

Interfering with Capitalism's Spell: Peter McLaren's Revolutionary Liminality

Samuel Day Fassbinder, Ph.D.*

California State University, Los Angeles

Abstract

McLaren's recent (post-2000) writings promote a form of agency called "revolutionary critical pedagogy," and a type of agent, the "committed intellectual" (McLaren 2005b, p. 253-281). But one can find an earlier agent-type in McLaren's (1986) *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, the "liminal servant," that explains how "critical pedagogy is secured by the most fecund of revolutionary talismans, critique" (2005a: 9). Borrowing from Theodor Adorno (1968), I suggest that McLaren's recent writing uses aspects of the "liminal servant" for the purpose of interfering with the "spell" of capitalist social relations through "revolutionary critical pedagogy." The beginning prologue examines "revolutionary liminality" in McLaren's writing; the second part explains how his written discursive strategies (naming the culprit, suggesting icons, theorizing to unite the disaffected) work to act out "revolutionary liminality."

*Samuel Day Fassbinder is Adjunct Professor of Communication at California State University, Los Angeles. His PhD is in Communication from The Ohio State University; his MA is in English, from Sonoma State University in northern California. His weblog can be read at <http://ecosocialism.blogspot.com>. He works with Food Not Bombs (<http://foodnotbombs.net>).

Prologue: Introducing the Liminal Servant in the Context of Capitalism

Flash back to the 1980s. This is from Peter McLaren's *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, put into publication in 1986, definitely one of my "formative texts" when I read it in graduate school in the early 1990s. In this text, Peter was observing classrooms in a 7-8 grade school in Toronto, specifically a Catholic school ("St Ryan") that served lower-class students. In the paragraph quoted below, he is creating a typology of the teacher-types he has been observing. One of the most important of his categories is that of the liminal servant:

THE LIMINAL SERVANT

The following section on the liminal servant is a composite description of what I consider to be the best attributes of a teacher working within a liberatory pedagogy. These attributes have been collected from observing teachers both formally and informally for over a decade. Some of the characteristics of the liminal servant were evident in teacher performances at St. Ryan....

The liminal servant is both a convener of customs and a cultural provocateur, yet she (or he) transcends both roles. She does not subordinate the political rights of students to their utility as future members of the labor force. She is a social activist and spiritual director as much as she is a school pedagogue. The liminal servant, as the name suggests, is able to bring dimensions of liminality to the classroom setting where obligations that go with one's social status and immediate role are held in abeyance.

The liminal servant does not shy away from the ambiguity and opacity of existence. She/he is androgynous, drawing upon both feminine and masculine modes of consciousness. Much depends upon her personal charisma and her powers of observation and diagnosis. She becomes aware of the strengths and weaknesses of her students by observing and diagnosing their ritual needs. The liminal servant views working class students as members of an oppressed group. Not only does she fight for the equality of her students outside the classroom, but she also attempts to educate her fellow teachers to the dangers of false consciousness. (McLaren, 1986, p. 114-115)

What is impressive about this description of the liminal servant is that it suggests a leader/ teacher of exceptional qualities who is there to fight for the social standing of the students, and who maintains a number of "normal" roles ("convener of customs and a cultural provocateur") while being both teacher and liberator. This is all accomplished through the manipulation of "liminal" rituals, which is to say that in the classroom of the liminal servant classroom activities are turned into special occasions of a sort.

All of this description functions as a sort of anthropological superstructure set atop the basic requirement that the liminal servant follow "a liberatory pedagogy." Now this can be a number of things, but mostly what it is, is a "pedagogy of the oppressed" in the sense in which Paulo Freire meant it in his earlier (1970) book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The "pedagogy of the oppressed" was meant to help the least-well-off students of society liberate themselves from oppressive circumstances.

