Pedagogies of disruption and the challenge of social justice under regimes of neoliberalism

Pedagogias de ruptura e o desafio da justiça social sob regimes do neoliberalismo

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Abstract: I argue in this paper in spite of its crucial importance to developing the formative culture necessary to a working democracy, higher education in North America is currently under attack by the apostles of neoliberalism, or what might be called a savage form of casino capitalism. No longer viewed as a source of enlightenment or a democratic public sphere, higher education is devalued because it is seen as a threat neoliberal regimes that fear its role of providing the critical knowledge, skills, and values necessary to produced inspired and critical citizenry. Intent at turning higher education into an adjunct of business culture, the apostles of neoliberalism are waging a campaign to undermine the principles of academic freedom, sacrifice critical pedagogical practice in the name of economic growth, and dismantle the university as a bastion of autonomy, independent thought, and uncorrupted inquiry. At stake in this struggle is a concerted attempt by right-wing extremists and corporate interests to strip the professoriate of any authority, render critical pedagogy as merely an instrumental task, eliminate protections for educators, define students as consumers, produce a form of indebted citizenship, and remove critical reason from any vestige of civic courage, engaged citizenship, and social responsibility. Neoliberalism is the enemy of social justice and if it is to be challenged necessitates that educators from across the globe join in developing a movement for the development of public goods that can work to create alliances to challenge the politics of neoliberalism on a global level.

Keywords: higher education, politics, neoliberalism, civic courage, pedagogy, critical thinking, formative cultures.

Resumo: Defendo neste artigo que, apesar de sua importância crucial para o desenvolvimento da cultura formativa necessária para uma democracia de trabalho, a educação superior na América do Norte esta atualmente sob ataque pelos apóstolos do neoliberalismo, ou o que poderia ser chamado de uma forma selvagem de capitalismo. Como não é mais visto como uma fonte de iluminação ou uma esfera pública democrática, o ensino superior é desvalorizado porque é visto como uma ameaça aos regimes neoliberais que temem o seu papel de fornecer conhecimento crítico, habilidades e valores necessários para produzir cidadãos inspirados e críticos. Com a intenção em transformar o ensino superior em uma ramificação da cultura empresarial, os apóstolos do neoliberalismo estão travando uma campanha para minar os princípios da liberdade acadêmica, sacrificar a prática pedagógica crítica em nome do crescimento econômico, e desmantelar a universidade como um bastião da autonomia, de pensamento independente, e questionamentos incorruptos. Em jogo nesta luta está uma tentativa orquestrada por extremistas de direita e interesses corporativos para despojar o professorado de qualquer autoridade, para tratar a pedagogia crítica como meramente uma tarefa instrumental, eliminar proteções para educadores, definir estudantes enquanto consumidores, produzir uma forma de cidadania endividada e remover a razão crítica de qualquer vestígio de coragem cívica, cidadania engajada, e responsabilidade social. O neoliberalismo é o inimigo da justiça social e se é para ser desafiado exige que os educadores de todo o mundo participem no desenvolvimento de um movimento para o desenvolvimento de bens públicos que possam trabalhar para criar alianças para desafiar a política do neoliberalismo em um nível global.

Palavras-chave: ensino superior, política, neoliberalismo, coragem cívica, pedagogia, pensamento crítico, culturas de formação.

Any analysis of higher education should be situated within the broader crisis of democracy that has impacted the United States and Europe since the 1970s along with the rise of state terrorism that has intensified after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. What we have seen in a number of countries has been the emergence of a savage form of free-market fundamentalism, often called neoliberalism, in which there is not only a deep distrust of public values, public goods, and public institutions, but also an unhesitating embrace of a market ideology that accelerates the power of the financial elite and big business. Together, the various regimes of neoliberalism have gutted the formative cultures and institutions necessary for democracy's survival while placing the commanding institutions of society in the hands of powerful corporate interests and right-wing bigots whose strangulating control over politics renders what remains of a democratic ethos corrupt and dysfunctional[1].

