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Education and the Production of Space

Political Pedagogy, Geography, and Urban Revolution

Derek R. Ford

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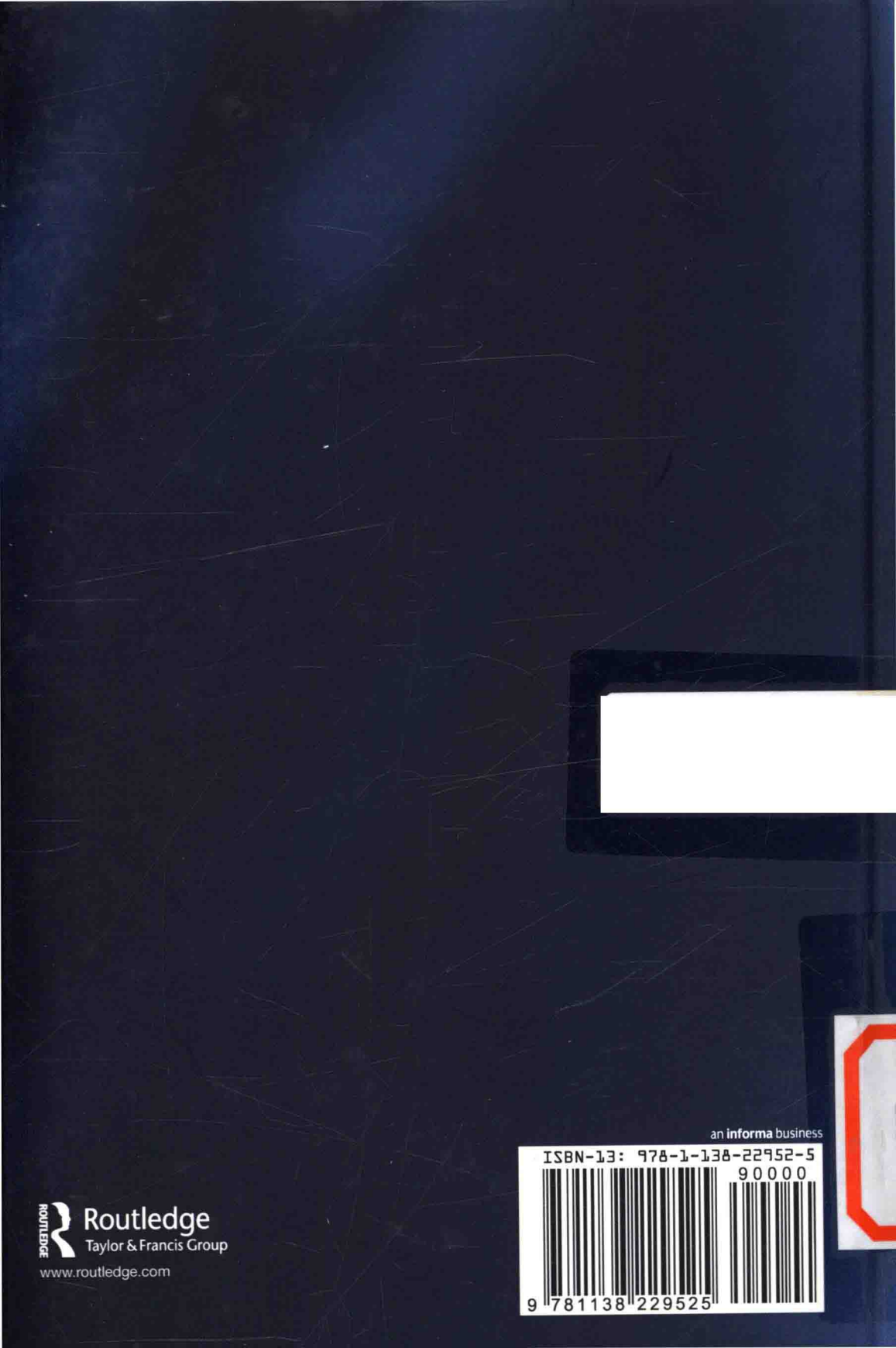
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Education and the Production of Space

