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## **Teaching Against the Grain: A Conversation between the Editors of the Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity and Peter McLaren on the Importance of Critical Pedagogy in Law School**

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## Teaching Against the Grain: A Conversation between the Editors of the Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity and Peter McLaren on the Importance of Critical Pedagogy in Law School

### Comments

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**TEACHING AGAINST THE GRAIN: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN  
EDITORS\* OF THE *GRIFFITH JOURNAL OF LAW & HUMAN DIGNITY* AND  
PETER MCLAREN ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN  
LAW SCHOOL**

PETER MCLAREN<sup>+</sup>

*This article is a dialogue between the Editors of the Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity and leading scholar Peter McLaren, speaking to the importance of critical pedagogy within education and law. This conversation was not subject to peer review.*

CONTENTS

I	THE RELEVANCE OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.....	174
II	REVOLUTIONARY PEDAGOGY AND CREATIVE SKILLS .....	177
III	'HISTORICITY' AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY .....	181
IV	CONCRETE UTOPIAS.....	189
V	THE MARXIST EDUCATIONAL LEFT.....	191
VI	CAPITALISM AND PEDAGOGICAL TRENDS .....	192
VII	LAW SCHOOL AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY .....	194
VIII	DESPONDENCY AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF STUDENTS .....	196

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IX	CAPITALISM AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY .....	197
X	CONCLUSION.....	199

### I THE RELEVANCE OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

**Lisa:** What is the relevance of critical pedagogy for university students?

**Peter:** Critical pedagogy offers students various languages of critique and possibility through which they can understand in a more nuanced and granular way the relationship between their individual subjectivity and the larger society. Put another way, these 'languages' or 'discourses' potentially serve as dialectical relays through which students can 'read the world' against the act of 'reading the word' — by that I mean reading one's lived experiences, as those experiences are reflected in or refracted through various critical theories, such as various feminist theories, theories that connect gender, race and political economy, theories that offer explanatory frameworks that can help students make sense of their own experiences. The idea is to create conditions of critical consciousness or critical self-reflexivity among students. The idea is to help students understand how various ideologies drive social life, to help students discern how systems of intelligibility or systems of mediation within the wider society (nature, the economic system, the state, the social system, cultural system, jurisprudence, schools, religion, etc.) are mutually constitutive with the self.

So, when we talk about liberation, we are referring to self-and-social transformation, that is, to a dialectical relationship. So, we need not refer to the self and social relations as though they were mutually exclusive categories, antiseptically distant from each other. They are not steel cast terms but rather bleed into each other. Again, it's a dialectical relationship. It is at this point that we arrive at the notion of praxis, the bringing together of theory and practice. Of course, we demonstrate that praxis begins with personal agency in and on the world. We begin, in other words, with practice and then enter into dialogue with others reflecting on our practice. This reflection on our practice, then informs subsequent practice — and we call this process or mode of experiential learning praxis, or self-reflective purposeful behaviour, that is exploring with others the relevance of philosophical ideas to the fault lines of everyday life and the necessity to transcend them.

Praxis is a way to realise freedom by transforming society's social structures, systems of intelligibility, of ideological mediation.

However, it's important to remember that being critically conscious is not a precondition for social justice action but critical consciousness is an outcome of acting justly. We act in and on the world and then reflect on our actions in an attempt to effect a deeper, more critical change in our society. We make society, as society makes us. What takes priority in all of this is ethics — the purpose of creating a more just society absent of needless suffering. Liberation theologians refer to this as a preferential option for the poor and oppressed. I take this a little further and call it a preferential obligation for the poor and those who are suffering. So, critical pedagogy is a means to challenge the ideological hegemony of neoliberal capitalism.

There is no secret cabal sitting in the damp cellars of the deep state compelling society to engage in self-censorship. It doesn't take the esoteric and arcane aspects of an Easter Mass in a Gothic cathedral to enable civilians towards self-censorship. There is no grand design in place across the United States (US) for a fascist state that would require penal battalions in which to place those who choose wilful ignorance over critical discernment. As Chomsky has explained it, we have the media at our disposal to manufacture our consent to the dictates of the surveillance state. Capitalism has made it easy to accommodate progressives. The appearance of their political positions can easily be mistaken for the essence of a viable socialist alternative to capitalism. But liberal progressivism is hardly socialism. In fact, most liberal democrats keep their distance from the idea of socialism. They make no bones about accepting capitalism as inevitable, as something carved in the runes of civilisation, while at the same time they desire to make capitalism more 'humane' by redistributing wealth from capital to labour. Capitalism has not suddenly unleashed blitzkrieg on an unsuspecting world but has succeeded through the logic of attrition, of the cold inevitability of 'there is no alternative', and fortunately those social justice warriors who have held strong against the blinding indifference to equality, civil rights and human dignity are with us still in the work being carried on by groups such as Black Lives Matter and Idle No More.

While the academic left has managed so far to create tactical defence zones, such as CRT, Lat Crit, queer theory, revolutionary critical pedagogy, ecosocialism, ecopedagogy, barely enough from keeping a disastrous situation turning catastrophic, the academic left is still

flailing about in the shadows of the new beacons of the hard right. Unlike during the fall of the Soviet Union (a totalitarian regime cloaked in Marxist terminology and driven by an unyielding loyalty to the Party apparatus and its state capitalist mode of production), when educational adherents of militant Stalinist Marxism were left clinging to grim shards of ideological rubble, Western Marxists had had time to reappraise Marx's writings outside the anaemic and disingenuous ideological parameters that served as an opportunistic means of thought control practiced and enforced by both Western democracies or communist parties, as those who became students of what Marx actually wrote — post-Marx Marxists — learned to engage in the humanism in Marx's work without discarding it as simply the refuse of the thinking of the 'Young Marx' as opposed to the more scientific 'Mature Marx'. And yet the left's attempt to navigate its current syncretic orbit has wandered off course. It hasn't yet discovered the means of challenging today's highly divisive public sphere, which is currently infected with a renascent ultra-nationalism and phony isolationism, a justification of irredentist claims to lost territory (metaphorically the loss of the Anglo-American Christian ethno-state through an historical demographic winter with its falling birthrate for whites) and a dangerous doctrine of natural domination cultivated in the geopolitical imaginary that justifies the existence of an ethno-religious statehood, echoing the catechism of National Socialism's resettlement doctrine.

Just think of Steve Bannon who appears to be in psychic communion with the Thule Society, and the multipolar, anti-globalist worldview promoted by Russia as an antidote to US imperial domination. Trump supporters in my mind share Trump's white supremacy, and it's clear that they have yet to be disintoxicated from the hatred of the first black president of the United States. The fear of a future white minority race is driving much of today's politics. Many are fearful of 'birth dearth' and today's nativist 'dearthers', alarmed by the declining Caucasian population in the United States, are blaming gays and lesbians, environmentalists, population control advocates, supporters of birth control, common law couples who refuse to be legally married and even married heterosexual couples who fail to have sufficiently larger numbers of white children for what they see as the demise of the white race — including what they perceive as their racially defined experiences of dispossession as white people who have been passed over by the politically correct multiculturalists in Washington — all of which they understand to be contributing to the impending death of Western Civilisation.

