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**Shirley R. Steinberg** is the Director and Project Leader of the Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy at McGill University.

**Ana Maria "Nita" Araujo Freire** was Paulo Freire's partner. She taught History of Education in Brazil in colleges and universities in the city of Sao Paulo for many years.

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# ON CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

HENRY A. GIROUX



## CHAPTER 1

## Critical Pedagogy in Dark Times

Some of the essays in this book were composed over 30 years ago, while the majority were written in the last decade — that the earlier essays remain relevant speaks to the ongoing attack on the very nature and condition of public and higher education in the United States. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of the logic and arguments that were first used against critical education in the 1970s and 1980s — today, ironically, they are put forth by their proponents in the name of “educational reform.” Three decades ago, it was precisely the dismantling of education’s critical capacity in conjunction with the emergence of a politics of authoritarianism that motivated my involvement in the field of education, and critical pedagogy in particular. What all the essays in this book have in common is the belief that education is fundamental to democracy and that no democratic society can survive without a formative culture shaped by pedagogical practices capable of creating the conditions for producing citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsible way. I recognized early on in my career that critical pedagogy as a moral and political practice does more than emphasize the importance of critical analysis and moral judgments. It also provides tools to unsettle commonsense assumptions, theorize matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic polity.

Critical pedagogy takes as one of its central projects an attempt to be discerning and attentive to those places and practices in which social agency has been denied and produced. When I first began exploring and writing about critical pedagogy, I became aware that pedagogy might offer educators an important set of theoretical tools in support of the values of reason and freedom. During this time, I was teaching history to high school students. For me, critical pedagogy as theoretical and political practice became especially useful as a way to resist the increasingly prevalent approach to pedagogy that viewed it as merely a skill, technique, or disinterested method. Within this dominant educational paradigm, young people were at one time and are now once again shamelessly reduced to “cheerful robots” through modes of pedagogy that embrace an instrumental rationality in which matters of justice, values, ethics, and power are erased from any notion of teaching and

learning. I rejected the mainstream assumption that treated pedagogy simply as a set of strategies and skills to use in order to teach prespecified subject matter. Critical pedagogy is not about an a priori method that simply can be applied regardless of context. It is the outcome of particular struggles and is always related to the specificity of particular contexts, students, communities, and available resources. It draws attention to the ways in which knowledge, power, desire, and experience are produced under specific basic conditions of learning and illuminates the role that pedagogy plays as part of a struggle over assigned meanings, modes of expression, and directions of desire, particularly as these bear on the formation of the multiple and ever-contradictory versions of the 'self' and its relationship to the larger society. My view of critical pedagogy developed out of a recognition that education was important not only for gainful employment but also for creating the formative culture of beliefs, practices, and social relations that enable individuals to wield power, learn how to govern, and nurture a democratic society that takes equality, justice, shared values, and freedom seriously. I began to see how pedagogy is central to politics in that it is involved in the construction of critical agents and provides the formative culture that is indispensable to a democratic society.

Wedded to a narrative of triumphalism and economic growth, education in the late 1970s and early 1980s was increasingly viewed less as a public good than as a private right. But there was more at stake in the emergent field of critical pedagogy than mapping the modes of economic and cultural domination that tied schools to new regimes of privatization, commodification, and consumerism. There was also an attempt to view schools as sites of struggle, to open up pedagogical forms to the possibility of resistance, and to connect teaching to the promise of self- and social change. As part of such an understanding, I attempted early on in my work to employ a notion of critical pedagogy that marshaled a language of critique and hope. While over the last three decades my understanding of the insights offered by critical pedagogy has expanded to spheres outside the classroom, the principles explored in my earlier work represent a crucial foundation. In order to address the struggles facing public and higher education today, I find it increasingly necessary to go back to these foundational principles as a starting point for explaining the value of a democratically informed notion of education and the importance of critical pedagogy.

The principles guiding my work on critical pedagogy are grounded in critique as a mode of analysis that interrogates texts, institutions, social relations, and ideologies as part of the script of official power. Put simply, critique focuses largely on how domination manifests as both a symbolic and an institutional force and the ways in which it impacts on all levels of society. For example, schools are often rightly criticized for becoming adjuncts of corporations or for modeling themselves on a culture of fear and security. Often this position goes no further than simply analyzing what is wrong with schools and in doing so makes it appear as if the problems portrayed are intractable. Domination in this mode of discourse appears to be sutured,

with little room to imagine any sense of either resistance or hope. While it is important to politicize the process of schooling and recognize the gritty sense of limits it faces within a capitalist society, what is also needed to supplement this view is an enabling, imaginative vision that takes us beyond the given and commonplace. Against the anti-democratic forces shaping public and higher education, there is a need to mobilize the imagination and develop a language of possibility in which any attempt to foreclose on hope could be effectively challenged. In this instance, the language of hope goes beyond acknowledging how power works as a mechanism of domination and offers up a vocabulary in which it becomes possible to imagine power working in the interest of justice, equality, and freedom. Examples of such a discourse emerge in my analyses of schools as democratic public spheres, teachers as public intellectuals, and students as potential democratic agents of individual and social change.

