

RASSEGNA DI PEDAGOGIA
PÄDAGOGISCHE UMSCHAU

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TRIMESTRALE DI CULTURA PEDAGOGICA
VIERTELJAHRSSCHRIFT FÜR KULTUR UND PÄDAGOGIK

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«Rassegna di pedagogia» is an International Peer Reviewed Journal.

The eContent is Archived with *Clockss* and *Portico*.

ANVUR: A.

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Gli articoli pubblicati sulla rivista vengono sottoposti a referaggio anonimo
in doppio cieco.

Responsabile del procedimento: Enza Colicchi.

RASSEGNA
DI PEDAGOGIA
PÄDAGOGISCHE UMSCHAU

LXXVI · 1-2
GENNAIO · GIUGNO 2018

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FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE

PISA · ROMA

REDAZIONE

Invio di manoscritti, libri per recensioni, riviste in cambio
alla redazione di «Rassegna di pedagogia»
c/o Prof.ssa Enza Colicchi, Via Panoramica dello Stretto 1020, 98168 Messina
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*

Per la migliore riuscita delle pubblicazioni, si invitano gli autori
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dell'Editore Fabrizio Serra, *Regole editoriali, redazionali e tipografiche*,
ed a fornire i testi e i relativi abstracts in copia cartacea e supporto magnetico.

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Ogni comunicazione o richiesta relativa agli abbonamenti dovrà essere inviata a:

FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE®

Casella postale n. 1, succursale n. 8, I 56123 Pisa,
tel. +39 050 542332, fax +39 050 574888, fse@libraweb.net

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I prezzi ufficiali di abbonamento cartaceo e/o Online sono consultabili
presso il sito Internet della casa editrice www.libraweb.net

*Print and/or Online official subscription rates are available
at Publisher's web-site www.libraweb.net*

I pagamenti possono essere effettuati tramite versamento su c.c.p. n. 17154550
o tramite carta di credito (*American Express, Visa, Eurocard, Mastercard*).

Uffici di Pisa: Via Santa Bibbiana 28, I 56127 Pisa.

Uffici di Roma: Via Carlo Emanuele I 48, I 00185 Roma.

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Autorizzazione n. 335 del 28/11/1968 del Tribunale di Padova.

Direttore responsabile: Fabrizio Serra.

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Fabrizio Serra editore incorporates the Imprints *Accademia editoriale*,
Edizioni dell'Ateneo, *Fabrizio Serra editore*, *Giardini editori e stampatori in Pisa*,
Gruppo editoriale internazionale and *Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali*.

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ISSN 0033-9571

ISSN ELETTRONICO 1724-1871

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PETER McLAREN: PORTRAIT OF A REVOLUTIONARY

PETAR JANDRIĆ

PROLOGUE

I HAVE been reading Peter McLaren since I first learned about critical pedagogy. In 2011, I finally met Peter at the 11 International Conference on Critical Education in Athens and requested an interview. Little did I know what was coming next! After a couple of years of co-writing, we ended up with so much text that it needed to be divided between two publications. Since then, Peter and I continued co-writing and meeting at least once per year. What started as a typical case of young scholar interviewing a leading figure in his field, has turned into warm friendship and collaboration which has now resulted in numerous publications covering two main themes: (digital) technology¹ and liberation theology.²

With each co-written article I learned more about Peter's work and its deep connections to his personal life. When Peter was feeling blue, I would find a poem or image in my inbox and feel its deep connections with his latest academic insights; when Peter married Angie, we engaged in deep discussions about pedagogy of love. As I dove deeper and deeper into Peter's work, I increasingly felt that it would be really important to connect it with his life. I was not ashamed to ask, and Peter never hid anything. Yet, these isolated facts were far from whole-rounded picture – a picture I desperately wanted to have yet could not find in existing sources.

As soon as people started connecting my name with Peter's, I recognized the tendency to mystify Peter and his life. Interestingly enough, such mystifications arrive more or less equally from the Left and from the Right: a unique combination of Peter's specific demeanor and his humble nature makes him a great target both for hate and worship. However, Peter is far beyond positive and negative mystifications: I've often seen him dismiss the first with a gentle push towards critique and dismiss the latter without offending the offender. However, importance of

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¹ I.e. McLAREN, JANDRIĆ 2014 and 2015.

² I.e. McLAREN, JANDRIĆ 2017 and 2018.

Peter's work has long ago superseded his personal capacity for responding to each and every interpretation of this work. With more than 50 published books, numerous articles, and tens of thousands of registered quotations, Peter has become a living legend of the contemporary critical pedagogy movement – and in the most productive years of his life!

