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## **Public Pedagogy and the Politics of Neo-liberalism: making the political more pedagogical**

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**ABSTRACT** Neo-liberalism has reached a new stage in the United States, buttressed largely by the almost seamless alliances formed among the Bush administration, religious fundamentalists, neo-conservative extremists, the dominant media, and corporate elites. This article explores the various ways in which neo-liberal cultural politics works as a form of public pedagogy to devalue the meaning of the social contract, education, and citizenship by defining higher education primarily as a financial investment and learning as a form of training for the workforce. Aggressively fostering its attack on the welfare state, unions, non-commodified public spheres, and any critical vestige of critical education, neo-liberal politics makes it increasingly more difficult to address the necessity of a political education in which active and critical political agents have to be formed, educated, and socialized into the world of politics. This article explores how the intersection of cultural studies and public pedagogy offers a challenge to both the ideology and practice of neo-liberalism as a form of cultural politics. In doing, so it outlines how the pedagogical can become more political in the classroom and how the political can become more pedagogical outside of the classroom via the educational force of the wider culture.

### **Introduction**

The ascendancy of neo-liberal corporate culture into every aspect of American life both consolidates economic power in the hands of the few and aggressively attempts to break the power of unions, decouple income from productivity, subordinate the needs of society to the market, and deem public services and goods an unconscionable luxury. But it does more. It thrives on a culture of cynicism, fear, insecurity, and despair. Defined as the paragon of modern social relations by Friedrich A. von Hayek, Milton Friedman, Robert Nozick, Francis Fukuyama, and other market fundamentalists, neo-liberalism attempts to eliminate an engaged critique about its most basic principles and social consequences by embracing the 'market as the arbiter of social destiny'.<sup>[1]</sup> Not only does neo-liberalism bankrupt public funds, hollow out public services, limit the vocabulary and imagery available to recognize anti-democratic forms of power, and produce narrow models of individual agency, it also undermines the critical functions of any viable democracy by undercutting the ability of individuals to engage in the continuous translation between public considerations and private interests by collapsing the public into the realm of the private. As Bauman observes, 'It is no longer true that the "public" is set on colonizing the "private". The opposite is the case: it is the private that colonizes the public space, squeezing out and chasing away everything which cannot be fully, without residue, translated into the vocabulary of private interests and pursuits.'<sup>[2]</sup> Divested of its political possibilities and social underpinnings, freedom offers few opportunities for people to translate private worries into public concerns and collective struggles. Central to the hegemony of neo-liberal ideology is a particular view of education in which market-driven identities and values are both produced and legitimated. Under such circumstances, pedagogy both within and outside of schools increasingly becomes a powerful force for creating the ideological and affective regimes central to reproducing neo-liberalism.

In the current historical moment, critical education and the promise of global democracy face a crisis of enormous proportions. It is a crisis grounded in the now common-sense belief that education should be divorced from politics and that politics should be removed from the imperatives of democracy. At the center of this crisis, particularly in the United States, is a tension between democratic values and market values, between dialogic engagement and rigid authoritarianism. Faith in social amelioration and a sustainable future appears to be in short supply as neo-liberal capitalism performs the dual task of using education to train workers for service sector jobs and produce life-long consumers. At the same time, neo-liberalism feeds a growing authoritarianism steeped in religious fundamentalism and jingoistic patriotism, encouraging intolerance and hate as it punishes critical thought, especially if it is at odds with the reactionary religious and political agenda being pushed by the Bush administration. Increasingly, education appears useful to those who hold power, and issues regarding how public and higher education might contribute to the quality of democratic public life are either ignored or dismissed. Moral outrage and creative energy seem utterly ineffective in the political sphere, just as any collective struggle to preserve education as a basis for creating critical citizens is rendered defunct within the corporate drive for efficiency, a logic that has inspired bankrupt reform initiatives such as standardization, high stakes testing, rigid accountability schemes, and privatization. Cornel West has argued that just as we need to analyze those dark forces shutting down democracy, 'we also need to be very clear about the vision that lures us toward hope and the sources of that vision'.<sup>[3]</sup> In what follows I want to recapture the vital role that critical and public pedagogy might play for educators, cultural studies advocates, and other cultural workers as both a language of critique and possibility by not only addressing the growing threat of free-market fundamentalism and rigid authoritarianism, but also the promise of a cultural politics in which pedagogy occupies a formative role.

