

Afterword

Public Pedagogy and the Challenge of Historical Time

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The editors of this outstanding volume have assembled a potent group of scholars and activists—both *veterano/as* and voices newly emergent on the scene—from a wide range of disciplines both inside and outside of the field of education. These contributors do not contest the mutually determining relationship between pedagogy and politics, and have dedicated themselves to deploying their pedagogical initiatives in the service of reclaiming the public sphere. They are committed to transforming our social universe from an arena of strife and exploitation to counter-public spaces able to foster relations of mutuality, trust, and social and economic justice. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's (1988) book, *Manufacturing Consent*, is perhaps the most well-known treatise on how public pedagogy operates, and its particular focus was on the role and functioning of the media. It prophetically underlined the growing pedagogical role of the corporate media in manufacturing what Chomsky (1989) would later call "necessary illusions" that ideologically condition the public to accepting certain events and social relationships as unshakably true and absolutely essential. The *Handbook of Public Pedagogy* is written in the spirit of this storied volume. All of its contributors assert the vital need for defending the enduring values of public life and for transforming those dimensions of public life under threat of an encroaching barbarism, the most hideous instantiations of which revealed themselves in the criminal domestic and foreign policy abominations of the Bush administration.

Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that the *Handbook of Public Pedagogy* is a book that has been published at a very precipitous time in world history. There is a sacrosanct boundary freighted with danger that the Janus-faced U.S. media vaingloriously defends—and that public intellectuals attempt to cross at their own risk. That risk entails advocating alternatives to capitalism, or expressing admiration for regimes like Cuba or Venezuela. You can always expect a pother of media attacks any time the word "socialism" is used in a way that isn't dripping with acrimony and derision. A public dialogue about socialism could loosen the death-grip that capitalism has placed around our throats. Capitalism, after all, is not some disembodied, eternal, cosmic singularity or independent monad that has been divinely bestowed on the U.S. administration. No apologist of capital with high ecclesiastical rank is needed to anoint the feet of the White House staff with spikenard, since capitalism clearly is a fully flawed, fully human invention. But we are not likely ever to hear this debate in the increasingly globalized and globalizing capitalist media and culture industry.

The much-vaunted claim that capitalism is the only road to democracy simply and mistakenly reinforces the false perception that there exists an ontological divide between socialism and human rights. Born of the marriage between social Darwinism and American exceptionalism—so deeply embedded in the philosophies, values, and narratives of Western “civilization”—such arrogance has become the cruelest catalyst for the reproduction of colonial epistemology or what has been called the coloniality of power. Morally and historically threadbare justifications for the cultural grandeur of the Anglosphere creates an insidious double-sided fallacy that, on the one hand, suggests the superiority of Western culture and, on the other, minimizes the non-Western contributions of indigenous epistemologies, ensepulchuring their “forbidden” knowledges in a seamless tomb of dead letters.

Living inside the belly of the world’s greatest superpower with the most powerful military force ever created, is to feed on a diet of Eurocentric universalism whose providers have cast subaltern knowledges into the rag-and-bone shop of the cultural imaginary as a kind of waste matter excreted by the global industrial complex. The United States has arrogated to itself the dominant mantle of divine stewardship of all of the resources—both living and inert—of the earth and public intellectuals in the main have, egregiously, upheld this view. Being guided by sundry corporate elites and bold cadres of cultural gatekeepers who shape and program the media makes it easy to reconfirm the “might makes right” position taken by the ultra conservatives in their unrestrained ideological assault on the barbarians who live on the other side of an imaginary wall (or very real border) that separates the more developed neoliberal democracies from the underdeveloped ones (I prefer the term over-exploited). The guardians of the Western capitalist countries are not ready to dump the old philosophical equipment used to justify the exercise of its coloniality of power. On the contrary, they are bent on reasserting their dominance by imperious acts of manifest destiny exercised with a Promethean determination and backed by the filthy lucre of corporate-driven profit-making. We have, after all, destroyed entire countries while proclaiming to respect the laws of humanity and somehow the grotesque contradiction embodied in these acts of destruction never reach our conscious awareness because the tangled hierarchy we inhabit is kept in place by ideological forces that delimit our ability to recognize our acts of gross inhumanity.

The *Handbook of Public Pedagogy* helps us to intervene in this dilemma. To bring systems of intelligibility into dialogue with other systems in a way that rearticulates the geopolitical order of knowledge production horizontally rather than vertically, is not only to re-cognize knowledge formation from a decolonizing standpoint, but to interrogate critically all knowledge production from a social, political, and ethical perspective as part of a larger project of creating a post-capitalist future. Here we deal with questions of epistemology and epistemicide (the denaturing, despoiling, and enfeebling of indigenous knowledges related to property, nature, and kinship and other contexts). We participate actively at multiple yet inseparable levels of class struggle, recognizing that money buys only what we have lost, that which alienation has vanquished among us, under capitalist social relations—relations which, of course, are constantly racialized, gendered, and sexualized according to the needs and purposes of the transnational capitalist class and reinitiated according to the strategies of the corporate elite. To invoke a critical public pedagogy is not a call to fight racism, sexism, speciesism, or White supremacy by imposing some version of universalism on the rest of humanity but to open up the veins of universalism to a pluriversality, to an infusion of voices from below, a collective expression that leads to a plurality of narratives and conceptions of what constitutes both consciousness and reason. There is no universalism innocent of many voices, and these voices are those of people struggling from below, and we—as critical public pedagogues—need to struggle alongside those voices, making the path as we walk, horizontally and not from a position of ascendancy, not from above, but in

