

*Cultural Studies and Education in Dark Times:  
The Assault on American Democracy*

by

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In the aftermath of the election of George W. Bush to the presidency in 2004, democracy is being threatened as at no other time in the recent past and the United States may be on the verge of surrendering its democratic ideals, practices, and values to an emerging authoritarianism that is casting a heavy shadow across America and its neighbors at the present historical moment. The sources of this threat are multiple. **The first is a market fundamentalism through which** the values of the market and the ruthless workings of finance capital become the template for organizing the rest of society. Everybody is now a customer or client, and every relationship is ultimately judged in bottom-line, cost-effective terms **as the neoliberal mantra “privatize or perish” is repeated over and over again.** **Responsible citizens** are replaced by an assemblage of entrepreneurial subjects, each tempered in the virtue of self-reliance and forced to face the increasingly difficult challenges of the social order alone. Freedom is no longer about securing equality, social justice, or the public welfare, but about unhampered trade in goods, financial capital, and commodities. As the logic of capital trumps democratic sovereignty, low-intensity warfare at home chips away at democratic freedoms, and high-intensity warfare abroad delivers democracy with bombs, tanks, and chemical warfare. The consequences for politics are devastating. As Paul Krugman points out, “The hijacking of public policy by private interests” parallels “the downward spiral in governance.”<sup>1</sup>

The global cost of these neoliberal commitments is massive human suffering and death, delivered not only in the form of bombs and the barbaric practices of occupying armies, but also in structural adjustment policies in which the drive for land, resources, profits, water, and goods are implemented by global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Global lawlessness and armed violence accompany the imperative of free trade, the “virtues” of a market without boundaries, and the promise of a Western-style democracy imposed through military solutions. In a rare moment of truth, Thomas Friedman, the famous columnist for the *New York Times*, precisely argued for the use of US power - including military force - to support this anti-democratic world order. And claimed that “The hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist ... And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley's technologies to flourish is called the US Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.”<sup>ii</sup> As Mark Rupert points out, “In Friedman's twisted world, if people are to realize their deepest aspirations - the longing for a better life which comes from their very souls - they must stare down the barrel of Uncle Sam's gun.”<sup>iii</sup>

Advocates of neoliberalism wage a war against the gains of the welfare state, renounce its commitment to collective provision of public goods, and ruthlessly urge the urban poor, homeless, elderly, and disabled to rely on their own initiative. As the state gives up its role as the guardian of the public interest and public goods, reactionary politics takes the place of democratic governance. **As the government is hollowed out and privatization schemes infect all aspects of society, two serious consequences are** a growing gap between the rich and the poor and the downward

spiral of millions of Americans into poverty and despair. The haunting images of dead bodies floating in the flooded streets of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina along with thousands of African-Americans stranded in streets, abandoned in the Louisiana Superdome, and waiting to be rescued for days on the roofs of flooded houses serve as just one register of the despairing racism, inequality, and poverty in America. The stark realities of race and class divisions along with the widening reach of poverty, racism, and the abuse of human rights are also visible in an array of troubling statistics. **For instance, the poverty rate in the United States rose to 12.5 percent in 2004—and includes 35.9 million people. The rate of child poverty rose in 2004 to 17.6 percent boosting the number of poor children to 12.9 million. For African-Americans the poverty rate was twice the national rate with 24.4 percent of blacks living below the poverty line. Moreover, children are a disproportionate share of the poor in the U.S. Although they are 26 percent of the total population, they constitute 39 percent of the poor. Moreover 45 million people are uninsured in the US, and the number has increased by 6 million since 2000, the year George W. Bush was appointed to the presidency.**<sup>iv</sup>

**The second fundamentalism can be seen in a religious fervor** embraced by Bush and his cohorts that not only serves up creationism instead of science in the public schools but substitutes blind faith for critical reason.<sup>v</sup> This is a deeply disturbing trend in which the line between the state and religion is being erased as radical Christian evangelicals embrace and impose a moralism on Americans that is largely bigoted, patriarchal, uncritical, and insensitive to real social problems such as poverty, racism, the crisis in health care, and the increasing

impoverishment of America's children. Instead of addressing these pressing concerns, right wing Christians, who have enormous political clout, are waging a campaign to ban same-sex marriages, privatize social security, eliminate embryonic stem cell research, and overturn *Roe v. Wade* and other abortion rights cases.