Emerging from a radical pedagogical tradition, *Education and the Production of Space* deepens and extends Henri Lefebvre's insights on revolutionary praxis by revealing the intimate relationship between education and the production of space. Synthesizing educational theory, marxist theory, and critical geography, the book articulates a revolutionary political pedagogy, one that emerges as a break from within—and against—critical pedagogy. Ford investigates the role of space in the context of emerging social movements and urban rebellions, with a focus on the Baltimore Rebellion of 2015, and shows how processes of learning, studying, and teaching can help us produce space differently, in a manner aligned with our needs and desires.

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Preface

> The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.
>
> —Karl Marx

I remember hearing something about Occupy Wall Street as September approached in 2011. I'm always excited to hear about new initiatives, and this was no exception. I was definitely skeptical, however, and besides, I was in Syracuse, starting my second semester of graduate school and organizing with the ANSWER Coalition on campaigns against police brutality in the city and my country's war on Libya. On September 17 of that year we had our own event in Syracuse, a "Lyrical Revolt," a night of politically conscious hip hop and urban art. It was a fundraiser to benefit the family of Chuniece Patterson, who was killed by medical neglect at the local jail, the Onondaga County "Justice" Center. Her family hadn't been able to give her a proper burial and headstone, and we wanted to set that right, and to have an outlet to agitate against the police and to raise consciousness about the many crimes of capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism. I remember while we were getting ready for the show, one of our special guests, rapper Marcel Cartier (who was up from the South Bronx), getting a message that Immortal Technique and several other artists were scheduled to perform at Occupy that weekend. The encounter was about to take hold and contribute to a massive shift in consciousness and a rapid advance in political organization in the US.

I locate Occupy within a longer trajectory of the reawakening of communist consciousness since the dreadful dissolution and overthrow of the Soviet Union and the countries of the socialist bloc between 1989–1991. Any critiques of the policies of the USSR or the Eastern Bloc countries aside, this was a terrible setback in the international communist movement, one from which we still haven't fully recovered. It ushered in an era of uncontested unipolar domination by the United States. With the Soviet Union gone, the US was free to wage a brutal war against Iraq (first by military means, then by economic means, then again by military means), and to

bomb and dismember Yugoslavia, and to tighten sanctions against Cuba and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (who were already suffering terribly from the loss of their main partners in trade and, in the case of the DPRK, weather catastrophes). At the end of the 1990s a new hope emerged in the alterglobalization movement, as masses of people began to throw down with the cops at meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The terror attacks of 9/11 ended that movement abruptly, as George W. Bush's approval ratings skyrocketed overnight.

There was always resistance, of course, and a few days after 9/11 the ANSWER Coalition brought 25,000 people to the streets of DC to protest against war and racism. But it wasn't until the second war against Iraq in 2003 began that a new mass movement arose in the US. This period witnessed the largest antiwar demonstrations in history. At the same time, around 2005–2006, a new immigrant rights movement erupted across the US. These protests were militant, class conscious, and led by the primarily Latino immigrant community. The Democratic Party in the 2008 election cycle was able to absorb much of this energy, reaffirming once again its role as the graveyard of social movements. Meanwhile, US hegemony abroad was being challenged by the heroic Iraqi resistance and the growing prominence of states that are independent of—or antagonistic to—the US: Iran, Venezuela, China, and Russia. This shift isn't coincidental, as Dan Glazebrook argues that the Bolivarian Revolution might have been challenged by the US had it not been tied down completely in Iraq and Afghanistan.[1] Occupy emerged during this moment, on the heels of these outbursts of indignation and desire, and in the context of an emerging multipolar world. Unlike previous movements, which, while continuous in the broad sense, were punctuated by separate events, the Occupiers didn't leave. This claiming of space forced the question of geography and spatial access to the forefront of domestic and global conversations about justice.

