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Derek R. Ford & Collin L. Chambers

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Marx's Pedagogies, the Party, and China: The Open Dialectic of Research and Presentation in Theory and Historical Praxis

Derek R. Ford and Collin L. Chambers

While pedagogies emanating from the Marxist tradition have been proposed and debated, this essay argues that Marx had clear pedagogical logics of his own that he laid out by articulating the differences between inquiry and presentation or, said differently, between studying and learning. This essay presents these logics as they play out in Marx's writing and research, focusing particularly on the Grundrisse notebooks and the first volume of Capital, each of which accord different primacy to inquiry and presentation. To show the political logics of Marx's pedagogies in practice, the essay draws from Lenin's conception of the Communist Party as an educational form tasked precisely with navigating between Marx's pedagogies. A case study follows, of the historical and contemporary experiences of the Chinese Communist Party as it has directed and yielded to Marx's pedagogies.

Key Words: China, Communist Education, Marxism, Party, Pedagogy

Marxism and even the Leninist tradition have reentered Western popular and academic discourse in a serious way, which partly explains the small but still significant renewed interest in revolution and pedagogy by educational theorists and others. While several Marxist pedagogies have been proposed and debated, from that of Louis Althusser (Lewis 2017; Cree 2019), to Fredric Jameson (Lewis 2009), to that of the commons (Weeks 2010), research into the development of Marx's *own* pedagogies is lacking.

One exception is Tyson Lewis (2009), who contends, as an aside, that Marx *introduces* a pedagogical problematic without ever addressing it. His source is Marx's 1872–5 preface to the French translation of *Capital*, which took the form of a serial. In this text, Marx supported the serial form because of its accessibility, yet Lewis notes that Marx was “also hesitant” (439), for Marx then remarked on how the presentation of the book makes the first three chapters so difficult that many may not access it, or they may impatiently toss it aside. At that point, Marx was “in a pedagogical standstill.” Marx (1967, 30) admitted as much in the preface's last paragraph, indicating the standstill as one he was “powerless to overcome, unless it

be by forewarning and forearming those readers who zealously seek the truth.” Marx seems to have left the answer to this pedagogical question to the reader.

This essay proposes that Marx *did* explicitly answer the question in his articulation of the differences between inquiry and presentation, each of which are particular pedagogical logics. We demonstrate how these logics play out in Marx’s own writing and research, focusing on where they are most concentrated: his *Grundrisse* notebooks and the first volume of *Capital*, each of which accord different primacy to inquiry and presentation, yet neither of which sacrifice one for the other.

We next turn briefly to Lenin and show how his conception and praxis of the Communist Party takes an educational form tasked precisely with navigating between Marx’s pedagogies, thereby showing that the Party is not only a political vehicle but a pedagogical one as well. This will contribute to the new literature on the Party form, which has reentered Western activism as a desirable organizational mode of communist struggle and—especially through the work of comrade Jodi Dean (2016)—is also considered seriously in academic research, allowing educational theorists to examine the pedagogy of the Communist Party (Ford 2016, 2017; FitzSimmons and Souranta 2020; Holst 2010; Lewis 2012; Malott 2016). That this is a new development speaks to the anticommunist origins of critical pedagogy in North America, which drew heavily on Paolo Freire without ever engaging the last chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where, as Tyson Lewis (2012, 102) puts it, he “clearly saw his pedagogy as a tool to be used within revolutionary organization.” Likewise, work on the pedagogy of the Party generally springs from Lenin, Lukács, Gramsci, and others and never from Marx or Engels—at least in any depth. This is peculiar given that Marx (1983, 62–5), in a March 1852 letter to Joseph Weydemeyer, acknowledged that his contribution to the movement was not the discovery of classes or class antagonisms but “that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat.” The primary instrument for waging this struggle and for instituting the proletarian dictatorship is the Communist Party.

Finally, to provide a case study, we turn to the controversial—by which we mean often slandered and discarded—experiences of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) as it has both directed and yielded to Marx’s pedagogies. We do this by examining the two-line struggle, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and the later post-1978 turn to “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Throughout, we pay attention to the internal and external contradictions and forces that shaped and directed Marx’s and the CPC’s pedagogical shifts. In the end we gesture toward some contemporary ways communists today can mobilize Marx’s pedagogies in social movements, communist parties, and other organizations as evidence of the importance these pedagogies retain.

Before we begin, however, we want to make clear that our argument is not that the Communist Party is *only* a pedagogical instrument of revolution, which would in effect collapse politics and pedagogy together. Instead, our contention is that

the political task of the Party—establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat and abolishing class society—cannot be understood without attending to the pedagogical tasks it takes on. In other words, the political question is about the struggle for power while the pedagogical question is about the imaginative, affective, and strategic struggles within and emanating from the Party.¹

Marx's Pedagogical Prerequisite: Presuming Competence

As any communist knows, Marxist pedagogy is not a matter of merely explaining or convincing, of coming up with the right wording, question, presentation, speech, or reading. These are educational tactics rather than pedagogies, which refer instead to specific ways, modes, or logics of education. Marxist pedagogy is contingent on a multitude of factors: the dominant political ideology at the time (is it intensely anticommunist or more open?), the force of the state (is it under military dictatorship or bourgeois democracy?), the consciousness of students as individuals or as a collective (are they coming from a liberal issue-based organization or from a strand of the movement?), the autonomy allowed in particular settings (is it an after-school club at a public/private school, a community meeting, or a Party office?). And of course there are other factors such as the literacy skills, personalities, time commitments, and relations of and among teachers and students.

