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***Resistance Postmodernism and
the Ordeal of the Undecidable:
A Marxist Critique***

**Jane Kelly
Mike Cole
Dave Hill**

**Kingston University
University of Brighton
University College Northampton**

Correspondence: dave.hill@northampton.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

The chapters in *Postmodernism in Educational Theory: Education and the Politics of Human Resistance* (Hill, McLaren, Cole and Rikowski.1999) to which we have contributed as editors and writers, and the articles in *Educational Theory*, (Fall 1998, Vol. 48, No. 4), exemplify an important current debate in education, part of a wider intellectual discussion as to the most useful theory(ies) to analyse, understand and respond to contemporary, capitalist society **(1)**.

To refer, initially, to the *Education Theory* volume, on the one side stands the article by Peter McLaren, 'Revolutionary Pedagogy in Post-revolutionary Times: Rethinking the Political Economy of Critical Education'. Following Samir Amin, McLaren states his position as a 'noneconomic-determinist interpretation of Marxism in which the capitalist mode of production is not reduced to the status of an economic structure' (McLaren 1998:446-7) **(2)**. This he uses to analyse the present situation in politics, and more especially education theory and practice. On the other side stand postmodern theories, here in their 'resistance' postmodernist guise, articulated by a series of writers ranged against McLaren.

First, McLaren firstly argues that postmodern and poststructuralist theories have allowed educators to accommodate 'to the requirements of capital and the objectives of neoliberalism' (McLaren 1998: 449). Second, he stresses the divisive nature of 'identity' politics which along with 'difference' theories has subsumed the politics of the oppressed, reducing class analysis 'to an epiphenomena of race, ethnicity, and gender' (McLaren 1998: 445). In opposition to the postmodern collapse of theory, McLaren argues for the usefulness of Marxism to analyse, critique and work out a strategy to develop a politics of resistance to capitalism. For him the starting point is a critical pedagogy, 'a necessary (but not sufficient) element in this resistance' (McLaren 1998: 436), based on the class struggle but which also confronts racism, sexism and homophobia (he does not mention discrimination against the disabled) (McLaren 1998: 452).

Patti Lather, author of 'Critical Pedagogy and its Complicities: A Praxis of Stuck Places' on the other hand, rejects the Marxian metanarrative in favour of what she has described in previous writing as 'postmodernism of resistance'. This she contrasts with what she labels 'postmodernism of reaction' (Lather 1991). The former, which she describes as neo-Nietzschean, is concerned with the collapse of meaning, with nihilism, and with cynicism. The conception of the individual is of a fractured schizoid consumer, existing in what Lather describes as 'a cultural whirlpool of Baudrillardian simulcra' (Lather 1991: 160-161). This vortex is captured perfectly by Jean Baudrillard, himself.

[Postmodernism] is a game with the vestiges of what has been destroyed...[W]e must move in it, as though it were a kind of circular gravity...I have the impression with postmodernism that there is an attempt to rediscover a certain pleasure in the irony of things, in the game of things. Right now one can tumble into total hopelessness - all the definitions, everything, it's all been done. What can one do? What can one become? And postmodernity is the attempt - perhaps it's desperate, I don't know - to reach a point where one can live with what is left. It is more a survival among the remnants than anything else. (Laughter). (Baudrillard 1984, in Gane 1993: 95).

Lather (1991) defines 'postmodernism of resistance', on the other hand, as participatory and dialogic, encompassing pluralistic structures of authority. It is non-dualistic and anti-hierarchical

and celebrates multiple sites from which the word is spoken (Lather 1991: 160). More recently, Lather (1998) has taken multivocality to its logical conclusion. Adopting Derrida's (1994) concept of the 'ordeal of the undecidable', where 'one cannot define, finish or close', she advocates 'a praxis of not being so sure' (Lather 1998: 488). This in order to oppose 'the masculinist voice of abstraction and universalisation, which assumes the rhetorical position of "the one who knows"'(Lather 1998: 488).

She thus adopts a gendered position in which male knowledge, the ability to theorise and to work with abstractions, which she calls 'a boy thing', is rejected, to be replaced by a (presumably) female indecision of 'not being sure'. To adhere to these ideas of Lather is to support an essentialist framework, what used to be called 'radical' feminism, where women and men are seen as 'essentially' different, a framework socialist feminists would refute. Since the 1970s and 1980s socialist and Marxist feminists (for example, Kuhn and Wolpe 1978; Sargent 1981; Vogel 1983; Coontz and Henderson 1986; Beechey 1987) have fought for the recognition that women were just as able as men when it comes to theorising an understanding of the world and women's place in it, not simply for understanding's sake, but to develop political activities and campaigns to pursue the liberation element of the 'Women's Liberation Movement'. In rejecting apparently 'male' practices, the fight for the acceptance of women as theorists on a par with men seems to have been jettisoned. Does Lather really believe, as she seems to suggest, it is better 'not to know'?

Basing herself on theories of 'identity' and 'difference', derived from the work of Foucault (see below), she underlines the impossibility of the oppressed empathising with each other and acting together with other oppressed and exploited groups. This leads to a disabling paralysis as to the way forward. Difference between the sexes is extended to differences between women themselves, 'races', sexualities and so on, until it becomes impossible to talk of any group in society at all. Not only 'class' as a category, but the differently oppressed groups too, disappear, to be replaced by a celebration of uncertainty, confusion and lack of knowledge.

Lather also states that critical pedagogy, as McLaren posits it, is impossible to carry out. But rather than seeing this as a problem, she celebrates it, stating that the task is 'to situate the experience of impossibility as an enabling site for working through aporias' (Lather 1998: 495). She argues for a praxis that 'is about ontological stammering, concepts with a lower ontological weight, a praxis without guaranteed subjects or objects, oriented toward the as-yet-incompletely thinkable conditions and potentials of given arrangements' (Lather 1998: 495).

Although Lather uses the Marxist term 'praxis', the definition by Balibar, 'philosophy viewing itself in the mirror of practice', which she relies on (Lather 1998: 497), evacuates the dialectical dynamism inherent in the concept. For Marxists neither philosophy nor action should have priority. Dialectically linked they test each other out. For Marxists the relevant question is, what is the theory behind this activity? Is this theory practicable when put into action? After all, Marx thought philosophers up to now had only described the world; his project was to change it. If Lather's theory were to be put in practice, it would change nothing.

Quoting approvingly from a New Zealand paper (Jones 1998) where the author argues that oppressed groups (in this case Maori students in a class of Pakeha - white - students) may resist the demand to make themselves visible to the powerful, Lather suggests we adopt Jones' call for a "politics of disappointment", a practice of "failure, loss, confusion, unease, limitation for dominant ethnic groups"'(Lather 1998: 496). Lather is claiming to be anti-colonialist in supporting Maori students in their wish to break into 'discussion groups based on ethnic sameness' (ibid: 496). However, since she believes that 'all oppositional knowledge is drawn into the order against which

it intends to rebel' (ibid: 493), it is difficult to see what possible progressive potential her overall project has. Just how is her aim of deconstructing Marxist intellectuals (ibid: 490) in any way progressive?

