

Rethinking Critical Pedagogy: Socialismo Nepantla, and the Specter of Che

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It is difficult to imagine a more ominous time to be addressing the importance of indigenous knowledges and the struggle against imperialism, neoliberal capitalism and what Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano (1998) describes as the “coloniality of power”. We are challenged into believing that we live in anything but a racist state when anti-immigration zealots are sporting “Kill a Mexican Today?” shirts, when talk show hosts are calling for citizens to arm themselves in a defense of the border with Mexico (one Arizona talk show host, Brian James, even urged listeners commit murder when he advocated that they converge on the border one day a week with high-powered weapons [he described what ammunition to use so that the shots were sure to be fatal] and shoot to kill those who dared cross the line), when members of Jim Gilchrist’s neo-fascist The Minuteman Project are organizing for-profit human safaris where U.S. citizens can join them in capturing undocumented Mexicans who have managed to cross illegally into the United States, when a family-owned Mexican restaurant near San Diego is firebombed and the words “Fuck Mex” spray-painted on the walls (Ross 2006), when vigilante ranchers such as Roger Barnett are accused of terrorizing the children of undocumented workers with a loaded AR-15 automatic rifle, when there is a sickening boost in popularity for the Internet video game, “Border Patrol”, a Flash-based game (complete with splattered blood) that lets players shoot at undocumented Mexican immigrants as they try to cross the border into the United States, when the quiet Pennsylvania town of Hazleton, infamous for its “Illegal Immigrant Relief Act” that imposes penalties and businesses and landlords to deter them from hiring or renting rooms to undocumented immigrants, declares that as part of a citizen-organized public awareness program to demonstrate the town’s “zero tolerance” policy towards undocumented immigrants, it is banning Santa Claus this Christmas, and when over thirty other towns are considering

similar laws to the Illegal Immigrant Relief Act to drive out undocumented workers.

Immigration agents are sweeping through towns across the United States and, without warrants, seizing Latina/os from homes and factories. A recent roundup of undocumented workers in New Bedford, Massachusetts, by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents saw 361 workers from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Brazil, Cape Verde and Portugal taken to Fort Devins in the Boston area and then shipped to prisons in Texas and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Nursing infants were separated from their mothers, and children were left in schools and day care centers while their parents were being detained. ICE even tried to pressure the New Bedford Division of Social Services to put these motherless and/or fatherless children into foster homes. These actions bring to mind Herbert Hoover's Mexican Reparation campaign during the Great Depression that oversaw the deportation of two million Mexicans and Mexican Americans (sixty percent of whom were children born in the United States while the rest were mostly US citizens), the deportation of Chinese immigrants from over two hundred towns at the turn of the century and the creation of the "anti-Coolie" League and vigilante committees such as the "601" – six feet under, zero trial, one bullet. Recently the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party announced in front of a burning cross to ABC Evening News that since they began assaulting, torching and "bleaching" Latinos, their membership has grown by 40 percent (Pfaelzer 2007).

With undocumented maids and housekeepers taking care of their children for the evening, ruling elite couples in New York can flock to the Algonquin Hotel where they can purchase a \$10,000 "martini on a rock" (that comes with a diamond at the bottom of the glass), or attend many of the elite eateries of Manhattan that serve up 50 dollar hamburgers, thousand dollar omelets, or Bling mineral water at 90 dollars a bottle.

Those of us who work in the field of critical pedagogy are acutely aware of how the recent climate of anti-immigration and vigilante justice constrains the development of an informed, critical citizenry and instead further enables the naturalization of racialized capitalist social relations.

Critical pedagogy is best understood in relation to that from which it departs: mainstream-oriented pedagogy that seeks accommodation with the interest-group political system that populates the dark chambers of corporate capital. While critical educators are hospitable to efforts at progressive educational reform, even those incremental reforms that are fought for tooth and nail from

the ground up in local educational wards, not all of them are committed to a project that seeks to transform the very system of capital from which they attempt to wrest their reforms. While all critical educators can, to a large extent, agree with making education a theme-driven, student-centered, humanizing experience by ridding pedagogical practices of their necromania (authoritarian teaching methods and “banking” practices where knowledge is deposited into what is perceived to be the empty heads of the students), not all of these same educators agree about the kind of society that critical pedagogy would like to take part in creating. To seek to create a post-capitalist society is, for many critical educators as well as mainstream educators, to mistake for reality a pipe-dream conjured from the rusted hookahs of *professeurs radicaux des années 60* and their misguided acolytes of today. It is to join the chorus of the often-raised and constantly repeated objections to socialism as an enemy of democracy that would create a society of idlers and parasites, utopian navel-gazers and heartless bureaucrats seeking to maintain a hollow co-existence—an intoxicating drabness—among its lifeless masses. Finding such objections untenable, we have named the society that we seek to create with the help of critical pedagogy a socialist one, and our work draws widely upon the socialist tradition. Because socialism is not an endpoint but an unfinished process that demands criticism in order to develop, we prefer to see it as a form of perpetual pedagogy.

As educators interested in an analysis of subjective formation and our self-constitution as social agents within the totality of capitalist social relations, we have followed the work of those scholars who have begun to explore the intersection of nationalism, imperialism and subjective formation as these have been impacted by contemporary geopolitics and the struggle among the oppressed for liberation. The work of these scholars has made important contributions to our understanding of the intersection between human agency and social, cultural, and institutional relations. What we have discovered is that ideas not only seek to be made into reality (through “hechos” or concrete actions) but reality itself reaches out to be made into an idea. Without such a reaching out, we are left only with empty gestures or disconnected, circular lucubrations. When these two processes occur simultaneously (we could even say dialectically) we call this praxis, and when praxis occurs in the context of class struggle, we call this a revolution. In this respect, reality does not need to accommodate or adjust itself to socialism, rather, socialism is reality coming into existence through the efforts of those who wish to expand the conditions of possibility for social justice and human freedom.

Capitalist social relations of production and accumulation have generated and continue to ignite global crises of over-production and over-accumulation. On the horizon loom more wars and devastation more terrible than have ever been imagined by our most prescient science fiction writers. The U.S. military's geopolitical struggle for strategic advantage in regions throughout the world that contain scarce resources such as oil, natural gas and water, the by-any-means-necessary-strategy that the transnational capitalist class is ready to exercise on its own behalf in the face of U.S. and world economic stagnation, and the frenetic forward momentum of the U.S. war machine since the demise of the Soviet Union have all set the stage for what John Bellamy Foster (2005) calls "naked imperialism" – the vicious imperialistic pursuit of U.S. global hegemony. Against this brute panorama stretching its reach across the planet and its inhabitants, we bring into focus the seldom cited domains of class and class consciousness in rethinking critical pedagogy towards a socialist future.