Right-wing evangelical leaders such as Pat Robertson, James Dobson, and Jerry Falwell make public announcements on all manner of public and foreign policy issues while cultivating a close relationship with the White House. For example, a Bush administration favorite, Pat Robertson, has called for the assassination of Hugo Chavez, the president of Venezuela, and suggested that the devastating stroke suffered by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was "divine punishment for pulling Israel out of Gaza last summer."<sup>vi</sup> In addition, many Christian conservatives have played a prominent role in anointing the war on terrorism as a "holy war" and have helped shape the Bush administration's policies toward the Middle East, providing further legitimation for the "war on terrorism" and the ongoing assault on Palestinian rights and sovereignty. Not only has the Christian Right directed its anger at Islam, it has often made public statements expressing views so extreme that they were widely reported in the Arab world, further fueling hatred of the United States and providing a recruiting tool for Islamic terrorists. A new breed of religious zealot is being elected to the highest level of government, buttressed by a media largely controlled by conservative corporate interests and financed by growing base of Christian fundamentalists. For instance, the recently elected senator from Oklahoma has publicly argued for the death penalty for doctors who perform

abortions. Jim DeMint, the new senator from South Carolina, wants to ban gays from teaching in public schools; and Jon Thune, the newly elected senator from South Dakota, supports a constitutional amendment banning flag burning, not to mention making permanent Bush's tax cuts for the rich. Widely recognized as creating the first faith-based presidency, George W. Bush has done more during his first term to advance the agenda of right-wing evangelicals than any other president in recent history, and he will continue to do so in his second term.<sup>vii</sup> What is most disturbing is not simply that many of his religious supporters believe that Bush is their leader but also that he is embraced as a "messenger from God,"<sup>viii</sup> whose job it is to implement God's will. Bush seems to harbor the same arrogant illusion, out of which has emerged a government that pushes aside self-criticism, uncertainty, and doubt in favor of an absolutist furor and moral righteousness bereft of critical reflection.<sup>ix</sup>

Ron Suskind has argued that the one key feature of Bush's faith-based presidency is that it scorns "open dialogue, based on facts, [which] is not seen as something of inherent value."<sup>x</sup> Increasingly, Bush has become widely recognized as a president that exhibits a dislike, if not disdain, for contemplation, examining the facts, and dealing with friendly queries about the reasons for his decisions. Rampant anti-intellectualism coupled with Taliban-like moralism now boldly translates into everyday cultural practices as right-wing evangelicals live out their messianic view of the world. For instance, more and more conservative Christian pharmacists are refusing to fill prescriptions for religious reasons. Mixing medicine, politics, and religion means that some women are being denied birth control pills or any other product designed to prevent conception. The only sex education the nation's children receive is abstinence only. And the swelling ranks of the poor are serviced not by a robust welfare state but rather by faith-based

institutions more interested in saving souls than eliminating the material conditions of human suffering and hardship. I want to offer one caveat here. My critique of the role of religion in the Bush administration is not an attack on religion per se but a critique of its appropriation by right wing extremists and conservative politicians in order to promote a deeply reactionary and retrograde social policies. Clearly, the Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, for example, do not speak for progressive and liberal religious groups.

**The third anti-democratic dogma is visible in the relentless attempt on the part of the Bush administration to destroy critical education** as a foundation for an engaged citizenry and a vibrant democracy. **The attack on secular critical thought and diversity is** evident in the attempts to corporatize education, exclude poor and minority youth, standardize curricula, privatize public schooling, and use the language of business as a model for governance; it is also evident in the ongoing efforts of corporations and neoconservative ideologues to weaken the power of **university** faculty, turn full-time jobs into contractual labor, and hand over those larger educational forces in the culture to a small group of corporate interests. Higher education has **also been attacked** by right-wing ideologues such as David Horowitz and Lynne Cheney who view it as the “weak link” in the war against terror.<sup>xi</sup> Horowitz also acts as the figurehead for various well-funded and orchestrated conservative student groups such as the Young Americans and College Republicans, which perform the ground work for his “Academic Bill of Rights” policy efforts **that seek** out juicy but rare instances of “political bias”—whatever that is or however it might be defined—in college classrooms. These efforts

have resulted in considerable sums of public money being devoted to hearings in multiple state legislatures, most recently in Pennsylvania, in addition to helping impose, as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* put it, a “chilly climate” of self-policing of academic freedom and pedagogy.<sup>xii</sup> It gets worse. At the University of California at Los Angeles, the Bruin Alumni Association has posted on its website an article called, “The Dirty Thirty,” in which it targets what it calls the university’s “most radical professors.”<sup>xiii</sup> Radical, according to this group, appears to mean, among other things, holding views in opposition to the war in Iraq, supporting affirmative action, and attacking [quote] “President Bush, the Republican Party, multi-national corporations, and even our fighting men and women.”<sup>xiv</sup> The Bruin Alumni Association does more than promote “McCarthy-like smears,” intolerance and anti-intellectualism through a vapid appeal to “balance”; it also offers \$100 prizes to any students willing to provide information on their teachers’ political views. Of course, this has less to do with protesting genuine demagoguery than it does with attacking any professor who might raise critical questions about the status quo or hold the narratives of power accountable.<sup>xv</sup> Illegal and unethical spying at the national level now seems to offer yet another strategy to harass professors, insult students by treating them as if they are mindless, and provide a model for student participation in the classroom that mimics tactics used by fascists and Nazi plants in the 1930s.

