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God and Governance: Reflections on Living in the Belly of the Beast

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God and Governance Reflections on Living in the Belly of the Beast

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Abstract

In this critical rage article, Peter McLaren unleashes his revolutionary critique aimed at capitalist injustice behind postdigital socio-technological developments, historical forms of injustice such as racism and colonialism, and recent political events and developments including but not limited to US interventions in Latin America and the presidency of Donald Trump. Rising from two important prongs of McLaren's work—revolutionary critical pedagogy and liberation theology—the article connects myth, religion, science, politics, technology, and humanity. The article reveals McLaren's most intimate thoughts and experiences and aligns them with sophisticated theory and philosophy. It dances between the individual and the collective, the realistic and the utopian, the scientific and the mystical. This uniquely written article, which constantly hovers between extremes in the dialectic of love and rage, simultaneously develops theoretical discourse and practical action of revolutionary critical pedagogy.

Keywords

Critical pedagogy Rage Love Revolution Emancipation Socialism

On Jesus and Miss World

When I was seventeen, I was an evangelical Christian. My conscience was captive to a literalist reading of scripture. But I did not always follow my conscience. I worked one summer at the Philips Electronics Exhibit of the Canadian National Exhibition. My job was to demonstrate and service the Philishave razor exhibit, brush the rotating razor cutters, and whisk them clean and then swab the famed egg-shaped 'floating heads' with alcohol after each person shaved. (Philips used the name Norelco in the US). Philips hired Miss World to appear at the exhibit, and I once invited her to lunch and she accepted. All that I could afford were two hot dogs, but that seemed fine with Miss World as long as there was plenty of mustard. I told her the razor I was demonstrating could be used to shave women's legs as well as men's faces. She asked me to demonstrate and of course, caught in the act, I was fired. But at least I could brag that I shaved the legs of Miss World, and that gave me street credibility with my non-evangelical friends who often ridiculed me for attending regular prayer meetings. And of course, my stint with Miss World was not in character with being an upstanding Canadian gentleman and that was precisely what was needed to stop the ridicule. But something else happened to me at the Canadian National Exhibition before I was fired. I met an older woman (she must have been in her early twenties) at one of the adjacent exhibits. She smoked cigars and had long pigtailed, and was stunningly alluring to me. For a short time, she, and not God, became My Mighty Fortress.

We started to hang out after the exhibition closed down and I naively asked her to accompany me to a prayer meeting. Her enjoyment at agitating the mainstream 'suits' was partly responsible for her agreement, and she was delighted at how flabbergasted the other evangelicals appeared when she entered the parish draped on my arm, resplendent in her micro-miniskirt, spike heels, dewy skin, and vampy makeup, puffing on a cigar, topped off with a sex-kittenish pout. The sensual allure of Gilbert (not her real name as she insisted that Gilbert sounded more mysterious, so I guessed she was probably

an Ann or Alice) was too much for me to resist, and I agreed to be absent for most of my prayer meetings in order to be in the arms of my new friend. But something more riveting—repugnantly riveting—occurred that caused me to break with the evangelical community. The pastor of my church (actually a mega-church that seated hundreds) gave a sermon one afternoon and told us that, if Adolf Hitler had confessed his sins, repented, and accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, he would have gone to heaven but all the Jews he tortured and gassed in the showers of the death camps would be suffering in hell because they did not accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Immediately after he finished his vile proclamation, I jumped out of my seat and made for the nearest exit. Later the next day, I was so stoked by fury that I affixed a letter condemning the pastor to an arrow, grasped my fiberglass archery bow, and stood stalwart across the street from the church. After a deep breath, I fired the arrow smack into the door of the church. (Luckily nobody opened the door the moment I let the arrow fly). That was it for me. No more evangelical churches or church groups!

I used to read a lot of Billy Graham at the time. He was undoubtedly the greatest US evangelist. Regrettably, his son, Franklin Graham, is a perfidious characterization of his father. A Trump supporter, he thrives on cruelty in the name of security, on homophobia, in the name of God's law, and supports a politics indignantly removed from the gospels. I am sure he is thrilled that Trump (whom many churlish evangelicals deceitfully proclaim was sent by God to save the Jews) moved the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. I am sure he believes that now we are one more step closer to the end of days. Graham is not alone. He has churches and schools behind him.

It's more than risible—so let us call it repugnant—to discover what goes on in some faith-based hate churches, such as the ATLAH World Missionary Church in Harlem, located near the historic Marcus Garvey Park and Apollo Theater. The church boasts a K-12 private school and is run by an eccentric (to put it mildly) pastor James Manning. Manning once described President [Barack Obama](#) as a 'long-legged mack daddy,' claimed that Starbucks was putting 'sodomite semen' in its lattes, locked a student in the church basement for hours at a time, and put signs on his church stating 'Jesus would stone homos' and 'Obama is a Muslim. Muslims hate fags. They throw fags off buildings.' He urged Harlem to vote for Trump but then did an about face by describing Trump as 'a nasty cracker possibly having sex with Ivanka,' hired teachers who considered gay people to be demons, posted a message on the school's website urging parents to 'Stop the homosexual brainwashing of your children!,' accused Obama and actor Jussie Smollett for having an affair, required some of his followers to give him access to their bank accounts, and urged some of his congregants to defecate in a bag and leave it at gay-owned businesses (Klein [2019](#)). Manning is still able by law to award students New York State-approved regents diplomas. I wonder in amazement at the undiluted theological hysteria he panders to his congregation, and why it took so long to lift the lid on his pecuniary and homophobic ploys and slew of mind-numbing proclamations which are not the indications of a serious mind nor simply serious breaches of decorum but rather the full-throated ravings of a Christian minister gone bonkers.

But is the hate that fuels Manning much different than that of Franklin Graham? Graham's willingness to abandon Christian principles of decent moral behavior to position himself within Trump's inner orbit surely lacks the carnivalesque trappings of Manning's actions. Notwithstanding, Graham's support for Trump, whom he claims God personally put in the presidency, and his double standard and hypocrisy when it comes to moral behavior, has certainly given the imprimatur to, and thus helped to normalize, Trump's fascist leanings, not to mention make a mockery of the evangelical movement. Which is worse, hate-based faith or faith-based hate? The former is the type of eye-for-an-eye fascist ideology fueled by faith in a God who will reward those warriors who protect the white Christian ethno-state and its symbols from all those who seek to undermine America—Muslims, gays and lesbians, immigrants, and refugees. They are more likely than most of us to believe that God made the world

with fossils already in place to test our faith; the latter reflects an understanding of eschatology locked inside a rear-view mirror comprehension of history that takes place in the future anterior. That we must face backward in order to move forward, that what once was will always be, despite the horror and wreckage sown by war, imperialism, settler colonialism, slavery, antisemitism. That what was said in the Bible has already been agreed upon in the future, that the covenant with Christ is therefore completely sealed, and that, since the Iron Age, there have been no questions that have not already been settled, since the future has already passed. Time is up for those who have not invited Jesus to become their personal savior. These Christians believe that they merit heaven, but those who do not share their faith or political proclivities merit eternal damnation.

Were he more 'woke' (to use the popular term) Graham would realize that the eschaton has already begun, and it is our duty to make it immanent—but not in the way Christian millennialism understands this process, and certainly not as a form of secular messianism or immanent hypostasis of the eschaton through some gnostic cult but rather as a prefigurative politics, to use a term introduced by my friend Carl Boggs. It's a bit like anarchism or libertarian-socialism, creating within social movements those pedagogical practices, social relations and political formations that embody or prefigure the society we hope to achieve—in my case, it would be the socialist society of the early disciples of Christ, who lived communally, as communists.