From Class Consciousness to Nepantlismo

One of the key areas of inquiry in our attempt to understand the formation of subjectivity and human agency, has been that of class consciousness. Our application of the term class consciousness proceeds from the larger social formation of capitalism in reference to the dialectical relations that both constrain and broaden the conditions for classed societies to enact processes for social change. Contrary to orthodox conceptions of class as a set of individual or collective economic expressions (e.g. I, we, reproduce capital) or the Weberian-derived formulations of class as a contingent effect of culture and market forces upon lifestyle and consumption habits, status or social prestige, we discuss class in relationship to ownership of the means of production and whether or not individuals and groups are dependent upon wage labor to survive and discuss class consciousness in terms of a collective topography reflective of the means that shape ontological existence. Following Bertell Ollman (1993), our understanding of class is derived from a sense of place within the capitalist social structure. Composed of real people who cohere around the qualities of individuals that constitute a particular group formation, class underscores "the relation to the group, qua group, to a central organizing function of the system". On this point Bertell Ollman is particularly insightful:

“[...]it is not enough to treat people as embodiments of social-economic functions. As much as this helps us understand their conditions, the pressures they are under, and their options and opportunities, the people involved must still respond to these influences in ways that make what is possible actual. Here, class is a quality that is attached to people, who possess other qualities –such as nationality, race or sex, for example– that reduce and may even nullify the influence on thinking and action that comes from their membership in the class. Conceived as a complex social relation, in line with Marx’s dialectical outlook on the world, class invites analysis as both a function and a group, that is to say, from different sides of this relation”.

In Ollman’s terms, class consciousness refers both to one’s objective condition (function/place) and subjective formation (social relations). More specifically, Ollman notes that class consciousness “refers to how, when, from and towards what a whole class of people are changing their minds”. Ollman emphasizes class consciousness in relation to a group in his effort to denote the collective and interactive processes of coming to know and act upon the world. The way in which people organize often takes place across various dimensions –ethnicity, gender, nationality– but as Ollman notes, the objective interests of people return to the organizing function of class membership in capitalist society. In other words, while social movements and group formations are grounded in multiple orientations they maintain an operational movement within, against, or in transcendence of capitalism.

Class underscores a person’s relation to the material world. The liberal/post-modern tendency to reduce class to a “mode of social differentiation” along with race, gender and sexuality neutralizes the perennial effects of the capitalist system and distills cultural differences into their “proper niches” without highlighting the common object of theorization that emerges from their condition (San Juan 2004). Critical pedagogy intervenes in this encounter in its attempt to establish the pedagogical conditions whereby the authentic specificity of realities lived and histories known can be utilized to recuperate a vision of the world outside of the capital-labor relation. As Ollman notes, a look into class consciousness as an evolving process is not a facile form of utopian thinking. On the contrary, an analysis of class consciousness as an act which leads to transformative action requires an understanding of “becoming” as a form “assumed by the future within the present, and as such affects how we understand the present, how we should study it, and what we can do to help change it”. The study of class consciousness is simultaneously a look into capitalist society, into “how it works and

where it is tending, viewed from the perspective of that moment when the mass of workers have acquired the understanding that is necessary for engaging in revolutionary activity”.

The study of class consciousness is not an abstract exercise; it is a rigorous and purposeful analysis of the living material conditions that shape the collective thinking and organization of classes, while simultaneously addressing the potential of the working class to defeat the capitalist class. This brings our attention to the importance of understanding the different modalities in which consciousness emerge, from the real and lived expressions of human agents to an analysis of the social structures that supply the “breathing matter” through which people make sense of the social world. A study of class consciousness without a due consideration of the various vectors that mark our daily living conditions fails to adequately grasp the explanatory power of class consciousness and its radical potential for enacting change. Class consciousness allows us to investigate and analyze multiple identity formations within against the global backdrop of capitalist society. It is in the dialectical interchange “betwixt and between” agency and structure that a global consciousness can surface in our collective push towards creating the conditions in which we freely choose to construct, express and enact knowledge.

Our work builds upon that of Ollman, who details workers’ class consciousness as the site of revolutionary activity. We extend his analysis of class consciousness to those sites embedded within and in opposition to the broader capitalist social order. We recognize the importance of studying class consciousness from the standpoint of workers in the forms in which it exists, but we also contend that it is necessary to understand class consciousness from the very sites in which subjectivities are formed and contested, in the formal and informal educational spaces of social struggle. Our goal in all of this is to develop critical pedagogies that connect the language of everyday experiences to the larger struggle for autonomy and social justice carried out by groups with an emphasis on the creative capacity of all individuals to create democratic social formations able to address local needs in the context of a larger project of human emancipation by means of political transformation. The questions that guide such a pursuit can be framed as follows: How do we find relevance and meaning in a social universe that denies our capacity to develop our humanity? How do we challenge a culture that nourishes a shameless politics of the lowest common denominator, a politics that has gutted democracy of any foundation for human decency, a foundation abandoned a feckless official opposition? How do we transform a social uni-

verse that gives us the capacity for community, solidarity and freely associated labor but that denies us the social relations that make this a real possibility and that fails to pose the question: How does society shape me in ways that enable me to develop a consciousness of social justice but that socially constrain me from contributing to a more humane world? How do we create an alternative to capitalist society – a post-capitalist society?

Finding answers to these questions requires that we undergo a systematic and profound process of coming to know the social world and the ways in which we are implicated in it. This is not a simple task; it requires that we simultaneously step within and outside the immediacy of the local environment that serves as the proximate architecture of our subjectivities. From within we can identify that which brings an uncanny sense of comfort and awareness in what we come to know as focalist approaches to knowledge, or the “local experience”. By ferreting out the instability within existing concepts of identity, we can locate and name its more tangible elements but doing so will only give us a narrow view or different nook from which to examine the totality of that experience. Once we step outside local frames of references we can call into question the deeper antagonisms of political consensus, exclusion and alliance-building. In rethinking critical pedagogy we must be able to recognize and respond to those antagonisms that prevent the self and the collective “we” from perceiving an interconnectedness to the larger horizon against which culture is contested and struggles for justice are pursued.

Towards a Nepantla Pedagogy

Elsewhere we (McLaren and Jaramillo 2006, 2007) have discussed the importance of historical materialism in offering the means for “understanding the complex categories of identity based on race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender, not as autonomous formations but as interconnected processes within the larger dynamics of social relations” so that we are able to recognize “the particularity and relative autonomy of race without jettisoning the causal character of class relations” (Gonzalez 2004: 180-181). From such a perspective, reality is perceived not as an absolute truth but as “a set of processes” (Gonzalez 2004: 181). The purpose of historical materialist critique is not to “correct faulty ideas” (Gonzalez 2004: 182) analytically, but “to negate them” and demystify them (as ideological correlates of real social contradictions) and in doing so “to transform them qualita-

tively” (Gonzalez 2004: 182). Historical materialism attempts to reinstate the importance of foregrounding the role of relations of production in a field of multiculturalism that has, regrettably in our view, overemphasized contingency and the reversibility of cultural practices at the level of the individual at the expense of challenging the structural determinations and productive forces of capital, its laws of motion, and its value form of labor – a move that we believe has replaced an un-dialectical theory of economic determination with a poststructuralist theory of cultural determination, one that underestimates the ways in which the so-called autonomy of cultural acts are already rooted in the coercive relationships of the realm of necessity. Indeed, questions of whose voice is heard and what knowledge is valued are important, but they cannot ultimately obfuscate the underlying sources of oppression (Grande 2004).

