

Re-enchanting the Project of Critical Social Theory: Troubling Postmodernism
A critical essay review of *Marxism Against Postmodernism in Educational Theory*
edited by Dave Hill, Peter McLaren, Mike and Glenn Rikowski. (Lanham, MD:
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The twentieth century has left in its wake, the abolition of nation states, countless class struggles, politically impotent progressive intellectuals, and an “Empire” materializing before our eyes. As global capitalism expands, it continues its brutal neoliberal attacks on the working class, resulting in program cuts, abolition of a living wage, job outsourcing, dissolution of social security, and privatization of public enterprises, particularly, education.

With this new reality, there no longer exists any real threat to global capitalism. Nor is there any consideration for the development of a global society.¹ With no apparent alternative to these unbridled market-led economic strategies, it seems that fundamental structural changes in society are no longer possible; the Left has become an anachronism.²

At the end of the millennium the onset of ‘everything postmodern’ and the consequent Marxist bashing and calls for the ‘death of Marxism and socialism,’ provides extinction as the only prospect facing Marxist educational theory.³ Disenfranchised, dispersed, and disheartened Leftists and lapsed Marxists, alike, find themselves trapped within a barrage of postmodernisms. Diluted efforts and weakened positions are also exacerbated by a lack of coherency, with many differing directions, no common language, and no clear cut theoretical response to a strengthened ‘Right.’

In response to these tensions, a new book, **Marxism Against Postmodernism in Educational Theory** (Lexington Books, NY), has arrived. This book is a collective work by a number of different writers. It challenges postmodernist politics and

theories and argues for Marxism's continuing relevance. The book offers a well-developed rigorous Marxist-inspired critique of postmodernism and post structuralism in educational settings. Also, it provides the language to respond to the onslaught of postmodernism. As two of the authors attest, this book discerns a need to clear the decks of junk theories and debilitating 'political' posturing because of the urgent task ahead for critical social theorists.

The authors argue the significance of education and training, as resources, for constructing a future based on the struggle against capital, the social forms and institutions it engenders, and the social inequalities that arise from its market mechanisms. Dave Hill and Mike Cole eloquently argue that postmodernism marginalizes and serves to disempower the oppressed by denying the notion of 'emancipation in a general sense.' This is especially true considering the global scale and rate of capitalist market exploitations: concomitant with open class conflict, aggressive consumerism, rapacious individualism, xenophobic tribalism, and chauvinistic nationalism. These issues ensure that Marxist thought is an inescapable part of the intellectual weaponry for today's freedom fighters.⁴ In this book, the authors show the intellectual rigor to respond, the courage to take the less traveled path, and the integrity to be dissenting voices against postmodernism.

The global scale and rate of capitalist market exploitations are no accident. Their onslaught has taught critical and socialist theorists alike many costly lessons since this turn away from Socialism and Marxist theory, which has occurred since the end of the cold war and the failed Russian-Soviet "socialist" experiment. Socialism has not died, because it never really lived.⁵ The contention that seeking another world is impossible has been greatly assisted by the clever identification of socialism with the Stalinist experiment and its sequel, argues Singer (1999). He adds that even if one has always been anti-Stalinist, categorically rejecting the confusion between socialism and the crimes of the Georgian tyrant, one must still settle this account with the past.⁶ So we are in an uphill battle, the failure of socialism does not mean that the lessons of socialism are for naught. Marx never committed himself to offering suggestions about how socialism would function in the world. The lack of understanding of socialism and the overwhelming embrace of postmodernism in everything theoretical made it difficult to question this behemoth.

Committed Leftists have found few that were willing to identify themselves as Leftist or Marxist for fear of reprisal. Left intellectuals who object to postmodernism tend to complain in private but remain largely silent in public, largely because they have not learned to speak the postmodernist vocabulary. Still others became enamoured with the thrust of postmodernism, and its commitment to discourse, deconstruction and nihilism abandoning a critical socialist perspective.⁷ Marx instead offers a non-reductionist, critical, dialectical materialism that is according to the authors the most warranted way to study the world. They, rightly, accuse Postmodernists of failing to connect and explain convincingly the *necessary* connections between “discursive materiality” and the social relations of production. Some would argue that language/discourse is the only way that we can deal with the material world. However, when one studies Marx’s concept of the new materialism, as compared to prior crude versions, it becomes apparent that he never saw stark dichotomies between thought and material “realities.”⁸