When Winfried Böhm invited me to write this article, the need to understand Peter's work through his life and career has meticulously blended with the need to demystify Peter's persona. Based on our numerous conversations supported by his Wikipedia entry¹ I classified Peter's work in two over-reaching phases. Each phase is divided into three stages, which are framed either by significant events in Peter's life or by significant developments in his work. In this way, I arrived at a following classification:

The Reconciliatory Phase

1948-1973: Early childhood and wild years

1974-1984: From rookie teacher to acclaimed writer and perspective academic

1985-1993: From perspective academic to one of the leading architects of critical pedagogy

The Revolutionary Phase

1994-2001: From cultural studies and postmodernism to Marxist humanism

2001-2013: From Marxist humanism to revolutionary critical pedagogy

2013-: Peter McLaren's liberation theology

In the Reconciliatory Phase, Peter was mostly interested in evolutionary development or 'correcting' education. In a typical biographer's maneuver, the story begins with the stage covering Peter's school years: 1948-1973: Early childhood and wild years. The second stage, 1974-1984: From rookie teacher to acclaimed writer and perspective academic, has also imposed itself without any effort – it covers Peter's five years as high school teacher, success of his best-selling book *Cries from the corridor*,² and the period of his doctoral studies. The third stage, 1985-1993: From perspective academic to one of the leading architects of critical pedagogy, is marked by Peter's collaboration with Henry Giroux at Miami University. During the time, Peter deeply engaged in cultural studies and postmodernism, and significantly contributed to foundations of North American critical pedagogy.

In the Revolutionary Phase, Peter turned his attention from education to broader social issues and switched his evolutionary perspective into open revolutionary anti-capitalism. The fourth stage, 1994-2001:

¹ Wikipedia 2018.

² McLAREN 1980.

From cultural studies and postmodernism to Marxist humanism, starts with Peter's move to University of California, Los Angeles, and his turn from postmodernism to class struggle and Marxism. The fifth stage of Peter's work – 2001-2013: From Marxist humanism to revolutionary critical pedagogy – is not marked by a change of job or location. However, in 2001 Peter started to actively use Paula Allman's phrase revolutionary critical pedagogy¹ which denotes his shift towards social struggle at large. At the moment of writing these words, the last stage – 2013-: Peter McLaren's liberation theology – is in full swing. Those of us who regularly work with Peter, can only admire at the torrent of new ideas he produces on regular basis.

These phases and stages should be understood merely as 'necessary evils' or tools needed to make some order in Peter's complex life and work. However, borders between them cannot be cut clearly. While Peter did occasionally revoke some of his earlier works, he always placed overgrown ideas into a broader context and used them as tools for conscientization and critique. Spanning over a rich lifetime, Peter's work presents a complex curve of development. Sometimes it approximates a straight line, but sometimes it makes significant curves and diversions. For the better or for the worse, the only ideas and values Peter is truly dogmatic about are his love and care for humanity.

This article is based on numerous sources. After almost a decade of co-writing with Peter, I managed to read a significant part of his rich opus. Peter's life and work has been a subject of numerous critiques, which I explored at every opportunity. In preparation of this article, Peter kindly supplied various documents such as his latest curriculum vitae and the list of his publications. Last but not least, Peter did a lot of work on this article: approved classification of his career into phases and stages, provided useful insights and comments, and made many corrections. Most importantly, Peter's direct engagement with this article offers a wealth of information that cannot be found in any sources. Endorsed by Peter himself, this article is a scholarly biography with elements of personal autobiography – an unusual combination, which is hoped to produce a balanced, honest, warm, and personal view to Peter's life and career until present.

1948-1973: EARLY CHILDHOOD AND WILD YEARS

Peter Lawrence McLaren was born on 2 August 1948 in a conservative working-class family in Toronto. Peter was the only child. Yet, sur-

¹ ALLMAN 2001.

rounded by his many cousins, children of father's sister and mother's four sisters and two brothers, he was never lonely. Peter's mother Frances Teresa Bernadette McLaren was first a homemaker and then telephone operator. His father Lawrence Omand McLaren was a World War II veteran who climbed on a career ladder from a television salesman to general manager of Phillips Electronics for Eastern Canada. At the age of fifty, however, he became a victim of ageism. This forced him towards a series of low paid jobs which, combined with his poor health, led to his premature retirement and death. Peter's mother was Catholic, his father was brought up Presbyterian, and Peter was raised in the Anglican tradition.

As a teenager Peter was interested in literature, poetry, literary and art criticism, philosophy, and social science. In middle school Peter won a writing award for producing a science fiction story; in high school he was making 35 mm movies and wanted to become a film director. Under the influence of his high-school teacher Dennis Hutcheon, Peter became interested in theology and contemplated becoming a priest, and Harold Burke, another English teacher, motivated him towards theater. Yet, the exciting temptations of the late 1960s counterculture led him on a different path. At the age of 16 Peter became disillusioned with school, which he nevertheless attended with considerable success. Witnessing his father's unfortunate life after the layoff, he also vowed that he would never work for a large corporation.