On the question of voice, we recognize the ongoing need for developing languages of critique and resistance that help configure the relation between the self –as a racialized, indigenous, gendered and alienated body– and the larger totality of social relations. These languages of critique and resistance progress from the cognitive schemas of how we see and subsequently live in the world. For us, this means boundaries must be breached from the outside to the inside, while retaining a sense of “within” that organically constitutes the self. In advancing a historical materialist position, we are compelled to reflect upon dimensions of social life that bring into central focus the liminal or border zones of identity, voice, agency and resistance that can also recuperate the spiritual, temporal and physical realms that have been forcibly erased through an ethnocentric colonialist perspective. We are aware that just as we are located as subjects of enunciation with the global division of labor, we are also organized racially and geopolitically. As Ramon Grosfoguel (forthcoming) notes:

“By hiding the location of the subject of enunciation, European/Euro-American colonial expansion and domination was able to construct a hierarchy of superior and inferior knowledge and, thus, of superior and inferior people around the world. We went from the 16th century characterization of ‘people without writing’ to the 18th and 19th century characterization of ‘people without history’, to the 20th century characterization of ‘people without development’ and more recently, to the early 21st century of ‘people without democracy’. We went from the 16th century ‘rights of people’ (Sepulveda versus de las Casas debate in the school of Salamanca in the mid-sixteenth century), to the 18th century ‘rights of man’ (Enlightenment philosophers), and to the late 20th century ‘human rights’.

All of these are part of global designs articulated to the simultaneous production and reproduction of an international division of labor of core/periphery that overlaps with the global racial/ethnic hierarchy of Europeans/non-Europeans”.

These insights of Grosfoguel are important, since they give strategic centrality both to the global division of labor under neoliberal capitalism and also point to how the global labor force is articulated within a racist and patriarchal logic of core/periphery that weighs heavily with colonial history. Grosfoguel (forthcoming) notes that

“the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures. What is new in the ‘coloniality of power’ perspective is how the idea of race and racism becomes the organizing principle that structures all of the multiple hierarchies of the world-system [...] the different forms of labor that are articulated to capitalist accumulation at a world-scale are assigned according to this racial hierarchy; coercive (or cheap) labor is done by non-European people in the periphery and ‘free wage labor’ in the core. The global gender hierarchy is also affected by race: contrary to pre-European patriarchies where all women were inferior to all men, in the new colonial power matrix some women (of European origin) have a higher status and access to resources than some men (of non-European origin). The idea of race organizes the world’s population into a hierarchical order of superior and inferior people that becomes an organizing principle of the international division of labor and of the global patriarchal system. Contrary to the Eurocentric perspective, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and epistemology are not additive elements to the economic and political structures of the capitalist world-system, but an integral, entangled and constitutive part of the broad entangled ‘package’ called the European modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system...”

Grosfoguel draws a great deal upon the important work of Anibal Quijano’s (1991, 1993, 1998, 2000; Quijano and Wallerstein 1992). Quijano’s (1993) concept of “structural heterogeneity” is especially salient for our purposes, in that it “implies the construction of a global racial/ethnic hierarchy that was simultaneous, coeval in time and space, to the constitution of an international division of labor with core-periphery relationships at a world-scale” (Grosfoguel forthcoming). The accumulation of capital needs to be seen as constituted by and entangled with a racist, homophobic and sexist global ideologies that were part and parcel of European colonial expansion. Quijano’s (1993) notion of the “colonial-

ity of power” postulates “that there is no overarching capitalist accumulation logic that can instrumentalize ethnic/racial divisions and that precedes the formation of a global colonial, eurocentric culture” (Grosfoguel forthcoming). As Grosfoguel (forthcoming) maintains, Quijano’s notion that racism is constitutive and entangled with the international division of labor and capitalist accumulation at a world-scale suggests that multiple forms of labor co-exist within a single historical process and that “free” forms of labor were assigned to the core or European origin populations and “coerced” forms of labor assigned to the periphery or non-European populations according to the racist Eurocentric rationality of the “coloniality of power”. Arguing that there exists no linear teleology between the different forms of capitalist accumulation (primitive, absolute and relative, in this order according to some forms of Marxist Eurocentric analysis), Quijano asserts that the multiple forms of accumulation also co-exist simultaneously, are coeval in time. Seen as a long-term trend, the “violent” (called “primitive” accumulation in Eurocentric Marxism) and “absolute” forms of accumulation are predominant in the non-European periphery while the “relative” forms of accumulation predominate in the “free” labor zones of the European core (Grosfoguel forthcoming.).

This brings us in direct contact in our work with indigenous, feminist and anti-colonial articulations of the self and the social as we uncover the boundaries in which difference is expressed (Jaramillo in progress). To illustrate this point we bring into discussion the work of the late Gloria Anzaldúa on the theory of *nepantla*.

At the beginning of the 16th century, *las indígenas* in Mexico under Spanish conquest and *la conquista espiritual* (see Leon-Portilla 1974) expressed their resistance to Christian beliefs through “*nepantla*.” *Nepantla* signified an intermediary space *sin rumbo* (a “borderland” of “betwixt-and-between”), as *las indígenas* shifted their cultural and spiritual practices to accommodate the Christian doctrines being imposed upon them. The *teoría del nepantlismo cultural* surfaced from direct Spanish-Christian conquest and force, a temporary refuge from the terminal effects of absolute refusal (physical death) and complete assimilation (spiritual death). In *nepantla*, *las indígenas* began to undo the trauma of colonization. Remaining faithful to their hearts and in honor of their spirits, they acquired the determination and ability to resist the religious practices and rituals not of their own making (Leon-Portilla 1974). Centuries later, Anzaldúa drew on *la teoría del nepantlismo* to “represent psychic/spiritual/material points of potential transformation” (Keating 2006: 8). *Nepantla* was Anzaldúa’s attempt to

“theorize unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestizas living in between overlapping and layered spaces of different cultures and social and geographic locations, of events and realities – psychological, sociological, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined” (176). For Anzaldua *nepantla* represented the “zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it” (Anzaldua 2002: 548-549). And through *nepantla*, *nepantleras* emerged, *los sabios de la comunidad*, visionary cultural workers who risk self-isolation and shame to “see through restrictive cultural and personal scripts”, as they move beyond “what is” to “what could be”. We have expanded upon the concept of *nepantla* as a space where students and teachers can engage in a dialectics of negation, as *nepantla* opens up possibilities for potentially new and transformative social practices to emerge. Through an individual and collective refusal of dominative social and cultural practices, a politics of renewal is born where *nepantleras* can create the material-spiritual-psychic conditions for direct participation in a social world of their own making (Anzaldua 2002).

