

Critical Work and Radical Pedagogy:
Recalling Herbert Marcuse

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Critical Work and Radical Pedagogy: *Recalling Herbert Marcuse*

We submit to the peaceful production of the means of destruction, to the perfection of waste, to being educated for a defense which deforms the defenders and that which they defend.

Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964, ix)

The inner dynamic of capitalism . . . necessitates the revival of the radical rather than the minimal goals of socialism.

Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972, 5)

Capitalism has long been armed with its own theories of work and wealth; labor has not. Herbert Marcuse is perhaps most famously noted for his contention that the labor force, narcotized and anaestheticized by consumerism and in collusion with business priorities, lacks a critical appreciation of the potential of a philosophy of labor to transcend existing society. “Under the conditions of a rising standard of living, non-conformity with the system appears to be socially useless, and the more so when it entails tangible economic and political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole” (Marcuse 1964, 2). Marcuse certainly understood that this was not a permanent condition, and that in spite of the dominant state of system-stability: “...forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society” (Marcuse 1964, xv).

This essay will attempt to re-think a critical philosophical analysis of labor and the human condition and build an alternative vision for labor. Given recent global economic dislocations, the time is ripe to reconstruct a critical theory of wealth and work. We will build on, and beyond, the foundational theories of Herbert Marcuse to produce a revitalized theory of society grounded in a critical understanding of human working, wealth-building, activity.

Real structured interconnection exists in our economic lives. We call our theory “critical work” because it penetrates beneath empirical economic facts and discerns generative economic and labor structures that are neither obvious nor apparent. An adequate understanding of the labor process requires critical reasoning and analysis. We will present a model of workforce remuneration and capital accumulation as a critical foundation for interpreting the intensifying inequalities in the social distribution of income and wealth in the contemporary U.S. Usually concealed, the structure and dynamics of the value production process will be made visible here in their material form. This crucial dynamic undergirds the intensifying maldistribution of wealth in the U.S., and is at the root of its recurring recessions and economic depressions, including finance capital’s crescendo of economic failure in 2008, likewise the result of an over-appropriation of capital as we shall demonstrate below.

Herbert Marcuse’s political-philosophical vision and cultural critique continue to shed light on current debates concerning repressive democracy, political and racial inequality, education as social control, and the radical meaning of political struggle – especially where issues of alienation, war, oppression, critical inquiry, critical media literacy, and civic/revolutionary action are involved. Marcuse’s caustic condemnations of U.S. military aggression, its need for an “enemy,” the irrationality of U.S. economic waste, destruction, and affluence, etc., are particularly timely and deserve invigorated attention across this nation’s campuses as well as in other cultural and political circles today.

Three major reasons compel us to highlight key aspects of Herbert Marcuse’s thought under current conditions. First of all: Marcuse knew that because capitalism exists, so too does exploitation, and that *system change* is necessary and *possible* if we comprehend and refuse the system. He stressed that system change requires a twofold refusal: of its mode of production and the repressive satisfactions that replicate it. Over the last several decades there has been a regression in the comprehensiveness of critical theory. We are returning to Marcuse to fill-in some of the key and notable eco-

conomic deficits of contemporary forms of cultural commentary stemming from postmodern literary and aesthetic theory. Secondly, Marcuse not only described the obscenities of global inequality, domination, alienation, and war in an extraordinarily vivid and effective manner, more importantly his writing evokes labor solidarity among subaltern groups across traditional barriers of culture: immigration status, race, gender, wealth and income differentials, and political-philosophical diversity. He elucidated social change strategies needed to help labor reclaim its humanist promise, including tactics for intercultural/multicultural organizational development. Thirdly, Marcuse was aware that critical theory needs to be *taught* in order to empower the exploited and oppressed, hence the need for radical pedagogy.

Marcuse's Labor Theory of Humanism / Humanist Theory of Labor

Marcuse early on addressed the deep roots of the capitalist system's functioning and its crisis: the commodification of labor. He developed a critical study of work and social alienation looking at economic activity within the total complexity of other human activities and human existence in general. In his 1933 essay "On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor in Economics" labor is seen as the key activity by which humanity exteriorizes itself and also humanizes the world. In addition to persons directly involved in the labor force, others like politicians, artists, researchers, and clergy also do work in his estimation. He contends that "labor is an ontological concept of human existence as such" (Marcuse [1933] 1973, 11). Marcuse builds upon Hegel's theory of the laboring consciousness overcoming its alienated existence and attaining an emancipated perception of its authentic self (Marcuse [1930] 1976, 36). He tied this also to Marx's historical and dialectical theory of socialist revolution as having the *singular purpose* of labor's supersession of "capitalist commodity production" (ibid., 38). Marcuse likewise honors Marx's philosophical humanism as "the foundation of historical materialism." His essay with this title (Marcuse [1932] 1973) emphasizes that Marx (in the 1844 Manuscripts) re-

peatedly identifies a genuine concept of communism with a humanist worldview, and that the alienation theory articulated there by Marx looks to the supersession of alienation through the actualization of the human essence (Marcuse [1932] 1973, 7-8). Marcuse and Marx asserted a radically materialist conception of socially active human beings. Seen from the outside, we are the ensemble of our social relations; seen from the inside, we are *sensuous living labor*. In *Reason and Revolution* Marcuse cites Marx on the centrality of *labor* to human existence and criticizes the lack of labor theory in the sensualism of Feuerbach:

Because he conceived human existence in terms of sense, Feuerbach disregarded this material function of labor altogether. ‘Not satisfied with abstract thought, Feuerbach appeals to sense-perception [Anschauung]; but **he does not understand our sensuous nature as practical, human-sensuous activity.**’ Labor transforms the natural conditions of human existence into social ones. By omitting the labor process from his philosophy of freedom, therefore, Feuerbach omitted the decisive factor through which nature might become the medium for freedom. (Marcuse [1941] 1970, 272, emphasis added)

Thus Marcuse, like Marx, emphasized that labor must be seen as a central dimension of human life, beyond its “purely economic” form. They understood alienated human existence in terms of capitalist production’s repressive deprivation of pleasure and disregard for unmet human needs.

The distress and neediness which appear in man’s sensuousness are no more purely matters of cognition than his distress and neediness, as expressed in estranged labor, are purely economic. Distress and neediness here do not describe individual modes of man’s behavior at all; they are features of his whole existence. (Marcuse [1932] 1973, 21)

In 1947, Marcuse drafted “33 Theses,” a document first published in 1998, which declared: “The production apparatus developed under capitalism, propelled by wage labor within the existing form of the division of labor, perpetuates the existing forms of consciousness and needs. . . . the revolutionary working class. . .

alone has the real power to abolish existing relations of production and the entire apparatus that goes with it” (Marcuse 1998, 222-23).

Seldom discussed among students (or among faculty) is the question of where wealth comes from or the nature of the relationship of wealth to labor. These issues were first formulated, and for many economists settled without controversy, in the classical economic theory of John Locke and Adam Smith. They held that a person’s labor is the real source of all wealth and property that one might have the right to call one’s own. Locke emphasized the natural equality of human beings and that nature was given to humanity in common:

Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person; this nobody has any right to but himself. The labor of his body and the work of his hands we may say are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labor with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. – John Locke, 1690. *An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government*, Chapter V, Paragraph #27.

Similarly Adam Smith held:

The produce of labor constitutes the natural recompense or wages of labor. In that state of things which preceded both the appropriation of land and the accumulation of stock, the whole produce of labor belongs to the laborer.... In the arts and manufactures the greater part of the workmen stand in need of a *master* to advance them the materials of their work, and their wages and maintenance till it be completed. *He shares the produce of their labor, or the value which it adds to the materials upon which it is bestowed; and in this share consists his profit.* – Adam Smith, 1776. *Wealth of Nations*, Chapter VIII, Paragraphs 1, 2, and 8 (emphasis added).

