On Critical Pedagogy

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Introduction

Some of the essays in this book were composed over thirty years ago, while the majority were written in the last decade—that the earlier essays remain relevant speaks to the ongoing attack on the very nature and condition of public and higher education in the United States. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of the logic and arguments that were first used against critical education in the 1970s and 1980s—today, ironically, they are put forth by their proponents in the name of "educational reform." Three decades ago, it was precisely the dismantling of education's critical capacity in conjunction with the emergence of a politics of authoritarianism that motivated my involvement in the field of education, and critical pedagogy in particular. What all the essays in this book have in common is the belief that education is fundamental to democracy and that no democratic society can survive without a formative culture shaped by pedagogical practices capable of creating the conditions for producing citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsible way. I recognized early on in my career that critical pedagogy as a moral and political practice does more than emphasize the importance of critical analysis and moral judgments. It also provides tools to unsettle common-sense assumptions, theorize matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic polity.

Critical pedagogy takes as one of its central projects an attempt to be discerning and attentive to those places and practices in which social agency has been denied and produced. When I first began exploring and writing about critical pedagogy, I became aware that pedagogy might offer educators an important set of theoretical tools in support of the values of reason and freedom. During this time, I was teaching history to high school students.

For me, critical pedagogy as theoretical and political practice became especially useful as a way to resist the increasingly prevalent approach to pedagogy that viewed it as merely a skill, technique, or disinterested method. Within this dominant educational paradigm, young people were at one time and are now once again shamelessly reduced to "cheerful robots" through modes of pedagogy that embrace an instrumental rationality in which matters of justice, values, ethics, and power are erased from any notion of teaching and learning. I rejected the mainstream assumption that treated pedagogy simply as a set of strategies and skills to use in order to teach pre-specified subject matter. Critical pedagogy is not about an *a priori* method that simply can be applied regardless of context. It is the outcome of particular struggles and is always related to the specificity of particular contexts, students, communities, and available resources. It draws attention to the ways in which knowledge, power, desire, and experience are produced under specific basic conditions of learning and illuminates the role that pedagogy plays as part of a struggle over assigned meanings, modes of expression, and directions of desire, particularly as these bear on the formation of the multiple and ever-contradictory versions of the "self" and its relationship to the larger society. My view of critical pedagogy developed out of a recognition that education was important not only for gainful employment but also for creating the formative culture of beliefs, practices, and social relations that enable individuals to wield power, learn how to govern, and nurture a democratic society that takes equality, justice, shared values, and freedom seriously. I began to see how pedagogy is central to politics in that it is involved in the construction of critical agents and provides the formative culture that is indispensable to a democratic society.

Wedded to a narrative of triumphalism and economic growth, education in the late 1970s and early 1980s was increasingly viewed less as a public good than as a private right. But there was more at stake in the emergent field of critical pedagogy than mapping the modes of economic and cultural domination that tied schools to new regimes of privatization, commodification, and consumerism. There was also an attempt to view schools as sites of

struggle, to open up pedagogical forms to the possibility of resistance, and to connect teaching to the promise of self- and social change. As part of such an understanding, I attempted early on in my work to employ a notion of critical pedagogy that marshaled a language of critique and hope. While over the last three decades my understanding of the insights offered by critical pedagogy has expanded to spheres outside the classroom, the principles explored in my earlier work represent a crucial foundation. In order to address the struggles facing public and higher education today, I find it increasingly necessary to go back to these foundational principles as a starting point for explaining the value of a democratically informed notion of education and the importance of critical pedagogy.

The principles guiding my work on critical pedagogy are grounded in critique as a mode of analysis that interrogates texts, institutions, social relations, and ideologies as part of the script of official power. Put simply, critique focuses largely on how domination manifests as both a symbolic and an institutional force and the ways in which it impacts on all levels of society. For example, schools are often rightly criticized for becoming adjuncts of corporations or for modeling themselves on a culture of fear and security. Often this position goes no further than simply analyzing what is wrong with schools and in doing so makes it appear as if the problems portrayed are intractable. Domination in this mode of discourse appears to be sutured, with little room to imagine any sense of either resistance or hope. While it is important to politicize the process of schooling and recognize the gritty sense of limits it faces within a capitalist society, what is also needed to supplement this view is an enobling, imaginative vision that takes us beyond the given and commonplace. Against the anti-democratic forces shaping public and higher education, there is a need to mobilize the imagination and develop a language of possibility in which any attempt to foreclose on hope could be effectively challenged. In this instance, the language of hope goes beyond acknowledging how power works as a mechanism of domination and offers up a vocabulary in which it becomes possible to imagine power working in the interest of justice, equality, and freedom. Examples of such a discourse emerge in my

analyses of schools as democratic public spheres, teachers as public intellectuals, and students as potential democratic agents of individual and social change.

As part of the language of critique, I use critical pedagogy to examine the various ways in which classrooms too often function as modes of social, political, and cultural reproduction, particularly when the goals of education are defined through the promise of economic growth, job training, and mathematical utility. In the context of reproduction, pedagogy is largely reduced to a transmission model of teaching and limited to the propagation of a culture of conformity and the passive absorption of knowledge. Contrary to these ideas, I develop a theory of critical pedagogy that provides a range of critiques against a traditional pedagogy operating under the sway of technical mastery, instrumental logic, and various other fundamentalisms that acquire their authority by erasing any trace of subaltern histories, class struggles, and racial and gender inequalities and injustices.

As part of the language of hope and possibility, I develop a notion of critical pedagogy that addresses the democratic potential of engaging how experience, knowledge, and power are shaped in the classroom in different and often unequal contexts, and how teacher authority might be mobilized against dominant pedagogical practices as part of the practice of freedom. I stress pedagogical approaches that enable students to read texts differently as objects of interrogation rather than slavishly through a culture of pedagogical conformity that teaches unquestioning reverence. I also argue for developing a language for thinking critically about how culture deploys power and how pedagogy as a moral and political practice enables students to focus on the suffering of others. I develop a framework for engaging critical pedagogy as a theoretical resource and as a productive practice, and in doing so reject dominant notions of pedagogy as an *a priori* method, technique, or rationality that simply has to be implemented. Instead, I expand the meaning and theory of pedagogy as part of an ongoing individual and collective struggle over knowledge, desire, values, social relations, and, most important, modes of political agency. I develop the idea that critical pedagogy is central in drawing attention to questions

regarding who has control over the conditions for the production of knowledge, values, and classroom practices. I also address the importance of recognizing the role critical pedagogy plays in acknowledging the different ways in which authority, experience, and power are produced under specific conditions of learning. I place great importance, as did Paulo Freire, Roger Simon, Joe Kincheloe, and others, on the productive and deliberative nature of pedagogy.

As part of a discourse of educated hope, critical pedagogy in my work functions as a lens for viewing public and higher education as important sites of struggle that are capable of providing students with alternative modes of teaching, social relations, and imagining rather than those that merely support the *status quo*. While recognizing the importance of public and higher education as potential democratic public spheres, I also present the case that educators at all levels of schooling should be addressed as public intellectuals willing to connect pedagogy with the problems of public life, a commitment to civic courage, and the demands of social responsibility. I understand pedagogy as immanently political, but not because I believe it is desirable to impose a particular ideology on teachers and students. On the contrary, I understand pedagogy as political because it is inherently productive and directive practice rather than neutral or objective. For me, pedagogy is part of an always unfinished project intent on developing a meaningful life for all students. Such a project becomes relevant to the degree that it provides the pedagogical conditions for students to appropriate the knowledge and skills necessary to address the limits of justice in democratic societies. As a responsible and self-reflective practice, critical pedagogy illuminates how classroom learning embodies selective values, is entangled with relations of power, entails judgments about what knowledge counts, legitimates specific social relations, defines agency in particular ways, and always presupposes a particular notion of the future. As a form of provocation and challenge, critical pedagogy attempts to take young people beyond the world they are familiar with and makes clear how classroom knowledge, values, desires, and social relations are always implicated in power.

Politics is central to any notion of pedagogy that takes as its primary project the necessity to provide conditions that expand the capacities of students to think critically and teach them how to take risks, act in a socially responsible way, and connect private issues with larger public considerations. What is more, critical pedagogy foregrounds a struggle over identities, modes of agency, and those maps of meaning that enable students to define who they are and how they relate to others. Though writing in another context, Stuart Hall is helpful in capturing how matters of agency and identity are central to any notion of pedagogy and political organization. He writes:

> How can we organize these huge, randomly varied, and diverse things we call human subjects into positions where they can recognize one another for long enough to act together, and thus to take up a position that one of these days they might live out and act through as an identity. Identity is at the end, not the beginning, of the paradigm. Identity is what is at stake in any viable notion of political organization.[1]

Understood in these terms, critical pedagogy becomes a project that stresses the need for teachers and students to actively transform knowledge rather than simply consume it. At the same time, I believe it is crucial for educators not only to connect classroom knowledge to the experiences, histories, and resources that students bring to the classroom but also to link such knowledge to the goal of furthering their capacities to be critical agents who are responsive to moral and political problems of their time and recognize the importance of organized collective struggles.[2] At its most ambitious, the overarching narrative in this discourse is to educate students to lead a meaningful life, learn how to hold power and authority accountable, and develop the skills, knowledge, and courage to challenge common-sense assumptions while being willing to struggle for a more socially just world. In this view, it is necessary for critical pedagogy to be rooted in a project that is tied to the cultivation of an informed, critical citizenry capable of participating and governing in a democratic society. As such, it aims at enabling rather than

subverting the potential of a democratic culture.