Contemporary neoliberalism is an updated and more ruthless stage in the history of modern capitalism, exceeding in its rapaciousness the free-market fundamentalism made famous by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman Neoliberalism's search for the consolidations of class power now has a global reach, even as it exhibits a brutal disregard for the social contract[2]. As Robert McChesney has argued, it can be likened to "classical liberalism with the gloves off[3]". In other words, neoliberalism is liberalism without the guilt or any willingness to provide political concessions - a more predatory form of market fundamentalism that is as callous as it is orthodox in its disregard for democracy. The old liberalism believed in social provisions and partly pressed the claims for social and economic justice. Neoliberalism, in contrast, considers the discourses of equality, justice, and democracy quaint, if not dangerous. It seeks to trivialize all things public, to eviscerate public life, undermine public trust, and destroy any notion of the common good. More than simply an intensification of classical liberalism, contemporary

neoliberalism represents a confluence, a historical conjuncture, in which the most vicious elements of capitalism have come together to create something new and more punishing, amplified by the financialization of capital and the development of a mode of corporate sovereignty that ignores social costs and takes no prisoners.

Neoliberalism is the latest stage of predatory capitalism, is part of a broader project of restoring class power and consolidating the rapid concentration of capital. It is a political, economic, and political project that constitutes an ideology, mode of governance, policy, and form of public pedagogy. As an ideology, it construes profit making as the essence of democracy, consuming as the only operable form of citizenship, and an irrational belief in the market to solve all problems and serve as a model for structuring all social relations. As a mode of governance, it produces identities, subjects, and ways of life free of government regulations, driven by a survival of the fittest ethic, grounded in the idea of the free, possessive individual, and committed to the right of ruling groups and institutions to accrue wealth removed from matters of ethics and social costs. As a policy and political project, neoliberalism is wedded to the privatization of public services, selling off of state functions, deregulation of finance and labor, elimination of the welfare state and unions, liberalization of trade in goods and capital investment, and the marketization and commodification of society. As a form of public pedagogy and cultural politics, neoliberalism casts all dimensions of life in terms of market rationality. One consequence is that neoliberalism legitimates a culture of cruelty and harsh competitiveness and wages a war against public values and those public spheres that contest the rule and ideology of capital. Through its elevation of self-interest and possessive individualism, it saps the democratic foundation of solidarity, degrades collaboration, and tears up all forms of social obligation.

Under the regime of neoliberalism, democracy has been undermined and transformed into a form of authoritarianism unique to the twenty-first century. What is distinctive about the new mode of authoritarianism is that it is driven by a criminal class of powerful financial and political elites who refuse to make political concessions[4]. These elites have no allegiances to nation-states and do not care about the damage they do to workers, the environment, or the rest of humanity. They are unhinged sociopaths, far removed from what the Occupy movement called the "99 percent[5]". They are the new gated class who float above national boundaries, laws, and forms of regulation. They are a global elite whose task is to transform all nation-states into instruments to enrich their wealth and power. The new authoritarianism is not just tantamount to a crisis of democracy: it is also about the limits now being placed on the meaning of politics and the erasure of those institutions capable of producing critical, engaged, and socially responsible agents.

Increasingly, the slide into this market-based form of authoritarianism has appeared in the realm of politics. Money now drives politics in the United States and a number of other countries. Congress and both major political parties have sold themselves to corporate power. Campaigns are largely financed by the financial elite such as the right-wing Koch brothers, Sheldon Adelson, major defense corporations such as Lockheed Martin, and key financial institutions such as Goldman Sachs. As a 2013 Princeton University report pointed out, policy in Washington, DC, has nothing to do with the wishes of the people but is almost completely determined by the massively wealthy and big corporations, made even easier thanks to Citizens United and a number of other laws supported by a conservative Supreme Court majority[6]. Hence, it should come as no surprise that Princeton University researchers Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page came to the conclusion that the United States is basically an oligarchy where power is wielded by a small number of

elites[7]. As Chris Hedges has argued, "There is no national institution left that can accurately be described as democratic[8]".