Any supporter of the capitalist order who had any belief in the efficacy of academic writing would surely be delighted to hear that Lather who, like so many of her postmodern contemporaries, was arguing in the 1980s that 'feminism and Marxism need each other' (Lather 1984: 49) and that 'the revolution is within each and every one of us and it will come about' (Lather 1984: 58), is now so confused that she thinks the future is an open book, with some progressive potential and in which all opposition is drawn into the dominant order. This is essentially pro-capitalist confusion. It is, as McLaren and others (McLaren 1998; cf. Cole and Hill 1995, 1996, 1999a) point out, one of the ways that postmodernism acts as an ideological support for national and global capital.

For 'postmodernists of resistance' such as Lather, the subject is 'in-process' and incapable of agency. Unlike the 'postmodernists of reaction', who stress increased social normalisation and regulation, 'postmodernists of resistance', Lather claims, see difference without opposition, personal autonomy and social relatedness. Whereas the former accept the inevitability of multinational hyperspace, the latter are into ecopolitics (Lather 1991: 160-161). Postmodern feminism, is somewhat immodestly described by Lather, following Kroker and Cook (1986), as 'the quantum physics of postmodernism' (cited in Cole and Hill 1996).

While there are differences in intention and in emphasis between the two postmodernisms, they have too much in common to be thought of as separate theories. It is more accurate, we suggest, to think of a continuum, with 'postmodernism of reaction' at one end and 'postmodernism of resistance' at the other. One end of the continuum is peopled by reactionaries, engrossed in 'games of despair',

The mass is dumb like beasts, and its silence is equal to the silence of beasts...it says neither whether the truth is to the left or to the right, nor whether it prefers revolution or repression. It is without truth and without reason. It has been attributed with every arbitrary remark. It is without conscience and without unconscious. (Baudrillard 1983: 28-9, cited in Cole and Hill 1999a).

The other is composed of defeatist ex-socialists, engaged in a rhetoric of left posturing, represented in Britain most notable by the writers of that ill-named magazine *Marxism Today*, journal of the Communist Party in Britain in its decline, whose ideas are collected in a volume entitled *New Times* (3).

WHAT LIES BEHIND POSTMODERNISM?

The Influence of Foucault

In another response to McLaren, Wendy Kohli ('Critical Education and Embodied Subjects: Making the Poststructural Turn'), writes that she is a "'lapsed" Marxist',

[now] shifting to a different frame - a Foucauldian feminist poststructuralism - I am asking different (and perhaps even more dangerous) questions than I have in the past about education, curriculum, schooling, and political/social change - particularly in relation to the construction and care of the self. By examining the multiple discourses that produce educational subjects, embodied educational subjects, I want to argue....for a

reconceptualisation of educational practices that will subvert their disciplining, regulating, and normalising tendencies (Kohli 1998: 517).

While we might agree with her that the norm of a 'white, male, heterosexual, bourgeois body' has in the past been used to 'represent' everyone, we question why, in a critique of that normalisation, is it necessary to concentrate, as she does, on concepts such as the 'body' and 'embodiment'? As she herself accepts, it is partly a matter of fashion,

The body - the "lived" body, the "material" body, the "inscribed" body, the "disciplined" body, the "abject" body, the "medicalised" body, the "performed" body, the "historicized" body, the "transgressive" body - *is now fashionable*. The body is "in". (Our emphasis) (Kohli 1998: 518)

Just because 'embodiment' has been adopted by numbers of academics, it does not mean we all have to use it uncritically. Rather, we should ask ourselves, useful, does it produce useful knowledge? The development of ideas which focus on the body in this way seems to us useful only by way of an analogy. For its stress on the body is also a stress on the individual, as Foucault's stress on the internalisation of power by the 'body' turns us away from power held by the institutions of the state or other recognisable authorities, from schools to the police and army, to an examination of individuals. This approach disarms us in the face of current developments in education.

The educational system, far from being a haven of diversity and creativity, is now under tighter managerial control and assessment than it has been for many years with a strong concentration on business values and instrumental procedures, as evidenced, for example, by the British 'new Labour' government's fascination with 'the School Effectiveness Movement', a fairly mechanistic and management focused organisational perspective that concentrates on factors internal to the school and ignores questions of curriculum selection and social class intake into a school (Brown et al. 1995; Chitty 1997; Hatcher 1998; cited in Sanders, Hill and Hankin 1999). It also ignores the way in which the curriculum selection and its monitoring/enforcement have substantially yanked 'official school knowledge' and teachers' teaching into ideological uniformity and conformity (Apple 1993; Hill 1989, 1991, 1997a, b, 1999b).

How useful an analytical tool is 'embodiment' for understanding and confronting such current ideas in educational theory? Rather than face up to these dominant ideas in education based on business management techniques and greater curriculum control and surveillance, and increasingly determined by the needs of capital, reliance on notions of the body to analyse the situation turns us away from the real issues and into a cul-de-sac.

Foucault's influence may also be found in the work of postmodern theorist Judith Butler. In order to 'denaturalize gender as such' (Butler 1990: 149), Butler proposes 'a strategy to denaturalize and resignify bodily categories', which she describes as 'a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame' (Butler 1990: xii). Her primary political aim, resulting from her (unexceptional) suggestion that 'multiple identifications can constitute a non-hierarchical configuration of shifting and overlapping identifications that call into question the primacy of any univocal gender attribution' (Butler 1990: 66) is 'to make gender trouble' (Butler 1990: 34). In more detail, her text is an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender

that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilisation, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity (Butler 1990: 34). However much fun this might be, we have to ask just how much difference it would make to the class nature of economic and political power relationships if the 'gender parody', drag acts and widespread denaturalization of sex and gender became a coherent opposition to heterosexism (Butler 1990: 138).

Butler herself notes that 'parody by itself is not subversive' and suggests that there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling (Butler 1990: 139). Again, we have to ask, how far does it get us in developing and involving large numbers of individuals in a political project to understand that '[g]ender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylised repetition of acts' or that it is 'a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment' (Butler 1990 :140-141)?

In fact, transgression of (traditional) gender roles and identities is happening contemporaneously in the material realities of the labour market as more and more women return to work and 'male' work is feminised (c.f. Ainley 1993). It is also happening, to a certain degree, in fashion, clothing, and sexual practice. It is not at all clear that the more widespread existence of transvestism, transsexualism and sado-masochistic fetishism in clothing, clubbing and erotica is rocking the capitalist class at all. 'Fetishism as personal practice does not bring with it change or revolution' (Gamman and Makinen 1994: 221). Nor do campaigning and street-level political protests, such as the Spanner protest (for the decriminalisation of consenting 'hard' S&M practice) and S&M Pride, or Gay Pride, mass marches and festivals. In its dominant neo-liberal form, even if less so in its neo-conservative form, capitalism can cope with, and profit from sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. The 'pink pound' and the fetish consumer market are grist to the mill of late capitalism. What it finds harder to deal with is solidaristic class opposition such as in industrial action, and coalitional politics with a class perspective, as in the (successful) Anti-Poll Tax movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Britain (Sanders, Hill and Hankin 1999).

The inadequacy of Butler's theory for social change is also evident in her recent article 'Merely Cultural' (Butler 1998), where she misuses a quote from Engels **(3)** (Butler 1998: 39) to claim that gays and lesbians 'constitute a differential class' (Butler 1998: 41), and in threatening the heterosexual norm of the family, 'essential to the functioning of the sexual order of political economy', they constitute 'a fundamental threat to its very workability' (Butler 1998: 42). To claim that lesbians and gay men, on their own, could threaten the viability of capitalism, is, of course, a nonsense. But this does not mean that they could not be part of an alliance that does do just that. For if we are to threaten capital we need to build an alliance of all who have any interest in its overthrow. The issue or issues that might be to the fore are unpredictable - in both the French bourgeois revolution of 1789 and in the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, women's demands, including the demand for 'Bread', fought for by women, were the spark to revolutionary change. The fact that the issues were not based at the point of production did not undermine their potency in rallying huge numbers of people. But it was precisely those huge numbers of people who were needed to effect change, not one or other of the oppressed groups, and not the working class on its own either **(4)**.