Fast-forward back to the present day. When Peter McLaren wrote in the 1980s of "a liberatory pedagogy" in *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, he now writes of "revolutionary critical pedagogy." The present-day incarnation of Peter McLaren now describes himself as a "classical Marxist," and writes theoretically of "Marxist-Humanism" and of neo-Grainscan international political economy in the vein of William I. Robinson.^[4] One reason for McLaren's change in writing style has

been his growing concern about the distance between recent versions of "critical pedagogy" and Freire's original version in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Indeed, for McLaren, this is a concern about

the way in which the work of Paulo Freire has become -- in many instances -- reconciled to capitalism through political vulgarization and pedagogical domestication. The work of Freire is often used in the field of critical literacy in a way that alarmingly disconnects literacy and pedagogy from capitalist exploitation and class struggle: in short, in a way that side-steps revolutionary praxis. (McLaren, 2006, p.25)

The radicalism of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* itself confirms McLaren's assertion that Freirean pedagogy is moving in the direction of domestication -- the point being that Freire's own text is of a piece with revolutionary sentiment in the 1960s. The rarely-quoted chapter 4 of Freire's early (1970) magnum opus is about how to teach "revolutionary praxis," (p.107) and more specifically about how to teach groups of people to resist colonization. It was specifically written in a spirit that celebrates Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. And, arguably, McLaren's pivotal (2000) book *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of Revolution* can be read as an attempt to contextualize and update that same chapter of Freire's book. This book marks a period where McLaren revisits Freirean theory to become a "classical Freirean" as much as he himself claims to be a "classical Marxist."

McLaren's recent output is quite prodigious. Indeed, as I said in my interview with him,^[ii] McLaren is "most recently the author of *Capitalists and Conquerors* (2005) and *Red Seminars* (2005) and *Teaching against Capitalism and the New Imperialism* (with Ramin Farahmandpur) (2005)" as well as a recent set of interviews titled *Rage and Hope* (2006). A discursive examination of these works will uncover a set of strategies for this return to "classical Freireanism." Furthermore, one can read into these strategies a reappearance of the "liminal servant" mentioned in McLaren's earlier writings. In sum, my reading of the "liminal servant" within McLaren's later writings reveals a "revolutionary liminality" at work in his written persona.

The goals of a "revolutionary liminality" could perhaps be read out of something Peter wrote with Nathalia E. Jaramillo in an essay on George W. Bush with the vivid title "God's Cowboy Warrior"

...any revolutionary struggle must be dedicated to educating the emotions as much as the intellect and why anti-imperialist struggle must be waged on the triple continents of reason, passion, and revolution. It must take place not only on the picket line or protest march, but also in the schools, places of worship, libraries, shop floors, and corporate offices -- in every venue where people come together to learn, to labor, and to love.

In order to shift critical pedagogy into a new register, we need to rethink the very premises of critical pedagogy, not as some grand contemplative act, but as part of a philosophy of everyday life. This challenge has to do with creating a living Marxism, a way of negotiating the reality of a racist and class society on a daily basis so as to transform such a society. (McLaren, 2005a, p. 324)

One can see how, in this passage, McLaren and Jaramillo want to make the return to (Freirean) critical pedagogy into right-brained, ritual activity, contextualized by the venues of everyday life and the activities of learning, laboring, and loving. This is often regarded as a mind-space far away from that of the typical professorial pursuit of "academic writing as real estate"^[iii] that churns out texts from within the sheltered structures of the academic tenure-track. Compare the spirit of the above quote with that of a similar passage from *Schooling*:

the liminal servant is wary of too much ratiocination and leans toward divining myths, metaphors and rhythms that will have meaning and purpose for her students -- not just as abstractions, but

as "lived" forms of consciousness... The liminal servant encourages students to enact metaphors and embody rhythms that bypass the traditional mind/body dualism so prevalent in mainstream educational epistemology and practice. The liminal servant is a vagrant, a tramp of the obvious who becomes the tramp of demystifying conscientization. The ordinary becomes the object of critical examination and reflection... (the liminal servant) knows that she must not merely present knowledge to students; she must transform the consciousness of students by allowing them to 'embody' or incarnate knowledge. (McLaren, 1986, p. 116)

The aim of "incarnate knowledge" in the latter passage from *Schooling* is less distinct than in "God's Cowboy Warrior" -- but nevertheless illustrative of "revolutionary liminality." The difference between the two "revolutionary liminalities" is more reflective of McLaren's change in focus than of anything else. In *Schooling as a Ritual Performance*, McLaren attempted to capture the stultifying atmosphere of a school which was in the business of "making Catholics," (pp. 180-216) in which the subjectivities of the students were, in the end, inscribed into late capitalism (p. 216). In the more recent works, McLaren is concerned with the overall picture of the capitalist system and with the overall theory to be used in demystifying it. And it is this demystification that requires further explanation. What needs to be demystified? Why is writing (and writing style) so important to McLaren's "revolutionary critical pedagogy"?