The despicable and often deranged arch-conservative William F. Buckley warned that the eschaton must not be realized in the here and now, and he popularized the slogan, 'Don't immanentize the eschaton' (Goldberg [2002](#)) which was a phrase borrowed from Eric Voegelin ([1985](#)) [1952] that became the slogan of the unctuous Young Americans for Freedom. How tragic that was.

My high school history teacher, John Muggeridge, son of Malcolm Muggeridge, was one of the few conservatives in my life that I enjoyed, and he was a Catholic to boot, just like Buckley. But very unlike Buckley in temperament.

I sometimes believe that I am cursed to know too much of humanity, poised precariously on the edge of a skyscraper like Damiel, an angel from the film *Wings of Desire* (Wenders [1987](#)), who spends his hours on earth perched atop buildings high over the cityscape of Berlin, listening to the din of human thoughts below and taking notice of our puny movements, all captured in the sepia-toned black-and-white images of the angelic imagination.

Pretty soon, the CCTV cameras are going to put the angels out of business. Think of the specters of cameras atop of buildings, traffic signals, and highway signs employing point-to-point (P2P), point-to-multipoint (P2MP), or mesh wired or wireless links. If it is not the CCTV cameras, it's something else. We are always being monitored, evaluated, and judged, and if we pass all the tests, we are magically resurrected in the clump of toxic soil we call the earth, having earned the right to call ourselves human. Yet we are singular and unique individuals, stardust formations, and the culmination of consciousness. Transhumanists wish to upload the human mind into a computer, to breathe sentience into inanimate objects, to become assimilated into our laptops, and thus to ascend into the godhead and then to descend as immortal silicone-based gods. Are we perhaps reversed engineered genetic material left behind by some ancient space beings? If so, I pity the ancient astronauts. Were we mixed with dung and extraterrestrial vomit?

For anyone who watches television on a regular basis, it could be too late to rehabilitate your humanness. You may already have swallowed the poison pill without knowing it, your capacity for humanity may already have been fatally compromised; you may be condemned to view the world with a smirk and side-eye. Haven't you noticed how our emotions have been reduced to emojis—we have 'perv eyes' or 'shifty eyes'—oh, just to let you know, 'Eyes' was approved as part of Unicode 6.0 in 2010

and added to Emoji 1.0 in 2015.’ What about ‘rolling eyes’? ‘Face with rolling eyes is an emoji used to express disbelief, annoyance, impatience, boredom, and disdain. It can also be used to indicate sarcasm or irony.’ Well, that’s a lot of choices of emotions for one single emoji—how is a person supposed to know if what you are saying is met with disdain or impatience? But we have more than just eye emojis, we have full face emojis. We have ‘smirking face’ and oh, just to let you know, Smirking Face. A yellow face with a sly, smug, mischievous, or suggestive facial expression. It features a half-smile, raised eyebrows, and eyes looking to the side. Often used to convey flirtation or sexual innuendo. ... Smirking Face was approved as part of Unicode 6.0 in 2010 and added to Emoji 1.0 in 2015’. (Dictionary.com [2019](#))

Face with rolling eyes debuted in summer 2015 as part of a much-hyped batch of new emoji released by the Unicode Consortium. In February 2016, emoji keyboard provider EmojiXpress found that face with rolling eyes was the most popular emoji being used among Unicode’s new set by iPhone users at the time. At points in March 2017, Emojipedia featured face with rolling eyes as one of the most popular emoji on its site.

Face with rolling eyes hasn’t just been popular, though. Some think it can be quite useful in addressing the ambiguity that riddles electronic communication. As Ashley Fetters argued in April 2016 for GQ, face with rolling eyes can function as a much-needed sarcastic tone marker, indicating that a message should be read as ironic, thus eliminating any confusion. (Dictionary.com [2019](#))

So let me get this straight—we are supposed to compensate our electronic communication with emojis to *avoid* ambiguity? Drawing faces, then, becomes a way to clarify understanding when we communicate through written messages? When I was going through grade school and high school, it was the other way around. What would Shakespeare have produced—if anything—if suddenly everyone were reduced to communicating through emojis? Our facial expressions do not always communicate what we are trying to say. Does a smirking face really capture the anguish that we sometimes feel being trapped as finite beings in an infinite universe? Or should we create a special emoji that signifies ‘anguish of finite beings trapped in a metaphysical void?’ I worry about the ability of our young people to master the English language in a world overpopulated by emojis. Having a mind unburdened by a complicated thought is not a good thing, especially in a world increasingly infected with misunderstanding and hate.

I can imagine that, one day, our emails will be answered automatically. The computer will know enough about our preferences and temperament, and previous exchanges with specific people, to save us from at least the most tedious of emails. This is almost happening now, as we can just click ‘thanks’ or ‘very good’ at the bottom of our reply messages provided by our e-mail programs since our computer can now recognize certain types of messages. Frankly, I am loath now to use ‘good’ or ‘very good’ in my responses because I fear my friends might feel slighted that I am too lazy to respond with some original words. The day when our computers automatically answer our emails, and communicate through emojis, will our computers be asking if they have any use for human beings anymore? What a wonderful world that will be (do I need an emoji here to indicate sarcasm?).

We have come a long way with technology. We know that DNA technology can now solve ‘cold case’ murders that occurred in the distant past. Bodies that were too corrupted to be identified can now be identified. The shriveled remains of unidentified mummified corpses can be rehydrated by medical experts with patterned fluids so that families can recognize their mutilated, long-lost kin. But there is little hope to rehydrate a mind mummified by the stupidification and moronization of US popular media. That should be more obvious to those living above the ground.

Wings of Desire and Winging it

Perched atop skyscrapers like Daniel can dampen the spirit, so I have a habit of writing down whatever comes to mind, with the intention of figuring out what it might mean at some later date. Keeping daily observations and thoughts in a notebook surely helps writers like myself, since filtering your experiences through long-term memories might lead you to misrecognize crucial correlations that, in turn, might lead you to jumping to false conclusions based on your preconceived ideas, your untested predilections. It could pervert the actual feeling that you were experiencing at the time, and cause you to plant plums and apricots instead of grapes. Once I take stalk of my feelings, I find a style that best expresses their conjugation with ideas. I try to give a personality to those feelings—in fact, I must, in order to retain some psychological ballast. My sentences have their own personality, trapped in the excesses of the Renaissance, with breakouts here and there into modernity. That's the best way I can integrate my feelings into my thoughts.

I tend to write with a Dantean conceit, my words blackened by fire, a style derivative of the hardheartedness of those who have tried to describe the ghastly horrors found in the circulatory system of sin, in the furrows of the wake left by hellhounds come to earth to gnaw at the shanks of our doughy frames. I try to purge myself of my thoughts of God and governance yet continue to ask: How can we live congruent with our faith and the moral responsibility we must take for our life, with the spirit of self-gift to which we have been directed, the experimentation to which we have been entrusted, the resolution of questions in a field of existential conjectures and theories torn to pieces and thrust into scooped-out graves of historical amnesia? My style may shift according to the memories gifted to it and the ways in which such memories have been retrieved. They often surface unannounced, and remain incalculant to my stubborn summons.