Occupy also happened to coincide with my own coming to geography. When Occupy hit on September 17, I was a few weeks into a Monday evening seminar on "the geography of capital" taught by Don Mitchell (Mondays with Marx, we called it). We were working our way through the first volume of *Capital* while the occupation took hold on Wall Street, and while it spread to cities and towns across the country and the world, including Syracuse. During that semester, theory and practice were merged in the most seamless of ways. We would read Marx's words about the functions and origins of money while we engaged in ongoing debates with the Libertarians rallying to "end the fed," grapple with the general law of capitalist accumulation while we constructed placards for protests, and write about the changing organic composition of capital as we formulated slogans for our next direct action at the Bank of America downtown. And we would focus on Marx's conception of the state at the end of the semester as the federal, state, and local governments and police coordinated crackdowns on Occupy sites across the country. We weren't just protesting *in* the city, we

were protesting *for* the city, for the right of people to truly inhabit the city and make it their own. We knew the city was more than a built environment to facilitate the circulation of capital, and we definitely didn't want it to be a playground for the bourgeoisie. We wanted to attack the exchange-value of the city and reclaim it for use.

That semester set me on a research and organizing path that has culminated in this book. At the time, I didn't have much of an education about education. I was mostly interested in philosophy and political theory. So as I engaged in research about education—and I was drawn to critical education—I was always thinking about questions of capital and geography. There were just too many connections, from the ways in which the layout of the classroom prescribed certain flows for different subjects, and suggested certain relationships between students and the professor, to the ways that educational and pedagogical questions always came up as we prepared to march through the streets of the city. Things seemed to click when I picked up the work of Peter McLaren, and I still remember the first time I read his article (initially published in 1998, but I was reading a reprint in a 2005 book) that laid out a program of action to reassert critical pedagogy as a real force of dissension. McLaren called for critical pedagogy to "move into the direction of challenging new carceral systems of social control through the development of a critical pedagogy of space."[2] He urged for critical pedagogues to turn to the work of critical geography "to explore the spatiality of human life and couple this with its historicality-sociality."[3]

I did some searching and came up short. The only thing I could find to take up McLaren's calls specifically is a 2000 article by John Morgan. Morgan says he is excited about the spatial turn in education but worries "that this proliferation of spatial metaphors has blurred the distinctions between different meanings of space."[4] In response to this, he briefly surveys a few different conceptions of space from critical geography, noting that this type of geography is vastly different from how geography is taught in primary and secondary schools. The critical pedagogy of space that Morgan proposes is primarily related to understanding space as socially produced and, thus, susceptible to being produced differently. The main idea here is that spaces should be engaged as "social texts."[5] I also found some interesting sociological work that was flirting with critical geography. Most pertinent to my interests was Pauline Lipman's book published in 2011, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education*.[6] Lipman sheds the spatial light on the movement against educational privatization in Chicago, placing it in historical and geographic context. She even courts Henri Lefebvre's "right to the city" as a way to theorize and mobilize against these privatizations.

What was missing was a framework for a deep engagement between critical education and critical geography. Morgan's article was an introductory sketch of some ways that critical pedagogy might consider space. There was no in-depth examination of spatial studies, and the actual engagement between pedagogy and space was fairly superficial. All I read were vague

calls for critical teachers to help students understand how power produces space. With Lipman I got a rich sociological analysis of a particular city and a particular struggle, but it was light on theory, and I got the same vague calls about critical pedagogy helping students "develop tools of critical consciousness and social practice."[7] These are important calls, and they are ones that I develop and solidify in this book. But what I want to do is stage a deep conversation between critical geography and pedagogy, to lay the groundwork for what I am calling a revolutionary political pedagogy *for* space, one that integrates theories and histories of spatial production within the framework of a pedagogy oriented toward revolution. The emphasis on pedagogy *for* space is meant to accent ontological production rather than just epistemological tarrying. To be sure, intellectual investigation is absolutely crucial in what follows. But it's not the end game. Instead, this book works to mobilize critical understandings of space together with revolutionary pedagogy to develop an infrastructure to produce space in ways that disrupt and, ultimately, replace the contemporary global political, economic, and social order.