During the 1980s, I observed how the educational force of the wider culture had become more powerful (if not dangerous) in its role of educating young people to define themselves simply through the logic of commodification. In response, I expanded the notion of critical pedagogy to include sites other than schools. The growing prevalence of a variety of media—from traditional screen and print cultures to the digital world of the new media—necessitated a new language for understanding popular culture as a teaching machine, rather than simply as a source of entertainment or a place that objectively disseminates information. In response to the increasing influence of the broader culture in shaping people's perspectives and identities, I developed an analytic of public pedagogy, that is, a framework that illuminates the pedagogical practices at work in what C. Wright Mills once called the "cultural apparatus." What was clear to me at the time was that the cultural apparatus had been largely hijacked by the forces of neoliberalism, or what some theorists would call a new and more intense form of market fundamentalism. In this mode of public pedagogy, a new disciplinary apparatus developed at the institutional level through which the pedagogical possibilities for critical thought, analysis, dialogue, and action came under assault by a market-driven model of education. This became fully evident when many advocates of critical pedagogy and radical educational theory were fired from public schools and colleges. In addition, both liberal and conservative governments began to promote modes of pedagogy and educational goals that were largely about training future workers. Teachers and faculty were increasingly removed from exercising any vestige of real power in shaping the conditions under which they worked. Public school teachers were deskilled as one national political administration after another embraced a stripped-down version of education, the central goal of which was to promote economic growth and global competitiveness, which entailed a much-narrowed form of pedagogy that focused on memorization, high-stakes testing, and helping students find a good fit within a wider market-oriented culture of commodification, standardization, and conformity. This model of education has continued to gain ground,

despite its ill effects on students and teachers. Young people are now openly treated as customers and clients rather than a civic resource, while many poor youth are simply excluded from the benefits of a decent education through the implementation of zero-tolerance policies that treat them as criminals to be contained, punished, or placed under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system.

Higher education more and more has been held hostage to market-driven modes of accountability as disciplines and programs are now largely rewarded to the degree that they contribute to economic profitability. Under this regime of economic Darwinism, higher-education faculty are increasingly deprived of power and tenure-track jobs—and are subjected to a relentless attack by right-wing religious and political fundamentalists who equate any critique of established power, history, and policy as tantamount to engaging in "un-American behavior." If the politics of economic growth, scientism, and technical rationality influenced public and higher education in the 1980s, a new and more vicious mode of ideology and teaching, which I call neoliberal pedagogy, has emerged and now dominates education at all levels of schooling. As a pedagogical practice, neoliberal pedagogy also pervades every aspect of the wider culture, stifling critical thought, reducing citizenship to the act of consuming, defining certain marginal populations as contaminated and disposable, and removing the discourse of democracy from any vestige of pedagogy both in and outside of schooling. The political sphere, like most educational sites, is increasingly driven by a culture of cruelty and a survival-of-the-fittest culture. I believe the threat to critical modes of education and democracy has never been greater than in the current historical moment, especially with the rise of right-populist movements and governments across the globe.

Critical pedagogy has always been responsive to the deepest problems and conflicts of our time, and the chapters in this book partake in that project. In what follows, I situate my work on critical pedagogy as part of a broader project that attempts to address the growing authoritarian threats posed by the current regime of market fundamentalism against youth, critical modes of

education, and the ethos of democracy itself. In this way, the chapters in this book, while being written at different times, can be read as a complementary set of resources through which to imagine critical pedagogy—with its insistence on critical deliberation, careful judgment, and civic courage—as central to the cultivation of what John Dewey once called "democracy as a way of life." The chapters can also be read as interventions within the current historical conjuncture in which a renewed attention on pedagogy emerges out of the recognition that there is a real educational crisis in North America and a real need for developing a new theoretical, political, and pedagogical vocabulary for addressing the issue. In addition, these chapters can be used to rethink what democracy might mean at a time when public values, spheres, and identities are being eviscerated under a regime of economic Darwinism in which the "living dead" increasingly govern our educational apparatuses in public and higher education and also in the wider culture.[3] And, finally, these chapters collectively embody a politics of educated hope, responsive to the need to think beyond established narratives of power, prevailing "common-sense" approaches to educational policy and practice, a widening culture of punishment, and the banal script of using mathematical performance measures as benchmarks for academic success. We need to think otherwise as a condition for acting otherwise. Only a pedagogy that embraces the civic purpose of education and provides a vocabulary and set of practices that enlarge our humanity will contribute to increasing the possibility for public life and expanding shared spaces, values, and responsibilities. Only such a pedagogy can promote the modes of solidarity and collective action capable of defending the public good and the symbolic and institutional power relations necessary for a sustainable democracy.

With the growing influence of neoliberalism in the last thirty years, the United States has witnessed the emergence of modes of education that make human beings superfluous as political agents, close down democratic public spheres, disdain public values, and undermine the conditions for dissent. Within both institutions of schooling and the old and new media—with their expanding networks of knowledge production and circulation—we see the

emergence and dominance of pedagogical models that fail to question and all too frequently embrace the economic Darwinism of neoliberalism. Neoliberal ideology emphasizes winning at all costs, even if it means a ruthless competitiveness, an almost rabid individualism, and a notion of agency largely constructed within a market-driven rationality that abstracts economics and markets from ethical considerations. Both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama embraced models of education largely tied to the dictates of a narrow instrumental rationality and economic growth.[4] Both associated learning valuable knowledge and skills as part of a broader economic script that judges worth by what corporations need to increase their profits. President Obama continued to repeat the idea that education should be valued primarily for its ability to raise individual incomes and promote economic growth, with the consequence that pedagogy is tied to models of accountability driven by the need to "teach to the test." In this paradigm, students are educated primarily to acquire market-oriented skills in order to compete favorably in the global economy. This type of pedagogy celebrates rote learning, memorization, and high-stakes testing, while it "produces an atmosphere of student passivity and teacher routinization."[5] Rarely did President Obama mention the democratic goals of education or stress that critical education is central to politics in that it provides the formative culture that produces engaged citizens and makes social action and democracy possible. Under President Trump, a full-fledged attack has been waged on all forms of public and higher education.

For too many educators, politicians, and corporate hedge-fund managers, poor economic performance on the part of individuals is coded as a genetic and often racialized defect, while an unwillingness or inability to buy into a consumer culture is defined as a form of individual depravity.[6] Private endeavors now trump the public good across the full spectrum of political positions. Neoliberal public pedagogy strips education of its public values, critical content, and civic responsibilities as part of its broader goal of creating new subjects wedded to the logic of privatization, efficiency, flexibility, the accumulation of capital, and the destruction of the social state. Increasingly, the values that drive

neoliberal pedagogies in the United States are also embodied in policies that attempt to shape diverse levels of public and higher education all over the globe. The script has become overly familiar and all too often is simply taken for granted, especially in Western countries. Shaping the neoliberal framing of public and higher education is a corporate-based ideology that embraces standardizing the curriculum, supports hierarchical management, and reduces all levels of education to job training sites. Marc Bousquet rightly argues that central to this notion of neoliberalism is a view of higher education that enshrines "more standardization! More managerial control! A teacher-proof curriculum! ... a top-down control of curriculum [and] tenured management."[7] Significant numbers of faculty have been reduced to the status of part-time and temporary workers, comprising a new subaltern class of disempowered educators. In this view, faculty become just another reserve army of cheap laborers, a force that can be eagerly exploited in order to raise the bottom line while disregarding the rights of academic labor and the quality of education that students deserve. There is no talk in this view of higher education about shared governance between faculty and administrators, educating students as critical citizens rather than as potential employees of Wal-Mart, or affirming faculty as scholars and public intellectuals who have a measure of both autonomy and power. Teachers in the public school system fare no better than university educators, as they are increasingly deskilled, reduced to either technicians or security guards, or both.

There is a general consensus among educators in North America that public and higher education are in a chronic state of crisis. As Stanley Aronowitz points out, "For some the main issue is whether schools are failing to transmit the general intellectual culture, even to the most able students. What is at stake in this critique is the fate of America as a civilization—particularly the condition of its democratic institutions and the citizens who are, in the final analysis, responsible for maintaining them."[8] Universities are now facing a growing set of challenges arising from drastic budget cuts, diminishing educational quality, the downsizing of faculty, the growth of military-funded research, and the revamping of the

curriculum to fit the needs of the market.[9] Public schools are being devastated as tax revenues dry up. Thousands of teachers are being laid off, and vital programs are being slashed to the bone. It gets worse. Republican Party governors in Wisconsin, Ohio, Florida, and other states are eliminating the bargaining rights of teachers' unions.

