REJOINDER AND DISCUSSION

How Peter McLaren and Donna Houston, and Other "Green" Marxists Contribute to the Globalization of the West's Industrial Culture

C. A. BOWERS University of Oregon

For years, I have been critical of Freire and his many followers for ignoring the deepening ecological crisis and the human misery that it contributes to. That two prominent theorists within this Marxist/Freirean tradition of thinking should, some 32 years after the publication of *Limits to Growth* (1974), now be turning their attention to the formulation of a "revolutionary" ecology is a major development that I should welcome. Unfortunately, Peter McLaren with his coauthor Donna Houston (who published "Revolutionary Ecologies: Critical Pedagogy Ecosocialism" in a previous special issue of Educational Studies; McLaren and Houston 2004), and Moacir Gadotti, director of the Freire Institute of Brazil (whom I criticized in the same issue) make the mistake that Friedrich Nietzsche warned about; that is, interpreting new phenomena in terms of an old schema. Repeating a central part of Freire's formulaic thinking, Gadotti (2002) is unable to recognize the problematic nature of dichotomous thinking (an old cultural schema that we continue to perpetuate) whereby the supposedly universally oppressive nature of "cultural transmission" is juxtaposed against the universally progressive achievements that will follow from the student's "grand journey" into "his interior universe," which magically will lead to a shared "planetary consciousness." Similarly, McLaren and Houston's reliance on a core part of formulaic thinking among Marxists leads them to ignore the cultural assumptions they share with the industrial culture that they criticize. This is another double-bind schema that McLaren and Houston share with a wide range of constructivist educational reformers.

Unfortunately, they are not alone in reducing the different aspects of the ecological crisis to what can be understood by the interpretive schema worked out in Marx's writings. After reading their article on "Revolutionary Ecologies" (which involves a juxtaposition of two words that present a total misunderstanding of cultural and natural systems as ecologies), I read three books listed in their references: James O'Connor's (1998) *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*, Ted

Benton's (1996) *The Greening of Marxism*, and Paula Allman's (1999) *Revolutionary Social Transformation*. All three Marxist theorists rely on the same vocabulary that is dictated by the cultural assumptions that Marx took for granted—assumptions that ironically he shared with the industrial culture that was in its incipient stage of globalization. What is marginalized by the limited nature of Marx's lexicon, and thus linguistic tools of analysis, is that it did not provide a way of naming and thus understanding the importance of the world's diverse cultural knowledge systems—particularly as repositories of knowledge of the limits and possibilities of local bioregions. Just as the industrial system that Marx criticized (and that Lenin viewed as being improved by the adoption of Taylorism) required the colonization of other cultures, the revolutionary prescriptions of McLaren and Houston and Gadotti fail to take account of the differences in other cultural knowledge systems and thus must also be understood as reproducing a colonizing effect.

Aside from McLaren and Houston's references to the need for critical pedagogy theorists to turn their attention to the ecological crisis, the theory that is to guide this refocusing of their revolutionary efforts could have been written decades ago. Indeed, it has been reiterated so many times over the last hundred or so years that it has become an example of formulaic thinking that Nietzsche warns us about. The green Marxists mentioned earlier also rely on the same Marxist vocabulary that is unable to address either the cultural roots of the ecological crisis (other than those of capitalism and class oppression) or what we can learn from cultures that have resisted (not always successfully) the enclosure of their commons.