According to educational theory, Marxist pedagogical theory is concerned with *content*. The idea seems to be that by teaching Marx and Marxism and by endlessly listing the contradictions and problems of capitalism, enlightened students will then finally take their destiny into their own hands. This idea of the “enlightened” revolutionary teaching the “ignorant” masses, while certainly embodied by some teachers, is not located in any of the texts of the Marxist tradition. In fact, this was one of Lenin’s main gripes with the economists who focused on trade-union consciousness. It was also one of Marx and Engels’s main critiques of the reformism of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in Germany. Marx and (primarily or wholly) Engels (1991, 408; emphasis added) wrote the following in a letter for internal circulation among some SDP leaders:

As for ourselves, there is, considering all our antecedents, only one course open to us. For almost 40 years we have emphasised that the class struggle is the immediate motive force of history and, in particular, that the class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is the great lever of modern social revolution; hence we cannot possibly co-operate with men who seek to eliminate that class struggle from the movement. At the founding of the International we expressly formulated the battle cry: The emancipation of the working class must be achieved by the working class itself... *Hence we*

1. For more, see the introduction to Ford (2019b).

cannot co-operate with men who say openly that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves, and must first be emancipated from above by philanthropic members of the upper and lower middle classes.

What Marx and Engels are saying here is that we should *always presume competence* (a point central to the field of critical disability studies). This doesn't mean that we should *presume* that the capitalist system sets everyone up for success. Quite the contrary: the system sets the masses up for poverty. What presuming competence does mean, however, is that we should, by default and as a matter of educational principle, assume that everyone with whom we come into contact *has the capacity and potential* for transforming their consciousness and ideas, their habits and actions, their political beliefs and commitments.

Presuming competence also puts the onus on the educator, the revolutionary, the organizer, and the organization insofar as it means that if the student isn't "getting it," then the problem lies with *us*. Too often, however, educators and organizers displace their own incompetence onto students. For example, we've heard many teachers speak with pride about how many Cs, Ds, and Fs they give. For us, however, those grades are reflections of our teaching, and we'd never take any satisfaction in that. If our students don't do well, it's not due *exclusively* to either their or our *innate inability* but to a complex of factors discussed above. It's like telling someone who speaks English as a second or third or fourth language that they need to improve *their speaking* skills when, in reality, those of us who are first (or exclusively) English-language speakers need to improve *our listening* skills. As teachers, we want all our students to succeed. As revolutionary organizers, we want all members of our class to become communists, leftists, anti-imperialists, antiwar activists, or generally to the left of where they are now.

Marx's Pedagogies: Inquiry and Presentation, or Learning and Studying

Although Marx considered education at various points—and he envisioned a holistic socialist education of the future—he didn't write about pedagogy. To be sure, he participated consistently, diligently, vociferously, and to great effect in polemical disputes through articles, reports, speeches, and so on. Rather than look at this rhetorical style, however, we want to begin with a crucial distinction that Marx made in the afterword to the second German edition of the first volume of *Capital*. Here, Marx distinguished the *Forschung* from the *Darstellung*, or the process of research or inquiry from the method of presentation. He was responding to an assessment of *Capital* that appeared in an 1872 edition of the *European Messenger*, based in Saint Petersburg. The assessment focused on Marx's method of presentation and commended Marx for showing the laws of capitalism and of social transformation.

For Marx, this review was ultimately an affirmation of his anti-Hegelian dialectic, but before clarifying his dialectic, he briefly noted the necessary differences between inquiry and formulation, or research and presentation, a difference that is not just political or philosophical but pedagogical in nature. “Of course,” Marx (1967, 28) wrote,

the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connexion. Only after this work is done, can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction.

If you think about the experience of inquiry—what we refer to as *studying*—you might think about studying for a test. That’s not what Marx meant. Instead, studying or researching is a process that entails wandering around, looking for connections, thinking you’re onto something and then following it to a dead end, generating ideas, tracing lineages, getting lost in the archives (whether these be in a library or museum or found on street corners, in cafes, or on YouTube). Studying and inquiry are about the *means*, which doesn’t indicate that the ends aren’t important. When Marx was studying, he had an end in mind: he wanted to understand the inner logics and dynamics of capital, how these came to be, what impact they had and might have on the world, and how their contradictions can be seized during the class struggle. But this goal wasn’t always at the forefront of his mind. What we might read as “digressions” in his work are often the reality that the end goal had to be suspended at moments for research to continue. After all, why spend so much time critiquing Bastiat and Carey, two relatively unimportant and unknown French economists? In fact, a lot of what we consider “distraction” or “procrastination” might actually be profound moments of studying.

Presentation takes a totally different pedagogical form, one that we term *learning*. Presentation is a process of learning, as it is linear, logical, and developmental. It begins with a predetermined end in mind that guides the demonstration such that it begins with the most elementary conceptual building blocks and proceeds linearly in a developmental manner toward the end goal. Whereas studying is about means, learning is about ends. These ends structure everything that comes before. Therefore, Marx’s *Capital* often casts aside the historical beginnings of capitalism and leaves it to the very end where we finally learn that it was through slavery, colonialism, legal and extralegal theft, individual and state violence, repression, and so on that capitalism came (and continually comes) to be.

Studying, however, can’t last forever, especially for revolutionaries. *Capital* had to be published; state power must be seized. Yet only once you’ve studied can you begin *presenting* your findings. At the same time, Marx knew he couldn’t fully delineate and learn about capitalism so long as capital existed, as capital by

definition is a dynamic social relation. When one sets out to study, there may be an end in sight (a dissertation or a book, a piece of information, or a theoretical development), but as one begins to study, the end retreats. Studying, as such, suspends the dichotomies that define learning. These dichotomies “include before and after, novice and expert, student and graduate, uncertified and certified” (Lewis and Friedrich 2016, 239). When studying, one is no longer a novice but not yet an expert, no longer a student but not yet a graduate. It’s an interminable openness to the world as otherwise.

This openness to the world—including to ourselves and to social relations—as *otherwise than they are* is key to the communist project. After all, communism is a revolutionary reconstruction of society in which radical transformations take place under the dictatorship of the proletariat. By suspending the hierarchical structuring of learning, study offers an opportunity for desubjectification, disindividuation, and the realization of a collectivity. In this way, studying counteracts the divisions that capital instills to prevent the realization of the proletarian class as a class in and for itself. In other words, as capital produced the collective laborer, it also worked to divide workers from realizing their collectivity. Studying is an educational praxis that can work against this process precisely by rendering such distinctions inoperative, thereby creating a common, collective subject.

