

The Pennsylvania State University
The Graduate School
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

**CONTESTING COMMON SENSE DISCOURSE: LANGUAGE, POLITICS AND
DEMOCRACY**

A Thesis in
Curriculum and Instruction
by
Panagiota Gounari

©2004 Panagiota Gounari

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2004

The thesis of Panagiota Gounari was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Henry A. Giroux
Waterbury Chair, Professor of Education
Thesis Adviser
Chair of Committee

Patrick Shannon
Professor of Education
Coordinator for Graduate Programs in Curriculum and Instruction

Jacqueline Edmondson
Assistant Professor of Education

Paul B. Younquist
Associate Professor of English

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

Abstract

Given a historical moment marked by a plethora of political, ideological, social, racial, cultural, religious, and other crises in the public terrain, there is a critical need to confront the notion of political neutrality. I argue that these crises are symptomatic of a deeper malady of our contemporary societies, namely the depoliticization of politics. Within this framework, I provide various instances of discourses and discursive practices that illustrate the ways in which language may be used both as an ideology and a means for imposing a dominant view upon others. I also discuss examples of the ways language could be used to contest such practices in the struggle to revitalize politics. Given that politics must always find its point of departure in the concrete situation, it is important to identify the discourses and discursive practices that block individuals from developing pertinent subjective positions. Redefining politics raises questions of ethical responsibility about the degree to which individuals, concerned with public affairs, are promoting their own special interests. When we raise questions about the space politics inhabits and the ways it neutralizes itself discursively, thereby depoliticizing politics, we are also exposing the various types of agency that this process produces or suppresses.

My goal is to repoliticize and re-historicize the question of language and its ensuing discourses and reveal the discursive practices that shape it and are shaped through it, in an attempt to reclaim it as a tool for civic participation, political and critical literacy and the articulation of difference, that is vital to a form of agency for democratic citizenship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One. INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter Two. UNLEARNING HISTORY AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE.....	17
Discursive Construction of an Ideal Historical Model	17
On History.....	23
History as Containment	27
Public Memory as Rupture: A Pedagogical Project.....	39
Chapter Three. THE POLITICS OF INTOLERANCE: U.S. LANGAUGE POLICY IN PROCESS	55
Language as Ideology	59
Schools and the Reproduction of Legitimate Language.....	73
Chapter Four. RECLAIMING THE LANGUAGE OF POSSIBILITY: BEYOND THE CYNICISM OF NEOLIBERALISM	79
The functions of Neoliberalism.....	84
The Discourse of Inevitability or the Inevitability of Discourse.....	92
The Case of Freedom.....	95
An Interventionist Pedagogy.....	112
References.....	119

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

We live at a time where politics appears to be so far removed from our civic lives and the practices of human societies that it seems almost heretic for anyone to try to advocate its importance—not to mention its revitalization—and to reclaim a terrain for its existence and evolvment. We are witnessing, instead, the emergence of what Carl Boggs calls “antipolitics,”¹ a retreat from civic engagement, a deepening feeling of powerlessness, the embrace of a culture of cynicism that builds a wall of apathy and indifference to the “*koina*,” that is, the affairs of the “*polis*.” Similarly David Croteau observes that “the reigning political mood in America is a combination of disenchantment, cynicism, and alienation.”²

If politics is, in a sense, the “ongoing critique of reality,”³ questioning this reality, its discourses and its practices would be the first step towards re-politicizing politics. Politics here should be understood as a project in the making, unfinished and open, a “mechanism of change, not of preservation or conservation.”⁴ Politics is an “explicit and lucid activity that concerns the instauration of desirable institutions and democracy as the regime of explicit and lucid self-institution as far as is possible, of the social institutions that depend on explicit collective activity.”⁵ In a substantial democracy, politics should always aim at establishing and safeguarding democratic practices as these evolve historically to characterize different societies in space and time. Politics constitutes a unique public sphere, a type of agora in which people come together, interact, make

decisions, forge citizen bonds, carry out the imperatives of social change, and ultimately search for the good society insofar as “justice belongs to the polis.”⁶ Contrary to this, the depoliticization of politics tends to promote a conservative agenda that makes participation in collective decisionmaking irrelevant, shrinking the public sphere, reinforcing individuality over the collective, and creating an illusion of participation in foregone conclusions.

My project is to link the question of language with politics and look into these specific instances of language, as discourses and as practices that either confirm or deny democratic politics. Language plays a primary role in the understanding of politics in that politics without language deracinates politics. The question of language is primary to any democratic politics to the degree that politics calls for a political language in order to articulate its project. Within this framework, I view language beyond the struggle over meaning. I analyze it as it articulates as part of a larger cultural politics. Language is part of the project of reclaiming politics and history and serves as the precondition of agency and therefore, of hope.

Amidst all the economic, cultural and social changes in an age of globalized extraterritorial power, individuals find themselves unable to make sense of their own existence both as individuals and as members of a community. This mood of confusion and apathy can be observed in almost every aspect of private and public life in the United States. In the absence of a serious counter-discourse to the ongoing belligerent rhetoric on war, the sacrifice of civil rights to the altar of “homeland security,” the apocalyptic discourse around the future of human societies and the TINA (There Is No Alternative) notion, the call for more consumption, more privatization, and less state control, we are

witnessing an imprisonment of people in individualities that block out any notion of dissent and struggle for the collective. As the language of intervention that would mobilize agency is gradually lost, people found themselves falling more and more into a lethargic political apathy. This apathy became evident in the 2000 presidential elections when only a small percentage of people actually voted (111 million out of a 281 million population—less than 50 percent), and is also reflected in the disinterest of the electorate; according to the U.S. Census Bureau, “among registered voters who failed to cast ballots, one out of five reported they were ‘too busy’ to vote.”⁷ George W. Bush won the presidential election by a plurality of approximately 537 votes over Al Gore. Today, four years later, it is estimated that over 90,000 people, mostly Blacks and Hispanics, and primarily Democrats, were wrongly barred from voting.⁸ What the Democrats have called a “stolen election” was never addressed by mainstream or non-mainstream media, and there was no legal action taken against the people responsible for jeopardizing the democratic procedures of a country that prides itself on its exportation of its “democratic model”. A country that sends observers to supervise Third World elections “on the assumption that America leads the world in democratic process,”⁹ allowed for the manipulation of its own. The same Republican clique that manipulated the 2000 presidential elections is now waging a war to disseminate their vision of “democracy” to other parts of the world. Amidst blatant contradictions and lack of evidence of the now notorious “weapons of mass destruction,” the populace seems disinterested to the degree that, despite growing skepticism (which has taken two years to reach the surface), according to a poll by the Washington Post almost 60 percent still support the president’s decisions on foreign policy.¹⁰ Lewis Lapham argues that “the Bush administration

employs a good many ideologues ... who take for granted the stupefaction of an electorate too lazy to open its mail. Assuming a general state of political somnambulism not much different from their own, the authors of the government's press releases count on an audience that thinks of politics as trivial entertainment.”¹¹

In other words, what characterizes our contemporary society is, according to Cornelius Castoriadis, the “rise of insignificance” a state (of affairs) where reality shows and glimpses into other people's private lives have become more important than true participation in civic life, and where self-interest and individualism have largely replaced the struggles for a welfare state health insurance for everyone, access to education, sustainable development, preservation of the environment, and the eradication of injustice, inequality, and poverty. In a new global trend, people are investing their lives in reality shows such as “Survivor,” “Big Brother,” “Temptation Island,” or “The Osbournes,” playing a voyeuristic role in the private affairs of others. The increasing number of such productions and participants attests to the truth of the matter.¹² The ideology behind this type of amusement is hardly new. While the technologies and telecommunication tools used have reached a new heights, the ideology remains very familiar. As Theodor Adorno and Marx Horkheimer have noted in the context of late capitalism, “amusement ...is the prolongation of work. It is sought after as an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again.” They insist that “pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association. No independent thinking must be expected from the audience.”¹³ Adorno and Horkheimer's remarks point to the malady of our post-modern, neo-liberal,

mechanized, consumerist societies; sameness that creates a false security of homogeneity and consensus. It is hard to imagine how individuals can become socialized to be active citizens when the main representations and role models presented to them deal with deeply privatized, individualized, and fragmented lives.

The notion of what it means to be a citizen is gradually disappearing, giving way to the all-encompassing consumer-individual, a privatized human being who, at best, considers politics to be about voting every four years and, at worst, lacks even the basic discourses and referents to talk about her or his own political existence. Within this framework, Zygmunt Bauman brilliantly notes that

with extant political institutions no longer able to slow down the speed of capital movements, power is increasingly removed from politics – a circumstance which accounts simultaneously for growing political apathy, the progressive disinterestedness of the electorate in everything ‘political’ except the juicy scandals perpetrated by top people in the limelight, and the waning of expectations that salvation may come from government buildings, whoever their current or future occupants may be.¹⁴

This reality is captured in Bauman’s notion of the “synopticon” and the “panopticon.”¹⁵ He argues that “panopticon” has been replaced by “synopticon”; instead of the few watching the many, it is the many that nowadays watch the few. The synopticon reflects the “disappearing act of the public, the invasion of the public sphere

by the private; its conquest, occupation and piecemeal but relentless colonization”.¹⁶ In a traumatized post–September 11 society, where the public by and large has been unable to bridge the gap between private and public, involvement in the affairs of the state has degenerated to the consumption of flag-theme products, and the passive acceptance of curtailed civil liberties. Increasingly, the general populace embraces a patriotic discourse generated by conservatives and disseminated by loyal TV networks around “a concept of U.S. rightness, goodness, freedom, economic promise, and social advancement so woven into daily life that it does not appear to be ideological but a fact of nature.” In the ideology of common sense, the United States equals goodness and goodness requires unquestioning loyalty and love for all its policies.¹⁷ While this discourse closes down the discussion and analysis vital to the continued existence of any democracy, it also robs people of any opportunity to shed light on their personal civic role to such a degree that they embrace it with the utmost faithfulness and respect, as an absolute “fact of nature.”¹⁸ In other words, people accept as natural a foreign policy where sons and daughters go to war for oil and multinational corporation interests; where policy seems to be more concerned about foreign dictators’ atrocities than, for instance, with the radical increase in homelessness in the United States¹⁹; where professors lose their jobs for expressing dissent about government policies; where actors and singers who express their dissatisfaction with war policies are blacklisted; where people get arrested for simply wearing a tee-shirt featuring “Give Peace a Chance.”²⁰ However, these contradictions in a society that calls itself democratic are not part of a public debate. More often than not, these contradictions do not even reach the news; when they do, given the lack of critical tools with which to read them and understand their contradictory character, they have

little or no impact. The dominant discourse has numbed society to the possibility of translating “public troubles” into private problems and vice versa. There is an overwhelming imposition of what is to be considered “common sense”—that is, in reality, very much uncommon, since it is constructed to impose a monolithic view of the world that is not shared by everyone.

In the absence of the art of translation that would raise questions about the hidden agenda of the dominant ideologies and force people to think about and try to understand their reality as it articulates with the construction of social life, the gap between private and public life is increasingly widening. Along these lines Bauman insists that “there is no easy and obvious way to translate private worries into public issues and, conversely to discern and pinpoint public issues in private troubles.”²¹

At the same time, while schools should be the primary sites for exposing students to alternative discourses and varying realities, and create environments for gaining agency and the necessary tools for translating private troubles into public issues, they largely remain, instead, the dominant sites for indoctrination and the cultivation of a culture of consensus. Educational institutions could be a fertile terrain for revitalizing politics. They could be the sites for decentering power in the classroom, so that those dynamics of institutional and cultural inequalities that marginalize some groups, repress particular types of knowledge, and suppress critical dialogue can be addressed. In this respect, schools could be the first democratic exercise for future citizens. Bringing politics back into the schools necessarily redefines the goals and purpose of education. Beyond training for skills and competencies, knowledge and competitiveness in the job market, schools would be first and foremost places for developing agency, for socializing

individuals how to live in a democracy and make them aware of their civic rights and responsibilities. Schools would teach a discourse of inquiry and analysis, not consensus, dissent rather than complacency, and they would encourage students to explore the translation tools necessary for their developing agency. Contrary to this, the conservative agenda aims at politicizing education as “a form of pedagogical terrorism in which the issue of what is taught, by whom and under what conditions is determined by a doctrinaire political agenda that refuses to examine its own values, beliefs, and ideological construction.”²² A case in point is the No Child Left Behind Act that the Bush administration promoted as the model of education for the new century. With its instrumentalization of content, its focus on testing and scientific methods, mandated tests and punitive sanctions for underachieving schools does a lot more to promote a conservative agenda than to improve the educational landscape of the United States. According to Stan Karp, “NCLB is part of a larger political and ideological effort to privatize social programs, reduce the public sector, and ultimately replace local control of institutions like schools with marketplace reforms that substitute commercial relations between customers for democratic relations between citizens.”²³ In this respect, schools are now open fields to neoliberal politics. In addition, the NCLB moves control over curriculum and instructional issues away from teachers, classrooms, schools and local districts where it should be, and puts it in the hands of state and federal education bureaucracies and politicians. It represents the single biggest assault on local control of schools in the history of federal education policy. More importantly, NCLB produces specific types of identities by including provisions that, for example, try to push prayer,

military recruiters, and homophobia into schools while pushing multiculturalism, teacher innovation, and creative curriculum reform out.²⁴

In this regime, the art of translation turns into unquestioning adoption of a discourse that strips people from the tools that would enable them to truly comprehend their social, historical, and political location and therefore become agents. Agency such as this should be understood as the negotiation between constraints and possibilities, the ability to act upon our understanding of our human, social and political condition. It is the force that prompts individuals to act upon their private, social, and historical conditions, aiming for a change that would improve their existence in some fundamental way. Interestingly enough, most educators by and large refrain from acknowledging the political nature of schooling, embracing a more “neutral” stance. Neutrality, however, masks specific pre-existing political choices concerning curricular choices and content, access to education, success and failure of certain groups of students, and so forth. In this respect, by adopting a neutral position, educators align themselves by implication with the choices already put in place by a dominant order seeking to preserve a system of inequality and depoliticization and perpetuate its own existence. In opposition to this notion of depoliticization, Michel Foucault argues that “the real political task in a society ... is to criticize the workings of institutions, which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them”.²⁵ Against equating power with domination, I am working power through the cultural round. Power is not a monolithic entity neatly defined and contained. It works across different modalities such as in the way it embodies itself in

the notion of the State, as ideology (hegemony), as material existence and finally as cultural politics in that power mobilizes culture. In that sense, power presupposes a possibility for the future.

The first step in that direction would be for educators to acknowledge the political nature of schooling and the symbolic violence it has exercised through curricula, practices, and discourses. Consequently, the task is to bring politics back to schools as a force for awareness, conscientization, and change.

Given a historical moment marked by a plethora of political, ideological, social, racial, cultural, religious, and other crises in the public terrain, there is a critical need to confront the notion of political neutrality. I argue that these crises are symptomatic of a deeper malady of our contemporary societies, namely the depoliticization of politics. Depoliticization is largely manifested through discourses that, in turn, form subjectivities that either conform with or contest these discourses. Here, I use the term “discourses” to refer to these elements & mechanisms of life that articulate social practices and, in turn, are discursively represented. According to Norman Fairclough and Lillie Chouliaraki, discourse includes spoken and written language in combination with other semiotics (like music in singing), nonverbal communication that includes, for instance, facial expressions, body movements, gestures and so forth, and visual images, like photographs, pictures, film and television and other visual representations.²⁶ Fairclough and Chouliaraki point out that the concept of discourse “can be understood as a particular perspective on these various forms of semiosis—it sees them as moments of social practices in their articulation with other non-discursive moments.”²⁷ Discourses are necessarily historical and in so far as discursive representations help sustain relations of

domination within the practice, they are ideological. Discourses refer to each other and are constituted in that process of reference, called “intertextuality.”²⁸ James Gee notes that a discourse is “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artifacts,’ of thinking, feeling believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network,’ or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role.’”²⁹ Discourses as language and non-language symbols are instrumental to an understanding of how the discourse of common sense is formed and reproduced. Here, I am not claiming that language, as it is manifested through different discourses, is simply an absolute ideological vehicle for domination and that it imposes upon people a certain worldview. I am saying, as did Foucault, that discourse is not simply the medium that translates struggles or systems of domination, but is rather the reason for which and by which there is a struggle.³⁰ In this view, discourses are not only oppressive spaces but also sites of contestation.

Within this framework, I provide various instances of discourses and discursive practices that illustrate the ways in which language may be used both as an ideology and a means for imposing a dominant view upon others. I also discuss examples of the ways language could be used to contest such practices in the struggle to revitalize politics. Given that politics must always find its point of departure in the concrete situation,³¹ it is important to identify the discourses and discursive practices that block individuals from developing pertinent subjective positions. Redefining politics raises questions of ethical responsibility about the degree to which individuals, concerned with public affairs, are promoting their own special interests. It is this ethical responsibility that moves people to

subjective positions since, according to Alain Badiou, “a person is composed into a subject in a given moment, mobilized in order for a truth to proceed”.³² When we raise questions about the space politics inhabits and the ways it neutralizes itself discursively, thereby depoliticizing politics, we are also exposing the various types of agency that this process produces or suppresses. Questioning ideologies, institutions, and discursive practices is a first step towards reinventing politics, revealing subjective positions that would enable people to assume ethical responsibility and to act upon it.

In the following chapters I present instances which resulted in people becoming alienated from the political system through a discourse of so-called common sense—that is, where dominant explanations become straight jacketed in common perceptions and understandings about how the world is or should be. The language of common sense is purged of any metaphysics or any means for expressing beliefs or values contrary to those provided by the hegemonic order of a society. Given that every society produces its own regime of truth, there are specific types of discourse that function as true in different spatio-temporal instances. These discourses, in turn, function as the norm for assessing truth or falsehood, since they are now imprinted in people’s consciousness as “natural” or “true.” One of the reasons why the language of common sense appears to be so natural is because it has been dehistoricized. In other words, discourses are necessarily historical since they are constructed and shaped in different spatio-temporal contexts. Each discourse/discursive practice is marked by its historical era, as surrounding events and evolving conditions that adhere to and are affected by them. Currently language is stripped from its historicity, a process linked to its depoliticization.

Chapter one discusses the ways in which language has been dehistoricized, resulting in depoliticization. I use as an example the conservatives' homogeneous historical narrative presently being pushed into schools. This monolithic, eurocentric, westernized version of history produces a discourse of common sense while at the same time it uses a dehistoricized language for its dissemination and perpetuation. This discourse is stripped from its historicity, the discursive practices, ideologies, and politics that created it, and it is largely neutralized. Accordingly, those who have the power to write and manipulate history, have the power to legitimize some discourses over others. In this first chapter I address historical privileging of everything American. Such a homogenous historical narrative has been instrumental in creating a culture of consensus and passivity. The erasure of historical language points to the crisis of public memory as a tool for agency and civic engagement. Giroux accurately notes that

The current crisis of cultural politics and political culture facing the United States is intimately connected to the erasure of the social as a constitutive category for expanding democratic identities, social practices, and public spheres. In this instance, memory is not being erased as much as it is being reconstructed under circumstances in which public forums for serious debates have been eroded. The crisis of memory and the social is further amplified by the withdrawal of the state as a guardian of the public trust and its growing lack of

investment in those sectors of social life that promote the public good.³³

Therefore, a dehistoricized language erases those opportunities necessary for individuals to assume agency and therefore to act, to contest, to confront. As argued by Badiou, history recalls situations and creates events so as to move people into subjectivity positions, since they are faced with an excess of events and therefore they need to invent a new way of “being” drawing from old and new knowledges.” This is their evolving agency that is now jeopardized under a monolithic historical paradigm.