As democracy is removed from the purpose and meaning of schooling, the dominant media are increasingly reduced to propaganda machines, available to the highest corporate bidder and have become the most powerful form of public pedagogy. As is commonly known,

the major media outlets in the United States are controlled by six companies and the six largest cable companies reach 80 percent of cable television subscribers.<sup>xvi</sup> Under such circumstances, democracy is hijacked by private interests and the marketplace of ideas has almost nothing to do with providing citizens with the knowledge that is crucial to be active participants in shaping and sustaining a vibrant democracy. On the contrary, the media largely serve to target audiences for advertising, pander to the anti-liberal ideologies of the political elite, function in large part to reinforce the conventional wisdom of corporate interests, and help produce a populace weighed by cynical withdrawal and set adrift in a sea of celebrity scandal and mindless info-tainment and mili-tainment. Politics is now largely a made-for-TV spectacle in which sound bytes replace any vestige of intellectual analysis. Increasingly the poverty of political discourse is matched by the irresponsibility of public-relations intellectuals. Under the sway of a market fundamentalism, the dominant media have deteriorated into a combination of commercialism, propaganda, and entertainment.<sup>xvii</sup> This became even more evident recently as it was discovered that the White House was paying real conservative commentators such as Armstrong Williams to endorse administration policies on their radio and TV shows. The Bush administration has also spent over 240 million dollars creating its own fake news videos, which it then distributed to local stations who aired the programs as if they were actual journalistic shows. Rather than perform an essential public service, the dominant media has become the primary tool for promoting a culture of consent and conformity in which citizens are routinely misinformed and public discourse is debased. Media concentration radically restricts the range of views to which people have access, disabling democracy itself.



As the critical power of education both within and outside of schools is reduced to the official doctrine of compliance, conformity, and reverence, it becomes more difficult for the American public to engage in critical debates, translate private considerations into public concerns, and recognize the omissions, distortions and lies that underlie much of current government policies. How else to explain how Bush was re-elected in 2004 in the face of flagrant lies about why the U. S. invaded Iraq, the passing of tax reform policies that reward the ultra-rich at the expense of the middle and lower classes, and the pushing of a foreign policy platform that is largely equated with bullying by the rest of the world? What is one to make of Bush's winning popular support for his re-election in light of his record of letting millions of young people slide into poverty and hopelessness, his continued "assault on regulations designed to protect public health and the environment," and his promulgation of a culture of fear that is gutting the most cherished of American civil liberties?<sup>xviii</sup>

At the same time, new forms of media are emerging in the culture that are more difficult to control and offer a range of opportunities for linking knowledge to social change. Critical knowledge is increasingly produced and distributed through electronic technologies that include high speed computers, new types of digitized film, camera phones, and CD-ROMs. These new technologies are using virtual modes of communication such as the Internet in order to produce, organize, disseminate critical information, develop protest movements, and create international alliances. From Seattle to Chiapas, the Internet is being used by dissident groups, youth, and others as a new form of public pedagogy that is fighting negative globalization, neoliberalism and range of anti-democratic forces. The result is a public pedagogical apparatus that plays a decisive role in producing diverse cultural spheres that gives new meaning to education as a

political force and raises important questions about the emerging shape and possibilities of a viable cultural politics.

**Finally, of all of the anti-democratic fundamentalisms of which I have been speaking one of the most powerful shaping American life is the ongoing militarization of public life.** David Theo Goldberg calls this new militarism a “new regime of truth,” a new epistemology defining what is fact and fiction, right and wrong, just and unjust. Americans are obsessed with military power. How else to explain the fact that the United States has 725 official military bases outside the country and 969 at home? Or that it spends more on defense than all the rest of the world put together?<sup>xix</sup> Bush’s permanent war policy with its unilateral legitimation of preemptive strikes against potential enemies not only sets a dangerous precedent for ushering in authoritarianism, but also encourages similar demagogic policies among other right-wing nations. As President Bush explained at a news conference on April 13, 2004 and **has repeated** again and again in different public venues as 2006 unfolds, “This country must go on the offense and stay on the offense.”<sup>xx</sup> **In its assumption** that military power is the highest expression of social truth and national greatness, the Bush administration opens a dangerous new chapter in American military history that now gives unfettered support to what C. Wright Mills once called a “‘military metaphysics’—a tendency to see international problems as military problems and to discount the likelihood of finding a solution except through military means.”<sup>xxi</sup> Such aggressive militarism is fashioned out of an ideology that not only supports a foreign policy based on what Cornel West calls “the cowboy mythology of the American frontier fantasy,” but also affects domestic

policy as it expands police power, the prison-industrial complex, and other instruments of violence. In this framework, as Andrew Bacevich observes, crime is presented “as a monstrous enemy to be crushed (targeting poor people) rather than as an ugly behavior to change (by addressing the conditions that often encourage such behavior).”<sup>xxii</sup>

The influence of militaristic truths, values, social relations, and identities now permeates and defines American culture. As higher education is pressured by both the Bush administration and its jingoistic supporters to serve the needs of the military-industrial complex, universities increasingly deepen their connections to the national security state in ways that are boldly celebrated. Universities now supply resources, engage in research contracts, and accept huge amounts of defense contract money to provide the personnel, expertise, and tools necessary to expand the security imperatives of the U.S. government. Public **universities** such as Penn State, Carnegie Mellon, the University of Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins, and a host of others, shamelessly expand the reach and influence of the national security state by entering into formal agreements with the FBI.<sup>xxiii</sup> Graham Spanier, the president of Penn State argues in a statement pregnant with irony that the establishment of the National Security Higher Education Advisory Board, which he heads, “sends a positive message that leaders in higher education are willing to assist our nation during these challenging times.”<sup>xxiv</sup> Such commentary reads like a page out of George Orwell’s *1984*, countering every decent and democratic value that defines higher education as a democratic public sphere.