It would be a mistake to valorize studying at the expense of learning. Instead, both are necessary educational processes. Only after one learns to read, for example, can one study a text. We can even read Marx’s *Capital* as a heterogenous combination of learning and studying, yet one in which Marx was forced to prioritize learning. Marx sought to understand, articulate, learn, and relay the precise logics of capital, of its contradictions, and of how the working class has and can seize on these contradictions to institute a revolutionary transition to communism. Research never properly reveals or articulates itself; it is found in the traces of presentation. Without studying, which requires previous learning, Marx never could have articulated the logics of capital that he did.

Marx’s pedagogical gesture is thus one that affirms the necessity of both educational logics. Yet his movements between learning and studying weren’t dictated by some inner genius but by the twists and turns of the workers’ movement and, undoubtedly, his own health. The writings of Marx, Engels, and others still *explain* the workings of capitalism today because they get at its fundamental logics and contradictions and at the tasks of revolution—the ones that remain the same while capital exists—even if they change their form here and there, or even if they take on different significances at different moments. And even though Marx couldn’t and never claimed to predict how capital would develop after his death, his writings remain fundamental cornerstones not only to revolutionary critique and analysis but most importantly to *action*. This is because Marxism develops by its return to study and to inquiry, tracing new lineages and discovering what Marx didn’t write about because of the research unavailable to him, the

moral or social standards at the time, or the (many) times he was not in good health or financial circumstances.²

Marx's Pedagogical Navigations in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*

Marx's notes that were eventually published as the *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* were penned during the financial crisis of 1856–7, a crisis that spurred Marx to a frenzy of study. He set out to study the inner logics and dynamics of capitalism, to critique bourgeois political economy, to lay out a method, and to identify what contradictions could galvanize the revolution. But the result was a series of notes in notebooks, abandoned by Marx, not published until 1939 in the Soviet Union, and only made available in Europe and the United States during the early 1960s. As notes, they're traces of Marx's studying that, as Eric Hobsbawm (1964, 10) put it, were "written in a sort of private intellectual shorthand which is sometimes impenetrable, in the form of rough notes interspersed with asides which, however clear they may have been to Marx, are often ambiguous to us." As a result, "Anyone who has tried to translate the manuscript or even to study and interpret it, will know that it is sometimes quite impossible to put the meaning of some sibylline passage beyond all reasonable doubt" (10). It's for this reason that one edited collection of scholarship on the *Grundrisse* refers to the book as "a veritable 'laboratory'" (Bellofiore, Starosta, and Thomas 2013, 3). What we see in the *Grundrisse* is Marx studying—or *thinking*—rather than presenting *knowledge*. It is precisely because of the preponderance of studying that these notes are particularly ripe for debate, contestation, and more studying.

As a result, the book continues to be read in a variety of ways. For some, these notebooks are seen as preparatory research for Marx's magnum opus, *Capital*—especially the first volume, the only one published (and republished) during Marx's lifetime. They read Marx's notebooks *through* the final work. Viewed in this manner, for Louis Althusser (1971, 70) it was *Capital* that constitutes the work "by which Marx has to be *judged*" instead of either of his earliest Hegelian works or the "still very ambiguous works like *The German Ideology*, or even the *Grundrisse*," the latter of which was still too Hegelian for Althusser.

For others, the notebooks represent a work of Marx in their own right, distinct from and even superior to *Capital*. Antonio Negri (1991, 9), for example, understands the *Grundrisse* as an explicitly *political* text, a *more* Marxist text than *Capital* precisely

2. In the essay "Marx's Coat," Peter Stallybrass (1997, 187) posits that the reason Marx spent so much time on linen and coats in the beginning of *Capital* was that his own "overcoat was at the pawnshop throughout the 1850s and early 1860s. And his overcoat directly determined what work he could or could not do. If his overcoat was at the pawnshop during the winter, he could not go to the British Museum" and study. Without his overcoat, he wouldn't gain admission to the museum and couldn't access the newspapers and archives.

because of its “incredible openness” and its emphasis on antagonistic subjectivity. *Capital*, according to Negri, is closed, determinate, and objective, a book where antagonisms are sublated and resolved dialectically, foreclosing the subjective rupture that communist revolution requires.

Still others insist that we read them together, either to complete Marx's analysis or to generate new insights. Regarding the former, Moishe Postone (2008, 124) argues that the notebooks give clearer presentations, particularly of Marx's explicit “distinction between ‘real wealth’ (or ‘material wealth’) and value.” Postone insists that the notebooks emphasize the historicity of Marx's categories in ways that *Capital* doesn't, thereby forming a more comprehensive, accessible, and relational view of Marx's critiques and categories. Regarding the latter, George Caffentzis (2013, 270) insists that the animating forces of communism in the *Grundrisse* aren't negated in *Capital* but are rather “mutated in an ingenious way.” Taken together, both present different—but not contradictory—aspects of capital's contemporary forms of exploitation and of proletarian forms of resistance.

Our intention in this essay is not to defend one reading against another, and in some ways we wager that the different presentations are legitimate and productive for the communist struggle. Such a wager, however, is contingent upon an appreciation of Marx's pedagogies, and in particular his heterogeneous blocking together of learning and studying. Turning first to the *Grundrisse* is helpful precisely because it is a work of study: open, sometimes opaque, wandering, committed yet not committed, loose, hanging, improvisational, and unresolved. Marx (1973) spent pages pursuing tangents, mentioning names and ideas without always providing context or even critique. He casually linked art objects to any and all commodities to affirm that “production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object” (92). The relationships in the book are simultaneously objective and subjective, always open to transformation within the notes themselves, which is why it isn't always clear if Marx was writing about value or wealth. And Marx was explicit that he had to draw conceptual boundaries but that they all “become fluid in the further course of development” (817).

Negri's 1978 Paris lectures on the *Grundrisse*, delivered at the invitation of Louis Althusser, represent the most partisan approach to the book. It's not that Negri dismisses *Capital*, of course, but he insists that it represents only one aspect of Marxism, with the defect that economics undermines critique and dialectics dominates antagonistic contradictions. The *Grundrisse* is, on the other hand, an endless unfolding of antagonisms produced by and productive of revolutionary subjectivity. *Capital*, on the contrary, is more limited precisely because of its “categorical presentation,” which tends to foreclose subjectivity from erupting into movement (Negri 1991, 8). Negri thus sees *Capital* as presentation and the *Grundrisse* as inquiry. He insists, for example, that the notes contain “no linear continuity, but only a plurality of points of view, which are endlessly solicited at each determinant moment of the antagonism” (13).