For us, Anzaldua’s *nepantla* creates a context that enables teachers and students to mediate the schism between theory and practice as they move into less secure pedagogical processes. We extend Anzaldua’s concept of *nepantla* while building upon previous observations of the classroom as the site of liminality (McLaren 1986) in which both student and teacher become objects of study in relation to the conditions of their immediate environment and of the larger social totality. *Nepantla* brings into focus the contradictions embedded within cultural forms, as each individual experience is understood to be further mediated by overlapping spheres of identity. In *nepantla*, the silent amongst the voiceless can be heard, as no fragmented marker of identity goes unnoticed. Women contest the social forms that constitute their consciousness within the colonized group politic, the body exposes its racial and sexual configuration, and culture is released from its embeddedness in logocentrism. In turn, a much more fluid acumen circulates between social actors with the understanding that no single or unitary individual can separate herself from the vestiges of her past, the remnants of her present, or from the objects yet unrealized that call her from an unknown future. Inquiring into the silences and subjugated knowledges of the students, *nepantla* pedagogy is guided by a shared (yet necessarily partial) understanding of the global relations that shape the self and the collective “we”. Freeing the subject from constraints that limit one’s critical activity gives rise to questions about the self in relation to various social, cultural and institutional arrangements. We

begin to recognize that while we appear to live in a world of singular persons who alternatively occupy the position of speakers and listeners, we share a responsibility to each other. We also recognize that we forget our reciprocal accountabilities to each other because we too often confuse subjective, autonomous self-identity with critical agency. Autonomous self-identity is what is historically and socially produced out of social contradictions and is presented as natural. The pursuit of autonomous self-identity is the opposite of the struggle for liberation. The space of nepantla enables students to recognize what they normally mis-recognize: that capitalist-patriarchal-imperialist relations are historically produced and serve to repress the empirically given: the “not yet” or “what could be” of revolutionary hope. For us, formal and informational education sites are transgressions towards nepantla, where theory interfaces with practice in a process of de-linking the self from the material architecture of oppression. La teoría del nepantlismo expands upon the conceptual terrain where subjects begin to mediate their social roles and practices through critical reflection and political anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist struggle. In other words, they strive towards critical agency in a larger struggle that we would call socialismo nepantlismo.

The notion of the unified self is a tautology that denies the reality of historical contingency. Nepantla pedagogy occasions its learners into knowing the way of historical contingency, a way of thinking about self and other and the relations between them through an analysis of the systems of mediation that sustain and reproduce them. Here our approach is similar to Baldacchino's (2005) notion of finding pedagogical hope in groundlessness, that is, in a hope contained in the knowledge of the contingency of historical production (and the promise that the social can be reproduced anew in different social arrangements) and in the creation of a language able to re-articulate critical thinking beyond its current enmeshment in Cartesian reason's sense of certainty and Euocentric arrogance. In this instance, nepantla pedagogy helps to develop an historical-contingency consciousness that rejects the certainty of Enlightenment reasoning and that supersedes the dialectical tension between subject and object. In other words, we as nepantleras are intent upon de-naturalizing the language of truth and certainty in so far as we evoke paradox and liminality and challenge the unitary cohesiveness of the self (i.e., the notion of a metaphysical self that exists prior to its enmeshment in the world of social relations). Nepantla pedagogy rejects a unitary ground (via the self-conceits of certainty) for enacting civic agency.

Civic agency does not sever the subject from historical continuity, with the attempt to create a society predicated on the 'new.' The way we envision civic

agency builds upon Marx's attempt to create a society that is not premised on capital's value form and class hierarchy (Fritsch 2005). Critical civic agency requires a movement outward to both analyze and undermine the material relations and structural edifices that condition our subjectivity *a priori*. In our work, this movement is directly connected to the development of class consciousness and class struggle. One challenge that we face (largely because we understand that structure and agency are mutually constitutive), is to ensure that nepantla pedagogy does not fall into a post-structuralist preoccupation with the primacy of discourse and a displacement of those social structures that invariably constrain and enable discourse. Nepantla pedagogy recognizes how social structures depend upon being reproduced by agency (via political passivity, the production of intransitive consciousness and by means of ideological hegemony) but also stresses how those very structures can be transformed by means of protagonistic class struggle. It is in this context that Nepantla pedagogy recognizes the positive relation inherent in the negative as in the supersession of alienation "through the supersession of the objective world in its estranged mode of being" (Marx 1973: 341), and primarily with respect to the alienated labor that characterizes the capitalist mode of production. Marx uses the metaphor of religion to articulate the concept of positive humanism: "atheism is humanism mediated with itself through the supercession of religion whilst communism is humanism mediated with itself through the supercession of private property. Only through the supersession of this mediation—which is itself, however, a necessary premise—does positively self-deriving humanism, positive humanism, come into being" (Marx 1973: 341-342). In *Capital*, vol. 3, Marx stated: "The realm of freedom really begins only where labor determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper [...] The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it, though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity at its basis. The reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite" (958, 959).

The principles that guide our development of critical civic agency are those that the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela have taught us: a commitment to struggle against racial, sexual, gender and economic exploitation; a principled and practical opposition to imperialism (both economic and military); a celebration of the rich diversity of global human struggle for a socialism for the 21st century, a struggle that will involve democratically organized mass movements dedicated to self-emancipation, direct participatory democracy and the pursuit of the expansion of human development for the purpose of creating a cultural of free-

dom; a commitment to communal ownership of social-economic resources and environment-friendly technologies that will respect and protect the integrity of ecosystems and the bio-cultural lifeworld (McNally 2006). These principles are all conjointly animated by Marx's theory of social revolution: the self-emancipation of the working class through its own praxis.

In our ongoing work in Venezuela, we have been greatly impressed by the Bolivarian Missions and their emphasis on human development and the creative capacity of all individuals to create democratic social formations able to address local needs in the context of a larger project of human emancipation by means of political transformation. These missions consist of anti-poverty and social welfare programs. We were able to visit one of them in particular, Mission Ribas, a two-year secondary school program (that teaches Spanish, mathematics, world geography, Venezuelan economics, world history, Venezuelan history, English, physics, chemistry, biology, and computer science), targets five million Venezuelan dropouts. This program has a Community and Social-labor Component, where groups use their personal experience and their learning to develop practical proposals to address the needs of their communities and nation. We were fortunate enough to join in a group discussion of this component of the program in Barrio La Vega, on September 11, 2006. The facilitator of the class began by asking participants to relate their memories about the significance of September 11 in their regional histories. Participants began to recollect the Chilean coup led by Augusto Pinochet backed by the United States in establishing a military dictatorship that lasted seventeen years. The discussion focused on the murdered and tortured victims under Pinochet's rule, leading to what participants described as one of the bloodiest coups in Latin American history. From this discussion point people began to recollect their own resistance to the failed coup d'etat that marked Venezuelan history in the year 2002. Many of those seated in the open-aired classroom chronicled the day in which thousands marched down from the shantytowns hovering over the presidential palace to defy the presumed natural order of history and to reinstate their democratically elected president. Their narratives collided against the dominant tropes of history and experience that since 2001 locate terror and oppression within a Western Eurocentric topology. The point for the Bolivian educators was not to privilege one form of terror over another, but to recuperate their social struggle in relation to an unfolding epoch where terror is presumed to exist outside the chronology of their historical memory. The Bolivarian project assumes multiple forms. Whereas the educational missions seek to provide the disenfranchised with the necessary skills

to build a society of their own making, they are also committed to decolonizing the self from a historical legacy of oppression.