Unfortunately, public schools fare no better in an era of permanent war. Public schools not only have more military recruiters; they also have more military personnel

teaching in the classrooms.<sup>xxv</sup> When the market logic of neoliberalism combines with the militaristic logic of the current administration, the purpose of schooling undergoes a fundamental shift. Schools now adopt the logic of “tough love” by implementing zero tolerance policies that effectively model urban public schools after prisons, just as students’ rights increasingly diminish under the onslaught of a military-style discipline.<sup>xxvi</sup> Students in many schools, especially those in poor urban and rural areas, are routinely searched, frisked, subjected to involuntary drug tests, maced, and carted off to jail. The not-so-hidden curriculum here is that certain youth make a poor social investment; they can’t be trusted; their actions need to be regulated preemptively; and their rights are not worth protecting. For instance, the No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to provide students’ personal information to military recruiters who then attempt to sell them on joining the armed services. Military recruiters roam the corridors of schools and are as omnipresent as guidance counselors, providing a number of school services and offering up a range of gimmicks such as video game contests and sponsored concerts in order to up their recruitment quotas. Nearly 50 percent of junior and senior high schools in the Chicago Public School system support Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) programs, while other schools in Chicago run as military academies.<sup>xxvii</sup> As a result of some struggles on the recruiting front, the Army went so far as to conduct a “Take it to the Streets” recruiting campaign in the spring of 2004, during which decked-out Hummers, replete with hip-hop blaring woofers and *America’s Army’s*, a popular video game, were paraded around city centers in the hopes of persuading young African-American and Latino youth to join up. Of course, not all poor minority youth comply with such measures. **All these examples confirm what** Michael Hardt

and Antonio Negri point out in *Multitude*: **war** has become the organizing principle of **American** society and the foundation for **global** politics and other social relations.<sup>xxviii</sup>

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

In opposition to the rising tide of authoritarianism, Cornel West has argued that just as we need to analyze those dark forces shutting down democracy “we also need to be very clear about the vision that lures us toward hope and the sources of that vision.”<sup>xxix</sup> In what follows, I want act on West’s utopian call by recapturing the vital role that an expanded notion of critical education and cultural studies might play for educators and other cultural workers as both a language of critique and possibility by not only addressing the growing authoritarian threats to an inclusive democracy but also the promise of a cultural politics in which pedagogy occupies a formative role.

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Of course, my position is not without its critics. It is not a position that supports traditional views of humanistic education, its canons, or its implicit demand for reverence rather than engagement. Before I assess how educators and others can take up this challenge of a growing authoritarianism that is coming your way, I want to offer you by way of a counter-example a critical commentary on the state of humanistic education made several years ago that is quite different from the one I want to offer you today. This commentary by Jeffrey Hart, Professor Emeritus of English at Dartmouth college and a longtime senior editor at the conservative *National Review* seems especially interesting in light of the current attacks on higher education in the U.S. **Sounding the alarm** on the disciplinary and theoretical changes in the humanities, changes that would include the emergence of ethnic studies, globalization

studies, cultural studies and women's studies-- Hart responds to the question "How to get a decent college education?" as follows:

Select the ordinary courses. I use ordinary here in a paradoxical and challenging way. An ordinary course is one that has always been taken and obviously should be taken—even if the student is not yet equipped with a sophisticated rationale for so doing. The student should be discouraged from putting his money on the cutting edge of interdisciplinary cross-textuality...If the student should seek out those ordinary courses, then it follows that he should avoid the flashy come-ons. Avoid things like Nicaraguan Lesbian poets. Yes, and anything listed under 'Studies,' any course whose description uses the words 'interdisciplinary,' 'hegemonic,' 'phallocratic,' or 'empowerment,' anything that mentions 'keeping a diary,' any course with a title like 'Adventures in Film. Also, any male professor who comes to class without a jacket and tie should be regarded with extreme prejudice unless he has won a Noble Prize."

Unlike Mr. Hart who believes that cultural studies is the enemy not of only higher education but also what he would term the disinterested mind, I am going to argue that cultural studies because of its long-standing relationship to matters of pedagogy, and in spite of its checkered theoretical legacy, is one of the more promising theoretical traditions within the academy that links learning to social change and education to the imperatives of a critical and global democracy.