After completing high school, Peter hitchhiked to San Francisco and Los Angeles and joined the budding countercultural scene. He participated in anti-Vietnam war protests, met with Black Panthers, Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsburg, and experimented with drugs. He stayed at flop houses with fellow hippies and nearly every night he, along with his fellow travelers were interrogated by the FBI who were seeking to arrest draft resisters. At a time, he recalls,

I spent considerable time with a variety of colorful and creative individuals whose lives bounced paradoxically between expressive rituals of emancipation and pathological rituals of self-destruction. Drugs became a part of many lives. For many, drugs seemed to serve as a symbolic medium to penetrate the contradictions between freedom and constraint in a society nourished by the myth that progress through technology is the only objective reality. Timothy Leary, the high priest of LSD, handed me a note at a concert: DIPLOMA, it read. YOU ARE NOW FREE.¹

During that period Peter started writing short stories and poetry. With some help of Allen Ginsberg, Peter began to prioritize creative poten-

¹ McLAREN 2016: 35.

tials of his work over corporal enjoyment: «While Timothy Leary and I tripped together on LSD, Allen Ginsberg told me to stop taking psychedelics and to concentrate on my writing». ¹ Upon his return from California, Peter was jailed and systematically beaten by Toronto police. As he recalls later, there he “learned a major political lesson. (...) [Peter] had begun to realize that a new generation was being born and life was not going to be easy, especially if you lived your life against the grain”. ²

In 1968 Peter enrolled at the University of Toronto to study Chaucer, Beowulf, Middle English and Old English. He also took a course with acclaimed sculptor, Robert Downing, who used to drive Peter around Toronto in his sports car where they smoked marijuana, and discussed the various sculptures around the city. Peter realized he had no real talent as a sculptor. As a freshman student he was apart-time member of the Yorkville Village hippie community where he was invited to parties and gatherings of the underground Toronto arts community – Peter still vividly remembers a party where a young woman performed The Dance of the Seven Veils – and gained first-hand insight into the dynamics of the double-speak of hippie (counter)-cultural production: «All pretending that we were creating a new society free from the normative shackles of conventional morality and lifestyle, but basically we were looking for drugs, sex and rock and roll and our twenty minutes of fame». ³ To test his willpower, Peter spent the entire night in Mount Pleasant Cemetery high on LSD, reciting his favorite poem, Lament, by Dylan Thomas while attempting Zorba the Greek dance moves around the tombstones which appeared to dance along with him. It was the dance moves of the life size stone Angels that impressed him the most. Upon reflection, Peter thinks this episode was related to his own inability to distance himself from self-destructive aspects of the 1960s drug culture.

Peter dropped out of the University of Toronto, as some of his close friends were getting addicted to heroin and he wanted to escape from their influence by moving to Kitchener, Ontario where he decided to complete his English degree at the University of Waterloo. In 1973 Peter earned a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, specializing in Elizabethan drama, at the University of Waterloo. Some Vietnam War draft resisters who were touring Canada, helped to educate Peter further about the war and the history of U.S. imperialist politics. Peter moved back to Toronto to enter what was then called Toronto Teach-

¹ In DAVIS 2015.

² In DAVIS 2015.

³ McLAREN 2015a: 132.

ers College, which had replaced the Normal School in 1953. Peter was certified to teach kindergarten to grade 8. Shortly thereafter, teacher education in Ontario was transferred to the universities. Because he received a certificate rather than a university degree, Peter enrolled in extra courses during his doctoral program so that the same year he received his Ph.D., he also received a B.Ed degree. Peter had already been awarded a M.Ed degree from Brock University prior to enrolling in his Ph.D. program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

1974-1984: FROM ROOKIE TEACHER TO ACCLAIMED WRITER
AND PROSPECTIVE ACADEMIC

As a freshly minted teacher Peter spent a year teaching in an affluent neighborhood. Yet he wanted to serve where he was most needed, so he moved to the impoverished, multicultural, multiracial, high-density Toronto inner-city suburb community known as the Jane-Finch Corridor. In Jane-Finch, Peter learned pedagogies and teaching strategies developed by his fellow teachers that he felt were largely coping strategies to get through the day. Yet he wanted to reach beyond 'surviving' his challenging environment, and he embarked on a series of pedagogical experiments for the benefit of his students. As a young teacher, Peter learned an important lesson that teaching is not a job, but a calling – and for the rest of his career, he would cherish warm and personal relationships with his students.

The poverty he witnessed in the Jane Finch Corridor had a profound emotion affect on Peter and he lamented the lack of pedagogies in the school that could help students address issues of poverty, racism, violence in the local community and beyond. As a response, Peter wrote a honest and brutal account of challenges facing the Jane-Finch community. Published in 1980, his book *Cries from the corridor*¹ became one of top ten bestselling books in Canada. The year that *Cries from the Corridor* was published, Peter was accepted as a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. He developed a close relationship with his Doctoral Chair, Richard Courtney, who was one of the world's foremost authorities on children's drama. He was also a professional actor. Professor Courtney earned his academic position on the strength of his books and reputation, and his Fellowship in the Royal Society of Arts. But he held only one academic degree – a Bachelor's Degree from Leeds, and for this reason less

¹ McLAREN 1980.

productive and less influential professors looked down upon Professor Courtney because they held doctoral degrees. While Peter worked his way through the Ph.D. program under the tutelage of Courtney, he was elected by the governing board of Massey College as a Junior Fellow.

While at Massey College (modeled after England's Oxford and Cambridge universities), Peter attended High Table dinners and lectures by famous academics. Junior Fellows were required to wear a long black robe and on occasion to try to converse in Latin, German, or French (Peter was an utter failure in second languages). This piqued his interest in ritual. It was also the year he converted from the Anglican Church to the Roman Catholic Church. The year he successfully defended his thesis, 'Education as a ritual performance', Peter was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in England and joined the company of notable historical members such as Benjamin Franklin, Karl Marx, Adam Smith, Charles Dickens, William Hogarth, and Guglielmo Marconi. Even though Peter earned significant recognition as a scholar by the time he graduated, Peter considered himself fortunate to be appointed to the position of Special Lecturer in Education at Brock University as a one-year sabbatical replacement (replacing a professor who had been charged by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for a computer program copyright violation).

