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Reclaiming History: Marx, Education and Class Struggle*

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Abstract

This paper presents education in its widest revolutionary sense where its intent is rooted in the political objective of reclaiming history from capital for the purpose of human emancipation. It argues that such a revolutionary political education requires taking Marx on his own terms as a revolutionary educator and grounding the content of education for historical agency in the work of Marx. Furthermore, the paper argues that two issues of educational import flow from such a grounding. Firstly, the theoretical and methodological content of Marxian education is to draw from the 'guiding thread' of Marx's materialist view of history. Secondly, its pedagogy is to be informed by the task of producing the revolutionary subject. The two issues are shown to be intimately connected and, in their relation, express praxis. Through theoretically informed practice education is human capacity building for the active transformation of human history through class struggle whereby in the transformation of their circumstances class agents are also transformed. The paper concludes with the assertion that the implication to be drawn from these arguments is that revolutionary education can only be working class self-education and, as such, the concrete emergent expression of class struggle.

Keywords: Capital, capitalism, Marx, history, class struggle, education, revolution.

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Firstly, I must say that I am humbled by the enormous privilege it is to be standing here in front of you – in front of so many radically committed educators from across the globe - and to have the opportunity to speak of important matters – matters of historical urgency and necessity. Each of us in our own contexts and own ways know and live this urgency daily. But it is in the recognition – our common recognition - of the necessity for root and branch change to the social order of things that brings us to realise the gravity of what the Hungarian Marxian intellectual István Mészáros (2008) so aptly describes as the ‘challenge and burden of our historical time’. For history has been taken from us. It has been stolen from humanity. The prescience of Marx’s vision in the Communist Manifesto is startling. That vision saw the bourgeoisie, through pain of its own extinction, chasing itself across the globe and, in doing so, remaking the world in its own image. This is where we are: it is the time we are in. We live it but it is not *our* history.

Let me be clear, when I say that ‘this is not our history’, I have two meanings in mind: one conservative and one revolutionary. The former I have already alluded to. We are fed it daily: in the constant assertions from the servants of capital (e.g. politicians, political chatterers, media controllers) that ‘There IS No Alternative’ and in the incessant proclamations of its academic high priests (in universities, ‘independent’ think-tanks etc) that we are at the end of history and the rule of capital is all there is (e.g. Fukuyama 1992). In short, we are to believe that history, as human making, is now futile. It is senseless to struggle because there is no more active becoming: we just are. We are human capital. Humanity capitalised.

But, in the full revolutionary sense, to know that ‘this is not our history’ is to grasp that this also is not our destiny. Here sits my point about reclaiming history. It is to know the limits of, and to push beyond, capital. And today, this *should* be as clear – perhaps even clearer – than at any point in the history of capital’s rule over humanity. But as Stuart Hall has remarked of the paralysing grip that capital has over commonsense: “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism”. However, he continues: “We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world”. Now we have a radical imagining! We have a vista that turns back on the human-less future projected by capital and shows us that the “problem to be solved is that of breaking out of the windless present ... back into real historical time, and a history made by human beings” (Hall 2004: 76). Marxian educator, the late Paula Allman called such radical imagining: ‘vision’. She insisted that, in the absence of vision, radical education praxis was impossible. But, most importantly, “any vision worth striving for must be realistic rather than whimsical”. Not only was it to “be based on consideration and critiques of the past and present human condition” but also had to be “a vision ... derived from the real, the material world” (Allman 1999: 9).

I want to punctuate this presentation here with perhaps the kind of real material world examples that Allman might have had in mind. The first comes from a recent *New York Times* article (Keyi 2014):

Over the past few years, trips back to my home village, Huaihua Di, on the Lanxi River in Hunan Province, have been clouded by news of deaths – deaths of people I knew well. Some were still young, only in their 30s or 40s. When I returned to the village early last year, two people had just died, and a few other were dying. My father conducted an informal survey last year of deaths in our village, which has about 1,000 people, to learn why they died and the ages of the deceased. After visiting every household over the course of two weeks, he and two village elders came up with these numbers: Over 10 years, there were 86 cases of cancer. Of these 65 resulted in death; the rest are terminally ill. Most of their cancers are of the digestive system. In addition, there were 261 cases of snail fever, a parasitic disease, that led to two deaths. The Lanxi was dammed up years ago ... factories discharge tons of untreated industrial waste into the water every day. Animal waste from hundreds of livestock and fish farms is also discarded in the river. ... My hometown's terminal illness and death of Lanxi River have been heartbreaking for me. ... I know the illness does not just affect my village and my river. The entire country is sick, and cancer has spread to every organ of this nation. In our society, profit and G.D.P count for more than anything else. A glittering façade is the new face of China. Behind it, well-off people emigrate, people in power send their families to countries with clean water ...

The following is a suicide note of a 50-year-old Greek woman to her husband. She jumped off a high wall in Crete:

You can use the 600 Euros that you will find on me to pay our health insurance. I paid the rent yesterday. I am sorry, my daughter, I could not take more suffering just to put a warm plate on the table - a bloody plate. Make sure that our daughter goes to college and never leave her alone. She should get the house that we have in the village (Gounari 2014).