My own interest in cultural studies emerges out its early concern with adult education, exemplified in the work of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and Paul Willis, and more recently in the work of Lawrence Grossberg, Angela McRobbie, Meghan Morris, Stanley Aronowitz, and Nick Couldry, who focus on

education more broadly. This tradition, often ignored today, views cultural studies as an empowering practice that “acts directly upon the conditions of culture to change them,”<sup>xxx</sup> engages the politics of cultural studies as part of a broader project related to an inclusive democracy, and view matters of pedagogy as central to the project of cultural studies itself. Within this perspective, intellectual work and practice within the university are articulated as a matter of democracy. Raymond Williams captures this project in his claim that cultural studies

has been about taking the best we can do in intellectual work and going with it in this very open way to confront people for whom it is not a way of life, for whom it is not in any probability a job, but for whom it is a matter of their own intellectual interest, their own understanding of the pressures on them, pressures of every kind, from the most personal to the most broadly political—if we are prepared to take that kind of work and revise the syllabus and discipline as best we can, on this site which allows that kind of interchange, then Cultural Studies has a very remarkable future indeed.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Such a project calls for intellectual work that is theoretically rigorous, radically contextual, interdisciplinary, and self-critical about its motivating questions and assumptions. This project engages culture through a wide variety of social forms and material relations of power, views theory as a resource, and public memory as a series of ruptures rather than a totalizing narrative. Cultural studies is this perspective is not only deconstructive, but also willing, to quote Stuart Hall, “to address the central and disturbing questions of a society and a culture in the most rigorous intellectual way we have available.” Such a discourse points to the hard work of providing a language of

critique and possibility, of addressing how different futures can be imagined, and constructing the pedagogical conditions that make possible the agents, politics, and forms of resistance necessary to reclaim the promise of a truly global, democratic future.

My commitment to a version of cultural studies that takes seriously what it means to make the political more pedagogical emerges out of an ongoing project to theorize the diverse ways in which identities are constructed and struggled over, culture functions as a contested sphere over the production, distribution, and regulation of meaning and power, and how and where culture operates both symbolically and institutionally as an educational, political, and economic force. In this perspective, cultural studies recognizes the primacy of the pedagogical as a critical practice through which politics is pluralized, understood as contingent, and open to many formations.<sup>xxxii</sup> But cultural studies is also crucial for resisting those mutually informing material and symbolic registers in which matters of representation and meaning work to secure particular market and military identities, legitimate dominant relations of power, collapse church and state boundaries, and privatize spaces of dialogue and dissent, especially as various fundamentalisms attempt to undermine the very meaning and practice of a substantive democracy. .

Against the current attack on all things public, cultural studies can play an important role in reclaiming cultural politics as a crucial site where dialogue, critique, and public engagement become crucial as an affirmation of a democratically configured social space in which the political is actually taken up and lived out through a variety of intimate relations and social formations. The cultural field plays a central role in



producing narratives, metaphors, images, and desiring maps that exercise a powerful pedagogical force over how people think about themselves, engage with the claims of others, address questions of justice, and take up the obligations of an engaged citizenship. From this perspective, culture is the primary sphere/space/location in which individuals, groups, and institutions learn to translate the diverse and multiple relations that mediate between private life and public concerns. Far from being exclusively about matters of representation and texts, culture becomes a site, event, and performance in which identities and modes of agency are configured through the mutually determined forces of thought and action, body and mind, and time and space. Culture offers a site where common concerns, new solidarities, and public dialogue refigure the fundamental elements of democracy. Culture is also the pedagogical and political ground in which a global public sphere can be imagined to confront the now planetary inequities exacerbated by deregulated markets and deregulated wars, as it promotes the possibilities of cosmopolitan dialogue and democratic transformation. Culture as an emancipatory force affirms the social as a fundamentally political space, just as the anti-democratic tendencies I have examined in this talk attempt to reduce the social to isolated men, women and their families.

Central to any viable notion of cultural studies, then, is the primacy of culture and power, organized through an understanding of how private issues are connected to larger social conditions and collective forces; that is, how the very processes of learning constitute the political mechanisms through which identities are shaped, desires mobilized, and experiences take on form and meaning within those collective conditions and larger forces that constitute the realm of the social. This suggests the necessity on

the part of cultural theorists to be particularly attentive to the connections among pedagogy, political agency, and some level of shared beliefs and practices aimed at creating more inclusive communities and a democratic politics.

Yet, unfortunately, the much needed emphasis on making the political more pedagogical has not occupied a central place in the more recent work of most cultural studies theorists as it did in its earliest formations. Pedagogy in most cultural studies work is either limited to the realm of schooling, dismissed as a discipline with very little academic cultural capital, or is rendered reactionary through the claim that it simply accommodates the paralyzing grip of governmental institutions that normalize all pedagogical practices. The latter view is particularly disturbing not only because it often equates power strictly with domination but also because it fails to acknowledge the contradictions and spaces of resistance at work in sites that extend from schools to the Internet to the dominant media.