We who advocate a critical pedagogy, have inherited the acrimony and derision they continue to direct at us. Clearly, critical pedagogy is grievously incompatible with the shared prejudices of Trump supporters such as support for authoritarian populism and for nativism, for the excessive enforcement of the rule of law, the demonisation of and a deep horrific anger towards women, people of colour, immigrants and Muslims, the LGBTQ community, support for evangelical Christian beliefs, and a fanatical defence of the white race so lurid it could have had been hatched in the inner sanctum of Himmler's castle at Wewelsburg. The left in the US has yet to cohere around a viable alternative to capitalism under today's threat of overproduction. This threat has been dramatically underlined by the election of Donald Trump, thanks to the Kremlin playbook and its mobilisation of fascist *engagees* as well as the dangerous metapolitics of red-brown alliances (militant left and far-right).

Critical pedagogy is not opposed to traditional conservatism per se, but stands opposed to the ideas that soil the brainpans of the alt-right, that despicable praetorian guard of the militant right who are loathe to give any credence to ideas spawned by moderate political voices of various stripe (such as traditional conservative ideas or liberal values) believing that they breed ignoble instincts and are inhospitable to the racial hygiene of those who would defend a white ethno-state. This group refuses to be dis-intoxicated from the hatred of the first black president of the United States, and operates under threats of immiseration and the fear of a white minority race. The latter is a phenomenon that many right-wing movements refer to as 'demographic winter', a white supremacist interpretation of 'birth dearth'.

## II REVOLUTIONARY PEDAGOGY AND CREATIVE SKILLS

**Lisa:** Does revolutionary pedagogy involve creativity skills as well as critical and analytical disciplinary skills?

**Peter:** As someone who holds strong political beliefs but who holds them strategically enough to survive in the academy, I would want to emphasise that critical pedagogy is not a methodology, per se, sequestered in schools of education. It's not simply or mainly a set of pedagogical procedures or analytical steps as one might typically envision. In this sense it's different from the field known as Critical Thinking. It is more

about problem-posing than solution-giving. Of course, it does seek to resolve contradictions through dialectical reasoning, through the negation of the negation — through challenging the disciplinary modalities of domination within capitalist societies, but that's a whole discussion in itself.

It includes but goes beyond helping students graduate. Successful graduation rates among students will not necessarily alter the material positions of those suffering within neoliberal capitalist societies. To date, public and private education has not helped to build a social order where equality, democracy, inclusivity and criticality prevail. Mass schooling has socially reproduced class and racial hierarchies which give greater purchase to the cultural capital of white students and the rich and middle class who are reconfiguring the society using their power, privilege and wealth to amass more power and privilege and to create the conditions of possibility for acquiring greater fortunes for themselves. This is clearly repugnant in the face of massive income and social inequality in the United States and especially egregious in light of the increasing segregation of residential neighbourhoods and schools.

So, if we exercise creativity in our classes it would mean, for instance, resisting the ruthless foisting of market fundamentalism, market discipline on all aspects of life in the US, including the workplace, places of worship, the school-to-prison pipeline, healthcare, schooling, the environment. Almost every aspect of public life is becoming privatised, leading the formation of consumer citizenship and ethical race to the bottom line. Critical pedagogy is about the creation of critical citizenship, of breaking of the bunker mentality that you 'cannot negotiate with authority' and as a result you remain ensepulchered in the crucible of consumer citizenship, in the thrall of the trend towards the businessification of education, from K-12 right through to university education, including the baleful expansion of for-profit charter schools. So, creativity in the sense of practicing critical pedagogy requires that we ask the question, 'creativity for whom?', 'who benefits?' and creativity 'for what purpose?'.

We ask these questions in a dialogical space — this could be a K-12 classroom, a law school seminar room, or a church basement, or a community centre. The purpose of the dialogue is to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange — it is a form of de-acculturation, of de-acclimation, of de-socialisation, of questioning what we take for granted. But this is an existential, phenomenological process that doesn't follow



prescribed steps. The intent is to build a psychosocial moratorium where the educator and the students abandon the hierarchy and the educator is willing to be educated by the students, and when this works it creates a liminal space, a 'subjunctive moment' of 'what if'. What if the world was like THIS and not like THAT? What if it were a place of joy, love, hope and solidarity, and not a place of precarity, fear, hatred and division? What has society made of me? What do I like about that, and what do I want to change? How do we go about re-socialising ourselves so we can build a world where, for instance, capital does not flow from the labouring classes to the rich? How can we remake ourselves; how can we create spaces where we negotiate what we find meaningful in life? All aspects of life have a pedagogical dimension. All communication is pedagogical. When we see the American flag in a classroom, that is a pedagogy, part of the official catechism of patriotism. So, we negotiate and co-construct the curriculum with the students.

I work as a Chair Professor in China for part of the summer and when I ask students to form groups, and I start asking them questions about their lives and history and what they want to get out of the class, they initially think I am crazy. You are the teacher, we are graduate students who have made it into doctoral programs by absorbing the knowledge of our professors, so why are you wasting time asking us about what we think, how we feel? But by the end of the course, many of the students begin to understand that critical pedagogy is not listening to the expert sitting at the podium but standing with the professor with one foot in the classroom and one foot outside the classroom — in the space of the double negative. The world is not necessarily this and not that but both this and that. What do I mean when I make such a claim? Well, when I stand under the arch of the classroom doorway with half my body in the classroom and half my body outside the classroom, I am not in the classroom but I am not not in the classroom. Likewise, I am not in the hallway, but I am also not not in the hallway. I am both in the hallway and outside of it. This illustrates the idea of 'both-and' dialectical thinking rather than 'either-or' classical logic. This is the space of liminality, or betwixt and between, of 'what if?' This is why portals in sacred buildings have been so revered in religious communities over the centuries. Students understand that the way we normally name the world is hidebound and more malleable than it need be.

Capitalism, while taken for granted, is one of many possibilities for organising the world. Socialism is another possibility. How so? Well, the dialogue is initiated through

teachers serving as cultural workers. This space of co-constructing the curriculum with the students adopts some strategies such as the idea of detournement, created by the legendary Letterist International, and later adapted by the Situationist International. It's a way of turning the dominant society against itself, not unlike some forms of contemporary 'culture jamming'. In China I use the video, 'This is America', by Childish Gambino, to counter the perceptions of the US presented politely by my Chinese students. (When I teach in Latin America this is not necessary and I am sure the reason for this needs no explanation). The video incorporates Brecht's famous *Verfremdungseffekt* or 'alienation effect' and works well in certain pedagogical spaces for provoking social-critical reflection on the part of the students.

In Latin America I use a video created by a student at Instituto McLaren de Pedagogia Critica that uses a soundtrack consisting of popular narco-corridos that glorify the drug lords of Mexico. Disturbed by this cultural phenomenon taking place throughout Mexico, my student was able to acquire hundreds of photos of beheaded, shot, machete hacked and acid drenched bodies of victims of the cartels. These images then accompany the popular narco-corridos. I am not permitted to show this video to students at Chapman University, nor would I want to. It is also inappropriate for the Chinese context. The student (who taught public school in Mexicali) who made this video as part of a class assignment in one of my courses in Ensenada is now a doctoral student at Cambridge University.