Peter began to develop Paulo Freire's ideas in working with teacher educators, and the reception by his students was mixed. Although the Dean had promised to extend his contract for a year, Peter was dismissed after his contract expired. He applied for jobs all across Canada but many university search committees considered Peter to be a potential thorn in their side due to his outspoken political views and his vociferous admiration for Freire's work and the writings of Henry Giroux, who had been fired by the President of Boston University for his development of critical pedagogy and whose tenure battle received national attention in the United States in 1983. Eventually Giroux was offered a teaching position at Miami University of Ohio.

1985-1993 FROM PERSPECTIVE ACADEMIC TO ONE
OF THE LEADING ARCHITECTS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

In 1985 Peter joined Miami University's School of Education and Allied Professions and spent the next eight years working with Henry Giroux. Upon his arrival Peter continued his PhD research on the educational value of rituals which culminated with the award-winning

book *Schooling as a ritual performance: Toward a political economy of educational symbols and gestures* (1986), later republished in several editions and languages. Peter's research interests during this period reflected his undergraduate studies in (Elizabethan) drama, film, theatre, arts, and his graduate studies in curriculum, ethnography, and anthropology. He was especially interested in *ethnic, gender, sexual, political and religious identity formation within school settings* and oppositional cultural politics which uncovered the ideological underpinnings of schooling. As he recalls,

My work became less directed at the classroom per se, and more focused on issues such as political, cultural and racial identity, anti-racist/multicultural education, the politics of white supremacy, resistance and popular culture, rituals of the school as vehicles for both resistance and conformity; the formation of subjectivity, and liberation theology. I was becoming focused on the larger relevance of critical pedagogy. In other words, I felt that critical pedagogy was habitually elusive when it came to hands-on solutions but fiercely relevant when addressing life's permanent conditions of exploitation. I realized that there were teachers who could write about the classroom and in doing so provide more practical insights than I could but that I could make a contribution in rethinking the conceptual and political terrain of critical pedagogy in the educational literature.¹

Peter and Henry helped to bring the works and ideas of the critical pedagogue Paulo Freire into North America, while Peter's two edited books for Routledge, England, reintroduced Freire's works to educators and social workers in the United Kingdom. Their collaborator and friend Donaldo Macedo translated Freire's main works; Peter and Henry wrote introductions, afterwords, and explanations. But they did not merely popularize Freire; instead, they actively built on Freire's work and laid ground for the North American tradition of critical pedagogy as we know it today. Peter's major works from this period include: *Critical pedagogy, the state, and cultural struggle*,² *Paulo Freire: A critical encounter*,³ *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis, and the postmodern*,⁴ *Politics of liberation: Paths from Freire*,⁵ and *Between borders: Pedagogy and the politics of cultural studies*.⁶

Working with Henry Giroux, Peter delved deeply into cultural studies and the linguistic turn in philosophy and critical theory that came to be known as postmodernism. As his work moved further and further from the classroom, his thinking became more and more sophisticated,

¹ POZO 2003.

³ LEONARD, McLAREN 1993.

⁵ McLAREN, LANKSHEAR 1994.

² GIROUX, McLAREN 1989.

⁴ LANKSHEAR, McLAREN 1993.

⁶ GIROUX, McLAREN 1994.

and he became probably the harshest critic of his own bestseller *Cries from the corridor*.¹

Reading it from the perspective of a critical theorist confronts me with my own ideological and pedagogical shortcomings; it places me face-to-face with my own situation as a young teacher in discourses that unconsciously worked against my own emancipatory intention. It is painful for me to read many of these vignettes because I recognize that I was not immune to many of the criticisms that I now lay at the feet of unjust schooling practices and the workings of a racist, sexist, and culturally imperialistic social formation.²

In 1989 he significantly expanded *Cries from the corridor*³ with an innovative, nuanced and granular theoretical commentary and turned his popular bestseller (which was once sold in subway stations and bus terminals) into an academic bestseller entitled *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*;⁴ as of 2016, the book is in its sixth edition. According to Wayne Ross,

across its six editions the basic structure of the book remained relatively consistent, although the content has changed and expanded in notable ways. The progressive radicalization of McLaren's thought can be traced across each edition of the book. (...) *Life in Schools* has always reflected an emancipatory politics, critiquing the abuses of capitalism, racism, sexism, homophobia, cultural imperialism, and asymmetrical power relations, but the left-leaning postmodernism and politics of reform that informs parts of the earlier editions has been swept away.⁵

In his late 30s and early 40s, Peter was a young prospective academic on an exciting mission. Shoulder to shoulder with other great figures such as Henry Giroux, Paulo Freire, Donaldo Macedo, Joe Kincheloe, and others, Peter has built the movement of critical pedagogy in North America as we know it today. In 1989, while still an Associate Professor of Education, he was awarded the distinction of being named Renowned Scholar-in-Residence at the School of Education and Allied Professions, Miami University, as the youngest person in history to hold this title. While teaching at Miami, Peter built concepts and ideas which had been waiting for mainstream recognition for a few more decades.