### **FROM A PEDAGOGY OF UNDERSTANDING to INTERVENTION**

In opposition to these positions, I want to reclaim a tradition in radical educational theory in which pedagogy as a critical practice is central to any viable notion of agency, inclusive democracy, and a vibrant broader global public sphere. Pedagogy as both a language of critique and possibility looms large in this critical tradition not as a technique or a priori set of methods but as a political and moral practice. **As a political practice,** pedagogy is viewed as the outgrowth of concrete struggles and illuminates the relationship among power, knowledge, and ideology, while self-consciously, if not self-critically, recognizing the role it plays as a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within particular sets of social relations. **As a**

**moral practice**, pedagogy recognizes that what cultural workers, artists, activists, media workers and others teach cannot be abstracted from what it means to invest in public life, presuppose some notion of the future, or locate oneself in a public discourse. The moral implications of pedagogy also suggest that our responsibility as intellectuals for the public cannot be separated from the consequences of the knowledge we produce, the social relations we legitimate, and the ideologies and identities we offer up to students as well as colleagues.

Refusing to decouple politics from pedagogy means, in part, creating those public spaces for engaging students in robust dialogue, challenging them to think critically about received knowledge, and energizing them to “come to terms with their own power as individual and social agents.” Pedagogy has a relationship to social change in that it should not only help students frame their sense of understanding, imagination, and knowledge within a wider sense of history, politics, and democracy but should also enable them to recognize that they can do something to alleviate human suffering and promote social justice, as the late Edward Said has suggested. Part of this task necessitates that cultural studies theorists and educators anchor their own work, however diverse, in a radical project that seriously engages the promise of what Jacques Derrida called an unrealized democracy against its really existing and radically incomplete forms. Of crucial importance to such a project is rejecting the assumption that theorists can understand social problems without contesting their appearance in public life. More specifically, any viable cultural politics needs a socially committed notion of injustice if we are to take seriously what it means to fight for the idea of the good society. I think Zygmunt Bauman is right in arguing that “If there is no room for the

idea of *wrong* society, there is hardly much chance for the idea of good society to be born, let alone make waves.”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Cultural studies theorists need to be more forceful, if not more committed, to linking their overall politics to modes of critique and collective action that address the presupposition that democratic societies are never too just, which means that a democratic society must constantly nurture the possibilities for self and social critique, collective agency, and forms of citizenship in which people play a fundamental role in shaping the material relations of power and ideological forces that affect their everyday lives. Within the ongoing process of democratization lies the promise of a society that is open to exchange, questioning, and self-criticism, a democracy that is never finished, and one that opposes neoliberal and neoconservative attempts to supplant the concept of an open society with a fundamentalist market-driven or authoritarian one.

Cultural studies theorists who work in higher education and other public spaces need to make clear that the issue is not whether higher education or the museum for that matter has become contaminated by politics, as much as recognizing that such sites are already a space of politics, power, and authority. At the same time, cultural workers can make visible their opposition to those approaches to pedagogy that reduce it to a set of skills to enhance one’s visibility in the corporate sector or an ideological litmus test that measures one’s patriotism or ratings on the rapture index. There is a disquieting refusal in the contemporary academy to raise broader questions about the social, economic, and political forces shaping the very terrain of higher education-- particularly unbridled market forces, religious fundamentalist groups, and racist and sexist forces that unequally value diverse groups within relations of academic power.

There is also a general misunderstanding of how teacher authority can be used to create the pedagogical conditions for critical forms of education without necessarily falling into the trap of simply indoctrinating students.<sup>xxxiv</sup> For instance, many conservative and liberal educators believe that any notion of critical pedagogy that is self-conscious about its politics and engages students in ways that offer them the possibility for becoming critical--what Lani Guinier calls the need to educate students "to participate in civic life, and to encourage graduates to give back to the community, which through taxes, made their education possible"<sup>xxxv</sup>--leaves students out of the conversation or presupposes too much or simply represents a form of pedagogical tyranny. While such educators believe in practices that open up the possibility of questioning among students, they often refuse to connect the pedagogical conditions that challenge how and what they think at the moment to the next task of prompting them to imagine changing the world around them so as to expand and deepen its democratic possibilities. Teaching students how to argue, draw on their own experiences, or engage in rigorous dialogue says nothing about why they should engage in these actions in the first place. How the culture of argumentation and questioning relates to giving students the tools they need to fight oppressive forms of power, make the world a more meaningful and just place, and develop a sense of social is often missing in contemporary progressive frameworks of education.

While no pedagogical intervention should fall to the level of propaganda, a pedagogy which attempts to empower critical citizens can't and shouldn't avoid politics. Pedagogy must address the relationship between politics and agency, knowledge and power, subject positions and values, and learning and social change--while always

being open to debate, resistance, and a culture of questioning. Educators committed to simply raising questions often have no language for linking learning to forms of public minded scholarship that would enable students to consider the important relationship between democratic public life and education, or what it would mean to encourage students pedagogically to enter the sphere of the political, enabling them to think about how they might participate in a democracy by taking what they learn “into new locations—a third grade classroom, a public library, a legislator’s office, a museum”<sup>xxxvi</sup> or for that matter taking on collaborative projects that address the myriad of problems citizens face in a diminishing democracy.