### **The Scourge of Neo-liberalism**

Neo-liberalism has become one of the most pervasive and dangerous ideologies of the twenty-first century. Its pervasiveness is evident not only in its unparalleled influence on the global economy, but also by its power to redefine the very nature of politics and sociality. Free-market fundamentalism rather than democratic idealism is now the driving force of economics and politics in most of the world. It is a market ideology driven not just by profits, but also by an ability to reproduce itself with such success that, to paraphrase Fred Jameson, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of neo-liberal capitalism.<sup>[4]</sup> Wedded to the belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions, neo-liberalism wages an incessant attack on democracy, public goods, the welfare state, and non-commodified values. Under neo-liberalism, everything either is for sale or is plundered for profit: public lands are looted by logging companies and corporate ranchers; politicians willingly hand the public's airwaves over to powerful broadcasters and large corporate interests without a dime going into the public trust; the environment is polluted and despoiled in the name of profit-making just as the government passes legislation to make it easier for corporations to do so; what public services have survived the Reagan-Bush era are gutted in order to lower the taxes of major corporations (or line their pockets through no-bid contracts, as in the infamous case of Halliburton); entire populations, especially those of color who are poor, are considered disposable; schools more closely resemble either jails or high-end shopping malls, depending on their clientele; and teachers are forced to get revenue for their schools by hawking everything from hamburgers to pizza parties.

Under neo-liberalism, the state now makes a grim alignment with corporate capital and transnational corporations. Gone are the days when the state 'assumed responsibility for a range of social needs'.<sup>[5]</sup> Instead, agencies of government now pursue a wide range of "deregulations", privatizations, and abdications of responsibility to the market and private philanthropy'.<sup>[6]</sup> Deregulation, in turn, promotes 'widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation's basic productive capacity'.<sup>[7]</sup>

As neo-liberal policies dominate politics and social life, the breathless rhetoric of the global victory of free-market rationality is invoked to cut public expenditures and undermine those non-commodified public spheres that serve as the repository for critical education, language, and public

intervention. Spewed forth by the mass media, right-wing intellectuals, religious fanatics, and politicians, neo-liberal ideology, with its merciless emphasis on deregulation and privatization, has found its material expression in an all-out attack on democratic values and social relations – particularly those public spheres where such values are learned and take root. Public services such as health care, childcare, public assistance, education, and transportation are now subject to the rules of the market. Social relations between parents and children, doctors and patients, and teachers and students are reduced to those of supplier and customer, just as the laws of market replace those non-commodified values capable of defending vital public goods and spheres. Forsaking the public good for the private good and hawking the needs of the corporate and private sector as the only source of sound investment, neo-liberal ideology produces, legitimates, and exacerbates the existence of persistent poverty, inadequate health care, racial apartheid in the inner cities, and the growing inequalities between the rich and the poor.[8]

In its capacity to dehistoricize and naturalize such sweeping social change, as well as in its aggressive attempts to destroy all of the public spheres necessary for the defense of a genuine democracy, neo-liberalism reproduces the conditions for unleashing the most brutalizing forces of capitalism. Social Darwinism, with its brutalizing indifference to human suffering, has risen like a phoenix from the ashes of the nineteenth century and can now be seen in full display on most reality television programs and in the unfettered self-interest that now drives popular culture and fits so well with the spirit of neo-fascism. As social bonds are replaced by unadulterated materialism and narcissism, public concerns are now understood and experienced as utterly private miseries, except when offered up on *The Jerry Springer Show* as fodder for entertainment. Where public space – or its mass-mediated simulacrum – does exist, it is mainly used as a highly orchestrated and sensational confessional for private woes, a cut-throat game of winner takes all replacing more traditional forms of courtship as in *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?* or as an advertisement for crass consumerism, like MTV's *Cribs*.