In the United States, many of the problems in higher education can be linked to low funding, the domination of universities by market mechanisms, public education's move towards privatization, the intrusion of the national security state, and the lack of faculty self-governance, all of which not only contradicts the culture and democratic value of higher education but also makes a mockery of the very meaning and mission of the university. Universities and colleges have been increasingly abandoned as democratic public spheres dedicated to providing a public service, expanding upon humankind's great intellectual and cultural achievements, and educating future generations to be able to confront the challenges of a global democracy. Meanwhile, public education has been under attack by the religious right and advocates of charter schools and privatization, and increasingly subject to disciplinary measures that prioritize a culture of conformity and punishment.

The crisis in education has crucial political, social, ethical, and spiritual consequences. At a time when market culture is aggressively colonizing everyday life and social forms increasingly lose their shape or disappear altogether, educational institutions seem to represent a reassuring permanence, as a slowly changing bulwark in a landscape of rapidly dissolving critical public spheres. But public and higher education in the United States and elsewhere are increasingly losing their civic character and commitment to public life as they become more closely aligned with corporate power and military values. Corporate leaders are now hired as university presidents; the shrinking ranks of tenure-line faculty are filled with contract labor; students are treated as customers; adjunct faculty are now hired through temp agencies; and learning is increasingly defined in instrumental terms. At the same time, critical knowledge is relegated to the dustbin of history, only retaining a vestige of support within impoverished

and underfunded liberal arts programs that are themselves being downsized and marginalized within the larger institution.

Conscripting the university to serve as corporate power's apprentice, while reducing matters of university governance to an extension of corporate logic and interests, substantially weakens the possibility for higher education to function as a democratic public sphere, academics as engaged public intellectuals, and students as critical citizens. In a market-driven and militarized university, questions regarding how education might enable students to develop a keen sense of prophetic justice, promote the analytic skills necessary to hold power accountable, and provide the spiritual foundation through which they not only respect the rights of others but also, as Bill Moyers puts it, "claim their moral and political agency"[10] become increasingly irrelevant.[11] Public schools have fared even worse. They are subject to corporate modes of management, disciplinary measures, and commercial values that have stripped them of any semblance of democratic governance; teachers are reduced to a subaltern class of technicians; and students are positioned as mere recipients of the worst forms of banking education and, in the case of students marginalized by race and class, treated as disposable populations deserving of harsh punishments and disciplinary measures modeled after prisons.

If the commercialization, commodification, privatization, and militarization of public and higher education continue unabated, then education will become yet another casualty among a diminishing number of institutions capable of fostering critical inquiry, public debate, human acts of justice, and common deliberation. The calculating logic of an instrumentalized, corporatized, and privatized education does more than diminish the moral and political vision necessary to sustain a vibrant democracy and an engaged notion of social agency; it also undermines the development of public spaces where matters of dissent, public conscience, and social justice are valued and offered protection against the growing anti-democratic tendencies that are enveloping much of the United States and many other parts of the world.

Educating young people in the spirit of a critical democracy by

providing them with the knowledge, passion, civic capacities, and social responsibility necessary to address the problems facing the nation and the globe means challenging those modes of schooling and pedagogy designed largely to promote economic gain, create consuming subjects, and substitute training for critical thinking and analysis. Such anti-democratic and anti-intellectual tendencies have intensified alongside the contemporary emergence of a number of diverse fundamentalisms, especially a market-based neoliberal rationality that exhibits a deep disdain, if not outright contempt, for both democracy and publically engaged teaching and scholarship. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that education in many parts of the world is held hostage to political and economic forces that wish to convert educational institutions into corporate establishments defined by a profit-oriented identity and mission.

Prominent educators and theorists such as Paulo Freire, Hannah Arendt, John Dewey, Cornelius Castoriadis, and C. Wright Mills have long believed and rightly argued that we should neither allow education to be modeled after the business world nor sit by while corporate power and influence undermine the relative autonomy of higher education by exercising control over its faculty, curricula, and students. All of these public intellectuals have in common a vision and project of rethinking the role education might play in providing students with the habits of mind and ways of acting that would enable them to identify and address the most acute challenges and dangers facing a world increasingly dominated by a mode of instrumental and technical thinking that is morally and spiritually bankrupt. All of these theorists offered a notion of the university as a bastion of democratic learning and meaningful social values, a notion that must be defended in discussions about what form should be taken by the relationships among corporations, the war industries, and higher education in the twenty-first century.

The major impetus of this book is to present the theoretical and practical elements of a critical pedagogy in which education has a responsibility not only to search for the truth regardless of where it may lead but also to educate students to make authority politically and morally accountable. Such an approach is informed

by the assumption that public and higher education must strive to expand the pedagogical conditions necessary to sustain those modes of critical agency, dialogue, and social responsibility crucial to keeping democracies alive. Critical pedagogy within schools and the critical public pedagogy produced in broader cultural apparatuses are modes of intervention dedicated to creating those democratic public spheres where individuals can think critically, relate sympathetically to the problems of others, and intervene in the world in order to address major social problems. Although questions regarding whether educational institutions should serve strictly public rather than private interests no longer carry the weight of forceful criticism, as they did in the past, such questions are still crucial in addressing the reality of public and higher education and what it might mean to imagine the full participation of such institutions in public life as protectors and promoters of democratic values, especially at a time when the meaning and purpose of public and higher education are besieged by a phalanx of narrow economic and political interests.

All of the chapters in this book share the position that public and higher education may constitute one of the few public spheres left in which critical knowledge, values, and learning offer a glimpse of the promise of education for nurturing hope and a substantive democracy.[12] It may be the case that everyday life is increasingly organized around market principles, but confusing democracy with market relations hollows out the legacy of education, which is inherently moral, not commercial. Democracy places civic demands upon its citizens, and such demands point to the necessity of an education that is broad-based, critical, and supportive of meaningful citizen power, participation in self-governance, and democratic leadership. Only through such a critical educational culture can students learn how to become individual and social agents, rather than merely disengaged spectators, and become able not only to think otherwise but also to act upon civic commitments that "necessitate a reordering of basic power arrangements" fundamental to promoting the common good and producing a meaningful democracy.[13]

What all of the chapters in this book partake in is the aim of reclaiming public and higher education as sites of moral and

political practice for which the purpose is both to introduce students to the great reservoir of diverse intellectual ideas and traditions and to engage those inherited bodies of knowledge thorough critical dialogue, analysis, and comprehension. Each chapter affirms the notion that education should be organized around a set of social experiences and ethical considerations through which students can rethink what Jacques Derrida once called the concepts of "the possible and the impossible"[14] and move toward what Jacques Rancière describes as loosening the coordinates of the sensible through a constant re-examination of the boundaries that distinguish the sensible from the subversive.[15] Both theorists express concern with how the boundaries of knowledge and everyday life are constructed in ways that seem unquestionable, which makes it all the more necessary not only to interrogate common-sense assumptions but also to ask what it means to question such assumptions and see beyond them. Critical pedagogy asserts that students can engage their own learning from a position of agency, and in so doing can actively participate in narrating their identities through a culture of questioning that opens up a space of translation between the private and the public while changing the forms of self- and social recognition.

Another overarching theme of the book argues that central to any viable notion of critical pedagogy is enabling students to think critically while providing the conditions for students to recognize "how knowledge is related to the power of self-definition"[16] and to use the knowledge they gain both to critique the world in which they live and, when necessary, to intervene in socially responsible ways in order to change it. Critical pedagogy is about more than a struggle over assigned meanings, official knowledge, and established modes of authority: it is also about encouraging students to take risks, act on their sense of social responsibility, and engage the world as an object of both critical analysis and hopeful transformation. In this paradigm, pedagogy cannot be reduced only to learning critical skills or theoretical traditions but must also be infused with the possibility of using interpretation as a mode of intervention, as a potentially energizing practice that gets students to both think and act differently. I have always believed that critical pedagogy is not simply about the search for

understanding and truth, because such a goal imposes limits on human agency, possibility, and politics. Critical pedagogy also takes seriously the educational imperative to encourage students to act on the knowledge, values, and social relations they acquire by being responsive to the deepest and most important problems of our times, especially at a time of rising fascism in the United States and in other countries.

As a political and moral practice, education always presupposes a vision of the future in its introduction to, preparation for, and legitimation of particular forms of social life. Any meaningful consideration of educational theory and practice must confront the challenges arising from questions about whose future is affected by these forms. For what purposes and to what ends do certain forms endure, and what promise or peril do they hold for future generations? How might we imagine different forms of social life that lead to a more democratic and just future? It is hoped that this book will make a small contribution in raising such questions, while purposefully engaging with the various struggles that produced them.

Notes

1 Stuart Hall (1997), "Subjects in History: Making Diasporic Identities," in Wahneema Lubiano (ed.), *The House That Race Built*. New York: Pantheon, p. 291.

2 Chandra Mohanty (1989), "On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s," *Cultural Critique*, 14: 192.

3 I extend this concept of the living dead in Henry A. Giroux (2011), *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism*. New York: Peter Lang.