Against Enlightenment

Central to postmodernism is an attack on what they call 'Enlightenment' thought, by which postmodernists mean any over-arching theory or metanarrative which claims to understand the

world as a totality. The rejection of this aim is replaced by an emphasis on the contingent, the local, the personal - identity and difference- as opposed to solidarity and change. Thus no general statements may be made about society as a whole, or any social group or class therein.

We take issue with this anti-foundationalism, the rejection of the metanarrative, the denial of any 'totalising' system of thought. We challenge postmodernist writers' self-proclaimed inability to make general statements about society. This point has been made, inter alia, by a number of writers (Callinicos 1989; Crook 1990; Ainley 1993; Hewitt 1993; Maynard 1993; McLaren 1998a, b; Aronowitz and Giroux 1986 in their pre-postmodern phase, and Jarvis 1998). Contrary to Lyotard and Foucault, we suggest that the motor of the class struggle is still determinant and that the Enlightenment metanarratives of Marxism and neo-Marxism, and their analysis of capital and power, best explain current and ongoing economic, political, social, educational, cultural and labour market developments, both in Britain and world-wide.

We argue that these recent major processes of restructuring social, welfare and educational provision, along with trade union legislation, are underpinned by market-led strategies, and are in line with the current requirements of capitalist states (Hill 1989; 1990, 1999b, Apple and Whitty 1999). Economically, at state levels, these changes entail privatisation programmes, incorporating the creation of a hierarchy of provision in the 'public' services. Such a hierarchy has been intensified in the education system with respect to England and Wales (Ainley 1993; Gerwitz, Ball and Bowe 1995; Hill 1997a; Whitty, Power and Halpin 1998), and in the similar 'marketisation' and hierarchicalisation of schooling in Australia (Blackmore 1995) and New Zealand (Lauder et al. 1995).

Postmodernist analyses, in general, marginalise and/or neglect the determining effects of the relations of production. In particular postmodernism, albeit unwittingly for 'resistance postmodernists', serves to disempower the oppressed, by denying the notion of 'emancipation in a general sense'. This is either denied, ignored or underplayed in the discourse of postmodernism, or else the changes are designated as 'postmodern', as reflecting or being part of postmodernity (Cole and Hill 1995).

Adherents of Postmodernism in Britain argue that the apparent 'disappearance' of class resulted from cultural changes occurring as a result of the transition from 'Fordist' to 'post-Fordist' methods of production. Champions of this position point to the destruction variously of 'traditional' class signifiers in Britain (the decline of flat caps and whippets), class institutions (such as Trades Unions, the Co-op, the Workers Educational Association), class locations (such as the mining village, the steel town, factory area), and therefore of class consciousness (evidenced by four successive Conservative electoral victories in Britain between 1979 and 1997 and by 'New' Labour's 'classless' appeal in its 1997 general election victory). The social and cultural order organised around class has been replaced, they assert, by a 'new order' based on individual rights, mobility, choice (consumer and life-style in particular), and freedom (Sanders, Hill and Hankin 1999).

Postmodern academics at one level, and a range of politicians and political theorists at another, have attempted to consign Marxist analysis and socialist egalitarian educational and political programmes to the dustbin of history. In addition to postmodernist academics such as McLaren's, critics in *Education Theory*, political groups seeking to inter Marxism include both Radical Right Thatcherites/Reaganites and their neo-liberal/neo-conservative successors, and 'Third Way' politicians such as Clinton, Blair and Schroeder. We believe, however, that a Marxist analysis and understanding of social class is crucially significant for an understanding of contemporary

capitalism, and to grasp the restructuring of education that has occurred through the nineteen-eighties and nineties in many of the advanced capitalist industrial states. We argue that an understanding of social class is essential for developing and constructing economic, political and education systems based on social justice and egalitarianism. In rejecting the determining effects of capital, or in neutralising capitalism itself, postmodernism serves to uphold the current capitalist project

New Times

The 'New Times' (6) argument is that the world has changed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, and that the advanced capitalist countries are 'increasingly characterised by diversity, differentiation and fragmentation' (Hall and Jacques 1989:11). 'New Times' has a number of recurring themes: the decline of mass production and of traditional industries, the rise of myriad political and social struggles and individualism, style and consumption. Their postmodern prioritisation of market/ consumption/ lifestyle over production is derived from Max Weber and is commonplace analysis in many sociological accounts of social class. It rejects an analysis based on class derived from Marx as 'old fashioned' and 'out of date', 'no longer applicable'. It also rests on a national picture, for while in some industrialised countries such as Britain the size and weight of the traditional industrial working class has changed, with the decline of older industries such as steel, coal, heavy engineering, ship building, and a parallel growth of service industries, the working class, world-wide, is bigger than ever.

We accept wholeheartedly the position of A. Sivanandan who has summed up what 'New Times' means for him:

a shift in focus from economic determinism, from changing the world to changing the word, from class in and for itself to the individual in and for himself or herself. Use value has ceded to exchange value, need to choice, community to identity, anti-imperialism to international humanism. And the self that new timers make so much play about [has] become a small, selfish inward-looking self that finds pride in life-style, exuberance in consumption and commitment in pleasure - and then elevates them all into a politics of this and that, positioning itself this way and that way (with every position a politics and every politics a position) into a 'miscellany of movements and organisations' stretching from hobbies and pleasure to services (Sivanandan 1990: 23).

Arguing against too much stress on consumption, Michael Rustin has suggested, correctly in our view, that the Marxist tradition has been right all along in its emphasis on creative work (paid or unpaid) as the central form of human fulfilment and on the importance of the work group, neither of which can be replaced by consumption (1989: 314). This is certainly true in our own experience, and we expect also true in the experiences of the 'New Times' writers, who, we suspect derived much satisfaction from their own creative endeavours. We have dealt at length elsewhere with our critique of 'New Times' (Cole 1992; Cole and Hill 1995, 1997; Hill 1999a).

The New Times 'work in progress' continued through the early 1990s. In 1992, Hall posed the question of whether we are entering a 'new constellation of political, economic, social and cultural life' and the 'New Times' that we confront. (Hall, Held and McLennan 1992: 4). It is ironic that in a 1998 one-off issue of *Marxism Today* Hall, one of the major midwives of 'New Times', and of 'New Labour' as a Party fit to represent and lead Britain on the journey into the 'New Times' of postmodernity, is now returning to a more class-based analysis redolent of his early work such as

Policing the Crisis (1978). Here, in 1998, the teacher is lamenting how well his nostrums and prescriptions and lessons were learned (Cole and Hill 1999a).

While it is important to recognise that some post-Fordist developments in the organisation of production and consumption have taken and are taking place, the changes, while developmental, are geographically and sectorally limited and specific. Such changes have not and are not fundamentally altering workers' relations to the means of production and post-Fordist developments, where they exist, should be conflated neither with post-capitalism nor postmodernism. Postmodernist analysis, with its stress on segmentation, differentiation, collective disempowerment and its *telos* of individuated desire, serves well the purpose of justifying and adumbrating marketised projects of capital. (Cole and Hill 1999a, b).