Neoliberal societies, in general, exist in a perpetual state of war—a war waged by the financial and political elites against low-income groups, the elderly, minorities of color, the unemployed, the homeless, immigrants, and any others whom the ruling class considers disposable. But disposable populations consigned to lives of terminal exclusion now include students, unemployed youth, and members of the working poor as well as the middle class who have no resources, jobs, or hope. They are the voiceless and powerless whose suffering is enveloped by the ghostly presence of the moral vacuity and criminogenic nature of neoliberalism. They are neoliberalism's greatest fear, and a potential threat in a society that has capitulated to market-driven forces.

What is especially disturbing about neoliberalism in the United States today is that the social contract and social wage have no defenders; they are being destroyed by politicians and anti-public intellectuals on both sides of the political spectrum. Liberty and freedom are reduced to fodder for inane commercials or empty slogans used to equate capitalism with democracy. In other words, the public spheres and institutions that support social provisions and keep public values alive in the United States have come under a sustained attack. Such an assault has not only produced a range of policies that have expanded the misery, suffering, and hardships of millions of people, but also reinforced a growing culture of cruelty in which those who suffer the misfortunes of poverty, unemployment, low skill jobs, homelessness, and other social problems are the object of both humiliation and scorn[9].

At the same time, liberty and civil rights face a direct assault as racism spreads throughout American culture like wildfire, exemplified in such trends as escalating police harassment of young black and brown[10]. A persistent racism can also be seen in the attack on voting rights laws; the mass

incarceration of African-American males; and the racist invectives that have become prominent among right-wing Republicans and Tea Party types, most of which are aimed at President Obama[11]. Meanwhile, women's reproductive rights are being aggressively undermined, and there is an ongoing attack on immigrants[12]. Education at all levels is increasingly defunded and defined as a site of training rather than as a site of critical thought, dialogue, and critical pedagogy[13].

What is more, American democracy has been all but crushed by the emergence of a national security and permanent warfare state. This is evident not only in endless wars abroad. As Edward Snowden made clear, the United States is now a security-surveillance state illegally gathering massive amounts of information from diverse sources on citizens who are not guilty of any crimes[14]. In addition, the passing of a series of laws such as the PATRIOT Act, the Military Commission Act, the National Defense Authorization Act, and many others shred due process by giving the executive branch the right to hold prisoners indefinitely without charge or a trial, authorize a presidential kill list, and conduct warrantless wiretaps. Both Bush and Obama claimed the right to kill any citizens considered to be terrorists or the aides of terrorism. Targeted assassinations are now typically carried out by drones that are known to be killing innocent children, adults, and bystanders[15]. There is also the shameful exercise under Bush, and to a lesser degree under Obama, of state-sanctioned torture coupled with a refusal on the part of the government to prosecute those CIA agents and others who willfully engaged in systemic abuses that are properly designated war crimes.

With the release of the Senate Select Committee Intelligence's report on torture, it becomes clear that in the aftermath of the loathsome terrorist attack of 9/11, the United States entered into a new and barbarous stage in its history, one in which acts of violence and moral depravity were not only embraced but celebrated[16]. Certainly, this is not to suggest that the United

States had not engaged in criminal and lawless acts historically or committed acts of brutality that would rightly be labeled acts of torture. That much about our history is clear and includes not only the support and participation in acts of indiscriminate violence and torture practiced through and with the right-wing Latin American dictatorships in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil in the 1970s but also through the willful murder and torture of civilians in Vietnam, Iraq, and later at Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and Afghanistan. The United States is no stranger to torture, nor is it a free of complicity in aiding other countries notorious for their abuses of human rights. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman reminded us by taking us as far back as 1979 that of the "35 countries using torture on an administrative basis in the late 1970s, 26 were clients of the United States[17]".