Conscripts in a relentless campaign for personal responsibility, Americans are now convinced that they have little to hope for – and gain – from the government, non-profit public spheres, democratic associations, public and higher education, or other non-governmental social forces. With few exceptions, the project of democratizing public goods has fallen into disrepute in the popular imagination as the logic of the market undermines the most basic social solidarities. The consequences include not only a weakened social state, but also a growing sense of insecurity, cynicism, and political retreat on the part of the general public. The incessant calls for self-reliance that now dominate public discourse betray an eviscerated and refigured state that neither provides adequate safety nets for its populace, especially those who are young, poor, or racially marginalized, nor gives any indication that it will serve the interests of its citizens in spite of constitutional guarantees. In fact, as the state is being reconfigured, it is increasingly becoming a punitive state more concerned with punishing and policing than with nurturing and investing in the public good. Situated within an expanding culture of fear, market freedoms seem securely grounded in a defense of national security, capital, and property rights. When coupled with a media-driven culture of panic and hyped-up levels of insecurity, surviving public spaces are increasingly monitored and militarized. Recent events in New York, New Jersey, and Washington, DC provide an interesting case in point. When the media alerted the nation's citizenry to new terrorist threats specific to these areas, CNN ran a lead story on the impact on tourism – specifically on the enthusiastic clamor by tourist families to get their pictures taken among US paramilitary units now lining city streets, fully flanked with their imposing tanks and massive machine guns. The accouterments of a police state now vie with high-end shopping and museum visits for the public's attention, all amid a thunderous absence of protest. But the investment in surveillance and containment is hardly new. Since the early 1990s, state governments have invested more in prison construction than in education, and prison guards and security personnel in public schools are two of the fastest growing professions. Such revolutionary changes in the global-body politic demand that we ask what citizens are learning from this not-so-hidden curriculum organized around markets and militarization. As that syllabus is written, we must ponder the social costs of breakneck corporatization bolstered by an authoritarianism that links dissent with abetting terrorism; for instance, as neo-liberalism feeds a growing authoritarianism steeped in religious fundamentalism and jingoistic patriotism, encouraging intolerance and hate as it punishes critical

thought, especially if it is at odds with the reactionary neo-conservative and political agenda being pushed by the Bush administration. Increasingly dissent in the academy is viewed as unAmerican and potential grounds for dismissal. The recent firestorm over Ward Churchill provides a case in point. In particular, I want to read a comment made by Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker of the House, who referring to Churchill argued, 'We are going to nail this guy and send the dominoes tumbling. And everybody who has an opinion out there and entire disciplines like ethnic studies and women's studies and cultural studies and queer studies that we don't like won't be there anymore.'<sup>[9]</sup> In short, private interests now trump social needs, economic growth becomes more important than social justice, and the militarization and commercialization of public space now define what counts as the public sphere, if not what counts as the meaning and purpose of education itself.

Within neo-liberalism's market-driven discourse, corporate power marks the space of a new kind of public pedagogy, and one in which the production, dissemination, and circulation of ideas emerge from the educational force of the larger culture. Public pedagogy in this sense refers to a powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces whose aim is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain. Corporate public pedagogy culture largely cancels out or devalues gender, class-specific, and racial injustices of the existing social order by absorbing the democratic impulses and practices of civil society within narrow economic relations. Corporate public pedagogy has become an all-encompassing cultural horizon for producing market identities, values, and mega-corporate conglomerates, and for atomizing social practices. Politics becomes increasingly privatized and commercialized and, as such, utterly banal. For example, some neo-liberal advocates argue that the health care and education crises faced by many states can be solved by selling off public assets to private interests. The Pentagon even considered, if only for a short time, turning the war on terror and security concerns over to futures markets subject to online trading. Neo-liberalism utterly privatizes politics and offers absurd solutions to collective problems, such as suggesting that the problem of water pollution can be solved by buying bottled water. Thus, non-commodified public spheres are replaced by commercial spheres as the substance of critical democracy is emptied out and replaced by a democracy of goods available to those with purchasing power and the increasing expansion of the cultural and political power of corporations throughout the world.

Under neo-liberalism, the dominant public pedagogy, with its narrow and imposed schemes of classification and limited modes of identification, uses the educational force of the culture to negate the basic conditions for critical agency. What becomes clear in the new information age of what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'liquid modernity' <sup>[10]</sup> is that the power of the dominant order is not just economic, but also intellectual – lying in the realm of knowledge, information, beliefs, and ideas. Matters of agency become even more crucial to viable democratic politics as those spaces capable of producing critical modes of agency increasingly disappear into the black hole of commercialized space. This is all the more reason to take seriously Hannah Arendt's claim that: 'Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance.'<sup>[11]</sup> And it is precisely within such a realm that individuals are socialized into forms of individual and social agency in which they learn how to govern rather than be governed. Politics often begins when it becomes possible to make power visible, to challenge the ideological circuitry of hegemonic knowledge, and to recognize that 'political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion, a conversion of the vision of the world'.<sup>[12]</sup> But another element of politics focuses on where politics happens – how proliferating sites of pedagogy bring into being new forms of resistance, raise new questions, and necessitate alternative visions regarding autonomy and the possibility of democracy itself.