As Bourne has noted,

New Times was a hall of mirrors, reflecting the moving picture show of the social and cultural upheavals of our time. Everything was in flux, making life uncertain, destroying old realities, creating new ones that were equally ephemeral. 'All that is solid melts into air' declared the New Timers, citing Marx in a last ditch attempt to sound radical (Bourne 1999: 151-2).

Our argument against 'New Times' and following Marx, is that capitalism can only be adequately theorised if 'the economic' and social class are centrally placed.

THE CENTRAL TENETS OF POSTMODERNISM

Identity

One of the most influential contributions made by postmodernist/ post- structuralist thinking has been in the area of 'identity'. Poststructuralist accounts of fragmented, de-centred subjectivity are intellectually dominant. This might be an advance on former monolithic 'vulgar Marxist' accounts of social class influenced by the Stalinist tradition, which substantially ignored questions of ethnicity, sex and sexuality in both theoretical terms and in terms of political action and mobilisation. However much non-Stalinist theory and practice have always recognised the complexity of subjectivity. The notion of an essential, unitary self was rejected, over a century and a half ago, by Marx in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach, 'But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations' (Tucker 1978: 145, cited in Sanders, Hill and Hankin 1999) (7).

Thus we would argue that the concept of decentred subjectivity possesses useful explanatory power when we come to confront the question of declining 'class consciousness' (8). But we challenge arguments and theories proclaiming 'the death of class', and those proclaiming that there is a qualitative equality, a sameness, between oppression and exploitation based on 'race', gender, and social class. Our contention is that class exploitation is fundamental to capitalist economy, as opposed to the (admittedly near universal) sex or 'race' exploitation. We see social class exploitation as fundamental to the continuation of capitalism. Capitalism can survive with various degrees of sex and 'race' equality. However, it cannot concede total liberation to the oppressed - women, black people, lesbians and gay men, the disabled - first of all because it relies on the divisions within the working class to maintain its rule (9), and secondly because the achievement of women's liberation, for example, is dependent on socialist principles, including a replacement for the bourgeois nuclear family, the central site of women's oppression. This does not mean we ignore

democratic demands for increased equality now, within bourgeois society, but it does mean that true liberation of the oppressed (like the liberation of the working class) cannot be achieved within capitalism. That is why it is in the interests of the oppressed to link up with the working class as well as demanding the working class adopt the liberation of the oppressed amongst its demands!

In the 1970s the feminist slogan 'the personal is political' was developed to demand the politicisation of personal life, especially sexual relations. But in the 1980s and 1990s it was used to shift the centre of gravity of struggle from the community and society to the individual. As Bourne says, "'What has to be done?" was replaced by "who am I?" as blacks, feminists and lesbians and gays, who had been part of the pressure groups in Left parties or in social movements campaigning for rights, turned to Identity Politics' (Bourne 1999: 153). In the context of the political shift to the right after 1979/80, both in Britain and the USA, with the elections of Thatcher and Reagan, articulating one's identity changed from being a path to political action to being the political action itself.

As Bourne argues in an analysis of postmodernism and 'race', the politics of identity and difference have been used to justify the break with class politics. Kobena Mercer asserts, 'Identity is a key motif of post-consensus politics because the post-war vocabulary of Left and Right and centre ... has been shot to pieces,' (Mercer, 1990: 50). 'This "Left" is now so diverse', agreed Jonathan Rutherford, 'that its constituent parts have no underlying shared logic, values or politics.' He went on, 'We can use the word difference as a motif for that uprooting of certainty. It represents an experience of change, transformation and hybridity' (Rutherford, 1990:10, cited in Bourne 1999: 153-4)

A number of commentators have taken up the theme. For example, in *Race, Culture and Difference*, a postmodern anthology, edited by James Donald and Ali Rattansi, for example, it is argued that '[g]etting to grips with the dynamics of "race", racism and anti-racism in Britain today means studying an ever changing nexus of representation, discourse and power. And that requires a critical return to the concept culture.' Rethinking culture means discarding 'the claims and comforts' of concepts like community or 'the black experience' to understand that 'race' and identity are 'inherently contestable social and political categories'. According to Rattansi, the new thinkers have re-posed the question 'in terms of cultural authority and individual agency' to require a 'careful analysis of contemporary political struggles over questions of representation, symbolic boundary formation and identification' (Rattansi 1992, cited in Bourne 1999: 155).

Bourne continues,

Rattansi wants us to discard yet more. 'Racism', 'ethnicity', 'nationalism' are no longer part of 'a viable taxonomy'. For they belong to that era of creating 'convincing, all-encompassing explanatory frameworks'. Today, in postmodern times, there is a 'loss of confidence in the West's metanarratives'. Nor could he accept the European Enlightenment's confidence in Reason with Progress that emanates from 'Western Man'. On the contrary, racism is connected to the sub-conscious and the irrational. Besides, how can we use the concepts of a modernity which has been associated with colonialism, genocide, slavery and the Holocaust? If Enlightenment-derived values of human universalism installed 'western man' as the norm, how can we use these same tainted values to mobilise for human rights 'against racialized discrimination, inequalities and violence?' (Bourne 1999: 155).

Whether such concepts as these are helpful in understanding the experience of black people at the hands of the police in Britain and the United States seems to us more than questionable. The enquiry into the handling of the Stephen Lawrence murder in Britain, the beating of a black Haitian and the gunning down of a West African immigrant by New York police have exposed both the London and New York police departments as institutionally racist. That this can be put down to 'a consideration of the relation between the "psychic" and the "social"' seems unhelpful, even laughable.

Many of today's academics, influenced by post-structuralism and postmodernism, would contest this concept of institutional racism, preferring 'racialized discourse' as the key concept of study (10). Secondly, they would view the idea of engaging in a political fight against racism out of date. Thirdly, they would object to the term 'anti-racism' and indeed the anti-racist project, calling instead for the acceptance of 'difference' (Bourne 1999: 150).

As Bourne notes, the whole thinking about race has been turned upside down, depoliticised. Every aspect of left theory on race has been overturned: the relationship of race to class, the fact of institutional racism, the importance of black struggle, the emphasis on the structural as opposed to the individual (Bourne 1999: 150).

Eschewing collective political struggle opened the gates to a whole supermarket of different quasi-political brands of fashionable thinking on what used to be called racism. Prominent among the ideas being sold is that power itself is no longer to be conceptualised in terms of 'the state' or 'the ruling class' but as something that operates everywhere, 'horizontally as much as vertically, internally as well as externally' (Brunt 1988). It can therefore be taken on at a 'multiplicity of points of resistance' which include creating new discourses (ibid.). Thus, for Brunt, politics is not something done 'out there' in meetings and parties but here in the person (Bourne 1999: 152).

The recent formation of a National Civil Rights Movement in Britain (March 1999), based on the American example and supported by many family campaigns against police injustice to blacks, Asians, Irish and asylum seekers, suggests that the oppressed themselves do still think it is necessary to organise, demonstrate and fight in traditional ways to overcome racism and discrimination.