Marx and Marcuse stressed that labor is a *social* process, that the value created through labor is most genuinely measured by so-

cially necessary labor time, and its product rightfully *belongs* to the labor force as a *body*, not to individuals as such, i.e. grounding a *socialist labor theory of ownership and justice*. Marx and Marcuse were extending the theories of Locke and Smith through to their logical conclusions. We can see how much current political discourse has devolved when we note here that even Abraham Lincoln emphasized that “Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.”¹ In this classic view capital is congealed labor. Capital is accumulated only as the private appropriation of a portion of the wealth created by society’s workforce as such. As we noted above, Marx proposes and Marcuse concurs that human beings are sensuous living labor, and that work (along with sexual reproduction) is one of the fundamental and necessary conditions/activities in the life of the human species. Social labor sustains life. When commodified, this wealth-creating activity is transformed, restricted, and distorted into an item for sale, barter, exchange. The commodification of labor means that human work activity is not a good in itself. It is reduced to a ware, and like any other ware, it has a price or a cost. The overall value of the activity of the workforce, governed by capitalist property relations, is diminished to its aggregate payroll. It is never fully remunerated for its contribution to the production process precisely because its contribution has been commodified and the labor market reduces its

¹Lincoln’s Annual Message to Congress, December 3, 1861, cited in Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988) p. 10. Lincoln was aware of Marx’s writing and ideas via the mediation of socialist Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, which published articles under Marx’s byline from 1852-1862. See John Nichols, “Reading Marx with Abraham Lincoln” chapter 3 in *The “S” Word: A Short History of an American Tradition* (London and New York: Verso, 2011); also Robin Blackburn, *An Unfinished Revolution: Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln* (London and New York, Verso Press, 2011). Further, see Charles Reitz, “Horace Greeley, Karl Marx, and German 48ers: Anti-Racism in the Kansas Free State Struggle, 1854-64,” *Marx-Engels Jahrbuch 2008* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009).

payroll to the cost of labor force reproduction, a subsistence income that has been called the “iron law of wages.”

For these reasons we wish to argue, as Marcuse clearly saw, that there can be no rehumanization of society and social philosophy without the “*liberation of labor*” (Kellner 1973, 3 emphasis in original) – and, as we will argue below – neither can this rehumanization be accomplished without a concomitant *socialist labor theory of ownership and justice*. Douglas Kellner (1973, 7) has importantly pointed out that by 1967 Marcuse clearly indicated that “the qualitative difference between the free and unfree society, is that of letting the realm of freedom appear within the realm of necessity – in labor and not only beyond labor” (Marcuse 1970, 63). Like Kellner, we (Reitz 2000, 64) have criticized the earlier Marcuse ([1933] 1973) who tended to emphasize the activity of *play* as a counterpoint to the alienating attributes of work. But Marcuse went on to make unique and powerful contributions to the analysis of system-wide economic and cultural developments the strengths of which we shall emphasize as this essay proceeds.

Capital Appropriation is a Subtraction from Wealth Produced by Labor

The labor theory of value, even in Locke and Smith, is rejected by most conventional economists who contend that labor is merely a “cost” of doing business, and that profit accrues from entrepreneurial skill, technological innovation, and risk-taking. These factors may increase profit in the short run in a sub-division of any given industry, where fractions of capital compete, yet in the long run the innovative production processes and reduced costs and payrolls become the new social average. What has meaning for an individual entrepreneur does not explain the aggregate picture, rather the national income accounts reveal the structural fundamentals of the value production process. At the same time the national income accounts presuppose that labor is a commodity paid for through payroll outlays from the value added in the value production process. Critical theorizing demonstrates that labor has a reality and a

capacity beyond its theoretical and practical confinement within its commodified form (i.e. a wage or salary). The fuller potential and power of labor, as recognized by Locke and Smith, challenges the presumption that capital produces value, the view that profit unilaterally accrues as a reward for the contribution of the investor/employer. Labor provides the total value added in the production process, even of that which capitalists appropriate as profit income. Profit is a *subtraction* from the overall value produced.

Though the basics of value creation and the dynamics of capital acquisition and workforce remuneration are well known in critical Marxist circles, let us illustrate them here nonetheless with a simple hypothetical. In this example assume that you can buy for \$50 a quilting kit containing everything you need (fabrics, thread, pins, needles, scissors, and design) to construct by hand an attractive quilt. After you assemble the kit, the finished quilt is an item you can really sell for \$350. By the end of the production process, the materials in the kit have been transformed in economic value: there is \$300 in *value added*. The factor that generated the added value is your labor. Since you bought the kit and built the quilt, you earned \$300 through your productive activity. Assume also that you can get someone else to build a similar quilt from a \$50 kit you already own. This person agrees to construct the quilt for \$100. At the end of the work/production process under capitalist productive relations, you own the quilt, because you owned the kit and you hired another to work-up the materials. After again selling the quilt for \$350 and paying your employee the \$100 fee for the labor provided, you keep \$200 of the \$300 value added as your due, though you were not active in the actual production process yourself. In this case, the employee gets income from this activity because of his or her labor. You get income because of your ownership. In this sense business people traditionally speak of the ownership of *income-producing property*. We know it was not the *property* that produces income, rather the *property and power relationships* of the business system allow owners of capital to appropriate income that it has not earned from the wealth created by labor. Major firms in the garment industry operate according to the structural dynamics of this example with their labor force functioning as the employee above did, writ

large. Whether at the macro or micro level, however, under this system, private ownership of capital is clearly not socially necessary for *value production*. The necessary component is *labor*.² A *critical* appreciation of work turns right side round the empiricist assertion that employers are paying their employees, and demonstrates that *employees are paying their employers*,³ as our analysis of 2011 U.S. Census Bureau data will demonstrate. The Americanization of the world-wide economy aims at the overall reduction of payrolls on the global assembly line, no matter the greater levels of manufacturing employment in developing countries. Our thesis is that *inequality is not simply a matter of the gap between rich and poor, but of the structural relationships in the economic arena between propertied and non-propertied segments of populations*. The close correlations of U.S.-led corporate globalization and intensifying inequalities of income and wealth, however, do not explain causality or the generative mechanisms that are the *origins of inequality*. For this, a model is required that can be empirically tested and which explains incomes in terms of differential returns to the workforce and to capital as structurally determined factors internal to the production process itself. This essay will develop just such a model,⁴ which will also illustrate the dynamics of wealth acquisition and accumulation (**Exhibit A**). Our model may serve as a small but necessary contribution to the advancement of a more economically informed critical theory of society.

² We must abstract from the particular qualities of the labor power of any individual person and instead focus on labor power at the average industry rate of productivity, what Marx called socially necessary labor time. See Raj Patel, *The Value of Nothing* (New York: A Picador Book of St. Martin's Press, 2009) p. 66.

³ The power of the strike is to withhold these payments; the power of socialism is to reduce/eliminate them. In any society the labor force must produce a surplus of value/wealth to maintain infrastructure and provide for social goods such as health care, education, etc., over and above incomes to individuals. Marx's point is that *only the labor force as a social body* has a legitimate right to manage this surplus. When it does, a socialist humanism may flourish.

⁴ Thanks also to early discussions with Ken Stone, Canadian Party of Labour (Hamilton, Ontario).

Inequalities of income and wealth have been increasing over the last three decades in the United States, a tendency established well before the current economic fiasco in the banking and real estate industries. As we shall see, middle range households have lost the most. In large part this is the toll of capitalist globalization, while in November 2010 U.S. corporations reported their best quarter ever, after seven consecutive quarters at the highest rates of growth in history.⁵ Clearly this could not endure.⁶ Following decades of labor speedup,⁷ the jobless “recovery” continues to facilitate massive capital accumulation⁸ and the intensification of poverty.⁹ The sharpest wealth declines in the U.S have hit minority families. Hispanic households suffered asset losses of 66% between 2005 and 2009; wealth in Asian American households fell by 54%; African American households dropped 53%.¹⁰

The following discussion of the origins and outcomes of income inequality in the manufacturing sector offers several principles that can be applied more generally to the production and sale of products in other sectors of the U.S. and global economies, such as financial and information-based services. This analysis seeks to draw out implications latent in standard economic data, and to arrive

⁵ *The New York Times*, November 24, 2010, p. B-2.

⁶ See *The New York Times*, July 11, 2011, “Weak Results are Projected for Wall Street” p. B-1.