Had McLaren and Houston actually read David Gruenewald's (2003) article, "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place," instead of quoting two words that fit the vocabulary of critical pedagogy theorists (the most problematic for me being *interrogate*, which is the most frequently used verb in a police state), they would have encountered a description of eco-justice that cannot be reduced to a matter of "class exploitation." And if they had read any of my books that Gruenewald listed in his reference section, they might have become aware of the other silences that are directly attributable to the Marxist paradigm that they and the other green Marxists urge the world to embrace again. That is, I discuss different cultures that have developed ecologically sustainable beliefs and practices that represent different approaches for resisting the spread of economic and technological globalization, and I cite authors such as Vandana Shiva (1993), Helena Norberg-Hodge (1992), the key members of PRATEC who are engaged in cultural affirmation projects in Peru and Bolivia, and the Third World contributors to Wolfgang Sachs's book that criticizes the cultural transformations that result from the Western way of thinking about development (1992). Instead of taking seriously these diverse cultural expressions of resistance, and considering what we can learn from them that would be relevant to how we revitalize the commons spread across North America, McLaren and Houston give us yet another example of verbal theater where revolutionary theorists rely on the magical power of their god-words to overcome the on-the-ground forces of oppression. Verbal theater, as we all know, has not reversed the accelerating transformation of the commons into market relationships—though it may continue to have a ritual cleansing effect like going to confession and preparing for the rapture to separate the deserving from the undeserving.

The silences that McLaren and Houston share with the green Marxists, and with Marx himself, are a prominent feature of their way of understanding the mission of an "ecosocialist pedagogy." If McLaren's pedagogy were to be universally adopted, it would contribute to the globalization of the West's industrial culture—just as would be the case with the universal adoption of Freire's and Gadotti's respective approaches to emancipation from the diverse forms of cultural transmission they equate with a banking approach to education This is a serious criticism, and thus it needs to be explained further.

What the industrial culture needs in order to expand is the elimination of cultural differences as well as the undermining of the intergenerational knowledge that is the basis of the interdependent and self-sufficient networks that enable individuals to be less dependent on consumerism. In many non-Western cultures, work is understood as "returned" rather than as paid. What the industrial culture requires, in short, is the autonomous individual—that is, a consumer-oriented industrial culture requires anomic individuals who have no intergenerationally derived knowledge and skills that reduce their dependence on what can be industrially produced and sold. The individual who engages in the continual process of emancipation will, in short, have neither the skills nor the culturally relevant knowledge that is required to participate in the mutual tasks of the community. What Freire and his followers have failed to recognize is that the revitalization of the commons is dependent on other approaches to learning than the one approach to knowledge that they propose.

The argument can be made that the shared pattern of reducing the culturally diverse and complex forms of intergenerational knowledge to what Freire calls the banking approach to education, and Gadotti reduces to the "cultural transmission" that stands in opposition to the student's grand journey into "his" subjective world, can be traced back to Marx's reliance on a political economy analysis of the role of capitalism in shaping class relationships and the legitimating ideology—as well as Marx's acceptance of the cultural assumption that change is linear and inherently progressive in nature. It's interesting to speculate about how Freire's ideas may have taken a different form if Marx had instead been grounded in cultural and linguistic anthropology. But here there is another irony: While Marx ignored the importance of understanding the knowledge systems of other cultures, his view of peasant cultures as backward and in need of moving through the stages of industrial development in order to arrive at a classless society appears to have been influ-

enced by the Social Darwinian and racist thinking that characterized the early beginnings of anthropology.

This observation may appear to be irrelevant to my critique of the silences and missionary agenda of McLaren and Houston, Freire, and their many followers. Yet this early phase of Social Darwinian thinking shows up in Freire's ways of categorizing cultures in terms of what he interprets as their different stages of development. For example, in Education for Critical Consciousness (Freire 1973), the intellectual leader that McLaren and Houston urge us to follow identified three stages of cultural development, with the most primitive and animal-like stage being identified as a "semi-intransitivity of consciousness" (17). The more evolved cultures, he noted, possess a "critically transitive consciousness" (18–19). Like contemporary Darwinian theorists who attempt to extend the theory of natural selection, which is a powerful explanatory framework in the biological realm, Freire identifies cultures based on critical reflection as the most advanced—thus overlooking the Janus nature of critical reflection (i.e., its role in developing the technologies that have, over the last 200 years, trashed the environment and undermined traditions that represent alternatives to a consumer-dependent lifestyle). The bias against nonmodern and non-Western cultures that is an inherent aspect of Marx's thinking, of his followers such as McLaren or Freire, and most of Western academics, is important for several reasons. The first is that it eliminates any doubts about the right (indeed, the responsibility) to colonize these less developed cultures—and thus to indoctrinate them to think and act in ways that enable them to achieve their highest potential as critical human beings—as Freire understands it. The second reason that the latent Social Darwinian interpretative schema is important is that it explains why more developed cultures such as those in the West should ignore what can be learned from these supposedly backward cultures even though many of them have succeeded, where Western cultures have not, in living within the limits of their bioregions.

