In academia, the effects of the “cultural turn” have been felt deeply. In everyday life, tenets from cultural politics have influenced how people behave or regard their options for action, such as the reconfiguration of social movements, protests, and praxis in general. Many authors writing in this field are known for their scholarship and social activism, both of which are arguably guided by principles of cultural politics about the nature of representation and the deployment of power in political discourses. The *Handbook of Cultural Politics and Education* is less an attempt to standardize contemporary educational scholarship and more a collection that engages the problems and promises of recent themes in social and cultural thought, which require our attention and demand a response. In other words, it opens doors to questions rather than convenient answers to difficult educational dilemmas. The Handbook is part of the appraisal of an opening created by interdisciplinary writings on such themes as representation, civil society, cultural struggle, subjectivity, and media within the context of education. Indeed cultural politics troubles traditional frameworks in search of critical explanations concerning education’s place within society. The contributions in the collection support this endeavor.

“In these difficult times, critical pedagogy needs all the theoretical inspiration it can muster. This formidable collection of provocative texts, skillfully edited by Zeus Leonardo, draws on a wide range of ideas from leading contemporary theorists and imaginatively applies their lessons to the thorny problems of the real world.” - Martin Jay, Sidney Hellman Ehrman Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley.

“This volume is a cutting-edge contribution to the study of cultural politics in education. Chapter authors affirm the critical role of culture as a set of material practices; they excavate and develop foundational thinking on ideology, discourse, race, and the array of post-studies in social theory. The book is at once an accessible introduction to, and a brilliant advancement of, the field of cultural analysis.” - Jean Anyon, Professor of Urban Education at City University of New York, Graduate Center and author of *Ghetto Schooling*. 

Handbook of Cultural Politics and Education
Zeus Leonardo (Ed.)
Handbook of Cultural Politics
and Education
Contexts of Education is a new series of handbooks that embraces both a creative approach to educational issues focused on context and a new publishing credo.

All educational concepts and issues have a home and belong to a context. This is the starting premise for this new series. One of the big intellectual breakthroughs of post-war science and philosophy was to emphasise the theory-ladenness of observations and facts—facts and observations cannot be established independent of a theoretical context. In other words, facts and observations are radically context-dependent. We cannot just see what we like or choose to see. In the same way, scholars are argue that concepts and constructs also are relative to a context, whether this be a theory, schema, framework, perspective or network of beliefs. Background knowledge always intrudes; it is there, difficult to articulate, tacit and operates to shape and help form our perceptions. This is the central driving insight of a generation of thinkers from Ludwig Wittgenstein and Karl Popper to Thomas Kuhn and Jürgen Habermas. Increasingly, in social philosophy, hermeneutics, and literary criticism textualism has given way to contextualism, paving the way for the introduction of the notions of ‘frameworks’, ‘paradigms’ and ‘networks’—concepts that emphasize a new ecology of thought.

This new series is predicated upon this insight and movement. It emphasises the importance of context in the establishment of educational facts and observations and the framing of educational hypotheses and theories. It also emphasises the relation between text and context, the discursive and the institution, the local and the global. Accordingly, it emphasizes the significance of contexts at all levels of inquiry: scientific contexts; theoretical contexts; political, social and economic contexts; local and global contexts; contexts for learning and teaching; and, cultural and interdisciplinary contexts.

Contexts of Education, as handbooks, are conceived as reference texts that also can serve as texts.
Handbook of Cultural Politics and Education

Edited by

Zeus Leonardo
*University of California, Berkeley, USA*
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ZEUS LEONARDO

AFFIRMING AMBIVALENCE

Introduction to Cultural Politics and Education

CULTURE’S TURN AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICS

In Colin Sparks’ (1996) excellent introduction to Stuart Hall’s corpus, Sparks characterizes the development of cultural studies as an initial intervention into orthodox Marxist studies. An impasse had occurred within Marxism with respect to the superstructure’s effectivity, particularly the role and status of culture. Deemed secondary and an effect of the base (sometimes referred to as infrastructure), superstructural features, like family, church, and education, became significant but not determining aspects of history and struggle. They were depicted as ideological fields where cultural processes bear the imprints of the economy. Although Marxism arguably represents within the phrase “political economy” a study of the whole rather than fragments of society, it accomplished this analysis by locating history within the economy and a necessary but insufficient politics within culture. Orthodox Marxism left undeveloped a genuine appreciation for the creative aspects of culture, even its working class version. Ambivalence toward orthodox Marxism became an opportunity for theory production, which would turn its critical eye toward the neglected process of culture.

As Sparks explains, in early cultural studies Hoggart, Williams, and Thompson offered an answer to the impasse by documenting the development of working class culture, with Thompson being its champion, Williams its believer, and Hoggart its follower. Of the three figures, Thompson represents the most direct lineage with Marxism, with Hoggart having the least umbilical relation with the previous orthodoxy. It would be inaccurate to suggest that a critical theory of culture begins with the British. Lukács, the Frankfurt School, Gramsci, and Althusser – all sensing the Marxist impasse – entered the theoretical fray decades before, with their study of working class consciousness, the culture industry, civil society, and ideological interpellation, respectively. Historical events, like the rise of European fascism also provided a thrust for theories that would speak to the exigencies of a world threatened by authoritarianism, something that Adorno took very seriously. Later, the failures of Soviet communism would become evident, leading to further questions regarding the limitations of a Marxist-Leninist project without a robust cultural component. Affirming the critical role of culture as a generative process became a revolutionary intervention within Marxism that pushed for new questions about the nature of contradiction, this time as a lived aspect of political practice.
This moment crystallizes in British cultural studies, which spawned a programmatic assault at the study of culture in the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, in Birmingham, England. Although the CCCS occupies a small and rather insignificant physical office in the Birmingham school, as Handel Wright (1998) notes, its symbolic stature takes up as much space as the Frankfurt School within critical studies of culture. Under various leaderships from Stuart Hall to Paul Willis, the CCCS produced key and visible work that would be decisive in producing, in Kuhn’s (1970) sense, a paradigm shift. In particular, Stuart Hall’s early work produced key insights on the question of working class culture without falling prey to what Sparks calls a “workerist” analysis, or a romantic projection of proletarian revolutionariness. Hall’s was not an anthropologically inspired take on culture, which has a long-standing tradition, but rather a cultural materialism (Williams, 1977) that harkens back to the early to middle Marx before the volumes of Capital. Hall (1996a) writes, “I like people’s middle period a lot, where they have gotten over their adolescent idealism but their thought has not yet hardened into a system” (p. 146). Although Hall was inspired by Althusser – who wasn’t in the 1960s? – he favored the younger Marx to the mature one. So against scientific Marxism, Hall did not accept Bachelard’s notion of the “epistemological break” so dear to Althusser. Hall gave the nod to the ambivalent Marx, whose analysis was not only cultural, but less systematized and ultimately more open. With respect to culture, theory is not hopelessly tied to an idea but a set of material practices. These questions around Marxism aside, Eagleton (2003) notes that cultural theories of the 1960s and 70s were on the whole comradely rather than hostile. As we will see, this would later change.

At this point, it may be relevant to explain the difference between the relatively recent innovation of Cultural Studies and studies of culture from allied disciplines, like anthropology and sociology. In these latter disciplines, culture has been a central concern. From rituals to processes of modernization, culture is a theoretical construct that enjoys deep engagement in the disciplines. From Mauss’ (1967) Melanesian ethnographies, to Bataille’s (1988, 1991) studies of the sacred, to Levi-Strauss’ (1963) structural anthropology, and to Weber’s (1978a) disenchantment with the impersonal nature of modern bureaucracy, culture has not received short shrift. In education, anthropologists and sociologists of education are not scarce and ethnography is a methodology dedicated to the study of culture, long before Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams introduced the turn to culture. What differs in the turn from studies of culture to cultural studies is precisely a reaction to the metanarratives of Marxist science, helped along by the (re)discovery of Marx’s earlier, humanist texts. The return to the anthropological Marx provided a language that allowed theorists to tap into processes associated with class consciousness, alienation, and meaning making. It shifted the attention from objective analysis of modes of production to modes of everyday class life. In terms of method, this required a shift from quantitative to qualitative, if not ethnographic, research for culture is not easily apprehensible through numbers and regressions, at least not without a good dose of violence to a proper cultural understanding. Ethnography, it seems, took over where positive science left off. The appreciation of daily
life within capitalist social formations was particularly intense insofar as the rise of consumption culture (Baudrillard, 1988a, 1988b), counter or sub-cultures (Hebdige, 1996), and media and information society (Kellner, 1995; Bell, 1960) made new forms of analysis possible. It was no longer the world Marx had described and social theory slowly gave way to cultural theory. It would be inaccurate to describe this transition as evidence of a move away from politics and towards culture, but more precisely as the turn to *culture as a form of politics*: in other words, cultural politics. Moreover, the turn to cultural studies was always linked to concerns over domination and possibilities for revolutionary thought, which were not always central to mainstream uptakes of culture.

This culture-as-politics is a second difference from the already extant theories of culture. Whereas culture – from its ethnicity or tribal forms, from Balinese cock fights and Bhutanese cooking – gave the university an international flavor and extended our intellectual taste, cultural studies since the 1960s attached the problem of power with culture. This is different from Weber’s (1930) earlier exposition of ethno-economic development in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and Robert Park’s (1964) ethnicity paradigm in sociology. These are no doubt studies of power but inscribed by more or less traditional notions of ethnicity. The difference is captured by Hall’s (1996b) invocation of “new ethnicities,” or the recognition of cultural groups that are demarcated along lines of meaning rather than nations or conveniently bound geographies. Hall’s rendition of culture or ethnicity aligns itself with Hebdige’s legitimation of counter or sub-cultures, like punk, or what Spivak (1988) later includes in a more comprehensive study of the subaltern. Although early cultural studies shows a bias toward class – specifically working class – culture, we will see later that this culture comes with multiple inscriptions, such as race and gender. No longer disparaged as existing outside history, gender takes on greater importance as a form of social, as opposed to biological, relation. Weedon (1997) and McRobbie (1996) would insist on a full-fledged accounting of gender as a cultural system of subject positions, which relegates the feminine as a dependent sphere to the masculine. Fraser (1997) calls attention to the problem of recognition, or distribution’s cultural cognate, in order to explain that a dual theory fares better than a sole focus on economic justice. People on the margins suffer from material deprivations and status differentials in a society that treats them as second class citizens while profiting from their labor. In short, social systems like gender or race are both ideological and material relations. Cultural theory as such did not evolve in isolation from other trends in thought, some of which were more committed to science, such as Althusser’s structural Marxism. But even these currents could not simply return to Marx before the impasse.

Althusser’s rise exemplified a great compromise for it was he who addressed the impasse between an insistence on a material struggle and the increasing importance of ideological relations and steadily developing cultural apparatuses, particularly in advanced Western societies. Although Althusser cemented Marxism into a permanent status because of the equal permanence that he established for ideology, Althusser’s Lacanian-inspired theory of interpellation was a decisive moment in theory development due to its theoretical accommodations of the “culture problem.”
Although he insisted on the faceless and scientific version of structural Marxism, Althusser’s (1971) nod to schools as part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) gave the study of education the weight that it needed within Marxist studies, heretofore no longer merely ideological without a proper relation with the material. I will have more to say about Althusser below but for now it suffices to say that this pre-poststructuralist, even as he kicked and screamed with his fetish of science, opened the door to cultural ambivalence. His theory of interpellation, or subject-making taken to its logical extent by his former student Foucault and once collaborator Balibar, is arguably the dominant theory of cultural politics today.

As Sparks continues to survey the development of Hall and cultural studies generally, he finds that the early intervention into Marxism gives way to a Foucauldian-inspired analysis of discourse. Themes associated with Marxist materialism, such as production, commodification, and consumption, are replaced by the sign, subject, and signification. Terms so long associated with the Leftist intellectual tradition are eclipsed by a new set of concerns. Political economy becomes overshadowed by political anatomy (Foucault, 1977) and body studies (Turner, 1992), consciousness by subjectivity and subject-formation (Lather, 1991; Youdell, in press), alienation and determinisms by indeterminacy and aleatory relations (Baudrillard, 1990), teleologies with television (Kellner, 1992), and the turn from modes to movies (Giroux, 2002). In cultural theory, we have witnessed the central preoccupation with capitalist production shift to studies of Hollywood production. Eagleton (1991) laments that new students of revolutionary theory have more cant than familiarity with Kant. This is made possible by new theoretical frameworks that are introduced during these New Times, such as Habermas’ (1984, 1987a) reconstruction of communication and language pragmatics, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) rhizome alternative to the root, and Derrida’s (1976) own doubts about dialectics. At times the ambivalence toward Marxism transforms into downright animosity toward the father (see Baudrillard, 1975; Leonardo, 2003a). In short, there is a theoretical falling out of love with Marxism, but we still wait to see if the break up is prelude to a make up, especially in times of economic downturn, when the bearded man’s relevance is reconsidered (Hitchens, 2009).

These intellectual shifts are part of historical changes, one of which is the political melancholy following the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s. Sparks’ point is that, in its current and dominant form, cultural studies exhibits a very limited relation to Marx, a tendency whose political utility about which he expresses serious reservations (see also Eagleton, 2003). Many post-grand theorists, like Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida have paid their Marxist dues and could hardly be criticized as not possessing intimate background of the Marxist literature. But alas, as Eagleton notes, God was not a structuralist after all and it seems we have entered the beginning of the end for grand theories. As Sparks regrets, these interventions may have been necessary but remain insufficient. Many of today’s dominant theorists were once students of prominent Marxists during a time when the opposition only had Marx, Freud, and Saussure upon which to rely (Foucault, 1983). The turn to Nietzsche and counter-enlightenment thinkers opened new fields of possibility and political practice. This is the beginning of
the “post” in social theory. In my survey of cultural politics in education, this
Introduction will take its cue from Sparks’ outline of early cultural Marxism, the
transition to a Foucauldian analysis of discourse, and its current iterations. I will
organize the chapter into themes that are central to a sweeping understanding of
cultural politics. Although the chapter is admittedly not the final word on these
matters, I hope it will do justice to the influential developments in cultural politics
of education.

In her essay on the permutations of social theory, Seehwa Cho (2010) expertly
describes the historical development of intellectual production that shifts the
attention from economic to cultural production. She finds that the turn to culture is
not a simple return to a neglected concept but a shift in problematic, this time
culture as the privileged theoretical construct. Seen this way, culture is not simply
the relation we enter into when we highlight rituals, meaning, and language.
Rather, culture is an assemblage of themes, a whole architecture whereby social
life itself finds its expression and possibilities, including the economy, which now
takes the form of a cultural relation. In short, culture here is endowed with its full
measure of radicality, a politics (Apple, 1996). With respect to education, Cho’s
insights bear out. In the 1970s, the educational Left witnessed a burgeoning field of
studies into cultural politics, sparked in the British context by Willis’ (1977)
ethnography of the lads and Bernstein’s (1977a, 1977b) detailed account of class-
based cultural codes. Taking its cue from a newly legitimated focus on schools,
Willis’ study in particular has since become a classic in its appreciation of insights
gained from theories of cultural reproduction but also introduces the importance of
cultural production. That is, although he admits that reproduction happens by
virtue of capital’s imperatives and schools’ place within the intellectual division of
labor, Willis’ study affirms the critical role that cultural insight provides for
students who penetrate the social formation despite the fact that they enter
contradictions within their practical consciousness. Willis (1981) remarks,

[O]ur starting point should be in the cultural milieu, in material practices and
productions, in lives in their historical context in the everyday span of existence
and practical consciousness. We should investigate the form of living collective
cultural productions that occur on the determinate and contradictory grounds of
what is inherited and what is currently suffered through imposition, but in
a way which is nevertheless creative and active (p. 49).

Still tied to a Marxist understanding of class, Willis’s general findings concerning
the power of cultural forms in education proved decisive. Although it would over-
reach to suggest that Learning to Labor serves as the guiding inspiration to Giroux’s
(1983) theory of resistance, Apple’s (1990) use of ideology as cultural mediation,
and McLaren’s (1991) framing of culture as a struggle over meaning, the theoretical
conversation has travelled back and forth across the Atlantic. A problematization
of Bowles and Gintis’ (1976) economistic framework that gives short shrift to
cultural struggle, the turn to culture as worldview-generating provides the neo-
Marxist Left a way into schooling as part of a general capitalist production, and
without the usual fear that one is being an ideologue for straying too far from
economic exchange. Neither folkish in their uptake of everyday school life nor elitist in their denigration of popular culture, cultural politicians in education struck a balance that established a proper relation between the material organization of society and the ideological production of schooling.

This synthesis is most evident in Freire’s (1993) concern over the “culture of silence” that is produced in a schooling experience that does not affirm students’ ontological right to be free. As cultural workers (Freire, 2006), teachers work the material from nature into culture, a distinctly human form of intellectual labor. Liberated from the economy’s determinisms, culture is given its autonomy that allows theorists to follow its flows without being burdened by concerns about determinisms that dogged the orthodoxy. As a cultural or humanist Marxist, Freire’s work is evidence of a certain reculturation project in education as part of a larger social change. Although Freire was clear that the educational apparatus by itself would be an insufficient catalyst for change, he deemed it an important node in the broader search for cultural freedom (see Giroux, 2010, http://www.truthout.org/10309_Giroux_Freire). Central to Freire’s analysis is the cultural process of decoding reality as a constitutive moment in dialogue. Taken as something more than mere classroom chatter, dialogue becomes the ontological property of educators and students who enter communication as incomplete subjects in search of freedom. With this admission comes the centrality of humility, which is not synonymous with humanitarian humbleness, something false at the same time that it is pretentious. On the contrary, Freire supported a form of classroom authority that admits to the openness of knowledge, not its impossibility on the left or its predetermined form on the right. Reconstructing authority, which has plagued a certain Leninist variety of Marxism, Freire’s intervention is a key moment in education as a process of cultural change. Rejecting authoritarianism and vanguardism on one side but denouncing neutrality on the other, Freire reconstructs authority as a form of power sharing and does not encourage teachers to pretend that they do not have charge of a room filled with either kids or adult learners. Educators are both in authority to the extent that the state has given them a measure of power as well as an authority insofar as they possess critical amounts of training, knowledge, and skills. Abdicating their power is therefore itself an act of power, which in the end, may produce either classroom chaos at best or resorting to the subtle expression of manipulative power at worst. For Freire, reconstructing authority necessitates establishing a new culture of power, one that does not mystify it as predetermined and therefore unchangeable, and is ultimately deployed in the interest of the oppressed.

Freire was neither alone nor unpreceded by other intellectuals in the reconstruction of authority. The dissident, Antonio Gramsci, decades earlier provided insights on the nature of a passive, cultural revolution required by the development of a complex system of civil society. As Perry Anderson (1976) notes in his monograph-length essay in New Left Review, no Marxist thinker in the last 50 and more years has been more respected and engaged by social(ist) thinkers than Gramsci. To some the father of cultural Marxism, to others a martyr because of his imprisonment, Gramsci (1971) has generated a cottage industry of intellectual
production dedicated to at least two cultural concepts: hegemony and the intellectual (see Buras, 2008; Borg, Buttigieg, and Mayo, 2003; Holst, 2001). According to Gramsci, hegemony is a process that is quite distinct from relations of domination. Whereas the first is characterized by the process of consent, the second is marked by coercion. Although Gramsci never denies the presence of coercion and its partnership with consent, it is the latter process that he pursues in light of a highly developed civil society within western nations, which ameliorates, perhaps dilutes, the coercive power of the state. According to Anderson, Lenin seems to confirm this distinction when he urges western nations to develop different strategies in their struggles against non-Czarist states, where a war of maneuver, or a cohesive, all out assault on the state was necessary. For highly developed states, a war of position requires local sensitivity to cultural processes that are not apolitical in nature, but politics in the form of meaning where the struggle over the terrain of cultural politics properly commences.

Anderson’s treatment of Gramsci reminds us that in contrast to eastern socialist struggles, where the “state was everything,” the state in developed, western nations is but an “outer ditch,” filled in with an architecture of cultural institutions that can either work in the service of state power or become mechanisms for resistance against it. Anderson’s bone of contention with Gramsci is the Italian’s somewhat reformist stance on the question of force. To Anderson, power always falls back on the question of force where the state, in Weber’s (1978b) terms, monopolizes its legitimate use. In other words, in times of “peace,” consent is enough to convince the mass to fall in line but in times of conflict, the state reserves the right to deploy force. The elite and masses in capitalist nations are in a constant state of undeclared war. In light of this, the question of consent becomes less meaningful if it always entails the veiled threat of force. Consent becomes the euphemized form of coercion, its cultural cognate, its symbolic form. The ruling bloc’s ability to win consent from the mass is the latter’s inability to use legitimate force against the state.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony has become a household term in cultural politics. Its generative use means that resistance is built into a social system, always there as a dynamic part of the complex dance between domination and revolution. As Martin (1992) notes, this is not a “Swiss cheese theory of power” where insurgents poke holes into the fabric of domination, but rather a resistance that is already prefigured into it. For example, Martin’s creative analysis of science school textbooks’ cultural construction of conception extracts militarized images of sperms assaulting the passive egg waiting to be conquered. The metaphorical basis of science on which Stepan (1990) insists, is not a surrender to language and an argument for the abolition of metaphor. Rather, it engenders resistance to dominant meanings via the project of semiotic insubordination, of subverting significations that parade as truth. This is precisely why consent has to be rewon as part of the compromise into which the ruling bloc enters, in order to remain in power. In this sense, power does not ossify but is constantly reconfigured and the bloc has to recruit new elements to enter its orbit. That said, resistance does not always produce radical outcomes, as discovered by Willis’ (1977) lads and MacLeod’s (2008) Hallway Hangers, in whom we find
a combination of good and common sense. They are realistic examples of students who possess the ability to “penetrate” the social formation and simultaneously be seduced by its machinations. Hegemony assumes resistance and the bloc is in no way threatened by it until the resistance matures from private, individualized expressions to cultural forms of public protest. This by no means suggests that nothing changes until this point of rupture as much as it is the confirmation that a new hegemony has been realized. This is what Laclau and Mouffe (1991) suggest when they claim that there is no revolution without hegemony, which makes the aspiration of getting beyond hegemony an abstraction at best and a mystification at worst. One cannot be against hegemony as much as it is useless to be against politics.

The historic bloc differs from the more orthodox concept of the ruling class. In classical Marxism, the focus falls on the singular development of the bourgeoisie. For example, as Marx and Engels (1970) note, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force” (p. 64; italics in original). Control of material production is key in orienting society to the will of the bourgeoisie. The concept of the bloc differs from the ruling class through the former’s development as an ideological ensemble. No longer just the ruling class, the bloc is a combination of bourgeois and non-bourgeois elements of society. It certainly contains a material component and control of production is still key in establishing hegemony, but cultural relations become the bloc’s smoking gun. Ideological hegemony is not just the process of falsifying the mass’ consciousness but the way that an entire social formation functions under the alignment of disparate groups – always contingent – the result of which is to perpetuate the capitalist worldview. The ruling class no longer goes it alone and instead recruits, in both strategic and unintentional ways, a whole set of new allies from various sectors of society, compelled by both material and ideological reasons, and recrudescenting into economic and identitarian-based social movements. Hegemony recruits them all for mutual benefit. This is precisely why the concept of the “bloc,” rather than the more classical “ruling class,” represents an advance insofar as it captures the complex power web that characterizes advanced capitalist societies and the shifting terrain of political alliances they generate.

Gramsci’s study establishes the give and take that was missing in Marxist, scientific orthodoxy, where change only took place after the revolution. Gramsci illuminates the process before revolutionary periods wherein inchoate elements within the mass prepare an organic group for leadership and convince the mass through intellectual, moral persuasion. In this sense, Gramsci theorizes everyday life as possessing revolutionary moments, or culture in its most creative sense that would have pleased someone like Raymond Williams. In this reconstruction, the intellectual does not equate with a certain erudite version but rather its organic function of an organic relationship between a theory of society and social practice. It is less a profession and more an apprehension of the disparate levels of social analysis from media to modes of production. Revolutions in their epochal sense are hard to come by and never develop instantaneously or spontaneously. They are
prepared for, through the reconstruction of common sense, the imagining of the possible, and remaking of consciousness.