To understand what about capitalist society ultimately needs demystifying, we flash back to 1968, a good year for radicalism. Here is the transcript of the final flourish of a speech given by Theodor Adorno (2001), the intellectual voice of critical theory, a year before his death:

The only relationships ultimately realized between people, however, are those buried under the relations of production. This is why the overwhelming organization of things remains at the same time its own ideology, virtually powerless. As impenetrable as the bane [Bann] is, it's only a spell [Bann]. If sociology is to do more than just furnish welcome information to agents and interests, by fulfilling those tasks for which it was once conceived, then it is up to it, with means which do not themselves fall prey to the universal character of the fetish, to ensure, be it to ever so modest an extent, that the spell dissolves itself. (p. 1)

The concept of "spell" or (in German) Bann is one of the most compelling in the lexicon of the critical theorist Theodor Adorno. Adorno uses the word "Bann" to mean a sort of bad magic in the world; the translator Dennis Redmond translates it as "bane" to distinguish its negative character. What Adorno is talking about is a spell -- and a spell, according to the mythology of witchcraft, conveys magic to be used over people, to make them do things they ordinarily wouldn't do. Only in Adorno's use of "Bann," the spell is something cast upon the "organization of things" itself -- in other words, the ordinary is itself the source of bad magic. The implication is that there is some sort of bad magic going on in a world ostensibly rationalized by democracy, technology, and the corporate order.

More specifically, the world of the present is said to be under the spell foisted upon it by the relations of production, i.e. by the capitalist system. The capitalist system is, today, the system we all use; it is the system Adorno speaks of when he uses the term "the overwhelming organization of things." The "organization of things" is, as the hard-headed speak of it, the real world; yet there is this idea conveyed in "Bann" that a spell continues to operate in the "organization of things."

The idea that capitalism involves a spell doesn't originate with Adorno. Marx, indeed, wrote of "commodity fetishism"; and a fetish is about a (magical) power that an object has over us. Commodity fetishism, indeed, is the name of the spell. When one thinks in an anticapitalist manner, against a society that believes in itself when one, oneself, doesn't, one tends to argue that the rest of the world has been trapped under a spell, a spell that normalizes the capitalist system to an extent that life outside of it

becomes unthinkable. Consumerism and family life define the normal role for those who have "leisure time"; "work" becomes equivalent to being on someone's payroll, and "unemployment" a state of "poverty." Possessive individualism, an ideology that defines the world as something to be owned by (white, male) sovereign individuals as "real estate," becomes the only way to think about the natural world. The individual's relations to others reinforce these ways of thinking. And this is the power of the spell that commodity relations hold over society.

What was Adorno's response to this reality? For Adorno, sociology (as practiced within the academy) needed to avoid commodification, somehow. Indeed, this was to be done in the radical hopes of 1968 that "the spell dissolves itself," but in light of Adorno's famous pessimism about radical social change, it's easier to paint him as a survivor of the world that produced Auschwitz (the Nazi concentration camps, as a horrifying event of bureaucratized mass murder) rather than as a revolutionary. As a note of explanation, Adorno (like McLaren) believed that there was no imminent possibility of revolution to be found in the privileged "First World." For anticapitalists like Adorno and McLaren, when revolution is not imminent, what remains are attempts to interfere with the spell of commodity relations, to build something new in capitalism's shadow.

For McLaren, the question of how to interfere with the spell of capitalist relations becomes a question of how to practice a "revolutionary critical pedagogy" when "there is little evidence to indicate that the United States is prepared to consider a socialist alternative to its imperialist democracy anytime soon" (McLaren, 2005a, p. 323). What is McLaren's purpose, given these conditions? He gives his own answer to this question in an interview (with Michael Pozo) in *Rage and Hope*:

My particular task is to transform teacher and student practice into a far-reaching political praxis linked to social movements to contribute to creating a multi-racial, gender-balanced, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist movement that is internationalist in scope. (McLaren, 2006, p. 17)

With our analysis of McLaren, then, we are concerned with how he sees the spell of capitalist social relations to be broken, and with that, how a movement is to be built amongst those who have recognized McLaren's anticapitalism as their own.