### **The Politics of Public Pedagogy**

At this point in American history, neo-liberal capitalism is not simply too overpowering; on the contrary, 'democracy is too weak'.<sup>[13]</sup> Under neo-liberalism, pedagogy has become thoroughly reactionary as it constructs knowledge, values, and identities through a variety of educational sites and forms of pedagogical address that have largely become the handmaidens of corporate power, religious fundamentalism, and neo-conservative ideology. These new sites of public pedagogy,

which have become the organizing force of neo-liberal ideology, are not restricted to schools, blackboards, and test-taking. Nor do they incorporate the limited forms of address often found in school settings. Such sites operate within a wide variety of social institutions and formats including sports and entertainment media, cable television networks, churches, and channels of elite and popular culture, such as advertising. Profound transformations have taken place in the public space, producing new sites of pedagogy marked by a distinctive confluence of new digital and media technologies, growing concentrations of corporate power, and unparalleled meaning-producing capacities. Unlike traditional forms of pedagogy, knowledge and desire are inextricably connected to modes of pedagogical address mediated through unprecedented electronic technologies that include high-speed computers, new types of digitized film, and CD-ROMs. The result is a public pedagogy that plays a decisive role in producing a diverse cultural sphere that gives new meaning to education as a political force. What is surprising about the cultural politics of neo-liberalism is that cultural studies theorists have either ignored or largely underestimated the symbolic and pedagogical dimensions of the struggle that neo-liberal corporate power has put into place for the last 30 years, particularly under the ruthless administration of George W. Bush.

While Paulo Freire and other leading educational theorists were right about linking education and democracy, they had no way in their time of recognizing that the larger culture would extend beyond, if not supersede, institutionalized education as the most important educational force in the developed societies. In fact, education and pedagogy have been synonymous with schooling in the public mind. Challenging such a recognition does not invalidate the importance of formal education to democracy, but it does require a critical understanding of how the work of education takes place in such institutions as well as in a range of other spheres such as advertising, television, film, the Internet, video game culture, and the popular press. Rather than invalidating the importance of schooling, it extends the sites of pedagogy and, in doing so, broadens and deepens the meaning and importance of public pedagogy. The educational force of the wider culture and its ongoing processes of what Raymond Williams called '*permanent education*' [14] must become a central concern of formal schooling itself.

The concept of public pedagogy also underscores the central importance of formal spheres of learning, which unlike their popular counterparts – that are driven largely by commercial interests and more often miseducate the public – must provide citizens with those critical capacities, modes of literacy, knowledge, and skills that enable them both to read the world critically and participate in shaping and governing it. Put differently, formal spheres of learning provide one of the few sites where students can be educated to understand, engage critically, and transform those dominant spheres of public pedagogy that are largely shaping their beliefs and sense of agency. I am not claiming that public or higher education are free from corporate influence and dominant ideologies, but that such models of education, at best, provide the spaces and conditions for prioritizing civic values over commercial interests (i.e. they self-consciously educate future citizens to be capable of participating in and reproducing a democratic society). In spite of its present embattled status and contradictory roles, higher education remains uniquely placed – though also under attack from the forces of corporatization – to prepare students both to understand and influence the larger educational forces that shape their lives. Needless to say, those of us who work in such institutions by virtue of our privileged positions within a rather obvious division of labor coupled with higher education's lingering if not damaged dedication to freedom and democracy have an obligation to draw upon those traditions and resources that are capable of providing a critical education to all students in order to prepare them for a world in which information and power have taken on new and powerful dimensions. In fact, Scott Lash has brilliantly and rightly argued that the critique of information cannot be separated from the critique of power itself, and that this provides a new challenge for how we are to theorize a new politics for the twenty-first century.[15] One entry into this challenge is to address the theoretical contributions that a number of radical educators and cultural studies theorists have made in engaging not only the primacy of pedagogy as a political force, but also how the relationship between culture and power constitutes a new site of both politics and pedagogy.