The intellectual’s role is key in the reconstruction of consciousness and in education this role appropriately falls on the shoulders of teachers. Functioning as potential intellectuals in Gramsci’s sense, teachers have a foot in public life as workers for the state as well as a foot in cultural life as purveyors of knowledge in schools. In elementary school in particular, tens to hundreds of students pass through teachers’ lives in a school day, making them second only to family in time spent with young people. Even friends rarely spend six hours a day together. With this “captive audience” in tow, teachers are in a unique position to assume the role of the organic intellectual over and beyond their role as knowledge transmitters (see Giroux, 1988). To Gramsci, the traditional intellectual is defined by his vocation, usually tied to a profession. Although they make strange bedfellows, intellectuals and the political elite often share the same room. On the other hand, the organic intellectual assumes a socio-political, rather than a technical, function. For example, intellectual by training and organic by potential, teachers have the transformative opportunity to influence young minds on questions of justice, the constitution of history, and the nature of power, as they negotiate school knowledge. Because these issues are already embedded in the creation of the curriculum, instructional practice, and assessments, they are not extra-educational themes that must be injected into the otherwise “normal” process of schooling. They are already there and teachers may work differently without necessarily having to working harder. It does not ask more of; but rather something different from, them (Leonardo, 2003b). Reframing teachers as cultural workers suggests that they are not custodians of the state but rather its promise keepers, of insisting that it remain accountable to them as critical citizens. As teachers build civic capacity to intervene not only on behalf of less mature students but equally on their own behalf, they affirm their autonomy as intellectuals.

IDEOLOGY

Classical social theories have been unabashedly materialist, and economistic at that. By emphasizing the base at the expense of the superstructure, social theory favored a set of concerns, such as science, history, objective relations, and the derogation of other sets of concern with subjectivity, consciousness, and meaning. The turn to culture can be linked to an equally powerful turn to studies of ideology. Turning to ideology is not simply favoring an analysis of the superstructure as an antidote to the limitations of base studies. It is an entire way of explaining social and cultural relations, including material processes. By stating this, cultural politics does not conveniently transform ideas into material forms or materiality into a mere notion. Or as an orthodox Marxist may object, this is not materialist at all but a romance with the idea of materialism, what Ebert (1996) calls “matterism.” The uptake of ideology does not necessitate abandoning the concept within the realm of pure ideality but its direct link with modes of material existene. In other words, to affirm ideology studies is not to displace materialism but to speak from a particular point in the dialectic between ideas and the material world.
It is not far of a stone’s throw to suggest that cultural politics is the fuller appreciation of ideology as a force in its own right, which, as Althusser (1969) has noted, rebounds back on economics, or is able to affect it without determining it. In fact, as a dues paying Marxist, Althusser creates the concept of “overdetermination” to suggest that the economic reigns in the final instance without being the origin in the first instance. This means that while economics does not begin the process it certainly ends it, in the final analysis. This is not only clever but represents Althusser’s attempts to address the impasse in Marxist studies.2 This point addresses the problem of determinism and teleology that has dogged Marxist theory, which demanded a response either from within or from without Marxism. Raymond Williams (1977) diagnoses the problem best when he writes,

A Marxism without some concept of determination is in effect worthless. A Marxism with many of the concepts of determination it now has is quite radically crippled. . . The concept of overdetermination is an attempt to avoid the isolation of autonomous categories but at the same time to emphasize relatively autonomous yet of course interactive practices (p. 83; italics in original).

A Marxism that observes no conceptual limits exposes it to criticisms on the nature of a bounded analysis. It falls to the relativism of determinations that range from the economy to ear shapes. One cannot take Marxism to task for setting limits to social analysis, which is a necessary move, but a critic might hold it accountable for the choices it does make. For instance, its current forms of determination must answer to another criticism about the nature of the interconnected levels of analysis between the base and superstructure. It seems a compromise had to be struck or Marxism risks devolving from doctrine to dogma.

Economics may not be the root of social process but rather its destiny, its final resting place. It may not be the cause but an effect of social processes. For instance, where the analysis concerns gender or race, we may say that social disparities are economic in form but not in nature. Indeed race or gender discrimination includes labor exploitation but this may be one of patriarchy’s effects rather than something caused (and therefore addressed) by the economy. The symptom is material, even economic, without it being determined by the economy. It is economic in the last, but not the first, instance.

Althusser’s intervention reconstructs Marxist teleology insofar as the institution of communism does not rid itself of ideology, this time less of a problem for Marxist science and more of a natural progression as it matures. That is, as Marxist science becomes more rigorous (and hopefully accurate) in its understanding of social life, ideological thinking becomes a larger problem to confront. In the beginning, many Marxist strains of thought may have had legitimate claims to the status of science, much like the development of science itself. As Marxism matures, fewer iterations have bragging rights to being scientific. It becomes more selective, more refined, therefore its other, namely ideology, develops in the opposite direction alongside with common sense.3 As ideology engulfs more of social life, it establishes itself as more or less a permanent fixture of thought and the social formation.
Taking from Lacan, Althusser then likens ideology to the unconscious, always a remainder of the day in the sense that it represents a part of experience to which subjects do not have complete access. Althusser’s innovation departs from Lukács’ concept of ideology, which links its development with the maturation of working class consciousness. It also goes in the opposite direction of Freire, for whom purging the ideology of the oppressed is dependent on realizing a critical, humanist, and rational consciousness, or conscientization against superstitious thought. Of course, Althusser leaves behind the utterly pejorative notion of ideology as distortion because it functions through allusion as much as illusion. It recalls the real relations, albeit in phantasmic, elusive form. In this, Althusser’s appropriation of Lacan is decisive (Hirst, 1994; Apple, 1998; Aoki, 2000). Althusser shifts the theory of ideology from an exclusive attention to the real, to the real’s relation with the symbolic. It allows Althusser to affirm the role of language in creating the subject, which leads to his theory of interpellation. Still concerned with capitalism, Althusser’s subject is a laboring subject involved in answering to the call of class division. In all, affirming ideology reconstructs the relationship between the base and superstructure, not the valorization of the latter and derogation of the former.

The theory of interpellation is based on the suggestion that in order to exploit people in capitalism, a subject is already assumed. Althusser uses the analogy with the military insofar as a soldier is always assumed to be a citizen of a nation, therefore only citizens may be recruited into the army. This is made plain by the general rule that nations do not recruit other countries’ citizens into its army, as it must choose from within its own ranks. This is real to the extent that there are corroborating documents regarding citizenship. However, the process is symbolic insofar as a citizen imagines him or herself as a member of the nation (see also B. Anderson, 2006). S/he participates in rituals, narratives, and symbols as part of belonging to the nation and through these performances, helps constitute the nation as well as what and who signifies a legitimate citizen. Economic classes function in similar ways, creating subjecthood for the individuals who constitute them. They participate in the cultural rituals of labor, narratives of daily class life, and establish their class identity in the process. They become subjects of labor and are subjected by it; thus “subject” takes on a double meaning. Interpellation also establishes efficiency. Although a worker can certainly be exploited in the objective sense, this is incomplete. Just as a pet answers to its name in order for the master to subjugate it, workers are more efficiently brought into the fold if they enter class interpellation. Even pets differ in our ability to interpellate them as we notice most cats’ capacity to ignore their name whereas a dog is pleased as punch to hear his, and a worm is quite another story. Likewise, laborers enter the universe of the “worker,” which is not a natural, pre-existing category but one created by capitalism. They may revolt against their subjugation, but this is made possible by the preceding fact of interpellation. They may not turn around to the subject hailing (it does not require this of them) and it may even miss or misfire on occasion. But once it is established, interpellation, according to Althusser, rarely fails to register a response. The subject’s way out is not the absence of interpellation but the possibility of another interpellation, a counter-interpellation.
In schools, Althusser’s theory of ideology transpires almost literally. Students typically answer to their name during roll call and homeroom. If the teacher fails to record a response, as an Ideological State Apparatus, the school has the power to “trace” him or her by calling the parents. These decisions have economic incentives as public school funding is tied to daily student attendance. As subjects of schooling, young people assume the position of “student” as soon as they recognize their newfound identity. They then become potential workers through the creation of dispositions and habits, skills and know-hows to master the cultural arbitrary disguised as objective and backed by science (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). The point is that interpellation here comes with economic effects as students file in line for their introduction to work life. But this destiny is also accomplished through culture by building an entire social system that functions through language and other social practices. For example, students participate in school culture by attending pep rallies and loitering next to the Pepsi machines. They sport symbols and school colors to show their loyalty. They take tests to display their school knowledge, often complaining of its lack of utility because its worth is apparently conferred through the credential earned more than the actual skills learned (Collins, 1979). These are the functional, ideological myths that integrate students into school life. At times, such as the worldwide student protests of 1968 or the East Los Angeles blow out, students refashion this interpellation and create an entirely different subject position toward schooling, a new ideological reconstitution.

Althusser rehabilitates the concept of ideology from a purely idealist and illusory status to one that has material underpinnings. Likewise, material life produces a certain worldview, which falls within the domain of ideologies. But whereas ideology itself has no history, ideologies have histories (e.g., aristocratic, capitalist, communist). Ideology continues even into communist society because it functions for subjects as it integrates them into social life. While illusory, ideology maintains its autonomy insofar as the ideology of aristocracy – for example, in the UK – continues even after it is no longer hegemonic (Poulantzas, 1994). To Althusser’s collaborator, Poulantzas, this fact speaks to the effectivity of ideology that recommends it over Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. Ideology’s autonomy is eternal, like Freud’s concept of the unconscious.

The reconstruction of ideology did not begin with Althusser. It arguably began as early as Lenin and then on to Lukács, if we do not count Marx’s rescuing of its iteration as a “science of ideas” that began with Destutt de Tracy. For Lukács (1971), ideological maturity of the working class required a grasp of the totality over the fragmented and fleeting, local and specific levels of analysis. For Lenin (1963), politics was no less than a war between capitalist and socialist ideology, requiring the latter to destroy the former. Both Lukács and Lenin considered ideology as a potential weapon in class struggle, but only after a robust materialist analysis precedes it. By contrast, to Althusser no amount of materialist thinking rescues us from ideology. Ironically, he asserts the opposite: a materialist science creates an enlarged tumor called the ideological field. It is with Althusser where ideology gains its privileged status through its apparent permanence. This may not
have been his intention, concerned as he was with establishing a physics of history. But it is perhaps his legacy.

Having broached the question on the status of ideology, cultural theory virtually opens the floodgates and theories of ideology explode in the 1970s and on. As a young Althusserian, Stuart Hall enters the scene and offers the worldview thesis of ideology. Pushing a little harder on Althusser’s theory, Hall (1996c) culturalizes it even further and suggests a descriptive framework for ideology as the general system of meanings constituted in language: “By ideology I mean the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works” (p. 26). Hall’s reworking of ideology is not far off from Geertz’s (1994) anthropological theory of ideology as a set of linguistic tropes that make up the cultural system. It shares Ricoeur’s (1986) commitment to an integrative description of ideology as a set of tools, linguistic or otherwise, which ensure that people have direction and purpose, without which society becomes ill-equipped at dealing with modern life. If this sounds a bit functionalist, then it shares Durkheim’s (1933) concerns about the anomie that results when people are uncertain about the expectations placed upon them. So whereas ideology was once the antithesis of materialist thought and a source of people’s estrangement or alienation from their essence, the labor process, product, and other laborers, some intellectuals have transformed ideology into the exact opposite: ideology as an unavoidable framework responsible for people’s social and cultural integration. Not only do humans find ideology irresistible, they depend on it. There are several reasons for this shift in thinking.

This theoretical transformation may represent the backlash against orthodox Marxism’s overreliance on science that began with the utopian socialists. Trying to provoke a theoretical break reminiscent of Althusser’s radical demarcation between the ideological and scientific Marx, Aronowitz (1988) announces the conceptual dependency between science and ideology. As long as science exists as a theoretical construct, its opposing term in the dialectic, namely ideology, will continue to be a problem. As a radical solution, purging science necessitates vacating ideology. Aronowitz establishes the position that any study of ideology by default invokes the construct of science, which has been a source of another kind of problem. For example, by emphasizing rationality over myth, something of which Freire was also guilty, Marxism became vulnerable to a certain Eurocentric valuation of reason. Historical materialism was not just a science but equally a cultural apparatus that spawned a set of values that passed off as neutral and part of human nature rather than as specific and socially conditioned.

To take one instance, the notion of myth so central to European thinkers was derogated to irrational at best or reduced to falsehoods at worst. In other words, Marxism traded in truths whereas other perspectives fought over the leftover pieces called myths or falsehoods. Myth becomes a synonym for mystifications and magical thinking whereas it arguably represents the stories that bind a society (Richardson, 1994; Barthes, 1994). By demoting narratives to the status of myth,
Marxism fails to appreciate its own narrative structure, complete with its competing stories about human nature and the societies it creates. It denies its metaphorical basis, in as much as science relies on language to constitute its object of study (Stepan, 1990). It may bend the ideological stick too far to couch Marxist theory as just another story among stories, which denies its praxiological value, it does not reduce the power of Marxism to admit its situatedness, its ideology in terms of a conditioned worldview. On the contrary, it encourages a self-reflective component to Marxism that has been important to most contemporary cultural theory.

Although a purely descriptive theory of ideology contains its own limitations with respect to power relations (Larrain, 1991, 1996), it avoids painting the critic into a corner of neutrality. Eagleton (1996) makes a useful distinction between neutrality and objectivity, arguing that cultural theory often problematically equates them. Whereas an intellectual (e.g. Marx) is not required to show neutrality, he may still perform an objective analysis of social processes. In other words, although Marx rejects capitalism, this does not prevent him from apprehending its objective laws. However, for some Marx’s moral outrage is precisely what gets in the way of his objective social analysis (Hitchens, 2009). The upshot seems to be that while neglecting our social conditioning leads to theoretical pretensions of neutrality, reducing analysis to perspectivism imprisons the cultural critic from forming more or less accurate assessments of a situation. We may be ideological in the first instance (caught up in an unavoidable worldview) and not ideological in the second sense (caught up in falsehoods because of our worldview).

**DISCOURSE**

Then came poststructuralism. And nothing was ever the same again. Cultural politics enters a new chapter and an epistemological break in reverse is inaugurated, critical of a science fetish. There were signs of this development evidenced by the permutations in theories of ideology and the ensuing conceptual tug-of-war so it does not pay off to conceive of recent intellectual trends as a complete break. But to underestimate the shift toward discourse does not do justice either to the innovations or the ongoing debates. Hall (1996a) is inclined to believe that something intellectually significant has occurred when he says,

> I’ve gone a very long way along the route of rethinking practices as functioning discursively – i.e. like languages. That metaphor has been, I think, enormously generative for me and has powerfully penetrated my thinking. If I had to put my finer on the one thing which constitutes the theoretical revolution of our time, I think it lies in that metaphor – … it has reorganized our theoretical universe (p. 145).

Going away from science, Marxism, and centralities, and towards signs, Nietzsche, and dispersal, Foucault (1972) and company’s arrival begins what Sparks considers the latest phase of cultural politics. Taking his teacher’s lessons on interpellation to their logical extent, Foucault turns Althusser’s structuralism into a superstructuralism in two senses.
First, the history without a subject that owes so much to Althusser’s reading of Hegel becomes the mantra (see also Ashley, 1997). Not only is the subject exchanged for emphasizing the autonomy of discursive processes, the subject is outlived by such documentation and rendered largely irrelevant to it. What matters is the utterance, not the speaker. On this point, Hall (1996a) warns against a desperate effort to install a historical break by announcing it, as the high priest of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard, has been accused of doing. Theory cannot quite do away with the subject in the absolute sense, which still makes history even as it multiplies it. It is superstructural in the sense that an impersonal, terroristic structure goes into auto-pilot and gives rise to concepts like surveillance, docile bodies, and bodies without organs, or bodies without the imposing effect of social organization (Foucault, 1977; Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). A history without a subject is precisely a history without a social being that speaks to its unified dimensions.

To some, the announcement of the death of the subject is ironic for a perspective that depends so much on themes of subjectivity and subject-formation. Although one could perform a literal reading of the announcement as the eulogy for the subject, it is more accurate to conceive of it as the death of the liberal subject (Biesta, 2006). The obituary for the liberal subject mourns the loss of its autonomy, rationality, and transparency, but essentially no love is lost. Of poststructuralism, Weedon (1997) writes,

It is a theory which decentres the rational, self-present subject of humanism, seeing subjectivity and consciousness as socially produced in language, as sites of struggle and potential change. Language is not transparent as in humanist discourse, it is not expressive and does not label a ‘real’ world. Meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language and language is not an abstract system, it is not expressive and does not label a ‘real’ world. Meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language and language is not an abstract system, it is always socially and historically located in discourses. Discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status and power. The site of this battle for power is that subjectivity of the individual and it is a battle in which the individual is an active but not sovereign protagonist (p. 40).

As Jameson (2001) notes, theory and philosophy have long depended on the concept of subjectivity, perhaps reaching its golden age with Descartes’ cogito. By contrast, the subject is a relatively recent innovation, usually associated with Foucault’s studies of the way discourses produce the subject it ostensibly describes. For example, in gender studies Judith Butler (2004) observes that the so-called gender stereotypes do not issue from a pre-existing patriarchal system that maps onto our language practices and confirms roles and expectations regarding men and women. These speech acts are performances that install the subjects of gender as they attempt to apprehend them through language. There is no abstract gender system behind them outside of their articulations and performances. Otherwise known as the constitutive property of language, speech performances do not just make subjects intelligible but actively invent them. . . over and over. The same can be said for racial subjects, whose “reality” is not outside the language that reflects
their existence. As Derrida (1985) notes, no language, no racism; likewise, no racial discourse, no racial subjects. For the cultural critic, it necessitates knowing language in order to know race in the making (see Leonardo, in pressa). This is different from suggesting that language is a prison-house as much as it acknowledges that existing within a language opens us to the world from the inside-out rather than being “quarantined from it” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 62).

Second, recent cultural theory is also a form of superstructuralism in a more straightforward sense in that it completes the emphasis on cultural, or superstructural, features of society. Sparks is correct to announce that the late phase of cultural politics hardly resembles a relationship with Marx, a trend whose effectivity he questions. Although many critics are more sanguine than Sparks, it is worthwhile assessing the consequences resulting by moving away from Marx, what they enable and disable in terms of educational and social analysis, and to what kinds of interventions they give rise. It seems the love affair with Marx is definitely over, which does not mean that there are no social and cultural critics who carry on the torch. A theoretical legacy and insurrection that has had a long run has been all but replaced and themes about modes give way to madness, dialectics to deconstruction, and revolution to repetition.

Discourses recall ideology because they have something to do with constituting a world for the subject. Freire’s insistence that a world has no meaning without minds that contemplate over it and consciousness is empty without a world to which it refers, still applies here. Discourses are about the world and cannot but be this way. The world is constituted in both the material and ideal sense because as immaterial as God is, for example, the idea alone has erected institutions worldwide. So whereas religious discourse may appeal to an ideal entity, we behave in a material way. That said, discourse is not synonymous with ideology so it is misleading to find a Foucauldian-inspired entry (p. 2) in Eagleton’s (1991) definitions for ideology. Ideology assumes a deep social structure, usually but not always based on class. In race studies, this ideology is driven by whiteness, in gender studies, by patriarchy. Discourse is not the conceptual extension of ideology but rather its replacement. It does not begin with assumptions of essences, origins, and substances but shifting terrains of power configurations and cultural contestations. It departs from a different source, that of language. Whether or not it is materialist in the end is unclear but its relation with the material is indisputable. In fact, one cannot willy-nilly invoke ideology without recalling the avatar of Marx, at least not without conceptual consequences. As noted, there have been several attempts to rehabilitate the concept of ideology, even turning it into a positive concept that represents integration (Ricoeur, 1986; Geertz, 1994) or a modernizing outlook (Gouldner, 1976). However, these reframings were never fully successful at loosening Marxists’ grip on the concept. At best, they were able to express a theoretical ambivalence toward its classical use, which is not insignificant. But the advent of discourse studies introduces a new theory rather than a remetaphorization of an existing trope.

It is in this sense that contemporary cultural theory bares little resemblance to Marx without suggesting that it owes nothing to him. It no longer represents on one side, an intellectual quarrel with, or on the other an homage to, him but a genuinely
different way of analyzing social life. In Althusserian (2003) language, following Bachelard, discourse studies introduces a new problematic, marking a new theoretical position as radically different today as Marx’s was in his time. It was made possible by initial debates around the problems within Marxism, as Sparks notes, but underestimating its newness now forgets the fact that historical changes require different intellectual tools to understand them, just as the contradictions of capitalism called on Marx to explain them. Marxism is no doubt still useful, still axiomatic to some people, especially in these times of economic instability. No doubt post-Marxism would thrive better in post-exploitation but for now, Marxism is like blue jeans refusing to fade away. That established, continuing analysis in the same vein becomes increasingly difficult to pull off because so much has been said, so much has been written. If Marxism continues its relevance, it cannot be your grandparents’ Marxism.

One of the innovations of a discourse-based cultural theory is that insofar as the economy remains an important, sometimes privileged, site of analysis, it can be studied as a cultural relation. This was signalled earlier by the turn to consumptive practices, media and communication society, and popular culture. The economy is no longer only a set of material, extra-discursive arrangements in the economic sense but the circulation and control of cultural matter, such as the means of communication, as well as extra-material, discursive elements, like norms and values. The shift to discourse allows cultural politics to transition from the focus on means of production to the production of meaning. This is not altogether an idealist move to the extent that the production of meaning requires apparatuses that give texts their significance and force in the first place. That is, there is no meaning without an apparatus but no mechanism without significations that recruit subjects to constitute them.

The turn to discourse makes possible a new set of studies that before would simply have been branded as ideological in the pejorative sense. With the new appreciation of ideology turned into language-as-social practice, cultural analysis puts on equal footing with the economy, studies of Foucault and fat politics, Deleuze and people with delusions, and Lyotard on the politics of leotards. A veritable wave of research on previously silenced populations and their experiences floods the libraries, giving voice to their existence without the undue pressure to link it back to economic determinism. Of course, the economy looms largely in the new analysis but as one determination among many. An age of ambivalence about the guarantees of social and cultural analysis gives way to what Lyotard (1984) calls “slackening” as scientific and technological rationality loses its grip and metanarratives become suspect. To some, this artifice is nothing but trendy and a sign of the inability to deal with revolution in its longue durée. It must be noted again, however, that the majority of post-thinkers studied under the Marxists, modernists, and structuralists of their time: e.g., scratch Baudrillard and one finds Lefebvre, turn Foucault’s stone and one finds Althusser. The hunt for theory represents not only these intellectuals’ restlessness but a sincere search for liberation and all its promises and problems. Coming out of the highs and disappointments from the Bolsheviks to the Beatles, intellectuals face what Ranciere calls a profound
melancholy that something has been lost. It is in this manner that theory loses its innocence and enters maturity, at least an adolescent phase of rebelling against the myths told by one’s parents.7

In fact, there were significant pre-poststructuralists (pre-posts?) of whom we may now speak. These transitional figures represent the space of theory somewhere between Marx and Mannheim on one side, and Derrida and Deleuze on the other. Before Baudrillard and Bourdieu entered the scene, they were preceded by intellectuals who began the theoretical disobedience. We can cite at least three. When Bataille introduced Nietzsche to the French, he did more than pronounce the death of God, but decapitated a theoretical head. Arguing for an acephalic, or headless, theory of society, Bataille (1988, 1991) questions Marx’s universal theory of production through an alternative theory of expenditure. Claiming that Marx was indeed radical and dialectical, Bataille faults the German for not being radical and dialectical enough. Creating the other of capitalism by imagining communism, Marx opposed the first with the second while still staying within the logic of production, merely substituting one private form with a public version (see also Baudrillard, 1975). He did not consider the possibility that humans were inclined to waste, or expend, rather than produce. Bataille’s privileged signifier was the potlatch, not production. To be clear, following Marcel Mauss’s ethnography of symbolic exchange in tribal societies, Bataille acknowledged a society’s need to produce but only in order then to expend or use up what it produces, or consumption in its literal, radical sense. Consumption becomes the destiny of production, not the other way around. Bataille intervenes with a theory of expenditure, or the dialectical other of production, which was later appropriated by Derrida, Bourdieu, and Baudrillard. Bataille radicalized Mauss’ notion of the gift, where an offering must be cancelled or exceeded by a more extravagant gift. It is guided less by a dialectical progression but rather by the drive to extremes, or more x than x (Genosko, 1989). This ethos is extended to include theory production, whose result must be regarded as a gift to be transcended. Failing to do so institutes power in the hands of the giver. In education, the gift concept has been used by McLaren, Leonardo, and Allen (2000) to argue that whiteness, for instance, not only controls the means of production but also the means of expenditure, the material process and the natural state of desiring excess. In short, whiteness hoards both.

