

# Reflections I · II

Reflexiones desde la educación y las artes en la era COVID-19 |  
Reflexões da Educação e das Artes na Era da COVID-19 | Reflections  
from Education and the Arts in the COVID-19 Era

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Abstract:

*Reflection I* comes from the North American context, from Chapman University (USA). Peter McLaren is a professor at Chapman University, a researcher of reference in the international field of critical pedagogy. Wang Yan is a researcher in the Faculty of Educational Studies at Chapman University, her current research interest include Culture and Curricular Studies. *Reflection II* is developed by Petar Jandrić, professor at University of Applied Sciences of Zagreb (Croatia), researcher and expertise in understanding the intersections between critical pedagogy and information and communication technologies.

Keywords: COVID-19. Arts. USA. Critical Pedagogy. Croatia. Postdigital.

Resumen:

La *Reflexión I* proviene del contexto norteamericano, de la Universidad de Chapman (EE.UU.). Peter McLaren es profesor de la Universidad de Chapman, un investigador de referencia en el campo internacional de la pedagogía crítica. Wang Yan es investigadora de la Facultad de Estudios Educativos de la Universidad de Chapman, sus intereses actuales de investigación incluyen la Cultura y los Estudios Curriculares. La *Reflexión II* está desarrollada por Petar Jandrić, profesor de la Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas de Zagreb (Croacia), investigador y experto en la comprensión de las intersecciones entre la pedagogía crítica y las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación.

Palabras claves: COVID-19. Artes. USA. Pedagogía Crítica. Croacia. Postdigital.



Resumo:

*Reflexão I* vem do contexto norte-americano, da Chapman University (EUA). Peter McLaren é professor da Chapman University, um pesquisador de referência no campo internacional da pedagogia crítica. Wang Yan é pesquisadora da Faculdade de Estudos Educacionais da Chapman University, seu interesse atual de pesquisa inclui Cultura e Estudos Curriculares. *Reflexão II* é desenvolvida pela Petar Jandrić, professor da Universidade de Ciências Aplicadas de Zagreb (Croácia), pesquisador e especialista na compreensão das interseções entre a pedagogia crítica e as tecnologias de informação e comunicação.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19. Artes. EUA. Pedagogia Crítica. Croácia. Pós-digital.

## Reflection I

The US is in chaos, as Trump and his sycophantic minions wage war against democratic values, institutions and laws, bringing despotism to every nook and cranny of public life. Since the Trump administration has egregiously botched its response to the pandemic, there exists a supreme urgency in finding alternative sources of aid for the nation's aggrieved communities. Clearly, our involvement in social media has been ramped up during periods of enforced quarantine and it's time to take advantage of this involvement. This is a prime moment for the arts to play an increasing role. All art is a form of technology and when creatively employed by social justice warriors, social media can help us connect to people in distant geographical locations. But in doing so there is usually a price to pay—a neglect of our own local communities. The global reach of our communications has its advantages and benefits but too often we are sucked away, as in a vacuum tube, from involvement in our own local neighborhoods and communities. With social media, we meet up daily with people with whom we are most compatible but who may reside thousands of miles away, often in other countries. Yet in many instances we don't know the cares and concerns of our most immediate neighbors who live on the next street over from us. Consequently, it is increasingly imperative to find **innovative ways** to become more politically active in our own local communities. One excellent example is Zero Hour, a coalition of youth climate activists who are utilizing targeted online campaigns which can include virtual training, webinars and the distribution of educational materials. Also, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, Skype, Zoom, Tick-Tock, Facebook, online postings with hashtags and email offer digital platforms for building solidarity and reciprocity in the midst of this pandemic. Activists can create digital strikes that can be focused on single issue campaigns or actions that encompass multiple issues. Greta Thunberg has taken her climate strike online. Digital protests among public school teachers can sketch out the relationship between educational policy and neoliberal capitalism; podcasts can be made available relating climate change to the global economy, or linking the current pandemic to the climate crisis, or educating the public about the necessity of a socialist alternative to capitalism.

These digital protests can be made more conceptually and affectively engaging by utilizing digital artifacts in multimedia art projects that serve as democratic and pro-social adjuncts to community-based projects. Arts organizations can help to rebuild community, and offer a spirit of hope in difficult times. Applied theater professors such as New Zealand's Peter O'Connor, has worked in creating improvised theater projects in prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and in earthquake zones. He recently worked with the Museum of Contemporary Arts