4 I take up Obama's educational failures in Henry A. Giroux (2010), *Politics After Hope: Obama and the Politics of Youth, Race, and Democracy*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

5 Martha C. Nussbaum (2010), *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 134.

6 Stanley Aronowitz (2008), *Against Schooling*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, p. 22.

7 Marc Bousquet (2009), "An Education President from Wal-Mart," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 23, 2009. Available online at: http://chronicle.com/blogPost/An--Education--President--From/7434. Accessed July 23, 2009.

8 Aronowitz, *Against Schooling*, pp. 16–17.

9 See Aronowitz, *Against Schooling*; Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux (2004), *Take Back Higher Education*. New York: Palgrave; Henry A. Giroux (2008), *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers; John Wilson (2008), *Patriotic Correctness: Academic Freedom and Its Enemies*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers; Christopher Newfield (2008), *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty Year Assault on the Middle Class*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Mark Bousquet (2008), *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*. New York: New York University Press; Frank Donoghue (2008), *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*. New York: Fordham University Press; and Evan Watkins (2008), *Class Degrees: Smart Work, Managed Choice, and the Transformation of Higher Education*. New York: Fordham University Press.

10 Bill Moyers (2007), "A Time for Anger, a Call to Action," CommonDreams.org, February 7, 2007. Available online at: www.commondreams.org/views07/0322--24.htm. Accessed December 10, 2009.

11 I take up the issue of the increasing militarizing of the university in Giroux, *The University in Chains*.

12 On the relationship between education and hope, see Mark Coté, Richard J. F. Day, and Greig de Peuter (eds.) (2007), *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments against Neoliberal Globalization*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; and Henry A. Giroux (2003), *Public Spaces/Private Lives: Democracy Beyond 9/11*. Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield.

13 Sheldon S. Wolin (2008), *Democracy, Inc.: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 43.

14 Jacques Derrida (2001), "The Future of the Profession or the Unconditional University," in Laurence Simmons and Heather Worth (eds.), *Derrida Downunder*. Auckland: Dunmore Press, p. 245.

15 Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey (2007), "Art of the Possible: An Interview with Jacques Rancière," *Artforum*, March 2007, pp. 260–1.

16 Mohanty, "On Race and Voice," p. 192.

Part One

Pedagogy as Cultural Politics

1

Schooling and the Culture of Positivism

Notes on the Death of History[1]

There is no neutral material of history. History is not a spectacle for us because it is our own living, our own violence and our own beliefs.[2]

John O'Neil

Introduction

One of the more fundamental questions raised by educators in recent years focuses on how public school classroom teachers might develop an orientation to curriculum development and implementation that acknowledges the important underlying ethical and normative dimensions that structure classroom decisions and experiences. The absence of such an orientation has been well noted.[3] For example, in different ways both phenomenological and neo-Marxist perspectives on educational thought and practice have pointed to the atheoretical, ahistorical, and unproblematic view of pedagogy that presently characterizes curriculum development, particularly in the social sciences.

Some phenomenological critics have charged that teaching practices are often rooted in "common-sense" assumptions that go relatively unchallenged by both teachers and students, and serve to mask the social construction of different forms of knowledge. In this view, the focus of criticism is on the classroom teacher who appears insensitive to the complex transmission of socially based definitions and expectations that function to reproduce and legitimize the dominant culture at the level of classroom instruction.[4] Teachers and other educational workers, in this case, often ignore questions concerning how they perceive their classrooms, how students make sense of what is presented to them, and how knowledge is mediated between teachers

(themselves) and students.

On the other hand, some neo-Marxist critics have attempted to explain how the politics of the dominant society is linked to the political character of the classroom social encounter. In this perspective, the focus shifts from an exclusive concern with how teachers and students construct knowledge to the ways in which the social order is legitimated and reproduced through the production and distribution of "acceptable" knowledge and classroom social processes.[5] Thus, neo-Marxist educators are not simply concerned with how teachers and students view knowledge; they are also concerned with the mechanisms of social control and how these mechanisms function to legitimate the beliefs and values underlying wider societal institutional arrangements.

Both views have led to a greater appreciation of the hermeneutic and political nature of public school pedagogy. Unfortunately, neither view has provided a thorough understanding of how the wider "culture of positivism," with its limited focus on objectivity, efficiency, and technique, is both embedded and reproduced in the form and content of public school curricula. While it is true that some phenomenologists have focused on the relationship between the social construction of classroom knowledge and the major tenets of positivism, they have generally ignored the forms and social practices involved in its transmission. On the other hand, while neo-Marxist critiques have emphasized the ideological underpinnings of classroom social practices, they have done so at the cost of providing an in-depth analysis of how specific forms of knowledge are produced, distributed, and legitimated in schools.[6]

While it is clear that the hermeneutic and political interests expressed by both groups must be used in a complementary fashion to analyze the interlocking beliefs and mechanisms that mediate between the wider culture of positivism and public school pedagogy, the conceptual foundation and distinct focus for such an analysis need to be further developed. This chapter attempts to contribute to that development by examining the culture of positivism and its relationship to classroom teaching through the lens of a focused social and educational problem, the alleged "loss

of interest in history" among American students and the larger public. This issue provides a unique vehicle for such an analysis because it presents a common denominator through which the connection between schools and the larger society might be clarified.

Beyond the death of history

Within the last decade, a growing chorus of voices has pointed to the public's growing sense of the "irrelevance" of history. Some social critics have decried the trend while others have supported it. For instance, the historian David Donald believes that the "death of history" is related to the end of the "age of abundance." History, in Donald's view, can no longer provide an insightful perspective for the future. Voicing the despair of a dying age, Donald resigns himself to a universe that appears unmanageable, a sociopolitical universe that has nothing to learn from history. Thus, he writes:

> The "lessons" taught by the American past are today not merely irrelevant but dangerous ... Perhaps my most useful function would be to disenthrall [students] from the spell of history, to help them see the irrelevance of the past ... [to] remind them to what a limited extent humans control their own destiny.[7]

Other critics, less pessimistic and more thoughtful, view the "death of history" as a crisis in historical consciousness itself, a crisis in the ability of the American people to remember those "lessons" of the past that illuminate the developmental preconditions of individual liberty and social freedom. These critics view the "crisis" in historical consciousness as a deplorable social phenomenon that buttresses the spiritual crisis of the 1970s and points to a visionless and politically reactionary future. In their analyses, the "irrelevance of history" argument contains conservative implications, implications that obscure the political nature of the problem: the notion that history has not become irrelevant, but rather that historical consciousness is being suppressed. To put it another way, history has been stripped of its

critical and transcendent content and can no longer provide society with the historical insights necessary for the development of a collective critical consciousness. In this view, the critical sense is inextricably rooted in the historical sense. In other words, modes of reasoning and interpretation develop a sharp critical sense to the degree that they pay attention to the flow of history. When lacking a sense of historical development, criticism is often blinded by the rule of social necessity that parades under the banner of so-called "natural laws." This assault on historical sensibility is no small matter. Herbert Marcuse claims that one consequence is a form of false consciousness, "the repression of society in the formation of concepts ... a confinement of experience, a restriction of meaning."[8] In one sense, then, the call to ignore history represents an assault on thinking itself.

While it is true that both radicals and conservatives have often drawn upon history to sustain their respective points of view, this should not obscure the potentially subversive nature of history. Nor should it obscure the changing historical forces that sometimes rely upon "history" to legitimate existing power structures. Historical consciousness is acceptable to the prevailing dominant interest when it can be used to buttress the existing social order. It becomes dangerous when its truth content highlights contradictions in the given society. As one philosopher writes, "Remembrance of the past might give rise to dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive content of memory."[9]

The suppression of history has been accurately labeled by Russell Jacoby as a form of "social amnesia," and he says: "Social amnesia is a society's repression of its own past ... memory driven out of mind by the social and economic dynamic of this society."[10] Jacoby's analysis is important because it situates the crisis in history in a specific sociohistorical context. If Jacoby is right, and I think he is, then the "crisis" in historical consciousness, at least its underlying ideological dimensions, can be explained in historical and political terms. This perspective can be put into sharper focus if we begin with an explanation of the changing nature of the mechanisms of social control over the last sixty years in the United States. To do this, we will have to turn briefly to the work of the

late Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci.

Gramsci was deeply concerned about what he saw as the changing modes of domination in the advanced industrial societies of the West. He claimed that with the rise of modern science and technology, social control was exercised less through the use of physical force (army, police, etc.) than through the distribution of an elaborate system of norms and imperatives. The latter were used to lend institutional authority a degree of unity and certainty, and provide it with an apparent universality and legitimation. Gramsci called this form of control "ideological hegemony," a form of control that not only manipulated consciousness but also saturated and constituted the daily experiences that shaped one's behavior.[11] Hence, ideological hegemony referred to those systems of practices, meanings, and values that provided legitimacy to the dominant society's institutional arrangements and interest.