This is a human reality of the neoliberal plan of austerity for Greece: part of what Stuart Hall, Doreen Massey and Michael Rustin refer to as the “neoliberal offensive” where, if “Chile was the laboratory for the early phases [of its social experiment], Greece has become the laboratory for an even more fierce implementation” (2013: 12). Or perhaps we could consider an earlier ‘phase’ of capitalist development. Frederick Engels’ magisterial work on the *Condition of the English Working Class* provides ample empirical insight (Engels 2009 /1845). For example of the death of London woman Ann Galway in 1843 he records:

She had lived at No.5 White Lion Court, Bermondsey Street, London, with her husband and a nineteen-year-old son in a little room, in which neither had a bedstead nor any other furniture was to be seen. She lay dead beside her son on a heap of feathers which were scattered over her almost naked body, there being neither sheet nor coverlet. The feathers stuck so fast over the whole body that the physician could not examine the corpse until it was cleansed, and then found it starved and scarred from the bites of vermin. Part of the floor of the room was torn up, and the hole used by the family as a privy (Engels 2009 /1845: 73).

Or his account of two boys who were brought before a police magistrate in January 1844:

... being in a starving condition, they had stolen and immediately devoured a half-cooked calf's foot from a shop. The magistrate felt called upon to investigate the case further, and received the following details from the policeman: The mother of the two boys was the widow of an ex-soldier, afterwards policeman, and had had a very hard time since the death of her husband, to provide for her nine children. She lived at No. 2 Pool's Place Quaker Court, Spitalfields, in the utmost poverty. When the policeman came to her, he found her with six of her children literally huddled

together in a little back room, with no furniture but two old rush-bottomed chairs with the seats gone, a small table with two broken legs, a broken cup, and a small dish. On the hearth was scarcely a spark of fire, and in the corner lay as many old rags as would fill a woman's apron, which served the whole family as a bed. For bed clothing they had only their scanty day clothing. The poor woman told him that she had been forced to sell her bedstead the year before to buy food. Her bedding she had pawned with the victualler for food. In short, everything had gone for food (Engels 2009 /1845: 74).

These examples bring us to a point. Unlike what bourgeois historians might assert, these are not scattered scraps of history strewn, unrelated, across time and space. Neither are they 'externalities' of capitalism. Rather they are the outcomes of the *internal* workings of capital and the consequences of class war. As the Hegelian Marx has taught us the *content* of capital (its inner logic) is to be distinguished from, but held in relation to, the various historical and contextual *forms* it takes.

I contend that is from this position that we are to understand the reclamation of history. Furthermore, as I hope it will become clear, it will be educators that have a central role to play in its realisation: in the active de-capitalisation of history I turn to Marx, himself a revolutionary educator, to inform this radical, urgent and necessary work of history.

Marx: The Revolutionary Educator

To those who know the work of Marx it might seem strange to talk of him as an educator. He was certainly a philosopher, historian and revolutionary. But can he be described as an educator? For it is certainly the case that Marx wrote very little, directly, on education. Indeed, one has to trawl Marx's voluminous works to find what might accurately be described as the occasional exploration of general educational themes and issues¹. However, I do not see an absence of a thorough treatment of education by Marx a debilitating barrier to the development of a coherent Marxian view of education. But in what does such coherence consist? On this matter Robin Small insists, correctly in my view, that it is less important to draw on what Marx specifically said *about* education than to get to work 'putting to work' his broad theories *for* radical and transformative educational praxis. In developing this idea in his most recent work, Small describes Marx-the-revolutionary as Marx-the-educator: "He challenges us to develop our capacity to think critically about our own society and, in particular, to look beneath the surface of [things] and find out what is really happening in ... social life. (Small 2014: 2)

I believe Small's instincts here are both correct and instructive here. It is Karl Marx as the revolutionary educator that makes it possible to conceive of Marx, education and class struggle. It is an invitation to engage in a process – an

¹These include the free and universal education for children, the unification of education and material production, as well as education as revolutionary praxis. See for example Chapter 15 of Capital Volume 1 where Marx specifically discusses the impact of the Factory Acts on working-class children (Marx 1976 / 1867: 610 - 635); Section IV of his Critique of the Gotha Programme (Marx 1971 / 1875: 27 - 29); The Communist Manifesto (Marx and Engels 1966 / 1848); and The Civil War in France (Marx 1978 / 1871).

unfinished project – that takes education as a necessary (but not sufficient) ingredient of revolutionary socialist strategy. Education, in the full sense of the word, is a liberating force that, in its unfinished nature, is an open process of self-reflexive engagement. In this way, we can say that the substance of Marxian education will not be located in the words of educational scriptures or the logic of elegant curriculum plans laid out over 150 years ago - such a *formal* approach to understanding Marx and education is both limited and limiting. Rather, my point is that Marxian education is to be built from an engagement with the *content* of Marx's work i.e. from the theoretical resources he provides to develop human and humanizing capacities to envision and actualize alternative post-capitalist futures. In other words, as long as humanity is ruled by the logic Capital² then education can be nothing but, as Peter Hudis has succinctly put it, “the labour of thinking out *and working out* in everyday life an alternative to capitalism” (2013: 215).