A second transitional figure, or pre-post, is Adorno. In his sole authored Negative Dialectics, Adorno (1973) begins the philosophical assault on systematic thinking. Systems thinking, he would argue, undervalues the particular at best and is imperialist at worst. Theorizing at the level of systems neglects the local in favor of universal principles. As a result, specificity is given up for abstraction that subsumes the particular, here defined by Adorno (1973) as “the nonidentical” (p. 170) “which would be the thing’s own identity against its identifications” (p. 161), into general explanations about social life, even when this is inappropriate. The system’s code becomes imperialistic precisely at the point when all social phenomena are reduced to its precepts. Insofar as Marxism was guilty of such a reduction, it becomes a terroristic theory of society. When Adorno writes, “The innermost core of the object proves to be simultaneously extraneous to it,
the phenomenon of its seclusion, the reflex of an identifying, stabilizing procedure” (p. 161), his influence on Derrida becomes clearer, a lineage that leads to the doorsteps of deconstruction’s problem with interiority. This conceptual violence allows Adorno to note the suppression of difference in favor of identitarianism, which conveniently forgets its own condition of possibility through its nonidentity, its complementarity that secures the subject of whiteness, for example, with the fact of blackness (see Fanon, 1967). As Adorno (1973) puts it, “The nonidentity which determines it from within, after the criterion of identity, is at the same time the opposite of its principle, that which it vainly claims to be controlling. … Identitarian thinking is subjectivistic even when it denies being so (pp. 182–183). With Adorno’s problematization of systems and identity, Foucault’s uptake of localism and specificity is given context, and goes a long way to explain the origins of Derrida’s celebrated critique of logocentrism.

The third precursor to post-theory, to whom I have made lengthy reference already, is Althusser. I will not describe ad nauseam his role as a transitional thinker other than focusing on his theory of interpellation. His theory of ideology-as-interpellation is perhaps the most obvious connection with Foucault’s almost singular focus on the subject, subjectivity, and subject-creation. Not merely false and illusory, ideology in the Althusserian sense calls on people, which makes possible their ultimate subjugation: subject here taking on the double meaning of subject-creation and subjection. Whereas a strictly modernist-inspired theory can speak of objective exploitation, Althusser introduces the moment of subjectification that complements objectification within capitalism. In other words, one must answer to a name given before exploitation can truly begin. In race terms, a person of color is subjected to the efficiency of discrimination only after he thinks of himself as a racialized subject; women are recruited into patriarchy once they perform the invention of womanhood as bound up with their sense of self (see Wittig, 1993). Whereas for Althusser interpellation was almost purely a phenomenon linked to exploitation, recent theorists expand the concept of interpellation to include moments of resistance through counter-interpellation, or answering a call against an existing regime. Judith Butler (1997) puts it best when she writes:

Even the most noxious terms could be owned, that the most injurious interpellations could also be the site of radical reoccupation and resignification. But what lets us occupy the discursive site of injury? How are we animated and mobilized by that discursive site and its injury, such that our very attachment to it becomes the condition for our resignification of it? Called by an injurious name, I come into social being, and because I have an inevitable attachment to my existence, because a narcissism takes hold of any term that confers existence, I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially. The self-colonizing trajectory of certain forms of identity politics is symptomatic of this paradoxical embrace of the injurious term. As a further paradox, then only by occupying – being occupied by – that injurious term can I resist and oppose it, recasting the power that constitutes me as the power I oppose. … any mobilization against subjection
will take subjection as its resource, and that attachment to an injurious interpellation will, by way of a necessarily alienated narcissism, become the condition under which resignifying that interpellation becomes possible. This will not be an unconscious outside of power, but rather something like the unconscious of power itself, in its traumatic and productive iterability (p. 104).

Whereas Althusser focused entirely on economic interpellation, Butler and others have dispersed his theory toward multiple and competing hailings, all of which struggle with one another for supremacy over the subject as well its resistance to their molesting powers. Of course, Lyotard (1984) deems these interpellations, such as the political, ethical, economical, as incommensurable language games, further adding to the fragmentation of cultural theory and subverting its ability to explain once and for all a unified understanding of social life. Bataille, Adorno, and later Althusser provide a platform that eventually transforms the production of cultural theory and understanding of cultural politics. There are other good and possible candidates for the status of pre-posts, such as Sartre’s existentialism, but suffice it to say that these three theorists represent a critical bridge between classical cultural and social thought and contemporary intellectual developments. They made it possible first to recognize the impasse within Marxism and second to address its conceptual dilemmas through alternative theories.

With respect to social transformation, the turn to cultural processes introduces ambiguity and dispersal. No longer is economic revolution the only way to go. In fact to some, Stalinism bears resemblance to Nazism over and beyond their leaders’ distinctive moustache. Earlier, Weber (1994) warned sociologists about the imperialism of a centralized communist economy, which concentrates control of the means of administration in the hands of an oligarchic elite, what Dunayevskaya (1992) calls “state-capitalism.” Marxist orthodoxy was unduly economic in its materialism, forsaking other nominally material relations, such as bureaucratic ones, where power does not necessarily rest in the hands of capitalists, but equally in the hands of powerful (often rich, but not the bourgeoisie), credentialed, and high status social groups and their figureheads. Fraser (1997) takes on the task of reforming theory when she recreates Weber’s notions of prestige and honor into a problem of recognition and marries it with a nominally Marxist problem of the politics of redistribution. In effect, she argues that a theory of justice falls short without accounting for the dual process of dishonor and dispossession, both of which have the ability to produce the other. For instance, it is readily obvious that people of color in the US suffer from a lack of recognition (an ideological process), which then produces objective consequences (a material process). This is ultimately what Dumas (2009) finds in the case of Seattle where the Black community’s demands for accountability from local schools that are already dilapidated and resource depleted, are met with casual glances from school leaders (see also North, 2006). Arguing for a post-socialist theory and against the economic reductions of Marxism as well as the relative poverty of identity politics – both deemed vulgar when acting alone – Fraser’s framework forwards a two-pronged theory of distributive and political justice.
Dumas (2009) adopts Fraser’s perspective and marries it with what he terms the “Black educational imagination” (p. 105; italics in original), an appropriation of Robin Kelley’s concept of the “Black radical imagination.” As the Seattle case shows, Don Alexander, leader of Seattle’s Save Our Southend Schools, and Dr. Caprice Hollins, former director of Seattle’s Office of Equity and Race Relations, found themselves at an impasse. They did not disagree over the question of justice for African Americans, and as such, were not working at cross-purposes. But through savvy, theoretical understanding, Dumas documents in convincing manner Alexander and Hollins bifurcating along distributive and recognition lines of thinking, respectively. As a result, they could not see that “there is no redistribution without recognition, and no recognition without redistribution” (p. 82). This means that focusing on racial desegregation alone does not address the fact of whiteness as an invisible, yet material force that facilitates White control over most of the valuable resources in Seattle. The differential outcome, while not always economic, is material. This leads to a condition of integration that is still inherently unequal. On the other hand, emphasizing resource allocation by itself fails to recognize the continuing assaults to dignity that African Americans suffer in schools, which rebound on distributive relations because Black students’ legitimacy is always suspect. A cultural theory that decenters economic relations, while still regarding it as central to struggles over hegemony, makes room for identity-based grievances and allows for a more variegated attack on a social system from multiple nodes within the structure.

Marrying Gramsci’s war of position with Foucault’s dispersal of power relations and concept of discourse, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argue for a cultural politics that is based less on a center from which everything emanates and more on multiple margins that form a collective. Finding no position outside of hegemony, the point is not to counter common sense but to reform it with as many groups’ desires for justice as possible, which speaks less to Lenin’s vanguard and even less to a privileged subject of revolutionary alterity, like the working class, and more about the mass, that indistinguishable desire agreeable to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) concept of the rhizome. Having neither origin nor teleology, the reworking of hegemony is always historically specific and politically concrete since it can never be abstracted in advance by the good intentions and conceptual projection of a theorist. As a product of compromise, the alternative hegemonic bloc aspires to win the multitude’s consent (see Hardt and Negri, 2001). If the world feels both post-collectivist and post-individualist, to Eagleton (2003) it may also present an opportunity. It necessitates that we would “imagine new forms of belonging, which in our kind of world are bound to be multiple rather than monolithic” (p. 21). Lost is the notion of an a priori radical class; gained is the articulation of various tendrils of politics reaching out to justice. Lost is any sense of preparing for a projected state of affair, or blueprint society; gained is the concrete working out of a practical politics based on exigent circumstances, a politics based on practice. Finally, lost is a sense of guarantees in exchange for permanent ambiguity and perpetual revolution. Contrary to the end of cultural theory, it is the opening of radical thought as always in the making.
POST-STUDIES

Perhaps nothing is more enigmatic in cultural politics than the signifier “postmodernism.” It represents anything from eclectic architecture and hybrid art, to anything we fail to understand. To any cultural theorist who has partaken in enough conversations about ideas, one inevitably runs into a situation where something difficult to understand is branded as “postmodern.” The postmodern becomes a theoretical bin wherein anything from the unconscious to the unpresentable is stored for a later explanation. For many intellectuals, the situation can be rather frustrating or comedic, depending on the interlocutor. It represents both a pretentious appeal to high theory for someone who wants desperately to be in the know, and sometimes as a thinly veiled insult against an idea or thinker one rejects. The latter is usually followed by an uncomfortable Beavis and Butthead laughter that someone has just betrayed his or her own ignorance. In short, if we do not understand something, it must be postmodern. If it seems slightly trendy, it is postmodern too. Postmodernism becomes a term of derision. This is hardly proof of an intellectual grasp. Thus, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is not postmodern but comedian and Minnesota Senator Al Franken is. It can be a bit confusing as well, as when Foucault is claimed as both as a structuralist and poststructuralist, or when Baudrillard, regarded by some as the bad boy postmodernist, denounces the idea of postmodernism altogether. But much like the “big bang” was initially a derisive phrase used against a fledgling theory of the universe before it was all but verified – since the universe was claimed to be infinitely small in origin and lacking an atmosphere to convert the explosion into sound – both “big bang” and postmodern have stuck and become household terms. The main difference is that whereas the big bang began the expansion of the universe through an outward, cataclysmic event, postmodernism can be regarded as evidence of a certain theory implosion.

Along the same lines, perhaps nothing identifies cultural politics today more than the prefix “post,” known for everything post under the sun: post-Marxism, post-feminism, post-formalism, post-human, post-political, post-race, even post-contemporary (i.e., the present outruns itself). It is becoming rather post-humorous. Outside of some gratuitous usage of the “post”-script, post-theory indicates intellectual depth (against Baudrillard’s 1979 position in *Seduction*) when it is specified in concrete terms. The post-nomenclature bears little agreement on what the sign actually means. For instance, the post in postmodernism may be very different from the “same” post in post-humanism. Cultural studies is replete with post-significations and if it uses them haphazardly, we may someday witness the rise of post-cultural studies. As yet another attempt to delineate what the “post” signifies, the following section considers some of the elisions and edifications contained in the post-moment.

The most literal, and probably least fecund, sense of post-theory is that it is an explanatory framework for a condition that follows an era. This is Jameson’s (1988) caution that theorists cannot avoid periodization and there is something about late theory as having come “after” a previous epoch that required a different intellectual apparatus to explain it. It was Saussure’s students who, after all, compiled his teachings posthumously after his death. In our time, we appear to live
in a post-Michael era after the fall of Jordan’s highflying acrobatics, Jackson’s hit after hit since “Off the Wall,” and Gorbachev’s memorable birth mark on the forehead. In the age of Kobe Bryant, the NBA in the US suffers apparently from a radical decentering of the concept of team in exchange for individual prowess; with the death of the man who did the moonwalk on Earth, pop has given way to hip hop and megastars are known more for sampling or producing others who know how to sample than they are for original work (to Baudrillard’s delight); the Cold War having ended with frigid Russia, we apparently enter a Hot War with terrorism in the desert. We are in a decidedly new era and only nostalgia can return us to our previous selves. We are literally out of touch. Basketball shorts that stop above the knees are as outdated as heavy metal hairstyles below the shoulders.

In this sense, it is apropos to speak of the age of post-colonialism, to the chagrin of many excellent anti-colonial and decolonial scholars who insist that colonialism continues in different forms. Administrative colonialism has ended and former colonies have gained their independence. From Puerto Rico to Philippinas, South America to South Africa, and India and Indonesia, the colonized have spoken in revolts that toppled European regimes on lands of color. While sharing in their own problems and recreation of colonialist dynamics (Fanon, 2004), these nationalist fronts accomplished something significant in ousting their masters and inaugurated a social formation after colonialism, often requiring violence. From the economic base to naval bases, anti-colonialist struggles reclaimed not only a land expropriated but also a cultural dignity radically compromised in the wake of language imposition (Memmi, 1965; Macedo, 2000), religious conversion (Spring, 2000; Dog and Erdoes, 1999), and general inferiorization (Fanon, 1967; Césaire, 2000). The colonizer’s school agenda was one of cultural eradication through education. Or put simply: cultural eradication. One cannot deny a transformation in cultural politics after the colonizer’s departure.

Although certainly related to colonialism, the effects of race and its hirsute companion, racism, require a slightly different analytic. In the age of Obama and the reconfiguration of skin color politics, a post-race predicament has become the subject of recent discussions. Its vulgar form takes on a rather conservative tone that suggests the falling significance of race relations (see Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 1999; D’Souza, 1996; McWhorter, 2001; cf. Brown et al., 2003), which is different from implying that the racial formation (Omi and Winant, 1994) is once again shifting (Omi, 2001), or that the end of race as an organizing principle of society can be envisioned (Gilroy, 1998; Leonardo, in press). Post-race thinking as an (after) thought falls prey to what Bonilla-Silva (2003), Gotanda (1995), and others have called “colorblind racism.” It mistakes the transmutations in race as evidence of a prelude to its end. It forgets the cleverness of whiteness to shift and morph without fundamentally threatening its hegemony, its ability to compromise while maintaining general white advantage (Richardson and Villenas, 2000). It neglects the fact that race has changed before, without challenging the embeddedness of raciology. And it takes progress as a sign of the benefits of liberal democracy without considering the historical record where racism was very much part of creating the liberal nation, the US being one of them (Mills, 1997).
As a slight variation of after-theory, post-thought signals a counter-position to many established traditions. It may span iconoclastic rejections of Marxism (Baudrillard, 1990) to more or less refutations of race analysis (see Darder and Torres, 2004; Miles, 2000; Fields, 1990). In these instances, the “post” not only signals an “after” but “anti.” Closely related to the designation of “after” is Jameson’s (1991) notion of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism. So postmodernism announces the late phase of modernism, which suggests, with Lyotard (1984), that we are well within the modern. How late it is, however, is hard to tell. Elsewhere I (2002) have used the phrase “late whiteness” to describe something similar happening to whiteness. Finally, it is possible that the “post” signifies an intensification of the modern condition and theories to explain it. The prefix is then equitable with “super,” as Foucault’s (1977) studies of surveillance represent a continuity with structuralism in an overbureaucratized social life. Superstructuralism is not only anti-humanist in Althusser’s sense but decisively post-humanist.

Through Said’s (1979) work on the cultural relations between the Occident and Orient in modern forms of imperialism, one appreciates the textual dimensions of colonialism. In this sense, post-colonialism does not so much describe social life after the fall of major European powers in the colonies, but rather the literary enactment of power. Arguing that colonialism is as much a cultural and writing relation as it is a material or military occupation, Said excavates the constitution of the Near East through European eyes. This gaze lends credibility to Foucault’s (1980) dyad of power/knowledge insofar as Europeans were able to exercise power over the Orient by controlling the knowledge produced about its peoples. In other words, Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world. In Cromer’s and Balfour’s language the Orient is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual). The point is that in each of these cases the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks”. (Said, 1979, p. 40; italics in original)

The modernist mantra “Speak truth to power” is replaced by “Speak power to truth.” Rather than assuming a humanist ability to speak with integrity to a unified power through rigorous analysis, we have the inversion that a truth does not exist but rather truth is a function of deployments of power that invest in particular ways of seeing the world. These otherwise ideological moments are constituted through texts that frame the self and Other in a relation of power that produces material consequences as well as expressing themselves through equally material apparatuses, like education or such “innocent” exchanges like travel. The “post” in various theories therefore signifies the turn to literature, reading, and writing as formidable moments in the articulation of power. Not only are events like colonialism examples of actual violation of human bodies but they equally transpire through the creation of bodies of knowledge, of how people are written into history, literally and figuratively. This is precisely why multiculturalism in
education became a fertile battleground in the 1970s onwards (Banks, 2006). With the K-12 schools and universities completely committed to Eurocentric curricula, an insurgent student movement in the US forged what is now a hegemonic form of multiculturalism. Few self-respecting teachers today who care about their own legitimacy in public schools question the validity of multiculturalism. This struggle over hegemony was not won without fanfare as the Right did its best to reassert the rightness and whiteness of the canon (Apple, 2006; Buras, 2008). However, the dust appears to settle and the argument now is not whether or not the US should adopt multiculturalism but which version. Of course, multiculturalism may be compatible with capitalism (Zizek, 1995; San Juan, Jr., 1994), which is very happy to turn folk heroes, like Che Guevara and Malcolm X, into commodities. Zizek (1995) observes that “the relationship between traditional imperialist colonialism and global capitalist self-colonization is exactly the same as the relationship between Western cultural imperialism and multiculturalism” (p. 44). This is true as one surveys the t-shirtization of radical thinkers, the patronizing spirit of “including” people of color into the official curriculum and tolerating their difference (see Davis, 1998). Indeed, a bourgeois form of multiculturalism is hardly threatening to global capitalism. Be that as it may, so are white supremacy and Europocentrism quite the partners-in-crime with capital.

The advent of postcolonialism opens conceptual tributaries that place language at the center of the educational debate, and not in the well-known sense of the “bilingual question.” Postcolonialism treats with seriousness both the power and insufficiency of language. On one hand, it attests to the violence in language and on the other, reminds us of the incompleteness of such violence (see McLaren, Leonardo, and Allen, 1999). At stake in such an analysis is the recognition that a fundamental ambivalence lies at the heart of hegemony and this “failure” of language to achieve transparency becomes a “condition of democratic contestation itself “ (Butler, Laclau, and Zizek, 2000, p. 2). The first violence of language, which Lacan clearly anticipated, becomes the source of a “way out” of semiotic brutalities and into another set of possibilities that are themselves doing violence on existing regimes of language (see Aoki, 2000; see also Leonardo and Porter, in press). Following Bataille’s appropriation of Mauss’ gift concept, resignifications disrupt meaning and introduce violence into an already violent regime of signs. This is accomplished through “doubling,” (Bhabha, 1990), “repetition,” (Butler, 1990), or in general reconfiguring what expressions or statements are made available (Goldberg, 1993).

That “post” transforms the social world into texts means that the old standby of “reading” in education takes on new importance. Reading formations introduce the power of the text to interpellate its subject, to read, i.e. position, the reader into a chain of competing sets of interest represented by the text. This is precisely Said’s (1979) point when he suggests that the Orient cannot be read innocently by both the Occident and people inhabiting the Orient. As a cultural phenomenon, the economy does not evaporate and melt into the air, as the Marxist saying goes, but it is recuperated as a textual relation where meaning is the commodity being sold on the block. This meaning appears in material forms or concrete embodi-
and cannot be reduced to an idea, which shares affinities with McLaren’s (1992) concept of “enfleshment.” As meanings descend from heaven to earth, students are able to make sense of them through educational discourses that are available to them (Weedon, 1997). An impoverished material condition is something to deplore but one’s education may also be discursively poor; often they are connected where poverty nominally produces both conditions. Post-theory intervenes into classical theory by insisting on their bi-directional co-implication. The material is completely necessary because discourse is about something: the concrete world. Likewise, the discursive explains the material’s social meaning, having none of it until the real is recruited into a symbolic system like language. No material to speak of, no discourse; no meaning, no world worth living. In all, the turn to meaning creates a materially-based discourse and a discursively-constituted materiality.

Bundled together, these iterations of the “post” indicate a break in cultural theory. This transformation has been signalled as an epistemological break, a discontinuity, or rupture. I find purchase in Lyotard’s (1984) original formulation of postmodernism as essentially a filter for modern theories. By locating the postmodern as an extension of, or a protrusion from, modernism, Lyotard avoids the otherwise cynical suggestion of the postmodern project (short “o”) as akin to scribbling a moustache on the portrait of modernism. As a project (long “o”), less a moustache and more a nose, postmodernism extends out from modernism as its latest phase of development characterized by ambivalence, particularly but not exclusively to metanarratives like Marxism. On projects, Hall (1996a) has this to say, “I don’t think there is any such thing as the modernist impulse, in the singular … It was always composed of many different projects… there were often, in fact, in conflict… I don’t know, analytically, what the single project was which modernism might have been” (p. 132; italics in original). Although they may share teleological and determinist assumptions, Weber, Marx, and Durkheim’s modernism is more accurately described as variations of the modernist project. They each theorized the economy, but their similarity may end there as they diverged in their portrayal of the economy as a bureaucratic system, productive relation, and role differentiation, respectively.

As Lyotard (1984) suggests, the modern can still be modern but only after it becomes postmodern, after it is filtered through slackening and agonistic analysis. Or as I suggested earlier, Marxist relevance continues but only through reinvention. In my reading, Lyotard does not suggest leaving behind concerns that made Marxism a powerful intervention as much as it goes forward from them. Post-theory owes a debt without being in servitude. The dangers of excessive textualization are clear when the economy is treated as a narrative rather than a brutal experience of exploitation but so are the vulgar consequences of materialism not lost when a politics of redistribution assumes that a levelling of the politics of recognition automatically follows in due time. Cuba’s socialist experiment has gone a long way to remove the material structures of racial discrimination but it has not removed the bureaucratic mechanisms that favor white, or light skin-toned, Cubans. To the Cubans’ defence, forty some odd years of socialism do not cancel out longer standing racial politics. So we wait.
Hall seems to support Lyotard’s point. He claims, “So ‘post’ means, for me, going on thinking on the ground of a set of established problems, a problematic. It doesn’t mean deserting that terrain but rather, using it as one’s reference point” (Hall, 1996a, p. 149). In Hall’s rereading of Marxism within the postmodern moment, he does not so much abandon its main premises but proceeds “with no guarantees.” As a general metaphor, a cultural politics of education that proceeds without guarantees is in line with Freire’s earlier insistence on the centrality of theoretical humility, something he (1994) criticizes orthodox Marxists, in *Pedagogy of Hope*, as lacking. This remark did not make Freire less Marxist but arguably more so by being less possessively invested in it. Or as Bottomore et al. (1991) have said elsewhere, the fall of Soviet-style Marxism was a welcome setback for committed Marxists all round for as long as Soviet rigidity followed similar lines, Marxism would become anachronistic. So in this last iteration of “post,” cultural theory reinvents itself, enabling it to ask new questions about its own premises and conditions of possibility. Again, Hall is helpful when he remarks, “The post-marxists use Marxist concepts while constantly demonstrating their inadequacy” (Hall, 1996c, p. 25). En route, cultural writing establishes a truly self-reflective intellectual pursuit, without which a theory has only vacuous claims to “criticality” (Leonardo, in pressb). This is the point wherein doctrine becomes dogma and position degrades into polemic. Dialogue is exchanged for diatribe and the victim is ultimately the student.