The problem-posing dialogue generated with the students in the co-construction of the curriculum constitutes a pedagogy of disposition, that enables students to use their lived experiences and their more formal understanding of society to read the world and the word, that is to have a dialectical understanding of their self-and-social formation, their subjectivity, and this disposes them towards a path of liberation, a form of social action for change, a way of constructing themselves and society in a different way, one that respects diversity, equality, the practice of peacemaking, and protecting the biosphere. This is the opposite of what Paulo Freire criticised as the traditional 'banking model' of education where knowledge is deposited into the brainpans of students as a means of socialising them to learn the 'right' way, that is, to learn in a technocratic, quantifiable way that socialises them to accept mainstream values, mores, rules of

behaviour, and the myth of meritocracy (i.e. success comes to those who work hard, study, learn how to interact appropriately with others, and fulfil their duties as citizens).

This is the true meaning of empowerment, a term that has unfortunately been hijacked by corporate culture the way Reagan hijacked the term 'revolution'. Ours is an intervention on behalf on human rights, equality, and social justice in its many incarnations. I must also emphasise that we prioritise anti-fascism and pro-socialism. Well, let me pause to make a qualification. I have developed (with inspiration from the late Professor Paula Allman) a form of critical pedagogy called 'revolutionary critical pedagogy' which is critical of forms of critical pedagogy that has been reduced to domesticated 'feel good' conversations with students. Revolutionary critical pedagogy is underwritten by a Marxist analysis of race and class, and arcs towards a viable socialist alternative to neoliberal immiseration capitalism. In an economy in crisis in which demand for labour declines in relation to developments in technology, real wages are stabilised by capitalist production and wage growth declines relative to the economy's total value creation, leading to a worsening workplace environment. In such an historical juncture, critical pedagogy encourages students to become critical and creative public intellectuals and activist citizens.

### III 'HISTORICITY' AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

**Allan:** Paulo Freire spoke of 'historicity' and why it is important for educators and students to be mindful of both hope and the need for 'the insertion of self in the creation of history and culture'. How important is hope and situated knowledge to critical pedagogy and why should students be interested?

**Peter:** Historicity is an important term in critical pedagogy. Especially at this historical juncture, as we are facing a species of capitalism that has continuously played a role in genocide, ecocide, and epistemicide, the latter referring to the abolition of ecologies of knowing of Indigenous peoples. The rise of the neo-Nazi alt-right in the US suggests that the Aryan visionary Guido von List still haunts the militant Anglo-American right, as does the zoology of Jorg Lanz, ex-Cistercian monk and Biblical scholar, who, inspired by Madame Blavatsky's mystical history of racial evolution, developed an occult religion of race that transmogrified into the Nazi Party. In the infamous Unite the Right torchlit rally in Charlottesville, North Carolina, the Artaman League's cry of 'blood and soil' echoed the

Nazi ideals of a pan European brotherhood of the racially pure, led by the Armanenschaft, whose duty was the extermination of adulterated and debased races and the purification of the Aryan race, the new Templar Knights, the new superman who leads a religion of white supremacist ethno-nationalism. Here the idea of an Aryan historicity was the long cherished dream hatched by the SS Race and resettlement bureau.

It is quite clear that we are facing not simply the prospect of a global police state, but the reality that a global police state has already come into being, even if we find it at times to be somewhat out of focus. I cannot remember in my lifetime when the organised working-class was as weak as it is today, far weaker than many other radical models proposed. It is not that fascism has been significantly absent over the past decades in the United States since World War II, but the pace at which twenty-first-century fascism has come upon us is due to the fact that twenty-first-century capitalism has become a self-fuelling engine whose capacity to travel the globe has intensified dramatically over the last few decades. Hence, for those of us who have chosen a life of self-reference in the midst of historical uncertainty, the birth of new systems of panoptical surveillance weaponised to crush the human will to resist, and a studied inattention to the perils of the marketing strategies designed to depoliticise us, we must continue to reflect upon the need to foreground the forces and relations of production as the medium of our most vital concerns if we are to break free from our shackles of alienation lest we unsuspectingly betray our ontological vocation of becoming more fully human. Our aptitude for and inspiration for becoming social justice educators must not be crushed, even during this world-altering time of ignorance. I can barely detect in today's factories of fear-mongering the faintest adumbration of optimism that is requisite for us to continue to live as moral beings, according to values that elevate and ennoble us rather than ethically impair us.

Trumpism is part of the normal progression of global capitalism, not some feckless aberration. And the same can be said, in my view, about the rise of fascism worldwide. So, the question of hope, of maintaining an 'optimism of the will' in Gramsci's sense is needed now more than at any time. And of course, we cannot divorce the idea of hope from the idea of utopia as Ernst Bloch, Paulo Freire and others have taught us. But we need a concrete utopia, not some abstract utopia disconnected from the daily struggles of the popular majorities. We can't move to the abstract universal except through the concrete, as Marx revealed to us. So, the utopia we forge must be built from the real

struggles faced by the vast numbers of people who are struggling to survive, to put food on the table, to provide shelter and healthcare for their families. For me, the struggle for socialism is an important means for fostering hope.

It thus behoves me to make the claim no less fervently that society is in desperate need of a new paradigm of the public intellectual who refuses to accept the limited situations imposed by the transnational capitalist state, who refuses to deflect attention away from the totalising effects of alienation and immiseration that globalised capitalism has wreaked upon every aspect of contemporary existence dependent upon value augmentation to survive — which covers a heck of a lot of territory.

We are facing the frenetic rise of the white Christian evangelical right who see in the rise of Trump a divine mandate: that born-again Christians must defend Western civilisation from the so-called cultural Marxists, the multiculturalists, the feminists, the environmentalists, the politically correct social justice warriors — and not least from the Freireans, the advocates of critical pedagogy.

Contrary to the argument made by spokespersons on the alt-right, the political corruption of US democratic culture and society did not begin with the discovery of Paulo Freire by radical educators, or by the Frankfurt School, whose members of whom imported pathfinding systems of a dialectical rethinking of Marx, Freud, and other continental philosophers applied to the production of mass ideological control that alerted readers to the potential danger of fascism merging with the market prosperity of Western capitalist countries. Rather the undermining of democracy in modern US history began with the 'rat lines' created by the OSS (later to become the CIA), Britain's M-16 and the Vatican. For example, Bishop Alois Hudal, a Nazi sympathiser and rector of the Pontificio Istituto Teutonico Santa Maria dell'Anima in Rome coordinated with German 'stay behind' operatives from the SS and the fascist Black Legions in order to help Nazis and fascists to escape from countries liberated by the Allies to Latin America, the US and Canada. Slowly, pro-fascist sentiments were normalised and weaponised in all US-allied countries, as part of a plan to resist a possible invasion of Western Europe by the Soviet Union or to destabilise the possible ascendancy of communist parties in the West. Clearly the OSS/CIA worked closely with German Nazis and Nazis from Nordic countries to create plans for secret operations against communist and trade union organisations in the West.