To be clear, I position education as productive work i.e. radical labour. Education is a deliberate and conscious process directed to the building of human capacities to labour for socialist transformation. In drawing upon on the intellectual resources left by Marx the objective of education is the production of the ‘revolutionary subject’. Such radical labouring does not frame ‘production’ from the perspective of Capital but from that of Labour. It does not take ‘production’ its narrow bourgeois *economic* sense. Rather, it is cast in a broader *historico-political* frame that fully appreciates the radical potential of Labour and the power of labour. What I advance is a form of socialist humanism that expresses the class agency of the proletariat (see Lebowitz 2006). John Freeman-Moir captures this well in what he describes as a ‘Marxian sense of education’ i.e. a “political education [that] can be understood as the process of consciously turning towards history in the course of participating in history” (2004: 555).

In this positioning Marxian education as revolutionary capacity-building work, I stress two related issues fundamental to Marxian praxis and its educational content. The first attends to a consideration of the materialist view of history as the core of Marx's work. I will stress that historical materialism represents the very sinew of the Marx and education relation. Particular attention will be given to Marx's economic works and the centrality of the labour theory of value in explicating the content of Marxian education. The second turns attention to the nature of the revolutionary subject. Here, the idea of human agency is brought to the fore in order to emphasise Marx's idea of labour power as a human capacity. My point will be, following Marx, that labour power is a commodity of a special kind. Given its potential for consciousness and self-reflexive creativity it has the power, unlike other commodities, not only to fuel the furnaces of capitalism but

² It is to be noted that I will use the term ‘Capital’ or ‘capital’ will be used in four different throughout this presentation. Firstly, as ‘Capital’ (i.e. with an upper-case ‘C’), it represents a political category expressing Capital as a class vis-à-vis Labour. Secondly, as ‘capital’ (i.e. with a lower-case ‘c’), it indicates an economic category i.e. a flow of value that can take various economic forms such as money, commodities, labour power and other means of production. Similarly, ‘labour’ refers to productive work (e.g. concrete labour) or the potential to work (i.e. labour power). Thirdly, when contained in the noun ‘capitalism’ it is taken to mean a historically specific social formation organised around the rule of Capital and the dominance of capital relations. Finally, when italicised as ‘*Capital*’ it refers to one or all of Marx's volumes of *Das Kapital*.

also to burn them down. But the latter possibility can only be fully grasped from the vantage point of Labour i.e. from a perspective beyond Capital (Lebowitz 1992) that also, importantly, includes Marx's internal critique of political economy in *Capital*.

To conclude I will bring these two central issues together by emphasising that education, by necessity and definition, is class struggle. For Capital, 'education' is about limiting horizons of possibility within its own vista and bringing closure to history. It expresses what could be called a pedagogy of hopelessness. For Labour – and humanity – education is about envisioning alternative possibilities and participating in the radical openness of history. It is expressed in a pedagogy of hope founded in the development of class-consciousness. From the perspective of Labour, education is political education where its *raison d'être* resides in bringing people to explore the nature and extent of their powers and, in this active doing, enabling them to not only discover but also pursue their class interests. To grasp the radical relation between Marx and education is to understand the revolutionary potential of doing history work i.e. of placing history in human hands.

Guiding Thread: Materialist View of History

As Marx famously put it in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the materialist view of history is the 'guiding thread' to all his work on political economy (Marx 1966 / 1859: 503). Its theoretical centrality to Marxism was amplified by Engels who proclaimed that, along with the theory of surplus value, 'historical materialism' represented Marx's greatest scientific discovery (Engels 1970 / 1883).

If the scientific core of Marxist theory is the materialist view of history, then its prime concept is 'mode of production'. In providing an explanatory basis for fundamental societal change, mode of production is understood to consist in a combination of what Marx refers to as the forces of production and the relations of production. The famous passage from the *Preface* presents this with clarity:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, their real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production. [...] From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution (Marx 1970 / 1859: 20 - 21).

A striking feature of the *Preface* passage is the apparent absence of active human engagement in, and with, such change. For example, Marx refers to consciousness as nothing but a 'determined' product of 'social existence'. Do we see here a jettisoning of philosophy and, in its place, the insertion of a determinist science?

But care needs to be taken with Marx's concepts – particularly, as in this instance, that of 'determination'. It should be noted that, as Marx makes explicit in *The German Ideology*, the 'real process of production' does not simply refer to material (or 'economic') production:

This conception of history thus relies on expounding the real process of production - starting from the material production of life itself - and comprehending the form of intercourse connected with and created by this mode of production, i.e., civil society in its various stages, as the basis of all history; describing it in its action as the state, and also explaining how all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, morality, etc., etc., arise from it, and tracing the process of their formation from that basis; thus the whole thing can, of course, be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various aspects on one another) (Marx and Engels 1976 / 1845 - 6: 61).