The issue of language in depoliticized discourses and discursive practices emerges and re-emerges as a site of contestation where dominant ideologies continually attempt to control and suppress vocabularies and discursive practices that could lead to the emergence of critical voices and radical subjectivities. In chapter two, I analyze in more detail the role of language and language policy in the dehistoricizing process. This chapter takes language from its functional structuralistic pretense and confronts those policies that perpetuate language neutrality and have purposely sidetracked practices that would affirm or deny subjectivities and the people’s cultural and historical locations as indispensable elements of their evolving identity.

Depoliticization is produced through the reinforcement of specific discursive practices and, in turn, produces its own discourse of naturalness and rationality. Ultimately, according to Boggs, a revitalized politics will “depend on a subversion of instrumental rationality, which is one of the hallmarks of contemporary technological discourse ... Democratic transformation requires a sustained popular attack on instrumentalism.”³⁴ Given the profound crisis of politics, the deterioration of social and

civic engagement, and the general public's alienation from the political system, the challenge to reinvent a de-commodified, historical, and political language is great. My last chapter deals with discursive practices within the neoliberal order and challenges their instrumentalism and "naturalness." If neoliberalism has managed in part to achieve a measure of transparency, naturalness, and inevitability, it has been done through a powerful discourse of "universality" and "Truth." This is very much in line with Chouliaraki & Fairclough's remark that an important characteristic of the economic, social, and cultural changes of late modernity is that they exist as discourses as well as processes that are taking place outside discourse, and that the processes that are taking place outside discourse are substantively shaped by them.³⁵ Obviously, there are considerable economic interests at stake in achieving hegemony over the discourse (and so the marginalization of others) within an economic discursive framework, especially given the potency of economic resources in shaping economic realities. Therefore achieving hegemony of this discourse means making it transparent and reflective of economic realities veiling thus the process through which these are constructed in a particular way. This process results in misrepresenting the discourse's arbitrariness to the degree that there is "a mystifying effect of unequal relations of power on language—it is discourse working ideologically".³⁶ Along these lines, the commodified language becomes both the tool and the ends of neoliberal ideologies that operate in order to guarantee their aggressive practices perpetuation. In an era of triumphant neoliberalism, the public discourse works not only to reflect the prevailing market order and its ideologies, but also to produce a positivistic discourse that obliterates public concerns about the social and political. While discourses are inherently open in that they consist of

free-floating elements, neoliberalism closes down the field of discursivity with its universal discourse of “common sense”.

In my conclusion, I propose a revitalization of politics through the invention of new vocabularies, the emergence of counter discourses, the cultivation of a culture of inquiry that will produce an active political identity for individuals and communities. The task of reinventing a discourse of critique and rehistoricizing its practices is ultimately linked to talks of rethinking democratic politics and to “restor[ing] the idea of politics as the realm where we can recognize ourselves as participants in a community.”³⁷

CHAPTER TWO

UNLEARNING HISTORY AND THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

Remembrance of the past may give rise to dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory.

Remembrance is a mode of dissociation from the given facts, a mode of “mediation” which breaks, for short moments, the omnipresent power of given facts. Memory recalls the terror and the hope that passed.

Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (1974: 98)

DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF AN IDEAL HISTORICAL MODEL

The present obsession with historical literacy has reached unprecedented proportions in the United States, both in the education debate and in the public arena. We are witnessing an intellectual battle over a redefinition of history—ranging from support to programs that teach traditional American history by those in charge of disbursing federal funds and proclamations by conservative groups of a widespread “historical illiteracy,” to the very death of history as it is illustrated in the notorious *End of History* by Francis Fukuyama.

This historical moment is by no means coincidental. As the United States assumes the role of a megapower aspiring to become the referent for the reading of the rest of the world and insists upon setting the context in which world histories should be

interpreted, there is a tremendous need to rewrite and promote history from a hegemonic point of view, thereby securing a world order to be legitimized through the construction of a discourse of common sense. Thus, the attempt on the one hand, to create new “mnemonic frameworks of definition”³⁸ that impose an understanding of subsequent histories through dehistoricizing spaces, places, and social locations. On the other hand, the conservatives accuse youth of historical illiteracy, as a form of ignorance of what is hegemonically deemed “important,” as stated by Lynne Cheney:

We are not doing a very good job of teaching it [American History] now, as a recent survey of seniors at the nation’s top liberal arts colleges and research universities reveals. Scarcely more than half, the survey found, “knew general information about American democracy and the Constitution.” Vast majorities were ignorant of facts that high school seniors should know: Only a third could identify George Washington as the American general at Yorktown; fewer than a quarter knew that James Madison was the “father of the Constitution.”³⁹

Even before the survey and Cheney’s comments, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) set the stage, issuing this warning: “As we move into the 21st century, our future leaders are graduating with an alarming ignorance of their heritage – a kind of collective amnesia—and a profound historical illiteracy which bodes ill for the future of the republic.”⁴⁰

While conservatives are eager to penalize youth for ignorance of what they call “basic historical facts,” they produce their own version of “true” history that (a) is limited to the history of the United States and ignores its own, inextricable links to world histories, the ways in which the United States radically affects them and is affected by them; (b) has a “canonical” virtue to the degree that it is characterized as “shared,” “homogeneous,” and “worthy” and is promoted accordingly; (c) is Western-centered and marginalizes other histories; (d) presents itself in disconnectedness with the current socio-historical order and the ideological weavings it entails; and (e) uses a dehistoricized language manifested through specific discursive practices that legitimize its supposed accuracy.

This obsession with an assimilationist and homogeneous notion of history that is necessarily dehistoricized—since it needs to erase history in order to rewrite it—gave rise to a number of works that proposed “cultural literacy” and “historical consciousness” as an antidote to what has been perceived as a series of crises in our modern Western civilization. The propagation of these mythical crises reached their apogee with the publication of Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind*, E. D. Hirsch’s book, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, and Arthur Schlesinger’s *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, among others. What these authors share is their obsession with the construction of a so-called crisis in U.S. history that, in their view, has been degraded into a useless, anathematic, and irrelevant narrative since it has been stripped from its canonical context. These conservative scholars, however, fail to link the canonical base of U.S. history with a western, eurocentric, patriarchal framework. They claim to be concerned with a form of historical amnesia

that is spreading like a virus in contemporary societies that fail not only to remember the past, but also to celebrate history in its supposed triumphant truth – a quality that they perceive as making history “didactic” and “transparent.” At the same time, while accusing youth of historical illiteracy, they hold the ideological conviction that gives primacy to Western Civilization while attacking other forms of cultural identifications and memories, which, nevertheless, are historical as well. The *Restoring America’s Legacy Report* (September 2002), an intellectual child of Lynne Cheney, notes with much indignation that students could graduate from 100% of the top colleges without taking a single course in American history while they are free to take courses in fields other than history: “At the University of California-Berkeley ‘Alternative Sexual Identities and Communities’ fulfills the American Cultures requirement. At Dartmouth ‘Music of Southeast Asia’ and ‘From Hand to Mouth: Writing, Eating and the Construction of Gender’ both meet the World Culture requirements. At Washington University in St. Louis, ‘Race and Ethnicity on American Television’ and ‘American Feminism and the Theatre’ are classified as ‘Textual and Historical Studies’ courses.” According to the report, courses with a narrow focus on “racism and inequality” or “multiculturalism” are not deemed as important as a grounding in “America’s history and its contributions to freedom and democracy.”⁴¹

These organizations and their supporters thus promote a version of history that is dehistoricized, sterilized, and stripped of any pedagogical possibility, one that fails to open up spaces for interpretation, and that instead fixes meanings and understandings through a conservative discourse around remembering. Within this perspective, history is to be consumed in a noncritical fashion through an information-banking model of

education designed to fatten students with selected historical points, always disarticulated from other historical events.

The idea of a homogeneous narrative of U.S. history has been essential to the reproduction of a culture of consensus where citizens passively accept the fateful relationship of their country to the rest of the world without thought or question. As Edward Said notes, “History is what as Americans we are supposed to believe about the U.S. (not about the rest of the world, which is “old” and therefore irrelevant)—uncritically, unhistorically. There is an amazing contradiction here. In the popular mind the U.S. is supposed to stand above or beyond history.”⁴² This leads to the creation of a false dichotomy between “old” vs. “new” history, which is never lost on policymakers who often rely on historical disconnectedness to forge distorted realities that promote their version of history. This was abundantly clear when U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld attempted to dismiss the European opposition, spearheaded by France and Germany, to the Iraq war, which he characterized as the “old” Europe that is no longer relevant. The “new” visionary Europe is made up of countries that remain obediently aligned with U.S. hegemonic principles. The old vs. new Europe false dichotomy also attempts to create a context that brooks no dissent or discussion concerning the preemptive war against Iraq, the violation of world regulatory bodies such as the United Nations, and the ethics and values of multilateralism and international consensus. Having failed to find moral and ethical grounds to launch a pre-emptive and illegal war condemned by most of the world, Rumsfeld’s only recourse was to rely on the manipulation of discourse strategies and to arrogantly dismiss world opinion, historical facts, and international laws. This is abundantly clear in his statement when asked by a

crowd of European journalists “for proof for the assertion that weapons of mass destruction confronted the United States with a clear and present danger.” Rumsfeld replied “The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”⁴³

The use of false dichotomies such as old vs. new Europe by Rumsfeld, and George W. Bush’s “You’re either with us or against us,”⁴⁴ is in line with Said’s thinking, which suggests that in the construction of “common sense,” the United States appears as an extra-historical entity to the degree that it supersedes history while at the same time using it to legitimize its own (dis)order. Here common sense needs to be understood in conjunction with the thinking of Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci, common sense is “the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed. Common sense is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. . . . Its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is.”⁴⁵ If common sense is the assimilation of the dominant ideology to the degree that it seems natural and is uncritically believed, then the discourse of common sense used by the dominant order can be understood as the uses of language as a form of social practice that work to neutralize language and therefore the ensuing practices, institutions, assumptions and presuppositions. All this is shaped through historical, social, cultural, and ideological practices that, in the case of common sense are either erased or invisible, making the discourse of common sense a powerful tool to justify policies, political decisions, and practices that are largely designated to oppress, stupidify and block dissent. Along these

lines, the selection of a specific historical discourse does not allow any possibility for interrogation, which might lead to the opening up of history or historical difference. In other words, instead of viewing the “crisis of history” as containing the possibility for developing multiple referents for its understanding, conservative scholars and policy makers recoil into a fixed, predetermined treatment of history that, according to Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, is “descriptive rather than anthropological and political....Its meaning is fixed in the past, and its essence is that it provides the public with a common referent for communication and exchange.”⁴⁶

However, in their urge to make a common historical referent “transparent” and “didactic,” conservative scholars and ultra-right think tanks achieve “nothing less and nothing more than a veiled [historical] information-banking model based on a ‘selective selection’ of Western [historical events],”⁴⁷ designed to devalue, dismiss, and degrade the daily lived-experiences that constitute the historical referents for those people who are never included in their so-called history. This process of evaluating and understanding history not only “dismisses the notion that [history] has any determinate relation to the practices of power and politics,”⁴⁸ but it also creates a false binarism between what constitutes the official history and what “is largely defined as a part of an on-going struggle to make history, experience, knowledge, and the meaning of everyday life in one’s own terms.”⁴⁹

ON HISTORY

Let us consider the roots and evolution of the term “history.” The word “history” originates from the weak stem «F__-» of the ancient Greek verb «____», which means “to know.” Therefore, history in this sense alludes primarily to knowledge and not remembrance. This by no means implies the existence of a “true” history that generates a

prototype of knowledge about the past or embraces a deterministic notion of finishedness and closure. It rather suggests that knowing the extent of our unfinishedness as human beings makes us agents to the degree that we know we are able to intervene in the world and change it.⁵⁰

Marita Sturken notes that “history can be thought of as a narrative that has in some way been sanctioned or valorized by institutional frameworks or publishing enterprises.”⁵¹ Both history and its multifaceted constructed memories should move beyond a superficial level of remembering and celebrating the past, or parroting the “official history,” as is done with the celebration of Columbus Day or Thanksgiving among other important, albeit fragmented, presentations of historical events. While the term history has been initially used to refer to general knowledge, traditionally it has come to mean “knowledge of the past.” The term has been also used to refer to historiography, the organized discipline that has as its goal the construction of a narrative that recounts the past. My use of the word history in this chapter includes both formal and informal historical discourses, cultural memories, and the ways the latter shape history as past, present, and future. I see history not in terms of its truthful or false qualities but rather examine “what its telling reveals about how the past affects the present,”⁵² and how our knowledge of the past can shed light to the complexities of our social, political, cultural, and ideological existence and our agency.

Why is it important to know? Would anything change for the better once we obtain this [historical] knowledge? Zygmunt Bauman departs from these two questions to discuss Pierre Bourdieu’s “cynical” and “clinical” uses of the knowledge of “how the complex and not readily visible social [and historical] mechanisms which shape our

condition work.” When used cynically, knowledge assumes that “the world being what it is, let me think of a strategy which will allow me to exploit its rules to my best advantage.” Knowledge can also be used clinically, that is, the knowledge of how the social-historical works to produce histories, significations, and narratives that “may help you and me to fight more effectively what we see as improper, harmful or offending our moral sense.”⁵³ Knowledge by itself does not determine to which of the two uses we resort, but without that knowledge there would be no choice from which to start. The clinical understanding of knowing frames the issue of history as instrumental in understanding our own socio-historical location and prompts a type of interventive historical literacy that is open to interpretations and necessarily linked to our agency and ethical responsibility as historical beings. In opposition to a conservative cynical reading of history imposed by a dominant order, we should propose a clinical reading that creates spaces for human agency and the development of democratic institutions. This dimension of knowing and history reveals its pedagogical character, par excellence. History is not simply about recalling, celebrating, or mourning. It is about knowing, understanding, making sense of the past with the aim, as Thucydides so eloquently argued in 431 BC, of interpreting the present and the future, “which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it.”⁵⁴ Here it is not implied that history repeats itself or that human lives and institutions remain unaltered and intact with the passing of time. I am rather suggesting that knowing what happened in a different spatio-temporal moment may propel human beings toward a necessary subjectivity, allowing for a type of agency to emerge. In light of this remark, history should be understood as porous and always-in-the-making, rather than immobile, determined, and stagnant. Left unproblematized, by

its very label history becomes irrelevant and remains fixed in its positivistic cover, depriving us from imagining otherwise. In its unchallenged version it denotes a clearly cut sequence of events that privilege some versions of history over others and measures all memories against a Western paradigm of historical narrative. Howard Zinn accurately notes that “Western civilization is complex. It represents many things, some decent, some horrifying. We would have to pause before celebrating it uncritically when we note that David Duke, the Louisiana Ku Klux Klan member and ex-Nazi says that people have got him wrong. ‘The common strain in my thinking,’ he told a reporter, ‘is my love for Western civilization.’”⁵⁵

Conservative think tanks and scholars interpret history against a “westernized” model as transparent, objectifiable, and subject to a functional definition. Remembering, in their view becomes a very specific function of the mind with a redemptive and deeply didactic quality that ultimately makes it doctrinaire and brings history to an end. This form of historical closure is understood by Kyo Maclear who suggests that the way we remember the past (especially the war events) “is socially organized and sanitized through conventions which tend to lend the past a mythic, even majestic quality.”⁵⁶ As a result, official history is often regarded as “objectifiable, iconic, and even ‘inevitable’ with a ‘clear, symbolically mapable quality.’”⁵⁷ Henry Giroux discusses this fatalistic and reductionistic notion of history when he argues that “this form of rationality [in conceiving history] prevents us from using historical consciousness as a vehicle to unmask existing forms of domination as they reproduce themselves through the ‘facts’ and common sense assumptions that structure our view and experience of the world.”⁵⁸

The current dominant discourse around history points exactly to a closure, a finite inspection of history *in toto*. This idea of remembering, as Bauman suggests, misses the opportunity to view the socio-historical events as a window into the past, where the recovery of public memory becomes a pedagogical tool, a means and not an end in and of itself. In other words, history becomes the tool for exploration, it should not function as the absolute truth that needs to be found. Furthermore, the mere representation of history as the object of a discipline or a classroom subject-matter that needs to be studied systematically, not only reduces it to a form of caricature but it also eclipses any possibility of pedagogical signification that would raise issues of representation and identity, as well as issues related to privileging some discourses of public memory over others. Accordingly, history becomes a succession of events, a schemata of finality, of causality or of logical consequence.

The final, inevitable character of history is very much part of a conservative ideology whereby the call for returning to the past is stripped of any dialogue on how the past is related to the students' lives, whose past are we to study, and why it should be important and worth remembering, as well as how our understanding/remembrance would go beyond a simple competency, to shed light on our own experiences, our own lives, and our own political existence. In addition, such a conceptualization of history fails to raise questions about the role of public memory in the construction of agency that is ultimately linked with the possibility of democracy.

HISTORY AS CONTAINMENT

The understanding of history as a closed chest of temporal events is best illustrated in a recent survey entitled "Losing America's Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century," conducted by the ultra-conservative American Council of Trustees &

Alumni (ACTA). ACTA defines itself as a “non-profit organization based in Washington D.C., dedicated to academic freedom, quality and accountability.” According to their survey, 81 percent (four in five) of the senior students from the “top 55” universities and colleges of the U.S. failed a history test that included questions such as (1) “identify the basic principles of the U.S. constitution,” (2) “who is the father of the U.S. constitution,” (3) “identify a line from the Gettysburg address,” and so forth, while 99 percent of the students asked could positively identify Beavis and Butthead as cartoon characters and 98 percent knew that Snoop Doggy Dog is a rap singer.⁵⁹ The analysts of the survey unleashed a harsh critique against today’s youth accusing them of historical illiteracy to the degree that, according to them, it jeopardizes the “belief that a shared understanding, a shared knowledge, of the nation’s past unifies a people and ensures a common civic identity” (ACTA 2000). Seen through this conservative prism, the “failure” of the senior students in history was for ACTA analysts a failure to assume a type of civic identity that is “common” for everybody living in the United States. A more recent report by ACTA (September 2002) entitled “Restoring America’s Legacy: The Challenge of Historical Literacy in the 21st Century” attempts to debrief the results of the previous survey and to explain why, given the “outcry and public concern” about historical illiteracy, nothing has been done in this sector since the publication of their last survey.