Truth and Knowledge

Central to postmodern theories is the idea that it is no longer possible to talk in terms of truth and knowledge. Instead postmodernists adopt a position that 'truth' is only ever a momentary reading in a chain of meanings. 'Modes of subjectivity, like theories of society or versions of history, are temporary fixings in the on-going process in which any absolute meaning or truth is constantly deferred' (Weedon, 1987: 173, cited in Kelly 1999: 170).

This lack of confidence in the possibility of stating a set of values, seeking knowledge and knowing truth from falsity is evident in another essay in the journal, 'Say you want a revolution...Suggestions for the Impossible future of Critical Pedagogy' by Gert J.J. Biesta. Criticising McLaren for seeking 'the execution of a programme' in his attempt to enumerate a list of 'what must be done' (Biesta 1998: 505), Biesta claims that the only way forward is 'by a perpetual challenge of all claims to authority *including the claims to authority of critical pedagogy itself.*' (His italics). He continues,

This implies that such a challenge cannot be put in the name of some superior knowledge or privileged vision, not even, as Gur-Ze'ev correctly concludes, the knowledge or vision of

the marginalised or oppressed. It can only proceed...on the basis of a fundamental ignorance. Such ignorance is neither naivete nor skepticism. It just is an ignorance that does not claim to know how the future will be or will have to be. It is an ignorance that does not show the way, but only issues an invitation to set out on the journey. It is an ignorance that does not say what to think of it, but only asks, "What do you think about it?" In short, it is an ignorance that makes room for the possibility of disclosure. It is, therefore, an emancipatory ignorance (Biesta 1998: 505).

We are reminded of the slogan - 'Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.' For it is patronising to think that knowledge cannot be learnt from others in a way that is conscious for both parties. Knowledge does not have to be unthinkingly accepted, for it is crucial to develop a critical approach to ideas, so that each one may be tested against experience for its validity, but this process is surely one conceived of as Praxis by Marx and Marxists (11). Furthermore, if we refute the idea that we can learn from history, we are left defenceless in the face of capital's advance. For example, from the experience of the war in Bosnia we can make an informed guess that the current 'war' by NATO forces against Milosevic in Serbia has more to do with the restoration of capitalism in the old Warsaw Pact countries than it has to do with the humanitarian aim of 'saving' the Kosovan Albanians (12).

Foucault is again influential in Biesta's article, especially on the latter's assertions on power and discourse, power and knowledge. His understanding that all knowledge is intimately bound up with power is disabling indeed:

The implication of this understanding of power/knowledge is that knowledge can no longer be used to combat power. This is not to say that change is no longer possible or that knowledge has become futile. It rather signifies the end of the "innocence" of knowledge as a critical instrument, and thus the end of the possibility of demystification. It urges us to recognise that we are always operating in a field of power/knowledge against power/knowledge (Biesta 1998: 506).

While Marxists have always argued that it is important to look out for and take into account where a writer/speaker 'is coming from', this is not the same as Foucault's understanding of the relation between the two concepts knowledge and power. If knowledge is always imbued with power, and therefore cannot be used against it, what of the working class woman who discovers she can speak in public and passes on a few tips to a friend who would like to do the same, as happened in the Women Against Pit Closures movement in the mid 1980s in Britain (13)? Such learning is all but ruled out by Foucault and his disciples.

Social Groups, Class and the Oppressed

Postmodernism refutes the idea of any common interest between oppressed groups and classes (especially of any commonality between the oppressed and the working class) and instead points to how different experiences colour and determine understandings - disallowing any action in common, say between women and the working class, the working class itself, or a fraction of it, black people and women, etc. They argue that Enlightenment thought, including Marxism, is gender and colour blind,

[It] has used the generalising categories of production and class to delegitimise demands of women, black people, gays, lesbians, and others whose oppression cannot be reduced to economics (Nicholson 1990: 11, cited in Kelly 1999: 168).

It is all very well for an academic with a good job and income to reflect on the nuances of difference between women and the very real differences between women and men - but is it in itself, an answer? No of course it is not. Nor is it a credible reading of what Marx and Engels actually wrote. Rather, it is based on a crude and economistic reworking of Marxism which has little to do with what Marx and Engels actually advocated. Neither ever made the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure an inevitable one:

According to the materialist conception of history the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction of life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted.

.....We make our own history, but in the first place under very definite presuppositions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are finally decisive. But the political, etc., ones, and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one (Engels 1890:8).

Nor was their work and the writings of Marxists who followed them on the relationship between the working class and the oppressed a mechanical one. For example Trotsky believed that socialism could not be achieved without the liberation of women from unpaid domestic labour. He wrote in 1924, 'In order to change the conditions of life, we must learn to see them through women's eyes', (Trotsky 1973: 8) and in his polemic against the effects of the Stalinist counter-revolution on the family he wrote:

How man enslaved woman, how the exploiter subjected them both, how the toilers have attempted at the price of blood to free themselves from slavery and have only exchanged one chain for another - history tells us much about this. In essence, it tells us nothing else. But how in reality to free the child, the woman, and the human being? For that we have as yet no reliable models. All past historical experience, wholly negative, demands of the toilers at least and first of all an implacable distrust of all privileged and uncontrolled guardians (Trotsky 1973: 73).

Far from being 'gender-blind' Marxism has a long history of interest in, theories about and practical attempts at overcoming the oppression of women. Nor is it possible today to understand the position of women without the help of theories which can explain women's role in the workplace and in the family - and the relationship between the two. Marxism can help us with this, but it is a help which those engaged in debates about identity ignore. (Rubery (ed.) 1988; Pennington and Westover 1989; Abbott and Wallace 1992; Kelly 1992, 1999).

This does not mean that the relations between the working class and the oppressed do not need to be thought through. Far from it: but these discussions have a history, dating back into the 1970s, and beyond. In that decade, when campaigning activities gave theory a critical edge it has since lost, the terms of the debate were of apparent 'hierarchies' of oppression. Is the oppression of women more important than that of lesbians and gay men? Is the oppression of heterosexuality more central than racial oppression? Socialist feminists always argued that this was not a useful way to pose the problem nor to win the campaign: rather it was necessary to try and build alliances and coalitions. For the central issue was to try and win. It was recognised that one section of the social movements could never win on its own, and nor did the social movements have the social weight to win without the support of working class. The working class is anyhow made up not just

of white men, but of all the oppressed groups too, women, black people, lesbians and gays, the disabled, etc. The question was always how to win as many as possible to any particular demand - say reproductive rights - by showing how such rights affected both women and men. Thus socialist feminists in Britain tried to build alliances between women and the working class through the organisations of the labour movement. Even at Greenham Common, in England, where radical feminists, camped out to oppose American bases with Cruise missiles with the slogan 'Take the Toys from the Boys', were in a majority, women from Labour Party and Trade Union organisations and most famously, women from the Women Against Pit Closures movement, visiting the camp in the mid 1980s, linked the two struggles together.

It is perhaps easier to find such examples in Britain than in the USA, because from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s the class struggle in Britain was at a higher level and the social movements were visible and active. These links between the working class in struggle and the social movements in solidarity culminated with the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-5, and it was seen in practice what could happen when these elements were brought together. Latterly, after the defeat of that strike, with the resurgence of 'New Realism' (14) and the increasing attacks by Thatcher against trade union rights and working conditions, the divisions opened up again. Assertions by theorists of difference such as Judith Butler that the struggles of the oppressed (lesbians and gay men) can 'threaten the workability of capital' are clearly mistaken (Butler 1998: 42). But this need not lead us to ignore such struggles. For it is not that the regulation of sex is not necessary for capitalism, it is, but none of the social movements on its own can threaten the viability of capitalism.