Here Marx makes clear that production consists in a totality determining *and* co-determining relations. We can take from this that Marx's idea of determination does not refer simply to all-powerful uni-linear forces but includes historically contingent and contextually emergent forces in the 'real process of production' (Banfield 2010). Furthermore, it is clear that humans produce not just material things but 'theoretical products' as well. This is a crucial point for theorising education. As the following section will develop further, if human agents were erased from history, then a Marxian conception of education, or any conception of education, would be impossible. In anticipation of that argument to come, it can be noted that writing humans out of history was neither Marx's intent nor is it a feature of his materialist view of history. But the fundamental point remains that in order for people to 'make history' they first must be able to live:

...life involves before everything else eating and drinking, housing, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life (Marx and Engels 1976 / 1845 - 6: 47).

The 'fundamental condition of all history' is production for human need. Whether the mode of production is capitalist, slave, feudal or other, this "*earthly* basis" (Marx and Engels 1976 / 1845 - 6: 48) is the first act of history. For Marx, the development of productive forces (which requires knowledge of both nature and how to change nature) necessarily occurs in particular relations of production (or forms of social cooperation). It is in the labour process that these forces and forms of social relations are brought together for the purpose of the production of use-values: "It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man³. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence" (Marx 1976 / 1867: 290).

To be clear, by referring to the 'requirements of man', Marx is operating at a high level of abstraction. In adopting a vantage point of the labour process in general, the panorama of all possible modes of production is brought into view. But Marx is aware that, in doing this, more concrete production relations are occluded. "The

³ 'Man' refers to 'human being'.

taste of porridge”, as Marx put it, “does not tell us who grew the oats, and ... does not reveal the conditions under which it takes place, whether it is happening under the slave owner’s brutal lash or the anxious eye of the capitalist” (Marx 1976 / 1867: 290 - 291). The way in which the means of production and labour power are brought together differentiates one mode of production from another. In class societies, direct producers are forced to labour for a non-producing minority where the former work to produce surplus value for the latter. As such, the basis of class societies is exploitation. How the extraction of a surplus from one class by another is achieved “distinguishes the various economic epochs of the social structure” (Marx 1978 / 1884: 120).

Exploitation is obvious in slave and feudal societies. The threat of physical violence is always as a possibility and is ever-present. However, things are – or, rather, *appear*- different in the day-to-day life under the capitalist mode of production. It seems that labour and capital come together in the market place as equals seeking to negotiate a ‘fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay’. This is not the case for the slave or the serf. The market is both a level playing field and an effective leveller where worker is ‘free’ to sell or withhold their power to labour power according to their wishes. Without any apparent physical threat or domination, no obvious force is involved compelling the worker to exchange their labour for a wage. But Marx makes it clear that this freedom carries a ‘double sense’. The wage labourer is “free from the old relations of clientship, bondage and servitude, and secondly free of all belongings and possession, and of every objective, material form of being, *free of all property*; dependent on the sale of [their] labour capacity or on begging, vagabondage and robbery as its only source of income” (1973 / 1857 - 8: 507).

Marx’s point here is that, within the capitalist mode of production, exploitation is concealed and freedom comes to be expressed as a-historical atomised individualism. But this egoistic sense of freedom occludes the reality of the social nature of production upon which the possibility of capitalist accumulation rests. Here we have what Harvey (2014) describes as one of the ‘fundamental contradictions’ of capitalism: the tension of private appropriation and common wealth. To grasp this contradiction at its root it is useful to compare capitalist relations of production to those of feudal societies (see Engels 1947/1878). Under feudalism, the processes of production and appropriation were essentially governed by individualistic peasant-lord relations. They took place on communal land that peasants not only worked for their own survival but also required for their resistance to lordly power. However, with the emergence of capitalism, production is socialised (e.g. bringing worker under one factory roof in the case of industrial capitalism) while accumulation remains individualised (Wood 2002). Whereas the former reveals the necessity of cooperative interdependency, the gravity of the latter sinks sociability and demands that people confront each other as self-interested competitors.

As such, the ‘freedom’ - and the equally problematic appropriation of ‘democracy’ (Wood 1995) - so enthusiastically trumpeted by the defenders of capitalism is, pure and simply, ideology: a superficial (but never-the-less real) expression of deeper underlying contradictory social relations of production (see Larrain 1979). In *Capital*, Marx provides many concrete examples of the

contradictory nature of capitalism. For example, in Part 8 of Volume I where he explicates his theory of primitive accumulation, Marx describes the ‘clearings’ made by the Duchess of Sutherland in the early 1800s for sheep pastures. It is instructive to quote at length:

This person, who had been well instructed in economics, resolved, when she succeeded to the headship of the clan, to undertake a radical economic cure, and to turn the whole country of Sutherland, the population of which had already been reduced to 15,000 by similar processes, into a sheep-walk. Between 1814 and 1820 these 15,000 inhabitants, about 3,000 families, were systematically hunted and rooted out. All their villages were destroyed and burnt, all their fields turned into pasturage. British soldiers enforced this mass of evictions, and came to blows with the inhabitants. One old woman was burnt to death in the flames of the hut she refused to leave. It was in this manner that this fine lady appropriated 794,000 acres of land which had belonged to the clan from time immemorial. She assigned to the expelled inhabitants some 6,000 acres on the sea-shore – 2 acres per family. The 6,000 acres had lain until this time waste, and brought in no income to their owners, The Duchess, in the nobility of her heart actually went so far as to let these waste lands at an average rent of 2s. 6d. per acre to the clansmen, who for centuries had shed their blood for her family (1976 / 1867: 891-2).