This essay will concern itself with what he does in his writing, paying close attention to "revolutionary liminality" and to the way in which it forwards the goals of "revolutionary critical pedagogy." (There is also an activist dimension to McLaren's own work, which in a future essay will have an even more encyclopedic scope than it does today. McLaren has worked with communities in Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, Pakistan, and South Africa to promote "revolutionary critical pedagogy," and has an academic organization "La Fundacion McLaren," in Mexico (and on the Web at <http://www.fundacionmclaren.org/>), to promote "revolutionary critical pedagogy" from within the academy. Indeed, if one is going to be a revolutionary, then word must be matched by deed.) There is an agent-form suggested in McLaren's later writings – the "committed intellectual," suggested in essay on Gramsci in *Red Seminars*. But in this essay I will focus upon the more discursively-revealing agent-form, the "liminal servant."

McLaren's immediate purpose is expressed quite simply: "As a critical educator, I follow Glenn Rikowski's work and encourage students to ask themselves the following question: What is the maximum damage we can do to the rule of capital, to the dominance of capital's value form?" (McLaren, 2006, p. 25) In the next portion of this essay, I shall examine the strategies of McLaren's prose to observe what damage he himself intends to do.

McLaren's Strategies for Interfering With the Spell of Commodity Relations

There are three strategic types in McLaren's (written) discourse that I wish to highlight; a) naming the culprits, b) suggesting icons, and c) theorizing to unite the disaffected. All of these strategies are strategies that a liminal servant would employ were she to engage her role in the written word. They attempt to engage existing customs; they attempt to educate the reader as regards the dangers of false consciousness. In general, McLaren's writing attempts to provide a liminal space where academic conventions of "detachment" are swept aside in favor of academic writing as a form of performance art.^[iv] For each category, then, I will illustrate with a prominent example for the sake of showing its discursive workings in the academic context in which McLaren's writings register their meanings.

Naming the Culprits

My interview with Peter McLaren (The "Dirty Thirty") provided a forthright example of this strategy; another important example of this would be the first part of "God's Cowboy Warrior," a section of which was quoted above. The general tone of this discursive strategy is cautionary; he argues to warn people of the bad things that people do when caught in the spell of pernicious ideologies. The especially-bad, then, are held up as examples of the dangers of false consciousness. In McLaren's hands, this strategy chooses its targets in a somewhat limited fashion; when he talks of the attack upon radical academia, for instance, he concentrates his fire upon those specific neoconservative organizations which he sees as engaged in a direct effort to silence free speech in the academy. In naming enemies, McLaren focuses upon fact, stylizing it to reveal how there are powers in the world, and real individuals using them, to struggle against us as individuals and as a class, so that we might be provoked into joining the struggle.

In my interview with Peter McLaren (The "Dirty Thirty"), in particular, the main task-at-hand consisted in identifying the main political culprits (Lynn Cheney, Andrew Jones (the head of the Bruin Alumni Association, David Horowitz), and their associates (Linda Chavez, a former Reagan appointee, and current UCLA professors Matt Malkan and Thomas Schwartz), and then to move on to identify the initiatives which they support. These include HR 509, the "International Studies in Higher Education Act," David Horowitz's "Academic Bill of Rights," and a couple of individual state legislative bills that are being drawn up around it. All of this is being foregrounded against the authoritarian tendencies of the "far right" in their current domination of American politics, as McLaren himself explains. In sum, McLaren tries to roll together a series of facts in a way which offers a sense of motivation to the reader. The interview reads as a sort of "action alert" to concerned academics.