Rikowski argues that Marxism expresses theoretically, politically and empirically, the dynamics of social class as the form of oppression within capitalist society that is constituted by its own development.⁹ Rikowski, and his co-authors are supported by others who want to address,

Left intellectuals on their grounds in an attempt to show that despite the deep tensions in his thought, Marx also, in his best moments rejected positivism and anti-foundationalism, instead of undermining his radical political commitments in fact made possible his developments of a practical and non-moralistic form of social criticism grounded firmly in existing historical conditions.¹⁰

Marxist theory, therefore allows one to see gender, ‘race’ and other forms of oppression through the lens of social class.¹¹ Further, Marxist educational theory is here to stay, with its existence secured by the degenerative forms of education and training assumed in contemporary capitalism.¹² The concentration of managerialism, bureaucracy, and regulation of education reduce it to labor on the cheap and underpin the relevance of Marxist analysis for educational struggles.¹³

This book helps us to understand how postmodernism stands as an obstacle to the formation of open and radical perspectives that challenge inequalities and the deepening of the rule of capital in all areas of social life. Quoting Helen Raduntz¹⁴,

the authors note that postmodernism “constitutes a sterile theoretical cul-de-sac with no political program for transformative change.¹⁴” In recent years, postmodernism has assumed an educational form, as educational theory—postmodernized modes of ‘reflective’ teacher practice, postmodern educational research methods, and so on.

There is an accelerating world crisis of Globalization as many new academic and popular book titles attest to including: *Globalization*; *The War on Terror*; *Politics of the Empire*; *The Empire*; *Empire of Barbarism*; and *The New Empire*. All of these publications attest to, the climate of Globalization that extends its hegemony over the world capitalist order. In its global quest for profit, capitalism has abandoned its claims to serve a larger historical cause to develop a global society.¹⁵ Even in the wealthiest capitalist economies, unemployment has become structural, and conditions of life have become onerous for most of the population.¹⁶

Before reading this book, I did not really understand that the situation was urgent. Many other reviews of the Marxist and postmodern arguments claim that the Marxist positions are disingenuous or suggest that the authors are making sweeping and inaccurate generalizations. Most of these reviews are merely apologetic treatments. On the other hand, the writers in this important book argue that despite the claims of self-styled ‘Postmodernists of resistance,’ postmodernism provides neither a viable educational politics, nor a foundation for effective radical educational practice. In place of postmodernism, the book outlines a ‘politics of human resistance’ which puts the challenge to capitalism and its attendant inequalities firmly on the agenda of educational theory, politics and practice. As many still hail postmodernism as fashionable, this group of essays presents a re-articulation and analysis of Marx that exposes the flaws in deconstruction and offers a renewed appreciation for Marx and the return to historical materialism, to class analysis. This book is written with the intention of countering vulgar reductionist readings of Marx and with rehabilitating the Marxist project of understanding the world.¹⁷

While it is difficult to define postmodernism and ‘educational postmodernism,’ the authors direct us to Usher and Edwards’ rendering of what they define as postmodernism. Their work indicates that it is a certain “attitude” toward “life” or a certain ‘state of mind,’ as ironical, self-referential posture and style, a different “way of seeing.” Yet, the authors of this book suggest that it still begs the questions of why

this ‘attitude’ is superior, more relevant, or politically ‘cool’ than any other. The authors declare that it is far better to adopt an ‘attitude’ of a commitment to social justice that seeks to end social inequalities. So, at the popular level, postmodernism reflects a certain celebration of aimless anarchism.

At a social-theoretical project, postmodernism is seen here as excessive; within the realm of ‘discourse’, it knows no bounds. Yet, in the social universe, in the real world, we are faced with structural constraints, collectively and individually, on our form of life; constraints set by capital and its social relations.¹⁸ For Postmodernists, all concepts are fragmented and all dualisms, such as the Marxist notion of two major social classes, are deconstructed. The search for ‘meaning’ within texts as within discourse is infinitized, comprising endless academic work for Postmodernists. Postmodernism has been called an “excessive social-theoretical practice” that attempts to negate the Enlightenment project, and with it reason and rationality, along with any attempts to secure ‘knowledge.’¹⁹ These authors add that meta-narratives, ethics and value, and any appeals to ‘truth’ are also scuppered. They demonstrate that the effects of postmodernism are predictable: relativism; nihilism; solipsism; fragmentation; pathos; and hopelessness. Worse, postmodernism acts as an obfuscation tool, a disguise, or veil for radical right wing projects and continues to obscure them under the guise of the ‘Third Way.’²⁰