Critical Pedagogy for a Better Society

If, within the social universe of capital, we are inevitably lashed to the very conditions we as critical educators hope to abolish, then there is no sense in trying to strike a delicate equipoise between capital and labor. The time has come to look beyond the value form of labor and seek alternatives to capitalism. Those of us who work in the field of education cannot afford to sit on the sidelines and watch this debate over the future of education as passive spectators. We need to take direct action, creating the conditions for students to become critical agents of social transformation. This means subjecting social relations of everyday life to a different social logic – transforming them in terms of criteria that are not already seeped in the logic of commodification. Students can –and should– become resolute and intransigent adversaries of the values that lie at the heart of commodity capitalism. This implies a new social culture, control of work by the associated producers and also the very transformation of the nature of work itself.

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

Revolutionary critical pedagogy operates from an understanding that the basis of education is political and that spaces need to be created where students can imagine a different world outside of capitalism's law of value (i.e., social form of

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

While our work has been greatly guided by the work of Marxist humanist critique, we stress that Marx’s work is not in any way to be held as sacrosanct in defiance of its disputed legacy after the fall of the Soviet Union. Many contemporary educators, especially those involved in critical race theory and multicultural education, all too readily dismiss Marxist thought as being unaware of its own Eurocentrist assumptions and viewpoints, not to mention linked to a modernity that has long since faded after the demise of industrial society. While we do not have space to defend Marxist humanist critique, we would like to underscore that it is not necessary to dismiss the works of prominent Western thinkers such as Marx tout court because their views on non-Western peoples we would find today to be essentializing and Eurocentric and perhaps even startlingly irrelevant. In our view, much of Marx’s work can be seen as proleptic, as embodying “latencies” or implied developments that anticipated much of the stubborn intransigence of capitalism. His views continue to illuminate the pres-

ent and instigate creative ideas even though his work might be viewed by some as politically incorrect. Remarks by Edward Said prove instructive:

“I have often been interpreted as retrospectively attacking great writers and thinkers like Jane Austen and Karl Marx because some of their ideas seem politically incorrect by the standards of our time. That is a stupid notion which, I just have to say categorically, is not true of anything I have either written or said. On the contrary, I am always trying to understand figures from the past whom I admire, even as I point out how bound they were by the perspectives of their own cultural moment as far as their views of other cultures and peoples were concerned. The special point I then try to make is that it is imperative to read them as intrinsically worthwhile for today’s non-European or non-Western reader, who is often either happy to dismiss them altogether as dehumanizing or insufficiently aware of the colonized people... or reads them, in a way, ‘above’ the historical circumstances of which they were so much a part. My approach tries to see them in their context as accurately as possible, but then –because they are extraordinary writers and thinkers whose work has enabled other, alternative work and reading based on developments of which they could not have been aware– I see them contrapuntally, that is, as figures whose writing travels across temporal, cultural and ideological boundaries in unforeseen ways to emerge as part of a new ensemble along with later history and subsequent art” (Said 2003: 23-24).

For those who have ears, you can listen to the groans of Marx in his grave; he stubbornly refuses to die because his mission is not yet completed. The more his adversaries pronounce him dead, the more he bangs his fist against his crypt, reminding us that capitalism never sleeps, and neither should we until our job as its gravediggers is complete. For critical educators, Marx is no longer the backdrop on the shallow stage of history or a portent of failed worker states; nor is he heralded as the unsung savor of humankind, fulsomely celebrated by those who possess the correct interpretation of his texts. Rather, his work offers to educators a way to move forward in the struggle to make classrooms spaces of social critique and social transformation where teachers and students alike can exercise a dialectical pedagogy of critique and hope, grounded in an exploration of what it means to labor and to educate one’s labor-power for the future purpose of selling it for a wage, and understanding this process from the perspective of the larger totality of capitalist social relations. And further, to cultivate the necessary political agency to move from understanding the world to changing it. And while they might occasionally slip in the puddles of spittle hurled at them from neo-

conservative and Christian dominionist educators who equate anything Marxist with the gulags of Stalin, it is important that Marxist educators keep class struggle at the forefront of educational transformation.

In our view, progressive educators make a mistake when they attempt to locate objectivity in human thinking, not in the objective material conditions that produce the foundations for the development of knowledge (Zavarzadeh 2003). Being “objective” is not a question of cognitive status. If we look for it there, we will have to agree with the postmodernists that all knowledges are undecidable and the effects of the playfulness of signifiers. Postmodernists purge epistemology of its material conditions by grasping these conditions as only as “ideas” and not objective structures. Acting ethically as revolutionary agents of social transformation means acting in order to resolve the contradictions of our objective location in relations of exploitation. It does not involve a Transcendent Self exhorting us to act according to abstract reasoning or set of rules (or according to a Magic 8 Ball), but rather by embodying an ethics that is related to our nexus of self-organization to our “embodied” way of understanding and engaging everyday life in a world in which capitalism is so ominously monolithic and unmitigated (Varela 1999). We follow an approach to “mindfulness” articulated by Varela (1999) in so far as we strive for a politics of transformation that is grounded in non-egocentric compassion, that is, for a politics of transformation that is not confused with the need to satisfy one’s own cravings for recognition and self-evaluation. This means developing a spontaneous and self-sustaining ethical praxis that rejects rationalistic injunctions, dogmatic assertions or obsessive ideals administered by some uber-agent (or what Lacanians would call a “big other”) in favor of releasing the mind from depending upon such injunctions and ideals. Instead, the collective proscription of society would be challenged by the act of creating more sustainable, life-enhancing social and cultural practices that will abolish scarcity. This is consistent with our development of a nepantla pedagogy and nepantla socialismo. Here we ascribe to an epistemic relativity, recognizing that we have no guaranteed access to truth, that knowledge is socially and historically constructed, and that there is no direct correspondence between knowledge and its object. Yet we oppose judgmental relativism since, as socialists working within a Marxist humanist orientation, we do not believe all theories and explanations are equally valid. Human action and social structures exist in a dialectical relationship and we adhere to those explanations with the greatest explanatory adequacy and which are guided by the elimination of capitalist exploitation and needless human suffering (see Joseph 2005). We prefer to view “truth” not as an

epistemological issue, but an ontological one, centered on how we are conditioned by the way we produce our means of subsistence, our material means of life, and how we produce the goods and services that we need to survive.

Making ethical decisions does not require a homunculus sage squatting in our brainpans, barking messages into our mind with a magic megaphone. Rather, it involves an acquisition of certain habits of revolutionary praxis in which compassion and class struggle become spontaneous and self-sustaining. We reach for freedom yet too often remain ambivalent, not about our reaching but about freedom itself. Freedom is not simply an idea but also a practice. We try therefore to construct agency in our lives but not just in any free-floating fashion. We seek, instead, a form of “lived” civic agency aimed at ameliorating exploitation and oppression. Such agency – an open fissure in the process of social formation – constitutes a break in the paralysis of the everyday. This approach opens the way to a critical approach to the problem of individual agency.