One more point needs to be made about the Darwinian-based cultural assumptions that are a taken-for-granted part of the McLaren and Houston–Freire agenda for the rest of the world. Their emphasis on critical reflection as the one true source of knowledge that is to be continually problematized, if it could be implemented, would undermine the knowledge systems of other cultures and thus lead to a world monoculture. This is justified on the grounds that they, and only they, know what constitutes social justice, but this development would be contrary to how natural selection works—which is to foster diversity. If there is an extrapolation that can be made from the theory of natural selection that has relevance for understanding cultures, it is that cultural diversity is a better fit with the diversity of the earth's bioregions than the monoculture that would result if McLaren, Freire, and Gadotti could impose their one true approach to emancipation and empowerment on the rest of the world.

One of the most revealing sentences in McLaren and Houston's (2004) article reads: "An ecosocialist focus on the dialectics of justice can help us replenish the soil of *universal* [italics added] human endeavor by bringing to the attention of students the intractable connection between capitalism and ecological devastation" (36). I can agree that this connection is responsible for many aspects of the ecological crisis; but McLaren and Houston's recommendation that Marx's formula of "from each according to his abilities and each according to needs" has not even been achieved in Marxist countries where political power and the instruments of interrogation and death for the "reactionary elements" were concentrated in the hands of political leaders who could turn Marx into a rap performance that would far exceed anything that McLaren and Freire could do.

McLaren's statement about what should be the "universal human endeavor" is yet another example of how far Freirean theorists have become divorced from the way in which cultural (particularly religious) differences have transformed today's political realities. One does not have to be a cultural anthropologist to know that other cultures, especially cultures that are very much in the news today, such as the Islamic, Hindu, Jewish, and Christian evangelicals who are looking forward to the rapture and are shaping political decisions at the highest level of government, to know that few members of any of these cultures would agree with McLaren and Houston's way of understanding what should be the "universal human endeavor."

Importantly yet ironically overlooked, McLaren and Houston's (2004) restatement of Marx's prescription for the allocation of material goods is more likely to be found in the practices of some indigenous cultures where the sense of moral reciprocity leads to greater cooperation and sharing of the material necessities of life. But even these cultures are not likely to agree that there is such a thing as a universal human endeavor—especially if they were to learn that it is to be based on the Freirean idea that each individual and generation should rely on critical reflection to "emerge from this daily routine that repeats itself" (Freire 1985, 199).

The one issue that is becoming a concern in many of the world's diverse cultures is how to revitalize their commons and thus to limit the further enclosure by the West's industrial culture. What limits their ability to prevent their respective cultural and environmental commons from being further enclosed as part of the West's industrial culture is that as their nonmonetized traditions are undermined by Western approaches to education (including the Western media and constructivist approaches to education—of which Freirean thinking is a part) they become more dependent on a money economy. This dependence on a money-based economy, in turn, gives the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and other international institutions more control over their lives, forcing them to become even more dependent on a money economy even as technological developments further advantage the already wealthy. What McLaren and Houston do

not recognize is that the forces that are undermining what remains of the commons are too complex to be reduced to a matter of class exploitation.