Nowhere is the post-as-filter more useful than in recent invocations of post-race analysis. Nowhere is it also more misunderstood as it is taken literally to mean “after” race relevance. Contrary to either conservative intellectuals or media analysts’ hype over Obama, both of whom are not poster children for race analysis, intellectual engagements of post-race neither endorse the colorblindness of the first nor the spectacle of the second. It would seem fitting to recognize the magnitude of Obama’s election to the highest office as a sign of racial slackening. It gives many young African Americans and other minority children permission to imagine themselves as potential presidents. Taken too far, this sentimentality forgets that the chances of any one them becoming president is a crap shoot; but roughly the same goes for many White children, the vast majority of whom will not aspire to such heights. The point is that, just as Reverand Al Sharpton makes the case that the late Michael Jackson made possible, against great odds, Black ascendency into public culture, bringing Black images, musical or not, into White homes and the White House – so Obama’s presidency creates a new public imagination, and not just for Blacks. It would have caught the late rap artist Tupac Shakur on his heels, having declared in the 1990s in the song “Changes,” that we are not likely to see a Black person for president.

That established, Obamarise is not equivalent to watching the setting of whiteness. Other events in US history, such as Emancipation and the multiple Civil Rights Movements, have instigated the audacious pronouncement that race and racism are on the wane. We only have to look at the continuing, albeit altering, structures of race relations to remark on its stubborn durability to withstand assaults, as Derrick Bell (1992) and David Gillborn (2008) are correct.
to remind us. It is possible to suggest that evidence exists to cite the falling and continuing significance of race. This is not as ludicrous as it sounds but characterizes the struggle over hegemony that is raciology. Much like the thermonuclear dynamics inside a star threatens to explode it while gravity warns of its catastrophic implosion, racial hegemony is the “tendential balance” and “unstable equilibrium” that makes it “work” (see Hall, 1996d). National and global developments petrify race at the same time that they question its validity, empirically and conceptually (Gilroy, 2000; Nayak, 2006; St. Louis, 2002). Although it is much too premature to write race’s obituary, it is worthwhile asking if it is justifiable as a form of social organization in perpetuity. Post-race analysis makes it possible to pose these questions, creating dilemmas out of them that we need not fear.

Post-race analysis is a racial discourse. Just as Marxism launched class theory to transcend class (perhaps better referred to as post-class theory), so post-race theory desires getting beyond race as a mode of organizing society. It is not an attempt at colorblindness but imagines the possibility of transcending the color line, a limit situation that staples of race theory, from Du Bois to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., have labored to expose. Just as it would sound contradictory to label Marxism classblind, charging post-race scholars with colorblindness is like pounding the square peg of sincere race engagement into the round hole of race-evasive scholarship. Post-race theorizing assumes a fundamental risk by questioning a several centuries-old concept whereas anti-race theories assume no such commitment when they question race’s future. Post-race theory is a mode of analysis that goes through race in order to imagine going beyond it. It appropriates a Fanonian (1967) phenomenology and sociogenic analysis of racialized bodies before it can ponder race as a moribund social relation. In other words, it asks what we have become that we no longer want to be, mainly deposits of skin color politics and the accompanying essentialisms. Risking it all, Gilroy and company do not ask for resignifications of race but its abolition. Only twenty years ago, it was not possible to pose/post these considerations, other than Marxist depreciations of the “race problem” (see Roediger, 1991). Now, in the age of ambivalence, we have recourse to ask the unaskable. Eagleton observes, Theory of this kind comes about when we are forced into a new self-consciousness about what we are doing. It is a symptom of the fact that we can no longer take those practices for granted. On the contrary, those practices must now begin to take themselves as objects of their own inquiry. Education scholars would do well to heed these theories, for it is school where race is remade daily almost without scrutiny. Under the current pedagogical regime, racial comfort zones are favored over spaces of risk that would enable students and educators alike to become something different, which is arguably the essence of learning.

It is this ambivalence that I would like to leave the reader with, in this portion of the Introduction. Cultural politics in education owes much to Marxism’s entry into the educational lexicon. It has given us the scientific knowledge that provides a radical theory of education to pose essential questions about the function and purpose of schooling. As a result, we discovered the determining effects of the economy, traced its mimetic structures in schools, and built a praxis that explains and intervenes into relations of exploitation. But as a cosmology, classical
Marxism became victim of its own conditioning and just as the bourgeoisie projects a world in its own image, Marxism painted itself into a corner. From the early writings of the Frankfurt School to the later theories of the CCCS, cultural studies as a form of praxis (Wright, 2003) and not merely a description of the world – as Marx himself warned against – enters a new threshold, which makes it nearly impossible to forge ahead in the same vein. For better or worse, Newton’s age has given way to Einstein’s universe. Likewise, it seems we live in the age of Foucault, a young anarchist of bad faith to some (e.g., Habermas, 1987b), the Nietzsche of our time to others. Intellectuals in education proceed with no guarantees and theorize at their own risk. They flail about, much like Said’s (1996) exilic intellectual, thrown into an existence for which there is no inventory, as the Gramscian lesson tells us. We sense the ambivalence because God is not only dead, but so is salvation. No theory can save us now and perhaps this is something to embrace.

THE VOLUME

This volume takes what is hopefully a structure and representation that embraces the emphasis on difference so central to cultural politics and education. Treating both education and cultural theory in the broadest sense possible, the collection takes a large slice of the politics of culture to include what is sometimes left out of more or less Eurocentric intonations of cultural politics in education. To this end, the volume excavates, in the spirit of inclusion, marginalized voices in cultural politics, such as critical studies of ability, Latino cultural studies, and analysis of Rightist formations. The authors represented here include a mixture of well-established cultural theorists and more recent voices from young scholars. An international editorial board also folds into the process a certain dialogical flavor to the chapters. Their consultation with the individual chapter authors broadens the conversation and enriches the insights. Even so, the volume does not offer the last word on these matters and the project could be more ambitious and significantly expanded in efforts to address pertinent issues in education not included here. As with all intellectual projects, this one is admittedly incomplete and begins in medias res. The following chapters are organized into themes with a set of essays that are grouped under them.

The first section, The Cultural Politics of Neoliberalism, sets up the collection by introducing the condition under which many K-12 schools and colleges of education currently function. In Henry Giroux’s leading chapter, an argument for a “public pedagogy of neoliberalism” launches the collection into the material and cultural dimensions of the recent economic restructuring of social life across the globe. Here Giroux recognizes the cruel theater of neoliberalism not only as a form of economic reprioritization but equally a shift in the production of subjectivities and rearticulation of political projects where the normalization of individual consumption becomes the dominant form of citizenship. He argues that neoliberalism has to be understood within a larger crisis of vision, meaning, education, political agency, and policies of radical exclusion: in short, a powerful
public pedagogy and cultural politics. However, Giroux finds interstices of hope for a resistance, at times amorphous, in the very heart of neoliberalism and its failure to commodify and co-opt everything in its wake, revealing the cracks in neoliberal hegemony. From Seattle and Davos to Genoa and Rostok, groups have mobilized to defend all those social advances that strengthen democratic public spheres and services, demand new rights and modes of power sharing, and strive for social justice adequate to creating forms of collective struggle that can imagine and sustain democracy of “another world” on a global level. Greg Dimitriadis’ chapter follows Giroux’s critique of neoliberalism by offering up the lessons learned from the business world with respect to its failures. Taking seriously the grip and role of business logic in schools, Dimitriadis takes a strategic stance toward a study of the corporatization and standardization of education, exemplified by the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind Act, which parallels an obsession with test scores with the business world’s mantra of “hitting the numbers.” In this, neoliberalism fails spectacularly in its efforts to deregulate both the market and schooling. The valuable lessons include an utter disregard for the lived realities in schools and the needs of the teachers and students who daily navigate them. It seems that greed isn’t good, after all. The language of business has failed business itself, which progressive educators would do well to engage seriously rather than summarily dismissed.

Dennis Carlson concludes this section by documenting neoliberalism’s effects on schooling as they trickle up to university settings. Using insights from Derrida, Carlson prognosticates about the “university to come.” Within neoliberalism, the university’s autonomy is constantly under threat of erasure. First, Carlson recalls Kant’s thoughts on the historical function of university settings in determining the agenda of public discourse as well as the contradictory space that faculties occupy in them, particularly education, which for Kant has one foot in the “lower” liberal arts (e.g., philosophy) and the other in the “higher” applied disciplines. Second, Carlson segues into Derrida’s more recent ruminations about the university (not to be equated with higher education per se), located within his general deconstructive philosophy, including a critique of autonomous reason. Like discourses, the university is something that the professoriate inherits and it comes with certain responsibilities as we consider ethically what and how it should serve the human striving towards democracy. This fundamentally undecidable condition is rendered fixed by neoliberalism’s unabashed drive toward logos, where the university functions for certain utilitarian ends. This has translated to what Carlson considers is a dangerous current that takes away control of knowledge selection and dissemination from faculties of education or reduces them to bureaucrats of knowledge.

In the second section, Globalization and Culture Industries, neoliberalism’s familiar partnership with globalization and capitalism is pursued. Peter McLaren and Valerie Scatamburlo-D’Annibale investigate the uses of Marxism within the study of cultural politics. Arguing for the strategic centrality of class, they insist on the usefulness of reinventing Marx for the context of an increasingly exploitative, apparently racial, predicament. They find that, with the events of the 2000 presidential
elections and Hurricane Katrina, “race” becomes the language through which America’s capitalist class contradictions are commonly expressed and obscured. The globalization of class is exchanged for the national focus on race, a hyper-culturalism that produces the inability to discern the roots of racial inequality in the expansion of capitalism. In particular, Katrina provides an apt example of why an exclusive focus on race must be challenged because poverty (i.e., class inequality) was the lynchpin that resulted in the masses being left behind and stranded, not race. In defence of the enduring relevance of Marxism, McLaren and Scatamburlo-D’Annibale do not argue for a flattening out of social markers in a cultural analysis of education, putting class beside other relations like race and gender, but rather the centering of class as a determining instance, the material armature or material basis for other forms of oppression within capitalist society. Here they guard against the semiotic excesses of, particularly, late cultural politics. Noah De Lissovoy’s chapter follows suit in forging a language of totality, which is his conceptual equivalent to the “whole” (cf. “global”). Tracing Lukács, he reinvigorates the Hungarian’s theoretical insights by marrying them to standpoint epistemology, largely gained from feminist philosophy. De Lissovoy uses the feminist concept of epistemic privilege to reiterate Lukács’ analysis of the working class potential to perceive the whole (totality) despite capitalism’s reifications. For De Lissovoy, working class consciousness (itself an experience rather than idea) is no more than an authentic revolutionary standpoint on the whole. But even Lukács did not witness the globalization currently sweeping across nations and any educational standpoint that claims a privileged relationship to the totality must, in the contemporary moment, speak to and from the global population of the truly dispossessed: in short, a global standpoint.

Closely related to Lukács’ work is the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory programme, which Benjamin Frymer takes up in the next chapter. Taking up Marx’s task, instead of merely categorizing and describing the world, dialectical theory would make possible the evaluation of history and society from the standpoint of human freedom. This required a penetrating comprehension of modern culture both within capitalist as well as socialist societies, requiring a turn to Marx’s cultural, as opposed to scientific, at times positivistic, concepts. Following the Frankfurt School, Frymer privileges themes like alienation, which for Marx, he reminds us, is not only or primarily an experience of estrangement, but a material and ontological condition – a distorted historical being formed within the capitalist relations of production. This access to Marx’s earlier manuscripts, Frymer explains, allows the Frankfurt School to tap more fully the effects of a growing culture industry that dominates a new world of standardized objects that limit people’s autonomy and subjectivity even as these objects present the illusion of being freely “chosen”. Ideological deception then becomes one of the main products of the culture industry. Frymer corrects what he observes is a misconception that bills the Frankfurt School, Adorno in particular, as elitist and disparaging of mass culture, when he recalls that the culture industry analysis is meant to apply to so-called “high culture” as well, which have been just as commodified and devalued as mass culture. Nowhere is modern estrangement more visible than in
the Columbine school shootings, a product of youth identity in a mediatized society becoming a commodity that is bought by media conglomerates and sold back to youth themselves as part of the cultural logic of what Debord earlier termed “society of the spectacle.”

Seehwa Cho completes the section by documenting the turn to culture in social theory and its arguable dominance in educational theory. One could focus on purely theoretical differences among scholars and approaches. Rather than delineate the conceptual differences between Marxism and post-al theories (poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism) regarding the question of culture, Cho examines the historical and social contexts that provoked the emergence of a singular focus on culture. In other words, her chapter examines the political economy of cultural theories/politics, or how the changes in the mode of capitalism, from industrial to post-industrial, pushed culture to the center stage both in critical theories and Leftist politics. For Cho, the growing attention to culture is a result of the class war that was waged through cultural interventions by the cultural industries and state cultural apparatuses, shifting the focus from capitalist production to consumer creation.

In the third section, Subjects and Subjectivities, the set of chapters take up the concept of subject-formation and the concomitant positionalities it produces. Zeus Leonardo’s chapter is an attempt to synthesize Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology for the purposes of race analysis. Intervening in the debate surrounding whether or not race can be reduced to the status of an ideological concept, Leonardo offers up a reframing of race relations as having both extra-ideological as well as extra-material elements. For this he turns to Althusser, whose theory of ideology is key in appreciating the material forms that ideology takes, avoiding a radical separation between the ideality of ideology and the materiality of economic relations. In this manner, he highlights the limits of the position that reduces race to ideology since race’s modes of existence, such as schools, are real while anchored to the reminder that race was a social invention, an interpellation that requires repetition and reification. Appropriating Althusser’s description of ideology as fundamentally sedimented at the level of the unconscious, Leonardo argues that race common sense has firmly saturated self and social understanding, particularly in the USA.

Deborah Youdell follows with her chapter, a Butler-inspired take on subject-formation as part of a general study of performativity. Put another way, Youdell advances a theory of subjectivity against notions of essences that lurk behind them; instead, subjects of race and gender are constituted through their performance. Designations such as “boy” and “girl”, “man” and “woman” are performative – they create the gendered subject that they name. Furthermore, these performatives do this while appearing to be just descriptive and create the illusion of gender’s prior existence. So while it appears that the subject expresses a gender that is true or “proper” to it, this is actually a performative effect of gender categorizations and their use. This naming is not simply descriptive, it is, to use Butler’s term, “inaugurative,” and makes the subject recognizable through processes of repetition whereby the subject is consistently referred to in a ritualized manner. Discursive agency comes in many forms, one of which is to intercept these performatives in
order to re-constitute discourses and subjects differently, which, while constrained
are not determined in advance. Youdell then shows how performativity, from
ability studies to sexuality in the classroom, has been used by educational scholars
to showcase the constitutive power of discursive performances.

In the next chapter, Alicia Broderick explores the cultural politics circulating in
contemporary discourses about autism, particularly the usage of metaphor therein.
Writing from a Disability Studies in Education (DSE) perspective, she argues that
there is currently an ongoing cultural struggle over the metaphoric constitution of
autism as disease vs. autism as neurodiversity. Related to the dominant “autism as
disease” metaphor, two dominant metaphors to emerge in popular cultural discourse
around autism in the last several years are: (a) autism as abductor and (b) autism as
epidemic. She argues that, taken together, within the organizing metaphoric construct
of autism as disease, these twin metaphors serve discursively to constitute (a) an
enemy and (b) a sense of urgency, each of which is necessary to constitute autism
as a cultural threat significant enough to support particular approaches and postures
toward both intervention (e.g., attempts at “recovery”) and prevention (e.g., “curing
autism”). Drawing upon Lakoff and Johnson’s (2003) theories of metaphor,
Broderick explores the circulation of power through metaphor in contemporary
autism discourse, considering also Foucault’s (1980) notions of “regimes of truth”
and “subjugated knowledges.” Exploring the cultural politics underlying the usage
of metaphor in autism discourse illustrates the powerful ways in which broader
cultural narratives about normalcy/abnormalcy become “naturalized,” thus obscuring
the ideological assumptions underlying decisions about educational policy and
practice.

Cameron McCarthy and Jennifer Logue’s chapter assesses the concept of
tradition within the cultural studies literature on the industrial working class. They
maintain that this term has been deployed within a center-periphery thesis and a
field-bound ethnographic framework by cultural studies scholars pursuing a sub-
cultural studies approach. Within this framework, “Britishness,” for example, has
been the silent organizing principle defining metropolitan working class traditions
and forms of cultural resistance. British cultural studies proponents have therefore
pursued the study of class and culture as a localized, nation-bound set of interests.
This has placed cultural studies in tension with postcolonial subjectivities often
reduced, as they have been in the classic works of Paul Willis’ (1981) Learning to
Labor and Dick Hebdige’s (1979) Subculture: The Meaning of Style, to the
metonymic “Pakis” and “Jamaicans.” McCarthy and Logue write against the grain
of the textual production of the working class within cultural studies scholarship
insisting that recent films – such as The Full Monty, Billy Eliot, and Bend It Like
Beckham and the literary works of Jeanette Winterson, George Orwell, George
Lamming, and Kazuo Ishiguro – offer a more complex story of class identities in
the age of globalization and transnationalism.

In Gert Biesta’s chapter, the subjectification function might perhaps best be
understood as the opposite of the socialization function. It is precisely not about the
insertion of “newcomers” into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at
independence from such orders; ways of being in which the individual is not simply
a “specimen” of a more encompassing order. This move was possible because Kant only allowed for one definition of what it meant to be human: rationally autonomous. This leads to Levinas’ injunction that humanism is not sufficiently human, or not humane enough, when it specifies what it is to be human before the actual manifestations of particular humans. Levinas is not interested in the human subject as such but first and foremost in the question of the uniqueness of each individual human subject, that is, with the way in which human subjects are precisely not specimens of a wider order: not a theory of subjectivity but an ethics of subjectivity that does not ask what the subject is, but how he exists, how he is possible in the first place without being interchangeable. Learning from Levinas, Biesta argues, opens up the event of education rather than socialization, a pedagogy of interruption that is fundamentally not humanistic.

In the fourth section, The Politics of Knowledge, Michael Peters, Rodrigo Britez, and Ergin Bulut open with the idea that the most significant material change underpinning neoliberalism in the 21st century is the rise in the importance of knowledge as intellectual capital. This change, more than any, propels the neoliberal project of the “knowledge economy” that has predominated in world policy forums at the expense of alternative accounts of globalization. It is an account that universalizes policies and obscures country and regional differences. It also denies the capacity of local traditions, institutions and cultural values to mediate, negotiate, reinterpret and transmute the dominant model of globalization and the emergent form of knowledge capitalism on which it is based. This chapter traces the birth of neoliberalism and its expression in three models of economic liberalism. Finally, it provides an alternative reading of the knowledge economy based on the emergence model of social knowledge production based on peer co-production of knowledge goods and the ethics of participation and collaboration.

Jennifer Sandler and Michael Apple’s chapter then begins by asking the question: “What knowledge is of most worth?” They argue that recent calls for rigor and relevance in the field of education have become increasingly unified and specific, focused and public. The critique of education research has found its voice – along with a great deal of power – within the federal educational policy sphere. This voice says not just “rigor” and “relevance,” but “randomized controlled trials” and “what works.” This voice suddenly seems ubiquitous in federal policy, a mantra repeated with remarkable specificity and finding its way into federal educational policy, research training programs, conferences, job postings, RFPs, and the verbiage of myriad policy organizations. It is represented in a newly coherent program of grants and fellowships on the part of the Institute of Education Sciences, as well as the over $10 million per year allocated for the What Works Clearinghouse for reviews of intervention research in education and promotion of the results of these reviews to the public. The politics of research methods in education is suddenly big news. This chapter begins to trace these politics by describing this shift – to which Sandler and Apple refer as “evidence-based policy/practices,” or EBP – from what they understand to be the perspective of its advocates, creating what the authors call an epistemological movement. Finally, they address how the EBP movement might be understood in relation to the context of its particular constitutive
outside: diverse interest groups and advocates who situate their political and educational work within subjective, lived experiences.

Kristen Buras’ chapter documents and analyzes the rise of rightist multiculturalism as part of the new hegemony. More specifically, she refers to the propensity, especially over the past two decades, toward particular forms of compromise—namely, those building on the cultural sensibilities of and demands for recognition by marginalized groups while at the same time steering those sensibilities in dominant directions. Rightist multiculturalism represents a far more extensive effort to reconstruct the radical racial critiques of the 1960s than the inclusion of textbook sidebars on the Little Rock Nine or mainstreaming of Malcolm X through state issuance of an honorary postage stamp. Buras is referring here to the neocorporative-inspired Core Knowledge curriculum around which E. D. Hirsch and the Core Knowledge Foundation have built an entire school reform movement premised on this new hegemonic approach. Using a neo-Gramscian lens, she critically examines Hirsch’s vision of education and the ways his guiding assumptions appeal to unequally empowered groups. Moreover, she traces the cultural politics and growth of the Core Knowledge movement, analyzes the allegiance of dominant and subaltern groups to Core, and underscores the tensions generated by diverse actors and interests within the movement as they strike strategic forms of compromise.

Sandra Harding rounds out the section with a report on the status of women in the sciences. It is now three decades since critics began to look at the theories and practices of science and technology (S&T) through the distinctive perspectives produced by the women’s movement in the US and Europe. Yet the higher that one looks in S&T worlds, the fewer women one finds. In the last decade especially, analyses that start off from the lives of women from racial and ethnic minorities in the North and women in the Third World have added distinctive perspectives to these debates. The persistence of discrimination against women raises troubling questions. A second concern has focused on cases of sexist and androcentric applications and technologies of S&T. Third, sexist, racist, imperialist and “orientalist” results of scientific research in biology and the social sciences have justified the enforcement of women’s second-class citizenship. A fourth focus has succeeded in shifting attention from the reputed deficiencies of girls and women to the documented deficiencies of S&T curricula and pedagogy. In this chapter, Harding reviews the main themes in these literatures, and then briefly turns to their implications for theories of democracy and philosophies of science.

In the fifth section, Social Identities, the UK’s leading Critical Race Theorist, David Gillborn, introduces the main tenets of critical race theory as a form of cultural politics. Focusing specifically on interest convergence, or the way that racial progress intersects with whites’ own political interests, he examines the Stephen Lawrence case in Great Britain, arguably the most famous single episode in the history of British race relations. Stephen Lawrence was 18 years old when he was murdered by a gang of White youths. His parents’ fight for justice, in the face of a racist, incompetent and uncaring police force, made legal and social history. The Stephen Lawrence case led to far-reaching changes in race equality.
law, including the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (RRAA) that was passed in November 2000. It elevated the notion of “institutional racism” to a point in the public consciousness where the term is now frequently used and debated in politics and in the mainstream media. Despite all this, serious questions remain about the long-term impact of the case. The Lawrence case demonstrates conclusively that struggles for race equality are never complete. Landmark victories, no matter how hard won, may be the beginning, not the end, of the change process. But it would be wrong to interpret this analysis as hopeless. Rather, the chapter points to a more realistic measure of success and our chances for further change in the future. In the tradition of Derrick Bell, Gillborn’s portrait of the Lawrence family’s pursuit of racial justice becomes an ultimate act of defiance in a time when colorblind policies discourage such analysis.