At the forefront of our critical pedagogy is the realization that historical conditions up to the present time have not enabled the individual to become an independent, sovereign subject, exercising agency in the realm of social life outside of a relationship to others. Within capitalist society, agency, cogito and self-consciousness relatively coincide, mediated by social relations of production, cultural and institutional formations and social structures. We remain mindful of the fact that as long as our being, our “ergo sum” is conjoined to the ontology of our European imperial self-consciousness, to our “I think, therefore I am” of Descartes’ “cogito”, where ideas partake of sacerdotal status, we relegate those who do not share these ideas (since we have been conditioned to think of the European as the center of thinking, the center of history), who do not participate in our rationality, to the land of the unclean and the dead. It is clear that the “other” is internal to the European system as an inert idea, a cogitatum, a “that which is thought”. According to Enrique Dussel (1985), a liberation theologian highly critical of both Tridentine and existential theology, the European colonialist experience formed the substructure of the “ego cogito” (“I think”) and the colonialist “I” first experiences itself as “I conquer” – such as the “I conquer” of Cortes or of Columbus. Ramon Grosfoguel (forthcoming) expands on this theme:

“Rene Descartes, the founder of Modern Western Philosophy, inaugurates a new moment in the history of Western thought. He replaces God, as the foundation of knowledge in the Theo-politics of knowledge of the European Middle Ages, with (Western) Man as the foundation of knowledge in European Modern times. All the attributes of God are now extrapolated

to (Western) Man. Universal Truth beyond time and space, privilege access to the laws of the Universe, and the capacity to produce scientific knowledge and theory is now placed in the mind of Western Man. The Cartesian 'ego-cogito' ('I think, therefore I am') is the foundation of modern Western sciences. By producing a dualism between mind and body and between mind and nature, Descartes was able to claim non-situated, universal, God-eyed view knowledge. This is what the Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gomez called the 'point zero' perspective of Eurocentric philosophies (Castro-Gomez 2003). The 'point zero' is the point of view that hides and conceals itself as being beyond a particular point of view, that is, the point of view that represents itself as being without a point of view. It is this 'god-eye view' that always hides its local and particular perspective under an abstract universalism. Western philosophy privileges 'ego politics of knowledge' over the 'geopolitics of knowledge' and the 'body-politics of knowledge'. Historically, this has allowed Western man (the gendered term is intentionally used here) to represent his knowledge as the only one capable of achieving a universal consciousness, and to dismiss non-Western knowledge as particularistic and, thus, unable to achieve universality".

This "othering" resulting from the "point zero" of the universality of Western rationality can be seen in the figure of the prisoner at Abu Graib in Iraq, perched on a box, covered in a pointed black hood, electrical wires dangling from the fingers of outstretched, crucified arms, and leading to other intimate parts of his body. Bill Blum (2007) has updated this image of the effects of "othering" by the American imperial regime with another iconic image, this time of geopolitically situated not in some external colony or occupied territories but the internal colonies of the city slums throughout the United States. Here we find those indigent victims of the war waged by the US capitalist class against its poor and dispossessed, victims created whenever the profligate ways of capitalism are mistaken for being anything other than barbaric, when human relations are reduced to market relations (Rivage-Seul and Rivage-Seul 1995), in this case, when the cost of saving lives (calculated as earning power over a normal lifespan) becomes greater than the anticipated benefit (in terms of opportunities to make a profit):

"Now we have, if a photo were available, what could be an iconic image of the US war against the people of America, or at least against their health care – a paraplegic man, no wheelchair or walker, somehow propelling himself along a street in Los Angeles, a broken colostomy bag dangling from his piteous body, clothed in a soiled hospital gown, dragging a bag of his belongings in his clenched teeth... This human being had been taken by Hol-

lywood Presbyterian Medical Center to a homeless mission, which refused to accept him; the man then hurled himself from the hospital van to the street. Witnesses said that the van driver ignored their cries for help and instead applied makeup and perfume before speeding off. This is one of several cases in the recent past of 'homeless dumping' in Los Angeles. It's all very understandable, from a bookkeeping point of view. The homeless missions have only so many beds, the hospitals have a budget and the debits and the credits have to balance. It's what happens when a free market in a free society guarantees access to Coca Cola but not to health care".

We do not yearn for total social revolution to appear after a sudden irruption into history of some sword-wielding anti-capitalist messiah. History will not grant us such an unexpected gift. The way we try to engage history –to point it in the direction of socialism– is to join its most crucial aspect, that of class struggle. Class is an objective structure –a material contradiction– and when we think of the concept of "objectivity" we think of class as the means by which human beings produce their material life through their labor, which in capitalist societies involves the exchange of labor power for a wage and extraction from workers of surplus labor. Objectivity as the objective social relations of production means that we must, as revolutionary critical educators, work to resolve these material conditions such that human beings are no longer exploited and oppressed. And this means struggling both locally and transnationally for a social universe outside of capital's social form, that is, outside of wage labor and property relations. To be objective, then, does not mean to be politically neutral. Here, objectivity is not a form of epistemology. Objectivity cannot be relegated to the realm of the discursive, to the domain of ideas. Rather, objectivity means grasping the world conceptually so that you are able to change it, to transform it (see Zavardadeh 2003) in the interests of a more humane and creative society (to which we give the name socialism). Rather than see objectivity as pertaining to the world of ideas (i.e. as statements about the objective, which is to slide into idealism), we prefer to see objectivity as an ontological intervention in and on the world (Zavardadeh 2003) that initially requires a conceptual grasp of the world capable of demythologizing its oppressive dimensions. These historically conditional structures that create the objective world are not visible without the help of concepts (as opposed to ideas). Unlike epistemological debates carried out in the realm of discourse, objectivity (which we see as having its roots in the savage ontology of capitalists social life) has its "truth", which is the truth of social life, the truth of the exploitation of human beings by means of wage labor. For us, striving for ob-

jectivity is a form of ontological praxis, of making an intervention in the world by acknowledging and understanding the truth of capitalism as a means of exploitation. And, of course, by working to transform the structures of the social relations of production in the interests of creating a socialist society.

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

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

A deeper experience of the present also requires a detour via the past. This sentiment is embodied in the work of what Michael Lowy and Robert Sayre (2001) refer to as revolutionary or utopian romanticism (as distinct from other forms of reactionary and reformist romanticism). They are worth quoting at length:

“Revolutionary romantics do not seek to restore the premodern past but to institute a new future, in which humanity would rediscover a portion of the qualities and values that it has lost with modernity: community, gratuitousness, gift giving, harmony with nature, work as art, the enchantment of life. But this implies a radical challenge to an economic system that is based on exchange value, profit, and the blind mechanism of the market: capitalism (or its alter ego that is in the process of dislocation, industrial despotism, bureaucratic dictatorship over needs). It is thus not a matter of finding solutions to certain problems but of aiming at an overall alternative to the existing state of affairs, a new civilization, a different mode of life, which would not be the abstract negation of modernity but its ‘sublation’ or absorption (*Aufhebung*), its insistent negation, the conservation of its best gains, and its transcendence toward a higher form of culture—a form that would restore to society certain human qualities destroyed by bour-

geois industrial civilization. That does not mean a return to the past but a detour via the past, toward a new future, a detour that allows the human spirit to become aware of all the cultural richness and all the social vitality that have been sacrificed by the historical process launched by the Industrial Revolution, and to seek ways of bringing them back to life. It is thus a question not of wanting to abolish machinery and technology but of subjecting them to a different social logic – that is, of transforming them, restructuring them, and planning them in terms of criteria that are not those of the circulation of merchandise. The self-governing socialist reflection on economic democracy and that of the ecologists on the new alternative technologies –such as geothermal or solar energy– are first steps in this direction. But these are objectives that require a revolutionary transformation of the entire set of current socioeconomic and political-military structures”.