Political Activity

What is most reactionary about postmodern thought is its acceptance that 'nothing can be done' or that what can be done cannot be foreseen. This pessimism characterises many of the responses to McLaren in the journal. For Biesta, for example,

My aim is not to articulate a new program or a new direction for critical pedagogy. I only want to suggest a particular point of view - which focuses on the importance of the recognition of the impossibility of critical education (which is not what is not possible but what cannot be foreseen and calculated as a possibility but literally takes us by surprise) (Biesta 1998: 500).

But what does it mean to be committed to something like justice (the term both McLaren and Gur-Ze'ev seem comfortable with)? I want to suggest - and here I will rely on Jacques Derrida, one of those "postmodernists" whom neither McLaren nor Gur-Ze'ev seems to think offers work with any ethical and political significance - that in the very name of justice, there can be a commitment to the impossibility of justice (Biesta 1998: 508).

Explaining, after Derrida, that 'justice is not a principle or a criterion...nor an ideal' (Biesta 1998: 509), he argues that it is not something we can have knowledge about. Like 'undecidability', justice has 'no course of action which necessarily follows', (Biesta 1998: 509) for Derrida questions the very notions of 'ethics, politics and responsibility' by the phrase 'if there are any' (Biesta 1998: 509). Without having any belief in the possibility of change for the better postmodernism is indeed left in one of Lather's 'stuck places'.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS: CAPITALISM TODAY

While it should be clear that our theoretical and political sympathies lie squarely with McLaren and we thoroughly applaud his return to Marxist theory and his cogent analyses of postmodernism, we have some reservations about his analysis of capitalism today. In his *Education Theory* article he paints a grim picture indeed of capitalism's 'death agony': but written before widespread reporting of the economic crisis spreading from SE Asia to the second biggest world economy, Japan, and beyond to Russia and Brazil for example, his article over-emphasises the strength and underestimates the crisis of the capitalist system. The Brazilian real has suffered a 29% devaluation in the first three months of this year, and their GDP is now - 3.5 - 4% (*The Economist*, March 27 - April 2 1999, p.6.).

Although he notes near the beginning of his article that capitalism is 'self-destructing as a result of intensified competition leading to overcapacity and overproduction and a fall in manufacturing profitability' (McLaren 1998: 432), this insight is not fully integrated into the analysis of the rest of the article. Instead he goes on to list the appalling effects of the crisis on ordinary people, including those in the semi-colonial world. These effects are all absolutely true, and it is refreshing to hear them said out loud, as he does vibrantly and repeatedly in his writings here and elsewhere, but we would alter the balance of his essay by emphasising more than he does the real difficulties global capital is in. McLaren's is an over-pessimistic analysis which does not make a realistic estimate of the balance of forces between capital and labour (by which we take to mean the world working class and the oppressed), instead assuming the total hegemony of the ruling class (presumably worldwide).

A few economic facts reveal some of the structural problems capitalism faces. Japan has been in recession since the beginning of the 1990s. Its economy did not in fact recover from a US-imposed revaluation of the yen in 1985, (this produced a 40% reflation of the yen against the dollar by 1990) so that since 1993 the government has been desperately trying to reflate the economy by neo-Keynesian public spending policies. There have been seven huge government packages, with the latest in December 1998 of \$112 billion, bringing the total to \$760 billion (*Socialist Outlook*, Dec 1998). None of these packages has worked. Last year (1998) saw 1,600 companies a month going bankrupt, with unemployment at record levels (*The Economist*, March - April 2 1999, p 81). The existing Japanese crisis was made worse by the collapse of the 'Tiger' economies last year, and is now a crisis not only of the financial sector, but also of overproduction. There are too many goods chasing too few markets. In Japan the crisis and fear of its implications, including unemployment, has led people to increase savings at the expense of spending. Thus Japan's trade surplus with the rest of the world increased by 45.6% in September 1998; Japanese exports to the USA increased by 3.9% while US imports to Japan fell 9.3%.

Meanwhile (as of May 1999) the US and British stock markets are overpriced, based on an optimism about the long term growth of information technology along with a wave of merger activity. But the internal economy of the US is the most heavily indebted in the world, with few people with any savings and with a spending boom based largely on inflated stock markets. All these factors make a financial crash a real possibility in the near future.

As well as underestimating the crisis of overproduction facing world capital, McLaren's text seems to accept that new markets for capital's possible expansion have opened up after the collapse of the Stalinist states in 1989-90. 'The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s and the shift to capitalism in Eastern Europe have bought nearly five billion people into the world market' (McLaren 1998: 434). But the peoples of these new markets are so poor they cannot afford the goods being overproduced in capital's heartlands; and the so-called 'Tiger' economies of SE Asia, as well as China, are more concerned to sell their goods to the rest of the world than to become its

markets - hence the collapse in the price of semi-conductors, with factories such as Siemens in North West England closing down even before they have started production.

The implicit assumption that the capitalist law of value reigns globally is a secondary problem in the framework of McLaren's essay: he writes, 'Today capital is in command of the world order as never before, as new commodity circuits and the increased speed of capital circulation works to extend and secure capital's global reign of terror' (McLaren 1998: 436). Although politicians and the media would have us think that capitalism, as an economic system, is in control globally, it seems to us that it is at least still open to debate as to whether capitalism has been restored in the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe, China, etc. Here is not the place to debate such issues, but although capital has made big inroads into some of the economies of Eastern Europe, especially the Czech Republic and Hungary, it is less clear that the working class in states such as Rumania and parts of the ex-USSR, are subject to the law of value **(15)**.

Our understanding of Marxist theory should make us stop and think again about the restoration of capitalism in the former Eastern bloc countries. To suggest that capitalism has been restored, that one mode of production (a worker's state) has been overthrown and replaced by another (capitalist) mode, without the violent overthrow of one state form for another, goes against Marxist theory. Marx and Engels, and later Lenin and Trotsky, all took lessons from the Paris Commune of 1870. Marx, *The Civil War in France*, (1871), Lenin, (1917) *State and Revolution*, Trotsky, (1970) *Leon Trotsky on the Paris Commune, Collected Writings from 1906-21*. For example Marx added a point in the 'Preface' to the *Communist Manifesto* in 1872 stating, 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purpose.' Rather, he argued, the bourgeois state has to be overthrown, which would usually result in violence, as the old order defends its interests to the last, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

If this is true for a transition from capitalism to a worker's state, it presumably holds good for a transition from a (degenerated) worker's state **(16)** to a capitalist mode of production. And yet in these states of the former Eastern bloc, the state has not been overthrown violently or otherwise, and while it is true that a market exists and there is some capitalist development, whether the working class is now forced to sell its labour, as a commodity, subject to the law of value, is still open to question.

These two sets of points suggest that capitalism is in much worse shape than might seem to be the case from a first reading of McLaren's article. However he does provide some stunning statistics on the effects of capitalism in crisis, including in England where the flexible workforce is now a reality for a majority of workers. The figure that he quotes of 51% not in full time employment is from 1996, but it is likely that the process of introducing part-time, temporary contracts he describes, has increased not decreased. (McLaren 1998: 449) **(17)**. Later, he quotes from an article by Bill Bigelow giving the lie to the idea that it is fine to pay workers in developing countries less because their cost of living is lower: 'He notes that milk in Haiti is 75 cents; in New York, 65 cents; eggs in Haiti are \$1.50; in New York, \$1.39; cereal in Haiti is \$1.90; in New York, \$1.60; gas in Haiti is \$2.20; in New York, \$1.26' (McLaren 1998: 456).