"God's Cowboy Warrior," a piece McLaren wrote with Nathalia E. Jaramillo, (McLaren and Jaramillo (2006)), offers a more elaborate naming of culprits. The authors deliver a thorough evisceration of the Bush administration for its megalomania, its adherence to the narcissistic philosophy of Leo Strauss (examined in detail therein), and its role in the triumph of the military-industrial complex in a nation in which "the infrastructure for a transition to a fascist state is already in place" (p. 266). Thus, there are people in the world who are manipulating the spell cast upon the world into something even worse, i.e. fascism. McLaren and Jaramillo suggest modestly that the Bush administration is in fact so self-discrediting that "it doesn't need a commentary such as ours to make a case against it," (p. 277) and call for Bush's impeachment. They then make a connection between Bush imperialism and the needs of the (owning class within the) capitalist system itself. "Whereas imperialism once tried to disguise the tendency in the decline of the rate of profits through the extraction of super-profits from exploited lands overseas, the tendency of the rate of profit to decline is now what openly drives capital's quest for imperialist expansion" (p. 279). The theories of Peter Hudis and James Petras are discussed as relevant to these phenomena. The narrative of "God's Cowboy Warrior" ends with a discussion of how a socialist alternative to US imperialism can be imagined.

The point, then, of naming the culprits as a discursive strategy is to show how certain particular people are responsible for the increasing difficulty of life, as it currently stands under neoliberal economic hegemony. This is pursued not to implicate us all in the presence of the evils of neoliberalism, but rather to explain that, under the current system, power is routinely granted to the avatars of false consciousness.

Suggesting Icons

When McLaren wrote *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*, he chose to discuss Guevara in the context of schools and education not because Che was a schoolteacher by profession (Che's original training was in medicine), but rather because he thought a discussion of Che would provide appropriate symbolic brushstrokes for a theory that would make critical pedagogy, like Che, "militantly optimistic about overcoming capitalism," and give it a perspective that was "unwavering and heroic." (McLaren, 2000, p. 107). This is, perhaps, the most dramatic example of McLaren's use of iconic discourse within his opus. In discussing Che Guevara's lessons for critical pedagogy, McLaren employs similar prosaic techniques to those used elsewhere in his opus; he suggests, for instance, that "a critical pedagogy for multicultural education should quicken the affective sensibilities of students as well as provide them with a language of social analysis, cultural critique, and social activism in the service of cutting the power and practice of capital at its joints." (p. 103) This may be an "ordinary" McLaren recommendation, if such a thing can exist. But the point of saying these words this in the context of a discussion of Che Guevara is to allow us to see Che Guevara as an inspiration to *try to do* what he (McLaren) is suggesting teachers ought to do.

In using iconic discourse, in suggesting Che Guevara and Paulo Freire as part of a pantheon of iconic figures, McLaren is not suggesting any sort of Marx-worship or Marxist-worship. Indeed, McLaren suggests that "Marxism puts its stock in good works rather than in faith. It puts an emphasis in denouncing and transforming the world, not wrapping doctrinal tentacles around its major texts..." (McLaren, 2006, p. 45) We have already discussed above the power of McLaren's denunciatory discourse; the point here is that his iconic celebration of Che Guevara is not meant in any way to be doctrinal or religious.

Perhaps, then, we would be underestimating icons if we theorized icons, and iconic discourse, to be inimical to critical thinking. Clearly, our own society is full of icons. We fetishize these icons for their symbolic value. Money itself serves us as an icon; in its physical paper and metallic forms, it has the pictures of Presidential icons printed on it. Our respect for it is iconic; as a material existence it is mere paper bills, metal discs, or (as credit) pixels on a screen, themselves unimportant as objects. Yet somehow we regard money as the moving force of our working lives, as something that in fact "makes the world go 'round." More theoretically, money is an iconic form of exchange-value. Because of our fetish for money, everything we can buy with it has an "exchange-value." This is indeed what commodity fetishism is about. We use monetary forms (gold, silver) to make jewelry, and display them on our bodies iconically. In school we teach icon-worship; the American flag is saluted every morning. The point of flying airplanes into the World Trade Center in New York City on the morning of September 11, 2001 was that these towers were regarded by the airplane hijackers as American icons, as symbols of American strength. The power of icons and of iconic forms of communication and behavior indeed constitutes "the spell" in general, and the spell of commodity relations in particular. McLaren's response to our iconic existence is to bring counter-icons into the discussion, to evince their subversive value. His office at UCLA, for instance, serves as a shrine to Marx, Engels, Hugo Chavez, and anyone of iconic value who has value in his chain-of-associations as a subverter of the dominant paradigm. Would we be able to break the spell so easily if we merely proclaimed ourselves to be purely agnostic postmodern intellectuals, and then went about our business within the capitalist academy? I don't see it.