McLaren and Houston's (2004, 41) prescription that each generation should "collectively control production" in order to free themselves from coercion and oppression has particular relevance for sustaining the commons in different cultures. Unfortunately, the more formulaic aspects of Freirean thinking, that they, along with Henry Giroux, Peter Roberts, and the advocates of "transformative learning" promote, undermine the capacity for community self-sufficiency, which can take many forms. Subjecting all intergenerational knowledge and values to critical reflection, and the recognition that there are no other approaches to renewing knowledge, would undermine the ability to "collectively control production."

What McLaren and Houston's highly abstract way of thinking ignores is that "production," which may take the form of knowing how and when to plant a field of rice, build a house, prepare a meal, utilize a variety of technologies necessary for the making of clothes and medicines, write a play, and participate in community-centered arts and sports, is dependent on the intergenerational knowledge that the Freirean pedagogy would relegate to the junk heap of reactionary and oppressive knowledge. McLaren and Houston share with Freire and Gadotti, as well as the proponents of transformative learning, a vastly oversimplified and distorted way of understanding traditions. The irony is that they re-enact a large number of traditions in order to get their ideas into print and in participating in the routines of daily life. And most are strong adherents of such traditions as academic freedom, tenure, and royalty payments (I recall that during our lunchtime conversation, Freire could not get off the subject of how his royalties were being ripped off in certain countries). But it is more than a problem of irony; their emphasis on the emancipatory mission of critical reflection and thus a constructivist approach to knowledge contributes to undermining the other forms of education and renewal that are essential to the various forms of ecologically sustainable production on which human life depends.

McLaren and Houston appear caught in the time warp of a Marxist interpretation of cultural development where the promise of an industrial culture remains unrealized because of the greed and power of the capitalist class. Thus, neither they nor the other followers of Marx and Freire give attention to the nature of the commons, the culturally diverse approaches to local decision making about how to sustain the commons—and how to resist the modern approaches to the enclosure and thus monetization of the commons. Perhaps if their metaphorically layered language did not encode so many prejudices and misconceptions about the cultural commons, they would be able to recognize the importance of what Gruenewald (2004) described as place-based education—which can also be understood as education that revitalizes the commons.

McLaren and Houston, Freire, and Gadotti are correct in criticizing the industrial culture as a source of environmental degradation and global hegemony, but their self-imposed linguistic framework limits their ability to discuss what the alternatives are to the industrial culture they are just now beginning to understand as ecologically unsustainable. If we ask what culture assumptions keep them from asking what the alternatives are to an industrial mode of existence, we would have to conclude that one of them is the same assumption that Dewey also took for granted, namely, that change is the expression of progress, especially when guided by critical reflection (1929). Given this assumption, the task of educators then becomes, as Henry Giroux repeats over and over, that of the "transformative intellectual" (2002). Unfortunately, this ideologically driven optimism about the efficacy of teacher/student knowledge to change the world cannot be supported by the changes we are now witnessing in the environment and by the cultural changes resulting from computer-based technologies. What is being ignored by the self-imposed linguistic determinism that makes so repetitive the analysis and prescriptions of McLaren and Houston, Freire, and their many followers who forget to think critically about their own formulaic thinking is the one source of resistance to the further spread of industrial culture: the varied cultural and environmental commons that have not yet been enclosed by patents, corporate and private ownership, monetization, and market forces.

Asking what needs to be conserved within our own varied commons that represents alternatives (indeed, sites of resistance) to the further commodification of every facet of daily life is perhaps the most important silence in the vocabulary and thus in the thinking of McLaren and the other Marxist/Freirean theorists. But the use of *conserve* is viewed by these progressive thinkers as a reactionary word, which they incorrectly associate with the Rush Limbaugh type neoliberal mentality that now dominates American politics. That the central focus of the environmental movement is on *conserving* the diversity of species and that we now need to think more clearly about conserving the gains made in the areas of civil rights, the labor movement, and the traditions of local democracy (now threatened by the World Trade Organization and the government's increasing use of panopticon technologies) seems not to have altered the McLaren/Freirean tradition of associating conservatism with capitalism—which happens to be the greatest "transformative learning" force in the world today. Unfortunately, the transformational learning is now being dictated by the new technologies and by the new laws that extend the process of enclosure into such areas of life as gene lines and now cyberspace.