Pedagogically speaking, for Negri the *Grundrisse*'s traces of studying open prospects for revolution that the developmental learning of *Capital* closes. The notebooks are to be studied from the perspective not of theory but of struggle, moving "from exploitation in general, from command to surplus value" and, as such, "it is a class logic that governs this angle of attack of the exposition" (61). The development that mobilizes fixed concepts is the class struggle: living labor as it breaks free from the command of capital. Yet this development is guided by living labor's autonomous power subverting, refusing, and escaping capital rather than by a party of working and oppressed people overthrowing the state and the rule of capital. This development, like the notebooks, is not the result of linear contradictions unfolding but is rather totally open and indeterminate, absolutely subject to antagonistic advances and leaps.

On first blush, it does seem that what we have in *Capital* is a pedagogy of *learning* that is more formal, final, and resolved. Marx begins with something simple and obvious (the commodity) and then goes deeper and deeper until we see that this apparently "trivial" thing is a series of ongoing struggles between and within classes and the state that play out differently over history, that assume different forms (like technology and machinery), and so on. But we must get the concept of surplus value before any of this makes sense, and to do that we have to get to the basics of commodities, their two-fold nature, circulation, money, and so on. However, we must note that Marx's *Capital* was a project he *knew* he could never complete precisely because of capital's dynamism.

This is how we interpret Andy Merrifield's recent reading of *Capital*. Merrifield (2020, 15) writes that "Marx never wanted to finish *Capital* because he couldn't see how it could ever be finished. He sought the definitive but knew the impossibility of the definitive. It tormented him." When one reads the various outlines that Marx presented for *Capital* in the *Grundrisse* and elsewhere, it's clear that Marx was taking on a project he knew he could never finish. He wanted to write volumes on the state, the world market, foreign trade, wages, the history of theory, and more. In other words, he was still in the process of studying.

It's clear that learning takes primacy over studying in *Capital*, but it isn't exhaustive. It never *subsumes* studying. There are plenty of traces of study in *Capital*, such as how Marx constantly left ellipses open, indicating a need for further study, for more meandering and wandering, openings for retreating into research and getting lost in the process of studying. He'd note that something was *absolutely crucial* to the idea he was presenting before he'd cast it aside, telling us he didn't have time for it there, or that if he was to take it into account, it would mess up the presentation. He did this with credit, rent, and circulation, and Marx of course did return to these in later volumes. But when he did so with, say, wage theft, he never got back to it: a trace of studying within the presentational development.

Marx (1967, 150–1) repeatedly insisted on treating capitalists as totally determined by capital, such that the pursuit of surplus value "becomes his subjective

aim, and it is only in so far as the appropriation of ever more and more wealth in the abstract becomes the sole motive of his operations, that he functions as a capitalist, that is, as capital personified and endowed with consciousness and a will." Workers are likewise defined as those without the means of production and who *must* sell their labor power to survive. Yet it's clear that there are subjective elements of capital *and* of the collective working class. Surplus value is a *struggle* between different antagonistic subjectivities: the value and price of labor power, as Marx announced in *Capital's* tenth chapter, can't be solved within "the law of exchanges," as both capitalist and worker have equal rights and, hence, "between equal rights force decides" (225). Even in *Capital*, then, struggle permeates the concepts and categories.

Moreover, we see subjective antagonisms at work, such as those between individual capitalists and capital as a whole and antagonism between both of the former and collective labor. Even the state is a site of struggle and subjective contestation. The state is *forced* to regulate the working day, even though such regulation is "made by a state that is ruled by capitalist and landlord" (Marx 1967, 229). The state manages intraclass conflicts and interclass conflicts. Marx saw it as stepping in not only in the interests of collective capital but also in response to "the working-class movement that daily grew more threatening." There are laws and tendencies of capital, yes, but they're never deterministic or mechanical. In *Capital* they're always the result of an *international* class struggle. The latter is why Marx finds the relationship between slavery, colonialism, and capitalism so central to his presentation. These, too, are traces of study: indeterminate, nonlinear, open sources for more research. As Althusser (2006) would later write, for Marx to develop the theory of *Capital* he had to "paradoxically ... take into account what the *order of exposition* requires him to *bracket out* ... Whence the very long chapters on the working day, the labour process, manufacture and big industry, and the extraordinary chapter on primitive accumulation" (39). Althusser says these segments "stand *outside* 'the order of exposition'" or presentation (40). In other words, Marx couldn't even *present* his findings without breaking from learning into studying.

The Chinese Communist Party: Navigating Marx's Pedagogies

While Marx joined different Communist organizations and participated heavily in the First International, he was never a member of a Communist Party as we know it today. This is for the simple reason that such a Party didn't exist until after his death, until Lenin's interventions in the Russian Social Democratic Party and the creation of the Bolshevik Party. Thus, while his own pedagogical processes provide an instructive beginning point, we must translate these into the Party form, witnessing how the Marxist pedagogies of learning and studying are taken up as pedagogical and political tasks the Party must navigate between.

Lenin's critique of the economist Marxists was that they put their faith only in learning. The economists believed that the working class would—on its own, through struggle in the economic realm—overthrow capitalism and institute socialism as the contradictions of capitalism unfolded and heightened. These alone would provide the mechanisms and means for revolution. Ironically, this was in part a spontaneous form of learning through which engaging in the economic struggle would on its own lead to new forms of organization and class consciousness. Lenin argued that the Party is an organization that consolidates and advances spontaneity, moving economic knowledge of capitalism into class consciousness and advancing from rebellion and revolt into revolution. The Party steers in, between, and through spontaneous study and organized learning. In the Party *everyone* is a theorist and educator. When Lenin (1987, 137) delivered his ultimate formulation of who theorizes, he said that the Party creates a particular group of theoreticians: in the Party “all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals ... must be obliterated.” The Party is an intellectual and pedagogical infrastructure that tries to determine and quickly respond to and assess the various forces at play—when or if this or that spontaneous uprising will result in repression or will advance the revolutionary movement. We can see this clearly in the slogans Lenin and the Bolsheviks proposed throughout the two 1917 revolutions (Ford 2019a).