The alt-right has attacked the importation of US universities' various offerings of critical theory developed by Jewish intellectuals who comprised the Frankfurt School, arguing that these 'cultural Marxists' are to blame for today's crimes of political correctness, multiculturalism, feminism and queer theory, among other progressive developments. This is a favourite alt-right propaganda line. In reality, critical theory remains foundational to critical pedagogy precisely because it was able to reveal the marriage of the US culture industry with fascism.

To the drumbeat of conventional media propaganda which is designed to gaslight the public, to regiment the minds of the citizenry, to gin up preconscious feelings of American exceptionalism, and to buff up the fading historical glint of the Monroe Doctrine, we are marching lock-step through the graveyard of buried memories of past US administrations, knee-deep in a surplus of discontent with facts, etherised in a swamp of disinterred memories of American Empire. Despite the masterful stagecraft of masking its ideological hegemony, the operational signature of US empire is hard to ignore — for instance, US-trained death squads in Chile and El Salvador, the US support for fascist dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, the funding and training of the Contras of Nicaragua, the shocking silence surrounding current economic sanctions against Venezuela — why are we so quick to forget that sanctions are tantamount to an act of war? — have been responsible for, on balance, millions of deaths of the most vulnerable of the population. US imperialist invasions of Vietnam and Iraq and the undaunted machinations of the CIA have devastated entire countries using chemical warfare, and over the decades have helped to assassinate political leaders — Patrice Lumumba of Congo and Salvador Allende come to mind. The Bush Jr. administration captured and tortured terrorist suspects, whereas Obama made acts of US violence 'cleaner' by sending drones armed with missiles. But we don't deal with these historical events in our schools.

According to the Nuremburg Tribunal, one of the foundations of international law — aggression is the supreme national crime — yet the notion of American exceptionalism helps to codify practices that enable the government to, for instance, imprison and torture American citizens or put citizens on 'no-fly' lists without any explanation. You could look at the stipulations in the International Criminal Code, or the National Defence Authorization Act, which is neither vague nor fleeting and ask yourself if, under the auspices of *American Service-Members Protection Act* of 2002, whether any American

citizen will ever end up in the dock at The Hague. Laws codify practices which become, over time, ensepulchered in the body politic and the citizenry becomes insured to those practices. Look at the disinformation campaign now on Venezuela — Google and Facebook are complicit in a coordinated purge, in working with government agencies and think-tanks like the Atlantic Council that is dedicated to international security and global economic prosperity, in censoring and removing webpages that are sympathetic to the Maduro government. Will the country come to resemble Kansas in the 1850s — armed cadaverous pro-slavery gangs brandishing pistols and Bowie knives versus anti-slavery free-soilers? Will we treat immigrants like the Mormons treated emigrants from the North-Western Arkansas region at Mountain Meadows, Utah? Are we raising new generations of William Quantrills? Now to your point about situated knowledge I agree.

I am in agreement with Paula Allman who maintained that there are different levels of truth: meta-transhistorical truths, which appear to hold across the history of humanity but which must always be held to criticism; transhistorical truths, which are susceptible to future revision; truths that are specific to a particular social formation; and in conjunction, specific truths, which are transient but attain validity in the contextual specificity of the developmental processes of which they are a part.<sup>1</sup> While I agree that epistemological viewpoints about the world are value-laden and theory-laden, unlike postmodernists, I do not believe that we can alter the world simply by changing our beliefs about it. Nor would I want to bleed epistemological objectivity into ontological objectivity and claim that because there is no epistemologically objective view of the world there cannot exist an objective world ontologically. When we embrace different worldviews or cosmos-visions, this is not tantamount to inhabiting objectively different worlds. The specific social formation that has attracted the interest of whom we shall call ‘the revolutionary intellectual’ is capitalism, and the essential gesture of the revolutionary intellectual is to contribute to the formation of a counter-public sphere by making the case for a socialist alternative to capitalism. Students should be interested in knowing that while they cannot have access to the full truth of human history, the world is nevertheless knowable, but our knowledge of the world will always be partial and relational — not relative. We are immersed in fields of knowing, and our engagement is historically

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<sup>1</sup> Paula Allman, *Revolutionary Social Transformation: Democratic Hopes, Political Possibilities and Critical Education* (Bergin and Garvey, 1999) 236.

situated. The situated nature of knowledge has led me to develop a position that I call critical patriotism.

As someone who began teaching elementary school from 1974-1979, and then in various universities for over thirty years after that, I have tried to impress upon my students over these years that history is always upon us as a dark shadow we must carry with us even into the light of the present and the dreams of the future. We must never forget the horrors of the Holocaust or ignore the rising tide of anti-Semitism today. We must stand in solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters when they come under attack by anti-Semites. Nor should we ignore the sufferings and injustices inflicted upon our own First Nations peoples, upon our African American brothers and sisters, our Latinx and Asian communities and our Muslim brothers and sisters. We stand against all government policies that target innocent and vulnerable groups both in our own country and worldwide, and that permit them to serve as 'collateral damage' in our military operations.

To acknowledge the crimes of those who create and carry out human rights abuses in the US, and in the name of our government, is not tantamount to being anti-American. Crimes against humanity go much further back than the invasions of Vietnam and Iraq and US war crimes committed in those countries, and our logistical support for and training of Latin American military whose death squads slaughtered tens of thousands of men, women and children during the 1970s and 1980s. They are occurring right up to the present.

Once, at a banquet hosted by the Argentine Consulate General in Los Angeles, I was seated next to economist Arnold Harberger, who helped move Chile from a model of socialist transformation under president Allende to a market-driven neoliberal economy under the ruthless dictator, Augusto Pinochet. I was speaking to him approvingly of Lula, then president of Brazil, when Harberger made some comment about the child-like mentality of Brazilians. Slamming my drink on the table in response had all the guests looking my way, so I was forced to hold back my words out of some consideration for decorum, but my point was nevertheless made. Interesting how experiments in socialism are never tolerated by the US. A thriving socialist regime would be considered a national security threat to the US. Look what happened in Nicaragua, during the Sandinista Revolution.



The Reagan administration authorised the CIA to finance, arm and train anti-Sandinista fighters, mainly remnants of the National Guard under the murderous dictator Anastasio 'Tachhito' Somoza Debayle. And under US Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, the US began covertly selling arms to Iran and channeling the proceeds to the Contras, who were encouraged to attack civilian targets such as schools and hospitals, which they did with savage ferocity, murdering, torturing and raping teachers and students, including children. Not surprisingly, president Reagan lauded the rebels as 'moral equals of our Founding Fathers'. Fawn Hall, North's secretary, confessed to shredding much of the incriminating documents but was granted immunity from prosecution for her testimony during the infamous Iran-Contra proceedings. Interestingly, a friend of Fawn's, a doctoral student studying in Kansas, once introduced me to Fawn, during which time Fawn proclaimed me to be her 'favourite communist', a remark I assumed was made with considerable irony, as she proceeded to photograph me in the living room of my home (at the time I was living off the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles and Fawn, married to Danny Sugerman, manager of The Doors, was living in the nearby Hollywood Hills). Fawn asked if I would give her one of my books to read with her husband.