(MOCA) the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD), the Skid Row Housing Trust, Urban Voices, Piece by Piece and My Friends Place and created a show in just one week illustrating how Skid Row is a symptom of the wider issue of human greed and larger capitalist social relations. With the right planning and creativity, such work can be effectively moved online. Activists with a background in applied and participatory theater can creatively utilize their own online approaches such as Keith Johnstone's *Impro*, Joe Norris's *playbuilding*, or Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*. Organizing dramaturgical experiences through digital technology can motivate viewers to reflect upon their struggles with living in the shadow of the coronavirus. Such activities can serve as catalytic agents for constructing local as well as global, anti-capitalist solidarity. Here new counterhegemonic digital tools can be created for building solidarity movements designed to counter conspiracy narratives that are currently poisoning the internet. In Wuhan China, where the first pandemic outburst started, a Wuhan writer named Fang Fang wrote 60 entries about life in Wuhan city during the pandemic. Her entries connected with and warmed so many lonely and aggrieved souls in Wuhan and outside of Wuhan. Fang Fang's diary, which is controversially well known in China, will be published in English under the title, *Wuhan Diary*. Similarly, in New York City, a Chinese American female writer named Lan Lan wrote daily entries in Chinese about the pandemic in the New York area. Those diaries serve as powerful counternarratives contesting conspiracy theories and demystifying people's lives in two countries. Sadly, Lan Lan was hit by a car in her own neighborhood and passed away on March 27<sup>th</sup>.

In addition, Marxist activists remain engaged in a focused, historical materialist analysis since it is the case that numerous and execrable fascist regimes throughout the world continue to build strength under the cover of managing populations with powers of detention justified in the name of preventing infections from the deadly coronavirus. Once we are past the world-historical crisis brought about by the coronavirus crisis, we need to mobilize resistance against the surveillance state and efforts to normalize the union-busting practices of mega corporations such as Amazon and Walmart. First and foremost, need a public discussion to help us calibrate the balance we believe it is necessary to achieve between state surveillance and control and individual rights—a balance that will not sound the death knell of democracy.

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## Reflection II (Arts after Covid-19)

Following outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, various human activities – including almost all aspects of cultural production and consumption – have been transferred online in a blink of an eye. We live in postdigital times, in which digital and analogue aspects of our lives are intertwined in multiple, unpredictable, 'dirty' ways, and this disruptive event is exemplary of "rupture and continuation" of our postdigital reality (Jandrić et al. 2019). In regards to medium, there is nothing new in exhibiting art online. Newspapers are online, politics is online, pornography is online, school is online... so why not art? Certainly, the Internet cannot exactly reproduce this bead of sweat on musician's face while s/he is playing a difficult solo, or that tiny nuance in actor's facial expression. However, the Internet also offers novel forms of expression and consummation of artistic content, which cannot be done in a face to face

environments. Online and offline arts are conceptually different, yet complementary and equal in value.

Sudden migration of art production and dissemination to the Internet has not revealed some new, deep philosophical insights into relationships between the digital and the non-digital. Instead, it points towards importance of ancient, never resolved issues – primarily in relation to political economy of arts production. Contemporary artists are very open to the market; in many cases, their livelihood depends on live performance. Let us imagine a dark scenario in which current lockdown continues for the next few years. How are these people going to earn for their living? Some artists would surely reshape their practices for the Internet, yet many others would need to find completely different jobs. I'm not sure who bears the biggest loss in this scenario – artists who would need to retrain for other jobs, or society which would end up with much less artists and musicians. However, I am sure that a society in which the arts slowly die, is the society I don't want to live in.

Covid-19 pandemic has brought about huge global problems; yet it also presents a unique opportunity to change our ways of life and reshape our society (Jandrić 2020). So which opportunities for arts and artists can we find in this crisis? First, let us admit that relationships between artists, arts production, audience, and public interest, are largely unsettled and unsatisfactory under capitalism. The idea that value of artwork is somehow linked to its price in euros or dollars, just to mention this one aspect, is a huge fallacy. Various strata of society starkly disagree whether arts are investment or cost, who can be considered an artist, and whether our society needs the arts in the first place. So there is nothing new under the sun; Covid-19 has merely brought existing problems to the extreme. The good news is, that our current crisis is an important opportunity to democratically rethink these questions, at the level of whole society, and then develop and implement new future-oriented strategies for arts and artists. We need to seize this opportunity – and we need to do it immediately.

After the pandemic is over, there will surely be a lot of discussion about the social position of doctors, firemen, and other public servants who work hard to help us survive. However, as this viral Internet meme says, try to stay at home in self-isolation for one month without films, books, music... Without the arts, many people would take self-isolation much harder – they would be more depressive, and would have a stronger need to get out of their houses. In the long run, arts are as important for human survival as medicine and firefighting, and I think that artists should somehow find their own space, and place, in forthcoming discussions about social position of doctors, firemen, and other essential occupations. In the meantime, dear artistic friends, hold on and try to survive this crisis shoulder to shoulder with workers in tourism, hospitality, and other sectors which took the hardest blow of the Covid-19 crisis!

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