From here we turn to the ways in which the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) has navigated Marx's pedagogies. As we laid out above, studying and learning relate with each other within Marx's overall pedagogy, and the CPC has centered one over the other in particular phases of socialist development. These different pedagogical logics have in turn affected Chinese social relations of production and the overall political direction of socialist construction in China. Through the process of constructing socialism in China, the Party has had to both direct and yield to Marx's pedagogy. We contend that the two-line struggle occurring throughout the history of the CPC and that intensified in the years that followed the successful 1949 revolution is a manifestation of *studying* and *inquiry*. Additionally, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–9)—which saw the two-line struggle in the CPC burst asunder—can be understood as a great mass and spontaneous session of *studying*. We suggest that *learning* took precedence over studying with the adoption of market mechanisms that has characterized the “reform and opening up” period or, more broadly, the period of “Socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

It must be emphasized that in periods when studying was privileged over learning, it was not as if learning disappeared altogether (and vice versa). Our point is simply that one pedagogical logic was dominant over the other and at that time structured the overall pedagogical style of the CPC. In fact, one could even argue that the two-line struggle was a struggle over whether to privilege studying or learning in constructing socialism itself.

The details of the two-line struggle have already been laid out in detail elsewhere (e.g., Chambers 2018; Hinton 1972), but no one has yet put it in relation with the pedagogical logics of studying and inquiry. Gabriel (2019, III) posits that the kind of Marxism that now dominates the contemporary CPC is a “modernist version of Marxism” because of its hyper focus on developing the productive forces. However, the CPC has always been “modernist” in the sense that the Party has always understood the utmost necessity in developing the productive forces and creating the material foundations for socialism. Unfortunately, contemporary Marxists living in the Global North (which is overripe for socialism) often forget and ignore this central tenet of Marxism. Both sides of the two-line struggle were “modernist” in this sense; the main struggle came down to *what kind of modernism*. Inner struggles occurred throughout the history of the CPC, but we focus specifically on the struggles that occurred within the Party from 1949 to the eve of the adoption of market mechanisms in 1978, at which point the two-line struggle was finally resolved, albeit temporarily, through the transformation of the party line.

A brief description of the two-line struggle in the CPC follows. On one side were those comrades, famously personified by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, who argued that China’s economic base was not ready for socialism. One of the most efficient ways to promote development was through capitalist methods. Capitalist methods had to be used for decades before the introduction of socialism. These capitalist methods of development entail the continued development of the national bourgeoisie, a reliance upon technicians and experts, a general societal division of labor, and division between town and country and between workers and peasants. These “capitalist roaders,” as the other side called them, emphasized production and economic forces over class struggle as creating revolutionary change. For these comrades, to think China could skip over the historical phase of capitalist development was unscientific and utopian (Meisner 1982).

For the comrades on the other side of the struggle, such as Mao Zedong, what prevented the development of the productive forces was the fact that China was still plagued with old ideas, traditions, and attitudes. This side emphasized the need for workers and peasants to become both “red and expert” by combining “revolutionary politics with technical expertise” (Schmalzer 2019, 215). With “politics in command” and “walking on two legs” (the combination of existing indigenous methods with modern techniques), the Chinese people themselves could develop the productive forces without having to deploy capitalist mechanisms (Mao 1977). The “three great differences” of capital—between mental and manual labor, city and countryside, worker and peasant—were to be attacked with full force through mechanisms such as bringing production and industry to the peasants themselves in the countryside (the “backyard steel furnaces” are the famous example) so that proletarianization would occur without the evils of primitive accumulation and without the “terrible frightful vicissitudes” of capitalism more broadly (Anderson 2010; Marx [1881] 2014; Shanin 1983).

The differences between these two sides of the inner party struggle are very similar to how Laikwan Pang (2016) compares the different conceptions of time that existed within the CPC before and after the adoption of market mechanisms. The side with Mao saw historical time in a nonteleological sense from where, in fact, the historical underdevelopment of China allowed the Chinese people to “engage in the most spectacular historical changes”—that is, the capitalist historical stage could be bypassed completely (113). Pang draws from Susan Buck-Morss to characterize the prereform era as privileging “messianic time.” Messianic time can be understood as “now-time in opposition to the homogeneous chronological time used by the ruling class to present history as a continuum of progress. Messianic time is a time of the present because at any second the messiah might come. This concept of time forces us to focus on the here and now, which would effectively strip the future of its magic and reinvest the past with its full potential” (119). In the postreform era the teleological and orthodox notion of time and history dominates, which sees history moving in necessary stages: feudalism → capitalism → socialism → communism. Though contemporary Marxism has largely discredited this version of historical materialism (see Cohen 2000 as an exception to this), it is important to emphasize, for our purposes, that *both* notions of time are in line with Marx’s own conceptions of historical time. Within the intense two-line struggle, the CPC studied the *means* and *methods* of how to construct socialism in the historical-material context of underdevelopment and imperialism. As William Hinton (1972, 41; emphasis added) notes, the two-line struggle was “conflict between ... two mutually exclusive *roads* to the future.”

The two-line struggle can be theorized as studying for two reasons. First, through the two-line struggle, the Party studied exactly how to construct socialism. Both sides meandered through the works of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and others to perpetuate their proposed means and methods of socialist development. Their wandering through communist literature remained in the realm of study and inquiry until the struggle was resolved, when the party line was transformed.

However, it was not only within the Party that this struggle took place, and this leads to the second and more important point. The two-line struggle had a spontaneous nature, as it was only truly resolved through mass engagement. It must be remembered that there was never pure study divorced from learning. As such, there was a dialectic in the two-line struggle between spontaneity and organization (Negri 2014). First there was struggle within the Party, then criticism from the working masses (spontaneity), and then transformation (organization). Spontaneous criticism from the masses is what opened a space to study, struggle (debate), and experience the possibility that things might be radically otherwise. The end goal—a socialist China—was never in question, but the ends retreated as the Party and the masses immersed themselves in *means* and *inquiry*.