For the Left to reach people who are looking for alternatives to war, poverty, globalization, gender inequity, racism and environmental destruction, we need a determined struggle to build clear ideas into a mass force. It is the critical ideas, programs, methods and tactics based on the historical, and updated for the contemporary, experience of the working class that will inspire thousands of the new generation. It is therefore important when facing the harsh rule of capital, that we build ourselves up and find similarities between and among people (as opposed to emphasizing differences and fractured, hybrid identities) and to enhance our strengths based on *labor in and against capital*.²¹ We need to become a social and political force of substance, not virtual forces in the ethereal realm of ‘discourse.’ And, while it is true that in some respect there is a materiality to discourse as a form of practice, Postmodernists fail to make the necessary connections between discursive materiality and the social relations of production.

Marxism Against Postmodernism

There are three overarching themes in this book. They are:

- the appraisal and critique of postmodernism within educational theory;
- the explication of Marxist and socialist-feminist alternatives to postmodernism; and
- human resistance to capital and its associated forms of inequality.

With respect to education and training, the focus is fourfold:

- there is an emphasis on the degeneration of educational theory through the ‘postmodern turn’ (and the effects for educational politics, policy and perspectives);
- attention is given to the ways capitalist education and training are implicated in the social production of labor-power, the living commodity on which the whole capitalist system rests;
- a range of educational inequalities are analyzed and theorized, and various implications for the struggle for equality within education are drawn out; and
- most importantly, the subversive, critical, and emancipatory aspects of education are explored, with an emphasis on critical, revolutionary, and contraband pedagogies—pedagogies that run against the grain of capitalist educational and social life.

The authors argue that there is a much-needed socialist response to the current educational crises and, thankfully, this book provides a range of responses. The authors write that they are not just reacting against the poverty of postmodern theory and current economic and educational crises. They clearly highlight the contradictory roles of education and training within current global capitalism, suggesting that while on one hand, education and training are implicated in the social production of labor-power and in social inequalities and divisions, but on the other can become critical forces for change.

The book advances in four stages through twelve chapters. The four stages are:

- Introduction, including three chapters: Preface, Introduction and Prelude;

- Postmodern Excess, which focuses on the general critique of postmodernism and specific criticisms of postmodernism in educational theory;
- Human Resistance Against Postmodernism, which is focused on the general critique of postmodernism and specific criticisms of postmodernism in educational theory; and
- Pedagogy, Reprise and Conclusions, examines education as a form of human resistance to capital and social inequalities and divisions. This stage brings the key arguments of the book together and says farewell to postmodernism in conclusion.

The preface explains the book as an updated version, with additional chapters, of an earlier 1999 collaboration, *Postmodernism in Educational Theory: Education and Politics of Human Resistance* (London: Tufnell Press). The authors say that they were moved to write the updated book because of the many important events that have occurred since the earlier publication. These events include significant political proceedings and intellectual analysis that have taken place over the period, and the ever-increasing globalization of capital and commodification of humanity. The pace of privatization and marketization of education has quickened its opening to profit making, which the authors add has been spurred on by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle. The authors add that the new wave of anti-capitalist protests have given the Left a new heart and new confidence. Additionally, they add that the cover has been blown on the relationship between the WTO and other international organizations for education and the increasing take-over of schools, colleges, and universities by corporate capital. The authors hope to fuel debates within the educational Left internationally regarding the need for useful theoretical work for the movement. Their goal with this important book is to offer readers some propositions on this score. Their position is that:

- Marxist educational theory has a key role to play in generating ideas that challenge educational orthodoxies and ‘justifications’ for educational inequalities;
- Marxist educational theory can help us set a course for socialist transformation of education;

- Postmodernism in education cannot generate a vital politics of human resistance to neoliberal policies in education; and
- Postmodernism provides an inadequate set of theoretical resources for the libratory education that is required for the new century.²²

Accordingly, Rikowski and McLaren, in “Postmodernism in Educational Theory,” want to dismiss the illusions that some ‘Left’ postmodernisms of resistance, can hold out prospects for a fruitful consummation of Postmodernists and Marxist outlooks. No way. They also argue that education has a critical role to play in the struggle for a future, despite the claims of self-styled ‘Postmodernists of resistance’, where the domination of capital and its value-form of labor do not close off social, economic, and political options. They introduce the main arguments against the postmodernisms and relate the ideas of global capitalism as ‘humanity as capital’ in the first chapter. Further, they trace the incursion of postmodernism within educational circles in the United Kingdom, which they report has been a recent phenomenon. Following on the heels of what has been described as the ‘cultural turn’ in social theory: a focus on symbolic meaning after decades of research dominated by structural, functionalist, and empirical approaches within the human sciences.