### **Cultural Studies and the Question of Pedagogy**

My own interest in cultural studies emerges out of an ongoing project to theorize the regulatory and emancipatory relationship between culture, power, and politics as expressed through the dynamics of what I have previously referred to as 'public pedagogy'. This project concerns, in part, the diverse ways in which culture functions as a contested sphere over the production, distribution, and regulation of power, and how and where it operates both symbolically and institutionally as an educational, political, and economic force. From this perspective, cultural politics recognizes the primacy of the pedagogical for theorizing and realizing the political as an articulation and intervention into the social, a space in which politics is pluralized, recognized as contingent, and open to many formations.[16] But cultural politics is also crucial for resisting those mutually informing material relations of power and symbolic registers in which matters of representation and meaning work to secure particular market identities, legitimate dominant relations of power, and decouple the operations of politics from the sphere of power.

Against the neo-liberal attack on all things social, cultural politics must be reclaimed as the site where dialogue, critique, and public engagement become crucial as an affirmation of a democratically configured space of the social in which the political is actually taken up and lived out through a variety of intimate relations and social formations. The cultural field plays a central role in producing narratives, metaphors, and images, and in desiring maps that exercise a powerful pedagogical force over how people think about themselves and their relationship to others. From this perspective, culture is the primary sphere/space/location in which individuals, groups, and institutions engage in the art of translating the diverse and multiple relations that mediate between private life and public concerns. Culture provides the context through which the translating and pedagogical possibilities for deepening and extending democracy take place, but this fundamentally critical and dialogic process of what it means to be an engaged and critical citizen is now under assault, particularly as the forces of neo-liberalism dissolve public issues into utterly privatized and individualistic concerns.[17] Far from being exclusively about matters of representation and texts, culture becomes a site, an event, and a performance in which identities and modes of agency are configured through the mutually determined forces of thought and action, body and mind, and time and space. Culture is the public space where common matters, shared solidarities, and public engagements provide the fundamental elements of democracy. Culture is also the pedagogical and political ground in which shared solidarities and a global public sphere can be imagined as a condition of democratic possibilities. Culture as a site of struggle offers a common space in which to address the radical demand of a pedagogy that allows critical discourse to confront the inequities of power and promote the possibilities of shared dialogue and democratic transformation. Culture as an emancipatory force affirms the social as a fundamentally political space, just as neo-liberalism attempts within the current historical moment to deny culture's relevance as a democratic sphere and its centrality as a political necessity. And culture's urgency, as Nick Couldry observes, resides in its possibilities for linking politics to matters of individual and social agency as well as to the fate of a common culture as a shared site for an emergent democratic politics.[18]

Central to any viable notion of cultural studies is the primacy of culture and power, which is organized through an understanding of how the political becomes pedagogical, particularly in terms of how private issues are connected to larger social conditions and collective forces; i.e. how the very processes of learning constitute the political mechanisms through which identities are shaped, desires are mobilized, and experiences take on form and meaning within those collective conditions and larger forces that constitute the realm of the social. This suggests the necessity on the part of cultural theorists to be particularly attentive to the connections between pedagogy and political agency. More specifically, it means that cultural studies advocates address seriously the meaning of making the political more pedagogical by addressing where and how the psyche locates itself in public discourse, and what pedagogical conditions provide the groundwork for agents to enunciate, act, and reflect on themselves, their relations to others, and the wider social order.

Unfortunately, the much needed emphasis on making the political more pedagogical has not occupied a central place in the work of most cultural studies theorists. Pedagogy in most cultural studies accounts is either limited to the realm of schooling, dismissed as a discipline with very little academic cultural capital, or is rendered reactionary through the claim that it simply

accommodates the paralyzing grip of governmental institutions which normalize all pedagogical practices.

### **From a Pedagogy of Understanding to a Pedagogy of Intervention**

In opposition to these positions I want to reclaim a long tradition in radical educational theory that makes clear that pedagogy as an oppositional practice and active process of learning is central to any viable notion of critical citizenship, inclusive democracy, and the democratic demands of a broader global public sphere. Pedagogy as a language of both critique and possibility looms large in this critical tradition not as a technique or a-priori set of methods, but as a political and moral practice. As a political practice, pedagogy illuminates the relationship between power, knowledge, and ideology, while self-consciously, if not self-critically, recognizing the role it plays in a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within particular sets of social relations. As a moral practice, pedagogy recognizes that what cultural workers, artists, activists, media workers, and others teach cannot be abstracted from what it means to invest in public life, presuppose some notion of the future, or locate oneself in a public discourse.