Chinese Mascara and Cellphone Memories

As in this very moment, I am inclined to recall the day it was raining heavily in Jinhua, China. Black streaks were running down the cheeks of the buildings like mascara on the faces of mothers weeping for their lost children. I stopped by a water-logged restaurant that served countryside-style food, with a yearning for some Jiuqu Hongmei tea. After dinner, while I was admiring posters of Chairman Mao and Chairman Hua Guofeng, I noticed about ten young waitresses in orange uniforms in the upstairs dining area. They were all sitting together in the dark, their faces eerily illuminated by their large Samsung cell phones. They were playing games and watching videos. All of them were silent. There was no dialog. Occasionally, a waitress would leave her chair to attend to a customer and then, it was back to the darkened room to the comfort of her cellphone. Outside the restaurant were unpainted concrete buildings and hydroelectric towers. They also stood silent. Emerging from the creases in my brainstem, a thousand-year-old Buddhist Temple in Hangzhou stands like incandescent starlight bending into a black hole. Sacred figures from Buddhist history carved out of stone stand silent. Gold-painted statues of Buddha loom over the pious and curious visitors. In one temple, at least a hundred monks are chanting in unison, as great clouds of incense wafted through the open doors. Winding my way down from the highest temple on the hill, I notice one of the monks on his cellphone. He has been given a vision of modernity! Perhaps, he is checking the World Cup results? Or calling his condo in Shanghai? Cellphone memories are always cold and hard. Someone must warn the monk that, as much as he understands the virtues of solitude, nothing can compare to the aloneness of being connected by digital waves to the world. Analog memories have infinite possibilities. Once they pass from tablet to Wi-Fi router, and then are digitally encoded inside the integrated circuits of microprocessors so loved by the captains of technocracy, their microcontrollers trick us with pulse-width modulation to make us believe our memories have sprung into existence by the hand of Pythagoras himself, with help from the music of the spheres.

I loathe technology, and yet, like many others, I am addicted to it. I hate cell phones, except for use in emergencies, yet I have an iPhone which I check regularly. I hate the Internet, yet I spend time on the web each day checking what I have found to be reliable sources and authors. I am irritated when people around me are talking loudly on their cell phones. I greatly dislike the consumer hype around cell phone cases, and the like. There is just too much information available. It is overwhelming. Everybody creates their own Internet worlds, publishes their own journals and blogs, and sometimes you find something of interest but it remains stuck in the brainpan. Little of this information is embodied, it is magic without the mystery, without a warm whisper of innocence, and without a heart. Has anyone in Silicon Valley read Wittgenstein or Aquinas? Apparently not.

Digital Brutality and Eschatological Complacency

Digital technology is the perfect weapon of capitalism, it is antiseptically cleaved from the world experienced by our senses, it is knowledge disassociated from acts of knowing, and it keeps knowledge sequestered inside our brainpans like ordinary scraps of cognition that have been programmed to adduce evidence for reality in Cartesian terms rather than in psychophysiological spaces where we can see, feel, taste, and smell knowledge and where we might smell some Kantian or Rawlsian moral precepts. There are two different logic levels at play in the digital binarism of capitalism — winners and losers (see Peters and Jandrić [2018](#)). Yes, this preceded digital technology. But the binary system—value augmentation or immiseration—that has been digitalized offers no other choice and no alternative; its naturalization is so complete it has immunized itself almost entirely from a legitimation crisis. White people now would rather starve than bring in a system such as socialism that might create what the Trump's popular base views as welfare cheaters—allegedly lazy, good-for-nothing immigrants who get government handouts while sitting on their fat butts and vaping to an episode of the Kardashians. Capitalism is an omnipresent system in which brutality is a necessity, so much so that democracy refuses to descend there. It is an auction block in which souls are destroyed in the service of profit. It discharges such a scabrous stench of injustice that even the flies will not condescend to visit. In this carceral state encysted in the empyrean hinterlands of capital and driven by eschatological complacency, we are afforded little more than a postmortem encounter with democracy. We cannot surmount the antimonies of capitalism that we face — we are free to win or lose the game of life, but the rules are fixed to favor those already advantaged. For someone like me who appreciates the contributions of liberation theologians, and who seeks to effect remediation of the soul on the picket line rather than at high table dinners or high mass, looking at capitalism is akin to looking at a God who can unveil Himself and encounter us, who always remains above and beyond us. Or who can be understood only through a calculated market revelation in the person of *homo economicus* (McLaren and Jandrić [2017](#)).

Capitalism can be enshrined in the marketplace, outside of human control, or it can be unveiled by the local stockbroker, or by frenzied troglodytes buzzing inside the Wall Street offices where derivatives are traded like a rare error Barry Bonds 1993 baseball card. Capitalism can also be revealed through its primordial id, in the person of Donald Trump. Capitalism has survived the impact of Christianity but Christianity has not survived the impact of capitalism, as witnessed in the success of the prosperity preachers such as Joel Osteen, who completely ignores Agape and instead summons Dionysus in the guise of Jesus, who celebrates Eros by tap dancing on stage and speaking in tongues (Joel Osteen claims to have spoken Cantonese while in an ecstatic state). Manda---ka-mata-a-so-koya! Hallelujah! And do not we miss those bizarre facial contortions of the early Robert Tilton, king of the prosperity preachers and forever immortalized by his critics as the Farting Preacher! Ah, the sound of divine flatulence from the holy bowels churning for Jesus! Manda---ka-mata-a-so-koya! Hoo ba ba Kanda! Hallelujah! In their brutal struggle for market share and investable funds, today's captains of pentecostal commerce—

who stick to Trump as flies to a piece of dung—are poised to deliver a such a blow to their competitors that it will make the fate of Lot’s wife seem appealing in comparison. In so doing, they are legitimizing their ascendant power by associating poverty with sin’s primordial pulsations. Awash in surplus goods, God accordingly remains subjectively apprehended via quarterly earnings reports and objectively manifest in the forlorn faces of the homeless. And because God’s arteries are clogged with the debris of divine autolysis and putrefaction—the transubstantiation of the water of life incubated in Factory boilers, and bleached into oblivion by chlorine dioxide, hydrocarbons, and ammonia formaldehyde—is it any wonder that God ceases to be a conduit for the heart and instead reveals an inscrutable desire to augment profit shares?

Is there an inverse relationship between religiosity and spirituality? Those who preach hell and damnation are often those who are the least spiritual. Could it be that Pentecostal serpent handlers from Appalachia who like to gulp the gut rot in the backyard still are more fearful of love than they are of the rattlesnakes that they love to fondle?

Trump’s Pageantry of Dunces

The credulous that follow the sleazy ordinances of Trump are responding to real struggles and injustices suffered by the poor, but we cannot follow Trump’s clown car into the circus, as entertaining and cathartic as the pageantry of dunces can be for so many. Steve Bannon is the shifty mind behind the trajectory towards fascism. His attacks on Papa Francisco are gaining traction with conservative and reactionary Catholics. But we must stand with Francis, with the spirit of Obispo Angelelli, whose tomb was shown to me by Obispo Colombo in the Cathedral in La Rioja, Argentina. But more than that, we need to remember the sacrifices of all the lay Catholics who remain nameless yet who were at the forefront of revolutionary struggle and who built the movements that enabled liberation theology to take hold among the people. We must refuse the Bannon purge of the righteousness of the Spirit of Christ, of human decency, which can only lead us into an era of fascist dictatorship. We must be on guard against the professed guardians of Catholicism—groups such as Opus Dei who originated in Spain and rose to power during Franco’s dictatorship (just think of the holy stench emanating from the lies of Bill Barr, Trump’s Attorney General). We must save Jesus from imperial Christianity, from the Church itself. Only by standing with the poor in their moments of suffering can the Catholic Church redeem itself from its history of mass slaughter; only by helping to rebuild a society free from the capitalist law of value can the Church take a further step in its own redemption. Pope Francis is helping in this struggle in his criticisms of capitalism, but opposition to him is building.