1994-2001: FROM CULTURAL STUDIES AND POSTMODERNISM TO MARXIST HUMANISM

In 1993, Peter was recruited by the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, where he

¹ McLAREN 1980.

² McLAREN 2016: 32.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ McLAREN 2016.

⁵ ROSS 2016.

remained for the next 20 years. At first, he continued working with Henry Giroux within reconciliatory traditions of cultural studies and postmodernism. Examples of such work include *Critical pedagogy and predatory culture: Oppositional politics in a postmodern era*¹ and *Rethinking media literacy: A critical pedagogy of representation*.² In his preface to *Critical pedagogy and predatory culture*, Paulo Freire writes:

Peter McLaren is one among the many outstanding ‘intellectual relatives’ I ‘discovered’ and by whom I in turn was ‘discovered’. I read Peter McLaren long before I ever came to know him personally (...) Once I finished reading the first texts by McLaren that were made available to me, I was almost certain that we belonged to an identical ‘intellectual family.’³

However, as he began to realize theoretical and practical limits of the reconciliatory traditions, Peter’s thought has turned more and more towards Marxism. Many years later, he will email me the following:

One of the foundational social relations that interdicts a student’s access to resources necessary to see the world critically is, I believe, class exploitation. An exploitation that despoils communities and dispossesses workers of their humanity. (...) As early as the 1980s, I was asking myself: How do we react to the cries of help from the youth of today, whose full-throated screams meet the immemorial silence of the pedagogical tradition? An answer to this question mandated a move away from the ironic distanciation and self-indulgent detachment of the vulgar divas of the academy who clearly chose identity politics over class politics (and in so doing became complicitous in the very relations of inequality they officially rejected) by a close reading of Marx and Marxist theorists, culminating with engaging the work of Marxist educators.⁴

In 1997 Peter publishes the first book which explicitly refers to revolution in its title: *Revolutionary multiculturalism: Pedagogies of dissent for the new millennium*.⁵ A few years later he publishes the famous *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the pedagogy of revolution* (2000) which is generally recognized as his revolutionary manifesto. This book is interesting both for its academic content and writing. A student of English literature, and an award-winning author since his childhood, Peter has now done an important leap forward: he wrote a mature academic text with all qualities of a popular bestseller. In back matter of *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the pedagogy of revolution*, Rodolfo D. Torres writes:

In this lucid and theoretically informed reappraisal of the legacies of Che and Freire, Peter McLaren has made a significant contribution to a renewed Marx-

¹ McLAREN 1995.

² McLAREN, HAMMER, SHOLLE, REILLY 1995.

³ FREIRE 1995: x.

⁴ McLAREN, JANDRIĆ 2014: 806-807.

⁵ McLAREN 1997.

ist theory. Where critiques of capitalism seem to be out of fashion, this volume engages the lives of two great revolutionaries in the context of 'globalization' and increasing class inequality.¹

And in its Introduction, Joe Kincheloe provides Peter with a nickname that will remain with him forever:

it probably a good time to proclaim Peter McLaren the poet laureate of the educational left. No one operating in critical education has Peter's capacity to turn a phrase, to focus our attention on the relationship between pedagogy and injustice, or to make us chuckle while moving us to see anew.²

The unique quality of Peter's writing was also recognized in his other works. Thus, in his preface to the third edition of *Schooling as a Ritual Performance: towards a political economy of educational symbols and gestures*, Henry Giroux writes: «as a writer, he [McLaren] combines the rare gifts of the astute theoretician with that of the storyteller in the manner celebrated by Walter Benjamin» (1999, p. xxiii).

Looking back, it is now easy to recognize that Peter's Marxist humanism has been developing since his childhood. However, his appraisal of the two iconic figures on the left as finally made this revolutionary turn 'official'. Peter's turn provoked many reactions, which are probably best summed up by Freire's wife Nita:

What makes a blond man of the "North", a respected professor and intellectual, want to write about two men from the "South", accustomed to and engaged in the centuries-old, daily round of oppression and exclusion of the people of Latin America; two men united by similar aspects of courage and daring in historical time but, principally, in the space of solidarity, generosity, and humility?³

In 2001 Paula Allman publishes the book *Critical Education Against Global Capitalism: Karl Marx and Revolutionary Critical Education*⁴ where she introduces the expression 'revolutionary critical pedagogy'. Peter immediately adopts the term, which marks the beginning of a new phase in his work.

Peter's awards slowly grew in number, significance, and geographical coverage. Alongside numerous visiting professorships and keynote talks all over the US, in 1999 he received the *Trofeu O Lacador* Award presented by the Religious Society of Seu Sete De Male for his support of Afro-Umbandista religion in Porto Alegre, Brasil. In 2000 he received the *Amigo Honorifica de la Comunidad Universitaria de Esta Insti-*

¹ In McLAREN 2000.

² KINCHELOE 2000: ix.

³ ARAUJO FREIRE 2000: xiii.

⁴ ALLMAN 2001.

tucion from *La Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* in Guadalajara, Mexico. Furthermore, Peter's work has for the first time become a topic of dedicated publications such as the Special Issue of the «International Journal of Educational Reform» entitled *The Revolutionary Pedagogy of Peter McLaren* (2001).