Such forms of dispossession have been central features of the generation of capital and vital to the history of capitalism (Wood 2002). We witness this in the violent global expansionism of colonial capitalism where “all nations, on pain of extinction, [are compelled] to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; ... to become bourgeois themselves” (Marx and Engels 1966 / 1848: 112). But, importantly, this continues to this day. Harvey, for example, theorises a ‘new imperialism’ characterised by ‘accumulation by dispossession’. This is what we know of today as neoliberalism where mechanisms of privatisation, financialisation, state redistribution policies along with the creation and manipulation of crises augment the appropriation of land and the enclosure of public commons (Harvey 2003).

Noting the historical continuance of capitalism must alert us not to the coincidence of historical events or to the work of great individuals (as per the stories bourgeois history tell). Rather, it should draw attention to historical patterning and the necessity of identifying the enduring social mechanisms that have operated, for example, from times of nineteenth century land enclosures to the new methods of capital accumulation employed in neoliberal times. Marx provides the critical resources – or, more precisely, the resources for critique – to do this work. *Capital* is one such source. In this work he takes us to the very heart of Capital and its economic cell-form: the commodity.

Marx opens *Capital* Volume I with the sentence: “The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an immense collection of commodities” (1976 / 1867: 125). This is seductively straightforward – and so vividly obvious that we can imagine Marx was talking about the supermarket shelves or the shopping malls we know today. However, reading further through the early chapters of *Capital* we learn that there is much more to this opening line than first meets the eye. Firstly, the careful eye will note that Marx regularly uses the word ‘appear’ or phrases like ‘the appearance of things’. On these occasions he is drawing attention to the existence of what British critical realist Roy Bhaskar (1986, 1997, 1998) would refer to as deeper ontological strata existing below and

occluded by the mere appearance of things (see Banfield 2003, 2010, 2013). It is in this way that we can grasp Marx's description of capitalism as a generalised system of commodity production where the products of labour typically take the appearance of commodities to be bought and sold on the market. From the vantage point of Capital, the potential of workers to labour is also a commodity to be exploited. To return to the motif of freedom so cherished by capitalists, this means that a worker is "free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization [*Verwirklichung*] of his labour-power" (Marx 1976 / 1867: 272 - 273). In other words, capitalist relations of production presuppose the separation of direct producers from ownership of the means of production.

As a commodity, labour power has *exchange* value like any other commodity. Its *use* value "consists in the subsequent exercise of that power ... its real manifestation" (Marx 1976 / 1867: 277). According to the labour theory of value, not only is labour a source of the value of commodities but also the worker creates more value than the value of their labour power. The surplus value is profit for the capitalist. While, from the perspective of Capital, the reality appears as a 'fair day's work for a fair day's pay', from the vantage point of Labour surplus value is nothing but unpaid surplus labour. Superficially, "the sphere of circulation or commodity exchange", consisting in interactions between apparently free and equal commodity-owners posits "a very Eden of the innate rights of man ... the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham" (Marx 1976 / 1867: 280). However, beyond "this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone ... [rests] the hidden mode of production" (Marx 1976 / 1867: 279). It is here, in the deep structures of capitalist society, that exploitation is revealed:

When we leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities, which provides the 'free-trader vulgaris' with his views, his concepts and the standard by which he judges the society of capital and wage-labour, a certain change takes place ... He who was previously the money owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning (Marx 1976 / 1867: 280).

This reveals to us, in all the power of Marx's biting imagery, Labour from the view of Capital. These are the last words Marx offers before he takes the reader beyond Part 2 of *Capital* Volume I. From the 'noisy sphere of the market' to the 'hidden mode of production' the reader learns of the deep occluded realities generating the extraction of surplus value, the exploitation of labour and the drive for the incessant pursuit of capital accumulation. Throughout, the power of capital weighs down – almost deterministically - on labour. But it is to be recalled that *Capital* is one-sided. As Ernst Mandel notes in his introduction to the text, "Marx's fundamental aim was to lay bare the laws of motion which govern the origins, the rise, the development, the decline and the disappearance of a given form of economic organisation: the capitalist mode of production". Importantly, the purpose of *Capital* was not to discover universal economic 'laws' to serve the ends of prediction. *Capital* is "not 'pure' economic theory at all. For Marx, 'pure' economic theory, that is economic theory which abstracts from a specific social

structure, is impossible” (Mandel 1976: 12). Rather, *Capital* offers an internal critique of capital that, in exposing the logic of bourgeois economics from within, can be used to overthrow bourgeois relations. This points to a move beyond both *Capital* and capital - and a turn to the power of labour (and, of course, Labour). In doing so, it exposes the tension between the human as commodity and the human as radical power. It also raises the fundamental ontological question of the nature of being human and the possibility of the revolutionary subject.