⁷ See Monika Bauerlein and Clara Jeffery, “Speedup. All Work and No Pay,” the cover story in *Mother Jones* July and August 2011, pp. 18-25. Also Ben Agger, *Speeding Up Fast Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers 2004) op. cit.

⁸ See also “Companies Spend on Equipment, Not Workers,” *The New York Times*, June 10, 2011, p. A-1.

⁹ Sabrina Tavernise, “Poverty Reaches 52-Year Peak, Government Says,” *The New York Times*, September 14, 2011, p. A-1.

¹⁰ Sabrina Tavernise, “Recession Study Finds Hispanics Hit Hardest: Sharp Wealth Decline,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2011, p. A-1. The impact of institutional relationships of racial inequality on wage-related income disparities has been classically demonstrated in the study by Michael Reich, *Racial Inequality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). See also Sharon Smith, “Race, Class and ‘Whiteness Theory’” *International Socialist Review*, Issue 46, March-April 2006.

at certain significant findings that have been avoided in standard economics and business textbooks. In agreement with Marcuse's dialectical analysis, we see the global system of finance and commerce as no longer viable, plunging toward a dreadful reckoning with its own contradictions (see also Greider 1997, 316).

Understanding the social dynamics discussed in this essay is a vital part of radical pedagogy. In contrast, anyone who has grown up in the U.S.A. typically has little awareness of the nature of wealth or the pattern of its distribution in society. We also lack insight into the connection of income flows to relations of capitalist property ownership and the commodification of labor and life. The sociology texts by Macionis (2004, 201) are outstanding in the field in their emphasis on the facts of the unequal distribution of wealth. He utilizes the standard economic definition of wealth in terms of the value of the property to which one has title, minus debts. In the U.S.A. today, wealth distribution can be depicted on a vertical line representing all households in a declining order of property ownership, from top to bottom in quintiles as follows:

- 84% of the *total wealth* is held by the richest fifth of all households
- 11% by the second wealthiest fifth
- 5% by the middle fifth
- 1% by the second lowest fifth
- -1% by the poorest fifth of all households

When we first started teaching twenty-five years ago, the top quintile owned significantly less, 78% of the total wealth, and the poorest quintile owned a positive, albeit tiny, percentage (1%). The second richest quintile then had 15% of the wealth compared to its 11% share today. This pattern of polarization has also transpired with regard to incomes, over time, such that today 53% of all income accrues to the wealthiest fifth, up from 43% in 1979, and the top 1% doubled their share of the income the economy produces.¹¹

¹¹Robert Pear, "It's Official: The Rich Get Richer," *The New York Times*, October 26, 2011, p. A-20.

If the facts of increasing economic inequality are largely undisputed, the same may not be said of their social significance. The prevailing views among economists and business people, represented in the writings of George Gilder (1993) for example, hold that these inequalities are natural and normal, a positive social good. They signify a ladder of opportunity, and meritocratically reward differences in talent, effort, intelligence, perseverance, etc. In their view, it is precisely the possibility of upward mobility that characterizes a democratic economy.

Many writers in sociology and other social sciences, like Macionis (2004) and the philosopher John Rawls (1971), on the other hand, characteristically emphasize the profoundly alienating, unequal, and undemocratic impacts that such wealth and income maldistribution have on *life chances*. “Life chances” is a technical term used to indicate the relative access a household has to the society’s economic resources: decent housing, health care, education, employment, etc. The greater the wealth in one’s household, the greater one’s life chances. The less wealth in one’s household, the fewer the life chances. Questions of injustice and unfairness arise when the unequal distribution of life chances clashes with conventional wisdom about equality of opportunity and level playing fields. In the estimation of Macionis (2004), life chances (as well as wealth and income) are today being transferred away from the vast majority of households and redistributed to the advantage of the wealthiest. Rawls (1971) has argued persuasively that departures from perfect equality are in principle departures from social justice. We will not elaborate the details of Rawls’ argument here; still, his views are well founded in terms of social contract theory and a version of Kant’s ethical universalism. Instead, we shall indicate below the outlines of the socialist labor theory of ownership and justice utilized by both Marx and Marcuse which we contend has a greater material and sociological warrant.

The contemporary national income accounts compiled annually by the U.S. Census Bureau in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* document the dynamics of wealth creation and income flows in ways that may, in a certain sense, be reconciled with the labor

theory of value and wealth.¹² Most importantly this national accounting system does *not* include the “cost” of labor among the *input* costs in its conception of the production process. Instead, it treats workforce remuneration as do Locke, Smith, and Marx, above, – as an income flow stemming from the *value production process* itself.

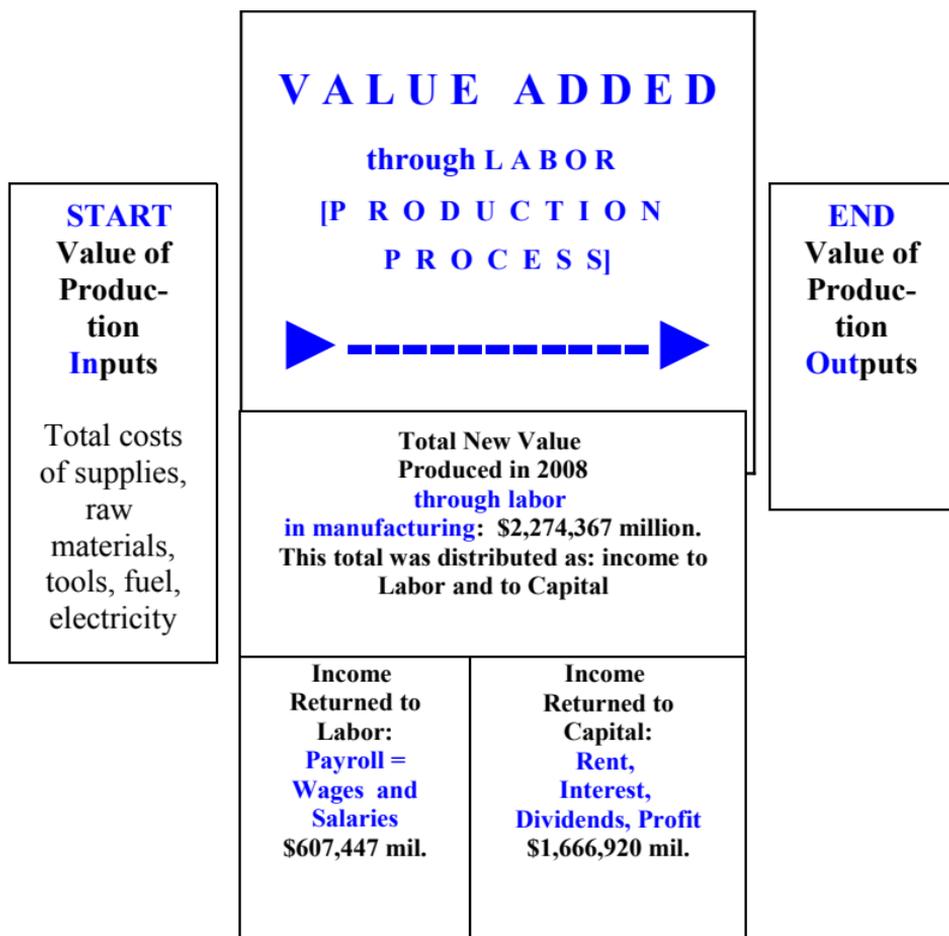
Our model, **Exhibit A**, outlines the dynamics of this *value production* process in manufacturing, and discloses the fundamental *distributive* structures of the contemporary business economy: capital acquisition/accumulation and workforce remuneration. If labor creates all wealth, as John Locke and Adam Smith have maintained, then it creates all the value that is distributed as income to labor (wages and salaries) and capital (rent, interest, dividends, and profit). Incomes returned to capital and labor are *structurally determined*, i.e. conditioned primarily by societal, rather than individual, factors. In the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* the amount of *new wealth created*, i.e. *value added* through production, is calculated by deducting the dollar costs of the *inputs* (supplies, raw materials, tools, fuel, electricity, etc.) from the dollar value of the *outputs*. Every dollar of the value added in U.S. manufacturing, for example in 2008 (\$2,274,367 million¹³), was distributed into one of the two basic income categories: to the workforce as *payroll*—wages and salaries: \$607,447 million; and to capital (i.e., owners and investors) as *profit, rent, dividends, and interest*: \$1,666,920 million. ***Something very like this disproportionate division of the added value between labor (36.4%) and capital (63.6%) is structured by unequal property relations into every sector of the economy and into the division of the Gross Domestic Product overall.*** This is the root of capit-

¹² The *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, as is standard procedure in conventional economics, measures value added in terms of price differentials between inputs and outputs of the production process. Marx’s labor theory measures value in terms of socially necessary labor time, and points out that the system of wage labor and capital requires that much labor time be unremunerated. The product of this unremunerated labor time is appropriated by capital, not itself active in the production process.