God cannot be reduced to a solitary self, nor to society, nor to an unimpeachable creed. We necessarily must conceive of God using paradox that in such a definition God always compromises one of the terms, such as God as a being with self-consciousness and God as society comprised of internal relations within the Godhead. Can God be both absolute and relational? Can God distinguish himself from herself? Can we distinguish God in principle or only in deed? We need to approach such questions with humility. We must refuse to fight the crusades once again! Let the stanchion to which our armorial standard is affixed be as bendable as bamboo rather than reinforced by hubristic overconfidence that will send all of humanity spiraling through the debris of a nuclear winter. So sayeth Damiel, this bespectacled professor of education with arthritic knees and a penchant for tilting at taken-for-granted truths and reveling in political dissidence!

Corporate capitalists and the legal counsels that protect them are not all Harvard trained and fine mannered; some are smarmy masters of beguilement, bombastic bullies who batter down with contrarian provocations hapless victims with few resources to defend themselves. They are unscrupulous experts at deception with law degrees from bargain basement strip malls. They are

crapulent, foul mouthed, and pettifogging fixers, tarted up to look legitimate (while rouge-plastered cheeks patterned after seventeenth-century monarch Louis XIV were once a fad of the French elite, today's classic fashion for the cool captains of commerce is a permanent five-o'clock shadow beard) and ready to threaten any citizen who attempts to aid and abet human decency. They stand above the citizenry in order to dominate them rather than with the citizenry in order to protect them from injustices. They not only betray a chronic incapacity to establish a relationship of understanding and kinship with the people but rather purposefully, if not dogmatically, create a relationship of domination and possession, without connections between themselves and the people whose labor power is the source of their success. There is no place for the poor and the outcast. Many of us grew up believing truth will prevail and corrupt politicians on the take will receive their due punishment. We obviously watched too many westerns where the cowboys in the white hats always prevailed. We Marxists cannot rely on the law to support us. We must look for our wellspring for revolution from our struggles from below, enlivened by Agape, or selfless love for humanity.

Hucksters and Huckabees

I was tempted to hide my head behind my wings when watching how the US government has become more sodden with government corruption over this past few years, with Sarah Huckabee Sanders, Minister of Propaganda, dissembling newspeak in a southern drawl, a liar who lies to the American people to protect the Liar-in-Chief: not surprising, given that her father, Mike Huckabee, is a Christian minister who claimed Obama attended madrassas, and who compared homosexuality to bestiality, who...forget it, the list is too long and crazy. Forget Sarah Sanders, the whole damn Trump administration is a kaleidoscopic melange of bucket shop hacks, reminiscent of slick flim flam men in charcoal gray three-piece bespoke suits that you could easily imagine playing blackjack in the back office of a gentlemen's club that serves as a front for money laundering. Only they are doing more than operating a Safescan 2985 SX currency discriminator and mixed bill counter with an 8-point counterfeit detector. They are, in fact, weaponizing information technology, discovering new ways to suppress the African American vote, working with advanced weapon military contractors, and helping to secure profits for major bondholders and ultra-reactionary Pentagon officials. It's a political version of the 'do what thou wilt' directive of the Solar Lodge of the Ordo Templi Orientis, whose Nietzschean spirit is alive and well among scofflaws and cultists of all stripe. I should know, I lived in Hollywood for nearly 20 years.

The evangelical God of the Trump cult is a tribal God who spits in the face of Karl Barth's formative insight that it is God's revelation to the human community that is important, and not *our* revelation to God, 'allowing' Him to fight with us in the trenches, ordering Him to be on our side as we persecute gays and lesbians, and people of color. Would that they attend a service at the Abyssinian Baptist Church at 132 West 138th Street between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Lenox Avenue in Harlem. They would be all the better for it! But they are more inclined to create the cheap grace of a United Reich Church in the heartland of America than the costly grace of Bonhoeffer's Confessing Church in Finkenwalde! They follow a president who makes this national threat in relation to his chimeric declaration of national emergency along the USA-Mexico border: 'I can tell you that I have the support of the police, the support of the military, the support of the Bikers for Trump...I have the tough people, but they don't play it tough – until they go to a certain point, and then it would be very bad.' (Sargent [2019](#)). This is right out of the Mussolini playbook. And the evangelicals love it, they are eating it up; they are beside themselves with sinful, gluttonous glee!

The Christian evangelical community needs some off-piste thinking about the poor and persecuted of this world—since they are convinced that the relentless torrent of immigrants pouring into our country are stealing our enjoyment of life, leaving us only with scattered shards of shared resentment—and

whether or not it is truly in the spirit of Christ to separate refugee families from their children and put the latter into cages. Maybe a good exercise would be to go back and read the early encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*. What kind of phantasmatic rupture in human history would have occurred if Soviet submarine commander Vasiy Arkhipov had not refused to fire a nuclear torpedo during the Cuban Missile Crisis? We cannot be content with the pendulum theory of history that humans shift back and forth between passive subjection and transformative praxis. We make our own history, as Marx reminds us, but in conditions not of our own making, as we are invariably populated by other people's intentions, and authoritarian populism offers us a rechargeable signifier in which the aggression of the 'we the people' can be affectively invested in the 'them' or the 'outsiders who don't belong.' This constitutive outside of 'the people' — 'the other' — is always ripe for re-politicization — as terrorism, as invasion, as theft of 'our' way of life. Authoritarian populism as an articulatory mechanism has the terrible potential to repopulate the ontological void created by the unholy alliance between neoliberalism's austerity capitalism, and the total administrative state, with endless enemies conveniently provided by the psychotic symptoms they share with a charismatic leader they have anointed as their guardian and protector of the homeland. Such a situation provides us with an urgent incentive to crack on when it comes to offering an alternative analysis and rhetoric to defeat and transcend it.

Jackboot Subversion, John Wayne, and the Flat Foot Floogie with a Floy Floy

That a president who extols fascists as 'very fine people' is barely condemned by members of his own party provokes one to wonder if there will emerge from the contemporary din of political unthought a special military corps of Trump Youth who hanker to follow in the footsteps of their Orange-faced leader, twittering paeans to the will-to-power from their fraternity covens stacked with 21st Amendment Hell or High Watermelon wheat craft beer and operating out of the self-preservation and self-regard that has become the signature of the Ivy League. Fans of swing among the Hitler youth risked a trip to a concentration camp for being decadent and subversive, such as belting out lines from songs such as the American hit, Flatfoot Floogie — 'Oh the flat foot floogie with a floy floy' and moving along the street with one of their jackboots on the curb and one on the road — but I suppose any music genre will accommodate the zealotry and political fidelism of Trumpmania.

Do you think that many Americans would be astonished that one of the greatest American heroes is a movie star whose films helped bring men into the battlefield in US war campaigns yet who never served his country in the military, having obtained a 3-A status, 'deferred for (family) dependency reasons' and likely because of pressure from the film company, Republic Pictures, to whom he was under contract and who submitted a 2-A (occupational) deferment for John Wayne in order to keep him turning out hit movies? For a time, Wayne was a member of the John Birch Society, known for its racist and anti-Communist political platforms, and became widely acclaimed for serving as 'a producer for and actor in a film about the ignominious House Un-American Activities Committee and a vocal supporter of the Vietnam War' (Rosenberg [2019](#)). He made the following admissions at various points in a 1971 *Playboy* interview:

I believe in white supremacy.... We can't all of a sudden get down on our knees and turn everything over to the leadership of the blacks....I don't believe in giving authority and positions of leadership and judgment to irresponsible people...I don't feel guilty about the fact that five or 10 generations ago these people were slaves...Now, I'm not condoning slavery. It's just a fact of life, like the kid who gets infantile paralysis and has to wear braces so he can't play football with the rest of us. (Wayne in Rosenberg [2019](#))

Referring to Native Americans he opined:

I don't feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them, if that's what you're asking....Our so-called stealing of this country from them was just a matter of survival. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves. (Wayne in Rosenberg [2019](#))

Wayne's opinions will, I trust, give some readers pause the next time they take a flight from or into John Wayne Airport in Orange County—or watch one of his westerns or war films. It's frightening to think how many Americans would not only absolve him of his racism but would respond, *ab irato*: 'Damn right, thanks John for telling it like it is!'