It was, I think, *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture* — I remember it contained an unflattering description of her former boss.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, Fawn did not seem pleased that I was working on behalf of Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution. Some have argued that leftists overlook the crimes committed by communist regimes, or leftist guerrilla groups. That no doubt has been the case. I would argue that crimes against humanity have been committed by those on the right and on the left. But that doesn't mean we ignore context. Violence of the state often provokes revolutionary violence from below, which provokes reactionary violence from above, which ends in a ceaseless cycle spiral of violence. (Wasn't this one of the teachings of Martin Luther King?) And sometimes revolutions turn into their opposite (as Marxist dialectical reasoning could anticipate via the notion of the negation of the negation). Marx would be correct to argue that the replacement of capitalism with the state ownership of the means of production is only the first negation, which needs to be followed by the negation of the negation, that is, the negation of the very idea that the means of production must be owned rather than equally shared. The failure to engage in the second negation was one of the reasons that I

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<sup>2</sup> Peter McLaren, *Critical Pedagogy and Predatory Culture* (Chapman University, 1995).

considered the former Soviet Union to be state capitalist — not communist in Marx's sense of the term.<sup>3</sup>

Over a decade ago while I was visiting comrades in Venezuela, having been invited to a live broadcast of *Aló Presidente* hosted by President Hugo Chavez, I was seated behind Ernesto Cardenal, a Catholic priest and brilliant poet, who served as Nicaragua's minister of culture from 1979 to 1987. Pope John Paul famously scolded him at the Managua airport for involving himself in politics and forbade him from administering the sacraments (he was rehabilitated by Pope Francis in 2019). Cardenal left the Sandinista Party in 1994, and rightly so in my opinion, as a way of protesting the authoritarian leadership of Daniel Ortega. Cardenal no longer believed the Sandinistas to be a revolutionary leadership. Cardenal joined the Sandinista Renovation Movement, proclaiming, 'Yo creo que sería preferible un auténtico capitalismo, como sería Montealegre, que una falsa revolución' (rough translation, 'I think it would be more desirable to have an authentic capitalism, as Montealegre's would be, than a false Revolution'). At the time, Eduardo Montalegre was the presidential candidate for the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance. So yes, of course, a liberal capitalist democracy would be preferable than, say, a communist regime that betrayed its principles and turned into a totalitarian police state. But here you are not describing the communism of which Marx so famously wrote.

The issue for me as a dual citizen (Canadian and US), is that we need to look in our own backyards, and address current conditions with the best analytical means we have available and forge networks of solidarity across borders — whether they be neighbourhood, regional, provincial, or nation state. Look at the behaviour of border agents towards political refugees, look at the squalid cages we have built to house the children of these refugees, forcing them to quench their thirst by drinking toilet water. Look at horrifying injustices inflicted upon African Americans by the police — it's become part of the everyday toxicity of American culture, part of a necrotic pageantry we call living the American Dream. To speak out against this culture is to exercise what I have always referred to as critical patriotism. To speak out against inequality is a form of critical patriotism. Revolutionary critical educators do this by analysing why capitalism

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<sup>3</sup> See the work of Raya Dunayevskaya on the topic of state capitalism, a theory to which I adhere.

hasn't produced equality, despite a myriad of attempts over the centuries. Marx is the preeminent theorist that can guide us in understanding the current crisis of transnational capitalism. Capitalism can't be fixed — it's time to organise another system. Let's struggle together to find another system that puts the workers in control of the means of production, and with a say in what to do with the profits. Equality doesn't mean everyone will be equally poor. Critics of Marx frequently use that line as a means of obscuring the dynamics of Marxist analysis.

The elements of despotism we see converging all around us is not the result of our being manipulated by a nefarious cabal seeded eons ago by extra-terrestrials that has been pulling humankind's strings from some Atlantean cradleland populated by lizard beings — pace all the occultists who wish to inhale the vitalistic ether of our warrior ancestors with the nasal acuity of Tony Montana snorting a mountain of cocaine spread out on his desk. Rather, it can be best understood by examining the forces and relations of production and how we organise society to fight scarcity, to challenge racism, sexism, homophobia and white supremacy, and to promote a society that continually thirsts for justice rather than succumbs to the temptation of unshackling the forces of proto-fascist authoritarianism.

#### IV CONCRETE UTOPIAS

**Elizabeth:** Ideas formed through critical pedagogy, such as revolution, are criticised as being utopian and idealistic which can have the effect of inducing cynicism and causing students to disengage. What guidance can you offer law students who must grapple with this kind of counter-critique throughout their studies?

**Peter:** There is nothing more important today than utopian thinking. We need it now more than ever. But we need to take advice from Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*, perhaps the greatest book on hope ever written. I am for concrete utopias against abstract utopias. Concrete utopias constitute our latency of being human and enable us to interrogate capitalist regimes of domination and produce alterative grassroots strategies and tactics. Think of concrete utopian thought as a prefigurative critique of political economy as a challenge to the augmentation of value in capitalist society. We try right now in the raw concreteness of our social life, to create social relationships and ways of

organising our communal life that reflect the future society we seek — socialism, for instance. Abstract utopians detach themselves from a critique of the here and now, they abstract themselves from the latency we possess as revolutionary agents able to challenge the messy web of capitalist social relations of production, far removed from protagonistic agency and struggle ‘on the ground’.

To become an agent of history requires utopian thinking in the register of a concrete utopia, able to challenge the swindle of fulfilment of consumer capitalism. We should engage collectively in the struggle to create the not yet realised future — a post-scarcity society, for instance. But the utopian imagination is not the same thing as trying to follow a blueprint. It’s more preconceptual, something we strive for and wish to attain.

We are trying to arrive at a particular historical moment, a moment when history really begins. Our struggle is part of our ‘prehistory’ and when we arrive at socialism, or true democracy, prehistory ends and we begin to live as genuine, authentic human beings. Utopian thinking is the way to disentangle ourselves from ideology, the internalised norms and values of our capitalist society. Ideology is a deformation of everyday life, an unconscious way we move in, through, and alongside everyday life which means following the ideas of the ruling class. Our lived experiences are formed from the ideologically deformed narratives and ideas of the ruling class, and, as Marx pointed out, the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas.

Utopian thinking helps us create history. History here proceeds through negation, as we ‘negate’ all that which prevents us from fulfilling our ontological vocation, which Paulo Freire maintained was to become more ‘fully human’. We generate oppositional concepts to the colonisation of our subjectivity that has been achieved through a marriage of the private sphere and the state. Those oppositional practices happen in the concrete materiality of history which is always open to what Freire called ‘untested feasibility’, where human potential and the contingencies of hope of human beings — which Bloch referred to as ‘daydreaming’ — enables us to face daily existential threats conjoined in a dialectical dance of history-making, of creating a radically other world.

This dialectical dance of history is about creating an oppositional public sphere or counter-public sphere, a space of re-primed or re-politicised dialogue, free from domination and oppression, the result of counter-hegemonic practices that open up

spaces of participatory democracy, direct democracy — which can only be realised in a world absent of value augmentation.