Both surveys, through their discourse, the presence as well as the absence of specific content, attempt to legitimize a specific type of historical literacy. In order to achieve this end, they recur to a wide range of discursive tactics; ACTA presents itself as a non-profit organization, meaning that it is formed for purposes other than generating a profit and that no part of the organization’s income is distributed to its directors or

officers. Usually nonprofit organizations are, among other, churches or church associations, schools, charities, medical providers, legal aid societies, volunteer services organizations, research institutes, museums, and so forth. ACTA's nonprofit organizational character aims at two things: to promote a politically neutral profile, creating the assumption that there is no political agenda behind its goals and action, and to legitimize its discourse and practices. At this juncture, ACTA's ideology disguises its ideological nature by becoming naturalized and perceived as "common sense." However, a close analysis of its discourse, including both events and their structures, unveils its political and ideological agenda.

Take for instance the title of the survey "Restoring America's Legacy: The Challenge of Historical Literacy in the 21st Century." The assumptions are that history is some form of mental restoration of events, a revival of the dead. The word "legacy" conjures an image of glory while it carries a worthiness, presupposing that history has to be glorious to be important, that it is about luminous times and great contributions, rather than about genocides, wars, tensions, and ideological conflicts as well. Take for instance the glorification of other early European arrives or the celebration of Columbus Day. Lynne Cheney insists "We should teach our children how hard the establishment of this country was. One of the documents they should read is *Of Plymouth Plantation*, in which William Bradford describes how the pilgrims 'brought safe to land . . . , fell upon their knees and blessed the God of heaven, who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean.'" Cheney quotes Bradford saying that 'this poor people's present condition.' ...It was a risky thing, coming here, and it was a risky thing a century and a half later when fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence. Benjamin Rush, one of the

signers, wrote of the ‘labors and fears and sorrows and sleepless nights’ they all suffered, and of ‘the pensive and awful silence’ as they stepped forward to sign what was believed by many of them to be their death warrants.⁶⁰

However, Zinn gives a different perspective for the ventures of Columbus, less glorious and noteworthy:

The policy and acts of Columbus for which he alone was responsible began the depopulation of the terrestrial paradise that was Hispaniola in 1492. Of the original natives, estimated by modern ethnologists at 300,000 in number, one-third were killed off between 1494 and 1496. By 1508, an enumeration showed only 60,000 alive...in 1548 Oviedo doubted whether 500 Indians remained.

It becomes obvious that there are groups of people who are usually absent from the “gloriousness” of American history and from history textbooks: the native Americans, the Mexicans, the African Slaves, the women, the immigrants, and so forth. In the conservative agenda of writing history there is almost never a space to talk about their histories. Even when marginalized groups are present, all conflicts and tension are erased or silenced to promote a more “politically correct” harmonious picture of co-existence.

Following the phrase “America’s Legacy” in the main title of ACTA’s report, the subtitle serves to reiterate and affirm that historical literacy is, in fact, the restoration of the American legacy. Here ACTA celebrates a revival of history by erasing it. The report completely neglects the fact that there are six billion people on this planet with their own histories and lived experiences, 6 billion offspring of people who lived before

us and tracked their own histories, creating diverse historical memories. Nevertheless, according to ACTA, history starts and ends in the United States and historical literacy is equated with American History literacy. Yet ACTA not only selects the history that is worthy, from the vast array of historical events and realities, they also suppress entangled histories from this selected version. For instance, while they promote learning American history, they exclude discussions of race relations, slavery and oppression, and the genocide of Native Americans. Despite their purported commitment to academic freedom they unleash an overt attack on multiculturalism and race studies accusing universities that “instead of broad courses on the full sweep of American history, ... require a narrow focus on racism and inequality.” They insist that “while knowledge of these topics is surely commendable, it is woefully incomplete when most students bring to the classroom a virtual ignorance of America’s history and its contributions to freedom and democracy.”⁶¹ Here there is a noticeable paradox: According to ACTA, educational institutions are either going to teach American history or they are going to teach about racism and inequality—as if the former can possibly exist without the latter and vice versa. Conservative scholars refuse to teach the inextricable connection between the two as well as their consequential relations. In this respect, they advocate a common sense styled pedagogy that does not extend beyond a certain comfort zone, and does not call into question their “facts.” The result is the creation of a false binarism; America in its totality and grandeur or unworthy local histories of its people.

The missing elements in the title, and the ensuing text in the ACTA survey are remarkable since not only is there no reference to the worth of other histories in contributing to our understanding of the world but also everything “American” is

squeezed under “*our* shared past,” or “*our* democracy’s origins” never really explaining or identifying those whose identities are casually collapsed under “we.” Can we truly talk about a “common civic identity” in a multicultural society like the U.S.? In order to understand this version of American history we need to look both at the inclusions and exclusions and ask why one event may have been excluded at the expense of the other, who participated in the decision process, and what does that choice imply pedagogically for our students who read and try to understand their world given their multiplicity of origins. In addition, ACTA blatantly ignores the fact that people outside the U.S. lived in organized free societies that—for their historical time—were extremely democratic and participatory, as is the case with governments in most European countries. It also ignores the essential fact that a discussion of U.S. history is not complete without its incorporation into world history. By failing to “read” different historical texts (as both events and discourses) in their dialectical relations, the survey misses a great opportunity to challenge not what the students know or do not know, but rather in what ways this knowledge obscures their understanding of the world or illuminates some aspect of their civic life and therefore helps them move toward the agency and subjectivity necessary for every democratic society.

The survey goes into great lengths to suggest that “after September 11, it is particularly urgent that *we* know what *we* are fighting for, not just whom *we* are fighting against” but fails to raise the question “why are we fighting?” and “who is *we*”? Interestingly, here we see a tension between private and public histories as they collapse into each other; “we” is used where there is a call for total consensus in order to legitimize political decisions and irrational or illegal wars—yet the cultural histories of

“we” are not at all included in ACTA’s “official story.” ACTA chairwoman, Lynne Cheney, insists that “knowledge of the ideas that have molded us and the ideals that have mattered to us function as a kind of civic glue. Our history and literature give us symbols to share; they help us all, no matter how diverse our backgrounds, feel part of a common undertaking.” Cheney’s use of “us” however, alludes to an illusionary consensus and a common culture. Her sentence is quite contradictory; on one hand she acknowledges that there are diverse backgrounds while on the other she claims that “our history and literature give U.S. symbols to share,” failing to qualify whose history and literature she refers to. Clearly Cheney does not refer to the quasi genocide of the Native Americans, appropriation of Mexican land, the round ups of Japanese during WWII, or the enslavement of the Africans. What Cheney really wants to suggest is that people from diverse backgrounds should unite under an umbrella of “commonality,” with Western or Westernized memories functioning as the link. This would imply celebrating a version of history where all of these diverse backgrounds are silenced or excluded, allowing the glory (real or imagined) of the West to shine as a process that reproduces dominant values.

It would be naïve to believe that ACTA actually advocates historical literacy. A “firm grounding in American History,” as they so strongly promote, would mean learning about innumerable histories of massacre, bloodshed, inequality, undemocratic decisions, and unpopular policies while unlearning myths. It would mean a learning process designed to rupture the flawless picture of harmonious living in a model democratic society. It would mean questioning the reasons for going into war, as well as the U.S. involvement and military interventions in many countries around the hemisphere, the

U.S. support of dictatorships, coups d'états, paramilitary organizations, and the training of terrorists around the world.⁶² It would mean exposing students to the huge divide between the rich and the poor, creating spaces to talk about racial inequalities and to explain how these inequalities have been historically shaped and reproduced. The survey insists that “if we are to preserve our Republic and keep faith with those who established it, each of us must understand our rights and responsibilities—literally we must restore America’s legacy,”⁶³ a process whereby civic rights and responsibilities are collapsed into the restoration of American legacy. This is a highly contradictory claim for a country whose history provides abundant examples of a disregard for democratic institutions both at home and abroad.

ACTA’s accusation that this “lack of understanding and suffering from historical illiteracy bodes ill for the future of our Republic” hides a more pernicious agenda of consensus and passivity. Historical illiteracy is defined against a literacy text that is absent from the survey and includes a set of fixed, pre-packaged facts disguised in such proclamations as, “we as citizens are the beneficiaries of a long struggle to secure and defend a free society . . . that we, as citizens, are responsible for maintaining that society . . .” With the use of the specific discourses of common sense and a call to concepts such as “freedom,” “civics,” and so forth, ACTA establishes for itself a mandate for intervention into curricula and public debate designed to dehistoricize.

Instead of viewing the past as opening up space for other possible histories, the conservative discourse around remembering (as it is manifested in the ACTA Survey) focuses on history as common ground, a statistical collection of shared facts and institutions that attempt to create some sort of absolute consensus—a consensus that

provides the bedrock upon which U.S civic identity is constructed. Along these lines Donaldo Macedo suggests that

the conservative cultural agenda fails to acknowledge ... that the reorganization of “our common culture” points to the existence of “our uncommon culture,” for commonality is always in a dialectical relationship with uncommonality. Thus, one cannot talk about the centeredness of our ‘common culture’ without relegating our ‘uncommon’ cultural values and expressions to the margins creating a de facto silent majority.⁶⁴

In their call to bring American History back to colleges and universities as an antidote to Snoop Doggy Dog, Beavis and Butthead, and the crisis of cultural literacy and democracy, conservative educators fail to understand that what is at stake in the present so-called crisis of history and in the youth’s “resistance” or “inability” to remember is larger than simply historical literacy as competence and fact banking. The true crisis does not lie in the inability of students to memorize “worthy” historical events, but in their inability (which is consciously and intentionally maintained by the school curricula) to critically look at the past and the present and understand them in dialectical relationship as evolving rather than closed processes. This remark brings me to my next point: Schools should be understood as sites of ‘memory-making’ in that they produce a type of memory that shuts down all questions.

Similar to ACTA’s call for “historical literacy” as facts-acquisition and memorization, the recent reauthorization by the U.S. Department of Education of the

Teaching American History program as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,⁶⁵ also engages in a selective processing of history. Under the provisions of this program, \$49.6 million dollars in grant money was given to sixty local school districts during 2001 with the aim of “rais[ing] student achievement by improving the quality of teaching by strengthening teachers’ knowledge, understanding and appreciation of American history.”⁶⁶ As announced by U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, “from the Mayflower Compact to the Articles of Confederation to the civil rights marches of the 1960s, American history is alive with stories of discovery, bravery and ideas about how we live.”⁶⁷ Paige insists that “students who know and appreciate the great ideas of American history will be well prepared to understand and exercise their civic rights and responsibilities.”⁶⁸ This proposal not only equates history with American History but it also legitimizes an official version of American history, excluding other intertwined histories. This sanitized American History is defined as an accumulation of “great ideas” and “bravery,” a register of events that are to be transmitted to produce a specific type of civic identity. However, this structural and positivistic perception of history fails to explain a number of pertinent issues. For instance, how are students to participate in a global world armed only with a knowledge of American history, as if it held some transcendental knowledge or power? What types of representations and assumptions does this type of history create about “us” and the “others”? Who is “us” anyway? And, finally, what sort of agency is to be produced when history is held hostage through a prescribed method of remembering, in a closed-down space that not only minimizes possibilities but also fails to provide alternative choices in terms of historical narratives?

The true agenda of the *Teaching American History* grants is revealed in their information section where it states that grants are to be awarded to local educational institutions in order “to carry out activities to promote the teaching of *traditional* [emphasis mine] American history in elementary schools and secondary schools as a separate academic subject (not as a component of social studies).”⁶⁹ Practically speaking, what this means is that the schools that receive federal funding should dedicate more time, energy, special activities, and resources to teaching a version of canonical *traditional* American history and, for this, these schools will be rewarded. Under these guidelines, it would appear that teaching Howard Zinn’s “People’s History of the United States” would result in being eliminated from federal funding. The teaching of traditional American history is designed as a band-aid for what is perceived as historical illiteracy; it will, in turn, close down any possibility of interrogating historical narratives or the very notion of what is “traditional.” Again, the choice of wording points to the construction of a discourse of common sense where so-called traditional American history remains unproblematized. At stake here is more than a blatant return to a canonical version of American history and a conservative attack on the school curriculum. The indisputable reign of tradition eclipses any possibility of an American identity outside these strictly prescribed historical parameters.

Tradition in the conservative view, denotes the “recording of events,” a linear order of particular ways, means, representations, and institutions shared in some temporal locus in the past and deemed important as a mimetic pattern for the present and future. It functions as a paradigm of correctness for how to live one’s life, as well as with a rigid guideline for any type of individual decisionmaking. In this sense,

tradition “is perceived as having a built-in institutional quality: the assumption that there is nothing that people currently alive can do to change the institutions they inherited, and that if oblivious to their impotence they try to meddle with the legacy—then unimaginable disasters will follow, whether brought about by divine punishment or by the laws of nature which neither admit nor bear any violation.”⁷⁰

It becomes obvious that both ACTA’s surveys and these touted educational policies concerning the teaching of history are an attempt to redefine history and force a return to what is called “basics.” Consequently, this information-banking approach leaves out important questions that are necessary for a more critical understanding of this redefined history. What are the consequences for a democratic society of teaching a homogenized, sterilized version of history? What does it mean to create consensus among citizens? In what ways does our “common culture” create more uncommonality and difference? In fact, it is an oxymoron to speak of a “common culture” or absolute consensus in a cultural democracy where, according to Chantal Mouffe, “there can never be a completely inclusive consensus. ... The very condition of the possibility for consensus is at the same time the condition of the impossibility of consensus without exclusion.”⁷¹ Mouffe suggests that in a democracy we should witness a “conflictual consensus,” that is, some form of consensus in terms of ethical-political principles that can never be rational or fully inclusive, and can only exist “through many different and conflicting interpretations that make room for dissent and for the institutions through which it can be manifested.”⁷² Mouffe also insists that when adopting a notion of conflictual consensus, we agree on what makes us citizens, what links us together, what certain

values link us; but when it comes to defining those values and interpreting them, there will always be competition.”⁷³ In this sense we should strive for a type of historical literacy that will function as a catalyst in helping the United States to learn and understand what makes us citizens, what it means to live in a cultural democracy—a historical literacy that will break through the common sense of “supplied” facts by rupturing the current conservative discourse. This form of historical literacy will challenge static ideas of what is worth being historical, will prompt interventions, and create opportunities for questioning a society’s own institutions.

PUBLIC MEMORY AS PUPTURE: A PEDAGOGICAL PROJECT

As opposed to teaching a traditional history of consensus and imposing a distorted common sense, a more honest and democratic account would advocate an unsettling pedagogy that promotes conflictual consensus. Conflictual consensus is dangerously absent from U.S. society. Anyone who raises questions or tries to develop a critical understanding outside the dominant paradigm, and is willing to perceive history as a possibility, is usually accused of being a revisionist or unpatriotic. The wholesale accusation of a lack of patriotism is a powerful, knee-jerk response to any deviation from the prescribed teaching of history, and there is little, if any, space available for questioning what patriotism is and how it is constructed in the current public discourse. For instance, after the hideous attacks of September 11 in New York, those critics who dared to consider alternative or more textured explanations for events were often labeled traitors and called unpatriotic as if, according to Judith Butler, “to explain these events would involve us in a sympathetic identification with the oppressor, as if to understand these events would involve building a justificatory framework for them.” Moreover, Butler points out that “our fear of understanding a point of view belies a deeper fear that

we will be taken up by it, find it is contagious, become infected in a morally perilous way by the thinking of the presumed enemy.”⁷⁴

The lack of dissent and the full alignment of public opinion with the hegemonic explanatory phrase “they hate us because we are better,” reveals the blatant ignorance of the United States’ historical participation in the world as an international terrorist. The events of September 11 proved even to the more suspicious, conservative Fukuyama-followers who claim the end of history, that history is far from over. In reality, the ensuing, arrogant discourse of “with us or against us.” that led to two invasions against foreign countries so far (Afghanistan and Iraq) coupled with the blind support of the American people for the president and his administration’s foreign policy decisions can be attributed to the enormous success of the teaching of a manipulated history in U.S. schools that guarantees no one would question the “obvious rightness” of U.S. hegemony. Schools as sites of memory production by and large promote an instrumentalized pedagogy, one that proclaims the end of history and reduces it to memorization of facts. Lewis Lapham notes that “a democracy stands in need of as many questions as its citizens can ask out of their own stupidity and fear. Voiced in the first-person singular and synonymous with the courage of an [...] unorganized, unrecognized, unorthodox and unterrified mind, dissent is what rescues the democracy from a slow death behind closed doors.”⁷⁵ The language of consensus has been cultivated with the help of the very few media conglomerates that in the last two wars became the voice of power. According to Said

CNN, Time Warner, Disney, NBC, Sky News and the rest
are part of the same ideological system, serve the same

clientele, and are now owned by the same relatively tiny group of people whose interest is to keep things as they are. Memory is an inhibition, a possible threat to their hegemony, just as it is very dangerous for a critic to keep making connections between supposedly un- or non-political institutions like the Supreme Court and the Constitution, and on the other hand, base commercial interests.”⁷⁶

The emerging patriotism overwhelmed schools and curricula, making it almost impossible to think outside this framework. Patriotism became common sense without any second thought. Without a historical and critical language that would unveil the contradictions and deceptions of this ultra-conservative and reckless administration, all political decisions were all too legitimate to even be questioned.

Schools have had enormous success graduating students who passively embrace the American doctrine that insulates U.S. history and society from the messy, less linear citizenship of a global transnational world. Despite the advent of critical pedagogy and education to raise consciousness, educational curricula are still embracing a nationalistic ideal that anaesthetizes students’ perception of the “other.” The current ‘crisis’ of history is, in reality, not a crisis of ignorance but rather a crisis of American society’s growing indifference toward the political culture of the United States. Public memory should be intimately connected with the question of democratic representation. That is, narratives of memory should necessarily enable people to read the world and position themselves in it, make the appropriate choices, and assume responsibility for themselves and the

societies they live in. Along these lines, the educational dimension of public memory has to bear relevance to students' lives and histories today. It should function as a stimulant that incites them to raise critical questions rather than paralyzing their thinking. As Butler argues in a different context, "if we paralyze our thinking, ... we will fail to take collective responsibility for a thorough understanding of the history which brings U.S. to this juncture. We will, as a result, deprive ourselves of the very critical and historical resources we need to imagine and practice another future."⁷⁷

The conceptualization and reproduction of a hegemonic notion of history as "given facts" and the subsequent shaping of public memory are an example, par excellence, of what Cornelius Castoriadis calls "heteronomy," that is, a condition in a society where the laws are imposed from the outside, from tradition, from God, nature, the laws of history or the market. In heteronomy, agency is reduced to accepting the social order as is, accepting that it is inevitable, to the extent that questioning or asking for explanations would mean aligning ourselves with something "unacceptable" in the given society. In this state of heteronomy, history functions as a model, a paradigm that brings a closure to both the past and the present. Hegemonic history in a state of heteronomy becomes a powerful tool that regulates the way people live and provides paradigms for mimesis rather than creating structures in which new social and cultural spaces are able to emerge. It works to conserve the past rather than as a means of insight into the past. History in heteronomy aids the creation and shaping of what is considered to be common sense to the degree that it imposes conceptions that are "accepted and lived uncritically"; it is its "'realistic,' materialistic elements which are predominant, the immediate product of crude sensation."⁷⁸ However, as Castoriadis suggests "reality

possesses no privilege, neither philosophical nor normative; the past has no more value than the present, and the latter exists not as a model but as material. The past history of the world is in no way sanctified – and it might be rather that it is damned, for it has shunted aside other, effectively possible histories.”⁷⁹ One could say that Castoriadis is really arguing for a historical present, a present that has not been stripped from its past histories but is not at the same time haunted by them.