Interpreting the work of one of the most recognized names in cultural politics – Stuart Hall – Michael Dumas’ chapter asks what it means to invoke Black education in a time of intense questions regarding racial essentialism. However, just because we might agree that race is, in Hall’s words, “a floating signifier,” is not to say that it signifies nothing at all, or that it has no material significance. Race matters precisely because its meaning is indeterminate, thus allowing social actors to construct, dismantle, shift and then re-construct racial representations that inform how we see and “do” race in our daily lives. Documenting the intellectual and political platform of the Birmingham School, Dumas traces its Marxist roots even as it goes beyond them to account for non-class based movements and subject formations, including race. As it concerns Black identity, there is no pure blackness to which we might aspire, (re-)create or return. This is not to say that “Black” has no meaning whatsoever; nor does it suggest that there is no need for a Black cultural politics. Applying Hall’s critique of racial essence, Dumas offers a Black politics without guarantees. This entails three pedagogical acts. First, it is important to continually reaffirm a discourse of struggle in Black education, indeed to struggle over the “Black” in Black education. Second, Black education insists on the complexity of Black representation, its multitude rather than its essence. Third, and perhaps most importantly, a critical cultural politics of Black education must begin with an engagement of the cultural production of young people, or their concrete acts to maintain that Black is still beautiful. In the next chapter, Sherick Hughes introduces Burke’s concept of drama, an influence on major Harlem Renaissance thinkers. Dramatism is perhaps, more accurately described as Burke’s Weltanschauung (i.e., Burke’s comprehensive view of the world of human life as a stage play of and about the human symbolic condition). Dramatism is the genesis and exodus; chicken and egg of his lifelong thinking, feeling, and acting about the human symbolic condition - his, yours, and mine - with all of the conflicts and possibilities thereof. Hughes’ chapter on Burke captures the theatrical in cultural politics that often blurs the already fine line between reality and performance.

Next, Sofia Villenas asks what it might mean to think critically about education with and from the knowledge and theorizing of people engaged in Chicana/Latina cultural production. She explores how Chicana literary scholarship born of the physical reality of the border serves to theorize cultural production from the
epistemologies, experiences and histories of those whose lives are carved by the existence of the U.S.-Mexico/Latin American border. Specifically, Villenas outlines five tenets of Chicana/Latina feminist thought – 1) intersectionality of oppressions, 2) global solidarities, 3) breaking down dualisms, 4) embracing ambiguity, and 5) tracking decolonial agency. Together, these offer feminista-centered conceptualizations of methodology, identity/identifications, pedagogy and social movement – all essential considerations in the study of a critical education centered on critique and hope. In excavating a mujerista and feminist paradigm of cultural production from the pen of Chicana and Latina literary scholars, novelists, poets, artists, essayists, folklorists, and revisionist historians, Villenas proposes how a different yet overlooked set of theoretical perspectives and tools contribute to addressing key educational issues of local and global dimensions. Finally, she explores recent educational research that is conceptualized from the spaces of Chicana/Latina feminist cultural studies, and concludes with implications and future directions for re-thinking specific issues in critical multicultural, Latina/o and immigrant/diaspora education.

Jackson Katz’s chapter shifts to a general introduction to the importance of masculinity studies in education and cultural theory. Specifically, he sketches out some of the key elements of a multiperspectival cultural studies analysis of media-driven constructions, particularly of presidential masculinity. One of the chief goals of a cultural studies approach to masculinity is to make visible some of the processes whereby white masculinity maintains its dominant social position and in doing so, to unmask and demystify it. In particular, presidential masculinity is a historical construction, and both hegemonic masculinity and its corollary, emphasized femininity, are fluid concepts that are contextual and continually negotiated in the media. Moreover, the president has arguably been the embodiment of hegemonic white masculinity in his era. Who he is and how he carries himself – and how his “manhood” is represented and constructed in media – has enormous influence in the fashioning of social norms and expectations of what it means to be a “real man.” In that sense, the presidency itself can be understood as a type of public pedagogy. Through a critical political media literacy, sports discourses like “boxing” and “football” become subjects for analysis of the way that gender is learned and students are recruited into combinations of masculine and feminine roles.

Diana Silberman-Keller’s chapter kicks off the last section, Reading Formations, by introducing the field of informal education as an ever-changing repertoire of educational, cultural, social and political activities that sometimes bridge between the deficiencies of formal and informal education and sometimes propose radical alternatives to institutionalized education. Informal learning’s status as “Between Tradition and Modernity” includes the idea of sustaining idealized learning patterns from the past on the one hand, and the tendency to transport these patterns into modern public spheres where learning is not generally supposed to take place on the other. The social change orientation is the belief in informal educational activities as potentially capable of effectuating social change, that is, beyond representing an attitude toward change. Silberman-Keller surveys research on
informal learning that takes place in Internet communities, video games, and traditional apprenticeship relations. As observed in the changing tropes of informal education, the future of cultural politics is captured by two main tendencies. First, the formalization and institutionalization of informal educational systems through the edification of departments, ministries and programs that foment informal education in various settings, results in the pedagogic and didactic pluralism of learning. Second and opposed to the first, the introduction of new technologies inspires the creation of new subcultures and social groups.

In Korina Jocson and Takeo Rivera’s chapter, the authors introduce a theory of poetry through the works of Bakhtin. The word, for Bakhtin, is a concrete living utterance shaped by various historical moments in dialogically agitated social environments. Bakhtin, argue Jocson and Takeo, draws a parallel between the novel and the body as a living entity, as becoming, as grotesque, as different, and as continually created or re-created by the world, like the novel, which is intertextual and conceived from a web of relationships with the world. They apply specifically three of Bakhtin’s concepts – polyphony (multivoicedness), chronotope (time and space), and carnival (newness and difference) – to examine empirically youth poetry and spoken word. From this, they generate the insight that the intersection of performance and poemness suggests a link between the pedagogical and ontological. If we understand performance as more than the staged act of performing a poem, but as a performance of identity, of becoming through performing, the importance of poemness therefore becomes far more apparent for education, both in and out of school forms of literacy.

Kalervo Gulson’s chapter commences with a brief introduction to the spatial turn in education, made possible through Foucault’s theoretical innovation from temporal to spatial logics of power. Second, it highlights some of the spatial images and orderings in the cultural politics of the school, which architecturally and symbolically is replete with spatial imagery and orderings. Third, it explores some of the possibilities and limitations of spatial theories – with a focus on metaphors – in relation to issues of identity, specifically hybridity and race, where a symbiosis exists with geography. Not only is race produced by space, but so is space by race. We do not need to look further than the history of abductions of Aboriginal children in Australia or the politics of housing development and segregation in cities like Chicago, where racialization and spatialization are clearly at work. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how spatial concepts might allow for different thinking about the cultural politics of education.

Finally, Douglas Kellner completes the volume with his treatise of how digital technologies pose tremendous challenges to educators to rethink their basic tenets, to deploy the new technologies in creative and productive ways, and to restructure schooling to respond constructively and progressively to the technological and social changes currently underway and emergent forms of culture and communication. Kellner discusses the fundamental transformations in the world economy, politics, and culture in a dialectical framework that distinguishes between progressive and emancipatory features, oppressive and negative attributes, and how a radical pedagogy and new technoliteracies are essential for democratic social transformation and
justice. Hence, following John Dewey and Paulo Freire, he calls for a reconstruction of education to make it more responsive to the challenges of a democratic and multicultural society.

NOTES

1 I regard the phrase “cultural politics” as a rough equivalent of the phrase “cultural studies.” That said, cultural politics is a broader descriptor for the study of cultural contestation, whereas cultural studies is a program of study and exists in a more formal space within the academy, best captured by Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler’s (1992) attempt to capture its contours in the edited collection, *Cultural Studies*. For this section, I will favor using cultural studies because of its British roots, but the remainder of the Introduction will stay with cultural politics as a more general phenomenon.

2 I consider Althusser’s attention to ideology unsurpassed in our era. This does not mean that his structural theory of ideology does not have gaps and holes, which I address in my chapter for this volume. It means that in making ideology the *defining concept of study*, Althusser has few rivals. Of current social theorists, I consider Eagleton the heir apparent to Althusser in studies of ideology.

3 If Althusser’s theory sounds elitist, it is a fair criticism. As he sees it, science and democracy develop in opposite directions. As Marxist science improves, less people have access to materialist thinking, creating a larger ideological field. It is a bit like a sports analogy wherein athletes are becoming more elite, therefore limiting access to professional sports to a narrower field of candidates. Regarding materialist thought, this narrowing is especially true in capitalist social formations, where Marxist thinking is discouraged. But to Althusser the problem does not wither away with the establishment of socialism. If this sounds like the beginning of poststructural deferral, then Fritzman (1998) is right to call Althusser a “poststructural materialist.”

4 For the moment, I am privileging poststructuralism as signifier of a general shift in cultural theory. I recognize that postmodernism in art and philosophy, postcolonialism in literature and history, as well as other post-varieties, are different discourses and react to diverse traditions. I use poststructuralism as a term that maintains a family resemblance, to borrow Wittgenstein’s phrase, with other post-foundational thought. Their critiques resemble each other’s spirit, if not also sharing a profound political orientation together. Some of these distinctions will be explored in the last section below on the turn to “post” in cultural politics.

5 Foucault is commonly referred to as a poststructuralist and my use of superstructuralism is a theoretical liberty. It signifies the continuity with Althusser’s structuralism taken to its height, rather than a radical break between Althusser and Foucault. It is for this reason that I consider Althusser a key predecessor of poststructuralism by calling him a pre-post thinker. Because there is no general agreement regarding the meaning of “post” in post-analysis, one possibility, which I am not championing by writing, is that it means “super.” Superstructuralism takes Saussure’s structuralist method of studying language without people and applies it to studying discourses without subjects.

6 Fredric Jameson delivered a series of lectures at UCLA’s Comparative Literature Department, 2001.

7 Ranciere gave a talk for the Department of French at UC-Berkeley, March 11, 2008.

8 Here I will privilege postmodernism as a broader cultural phenomenon. It has become a term that describes a general discomfort about new ideas as opposed to poststructuralism and postcolonialism, which remain primarily academic terms. For instance, in cycling one seatpost during the 1990s, which connects the saddle to the frame’s seat tube, bears the witty marketing title of “Postmodern.” There also exists a book called *Postmodernism for Dummies*. In general, the term postmodern encompasses the variety of post-discourses.

9 In the sense of post as “after.”

10 There are two varieties of post-race thought. The first did not go by the name of “post-race” but argued for the downplaying of race structures. For this reason, it belongs in the after-race discussion in the chronological sense that we live in the aftermath of race. Conservative analysts have been tenacious with this line of thought, particularly in the US, for several decades now. They are not
normally considered as subscribing to a cultural studies persuasion but nonetheless espouse a cultural politics, albeit of the Right (see Apple, 2006; Buras, 2008). For this reason, many race scholars cringe at the suggestion of “post-race” (in any form). The second version of post-race belongs with the cultural studies movement and actually uses the phrase, “post-race,” but does not strictly argue either for a time after race in which we live or the moribund status of race analysis. It may, in Gilroy’s (2000) case, argue for the dispreference toward race organization but it accomplishes this move via a thorough appreciation of the awesome nature of race relations as a lived reality. I will discuss this second version of post-race below in the section on “post” as a signifier for a certain ambivalence, which I (in pressa) have argued elsewhere as a theoretical filter that changes the nature of cultural analysis and proceeds with no guarantees.

11 The Los Angeles Staples Center, home to the Lakers, held a memorial service to honor and remember Michael Jackson on July 2009. There, Reverend Al Sharpton remarked on Michael Jackson’s opening of doors for African Americans in all sectors of public life, including the nation’s presidency. He spoke eloquently of Jackson’s ability to create a comfort zone among the races, whose members, through their differences, came together to appreciate his music. This comfort zone, he adds, is partly responsible, for the nation’s acceptance of a Black man for president. Although I am not sympathetic to an analysis that focuses on the influence of an individual, no matter the strength of presence and personality, in exchange for a fuller appreciation of the history that facilitated said events, both Jackson and President Obama are extraordinary people and not just anyone could have accomplished what they achieved. That said, one’s popularity did not determine the other’s success. The complete mediatization of Jackson’s eccentricism may not have aided in Obama’s election, but the latter may have succeeded precisely despite it as the electorate’s overwhelming choice.

REFERENCES

AFFIRMING AMBIVALENCE


THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF NEOLIBERALISM
AND EDUCATION
HENRY A. GIROUX

1. NEOLIBERALISM, PEDAGOGY, AND CULTURAL POLITICS

Beyond the Theatre of Cruelty

INTRODUCTION

As neoliberal ideology circulates around the globe inserting itself into every aspect of politics and daily life, progressive social theorists and educational critics increasingly focus their analyses on the primacy of class, economics, and the circulation of capital. Unfortunately, many of the commentaries reassert the importance of class as the central axis of inequality while increasingly devaluing any notion of cultural politics and the social movements that take seriously the cultural deployment of power. Rather than acknowledging that social movements that embrace the importance of cultural politics are about notions of freedom and equality that speak to vital issues, human needs, and desires, the economic-oriented left condemns such movements as being either merely cultural or as a species of narrow, particularistic interest. In this ongoing theoretical narrative, the challenge to repressive authority lies largely in the realm of the economic while struggles concerned with issues such as race, gender, sexuality, and disability are dismissed as either trivial or, more perniciously, a means to abet conservatives who seize upon affirmative action, gay marriage, and abortion to win over working class voters. In its most lethal form, as Eric Lott has pointed out, the purging of race from class issues not only carries “at least a tacit appeal to whiteness as the normative ground of politics” but also suggests that any political strategy that employs race [as well as gender and sexuality] also scares away white [and male] workers. Rather than duelling with conservatives over the modernist divide between high and low culture, the more recent version of this “war” pits political economy warriors such as Todd Gitlin, Michael Tomasky, Michael Lind and more recently Thomas Frank, and Walter Benn Michaels against all those progressives who adopt both a broad based social vision and argue that class while important “cannot be emancipatory for the whole.” In general terms, the strict advocates of class politics view both various species of what is reductively called identity politics as separatist cells and cultural politics more broadly as a detriment to overcoming economic equality and promoting economic justice. Four of the more important assumptions that characterize this position include: the notion that effective social movements cannot be organized by gays and lesbians, people of color, and other groups who while often recognizing that class matters, also recognize other modes of oppression.

Z. Leonardo (ed.), Handbook of Cultural Politics and Education, 49–70.
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as well as the diverse sites through which political struggles take place; rather than being a serious object of struggle, the cultural sphere, including mass and popular culture, is largely a site of domination controlled overwhelmingly by corporations and not susceptible to political struggle; since working class people only care about their paychecks, concerns with equality, freedom, and culture are at odds with any viable notion of politics. Finally, any political project that attempts to address either how class is lived through various social forms such as gender and race or analyze how various modes of oppression, including class domination, produce subjectivities and secure consent as part of a broader pedagogical and cultural offensive constitutes a diversion from “real” class struggles.

There is more at work here than an overdetermined emphasis on political economy and class through the disparagement of what is despairingly labeled as “cultural politics.” Indeed, there is also the refusal to acknowledge that the related issues of feminism, race, immigration, and sexuality count as real issues. Similarly, there is the refusal to recognize that central to any viable notion of politics is the primacy of education, persuasion, and the dynamics of diverse cultural struggles. Lost from this economistic perspective, as theorists as diverse as Judith Butler, Ellen Willis and Robin Kelly have pointed is the insistence that domination cannot simply be explained away through a class analysis and that class politics cannot be emancipatory for all groups. Moreover, a reductionist class politics and a deracinated identity politics when analyzed together do not add up to a viable notion of democratic politics. At the same time, the mass production of global poverty and inequality really matters, but it cannot be addressed by separating cultural life from material relations of power, or struggles for economic equality from other social movements. What is needed is a new political language that goes beyond the racially and gender cleansed politics of class in order to be both more inclusive and capacious in extending the boundaries of politics beyond both private life and the domain of the economic. In part, such an approach suggests a need for a new politics that takes material relations of power seriously but also calls for expanding its theoretical reach by recognizing culture as a central site in the production and struggle over power, broadening the sphere and range of experiences constituting the political, if not agency itself, and opening up new locations of resistance, struggle, alignments, experiences, and possibilities inscribed in the material contexts of every day life. Ellen Willis furthers this call for a new politics in her own critique of the old politics organized around the faulty binarism of class and cultural politics, and left politics as a zero-sum game. She writes:

[The view that] we can do class or culture, but not both—[is] simply wrong. People’s working lives, their sexual and domestic lives, their moral values are intertwined. Capitalism is not only an economic system but a pervasive social and ideological force: in its present phase, it is promoting a culture of compulsive work, social Darwinism, contempt for ‘useless’ artistic and intellectual pursuits, rejection of the very concept of public goods, and corporate ‘efficiency’ as the mode for every social activity from education to medicine.
Culture does not cancel out class as a central category of politics. On the contrary, a radical cultural politics recognizes both the strengths and limitations of a class oriented analytic paradigm and in doing so can work to address the theoretical potential for extending the reach of its possibilities by highlighting as Lawrence Grossberg argues “the specific forms in which domination and subordination are organized, about the ways they operate, about how they are lived, mobilized, and empowered, that is, questions about the actual ways in which cultural practices are deployed in relations of power and how they themselves deploy power, questions about the actual effects of culture within specific contexts, questions about culture’s relations to governance.”

In opposition to an overly determined notion of class politics, I want to analyze how matters of culture, pedagogy, economic inequality and power intersect to construct neoliberalism as one of the most effective anti-democratic forces at work in the world today. Central to my argument is that many class-based analyses of neoliberalism fail either to critically engage how neoliberalism works to win the consent of the very populations it exploits or how the educational force of trans-national exchange dependent on the new electronic technologies of global culture works to produce those needs, values, and subjectivities that resonate with neoliberal ideology and economic relations. Equally absent from this discourse are questions about the profound appeal neoliberal ideology has in mobilizing such a large and diverse strata of people both in the United States and around the world. In what follows, I want to address these lacuna through an analysis of what I call the public pedagogy of neoliberalism and the importance of cultural politics in opposing it as a mode of economic fundamentalism, and political rationality, but also as a set of dynamic discursive practices.

NEOLIBERALISM AS A THEATRE OF CRUELTY

What is often ignored by many theorists who analyze the rise of neoliberalism in the United States is that it is not only a system of economic power relations, but also a political project of governing and persuasion intent on producing new forms of subjectivity and particular modes of conduct. And while I want to develop this issue by analyzing the close link between the economic mechanisms of neoliberalism and its cultural politics of subjectification and self-regulation, I begin with a theoretical insight provided by the British media theorist, Nick Couldry, who insists that “every system of cruelty requires its own theatre,” one that draws upon the rituals of everyday life in order to legitimate its norms, values, institutions, and social practices. Neoliberalism represents one such system of cruelty, a political and cultural system that is reproduced daily through a regime of commonsense and a narrow notion of political rationality that “reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to educational policy to practices of empire.” What is new about neoliberalism in a post-9/11 world is that it has become normalized, serving as a powerful pedagogical force that shapes our lives, memories, and daily experiences, while attempting to erase everything critical and emancipatory about history, justice, solidarity, freedom, and democracy itself. Wedded to the belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic
decisions, neoliberalism wages an incessant attack on democracy, public institutions, public goods, and non-commodified values—even as it is increasingly viewed as responsible for the current global financial meltdown. Under neoliberalism everything is either for sale or is plundered for profit. Politicians willingly hand the public’s airwaves over to broadcasters and large corporate interests without a dime going into the public trust; corporations drive the nation’s energy policies, and the war industries give war profiteering a new meaning as the government, especially under the former Bush-Cheney regime, hands out contracts without any competitive bidding; politicians are now bought and sold by corporate lobbyists making a mockery out of the democratic process; the environment is polluted and despoiled in the name of profit-making just as the government passes legislation to make it easier for corporations to do so; public services are gutted in order to lower the taxes of major corporations; schools increasingly resemble malls or jails and teachers, forced to raise revenue for classroom materials, increasingly function as circus barkers hawking everything from hamburgers to pizza parties—that is, when they are not reduced to prepping students to get higher test scores. As markets are touted as the driving force of everyday life, big government is disparaged as either incompetent or a threat to individual freedom, suggesting that power should reside in markets and corporations rather than in governments and citizens. Citizenship has increasingly become a function of market values and politics has been restructured as “corporations have been increasingly freed from social control through deregulation, privatization, and other neoliberal measures.”

As the Obama administration bails out banks and other mega financial corporations instead of the millions of people suffering from the current economic recession, resistance is mounting to neoliberal policies. As we have seen in the last few decades, the corporate capitalist fairytale of neoliberalism is being challenged all over the globe by students, labor organizers, intellectuals, community activists, and a host of individuals and groups unwilling to allow democracy to be bought and sold by a combination of multinational corporations, corporate swindlers, international political institutions, and those government politicians who willingly align themselves with corporate interests and profits. From Seattle to Davos, people engaged in popular resistance are collectively taking up the challenge of neoliberalism and reviving both the meaning of resistance and the places where it occurs. Political culture is now global and resistance is amorphous, connecting students with workers, school teachers with parents, and intellectuals with artists. Groups protesting the attack on farmers in India whose land is being destroyed by the government in order to build dams now find themselves in alliance with young people resisting sweatshop labor in New York City. Environmental activists are joining up with key sections of organized labor as well as with groups protesting Third World debt. The collapse of the neoliberal showcase, Argentina, along with numerous corporate bankruptcies and scandals starting with Enron and more recently with Bernie Madoff, reveals the cracks in neoliberal hegemony and domination. In Latin America, a new wave of resistance to negative globalization and neoliberal structural adjustment policies has emerged among countries such as Chile, Peru, Argentina, and Venezuela. In addition, the multiple forms of resistance against
neoliberal capitalism are not limited by an identity politics focused on particularized rights and interests. On the contrary, new modes of popular opposition and politics have been expanded to address a broader crisis of political culture and democracy that connects the militarization and corporatization of public life with the collapse of the welfare state and the attack on civil liberties. Central to these new movements is the notion that neoliberalism has to be understood within a larger crisis of vision, meaning, education, and political agency. Democracy in this view is not limited to the struggle over economic resources and power; indeed, it also includes the creation of public spheres where individuals can be educated as political agents equipped with the skills, capacities and knowledge they need to perform as autonomous political agents. I want to expand the reaches of this debate by arguing that any form of resistance against neoliberalism must address the discourses of political agency, civic education, and cultural politics as part of a broader struggle over the relationship between democratization (the ongoing struggle for a substantive and inclusive democracy) and the global public sphere.

We live at a time when the conflation of private interests, empire building, and evangelical fundamentalism puts into question the very nature, if not existence, of the democratic process. Under the reign of neoliberalism, capital and wealth have been largely distributed upwards while civic virtue has been undermined by a slavish celebration of the free market as the model for organizing all facets of everyday life. Political culture has been increasingly emptied of democratic values as collective life is organized around the modalities of privatization, deregulation, and commercialization. When the alleged champions of neoliberalism invoke politics, they substitute “ideological certainty for reasonable doubt” and deplete “the national reserves of political intelligence” just as they endorse “the illusion that the future can be bought instead of earned.” Under attack is the social contract in which people were bound together, not as individuals expressing themselves only through the market place but as citizens who had obligations to one another. What neoliberalism undermines is a social contract bound to enlarging the public good, protecting the public values, and expanding social provisions—such as access to adequate health care, housing, employment, public transportation, and education—that ensure a limited though important safety net and a set of conditions upon which democracy could be experienced and critical citizenship engaged. It has been replaced with a notion of national security based on fear, surveillance, and control rather than a culture of shared responsibility. Self-reflection and collective empowerment are now reduced to self-promotion, self-interest, and legitimated by a new and ruthless economic Darwinism played out nightly on network television as a metaphor for the “naturalness” of downsizing, the celebration of hyper-masculinity, and the promotion of an unchecked notion of self-interest and individualism over even the most limited notions of solidarity and collective struggle. Neoliberalism with its celebration of markets, finance, and investors “requires a new belief in the future… the time of investment is now. The future must be lived in the present.”