¹³ This and other figures from: Table 1006. Manufactures – Summary by Selected Industry, 2008. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011*, p. 634, which is our **Exhibit B**, below.

alism's recurrent over-appropriation crises, to which we shall turn below.

**Exhibit A: Value Production and Distribution as Income:
Dynamics and Structure**



Our **Exhibit A** attempts to show how the working activity of people is regulated under capitalism. The working activity of people

is not regulated directly, but rather through “business relationships.”¹⁴ The model depicts the three inextricably interconnected activities of production, distribution, and capital accumulation. It discloses how a system of appropriation is embedded within the relationship of wage labor to capital in the distribution process. This model is derived from standard measures of domestic output, utilizing concepts like value added, gross domestic product (GDP), and the standard approaches to national income accounting (especially the income approach to GDP), for example in McConnell and Brue (2005) and Parkin (2005). Our theoretical contribution is to bridge the traditional macro-micro separations, which artificially and unnecessarily detach a macro discussion of national income from a micro consideration of income distribution in terms of wages, salaries, rents, profits, dividends and interest. We stress in particular that income distribution fundamentally occurs in a structurally (and not individually) determined manner, and that this is influenced by differential power relations and the level of intensity of class conflict.

The aggregate of values added across the economy for one year adds up to the measure of total economic output termed the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP is a major concern of the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the federal government tracks the values added in many branches of the economy.

Exhibit B presents empirical data from the *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2011* measuring wealth created (value added) in the manufacturing sector of the economy. The data (Table 1006) was retrieved June 11, 2011 from:

<http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/11statab/manufact.pdf>

¹⁴ Structured notably by the fetishized pursuit of exchange and market value (prices, rather than use values) through commodity production. We are indebted also to Fredy Perlman (1972) and Isaak Illich Rubin (1972) on Marx’s theory of value. Commodity fetishism is primarily an attribute of the capitalist productive system, not of the personal attitudes of individual consumers. Consumerism is *systemic*, not simply attitudinal.

Exhibit B:

Table 1006. Manufactures—Summary by Selected Industry: 2008

[12,781.2 represents 12,781,200. Based on the Annual Survey of Manufactures; see Appendix III]

Industry based on shipments	2002 NAICS code ¹	All employees			Production workers ² (1,000)	Value added by manufactures ³ (mil. dol.)	Value of shipments ⁴ (mil. dol.)
		Number ² (1,000)	Payroll				
			Total (mil. dol.)	Per employee (dol.)			
Manufacturing, total	31-33	12,781.2	607,447	47,527	8,672.9	2,274,367	5,486,266
Food ⁵	311	1,437.8	51,818	36,039	1,113.7	246,222	649,056
Grain and oil seed milling	3112	53.2	2,817	52,953	39.5	28,988	94,000
Sugar and confectionery products	3113	61.9	2,825	42,431	47.3	13,184	26,648
Fruit and vegetable preserving and specialty food	3114	167.7	6,232	37,161	138.5	28,045	63,187
Dairy products	3115	132.3	5,899	44,582	95.6	27,072	98,118
Animal slaughtering and processing	3116	505.7	15,217	30,094	438.9	50,823	169,925
Bakeries and tortillas	3118	271.6	9,442	34,760	172.8	34,108	58,701
Beverage and tobacco products	312	152.8	7,322	47,905	87.0	76,292	125,520
Beverage	3121	134.7	6,223	46,196	73.5	44,833	88,085
Textile mills	313	135.6	4,661	34,383	113.1	12,471	31,845
Textile product mills	314	136.3	4,151	30,455	104.9	11,540	26,630
Apparel	315	148.9	3,887	26,112	116.2	9,237	19,596
Leather and sew apparel	3152	118.5	3,075	25,951	92.2	7,385	15,608
Leather and allied products	316	31.7	994	31,361	23.9	2,619	5,411
Wood products ⁵	321	461.6	15,619	33,834	365.5	34,577	88,004
Sawmills and wood preservation	3211	91.7	3,394	37,024	76.9	7,278	24,272
Paper	322	403.2	20,546	50,957	311.6	79,175	178,749
Pulp, paper, and paperboard mills	3221	117.8	7,794	66,142	93.6	40,476	82,923
Converted paper products	3222	285.4	12,752	44,687	218.0	38,700	95,826
Printing and related support activities	323	605.9	25,138	41,491	422.4	60,003	99,167
Petroleum and coal products	324	105.9	8,415	79,444	69.2	91,559	769,886
Chemical ⁵	325	780.1	50,766	65,074	448.8	355,481	751,030
Basic chemical	3251	151.8	10,880	71,656	92.2	83,629	244,174
Pharmaceutical and medicine	3254	248.1	18,771	75,347	117.8	142,773	194,478
Soap, cleaning compound, and toilet preparation	3256	104.4	5,667	54,259	62.7	46,661	97,431
Plastics and rubber products	326	796.5	31,580	39,651	613.2	91,431	204,679
Plastics products	3261	651.8	25,299	38,815	499.7	76,503	167,423
Rubber product	3262	144.7	6,281	43,415	113.5	14,929	37,256
Nonmetallic mineral products	327	443.4	19,372	43,694	338.0	61,994	115,920
Glass and glass product	3272	93.9	4,227	45,042	74.0	12,562	23,197
Cement and concrete products	3273	213.6	9,106	42,637	161.8	29,774	57,779
Primary metal ⁵	331	418.3	22,693	54,245	328.7	93,564	282,141
Iron and steel mills and ferroalloy foundries	3311	109.3	7,668	70,150	87.4	43,036	126,332
Foundries	3315	144.0	6,435	44,689	116.3	15,492	31,842
Fabricated metal products ⁵	332	1,572.7	69,231	44,021	1,153.4	188,072	358,363
Forging and stamping	3321	123.5	5,763	46,663	92.0	15,834	34,899
Architectural and structural metals	3323	408.5	17,253	42,239	293.1	44,878	94,980
Machine shops, turned product and screw, nut, and bolt	3327	398.5	17,748	44,537	298.5	39,941	64,064
Coating, engraving, heat treating, and allied activities	3328	136.0	5,360	39,403	104.0	16,432	27,740
Machinery ⁵	333	1,127.4	57,212	50,749	726.1	168,153	356,954
Agriculture, construction, and mining machinery	3331	209.2	10,279	49,147	143.0	39,037	94,334
Industrial machinery	3332	127.6	7,648	59,919	67.6	18,703	35,612
Ventilation, heating, air conditioning, and commercial refrigeration equipment	3334	145.8	6,019	41,297	104.7	19,092	40,702
Metalworking machinery	3336	161.3	8,305	51,502	112.1	17,325	29,277
Computer and electronic products ⁵	334	1,034.1	66,345	64,156	493.8	234,390	391,082
Computer and peripheral equipment	3341	92.6	5,908	63,792	34.7	38,727	68,110
Communications equipment	3342	132.8	8,961	67,481	53.9	30,504	53,865
Semiconductor and other electronic component	3344	371.6	20,486	55,123	227.9	71,258	116,809
Navigational, measuring, medical, and control instruments	3345	395.1	29,033	73,475	151.3	88,473	139,775
Electrical equipment, appliance, and component	335	411.9	19,038	46,226	285.3	61,975	131,759
Electrical equipment	3353	144.4	6,890	47,705	96.1	21,840	44,301
Transportation equipment ⁵	336	1,474.4	82,532	55,976	1,018.6	252,187	666,807
Motor vehicle	3361	163.0	11,318	69,424	139.5	52,337	210,978
Motor vehicle body and trailer	3362	123.5	4,789	38,790	95.0	10,208	29,674
Motor vehicle parts	3363	523.7	24,771	47,297	391.6	62,812	174,646
Aerospace product and parts	3364	439.8	30,892	70,240	235.2	93,036	178,709
Ship and boat building	3366	149.0	6,857	46,016	103.1	16,665	30,430
Furniture and related products ⁵	337	459.8	16,344	35,544	343.3	43,965	80,466
Miscellaneous ⁵	339	642.9	29,782	46,322	397.1	99,460	153,200
Medical equipment and supplies	3391	313.7	16,151	51,491	188.3	60,424	84,029