Mao (1967, 119) clearly understood this dialectical relationship between spontaneity, organization, studying, learning, and the overall pedagogical function of the Party itself, as seen in his principle of the mass line:

In all practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily “from the masses, to the masses.” This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again concentrate ideas from the masses so that the ideas are persevered in and carried through. And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge.

The inner-party struggle became so fierce that the dynamic and spontaneous Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was initiated in 1966 *by the CPC* to attempt to finally resolve and transform the party line. The struggle within the CPC over the means of constructing socialism in China could not be resolved within the organized confines of the Party apparatus: it had to be settled by bringing the struggle to the level of *mass* struggle. Here, the Party’s internal *educational* process of studying was thrown open totally—and *politically*—to the masses, as the organization recognized the need for renewed spontaneity. The CPC was able to maintain the dialectic between organization and spontaneity during the Cultural Revolution by sending cadre-led “work teams” to structure the studying done in workplaces, in the countryside, and in spaces of cultural production. A concrete manifestation of this dialectic was the Shanghai Commune that was established in February of 1967, lasting less than a month. During the Cultural Revolution, there was much studying of Marx’s writings on the Paris Commune, and there was much experimentation. The coalescing of the major workers’ organizations in Shanghai in January 1967 led to the displacement of the CPC Shanghai Committee on 5 February and to the election of a Commune leadership. However, by the end of the month, the Commune dissolved itself and was replaced with a three-in-one committee (the people, the People’s Liberation Army, and the CPC; Meisner 1999, 324–33). Mao’s intervention was critical in this, as he indicated that it was imperative to retain the leadership of the Party and that the conditions were not ripe for a direct workers’ democracy, especially in the material-political context of underdevelopment and imperialism. This experimentation clearly shows that there were no preconceived outcomes, unlike in the pedagogical logic of learning. The “outcome” of the Cultural Revolution was very much up in the air, as both factions within the two-line struggle were ideologically represented in the different Red Guard groupings that were created spontaneously during the Cultural Revolution period (see Hinton 1972, 55–70). Neither Mao nor the Party knew what would come of this, and there was, in fact, a great deal of ultra-leftist excess during the Cultural Revolution and real threats of counterrevolution. Communism cannot be learned by rote recitation, only by learning *and* studying.

The Cultural Revolution was a clear manifestation of the fact that everyday life could be radically otherwise for the masses of people. There was a true *mass revolutionary optimism* during this period that permanent radical change was a realistic possibility (Chambers 2020). Chinese workers and peasants actively played a role in the mass movements; they were able to see and feel how a future communist society might function. This is exactly the experience of inquiry and study, with their *internal relations* to the political struggle. The *educational form* of the Cultural Revolution required *political preconditions*, just as the *political form* of the Cultural Revolution necessitated a new *educational form of life*. The Cultural Revolution was fundamentally about how China's path to socialism, and eventually communism, could be qualitatively different from already existing models, and this includes Soviet models of economic development. Workers and peasants were studying just how social relations between mental and manual workers, between city and countryside, and between worker and peasant could be radically different. For example, in the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, college entrance exams were abolished, students were sent to work with workers and peasants, and they were to study alongside them and follow their lead. University gates were flung open for peasants to come from the countryside to see what was going on and see the revolutionary upsurge. Mao wanted "the non-expert to lead the expert" (Gao 2008, 113). The intellectuals, professors, and Party bureaucrats in the cities were sent to the rural countryside to work the land and exchange knowledge and resources—to study—with the peasants. As a result of *political struggle*, the legacy of colonizing *education*, received by the former, was not undone so much as reconfigured by this studying, with the indigenous education of the latter. Peasants, workers, primary and secondary students, and indigenous rural healers became "barefoot doctors" equipped with basic medicinal knowledge and experience, vastly expanding access to health care.

The widespread distribution of Mao's writings, famously compiled in what is known as the "Little Red Book," ignited mass movements across China to suspend centuries-old norms, ideas, traditions, and attitudes, but not in a predetermined way. Crucial to this, we suggest, was the character of these *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*. The book contains over two hundred quotes on a range of topics and represents an openness of inquiry without the closed development of presentation.

Peasants in the countryside struggled against landlords who had oppressed them for centuries, establishing rural communes. Meanwhile, industrial workers reshaped and radically transformed the labor process (i.e., the daily experience of workers): managers were required to work with and alongside the rank-and-file workers, and technical workers had to work with the rank-and-file in research and development through "three-in-one teams" composed of managers, technicians, and the rank-and-file production-line workers. Any proposed technical innovation in the plant had to be approved by all three actors in these urban or industrial communes (Bettelheim 1974). More broadly, there was an intense effort

to diminish the gap between mental and manual labor, and this was a direct consequence of a mass study of Marx's writings and thoughts on education itself. Marx argued that participation in productive labor was an essential part of the full education of a human being (Small 1982).

As we said earlier, studying cannot last indefinitely, as Mao himself says in the essay "Reform Our Study." Party cadres cannot forever just meander through the various Marxist texts and only experiment because one must read "the theory of Marxism-Leninism with a purpose, that is, to integrate Marxist-Leninist theory with the actual movement of the Chinese revolution and to seek from this theory the stand, viewpoint with which to solve the theoretical and tactical problems of the Chinese revolution" (Mao 1971, 205). The ends are suspended but not annihilated, and there comes a time when clear *political* outcomes and goals must become the main concern rather than *educational* means and experimentation. Mao ([1964] 2022) is known for saying that the Party does not need "bookworms" and that a "dozen or so" Marxist books were sufficient to develop the productive forces and to construct socialism in China. To point this out does not in any way mean that there will be no more studying or "line struggles" within the contemporary CPC. The two-line struggle within the logics of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" certainly exists, but it has simply not been heightened to the degree to where we in the West have become privy to it; it has not been brought out into the open, into the arena of mass politics.