According to the authors, postmodernist theorists point to the end of modern sovereignty and demonstrate a new capacity to think outside the framework of modern binaries and modern identities, a thought of plurality and multiplicity. Hence, it poses a particular change to those viewing education as a resource for social equality and democracy. As the authors astutely argue, postmodernism has become the orthodoxy in educational theory, particularly in feminist educational theory. It heralds the end of grand theories like Marxism and liberalism, scorning any notion of a united feminist challenge to patriarchy, of united anti-racist struggle and of united working-class movements against capitalist exploitation and oppression. For Postmodernists, the world is fragmented, history is ended, and all struggles are local and particularistic. The authors, therefore, extol the emergence of a radical alternative to capitalism, arguing for a critical re-examination of earlier movements and struggles. They conclude that postmodernism provides neither a viable educational politics, nor a foundation for effective radical educational practice. For

postmodernism, the book outlines a ‘politics of human resistance’ and offers a critical revolutionary education theory that puts the challenge to capitalism and globalization.

Glenn Rikowski presents, the second chapter, Prelude: Marxist Educational theory after postmodernism. It is a brief survey of prospects for Marxist educational theory as well a delineation of the key tasks ahead for Marxist educational theory. Rikowski argues, firstly, for the need for such theory in today’s neoliberal times, when capital runs rampant throughout the globe, and uncovers evidence for cautious optimism, charting the volume of Marxist and Left writings on education since 1994. Secondly, he critiques the important work of Elizabeth Atkinson²³ where she provides an explicit and wide-ranging critique of Marxist educational theory from within what she calls “postmodern thought.” Rikowski writes that, Atkinson asserts she is seeking to critique unwelcome trends and developments within education policy and practice as a “responsible anarchist,” yet her critique of contemporary education practice is not radical at all; rather, it is a form of repressed dissent.²⁴

Rikowski writes that Marxist educational theory’s key tasks are to indicate the significance for education for the anti-capitalist struggles of the future and for socialist revolutionary transformation.²⁵ He articulates four key theoretical tasks:

- Show the role of education and training in the generation of value via their links to labor power.
- Explore the links between social class, education, and training and value creation in contemporary capitalism.
- Examine the ways in which ‘difference’ (gender, ‘race,’ age, sexuality, etc.) is conditioned by social class and value production, with special reference to the struggle for economic and social justice.
- Indicate the significance of education, especially radical pedagogy, for breaking capital’s weakest link: its reliance on our labor power to generate the labor that creates the substance of the social universe of capital-value.

While these are urgent tasks, Rikowski notes, and that each of these have been addressed by the four authors of this book, he adds that much work is required for Marxist educational theory on all four fronts.

Postmodern Excess

In chapter three, Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur discuss the prospects for Marxist analysis in the face of ‘post-Marxism.’ They argue that Marxist analysis is required now more than ever before in the history of capitalism. According to them, the onslaught of globalism and neoliberalism call forth the need for radical critique on a scale until now unimagined.

Avoidance of Marx’s relevance in today’s situation, argue McLaren and Farahmandpur, cannot be politically or intellectually justified. They show how ‘new times’ and post-Marxist theories are inadequate to the task of grasping the depth of horror generated by capitalist globalization and neoliberalism, and are also poor foundations for effective resistance movements. McLaren and Farahmandpur also expose postmodernism and educational postmodernism as brakes on the radicalization of theory and the understanding of developments in educational and social life.²⁶ They note the ‘tragedy’ of fragmentation and they show how postmodern thought has played a part in bringing this unfortunate situation about.