Cynicism is understandable since capitalism has hijacked the utopian impulse in our commodity culture. Critical literacy has given way to consumer literacy. Yet cynicism can be transformed into hope through engagement with others in collective struggle. Critical consciousness is not something you acquire through reading critical legal theory and then deciding to open up a storefront office in a working-class neighbourhood. Critical consciousness begins when you open that storefront office and then reflect upon the relationships you build in the process — and critical legal theory can be helpful in that effort. But revolutionary praxis begins with action, then reflection, then more reflective action. Critical consciousness is an outcome of action, not a precondition for acting.

#### V THE MARXIST EDUCATIONAL LEFT

**Allan:** In 1998 you wrote: ‘The Marxist educational Left has, for the most part, carefully ensconced itself within the educational establishment in an uneasy alliance that has disabled its ability to do much more than engage in radical posturing, while reaping the benefits of scholarly rewards.’<sup>4</sup> Has anything really changed after 20 years?

**Peter:** Not much has changed, Allan. We still have a gap between academic Marxists, and those that actively live their Marxist politics. I think it must be the same outside academia. All of us live in contradictory ways — some more than others — but I can only speak from my 30 years in the academy. And I find that so much research being done is research directed towards making incremental steps in changing education policy. It’s done with the understanding that we need to accept the social relations of capitalist society as more or less a permanent feature of our lives. Here in the US human rights is detached from the idea of economic rights. More research needs to be done on capitalism and possible alternatives to value production (production of monetised wealth). Sure, small steps aimed at the redistribution of wealth are important, but we need to exercise our utopian imagination and begin to address the root causes of educational inequality, an essential component of which is economic inequality — and how this links to racism, patriarchy,

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<sup>4</sup> Peter McLaren, ‘Revolutionary Pedagogy in Post-Revolutionary Times’ (1998) 48 *Educational Theory* 431, 431.

nationalism, etc. We cloak ourselves in our radical garb and debate each other at conferences, and unfortunately end up in the trap of mimetic rivalry, which depotentiates our ability to organise collectively. We end up competing rather than cooperating.

#### VI CAPITALISM AND PEDAGOGICAL TRENDS

**Allan:** Why is it unfashionable for academics to teach students about class inequality at a time when inequality is increasing, and it is fashionable to reflect on racism, sexism and homophobia?

**Peter:** Gender and racial equality are obviously at the centre of the struggle for democracy — this is undeniable just by looking at the impact of the Civil Rights movement, and groups such as Idle No More, and Black Lives Matter, Black Youth Project 100, to name a only a few movements of major importance. Race and racism are integral to the capitalist system but in order to see this clearly we need to go beyond identity politics. The transatlantic slave trade and colonialism helped secure capitalism as a world system of domination, exploitation and alienation, absolutely. Racism is integral to the logic of capital accumulation. But economic relationships are not secondary to racial ones. They are co-constitutive. Races were constructed as part of world capitalism, and racialised social relations help to mask or hide economic relationships.

Nevertheless, I think the Republican Southern Strategy of focusing on issues that divide us culturally, as a way to distract us from the strategic centrality of challenging capitalism, have been all too effective. This includes emphasising initiatives like, for instance, black entrepreneurialism. Affirmative action received too much of a ‘whitelash’, so the emphasis of government has been on building black small businesses, for example, as a way of reinforcing once more a Horatio Alger, ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’ ideology. I agree that wealth creation in the US has been racist and of course eliminating the racial wealth gap is important. But at the same time as we are trying to make wealth creation inclusive of all groups, let’s take a hard look at the heart of the system of value creation that we have — currently, we call it immiseration capitalism, neoliberal capitalism, etc.

In the universities, we are seeing very little critique of capitalism as a set of social, legal, economic and social relationships. At Chapman University, we have posters of individual

students that begin with 'I am Chapman'. Students will follow with a description of how they see themselves — so for instance you see, I am a Latina, I am Catholic, I am vegan, I am Wiccan, I am Christian, I am gay, I am Lebanese-American, etc., but I have yet to see a poster that says, I am a socialist, or I am anti-capitalist. There is a racial wealth gap, and a gender wealth gap — this should be addressed. But why not at least have one required course on Marx, or capitalism. In my 30 years in colleges of education you rarely, if ever, will find such a class, even though it's generally accepted that the best educational reform you could enact would be the abolition of poverty. But the social relations of capitalism are rarely addressed — largely because of the failures of so many communist revolutions and the way that those economic failures have been attributed by the media through establishing a false equivalence between communism and evil empires.

No mention of the fact that the Soviet Union was state capitalist and that Marx would have certainly been critical of any totalitarian state — in fact, Marx was in favour of the dissolution of the state. Hello spirit of Ronald Reagan, are you listening? No recognition that capitalism cannot fix problems engrained in the policies and practices of a racist capitalist state. We desperately need to move beyond a one-sided class-reductionist analysis of society and an equally one-sided identity politics that refuses to recognise class issues and a critique of capitalism. Just look at the vile and horrific resurgence of racism today — look at the way we are treating immigrants and political refugees, putting their children in cages, and look at the way black folks are being gunned down by police. The productivity of labour has been declining — the profits made from real estate and financialisation have not been invested into creating real jobs.

Corporate profits are being reinvested back into capital, not into creating decent jobs with medical coverage and retirement benefits. Profits are going into labour-saving technology. And Trump is using the current crisis of capitalism strategically - to blame the immigrants, blame those coming to the US from Mexico, from Central America, and from 'shithole' countries in Africa! Identity politics becomes a condition of being fixed on one's subjective existence in the face of existential threats while being distracted in the process from grasping and challenging the objective material conditions of exploitation that comes with living and struggling within the oppressive and dehumanising relations within the capitalist state — which include racism, sexism, patriarchy, white supremacy.

## VII LAW SCHOOL AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

**Ana-Catarina:** Given critical pedagogy focuses on students questioning, challenging and undermining the current practises and beliefs of the legal system, do you think the current system of teaching adequately prepares law students for their future careers?

**Peter:** I have never worked within a law faculty, although some of my doctoral students have their Juris Doctor degree, which they obtained before coming into the Ph.D. program in education. I first heard about Critical Legal Studies in the 1980s and read some work by Roberto Unger. And I was intrigued by the idea that legal analysis could become one of the cornerstones of building a more just and humane society. About that time I read the classic work by Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis, two Marxist economists, *Schooling in Capitalist America*. That shifted my interest to economics.

Shortly thereafter I met the great Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, and I began to focus more on critical theory and praxis philosophy. I cannot speak regarding how legal theory is taught in law schools but I would argue that Freire's development of critical pedagogy would certainly fit well within critical legal studies classrooms. You can't use the 'banking model' of education to teach critical legal studies — you would, I would hope, begin with addressing the lived experiences of your students, with developing critical consciousness through revolutionary praxis, through dialectical reasoning. I would advise adding Freire and Marx to the syllabi of all law courses.