I can only long for American versions of the 'White Rose' movement, whose members will define their beliefs in human goodness by their actions in and on the world, and in actions necessary to cultivate a counter-fascism powerful enough to sublimate the Nietzschean will to power into a grand refusal to forfeit moral and ontological clarity in the face of the rising fascist state and the self-regarding allegiance to power that goes with it.

Speaking of fascism, I see that the state of Texas has been considering the passing of a morally disheveled law that would make abortion a crime punishable by death. A nice bit of kit, that is, for the same evangelicals who would like to see homosexuals executed. Watching the abortion debate almost made me slip off the edge of my skyscraper perch and right into the swamp that Trump promised to drain when he first took office. I see that the insufferable President Trump, head of a Strongman State, is threatening another government shutdown, threatening again to keep it shut until he gets funding for his southern border wall that he claims he needs in order to keep out murderers, rapists, and human traffickers from Latin American countries.

During his initial (partial) shutdown of the government, 380,000 federal employees had been furloughed and the other 420,000 were forced to work without pay, and their immediate charge was to figure out a means for paying their bills without the promise of their next paycheck. These workers received no pay and suffered through the Christmas holidays, while Trump bragged that the workers are ready and willing to go without pay so long as he—Trump (he often refers to himself in the third person)—gets his border wall. The kraken US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) then proposed serfdom for federal workers so that they can continue to live without money. The OPM suggested the workers could use their personal lawyers (the assumption that federal workers all have personal attorneys like Trump is finger-down-the-throat elitism) to work out some form of debt peonage arrangement with their landlords and creditors to perform manual labor in lieu of paying rent.

Maybe next time, the federal workers could beg their landlords to agree to exchange their rent payments for unloading garbage bins, or painting the walls of their buildings? Matthew Whitaker, Trump's former acting Attorney General, moved to his position quickly—from a non-Senate-confirmed aide who recently worked as a salesman for a company convicted of fraud and as a hawk for toilets designed for men with extra-large testicles. That about sums up Trump's cabinet for me, but he, himself, is far more dangerous. An incontrovertible racist, he is constantly throwing red meat to his white supremacist base and often speaks as if he were Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest who founded the Ku Klux Klan. Trump, who suffers no shortage of well-established counterintuitive proclivities, has always imagined himself as a smarter tactician than any of his Pentagon generals.

The Klan Rides Again

When Alabama newspaper publisher Goodloe Sutton calls for the 'Ku Klux Klan to night ride again' and attack gated communities in Washington, D.C. (Noori Farzan and Brice-Saddler [2019](#)), we aren't surprised that he was censured by the Alabama Press Association and kicked out of the University of

Mississippi's Mass Communications and Journalism Hall of Fame. But it makes us wonder how he got into the Hall of Fame in the first place. Somebody should have doxxed in that skipper before he was able to get his column into print. He's happy enough now that he is a celebrity at the local diner. Maybe the old boys give him free haircuts. Maybe he will be invited to some KKK cross-burning ceremonies. We have two politicians that identify as Democratic Socialists—two! Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders. I wonder if Goodloe uses their photos for target practice. Wonder if he has a podcast about Bigfoot's sexual habits. I wonder if he limps through long vanished orchards and hunts deer in a camouflage suit gifted to him by the Grand Cyclops, or maybe by the Grand Kleagle. I wonder if he has ever eaten ice cream made with liquid nitrogen. I wonder if he vapes, glancing ahead at infinite space, straining his retina to see past the Dairy Queen parking lot and into the edge of the forest where dust first settled, then eons later, walked on limbs. I wonder if he eats beef jerky while he listens to Alex Jones on his laptop. I wonder if he will shoot up a pizza joint one day. There is so much to wonder about these days. I wonder why it took so long for the poster of *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith [1915](#)) to be taken off the walls of Dodge College, the film school that is part of Chapman University. Why is the Confederate flag, flown by the Ku Klux Klan during lynching parties, still flown by so many in the south today?

Only recently have the Yankees and Flyers abandoned singing Kate Smith's 'God Bless America' (Smith [1930](#)) before their games. It wasn't exactly a state secret that her 1931 rendition of 'That's Why Darkies Were Born' had the following lyrics:

Someone had to pick the cotton,

Someone had to plant the corn,

Someone had to slave and be able to sing,

That's why darkies were born (Smith [1931](#))

Another Kate Smith song, Pickniny Heaven (Smith [1933](#)), invited 'colored' children to dream about enormous watermelons.

Have white supremacists ever read the Sermon on the Mount? Well, let me put it another way: have white supremacists understood what the Sermon on the Mount means? Let me try one more time: have white supremacists ever considered taking the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount to heart?

So what do I think after spending so much time looking down from the Empire State Building, flapping my angelic wings, now clipped by despair and shedding their feathers from ingratitude? That the United States is a dangerous place for those who dream of a better life. Racism is an endogenous source of systemic moral instability and linked to exogenous forces such as the laws of motion of capital. The official custodians of gladiator capitalism have used their atavistic, madcap logic to ensure the subordination of industrial capitalism to finance capitalism. Real wages are the same as they were in the late 1970s (to get real wages you measure average wages and adjust it to prices that have gone up), and the future looks depressingly dim if not downright apocalyptic. The nation state is cleaving child refugees from their parents and putting them in cages, announcing that their parents are faking their oppression. As someone who has visited America Latina regularly for thirty years, who has been threatened by cartels, who has seen bodies on the streets, who has been on protest marches where people ducked for cover, I can only howl in despair and disbelief. My adopted country has no problem sucking all the natural resources out of countries in debt to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank but when it comes to moving people across borders and not precious commodities, then it's a

different situation altogether. I belong to a country that is trying to become a racially pure, aggressive, and aggrandizing Christian state re-fighting the crusades, and hence an illegitimate state.

The problem is both with the evangelical interpretation of the gospels and with Christianity itself. Had Christianity not become an institutionalized religion designed to serve and protect great empires and its negligible fragments of de facto colonies scattered hither and yon, its peoples denuded of their dignity, then we would not be in the current position of having to free ourselves from its chains. In our country, we have exterminated all but the vestiges of great indigenous nations and we have in my lifetime liquidated by napalm 3 million Vietnamese and have used white phosphorus and depleted uranium (that has 60% of the radioactivity of natural uranium) armor-piercing shells that have long-term health effects, to slaughter hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, not to mention our preferred, yet equally as devastating, penchant of death by sanction.