On revolutionary pedagogy, Roberto Bahruth ²⁷ elsewhere clarifies McLaren’s meaning of “revolutionary.” In this sense, revolutionary does not imply the revolutionary-anarchist overthrow and killing of authority. It should not realize the metaphorical dialectic relationship between master and slave, because the slave killed the master to become the new master and subjugate new slaves. Bahruth exclaims that, “Revolutionary, therefore, needs to be understood as the recognition of the other.” Further, he adds that, “McLaren is clear about this issue when he says that the challenge is to create an egalitarian and participatory socialist movement, not just to impose another form of class rule.” (p. 49)

Michael A. Apple and Geoff Whitty, in chapter four, argue that the pendulum has swung too far away from the social and educational theories and traditions informing change in curriculum and pedagogy. The fashionable postmodernist and poststructuralist alternatives, have sometimes merely thrown up old forms of social and educational outlooks where social control becomes the dominant leitmotif. Here, Apple and Whitty advocate a shift from a postmodernist obsession with meaning in educational discourse toward a concern with *critical action*. They call for a re-

emphasis on the *political economy of education*, though not to the neglect of cultural aspects of contemporary social and educational life. The chapter also provides analyses of educational ‘reforms’ of the last ten years (mainly in a British context, but also with examples from the United States and New Zealand) and asks the question: Can these be characterized as instances of *postmodern* educational reforms? Apple and Whitty argue that analysis of changes in capitalist accumulation processes is a more useful starting point for exploring these ‘reforms.’ Although they point toward some positive effects of postmodern theory, they are critical of its excessive moments and flights of fancy.

The main objectives of chapter five, by Mike Cole and Dave Hill, are to target ‘postmodernisms of resistance.’ They contrast these false pretenders with straightforwardly reactionary forms of postmodernism. Fashionable postmodernisms of resistance seek to provide alternatives to Marxist educational perspectives. The authors provide trenchant criticisms of postmodernist thought and postmodernisms of resistance in particular, before showing how *all* forms of postmodernist discourse disempower those aiming to uncover and struggle against a range of social and educational inequalities. Cole and Hill write that, Postmodernism ... serves the interests of capital’s current hegemonic project, particularly with respect to its interrelated attempts to discredit mass ideologies, such as socialism, to disempower mass groups who are structurally oppressed, and to privilege consumption and greed over production and solidarity. (p. 92) Finally, they point toward some positive effects of postmodern theory, they are critical of its excessive moments and flights of fancy.

Human Resistance Against Postmodernism

Glenn Rikowski indicates, in chapter six, that a politics of human resistance to the rule of capital faces a particular problem: *we are capital*. Most of this chapter is taken up with demonstrating how ‘we become capital,’ and the ways that ‘human’ life are capitalized. He explicates various criticisms of the currently fashionable trans/post-human theories. Special emphasis is given to the social production of labor-power in capitalism, and to the parts that education and training play in the formation of human-capital: humanity *as* capital. According to Rikowski and McLaren in their opening chapter, Postmodernists and post/trans-human theorists—protagonists of a cyborg future—blatantly ignore or deny that our lives and ‘selves’ are, after all, very

much centered: by *capital*, as social force and social relation. Further they argue, that as capital is a social force that exists as a range of contradictory social drives and flows through capitalist social relations, and because we become capital, then *our everyday lives are lived through and express these contradictions*.²⁸ Our lives are fragmented, shattered and unbalanced—and postmodernism reflects this, though only at the level of ‘discourse’ and the ‘text’—but this strikes a chord only because the ‘human’ has historically become capital, human-capital. This, also causing havoc *externally* to individuals, capital is also the ‘horror within’ personhood; we live our lives through its forms (money, value, state, commodity and so on) and its contradictions. As Glenn Rikowski shows, the struggle against the horror within cannot be undertaken internally—through some form of Marxist psychotherapy. Rather, the need for politics aimed at the abolition of the value-form of labor—the dissolution of capital itself—and this involves our *uniting* as labor against capital. Finally, the arguments in this chapter point towards the role that critical pedagogy can play in understanding and resisting our predicament as human-capital.

Michael Neary, in chapter seven, problematizes the concept of youth and the sociology of youth and youth cultural studies. By delving deeply into Marxist theory, Neary provides an innovative critique of conventional theories of human resistance. Through focusing upon some of Marx’s basic structuring concepts—*value, labor, labor-time* and so on—Neary expresses how capital is an impersonal form of social domination created by labor itself, and takes the form of abstract labor. In this analysis, Neary exposes some weak points within capitalist domination. He then proceeds to explore these vulnerabilities through an historical account of the “production of a specific form of human sociability: youth, through a particular form of regulation: training.” Neary does this by examining the United Kingdom’s Employment and Training Act 1948, showing how the resultant training ‘culture’ *was set against human resistance* (to capital’s domination). Neary’s exploration of the Act, in relation to the post-war and contemporary youth condition, shows how we can theorize resistance beyond orthodox accounts of working-class struggle and perceive that human resistance to capital “cannot be contained.”