2001-2013: FROM MARXIST HUMANISM
TO REVOLUTIONARY CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Now in his 50s, an acclaimed member of the small group of founding fathers of North American critical pedagogy and a respected professor at one of the top universities in the United States, Peter had the theoretical background, the life experience, and the opportunity to develop a mature theory of revolutionary critical pedagogy. This development builds on Peter's earlier Marxist works such as *Marxism against postmodernism in educational theory*;¹ Peter's interest in wider social questions such as neoliberalism reflected in *Critical theories, radical pedagogies, and global conflicts*,² *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?*,³ *Revolutionizing pedagogy: Education for social justice within and beyond global neoliberalism*;⁴ and particularly on Peter's interest in theory and practice of capitalism reflected in *Teaching against global capitalism and the new imperialism: A critical pedagogy*,⁵ *Capitalists and conquerors: A critical pedagogy against empire*,⁶ *Red seminars: Radical excursions into educational theory, cultural politics, and pedagogy*,⁷ *Critical pedagogies of consumption: Living and learning in the shadow of the "shopocalypse"*,⁸ *The havoc of capitalism: Publics, pedagogies and environmental crisis*,⁹ *Academic repression: Reflections from the academic-industrial complex*,¹⁰ and *The global industrial complex: Systems of Domination*.¹¹

During this time Peter spends a lot of time in Latin America – with Chavistas in Venezuela, with workers and unions in Mexico and Colombia, and with Zapatista supporters. In 2005, a group of scholars and activists in Northern Mexico established *La Fundación McLaren de Pedagogía Crítica* to develop a knowledge of McLaren's work throughout Mexico and to promote projects in critical pedagogy and popular edu-

¹ HILL, MCLAREN, COLE, RIKOWSKI 2002.

² FISCHMAN, SUNKER, LANKSHEAR, MCLAREN 2005.

³ KINCHELOE, MCLAREN 2007.

⁴ MACRINE, MCLAREN, HILL 2009.

⁵ MCLAREN, FARAHMANDPUR 2004.

⁶ MCLAREN 2005a.

⁷ MCLAREN 2005b.

⁸ SANDLIN, MCLAREN 2009.

⁹ MARTIN, HOUSTON, MCLAREN, SUORANTA 2010.

¹⁰ NOCELLA, BEST, MCLAREN 2010.

¹¹ BEST, KAHN, NOCELLA, MCLAREN 2011.

cation. In 2006 the *Catedra Peter McLaren* was inaugurated at the Bolivarian University of Venezuela. In 2011, *Instituto McLaren de Pedagogía Crítica* was established in Ensenada, Mexico. During his many trips to Latin America, Peter met key people such as Hugo Chavez and Lopez Obrador, and significantly contributed to an exchange of ideas and practices between the Americas. During this period, Peter was also one of the first critical pedagogues whose work was translated into Russian. Later, he was invited to lecture on Western Marxism and critical pedagogy in China. Peter's career has now become global, and his writings have been extensively translated to Spanish, Mandarin, and more than 20 other languages.

Peter has now become a textbook reference, and his critical pedagogy is taught at universities all over the world. Books about Peter's work include *De la pedagogía crítica a la pedagogía de la revolución. Ensayos para comprender a Peter McLaren*,¹ *Teaching Peter McLaren: Paths of dissent*,² *Peter McLaren, education, and the struggle for liberation*,³ and *Crisis of commonwealth: Marcuse, Marx, McLaren*.⁴ Peter has given hundreds of interviews and public appearances. In order to make his works more accessible, Peter has edited a widely-cited collection of interviews *Rage and Hope*.⁵

Peter was never a stranger to awards, yet now they started piling up significantly. He was presented with the 2002 Inaugural Paulo Freire Social Justice Award by the Paulo Freire Democratic Project at Chapman University, California. In 2004 he received the Friend of the University Award by the University of Guadalajara and also an honorary doctorate at the University of Lapland, Finland. In 2007, the Soka Gakkai International USA presented him with the Liberty Award. In 2010 he received a doctorate, *honoris causa*, from the University of Salvador, Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 2012 he received the title Honorary Chair Professor at Northeast Normal University in mainland China. Peter was invited as an honored guest by the Tarahumara (Rarámuri) indigenous group in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, and visited the Purépecha community in Cherán, a town in the state of Michoacán, Mexico. The civic council of Cherán, which had created its own armed militia and fought for the status of an autonomous community, honored Peter with the Defense of the Forest Award. Members of the community had been murdered by illegal loggers (member of the drug cartels who were diversifying their economic base) who were routinely steal-

¹ PRUYN, CHARLES 2005.

² PRUYN, CHARLES 2007.

³ ERYAMAN 2009.

⁴ REITZ 2013.

⁵ McLAREN 2006.

ing truckloads of lumber from the indigenous lands. The resistance to the killings and kidnappings were led by women. Peter has become a fellow of American Educational Research Association (AERA) Class of 2012. Last but not least, his books received far too many awards for an academic article.