The issue of remembering moves beyond “fixing” the type of historical illiteracy advocated by the conservative agenda, and beyond a process of establishing a touristic relationship to the past by freezing history in both time and space. According to Castoriadis it is not possible to “fix” the collapse of historical consciousness in our societies, or the absence of a project for the future, with intensive history classes. “We live in a society,” he writes, “that has instituted with the past a type of relationship that is entirely original and unprecedented: total disinvestment. . . . The relation to the past is, at best, touristic.”⁸⁰ Given the approach to history largely promoted by the conservative agenda, it is of paramount importance to question the versions of history that are deemed worthy to be taught in schools, as well as the broader cultural and political context that disarticulates the present from questions about the past. This disarticulation is inextricably related to the increasing irrelevance of politics in people’s lives as well as the erasure of the social “as a constitutive category for expanding democratic identities, social practices, and public spheres. In this instance, memory is not being erased as much as it is being reconstructed under circumstances in which public forums for serious debates have been eroded.”⁸¹

A critical analysis of history is perceived as being so irrelevant to the present that it blocks out, as Maclear points out “difficult questions . . . questions about how today’s social ‘order’ is constituted through commemorations that marginalize testimonies bearing witness to ongoing social crises and violence.” For example when, as Zinn recalls, “Jewish organizations lobbied against a Congressional recognition of the Armenian Holocaust of 1915 on the grounds that it diluted the memory of the Jewish Holocaust. Or when the designers of the Holocaust Museum dropped the idea of mentioning the Armenian genocide after lobbying by the Israeli government.” Zinn adds that “to remember what happened to Jews served no important purpose unless it aroused indignation, anger, action against all atrocities, anywhere in the world.”⁸² In other words, remembering becomes problematic when it privileges some histories at the expense of others, considering them less worthy or less atrocious.

Maclear suggests that “there is a tendency to see the ‘past’ as containable and unremittingly separate—as something that can be tidily hedged off in green-spaces and marked via satellite TV-time.”⁸³ Rearticulating the past with a view to making the present political is a great teaching challenge since it offers possibilities to make the past-present-future relationship meaningful.

Against a static and disarticulated view of the past we should position historical memory as a pedagogical force that according to Giroux, “makes claim on certain histories, memories, narratives and representations.”⁸⁴ In this instance, history is not the predetermined sequence of the determined, but “the emergence of radical otherness, immanent creation, [and] non-trivial novelty,”⁸⁵ and therefore remembering should rupture history’s successive character. Through the prism of history, remembering

should become less about commemorative practices and closure and more about knowing and creating spaces. History opens up the possibilities for a kind of transformative learning and an ensuing discourse of possibility. Under such conditions, the questions that need to be addressed would necessarily include: what is it in learning about other societies in other times that would enable us to understand our current historical social and cultural location, and how would this understanding or remembrance ultimately lead to our exercise of agency? How can remembering encompass a superficiality of celebration or mourning to become the axis of our transforming agency? How are we as agents to reinvent a language of critique for the past and possibility for the future that would unmask the conservative discourse and break the stagnancy of a contrived common sense?

Addressing the above questions implies viewing history as the means to an unlimited self-questioning of the individual, the society, and its institutions. Hence, we should adhere to Castoriadis's suggestion that in order to know other societies and historical epochs, we need to call into question "the institution which made us what we are and of the ways of thinking it has furnished us. What we know [about other societies] is heavily, perhaps exhaustively, conditioned by what we are as social individuals brought up in and fabricated by this particular society, our own."⁸⁶ Within this framework, he is correct when he stresses that no distinction should be made between the social and the historical since "the social makes itself and can make itself only as history; the social makes itself as temporality; and it makes itself in every instance as a specific mode of actual temporality," and "... the historical makes itself and can do so only as the

social; the historical is, in an exemplary and pre-eminent manner, the emergence of the institution and the emergence of another institution.”⁸⁷

The implications of Castoriadis’ remarks about a politics of public memory are of paramount value. Since the historical cannot be separated from the social, and the social is understood as a specific mode of actual temporality, history has an important relevance to the way we live our lives. In this instance, history is not disconnected from our living present but prompts us to look inside in order to understand who we are. No question on public memory can be addressed outside of the historical and, therefore, outside the social. Given the inseparable nature of the social and the historical, the current crises of contemporary societies are necessarily historical crises as well, crises that are shaped and reproduced through specific discourses that are also necessarily social and historical. By adopting this framework of analysis, historical illiteracy should be thus understood as the inability to make linkages that assist us in making sense of our sociohistorical present—and not the ability to memorize a standard, one-dimensional version of history.

Castoriadis’ understanding of the social as temporality raises a very important issue related to time and space in history. Unfortunately, as Herbert Marcuse so eloquently suggested, “the progressing rationality of advanced industrial society tends to liquidate, as an ‘irrational rest,’ the disturbing elements of Time & Memory.”⁸⁸ History, in its dominant version is always about the far remote past. It is conveniently positioned at a time so distant that it creates a comfort zone between the event and the individual. Occasionally, it gets so lost in the midst of time that it seems it should simply be left alone, that it has now gained a form of autonomy that disarticulates it from anything else. There is no call to question, or problematize history. The further we go back in time, the

safer it is to “remember.” However, the lessons of history should be unsettling; memory should not be perceived a refuge, but rather as an open arena of struggle. Unearthing and articulating dangerous memories should contribute to our notion of political agency in that it would force us to move beyond a depoliticized comfort zone. Historical narratives should be detached from their safe and permanent character and should become a counter-memory, an “unfinished, ephemeral process”⁸⁹ that involves opposing views and ideas that are subject to critique and questioning. A dynamic comprehension of history serves as a precondition for agency, ruptures the rigid forms of determinism, and acknowledges that “in this consciousness ... the very possibility of learning, of being educated resides.”⁹⁰

When history becomes distant or disconnected from the present, remembering becomes nostalgic instead of critical. For example, as Maclear notes, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemorations are about forgetting rather than remembering. It seems as if human beings rush to turn the page and turn their backs on history. However, Maclear insists that

These memories are still happening. They cannot be assigned dates or limits, which are not their own. These memories mark an excess. They test the alienating slumber of tradition, the exclusions of national communities, and call us to remember life’s boundaries—to rethink them. Heeding these unfolding testimonies from our multiple standpoints would require nothing short of a radical

transformation in the way we see, think, and feel our relationship to the past and otherness.⁹¹

The temporal/spatial dimension of history raises a number of questions. Why are history and remembrance so tied to the notion of temporal distance? What does it mean then to remember something that happened fifty years ago while conveniently forgetting its direct link to events taking place now? In other words, how can we remember, and commemorate, the Holocaust while simultaneously forgetting the current atrocities of Israel against the Palestinian people and the way Holocaust memory has enabled the Jewish State “to employ the tragic memories as the certificate of its political legitimacy, a safe-conduct pass for its past and future policies, and above all as the advance payment for the injustices it might itself commit”?⁹² In this sense, how can we mediate events through public memory and use disturbing memories to produce a kind of ethical referent for explaining the world without justifying it? How can disturbing memories serve as a translative tool for understanding the conditions that shape our present existence in the world? Furthermore, how can we conceptualize the sociohistorical in other societies without having to recur to some sort of transparent language of truth and without having to use our own imaginary cultural constructions as a canon? As Castoriadis so brilliantly argues,

The construction of its own world by each and every society is, in essence, the creation of a world of meanings, its social imaginary significations, which organize the (presocial, “biologically given”) natural world, instaurate a social world proper to each society (with its articulations,

rules, purposes, etc.), establish the ways in which socialized and humanized individuals are to be fabricated, and institute the motives, values, and hierarchies of social (human) life.⁹³

Social imaginary significations in Castoriadis' terms are situated historically and socially and should be understood as providing structures or representations that offer individuals selective modes of identification. If historically produced social imaginary significations offer modes of identification, then history is linked with agency to the extent that, according to Mouffe, "on the basis of different subjective points, suddenly there is some kind of crystallization into an identification that will make people act."⁹⁴ Historical literacy, as intervention in the world, positions public memory as a political and pedagogical project that unfolds identities, struggles, and desires that can mobilize the present. Public memory as a set of lived experiences, representations, histories, and identifications creates space for subjective or individual positions that are not fixed spatio-temporally. While we cannot speak about a common history as a set of common identifications and images shared by everyone, we can nevertheless talk about knowledge of the past that is open to all. Within this framework, agency "becomes more than the struggle over identification, or a representational politics that unsettles and disrupts common sense; it is also a performative act grounded in the spaces and practices that connect people's everyday lives and concerns with the reality of material relations of values and power."⁹⁵

Accordingly, for someone to really know about an event that happened in another society in another time, he or she would have to move beyond simply remembering or

recalling. It would be necessary to penetrate the façade of social-historical imaginary significations that vest each and every event with meaning. Viewed in this manner, remembering becomes a form of literacy, an intervention in the world that moves beyond a safety net to rupture contemporary meanings of socialization and humanization in order to understand a “social historical context” different from our own. Failing this would invariably limit our remembering, both past and present, to simply “masses of brute facts ... except insofar as they have been critically evaluated by us.”⁹⁶ This critical reevaluation should be part of every act of remembering and commemoration to ensure they acquire a transcendental importance.

Obviously, we cannot change what has been, but we can change how we gaze upon it, and knowing—instead of merely remembering—these histories, we can create new histories that are less exclusionary, less violent, less unjust, and more humane. It is in this rejuvenative examination and creation of what has occurred that our role as autonomous human beings should focus. By ceasing to be “tourists,” “visitors,” or “spectators,” and instead becoming authors of our own post-memory, we can begin raising questions about our agency and subjectivity. We can begin to question and explore these topics as more than a replication of the past. This relation to the past would enable us to locate ourselves in reference to memories and histories and thus make sense of our own contemporary reality. By contesting history’s memory we would create a new memory for ourselves. Along these lines, Horkheimer suggests that “fidelity to the old is not proved by repeating it but by giving it new expression in word and deed at each historical juncture.”⁹⁷ He adds that “[r]ecognition and relation to the past as present counteracts the functionalization of thought by and in the established reality. It militates

against the closing of the universe of discourse and behavior; it renders possible the development of concepts which de-stabilize and transcend the closed universe by comprehending it as a historical universe.”⁹⁸ This implies that we should not take history as a set of transparent events representing the Truth, but rather as a set of significations that lend themselves to exploration, rupture, redefinition and reappropriation. It also implies that “it is an error to imagine that civilization and savage cruelty are antithesis ... both creation and destruction are inseparable aspects of what we call civilization.”⁹⁹ Therefore history is essentially creation—creation and destruction—and it is incumbent upon us to decide whether to create or to destruct, because as autonomous beings we have the option to choose.

The value of “remembering” through history, that is, penetrating a different socio-historical construct lies not only on its shared, public nature, which makes it necessarily political and thus pedagogical, but also in its ability to serve as an antidote to the social and historical amnesia that results from the loss of agency. Reclaiming a politics of public memory necessarily implies reclaiming politics “as a progressive force for change within the cultural sphere.”¹⁰⁰ The real challenge is to reconstruct the pedagogical role of history, moving beyond the specialism of the discipline and creating a discourse that underlines the importance of keeping dangerous historical memories alive as a requirement for a substantive democracy. A critical perspective on public memory would consider both the politics of remembering and forgetting, and would lift the heavy yoke of positivism imposed by political will that presently distorts the manufacture of historical memories. This was eloquently captured by Ortega y Gasset when, in 1930, he wrote:

It may be regrettable that human nature tends on occasion to this form of violence, but it is undeniable that it implies a great tribute to reason and justice. For this form of violence is none other than reason exasperated. Force was, in fact, the “ultima ratio.” Rather stupidly it has been the custom to apply this expression ironically to methods of reason. Civilization is nothing other than the attempt to reduce force to being the “ultima ratio.” We are now beginning to realize this with startling clarity, because “direct action” consists of inventing the order and proclaiming violence as “prima ratio”[of the highest rationale] or strictly as “unica ratio”[the only rationale] It is the norm which proposes the annulment of all norms, which suppresses all intermediate processes between our purpose and its execution. It is the Magna Carta of barbarism.¹⁰¹

Since, according to Castoriadis, the “history of humanity is not the history of class struggle but the history of atrocities,”¹⁰² remembering these events or atrocities is necessarily instructive in that it calls for a language that would “test the boundaries of socially sanctioned remembrance and commemoration,”¹⁰³ and desanctify the sacredness of the past. The need for vocabularies that “can be appropriated by people in order to give some thought to their experience so that they can transform their relations of subordination and oppression”¹⁰⁴ {check this translation} is stressed by Mouffe when she

states that “we are facing a big deficit of new vocabularies, and we are at a moment in which the hegemony of neoliberal discourse is so strong that it seems as if there is no alternative.”¹⁰⁵ The creation of alternative vocabularies would necessarily have to be linked to specific historical meanings and should move beyond a type of historical literacy as simply understanding the status quo. The mere existence of an alternative language does not guarantee a political project. Alternative discourses do not imply something related to speech and writing but “something similar to what Wittgenstein meant by language games. It’s something composed of practices, institutions, discourse; it is something that is very material.”¹⁰⁶ Vocabularies should be understood not only “in terms of linguistics; it also means thinking about what kind of institutions and what kind of practices could be the ones in which new forms of citizenship could exist and what form of grassroots democracy could be conducive to the establishment of this kind of radical democratic hegemony.”¹⁰⁷ Such vocabularies would challenge established notions about the worth of history, the privileging of some histories and memories over others, the asymmetrical exchange value of events, the temporality and spatiality of histories, and the relevance of the past in our understanding of the present. Furthermore, they would open up the possibility for something different. This would require a language that is open, free from operationalism and functionality, a historical language that is part of our social imaginary significations. Thus, history as possibility must invariably be understood pedagogically so as to be relevant and meaningful. It is precisely the pedagogical and political nature of history that was succinctly understood by Paulo Freire who reminded us that “we know ourselves to be *conditioned* but not *determined*. It means recognizing that History is time filled with possibility and not

inexorably determined – that the future is *problematic* and not already decided, fatalistically.”¹⁰⁸

Against a backdrop where conservatives reduce history to mere consumption of fragmented facts, it is imperative that progressive and critical educators unveil the hegemonic mechanisms used to dehistoricize in an ongoing effort to paralyze thinking and human agency. Central to the mechanism of historical distortion is how language is used to manipulate realities and produce a fatalistic existence. Thus, language represents a fertile terrain of struggle that is rarely understood. That is why the issue of language emerges and re-emerges as a site of contestation where dominant ideologies always attempt to control vocabularies that could lead to the emergence of critical voices that are usually repressed. In the next chapter, I will analyze more concretely how the dehistoricizing process is invariably linked to questions of language and language policy.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POLITICS OF INTOLERANCE: U.S. LANGUAGE POLICY IN PROCESS

The United States has had no overt official language policy regulated by legal and constitutional declaration, yet it is the envy of many nations that aggressively police language use within their borders through explicit policies designed to protect the “purity” and “integrity” of the national language. They are envious that even without a rigid policy, the United States has managed to achieve such a high level of monolingualism and linguistic jingoism that speaking a language other than English constitutes a real liability. American monolingualism is part and parcel of an assimilationist ideology that decimated the American indigenous languages as well as the many languages brought to this shore by various waves of immigrants. As the mainstream culture felt threatened by the presence of multiple languages, which were perceived as competing with English, the reaction by the media, educational institutions, and government agencies was to launch periodic assaults on languages other than English. This was the case with American-Indian languages during the colonial period and German during the first and second world wars.

This covert assimilationist policy in the United States has been so successful in the creation of an ever-increasing linguistic xenophobia that most educators, including critical educators, have either blindly embraced the dominant assimilationist ideology or have remained ambivalent with respect to the worth of languages other than English. The

assumption that English is a more viable and pedagogically suitable language than others has completely permeated U.S. educational discourse. Even though the advent of critical pedagogy has produced important debate concerning cultural democracy, social justice, and alternative ways of viewing the world, the question of language is, at best, rarely raised and, at worst, relegated to the margins. With the exception of a handful of critical educators who have taken seriously the role of language in enabling oppressed students to come to subjectivity, most critical educators have failed to engage in rigorous analyses that would unveil the intimate relationship between language, power, and ideology and the ensuing pedagogical consequences. Take, for example, the extensive literature in multicultural education, including critical multiculturalism. These writings usually assume that the valorization of ethnic cultures will take place only in English, of course. Donaldo Macedo and Lilia Bartolome bluntly interrogated this assumption when they argued that

although the literature in multicultural education correctly stresses the need to valorize and appreciate cultural differences as a process for students to come to voice, the underlying assumption is that the celebration of other cultures will take place in English only, a language that may provide students from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds with the experience of subordination.¹⁰⁹

Given this pervasive assimilationist culture it is not surprising that even well-intentioned critical educators fall prey to a seemingly laissez-faire language policy. As a result, most educators, including critical educators, not only see nothing wrong with their

own monolingualism, they also give their tacit assent, sometimes unknowingly, to the reproduction of the English-Only ideology. Conversely, they fail to understand that the ongoing debate about the effectiveness of bilingual education springs from an enormous misconception about the *nature* and *functions* of language. Opponents of bilingual education, conservative educators, and advocates of movements that support national and linguistic homogeneity and assimilation, assign to language a mechanistic, technical character. Within this technical perspective, they propose the adoption of English-Only instruction as a remedy for the so-called “failure” of linguistic minority students. In addition, they claim that only through the mastery of English will non-English-speaking students be able to participate equally in mainstream society. However, the English-only remedy, or “English for the Children,” as it has euphemistically redefined itself lately, seems to cure neither the symptom nor the cause of the problem. Reducing the bilingual education debate to technical issues of “teaching language” constitutes an assault on non-English-speaking students’ cultural and ethnic identity, which is inextricably related to their language. It also veils the political and ideological nature of the issue. Viewing bilingual education as merely a technical language issue is, in reality, a complication rather than a simplification of the complex nature of the pedagogies required to address the specific linguistic and cultural needs of linguistic minority students. For language is not simply a technical system, a total of phonemes, morphemes, words and phrases, a code of signs of a particular form that enables members of a linguistic community to communicate. “Simple communication” implies linguistic interaction between humans in given historical, social, and cultural contexts. Humans are not machines or robots that simply produce grammatically correct phrases and exchange codified messages. Their

way of communicating not only reflects, but also produces and/or reproduces, specific ideologies, as well as the feelings, values, and beliefs that invariably define their historical and social location. Identity is mapped onto language. In other words, individuals draw from a pool of social practices available to them in order to interpret (written/oral) ‘texts.’ Texts, in turn, as Norman Fairclough notes, “negotiate the sociocultural contradictions ... and more loosely ‘differences’ ... which are thrown up in social situations, and indeed they constitute a form in which social struggles are acted out.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, language is not merely reflective, and, as explained so eloquently by James Donald, educators must understand its productive nature.