A sustained and deep conversation, however, requires the setting of specific and narrow parameters. The framing took place over time through intentional decisions, accidental encounters, and historical forces. The stage was set with my Mondays with Marx (and Mitchell) seminar and through my encounter with McLaren's call. I develop in this book a *specific* spatialization of a *particular* domain of educational theory and pedagogy. This is necessary if we are to move beyond the general stance of "we should take space into consideration" that is so prevalent in educational literature. In doing so, I found it necessary to move beyond what exists in education thus far. Namely, in this book I break with the tradition of critical pedagogy. This is a move that wasn't present in my original dissertation but came shortly after. For reasons I explain more in chapter two, I found the tradition to be stagnant and stultifying. While I believe that McLaren has done much to breathe new life into it, I want to take the advantage (or arrogance?) of my youth and try to start something new. This is why I speak about revolutionary *political* pedagogy.

The Logic of the Book

The most frustrating thing for any militant is that the moment and duration of struggle is almost completely out of our control. No matter how hard we wish, how many flyers we post around town, how many invites we get out on social media, how much networking we do with likeminded individuals and organizations, how alluring our wording is, how of-the-moment our slogans are, we can't make a movement happen. The objective conditions have to be laid, a crisis has to be present. These objective conditions have historically been laid by economic contractions, imperialist wars and, most recently in the US, racist state violence. Given this, the

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task of the militant (or, in tamer terms, the "organizer") is to focus in on the subjective conditions, on our understanding and critique of the current order of things, on changing ourselves and orienting ourselves and others toward the possible futures that are immanent in the present. When crises erupt, then, we are better prepared to turn them into general crises that can provoke wholesale transformation in the mode and relations of production. In his reflections on the May 1968 uprising in France, Henri Lefebvre put it like this:

> Economic crisis is not revolutionary in itself. On the contrary. As analyzed and presented by Marx, economic crisis has a "purgative" function in capitalist society. It is absorbed by the cycle, which can now resume its course. . . . Following a few inevitable disturbances, production and reproduction (including that of social relations) are resumed. Only the action-critique of superstructures (ideologies and institutions) transforms the economic crisis into general crisis, making it thus possible to transform social relations and the structures proper (production and property relations).[8]

Economic crises can be extremely productive for capital, they can clean the slate, allow a fresh start, provide the big guys an opportunity to buy up the little guys on the cheap. We have to be prepared with an economic critique, Lefebvre is saying, but we have to do more. We have to formulate "action-critiques" of the whole system and its various manifestations. These action-critiques are epistemological and ontological projects, processes of new understandings, new imaginings, and new enactings. It is such an action-critique that this book seeks to develop.

I begin chapter one with something of an introduction to the field of critical pedagogy. I have a few reasons for doing this. For one, it establishes the ground on which I stand (and from which I depart). For two, in my research I have come across very few adequate surveys of and introductions to the field. By constructing my foundation I also then construct what I consider to be critical education, and there is no doubt many would have made different choices. Others are free—and encouraged—to set their own stages. The real work begins in chapter two, when I articulate my break from, within, and against critical pedagogy. I do so by evaluating two moments: first, the wave of poststructural/postmodern critiques of critical pedagogy, and second, the marxist resurgence within critical pedagogy. Both of these moments happened before my time, and so I look at them with fresh eyes, or so I hope. Thus my intention is not to draw up a balance sheet, but to get at the real issues involved, identify their importance, and make proposals for future lines of flight. The revolutionary political pedagogy I develop is one of these lines, and at the end of chapter two I delineate seven components of this pedagogy, which provide a shell that I work on developing in the rest of the book.