Education Work: Producing the Revolutionary Subject

I have already emphasised that education – in its full emancipatory sense – is revolutionary work. It is capacity building that both requires and produces human agents. As such, the ontological content of revolutionary education must be underpinned by a view of human nature. For Marxian education this must be a historically materialist one. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx famously announced that it is human beings that “make their own history, but ... not ... as they please” (Marx 1966 / 1852: 398). Interestingly, we find in *Capital* – the pinnacle of Marx’s ‘mature’ scientific work – the view of humans as active and historically situated agents being contrasted with, what Marx calls, the ‘Robinsonades’ of bourgeois thought. Marx reveals that in constructing their theories of society, bourgeois theoreticians like Adam Smith and David Ricardo were “fond of Robinson Crusoe stories” (1976 / 1867: 169) because they portrayed a view of ‘Man as the Natural Individual’: “not arising historically, but posited by nature” (Marx 1973 / 1857 - 8: 83). If Robinson Crusoe was Daniel Defoe’s character hero, then the imaginary idol of political economists was and remains the ‘Natural Individual’. Thrown into competitive isolation with nature’s vicissitudes, Bourgeois Man was constructed as the ideal: the image of ‘Natural Man’ finally released from the bonds of all previous social relations. In the preparatory notes he made for *Capital*, Marx put it this way:

In this society of free competition, the individual appears detached from the natural bonds etc. which in earlier historical periods make him the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate. Smith and Ricardo still stand with both feet on the shoulders of the eighteenth century prophets, in whose imaginations this eighteenth century individual ... appears as an ideal, whose existence they project into the past (Marx 1973 / 1857 - 8: 83).

In contrast to Smith, Ricardo and their ‘eighteenth century prophets’, Marx’s view of human beings is, in a vital sense, thoroughly social. For example, in his Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, Marx described the “human essence [as] no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations” (1966 / 1845: 14) that, Marx stresses, “conditions ... general social, political and intellectual life” (1966 / 1859: 20 - 21). We can take from this that ‘social being’ represents the historical dimension of Marx’s theory of human nature. It is constituted by those observable features of human action and historical events that, as Mihailo Marović notes, provide “the empirical scientific ground for any sound theory of human nature” (1991: 243).

However, Marx recognised that taking exclusively historico-empirical route to social being risks arrival at historicist destinations that ultimately dispense with any meaningful conception of what it is to be human. He saw historicism tending

to reductionism (e.g. biological, sociological or psychological), empiricism (where human nature is simply what is observed) and scientism (human beings consist in patterns of a-historical characteristics). Indeed, historicism for Marx risked the obliteration of *social* being.

In opposition to historicism, Marx took an Aristotelian route where human nature is seen as consisting in essential powers. But his path was also a realist one where powers are grasped in both their actuality and their potentiality (see Isaac 1988). Understood as capacities, powers exist even if they are empirically absent. A power may not be observed or experienced but this does not deny its existence. Below the surface of actual appearance, it remains a force in its potentiality even when frustrated or dampened by co-determining and countervailing powers. Thus, from a realist view of power, human nature has metaphysical as well as historically specific dimensions. To Marx, human nature was simultaneously historical and trans-historical such that those "that would judge all human acts, movements, relations etc. ... would first have to deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch" (Marx 1976 / 1867: 759).

In dealing with 'human nature in general', Marx distinguished between 'natural being' and 'species being'. As natural beings, humans consist in natural world powers that they not only share with nature but also depend upon for their existence. Marx called this 'man's inorganic body':

... that is to say nature in so far as it is not the human body. Man lives from nature, i.e. nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man's physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself for man is part of nature (Marx 1975 / 1844: 328).

The concept of 'inorganic body' brings humans and nature into an internal relation. This is the basis of Marx's materialist commitment to naturalism (Banfield 2013). But Marx's philosophy of internal relations does not commit his naturalism to a search for first, or final, causes. For Marx, as Ollman argues, "it is the relations in which the so called first causes stand that ... require explanation" (1976: 28). As a realist about powers, Marx's explanations are ontologically deep, entailing a human-nature continuity. In providing an example of natural continuity, Marx refers to hunger, taking it as a real expression of an objective unsatisfied need:

Hunger is a natural need; it therefore requires a nature and an object outside itself in order to satisfy and still itself. Hunger is the acknowledged need of my body for an object which exists outside itself and which is indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential nature (Marx 1975 / 1844: 390).

Importantly, human nature is not exhausted in 'natural needs' and 'inorganic nature'. It also consists in the powers, capacities and needs that all humans share i.e. species being powers that are qualitatively different from that of other creatures:

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect

builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour-process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes [verwirklicht] his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. This subordination is no mere momentary act. Apart from the exertion of the working organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work (Marx 1976 / 1867: 284).