Another index of America's descent into barbarism is the increasing prominence of the racial punishing state along with the school-to-prison pipeline, which disproportionately affects children of color; the criminalization of a range of social problems; a massive incarceration system; the militarization of local police forces; and the ongoing use of state violence against youthful dissenters[18]. The prison has now become the model for a type of punishment creep that has impacted public schools in which young children can be arrested for violating something as trivial as a dress code[19]. The punitive model of prison culture is also evident in a number of social services where poor people are put under constant surveillance and punished for minor infractions[20]. Indeed, throughout the culture, we see the militarization of everyday life in the endless celebration of the military, the police, and religious fundamentalisms, all of which are held in high esteem by the American public, in spite of their overt authoritarian nature. What this list amounts to is the undeniable fact that, in the last forty years, the United States has launched a systematic attack not only on the practice of justice, but on the very idea of democracy itself.

More recently, we have witnessed the development of a collective existential crisis, evident in the despair and depoliticization that have overtaken much of the American populace, particularly since 9/11 and the economic crisis of 2008. The economic crisis has now been matched by a crisis of ideas, and many people have surrendered to a neoliberal ideology that limits their sense of agency by defining them primarily as consumers, subjects them to a pervasive culture of fear, blames them for problems that are not of their doing, and leads them to believe that violence is the only mediating force available to them. As neoliberal forces colonize popular culture and its pleasure quotient, people are led to assume that the spectacle of violence is the only way through which they can feel anything anymore. How else to interpret polls that show that a majority of Americans support the death penalty, torture, government surveillance, drone warfare, the prison-industrial complex, and zero-tolerance school policies that punish children[21]? Trust, honor, intimacy, compassion, and caring for others are now viewed as liabilities, just as self-interest has become more important than the general interest and the common good.

In such a society, selfishness and an unchecked celebration of individualism become, as Joseph E. Stiglitz has argued, "the ultimate form of selflessness[22]". That is, a dire consequence of neoliberalism is that it makes a virtue out of producing a series of widespread crises that, in turn, creates an existential crisis of personal agency and subjectivity, both of which sap democracy of its vitality. Within the discourse of neoliberalism, larger social, political, and economic structures disappear replaced by the mantra of individual responsibility. Individuals are now blamed exclusively for the problems they face rendering them powerless in the face of larger structural modes of oppression. There is nothing about this contemporary mode of blame and culture of cruelty that suggests it is related to the internal workings of neoliberal market fundamentalism. Moreover, the economic crisis

intensified its worse dimensions. The source of the existential crisis many Americans face lie in the roots of neoliberalism, particularly since its inception in the 1970s when social democracy proved unable to curb predatory capitalism and economics became the driving force of politics and increasingly imposed a market rationality on the entirety of the social order. After the 1980s, neoliberalism no longer became a template for simply the market; it became a template for governing the whole of social life. In doing so, it has waged/ a war on the welfare state, social provisions, unions, public goods, and any other institution at odds with the logic of privatization, deregulation, and commodification.

I think it is fair to say, following Hannah Arendt, that each country will develop its own form of authoritarianism rooted in the historical, pedagogical, and cultural traditions that enable it to reproduce itself[23]. In the United States, there will be an increase in military-style repression to deal with the inevitable economic, ecological, political crises that will intensify under the new authoritarianism. In this instance, the appeal will be largely to security, reinforced by a culture of fear and an intensified appeal to nationalism. A "hard war" that deploys state violence against the American people will be supplemented by a "soft war" waged on the cultural front aided by the new electronic technologies of consumerism and surveillance. There will be a full-fledged effort to conscript the pedagogical influence of various cultural apparatuses, extending from schools and older forms of media, on the one hand, to the new media and digital modes of communication, on the other. These educational tools will be used to produce elements of the authoritarian personality, while crushing as much as possible any form of collective dissent and struggle. Under such conditions, state sovereignty will be permanently replaced by corporate sovereignty, giving substance to the specter of totalitarianism that Michael Halberstam once stated "haunts the modern ideal of political emancipation[24]".