the spirit of the Zapatistas' "preguntando caminamos," or "walking we ask questions"—the way of the *guerrillero* pedagogue. As an engineer friend of the Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano (2009), told him: "único que se hace desde arriba son los pozos" ("the only thing that you can make from up to down are holes") (§ 43). But there is also a time when we must take state power, as the Chavistas have taught us, but only in so far as we can create the conditions of possibility for a more direct, participatory, and socialist democracy.

When we give the same rights and freedoms to the poor as we give to the rich—the right to beg for food in restricted places, the right to default on our mortgages, the right to distract ourselves with yachts or vintage sports cars—we must consider these rights and freedoms as wrongs turned inside out. After all, why should anyone in our society have to beg for food, especially while others are enjoying a cruise in the Pacific in their expensive toys? And do the poor have the same power to evade the law as the rich? But as public pedagogues, we can't really ask these questions—we aren't supposed to raise these issues in the public square. As Dom Helder Camara (as cited in McIntosh, 2006), mentor to Paulo Freire, once said: "I feed the poor, I'm called a saint. I ask why the poor have no food, I'm called a communist" (§ 9) (it seems in this case that communists have the moral edge over saints). Only when we know just how we have been made to be unfree can we unlock the manacles that chain us to necessity.

Not only are the authors in this volume engaged in a shared project of producing critical social thought, but also in fostering the creation of a theory and philosophy of praxis. They not only interrogate the limitations of occidental thought and the circumscriptions afforded by critical theory, critical race theory, Marxist humanist discourse, and other languages of critique, but also are able to direct themselves and others towards alternative and oppositional ways of thinking about and acting in relation to and against modernity/coloniality and the epistemologies of empire. In other words, the "other knowledges" in this volume attempt to disturb the hegemonic ontological categories that have saturated the imaginary of our age, imprisoning us in the normalcy of their ways of knowing, such that they have become impervious to critique. Consequently, the critical public pedagogy reflected in this volume sets out to blunt the limit horizon of our time. By undressing different logics, rationalities, systems of classification and structures of power, the chapters in this collection unleash the epistemic force of the subaltern local histories that enable us to re-enunciate power, to expand the potential for coordinated growth and development, thus, making us an enemy of forgetfulness and a protagonist actor in revolutionary praxis from the point of view of the most invisible among us—*los olvidados*, who have treacherously been denied all bonds of human solidarity and compassion.

I like to think of the words in this volume as portraits—effigies or totems made of print—that embody the energy of the writers' own struggles, energy that can be released in the act of reading so as to engage the reader's moral conscience. Through the gravitational pull of a black sun, the plasma of their ideas travels from the soil of the earth to the gardens of our imagination, countering the ideological dead weight of the already ordained truth of the everyday—bringing to mind the famous words from the *Eighteenth Brumaire*:

Men make history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. (Marx, 1977, p. 300)

The critical public educators in this volume recognize that public pedagogy is not about the struggle for information (matter in its lowest common denominator) so much as it is about the struggle for knowledge, a place where consciousness can discover itself, a place where knowl-

edge gives way to a creative purposiveness—to a protagonistic agency. But it is even more than this—it is about the struggle to transform such knowledge into wisdom, by means of a dialectical reading of the word and the world, that is, in the reciprocally revealed relationship between consciousness and the world, and that which lies beyond the world. It is to recognize the unity in diversity that unites both the large and the small, the powerful and the powerless, in the dinergic wholeness of social life. And this can only be a lived engagement, as a habit-forming process that shapes harmonious relationships between the self and others, where possibility is collapsed into our muscle and brain matter so that we are able to struggle in the classrooms, in the streets, in our public squares and in our laboratories, seminar rooms, factories, community centers, offices, and churches in our quest to join Freire (1975) along the craggy and rock-strewn paths traveled by “pilgrims of the obvious” (p. 12). Here we can discover the deep-rooted unity below the surface diversity of the world without imposing it. We discover it, together, in our shared human wholeness, as enemies of deception and lies and as friends of both human and non-human worlds in a collective socialist project to create a positively sustainable social order.

The deep anchors of unbridled and uncontested capitalism, which has fashioned the contours of our structural unconscious, has blurred the historical struggle for socialism in its reverential thrall to the cult of neoliberalism. As soon as the Cold War ended, the United States could officially jettison its professed goals of social and economic equality as intrinsic components of capitalist democracy, even if they had only existed as part of its propaganda campaign. No wonder the heroic task of critical pedagogy—the quest for social and economic justice—continues to be so difficult. Yet this should not be a cause for despair but a call for renewing our efforts in what surely will be a long revolution.

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