I take language to be productive rather than reflective of social reality. This means calling into question the assumptions that we, as speaking subjects, simply use language to organize and express our ideas and experiences. On the contrary, language is one of the most important social practices through which we come to experience ourselves as subjects. My point here is that once we get beyond the idea of language as no more than a medium of communication, as a tool equally available to all parties in cultural exchanges, then we can begin to examine language both as a practice of signification and also as a site for cultural struggle .¹¹¹

As Donald points out, linguistic functions are not restricted to simple reflection or expression. Language actually shapes human existence in a dual way. For one, it affects

the way humans are perceived through their speech. Secondly, individuals develop *discourses* that are formed through their identity in terms of class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, popular culture, and other factors. Discourses should be understood, according to Fairclough, as “use[s] of language seen as a form of social practice”¹¹² that is, as systems of communication shaped through historical, social, cultural, and ideological practices, which can work to either confirm or deny the life histories and experiences of the people who use them. Recognizing discourse as a social and ideological construct, J. P. Gee defines it as “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network.’”¹¹³ In what follows I want to argue that given the social and ideological nature of different functions and uses of language, the proposition that language is neutral or non ideological constitutes, in reality, an ideological position itself.

LANGUAGE AS IDEOLOGY

The non-neutrality of language is very well understood by Jacques Derrida, who argues that even “everyday language is not innocent or neutral. . . It carries with it not only a considerable number of presuppositions of all types, but also presuppositions inseparable from metaphysics, which, although little attended to, are knotted into a system.”¹¹⁴ I would argue that the “metaphysics” to which Derrida refers can also be understood as ideological nets. Even if the functions of language are reduced to “mere communication,” it still “presupposes subjects (whose identity and presence are constituted before the communication takes place) and objects (signified concepts, a

thought meaning) that the passage of communication will have neither to constitute, nor, by all rights, to transform.”¹¹⁵

As subjects of our language we possess a particular identity that is always crossed along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth. At the same time, as objects, we are marked by our language in terms of these same categories. In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu argues correctly that linguistic utterances or expressions are forms of practice and, as such, can be understood as the product of the relation between a linguistic *habitus* (a set of predispositions) and a linguistic market. Linguistic utterances are produced in particular contexts or markets, and they always involve the speaker’s socialized assessment of the market condition as well as the anticipations of this market. That is, all linguistic expression is a linguistic performance that addresses a particular market. For example, the U.S. linguistic market requires speakers to use so-called standard English, which is a valued and accepted linguistic variety for this particular market. A speaker of nonstandard English, e.g., Ebonics or “Spanglish,” is not an acceptable speaker in the same market to the extent that he or she speaks a variety that is “inappropriate” and devalued by the dominant society. The highly charged debate in Oakland, California, over the recommendation to use Ebonics as a vehicle of instruction among African-American students in the public schools stands as formidable testimony to the power of linguistic hegemony in the U.S. market. Even middle-class African-Americans like Jesse Jackson became vocal adversaries of such pedagogical propositions, indicating the extent to which they have internalized the linguistic and cultural oppression perpetrated against them. Those African-Americans who oppose Ebonics as a viable vehicle of instruction in schools not only reflect a high level of colonization of the mind,

but they also reinforce the yoke of the very colonialism that oppresses and represses their language--the most important signpost for cultural identity formation. Once African-Americans allow their minds to be colonized, they are unable to “examine language both as a practice of signification and as a site for cultural struggle--a mechanism which produces antagonistic relations between different social groups.”¹¹⁶

Linguistic oppression is not necessarily restricted to speakers of nonstandard varieties. An alleged speaker of standard English who, for example, has not received formal education may turn out to be a nonacceptable speaker at certain levels of linguistic interaction (e.g., at a corporate board meeting or in academia). Bourdieu illustrates this point by saying that individuals from upper-class backgrounds are endowed with a linguistic habitus--tied to a specific kind of cultural capital--that enables them to respond with relative ease to the demands of most formal or official occasions. This includes obviously the school curriculum. On the other hand, he adds, “Individuals from petit-bourgeois backgrounds must generally make an effort to adapt their linguistic expressions to the demands of formal markets. The result is that their speech is often accompanied by tension and anxiety, and by a tendency to rectify or correct expressions so that they concur with dominant norms.”¹¹⁷

The notion of “habitus” can also be understood as a form of “apprenticeship,” that is, socially learned discourse and behavior that can either deny or affirm access to particular social and cultural practices. Individuals who have been apprenticed through particular discourses to approach the dominant “norm” become competent speakers of the standard, while members who develop discourses that diverge from the “norm” are perceived as speaking nonstandard varieties. In either case, whenever language is

present, an invisible but omnipresent evaluation system is put into play. Therefore, the set of predispositions--namely the cultural capital (as different forms of cultural knowledge, including language knowledge) that shapes one's discourse--differs among individuals. Through linguistic interaction, evaluation functions not only to measure an individual's "value"--in terms of what the language actually "says" about the speaker--but also classifies individuals into preconceived groups identified as speaking nonacceptable languages for the respective markets. As a result, language evaluation is an inherent mechanism that is often used to dominate other groups culturally. This mechanism was used effectively by the colonial powers, and its legacy remains anchored in the current language policies of former colonial possessions, particularly in Africa, where the official languages with more currency are always the colonial languages. In some real sense, the language policy in the United States functions as a form of internal colonialism. Hence, even if non-English-speaking students are able to meet the needs of the U.S. linguistic market (in terms of mastering enough English to "simply communicate," as the proponents of English-only suggest), they will always be identified as the "other" Their language will always be marked by their color, race, ethnicity, and class and constructed within a politics of identity that situates subjects within an assimilation grid. Generally, groups of speakers who are typecast via the devaluation of their language tend to resort to resistance by protecting their only tools of opposing domination, namely language and culture. In short, their language will always be marked by their otherness, both in terms of ways they are perceived and the ways they see the world ideologically. Thus, it becomes obvious that the issue at hand is not language, but the right to be different in a supposed cultural democracy. Or as Fairclough accurately

notes “the problematic of language and power is fundamentally a question of democracy.”¹¹⁸ However, the issue here is not simply to acknowledge cultural diversity. As Homi Bhabha reminds us, cultural difference--as opposed to cultural diversity¹¹⁹-- should be understood as

the awareness that first of all you have the problem of difference, [but] not because there are many preconstituted cultures. [...] Cultural difference is a particular constructed discourse at a time when something is being challenged about power or authority. At that point, a particular cultural trait or tradition ... becomes the site of contestation, abuse, insult, and discrimination. Cultural difference is not the natural emanation of the fact that there are different cultures in the world. It's a much more problematic and sophisticated reproduction of a ritual, a habit, a trait, a characteristic ...

The question of cultural difference is not the problem of there being diverse cultures, and that diversity produces the difference. It is that each time you want to make a judgment about a culture or about a certain element within a certain culture in the context of some kind of social and political condition that puts pressure on that judgment, you are standing at that point in this disjunctive difference-making site.

Through the proposition that the English language is a passport which gives access to the higher cultural, political, and economic echelons of U.S. society, opponents of bilingual education attempt to hide their ongoing cultural invasion of other groups. Learning standard English will not iron out social stratification, racism, and xenophobia. Nevertheless, under the “naivete” pretext and the notion that language exists in a vacuum, conservative educators continue to disarticulate language from its social and ideological context by conveniently ignoring the following facts:

First, *meaning carried by language can never be analyzed in an isolated fashion.* Meaning is always historically constructed and it is a phenomenon of culture, a product of culture that is inherently ideological and, thus, political. Furthermore, as everything ideological possesses meaning, every sign--as a form of meaning--is also ideological. Following this line of argument, access to meaning must invariably involve a process whereby the reading of the world must precede the reading of the word. That is to say, to access the meaning of an entity, we must understand the cultural practices that mediate our access to the world semantic field and its interaction with the words’ semantic features.

Second, *language cannot exist apart from its speakers.* The transition from the Saussurean “langue” to “parole”¹²⁰ is possible only through the mediation of humans as agents of history who actively participate in the formation and transformation of their world. Human communication is unique; human language is “species specific” and cannot simply exist in a form of abstract signs. It is humans that give meaning to the signs, where the signifier becomes the signified. Language cannot exist as an autonomous code, detached from its speakers and contexts. By neglecting the role of

the speaker in his/her cultural, political, and ideological location and by ignoring the context in which communication takes place (the parameters set in the linguistic market), we fail to acknowledge that language, in all of its aspects, can by no means be either neutral or innocent. It is a social as well as a cultural marker.

Roland Barthes makes the claim that “to decipher the world’s signs always means to struggle with a certain innocence of objects.”¹²¹ This ostensible innocence of objects must be challenged in order to conceptualize language in its real dimension and to position the debate on bilingual education within its ideological and political context. The real context of the debate has nothing to do with language itself, but with what language carries in terms of cultural goods. As Bhabha reminds us, “there is some particular issue about the redistribution of goods between cultures, or the funding of cultures, or the emergence of minorities or immigrants in a situation of resources--where resource allocation has to go--or the construction of schools and the decision about whether the school should be bilingual or trilingual or whatever. It is at that point that the problem of cultural difference is produced.”¹²²

If Bhabha is correct, then linguists and educators need to move beyond the notion that language is a “treasure,” a common possession--what Bourdieu calls “the illusion of linguistic communism.”¹²³ The existence of a common language, a “code” open to use by everybody and equally accessible to all--as assumed by proponents of the English- only movement--is illusory. This assumption begs the question of why, from a sea of languages, “dialects,” “standards,” and “varieties,” standard English emerged as the most appropriate and viable tool of institutional communication. Application of the simple theorem that “language is identified with its speakers” would require that we find native

speakers of standard English, identify them, and analyze their “mother tongue.” I am convinced that no American is a native speaker of “Harvard English,” and definitely no French person has the discourse of the Académie Française as his or her mother tongue. If mastery of standard English is a prerequisite for enjoying the “common culture,” we first need to clarify what kind of standard English we are to teach and thus to speak. This statement seems to contradict itself, as some would argue that there are not many kinds of standard English. Standard English would literally be “clear” English, sterilized from any “familiarity,” “jargons,” or “unacceptable” forms that “dialects” often use, the kind of English used in the “Great Books.” In addition, the existence and use of a “colorless and odorless,” sterilized code implies that language is dehistoricized and that we, as humans, have no obvious markers of identity (such as ethnicity, culture, race, class, gender, or sexual orientation) reflected and refracted through our language. A more honest definition would address the following questions: “Who speaks the standard?” “Who has access to it?” “Where does one develop this particular discourse and through what process of apprenticeship?”

Those who assume a “common culture” invariably imply the existence of a common language. This is evident when Ronald Wardaugh asserts that “language is a *communal possession*, although admittedly an abstract one. Individuals have access to it and constantly show that they do so by using it properly. ... A wide range of skills and activities is subsumed under this concept of *proper use*.”¹²⁴ However, Wardaugh’s position raises a series of problems. If language is a common treasure among humans, how can we explain the fact that some languages are perceived as more “appropriate” or even more “civilized” than others? Why are there “standard” languages? Why are some

languages considered “well-chosen,” “sophisticated,” “elevated,” or “civilized,” while others are “familiar,” “uncouth,” “popular,” “patois,” “varieties,” “crude,” or “pidgin,”? If language is a communal possession, why is it that, although every human being possesses a language, not every language is perceived as “human”? For example, pidgin and creole languages are usually characterized as savage, corrupt, or bastardized forms of colonial languages. How is it that the use of human language can work towards dehumanizing certain cultural groups? If everybody has a language, how is it that some people, although they have a language, don’t have a voice, and as a result, need to be interpreted in order to emerge from their silenced culture? And if language is nothing but a communication tool, how can we explain the phenomenon of linguistic imposition of one language in preference to another, as well as the fact that some languages are held up as models to which others ought to aspire? If language is so innocent, why in most countries is linguistic policy part of governments’ self-interest? Why do people work and fight for language conservation and propagation throughout the world? If language is a shared good, how is legitimacy granted to the process of robbing some people of their own language? Moreover, who defines the “proper” use to which Wardaugh was referring? If speakers of a language have equal access to this illusionary common code, why do we not all speak the same variety--namely the standard?

These questions can be answered only if language is assigned to its real ideological and social context, and the mechanisms of linguistic and cultural oppression are unveiled. As Paulo Freire suggested, “For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority ... The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from

themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, talk like them.”¹²⁵

Since language is always intertwined with culture, cultural invasion is intimately tied to linguistic invasion. Language is culture. The language policy of the United States--which gave rise to the English-only movement and the more recent “English for the Children” idea, as well as the incessant debate over bilingual education--clearly illustrates the mechanism of linguistic and cultural hegemony in process. The dominant ideology requires a homogenized standard language and labels other forms as “dialects,” “jargons,” or “patois.” This process legitimizes the standard as the norm, and that, in turn, benefits a dominant order. When the standard becomes the norm, it serves as the yardstick against which all other linguistic varieties are measured. This evaluation process will invariably lead to forms of devaluations, which are almost always connected to factors of culture, ethnicity, class, gender, and race. Through this process, the dominant ideology works to devalue any form of “different” or “popular” language, or language of a “different color.” The same ideology labels African-American English as nonstandard and creates the perception that it is an incomprehensible dialect, occurring only in black ghettos, and that one can easily produce it by simply breaking the rules of standard English.¹²⁶ As mentioned earlier, the incredible intolerance for different varieties of language was clearly demonstrated a few years ago in the debate over Ebonics or black English. The mainstream mass media and public opinion totally rejected this form of linguistic and cultural “otherness” and manifested their inherent racism in their constant devaluation of Ebonics. In this context it is not an exaggeration to speak about linguistic hegemony to the extent that the development of a normative

discourse through standard English naturalizes for instance, ideologies and practices connected to white supremacy, racism and oppression. According to Fairclough, “naturalized discourse conventions are a most effective mechanism for sustaining and reproducing cultural and ideological dimensions of hegemony.¹²⁷”

Moreover, as language is identified with its speakers, it is obvious why oppressed and marginalized ethnic or cultural groups are perceived as speaking a nonstandard or “second- class” language, a “dialect” that does not deserve to be heard or taught and which is always associated with backwardness or savageness. It is also obvious why the speakers of those languages are perceived as not being “endowed” with the “linguistic habitus” required to address the needs of the U.S. linguistic market. The real target in the English-only debate is not the language spoken by these cultural groups but their humanity and cultural identity. The debate should be unmasked to reveal its inhumanity, unfairness, dishonesty, and outrageousness.

Identification of language with human culture sheds light on every attempt to impose English on students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This particular practice is not new; it has been implemented and tested for centuries through colonization. Integration into a single “linguistic community” is a product of political domination. Institutions capable of imposing universal recognition of a dominant language recognize this process as a means for establishing relations of linguistic domination and colonization.

As I have suggested, the existence of a common language also implies the existence of a common culture. Conversely, any reference to a common culture must

also imply the existence of an uncommon culture. Donaldo Macedo analyzed this dialectical relationship in *Literacies of Power*:

The conservative cultural agenda fails to acknowledge ... that the reorganization of 'our common culture' points to the existence of 'our uncommon culture,' for commonality is always in a dialectical relationship with uncommonality. Thus, one cannot talk about the centeredness of our 'common culture' without relegating our 'uncommon' cultural values and expressions to the margins, creating a de facto silent majority.¹²⁸

What supporters of the English-only” movement and opponents of bilingual education wish to achieve through the imposition of a “common culture” is the creation of a de facto silent majority. Since language is so intertwined with culture, any call for a “common culture” must invariably require the existence of a “common language.” In fact, the English-only proponents’ imposition of standard English as the only viable vehicle of communication in our society’s institutional and civic life, under the rubric of our “common language,” inevitably leads to the “tongue-tying of America.” This “tongue-tying” aids the conservative attempt to reproduce dominant cultural values by insisting, on one hand, on ever-present, collective myths that present a diverse origin, a diverse past, and diverse ancestors, and, on the other, on a common mother tongue and a necessary common, homogeneous, and indivisible future.¹²⁹ In general, movements that claim to promote ethnic, linguistic, and cultural integrity attempt, in reality, to impose cultural domination through linguistic domination, under the guise of an assimilative and

let's-live-all-together-happily model. This process invariably becomes a form of stealing one's language, which is like stealing one's history, one's culture, one's own life. As Ngugi Wa'Thiongo so clearly points out:

Communication between human beings is the basis and process of evolving culture. Values are the basis of people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this is carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation, and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next.¹³⁰

If Ngugi is correct, and I believe he is, all of society is permeated by language. Therefore, in a certain sense, everything is cultural; it is impossible to be part of a non-culture, as it is impossible to be part of a non-language. When a dominant group cuts out the possibility of language transmission from one generation to the next by imposing its own language under the guise of a "common language," it also cuts out the cultural sequence and, therefore, cuts people from their cultural roots. Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war? So far I have attempted to argue that, in reality, there is no such thing as a "common culture" in multicultural American society. In fact, it is an oxymoron to speak of a "common culture" in a cultural democracy. In truth, there was never a "common culture" in which people of all races and colors participated equally in the United States. Hence, the proposition "common culture" is a

euphemism that has been used to describe the imposition of Western dominant culture in order to eliminate, degrade, and devalue any different ethnic/cultural/class characteristics. It is a process through which the dominant social groups attempt to achieve cultural hegemony by imposing a mythical “common language.” In turn, language is often used by the dominant groups as a manipulative tool to achieve hegemonic control. As a result, the current debate over bilingual education has very little to do with language per se. The real issue that undergirds the English only movements is the economic, social, and political control by a dominant minority of a largely subordinate majority which no longer fits the profile of what it means to be part of “our common culture” and to speak “our common language.”

The English-only movements’ call for a “common language” does more than hide a pernicious social and cultural agenda. It is also part of an attempt to reorganize a “cultural hegemony,” as evidenced by the unrelenting attack of conservative educators on multicultural education and curriculum diversity. The assault by conservatives on the multiplicity of languages spoken in the United States is part of the dominant cultural agenda to both promote a monolithic ideology and to eradicate any and all forms of cultural expression that do not conform to the promoted monolithic ideology. This reproductive mechanism is succinctly explained by Henry Giroux, when he shows how the conservative cultural revolution’s

more specific expressions have been manifest on a number of cultural fronts including schools, the art world, and the more blatant attacks aimed at rolling back the benefits of civil rights and social welfare reforms constructed over the

last three decades. What is being valorized in the dominant language of the culture industry is an undemocratic approach to social authority and a politically regressive move to reconstruct American life within the script of Eurocentrism, racism, and patriarchy.¹³¹

What becomes clear in our discussion so far is that the current bilingual education debate has very little to do with teaching or not teaching English to non-English speakers. The real issue has a great deal more to do with the hegemonic forces that aggressively want to maintain the present asymmetry in the distribution of cultural and economic goods.