While he does provide some useful material on the impact of capital's barbaric activities, he overestimates the possible role that a 'critical pedagogy' could play. The very question he asks reveals this:

Can a renewed and revived critical pedagogy grounded in an historical materialist approach to educational reform serve as a point of departure for a politics of resistance and counterhegemonic struggle in the twenty-first century? (McLaren 1998: 448).

Could a 'critical pedagogy' play such a role? We are not here arguing that it is irrelevant what educators do. Far from it, the class struggle is played out in everyone's everyday lives, be we teachers, steel workers or nurses. It is also played out in the lives of school and college students, as evidenced in the very substantial contemporary and recent Marxist analysis of Education (summarised in Livingstone 1995; Rikowski 1996; Cole, Hill and Rikowski 1997). Where critical and Marxist educators do disagree is over the role and over the efficacy of critical pedagogy.

While recognising the considerable limitations on the transformative capacity of individuals, groups and apparatuses (limitations habitually under- recognised by culturalist neo-Marxists) (Hill 1999a), we do however, with McLaren (and his considerable corpus of work on critical pedagogy) agree that teachers should be 'critical transformative intellectuals', committed to a metanarrative of social justice inside and outside the classroom (Hill 1997b; Cole, Hill, Soudien and Pease 1997).

This concept is highly problematic. How is real social change to be accomplished? When it comes to it, McLaren's ten points are grounded, as they must be, in classroom practice - albeit of a radical and challenging kind- so that his question as to whether critical pedagogy is a point of departure for 'a politics of resistance and counter-hegemonic struggles' (McLaren 1998: 448) remains inevitably unanswered (18). Whether or not it is a point of departure, we, with McLaren, consider that, along with material realisation and circumstance, such a politics is a necessary part of this counter-hegemonic struggle.

Conclusion

To conclude with some brief observations on the theoretical position adopted by McLaren's critics in *Education Theory* (Fall 1998, 48, (4)), Lather's project of 'disciplining the featured essays ... with some feminist pedagogy' (Lather 1998: 489) consists of an acceptance that 'the educational Left in the United States has largely failed to effect change not only in global capitalist relations but also in its more specific target of schooling', and a proposal that 'a sort of stammering and stuttering in terms of the constitution and protocols of knowledge' could be a way forward (Lather 1998: 490). Failed it might be, but 'stammering and stuttering' even used metaphorically, in the face of the clear-headed offensives of capital, will get us nowhere. Simply charging Marxist theory as macho, a 'master discourse', 'too strong, too erect, too stiff' (Lather 1998: 490) is a derogation of the responsibility of developing serious theory.

Kohli, though more muted in her criticism of McLaren (and Gur-Ze'ev), '[they] offered me insight and inspiration, even as I differed with them' (Kohli 1998: 512), nonetheless also rejects the view that 'objective laws of history' (her short-hand for Marxism) are 'subtle enough to explain the cultural complexities and differential effects of cyber-capitalism' (Kohli 1998: 512). Despite acknowledging that class analysis remains relevant, that 'economic conditions are crucial to any critical analysis of a post-industrial world' (Kohli 1998: 512), she does not herself return to these ideas, agreeing instead with Gur-Ze'ev 'where he argues for a more skeptical, less utopian "counter-education" that "does not promise collective emancipation"' (Kohli 1998: 517), and drawing on Foucault and 'embodiment', 'to ask different questions about the intelligibility of the self, the individual in relation to others, and the knowledge/power nexus that produced us' (Kohli 1998: 519).

Biesta too, in his use of terms such as 'emancipatory ignorance', 'the impossibility of justice', 'the impossibility of demystification' (Biesta 1998: 505, 508, 510), even if these impossibilities 'release the possible' (Biesta 1998: 510), seems to be playing with words rather than seriously confronting the crisis of radical educational theories. His final sentence, 'That will be the real revolution' (Biesta 1998: 510) is just a cover - his ideas will no more bring about the conditions for a social revolution than those of Lather and Kohli.

Postmodern calls to refute notions of truth and adopt a praxis of undecidability seems at best irresponsible in the face of capital's barbarity, at worst they do indeed appear to 'accommodate to the requirements of capital' (McLaren 1998: 449). Rather than seeking answers to compelling questions of a viable future for millions of ordinary people caught in capitalism's vicious grip, postmodernists celebrate uncertainty, confusion and lack of knowledge.

NOTES

1. Our aim in this paper is not to engage in the (largely North American) debate on critical pedagogy, but rather to intervene in the wider educational debate between postmodernism and Marxism. We have put forward our views on critical transformative education elsewhere (e.g. Hill 1990, 1991, 1997b; Cole, Hill, Pease and Soudien 1997; Hill, Cole and Williams 1997).
2. Originally 'exiled' from Canadian academia for his Marxist views, McLaren himself embraced postmodernism for a period in the 1980s and early 1990s (e.g. McLaren 1994) only to return to an historical materialist position in the later 1990s (e.g. McLaren 1998; McLaren and Farahmandpur 1999; McLaren, Hill and Cole, 1999).
3. *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* was edited by Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, published by Lawrence and Wishart in association with *Marxism Today*, in 1989. It was a compilation of articles reprinted from *Marxism Today*. The 'Introduction' sums up the project of the collection, 'The 'New Times' argument is that the world has changed, not just incrementally but qualitatively, that Britain and other advanced capitalist societies are increasingly characterised by diversity, differentiation and fragmentation, rather than (sic) homogeneity, standardisation and the economies of scale which characterised modern mass society. This is the essence of the...transition from 'Fordism' ...to 'post-Fordism' (Hall and Jacques 1989: 11-12). For an extended discussion, see below.
4. The quote is, 'the determining factor in history is, in the last instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life', from Engels (1884), *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.
5. The working class on its own is capable of overthrowing the state, but without the incorporation of the demands of the oppressed the revolution would be deformed from the start.
6. See note 3 for discussion of 'New Times' and *Marxism Today*.
7. Norman Geras in his stimulating exegesis of Marx's Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*, argues that there are at least two possible readings of the Sixth Thesis: 'In its reality the nature of man is conditioned by the ensemble of social relations, and/or, 'In its reality human nature, or the nature of man, is manifested in the ensemble of social relations (Geras 1983: 46-47). It is important, in reading the Sixth Thesis, to interpret it

dialectically and not to exclude the active role of human beings who act in history, albeit in prescribed circumstances.

8. For a discussion see Sanders, Hill and Hankin 1999.

9. Such divisions have, historically, included those between 'the aristocracy of labour' on the one hand and unskilled labour on the other.

10. Bourne also argues that the term 'black people' would be disputed as essentialist and replaced by ethnic identities. However, it should be pointed out, in relation to this point of Bourne's, that 'black' as an all-encompassing nomenclature has also been contested in Marxist analysis, for example by Miles (1993) and by Virdee (1999) and Virdee and Cole (1999).

11. See p. 4 above for more on Lather's use of the concept 'praxis'.

12. This knowledge should not lead us to ignore the rights of self determination of the Kosovan people, but it places the break-up of ex-Yugoslavia in the context of the role played by the IMF and the World Bank in bankrupting that country, thus exacerbating existing ethnic tensions to the point of war. For more on this see Michel Chossudovsky (1996) *Dismantling Former Yugoslavia, Recolonising Bosnia*.