Since the antebellum period and through to Jim Crow to current neoliberal pseudo-democracy, poor whites are finding it exceedingly more difficult to cash in on their whiteness, as their economic and material advantages gravely diminish. Just think of those subprime borrowers who defaulted on their loans—or worse, those who could never qualify for a subprime mortgage. They could never make it in our copycat culture dependent upon often unscrupulous and ceaseless innovation, diffusion, and the iteration of new products. I understand their anger, but such anger is encysted in the disease of violence and will seal our fate in the vault of pre-history. Are we going to go beyond limited freedom of market determinations with its laws of supply and demand or the laws of motion of capital or accept there is no alternative to capitalism? If there is no alternative, then there is no real freedom. Freedom is created when individual capacity flourishes, liberated from wants, needs and constraints. But the struggle between capital and labor is always decided by force. And we do not have an army behind us—yet. Real freedom begins when we bid adieu to the market economy. I recommend a serious discussion of reparations for our African American and First Nations brothers and sisters along the lines of the South African anti-apartheid precepts of recognition and responsibility yet which would also imagine a society absent of capitalism's value form of labor. I hold a primitive faith in socialism. After all, is not faith what makes all knowledge possible? Call me a fool but remember the intersubjective mystery divinely evoked by Elvis when he first sang these words to an entire generation, which happened to be mine:

Fools rush in

Where angels fear to tread

And so I come to you my love

My heart above my head

Fools rush in

Where wise men never go

But wise men never fall in love

So how are they to know (Presley [1972](#))

If you have heard Glenn Campbell or Mollie Tuttle sing John Hartford's 'Gentle on My Mind' ([1967](#)), or Leonard Cohen sing 'Suzanne' ([1967](#)), then very likely, you know what I mean.

Spirits in the Attic and Rabbit Holes in the Ground

I was in the subway in Paris, over twenty years ago when I saw a woman walk in front of me, but I could not see her face. I felt compelled to follow her since I thought she was a ghost; eventually, she turned around suddenly and smiled at me, her face flushed with kindness. It was the singer Sade. I have been listening to her music ever since this chance, wordless encounter, and it has helped me endure difficult times. I was once in a house, and sacred ash was manifesting on portraits of Hindu gods. A honey-like substance that tasted divine (I was offered a sip) was running down a window in the kitchen. And once, in Brazil, an Umbandista, an ancient man who sat in a rocking chair with a rooster on his shoulder, told me that I was the son of Ogum, and then, he narrated my entire life story — well mostly the romantic parts. How did he know? When I was in my late teens, I entertained a room full of angels in the basement of my home. An Umbanda priestess and I moved our hands in perfect symmetry at a *terreiro* in a favela that my fellow professors warned me against visiting. I fell under the trance of Pomba Gira numerous times during rituals in Brazil. Exú asked me to participate in a wedding ceremony. When Exú cut into the wrists of the bride and groom with a ceremonial knife, blood spurted all over my shirt. Their wounds were aligned by a participant, and a cloth was used to bind their wrists together.

I have seen many things I do not understand, strange energetic entities that speak in the moonlight. What do you do when your *pai-de-santo*, your *babalorishá*, manifests Exú and decides to open some doors for you, when you know he can be capricious as well as kind and loving, when you find him equally in skid row and enjoying debauched reveries at the palaces of kings and queens, when his spirit is so powerful it is impossible to deny? Once a lawyer from Brazil's *Partido dos Trabalhadores* told me that members of an Umbanda group where we once celebrated a feast of *Pomba Gira* saved her daughter's life through a spiritual intervention when she was undergoing a tonsillectomy? These are questions I've tried to answer since my participation in Umbanda ceremonies decades ago. Perhaps, some of the spirit-possession can be ruled out and considered a form of self-hypnosis. But does this scientific revelation really matter to those historically oppressed Brazilians who, during celebrations in their *terreiros*, are possessed by their gods? Or should it matter to us? There is nothing hateful at the heart of this religious practice. It is filled with outpourings of love and dedication to helping others. Umbandistas also worship Jesus. Yet they are constantly coming under attack, being falsely accused of practicing black magic.

The new covenant of Jesus is about love, forgiveness, redemption. But what is consuming today's evangelical wingnuts—conspiracy theories in which the FBI worked to help Donald Trump become president because he could help them prosecute pedophile Freemason Illuminati liberal Democrats who are really space alien lizards who are masquerading (through shape-shifting technologies) as liberal Democrats, operate secret sex slavery rings, and eat infants at secret ceremonies with fellow space aliens such as the British royal family, the Clintons and the Bushes — is fueled by a cultish, Trump-worshipping racism, white supremacy, and a deep-seated frustration with the structured inequality and immiseration brought out by the value augmentation without which capitalist society could not exist (although poverty is not yet identified by QAnon as endemic to capitalism and that might help to legitimize alternatives such as socialism which would go against the interests of the corporate media). Some of the QAnon conspiracy followers believe that Hillary Clinton has already been executed by lethal injection and are eagerly waiting for 'The Storm,' during which time all of Trump's enemies, including Representative Adam Schiff and other stewards of the empire, would meet their deserved fate. After a huge computer data dump (which, like the end-times preachers, is always characterized as just around the corner), these guardians of the New World Order will be arrested and put to death.

While the Russiagate conspiracy created by the corporate liberal media is not as outrageous as QAnon, it nevertheless deserves to be dressed down. The Russiagate conspiracy that was created by the liberal

media since the election of Donald Trump hinted at secret ‘pee tapes’ that Russia had and was using as leverage against Trump. It also inferred that Trump colluded with Russia to gain the presidency in return for foreign policies favorable to Russia. While there is certainly a ‘deep state’ dimension to the US government—if by that we mean the workings of the military industrial complex that helps to drive US foreign policy—and while I would not rule out definitively that alien spacecraft have crashed on the earth, the QAnon followers have gone down the never-ending rabbit hole. It was easy for the corporate liberal media—and ashamedly, some leftist outlets—to peddle the Trump-Russia conspiracy as legitimate, putting Trump at the middle of a reality TV show in order to attract viewers and make money, and in doing so to deflect attention from the massive upward transfer of wealth from below, that is, from an unprecedented transfer of wealth from labor to capital. The Trump administration is dangerous, undeniably, but it is dangerous for its policies and practices, not because of accusations that it colluded with Russia. Since the release of the Mueller Report (Mueller [2019](#)), the degraded corporate media has shown itself for what much of it is—fake news—in the eyes of Trump supporters. Trump can eviscerate civil liberties, intensify the corruption of gladiator capitalism, and escalate the rate of inequality, but the mainstream media is not going to focus on that because it goes against the interests of American corporations.

Anthropologist Edith Turner once had a waking dream while she was doing fieldwork among the Inupiat people of northern Alaska. She saw a man having to carry a pile of items that looked like window glass, and she thought it had something to do with her house. A month later, an intruder entered her house by breaking a window. When the trash man arrived and started to carry out sheets of broken glass, Edith recalled her dream. When Edith wrote to me in response to my request for an endorsement for my book, *Schooling as a Ritual Performance* (McLaren [1999](#)), which was grounded in her late husband’s anthropological work, she shared with me that her husband, Victor, would have approved. That made me smile. After a Catholic requiem mass for Victor upon his death, students of Victor met at his home and danced a sacred dance, African style, and some wore an Ndembu funeral mask. There is sometimes coherence even in death. I hope my students dance at my graveyard to the music from the film *Zorba the Greek* (Cacoyannis [1964](#))! I hope they remain skeptical of what they see transpire in the world of politics, but not remain cynical, and most of all not be betrayed by false optimism or the swindle of fulfillment. I hope they remain hopeful enough to laugh, sing, cry, and shout at the heavens, even though no one might be listening.

The Revolution to Come

Are we defending socialism strategically as the possibility for revolution or only culturally, as in the cultural currents running into that glorious postmodern sea of identity politics we call cosmopolitanism? Like many of you, I’m frustrated with what we have failed to learn over the past five decades as we reconstituted ourselves as a political force with which to be reckoned. I’m frustrated by what we have frightfully failed to achieve in our willful refusal to learn from our various incarnations over the years, first as the postrevolutionary left of 1968 and then as the post 1989 ‘new left’ (McLaren and Jandrič [2014](#)). When are we going to open the debate over strategy or has that savannah now turned to desert? Yes, yes, I am all for the new social movements bundled together like Roman fasces to make them unbendable, and yes, I collect as many reports as I can of all the critiques of neoliberal capitalism displayed with their hefty price tags on the bookshelves at academic forums. Yes, this makes us stronger but to what extent does it distract us from what is so often absent: revolutionary strategy! In what ways does it make us less prepared for political transformation? What, exactly, are we going to do about strategy, about changing the productive base and creating a social universe without its value form, and forging an immutable path towards socialism?