Now, as regards Che in particular, I do recognize that Che Guevara is more of an inspiration to anti-capitalist effort than perhaps any iconic figure Latin America has produced (I'm sure there are exceptions, however), and certainly I recognize that the impact of his facial image has been spread throughout the (capitalist) world in murals, on t-shirts, and otherwise. I do not, however, imagine Che Guevara to be an icon of perfection. I will only discuss what I imagine to be the most innocuous of Che's shortcomings. It was my reading of Che's works as reported in Jon Lee Anderson's respectful biography *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* that his revolutionary strategy suffered from an underestimation of the need for appropriate conditions for the "making of a revolution." This, too, played with his reputation; the back cover of Pierre Kalfon's *Che, Ernesto Guevara, una leyenda de nuestro siglo* refers to Che as "un Don Quijote de los tiempos modernos," or in short, a romantic unrealist. If we wish to do the most possible damage to capitalism, we need to wrestle with what is possible. In theorizing this difference I have with Che, I would invoke Gramsci's distinction between a "war of movement," involving the conquest of the state such as was accomplished by Lenin, and a "war of position," the ideological battle for the consciences of the people. I would use this distinction to suggest that perhaps Che was a little too anxious to get onward with the "war of movement" when the "war of position" in the countries where he worked (outside of Cuba, of course) had not run its course.

Nevertheless, I can participate in the aura of Che as a liminal servant, as someone outside of the now-globally-dominant capitalist social structure provided by US hegemony, promising the United States an engagement in "One, two, three, many Vietnams." The celebration of Che Guevara is iconic play; people who wear images of Che on their t-shirts are not suggesting everything that Che did so much as a romantic anticapitalism which uses his image as the basis for a sentiment.

Theorizing to Unite the Disaffected

Much of the recent writing done by Peter McLaren is theoretical, dealing with generalities about capitalism, about social categories, and about critiques of social theory from his "classic Marxist" perspective. However, even though at times McLaren's prose can become dry in this respect, the general intent appears to be a sort of community-building, starting from the base of a respect for the individual whose individuality is being incorporated into a coerced uniformity. In an interview with Michael Pozo in *Rage and Hope*, McLaren defends his use of theory qua theory, in response to the question: "How has your implementation and study of people such as Ernesto Guevara, Malcolm X and Rosa Luxemburg returned the lived experiences back to students taught under "detached" theories?" McLaren responds:

...the question is not one of providing the correct political language -- revolutionary critical pedagogy, critical theory, historical materialism, analytical or dialectical Marxism, or what have you -- but to create pedagogical spaces and contexts for the oppressed to fashion their own understandings out of their shared history of struggle. (McLaren, 2006, p. 33)

This quote, itself, would offer a straightforward definition of what it means to proclaim a theory to unite the disaffected. The oppressed have their own understandings of how life in the world is, but within each is a shared history of struggle. A theory that is useful to revolutionary critical pedagogy can provide a pedagogical space to illuminate that history; a theory that doesn't, won't.

So that is what a McLaren continues with a discussion of what a theory that is useless to revolutionary critical pedagogy looks like:

Theories... often set up an opposition -- an irreconcilable dualism or un-transcendable antinomy or incontestable contradiction between the subject and the object or nature of knowledge where the ontological structure of subjective agency supposedly corresponds to the actual dualisms of the mode of production, albeit in its alienated and reified formations. In this process, the

concrete historical subject is obliterated, abstracted away, so that it is made to feel as if it were at one with the madness of capital into which it has been insinuated, so that the subject resigns itself to an inevitable complicity with the processes of its own formation. (p. 33)

To imagine an example: uncritical theories locate the agency of capitalism (insofar as capitalism is itself an agency) in something other than capitalism itself. So, for instance, one might blame George W. Bush, and George W. Bush alone, for the trajectory taken by the US government, without looking at all of the other subjectivities that stand with Bush in his policies, and without looking at the hierarchical and mediated nature of the "structure of subjective agency" (i.e. the system) that grants Bush the power that he has. Meanwhile the subject, i.e. the individual person, can imagine her powerlessness before Bush without examining the roots in political economy of Bush's power. In real life, however, the capitalist system helps George W. Bush do his dirty work, but without a helpful theory, the subject remains unable to see how such a system becomes an agency.