¹ North American Industrial Classification System, 2002; see text, Section 15. ² Includes employment and payroll at administrative offices and auxiliary units. All employees represents the average of production workers plus all other employees for the payroll period ended nearest the 12th of March. Production workers represent the average of the employment for the payroll periods ended nearest the 12th of March, May, August, and November. ³ Adjusted value added; takes into account (a) value added by merchandising operations (that is, difference between the sales value and cost of merchandise sold without further manufacture, processing, or assembly), plus (b) net change in finished goods and work-in-process inventories between beginning and end of year. ⁴ Includes extensive and unmeasurable duplication from shipments between establishments in the same industry classification. ⁵ Includes industries not shown separately.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Survey of Manufactures, "Statistics for Industry Groups and Industries: 2008," June 2010, <<http://www.census.gov/manufacturing/asm/index.html>>.

When the real world figures of **Exhibit B** are analyzed according to the model outlined above in **Exhibit A**, we can gain a concrete understanding of how the economy functions. The differential incomes distributed to labor and to capital account for the dynamics of capital appropriation/accumulation.

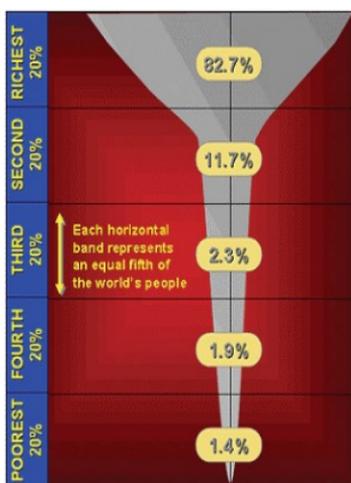
Looking at data, we see, for example, that in category 3152, **cut and sew apparel**, total value added (in millions) was **\$7,385**. The payroll (in millions) was **\$3,075**. Therefore the amount returned to capital (in millions) was **\$4,310**. This figure is an amount equal to 100% of what was paid to the workforce *plus* an extra 40%. What is true in this sector of the economy holds true in every other branch even more dramatically. In category 3118, **bakeries and tortilla**, total value added (in millions) was **\$34,108**, the payroll was **\$9,442**; hence **\$24,666** was returned to capital, more than double the amount returned to labor.

This analysis has examined incomes in the context of property relationships that are key to wealth accumulation, emphasizing how property relations account for the basic fact of the U.S. economy – the highly unequal distribution of incomes resulting from the patterns of workforce remuneration and the patterns of returns flowing to capital (via “income-producing wealth”). As is well-documented in many sources, U.S.-led corporate globalization is intensifying social inequality, alienation, and cultural polarization worldwide. This correlates directly with growing inequality both within and between nations (Sernau, 2001, 52-55). The result according to United Nations’ data presented by Korten (1995, 107) can be graphed as a “champagne glass” depicting the global distribution of income among the world’s population (**Exhibit C**):

- 82.7% of the *total world income* accrues to the richest fifth of the world’s population;
- 11.7% to the second richest fifth;
- 2.3% to the middle fifth;
- 1.9% to the fifth next to the bottom; and
- 1.4% to the poorest fifth.

These figures indicate that an intensifying alienation and exploitation are occurring today through the “race to the bottom” as U.S.-led global capitalism scours the world for the lowest wage labor markets. Policies of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and NAFTA have led to structural adjustments that exemplify “policies of external domination that hurt the poor” (Sernau, 2001, 36).^{15, 16}

Exhibit C:



Such policies are sometimes resisted by a variety of forces. When armed insurrection is involved, these movements are being ever more frequently labeled “terrorist.” Chalmers Johnson (2000, 2004) has argued that the U.S. military’s approximately 700 bases around the world serve primarily to extend the economic global he-

¹⁵ The current recovery, devoid of job growth, is a further indicator of a distorted political economy in which taxpayer/government subsidies to finance capital have permitted a redistribution of wealth to the advantage of the largest banks and high income individuals – reducing the global payroll and intensifying global inequality.

¹⁶ The visual representation of the U. N. data is taken from <http://www.-christianitytoday.com/workplace/articles/theologyfairpay.html>

gemony of this country. Operations that have sought to secure this hegemony abroad have led to forms of violent resistance he called “blowback.” Because these military operations have been kept secret from the U.S. public, it does not have the context to understand these dynamics, and views attacks, like 9-11, with incomprehension and as certainly unprovoked.

Capitalism’s Contemporary Over-Appropriation Crisis

Global economic polarization between those with immense property holdings versus the intensified immiseration of those without has led to the deepening crisis of corporate capitalism that much of the world is currently witnessing. The political imperatives of financial speculation and predatory lending are more openly odious and vicious than the “comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom” Marcuse (1964, 1) condemned in the ’60s. Marcuse recognized the advent of this nation’s (and the world’s) intensifying political and economic inequalities, and that the system’s logic of profit maximization, not greed or bad leadership, stood at the root. His call for a “revival of the radical rather than the minimal goals of socialism” (Marcuse 1972, 5) raises his theory significantly above that of some proponents of critical theory’s linguistic turn, or postmodernism’s interest in paradox, spectacle, games and signification, neither of which seeks to explain or challenge commodification as Marcuse does in terms of its contradiction to human need and the higher potentialities of science, technology, and production.

The 2008 economic debacle in the U.S. resulted in massive investment and job losses stemming directly from the institutional inability of the “world’s strongest financial system”¹⁷ to manage huge U.S. surpluses of capital without reckless speculation and massive waste of societal resources. The brutal consequences of this crisis are fairly well-known; its origins, however, are not. It was necessary

¹⁷ The Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report: Final Report of the National Commission on the Causes of the Financial and Economic Crisis in the United States* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011) p. xvi.

therefore to impel the analysis *forward* with contemporary data, as we have attempted to do above, and *more deeply*, through to the roots of capitalism's remuneration dynamics and structure summarized above in our model, **Exhibit A**.

The global economy has increasingly become what William Greider (1997) has termed a rentiers' regime: one world supervised by global finance capital. Finance capital derives its (often times usurious) income from interest payments on massively extended credit (Greider 1997, 285-289). A governing system of, by, and for finance capital has emerged largely led by U.S. interests, yet it is unsustainable in its own terms. To paraphrase Marx: these interest payments [Marx: rents] arise not from necessarily productive investment [Marx: the land], but from the social order. Austerity budgeting is the preferred social policy of hegemonic U.S. and global financial interests today, and the primary function of sovereign states is now the enforcement of debt payments to Wall Street and its own debt service through "structural adjustment" policies and budgeting that shifts resources from social needs oriented programs to financial institutions. Keynesian strategies in support of the U.S. (or Greek or Portugese) labor force are no longer necessary in a political milieu where reactionary politicians will demand and liberal politicians will agree to direct government subsidies to finance capital.

A predatory or "fast"¹⁸ capitalism – characterized by manic investing unhinged from reality in pursuit of market advantage in financial assets – described by Ben Agger (1989, 2004) has certainly emerged since the 1980s. Given deregulation, megamergers of financial institutions, globalized communications technologies facilitating instantaneous capital flows, reckless investment in the real economy (commercial and residential real estate) and synthetic

¹⁸ A "fast" or predatory capitalism exploits not only labor, consumers, and borrowers: it also exploits other institutional *investors*. Weaker banks are charged a premium to borrow by the stronger banks. Weaker nations must make higher debt payments to the stronger ones. Sovereign debt crises become opportunities for structural adjustments to the advantage of finance capital.

product (unreal derivatives, etc.), huge accumulations of capital (Greider, 232) have been amassed at the top of the global economy (i.e. largely in the U.S). The U.S. capital glut led to a condition where investment banks have had to devise ever more speculative strategies to realize profit given the super-abundance of wealth accumulated at the top. This is what we refer to as the over-appropriation crisis or the crisis of capital valorization. Today the global capitalist system is hyperactive. It is erratic,¹⁹ desperate, disintegrating, and self-destructive.