In chapter eight, Dave Hill, Mike Sanders and Ted Hankin provide compelling arguments for a “return to class analysis” as the basis for a rejuvenated educational

theory and politics. These authors show how we still live in a class-divided society and unearth some key facts regarding social class differences. They go on to show the deleterious effects of postmodernist discourse on contemporary educational debate and politics. The main part of the chapter is taken up with working through problems and issues in class analysis, before showing the relevance of social class to a range of contemporary policy developments. They end with an argument for reinvigorating the secondary curriculum through a pedagogy, which enlightens young people about the (capitalist) nature of the society in which they live and that provides resources for critical analyses of contemporary society.

Jenny Bourne offers critiques of postmodernist and post structuralist positions on 'race,' in chapter nine. She shows how these perspectives have re-radicalized the study and politics of 'race,' while simultaneously undermining social class analysis. Bourne provides a compelling account of the rise of postmodernist theory from its beginnings in 'cultural studies' to its eventual flowering in the hokum of 'new times' and theories of identity 'politics.' In the United Kingdom in particular, she argues that human capital theory (largely implicitly, but increasingly explicitly) is at the foundation of education and training policy development. Reform mania has resulted, powered by a generalized drive to raise the quality of human capital (labor-power) throughout British capital. This is the case with respect to current U.S. school reform efforts. The domestic dialogue in the United States on privatizing public education furnishes much of the ideological cushioning behind privatization movements that have been used to implement a broader imperial structure of financial, economic, and political reform through the privatization of state functions on the third world.²⁹ The special emphasis on labor-power quality results from the (erroneous) perception by governments that they can control this commodity. She then shows how we can reclaim radical 'race' perspectives, pinpointing criticism within culturalism and positions that make positive claims for a 'politics of identity/difference,' and showing how 'Left' Postmodernists have betrayed the oppressed.

Bourne concludes with a critique of the work of Phil Cohen on youth and education. This critique illuminates the poverty of postmodern perspectives. Postmodernism, argues Bourne,³⁰ is useless as a basis for understanding and resisting racism. Postmodernist 'politics,' such as it is, largely rests upon the concepts of identity and

difference. Jenny Bourne shows that the “politics of identity and difference [are] being clearly used to justify the break with class politics.” The problem with basing ‘Left’ politics on notions of identity and difference is that these concepts, when driven through the mill of postmodernism, become an *anti-politics*, a kind of “game of despair.” This is because, in pointing toward the fragmentation of ‘selves’ and a corresponding lack of a *core* to personhood, to the hybridity of ‘identities’ (we are legion), and the infinite play of ‘difference’ based on social context, perspective, infinite interpretation and variegated relations to the Other—we are left with *little or nothing in common* upon which to build a politics of resistance to capital.³¹ This applies to a prospective politics of gender, ‘race,’ disability and sexuality as much as it does for a politics based upon upper class struggle. She adds that Postmodernists reflect what Peter Sloterdijk calls “cynical reason,” which is an “enlightened false consciousness” or a “hard-boiled, shadowy cleverness that has split courage off from itself, holds anything positive to be a fraud, and is intent only on somehow getting through life.”³²

In chapter ten, Jane Kelly critically analyzes postmodernist and poststructuralist feminisms theories. She charts the development of these theories within feminism and then exposes their incoherence. For Kelly, “postmodernized feminism” is on a road to nowhere: bereft of political direction, imbued with theoretical drift.³³ Through an historical and empirical analysis of the position of women in Britain, Kelly finds that there is still much about which to be angry. The position of women on a range of issues—from pay, to working conditions and beyond—requires clear theoretical analysis that can function as guide to effective political action for changing women’s lives for the better. The preoccupations of postmodernism are elsewhere. Postmodernism is not only excessive in its effects but also a form of self-indulgence, argues Kelly.