Because McLaren and Houston's (2004) article suggests that using eco-justice as a guide to educational reform is also, along with critical pedagogy, a "revolutionary" ecology, it is important to clarify once again the differences between the two approaches to reform. Given that there are few discussions of the educational

reform implications of an eco-justice oriented pedagogy, one might have expected McLaren and Houston to have read my recent article, "Can Critical Pedagogy Be Greened?" (Bowers 2003, 11–20), as well as *Educating for Eco-Justice and Community* (Bowers 2001). It is quite apparent that while making a reference to several of my recent books and thus conveying the impression that they are knowledgeable about their contents, McLaren and Houston had read neither the article nor the most relevant book.

Given their suggestion that critical pedagogy, along with a strong emphasis on a class analysis, contributes to the achievement of eco-justice, it is important to clarify here the basic differences between the two approaches to educational reform. We must start with the hallmark of critical pedagogy theorists: their claim that all traditions are sources of oppression and thus must be overturned through the development of a critical understanding of reality—which, in turn, is to lead to a transformation of that reality. Freire refers to the forms of learning that do not involve the transformation of intergenerational knowledge as a banking approach (1974), while Gadotti calls it cultural transmission (2002), and Bill Doll refers to it as a *closed system of thinking* (1993)—whereas others, such as Peter Roberts, view the passing on of traditions as a reactionary process (2000). Giroux's idea of the "teacher as a transformative intellectual," which he suggested should be the model of teachers in Pakistan as well in other parts of the world (2002), captures the essence of critical pedagogy as leading to a culture of continual change that is based on the critical reflection of students and teachers who have only a limited range of experience—and are unlikely to be able to discriminate between their own subjective needs and the needs of an interdependent and sustainable commons.

An eco-justice approach to educational reform contrasts sharply from this approach to continual revolution. Addressing eco-justice issues—such as environmental racism, economic and cultural domination of Third World cultures by the West, revitalizing the commons in ways that reduce dependence on a money economy and represent sites of resistance to the spread of industrial culture, conserving natural systems and thus helping to ensure that the prospects of future generations will not be diminished, and recognizing the importance of earth democracy—have many curricular implications that require a critical awareness of cultural practices that exacerbate injustices in each of these areas. But critical awareness is only part of the process of contributing to eco-justice and the revitalization of the commons. The other part is to help students recognize what needs to be conserved—and to discriminate between the forms of conservatism that help to perpetuate injustices and those that are essential to the achieving eco-justice in the areas just mentioned.

In other words, students need to learn that the word *conserving* is the most appropriate political term for addressing the health-related benefits of toxic-free

environments for all segments of society, cultural knowledge and practices that have a smaller ecological footprint, networks of mutual support that reduce dependence on a consumer-dependent lifestyle, and ensuring that the cultural achievements in the areas of civil liberties and the democratic traditions of sustaining the commons. As I pointed out earlier, the code words *class*, *emancipation*, and *critical reflection*, although appropriate in certain circumstances, do not help educators understand what needs to be conserved if the world's different cultures are to resist the industrial transformations that are now being aggressively promoted in the growing and preparation of food, in health care, in entertainment, and in the commodification of such areas of the natural commons as potable water.

The critical pedagogy literature, along with McLaren and Houston's (2004) article, are prime examples of how this wheel of theory, while going round and round in a repetitive circle, never touches the ground of everyday reality as it is lived in the different cultures of the world. Thus, these ethnocentric theorists never address specific cultural practices that contribute to the achievement of eco-justice within the commons. Where do they stand on the patenting of indigenous knowledge? Or do they view, for example, the indigenous knowledge of the medicinal qualities of local plants as an expression of tradition and thus a banking approach to education that needs to be overturned by a "transformative" member of the local culture who has come under the influence of a critical pedagogy oriented teacher? Where do they stand with regard to the forms of intergenerational knowledge and practices that enable people to resist the further enclosure (i.e., privatization, monetization, commodification) of the commons? Does the farmer's knowledge of how to select the best seeds for next year's planting need to be conserved, or is the Monsanto Corporation's culturally transformative agenda that is also encoded in the genetically altered seeds more in line with the revolutionary thinking of McLaren and Houston and Freire?