According to Marx, human species powers rests in conscious, self-reflexive, and transformative practice where “Productive life is species life” such that, in the “practical creation of an *objective world*, the fashioning of *inorganic nature*, is proof that man is a conscious species-being” (1975 / 1844: 328; 328 - 329). In productive life, human beings not only transform their inorganic body but themselves: they “practically and theoretically” (Marx 1975 / 1844: 327) make their species. It is the coming together of practice and theory that Marx calls ‘praxis’. Human self-creation in history is praxis such that “all history is nothing but a continual transformation of human nature” (Marx 1995 / 1847: 160). It is in this sense that Marx is able to refer to human beings as both ‘universal’ and ‘free’ (see Marx 1975 / 1844: 327). Not only do humans embody universal capacities to (re)make their own species but they can also make their species the object of thought and action. According to Marx, “man reproduces himself not only intellectually, in his consciousness, but actively and actually, and he can therefore contemplate himself in a world he himself has created” (1975 / 1844: 329). In this way, Marx’s humanism is rooted in a tripartite of being: natural, species and social. Collier (1999) refers to this as an ontological ‘chain of being’ that stretches from non-human nature through to human socio-cultural realities. It expresses an inter-dependence of power relations where natural ‘laws’ (or, rather, ‘tendencies’) of being are basic in underpinning species-being on which social being in turn rests:

The species-being of individuals is ... always and everywhere an antecedent condition of their socio-cultural interaction and learning, of any particular social structure into which they are born, and therefore of the reproduction or elaboration of all historical socio-cultural systems (Creaven 2000: 45).

The ‘chain of being’ emphasises natural necessity but avoids reductionist humanism. It sees human nature resting in a realist ontology of natural necessity, an epistemology of stratified explanation, and an axiology of ethical naturalism (Bhaskar 1986). As Collier puts it, the power of human species being is that “ability to know and value things other than ourselves” (1999: 90). Or, in relation to praxis, it points to capacities not just to know one’s real needs and interests but the ability to judge, value and act upon them. Here, we are able to grasp Marx’s understanding of human beings as self-reflexive producers of nature and “the manifestation of a force of nature” (Marx 1971 / 1875: 11). This is the ‘sensuous activity of labour’ through which

... the creative human transformation of nature occurs. We mean by labour-power, or labour-capacity, the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind (Marx 1976 / 1867: 270).

In this view of labour power beyond Capital, the sensuous activity of labour becomes a trans-historical category: a 'nature in general' capacity set in motion to produce use-value unconstrained by the compulsion to produce exchange-value. From this vantage point we can begin to conceive of the production of educational use-value. But care needs to be taken in doing so. At times Marx distinguishes between labour and praxis. Where the latter refers to conscious action, the former is sometimes used by Marx to describe "those first instinctive forms ... which remain on the animal level" (Marx 1976 / 1867: 283). The significance of this distinction becomes apparent when Marx talks of 'alienation' and 'alienated labour' where labour power takes the form of a commodity within capitalist relations of production. Capital, for Marx is "accumulated labour" (Marx 1975 / 1844: 287), or "dead labour, that, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (1976 / 1867: 342). Entombed in commodities, capital is used to purchase living labour in order to accumulate greater amounts of dead labour. In the process of capital accumulation, the living labourer "must sell himself and his humanity" such that his "own labour increasingly confronts him as alien property" (Marx 1975 / 1844: 287; 285).

The externalization [Entäußerung] of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien (Marx 1975 / 1844: 324).

Here the 'young' Marx refers to alienation as expressing a double designation. It evokes an imagery of the subservience of labour that would not be out of place in the pages of *Capital*. On one side of the designation, the reader is presented with the objectification of labour. Alienation occurs because the worker's own universal nature – her power to labour – is appropriated by an external force. Her own nature becomes an alien thing. It

... appears apparent not only in the fact that the means of my life belong to another and that my desire is the inaccessible possession of another, but also in the fact that all things are other than themselves, that my activity is other than itself, and that finally - and this goes for the capitalist as well - an inhuman power rules over everything (Marx 1975 / 1844: 366).

On the other side, the objectification of the products of labour is revealed. Direct producers are alienated from the products of their labour. No longer seeing themselves in their work they are denied their species life:

In tearing away the object of his production from man, estranged labor therefore tears away from him his species-life, his true species-objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him (Marx 1975 / 1844: 329).

The struggle against alienation is a struggle for species life and the reclamation of human history for human ends. It is labour power activated as a species being capacity that makes such struggles both possible and necessary. Labour power is universal and always already possesses the potential for conscious, revolutionary action. It has, in other words, the capacity to turn its 'living fire' on the furnaces

of capitalism. Understanding education as the production of revolutionary labour power is the fundamental message from Marx the educator. However, if education is revolutionary praxis, philosophy is not – and cannot be – the lordly legislator of that praxis. It is to be recalled that Marx placed great emphasis on practice. After all, it is what the ‘young’ Marx saw as distinguishing his materialism from that of Feuerbach:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively (1966 / 1845: 13).