Freire was admitted to the legal bar in 1943, but he chose not to practice law. He opted to become a high school teacher instead. I wonder if there is a lesson in that. Had he been working in the US at the time, perhaps he would have found more opportunities to pursue social justice initiatives by taking on class action suits on behalf of impoverished communities, or he would have become involved in environmental law. I don't want to diminish the contributions of fearless, committed lawyers in creating a just and humane future. As it turned out, Freire was imprisoned by the military dictatorship and afterwards went into self-exile to avoid being assassinated.

**Vanessa:** What is your view of the trend toward 'intensive' styled university courses? Should they be regarded as equivalent with traditional courses? Why/Why not?



**Peter:** Knowledge is not information that has been meticulously inked into a three-ringed compendium that sits at the elbow of a reference desk librarian, or that sits in some sacred urn like the armorial ashes of some long-departed king. The term ‘intensive’ is designed to effect a certain slippage of meaning. Nor does the term stipulate any generalised standards. Such courses in my view are too often part of today’s alchemy of propaganda, designed as institutional money-generators that offer the same content as normal courses to be covered in less time. Can courses that are accelerated over a certain time span be taught with sufficient rigor? Likely not. So, the institutions offering such courses need to advertise their intensive courses both as rigorous and accelerated.

And what precisely does this mean — a course stripped to the bones — with all the excess fat removed? Fewer coffee breaks and classroom jokes? The concept of ‘intensive’ is rarely spelled out. Does ‘intensive’ mean more rigorous content, or content taught via some kind of streamlined pedagogy. It surely means that content and pedagogy are seen as separate whereas for me the curriculum should be co-constructed between the teacher and students. Knowledge is, after all, a dialogical practice.

So, is an ‘intensive course’ an academic equivalent of a two-week boot camp workout guaranteed to shed 20 pounds or your money is refunded? Or does it refer to content covered? And if it is the latter, then to what extent can one realise a profound understanding of content at a breakneck speed? So, then, are we talking about covering less content, but in more depth, or more content, but in less depth. None of this is specified in the course advertisements, and the contradictions abound. Can the concept of rigor be applied to the concept of intensive? Or by the term ‘intensive’ do we mean ‘intense’. You certainly can have intense classroom activities in a class that is anything but intensive, if by that we mean both rigorous, in-depth (examining material from multiple perspectives) and comprehensive. Comprehensive is not very often compatible with ‘compressed’ or ‘compact’ time frames. These outcomes often work against each other. Knowledge, as my mentor Paulo Freire said, requires reading the word and the world. To what extent can teachers and students have the opportunity to truly engage dialogically with the materials offered in these ‘intensive’ classes?

## VIII Despondency and Epistemological Challenges of Students

**Elizabeth:** A law student who comes to the classroom with a critical mind and a desire to serve justice as a lawyer might wish to understand how law interacts with society — that is, how it is felt in everyday life. This could include gaining a meaningful understanding of how law reproduces power relations and further generates inequalities. However, the reality of dominant legal pedagogy is that law students will instead leave the classroom feeling desensitised to the exploitive nature of law. Based on your knowledge of law curricula and the epistemological challenges students face, how can students navigate themselves through law school?

**Peter:** I wish I could provide you with an answer, but all of my 30 years as a Professor has been in colleges of education, and occasional guest teaching in philosophy faculties, and of course invited addresses to groups from many different disciplines, such as geography, theology, global studies. I would reason that many of the difficulties faced by law students would be similar to those faced by students in a wide variety of disciplines and professional fields.

I have had doctoral students ask me the following questions over the years: how do I get through this doctoral program without losing my soul? How have you managed to survive in the university as a Marxist? Is it because you are male and white? These are legitimate questions. Students are aware, for instance, that there are hundreds of books written about critical pedagogy, but many of these books have domesticated critical pedagogy, or turned critical pedagogy into a methodology. I would hazard to guess that similar questions are raised by students in faculties of law.

Critical pedagogy is not a methodology in the strict sense of the term. It is a philosophy of praxis applied in everyday life. Rarely are issues debated in education classrooms about the history of educational law (there are exceptions of course). Yes, we read about the *Brown v Board of Education* landmark decision in 1954 (decided in the Supreme Court), but few students are aware of the *Mendez v Westminster* class action lawsuit (decided at the trial and appellate levels in at a federal circuit court in California), which preceded *Brown* by approximately eight years. I've met members of the Mendez family. Thurgood Marshall participated in the Mendez appeal and his work on that case helped him win the *Brown* decision. Few education students have ever heard of *Tape v Hurley*, in which the

California Supreme Court found unlawful the exclusion of a Chinese American student from public school based on her ancestry — this occurred in 1885! Many students of mine have examined the school-to-prison pipeline, have looked at how the legal system in general supports white property owners, and see our educational system — especially one driven by high stakes testing — as reproducing the class and racial hierarchies within the US.

And of course, the issue of privatising education is a big one, and there is a big debate over charter schools, the anti-union practices that come with charters, and the lack of qualified teachers who are conscripted into those charters, and of course the general corporatisation and ‘branding’ of universities, including colleges of education. So yes, there is a general feeling of malaise within schools of education, a feeling that while you might make a meaningful difference in the lives of students, you won’t be able to effect much systemic change, and I assume that such malaise and despondency among students is also expressed in law school seminars.

#### IX CAPITALISM AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

**Allan:** Before the 2008 GFC you observed, ‘One of the central contradictions of the new global economy is that capitalism no longer seems able to sustain maximum profitability by means of commensurate economic growth and seems now to be relying more and more on simply redistributing wealth in favour of the rich, and on increasing inequalities, within and between national economies, with the help of the neoliberal state.’<sup>5</sup> Since the GFC we’ve seen this play out on the streets of the world with widespread people protests but it appears that political populism and nationalism have benefitted while extreme wealth concentration remains relatively stable. How do you see this?

**Peter:** The concentration and centralisation of capital after WWII has given us corporate capitalism. There has been a decline in the rate of profits since the 1970s, and the massive debt levels have been accumulated by global capital — which makes it impossible to return to the welfare state or the ‘nanny state’ that defined progressive liberal states when I was young and starting out as an elementary school teacher in the mid-1970s.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid 432.

'Neoliberalism' or the neoliberal state is not the seedbed of the problem — it is, of course, capitalism! We've had capitalism for hundreds of years whereas we've had neoliberalism only since the 1970s. We now have national-capitalist and transnational capitalist development models which are fuelled by anti-immigrant sentiment, white nationalist ethno-politics, and we are seeing it both in the US and Europe, and in Latin America the pink tide has vanished largely as a result of the crisis of capitalism. The answer is not a revival of Keynesianism (which some view as the antidote to neoliberalism) but the elimination of value production and creating a social universe absent of capital's value form. I hold a Chair Professorship in China during summers and I have been alarmed at the number of peasants displaced from the land and forced into urban areas to seek employment. Instituto McLaren is housed in Mexico and I have noticed a similar situation there, in Oaxaca and Chiapas especially. What will happen when technological innovations in labour productivity replace their jobs?