Gramsci's analysis is crucial to understanding how cultural hegemony is used by ruling elites to reproduce their economic and political power. It helps us to focus on the myths and social processes that characterize a specific form of common sense, particularly as it is distributed through different agencies of socialization such as schools, families, trade unions, workplaces, and other ideological state apparatuses.[12] Thus, the concept of cultural hegemony provides a theoretical foundation for examining the dialectical relationship between economic production and social and cultural reproduction.[13] At the core of this perspective is the recognition that advanced industrial societies such as the United States iniquitously distribute not only economic goods and services but also certain forms of cultural capital, that is, "that system of meanings, abilities, language forms, and tastes that are directly and indirectly defined by dominant groups as socially legitimate."[14] This should not suggest that primary agencies of socialization in the United States simply mirror the dominant mode of economic production and function to process passive human beings into future occupational roles. This over-determined view of socialization and human nature is both vulgar and mystifying. What is suggested is that the assumptions, beliefs, and social processes that occur in the primary agencies of socialization neither "mirror" wider societal

interests nor are they autonomous from them. In other words, the correspondences and contradictions that mediate between institutions like schools and larger society exist in dialectical tension with each other and vary under specific historical conditions.[15]

It is within the parameters of the historically changing dialectical relationship between power and ideology that the social basis for the existing crisis in historical consciousness can be located. Moreover, it is also within this relationship that the role schooling plays in reproducing this crisis can be examined. Underlying the suppression of historical consciousness in the social sphere and the loss of interest in history in the sphere of schooling in the United States at the present time are the rise of science and technology, and the subsequent growth of the culture of positivism. It is this historical development that will be briefly traced and analyzed before the role that public school pedagogy plays in reproducing the crisis in historical consciousness is examined.

With the development of science and new technology in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, both the pattern of culture and the existing concept of progress changed considerably. Both of these changes set the foundation for the suppression of historical consciousness. As popular culture became more standardized in its attempt to reproduce not only goods but also the need to consume those goods, "industrialized" culture reached into new forms of communication to spread its message. Realms of popular culture, formerly limited to dance and dime store novels, were now expanded by almost all of the media of artistic expression.[16] The consolidation of culture by new technologies of mass communication, coupled with newly found social science disciplines such as social psychology and sociology, ushered in powerful new modes of administration in the public sphere.[17]

Twentieth-century capitalism gave rise to mass advertising and its attendant gospel of unending consumerism. All spheres of social existence were now informed, though far from entirely controlled, by the newly charged rationality of advanced industrial capitalism. Mass marketing, for example, drastically changed the

realms of work and leisure and, as Stuart Ewen has pointed out, set the stage for the contestation and control over daily life.

> During the 1920s the stage was set by which the expanding diversity of corporate organization might do cultural battle with a population which was in need of, and demanding, social change. The stage was in the theatre of daily life, and it was within the intimacies of that reality—productive, cultural, social, psychological—that a corporate pièce-de-théâtre was being scripted.[18]

While industrialized culture was radically transforming daily life, scientific management was altering traditional patterns of work. For instance, the integration of skill and imagination that had once characterized craft production gave way to a fragmented work process in which conception was separated from both the execution and the experience of work. One result was a fragmented work process that reduced labor to a series of preordained and lifeless gestures.[19]

Accompanying changes in the workplace and the realm of leisure was a form of technocratic legitimation based on a positivist view of science and technology. This form of rationality defined itself through the alleged unalterable and productive effects the developing forces of technology and science were having on the foundations of twentieth-century progress. Whereas progress in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was linked to the development of moral self-improvement and self-discipline in the interest of building a better society, progress in the twentieth century was stripped of its concern with ameliorating the human condition and became applicable only to the realm of material and technical growth.[20] What was once considered humanly possible, a question involving values and human ends, was now reduced to the issue of what was technically possible. The application of scientific methodology to new forms of technology appeared as a social force generated by its own laws, laws governed by a rationality that appeared to exist above and beyond human control.[21]

Inherent in this notion of progress and its underlying technocratic rationality is the source of logic that denies the

importance of historical consciousness. Moreover, this form of rationality serves to buttress the status quo by undermining the dialectic of human potential and will. As a mode of legitimation, this form of rationality has become the prevailing cultural hegemony. As the prevailing consciousness, it celebrates the continued enlargement of the comforts of life and the productivity of labor through increasing submission of the public to laws that govern the technical mastery of both human beings and nature. The price for increased productivity is the continued refinement and administration of not simply the forces of production but the constitutive nature of consciousness itself. For example, in spite of its own claims, positivist rationality contains a philosophy of history that "robs" history of its critical possibilities. Thomas McCarthy writes that this philosophy of history

> is based on the questionable thesis that human beings control their destinies to the degree to which social techniques are applied, and that human destiny is capable of being rationally guided to the extent of cybernetic control and the application of these techniques.[22]

Rethinking the culture of positivism

If critical consciousness, in part, represents an ability to think about the process as well as the genesis of various stages of reflection, then this notion of history contains few possibilities for its development as a critical and emancipatory force.

This form of rationality now represents an integral part of the social and political system of the United States and can be defined as the culture of positivism. If we are to understand its role in suppressing historical consciousness, the culture of positivism must be viewed through its wider function as a dominant ideology, powerfully communicated through various social agencies. The term "positivism" has gone through so many changes since it was first used by Saint-Simon and Comte that it is virtually impossible to narrow its meaning to a specific school of thought or a well-defined perspective. Thus, any discussion of positivism will be necessarily broad and devoid of clear-cut boundaries. However, we

can speak of the culture of positivism as the legacy of positivistic thought, a legacy which includes those convictions, attitudes, techniques, and concepts that still exercise a powerful and pervasive influence on modern thought.[23]

"Culture of positivism," in this context, is used to make a distinction between a specific philosophic movement and *a form* of cultural hegemony. The distinction is important because it shifts the focus of debate about the tenets of positivism from the terrain of philosophy to the field of ideology. For our purposes, it will be useful to indicate some of the main elements of "positivism." This will be followed by a short analysis of how the culture of positivism undermines any viable notion of critical historical consciousness.

The major assumptions that underlie the culture of positivism are drawn from the logic and method of inquiry associated with the natural sciences.[24] Based upon the logic of scientific methodology, with its interest in explanation, prediction, and technical control, the principle of rationality in the natural sciences was seen as vastly superior to the hermeneutic principles underlying the speculative social sciences. Modes of rationality that relied upon or supported interpretative procedures rated little scientific status from those defending the assumptions and methods of the natural sciences. For instance, Theodore Abel echoed a sentiment about hermeneutic understanding that still retains its original force among many supporters of the culture of positivism.

> Primarily the operation of Verstehen (understanding human behavior) does two things: It relieves us of a sense of apprehension in connection with behavior that is unfamiliar or unexpected and it is a source of "hunches," which help us in the formulation of hypotheses. The operation of Verstehen does not, however, add to our store of knowledge, because it consists of the application of knowledge already validated by personal experience; nor does it serve as a means of verification. The probability of a connection can be ascertained only by means of objective, experimental, and statistical tests.[25]

Given the positivist emphasis on technical control and coordination, it is not surprising that the role of theory in this perspective functions as a foundation to boost scientific methodology. At the heart of this perspective is the assumption that theory plays a vital role in manipulating certain variables to either bring about a certain state of affairs, or to prevent its occurrence.[26] The basis for deciding what state of affairs is to be brought about, or the interests such a state of affairs might serve, are not questions that are given much consideration. Thus, theory, as viewed here, becomes circumscribed within certain "methodological prohibitions."[27] It was Auguste Comte who laid the foundation for the subordination of theory to the refinement of means when he insisted that theory must be "founded in the nature of things and the laws that govern them, not in the imaginary powers that the human mind attributes to itself, erroneously believing itself to be a free agent and the center of the universe."[28]

What is missing from Comte's perspective can be seen when it is instructively compared to the classical Greek notion of theory. In classical thought, theory was seen as a way men could free themselves from dogma and opinions in order to provide an orientation for ethical action.[29] In other words, theory was viewed as an extension of ethics and was linked to the search for truth and justice. The prevailing positivist consciousness has forgotten the function that theory once served. Under the prevailing dominant ideology, theory has been stripped of its concern with ends and ethics, and appears "unable to free itself from the ends set and given to science by the pre-given empirical reality."[30] The existing perspective on theory provides the background for examining another central tendency in the culture of positivism: the notion that knowledge is value-free.