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

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

the importance of recognizing the role critical pedagogy plays in acknowledging the different ways in which authority, experience, and power are produced under specific conditions of learning. I place great importance, as did Paulo Freire, Roger Simon, Joe Kincheloe, and others, on the productive and deliberative nature of pedagogy.

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

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

How can we organize these huge, randomly varied, and diverse things we call human subjects into positions where they can recognize one another for long enough to act together, and thus to take up a position that one of these days they might live out and act through as an identity. Identity is at the end, not

the beginning, of the paradigm. Identity is what is at stake in any viable notion of political organization.<sup>1</sup>

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

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

embraced a stripped down version of education, the central goal of which was to promote economic growth and global competitiveness, which entailed a much-narrowed form of pedagogy that focused on memorization, high-stakes testing, and helping students find a good fit within a wider market-oriented culture of commodification, standardization, and conformity. This model of education has continued to gain ground, despite its ill effects on students and teachers. Young people are now openly treated as customers and clients rather than a civic resource, while many poor youth are simply excluded from the benefits of a decent education through the implementation of zero-tolerance policies that treat them as criminals to be contained, punished, or placed under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system.

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

Critical pedagogy has always been responsive to the deepest problems and conflicts of our time, and the essays in this book partake in that project. In what follows, I situate my work on critical pedagogy as part of a broader project that attempts to address the growing authoritarian threats posed by the current regime of market fundamentalism against youth, critical modes of education, and the ethos of democracy itself. In this way, the chapters in this book, while being written at different times, can be read as a complementary set of resources through which to imagine critical pedagogy — with its insistence on critical deliberation, careful judgment, and civic courage — as central to the cultivation of what John Dewey once called “democracy as a way of life.” The chapters can also be read as interventions within the current historical conjuncture in which a renewed attention on pedagogy emerges out of the recognition that there is a real educational crisis in North America and a real need for developing a new theoretical, political, and pedagogical

vocabulary for addressing the issue. In addition, these chapters can be used to rethink what democracy might mean at a time when public values, spheres, and identities are being eviscerated under a regime of economic Darwinism in which the “living dead” increasingly govern our educational apparatuses in public and higher education and also in the wider culture.<sup>3</sup> And, finally, these chapters collectively embody a politics of educated hope, responsive to the need to think beyond established narratives of power, prevailing “commonsense” approaches to educational policy and practice, a widening culture of punishment, and the banal script of using mathematical performance measures as benchmarks for academic success. We need to think otherwise as a condition for acting otherwise. Only a pedagogy that embraces the civic purpose of education and provides a vocabulary and set of practices that enlarge our humanity will contribute to increasing the possibility for public life and expanding shared spaces, values, and responsibilities. Only such a pedagogy can promote the modes of solidarity and collective action capable of defending the public good and the symbolic and institutional power relations necessary for a sustainable democracy.

With the growing influence of neoliberalism in the last 30 years, the United States has witnessed the emergence of modes of education that make human beings superfluous as political agents, close down democratic public spheres, disdain public values, and undermine the conditions for dissent. Within both institutions of schooling and the old and new media — with their expanding networks of knowledge production and circulation — we see the emergence and dominance of pedagogical models that fail to question and all too frequently embrace the economic Darwinism of neoliberalism. Neoliberal ideology emphasizes winning at all costs, even if it means a ruthless competitiveness, an almost rabid individualism, and a notion of agency largely constructed within a market-driven rationality that abstracts economics and markets from ethical considerations. Both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama embraced models of education largely tied to the dictates of a narrow instrumental rationality and economic growth.<sup>4</sup> Both associated learning valuable knowledge and skills as part of a broader economic script that judges worth by what corporations need to increase their profits. President Obama continues to repeat the idea that education should be valued primarily for its ability to raise individual incomes and promote economic growth, with the consequence that pedagogy is tied to models of accountability driven by the need to “teach to the test.” In this paradigm, students are educated primarily to acquire market-oriented skills in order to compete favorably in the global economy. This type of pedagogy celebrates rote learning, memorization, and high-stakes testing, while it “produces an atmosphere of student passivity and teacher routinization.”<sup>5</sup> Rarely has President Obama mentioned the democratic goals of education or stressed that critical education is central to politics in that it provides the formative culture that produces engaged citizens and makes social action and democracy possible.