Under neoliberal domestic restructuring and the foreign policy initiatives of the Washington Consensus, motivated by an evangelical belief in free-market
democracy at home and free trade abroad, the United States in the last thirty years
has witnessed the increasing obliteration of those discourses, social forms, public
institutions, and non-commercial values that are central to the language of the
common good, public commitment, and democratically charged politics. Civic
engagement now appears impotent as corporations privatize public space and
disconnect power from issues of equity, social justice, and civic responsibility.
Proceeding outside of democratic accountability, neoliberalism has allowed a handful
of private interests to control as much of social life as possible in order to maximize
their personal profit.

Abroad, neoliberal global policies have been used to pursue rapacious free trade
agreements and expand Western financial and commercial interests through the
heavy-handed policies of the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and
the International Monetary Fund in order to manage and transfer resources and
wealth from the poor and less developed nations to the richest and most powerful
nation states and to the wealthy, corporate defenders of capitalism.16 Third world
and semi-peripheral states of Latin America, Africa, and Asia have become client
states of the wealthy nations led by the United States. Loans made to the client
states by banks and other financial institutions have produced severe dislocations
and consequences for “social welfare programs such as health care, education, and
laws establishing labor standards.”17 For example, the restrictions that the IMF and
World Bank impose on countries as a condition for granting loans not only impose
capitalist values, they also undermine the very possibility of an inclusive and
substantive democracy. The results have been disastrous and can be seen both in
the economic collapse of countries such as Nigeria and in the fact that “one third
of the world’s labor force—more than a billion people—are unemployed or under-
employed.”18 Tracking 26 countries that received loans from the World Bank and
the IMF, The Multinational Monitor spelled out the conditions that accompanied
such loans:

[c]ivil service downsizing; [p]rivatization of government-owned enterprises,
with layoffs required in advance of privatization and frequently following
privatization; [p]romotion of labor flexibility—regulatory changes to remove
restrictions on the ability of government and private employers to fire or lay
off workers; [m]andated wage reductions, minimum wage reductions or
containment, and spreading the wage gap between government employees
and managers; and [p]ension reforms, including privatization, that cut social
security benefits for workers.17

At home, corporations increasingly not only design the economic sphere but also
shape legislation and policy affecting all levels of government, and with limited
opposition. As corporate power lays siege to the political process, the benefits flow to
the rich and the powerful. Included in such benefits are reform policies that shift the
burden of taxes from the rich to the middle class, the working poor, and state
governments as can be seen in the shift from taxes on wealth (capital gains,
dividends, and estate taxes) to a tax on work, principally in the form of a regressive
payroll tax. During the 2002–2004 fiscal period, tax cuts delivered $197.3 billion in
NEOLIBERALISM, PEDAGOGY, AND CULTURAL

tax breaks to the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans (i.e., households making more than $337,000 a year) while state governments increased taxes to fill a $200 billion budget deficit.\(^{18}\) Equally alarming, a recent congressional study revealed that 63% of all corporations in 2000 paid no taxes while “[s]ix in ten corporations reported no tax liability for the five years from 1996 through 2000, even though corporate profits were growing at record-breaking levels during that period.”\(^{19}\) While the rich get huge tax cuts, the Pentagon is spending about “$6 billion a month on the war in Iraq or about $2 million a day.”\(^{20}\) Moreover, as part of an ongoing effort to destroy public entitlements, the Bush administration reduced government-provided services, income, and health care; in addition, it implemented cuts in Medicare and veterans benefits as well as trimmed back or eliminated funds for programs for children and for public housing. There is no indication that the Obama administration will significantly reverse any of these neoliberal policies.

Neoliberal global policies also further the broader cultural project of privatizing social services through appeals to “personal responsibility as the proper functions of the state are narrowed, tax and wage costs in the economy are cut, and more social costs are absorbed by civil society and the family.”\(^{21}\) The hard currency of human suffering permeates the social order as health care costs rise, one out of five children live beneath the poverty line, and 47 million Americans bear the burden of lacking any health insurance. In 2007, President Bush vetoed legislation that would have provided an additional and much needed $35 billion to the highly successful and popular State Children’s Health Insurance Program (S-chip). Bush’s justification ranged from ridiculous—as when he claimed the whole issue was a media myth—to the more transparent and ideologically driven argument that the program would expand “socialized-type medicine,” interfere with private insurance, and cost too much. Actually, the costs for the bill would have come from levying a 61-cents-a-pack increase in the federal excise tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products, providing a further disincentive for smokers.\(^{22}\) Moreover, the program run by insurers, doctors, and nurses who deliver the services. This bill would have provided health insurance for 3.8 million children from low-income families who are currently uninsured. Besides a veto, the Bush administration offered no alternative program to address the plight of the nine million children uninsured and the millions underinsured. What becomes clear in this egregious act of presidential incompetence and moral indifference is that Bush the unflappable neoliberal warrior was willing to sacrifice the health of millions of poor children as part of his relentless attempts to destroy all vestiges of the welfare state and promote his pro-corporate, market-based fundamentalism.\(^{23}\) Draining the public treasury of funds and disparaging the social state does more than result in failed governance, it also puts people’s lives at risk, as was obvious in the government’s recent failure to provide decent care at Walter Reed Hospital for wounded soldiers returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time that it starves public programs and services, neoliberalism becomes complicitous with the transformation of the democratic state into a national security state that repeatedly uses its military and political power to develop a daunting police state and military-prison-education-industrial complex to punish workers, stifle dissent, and undermine the political power of labor unions and progressive social
movements. Unsurprisingly, Obama’s attempt to reform health care in America is unanimously opposed by the Republican Party and the debate has been largely driven by insurance and pharmaceutical companies which oppose it.

With its debased belief that profit-making is the essence of democracy, and its definition of citizenship as an energized plunge into consumerism, neoliberalism loosens or eliminates government regulation of market forces, celebrates a ruthless competitive individualism, and places the commanding political, cultural, and economic institutions of society in the hands of powerful corporate interests, the privileged, and unrepentant religious bigots. Within the discourse of neoliberalism, democracy becomes synonymous with free markets while issues of equality, social justice, and freedom are stripped of any substantive meaning and used to disparage those who suffer systemic deprivation and chronic punishment. Individual misfortune like democracy itself is now viewed either as an excess or as being in need of radical containment. The media, largely consolidated through corporate power, routinely provide a platform for high profile right-wing pundits and politicians to remind us of how degenerate the poor have become reinforcing the central neoliberal tenet that all problems are private rather than social in nature. Conservative columnist Ann Coulter captures the latter sentiment with a cruel vengeance with her comment that “[i]nstead of poor people with hope and possibility, we now have a permanent underclass of aspiring criminals killing one another between having illegitimate children and collecting welfare checks.”

Radio talk show host Michael Savage also exemplifies the unabashed racism and fanaticism that emerge under a neoliberal regime in which ethics and justice appear beside the point. Buttressed by a right wing media culture in which 91 percent of political talk radio is conservative, Savage routinely refers to non-white countries as “turd world nations,” homosexuality as a “perversion” and young children who are victims of gunfire as “ghetto slime.”

As Fredric Jameson argues in The Seeds of Time, it has now become easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. The breathless rhetoric of the global victory of free-market rationality spewed forth by the mass media, right-wing intellectuals, and governments alike, has found its material expression in both an all-out attack on democratic values and the growth of a range of social problems, including virulent and persistent poverty, joblessness, inadequate health care, racial apartheid in the inner cities, and the increasing inequalities between the rich and the poor, all of which have been made much more severe in the current economic crisis. While such issues are more visible than ever, they are rarely addressed as part of the political and ideological crisis of neoliberalism or they are factored into talk-show spectacles in which the public becomes merely a staging area for venting private outrage and emotions.

As neoliberalism takes hold of the public imagination, it becomes increasingly more difficult to talk about what is fundamental to civic life, critical citizenship, and a substantive democracy. In its dubious appeals to universal laws, neutrality, and selective scientific research, neoliberalism “eliminates the very possibility of critical thinking, without which democratic debate becomes impossible.” Hence, neoliberal policies that promote the cutthroat downsizing of the workforce,
bleeding of social services, reduction of state governments to police precincts, the ongoing liquidation of job security, the increasing elimination of a decent social wage, the creation of a society of low-skilled workers, and the emergence of a culture of permanent insecurity and fear hide behind appeals to common sense and alleged immutable laws of nature. When and where such nakedly ideological appeals strain both reason and imagination, religious faith is invoked to silence dissension. Society is now defended as a space to nurture the most fundamental values and relations necessary to a democracy but as an ideological and political sphere “where religious fundamentalism comes together with market fundamentalism to form the ideology of American supremacy.”29 Similarly, American imperial ambitions have been legitimated by public relations intellectuals as part of the responsibilities of empire building, now celebrated as a civilizing process for the rest of the globe. As culture is increasingly militarized, civil liberties suspended, and a war is waged in Iraq and Afghanistan, shades of authoritarianism creep into the social order, lagely justified “in the service of spreading liberty and democracy.”30 Neo-conservatives join hands with neoliberals and religious fundamentalists in broadcasting to the rest of the globe an American triumphalism in which the United States is arrogantly defined as “The greatest of all great powers in world history.”31 Money, profits, and fear become powerful ideological elements in arguing for opening up new markets and closing down the possibility of dissent at home. In such a scenario, a new kind of coercive state emerges as “authorized power is [sanctioned as the only type of] credible. … [and] state appeals to fear [become] the only effective basis for obedience.”32 This becomes clear not only in the passage of repressive laws such as the USA PATRIOT Act and the Military Commissions Act of 2006, but also in the work of prominent neoconservatives such as David Frum and Richard Perle who without any irony intended insist that “[a] free society is not an un-policing society. A free society is self-policing society.”33 And while such flagrant violations of democracy are largely associated with the Bush-Cheney regime, they are now being carried out under the Obama administration as well. At the same time, democratic politics are increasingly derailed by the intersection of a free-market fundamentalism and an escalating militarism.35 The consequences can be seen in the policy of anti-terrorism practiced by the Bush administration and repeated under Obama that mimics the very terrorism it wished to eliminate.

Not only does this policy of all-embracing anti-terrorism exhaust itself in a discourse of moral absolutes, militarism, revenge, and public acts of denunciation, it also strips community of democratic values by configuring politics in religious terms and defining every citizen and inhabitant of the United States as a potential terrorist. Politics becomes empty as citizens are reduced to obedient recipients of power, content to follow orders, while shaming those who make power accountable. Under the dictates of a pseudo-patriotism, dissent is stifled in the face of a growing racism that condemns Arabs and people of color as less than civilized. The ongoing refusal of the American government to address with any degree of self-criticism or humanity the torture and violation of human rights exercised by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq offers a case in point.36 In light of the revelation of the most grotesque brutality, racism, and inhumanity exhibited by American soldiers...
against Arab prisoners captured on camera and video, powerful right-wing politicians and pundits such as Rush Limbaugh and Cal Thomas initially defended such actions as a way for young men to either “blow some steam off,” engage in a form of harmless frat hazing, or give Muslim prisoners what they deserve. It gets worse. Commentators such as Newt Gingrich and Republican Senator James Inhofe went so far as to suggest that calling attention to such crimes not only undermined troop morale in Iraq but was also unpatriotic. That argument seems to have some credibility in the highest reaches of government since as of 2010 no high ranking official has been legally charged with a crime. Defending torture and gross sexual humiliations by U.S. troops in Saddam’s old jails is not merely insensitive political posturing, it is, more tellingly, indicative of how far the leadership of this country has strayed from any semblance of democracy. As a New York Times editorial pointed out in October 2007, the Bush administration turned the United States into a “nation that tortures human beings and then concocts legal sophistries to confuse the world and avoid accountability before American voters.” The editorial goes on to state that “President Bush and his aides have not only condoned torture and abuse at secret prisons … [whose techniques were] modelled on the dungeons of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union … but they have conducted a systematic campaign to mislead Congress, the American people and the world about those policies.”37 And while the Obama regime has softened some of these policies, it has not eliminated them.

Political culture, if not the nature of politics itself, has undergone revolutionary changes in the last two decades, reaching its most debased expression under the administration of the former imperial presidency of President George W. Bush. Within this political culture, democracy was not only subordinated to the rule of a market, but corporate decisions were also freed from territorial constraints and the demands of public obligations, just as economics was disconnected from its social consequences. Power has more and more become free from territorial constraints and politics largely nation-based. Zygmunt Bauman captures what is new about the relationship between power, politics, and the shredding of social obligations in his comment:

The mobility acquired by ‘people who invest’—those with capital, with money which the investment requires—means the new, indeed unprecedented... disconnection of power from obligations: duties towards employees, but also towards the younger and weaker, towards yet unborn generations and towards the self-reproduction of the living conditions of all; in short the freedom from the duty to contribute to daily life and the perpetuation of the community.... Shedding the responsibility for the consequences is the most coveted and cherished gain which the new mobility brings to free-floating, locally unbound capital.38

As corporate power increasingly frees itself from any political limitations, it uses its power through the educational force of the dominant culture to put into place an utterly privatized notion of agency in which it becomes difficult for young people and adults to imagine democracy as a public good, let alone the transformative
power of collective action. Democratic politics has become ineffective, if not banal, as civic language is impoverished and genuine spaces for democratic learning, debate, and dialogue such as schools, newspapers, popular culture, television networks, and other public spheres are either underfunded, eliminated, privatized, or subject to corporate ownership. Under the politics and culture of neoliberalism, in spite of its tensions and contradictions, society is increasingly mobilized for the production of violence against the poor, immigrants, dissenters, and others marginalized because of their age, gender, race, ethnicity, and color. At the center of neoliberalism is a new form of politics in the United States, one in which radical exclusion is the order of the day, a politics in which the primary questions are no longer about equality, justice, or freedom, but about the ability to simply survive in a culture marked by fear, moral collapse, and economic deprivation. As Susan George insists, the question that now seems to define neoliberal “democracy” is “Who has a right to live or does not?”

It is important to stress that neoliberalism is more than a neutral economic discourse that can be measured with the precision of a mathematical formula or defended through an appeal to the rules of a presumptively unassailable science that conveniently leaves its own history behind. On the contrary, rather than a paragon of economic rationality that offers the best “route to optimum efficiency, rapid economic growth and innovation, and rising prosperity for all who are willing to work hard and take advantage of available opportunities,” it is an ideology that subordinates the art of democratic politics to the rapacious laws of a market economy, a calculating cost-benefit analysis that expands its reach to include all aspects of social life within the dictates and values of society. More importantly, neoliberalism is a historical and socially constructed ideology that needs to be made visible, critically engaged, and shaken from the stranglehold of power it currently exercises over most of the commanding institutions of national and global life. As an economic theory, cultural politics, and public pedagogy, neoliberalism constructs a notion of commonsense in which it becomes difficult for many people either to imagine a notion of individual and social agency necessary for reclaiming a substantive democracy or to theorize the economic, cultural, and political conditions necessary for a viable global public sphere in which public institutions, spaces, and goods become valued as part of a larger democratic struggle for a sustainable future and the downward distribution of wealth, resources, and power. Hence, it is not surprising that popular advocates of the free market such as right wing television celebrity and talk show host Glen Beck justifies his reactionary support for free market fundamentalism by an unqualified appeal to common sense.

As a public pedagogy and political ideology, the neoliberalism of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman is far more ruthless than the classic liberal economic theory developed by Adam Smith and David Ricardo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Neoliberalism has become the present conservative revolution because it harkens back to a period in American history—the Gilded Age—that supported the sovereignty of the market over the sovereignty of the democratic state and the common good. Reproducing the future in the image of the distant past, it represents a struggle designed to roll back, if not dismantle, all of the policies
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put into place over seventy years ago by the New Deal to curb corporate power and give substance to the liberal meaning of the social contract. The late Pierre Bourdieu captures what is distinctive about neoliberalism in his comment that it is

a new kind of conservative revolution [which] appeals to progress, reason and science (economics in this case) to justify the restoration and so tries to write off progressive thought and action as archaic. It sets up as the norm of all practices, and therefore as ideal rules, the real regularities of the economic world abandoned to its own logic, the so-called laws of the market. It reifies and glorifies the reign of what are called the financial markets, in other words the return to a kind of radical capitalism, with no other law than that of maximum profit, an unfettered capitalism without any disguise, but rationalized, pushed to the limit of its economic efficacy by the introduction of modern forms of domination, such as ‘business administration’, and techniques of manipulation, such as market research and advertising.46

Neoliberalism has become a broad-based political and cultural movement designed to obliterate public concerns and liquidate the welfare state, and make politics everywhere an exclusively market driven project.47 But neoliberalism does more than make the market “the informing principle of politics”48 while allocating wealth and resources to those who are most privileged by virtue of their class, race, and power; its political culture and pedagogical practices also put into play a social universe and cultural landscape that supports a particularly barbaric notion of authoritarianism, set in motion under the combined power of a religious and market fundamentalism and anti-terrorism laws that suspend civil liberties, incarcerate disposable populations, and provide the security forces necessary for capital to destroy those spaces where democracy can be nourished. All the while the landscape and soundscape become increasingly militarized through a mass mediated spectacle of violence whose underlying purpose is to construct the public as soldiers in the ‘war on terrorism’ while redefining democracy as a mix of war and American idealism.

As a cultural politics and form of economic domination, neoliberalism tells a very limited story, one that is antithetical to nurturing democratic identities, values, public spheres, and institutions while lacking any ethical language for recognizing politics outside of the realm of the market, controlling market excesses, or for challenging the underlying tenets of a growing authoritarianism bolstered by the pretense of religious piety.

Neoliberalism does not merely produce militarized public spheres, economic inequality, iniquitous power relations, and a corrupt political system, it also promotes rigid exclusions from national citizenship and civic participation. As Lisa Duggan points out, “Neoliberalism cannot be abstracted from race and gender relations, or other cultural aspects of the body politic. Its legitimating discourse, social relations, and ideology are saturated with race, with gender, with sex, with religion, with ethnicity, and nationality.”49 Neoliberalism comfortably aligns itself with various strands of neoconservative and religious fundamentalisms waging imperial wars abroad as well as at home against those groups and movements that threaten its authoritarian misreading of the meaning of freedom, security, and productiveness.
NEOLIBERALISM, PEDAGOGY, AND CULTURAL

One controversial example of how big corporations, particularly media conglomerates, use their power to simultaneously support neoliberal values, reactionary policies, and the politicians who produce them took place in 2004 when the Sinclair Broadcast Group, a Maryland-based media company whose holdings comprise sixty-two television stations, including several ABC affiliates refused to air on its stations a special edition of Nightline with Ted Koppel. Sinclair was disturbed because Koppel announced that he was going to read the names and show photographs of the then 721 U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq. Sinclair’s refusal to air Nightline on its ABC stations was based on the argument that Koppel was making a political statement that allegedly undermined the war effort by drawing attention to its most troubling consequences. And its rationale for this act of censorship was partly based on the argument that Nightline could have read the names of the thousands of citizens killed in terrorist attacks during and the events of September 11, 2001. The problem with this accusation, as a statement from ABC made clear shortly after the charge, is that the network did broadcast a list of the 9/11 victims, one year after the gruesome event. What Sinclair did not mention was that it has been a generous contributor to the Republican Party and that it has lobbied successfully for policies that have allowed it to own even more stations. Sinclair shares the perspective of many of its corporate allies on the Right who believe that the costs of the war should be hushed up, in favor of news that portrays the Bush administration in a favorable light. After all, censoring the news is a small price to pay for the corporate windfalls that reward such acts. Free-market fundamentalism makes it easier for corporate power and political favoritism to mutually inform each other, reinforcing the ideological and political conditions for the perpetuation of a system of profits, money, market values, and power that allows, as Bill Moyers has pointed out, big corporations and big government to scratch each others’ back, while cancelling out the principles of justice and human dignity that inform a real democracy.

Neoliberalism has to be understood and challenged as both an economic theory and a powerful public pedagogy and cultural politics. That is, it has to be named and critically understood before it can be critiqued. The commonsense assumptions that legitimate neoliberalism’s alleged historical inevitability have to be held up to the light so as to reveal the social damage they cause at all levels of human existence. Hence, I not only attempt to identity and critically engage many of the most salient and powerful ideologies that inform and frame neoliberalism but also argue for making cultural politics and the notion of public pedagogy central to the struggle against neoliberalism, particularly since education and culture now play such a prominent political and economic role in both securing consent and producing capital. In fact, my position is similar to Susan Buck-Morss’ argument that “[t]he recognition of cultural domination as just as important as, and perhaps even as the condition of possibility of, political and economic domination is a true ‘advance’ in our thinking.” Of course, this position is meant not to disavow economic and institutional struggles but rather to supplement them with a cultural politics that connects symbolic power and its pedagogical practices with material relations of power. In addition, I analyze how neoliberal policies work at the level of
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everyday life through the language of privatization and the lived cultural forms of class, race, gender, youth, and ethnicity. Finally, such a struggle would have to employ both a language of critique and possibility, engagement and hope as part of a broader project of viewing democracy as a site of intense struggle over matters of representation, participation, and shared power.

Central to such a political struggle is the belief, as Alain Touraine argues, that neoliberal globalization has not “dissolved our capacity for political action.”\(^{52}\) Such action depends on the ability of various groups—the peace movement, the anti-corporate globalization movement, the human rights movement, the environmental justice movement—within and across national boundaries to form alliances in which matters of global justice, community, and solidarity provide a common symbolic space and multiple public spheres where norms are created, debated, and engaged as part of an attempt to develop a new political language, culture, and set of relations. Such efforts must be understood as part of a broader attempt not only to resist domination, but also to defend all those social advances that strengthen democratic public spheres and services, demand new rights and modes of power sharing, and strive for social justice adequate to creating forms of collective struggle that can imagine and sustain democracy on a global level. The anti-corporate globalization struggle’s slogan “Another World is Possible!” demands, as Alex Callinicos insightfully points out, a different kind of social logic, one that requires a powerful sense of unity and solidarity.

Another world—that is, a world based on different social logic, run according to different priorities from those that prevail today. It is easy enough to specify what the desiderata of such an alternative social logic would be—social justice, economic efficiency, environmental sustainability, and democracy—but much harder to spell out how a reproducible social system embodying these requirements could be built. And then there is the question of how to achieve it. Both these questions—What is the alternative to capitalism? What strategy can get us there?—can be answered in different ways. One thing the anti-capitalist movement is going to have to learn is how to argue through the differences that exist and will probably develop around such issues without undermining the very powerful sense of unity that has been one of the movement’s most attractive qualities.\(^{53}\)

Callinicos’ insight suggests that any viable struggle against neoliberal capitalism will have to rethink “the entire project of politics within the changed conditions of a global public sphere, and to do this democratically, as people who speak different political languages, but whose goals are nonetheless the same: global peace, economic justice, legal equality, democratic participation, individual freedom, mutual respect.”\(^{54}\) Indeed, one of the most central tasks facing intellectuals, activists, educators, and others who believe in an inclusive and substantive democracy is the utilization of theory to rethink the language and possibilities of politics as a way to imagine a future outside of the powerful grip of neoliberalism. Critical reflection and social action in this discourse must acknowledge how the category of the global public sphere extends the space of politics beyond the boundaries of local resistance. Global problems need global institutions, global modes of dissent, global intellectual work, and global social movements. Moreover, any politics that
is going to challenge the reach of global neoliberalism is going to have to address
the formative culture that makes it possible. This suggests a politics that is capable
of rethinking the relationship between culture and pedagogy.