I dedicate chapter three to an examination of our contemporary political juncture, which is most often defined as neoliberalism. I explore both the social-subjective and political-economic aspects of neoliberalism as it pertains to education. I argue that it does so through three primary ways: 1) through contributing to the production and dissemination of ideology; 2) through the accumulation of educational capitals; and 3) through working to fashion neoliberal subjectivity. I then address a pressing issue with the literature on neoliberalism and its rather uncritical acceptance of David Harvey's important—but limited—work. Neoliberalism represents a restructuring within advanced capitalist countries and a shift away from Keynesianism in those countries, but it doesn't account for the global context in which that shift took place. In order to account for this, I argue, we need to understand neoliberalism as part of a counterrevolutionary offensive within the global class war. I then take a turn to the origins of the concept of the global class war, to the historical event that made it possible to identify this trend: the Korean War. This is a war that goes on today, and is somehow both remembered and profoundly misunderstood; a historical amnesia that, when pressed, can only come up with wrong answers. There is a troubling consensus between the Left and the Right about the war and about the DPRK that I set out to correct here. I demonstrate the terrible critiques of the DPRK in critical education, calling out Joel Spring's "analysis," which is at best clumsy and at worst treacherous. Korea represents a struggle that still wages today not just on the peninsula, but also on the globe: a global civil struggle between two social and economic systems. This helps us appreciate the victories won by workers and oppressed people in the 20th century as part of a global offensive of the proletarian class camp, and it provides us with new allies in our struggle against neoliberalism in the US.

While chapter three is situated at the level of the global, insisting as it does on the primacy of the international situation, why is it that the global is so important? It is to this question that I turn in chapter four, which marks a transition into critical geography. I begin with the "spatial turn" in the mid-1990s. Whereas most educational research has viewed "globalization," "neoliberalism," "post-Fordism," or the "information economy" as reasons for the spatial turn in social theory, I argue that the spatial turn is really the result of capital's development. Globalization is, in Marx's words, "given in the very concept of capital itself."[9] As such, I go back to Marx and Engels and draw out four lines of their thinking that are deeply spatial and hold relevance for the current moment: 1) absolute and relative expansion; 2) the town and country division and antagonism; 3) transportation and communication; and 4) fixed capital and the built environment. This chapter lays bare the deep roots that lie underneath the development of the *global* class war and the important role of the production of space in capitalism. They also serve a purpose for deepening the educational investigation into marxism and Marx's thought, which has tended to focus only on the *production*

of capital (which is the focus of the first volume of *Capital*), and not on the *realization* of capital (which is the focus of the second volume of *Capital*). Bringing the overall valorization process into the educational picture pinpoints additional contradictions and barriers within capitalism that bear directly on educational concerns, including the relationship between the content and form of education. For example, through an analysis of the built environment and fixed capital, I demonstrate that revolutionary content isn't just a precursor to social action; it *is* a social action.

Chapter five homes in on one particularly important spatial formation under the present: the city. As Andy Merrifield reminds us, "Political struggles always happen somewhere and at some time, in specific locations, predominantly in cities, given that they are crucibles of power in our society."[10] Cities are where the global contradictions of capitalism are most acute and concentrated; they are absolutely imperative to the reproduction of capitalism, yet they are also where capitalism is highly vulnerable to disruption and, potentially, overthrow. I begin this chapter with a closer examination of the relationship between capitalism and the city before turning to literature on the right to the city. This literature has only been superficially engaged in critical educational theory, and it has not yet made an entrance into revolutionary forms of pedagogy. I take time to trace the development of this literature in the work of Lefebvre and those who have extended his project. Next I concentrate on some important debates that have taken place over the right to the city, including: what kind of right is it, whose right is it, what exactly is a city, and how does the international division of labor affect struggles for the city? In the concluding section I make explicit the lessons that we learn by placing political pedagogy in a conversation with the right to the city, focusing in particular on the way that struggles in and over the city help us think through the relationship between political economy and difference, broaden and specify our conception of value-production, and orient us toward the encounter and simultaneity—and the *use* and *use-value* that they necessitate—that always resist within and against the logic of capital.