Peter's work has never been popular with the powers-that-be. However, his move towards critical Marxist humanism and then to revolutionary critical pedagogy has increased his problems with the mainstream. In 2006, Peter topped on Andrew Jones' blacklist of progressive educators 'Dirty Thirty'¹ aimed at harassing leftist professors at US universities. Occasionally, before a talk, Peter would receive anonymous death threats on his phone at his hotel. Seeking a less stressful working environment, Peter was offered a Distinguished Professorship at Chapman University, in the small city of Orange, which he accepted after 20 years teaching at UCLA.

2013: PETER MCLAREN'S LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Peter has remained at Chapman University since he began his new position in 2013. Chapman's founding religious denomination is the Disciples of Christ, that recognizes the integrity of a variety of spiritual path and supports an ecumenical environment. Peter is married to Yan Wang from Northeast China – a brilliant young Chinese woman, who is interested in deepening the relationship between critical pedagogy and improvisation. Inspired by his numerous visits to Latin America, his childhood fascination with religion, and his conversion to Catholicism, Peter started developing more palpable links between the tradition of liberation theology and revolutionary critical pedagogy. This work culminated with his masterpiece *Pedagogy of insurrection: From resurrection to revolution*,² and follow-up dialogic articles expanding on its ideas.³

Peter's liberation theology builds on his childhood interest in theology, his theoretical achievements in Marxist humanism and revolutionary critical pedagogy together, his practical experiences all over the world (most notably in South America), and various other streams of his life and thought. Within this framework Peter produced some of his most mature and sophisticated insights, and once again went against the grain to inspire and shock (academic) mainstream with catchy, powerful claims that Jesus was a communist, that the King-

¹ FASSBINDER, MCLAREN 2006.

² MCLAREN 2015b.

³ MCLAREN, JANDRIĆ 2017 and 2018.

dom of God equals Marx's imagined socialist society, and that science and religion should unite against its common enemy of capitalism. Underlined by a strong emancipatory and liberatory message, these claims startle people on all sides of the political spectrum. However, their critics miss a crucial point of Peter's current work: at the present historical moment marked with strong dominance of the Right, and desperate fragmentation of the Left, Peter's liberation theology develops new modes of revolutionary organization and offers a new hope for humanity.

These days, the list of various recognitions for his work is far too long for an academic article – since 2013, he received more than 30 awards and honorary positions in countries including but not limited to Greece, Venezuela, Colombia, Turkey, Mexico, us, Ukraine, China, Argentina, and the UK. Peter now firmly belongs to world's intellectual *crème de la crème*, and his public appearances such as the recent debate with the Nobel laureate Vernon Smith¹ are followed with great attention in all strata of the society. Unsurprisingly, such success has also brought into light many enemies. In 2016, following his marriage with Yan Wang, a right-wing blog accused Peter of being a traitor to the white race. Anonymous hackers voiced over one of Peter's interviews, in the Russian language, and replaced his verbal comments with an entirely false English translation. Yet, with his unique combination of humility and openness to the other, Peter has always risen above primitive insults and abuse.

Peter's role at Chapman University in Orange, California, where he is Distinguished Professor in Critical Studies, includes serving as Co-Director of The Paulo Freire Democratic Project, and International Ambassador for Global Ethics and Social Justice. He also has been reappointed as Chair Professor, Northeast Normal University, Changchun, China. He extensively publishes, edits, teaches, and speaks all over the world. In 2018 he presented his newest book, co-edited with Suzanne SooHoo, *Radical Imagine-Nation: Public Pedagogy & Praxis*.² His work is now subject to a growing number of dedicated publications, such as the Special Issue of *Policy Futures in Education* entitled 'Pedagogies of Insurrection'.³ Peter is now more productive than ever, and we can only guess what he will come up with next – but we can rest assured that it will be ground-breaking, emancipatory, and fit for the contemporary historical moment.

¹ McLAREN, SMITH 2017.

² McLAREN, SOOHOO 2018.

³ BOJESEN 2017.

EPILOGUE

The story of Peter McLaren may seem like a primer of the American Dream – kid from a humble working class family, who worked himself to become one of the most respected living theorists in his field. The story of Peter McLaren may seem like a primer of extraordinary talent which, in spite of all obstacles and difficulties, has managed to surface and shine. The story of Peter McLaren may seem like a primer of gradual intellectual growth of a humble but perseverant scholar and human being. The story of Peter McLaren may seem like a primer of an artistic soul which significantly contributes to the discourse of social sciences. The story of Peter McLaren may seem as a primer of an extraordinary person, who did some extraordinary things, and yet remained humble, warm, and open to people from all walks of life.

These stories may capture Peter's career, yet they all miss the spirit of Peter's personality and work. During our friendship, which now spans for almost a decade, I was privileged to witness what I believe is the soul of his work. Peter never was, or wanted to be, a primer or a leader. He is a researcher, gifted with extreme curiosity, and a warm human being, who wants to help others get rid of oppression and reach their full potentials. Peter is an inspiring fellow traveler – always creative, but never leaves people behind; always in position of intellectual and moral power, but never in position of political power. With his long silver hair, tattoos, indigenous clothing and jewelry, an inevitable leather bag, and the proverbial John Lennon glasses, Peter has remained faithful to his countercultural origins and connected to the world that brought him into being. For all his academic contributions and personal traits Peter was made into an icon of the contemporary left and a living monument of contemporary critical pedagogy – a position he never sought, but always carried with a combination of pride and humility.