Neoliberalism's war against the social state has produced new forms of collateral damage. As security nets are destroyed and social bonds undermined, neoliberalism relies on a version of social Darwinism both to punish its citizens and to legitimate its politics of exclusion and violence, at the same time convincing people that the new normal is a constant state of fear, insecurity, and precarity. By individualizing the social, all social problems and their effects are coded as individual character flaws rooted in a lack of individual responsibility or, worse, a form of psychopathology[25]. As political concessions become relics of a long abandoned welfare state, any collective sense of ethical imagination and social responsibility towards those who are vulnerable or in need of care are hollowed out to serve the interests of global markets. Life is now experienced as a war zone, with growing numbers of people considered disposable, particularly those who are viewed as a liability to capitalism and its endless predatory quest for power and profits.

The death-haunted politics of disposability, evident in the wave of austerity measures at work in North America and Europe, is a systemic outcome of neoliberal capitalism as it actively engages in forms of asset stripping and social control[26]. In recent years, the notion of disposability has become one of global neoliberalism's most powerful organizing principles, rendering millions redundant according to the laws of a market that wages violence against the 99 percent on behalf of the new financial elites. Under the regime of neoliberalism, Americans live in a society where ever-expanding segments of the population are being spied on, considered potential terrorists, and subject to a mode of state and corporate lawlessness in which the arrogance of power knows no limits. As American society is increasingly militarized, the policies and practices of disposability have become a societal scourge that constitutes entire populations as excess to be relegated to zones of social death and abandonment, surveillance, and incarceration.

What has emerged in this particular historical conjuncture is the way in which young people, particularly low-income and poor minority youth, are increasingly denied any place in an already weakened social order. The degree to which youth are no longer seen as central to how many neoliberal societies define their future is startling. One index of what might be called the war on youth can be seen in the increasing exclusion of working-class youth from higher education. The skyrocketing rise in tuition fees, the defunding and corporatization of higher education, and the increasing burden of student debt, along with the widening gap in wealth and income across the entire society, have abandoned many low-income and poor minority youth to inhabit sites of terminal exclusion ranging from struggling public schools to prisons.

What needs to be stressed is that the increasing corporatization of higher education will most certainly undermine its role as a democratic public sphere and a vital site where students can learn to address important social issues, be self-reflective, and learn the knowledge, values, and ideas central to deepening and expanding their capacities to be engaged and critical agents. This role of higher education is perceived by neoliberal acolytes as dangerous because it has the potential to educate young people to think critically and learn how to hold power accountable[27]. Unfortunately, with the corporate university now defining many aspects of governance, curriculum, finances, and academic matters, education has become largely about training, creating an elite class of managers, and eviscerating those forms of knowledge that threaten the status quo. Any subject or mode of knowledge that does not serve the instrumental needs of capital—especially anything that might conjure up forms of moral witnessing and collective political action— is rendered disposable, suggesting that the only value of any worth is exchange value. The corporate university is the ultimate expression of a disimagination machine in its efforts to reduce pedagogical practice to nothing more than a

commercial transaction; employ a top-down authoritarian style of power; mimic a business culture; infantilize students by treating them as consumers; and depoliticize faculty by removing them from all forms of governance. As William Boardman argues, the destruction of higher education

> by the forces of commerce and authoritarian politics is a sad illustration of how the democratic ethos (educate everyone to their capacity, for free) has given way to exploitation (turning students into a profit center that has the serendipitous benefit of feeding inequality) [28].

As an co-conspirator in the neoliberal takeover of the social order, higher education today has nothing to say about teaching students how to think for themselves in a democracy, how to engage with others, or how to address through the prism of democratic values the relationship between themselves and the larger world. Hence, students are treated like commodities and research data - or, worse, as institutional performance indicators—to be ingested and spit out as potential job seekers for whom education has become merely a form of training. Students are now taught to ignore human suffering and to focus mainly on their own self-interest, and by doing so they are being educated to exist in a political and moral vacuum. Education under neoliberalism is a form of radical depoliticization, one that kills the radical imagination and hope for a world that is more just, equal, and democratic.