What needs to be conserved in different cultures if they are to resist the industrialization of food that is now part of the globalizing agenda of powerful elites that agree with McLaren and Houston and Freire that people should be emancipated from their traditions? The failure to recognize that critical reflection can serve both to bring about needed changes as well as to help clarify why many traditions should be conserved is a major problem that is not being addressed by McLaren and by the many followers of Freire. In addition to making it difficult to publish books that do not adhere to their politically correct way of thinking, their contribution to addressing the deep cultural roots of the ecological crisis is to perpetuate a form of political theatre where the god-words and clichéd thinking are the main focus of attention. The participants in this verbal and highly ritualized theater gain only in terms of publications that advance their professional careers and in further reinforcing their group identity.

But unlike other forms of ritualized behavior that changes little in real life, their theater is taken seriously by classroom teachers who find that the god-words of critical pedagogy reinforce their romantic thinking about the importance of students discovering their own knowledge and values—which is just what serves the interests of those who gain from the spread of the industrial culture.

Hyperconsumerism contributes to undermining the achievement of eco-justice in all of the areas mentioned earlier. It is also changing the earth's natural systems in ways that exceed the ability of the eco-management technologies to ensure a sustainable future. In the book *Steady-State Economics*, Herman E. Daly (1991) made the point that the one area in which unlimited growth does not have an adverse impact on the environment is in our symbolic systems. So far, I have used examples in the areas of food, health care, built environments, and so forth, to highlight the silences in the writings of McLaren and other critical pedagogy theorists about how conserving is a form of resistance to the spread of industrial culture. There are other areas in which conserving and innovation come together in ways that strengthen the commons while resisting the commodification of the symbolic world that Daly envisions as part of the basis of a sustainable future.

The arts—including literature, poetry, dance, visual arts, theater, and so forth—are also dependent on carrying forward (conserving) the achievements of the past while at the same time becoming the basis for the expression of imagination and reinterpretation. Mentors are the intergenerational bridge in this process, and the development of talent, values, and identity that grows out of this intergenerational relationship is far more complex that what is recognized as occurring in Freire's process of conscientizicao—which McLaren and Houston seem willing to accept as the guide to achieving a future that is in a perpetual state of revolutionary change. The history of jazz in America is a prime example of the dialectic of conserving and innovation, and the mentors were not representatives of an elite class. Sadly, this tradition within the African American commons, while still existing in an attenuated condition, is being taken over by the incessant drive to "transform" (again we find the god-word of critical pedagogy theorists) everything into a commodity—which leads to a profoundly different set of social relationships between the artist and the consumer. It would be just as easy to cite the other examples from Euro-American and Third World cultures where traditions of self-sufficiency are being coopted by the "transformative" dynamics of the industrial culture that McLaren and Houston criticize but whose silences marginalize the importance of intergenerational knowledge in the struggle to resist the further enclosure of the world's diverse cultural and environmental commons.

Education is at the center of both dynamics: the revitalization of the commons as sites of resistance to the spread of the environmentally destructive industrial cul-

ture and learning to adjust to the transformations that follow each turn of the wheel of technological and market innovations. McLaren and Houston, Freire, and his many followers need to assess which approach to education they are really promoting, and this will require considering whether their language enables them to address the cultural roots of the ecological crisis and the current drive to create a world monoculture.

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Correspondence should be addressed to C.A. Bowers, Environmental Studies; University of Oregon; Eugene, Oregon 97403; E-mail: chetbowers@earthlink.net

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