Yes, I was in Greece and Turkey when the left learned to plan and to self-manage, to organize horizontally, to prioritize social needs over consumer preferences, and to call for more public participation in social and educational and environmental reform. Participatory democracy and direct democracy were heralded as more egalitarian and inclusive and anti-imperialist but were too often limited to questions of economic redistribution not changes in relations of production. Witchfinder Generals seeking us out in the universities and condemning us as anti-American did not help our initiatives to put a spoke in the wheel of capitalism. Venezuela was praised for fostering popular forms of power from below while being rightly criticized for being too dependent on oil revenues and leaving its social sectors vulnerable to global market forces, without the foreign currency—euros or US dollars required by exporters when sending goods into the country—and thus causing the country to be unable to participate in the swindle of ‘free trade’ and instead face economic conflagration, while many of us were simultaneously complaining that the masses were not ready for revolution.

We praised the ‘organic intellectuals’ in the barrios but complained that they saw their biggest challenge as the ‘economic elite’ rather than the ruling capitalist class. When will our historic bloc emerge with a labor leadership fit for the task of fighting for public ownership of the means of production and an emancipatory popular sovereignty without falling prey to the strategic deception and authoritarian populism of a Donald Trump who has denigrated the multi-ethnic makeup of US citizenry while purging Muslims from the providential protections of its faith-based population? The Satanic splendor of class antagonisms, class struggle, homophobia, patriarchy, racism, oppression of the poor, and empire-building are co-constitutive and will remain so long as we forego strategic questions surrounding revolution. The challenge is not to ask vanguard intellectuals with too much ink in their veins to lock arms with motley workers on the picket lines but to understand that the fear of those advocating revolution is proportionate to the fear of those who oppose it. Hence, broad plans must be put in place for the creation of a postnational revolutionary subject—for a new ontology and praxis necessary to broaden and deepen our individual and collective capacities. And for some of my religious brothers and sisters, it means following the path of self-abandonment and uniting with the consciousness of Christ.

I foresee that there will be women at the forefront of the revolution. Have not women’s contributions in socio-political struggles been too often overlooked and for too long (i.e., most of recorded history)! Why do we not read more about the powerful women in the Bible? Why do not we hear more about Phoebe, Lydia, Priscilla, Mary mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene? Have there not been powerful women revolutionaries throughout history? Rosa Luxemburg, Celia Sánchez, Vilma Espín, Melba Hernandez, Haydée Santamaría, Claire Lacombe, Margarita Neri, Qiu Jin, Joan of Arc, Dolores Huerta, Raya Dunayevskaya, Grace Lee Boggs, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, and the list goes on and on.

Anaconanda: the Communes Were Resisting Even Before They Were Born

Here would be a good place, I think, to mention why my work emerges from my experiences, why it resonates with struggles I have witnessed, and to a lesser attempt participated in, in Latin America. The struggle of the Chavistas in Venezuela, of the Zapatistas in Mexico, and the current struggles of workers and campesinos throughout Latin America have made an unforgettable impression on me. Today, as I reflect upon those experiences, I believe that we are underestimating the power of the commune to make important political impacts in Latin America and elsewhere—including in our own barrios and neighborhoods. Let me just mention one commune in Venezuela—*El Panal* Commune—that is currently under siege in Caracas by the forces of US imperialism—the sanctions, the support for government coups, etc., and also the inertia built into some elements the Venezuelan government, whose politicians have still not caught up to the vision of the late President, Hugo Chávez.

The commune's process of grassroots planning and administration of resources has much to teach us about community-building. For example, *El Panal* was able to create a commune that still serves as a highly functional cultural, social, economic, and political organization. When President Chávez was alive, Anacoana Marin, a key cadre of The Alexis Vive Patriotic Force, located in Caracas' 23 de Enero barrio, was impressed by Chávez's plan to join communal councils into a higher form of organization and this resulted in the creation of the *El Panal* Commune which involves the participation of approximately 13,000 people. She knew that Chávez's proposal to make the seed of the commune the struggle for socialism—to build a socialist patria—would be explosive and so it was. After engaging in some of the ideas made popular by Chávez, she recognized that '[t]he commune is the historical subject, the commune and its people, the *comuneros*, that is where the revolution really begins' (Pascual Marquina [2019](#)). She recognized along with her comrades that '[t]he communal subject is the one that affirms that capitalism is not a natural occurrence, it is an imposition' (Pascual Marquina [2019](#)). I find the story of her struggle powerful. In a recent interview, she writes:

It became clear to us then that there was going to be a new level of confrontation. We knew that the path towards socialism was going to be demonized, that contradictions would pop up everywhere, inside and outside. So we can say that the communes hadn't even been born yet, and we were already in resistance! But the truth is that we have been in resistance for more than five hundred years. (Pascual Marquina [2019](#))

After the many tumultuous years since Chávez's death, Anacoana clearly recognizes the forces that her commune faces: 'Today, we are not only resisting imperialism. We are also resisting old forms of production and their diverse forms of domination: from the organization of education and affects, to the organization of the formal political sphere and the economy.' (Pascual Marquina [2019](#)).

The 2009 Law of Communes stated that communal councils would be the embryonic formation of a commune. However, Anacoana and her comrades followed their own path through the collective endeavors of the Alexis Vive Patriotic Force. She refers to the collectives as the '*Panalitos por la Patria*' ('Beehives for the Homeland'), and as the 'DNA of the communal body,' or as 'the engines of the communal initiative.' They also have formed *brigades*, made up of the more militant comunards, 'highly politicized units' who have 'a life-commitment to the struggle' and these include professional cadres who are responsible for issues surrounding production and distribution in the community. As another component, they have 'associated work collectives' who are involved directly in producing goods and services. The commune is autonomous and is responsible for addressing the needs of the community; it must provide those resources most urgently needed by the community, and any surplus goes directly back to the community. Some of the resources provided by the associated work collectives go to fueling their *comedor popular* (people's canteen), some go to communications, medical expenses for the community, transportation, and infrastructure and also for contingencies, as the unexpected always seems to occur. The final level of the commune is the *patriotic assembly*, 'the space where comuneros gather to decide collectively what must be done, and how, through participatory democracy' (Pascual Marquina [2019](#)). During the blackout, when the opposition forces of the coup attacked the city's electrical power grid, the community built a diesel-powered electrical grid inside the commune. Anacoana's comments are highly apposite for today:

When you pull away from *constituted* power, that opens a space for the new to bloom: that flower springs forth from the creative tensions. We welcome contradictions. If we didn't have them, it would mean that we wouldn't have a project. Instead, we would be part and parcel with our society's hegemonic logic, which is capitalist.

Against the logic of representative democracy, we propose participatory and protagonic democracy, and the commune is the supreme expression of the latter.