The moral implications of pedagogy also suggest that our responsibility as public intellectuals cannot be separated from the consequences of the knowledge we produce, the social relations we legitimate, and the ideologies and identities we offer up to students. Refusing to decouple politics from pedagogy means, in part, that teaching in classrooms or in any other public sphere should not only simply honor the experiences students bring to such sites, but should also connect their experiences to specific problems that emanate from the material contexts of their everyday lives. Pedagogy in this sense becomes performative in that it is not merely about deconstructing texts, but is also about situating politics itself within a broader set of relations that address what it might mean to create modes of individual and social agency which enable rather than shut down democratic values, practices, and social relations. Such a project recognizes not only the political nature of pedagogy, but also situates it within a call for intellectuals to assume responsibility for their actions, to link their teaching to those moral principles that allow us to do something about human suffering, as the late Susan Sontag has recently suggested.[19] Part of this task necessitates that cultural studies theorists and educators anchor their own work, however diverse, in a radical project that seriously engages the promise of an unrealized democracy against its really existing forms. Of crucial importance to such a project is the rejection of the assumption that theory can understand social problems without contesting their appearance in public life. More specifically, any viable cultural politics needs a socially committed notion of injustice if we are to take seriously what it means to fight for the idea of the good society. I think Zygmunt Bauman is right in arguing that: 'If there is no room for the idea of *wrong* society, there is hardly much chance for the idea of good society to be born, let alone make waves.'

[20]

Cultural studies theorists need to be more forceful, if not committed, in linking their overall politics to modes of critique and collective action that address the presupposition that democratic societies are never too just or just enough. Such a recognition means that a society must constantly nurture the possibilities for self-critique, collective agency, and forms of citizenship in which people play a fundamental role in critically discussing, administrating, and shaping the material relations of power and ideological forces that bear down on their everyday lives. At stake here is the task, as the late Jacques Derrida insisted, of viewing the project of democracy as a promise – a possibility rooted in the continuing struggle for economic, cultural, and social justice.[21] Democracy in this instance is not a sutured or formalistic regime, it is the site of struggle itself. The struggle over creating an inclusive and just democracy can take many forms, offers no political guarantees, and provides an important normative dimension to politics as an ongoing process of democratization that never ends. Such a project is based on the realization that a democracy which is open to exchange, question, and self-criticism never reaches the limits of justice.

By linking education to the project of an unrealized democracy, cultural studies theorists who work in higher education can make clear that the issue is not whether higher education has become contaminated with politics, but rather that it is more importantly about recognizing that education is already a space of politics, power, and authority. At the same time, they can make clear their opposition to those approaches to pedagogy that reduce it to a methodology like 'teaching of the

conflicts' or, relatedly, to simply opening up a culture of questioning. Both of these positions not only fail to highlight the larger political, normative, and ideological considerations that inform such views of education and pedagogy, but they also collapse the purpose and meaning of higher education, the role of educators as engaged scholars, and the possibility of pedagogy itself into a rather short-sighted and sometimes insular notion of method, albeit one that narrowly emphasizes argumentation and dialogue. There is a disquieting refusal in such discourses to raise broader questions about the social, economic, and political forces shaping the very terrain of higher education – particularly unbridled market forces, or racist and sexist forces that *unequally* value diverse groups of students within relations of academic power – or about what it might mean to engage pedagogy as a basis not merely for understanding, but also for participating in the larger world. There is also a general misunderstanding of how teacher authority can be used to create the pedagogical conditions for critical forms of education without necessarily falling into the trap of simply indoctrinating students.[22] For instance, liberal educator Gerald Graff believes that any notion of critical pedagogy that is self-conscious about its politics and engages students in ways that offer them the possibility for becoming critical – or what Lani Guinier calls the need to educate students 'to participate in civic life, and to encourage graduates to give back to the community, which through taxes, made their education possible' [23] – either leaves students out of the conversation or presupposes too much and simply represents a form of pedagogical tyranny. While Graff advocates strongly that educators create the educational practices that open up the possibility of questioning among students, he refuses to connect pedagogical conditions that challenge how they think at the moment to the next step of prompting them to think about changing the world around them so as to expand and deepen its democratic possibilities. George Lipsitz criticizes academics such as Graff, who believe that connecting academic work to social change is at best a burden and at worst a collapse into a crude form of propagandizing, suggesting that they are subconsciously educated to accept cynicism about the ability of ordinary people to change the conditions under which they live.[24] Teaching students how to argue, draw on their own experiences, or engage in rigorous dialogue says nothing about why they should engage in these actions in the first place. How the culture of argumentation and questioning relates to giving students the tools they need to fight oppressive forms of power, make the world a more meaningful and just place, and develop a sense of social responsibility is missing in work like Graff's because this is part of the discourse of political education, which Graff simply equates to indoctrination or speaking to the converted.[25] Here, propaganda and critical pedagogy collapse into each other. Propaganda is generally used to misrepresent knowledge, promote biased knowledge, or produce a view of politics that appears beyond question and critical engagement. While no pedagogical intervention should fall to the level of propaganda, a pedagogy that attempts to empower critical citizens cannot and should not avoid politics. Pedagogy must address the relationship between politics and agency, knowledge and power, subject positions and values, and learning and social change while always being open to debate, resistance, and a culture of questioning. Liberal educators committed to simply raising questions have no language for linking learning to forms of public scholarship that would enable students to consider the important relationship between democratic public life and education, politics and learning. Disabled by a depoliticizing, if not slavish, allegiance to a teaching methodology, they have little idea of how to encourage students pedagogically to enter the sphere of the political, which enables students to think about how they might participate in a democracy by taking what they learn 'into new locations – a third grade classroom, a public library, a legislator's office, a park' [26], or, for that matter, by taking on collaborative projects that address the myriad of problems citizens face in a diminishing democracy.