Since theory functions in the interest of technical progress in the culture of positivism, the meaning of knowledge is limited to the realm of technical interests. In brief, the foundation for knowledge is drawn from two sources: "the empirical or natural sciences, and the formal disciplines such as logic and mathematics."[31] In this scheme, knowledge consists of a realm of "objective facts" to be collected and arranged so they can be

marshaled in the interest of empirical verification. Knowledge is relevant to the degree that it can be viewed "as description and explanation of objectified data, conceived—*a priori*—as cases of instances of possible laws."[32] Thus, knowledge becomes identified with scientific methodology and its orientation towards self-subsistent facts whose law-like connections can be grasped descriptively. Questions concerning the social construction of knowledge and the constitutive interests behind the selection, organization, and evaluation of "brute facts" are buried under the assumption that knowledge is objective and value-free. Information or "data" taken from the subjective world of intuition, insight, philosophy, and non-scientific theoretical frameworks is not acknowledged as being relevant. Values, then, appear as the nemeses of "facts," and are viewed at best as interesting, and at worst as irrational and subjective emotional responses.[33]

The central assumption by which the culture of positivism rationalizes its position on theory and knowledge is the notion of objectivity, the separation of values from knowledge and methodological inquiry alike. Not only are "facts" looked upon as objective, but the researcher him- or herself is seen as engaging in value-free inquiry, far removed from the untidy world of beliefs and values. Thus, it appears that values, judgments, and normative-based inquiry are dismissed because they do not admit of either truth or falsity. It seems that empirical verification exacts a heavy price from those concerned about "the nature of truth."[34]

The severance of knowledge and research from value claims may appear to be admirable to some, but it hides more than it uncovers. Of course, this is not to suggest that challenging the value-neutrality claims of the culture of positivism is tantamount to supporting the use of bias, prejudice, and superstition in scientific inquiry. Instead, what is espoused is that the very notion of objectivity is based on the use of normative criteria established by communities of scholars and intellectual workers in any given field. The point is that intellectual inquiry and research free from values and norms are impossible to achieve. To separate values from facts, social inquiry from ethical considerations, is pointless. As Howard Zinn points out, it is like trying to draw a map that illustrates every detail on a chosen piece of terrain.[35] But this is

not just a simple matter of intellectual error; it is an ethical failing as well. The notion that theory, facts, and inquiry can be objectively determined and used falls prey to a set of values that are both conservative and mystifying in their political orientation.

While it is impossible to provide a fully detailed critique of the assumptions that underlie the culture of positivism, it is appropriate to focus on how these assumptions undermine the development of a critical historical consciousness and further serve to diminish public communication and political action. Consequently, it is important to look briefly at how these assumptions function as part of the dominant ideology. Functioning both as an ideology and a productive force in the interest of a ruling elite, the culture of positivism cannot be viewed as simply a set of beliefs, smoothly functioning so as to rationalize the existing society. It is more than that. The point here is that the culture of positivism is not just a set of ideas, disseminated by the culture industry; it is also a material force, a set of material practices that are embedded in the routines and experiences of our daily lives.[36] In a sense, the daily rhythm of our lives is structured, in part, by the technical imperatives of a society that objectifies all it touches. This is not meant to suggest that there are no contradictions and challenges to the system. They exist, but all too often the contradictions result in challenges that lack a clear-cut political focus. Put another way, challenges to the system often function as a cathartic force rather than as a legitimate form of protest; fairly frequently they end up serving to maintain the very conditions and consciousness that spurred them in the first place. Within such a posture, there is little room for the development of an active, critical historical consciousness.

The present crisis in historical consciousness is linked to the American public's deepening commitment to an ever-expanding network of administrative systems and social control technologies. One consequence of this has been the removal of political decisions from public discourse by reducing these decisions to technical problems answerable to technical solutions. Underlying this crisis are the major assumptions of the culture of positivism, assumptions which abrogate the need for a viable theory of ideology, ethics, and political action.

Finally, inherent in this perspective is a passive model of humanity. The positivist view of knowledge, "facts," and ethics has neither use nor room for a historical reality in which humanity is able to constitute its own meanings, order its own experiences, or struggle against the forces that prevent it from doing so. Meaning, like "time and memory," becomes objectified in this tradition and is eliminated as a radical construct by being made to exist independently of human experience and intention. In a society that flattens contradictions and eliminates evaluative and intellectual conflict, the concept of historical consciousness appears as a disturbing irrationality. Marcuse puts it well:

> Recognition and relation to the past as present counteracts the functionalization of thought by and in the established reality. It militates against the closing of the universe of discourse and behavior; it renders possible the development of concepts which destabilize and transcend the closed universe by comprehending it as historical universe. Confronted with the given society as object of its reflection, critical thought becomes historical consciousness; as such it is essentially judgment.[44]

I have argued so far that the loss of interest in history in the public sphere can only be viewed within the context of existing sociopolitical arrangements, and that what has been described as a marginal problem by some social critics, in essence, represents a fundamental problem in which the dominant culture actively functions to suppress the development of a critical historical consciousness among the populace.[45] This is not meant to imply a conscious conspiracy on the part of an "invisible" ruling elite. The very existence, interests, and consciousness of the dominant class are deeply integrated into a belief system that legitimizes its rule. This suggests that existing institutional arrangements reproduce themselves, in part, through cultural hegemony in the form of a positivist worldview that becomes a self-delusion and leaves little room for an oppositional historical consciousness to develop in the society at large. In other words, the suppression of historical consciousness works itself out in the field of ideology. In part, this is due to an underlying "self-perpetuating" logic that shapes the

mechanisms and boundaries of the culture of positivism. This logic is situated in a structure of dominance and exists to meet the most fundamental needs of the existing power relations and their corresponding social formations.[46] It appears to be a logic that is believed by the oppressed and oppressors alike, those who benefit from it as well as those who do not.

Depoliticizing education through historical amnesia

I now want to examine how the culture of positivism has influenced the process of schooling, particularly in relation to the way educators have defined the history "crisis" and its relationship to educational theory and practice at the classroom level. I will begin by analyzing how the nature of the loss of interest in history has been defined by leading members of the educational establishment.

Unlike critics such as Lasch and Marcuse, American educators have defined the "loss of interest" in history as an academic rather than political problem. For instance, the Organization of American Historians (OAH) published findings indicating that history was in a crisis and that the situation was "nationwide, affecting both secondary schools and higher education in every part of the country."[47] According to the OAH report, the value of history is being impugned by the growing assumption on the part of many educators that history is not a very practical subject. What is meant by "practical" appears problematic. For example, the Arizona Basic Goals Commission urged teachers to make history more practical: to place stress on "positive rather than negative aspects of the American past, eschew conflict as a theme, inculcate pride in the accomplishments of the nation and show the influence of rational, creative, and spiritual forces in shaping the nation's growth."[48]

For other educators, making history practical has meant reversing the growing divisions and specializations in history course offerings at all levels of education. This group would put back into the curriculum the broad-based history courses that

were offered in the 1950s. In this perspective, the loss of interest in history among students has resulted from the fragmented perspective provided by specialized offerings in other disciplines. Warren L. Hickman sums this position up well when he writes:

> The utility of history is perspective, and that is in direct opposition to specialization at the undergraduate level. History's position in the curriculum, and its audience, have been eroded steadily as specialization, fragmentation, and proliferation of its offerings have increased.[49]

Both of these responses view the loss of interest in history as a purely academic problem. Severed from the socioeconomic context in which they operate, schools, in both of these views, appear to exist above and beyond the imperatives of power and ideology. Given this perspective, the erosion of interest in history is seen in isolation from the rest of society, and the "problem" is dealt with in technical rather than political terms, that is, history can be rescued by restructuring academic courses in one way or another. These positions, in fact, represent part of the very problem they define. Collapsing the general into the particular results in severing isolated issues from larger public considerations, thus surrendering any sense of history, context, and politics. The loss of interest in history in schools is due less to the changes in course structure and offerings, though these have some effect, as much as it is due to the growing impact of the culture of positivism on the process of schooling itself, and in this particular case the social studies field. It is to this issue that we will now turn.

Social studies and the culture of positivism

Classroom pedagogy in varying degrees is inextricably related to a number of social and political factors. Some of the more important include: the dominant societal rationality and its effect on curriculum thought and practice; the system of attitudes and values that govern how classroom teachers select, organize, and evaluate knowledge and classroom social relationships; and,

finally, the way students perceive their classroom experiences and how they act on those perceptions. By focusing on these limited but nonetheless important areas, we can flesh out the relationships among power, ideology, and critical pedagogy, particularly as applied to the social sciences.

As I have pointed out, within the United States the social sciences have been modeled largely against the prevailing assumptions and methods of the natural sciences.[50] In spite of recent attacks on this mainstream perspective, the idea of social science conceived after the model of the natural sciences exerts a strong influence on contemporary educational thought and practice. Historically, the curriculum field, in general, has increasingly endeavored to become a science. That is, it has sought to develop a rationality based on objectivity, consistency, "hard data," and replicability. As Walter Feinberg writes, "The social scientists and policy makers who laboured in the field of education in this century were born under the star of Darwin, and ... this influence was to have a profound impact upon the direction of educational theory."[51]

Moreover, in the 1970s, as financial aid to education has decreased and radical critics have dwindled in number, the positivist orientation to schooling appears to be stronger than ever. Calls for accountability in education, coupled with the back-to-basics and systems-management approaches to education, have strengthened rather than weakened the traditional positivist paradigm in the curriculum field. As William Pinar and others have pointed out, the field is presently dominated by traditionalists and conceptual-empiricists, and while both groups view curriculum in different ways, neither group steps outside of the positivist or technocratic worldview.[52]

These two groups must be viewed in something other than merely descriptive, categorical terms. Both the assumptions they hold and the modes of inquiry they pursue are based upon a worldview that shapes their respective educational perspectives. Moreover, these worldviews precede and channel their work and influence the development of public school curricula.[53] This suggests that, whether adherents to these positions realize it or not, their theoretical frameworks are inherently valuative and

political; thus, they share a relationship to the wider social order. Thomas Popkewitz captures the essence of this when he writes:

> [E]ducational theory is a form of political affirmation. The selection and organization of pedagogical activities give emphasis to certain people, events and things. Educational theory is potent because its language has prescriptive qualities. A theory "guides" individuals to reconsider their personal world in light of more abstract concepts, generalizations and principles. These more abstract categories are not neutral; they give emphasis to certain institutional relationships as good, reasonable and legitimate. Visions of society, interests to be favored and courses of action to be followed are sustained in history.[54]

One way of looking at the political and valuative nature of educational thought and practice is through what Thomas Kuhn has called a "paradigm." A paradigm refers to the shared images, assumptions, and practices that characterize a community of scholars in a given field. In any specific field one can find different paradigms; thus, it is reasonable to conclude that any field of study is usually marked by competing intellectual and normative perspectives. As Kuhn has written: "A paradigm governs, in the first instance, not a subject matter but a group of practitioners."[55]

The concept of paradigm is important not merely because it guides practitioners in their work; it also illustrates that paradigms are related to the nexus of social and political values in the larger society. That is, the genesis, development, and effects of a given paradigm have to be measured against wider social and cultural commitments. In a simple sense, a paradigm might be viewed as in opposition or in support of the dominant ideology, but it cannot be judged independently of it. Educational workers in public education are not only born into a specific historical context; they embody its history in varying ways both as a state of consciousness and as sedimented experience, as a felt reality. To what degree they critically mediate that history and its attendant ideology is another issue. Thus, educational practitioners can be viewed as not only products of history but producers of history as well. And it is this dynamic process of socialization that links them

More guarded critics such as George Beauchamp acknowledge that normative-based curriculum theories have their place in the field, but, true to the spirit of his own view, he reminds us that "we" need to "grow up in the use of conventional modes of research in curriculum before we can hope to have the ingenuity to develop new ones."[61] In both Popham's and Beauchamp's arguments, the underlying notion of the superiority of efficiency and control as educational goals are accepted as given and then pointed to as a rationale for curriculum models that enshrine them as guiding principles. The circularity of the argument can best be gauged by the nature of the ideology that it thinly camouflages.

Missing from this form of educational rationality is the complex interplay among knowledge, power, and ideology. The sources of this failing can be traced to the confusion between objectivity and objectivism, a confusion which, once identified, lays bare the conservative ideological underpinnings of the positivist educational paradigm. If objectivity in classroom teaching refers to the attempt to be scrupulously careful about minimizing biases, false beliefs, and discriminating behavior in rationalizing and developing pedagogical thought and practice, then this is a laudable notion that should govern our work. By contrast, objectivism refers to an orientation that is atemporal and ahistorical in nature. In this orientation, "fact" becomes the foundation for all forms of knowledge, and values and intentionality lose their political potency by being abstracted from the notion of meaning. When objectivism replaces objectivity, the result, as Bernstein points out, "is not an innocent mistaken epistemological doctrine."[62] It becomes a potent form of ideology that smothers the tug of conscience and blinds its adherents to the ideological nature of their own frame of reference.

Objectivism is the cornerstone of the culture of positivism in public education. Adulating "facts" and empirically based discourse, positivist rationality provides no basis for acknowledging its own historically contingent character. As such, it represents not only an assault on critical thinking; it also grounds itself in the politics of "what is." As Gouldner points out, "It is the tacit affirmation that 'what is,' the status quo, is basically sound."[63] Assuming that problems are basically technocratic in

nature, it elevates methodology to the status of a truth and sets aside questions about moral purposes as matters of individual opinion. Buried beneath this "end of ideology" thesis is a form of positivist pedagogy that tacitly supports deeply conservative views about human nature, society, knowledge, and social action.

Objectivism suggests more than a false expression of neutrality. In essence, it tacitly represents a denial of ethical values. Its commitment to rigorous techniques, mathematical expression, and lawlike regularities supports not only *one* form of scientific inquiry but social formations that are inherently repressive and elitist as well. Its elimination of "ideology" works in the service of the ideology of social engineers. By denying the relevance of certain norms in guiding and shaping how we ought to live with each other, it tacitly supports principles of hierarchy and control. Built into its objective quest for certainty is not simply the elimination of intellectual and valuative conflict, but the suppression of free will, intentionality, and collective struggle. Clearly, such interests can move beyond the culture of positivism only to the degree that they are able to make a distinction between emancipatory political practice and technological administrative control.

Unfortunately, "methodology madness" is rampant in public school pedagogy and has resulted in a form of curricular design and implementation that *substitutes* technological control for democratic processes and goals. For instance, Fenwick W. English, a former superintendent of schools and curriculum designer, provides a model for curriculum design in which technique and schooling become synonymous. Echoing the principles of the scientific management movement of the 1920s, English states that there are three primary developments in curriculum design. These are worth quoting in full.

> The first is to establish the mission of the school system in terms that are assessable and replicable. The second is to effectively and efficiently configure the resources of the system to accomplish the mission. The third is to use feedback obtained to make adjustments in order to keep the mission within agreed-upon costs.[64]

In perspectives such as this, unfortunately pervasive in the curriculum field, manipulation takes the place of learning, and any attempt at intersubjective understanding is substituted for a science of educational technology in which "choices exist only when they make the systems more rational, efficient, and controllable."[65] In a critical sense, the Achilles heel of the culture of positivism in public school pedagogy is its refusal to acknowledge its own ideology as well as the relationship between knowledge and social control. The claims to objectivism and certainty are themselves ideological and can be most clearly revealed in the prevailing view of school knowledge and classroom social relationships.

The way knowledge is viewed and used in public school classrooms, particularly at the elementary through secondary levels, rests on a number of assumptions that reveal its positivist ideological underpinnings. In other words, the way classroom teachers view knowledge, the way knowledge is mediated through specific classroom methodologies, and the way students are taught to view knowledge all structure classroom experiences in a manner that is consistent with the principles of positivism.

In this view, knowledge is objective, "bounded and 'out there.' "[66] Classroom knowledge is often treated as an external body of information, the production of which appears to be independent of human beings. From this perspective, objective knowledge is viewed as independent of time and place; it becomes universalized, ahistorical knowledge. Moreover, it is expressed in a language that is basically technical and allegedly value-free. This language is instrumental and defines knowledge in terms that are empirically verifiable and suited to finding the best possible means for goals that go unquestioned.[67] Knowledge, then, becomes not only countable and measurable; it also becomes impersonal. Teaching in this pedagogical paradigm is usually discipline-based and treats subject matter in a compartmentalized and atomized fashion.[68]

Another important point concerning knowledge in this view is that it takes on the appearance of being context-free. That is, knowledge is divorced from the political and cultural traditions that give it meaning. And in this sense, it can be viewed as

technical knowledge, the knowledge of instrumentality.[69] Stanley Aronowitz points out that this form of empiricist reasoning is one in which "reality is dissolved into object-hood,"[70] and results in students being so overwhelmed by the world of "facts" that they have "enormous difficulty making the jump to concepts which controvert appearances."[71]

By resigning itself to the registering of "facts," the positivist view of knowledge not only represents a false mode of reasoning that undermines reflective thinking; it is also a form of legitimation that obscures the relationship between "valued" knowledge and the constellation of economic, political, and social interests that such knowledge supports. This is clearly revealed in a number of important studies that have analyzed how knowledge is presented in elementary and secondary social studies textbooks.[72]

For example, Jean Anyon found, in her analysis of the content of elementary social studies textbooks, that the "knowledge which 'counts' as social studies knowledge will tend to be that knowledge which provides formal justification for, and legitimation of, prevailing institutional arrangements, and forms of conduct and beliefs."[73] In addition to pointing out that social studies textbooks provide a systematic exposure to selected aspects of the dominant culture, she found that material in the texts about dominant institutional arrangements was presented in a way that eschewed social conflict, social injustice, and institutional violence. Instead, social harmony and social consensus were the pivotal concepts that described American society. Quoting Fox and Hess, she points out that in a study of fifty-eight elementary social studies textbooks used in eight states, the United States political system was described in one-dimensional, consensual terms. "People in the textbooks are pictured as easily getting together, discussing their differences and rationally arriving at decisions ... [moreover,] everyone accepts the decisions."[74] These textbooks present a problematic assumption as an unquestioned truth: conflict and dissent among different social groups are presented as inherently bad. Not only is American society abstracted from the dictates of class and power in the consensus view of history, but students are viewed as value-receiving and value-transmitting persons.[75] There

is no room in consensus history for intellectual, moral, and political conflict. Such a view would have to treat people as *value-creating* agents. While it is true that some of the newer elementary and secondary texts discuss controversial issues more often, "social conflict" is still avoided.[76]

Popkewitz has argued cogently that many of the social studies curriculum projects that came out of the discipline-based curriculum movements of the 1960s did more to impede critical inquiry than to promote it. Based on fundamentally flawed assumptions about theory, values, knowledge, and instructional techniques in social studies curricular design and implementation, these projects "ignored the multiplicity of perspectives found in any one discipline."[77] With the social nature of conflict and skepticism removed from these projects, ideas appear as inert and ahistorical, reified categories whose underlying ideology is matched only by the tunnel vision they produce.