Never content to receive less than maximal returns, capital is today as always hungry for valorization, seeking yields above average rates of profit. Yet the capital valorization process is currently in crisis. Wall Street institutions like “American International Group (AIG), Bear Stearns, Citigroup, Countrywide Financial, Fannie Mae, Goldman Sachs, Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, Moody’s, and Wachovia”²⁰ have desperately and (self-) destructively looted even the highest rollers in their own casinos. They designed investment instruments consisting of bundles of so-called subprime (in fact fraudulent) mortgages, had them triple-A rated by complicitous auditors, “flipped” the lethal assets for a fee, and shunted them to those less astute (institutional investors, pension plans, credit unions, etc.) who would directly bear the loss. The investment banks then took out insurance policies (credit default swaps) of which they [the investment banks], not the parties who had been sold the assets, were the beneficiaries when the investment products inevitably crashed and burned. Taxpayers covered the insurers’ liabilities (AIG was “too big to fail”) so that Wall Street was guaranteed payment for their worthless investment instruments.

One strategy of some key financial institutions was to back real estate development trusts (REITs) to overbuild massively both commercial and residential properties. In order to reap its big returns this desperate business plan also required that they issue massive

¹⁹ Louise Story and Graham Bowler, “Market Swings are Becoming the New Standard,” *The New York Times* September 12, 2011, p. A-1: “... canny investors could profit from the big swings....”

²⁰ *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission*, op. cit., p. xii.

amounts of mortgage credit to commercial and residential buyers, even when these were patently unqualified. These investment bankers then hedged their real estate investment bets by insuring themselves against commercial and residential mortgage client default through convoluted over-the-counter derivatives, credit default swaps.

The strategic irrationality of this country's leading investment banking institutions arises from the systemic fetish characteristic of *finance* capital (as well as of *industrial* capital as emphasized by Marx in *Capital*²¹): this is the obsession with an asset's ostensible price (as a marketable commodity) independent of its value as a function of socially necessary labor time or its use. The bubbles in asset prices in the dot.com area, telecommunications, as in commercial and residential real estate, resulted from finance capital's compulsion under penalty of extinction to seek the valorization of capital (profit acquisition/accumulation) through desperate bets on price fluctuations and volatile market values in speculative transactions independent of values as measured by real factors of production.

Investment in U.S. Treasury bonds has also been a traditional haven for surplus capital. After the debt limit showdown of mid-summer 2011, investment ratings agencies like Standard & Poor's have downgraded U.S. bonds. This increases the U.S. government's costs of borrowing and also increases the returns on these investment instruments. From the bondholder/rentier perspective, awash in wealth and wishing to maximize revenues, a bounce in the premiums the U.S. government can be made to pay on its borrowed funds is a desirable prospect.²² Similarly, changes to the U.S. tax code fa-

²¹ On the commodity fetish, see Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* Erster Band in *Marx-Engels Werke* Band 23 (Berlin, East: Dietz Verlag, 1968) pp. 85-98. Capitalist relations involve a paradoxical inversion: "... sachliche Verhältnisse der Personen und gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse der Sachen...." Human beings are valued only as matters of business, and only matters of business are seen as having human value.

²² Binyamin Appelbaum, "Taking a Closer Look At a Downgrade's Result: Treasuries Likely to Still Appeal to Investors," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2011, p. A-13.

avorable to the biggest corporations and the super-rich have not only relieved them of a significant tax burden: monies spared from taxation in this manner may instead be loaned back to the U.S. Treasury, earning interest, thus providing wealthy individuals and large corporations a positive rather than a negative cash flow.

Educating for The Great Refusal: Decommodification, Solidarity, and Socialism

Herbert Marcuse forty years ago analyzed the system-wide economic and cultural developments, that are now, especially in the U.S., much more obvious given the crisis of finance capital here since 2008. Political and philosophical tendencies that are often referred to as “neoliberalism” and/or “neoconservatism” in much analytical work today Marcuse clearly understood *as “counterrevolution”* (Marcuse 1972) – the advent of predatory capitalism aimed also at the full destruction of the democratic opposition.

The Western world has reached a new stage of development: now, the defense of the capitalist system requires the organization of counterrevolution at home and abroad. . . . Torture has become a normal instrument of ‘interrogation’ around the world. . . . even Liberals are not safe if they appear as too liberal (Marcuse 1972, 1)

Not long ago the news media brought us disclosures almost daily about the U.S. military’s use of torture and prisoner abuse (Abu Ghraib, [Guantánamo](#)), civilian massacres and war crimes (Fallujah, Haditha), not to mention loaded intelligence that the U.S. Defense Department desired as a pretext for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Henry Giroux (2006, 2005) refers to these events as constituting a new dark age, with a “New Authoritarianism” putting “America at the Edge.” In this rapacious context, it would be unconscionable for critical theory and critical pedagogy to equate praxis with philosophical and literary criticism and/or the development of an aesthetic taste for cosmic ironies. To do so would neglect critical theory’s classical economic and materialist conceptual repertoire

and forfeit a structural understanding of causation and complex determinancy.

Marcuse by the late '60s had famously become a proponent of an activist politics against capitalism, war, and imperialism. What remains relatively unacknowledged – though it is arguably a core element of this overall theory and practice – is the profound challenge he asserted against the systems of schooling and higher learning in the U.S., specifically opposing the displacement of the humanities in the '60s by Clark Kerr's²³ vision of higher education that had become mainly scientific and technical and that primarily stood in service to the needs of commerce, industry, and the military. Today more than ever – given the current crisis of global finance capital – higher education must encourage students and faculty alike to examine the conditions that serve to perpetuate the increasingly stressed and volatile realities of political, economic, and cultural life in the U.S. and the militarized processes of U.S.-led global polarization.

Marcuse called for intellectuals around the world to denounce American capitalism's essential venality:

This society is obscene in producing and indecently exposing a stifling abundance of wares while depriving its victims abroad of the necessities of life; obscene in stuffing itself and its garbage cans while poisoning and burning the scarce foodstuffs in the fields of its aggression; obscene in the words and smiles of its politicians and entertainers; its prayers, in its ignorance, and in the wisdom of its kept intellectuals. (Marcuse, 1969a, 7-8)

He condemned as loathsome any affirmative characterization of the cultural logic of capitalism as the “affluent society” or “democracy” given the glaringly unequal distribution of domestic and global incomes, wealth, and life chances and the ongoing implications for war and empire that we have highlighted in this essay. With uncanny prescience then (and immense relevance now) Mar-

²³ Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

cuse broke through the paralysis of criticism in the U.S. making it possible for many *students* to reframe social circumstances theoretically and to learn as they had not been able to learn before.

In an earlier essay we outlined an approach to critical pedagogy, called “EduAction” (for social science teachers in community college settings, but applicable elsewhere), which we and several of our colleagues have sought to implement in our own teaching (Reitz, 2002). Our EduAction perspective was inspired by and built upon some of Marcuse’s most brilliant and biting criticisms, for example:

To create the subjective conditions for a free society [it is] no longer sufficient to educate individuals to perform more or less happily the functions they are supposed to perform *in this* society or extend ‘vocational’ education to the ‘masses.’ Rather . . . [we must] . . . educate men and women who are incapable of tolerating what is going on, who have really learned what *is* going on, has always been going on, and why, and who are educated to resist and to fight for a new way of life. (Marcuse [1968] 2009a, 35)

Marcuse was a practitioner/theorist of critical pedagogy, paving the way, decades ago, for radical educational theorists like Peter McLaren, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, Douglas Kellner, and others now, including of course Angela Davis. In the following we would like to bring to bear important aspects of this scholarship which we believe are indispensable in the development of the signature elements of a critical theory of education.