Others have written that feminist pedagogical theory offers some of the most egregious examples of the way popular understandings and metaphors of femininity and domesticity, as well as, depictions of the femininity within some versions of postmodern feminisms are currently wielded to support the expansion of globalization, corporate power and the privatization of public power.³⁴

Pedagogy, Reprise and Conclusions

Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur begin chapter eleven with a wide-ranging critique of neoliberal ideology, pinpointing some contemporary attacks on workers and oppressed groups committed in its name. While McLaren and Farahmandpur acknowledge some positive aspects of postmodern theory, they note its failure to become a force for effective opposition to neoliberal policy. In this chapter, they develop critical positions on globalization and the marketization of social life, and then go on to show postmodernism in its collusion and synergy with neoliberalism. McLaren and Farahmandpur argue that postmodern and poststructuralist readings of hegemony, simply reduces the socialist struggle to an ideological warfare between the Left and the Right.³⁵ Following a return to class analysis and an extensive review of the relevance of social class to understanding key aspects of capitalist inequalities, McLaren and Farahmandpur set about “re-enchanting the project of critical educational theory” through developing a contraband pedagogy.

Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur note in chapter eleven that the outcomes of the current crisis of capital accumulation include the redistribution of income from poor to rich; the erosion of welfare benefits; the socialization of risks to capital; the suppression of labor incomes; the re-enforcement of surplus-value extraction (longer working hours); a raft of anti-labor laws in many Western countries; increased casualization, job insecurity and flexibilization of labor (temporary contracts, part-time and low-paid McJobs in the service sector); and increasing social division within the working class, accompanied by profound weaknesses within labor movements in many countries.³⁶ Furthermore, they add that many governments have related to the crisis by looking to education and training to give businesses within their national capitals a competitive edge in the global marketplace, by reforming education and training systems.

In the final chapter, McLaren, Hill, Rikowski, and Cole focus on the notion of human resistance, and show how the various chapters in this volume inform and theorize this issue. They explore concrete ways through which we can resist the degenerative tendencies of contemporary capital, and examine where education fits into strategies for human resistance. At this juncture, the authors make a case for forms of critical

and revolutionary pedagogy, and explicate the roles they can play within anticapitalist politics of human resistance.

Conclusions

Each account cites the different ways, to postulate *Marxism Against Postmodernism in Educational Theory* as important in terms of its public and disciplinary impact. Taken together, these appraisals decisively testify to its revolutionary impact on intellectual formations, structures, and lives, in the arenas of critical pedagogy and socialist theory. Interestingly, the current antagonistic relationship between postmodernism and Marxism and the debate over the viability of macrotheory and global discourse has inadvertently had some positive outcomes. For example, in vilifying Marxism many limitations of postmodern theory, including the need for more attention to broad social movements and the tendency toward contradictory polemics, become self-evident. Supporting the authors of this book, others write that despite the best intentions the postmodernist politics of difference not only is ineffective against but also can even coincide with and support the functions and practices of imperial rule.³⁷ Here, the danger is that postmodernist theories focus their attention so resolutely on the old forms of power they are running from, with the head turned backward, that they tumble unwittingly into the welcoming arms of the new power. It is rewarding to find a book that answers many questions that I have had regarding the limitations of postmodernism.³⁸

Considering postmodernism's intellectual bullying and dogmatism aside, what are the implications for the Left? As the barriers to capitalism collapse, and what seems an irreversible globalization of economics and culture, the more human values of the Left have come to seem archaic and irrelevant.³⁹ A critique of this culture is therefore imperative. But postmodernism is not that critique because there are too many respects in which postmodernism accepts or revels in the values of the marketplace for it to serve as a critique.⁴⁰ On a deeper level, the problem is that postmodernism is a stance of pure criticism, that it avoids making any claims, asserting any values (or acknowledging its own implicit system of values, in particular its orientation toward sophistication and aesthetics). One reason that postmodernism has taken hold so widely is that it is much easier to be critical than to present a positive vision. Being on the left means having a conception of the future and confidence that there is a

connection between the present and the future, and that collective action in the present can lead to a better society.⁴¹ The call for a revolutionary political action can be guided within Marxist theory. Marxism can provide a politics of human resistance that cannot and must not shrink from the powers that be.

In the end, this book examines the competing conceptions of critical pedagogy within and outside of educational debates as they have been affected by the changes and challenges raised by postmodernism. It is an informative and enlightened treatment of socialist thought, critical pedagogy, and Marxist theory. It cogently addresses issues that I had all along, yet lacked the language to both challenge and respond. This book gives us the language to formulate those challenges and responses with clarity. Like many great books, it seemed to say what one had always wanted to say. Books⁴² should be judged in terms of their circumstantiality or their implication in the social and political imperatives of the world in which they are produced. Clearly, this book rises to this challenge.

Notes

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