For too many educators, politicians, and corporate hedge fund managers, poor economic performance on the part of individuals is coded as a genetic and often racialized defect, while an unwillingness or inability to buy into a consumer culture is defined as a form of individual depravity.<sup>6</sup> Private endeavors now trump the public good across the full spectrum of political positions. Neoliberal public pedagogy strips education of its public values, critical content, and civic responsibilities as part of its broader goal of creating new subjects wedded to the logic of privatization, efficiency, flexibility, the accumulation of capital, and the destruction of the social state. Increasingly, the values that drive neoliberal pedagogies in the United States are also embodied in policies that attempt to shape diverse levels of public and higher education all over the globe. The script has become overly familiar and all too often is simply taken for granted, especially in Western countries. Shaping the neoliberal framing of public and higher education is a corporate-based ideology that embraces standardizing the curriculum, supports hierarchical management, and reduces all levels of education to job training sites. Marc Bousquet rightly argues that central to this notion of neoliberalism is a view of higher education that enshrines "more standardization! More managerial control! A teacher-proof curriculum! . . . a top-down control of curriculum [and] tenured management."<sup>7</sup> Significant numbers of faculty have been reduced to the status of part-time and temporary workers, comprising a new subaltern class of disempowered educators. In this view faculty become just another reserve army of cheap laborers, a force that can be eagerly exploited in order to raise the bottom line while disregarding the rights of academic labor and the quality of education that students deserve. There is no talk in this view of higher education about shared governance between faculty and administrators, educating students as critical citizens rather than as potential employees of Wal-Mart, or affirming faculty as scholars and public intellectuals who have a measure of both autonomy and power. Teachers in the public school system fare no better than university educators, as they are increasingly deskilled, reduced to either technicians or security guards, or both.

There is a general consensus among educators in North America that public and higher education are in a chronic state of crisis. As Stanley Aronowitz points out, "For some the main issue is whether schools are failing to transmit the general intellectual culture, even to the most able students. What is at stake in this critique is the fate of America as a civilization — particularly the condition of its democratic institutions and the citizens who are, in the final analysis, responsible for maintaining them."<sup>8</sup> Universities are now facing a growing set of challenges arising from drastic budget cuts, diminishing educational quality, the downsizing of faculty, the growth of military-funded research, and the revamping of the curriculum to fit the needs of the market.<sup>9</sup> Public schools are being devastated as tax revenues dry up. Thousands of teachers are being laid off, and vital programs are being slashed to the bone. It gets worse. Republican Party governors in Wisconsin, Ohio,

Florida, and other states are eliminating the bargaining rights of teachers' unions.

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

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

Conscripting the university to serve as corporate power's apprentice, while reducing matters of university governance to an extension of corporate logic and interests, substantially weakens the possibility for higher education to function as a democratic public sphere, academics as engaged public intellectuals, and students as critical citizens. In a market-driven and militarized university, questions regarding how education might enable students to develop a keen sense of prophetic justice, promote the analytic skills necessary to hold power accountable, and provide the spiritual foundation through which they not only respect the rights of others but also, as Bill Moyers puts it, "claim their moral and political agency"<sup>10</sup> become increasingly irrelevant.<sup>11</sup> Public schools have fared even worse. They are subject to corporate modes of management, disciplinary measures, and commercial values that have stripped them of any semblance of democratic governance; teachers



are reduced to a subaltern class of technicians; and students are positioned as mere recipients of the worst forms of banking education and, in the case of students marginalized by race and class, treated as disposable populations deserving of harsh punishments and disciplinary measures modeled after prisons.

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

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

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

The major impetus of this book is to present the theoretical and practical elements of a critical pedagogy in which education has a responsibility not only to search for the truth regardless of where it may lead but also to educate students to make authority politically and morally accountable. Such an approach is informed by the assumption that public and higher education must strive to expand the pedagogical conditions necessary to sustain those modes of critical agency, dialogue, and social responsibility crucial to keeping democracies alive. Critical pedagogy within schools and the critical public pedagogy produced in broader cultural apparatuses are modes of intervention dedicated to creating those democratic public spheres where individuals can think critically, relate sympathetically to the problems of others, and intervene in the world in order to address major social problems. Although questions regarding whether educational institutions should serve strictly public rather than private interests no longer carry the weight of forceful criticism, as they did in the past, such questions are still crucial in addressing the reality of public and higher education and what it might mean to imagine the full participation of such institutions in public life as protectors and promoters of democratic values, especially at a time when the meaning and purpose of public and higher education are besieged by a phalanx of narrow economic and political interests.