It cannot be emphasized too much that the slow death of the university as a center of creativity and critique, a fundamental source of civic education, and a crucial public good sets the stage for the emergence of a national culture that produces and legitimates an authoritarian society. The corporatization of higher education may, in fact, constitute the most serious assault against democracy. Certainly, it gives rise to the kind of thoughtlessness that Hannah Arendt believed was at the core of totalitarianism[29]. A glimpse of such thoughtlessness has been on display at Rutgers University, which recently presented an honorary degree to Condoleezza Rice while offering to pay her

$35,000 to give a commencement speech. This gesture was clearly motivated by political interests, for how else to explain giving such a prestigious degree to someone a number of people consider a potential war criminal[30]? This example is only one of many that exhibit how higher education has now become firmly entrenched in what President Eisenhower once called the Military-Industrial-Academic complex[31].

One of the most troubling elements of the corporate university's attempt to wage a war on higher education is the ongoing attrition of full-time faculty, as numbers are mostly reduced or replaced by part-time instructors with minimal power, benefits, and security. Not only are part-time and non-tenured faculty in the United States demoralized as they increasingly lose their rights and power, but many qualify for food stamps and are living slightly above the poverty level. Too many educators find themselves positioned as subaltern labor and staring into an abyss. As a result, they have become either unwilling to address the current attacks on the university or befuddled over how the language of specialization and professionalization has cut them off from connecting their work to larger civic issues and social problems. Hindered from developing a meaningful relationship to a larger democratic polity, the academy's retreat from public life leaves an ethical and intellectual void in higher education as it increasingly transforms critical educators into fully integrated supporters of the corporate university.

The seriousness of the declining numbers of public intellectuals who are willing to address important social issues, aid social movements, and use their knowledge to create a critical formative culture cannot be overstated. Moreover, the retreat of the intellectuals in the struggle against neoliberalism and other forms of domination is now, alarmingly, matched by the rise of anti-public intellectuals who have sold themselves to corporate power. While the list is too long to elaborate on one would have to include the likes of cultural theorists such as Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, and John McWhorter,

on the one, and arch supporters of neoliberalism such as Martin Feldstein, Glenn Hubbard, Frederic Mishkin, Laura Tyson, Richard Portes and John Campbell and Larry Summers.

These so-called intellectuals are the enemies of democracy and strive to impose subjectivities and values that buy into the notion that capitalism, rather than people, is the agent of history. They do not critique democracy for the sake of improving it; rather, they do everything they can to undermine democratic principles. These intellectuals are bought and sold by the financial elite and are nothing more than ideological puppets using their skills to destroy the social contract, critical thought, and all those social institutions capable of constructing non-commodified values and democratic public spheres. Their goal is to normalize the ideologies, modes of governance, and policies that reproduce massive inequities and suffering for the many, while generating exorbitant privileges for the corporate and financial elite. The growing presence of such intellectuals is symptomic of the fact that neoliberalism represents a new historical conjuncture in which cultural institutions and political power have taken on a whole new life in shaping politics. For instance, one can argue that if the economic crisis is not matched by a crisis of ideas it is because the corporate elite now control the commanding cultural apparatuses that produce and disseminate ideas, values, and ideologies that work to normalize market ideologies, policies, and practices. And it is precisely on the ideological front that neoliberalism has been able to legitimate the notion that the highest expression is self-interest, that selfishness is a virtue that consumerism is the noblest act of citizenship, and that militarism is a cherished ideal.