How formidable this task appears today, especially as religious faiths seem locked in an eternal battle over the souls of humankind. Are we not experiencing in these times the aftershocks of colonialism? And perhaps some new tremors? Ignoring the legacy of colonialism only worsens its effects. Pope Benedict XVI, who as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger headed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (organized much the same way as when it was known as the Holy Inquisition), was a founding board member with “Neilsy” Bush of the Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Research and Dialogue that was created in Geneva Switzerland in 1999. Ratzinger, we might recall, made a famous intervention into George Bush’s 2004 election, condemning any Catholic who voted for Kerry to having formally cooperated in evil because Kerry supports a woman’s right to choose. Now this same Ratzinger, as Pope Benedict XVI, has condemned Marxism and unbridled capitalism for the problems facing Latin America. Recently in Aperecida, Brazil, he again attacked grassroots Catholic activists who were still influenced by liberation theology, a theology he tried to crush when he was a cardinal. While in Brazil, he made the outrageous claim that indigenous populations had welcomed the European priests who had arrived with the conquistadores, claiming that they had been “silently longing” for Christianity. He also said that colonial-era evangelization involving the proclaiming of Jesus and his Gospel “did not at any point involve an alienation of the pre-Colombus cultures, nor was it the imposition of a foreign culture”. President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has joined indigenous groups in condemning the Pope’s remarks, claiming that Benedict XVI has ignored the enslavement and genocide of indigenous peoples in Latin America and the destruction of their native cultures, and has also ig-

nored what in some cases amounts to the complicity of the Catholic Church in such violence and destruction. President Chavez proclaimed that “the bones of the indigenous martyrs of these lands are still burning”. Clearly the legacy of colonial violence lives on, and not only in Latin America, but in North America as well. We see it’s offspring today.

We seek not to establish the fantasy of an opposite to capitalism but rather ground our vision of the future securely in the present and the possibility of change within the present, keeping in mind that socialism for the 21st century and our post-revolutionary future outside the value form of labor is still a product of the dialectic and can never be completely severed from the past in its search for its uniqueness and newness. The seeds of the future are in the present, and we need to recognize this as at the same time as we fight to rid ourselves of what Marx (1932) called “all the muck of ages”. Of course, in our quest to universalize the struggle for socialism, we adopt a pluriversal approach. According to Grosfoguel (forthcoming): “a truly universal decolonial perspective cannot be based on an abstract universal (one particular that raises itself as universal global design), but would have to be the result of the critical dialogue between diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects towards a pluriversal as oppose to a universal world”. Furthermore, writes Grosfoguel, “decolonization of knowledge would require to take seriously the epistemic perspective/cosmologies/insights of critical thinkers from the Global South thinking from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies”.

Discussing the “pluriversity” known as the Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi (the Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples, or the “house of wisdom”) Catherine Walsh of the Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar in Quito, Ecuador, argues that a language of decolonization can be crafted that is grounded in the logic of interculturality, one that “engages a knowledge and thinking that is not isolated from dominant paradigms or structures” and that “by necessity (and as a result of the historical process of coloniality) this logic ‘knows’ these paradigms and structures”. Such a logic works to decolonize both dominant paradigms and structures and western universal standards of knowledge. Ancestral and community-based knowledges are put in the service of a praxis-oriented perspective. These are not hybrid knowledge constructions but the construction of new epistemological frameworks “that incorporate and negotiate both indigenous and westernized knowledges, consistently maintaining as fundamental the coloniality of power and the colonial difference to which they have been subject”. This logic, asserts Walsh, “does not seek inclusion in the Na-

tion State as it stands but instead conceives of an alternative construction of organization, society, education, and governance in which difference is not additive or constitutive". Walsh writes of how "border thinking" (based in the work of Walter Dignolo) attempts "to mediate between the knowledge and thought constructed within colonial modern histories –within modernity/coloniality– and local knowledges linked to colonial difference" and challenges dominant western thought "with other histories and other ways of thinking". Walsh's discussion of "critical border positioning" draws attention to "how borders are constructed (including the multiplicity of borders themselves), the directionality and conflictivity of relations, and the conditions in which different actors and knowledges come into the conversation". This calls for a new geopolitical order of knowledge production that encourages an "interculturalization". Walsh writes that a critical border positioning recognizes "the capacity of social-ethnic movements to enter in/to work within and between the social, political, and epistemological spaces previously denied them and to reconceptualize these spaces in ways that contest the persistent re-coloniality of power, knowledge, and being and look towards the creation of an alternative civilization, a kind of strategic confrontation with the subalternizing conditions established by coloniality itself".

For us, however, it is important that in our attempts to create a project of decolonization that will be sufficient to contest the coloniality of power of modern imperial nation states, we do not lose sight of the struggle for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

The Specter of Che

While we remain mindful of the importance of sublating the categories of the old society in the struggle for the new society (a fundamental premise of nepantla pedagogy), we work towards a self-consciousness of how we exist as a union, as a group united in solidarity against capital and joined together by our common interests. Here we stress what Marx identified as "the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and human activity or self-change" (cited in Lebowitz 2006: 70). Here, now, we need to build a society of associated producers that will permit the development of our creative powers (in Marx's spirit of forging "an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all"), and such a struggle will require, in Lebowitz's terms, "the si-

multaneous changing of circumstances and self-change” (2006: 206, 65). We build new human beings while we build the new society. Lebowitz writes:

“Democratic, participatory, and protagonistic production both draws upon our hidden human resources and develops our capacities. But without that combination of head and hand, people remain the fragmented, crippled human beings that capitalism produces: the division between those who think and those who do continues – as does the pattern that Marx described in which ‘the development of the human capacities on the one side is based on the restriction of development on the other side’” (2006: 65).

In discussing the progress made in Venezuela’s Bolivarian revolution, Lebowitz (2007) underscores the commitment of revolutionaries to the project of human development and to what President Hugo Chavez calls “social economy” (based on the logic of the human being) as opposed to the capitalist economy (based on “the perverse logic of capital and the idea that the criterion for what is good is what it profitable”). Lebowitz identifies three characteristics of the Bolivarian revolution’s project of socialism for the 21st Century: “(a) social ownership of the means of production which is a basis of (b) social production organized by workers in order to (c) satisfy communal needs and communal purposes”. Lebowitz rejects the common opinion that Marx stipulated that socialism and communism had to arrive as two separate stages, with socialism arriving first until the forces of production created a society of abundance. Instead, notes Lebowitz,

“Marx understood that the new social, and intellectual defects it has inherited from capitalism. And, the specific defect that he identified was not that productive forces were too low but, rather, the nature of the human beings produced in the old society with the old ideas –people who continue to be self-oriented and therefore consider themselves entitled to get back exactly what they contribute to society. Building upon defects– rather than working consciously to eliminate them – is a recipe for restoring capitalism (as experience has demonstrated)”.