13. Women against Pit Closures was formed during the year-long 1984-5 Miner's Strike in Britain. Women in the mining communities, wives, sisters, mothers and friends of the miners organised together in solidarity with the strikers. It was a mass phenomenon. They went on picket lines, spoke at public meetings here and abroad, organised communal meals and visited the women's camp at Greenham Common, set up to campaign against the Cruise Missiles kept at the Greenham Common air base.

14. 'New Realism' was the name given to the defeatist response of the Labour and Trade Union movement in Britain to the election of the Thatcher Government in 1979. It argued that the Tory Government could not be defeated and so the working class should not try to fight against the attacks: rather, they should accept that the only possible way forward, realistically, was for the Trade Union leaders to try and negotiate a few small concessions. This was in the situation of high unemployment and a large Conservative majority in Parliament. In fact it was possible to fight, as the Miner's Strike showed, and it was also possible to win, as the campaign against the Poll Tax, which was partially responsible in Thatcher's downfall in 1990 also showed.

15. For example these workers often do not get paid and yet they go on working, especially in sectors like hospitals and schools; not a practice you find workers in capitalist economies undertaking. Many huge factories are 'overstaffed' by capitalist standards, and furthermore they are often paid 'in kind' rather than with wages. The recent example of a whole factory workforce being paid with pickled gherkins, which they were obliged to sell or exchange in the local market, is another example of an almost feudal system based on barter which has developed there. At a recent conference an employee of a North American Bank reported from Russia that the local water works of the town was still working to a plan of eight years ago, no orders having been received since then! Moreover because many local businesses cannot pay their water taxes, both the local restaurant and goods from the food store over the road were free to water workers! At present it seems that privatisation programmes have run up against the buffers, and big business is calling for the renationalisation of such businesses, to be privatised later, when the conditions are better. (Andy Kilmister, personal communication).

16. There has been a debate amongst Marxists about how to characterise the ex-USSR since the 1930s. On the one hand some have said Stalin's counter-revolution introduced a form of state capitalism, rather akin to Nasser's Egypt; others have argued that it remained a worker's state, but in a degenerate form. Whilst seeming a rather esoteric discussion, it had consequences in terms of whether or not to defend the USSR against imperialist attack.

17. For more on the 'flexible workforce' and especially the position of women in Britain's workforce see Kelly 1999: 179.

18. For McLaren 'critical pedagogy is, I maintain, a necessary (but not sufficient) element in this resistance [to capitalism]' (McKaren 1998: 436).

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CORRESPONDENCE

Dave Hill
University College Northampton
Park Campus
Boughton Green Rd.
Northampton NN2 7AL
dave.hill@northampton.ac.uk
(+ 44) (0)1604 735500

Postmodernism in Educational Theory: Education and the Politics of Human Resistance

**Dave Hill, Peter McLaren, Mike Cole and Glenn Rikowski
(eds.)**

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Postmodernism has become the orthodoxy in educational theory, particularly in feminist educational theory. It heralds the end of grand theories like Marxism and liberalism, scorning any notion of a united feminist challenge to patriarchy, of united anti-racist struggle and of united working-class movements against capitalist exploitation and oppression. For postmodernists, the world is fragmented, history is ended, and all struggles are local and particularistic.

Written by leading and internationally renowned British and North American socialist and Marxist thinkers and activists, Postmodernism in Educational Theory poses a serious challenge to this postmodern orthodoxy. Authors critically examine the infusion of postmodernism and theories of postmodernity into educational theory, policy and research. In addition, issues such as social class, 'race' and racism, gender, education policy and policy analysis, youth, and capital and commodification are addressed.

Writers in the book argue that despite the claims of self-styled 'postmodernists of resistance', postmodernism provides neither a viable educational politics, nor a foundation for effective radical educational practice. In place of postmodernism, the book outlines a 'politics of human resistance' which puts the challenge to capital(ism) and its attendant inequalities firmly on the agenda of educational theory, politics and practice.

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Business,

Business, Business: New Labour's Education Policy

A DAY CONFERENCE

ORGANISED BY

The Hillcole Group of

Radical Left Educators

Saturday 23rd October 1999, 10.30am- 4pm
The Friends Meeting House
Euston Rd., London (opposite Euston Station)

Speakers confirmed include:

Pat Ainley (University of Greenwich)
Martin Allen (Socialist Teachers' Alliance)
Caroline Benn (writer and adult educator)
Christine Blower (NUT)
Clyde Chitty (Forum Magazine and Goldsmiths' College)
Mike Cole (Hillcole Group and Brighton University)
Rosalyn George (Hillcole Group and Goldsmiths' College)
Richard Hatcher (Education and Social Justice journal and University of Central England)
Dave Hill (Hillcole Group and University College Northampton)
Janet Holland (South Bank University)
Rehana Minhas (Haringey LEA)
Jan Pollock (NATFHE Rank and File, London City Lit.)
(Institutional/LEA and union speakers in a personal capacity)

Organised by members of the The Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators including: Martin Allen (Socialist Teachers' Alliance, schoolteacher), Caroline Benn, (writer and adult educator), Shane Blackman, Clyde Chitty (Forum Magazine and Goldsmiths' College), John Clay (Brighton University), Mike Cole (Brighton University), Rosalyn George (Goldsmiths' College), Imelda Gardiner (schoolteacher), Dave Hill (University College Northampton), Janet Holland (South Bank University), Glenn Rikowski (Birmingham University), Julian Wooton (schoolteacher). The Hillcole Group is a group of socialist teachers and educationalists which publishes books and booklets through Tufnell Press www.tpress.free-online.co.uk/Hillcole.html

***Business, Business, Business:
New Labour's Education Policy***

10.am	Registration Mike Cole to chair the day	
10.30-10.40	The Hillcole Group	Rosalyn George, Janet Holland
10.40-11.10	Labour's Green Paper	Christine Blower
11.10-11.40	New Labour's Education Business	Dave Hill
12.00-12.45	Workshops	
	1. New Labour's Education Business	Dave Hill
	2. Labour's Green Paper	Christine Blower, Martin Allen
	3. LEAs	Rehana Minhas
12.45-1.30	Lunch	
1.30-2.00	Education Action Zones and Beyond	Richard Hatcher
2.00-2.30	FE and HE	Jan Pollock, Pat Ainley
2.40-3.30	Workshops	
	1. EAZs and Beyond	Richard Hatcher
	2. FE/HE	Jan Pollock, Pat Ainley
	3. Where To for the Left?	Caroline Benn, Clyde Chitty
3.30-4.00	The Way Forward	Caroline Benn, Clyde Chitty
	Conclusions to the Day	Dave Hill

Saturday 23rd October 1999, 10.30am- 4pm

The Friends Meeting House

Euston Rd., London (opposite Euston Station)

Coffee/Tea/Lunch Sandwiches available (for purchase)

Entrance: £10; low waged £5; students and concessions £2

Advance bookings to Dave Hill, University College Northampton, Park Campus, Boughton Green Rd; Northampton NN2 7AL, or phone Dave Hill on 01604 735500 or 01273 270943. Cheques payable to 'The Hillcole Group'. Emails to dave.hill@northampton.ac.uk. See www.tpress.free-online.co.uk/conf.html