As Gabriel (2019, 111) rightly points out, "There remains a significant number of party members who embrace an alternative vision of China's future than what is currently being practiced by the Xi Jinping administration." Certainly, the forces of socialism and communism exist within the contemporary CPC itself, the largest political party in the world, with almost ninety-seven million members. One thing is for sure: there will be new moments of studying and "struggle, criticism, transformation" in the People's Republic of China (Chambers 2018).³ The "heritage of Mao Zedong and the specter of the Cultural Revolution have not disappeared in the collective

3. Heilmann and Perry (2011, 11) interestingly point to a "guerilla policy style" that continues to exist in the CPC, a style that can be understood and seen as a sort of continuing spontaneity and study within the postreform era. "Guerilla policy style" is deployed by the CPC to circumvent "existing rules" and "overcome constraints." It plays "a vital role in dealing with crucial policy tasks, from mobilization in times of perceived crisis to managing central-local interactions to facilitating economic policy innovation and reorganizing public health care." But this is the important point: "Although ideologically inspired mass mobilizations no longer play the same role in routine policy-making and administration these days," mobilizing the masses still exists in post-reform China. As Heilmann and Perry point out, however, "The goal has changed from mobilizing the masses for political action and personal sacrifice to promoting passive compliance and commercial consumerism" (21). Despite the qualitative differences in the pedagogical logics of contemporary mass mobilizations in China, the capacity and infrastructure still exist to see revolutionary mass mobilizations once again in China because the CPC is still in control of the Chinese state apparatus. This possibility seems increasingly possible the further we go into the twenty-first century.

memory of the people in and outside the Party” and thus can be deployed once again when the political and economic situation calls for it (Tian 2005, 309).

Pedagogically speaking, the two-line struggle and Cultural Revolution can be thought of as functioning within the pedagogical logics of the *Grundrisse*, or that of studying; whereas the adoption of market mechanisms and “socialism with Chinese Characteristics” are more in line with the pedagogical presentational logics of *Capital*, which are more focused on learning. These pedagogical shifts, however, were internally related to political developments. Mao’s death in 1976 created the conditions for the “capitalist roaders” in the Party to win the two-line struggle and shape the party line, thus creating the new party line of “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” This new party line emphasized learning over studying in the goal of constructing socialism. The “reform and opening up” period has focused on *learning* from and adopting capitalist methods of development. The pedagogical emphasis here is focused on ultimate *outcomes* and *goals*—concern over the *means* of developing the productive forces takes a backseat. It is from within these pedagogical and political logics that one must understand the widened implementation of market mechanisms in China since 1978 (as well as those that existed previously on smaller scales). “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” is essentially a practical framework for constructing socialism in contexts of historical underdevelopment. The function of socialism, according to Deng Xiaoping, is to “develop the productive forces, to avoid polarization, and to provide prosperity for all,” and the development of socialism “can only be built through the endeavors of... several dozens of generations” rather than through radical leaps (Du 2005, 11).

Paul Kellogg (2015, 560) uses the notion of uneven and combined development to understand how China has been able to develop at the pace it has since the “reform and opening up” period. He explains this process as such: “Under pressure from the dynamism of industrial capitalism, contender states were forced to ‘skip stages’ and graft onto their societies the newest forms of industry, combining the most modern forms of economic and social organization with premodern ‘legacy’ forms. Uneven development, overcome over centuries through repetitions, was replaced by uneven and combined development, characterized by frenzied bursts of change as contender states strove to match the productive power of their rivals.”

But another way to look at “uneven and combined development” is to contextualize it within Marx’s pedagogy from the perspective of the pedagogical logic of learning. China has been able to rapidly develop in the reform period because the CPC learned from capitalist methods of development. However, as we will argue below, it has done so *under political and pedagogical conditions set by the CPC itself*. The theory of combined and uneven development thus abstracts from the pedagogical agency of the CPC. It is not theoretically and politically useful to make normative judgements over the decision made *by the CPC* to adopt market mechanisms because any judgment fails to consider that the decision itself is in accordance with Marx’s own pedagogy—specifically, the pedagogical logics of *Capital*. Such judgments also fail to consider external and internal conditions that shape

the dialectical nature of Marx's pedagogy between studying and learning. In *Capital* there is a clear, almost teleological *model* of how socialism and eventually communism becomes a historical possibility out of the necessary historical phase of capitalism. Capitalist methods not only develop the productive forces necessary for a prosperous socialist society but also create the proletariat, the "only really revolutionary class," which can usher in "the negation of the negation" (see Marx 1967, 713–15). Yet even this somewhat teleological presentation takes place in the very chapters that Althusser demonstrated were *external* to the presentation. We might echo Althusser (2006, 47) again and say that Marx is "politically *posing* and *exposing his own ideas*."

Additionally, we argue that because the CPC still maintains the power of the state apparatus, it is able to learn from Western capital but *on its own terms*. As Gabriel (2019, 112) says,

The policy-formation dynamic within the CPC leadership, particularly within the State Council, isn't really informed by "Western theories" and is instead informed by Deng Xiaoping thought. The best label for this theory is Dengist: theory that gives primacy to "black cat, white cat" pragmatism and "touching the stones while crossing the river" strategic-options strategy. Dengist theory need not care about exploitation or deregulation, except insofar as exploitation or deregulation contributes to the overarching goal of modernization ... my primary point is that Western analysts seeking to link rapid growth in China to neoliberalism and neoclassicism ... are blowing smoke.

Said in another way, to truly understand contemporary and postreform China, one must acknowledge the global political-economic system that China has to function within. It was clear after 1976 that China needed to gain access to modern technologies. With the slow decline of the USSR and the unfortunate continued tensions between the two socialist countries, where and how exactly was China supposed to get access to modern technologies and modern means of production more broadly? The global situation structured the CPC's decision to "reform and open up" and thus to prioritize learning. Indeed, the CPC studied *and* learned from the reform experiences of Yugoslavia, other Eastern European countries, and the USSR, and *from* this pedagogical matrix developed *political* reforms that took the successful things and left out the bad (Yu 2005).

The important political, economic, and social point to reemphasize here is that, since the CPC still holds the power of the state apparatuses, the Party is able to control and structure where foreign direct investment occurs and the terms of agreement of such investment, such as with required technology transfers.⁴

4. Not all of mainland China is "opened up" to foreign direct investment. This only occurs in the "special economic zones" on China's eastern coast. Western capitalists and their states constantly complain about how China steals technological knowledge, but technology transfers are required if Western capital wants access to China's massive labor market. These are the material

More fundamentally, the Party's political power provides the conditions for continual *pedagogical* shifts between learning and studying. One does not have to personally agree or like the current "line" of the CPC, but one must understand the Marxist pedagogical logics that the CPC functions within and uses.