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

What all of the chapters in this book partake in is the aim of reclaiming public and higher education as sites of moral and political practice for which the purpose is both to introduce students to the great reservoir of diverse intellectual ideas and traditions and to engage those inherited bodies of knowledge through critical dialogue, analysis, and comprehension. Each chapter affirms the notion that education should be organized around a set of social experiences and ethical considerations through which students can rethink what Jacques Derrida once called the concepts of "the possible and the impossible"<sup>14</sup> and move toward what Jacques Rancière describes as

loosening the coordinates of the sensible through a constant reexamination of the boundaries that distinguish the sensible from the subversive.<sup>15</sup> Both theorists express concern with how the boundaries of knowledge and everyday life are constructed in ways that seem unquestionable, which makes it all the more necessary not only to interrogate commonsense assumptions but also to ask what it means to question such assumptions and see beyond them. Critical pedagogy asserts that students can engage their own learning from a position of agency and in so doing can actively participate in narrating their identities through a culture of questioning that opens up a space of translation between the private and the public while changing the forms of self- and social recognition.

Another overarching theme of the book argues that central to any viable notion of critical pedagogy is enabling students to think critically while providing the conditions for students to recognize "how knowledge is related to the power of self-definition"<sup>16</sup> and to use the knowledge they gain both to critique the world in which they live and, when necessary, to intervene in socially responsible ways in order to change it. Critical pedagogy is about more than a struggle over assigned meanings, official knowledge, and established modes of authority: it is also about encouraging students to take risks, act on their sense of social responsibility, and engage the world as an object of both critical analysis and hopeful transformation. In this paradigm, pedagogy cannot be reduced only to learning critical skills or theoretical traditions but must also be infused with the possibility of using interpretation as a mode of intervention, as a potentially energizing practice that gets students to both think and act differently. I have always believed that critical pedagogy is not simply about the search for understanding and truth, because such a goal imposes limits on human agency, possibility, and politics. Critical pedagogy also takes seriously the educational imperative to encourage students to act on the knowledge, values, and social relations they acquire by being responsive to the deepest and most important problems of our times.

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

## NOTES

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

- 2 Chandra Mohanty (1989), "On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s," *Cultural Critique*, 14: 192.
- 3 I extend this concept of the living dead in Henry A. Giroux (2011), *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism*. New York: Peter Lang.
- 4 I take up Obama's educational failures in Henry A. Giroux (2010), *Politics After Hope: Obama and the Politics of Youth, Race, and Democracy*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.
- 5 Martha C. Nussbaum (2010), *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 134.
- 6 Stanley Aronowitz (2008), *Against Schooling*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, p. 22.
- 7 Marc Bousquet (2009), "An Education President from Wal-Mart," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 23, 2009. Available online at: <http://chronicle.com/blogPost/An-Education-President-From-7434>. Accessed July 23, 2009.
- 8 Aronowitz, *Against Schooling*, pp. 16–17.
- 9 See Aronowitz, *Against Schooling*; Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux (2004), *Take Back Higher Education*. New York: Palgrave; Henry A. Giroux (2008), *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers; John Wilson (2008), *Patriotic Correctness: Academic Freedom and Its Enemies*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers; Christopher Newfield (2008), *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty Year Assault on the Middle Class*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Mark Bousquet (2008), *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation*. New York: New York University Press; Frank Donoghue (2008), *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*. New York: Fordham University Press; and Evan Watkins (2008), *Class Degrees: Smart Work, Managed Choice, and the Transformation of Higher Education*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- 10 Bill Moyers (2007), "A Time for Anger, a Call to Action," *CommonDreams.org*, February 7, 2007. Available online at: [www.commondreams.org/views/07/0322-24.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/views/07/0322-24.htm). Accessed December 10, 2009.
- 11 I take up the issue of the increasing militarizing of the university in Giroux, *The University in Chains*.
- 12 On the relationship between education and hope, see Mark Coté, Richard J. F. Day, and Greig de Peuter (eds) (2007), *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; and Henry A. Giroux (2003), *Public Spaces/Private Lives: Democracy Beyond 9/11*. Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield.
- 13 Sheldon S. Wolin (2008), *Democracy, Inc.: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 43.
- 14 Jacques Derrida (2001), "The Future of the Profession or the Unconditional University," in Laurence Simmons and Heather Worth (eds), *Derrida Downunder*. Auckland: Dunmore Press, p. 245.
- 15 Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey (2007), "Art of the Possible: An Interview with Jacques Rancière," *Artforum*, March 2007, pp. 260–1.
- 16 Mohanty, "On Race and Voice," p. 192.