Republifascist allies’. Some of the most repulsive are ‘+3. White-supremacist and eliminationist satisfaction with a virus that was disproportionately killing off people of color’ and ‘+4. A Social Darwinian and eliminationist comfort with COVID-19’s devastating impact on the aged and infirm – on old and sick ‘useless eaters’ fascists have long wished to exterminate’ (Street 2020). Trump has expressed support for herd immunity, claiming that young people are at little risk of death as a result of Covid-19. On a day that US death rates set a daily record of more than 3,600, an internal memo was released by the Trump administration. Lloyd Green (2020) reports:

In a July 4, 2020 email, Paul Alexander, a political appointee at the Department of Health and Human Services, spelled it all out. In his words, infants, young adults, and middle-aged folks with no conditions had ‘zero risk,’ and were there to take the hit as America marched off a cliff. ‘We want them infected,’ declared Alexander.

Unfortunately, the administration never asked their permission to become human guinea pigs. Indeed, as fate would have it, younger Americans are now dying at historic rates, according to a study recently published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. As for herd immunity, it’s a lot like waiting for Godot.

American citizens have unknowingly been used as laboratory rats. Hundreds of thousands have died—including younger Americans—as a result of this ghastly social experiment that is redolent of former fascist governments. We agree with Street (2020) that to date, Trump is responsible for 270,000 American fatalities:

Properly handled, the pandemic should not have killed more than 35,000 Americans by now. Trump owns the remaining 270,000 fatalities. He killed them. And this mass murder he perpetrated was all about the fascism and of course the capitalism, the racism, and the imperialism and the sexism, none of which are (to say the least) inconsistent with the fascism. (Street 2020)

Street also provides us with five major ‘pandemo-fascist moments of 2020’ including ‘+1. The ordering of predominantly LatinX workers back into COVID-19-infected meatpacking plants’ and ‘+3. Trump refusing to wear a mask while his team loudly and tellingly played the song “Live and Let Die” as he visited a mask factory’ (Street 2020).

When media outlets owned by the crazy Falun Gong cult from Taiwan join Newsmax, OANN and far-right radio hosts in supporting Trumpian fascist in their attempts to overthrow the presidential election, we can recognize the tenacity of fascist ideology and how its powerful political aesthetics plays a part in establishing control of at least half the population of the United States. In fact, what keeps Trump politically buoyant is the shallow form of entertainment that he provides with his tawdry fascist aesthetics. This was foreseen by Walter Benjamin during the leadership of Adolf Hitler during the Third Reich. As Mathew Rozsa (2020) writes:

Benjamin, a Marxist and a Jew who was thus obviously opposed to the Nazis, postulated that modern fascists succeed when they are entertainers. Not just any entertainer — a circus clown or a juggler-turned-fascist wouldn’t do. Specifically, modern fascists were entertainers with a distinct *aesthetic*, one that appeals to mass grievances by encouraging their supporters to feel like they are personally expressing themselves through their demagogue of choice.

Benjamin’s insight, which appears to have been largely forgotten, is that keeping fascism out of power means recognizing how they use aesthetic entertainment to create their movements. That does require us to admit, cringe-inducing though it may be, that Trump is an artist — albeit a tacky, shallow and transparently self-aggrandizing one. More importantly, his movement, the MAGA crowd, has a distinct aesthetic which he has created and honed for them. (Rozsa 2020)

Rozsa notes Benjamin’s important recognition that ‘by using purely aesthetic entertainment to create solidarity among their supporters, they [fascists] could distract them from the economic and social forces oppressing them [the general population], and instead build political movements based around the ability to creatively express their grievances’. This is an important insight since it strongly suggests that if a politician can create the illusion that people’s voices count and that they are being heard, then the asymmetrical relations of power and privilege in favor of the ruling class can be securely kept in place.

Trump became a pop cultural icon by fabricating an image of a successful American businessman—a billionaire that liked to rub shoulders with the average man and unabashedly assault porn stars and beauty queens and brag about it. He is also a great entertainer: we all remember Trump’s grand ride down the golden escalator ride in Trump Tower to announce his presidential candidacy. Trump does not reside in the Oval Office anymore, yet his poisonous spirit and the fetid social changes he represents are all around us. It disgusts us to research and write about Trump’s antics and outbursts of hate, yet that dirty job needs to be done. Trump does not deserve our attention as a person, but as an embodiment of wider and deeper transformations of our society.

This all makes a good argument for mandatory classes in media literacy and virtue epistemology (MacKenzie and Bhatt 2019) in universities to protect us from future fascists. The tragedy is that many of the graduates of such classes are likely working for Trump behind the scenes through their affiliation with organizations such as Turning Point. Which is why we need not only media literacy classes but a revolutionary critical pedagogy in which such classes are

situated – a pedagogy that is centered around the ethical imperative developed in liberation theology, that of a preferential obligation to serve the most vulnerable populations and to fight for social justice. Scallywag pedagogy is postdigital, because it reconfigures human beings and technologies; ontological and epistemological, because it recognizes the dialectical relationships between righteous deeds and true utterances; historical, because it recognizes truth's situatedness in the dialectic of history; and revolutionary, because it aims at overturning capitalism in favor of a socialist alternative. Scallywag pedagogy is philosophy of practice, action and reflection, of transforming the world through speaking a true word: a foundational stepping-stone on our collective road beyond capitalism.

Postscript²

Charles Coughlin is smiling at Franklin Graham and Jerry Falwell Jr., egging on their madness from his preternatural abode, while Donald Trump, who turned out to be every bit as dark and sinister as Berzelius 'Buzz' Windrip, declines assistance from the ghost of Mussolini in championing the forgotten white men emasculated by feminists, GLBTQ advocates and anti-racists who have the temerity to stand for social justice. After all, Trump is the master of white nationalist skullduggery and his wrath is legendary. He has stamped out facts and replaced them with high voltage opinions, he has crushed journalists as enemies of the people and replaced them with Trump boot-licking sycophants. He has played all the Doremus Jessups like Nero's fiddle while democracy burned and children screamed in their cages.

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² This is a tribute to Sinclair Lewis' (1935) dystopian novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, describing the rise of a Hitler-like dictator in the USA.

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