In spite of the professional pretense to neutrality, academics in the field of cultural studies need to do more pedagogically than simply teach students how to argue and question. Students need much more from their educational experience. Democratic societies need educated citizens who are steeped in more than the skills of argumentation. And it is precisely this democratic project that affirms the critical function of education and refuses to narrow its goals and aspirations to methodological considerations. As Amy Gutmann argues, education is always political because it is connected to the acquisition of agency, the ability to struggle with ongoing relations of power, and is a precondition for creating informed and critical citizens who act on the world. This is not a notion of education tied to the alleged neutrality of the academy or the new conservative call for “intellectual diversity” but to a vision of pedagogy that is directive and interventionist on the side of producing a substantive democratic society. This is what makes critical pedagogy different from training. And it is precisely the failure to connect learning to its democratic functions and goals that provides rationales

for pedagogical approaches that strip what it means to be educated from its critical and democratic possibilities.

Cultural studies theorists and educators would do well to take account of the profound transformations taking place in the public sphere and reclaim pedagogy as a central element of cultural politics. In part, this means once again recognizing, as Pierre Bourdieu has insisted, that the “power of the dominant order is not just economic, but intellectual—lying in the realm of beliefs,” and it is precisely within the domain of ideas that a sense of utopian possibility can be restored to the public realm.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Such a task suggests that academics and other cultural workers actively resist the ways in which neoliberalism and neoconservatism discourages teachers and students from becoming critical intellectuals by turning them into human data banks or uncritical apologists for the existing regime of power. Educators and other cultural workers need to build alliances across differences, academic disciplines, and national boundaries as part of broader effort to develop social movements in defense of the public good and social justice. Students must be given the opportunity to learn a broad range of cultural literacies, engage diverse ways of comprehending critical civic competencies and technological values, and responsibly engage the question of what they want to do in the larger world with the scholarship and pedagogical practices they appropriate.

If the growing authoritarianism in the US is to be challenged, academics and others need to make visible the connection between the war at home and abroad. This suggests not only opposing an imperial foreign policy, but also the shameful tax cuts for the rich, the dismantling of the welfare state, the attack on unions, and those policies that sacrifice civil liberties in the cause of national security. Opposing the authoritarian

politics of neoliberalism and neoconservatism means developing enclaves of resistance in order to stop the incarceration of a generation of young black and brown men and women, the privatization of the commons, the attack on public schools, the increasing corporatization of higher education, the growing militarization of public life, and the use of power based on the assumption that empire abroad entails tyranny and repression at home. As the Bush administration spreads its legacy of war, destruction, commodification, torture, poverty, and violence across the globe, educators, students, and others need a new language for politics in the global public sphere for talking about what educational institutions should accomplish in a democracy and why they fail; we need a new understanding of public pedagogy for analyzing what agents can bring a meaningful democracy into being, how it might contribute to the creation of alternative public spheres and forms of collective resistance, and where such struggles can take place. We need to recognize, as Zygmunt Bauman points out, we recognize that the real pessimism is quietism – falsely believing in not doing anything because nothing can be changed. Most significantly, we need a new understanding of how culture works as a form of public pedagogy, how pedagogy works as a moral and political practice, how agency is organized through pedagogical relations, how individuals can be educated to make authority responsive, how politics can make the workings of power visible and accountable, and how to reclaim hope in dark times through new forms of pedagogical praxis, global protests, and collective resistance.



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- i. Paul Krugman, "Looting the Future," The New York Times (December 5, 2003), p. A27.
  - ii. Thomas Friedman, The Lexus and the Olive Tree (New York: Anchor, 2000), 373.
  - iii. Cited in Mark Rupert, "The Anti Friedman Page," online:  
<http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/maxpages/faculty/merupert/Anti-Friedman.htm>
  - iv.. "Economic Recovery Failed to Benefit Much of the Population in 2004," Center On Budget and Policy Priorities, (August 30, 2005). Online: [www.cbpp.org/8-30-05pov.htm](http://www.cbpp.org/8-30-05pov.htm)
  - v. What now seems a typical occurrence is the take over of school boards by right-wing Christian fundamentalists who then impose the teaching of creationism on the schools. See, for example, "Wisconsin School OKs Creationism Teaching," Associated Press (November 6, 2004). Available online: <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/1106-08.htm>
  - vi. Grey Myre, "Israelis' Anger at Evangelist May Delay Christian Center," New York Times (January 12, 2006), p. A12.
  - vii. See Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt," New York Times Magazine (October 17, 2004), pp. 44-51, 64, 102.
  - viii. Esther Kaplan, With God on Their Side: How Christian Fundamentalists Trampled Science, Policy and Democracy in George W. Bush's White House (New York: The New Press, 2004).
  - ix. One of the most frightening examples of this arrogance of power and easy certainty can be seen in an exchange Ron Suskind had with one of Bush's aides. He writes: "The aide said that guys like me were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. 'That is not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'" This is not so much a matter of faith producing a blinding arrogance as it is a fundamentalism that not only sees democracy as the enemy, but also prepares the groundwork for a faith-based authoritarianism or a new form of fascism. Ron Suskind, *Ibid.*, "Without a Doubt," p. 51.
  - x. Ron Suskind, *Ibid.*, "Without a Doubt," p. 47.
  - xi. This charge comes from a report issued by conservative group, The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, founded by Lynne Cheney (spouse of Vice President Dick Cheney) and Joseph Lieberman (Democratic Senator). See Jerry L. Martin and