In spite of the professional pretense to neutrality, academics need to do more pedagogically than simply teach students how to be adept at forms of argumentation. Students need to argue and question, but they need much more from their educational experience. The pedagogy of argumentation in and of itself guarantees nothing, but it is an essential step towards opening up the space of resistance towards authority, teaching students to think critically about the world around them, and recognizing interpretation and dialogue as a condition for social intervention and transformation in the service of an unrealized democratic order. As Amy Gutmann argues, education is always political because it is connected to the acquisition of agency and the ability to

struggle with ongoing relations of power, and is a precondition for creating informed and critical citizens.[27] This is a notion of education that is tied not to the alleged neutrality of teaching methods but to a vision of pedagogy which is directive and interventionist on the side of reproducing a democratic society. Democratic societies need educated citizens who are steeped in more than the skills of argumentation. And it is precisely this democratic project that affirms the critical function of education and refuses to narrow its goals and aspirations to methodological considerations. This is what makes critical pedagogy different from training. And it is precisely the failure to connect learning to its democratic functions and goals that provides rationales for pedagogical approaches which strip the meaning of what it means to be educated from its critical and democratic possibilities.

Cultural studies theorists and educators would do well to take account of the profound transformations taking place in the public sphere and reclaim pedagogy as a central category of cultural politics. In part, this means recognizing that the 'power of the dominant order is not just economic, but intellectual – lying in the realm of beliefs', and it is precisely within the domain of ideas that a sense of utopian possibility can be restored to the public realm.[28] Such a task, in part, suggests that intellectuals, artists, unions, and other progressive individuals and groups actively resist the ways in which neo-liberalism discourages teachers and students from becoming critical intellectuals by turning them into human databanks. Educators and other cultural workers need to build alliances across differences, traditional academic disciplines, and across national boundaries as part of a broader effort to develop social movements in defense of the public good and social justice. Part of this task demands that educators, artists, workers, and other cultural workers connect the forces of market fundamentalism to the war at home and abroad, challenge the shameful tax cuts for the rich, and resist the dismantling of the welfare state and the attack on unions and civil liberties. The authoritarian politics of neo-liberalism needs to be made visible in order to stop the incarceration of a generation of young black and brown men and women, the attack on public schools, the increasing corporatization of higher education, and the growing militarization of public life. As the Bush administration spreads its legacy of war, destruction, poverty, and violence across the globe, we need a new language for politics in the global public sphere; we need a new understanding of public pedagogy for analyzing what agents can bring it into being and where such struggles can take place. We need a language in which, as Zygmunt Bauman points out, we recognize that the real pessimism is quietism – falsely believing in not doing anything because nothing can be changed.[29] Most significantly, we need a new understanding of how culture works as a form of public pedagogy; how pedagogy works as a moral and political practice; how agency is organized through pedagogical relations; how politics can make the workings of power visible and accountable; and what it might mean to reclaim hope in dark times through new forms of global protests and collective resistance.