SCHOOLS AND THE REPRODUCTION OF LEGITIMATE LANGUAGE

An understanding of the nature and functions of language is crucial in order to locate areas of public life and institutions that actually reproduce the so-called legitimate language. Habermas correctly urges us “not to limit our critique on relationships of power to those institutions in which power is overtly declared, hence to political and social power only; we must extend it to those areas of life in which power is hidden behind the *amiable countenance of cultural familiarity*.”¹³² It is necessary to identify mechanisms of domination in order to make their ideology bare.

Educational institutions show this “amiable countenance of cultural familiarity,” while at the same time, playing a crucial role in the perpetuation of linguistic domination--the cultural reproduction inherent in any form of standardization process. Despite the widespread conservative notion that schools are, or at least should be, temples of neutrality and objectivity, the claim of neutrality hides a conservative view which

perceives knowledge as neutral and pedagogy as “a transparent vehicle of truth.” This perception “overlooks important political issues regarding how canons are historically produced, whose interests they serve as well as whose they do not serve, and how they are sustained within specific forms of institutional power.”¹³³

Schools as sites of struggle and contestation that reproduce the dominant culture and ideology, as well as what is perceived as legitimate language/knowledge, make use of their institutional power to either affirm or deny a learner’s language, and thus his or her lived experiences and culture. Additionally, schools are not simply static institutions that mirror the social order or reproduce the dominant ideology. They are active agents in the very construction of the social order and the dominant ideology. In that sense linguistic jingoism is constructed and spread within educational institutions through curricula, textbooks, etc. Educational institutions, in their symbolic and material existence, are so powerful that Althusser considers them to be “the dominant ideological State apparatus[es].”¹³⁴ He further explains that “no other apparatus has the obligatory audience of the totality of the children in the capitalistic social formation, eight hours a day, for five or six days out of seven.”¹³⁵ While Althusser’s position collapses into a theory of domination that does not allow for any type of resistance or radical forms of pedagogy, he is correct when he insists that the meaning of schools should be understood within the context of ideological state apparatuses.

Schools, throughout history, have directly helped to devalue popular modes of expression, as well as “varieties” or “dialects.” They have also served to elevate the standard language as the most clear and appropriate variety. This process has been implemented partly through the invisibility, falsification, or marginalization of

“otherness,” which is usually subsumed under the “common” rubric. Schools as sites where legitimate knowledge and language are reproduced have promoted a “deficit view” of learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, managing thus to impose a linguistic norm that defines a socially recognized criterion of linguistic “correctness.” As sites of cultural reproduction, schools have constantly denied the experiences of specific groups of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making sure to transmit what counts as knowledge, namely Western culture, so as to ensure national assimilation and preserve Western dominance in the curriculum. Through particular educational practices, the doctrinal system in the United States manages to promote the instruction of English as a necessary prerequisite in order to participate “equally” in the mainstream society. In reality, this requirement functions invariably as a barrier that prevents non-English speakers from having equal access to education and knowledge. This barrier prevents non-English speakers and other subordinate cultural groups from having access to the higher economic and social echelons of our society. It is important to point out that knowledge is not exclusive to English and that bodies of knowledge can be both produced and learned in other languages. To do otherwise is to consider English as education in itself. The facile English-only solution is illusionary to the extent that, in the mainstream, non-whites and students who belong to subordinate classes are deprived of access to quality education¹³⁶ Educational policy in the United States reflects an implicit economic need to socialize immigrants and members of oppressed groups to fill necessary but undesirable, low-status jobs.¹³⁷ In reality, instead of the democratic education the United States .. claims to have, what is in place is a sophisticated colonial model of education designed primarily to train state functionaries and commissars who

work for private ideological interests while denying access to millions. The result is to further exacerbate the equity gap already victimizing a great number of so-called minority students. The majority of whites who do not speak standard English because of their class position are also victims of this model of U.S. democracy. They are strategically taught that they belong to the norm, though they themselves are exploited, excluded, and devalued.

In addition to the function of cultural reproduction, educators should pay closer attention to the cultural production that takes place within schools--a process that affirms the individual's daily, lived experiences and which could tend toward "collective self-determination." As Giroux so eloquently argues, "It is essential ... to move from questions of social and cultural reproduction to issues of social and cultural production, from the question of how society gets reproduced in the interest of the capital and its institutions to the question of how the 'excluded majorities' have and can develop institutions, values, and practices that serve their autonomous interests."¹³⁸

It is only through cultural production (and this includes one's own language behaviors) that one can come to subjectivity. This is a process through which linguistic minority students, by speaking their own language, gain authorship of their world and are enabled to move from their present object to a subject position. However, this movement cannot occur unless progressive educators acquire critical tools that would facilitate the development of a thorough understanding of the mechanisms employed by the dominant culture in the reproduction of those ideological elements that devalue, disconfirm, and subjugate cultural and linguistic minority students. It is only "through an understanding of hegemony and cultural invasion, [that] critical bicultural educators can create

culturally democratic environments where they can assist students to identify the different ways that domination and oppression have an impact on their lives.”¹³⁹ Bilingual/multicultural education has to be situated within a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform, and reproduce meaning. Bilingual and multicultural education must also be seen as a medium that constitutes and affirms the historical and existential moments of lived experience which produce a subordinate or a lived culture.

Within this framework of action, language cannot be seen only as a neutral tool for communication. It should be viewed as the only means through which learners make sense of their world and transform their world in the process of meaning-making. In the meaning-making process, both subordinate students and their teachers need to know that standard English is “the oppressor’s language yet I need it to talk to you.”¹⁴⁰ As bell hooks so painfully understands, standard English “is the language of conquest and domination ... it is the mask which hides the loss of so many tongues, all those sounds of diverse, native communities we will never hear.”¹⁴¹

All those teachers who consider themselves agents of change and who struggle to create a more democratic culture need a thorough understanding of the role of standard English--even when minority students must acquire it in order to capture its dominance and re-create it as a counter-hegemonic force. . Their struggle needs to highlight how standard English is used “as a weapon to silence and censor.”¹⁴² In order to avoid the tongue-tying, silencing, and censorship that the use of standard English creates, we need to heed the analysis of language and its role in sabotaging democracy as recounted by June Jordan:

I am talking about majority problems of language in a democratic state, problems of a currency that someone has stolen and hidden away and then homogenized into an official “English” language that can only express non-events involving nobody responsible, or lies. If we lived in a democratic state our language would have to hurtle, fly, curse, and sing, in all the common American names, all the undeniable and representative participating voices of everybody here. We would not tolerate the language of the powerful and, thereby, lose all respect for words, per se. We would make our language conform to the truth of our many selves and we would make our language lead us into the equality of power that a democratic state must represent.¹⁴³

CHAPTER FOUR

RECLAIMING THE LANGUAGE OF POSSIBILITY: BEYOND THE CYNICISM OF NEOLIBERALISM

I happen to believe that questions are hardly ever wrong; it is the answers that might be so. I also believe, though, that refraining from questioning is the worst answer of all.

*Zygmunt Bauman, In Search of Politics*¹⁴⁴

In the preceding chapters I attempted to unveil the ideology behind the present hegemony of English and its implications for education, language planning, and cultural autonomy. In this chapter, I argue that beyond the importance of understanding how other national languages are steadily losing ground to English in important political and economic spheres of communication, it is of paramount value to analyze the language of neoliberal ideology—an ideology which permeates, in a stealth-like manner, even those national languages of countries that have bravely resisted the domination of English within their national boundaries. Ironically, the same ideology that has catapulted English into its present hegemonic state has found widespread acceptance, at least among the dominant sectors, in societies that correctly fight for linguistic sovereignty. In other words, while many nation-states denounce the imposition of English upon their civic, cultural, and institutional life, they blindly embrace the very language of neoliberalism that undergirds the ideology behind the present worldwide hegemony of English.

There is much talk currently on different crises that American society is facing: the crisis of values, the crisis of the economy, the crisis of politics, the crisis of youth, the

crisis of democracy, and the crisis of the public, among others. The use of the word “crisis” in these discourses points to a sense of loss or absence, an upcoming nihilism, or a notion of cynicism that, in turn, creates a sense of fatalism and brings about a closure. Crisis in the aforementioned examples calls for a *telos* that would neatly “arrange” all the problems and “close the case.” This view of crisis has manifested itself through conservative works of neoliberal utopianism that profess the “end of ideology,” the “end of history,” the “end of racism,” or the “end of politics.”¹⁴⁵ However, “crisis” by definition implies an opening up of possibilities and meanings. As Cornelius Castoriadis suggests, borrowing a concept from Hippocrates, a “crisis” is a moment of decision. As a medical term, the crisis of an illness is the paroxysmal moment that will result either in the death of the patient or the beginning of the healing process, due to a beneficial reaction produced by the very crisis.¹⁴⁶ Within this framework, in a given crisis, not only is there an opening of possibilities, but there are also opposing elements that struggle with each other. However, what characterizes our contemporary societies is the increasing “disappearance of social and political conflicts.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, we are not witnessing a real crisis to the extent that a crisis would signify a rupture in institutions and meanings or the opening up of questions for an ongoing dialogue. On the contrary, what we are witnessing is a hypnosis of dissident discourses, a “crisis of critique,” that is, a degradation, trivialization, and closure of meanings that shut down any and all questions. At the same time, the very language is being redefined to serve an operationalist role designed to suffocate dissent and to assume a strictly functional process of endorsing the dominant market discourse. I use the term “neoliberalism” to refer to the economic, political, and cultural practices that give primacy to the market

order where profit and consumption are the defining factors of any reality. It is well understood here that neoliberalism as political ideology shares a lot with both conservatism and neoconservatism and liberalism in that they all embrace capital as the leading force of societies. Respectively there are strong nuances of conservatism and neo-conservatism in the policies discussed in this chapter, but I will be using the term ‘neoliberalism’ to refer to all policies related to the capital’s economic control of the periphery and the entire world and the uncontrolled opening of the markets with the goal of accumulating more capital to the hands of the few.

Against this neoliberal backdrop, instead of having choices that would multiply conditions for constructive debate concerning public education, we are witnessing a “crisis of critique” and a closure of language meanings that are symptomatic of a deeper generalized crisis in political culture, society, and democracy. Hence, the debate should necessarily be positioned and understood within the framework of advanced capitalism and the current neoliberal (dis)order. These factors not only trivialize and distort public discourses as part of their depoliticizing function,¹⁴⁸ but they also generate and legitimize their own “transparent” and “natural” discourse that serves as a vehicle for circulating their myths and ideologies. In this process, linguistic mediations are lost and, according to Herbert Marcuse, language “tends to express and promote the immediate identification of reason and fact, truth and established truth, essence and existence, the thing and its function.”¹⁴⁹ The current “crisis of critique” signals the cessation of questioning and the suffocation of critique. This general failure to question is a direct by-product of the neoliberal ideology, which has managed to produce a powerful myth about itself that it does not need to be interrogated. It has acquired, in a sense, the symbolic power to

transcend history in that it has brought closure to the most pressing questions of our times. Neoliberal politics pretends to provide the answers for concepts and ideas that should remain perpetually open and be constantly questioned and redefined if they are to contribute to a vital political culture and a process of democratization. Nothing is more threatening to a democracy and the political existence of its citizens than the illusion that all questions have been answered, that there are no meanings to struggle over, that there is no need for meaning mediation because words are transparent and speak for themselves. If neoliberalism has managed in part to achieve that level of “transparency,” “naturalness,” and “inevitability,” it has done that through a powerful discourse of “universality” and “Truth.” As Zygmunt Bauman has observed, “[w]hat ... makes the neoliberal worldview sharply different from other ideologies--indeed, a phenomenon of a separate class--is precisely the absence of questioning, its surrender to what is seen as the implacable and irreversible logic of social reality.”¹⁵⁰

In an era of triumphant neoliberalism, the strictly imposed corporate language works not only to reflect the prevailing market order and its ideologies, but also to produce a positivistic discourse that obliterates public concerns about the social and the political. In other words, as Marcuse has noted, “The functionalization of language expresses an abridgement of meaning which has a political connotation. The names of things are not only ‘indicative of their manner of functioning,’ but their (actual) manner of functioning also defines and ‘closes’ the meaning of the thing, excluding other manners of functioning.”¹⁵¹ This closure of meaning points to a gradual extinction of language as a means of making sense of the world, or as a public good, inextricably connected to human agency, identity, and political existence. The obliteration of new

possibilities in meanings and the imposition of a dominant norm for both producing and understanding language cannot be understood outside the reigning positivism and rationality in advanced capitalist industrialized societies, where “the market mechanism is the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment.”¹⁵²

The triumph of positivism and rationality in neoliberal discourse is nowhere more obvious than in the appropriation and redefinition by the capitalist market ideology of concepts such as “freedom,” “democracy,” and “community,” among others. These terms should serve as both requirements and tools to human agency, involving, according to Larry Grossberg “relations of participation and access, the possibilities of moving into particular sites of activity and power, and of belonging to them in such a way as to be able to enact their powers.”¹⁵³ –Instead, they are trivialized in an economic jargon that uses them and celebrates them in order to maintain and serve its own world order and ideological purposes. What follows is an analysis of neoliberalism’s language and the effects it has in limiting public participation in a democratic society. In particular, I will consider how language works to disconnect effects from corporate policies, how it universalizes the market in ways that make it seem natural and self-evident, and finally, how it creates an illusion that a multiplicity of choices exist that are open to everybody.

At this juncture, the commodified language becomes both the tool and the end of neoliberal ideologies that operate in order to “guarantee” their aggressive practices. Their effects include the erasure of the welfare state, the shrinking of the public sector, the transfer of public wealth to private hands, and the minimalization of the functions of the state, a process that jeopardizes its civilizing and helping functions.¹⁵⁴ Neoliberalism imposes a logic whereby the state gives up its social functions to undertake a surveillance

and policing role, a logic that suggests a borderless world not for labor, but for capital¹⁵⁵. Against this landscape, I provide a discussion about how it would be possible to reclaim a decommodified language, a language *of* and *for* the social, a political language that would serve as both a means and a requirement of human agency and of individual and collective autonomy.

THE FUNCTIONS OF NEOLIBERALISM

To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment... would result in the demolition of society. ... Robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as the victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime and starvation.

Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*¹⁵⁶

In 1944 Karl Polanyi made the above prophetic statement in his book, *The Great Transformation*. Unfortunately, over fifty-five years after Polanyi's insightful remarks, the reality attests to the truth of his statement. We are currently witnessing the domination of a market economy that has, in turn, generated a "market society." Within this new market society, the functions of the state have been largely redefined, the public good has been replaced by consumer goods, the social has no language to be discussed, and the political is increasingly becoming depoliticized. Politics is becoming more and more irrelevant to people's lives, and it has been reduced to the act of voting every four years. According to Castoriadis, we are witnessing in the occidental world "a type of individual that is not anymore the type of individual of the democratic society or of a

society where we can struggle for more freedom, but rather a type of individual who is privatized, who is closed into his/her small personal milieu and who has become cynical regarding politics.”¹⁵⁷ Neoliberal practices have drained politics of its vitality and force, turning it into “a metaphor for the entrepreneurial self as the determined, autonomous subject who is able to put his or her practices into effect.”¹⁵⁸ Henry Giroux’s work is instrumental at this point, especially his claim that what is lost in this perspective are “important questions about the varied sites, practices, and forms of power that give meaning to how politics is shaped, deployed, and played out on a daily basis.” He concludes along these lines that “politics imitates the market to the degree that it highlights the importance of struggle but ignores the ethical implications of such struggles.”¹⁵⁹

Within the confines of a market-driven politics, the market itself becomes tautonymous to democracy, embracing a “convergence dogma” whereby market and democracy converge. This becomes succinctly clear in the dominant discourse of U.S. foreign policy. Generally, freedom is evoked when issues of trade and markets are invoked. We hear terms such as free trade and free market when discussing the democratization of a given country, but human rights and social justice, which should be at the center of any democratic proposal, are often relegated to the margins. The discourse around human rights is used only as a cover to penetrate other countries’ economies and/or to legitimize military interventions abroad. The United States has made capitalism into an exportable good, a commodity labeled “democratization,” and it has been trying to export it all around the world. However, democracy cannot be exported. It is both a regime and a process intimately tied to specific cultural, political, and historical

conditions, and it should necessarily be instituted by and for the people. The notion of “exporting democracy” becomes just another ideological trick to veil the imposition of the neoliberal order and the quest for new markets. Thus, democracy is usually understood as being synonymous with the opening up of markets and with the removal of government constraints. Absent from this “market democracy” is any discussion that would unveil the deeply political character of the markets. However, as Colin Leys states, “Contrary to the impression given by neoliberal ideology and neoclassical economics textbooks, markets are not impersonal or impartial but highly political.”¹⁶⁰ Markets are systems of rules and regulations that are linked in complex ways to other markets, and they are embedded directly or indirectly in a vast range of other social relations that are inherently unstable.

Acknowledging the market’s political character would allow us to talk about the effects and consequences that this politics has on real people’s lives. A case in point is the recent bankruptcy of Kmart, the nation’s third largest discount retailer. The media coverage only addressed the corporate money loss, focused on Kmart’s competition with the rival WalMart chain, and analyzed ways the corporation could be revitalized. While Kmart was filing for bankruptcy (or “reorganization,” as they euphemistically call it on their corporate website), the former CEO and chairman was leaving with \$9 million in his pocket. (Kmart got \$2 billion from a federal judge in new financing to pay employees and restock the shelves.) Unfortunately, in order to “reorganize” this badly administered, bankrupt business, the company had to close down 320 stores and lay off 22,000 workers--the third-largest layoff in the retail industry since Sears, Roebuck & Co. laid off 50,000 workers in January 1993. Layoffs (also referred to as downsizing) translate into

people losing their jobs, and that is inextricably related to housing, food, health insurance, and so forth. The TV networks certainly did not broadcast profiles of the workers that became unemployed. They did dedicate a great deal of time to talking about the CEOs and the public-relations people, as if the 22,000 employees were invisible. What was more important in the public discourse was that the closings would free up about \$550 billion in cash for Kmart to use to revamp existing stores, as if Kmart as a corporate entity was in more need than the people who made it work. Much discussion was also dedicated to the services and products of the Kmart chain, as well as the role of Martha Stewart, the queen of home products, in revitalizing Kmart culture. There was little possibility that the former Kmart CEO would starve from hunger--the average corporate CEO was paid as much as 42 factory workers in 1980, 122 factory workers in 1989, and 209 factory workers in 1996.¹⁶¹ Absent from this discourse was the fate of the people working in the 320 Kmart stores that were closing down. These were most likely people who worked for minimum wage and supported families of three or more.¹⁶² What kind of impact did the layoffs have on their lives? How was their health insurance affected (if they had any)? What about their housing situations? Their daily meals? Their kids' education? And this happened in a country where after massive layoffs and union-busting, less than 15 percent of workers are unionized. Neoliberal discourse erases the issues just as it depoliticizes the conditions that produce them.