The important pedagogical point to reemphasize here is that Marx's own pedagogy is a heterogeneous and at times paradoxical and impossible blocking together of studying and learning, inquiry and presentation, opacity and clarity. Just as Marx, after years of studying, was compelled to present the logics of capital—even in an admittedly partial form—so, too, was the CPC compelled to navigate away from studying and back toward learning after years of arduous and intense struggle through mass spontaneous studying.

Lessons and Questions

Despite Marx's lack of explicit engagement with pedagogy, in this essay we've suggested that through his writing on inquiry and presentation—and the way it shows up through the *form* of his work—he nonetheless left us with two important yet contradictory educational logics: studying and learning, or research and presentation. By turning to Negri's reading of the *Grundrisse* and our own reading of *Capital*, we've demonstrated that, despite their clear differences, these works can be blocked together by the divergent ways in which they block these pedagogies together, thereby establishing a continuity between the two texts that concerns not content but educational form. Further, we've historically situated how Marx's pedagogical modes of engagement weren't merely the products of an internal genius but were imposed on him by historical events and, most importantly, by the contours and needs of the communist struggle. By showing how the Communist Party takes up these educational logics and navigates between them, we've hoped to not only provide a different reading of the revolutionary process in China but, more importantly, to illustrate how the Party itself is an educational infrastructure for the communist struggle.

Taken together, our hope is that this work can contribute to ongoing research and organizing in the worldwide communist struggle. Marxist pedagogy is a never-ending alteration between inquiry and presentation. There's no determinism, no mechanistic causality, no chronological and predictable unfolding of struggle. The entire project of *Capital* ends with a few dozen lines and then silence: an opening for study and inquiry. This opening, however, isn't sufficient in itself, for the class struggle still needs concepts, categories, tactics, strategies, and understandings. The key for Marx and for Marxist pedagogy is to keep these in tension, yet the tension will change depending on a host of circumstances.

bases for the constant anti-China, anti-CPC propaganda that exists in both academic and popular spheres in the United States.

In conclusion, we offer common situations we face in organizing, and we present historical examples of how Marx's pedagogical processes can help reframe these situations. The most immediate problem this can address is the overwhelming predominance of presentation and learning in so many movements, organizations, and parties. This takes two forms. The first is when existing predetermined goals guide meetings. In other words, the organizing meeting begins with figuring out a *realizable* or "winnable" goal and proceeds backward from there. This shuts down the process of inquiry and revolutionary study, keeping us trapped within the present. The second is when the primary emphasis is on explaining and analyzing the dynamics of capitalism.

The presentation of the operations of capital are absolutely necessary. In fact, analysis and explication are what Sarah Gordan, who joined the Young Communist League when fourteen years old, attributes to the life-sustaining effect of the Communist Party. She has a hard time conceiving how someone could live in poverty *without* the party's linear presentation. "Imagine being that poor," she says, "with *nothing* to explain your poverty to you, nothing to give it some meaning, to help you get through the days and years because you could believe that it wouldn't always be this way" (Gornick 1977, 32). The party's literature, meetings, and functions served to provide a structural understanding so that Gordan was able to comprehend that her poverty wasn't her fault, that capitalism was to blame, that capitalism was bound to be overthrown, and so, too, was her state of poverty.

But while necessary, presentation is insufficient unless it's blocked together with ruptures of study and inquiry in which the world appears as otherwise than it is. An immersion in studying allows us to imagine a beyond: the communist future. Consider how Paul Levinson (quoted in Gornick 1977, 56), who was raised in a New York City housing project dominated by Communists in the early twentieth century, frames such meetings. "It was alive," he says, "talking late into the night, every night for years, we literally felt we were making history. Do you know what I mean when I say that? We felt that what we thought and spoke and decided upon in those basement rooms in the Bronx was going to have an important effect on the entire world out there." Here, the emphasis isn't on explication or presentation but on the experience of open communist research that makes another world not only theoretically but practically possible and realizable. The capitalist world that dominated their lives wasn't eliminated but was temporarily suspended such that new possibilities emerged.

Again, these pedagogies are contingent. If a Party or organization is defending itself from state repression, learning might take precedence. The immediate attack needs to be defeated, and that goal should play the determinant role in guiding a meeting. But even still, there might be opportunities to couple this with a process of studying, guided by questions like, "What would we institute after we defeat this?" Other times, however, we could start with the end goal of the total revolutionary transformation and restructuring of society. This isn't winnable by any one action, protest, campaign, or the like. But when we start here, with this

end, we open ourselves up to the process of research that Marx held so dear and without which we wouldn't *have* Marxism, let alone the Marxist theoretical and practical history on which we draw.

The central point is that Marx left us not only distinct yet dialectically related educational processes; he also offered us examples of why these processes must be navigated between, as well as the various factors that shape which processes we engage. It's not that learning comes first and studying comes later, and it's not that one is revolutionary and the other counterrevolutionary. Communist organizers, researchers, facilitators, and parties must deploy both, depending on different external and class- or site-specific contingencies.

Sometimes learning *must* take precedence and studying *must* be presented. At other times, studying *must* take precedence, we must be free to imagine alternatives, get lost in the possibilities, reach our dead ends, and open an inquiry to a new presentation and then to a new inquiry. It's in this spirit that we *present* our own take on *Forschung* from the *Darstellung*, which emanates not from "our" minds but from the collectives within and from which we study and learn elliptically. Under the current moment, the Communist Party is the pedagogical apparatus for such inquiry, yet as the Communist International's (1921) organizational document made explicit so long ago, "There can be no absolutely correct, immutable organizational form for communist parties." As a way of concluding, then, we propose that an exclusive focus on the pedagogies of research and presentation, or of studying and learning, might in fact foreclose the different organizational structures and pedagogical forms of life that the revolutionary struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the abolition of class society demands ...

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