Human intentionality and problem-solving in these texts are either ignored or stripped of any viable, critical edge. For example, in one set of texts pioneered under the inquiry method, comparative analysis exercises are undercut by the use of socially constructed biases built into definitional terms that distort the subjects to be compared. In analyzing the political systems of the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States is labeled as a "democratic system" and the Soviet Union as a "totalitarian state."[78] Needless to say, the uncriticized and simplistic dichotomy revealed in categories such as these represents nothing other than an updated version of the vulgar "democracy" versus "communism" dichotomy that characterized so much of the old social studies of the 1950s and early 1960s. While the labels have changed, the underlying typifications have not. What is new is not necessarily better. The "alleged" innovative discipline-centered social studies curriculum of the last fifteen years has based its reputation on its claim to promote critical inquiry. Instead, this approach appears to have created "new forms of mystification which make the social world seem mechanistic and predeterministic."[79]

A more critical view of knowledge would define it as a social construction linked to human intentionality and behavior. But if

lines or administrative offices, they are likely to present the world around as given, probably unchangeable and predefined.[84]

For many students, the categories that shape their learning experience and mediate their relationship between the school and the larger society have little to do with the value of critical thinking and social commitment. In this case, the *objectification* of the students themselves by the positivist pedagogical model leaves students with little reason to generate their own meanings, to capitalize on their own cultural capital, or to participate in evaluating their own classroom experiences. The principles of order, control, and certainty in positivist pedagogy appear inherently opposed to such an approach.

In the objectified forms of communication that characterize positivist public school pedagogy, it is difficult for students to perceive the socially constructed basis of classroom knowledge. The arbitrary division between objective and subjective knowledge tends to remain undetected by students and teachers alike. The results are not inconsequential. Thus, though the routines and practices of classroom teachers and the perceptions and behavior of their students are sedimented in varying layers of meaning, questions concerning how these layers of meaning are mediated and in whose interest they function are given little attention in the learning and research paradigms that dominate public school pedagogy in recent times. The behavioral and management approaches to such pedagogy, particularly at the level of middle and secondary education, reduce learning to a set of practices that neither defines nor responds critically to the basic normative categories that shape day-to-day classroom methods and evaluation procedures. As C. A. Bowers writes, "the classroom can become a precarious place indeed, particularly when neither the teacher nor the student is fully aware of the hidden cultural messages being communicated and reinforced."[85]

The objectification of meaning results in the objectification of thought itself, a posture that the culture of positivism reproduces and celebrates in both the wider society and in public schools. In the public schools, prevailing research procedures in the curriculum field capitalize upon as well as reproduce the most

basic assumptions of the positivist paradigm. For instance, methodological elegance in educational research appears to rate higher than its overall purpose or its truth value. The consequences are not lost on schools. As one critic points out:

> Educational research has social and political ramifications which are as important as the tests of reliability. First, people tacitly accept institutional assumptions, some of which are denied by school professionals themselves. Achievement, intelligence and "use of time" are accepted as useful variables for stating problems about schools and these categories provide the basis for research. Inquiry enables researchers to see how school categories relate, but it does not test assumptions or implications underlying the school categories. For example, there is no question about the nature of the tasks at which children spend their time. Research conclusions are conceived within parameters provided by school administrators. Second, researchers accept social myths as moral prescriptions. Social class, social occupation (engineer or machinist) or divorce are accepted as information which should be used in decision making. These assumptions maintain a moral quality and criteria which may justify social inequality. Third, the research orientation tacitly directs people to consider school failure as caused by those who happen to come to its classes. Social and educational assumptions are unscrutinized.[86]

It does not seem unreasonable to conclude at this point that critical thinking as a mode of reasoning appears to be in eclipse in both the wider society and the sphere of public school education. Aronowitz has written that critical thought has lost its contemplative character and "has been debased to the level of technical intelligence, subordinate to meeting operational problems."[87] What does this have to do with the suppression of historical consciousness? This becomes clearer when we analyze the relationships among critical thinking, historical consciousness, and the notion of emancipation.

If we think of emancipation as praxis, as both an understanding as well as a form of action designed to overthrow structures of domination, we can begin to illuminate the interplay among

historical consciousness, critical thinking, and emancipatory behavior. At the level of understanding, critical thinking represents the ability to step beyond common-sense assumptions and to be able to evaluate them in terms of their genesis, development, and purpose. In short, critical thinking cannot be viewed simply as a form of progressive reasoning; it must be seen as a fundamental political act. In this perspective, critical thinking becomes a mode of reasoning that, as Merleau-Ponty points out, represents the realization that "I am able," meaning that one can use individual capacities and collective possibilities "to go beyond the created structures in order to create others."[88] Critical thinking as a political act means that human beings must emerge from their own "submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled."[89] Not only does this indicate that they must act with others to intervene in the shaping of history, it also means that they must "escape" from their own history; that is, that which society has made of them. As Sartre writes, "you become what you are in the context of what others have made of you."[90] This is a crucial point, and one that links praxis and historical consciousness. For we must turn to history in order to understand the traditions that have shaped our individual biographies and intersubjective relationships with other human beings. This critical attentiveness to one's own history represents an important element in examining the socially constructed sources underlying one's formative processes. To become aware of the processes of historical self-formation indicates an important beginning in breaking through the taken-for-granted assumptions that legitimize existing institutional arrangements.[91] Therefore, critical thinking demands a form of hermeneutic understanding that is historically grounded. Similarly, it must be stressed that the capacity for an historically grounded critique is inseparable from those conditions that foster collective communication and critical dialogue. In this case, such conditions take as a starting point the need to delegitimize the culture of positivism and the socioeconomic structure it supports.

Conclusion

Schools play a crucial, though far from mechanistic, role in reproducing the culture of positivism. While schools function so as to mediate the social, political, and economic tensions of the wider society, they do so in a complex and contradictory fashion. This is an essential point. Schools operate in accordance, either implicitly or explicitly, with their established roles in society. But they do so in terms not entirely determined by the larger society. Diverse institutional restraints, different school cultures, varied regional and community forces, different social formations, and a host of other factors lend varying degrees of autonomy and complexity to the school setting. All of these factors must be analyzed and taken into account if the mechanisms of domination and social control in day-to-day school life are to be understood.[92]

Moreover, the assumptions and methods that characterize schooling are themselves representations of the historical process. But the mechanisms of social control that characterize school life are not simply the factual manifestations of the culture of positivism. They also represent an historical condition that has functioned to transform human needs as well as buttress dominant social and political institutions. Put another way, the prevailing mode of technocratic rationality that permeates both the schools and the larger society has not just been tacked on to the existing social order. It has developed historically over the last century and with particular intensity in the last fifty years; consequently, it deeply saturates our collective experiences, practices, and routines. Thus, to overcome the culture of positivism means that social studies educators will have to do more than exchange one set of principles of social organization for another. They will have to construct alternative social formations and worldviews that affect both the consciousness as well as the deep vital structure of needs in their students.[93]

Unfortunately, classroom teachers and curriculum developers, in general, have been unaware of the historical nature of their own fields. This is not meant to suggest that they should be blamed for either the present failings in public education or the suppression of historical consciousness and critical thinking in the schools. It simply means that the pervasiveness of the culture of positivism and its attendant common-sense assumptions exert a powerful

mode of influence on the process of schooling. Moreover, this analysis does not suggest that there is little that teachers can do to change the nature of schooling and the present structure of society. Teachers at all levels of schooling represent a potentially powerful force for social change. But one thing should be clear: the present crisis in history, in essence, is not an academic problem but a political problem. It is a problem that speaks to a form of technological domination that goes far beyond the schools and permeates every sphere of our social existence. There is a lesson to be learned here. What classroom teachers can and must do is work in their respective roles to develop pedagogical theories and methods that link self-reflection and understanding with a commitment to change the nature of the larger society. There are a number of strategies that teachers at all levels of schooling can use in their classrooms. In general terms, they can question the common-sense assumptions that shape their own lives as well as those assumptions that influence and legitimize existing forms of public school classroom knowledge, teaching styles, and evaluation. In adopting such a critical stance while concomitantly reconstructing new educational theories and practices, classroom teachers can help to raise the political consciousness of themselves, their fellow teachers, and their students.[94]

In more specific terms, social studies teachers can treat as problematic those socially constructed assumptions that underlie the concerns of curriculum, classroom social relationships, and classroom evaluation. They can make these issues problematic by raising fundamental questions such as: What counts as social studies knowledge? How is this knowledge produced and legitimized? Whose interests does this knowledge serve? Who has access to this knowledge? How is this knowledge distributed and reproduced in the classroom? What kinds of classroom social relationships serve to parallel and reproduce the social relations of production in the wider society? How do the prevailing methods of evaluation serve to legitimize existing forms of knowledge? What are the contradictions that exist between the ideology embodied in existing forms of social studies knowledge and the objective social reality?

Similarly, questions such as these, which focus on the

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