Indeed, the growing army of anti-public intellectuals who function largely as adjuncts of the military-industrial-academic complex and serve the interests of the financial elite is evidence of just how vast the neoliberal apparatus of pedagogical relations has become—an apparatus that privileges

deregulation, privatization, commodification, and the militarization of everyday life. What must be constantly brought to our attention at this time in our history is that public and higher education are not the only sites of education. The educational force of the wider culture has now become a major sphere in which identities, desires, and forms of agency are being shaped. This is particularly true for popular culture, which has been largely colonized by corporations and is increasingly used to reproduce a culture of consumerism and social illiteracy. Mainstream popular culture is a distraction through which people's emotions are channeled towards spectacles, often violent ones, while suffocating all vestiges of the imagination. Highjacked by neoliberal values, American culture now largely promotes the idea that any act of critical thinking is an act of stupidity, while offering up the illusion of agency through gimmicks like voting on American Idol.

What is crucial to consider about popular culture is that it is not simply about entertainment: it also functions to produce particular desires, subjectivities, and identities. It has become one of the most important and powerful sites of education, or what I have called an oppressive form of public pedagogy[32]. Film, television, talk radio, video games, newspapers, social networks, and online media do not merely entertain us; they are also teaching machines that offer interpretations of the world and largely function to produce a public with limited political horizons. They both titillate and create a mass sensibility that is conducive to maintaining a certain level of consent, while legitimating the dominant values, ideologies, power relations, and policies that maintain regimes of neoliberalism.

There are a number of registers through which a market-driven popular culture produces subjects willing to become complicit with their own oppression. Celebrity culture, for one, collapses the public into the private and reinforces a certain level of unthinking consumption. Surveillance culture undermines autonomy and is largely interested into locking people into

strangulating orbits of privatization and atomization. A militarized popular culture offers up violence and a hyper-masculine model of agency as both a site of entertainment and a mediating force through which to solve all problems. Indeed, violence has become the most important element of power and mediating force impacting social relationships. The advertising that imbues all elements of popular culture functions to turn people into consumers and suggests that the only obligation of citizenship is to shop. All together, these elements work largely as a way to depoliticize the population, distract people from recognizing their capacities as critically engaged agents, and empty out any notion of politics that would demand thoughtfulness, social responsibility, and the demands of civic courage.

Yet, there is also a subversive side to popular culture when it is used as a powerful resource to map and critically engage the politics of the everyday, mobilize alternative narratives to capitalism, and activate those needs vital to producing more critical and compassionate modes of subjectivity. Unfortunately, as Stuart Hall lamented, too few progressive thinkers have a "sense of politics being educative, of politics changing the way people see things[33]". Hall was pointing in part to a failure of the left to take seriously the political unconscious and the need to use alternative media, theater, online journals, news outlets, and other resources. Indeed, film, television, social media, and other instruments of culture can be used to make education central to a politics that is emancipatory and utterly committed to developing a democratic formative culture. There is enormous pedagogical value in bringing attention to the rare oppositional representations offered within the dominant media. At stake here is the need for progressives not only to understand popular culture and its cultural apparatuses as modes of dominant ideology, but also to take popular culture seriously as a tool to revive the radical imagination.

Anyone with an interest in democracy's survival must likewise be aware of education's political role as it shapes how people think, desire, and dream, and must struggle to make education central to a new politics. As a number of theorists from Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams to Paulo Freire and Stanley Aronowitz have argued for the last fifty years education is a crucial to the development of any radical political formation. To challenge the neoliberal stranglehold on all cultural and education institutions in the United States, such a formation would need to envision and develop new educational programs—extending from the creation of online journals and magazines to the development of alternative schools—as well as launch a comprehensive defense of those formal educational institutions that have historically acted as a safeguard for democracy.