Relations of exchange have to have a rational basis for their organisation, and this can't be accomplished as long as labour conforms to an abstract average, that is, as long as abstract universal labour time dominates concrete labour. Exchange relations are imposed upon workers, with little or no say among the workers. Long term control over capital is impossible either by capitalists or workers because the logic of capital, its laws of motion (not private property or the market system) assume a form of production relations in which wealth is accumulated in monetary form (we call this value augmentation) and this logic of self-expansion becomes an end in itself.

In order for this to happen, labour has to assume a particular form we call a commodity. Labour in itself is not the source of all value, because value is not determined by the actual amount of time it takes a worker to produce a commodity. The value of a commodity is produced by socially necessary labour time under global conditions — and innovations in technology that increase labour productivity means that this social average is going to fluctuate according to the laws of competition. Since workers have no say in what this social average will be, workers are going to remain controlled by the process of abstract labour. Augmenting the productivity of labour is essential to the survival of capitalism. Affective labour, or labour that doesn't augment value, won't help the workers pay the rent. Affective labour isn't considered as important as productive labour by capitalists. The only way out of this mess is to replace the value form of labour with socialism. A

society of freely associated labour where products do not assume a value form has to occur at a global level.

We can make this happen only in a scenario where we are no longer dominated by generalised commodity production, by socially necessary labour time, by alienated labour and where affective labour is not devalued. Our failure to develop an alternative to capitalism creates a political vacuum that can be seized upon by the likes of Trump, by authoritarian populists, by proto-fascists. We are seeing that all over Europe, in the US, and throughout Latin America. People attack neoliberalism, but not capitalism because to attack capitalism is to open the door to socialism, which has been maligned in the US, especially since the end of World War II. The challenge as I see it is: with what do we replace market anarchy? Planned production doesn't lead to socialism, but merely is transformed into a version of state-capitalism, and we are seeing that in China today, a country that calls itself communist. We need an alternative vision of transcending capitalism that is able to achieve hegemonic ascendancy — that achieves the popular support of the masses.

#### X CONCLUSION

**Editors:** What would you like to say to conclude this written dialogue?

**Peter:** I would only wish that we could consider more seriously the way that evangelical fundamentalist Christianity is influencing the current White House administration. We are used to media newspeak spun in the name of truth, from the chalkboard fanaticism of Glenn Beck, the shock jock pathology of Rush Limbaugh, the state media of Fox News, to the 'alternative facts' from the Trump White House, to Jesus stolen from the Bible, his words dropped into a Black Hole only to reappear from its deadly duel with gravity as a Joel Osteen sermon about striving to become a better you. In fact, co-pastor of Joel's church, and his wife, Victoria Osteen, once exclaimed, while twirling her leather skirt and parading her knee-high boots before an enthusiastic crowd at their Lakewood Church, former home of the NBA Houston Rockets: 'God wants everyone to be a superhero...like the ones you see in the movies.' But she didn't specify if she was referring to Superman, Jessica Jones, The Punisher, Ant-Man or some other Marvel figure. But Joel and Victoria are not the worst offenders, bending truth with the insouciance of a circus funhouse mirror — that would have to fall on the sagging shoulders of Franklin Graham, Jerry

Falwell, Jr. and others who have all but sanctified the Trump presidency with vainglorious pronouncements that betray their allegiance to the anti-kingdom.

Seven Mountains dominionism, the New Apostolic Reformation, Project Blitz's stealth attempts to transform American citizenship into Biblical citizenship and stealth tactics by these movements to weaponise the *US Religious Freedom Restoration Act 1993* in the service of replacing the secular foundations of the nation state with a theocratic state, all amount to a form of Christian imperialism that has found its irreligious champion in Donald Trump.

I would sound a warning against facile analogies between Biblical figures and present-day politicians that are percolating through right-wing evangelical communities. We now see the practice of 'grave sucking', sometimes called grave soaking, that occurs when Charismatic Christians lay on the graves of deceased Christians in order to transport their mantle or anointing into their own body, as if they were receiving a gravesite teleportation with God at the helm of Starship Prosperity. Some believe the election of Trump means that the 'Jezebel curse' (see the words of Christ in Revelation 2:20-29) has been broken; since Trump is the warrior-king Jesu reborn, reincarnated as an American Daddy Warbucks, our capitalist guardian against communists, union leaders, Bohemians and leftist professors, who has cast out Jezebel's idols by 'draining the swamp' of corrupt Washington politicians, moving the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and selecting Supreme Court judges at the behest of religious conservatives.

Jezebel was the Phoenician wife of King Ahab of Israel in the ninth century B.C.E. who worshipped Baal and who led the Jewish people into sin and moral deprivation. Some Charismatics see Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton as present-day analogues of Ahab and Jezebel (see the 'research' of 'doomsday' charade-master and New Jersey preacher and rabbi, Jonathan Cahn, and prepare yourself for a grand, girandola-like eschatological proclamation of this idea). Of course, the Trump administration's egregious attack on feminists, multiculturalists and political correctness also fits in well with this analogy. With all due respect to my Canadian Appalachian kin, and with the risk of chewing my cabbage twice, if this kind of thinking isn't 'si-goggling', I'm not sure what is. Of course, how the evangelical community can have adverse effects on US foreign policy is always a concern. Just think of what the consequences of a Biblical-inspired war under Trump would be like. With the Joint Strategic Operations Command (masters of crowd kill,

signature strikes, targeted assassinations, creating kill lists where all men over 15 and under 70 are fair game and outsourcing these lists to foreign militias) as the paramilitary arm of the Trump (the cosplay president) administration, the worst possible scenarios are at play as Trump's religious base yearns for Armageddon to begin.

To all those holy rollers who wish us to be in thrall of their charismatic swagger, impregnated by tongues of fire and the rushing winds of Pentecost, what you have normalised for us as the protocols of the presidency are the clownish bloviations of a P.T. Barnum who takes his foreign policy and legalist cues from *Fox & Friends*, who panders to foreign autocrats whose tyranny he seeks to emulate, whose ego battens on the anger and hostility of his base. You have managed to divide this nation and then resurrect it into a divine plutocracy. This man-child seeking his own Piazza Venezia balcony in arenas, centres and stadiums across the country from which to jaw jut, gangle and jimmy our brainpans so they remain open to fear, is but a symptom of conditions that are permeating the historical firmament of our social universe. There will be other despots as long as we ignore the root causes associated with value production and the racism that has engulfed our world. The documentary data in the Bible taken from the words ascribed to Jesus unequivocally condemn the accumulation of profit and excoriate the creation of differentiating wealth as tantamount to accumulating 'money of iniquity'. That would be a good place for Churchsplaining fundamentalist Christians to begin in re-setting their moral compass since there exist no exceptions to this Biblical reprobation. But I say this not in order to consider building a socialist theocracy but as a rebuke to right-wing exegesis and the Religious Right's clamorous attempts to merge evangelical Christianity with the lunacy of a president they claim was resplendently appointed by the grace and singular majesty of God to the world's most powerful office.

It's time to join the fray, to collimate our revolutionary line of march towards the future knowing full well that we may never achieve an alternative to capitalism but knowing that not trying will surely doom our planet to obliteration.

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