CULTURAL POLITICS AND PUBLIC PEDAGOGY

The point is not to inculcate perfect ideas, it is to make people become self-critical,
reflexive, critical of others—though not critical in an irritating sort of way—to
open their eyes, especially about their own motives, and to encourage them to be
autonomous. I think this is both the main aim of analysis and the prerequisite for
social change.55

If educators, artists, parents, and others are to further their understanding of
neoliberalism, educators and other cultural workers need to theorize more fully
a notion of pedagogy that expands our understanding of how the educational force
of the culture has become harnessed to neoliberalism as both a mode of common
sense and a dangerous form of rationality. Such a recognition presents the challenge
of what it means to address the pedagogical conditions at work in the reproduction
of both neoliberalism and negative globalization. Engaging pedagogy as a form of
cultural politics requires an analyses of the production and representation of
meaning and how these practices and the practices they provoke are implicated in
the dynamics of social power. Pedagogy as a form of cultural politics raises the
issue of how education might be understood as a moral and political practice that
takes place in a variety sites outside of schools. Pedagogy as defined here is
fundamentally concerned with the relations between politics, subjectivities, and
cultural and material production. As a form of cultural production, pedagogy is
implicated in the construction and organization of knowledge, desires, emotional
investments, values, and social practices. At stake here is developing a notion of
public pedagogy, in particular, which is capable of contesting the various forms of
symbolic production that secure individuals to the affective and ideological
investments that produce the neoliberal subject. As Antonio Gramsci reminds us,
hegemony as an educational practice is always necessarily part of a pedagogy of
persuasion, one that makes a claim to “speak to vital human needs, interests, and
desires, and therefore will be persuasive to many and ultimately most people.”56

Neoliberal hegemony is partly secured as a result of the crisis of agency that
now characterizes much of American politics. As neoliberal ideology successfully
normalizes and depoliticizes its basic assumptions and market-based view of the
world, it becomes increasingly difficult for people to recognize that neoliberal
rationality is a historical and political construction, and that there are alternatives to
its conceptions of democracy as an extension of market principles and citizens as
hyper-consumers or unthinking patriots. Challenging neoliberal hegemony means
exposing its historical character and its flimsy claims to promoting freedom
through choice while making visible how it operates in the service of class and
corporate power. But the ideology and structures of neoliberal domination must
be analyzed not merely within economic discourses but also as an oppressive
form of public pedagogy, a practice of political persuasion, actively responsible
for systematic forms of misrepresentation, distortion, and a mangling of public discourse by commercial interests.\textsuperscript{57}

The institutions and sites that constitute the machinery of persuasion are at the heart of any system of culture and thus represent crucial sites of what I have called spheres of and about public pedagogy. Recognizing this means treating conflicts of culture, power, and politics, in part, as pedagogical issues and recognizing cultural education as a project related to democracy.\textsuperscript{58} The concern that animates this chapter is precisely to address how neoliberalism constitutes what Imre Szeman has called “a problem of and for pedagogy.”\textsuperscript{59} If neoliberalism requires a supporting political culture, it is crucial to recognize that culture is the place where deeply held meanings and values are produced, internalized, identified with, and fought over. Culture under the regulating hand of the market is not simply about texts, commodities, consumption, or the creation of the utterly privatized subject; it is also about how various people take up and invest in various symbolic representations in the ongoing and daily practices of comprehension and communication. Culture has become a form of capital for economic investment, but it has little to do with the power of self-definition or the capacities needed to expand the scope of justice and human freedom. And it is precisely the challenge of education to provide a liminal space where knowledge, values, and desires can become meaningful in order to be both critical and transformative. If neoliberalism is to be challenged as a new mode of governmentality, it will have to be engaged as both a form of cultural politics and a pedagogical force, and not merely as a political and economic theory or mode of common sense or rationality.

As democratic institutions are downsized and public goods are offered up for corporate plunder, those of us who take seriously the related issues of equality, human rights, justice, and freedom face the crucial challenge of formulating a connection between the political and pedagogical that is suitable for addressing the urgent problems facing the twenty-first century—a politics that as Bauman argues “never stops criticizing the level of justice already achieved [while] seeking more justice and better justice.”\textsuperscript{60} Part of the problem to be addressed is that neoliberal ideology and practice will have to be challenged as part of an ongoing effort to open up new national and global spaces of education—employing a vast array of old and new media including free radio stations, digital video, online magazines, the Internet, digital technologies, and cable television. This means not only making critical pedagogy central to any viable notion of politics but also struggling to expand the “spaces for public life, democratic debate and cultural expression.”\textsuperscript{61} At its best, critical pedagogy should put into place those pedagogical conditions that enable a discourse of critique and possibility, one capable of making the operations of power visible in those theories, spaces, and social relations that are often complicitous with strategies of domination.

Discursive ambivalence is an important element in a pedagogy designed to unsettle official discourses by revealing the historical and social conditions that bring them into being, interrogating them as embodiments of specific ideological interests, and disclosing how they function to actively construct particular identifications and subject positions. If civic agency is to be taken seriously, educators need a new
language to both challenge and work outside of the discourse of neoliberalism in order to expose how it deploys power within its own prison-house of language. For example, “corporate crime” is more telling than “white-collar crime”; the “corporatization” of schools, water, the public airways, and highways is far more critical and revealing than “privatization” when attempting to make clear the corporate appropriation of elements of the public sphere. Similarly, a term such as “corporate welfare” reverses the script on government largesse and its most valued recipients and reveals how governance can be hijacked to serve business interests. Such a pedagogy has the potential to turn theory into a resource and reveal how power deploys culture and how culture produces power. Moreover, critical pedagogy should not only “shift the way people think about the moment but [also] potentially energize them to do something differently in that moment.”

It should be deeply concerned with matters of specificity and context, and demand a certain ability to listen, witness, make connections, and be open to others and the conditions that give meaning to their lives. As Nick Couldry points out, pedagogy for democracy requires more than an obsession with abstractions, rhetoric, instrumentalization, and the jargon of specialization; it demands an “engagement with the claims of others, with questions of justice [and] justice requires always an engagement with the concrete other, not merely an abstract other. For justice and, therefore, for an adequate notion of citizenship, there must be a commitment to dialogue with concrete others.”

We live at a time when the advocates of neoliberalism have no use for democracy except to view it as a rationale for expanding empires, opening trade barriers, and pursuing new markets. Democracy as both an ethical referent and a promise for a better future is much too important to cede to a slick new mode of authoritarianism advanced by advocates of neoliberalism and other fundamentalists. Democracy as theory, practice, and promise for a better future must be critically engaged, struggled over, and reclaimed if it is to be used in the interests of social justice and the renewal of the labor movement as well as the building of national and international social movements, the struggle for the social state, and the necessity to confront hierarchy, inequality, and power as ruling principles in an era of rampant neoliberalism. Such a task necessitates a politics and pedagogy that not only expand critical awareness and promote critical modes of inquiry but also sustain public connections. As Edward Said reminds us, if such a politics is to make any difference, it must be worldly; that is, it must incorporate a critical pedagogy and an understanding of cultural politics that not only contemplates social problems but also addresses the conditions for new forms of democratic political exchange and enables new forms of agency, power, and collective struggle. This is a pedagogy that embraces a global politics in its reach and vision, in its call for the democratic sharing of power and in the elimination of those conditions that promote needless human suffering and imperil the bio-systems of the earth itself.

Part of the task of developing a new understanding of the social and a new model of democratic politics rests with the demand to make the political more pedagogical while resisting at every turn the neoliberalization of public and higher education, creating new alliances between students and faculty, and rethinking the
potential connections that might be deployed between those of us who work in education and the vast array of cultural workers outside of schools. As Stanley Aronowitz, Howard Zinn, Roger Simon, Susan Giroux and others have stressed repeatedly, academics have a responsibility to view the academy as a contested site, a site where the spread of neoliberal ideas must be challenged. Contesting the neoliberalization of the university must be defended as important political work and viewed as a central element in theorizing the role of public intellectuals as part of a larger project in defining the meaning and purpose of the university as a democratic public sphere. In connecting the work that is done in educational institutions with the larger society, educators and academics also face the important task of supporting, as Judith Butler argues, other public spheres “where thoughtful considerations can take place.” There is a long legacy among educators and academics to engage in forms of criticism that appear unconnected to the discourse of possibility and hope. This approach to critique and social criticism should be modified so that while we should continue to defend critique as a democratic value and “dissent as a basis for a politics that diminishes human suffering,” we have a responsibility to go beyond criticism. Transcending this space requires combining a discourse of critique and possibility, one that enables others to recast themselves as agents who can forge new democratic visions against a fractured social, racial, and economic reality while speaking in the name of a desirable democratic future. Fortunately, while neoliberalism has achieved considerable dominance over political and economic discourse, there are a number of countervailing forces both at home and abroad that are challenging the politics and commonsense assumptions that drive its rationality and practices. From Seattle and Davos to Genoa and Rostok, people are engaging in various modes of popular struggle, collectively challenging the ethos, values, and relations of neoliberalism and resuscitating the meaning of politics, resistance, and the spaces where it becomes possible and takes place. Such signs are evident in grassroots and local movements to reclaim public education, the varied movements against neoliberal globalization, various struggles on behalf of populations that are HIV positive, workers rights movements, and those diverse groups fighting for environmental justice and public goods, among other struggles. Under the reign of neoliberal globalization, it is crucial for intellectuals and others to develop better theoretical frameworks for understanding how power, politics, and pedagogy as a political and moral practice work in the service of neoliberalism to secure consent, to normalize authoritarian policies and practices, and to erase a history of struggle and injustice. The stakes are too high to ignore such a task. We live in dark times and the specter of neoliberalism and other modes of authoritarianism are gaining ground throughout the globe. We need to rethink the meaning of global politics in the new millennium and part of that challenge suggests the necessity to “recognize that equality and freedom, class and culture, as ineluctably linked.” Doing so offers educators and others the possibility to take new risks, develop a new vitalized sense of civic struggle, and exercise the courage necessary to reclaim the pedagogical conditions, visions, and economic projects that make the promise of a democracy and a different future worth fighting for.
NEOLIBERALISM, PEDAGOGY, AND CULTURAL NOTES

Clearly this position ranges from very sophisticated analysis of class as in the work of David Harvey, Erik Olin Wright, Adolph Reed and the emerging discourse on disaster capitalism to the more reductive analyses put forth by a number of theorists, including Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, Michael Tomasky, Todd Gitlin, Richard Rorty, and Walter Benn Michaels. See David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, (Oxford University Press, 2005); Erik Olin Wright, Approaches to Class Analysis (London: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Adolph Reed Jr., Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene (New York: New Press, 2001); Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics (New York: WW. Norton, 1991); Michael Tomasky, Left For Dead: The Life, Death and Possible Resurrection of Progressive Politics in America (New York: Free Press, 1996); Todd Gitlin in Twilight of our Common Dreams: What America is Wrecked by Culture Wars (New York: Owl Publishers, 1996); Walter Benn Michaels, The Trouble with Diversity (New York: Owl, 2006). Clearly, there are many approaches to economic inequality and class discrimination that do not exclude cultural politics or reify an updated version of economism. See, for example, Stanley Aronowitz, How Class Works (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Lawrence Grossberg, Grossberg, Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America’s Future. (Boulder: Paradigm, 2005); Wendy Brown, Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Ken Saltman, ed. Capitalizing on Disaster (Boulder: Paradigm, 2007).


For an excellent analysis of the profound impact the world bank has on global politics and culture, see Bret Benjamin, Invested Interest: Capital, Culture, and the World Bank (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

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16 The Multinational Monitor (September 2001), pp. 7–8. See also, David Moberg, “Plunder and Profit,” In These Times (March 29, 2004), pp. 20–21.
33 For a rather vivid example of how dissent is criminalized, see the March 5, 2004, NOW with Bill Moyers transcript of “Going Undercover/Criminalizing Dissent” The program documents how undercover agents from all levels of government are infiltrating and documenting peaceful protests in America.


39 Susan George, Ibid., “A Short History of Neo-Liberalism: Twenty Years of Elite Economics and Emerging Opportunities for Structural Change”.


41 On neoliberalism as a form of governmentality or politics of conduct, see Michael Foucault, Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College De France 1975–1976 (New York: Picador, 2003).

42 David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).


44 See, David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).


49 Lisa Duggan, Ibid., p. xvi.


56 Ellen Willis, Don’t Think, Smile (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), p.xiv.


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68 Ibid., p. 104.

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2. LESSONS LEARNED FROM ENRON

What the Business World Really has to Teach Us

For some time now, politicians, conservative critics, and other social actors have called for schools to be run like businesses—more “efficiently” (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Moe, 2002; Whittle, 2006). These tendencies have reached a devastating crescendo as of late. In particular, No Child Left Behind legislation has tied high stakes test scores to school “success” or “failure” writ large (Hess and Petrilli, 2006). This move has enabled a whole host of logics to unfold—the effort to close schools failing to meet these largely unfunded mandates, the reallocation of public funds to charter schools, the tying of teacher employment to student test scores, etc. We see, as well, moves on the part of private industry to colonize public schooling services. The most visible example here are the Edison Schools—a for-profit venture that looks to widely deliver standardized curriculum in the name of “maximized efficiency” (Saltman, 2005). While critical educators typically attack these connections wholesale (as they often do the field of administration more broadly), they often miss their specific contours. In this chapter, I argue that progressive educators in fact have much to learn from a serious look at the business world. More specifically, I argue that educators can learn much from the failures of business including those of the late-1990s. A close look at this moment reveals a specific striking parallel between the fields of business and education. Just as intense focus on hyped-up stock prices lead to serious aberrations in business, so does the intense focus on test scores for education. Just as inflated (and for that matter, depressed) stock prices proved a largely illusory indication of company health, so do test scores of schools. If we are to learn from big business, I argue, we must take seriously its failures as well. This chapter is an effort to learn from the business world on their own terms and in their own language.

In doing so, I hope to expand discussion among progressives about the commercialization and corporatization of education in the U.S. As many have argued, the language of education has been colonized by the language of business (Giroux, 2005; Giroux, 2005b; McLaren, 2005; McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2005). Schools are increasingly run as if they were corporations. Young people are increasingly trained to act as producers and consumers of commodities—not as thoughtful and deliberative social citizens. Many progressives have valiantly contested these moves, often with rhetorically strong and morally engaged arguments. I argue here that progressives might also try to understand the specifics of these claims and logics more acutely than they normally do. “Getting inside” these arguments might
open unexpected vistas for critique and contestation. As I will argue here, we need not only argue against using business logics in education; we can also point out how business logics have failed business itself in some profound ways, especially in the 1990s.

THE ORIGINS OF THE CRASH

As Roger Lowenstein argues in *The Origins of the Crash: The Great Bubble and its Undoing* (2004), the roots of the late 1990’s stock market collapse can be traced back to the leveraged buy out (LBO) phenomena of the 1980’s. During this period, wealthy investors looked for companies they thought had an undervalued stock price. They then tried to “take over” these companies by offering attractive buy out offers to stock holders, offers supported or “leveraged” by deals with banks who supplied the necessary capital. These efforts were often unfriendly to management who often fought back with leveraged offers of their own. Perhaps the most famous such case was that of RJR Nabisco, immortalized in the best selling book *Barbarians at the Gate* (1990). The struggle over Nabisco lead to escalating offers and counter-offers, deals and counter-deals, which ultimately lead to the company’s downfall.

The era is best exemplified by the fictional movie *Wall Street* and the character Gordon Gekko. Taking place in the 1980s, the film traces the relationship between a young stockbroker named Bud Fox and his older mentor, a wealthy and ruthless “takeover king” named Gordon Gekko. The film traces Gekko’s seduction of Fox with his various unethical schemes, including criminal insider trading. In perhaps the film’s most famous scene, Gekko confronts the management of a paper company he is attempting to acquire at a stockholder meeting. Gekko begins by drawing comparisons between the global decline of America and the global decline of American big business. He then asserts his authority—against that of “current management” as the company’s largest stockholder. He charges that the management owns less than 3% of the company stock—that they have “no stake in the company,” though they lost some $110,000,000 of company wealth the previous year. He calls the management “bureaucrats” running the company into the ground with their high salaries, power lunches, “hunting trips,” and “golden parachutes.” The real owners of the company, he asserts, are the stockholders. He implores them to support his unfriendly takeover of the company, asserting his track record of making stockholders money on previous such deals. Drawing on (seemingly) Darwinian logics, he famously concludes the speech by saying that “greed is good,” that greed will save not only this failing company but “that other malfunctioning corporation called the USA.”

The phrase “greed is good” crystallized the 1980s zeitgeist and became the film’s most often quoted line of dialogue. The film’s lesson, of course, was that greed was not always good, that it led to the kinds of unethical (at best) and criminal (at worst) excesses of the era. Yet, we see another more subtle and looming issue in this scene—that of management compensation. CEO’s in the 1980s were typically compensated through high salaries and other perks. They often did not own large
shares of their company’s stock—hence, Gekko’s charge that the 33 Vice Presidents of Teldar Paper own less than 3% of the company. The accusation was widely leveled at CEOs during the 1980s, justifying the wide prevalence of LBOs.

As Lowenstein argues, CEOs could not be complacent about the charge and faced increasing pressure to increase the stock price of their companies. CEOs were increasingly driven to deliver what came to be called “shareholder value,” leading to an increasing stress on short-term stock price. Lowenstein (2004) writes,

Takeovers had [an] . . . energizing effect on managers, in particular CEOs. Previously, theirs had been the safest jobs around; now their fortress was under siege and their pulse rate was on the rise…. To escape buyout, CEOs felt they had to raise their share price. This was a significant departure. Previously, stock prices had been seen as a long-term barometer. Prices in the short term were notoriously unreliable (this was the lesson of the Great Crash). But with a Henry Kravis [a noted “takeover king” involved in the RJR Nabisco deal] lurking, the long term might not exist. (p. 6)

Lowenstein highlights an important shift here in this focus on short-term stock prices. Short-term stock prices can reflect a range of economic, social, and psychological vicissitudes. Some of these may be just that—short-term—not reflective of the company’s long-term health. This stress on daily, fluctuating stock price would have important repercussions for the business world—including in CEO compensation structures.

In a series of influential articles and books, Harvard Business School Professor Michael Jensen argued that such compensation should be tied more closely to the “health” of the companies they lead. As he wrote,

There are serious problems with CEO compensation but “excessive” pay is not the biggest issue. The relentless focus on how much CEOs are paid diverts public attention from the real problem—how CEOs are paid. In most publicly held companies, the compensation of top executives is virtually independent of performance. On average, corporate America pays its most important leaders like bureaucrats. Is it any wonder that so many CEOs act like bureaucrats rather than the value-maximizing entrepreneurs companies need to enhance their standing in world markets (Jensen, 1998, p. 270).

Here, Jensen argues that there is a disconnect between CEO compensation and company “performance,” that they are “virtually independent.” Like many common sense notions, the idea that performance and compensation should be linked masks a deeper set of issues and tensions. More specifically, it begs the question—how does one measure successful “performance”? The answer for Jensen was company stock price. He continues, “The most powerful link between shareholder wealth and executive wealth is direct ownership of shares by the CEO … By controlling a meaningful percentage of total corporate equity, senior managers experience a direct and powerful ‘feedback effect’ from changes in market value” (p. 275). If they own company stock, Jensen argued, CEOs have an incentive to increase its value. If they are paid through cash salary alone, they have no such incentive.
Paying CEOs through stock became increasingly pronounced in the 1990s. More specifically, CEO compensation through stock options—“options” to acquire company stock when it reaches a certain level—became increasingly popular. A CEO, therefore, might head up a company with a stock price of $80. As part of his or her compensation package, he or she might be entitled to 100,000 shares of the stock once it hit $90. Of course, the CEO here has a great incentive to push the price of the stock upward. As Michael Jensen writes, “stock options clearly provide value-increasing incentives for chief executives” (1998, p. 236).

The move to pay CEOs through stock options was set against the backdrop of new federal tax laws on compensation. In the aftermath of the 1980s, the U.S. economy went into a recession. Popular focus soon turned to the excesses of the previous decade—including outrageous CEO pay. Comparisons were drawn with Japan, which tended to pay its CEOs much less. As something of a response, President Clinton helped push a tax bill in 1993, which banned tax deductions on salaries above $1 million. But stock options were not considered a part of CEO income, strictly speaking. The plan, in large measure, backfired. As Lowenstein (2004) writes, “since stock options weren’t covered under the cap, boards interpreted the rule change as an implicit encouragement to grant more options” (p. 18–19). CEOs thus had a lot of incentive to increase stock price quickly.

THE NEW ECONOMY

Emerging here was an intense, unrelenting focus on “stock price,” both in and out of the company boardroom. Indeed, during the mid-to-late 1990s, a kind of popular investment fever overtook the public (Kessler, 2003; Partnoy, 2003; Shiller, 2006; Stiglitz, 2004). In American Sucker David Denby (2005) documents his own, highly personal seduction by the stock market, his highs and (more often) lows in amateur investing. A well-known film critic for the New Yorker, the book is a testament to how the rhetoric around popular wealth swept up wide and disparate groups of people from various walks of life. Lowenstein writes, “Investors … had fallen in love with stocks—with the idea of stocks. They had looked past dubious accounting, bid up multiples of earnings, and come to confuse long-term business value with the nebulous, manipulable concept of shareholder value” (2004, p. 103). This fever was fueled by new and emergent technologies, particularly the internet and its euphoric, near-religious promise of social and economic transcendence. This new technology was going to transform everything around us, from government to school to commerce—all for the better. Getting in on “the ground floor” of new, “start up” internet companies would also deliver untold wealth for investors. The fervor was compounded by news stations like MSNBC that reported on the minute-by-minute changes in stock prices and featured “rock star” stock analysts like Jack Grubman, Henry Blodget, and Mary Meeker.

The result was a net, upward surge in stock prices. This kind of market valuation, however, was often distinctly unreflective of the companies themselves which often did not have feasible business models. Millennial rhetoric, it seems, often substituted for revenue generating plans. Many investors felt they would be left
behind if they did not participate. The late-nineties saw increasing numbers of non-specialists invest in the market, particularly in technology stocks. For many, the market was a risk-free way to make money. There was, to echo Alan Greenspan, an “irrational exuberance” in the stock market.

One need only look at the most spectacular such failures to see the extent of both the irrationality and the exuberance. For example, WebVan was an on-line grocer that offered great prices and doorstep delivery. It raised $375 million in four months, and was soon valued at $1.2 billion. But it had very thin profit margins and could not sustain the growth and demand. It went bankrupt soon after. Kosmo.com was another on-line company that promised free delivery for a wide range of products, from DVD rentals to ice cream to pizza, within an hour. It raised $280 million before going bankrupt, unable to make a profit on the venture. Other ideas were even more poorly conceived. For example, Flooz.com was an “on-line currency” that consumers could buy and use at select participating internet sites such as Barnes and Noble. Yet, there was nothing to distinguish using “flooze money” from a credit card—only fewer participating retailers. A seeming nonsensical idea, it raised $35 million before going bankrupt (c.net).

Perhaps the most spectacular “flame out” of all was Enron (Eichenwald, 2005; McLean and Elkind, 2003). Based in Houston, Enron began as a natural gas company under the directorship of Ken Lay. The product of a large-scale merger in the 1980s, the company was a largely traditional one—it owned miles of pipelines and sold natural gas. In 1986, Ken Lay hired into management a young consultant named Jeffrey Skilling. Skilling, who eventually became CEO, proposed turning Enron into a large “gas bank.” Instead of simply selling gas, the company would “pool the resources of producers and supply them to industrial consumers” (Lowenstein, 2004, p. 130). Enron would thus coordinate a complex network of natural gas buyers and sellers—an idea clearly informed by the New Economy ethos. Enron soon went into a range of other speculative ventures and businesses, trading everything from broadband cable to futures in weather.