Peter has tremendous respect for political heroes such as Che Guevara, yet he is not one of them. Peter has only best words for his intellectual brother and friend Paulo Freire, yet he never took up a political position. Peter has built his own type of hero: an intellectual hero, a hero of humility and respect for everyone, who inspires and gently pushes everyone he meets to do the best of their ability for the benefit of humankind. Peter is deeply critical of own work, never satisfied with his current achievements, and always in the quest to improve further. Peter does not invite people to reproduce his work, but to use his work to live with the world. As he now approaches the most intellectually

productive years of his life, I do hope to share a part of this journey with Peter McLaren and extend our friendship and work far into the future.

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RIASSUNTO · *Peter McLaren – Ritratto d'un rivoluzionario* · L'articolo offre una panoramica della vita e delle opere di uno dei principali fautori della pedagogia critica, Peter McLaren. Il pensiero di McLaren viene presentato come articolato in due periodi: uno moderato e uno rivoluzionario. Il primo (1948-1973) comprende gli anni 'selvaggi' della giovinezza; il secondo (1974-1984) lo vede diventare un famoso scrittore e inserirsi nell'università; l'ultimo (1985-1993) lo consacra come uno dei principali artefici della pedagogia critica. Il periodo rivoluzionario comprende tre fasi. La prima (1994-2001) è caratterizzata da un interesse da parte di Peter McLaren per la cultura postmoderna prima e per l'umanesimo marxista dopo; la seconda (2001-2013) vede il passaggio dall'umanesimo marxista alla pedagogia critica rivoluzionaria; la terza (2013) coincide con l'approdo alla teologia della liberazione.

ABSTRACT · *Peter McLaren – Portrait of a Revolutionary* · This paper examines the life and works of one of the leading architects of critical pedagogy, Peter McLaren. The paper classifies McLaren's work in two over-reaching phases: the Reconciliatory Phase and the Revolutionary Phase. The Reconciliatory Phase is divided into three distinct stages: 1948-1973: Early childhood and wild years, 1974-1984: From rookie teacher to acclaimed writer and perspective academic, and 1985-1993: From perspective academic to one of the leading architects of critical pedagogy. The Revolutionary Phase is divided into three distinct stages: 1994-2001: From cultural studies and postmodernism to Marxist humanism, 2001-2013: From Marxist humanism to revolutionary critical pedagogy, 2013-: Peter McLaren's liberation theology. Based on this classification, the paper provides a whole rounded overview of McLaren's works until today.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG · *Peter McLaren – Portrait eines Revolutionärs* · Der Beitrag gibt Einblick in Leben und Werk eines weltweit anerkannten Architekten einer Kritischen Pädagogik. Großflächig wird dabei McLarens Schaffen in zwei Phasen eingeteilt: eine versöhnliche und eine revolutionäre. Die erste wird dreifach unterteilt in frühe Kindheit und wilde Jahre (1948-1973); vom Junglehrer zum anerkannten Autor und prospektiven Wissenschaftler (1974-1984); vom vielversprechenden Universitätslehrer zu einem der führenden Baumeister einer Kritischen Pädagogik (1985-1993). Die zweite Phase lässt sich in drei Schritte gliedern: Von kulturvergleichenden Studien und dem Postmodernismus zu einem Marxschen Humanismus (1994-2001); vom Marxschen Humanismus zu einer revolutionären Kritischen Pädagogik (2001-2013); schließlich Peter McLarens Befreiungstheologie (2013 ff.). Entlang dieser Unterteilung liefert der Beitrag eine globale Übersicht über Leben und Werk dieses zutiefst sozial engagierten Pädagogen und stellt gleichzeitig den ersten Versuch seiner Biografie dar.

RÉSUMÉ · *Peter McLaren – Portrait d'un révolutionnaire* · La contribution donne un aperçu de la vie et de l'œuvre d'un architecte mondialement reconnu d'une Pédagogie Critique. En gros, l'action de Mc Laren se divise en deux phases: une accommodante et une révolutionnaire. La première se divise en trois : la première enfance et les années sauvages (1948-1973); du jeune enseignant à l'auteur reconnu et au savant prospectif (1974-1984); du professeur d'université très prometteur à l'architecte et au meneur de la Pédagogie Critique (1985-1993). La seconde phase se laisse articuler en trois moments: des études de culture comparative et du postmodernisme à un humanisme marxiste (1994-2001); de l'humanisme marxiste à une Pédagogie Critique révolutionnaire (2001-2013); vient finalement la théologie de la libération de Peter McLaren (2013 ss). Au long de ces subdivisions, la contribution livre un aperçu global sur la vie et l'œuvre de ce pédagogue profondément engagé socialement et présente dans le même temps le premier essai de sa biographie.

COMPOSTO IN CARATTERE SERRA DANTE DALLA
FABRIZIO SERRA EDITORE, PISA · ROMA.
STAMPATO E RILEGATO NELLA
TIPOGRAFIA DI AGNANO, AGNANO PISANO (PISA).

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Ottobre 2018

(CZ 2 · FG 3)