Angela Davis (1998, 317, 318) summarized the impact of Marcuse on her own radical pedagogy as follows:

In the classroom and through his writings and lectures, Marcuse defended the radical activism of the ’60s. The emergence of an international student movement, the social movements of people of color, the rise of feminist activism brought a new, more optimistic dimension to Marcuse’s ideas. The seduction of the ‘one-dimensional society’ could be resisted.

He not only theorized these developments, but actively participated in mobilizations both in the United States and Europe. Working so closely with him during that period, I learned that while teaching and agitation were very different practices, students need to be assured that politics and intellectual life are not two entirely separate modes of existence.

Peter McLaren (2000) likewise emphasizes that intellectual life and politics are inseparable:

As it stands, the major purpose of education is to make the world safe for global capitalism. . . . [R]evolutionary educators **refuse** the role that global capitalism has assigned to them: to become the supplicants of corporate America and to work at the behest of the corporate bottom line. (McLaren 2000, 196-97 emphasis added)

He turns our attention toward capitalism's incompatibility with democracy, and has combined a critique of the logic of capital accumulation and global predation with a critique of schooling as a mechanism of social control and the reproduction of the unequal social division of labor. His critical pedagogy urges educators to "take the struggle over the social division of labor as seriously as we do the struggle over meaning and representation." (McLaren, 1997, 13).

McLaren's stress on the *refusals* required of the revolutionary educator most definitely derives from Marcuse's concept of the "Great Refusal" (Marcuse [1955] 1966, 149). We interpret this as a refusal of the structures and dynamics of capital appropriation today, including the patterns of workforce remuneration and reproduction in the U.S. economy.²⁴

²⁴ Reitz (2000) earlier emphasized Marcuse's theoretical grounding of the Great Refusal in an aesthetic ontology and an ostensible biological version of philosophical anthropology. These dimensions of his Great Refusal are never wholly detached from the Marxist political economy that permeates Marcuse's most militant middle period thinking and which we elevate here.

McLaren sums up: we are compelled by the force of economic necessity as well as the ethics of equality to refuse such reifications/deifications of the repressive social order and to pursue “the common goal of transforming the exploitative social relations of global capitalism” (McLaren 1997, 69). Without a world economic system based on socialist equality and democracy, there will be no peace and no survival. Ultimately, McLaren (2000, 1997) calls for the pedagogy of revolution and *revolutionary multiculturalism* – that is, teaching in a manner that refuses to replicate class exploitation, racism, gender inequality, empire, and war.

Educational institutions in this view and ours must certainly be reconfigured overall in the direction of *multicultural organizational transformation*. This involves the infusion of multicultural changes into curriculum, pedagogy, school climate (emphasizing support for student academic success and social justice activities), as well as into effective diversity initiatives in staffing, sourcing, supervision, and governance. All of this must be structured into the educational system. The movement and struggle for multicultural organizational transformation recognizes that entrenched patterns of *institutional racism* and discrimination undergird attitudes of *interpersonal racism*. Prejudice and bigotry are not simply a result of an individual’s attitude of disrespect or disregard (or *Anerkennungsvergessenheit* [being unmindful of the dignity of others] Honneth 2005, 62-77). Empathy and respect are certainly key goals of multicultural education reform. Nonetheless, it is the reduction and elimination of *institutional* inequalities in the economy, law, and education, etc., that best facilitates reductions in mindless bigotry and/or interpersonal expressions of bias.

It is insufficient for multicultural education reform merely to “celebrate diversity!” Necessary as that is, it is also necessary to pursue educational strategies to ensure equality and empowerment. In the current period of intensifying inequalities, especially racial inequalities, Marcuse’s critique of pure tolerance also has immense relevance. He warned that the warped call by cultural conservatives like Kors and Silverglate (1998) for “tolerance” of abusive speech

is/was systematically utilized by reactionary and liberal forces to abuse equality guarantees and to repress and destroy the possibility of democratic egalitarianism, i.e. this kind of tolerance had become *repressive tolerance*. As Marcuse describes the circumstance ...

... the conditions of ‘tolerance’ are loaded ... the active, official tolerance granted to the Right as well as to the Left, to movements of aggression as well as to movements of peace, to the party of hate as well as humanity. I call this non-partisan tolerance ‘abstract’ or ‘pure’ inasmuch as it refrains from taking sides – but in doing so it actually protects the already established machinery of discrimination. (Marcuse 1965, 84-85)

Marcuse’s anti-racist partisanship is clear:

The small and powerless minorities which struggle against the false consciousness and its beneficiaries must be helped: their continued existence is more important than the preservation of abused rights and liberties which grant constitutional powers to those who oppress these minorities. (ibid., p. 110)

Neoconservative culture warriors like Allan Bloom, William Bennett, and Lynne Cheney see the world quite differently. They explicitly wish to furnish students reasons to fight for U.S. cultural and political superiority in the world. They are attempting to reinsinuate an elitist, Eurocentric program for the liberal arts and U.S. general education *against the critical impulses within higher education moving toward multiculturalism and radical pedagogy*.

Bennett makes himself very clear in his *Why We Fight: Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism* (Bennett 2003, 48). Kellner (2003, 66-70), on the other hand, criticizes the nation’s post 9/11 warmongering, patriotism, and media propaganda. Likewise, McLaren (1995, 117) names the neoconservative approach to educational reform “white terror.”²⁵ He urges revolutionary multiculturalism as a means of refusing white terror and “rethinking” democracy (McLaren, 1997).

²⁵ On the U.S. resurgence of racism, see also Michael Moore’s (2001) *Stupid White Men*.

Marcuse advised critical educators and students to continue to take risks and struggle to infuse the curriculum with analysis of the “critical, radical movements and theories in history, literature, philosophy” (Marcuse [1968] 2009a, 37). He believed that education *could* act against alienation and oppression. The general framework of his critical social theory dialectically transformed (through negation, preservation, and elevation) a central assumption of classical European philosophy: higher education may yet cultivate both the aesthetic sense and political will to help us accomplish our humanization. Philosophy and art (i.e., the humanities) can, by virtue of their admittedly elitist critical distance, oppose an oppressive status quo and furnish an intangible, yet concrete, *telos* by which to guide personal growth and emancipatory social practice. Marcuse is attracted to the humanities because their subject matter and methodology are thought to focus upon questions of the meaning of human experience, rather than on the sheer description of conditions (this latter procedure being rejected as the non-philosophical approach of behaviorism and empiricism in the social and physical sciences). He regards classical learning by means of discourse and reflection on philosophy, literature, drama, music, painting, sculpture, etc., as liberating insofar as this is thought to propel humanity beyond the “first dimension” (the realm of conformity to what is) to the multidimensional world of significance and meaning that allows us to re-create life in accordance with the higher potentials of human beings. For him the curriculum must afford a world-historical, international, and multicultural perspective that examines the pivotal social struggles that have led to the emergence of various standards of criticism in ethics, in logic, in the worlds of art, physical science, production, and technology. These standards constitute the historical, and not merely abstract philosophical, *criteria* of judgment which intelligent action requires.

Because the abolition of commodified labor is impossible under capitalism, a liberal arts education that helps humanity accomplish its own humanization is inherently obstructed by the affirmative character of culture, and institutionally nearly impossible. The Marxist conceptions of *wage-labor* and *commodity*

fetishism are the key analytical criteria that measure the underlying dehumanization and commercialization of education and life itself under capitalism. Abolition of the phenomena they name would be pivotal hallmarks of humanist advancement in society and culture.

This society is fully capable of abundance as Marcuse recognized in *One Dimensional Man*, yet the material foundation for the persistence of economic want and political unfreedom is *commodity-dependency*. Work, as the most crucial of all human activities, by which humanity has developed to its present stage of civilization, can be and should be a source of human satisfaction. Under capitalism it is reduced to a mere means for the receipt of wages. Sensuous living laborers are reduced to being mere containers for the only commodity they can bring to the system of commodity exchange, their ability to work. This represents the commodification of the most essential aspect of human life. Necessities of life are available to the public nearly exclusively as commodities through market mechanisms based upon ability to pay.