## Notes

- [1] James Rule (1998) *Markets, in Their Place*, *Dissent*, Winter, p. 31.
- [2] Zygmunt Bauman (2001) *The Individualized Society*, p. 107 (London: Polity Press).
- [3] Cornel West (2004) Finding Hope in Dark Times, *Tikkun*, 19(4), p. 18.
- [4] Fredric Jameson (1994) *The Seeds of Time*, p. xii (New York: Columbia University Press).
- [5] George Steinmetz (2003) The State of Emergency and the Revival of American Imperialism: toward an authoritarian post-Fordism, *Public Culture*, 15(2), p. 337.
- [6] Ibid.
- [7] Barry Bluestone & Bennett Harrison (1982) *The Deindustrialization of America: plant closings, community abandonment and the dismantling of basic industry*, p. 6 (New York: Basic Books).
- [8] Doug Henwood (2003) *After the New Economy* (New York: The New Press); Paul Krugman (2003) *The Great Unraveling: losing our way in the new century* (New York: W.W. Norton); Kevin Phillips (2003) *Wealth and Democracy: a political history of the American rich* (New York: Broadway).
- [9] Newt Gingrich, cited in Scott Smallwood (2005) Ward Churchill Gets a Warm Welcome in Speech in U. of Hawaii, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 24.
- [10] Zygmunt Bauman (2000) *Liquid Modernity* (London: Polity Press).

- [11] Hannah Arendt, cited in John Brenkman (2000) *Extreme Criticism*, in Judith Butler, John Guillary & Kendal Thomas (Eds) *What's Left of Theory* (New York: Routledge).
- [12] Pierre Bourdieu (2001) *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 128 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- [13] Benjamin R. Barber (2002) *A Failure of Democracy, Not Capitalism*, *New York Times*, Monday, 29 July, A-23.
- [14] Raymond Williams (1967) *Communications*, p. 15 (New York: Barnes & Noble).
- [15] Scott Lash (2002) *Critique of Information* (London: Sage).
- [16] On the importance of problematizing and pluralizing the political, see Jodi Dean (2000) *The Interface of Political Theory and Cultural Studies*, in Jodi Dean (Ed.) *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, pp. 1-19 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
- [17] Zygmunt Bauman (1999) *In Search of Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
- [18] Nick Couldry (2004) *In the Place of a Common Culture, What?* *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, 26, pp. 1-19.
- [19] Susan Sontag (2003) *Courage and Resistance*, *The Nation*, 5 May, pp. 11-14.
- [20] Zygmunt Bauman (2002) *Society under Siege*, p. 170 (Malden, MA: Blackwell).
- [21] Jacques Derrida (2000) *Intellectual Courage: an interview*, trans. Peter Krapp, *Culture Machine*, 2, pp. 1-15.
- [22] Gerald Graff appears to have made a career out of this issue by either misrepresenting the work of Paulo Freire and others, citing theoretical work by critical educators that is outdated and could be corrected by reading anything they might have written in the last five years, creating caricatures of their work, or by holding up the most extreme and ludicrous examples of what people in critical pedagogy do (or, more generally, anyone who links pedagogy and politics). For more recent representations of this position, see Gerald Graff (2000) *Teaching Politically Without Political Correctness*, *Radical Teacher*, 58 (Fall), pp. 26-30; Gerald Graff (2003) *Clueless in Academe* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- [23] Lani Guinier (2003) *Democracy Tested*, *The Nation*, 5 May, p. 6. Guinier's position is in direct opposition to that of Graff and his acolytes. For instance, see Lani Guinier (2001) *Rethinking Power, Rethinking Theater: a conversation between Lani Guinier and Anna Deavere Smith*, *Theater*, 31(3), pp. 31-45.
- [24] George Lipsitz (2000) *Academic Politics and Social Change*, in Jodi Dean (Ed.) *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, pp. 81-82 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
- [25] For a more detailed response to this kind of watered-down pedagogical practice, see Stanley Aronowitz (2000) *The Knowledge Factory* (Boston: Beacon Press); Henry A. Giroux (2003) *The Abandoned Generation: democracy beyond the culture of fear* (New York: Palgrave).
- [26] An interview with Julie Ellison (2002) *New Public Scholarship in the Arts and Humanities*, *Higher Education Exchange*, p. 20.
- [27] Amy Gutman (2003) *Identity in Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- [28] Pierre Bourdieu & Günter Grass (2003) *The 'Progressive' Restoration: a Franco-German dialogue*, *New Left Review*, 14 (March-April), p. 66.
- [29] Zygmunt Bauman, cited in Madeline Bunting (2003) *Passion and Pessimism*, *The Guardian*, April 5.

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