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Anne D. Neal, Defending Civilization: How Our Universities are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It. (February 2002). Online: <http://www.goacta.org/publications/Reports/defciv.pdf>. ACTA also posted on its website a list of 115 statements made by allegedly “un-American Professors.”

xii. See “Forum: A Chilly Climate on the Campuses,” Chronicle of Higher Education (September 9, 2005), pp. B7–B13.

xiii. See “The Dirty Thirty.” Online: <http://www.uclaprofs.com/articles/dirtythirty.html>.

xiv. Andrew Jones, “Open Letter From the Bruin Alumni Association,” Online: <http://www.bruinalumni.com/aboutus.html>

xv. For a much more detailed account of this type of attack on higher education, see Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, Take Back Higher Education (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

xvi. See Ben H. Bagdikian, The New Media Monopoly (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

xvii. On the relationship between democracy and the media, see Robert W. McChesney, Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times (New York: The New Press, 1999).

xviii. Paul O’Neill, former Treasury Secretary who served in the Bush administration for two years, claimed on the January 11, 2004 television program 60 Minutes that Bush and his advisors started talking about invading Iraq 10 days after the inauguration, eight months before the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. See CBS News, “Bush Sought Way to Invade Iraq,” 60 Minutes Transcript (July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004). Available on-line:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/01/09/60minutes/main592330.shtml>. For a chronicle of lies coming out of the Bush administration, see David Corn, The Lies of George Bush (New York: Crown, 2003). On the environment, see Seth Borenstein, “Environment Worsened Under Bush in Many Key Areas, Data Show,” Common Dreams News Center (October 13, 2004). Available online: [www.commondreams.org/headlines04/1013-12.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/1013-12.htm)

xix. Tony Judt, “The New World Order,” The New York Review of Books (July 14, 2005), p.16.

xx. Ibid., p.16.

xxi. For the C. Wright Mills reference, see C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (1956; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 222. The quote comes from Andrew J. Bacevich, The New American Militarism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2.

xxii. Andrew J. Bacevich, The New American Militarism (New York: Oxford University

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Press, 2005), p. 6.

xxiii. Penn State News Release, "Penn State's Spanier to Chair National Security Board." (September 16, 2005).

xxiv. Ibid.

xxv. David A. Gabbard and Kenneth Saltman, eds., Education as Enforcement (New York: Routledge, 2003).

xxvi. I take up the issue of zero tolerance in great detail in Henry A. Giroux, The Terror of Neoliberalism (Boulder: Paradigm, 2004).

xxvii. See C. Schaeffer-Duffy, "Feeding the Military Machine," National Catholic Reporter (March 28, 2003). Online: [http://www.natcath.com/MNCR\\_online/archives/032803/032803a.htm](http://www.natcath.com/MNCR_online/archives/032803/032803a.htm).

xxviii. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), pp. 12–13.

xxix. Cornel West, "Finding Hope in Dark times," Tikkun 19:4 (2004), p. 18.

xxx. Nick Couldry, "Dialogue in an Age of Enclosure: Exploring the Values of Cultural Studies," The Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies 23:1 (2001), p. 66.

xxxi. Raymond Williams, The Future of Cultural Studies, p. 177.

xxxii. On the importance of problematizing and pluralizing the political, see Jodi Dean, "the Interface of Political Theory and Cultural Studies," in Jodi Dean, ed. Cultural Studies and Political Theory (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 1-19.

xxxiii. Zygmunt Bauman, Society under Siege (Malden, MA: Blackwell: 2002), p. 170.

xxxiv. Gerald Graff appears to have made a career out of this issue by either misrepresenting the work of Paulo Freire and others, citing theoretical work by critical educators that is outdated and could be corrected by reading anything they might have written in the last five years, creating caricatures of their work, or by holding up as an example of what people in critical pedagogy do (or more generally anyone who links pedagogy and politics) the most extreme and ludicrous examples. For more recent representations of this position, see Gerald Graff, "Teaching Politically Without Political Correctness," Radical Teacher 58 (Fall 2000), pp. 26-30; Gerald Graff, Clueless in Academe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

xxxv. Lani Guinier, "Democracy Tested," The Nation (May 5, 2003) p. 6. Guinier's

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position is in direct opposition to that of Graff and is acolytes. For instance, see A Conversation Between Iani Guinier and Anna Deavere Smith, "Rethinking Power, Rethinking Theater," Theater 31;3 (Winter 2002), pp. 31-45.

xxxvi. An Interview with Julie Ellison, "New Public Scholarship in the Arts and Humanities," Higher Education Exchange (2002), p. 20.

xxxvii. Pierre Bourdieu and Gunter Grass, "The 'Progressive' Restoration: A Franco-German Dialogue," New Left Review 14 (march-April, 2003), p. 66.