Commodified existence is not natural; it is contrived. Significant portions of commodified social life need to be rethought. While we cannot go into details here, *Charter 2000* (Brodsky 1998-99; Reitz 2000) seeks to articulate a common ground political platform that can unify progressive forces.²⁶ It asks: what kind of world do we want to live in, and its response is a broad, unifying, coherent draft program. This proposes a set of universal desirable outcomes envisioning a democratic society with sustainable abundance.

Consistent with Marcuse's ([1937] 1968, 143) obstinate utopianism, we must hammer out what we really do want. What are the most intelligent/wisest uses of labor? We emphasize here how the transformation of commodified human labor into *public* work, i.e. work that aims at the public good rather than private accumulation (Boyte and Kari 1996), would undergird progressive political advance. Work in the public interest in the public sector expands areas of the economy traditionally considered the public domain, the pub-

²⁶ See Brodsky, et. al., at <http://progressiveplatform2000.org/Charter-2000-Platform.htm>

lic sphere, the commonwealth: social needs oriented projects like libraries, parks, utilities, the media, telephone service, postal service, transportation, social services.

The decommodification of services in these areas, along with a guaranteed minimum income, would supply a socialist alternative its viability. So too the decommodification of health care, housing, and education. Already we see that areas within the field of information technology are pregnant with the possibility of decommodification: public-domain software and shareware on the internet, market-free access to Skype, etc. The demand for decommodification sets Marcuse's analysis – and ours – distinctly apart from a *liberal* call for a “politics of recognition” (Taylor 1994; Honneth 1994, 2005) that features *attitudinal* and/or *redistributive* remedies (Fraser and Honneth 2003). While recognition and redistribution are certainly necessary, they are not sufficient. The slogan “tax the rich,” while helpful in *liberal* terms, misses the *revolutionary socialist* point that the cure for the harsh distributional inequalities cited above lies in a new mode of production, distribution, and property ownership that restructures the very process of value creation, as well as the inextricably interconnected processes of exchange and consumption.

No non-socialist theory of education or society has any profound quarrel with wage labor or the general system of commodity dependency. Marx admonishes workers: “...instead of the *conservative* motto ‘*A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work!*’ they should inscribe on their banner the *revolutionary* watchword, ‘*Abolition of the wages-system!*’”²⁷ We have reiterated above how Marx clarified capitalist society’s obsession with production for profit rather than human need: its structurally generated fetish/addiction to production for commodity exchange rather than for use-values. Production for use rather than exchange would optimize living conditions within the social formation as a whole. Capitalist productive relations are driving global labor to its knees. Only the abolition of wage labor and commodity fetishism in the economy can restore satisfaction

²⁷ Karl Marx, *Wages, Price, and Profit* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p. 78. Emphasis in original.

and dignity to an uncommodified labor process. Human existence is a function of one's ensemble of social relations, and the frustration of *our essential sensuousness* propels a *politics of labor ownership of wealth* as the liberation of the repressed political potential of the human species.

Like Hegel and Marx, Marcuse understood that a subaltern, serving consciousness becomes aware through labor of its own dependency and unmet human needs. Ultimately, it learns also that those it serves are not absolutely independent and free, but rather dependent on it, labor. This reality is the basis of labor's own political education, and the foundation of its philosophy of possibility and hope. In the dominator systems that characterize global cultures today, not even the oppressors or their children are capable of coming to self knowledge strictly through the agency of those educational institutions committed fundamentally to the reproduction of an oppressive social division of labor. In such societies, educational institutions essentially replicate our fundamental class-based alienation. Only through the practical and intellectual opposition to the cultural logic of domination can any theorist emancipate himself or herself from even the most consoling mystifications of oppressor systems. And only thus does practice or theory become critical.

We have learned from the movements against racism and sexism that class relations do not wholly demarcate structures of dominator power. Racism, patriarchy, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination, disrespect, and inequality sorely inhibit our powers of actualization.²⁸ While the general abolition of the wages-system is not absolutely *sufficient* to secure the conditions for each of us to become all that we are capable of being, *the alienation and exploitation of labor is the enabling material core that today requires the dominant culture to target innocent minorities as scapegoats*. Radical social science must empower general education students (i.e.

²⁸ Forms of persecution are multiplying amidst growing global inequality: some right-wing Christian anti-Semitism of old is today being curiously supplanted by a neoconservative support for Zionism and the intensified vilification of Islam and Muslims. Other reactionary forces reinforce bias of every sort in the hoary yet effective strategy of divide and conquer.

the labor force in a multicultural society) intellectually, politically, and culturally to end these abuses.

Final Thoughts

Labor's key challenge today is re-thinking economics, building a theory and a practice for an alternative world system. We stress here also the important role of theory in scholarly research, explanation, social science. The business mind – the logic of marginal advantage within a market society that ostensibly accomplishes widespread prosperity – has been confronted here with its own contradictions: dehumanized production, an overworked and underpaid labor force, increasing impoverishment. We emphasize the power of the labor movement not only as a source of class contestation over the distribution of the economic value that it has produced, but also as a source of learning and advances in theory and social organization. Labor's traditional values have built the common good, and radical pedagogy begins with labor's untold story (see also Boyer and Morais [1955] 1997).

It is hoped that this essay may generate discussion and activism within the public at large, particularly within the labor force, but also especially among college students and teachers in several inter-related social science disciplines – sociology, economics, business ethics, labor education, and history – in the spirit of Herbert Marcuse's critical theorizing.

We have recalled²⁹ the most radical components of Marcuse's critical social analysis, and augmented these with our own contributions – primarily through our interpretation and modeling of fact-

²⁹ We use the term *recall* dialectically here: as German philosophy uses the concept *aufheben* – meaning variously to raise up, elevate, preserve, annul, refine, and supersede (Reitz 2000, 8). We seek an appreciation of Marcuse's important theoretical strengths going beyond weaknesses discussed elsewhere (Kellner 1973; Reitz 2000). Our engagement with Marcuse's philosophy is intended thus to liberate *the critical* in critical theory. We are recalling a “new” Marcuse.

based observations drawn from the national income accounts and also our work in critical pedagogy, labor education, and in the multicultural education reform movement. We have furnished thereby a curriculum component that may elicit freshened perceptions of the basic workings of the U.S. economy as well as challenge established patterns of education. Such perceptions can help generate a “new sensibility” (Marcuse 1969) with regard to the origins of social inequality, the irrationality and destructive nature of current patterns in the distribution of income and wealth, and the real possibility of a more humane, just, and abundant future. This new sensibility is a “refusal of the actual” (Marcuse 1969, 34), a form of consciousness in which science, technology, and art are released from service to exploitation and mobilized for a new vision of socialism (Marcuse 1969, 23, 26).

The analytical innovations presented here can be regarded as Marcusean insofar as they embody a form of the “Great Refusal,” and disclose truths about our human condition and our human potential that are “absent” from established patterns of academic and political discourse. We have sought to do this in our discussions of the intensifying inequalities in the social distribution of income and wealth, rival interpretations of the meaning of inequality, the implications of the labor theory of value for wealth accumulation, ownership, and justice, and finally the 2008 financial crisis in the U.S. Of special significance, we feel, is our model of workforce remuneration and capital accumulation. A depth-dimensional understanding of these dynamics undergirds our entire approach to critical work and radical pedagogy. We have recast the discussion of dehumanization and rehumanization in terms of the commodification and decommodification of sensuous living labor.

Economic processes today divest us from our own creative work, yet these also form the sources of our future social power. We have attempted to furnish the beginnings of a more comprehensive critical social theory stressing the centrality of labor in the economy. Learning occurs in communities that help one another to apprehend the dialectic of the historical and material world and the changing social condition of humanity within it. Critical work and radical

pedagogy must theorize the origins and outcomes of economic and cultural oppression, and be engaged politically with the labor force to end them. This is the logic and manifesto that can liberate the fuller potential of any critical theory of society. In education, critical theory must come to inform the full curriculum, such that its new norms of understanding and justice may enable us to build from within the realities of the present the partnership organizations of the future that will make possible new ways of holding resources and real opportunities for all persons to reclaim the full social power of labor, leadership, and learning.

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