Here Lebowitz underscores the fact that socialism must witness associated producers working to develop new social norms based on cooperation and solidarity among people and reject the logic of self-interest. The focus must be as much on the development of human forces as on developing the forces of production. Lebowitz (2007) is worth quoting at length on this issue:

“This concept of socialism for the 21st century rescues Marx’s original idea of an ‘association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’, a society focused upon the ‘development of all human powers as such the end in itself’. It embraces Che Guevara’s stress in his classic work, ‘Man and Socialism in Cuba’, that in order to build socialism it is essential, along with building new material foundations, to build new human beings. Thus, it rejects the practice of ignoring the transformation of social relations and human beings in order to develop productive forces – an unfortunate characteristic of the top-down efforts at building socialism in the 20th century”.

We are constantly reminded of Che’s storied admonition that you can’t build a socialist society without at the same time creating a new human being. Che sought the abolition of the economic vestiges of capitalism not as the automatic result of the development of the productive forces (he rejected unconditionally the evolutionist strain of capitalist-industrial progress) but through the intervention of social planning (in contrast to the centralized planning practiced under Stalin). Furthermore, Che recognized the specific autonomy of social, political and ideological transformation that comprised the social whole, and he valued the importance of political-moral motivation and the need for multiform action to change the consciousness of the masses in order to bring about the ideological hegemony of communist values.

Such a struggle and change of consciousness is necessary for the revolutionary struggle worldwide. As Che notes: “socialism cannot exist without a change in consciousness that will bring about a more brotherly disposition toward humanity, both at the individual level in those nations where socialism was being, or had been, built – and at the world level, with all the nations that are victims of imperialistic oppression” (Cited in Löwy 1997).

Today it is the informal sector that is keeping Latin America from sinking into a deeper abyss of poverty created by the politics of neoliberalism. Lands are being despoiled by international mining operations, water and forests have been destroyed by logging and toxic waste, air is clogged with lead and particulate matter, and health care, education, housing, sanitation are in shambles. The conditions which spurred Che Guevara to take up arms are still there; they have, in fact, worsened.

Civil society has increasingly become the stage upon which revolutions are now fought with the state having been abandoned by many groups who feel that those who focus on seizing control of the state find themselves upholding the

very relations of capital they originally fought to abolish. But it seems clear that we need more than just efforts to catalyze the self-organizing action of civil society against the state, we need to transform the very foundations of the state. Che's teaching's can push us forward in our belief that smashing the old state and creating a new one is still a possibility, even today, while at the same time he helps us to recognize that there is no certainty to our struggle for socialism because in many ways certainty is the enemy of revolutionary struggle.

What was remarkable about Che was the way he went against the traditional left of his day in the pursuit of new, more egalitarian and humane roads to this worthy goal, roads that he felt were more consistent with what he understood were the ethical principles of communism. Che rejected the Eastern European models of socialism that claimed to "conquer capitalism with its own fetishes". In his March 1965 essay, "Socialism and Man in Cuba", he wrote: "The pipe dream that socialism can be achieved with the help of the dull instruments bequeathed to us by capitalism (the commodity as the economic cell, profitability, individual material interest as a lever and so on) can lead into a blind alley[...] To build communism it is necessary, simultaneous with the new material foundations, to build the new man" (cited in Löwy 1997). By conjugating contingency with necessity, Che was not only rejecting the layers of technocracy and bureaucracy that such a model would bring to Cuba but also challenging the economic view of socialism (which viewed the economic sphere as an autonomous system governed by its own laws of value or the market) with a more political view of socialism which issues concerning prices and production are made on the basis of social, ethical and political criteria (Löwy 2003a). It is important to underscore that Che's Marxism has an essentially undogmatic character. As Löwy puts it,

"For Che, Marx was not a Pope endowed by the Holy Ghost with the gift of infallibility; nor were his writings Tables of the Law graciously handed down on Mount Sinai [...] Che stresses that Marx, although an intellectual giant, had committed mistakes which could and should be criticized"(1973: 13).

Che's anti-dogmatism in the realm of theory (Che viewed Marxism as a guide to action, a philosophy of praxis, a theory of revolutionary action) was not unrelated to his pedagogical practice, as he rejected outright the Stalinist cult of authority (which he often referred to as scholasticism) and claimed it was impossible to educate the people from above. Echoing the question raised by Marx in his Theses to Feuerbach ("who will educate the educators?"), Che wrote in a speech in 1960: "The first recipe for educating the people is to bring them into the revolution. Never assume that by educating the people they will learn, by education

alone, with a despotic government on their backs, how to conquer their rights. Teach them, first and foremost, to conquer their rights and when they are represented in government they will effortlessly learn whatever is taught to them and much more” (cited in Löwy: 1997).

Chavez’s struggle in Venezuela is that of enabling the working-class to resolve the existing contradictions that are troubling Venezuelan society and to pose an alternative logic to the accumulation of capital. This clearly requires, to some degree, the struggle for political power. Further, it requires an attempt to develop a dialectics of organization that takes into account the issue of social movements and political organization such that the rank-and-file are able to commit themselves to protagonistic action. That is, what is needed is a political party that fully appreciates what a dialectics of organization would embody. According to Bensaïd (2007: 161-162), “A politics without parties (whatever name –movement, organization, league, party– that they are given) ends up in most cases as a politics without politics: either an aimless tailism toward the spontaneity of social movements, or the worst form of elitist individualist vanguardism, or finally a repression of the political in favor of the aesthetic or the ethical”. Here, Bensaïd is rejecting the “rhetoric of counterpowers” of autonomist Marxist supporters of the Zapatistas who argue that taking political power can only lead to a ruling class exerting “power over” the working-class and the reproduction of a hierarchical, top-down society. According to Bensaïd,

“It [...] remains an illusion to believe that we can evade this difficulty by eliminating the question of the conquest of political power (on the pretext that power today is divorced from territory and scattered everywhere and nowhere) in favor of a rhetoric of counterpowers. Economic, military, and cultural powers are perhaps more widely scattered, but they are also more concentrated than ever. You can pretend to ignore power, but it will not ignore you. You can act superior by refusing to take it, but from Catalonia 1937 to Chiapas via Chile, experience shows right up to this very day that it will not hesitate to take you in the most brutal fashion. In a word, a strategy of counterpower only has any meaning in the perspective of dual power and its resolution. Who will come out on top?” (2007: 160)

Following in the spirit of Che and the Bolivarian Revolution of the Chavistas, we seek not a grand narrative of historical necessity but a praxis of being that can animate the inert material reality of everyday life, recognizing that innovations are often a synthesis of the already known and new discoveries. We seek a philosophy of revolutionary praxis where critical pedagogy can serve as a vehicle to

transform the present by brightening our dreams of the past through rays of hope molten with redemptive possibility. Our praxis of being, our nepantlismo, is developed so that we can find new collective and systematic ways of recreating the state from the bottom up, of building capacities that will help us administer everyday life in ways hitherto uncharted, such that these efforts can match—and eventually overwhelm—the forbidding scale of danger that we face in today’s specter of neoliberalism and its accompanying coloniality of power.

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