What the current state of higher education suggests is that the left in its various registers has to create its own public intellectuals in various sites ranging from universities, schools, and online media to any alternative spaces where meaning circulates. I completely agree with the late Pierre Bourdieu when he insisted that it is of enormous political importance "to defend the possibility and necessity of the intellectual" as one who is tirelessly critical of the existing state of affairs. Intellectuals have a responsibility to connect their work to important social issues, collaborate with popular movements, and engage in the shaping of policies that benefit all people and not simply a few. At the heart of this suggestion is the need to recognize that ideas matter in the battle against authoritarianism, and that pedagogy must be central to any viable notion of politics and collective struggle. Public intellectuals have an obligation to work for global peace, individual freedom, care of others, economic justice, and democratic participation, especially at a time of legitimized violence and tyranny. There is no genuine democracy without a genuine critique of power. The very notion of being an engaged public intellectual is neither foreign to, nor a violation of, what it means to be an

academic scholar—it is central to its very definition. Put simply, academics have a duty to enter into the public sphere unafraid to take positions and generate controversy, function as moral witnesses, raise political awareness, and make connections to those elements of power and politics often hidden from public view. They also have a duty to engage in pedagogical practices that renounce the notion that teaching is an impartial act or practice.

As Paulo Freire pointed out, pedagogy is rooted in the ethical responsibility to create the conditions for students to be self-reflective, knowledgeable, and be able to connect learning to individual and social change[34]. The critical educator's role is to address important social problems, encourage human agency rather than to mold it, and to promote critical consciousness which means educating the subject to be a critical and engaged individual and social agent. Pedagogy in this instance is an ethical and political practice that urges students see beyond themselves, to transcend the call to privilege self-interest, and to become a subject in the shaping of power, modes of governance, equality, and justice.

Higher education must be widely understood as a democratic public sphere—a space in which education enables students to develop a keen sense of prophetic justice, claim their moral and political agency, utilize critical analytical skills, and cultivate an ethical sensibility through which they learn to respect the rights of others. What is at stake here is for students to create alternative public spheres, particularly with the use of the new media to article their voices and make visible ideologies and modes of critical knowledge central to their own struggles. They can fight for unions, create alternative study groups, connect with social movements outside of the university, and work with neighboring communities to unite around struggles that they both have an interest in such as preventing the corporatization of public services, public goods, and the growing paramilitization of police forces in the United States. They can also produce their own public intellectuals willing to write for

alternative media outlets, give interviews on radio stations, and work with journals and book publishers to produce material that inspires and energizes their generation and others struggling to redefine the meaning of democracy.

Higher 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 and power politically and morally accountable. Higher education is one of the few public spheres left with the potential to sustain a democratic formative culture. When it is engaged in communicating critical knowledge, values, and learning, it offers a glimpse of the promise of education for nurturing public values, educated hope, and a substantive democracy. 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 civic values, participation in self-governance, and democratic leadership. Only through such a formative and critical educational culture can students learn how to become individual and social agents, rather than merely disengaged spectators. It is imperative that current and future generations be able to think independently and to act upon civic commitments that demand a reordering of basic power arrangements fundamental to promoting the common good and producing a meaningful democracy.

I want to conclude by stressing that it is impossible simultaneously to believe in the democratic promise of higher education and to surrender to the normalization of a dystopian vision. One has to be realistic, certainly, but not despairing. Nor is there any room in such optimism for a romanticized utopianism. Instead, one has to be motivated by a faith in the willingness of people to fight together for a future in which dignity, equality, and justice matter, while at the same time recognizing the repressive forces that bear down on such a struggle. More specifically, hope has to be fed by the desire for collective action. Power is never completely on the side of domination; nevertheless, in these times, resistance is not a luxury but a necessity. Those

who believe in higher education and democracy have to engage the issues of economic inequality and overcome social fragmentation, develop an international social formation for radical democracy and the defense of the public good, undertake ways to finance oppositional activities and avoid the corrupting influence of corporate power, take seriously the educative nature of politics and the need to change the way people think, and develop a comprehensive notion of politics and a vision to match. History is open, though the gates are closing fast. Making good on the promise of democracy, education as a practice of freedom, and the demands of justice is the core challenge that must drive the mission and meaning of higher education as it teaches young people what it means not merely to be educated, but also to be socially and ethically responsible to each other and the world at large.

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