According to Lay, Skilling, and others, Enron’s complex deals demanded more complex kinds of accounting mechanisms. In particular, management requested what was called “mark to market” accounting. This kind of accounting allowed Enron to book all projected future earnings on particular acquisitions as income for the current year. This meant that Enron could strike a deal with a company in 1999, for example, to supply its natural gas for 10 years. It could then record as revenue all its projected profits for 10 years in 1999, projecting the price of natural gas for that period as well. Perhaps the companies most decisive moment was when its accountants, Arthur Anderson, signed off on the request. This meant of course that Enron could make a series of large and perhaps shaky deals, project their revenue, and then report this as yearly earnings to their stockholders. Not surprisingly, these numbers did not represent what was happening at the company.

In an effort to increase its “bottom line,” Enron also engaged in criminal activity as well. In particular, the company’s Chief Financial Officer, Andrew Fastow, set up a series of companies called “limited partnerships” with names like Chewco and Death Star. In control of both these partnerships and Enron’s finances themselves,
Fastow moved company debt and liability to these entities, allowing Enron to book larger and larger profits, pushing its stock price upward. As many have commented, these partnerships were part of what might be called an elaborate “shell game” of company debt and assets. Enron’s Board of Directors gave Fastow permission to hold both positions, though he would eventually plead guilty to various criminal charges, including wire and securities fraud.

Of course, Enron eventually went bankrupt. Its lack of “hard assets” combined with deceptive accounting practices and fraudulent business deals created what many have called a “house of cards” that eventually fell. It was then the largest bankruptcy in U.S. history, losing over $60 billion for its stockholders. Its collapse was part of a general crash in the stock market in the late 1990s.

NEO-LIBERALISM

The spectacular failures of Enron and other such companies were not simply criminal aberrations. They emerged as the result of the massive constellation of economic and political shifts and re-alignments associated with “neo-liberalism” (Altman, 2007; Aronowitz, 2005; Fulcher, 2004; Giroux, 2005b; Harvey, 2003, 2005; Head, 2003; Klein, 2007; Piven, 2006; Reich, 1991, 2001, 2007; Stiglitz, 2003, 2006; Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2008; Weis, 2004). Commonly called “capitalism with the gloves off,” neo-liberalism is an economic philosophy—largely associated with the University of Chicago’s Department of Economics (generally) and Milton Friedman (specifically)—that advances the notion that an unfettered marketplace (or “free market”) uses scarce resources most effectively, promoting the overall good. Thus, the common call for wholesale “deregulation” of industries such as the telephone, oil, and cable television. Neo-liberalism signalled a shift away from the kind of large-scale state spending projects often associated with “Keynesianism.” Dominant throughout the middle-part of the twentieth-century, adherents to Keynesianism believed that such spending projects served to boost the entire economy and provide critical safety nets for the disenfranchised. Beginning in the latter part of the 1970s, these logics shifted. “Big government” was part of the problem, according to people such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Smaller government with less regulation over business was the new dominant.

A more subtle shift registered here, one elaborated upon (among others) in Naomi Klein’s The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism (2007)—that is, the emergence of economics as a largely autonomous discourse disconnected from other disciplines, sciences and social concerns. As Klein shows, Friedman and others were masters of forward-looking econometric measurements—predictions about inflation, depression, employment, etc.—based on complex mathematical models disconnected from real-world vicissitudes. In this respect, “neo-liberalism” was as idealistic as any doctrine or meta-narrative. She writes,

Like all fundamental faiths, Chicago School economics is, for its true believers, a closed loop. The starting premise is that the free market is a perfect scientific system, one in which individuals, acting on their own self-interested desires, create the maximum benefits for all. It follows ineluctably
that if something is wrong within a free-market economy—high inflation or soaring unemployment—it has to be that the market is not truly free. There must be some interference, some distortion in the system. The Chicago solution is always the same: a stricter and more complete application of the fundamentals. (p. 51)

With the rise of neo-liberalism, economics emerged as a fully autonomous discipline—its basic premises now articles of faith. The idea that one balanced social concerns and planning with economics was totally anathema. For this reason, Klein continues, many Chicago School economists saw Keynesianism as a greater threat than Marxism (p. 52).

Neo-liberalism, however, did not serve the common good. In fact, the kinds of large-scale de-regulations advocated by Friedman, Alan Greenspan and others have allowed for wide-scale profiteering in key industries. This result has been new, massive concentrations of wealth and growing economic inequalities, prompting many to call this the new “gilded age.” This kind of profiteering was at the heart of Enron’s role in the noted blackouts that took place in California in 2000 and 2001. California was the first state to de-regulate the energy market, allowing companies like Enron to buy and trade energy—and seemingly compete with each other. The promise was always that such competition would be good for the consumer. Instead, traders at Enron would buy enormous amounts of energy at market price in California and then move it out of state, causing shortages and blackouts in key areas. They would then sell it back selectively for much higher prices—sometimes for five or six times what they had paid for it. The so-called “energy shortage” in California was a carefully orchestrated shell game, enabled by de-regulation and its neo-liberal logics. Predictably, Lay and others blamed the fiasco on the remaining regulations on energy in California. I will return to this idea later in the chapter.

TESTING LOGICS

So what does all this tell us about education? I want to argue here that the focus on the “bottom line” in business helped create the kinds of aberrations we saw above. Instead of focusing on the long-term health of companies, focus turned to manipulating day-to-day stock prices. I argue here that we need to look closely at these business logics and their failures, as these logics are more and more taking hold in education today. In particular, high stakes testing has created a language of “bottom lines” which largely revolve around test scores. “Performance” can be measured through test scores for many, particularly in testable subjects like Language Arts and Math. Just as these logics failed business, however, they have also failed education.

The most notable of these movements, of course, has been the No Child Left Behind legislation. The effects of this legislation have been broad and deep—including the attenuation of the curricula, both in terms of substance and pedagogical practice—though they have been particularly profound on the most vulnerable of public schools. At the most basic level, a corporate language has overtaken school discourse, a language that implies clear inputs and outputs, assessments and
measurements that can be correlated and compared across disparate sites. Knowledge itself has come to be treated like a perfectly transparent commodity, one that can be treated and dispensed independent of particular actors in context.

According to federal guidelines, NCLB is “designed to change the culture of America’s schools by closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on what works” (http://www.ed.gov/nclb). This seemingly objective notion of “what works” has been used to promote so-called “evidence-based” standards in federally funded research. On this model, educational research should be classically experimental and causal, relying on large-scale, randomized samples to make generalized claims. The federal guidelines go on to note,

No Child Left Behind puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have been proven effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support these programs and teaching methods that work to improve student learning and achievement. In reading, for example, No Child Left Behind supports scientifically based instruction programs in the early grades under the Reading First program and in preschool under the Early Reading First program.

A deeply positivistic approach to knowledge and understanding is embedded in these research methodologies as well as the pedagogical practices assessments that emerge from them. In particular, this approach to research has lent itself to the “drill and skill” kinds of learning favored by high stakes testing initiatives such as the Bush administrations’ No Child Left Behind legislation. At the level of practice, NCLB encourages a kind of rote, short-term drill-and-skill approach to teaching, one which helps encourages a focus on lower-order skills.

Test scores also are now used to “prove” whether schools and teachers are “performing” or not. As with the stress on stock price, a whole host of “common sense” logics click into place when one assumes such test scores are representative of what students are learning. For example, one can use these test scores to measure how teachers are doing in the classroom. If they are doing well, they should be rewarded with increased salary or bonuses. If not, they should be punished. Similarly, these tests can be used to measure how efficiently schools are using their resources. Schools that are using them well should be given more resources. Schools that are using them poorly should be given less. In addition, there should be ample opportunity for private citizens and businesses to compete here. Citizens should be able to form their own charter schools. They should also be able to receive “vouchers” if they choose to opt out of the public school system. Private, for profit schools should have the chance to show they can do it better for less, of which the Edison Schools, founded by Charles Whittle, are the best example. As Kenneth Saltman (2005) demonstrates, these schools were established and later justified through their seemingly “innovative” ways of raising test scores. In doing so, they mobilized a common claim—the private sector can “do it better” without the influence and interference of bloated, public bureaucracy.
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These logics have had a profound impact on everyday life in schools. In particular, we see a constant pressure to “teach to the test”—to “hit the numbers” in business terms. Recall the unrelenting stress on stock prices in our earlier discussion. Recall the uncritical connection between company health and company valuation. Recall the aberrations it produced. Indeed, both anecdotal evidence as well as current research tell us that teachers are more and more altering their pedagogical practice with a sharp eye toward these tests. On one level, this is evidenced by the amount of time now devoted to testing in school. As Gail Jones, Brett Jones, and Tracy Hargrove (2003) discuss in their recent study of North Carolina schools, 80% of elementary school teachers said they spend more than 20% of their teaching time preparing for high stakes tests; 28% said they spend more than 60% of their time on such tests; and 71% said they spend more time on these tests than they did three earlier (p. 64). On another level, this stress on tests is evidenced by the kinds of teaching practices encouraged by high-stakes tests. This includes, especially, “item teaching,” or the narrow focus on teaching items identical or similar to the ones on high stakes tests. As the authors note, “the problem with item teaching is that students learn the knowledge and skills tested, but not the other knowledge and skills in the domain” (p. 66).

The effects of such testing can be seen from afar (as above) or can be seen up close. For example, Dale and Bonnie Johnson’s *High Stakes: Children, Testing, and Failure in American Schools* (2002) traces the effects of high-stakes testing for one year in one poor rural school in an elementary school in Redbud, Louisiana. In this book, the authors document the crushing poverty that delimits life in the local community and in the school. “The school has no library, no playground equipment, no counselor, no art classes, no hot water (except for a faucet in the teacher’s lounge), inadequate window heating and cooling units, no regular school nurse” (2002, p. xviii). In this context, high-stakes testing is one more extreme burden for the schools—its teachers, administrators, and students. They document the excessive time spent on rote, drill-and-skill practice, the constant imposition of “new programs” which will supposedly help raise the test scores, the constant tension and pressure which force many teachers to leave early. The authors also document what they don’t see—including anything that seems “frivolous” and “excessive,” like art or gymnastics.

In addition to the sheer time and effort spent on high-stakes tests, some schools and teachers have also resorted to deceptive reporting practices and even outright cheating. For example, as Kenneth Saltman demonstrates, Boston’s Renaissance Edison School was accused of “counseling out” special education and special needs students from applying. This was a way to “raise test scores and decrease costs associated with special provisions” (2005, p. 129). In effect, we see an effort to “cook the books” when reporting gains in scores and costs to the public. Saltman notes, as well, that a Western Michigan University study contested Edison’s claim that they made strong, measurable improvements in disadvantaged school. “While our findings do not suggest that Edison did less,” they write, “they do not suggest that the company did more with
these schools in terms of gains on standardized tests” (quoted in Saltman, 2005, p. 70). Finally, he shows that select schools were accused of cheating on tests:

In addition to charges that Edison manipulated test reporting, it has been accused of encouraging cheating on tests in classrooms. The scandal erupted in the winter of 2002 when the Wichita Eagle reported that, in interviews with seven former Edison teachers, four of the seven said that they had been told by the company “to do whatever it took to make sure students succeeded on standardized tests, including ignoring time limits, reading questions from a reading comprehension test aloud and in some cases correcting answers during a test.” (p. 74)

Jones, Jones, and Hargrove (2003) document, as well, numerous cases of cheating on high-stakes tests, summing up “the pressure for teachers to raise scores is enormous and comes from all sides of educational arenas” (p. 72).

Perhaps the most notable example of large-scale fraud is the so-called “Texas Miracle” that played such a part of George W Bush’s 2000 presidential campaign and largely served as the warrant for the No Child Left Behind legislation (future secretary of education Ron Paige was then Houston school superintendent). Through a number of “accountability” mechanisms as well as a range of high stakes tests, principles and administrators in Houston were made responsible for their schools’ achievement though the 1990s. The results, it seems, were remarkable—including plunging dropout rates and soaring test scores. Yet, as CBS News reported in 2004, much of this was illusionary. In particular, they uncovered grave malfeasance—the kind of deceptions and manipulations associated criminal corporations like Enron. As they discovered, schools “raised average test scores by keeping low-performing kids from taking the test. And in some cases, that meant keeping kids from getting to the 10th grade at all,” when they would take these exams (CBS News, Aug. 25, 2004). The Houston school system, it seemed, “cooked the books.”

NCLB: A FAILED BUSINESS MODEL

Just as Chicago School economists treated economics as a science disconnected from other social concerns and issues, adherents to NCLB treat education as a science disconnected from the lives, concerns, and needs of the people who inhabit the educational system (Apple, 2006). Both tend to focus (respectively) on short-term, bottom-line indicators that are not accurate measures of economic or educational health. With the acceleration of “bottom line” thinking in business, the long-term viability of companies was ignored, leading to a “boom and bust” in the late nineties. The acceleration of “bottom line” thinking in education has led to similar disasters—though they are less spectacular. We see this in the rise of “drill and skill” pedagogies, time spent “teaching to the test,” as well as the various semi-legal and illegal schemes used to “hit the numbers.” We also see its effects on the psyches of youth. As is well-documented high stakes tests cause young people
extraordinary amounts of stress. As Johnson and Johnson (2006) write of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test (TAAS), “In the Texas survey, 47 percent of students were reported to often or always develop headaches, 40 percent had upset stomachs, 38 percent showed irritability, 35 percent displayed increased aggression, 34 percent ‘froze up,’ and 29 percent vomited while taking the TAAS test” (p. 116).

We see this, as well, in the attenuation of a rich multi-layered curriculum. Focus has turned to the kinds of subjects that are both testable and “high stakes”—in particular Language Arts and Math. On one level, this has meant shrinking the purview of both these subjects. For example, “literacy” has come to mean a narrow, teacher-centered focus on decoding language for referential meaning. While this is important, it does not exhaust the range and kind of transactions young people can have with multiple kinds of visual and aural texts. On another level, it has meant that certain subjects have come to be seen as non-essential or subordinate to testable ones. Subjects like art or physical fitness now have to justify themselves through their supposed connections to Reading or Math. For example, many in-school creative writing interventions need now to “prove” they increase test scores in reading to remain funded.

These so-called “skills” are not even going to prepare young people for the 21st century workplace. While these impulses have of course been embedded in school life for nearly 100 years (Dimitriadis and Carlson, 2003), never before have they been so clearly pedagogically inappropriate for the long-term social and cultural reality young people face. According to Carlson and others like Andy Hargreaves, students in our so-called knowledge-society must learn to “create knowledge, apply it to unfamiliar problems, and communicate it effectively to others” (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 24). These require new modes and approaches to teaching and learning—constructivist and cooperative approaches that imply a range of learning outcomes and goals. These modes and approaches necessarily imply nuanced pedagogical practices that may only be realized in the long term. New testing regimes—in stark counter-distinction—encourage just the opposite. They encourage a kind of rote, short-term drill-and-skill approach to teaching, one which helps encourage “teachers to focus on low-level knowledge and skills, resulting in less in-depth understanding and less focus on higher-order thinking skills” (Jones, Jones, and Hargrove, 2003, p. 40). These tests encourage a narrow subjects-based approach that measures basic knowledge—not what young people can do with it. NCLB is a failed business model.

MOVING AHEAD

My point about inflated test scores and stock prices should be clear by now. Yet, I want to make a broader point here, as well, about how progressive pedagogues have responded to the ascent of business logics in education. In particular, many progressives have responded by simply dismissing such connections wholesale, mostly on moral grounds. Where some have called for an uncritical acceptance of business logics, then, others have uncritically dismissed them. Such responses lead to calcified, mutually reinforcing positions which often naturalize ideas about
business itself—its effectiveness, for example. The point is important. The Right has been able to mobilize a language around education that makes sense to people. The language is seductive and idealized—a language of minimized inputs, maximized outputs, and widespread accountability. To echo Michael Apple (2004), it is the language of an “audit culture.” Responses from progressives here have again been largely moralistic, that education should not be run like other kinds of businesses, that schools should prepare young people for democratic participation in public life. While this is a critical front, we should also highlight the ways in which the language of business has failed business itself. We should highlight the ways in which a focus on “the bottom line” lead to the kinds of aberrations we saw in the 1980s and 1990s (specifically) and the failures of neo-liberalism more broadly.

These failures run broad and deep. Indeed, the attendant economic fallout of the very recent collapse of the housing and mortgage market highlight another fallacy of neo-liberalism—its distain for large state intervention in economic policy noted above. As Ha-Joon Chang usefully points out in Bad Samaritans, “free trade free market policy claims” are largely illusionary. “Britain and the US are not the homes of free trade; in fact, for a long time they were the most protectionist economies in the world” (2008, p. 17). As Chang shows, the US has deployed protectionism and subsidies in selective and strategic fashion for some time now—recently, to compensate for the failed risks of wild financial speculation. Witness the recent role of the US Federal Reserve in helping to prevent the collapse of mega-bank Bear Stearns (in the form of a favorable loan to acquiring bank JP Morgan), the twelfth-hour financial bailout of mortgage guarantors Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, as well as the federal takeover of failed bank IndyMac. In all of these cases, wild speculation in the housing market and the attendant proliferation of exotic and often “sub-prime” mortgage packages, led to the impending collapse of key financial powerhouses. In all of these cases, “big government” intervened in the name of the broader social good. More and more, neo-liberal capitalism is evidencing the claim that it is nothing more than “welfare for the rich.”

In failing to take on these contradictions and discussions, again, we leave key claims unchallenged—in particular, that business logics are efficient. We do not question what is often a deep faith at the heart of neo-liberalism—the kind evidenced by Naomi Klein above—that often masks itself as a precise, mathematical science. In many respects, this allows the juggernaut of neo-liberalism and all it represents to appear immutable and inevitable. Corporate languages and logics will continue to largely overtake discussion around education in the US, particularly in the realm of public policy. While many critical pedagogues have valiantly rejected these moves, they have done so on moral grounds. I have offered perhaps another strategy here. I’ve looked at the ways in which business logics failed business itself. I have asked, as well, what a more expansive approach to mobilizing such discourses might look like. This discussion underscores, I hope, the importance of leaving critical discourses open to ventilation and inter-penetration. We need to ask what kinds of problems we want to solve in education—and make them matter to people. Schools are, in fact, in trouble. The Right is in fact offering
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an answer. And they do so with a hyper-clear language of efficiency and business. Should it be surprising that their initiatives tend to garner public support? In the end, progressives need to engage in what Gramsci calls a “war of position,” challenging the Right while offering our own compelling solutions. We must get beyond cheerleading only to the converted, not remaining comfortable in and within our disciplinary and institutional homes. We must begin to think in new ways—making new connections while strengthening old alliances.

An example of such disarticulation and re-articulation comes to mind, again from the realm of economics. Eighteenth Century philosopher Adam Smith is often hailed as the forefather of neo-liberal economics. His notion of the “invisible hand” evokes the near-mystical faith many neo-liberal economists have in the market—left unfettered, it will magically sort resources more efficiently and for the common good. In his recent autobiography, *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World* (2007), Allan Greenspan notes,

> Individuals who compete for private gain, [Smith] wrote, act as if “led by an invisible hand” to promote the public good. The metaphor of the invisible hand, of course, captured the world’s imagination—possibly because it seems to impute a godlike benevolence and omniscience to the market, whose workings are in reality as impersonal as natural selection, which Darwin came along and described more than half a century later. (p. 262)

Greenspan speaks in reverential tones about Smith and he certainly has been claimed as something of an intellectual patron saint for many neo-liberals. Greenspan himself, in Smith’s hometown of Kirkaldy, Scotland, evoked this notion of the invisible hand,” noting that Smith was “a towering contributor to the development of the modern world … of what we now term free-market capitalism” (Buchan, 2007, p. 2).

Yet, the term “invisible hand” appeared only three times in all of Smith’s writings. Biographer James Buchan writes in his book *The Authentic Adam Smith: His Life and Ideas* (2007),

> The phrase “invisible hand” occurs three times in the million-odd words of Adam Smith’s that have come down to us, and on not one of those occasions does it have anything to do with free-market capitalism or awesome international transactions …. A close reading of *The Wealth of Nations* and other good evidence shows that Smith was no doctrinaire free trader. He approves certain monopolies and restraints on trade, export subsidies and restrictions, sumptuary laws, penal taxation, limits on the rate of interest and the issue of bank notes, compulsory qualifications for craftsmen, [etc] … The words *laisser faire* or *laissez faire* appear nowhere in his work. (pp. 2–3)

Buchan quotes from *The Wealth of Nations*, “civil government … is in reality instituted for the defense of the rich against the poor” (p. 3). Indeed, according to Buchan and others, Smith did not see economics as existing in a vacuum. If anything, *The Wealth of Nations* (originally published in 1776) is about how to best sort wealth in society for the common good. Smith’s version of economics was not
disconnected from a vision of what a strong, healthy civil society would look like. In fact, his earlier book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (originally published in 1759) was about the nature of morality. Many argue that these two books cannot be separated—that his version of economics presupposed notions of morality. Smith’s work clearly should not provide an “alibi” for rampant, “gloves off” super-capitalism. Again, the rise of neo-liberalism near-magically wiped away such concerns, leaving only a precise science made up of mathematical models that have become articles of faith to all adherents. Economics can be thought of as an autonomous science, disconnected from all other social, political, and cultural concerns. Re-embedding our notions of economics in the everyday lives of people—getting past the failures of “bottom line” thinking—seems the question now facing economists in the wake of neo-liberal economics’ excesses.

Educators, I argue, need to take up similar questions in the wake of the failed business model of NCLB and other “bottom line” approaches to education. We need to ask what a more fully and deeply holistic vision of education might look like. For starters, this means looking past the prescribed notions of education—looking towards (as in my own past research) out-of-school learning curricula and sites (Dimitriadis, 2001, 2003, 2008). But more broadly, it means looking at education as one part of a social whole—one that cannot be abstracted from and pressed down upon in isolation. I recall here the important work of Jean Anyon. In her recent book, *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and a New Social Movement* (2005), she shows how difficult and futile it is to think about education and educational policy as disconnected from other kinds of policies. She argues for the mutual imbrication of pedagogical practices and policies and macroeconomic reform.

The “bottom line” approach to education favored by NCLB assumes a strong relationship between basic skills and social mobility—e.g., if students acquire a basic understanding of math and reading, they will be able to better compete in the job marketplace and achieve higher standards of living. On this model, a “basic skills” approach to schooling puts much burden on the schools themselves. In counter-distinction, Anyon argues that “macroeconomic policies like those regulating the minimum wage, job availability, tax rates, federal transportation, and affordable housing create conditions in cities that no existing educational policy or urban school reform can transcend” (p. 2). That is to say, one needs to be sober about the power of education policy alone to ameliorate social ills—including the widening gaps between rich and poor that Greenspan himself admits is a problematic effect of neo-liberal economic policy. A wider and more expansive notion of educational policy seems necessary—one that attends to issues such as affordable housing, minimum wage policy in a growing service economy, the often lack of efficient public transportation to those who must travel to far-out suburbs for jobs, etc. As Anyon writes,

> Policies such as minimum wage statutes that yield poverty wages, affordable housing and transportation policies that segregate low-income workers of color in urban areas and industrial and other job development in far-flung suburbs where public transit does not reach, all maintain poverty in city
neighborhoods and therefore the schools. In order to solve the systematic problems of urban education, then, we need not only school reform but the reform of these public policies. If, as I am suggesting, the macroeconomy deeply affects the quality of urban education, then perhaps we should rethink what “counts” as educational policy. (p. 3)

Educational policy, it seems, must be embedded in a broader set of economic policies.

Educators, in conclusion, must avoid the pitfalls of “bottom line” thinking. Such thinking has not put the economy in the service of the social good. Such thinking led to the aberrations of the late-nineties and beyond. We must think about education as existing in the context of young people’s lives and the social whole. The key here is that we do not need only to appeal to people’s sense of morality when making such arguments. We can point to the “spectacular flameouts” of Enron and other such companies that were neo-liberal darlings. We can work hard to avoid a “testing bubble” which will serve only to damage the long-term health of our school system and young people.

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