Frankly, every expression of popular organization that isn't submissive has always been criminalized in history. That's because popular organization is, indeed, a problem for the system. The mass media has always demonized the people when they organize, so it shouldn't surprise us. (Pascual Marquina [2019](#))

The key takeaway for me is that the communes will create the state, and not the other way around. As Anaconana writes, 'the commune, through self-government and autonomous popular economic activity, would bring about the new state, a communal state' (Pascual Marquina [2019](#)). Just as I was writing up these reflections, I turned on the news and heard that some sections of the military are staging a coup right at this very instant. This is the reality in Venezuela today. Of course at the time of this writing, I am sickened by the repeated imperialist attacks on Venezuelan sovereignty by the United States. According to Jeb Sprague ([2019](#)), the United States has been working overtime to promote economic collapse, sabotage, and internal division within Venezuela using a variety of well-worn methods: subcontracted-out operations used to destroy electrical grids, water storage tanks, and containers of diluent needed in the oil refining process, cybernetic attacks, economic sanctions, the promotion of diplomatic isolation, funding the opposition to the democratically elected and constitutionally formed Maduro government, freezing 30 billion dollars of Venezuelan assets, the appointment of Elliot Abrams, who became notorious in helping to oversee the dirty wars in Latin America in the 1980s, which saw US-trained death squads and soldiers from a handful of Latin American countries mutilate and murder hundreds of thousands of peasants and resistance fighters—and they also murdered priests who supported the peasants and were outspoken critics of government-sanctioned genocide.

Sprague ([2019](#)) reports that shipments of arms have been coming into Venezuela and its adjacent neighbor, Colombia, through clandestine CIA operations and through far-right operatives in Miami in order to spark a civil war in Venezuela. The flights began immediately after the swearing into office of incumbent President Nicolás Maduro. Sprague's ([2019](#)) report indicates that 21 Air LLC, an air charter firm based out of Greensboro, North Carolina, has ties to Gemini Air Cargo. Gemini Air Cargo has been identified as a front company used by the CIA to take suspected terrorists out of the country to black sites so they can be interrogated and tortured.

I am equally sickened that my native country, Canada, is also participating in the coup attempts in Venezuela. I've written so much about US imperialism over the decades, and it's time I took Canada to task. At least Justin Trudeau's father had the guts to defy the US and visit his personal friend, Fidel Castro, in Cuba (see McLaren [2015](#)). Pierre, however, had other problems, but his tenure as Canada's philosopher king is yet another story in itself. Yves Engler ([2019](#)) writes:

Thus, while the scope of the Trudeau government's current campaign against Venezuela is noteworthy, it's not the first time Ottawa has supported the overthrow of an elected, left leaning, government in the hemisphere. Canada passively supported military coups against Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 and Brazilian President João Goulart in 1964 as well as 'parliamentary coups' against Paraguayan president Fernando Lugo in 2012 and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Ottawa played a slightly more active role in the removal of Dominican Republic president Juan Bosch in 1965 and Chilean president Salvador Allende in 1973. In a more substantial contribution to undermining electoral democracy, Ottawa backed the Honduran military's removal of Manuel Zelaya in 2009.

Engler's (2019) comments should come as no surprise, but they bear repeating. Call me a *ñangara* if you must, but the animosity among North American politicians towards Venezuela has been stomach churning. As the fascist followers of Juan Gerardo Guaidó attempt to topple the last remaining edifices of the left-of-center Pink Tide in South America, Trump is ratcheting up his attack on Mexico, threatening tariffs that could result in a full-blown trade war, as Mexico under new political leadership strives to exercise its multipolar power as the 15th largest economy in the world. I had an opportunity to meet the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and, more recently, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Neither Obrador nor Maduro will accept the role designated for their countries by the United States—that of a failed state that can easily be owned by the United States. I wait for Latin America to rise again from the dust in its struggle against US imperialism. At the same time, I cannot forget what happened to Colosio in Tijuana in 1994. May his spirit rest in peace.

Should the Revolution Be Given Birth by Caesarian Section?

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'), which 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.

Yes, we recognize that the revolutionary *foco* of Che will not work today but we would remain intelligent fools thinking that we can dispense altogether with a socialist pedagogy, that we can forego attempts to build Che's new socialist human being in our creation of a cybercommunist future. The creation of socialist man and woman must be the charge of every educator. Tactically, challenges abound. Light must meet the rising darkness. Will Richard Barbrook's *Class Wargames* (2014; see Jandrić 2017) offer us new ideas for a more contemporary twenty-first century approach to revolutionary strategy? Can everyday practices of ludic subversion against spectacular capitalism become a more viable approach than, say, the creation of a new transnational socialist party or, conversely, the development of the commune as the cell form of the state creating communal councils capable of forming a transnational anarcho-syndicalist federation? Can a hybrid camera comprised of a hacked digital scanner and a Victorian camera that turns us all into 'unnatural grotesques' become the new cybernetic equivalent of Sherman's union brigades moving 10 steady miles a day over corduroy roads through the Salkehatchie swamps during the Carolina's crusade, or the equivalent of a Soviet T-34 tank during the battle for Kursk? Will the canny responses of today's postdigital communist social justice warriors be as effective as Marshal Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov's brilliant winter counter-offensive against the Wehrmacht in Operation Uranus? Or will they fall prey to a cyborg version of the Wehrmacht's Stuka dive bombers engaged in a 'devil's roundabout'? In all areas of social life, we will not know the answer to these questions unless we play the game. But as we prepare ourselves, we must activate an eternal wariness of the unsuppressable fact that our line of march might at any time be transformed into the Ides of March, a point in which history is betrayed in our attempt to save it. Raya Dunayevskaya (1978) referred to this as a revolution turning into its opposite.

I remember that, when the fire and fragments of our age were in full repair, its wreckage sagging sodden in a thousand Soviet cities, when the Western powers believed that the honor that once defined our species as *homo economicus* seemed restored, the world seemed pivot back onto its axis. The darkness of the world seemed to lift, and the smiling face of humankind emitted a somber afterglow of relief. It was then that Fukuyama (1992) pronounced the final victory of capitalism over

history, mocking the frail hope of those strong enough to dream of a world beyond Wall Street. But the mad economist was wrong; history is never over. It is always being repeated, if not as tragedy or farce, as Marx warned us, then as wrathful perorations of regret or baneful evocations of panoramic despair. History is filled with epic endeavors crammed into a two-book dos-à-dos omnibus edition published in the dingy bric-à-brac offices of Ace Books, and bound *tête-bêche*. It is written by windy hipsters in crumpled shirts, eating plastic-wrapped sandwiches from food trucks in the parking lots of strip malls fronted with big-box chain retail. These hipsters may be wasted on their strength, yet they can hear beyond the E Ring offices of the Pentagon jackboots on the march. What they are typing into their notepads may turn into the great manifestos of the future. If they have learned one lesson, it is that we honor history not by honoring those making history but by ourselves making history.

While we may remain temporarily frozen, shocked-and-awed by the blanched face and menacing rictus of the present crisis of accumulation, we cannot act as if the historical initiative of the subaltern is either impossible or no longer necessary. In fact, the necessity of such an initiative has only intensified, as has the need for popular sovereignty, for public ownership of the means of production, for democratic control of capitalist production, for alternative means of distribution, and for both strategic and tactical modes of resistance, and for strategies of transition to socialism, even if that means resorting to some of the 'old' methods of political disruption found in the rag-and-bone shop of political history whose pamphlets churned out by Progress Publishers many of us tossed into our dustbins at the dawn of the desktop computer era, when we believed the most important battlegrounds should be confined to the social universes of analog and digital (Jandrić et al. [2018](#)). I'm referring here to the general strike, to mass instances of insurrection, to factory recuperations, and attempts to overcome contemporary regimes of accumulation by transcending current political organizations and alliances, and forming constituent assemblies from below. We cannot give up on the creation of new regional blocs, or the creation of forms of internationalism that can help us build a historic bloc whose transnational reach is capable of turning the tide towards victory.

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