A solid example of an active McLaren discussion of "theoretical power" is his paper with Nathalia E. Jaramillo, "Critical Pedagogy, Latino/a Education, and the Politics of Class Struggle." (*Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies* 6:1 (2006), pp. 73-93). This essay theorizes the space constructed for the sake of "latino/a" identity as it interacts within a larger context of global capitalism, US nationalism, and racism in the US and in specifically Californian contexts. The authors explicitly defend language rights (in general) in the context of an ideology of assimilation that dominates the US context:

The very system that incorporates Latina/os and other immigrant groups into the dominant "Whitestream" society is the same system that seeks to alienate them from their local histories, their culture, and the location where their knowledge is inscribed, namely their language. (McLaren and Jaramillo, 2006, p. 81)

This initiates a discussion of language policy, in which the diversity of human subjectivities is defended against policies such as Proposition 227 in California and the No Child Left Behind Act.

From that point, this essay connects its defense of cultural identity to a Marxist-humanist critical pedagogy and, indeed, a critique of class struggle in a global context that derives its strength from the writings of William I. Robinson (McLaren and Jaramillo, 2006, pp. 86-90).

The point, then, of the discourse of theorizing to unite the disaffected, is to defend the particular against its incorporation into an imperialist universal, while at the same time suggesting a theory around which greater unities can be assembled. After all, those disaffected by imperialism must have something to unite around.

Conclusion

In writing of "revolutionary critical pedagogy," then, Peter McLaren performs some of the functions of a liminal servant. One of the byproducts of this performance, incidentally, is that McLaren appears to have accumulated a community of allies. This, of course, is reflected in his activist efforts in various places in the world; but for a written-word rendering of McLaren's community spirit one can read, for instance, his recent collection *Red Seminars*, co-written with twenty-two different co-authors. One can also read in McLaren (and this is common in academic writing) a heavy bibliographic emphasis upon citation; this itself also serves as a community-building function. The function of a liminal servant is to build communities of thinkers; as Turner theorized the concept of "liminality," it (as a ritual state of human existence) could be associated closely to the social state of existence which he called "communitas," which was meant to describe a state of social being devoid of status and roles and engaged in a sense of "togetherness" outside the social mainstream (Turner, p. 132). Now, in a context

of global capitalism where the reigning pedagogy acts to turn the world's distinct peoples into English-speaking consumers (Spring 2006), McLaren's work in building a counter-community aims at breaking the spell of commodity relations that holds people in thrall to the capitalist system as a whole.

Nevertheless, it is still an open question as regards to how far the above discursive strategies can interfere with the spell of commodity relations. It is also an open question whether the (written) discursive strategies for being a "liminal servant" can be diversified beyond the narrow typology I have set out in this essay. In summary, it is an open question how far the discourse of the "liminal servant" can go. Kudos to Peter McLaren, and friends, for making it happen in the way that they did.

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Notes

[i] See especially McLaren and Jaramillo (2006), "Critical Pedagogy, Latino/a Education, and the Politics of Class Struggle," *Cultural Studies/ Critical Methodologies* 6:1, pp. 73-93.

[ii] Fassbinder, S. (2006, 6 April). "The 'Dirty Thirty's' Peter McLaren Reflects on the Crisis of Academic Freedom," *MRZine*. Accessed 6 June 2006. <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/fassbinder060406.html>

[iii] Agger, B. (1990). "Academic Writing as Real Estate," *The Decline of Discourse* (pp. 122-147).

[iv] In the introduction to *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*, itself titled "Peter McLaren: The Poet Laureat of the Educational Left," Joe Kincheloe has already remarked at length on Peter's "fusion of reason and emotion" (x)