The last chapter of the book focuses on the question of pedagogy, a move that not only spatializes educational theory but also educationalizes spatial theory and is oriented explicitly toward ontological transformation. This move takes place by focusing in on Lefebvre's theorization of the production of space as a potentially revolutionary activity. I situate Lefebvre's analysis and then take it up as an educational problematic and seek to develop a pedagogy for space. I do this by augmenting Lefebvre's spatial triad of 1) representations of space; 2) representational spaces; and 3) spatial practice with an educational triad of 1) learning; 2) studying; and 3) teaching. I propose that each component needs to be held in a precarious, contingent, and dialectical relation. To ask more precisely after this process—and the relationship between learning, studying, and teaching in the production of space—I read this pedagogy through the 2015 Baltimore Rebellion. I present

the days leading up to and encompassing the rebellion as a pedagogical act of spatial production, presenting an understanding of the inspiring revolt as precisely the coordination of learning, studying, and teaching over and for the right to the city.

If it hasn't yet been made clear, this is a book of *educational theory*. It constructs a geographic-pedagogical theory oriented toward radically transforming the social relations of production. As any work of theory, it is incomplete, and it asks for performance and mobilization, generation and study. In this respect, I mean it to be more constructive than deconstructive. In other words, I do not constantly seek out flaws, gaps, contradictions, and inconsistencies. This doesn't mean that I hold any punches along the way. I do my best to write clearly in order to draw lines of demarcation, and I do so for intellectual and political reasons. Politics is always about divisive constructions and productive exclusions.

Certain people have been important in the production of this manuscript, and I don't want to exclude them (although I should add that it is not without due consideration that I implicate the following people in the production of this manuscript). First, I need to thank Don Mitchell. Don has had a tremendous influence on the development of my thinking over the past three years. Not only has he helped my marxism become simultaneously stricter and more flexible (i.e., more dialectical), but he is responsible for introducing me to the spatial manifestations of capital and the struggles against it. I always looked forward to his Monday evening seminars, when I could witness his ability to situate, explain, advance, and most importantly *teach* politically relevant content. Second, I need to thank Peter McLaren, who so graciously accepted my invitation to sit on my dissertation committee and who has taken such a supportive interest in my work (even when it gets him in trouble with others!). My editors at Routledge, Karen Adler and Katherine Tsamparlis, have been excellent in sharpening my ideas and in the general production process. Thanks, too, to the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and challenges. Most importantly, I want to thank the participants in the struggles from which the ideas in this manuscript were born, and to whom they should return. While this is a research book that isn't intended for wide distribution or mass consumption, the ideas generated herein have other avenues of communication and engagement. In particular, I want to acknowledge the comrades in Korea, who have taught me so much about discipline, dedication, unity, and practical solidarity. I dedicate this book to Kim Hye-young, a revolutionary leader in the Republic of Korea and current political prisoner.

Notes

1 Dan Glazebrook, *Divide and Ruin: The West's Imperial Strategy in an Age of Ruin* (San Francisco: Liberation Media, 2013).
2 Peter McLaren, *Capitalists & Conquerors: A Critical Pedagogy against Empire* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 93.

3 Ibid.
4 John Morgan, "Critical Pedagogy: The Spaces That Make the Difference," *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 8, no. 3 (2000): 273.
5 Ibid., 285.
6 Pauline Lipman, *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Race, Neoliberalism, and the Right to the City* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011).
7 Ibid., 167.
8 Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Upheaval*, trans. Alfred Ehrenfeld (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1969), 34–35.
9 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin Books and New Left Review, 1939/1973), 408.
10 Andy Merrifield, *Metromarxism: A Tale of the City* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 15.

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