Another example of how language works to disconnect corporate policies from their effects is the coverage of a strike in New England at the Interstate Bakery Corp., famous for producing the popular Twinkies. According to the local TV network's three-minute report on the issue (called "an obscure labor dispute" by the Boston Globe¹⁶³),

employees in the factory were going on strike, and the problem that emerged was that consumers were going to be deprived of their favorite snacks. The report took great pains to show footage of grocery stores where the shelves were empty of Twinkies and to interview frustrated consumers who could not believe that there were no Twinkies on the shelves. Suddenly, Twinkies became a collectible with a very important exchange value. However, what we never found out from the report was why the employees were on strike. What were their demands on the corporation that owns 53 percent of the bread market share in New England? We also never found out how the employees' demands were going to be met by the employer, nor what the outcome of the strike would mean for their wages, living conditions, and civil existence. In this case language worked to hide the true issue--the fact that the workers were struggling for their rights and had demands that would make their lives and the lives of their families better. Instead, it emphasized only the fact that a certain commodity was disappearing. People can live without some commodities or products; they cannot live without decent wages and without the solidarity of other people. When the consumer good has a higher exchange value in the politics of public discourse than the quality of human life, there is something very dangerous that threatens the roots of a so-called democracy. Language works to neutralize this danger and make it invisible.

It is necessary to make these linkages between economic events and the human consequences because there is a clear dichotomy in neoliberal ideologies between economy and policies. In other words, neoliberalism presents itself as an economic doctrine that professes free markets, deregulation, and freedom from government restrictions and trade controls, disguised under a positivistic economist discourse of

“naturalness” and “inevitability.” At the same time it neglects to talk about the effects of this economic theory on real people or the social costs of implementing such an economic order. This neglect has given rise to alarming poverty indices, as in the case of the total collapse of the Argentinian economy. The Argentinian middle class has practically disappeared, and over 49 percent of the population has now joined the ranks of the poor, all in the name of freedom and democracy. Deriving its social force from the political and economic power of those whose interests it defends, neoliberal politics tends to favor separation between the economy and social realities. This allows those interests to construct, in reality, an economic system corresponding to Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical description of it as “a kind of logical machine, which presents itself as a chain of constraints impelling the economic agents.”¹⁶⁴ In this way, language masks human suffering by diverting attention away from the lived experience of the people involved, directing it instead towards market causes.

The separation between the economic and the social is very much part of a neo-liberal agenda whereby increasing social inequalities, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and human suffering are perceived as individual problems or issues of character. Discussion centers around transactions, interested parties, and agreements, or around skills, competition, and choices, and these topics are largely presented as if happening in a laboratory vacuum. Absent from this discussion are questions about who is affected by these transactions (certainly the so-called “interested parties” do not include the unemployed, welfare recipients, or people working on minimum wage), or what these transactions or policies are costing in terms of jobs, unemployment, human suffering, sickness, suicide, alcoholism, drug addiction, and so forth. By using words

such as “interested parties” or “consumers,” instead of “people” or maybe “citizens,” neoliberalism conveniently positions subjectivities in an absolute apathy and inertia regarding any political project. Being a “consumer” already presupposes that you have a range of options and that you have the means to consume. It does not presuppose that you can question your very identity as a consumer, nor that this very identity really strips you of any form of agency that would call into question this reductionist notion of citizenship. The neoliberal “economic challenge,” which supposedly invites everybody to choose from a pool of “equal opportunity,” ignores the lines of class, race, gender, education, age, disabilities, and so forth. It also typecasts people as skilled or unskilled workers, educated or uneducated, successful or not successful, while it leaves unchallenged the already existing inequality inherent in the system that builds skills. It obscures the fact that choice may not be the same for people who do not have the resources to materialize these choices, in a society that largely promotes injustice and inequality of choices, opportunities, and resources.

The “crisis of critique” becomes obvious in the cases described above, where no questions are asked about the meaning of “options” and “choices,” nor about the neoliberal notion of “freedom” that uses language to block important questions from being asked. For instance, what does a call for more economic freedom really mean in societies where the vast majority of people live in dire poverty? How does it affect people who do not own or manage corporations, that is, the vast majority of population? How is the inclusive “we” used in neoliberal discourse as a transparent subject that corresponds to an equal, homogeneous, and unproblematic sociohistorical entity? What are the functions of the state that neoliberalism wants to eliminate, and what is their

impact on citizens? Does the elimination of these functions also apply to “corporate welfare”?

These questions need to be connected to a context where the market is expanding uncontrollably in all sectors of human life, where everything is becoming privatized, and where the state is giving up little by little its helping and welfare functions. The neoliberal demand for a minimal state threatens those civilizing and welfare functions of the state that “promote the adjustment of people to rapidly changing conditions and enable them to live together in a relatively peaceful way,” or that “directly promote the well-being of people.”¹⁶⁵ Instead, within a corporate reality, the state adopts solely a policing and surveillance role. It becomes, according to Beck, “a state that chips away at habeas corpus or trial by jury, increases prison sentences, steps up border patrols, and prepares for terrorism as the weapon of the weak.”¹⁶⁶ For instance, according to Bourdieu, in the United States, “the state is splitting into two, with on the one hand a state which provides social guarantees, but only for the privileged, who are sufficiently well-off to provide themselves with insurance, with guarantees, and a repressive policing state for the populace.”¹⁶⁷

As the state is weakened in terms of its welfare functions and ceases to impose rules upon the market frenzy--not to mention corruption, as demonstrated by the collapse of Enron--its power is transferred and diffused, losing its political nature and becoming a “meta-power.”¹⁶⁸ As a result, the state becomes depoliticized. The agenda for political choices today can hardly be politically constructed, as there is an ongoing separation of power from politics.¹⁶⁹ Power now has a less and less constrained mobility, is no longer geographically tied to any location, and is not contained within nation-states. On the

contrary, power is extraterritorial, it flows. This extraterritorial conception reverses the logic of the traditional understanding of power, violence, and authority. Capital is exported and circulated in international markets, and, contrary to neoliberal claims that there is no source of power, capital and the market become the sole sources of power. The difference is that the locus of this power cannot necessarily be set geographically, since as Beck argues, “the economy has broken out of the cage of territorially and nationally organized power conflict and has acquired new power moves in digital space.”¹⁷⁰ As a consequence, the market is more mobile; it is not tied to a specific geographic locus and therefore can be disposed globally as it is controlled and managed by transnational corporate powers. The extraterritoriality of power necessarily affects our understanding, as the source of decision-making and policy-implementation becomes invisible and its effects become inevitable.

THE DISCOURSE OF INEVITABILITY OR THE INEVITABILITY OF DISCOURSE

The neo-liberal apotheosis of the market confuses *les choses de la logique avec la logique des choses*, while the great ideologies of modern times, with all their controversies, agreed on one point: that the logic of things as they are defies and contradicts what the logic of reason dictates. Ideology used to set reason *against nature*; the neo-liberal discourse disempowers reason through naturalizing it.

Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics*¹⁷¹

It is neither a coincidence nor a natural phenomenon that while neoliberal policies have been directly or indirectly detrimental to the lives of millions of people, neoliberalism still remains in people's minds an important currency and a viable and "successful" doctrine, even for those who have mostly suffered the consequences of its catastrophic effects. This happens largely because neoliberal ideologies have been legitimized and disseminated through a well-organized network of diffusion that has succeeded in presenting the neoliberal order as the inevitable effect of an economic doctrine. This network of diffusion has functioned to establish neoliberal ideologies along the lines of what Terry Eagleton calls "strategies of legitimization." In this sense, the neoliberal framework has been promoting "beliefs and values congenial to it," and it has been naturalizing and universalizing such beliefs, producing thus the discourse of self-evidence and inevitability. It has been denigrating ideas that might challenge it, and it has been excluding rival forms of thought. Finally, it has been obscuring social reality by "suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of [neoliberal] ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions."¹⁷²

If we take a closer look at neoliberal discourse, we will realize that it is deeply rooted in a language of universalism and inevitability that "naturalizes" its premises. As Susan George notes, one explanation for the triumph of neoliberalism and the economic, political, social, and ecological disasters that go with it is that neoliberals "have created a huge international network of foundations, institutes, research centers, publications, scholars, writers, and public-relations hacks to develop, package, and push their ideas and doctrine relentlessly."¹⁷³ One of the responsibilities of this network is to create a

language that has the force to justify the unjustifiable, to produce a “strong discourse” that functions as a perfect representation of reality. George insists that millions of dollars spent on think tanks are not a waste, because “they have made neoliberalism seem as if it were the natural and normal condition of humankind. No matter how many disasters of all kinds the neoliberal system has visibly created, no matter what financial crises it may engender, no matter how many losers and outcasts it may create, it is still made to seem inevitable, like an act of God, the only possible economic and social order available to us.”¹⁷⁴ The sense of inevitability that characterizes neoliberal societies makes them examples par excellence of “heteronomy,”--the condition where it is believed that the laws and institutions of a society have been inevitably put in place by somebody or something that lies outside the civil society. According to Castoriadis, societies should be autonomous, that is, self-instituted historically through the dynamics and politics that exist within them with the actual and active participation of people. However, in the case of heteronomy (<heteros>: different, <nomos>: law), society is seen as a creation given by somebody else: the ancestors, gods, the God, the “laws of history” (in a Marxist sense), or by capital and the markets (as is the case with neoliberalism and capitalism). The institution of society is perceived as being given by a metaphysical entity, something that exists outside civil societies, something that is “stronger” than people. Given the neoliberal political context, questioning the laws and institutions of a given society is tantamount to questioning God or some sort of established authority that is uncritically embraced by the society in question. Heteronomy obliterates questioning and dissent, because its institutions are reduced to common sense that is naturalized in people’s minds. Heteronomy functions, therefore, in conditions of closure of meaning. In a

capitalist reality, heteronomy functions to establish and perpetuate the myth that the market is the sole director of human societies and that it creates the institutions and the laws. This is supposedly entrenched in the “nature” of human beings, and this biological nature is seen as coinciding with an economic order. For instance, Milton Friedman’s proposal is a case in point. He suggests that human freedom and economic freedom are very much part of human genetics to the extent that “we are all of us imbued with them. They are part of the very fabric of our being.”¹⁷⁵ What is particularly insidious in Friedman’s discourse is brilliantly captured by Bourdieu, who argues that “this fatalistic doctrine gives itself the air of a message of liberation, through a whole series of lexical tricks around the idea of freedom, liberation, deregulation, etc.--a whole series of euphemisms or ambiguous uses of words ... designed to present a restoration as a revolution, in a logic which is that of all conservative revolutions.”¹⁷⁶ The euphemisms function to strip concepts like freedom, equality, community, or democracy of the very meanings that would put them at the core of a democratic and autonomous (as opposed to heteronomous) society and the exercise of human agency.

THE CASE OF FREEDOM

In the culture, ideology, and politics of neoliberalism, the concept of “freedom” has a central role. According to Henry Giroux, “Freedom is negatively reduced to freedom from government restraint, and the rights of citizenship translate into the freedom to consume as one chooses.” However, the freedom to demand free education, free housing, and free health care is met with an aggressive assault, since “[t]he state ... becomes a threat to freedom, particularly the freedom of the market, as its role as

guardian of the public interests is actively disassembled, though its powers are still invoked by dominant interests to ensure their own privileges, such as free trade agreements, government subsidies for business, and strike ‘negotiations.’”¹⁷⁷

In order to redefine the concept of freedom, neoliberal ideologies produce a powerful discourse whose effects are so pervasive that it becomes almost impossible for anybody to even imagine freedom outside of the market order. Therefore, anybody interested in the process of the production and dissemination of such discourse should necessarily address the following questions: What is so powerful about the so-called “freedom to consume” that makes the discourse on neoliberal freedom so appealing and natural? How does neoliberal discourse manage to become so powerful as to appear inevitable? How are choices and opportunities materialized on the basis of available resources? Are the 30 million Americans who go hungry every day really free to choose? How is it that individual and collective freedoms collapse into the freedom of the markets? Does the anthropomorphism of the “Market” (the notion that the Market has a body, character, or human qualities) make it easier for individuals to relate to it on a personal level? How can we redefine the notion of freedom as part of our human agency?

Bourdieu suggests that the current market discourse gains its strength from the fact that “that there is nothing to put forward in opposition to the neoliberal view, that it has succeeded in presenting itself as self-evident, that there is no alternative.”¹⁷⁸ The inevitability and self-evidence of this discourse stem in part from its positivistic and rational character. As noted by Marcuse, “The sentence becomes a declaration to be accepted--it repels demonstration, qualification, negation of its codified and declared meaning. ... Analytical predication of words such as freedom, democracy, equality, etc.

or transgression of the discourse beyond the closed analytical structure is incorrect or propaganda.”¹⁷⁹ In this process, the way human beings mediate meanings gets lost, and the only intelligible language becomes the language of corporations and the market, the language of advertising, or the cinematic language that becomes both the referent for clarity and the mediator between ourselves and the world of signifiers. This is largely a language stripped of nuances and closed down so that referents and signifieds can only be “observable” and “tangible.” The need to talk about tangible, observable, and measurable sizes, to break down events into material segments, and the total empiricism in the analyses that are seen as ultimately leading to some sort of Truth, dominate the public discourse in an overwhelming way. These factors remind us always that “the imposing structure unites the actors and actions of violence, power, protection, and propaganda in one lightning flash. We see the man or the thing in operation and only in operation--it cannot be otherwise.”¹⁸⁰ This “operational” strategy erases any possibility for moving beyond prepackaged meanings, for establishing a public dialogue, or for reaching a thorough understanding that would go beyond the operationalist logic.

Along these lines, freedom acquires some sort of materiality and abandons the transcendent meanings that would necessarily link it to a struggle for something that does not provide instant gratification and pleasure as commodities do. Freedom in capitalism becomes a thing, a commodity, a product. It is never questioned and, therefore, never struggled over or redefined. It exists as an entity on its own that can be owned, used, and abused. It waits to be materialized in the different manifestations and activities of capitalist life. Freedom as commodity mobilizes our desires. We want the thing, the observable tangible materiality; we dread investing in or struggling for something that is

not there for our eyes to see. However, according to Benjamin Barber, “Markets give us the goods but not the lives we want; prosperity for some, but despair for many and dignity for none. The consumer has an identity, but it is an identity that satisfies neither the demands of brotherhood nor the imperatives of equality and liberty.”¹⁸¹ Within this reductionistic context described above, freedom is understood in its Gestalt nature, as a behavior, an attitude disconnected from a broader worldview. It is the “freedom to buy something,” operating in a functionalist logic and largely ignoring the ideological net around it that shapes and sustains it. As a result, it becomes a universal, it denotes a function, its transitive meaning is lost; it does not need to be problematized as it has already become common sense. It cannot go beyond descriptive reference to particular facts. It hides the linkage between the facts and the effects. However, by relegating itself to a mere descriptive reference, it becomes prescriptive.

More dangerously, this type of freedom carries a great many assumptions that almost always are left unproblematized. For instance, it presupposes an illusory variety of opportunities and choices. This was clearly understood by Marcuse when he argued that in a highly capitalist society the only freedom remaining is the freedom to choose from preconditioned choices that often lead to a choiceless choice. According to him, “Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves. Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear--that is if they sustain alienation.”¹⁸²

The illusion that there exist choices, but not *equal* choices, as the prerequisite for freedom is one of the basic premises in the work of neoliberal guru Milton Friedman. He also embraces neoliberal universalism and inevitability and claims that free markets are

integral to human nature. His notion of freedom is reduced to removing tyrannical state controls. Even according to liberals such as Derek Bok, resistance to state control is intrinsic to the American character. Bok suggests that “firmly rooted in our traditions is an instinctive distaste for strong government.”¹⁸³ Both Bok and Friedman allude to some sort of distorted genetics theory to explain deeply social and ideological constructions, and this is what gives to their discourse its natural character. If the desire for free markets is genetically determined and if the distaste for big government is instinctive, then who would dare question the authority of these “natural” facts?

Friedman is clear that Americans never had it so good, and that more market freedom and less state restraint are necessary conditions for prosperity and affluence. Any force to the contrary or, as Bauman points out, “any attempt at self-limitation is taken to be the first step on the road leading straight to the gulag, as if there was nothing but the choice between the market’s and the government’s dictatorship over needs--as if there was no room for citizenship in other form than the consumerist one.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, the theology of freedom to consume becomes, according to Friedman, “[a]n essential part of the economic freedom [that] is freedom to choose how to use our income: how much to spend on ourselves and on what items; how much to save and in what form; how much to give away and to whom.”¹⁸⁵ This logic is echoed by Robert Reich when he states that “[m]ost of us are more prosperous than ever before. We own more.”¹⁸⁶ If we look closely into these statements we can identify a common underlying assumption that often distorts reality. That “we” is an umbrella for everybody living under the reality described; “our income” is a common denominator, a referent to talk about both the few wealthy and the vast majority of the poor. One cannot help but wonder whether these people live on the

same planet where “the financial wealth of the top 1 percent of U.S. households now exceeds the combined household financial wealth of the bottom 95 percent.”¹⁸⁷

Obviously the groups situated at the two poles of this economic reality have neither the same choices nor the same resources or opportunities. Consequently, we need to adhere to Bauman’s suggestion that choice involves two sets of constraints. One is the *agenda of choice*--“the range of alternatives which are actually on offer,” which is necessarily linked to material conditions. The second is the *code of choosing*--“the rules that tell the individual on what ground preference should be given to some items rather than others and when to consider the choice as proper and when as inappropriate.”¹⁸⁸ With this framework of reference in mind, next time we talk about choices we should consider the agenda of choice for the 31 million Americans--including 12 million children--who regularly go hungry or can’t afford balanced meals.¹⁸⁹ And next time we want to talk about freedom to spend “our income,” we should consider the 10 million Americans who have no bank accounts. These people pay hefty fees to cash checks or pay bills, and more important, “they are not building the credit records needed, for example, to buy a house or to secure a loan to start a business.”¹⁹⁰ In addition, next time researchers are “puzzled why so many low-income families do not save or hold little or no assets”¹⁹¹ and blame that situation on “financial illiteracy,” we could point to the 5.4 million Americans who live in substandard housing and spend more than half their income on rent.¹⁹² The agency invoked in the discourse around choice is not simply “a matter of the spatial relations of places and spaces and the distribution of people within them. ... It is a matter of the structured mobility by which people are given access to particular kinds of places (and resources), and to the paths that allow one to move to and from such places.”¹⁹³

The poverty figures speak volumes about people who cannot cover their basic vital needs, who have no income, who cannot even give a security deposit to secure an apartment, much less buy commodities, spend on leisure, or save.¹⁹⁴ So, while “the average size of a new home has expanded from 1,500 square feet to 2,190 square feet,” according to a 1997 report of the National Coalition for the Homeless, nearly one-fifth of all homeless people (in twenty-nine cities across the nation) are employed in full- or part-time jobs.¹⁹⁵ Barbara Ehrenreich succinctly captured the situation::

Gail is sharing a room in a well-known downtown flophouse for \$250 a week. Her roommate, a male friend, has begun hitting on her, driving her nuts, but the rent would be impossible alone.