Philosophy can only be the conceptual underlabourer of revolution. In the end, “philosophers have only *interpreted* the world ... the point, however, is to change it” (Marx 1966 / 1845: 15). Consequently, the educator’s praxis, like that of the philosopher, is to

... confront the world not as doctrinaires with a new principle: “Here is the truth, kneel down before it!” We develop new principles to the world out of its own principles. We do not say to the world: “Stop fighting; your struggle is of no account. We want to shout the true slogans of the struggle at you.” We only show the world what it is fighting for, and consciousness is something that the world must acquire, like it or not (Marx 1978 / 1843: 14 - 15).

Conclusion: Education as Class Struggle

I have presented education in its widest revolutionary sense. That is, its use value is found in the objective of human emancipation. The argument has been that in order to grasp the ‘Marx and education’ relation it is necessary to take Marx on his own terms as a revolutionary educator. Logically, this means that the content of Marxian education is to be grounded in the work of Marx. Furthermore, I suggested that two issues of educational import flow from such a grounding. Firstly, the theoretical and methodological content of Marxian education is to draw from the ‘guiding thread’ of Marx’s materialist view of history. Secondly, its pedagogy is to be informed by the task of producing the revolutionary subject. The two issues are intimately connected and, in their relation, express praxis.

In giving emphasis to what counts as the content of Marxian education brings attention to the pedagogical possibilities lying in Marx’s work. This may mean, for example, using the rich historical data gathered by both Marx and Engels as a pedagogical resource (see, for example: Engels 2009 / 1845; Marx 1966 / 1852, 1976 / 1867). Some of these possibilities have been raised already and, in bringing Marx to work for Marxian, recognises Marx as a social historian (Small 2005: 43 - 46). However, in emphasising content, concerns about specific educational forms are sidelined. My intent has been not to underplay the importance of attending to educational forms but rather to open a critical vista to the contemporary practical relevance of the ‘Marx and education’ relation. Such a vista shows education to inhabit spaces other than formal institutions like schools and universities. These include: workplaces, community settings, pubs, parks, the streets and social media. In these contemporary times where schooling and higher education systems are increasing capitalised (and neoliberalised) such spaces are to be reclaimed as spaces of radical hope. To be clear, by evoking the idea of

radical hope I am not conjuring some far-flung idealist utopia. This is real hope formed from the knowledge of the material reality of labour power as a 'special commodity' with the capacity to think and do otherwise. But, like any capacity, it has to be developed and nurtured. This is the job of radical educators. However, as a capacity, labour power is only potential. Given counteracting forces and hostile contexts, the power to think and do otherwise can remain unactualised.

Just as history gives no guarantees, the rise of Labour's class agency is not determined. But the point about labour power is that it is always there. It is the possibility of the emergence of a radical labour power that haunts Capital. The poor capitalists! Not only must they constantly fight keep ahead of their competitors in the endless race to accumulate but they must also work to contain the power of Labour. Who is to liberate the capitalist from their anxious existence? As a class they cannot do it themselves. They cannot conceive of a world outside the orbit of capital. It is not in their class interest to do so. This is why they have to believe in TINA and why they would have us all speak their mantra.

It was Gramsci who famously said that we all possess the capacity to be intellectuals (1971: 9). But there are no guarantees here. There is a difference between an intellectuals and academics, just as there is a world of difference between an educator and a teacher. Educators must be intellectuals. On this point Terry Eagleton (2004) puts it nicely in his description of post-colonial scholar Edward Said as the 'last Jewish intellectual'. He could have been speaking of Marx. It is worth considering at length:

Intellectuals are not only different from academics, but almost the opposite of them. Academics usually plough a narrow disciplinary patch, whereas intellectuals [...] roam ambitiously from one discipline to another. Academics are interested in ideas, whereas intellectuals seek to bring ideas to an entire culture. The word "intellectual" is not a euphemism for "frightfully clever", but a kind of job description, like "waiter" or "chartered accountant". Anger and academia do not usually go together, except perhaps when it comes to low pay, whereas anger and intellectuals do. ...Intellectuals are not only different from academics, but almost the opposite of them. Academics usually plough a narrow disciplinary patch, whereas intellectuals ... roam ambitiously from one discipline to another.

It is clear: in bringing Marx and education together, education is revolutionary, human capacity building, practice. It is the active making of human history through class struggle whereby in the transformation of their circumstances class agents are also transformed. This is the insight that Marx the revolutionary educator offers us. Its impulse is to draw us to the fact that revolutionary education is, and can only be, working class self-education. Thus, the political task is "to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class" (Marx and Engels, 1966 / 1848). This will require, amongst other things, the political work of building broad based alliances amongst education workers and working class organisations. In the act of building, the materialist view of history and the revolutionary subject are to be kept squarely in sight.

Independent of class, it is possible to conceive of alternatives to capitalism. However, it is only Labour – because of its structural positioning vis-à-vis relations of production – that has the capacity to both envision and realise post-

capitalist futures. This is an issue of structure and agency: understanding capacity as mutually derived from the structural power of class location and the agential power arising from not only knowledge of those powers but also knowledge of one's class interests. In his extensive study of agency and structure in social theory, Alex Callinicos aptly describes this as class struggle: "the process through which agents discover their interests by exploring the extent of their powers" (2004: 150).

Education is class struggle.

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