Annette, a twenty-year-old server, who is six months pregnant and abandoned by her boyfriend, lives with her mother, a postal clerk

Marianne, who is a breakfast server, and her boyfriend are paying \$170 a week for a one-person trailer.

The other cook, Andy, lives on his dry-docked boat, which, as far as I can tell from his loving descriptions, cannot be more than twenty feet long.

Tina, another server, and her husband are paying \$60 a night for a room in the Days Inn. This is because they have no car and the Days Inn is in walking distance of the Hearthside.

Joan ... lives in a van parked behind a shopping center at night and showers in Tina's motel room.¹⁹⁶

Ehrenreich's testimony contradicts glaringly those who blindly embrace and promote the "freedom to choose" and the "never-had-it-better" dogma. Obviously, the people in Ehrenreich's account do not exactly have the "freedom to choose," mainly because given their material conditions, they really have no choice. Along these same lines, while "the number of cars has risen from one car for every two Americans age 16 or older to one car for each driving-age adult," and while "the number of Americans taking cruises each year has risen from 500,000 to 6.5 million and the production of recreational vehicles has soared from 3,000 to 239,000," the poverty figures are steadily increasing.¹⁹⁷ The same inequities apply to the issues of unemployment, drug abuse, incarceration, human suffering, lack of health insurance, and so forth. Neoliberal analyses comfortably leave out "the significant number of people living on the razor's edge, materially speaking, in the 'most affluent nation on earth'"¹⁹⁸ and fail to analyze why these people (do not) have access to opportunities and choices. In this case, the discourse around freedom uses language to perpetuate and expand the existing inequalities without challenging the underlying social structures and institutions that construct them and perpetuate them. While the contradictions in the neoliberal discourse become more and more obvious, the proponents of neoliberalism still insist that social problems are issues of character and that social concerns are private troubles. Markets, according to Barber, promote private rather than public forms of discourse, "allowing us consumers to speak via our currencies of consumption to producers of material goods, but preventing us from speaking as citizens to one another about the social consequences of our private market choices."¹⁹⁹ By adopting a language that is stripped of any ethical referent, we remain consumers, largely enclosed by our own little individual worlds.

This language of individualism is promoted by the “experts” who come to justify the unjustifiable, or as Marcuse would say, to prove the rationality of the irrational. The language of the “expert” is manifested in Derek Bok’s claim that “any doctrine emphasizing monetary rewards and tolerating highly unequal incomes can be morally defensible only if it includes a commitment to give all citizens opportunities to compete and to progress to the full measure of their ability.”²⁰⁰ We do not believe that any doctrine that promotes social inequality can be morally defensible. We do, however, believe in politics rooted in ethics and justice that serves the democratic imperatives of public life. Any politics stripped of the ethics that provide “a way of recognizing a social order’s obligation to future generations”²⁰¹ is a politics without a project. Unfortunately, Bok reproduces what Anatole Anton considers one of the illusions of neoliberalism--that “individuals with the same talent and abilities would be equally productive, independent of the social resources available to them and, thus, owe little to the society that provides the context for their achievements.”²⁰² I feel that what is provocatively missing from this type of discourse is an explanation of the fact that worldwide, “three billion people presently live on \$2 or less per day while 1.3 billion of those get by on \$1 or less,” yet “there [are] now roughly \$60 trillion in securitized assets (stocks, bonds, etc.), with an estimated \$90 trillion in additional assets that will become securitizable with the global reach of today’s ‘emerging markets’ development model. With help from [its] global regulatory agent, the WTO, neoliberalism is evoking a future where a handful of the world’s most well-to-do families may pocket more than 50 percent of that \$90 trillion in financial wealth.”²⁰³

Paul Street argues that in the present capitalist state of affairs people are “free to be poor” without anybody feeling the moral and ethical responsibility to intervene to change this reality.²⁰⁴ According to him, while leading architects of American policy and opinion claim that people are freer than ever before and that “democracy is literally sweeping the world as the twentieth century comes to a close,” the poverty rates are steadily increasing together with human misery and suffering. Child poverty (one out of four children is born into poverty,) unequal distribution of wealth (the top 1 percent of families have about the same amount of wealth as the bottom 95 percent,) wage rates, affordable housing, and healthcare (42 million people have no insurance while 29 million are underinsured) are the indicators that point to a different reality which is rarely taken into account when freedom is discussed in neoliberal analyses.²⁰⁵

On the contrary, freedom is often invoked in discussions about markets, trade, finance, and the act of consuming, as, for instance, when Friedman parallels voting with shopping. While he praises the freedom to elect our representatives, at the same time, he insists that the freedom to vote

is ... very different from the kind of freedom you have when you shop at a supermarket. When you enter the voting booth once a year, you almost always vote for a package rather than for specific items. If you are in the majority, you will at best get both the items you favored and the ones you opposed but regarded as on balance less important. Generally you end up with something different from what you thought you voted for. If you are in the

minority, you must conform to the majority vote and wait for your term to come. When you vote daily in the supermarket, you get precisely what you voted for, and so does everyone else. The ballot box produces conformity without unanimity; the marketplace unanimity without conformity. That is why it is desirable to use the ballot box, so far as possible, only for those decisions where conformity is essential.²⁰⁶

Friedman's notion of democracy speaks volumes about the kind of politics that neoliberalism has put into place. It also speaks volumes about what it means to live in a society where the only form of agency available is to consume. In a society where politics is so disarticulated from public life, Friedman's language gains "naturalness" and becomes unproblematic to most people. In this state of affairs, citizens are turned into consumers or human capital, and civil societies become commercialized malls. In fact, malls, as deeply depoliticized living spaces, have not only outnumbered secondary schools and post offices, they have acquired such centrality in the new social order that entire families now go to malls instead of parks, which suffer more and more draconian cuts in their maintenance budgets. In some states, while shopping malls are proliferating, parks are either in disrepair or are being closed down.

Redefining freedom within this framework would mean not only unveiling the contradictions discussed above, but also moving towards the decommodification of both public spaces and the very language used within these spaces. It would also mean reclaiming a language of and for the social. Challenging the neoliberal notion of freedom

would ultimately lead us to Bauman's brilliant remark that "all unfreedom means heteronomy." In other words, freedom is inextricably linked with the processes and functions that institute and sustain an autonomous society, where individuals, as a collectivity, participate in the creation of their own rules and institutions. This is a deeply democratic process. The opposite promotes a type of freedom that is stripped of its liberatory qualities and becomes distanced from autonomy because it serves a logic that brooks no question or dissent. This gives rise to heteronomy, where people stop asking questions about the nature of the system that is imposed on them because they begin to perceive such imposition as common sense. In this case people are mostly convinced that they do not have to fight for freedom because freedom is presented to them as a prepackaged gift. It becomes transparent and its meaning is compromised. As a result, the neoliberal notion of freedom collapses into its very "transparency," in that it is not self-explanatory nor does it point to a specific materiality or object. Freedom is not observable to the eye, nor does it have an exchange value that could be measurable in the mall of neoliberalism. Unfortunately, as Bauman suggests, "The passage to the late-modern or postmodern condition has not brought more individual freedom--not in the sense of more say in the composition of the agenda of choices or more capacity for negotiating the code of choosing. It only transformed the individual from political citizen into market consumer."²⁰⁷ Freedom in a democratic sense should mean transforming the consumer into a *zoon politikon*, a political being, in the Aristotelian sense.

The recontextualization of the term "freedom"--not in order to challenge, resist, or rupture, but rather to serve domination and heteronomy--is also manifested when it is repeatedly pronounced by neoliberal conservatives. Their usage reminds us that our

consciences should refuse to rest easy with the disappearing meaning of freedom.²⁰⁸ In other words, freedom in the neoliberal philosophy gets de-historicized and removed from its inherently oppositional and liberatory projects that should lead to both individual and collective autonomy. Therefore, one should always become suspicious when, for instance, a limitation of freedom is presented as a solution that will protect freedom. Take for example, the recent Patriot Act, which gives government officials carte blanche on surveillance of U.S. citizens, under the pretext of protecting freedom. Edward Said asserts that

by passing the Patriot Act last November, Bush and his compliant Congress have suppressed or abrogated or abridged whole sections of the First, Fourth, Fifth and Eighth Amendments, instituted legal procedures that give individuals no recourse either to a proper defense or a fair trial, that allow secret searches, eavesdropping, detention without limit, and, given the treatment of the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, that allow the U.S. executive branch to abduct prisoners, detain them indefinitely, decide unilaterally whether or not they are prisoners of war and whether or not the Geneva Conventions apply to them-- which is not a decision to be taken by individual countries.²⁰⁹

When the call for freedom implies more surveillance and more regulation of both public and private life, then something else is at work that rocks the very notion of freedom and democracy. At this point, and in order to understand the concept of freedom, it would be interesting to review Hannah Arendt's discussion of freedom and totalitarianism. According to her, a "totalitarian government does not just curtail liberties or abolish essential freedoms; nor does it . . . succeed in eradicating the love for freedom from the hearts of men. It destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom, which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space."²¹⁰ She adds that implicit in the discussion of freedom is the notion of a shared space between men and women, a public space that is erased when "men [sic] are pressed against each other." Thus, totalitarianism, in order to "abolish the fences of laws between men--as tyranny does—means to take away man's liberties and destroy freedom as a living political reality; for the space between men as it is hedged in by laws is the living space of freedom."²¹¹ In this sense, freedom becomes both a living and a political reality. Freedom would suffocate if there were not enough space, that is, it would not be able to survive outside the existence of a vibrant public sphere.

Unfortunately, in the United States public spheres have been shrinking and becoming more and more depoliticized. Public goods are currently under attack, starting with a healthcare system that is managed privately and is available only to those who can afford it. The U.S. media is dominated by fewer than ten conglomerates, whose annual sales range from \$10 billion to \$27 billion. These include major corporations such as Time-Warner, General Electric, Disney, Viacom, TCI, and Westinghouse.²¹² The language involved in these spaces is deeply marked by a market seal. In higher education

we also see a radical turn towards corporatization and privatization. Students in colleges and universities are customers, GAs and TAs are cheap labor, and tenure-track positions are becoming extinct. The mission of the university is being re-articulated in terms of the job market/stock market--knowledge is perceived as a commodity, preference is given to knowledge that is directly applicable and marketable, and curriculum is subordinated to specific corporate needs (as a matter of fact, curriculum now pertains to the CEOs' responsibilities). Tuition has become a premium for the university's product. Friedman illustrates this situation when he claims that "the college is selling schooling and the students are buying schooling. As in most private markets, both sides have a strong incentive to serve one another. If the college doesn't provide the kind of schooling its students want, they can go elsewhere. The students want to get full value for their money."²¹³ Following this line of argument, Friedman proudly quotes an undergraduate student from Dartmouth College saying that "[w]hen you see each lecture costing \$35 and you think of one of the other things you can be doing with the \$35, you're making very sure that you're going to go to that lecture."²¹⁴ Obviously when economics take over the pedagogical, something needs to be said not only about the changing nature of educational institutions--which are now being re-articulated and restructured to function on the model of corporations--but also about the very language that is used to sustain such a model. The corporate privatization model is infiltrating every domain of our society, including prisons. As Anton points out, "The increasing rate of incarceration in the United States in combination with a flat crime rate speaks to prisoners as human commodities for newly emerging private-prison companies. The punishment industry has become a booming addition to the private sector."²¹⁵

These examples and many more point to the increasing disappearance of urban spaces where people come into contact with each other, of contemporary agoras that bring people together. The public arena, “a zone where people could enter into discourse with others, exchange ideas, mount debates, and influence collective decision-making--where, in fact, important problems of common concern could be addressed--has degenerated well beyond even those minimal standards of liberal capitalism.”²¹⁶ Any discussion of freedom must invariably be connected to the extension rather than contraction of public spheres such as we are unfortunately witnessing in advanced capitalist societies. In the present cultural discourse on freedom, public spheres should be understood as open civic spaces, both ideological and material, where the free trade of ideas, knowledge, and practices takes place--a reclaimed decommodified territory where people can exercise a truly democratic citizenship. In short, public spheres should be highly political and should aim at human self-governance and at freeing people from the logic of the market. Public spheres must not be curtailed in the interest of the dominant ideology, and they must be reconceived beyond the notion of commodity. As Giroux clearly argues, “The concept of public sphere reveals the degree to which culture has become a commodity to be consumed and produced as part of the logic of reification rather than in the interest of enlightenment and self-determination.”²¹⁷

The gradual collapse of the public into the private has produced a notion of freedom that is very much individualized and privatized. Notions of solidarity, collectivity, and community are losing their content under the pressure of competitiveness and success. The notion of freedom has been separated from any political project. It is becoming an empty term that not only “reflects ... control but becomes itself an instrument of control

even where it does not transmit orders but information; where it demands, not obedience but choice, not submission but freedom.”²¹⁸

AN INTERVENTIONIST PEDAGOGY

We accuse them of criminalizing the freedom to oppose. We call the people to overcome the attitudes that immobilize them. We call them to take the streets and speak out. We are millions ... and this is not their planet. Against a capitalist Europe and against war. Another world is possible!

(From the Manifesto read at the Barcelona Manifestation against corporate Europe, March 16, 2000)

Neoliberalism as an economic, political, and cultural practice has dismantled the bridges that link private to public life. Today, more than ever before, Bauman asserts, there is “no easy or obvious way to translate private worries into public issues and, conversely, to discern and pinpoint public issues in private troubles.”²¹⁹ The call for more individual freedom sinks people into a more and more isolated and private life, while the collective initiative is dying and the political is reduced to the act of voting. Even voting implies an illusionary choice, since in the United States, a vocal advocate of multiparty systems, the two parties are so perfectly similar in their methods, objectives, and goals that what we truly have in place could be viewed as the most perfect one-party system in the world. Furthermore, “representatives” are also commodities to the extent that one needs more than \$40 million to get elected to the U.S. Senate. Who contributes to a \$40-million campaign chest? Certainly not the unemployed, low-wage workers, or welfare mothers. The commodity character of neoliberal societies has resulted in a state of “unfreedom”--a regime of heteronomy whereby laws and institutions are imposed by a

market order. The economy dictates its rules to the society rather than society making the rules and conditions for the markets. However, markets are simply not designed to do the things that democratic civil societies do, and consumers will not and cannot promote civic virtue by pursuing private ends.²²⁰

Unfortunately, the language used in these commodified spaces is necessarily a commodified language. One way that market ideology is naturalized and disseminated is through the use of a de-historicized language, where terms such as freedom, democracy, autonomy, community, and solidarity acquire a new content and serve the logic of accumulating capital. By denuding the language that is used to legitimize the current social and political (dis)order, we can recognize “the limits and social costs of a neoliberal philosophy that reduces all relationships to the exchange of goods and money.”²²¹ That is, by positioning language historically and looking through the projected transparency of the terms, we can re-appropriate a politicized language--a language that has a political project. Educational institutions are particularly important in this project as sites where language is produced and articulated. At the same time as sites of pedagogy and struggle they open up a space for politics. It is in this political space that a language of possibility and hope can be reclaimed and fought over.

There is more at stake here than the awareness that language needs to be decommodified and that its meanings need to be ruptured so as to “break the continuity and consensus of common sense.”²²² It is not enough to locate and expose the linguistic functions in communication that perpetuate market domination by neutralizing meanings. The existence of a decommodified language does not guarantee a political project in any way. We need a new kind of literacy that moves beyond “communicative action” and

“interpretive understanding.” As Hommi Bhabha suggests, we need a type of literacy that acts as “an equalizing force.” The kind of literacy that is not merely about competence but “is about intervention--the possibility of interpretation as intervention, as interrogation, as relocation, as revision--is often not taught even at the best institutions.”²²³ In addition to developing a language of possibility and critique, we need to link decommodified language to a notion of human agency as the mediation between constraints and possibilities. While there is a huge communicative dimension in language, communication is hardly an end in itself, and, as Castoriadis says, “it is totally inadequate as a way of bringing out criteria for action.”²²⁴ In public discourse, “communicative action” and “interpretive understanding” are two important moments, but in no way do they define its meaning or its end. To paraphrase Castoriadis, the end of this type of intervention should not be “interpretive understanding” of the discourse so as to unveil its contradictions, but rather a contribution to people’s access to their own autonomy (their capacity to challenge themselves and to lucidly transform themselves).²²⁵ This project is fundamentally pedagogical--a project for a “paideia of autonomy” against the triumph of capitalist imaginary significations--and, therefore, also political. This pedagogical project would necessarily require a language that is open, free from operationalism and functionality, a historical language that is part of a democratic imaginary signification which questions any and all authority, including the authority of our own proper thoughts. This language could be part of a pedagogical project of hope if schools are understood as primary sites where language is produced and articulated. As such they are sites of pedagogy, struggle and therefore sites of politics.

Giroux is worth quoting at length here when he suggests that

[c]hallenging neoliberalism also demands new forms of social citizenship and civic education that have a purchase on people's everyday lives and struggles, expressed through a wide range of institutions. In this instance politics is inextricably connected to pedagogies that effectively mobilize the beliefs, desires and forms of persuasion that organize and give meaning to particular strategies of social engagement and policy transformation. Education as a form of persuasion, power and intervention is constitutive of those ongoing struggles that shape the social. Challenging neo-liberal hegemony as a form of domination is crucial to reclaiming an alternative notion of the political and rearticulating the relationship between political agency and substantive democracy.²²⁶

Any viable notion of democracy should necessarily acknowledge the contradictions in the locution “democratic markets”—an expression which hides the fact that being a consumer is not tautonymous with being a citizen, and that unregulated free markets cannot produce democracy, social justice, a sustainable environment, and welfare for everybody.²²⁷ A more honest account of what democracy means should be based on a notion of both individual and collective freedom that possesses self-limiting qualities. As Castoriadis so brilliantly suggests, “I can say that I am free in a society where there are laws, if I have had the effective possibility (and not only on paper) to participate in the discussion, deliberation, and formation of these laws. In other words,

the legislative power should belong effectively to the collective, to the people.”²²⁸ In this way of thinking, freedom is understood as an activity and as a struggle. It is not given to us as a gift, it does not have a transparent meaning, and it needs to be redefined and struggled over. Freedom has its own rules, including the unique capacity to limit itself. Unlike what is happening in the capitalist societies that are unable to limit themselves and therefore become abusive to their citizens, freedom in a democracy sets its own limits. In a truly free and autonomous society, limits are put collectively to things that we can and cannot do. As Bauman suggests, “The art of politics, if it happens to be democratic politics, is about dismantling the limits to citizens’ freedom; but it is also about self-limitation: about making citizens free in order to enable them to set, individually and collectively, their own individual and collective limits.”²²⁹

The recent collapse of the Argentinean economy attests to the absence of limits in the neoliberal order. It also attests to the detrimental results of twenty-six years of neoliberal economic policies under the guidance of International Monetary Fund. While the case of Argentina is an example par excellence of what happens when deregulated markets dictate the rules to the state, it also points to what people can do when they become aware of their civic power--which was strong enough in this case to overturn a number of presidents and to push for a radical solution to the current economic and social impasse.

The case of Argentina also attests to Immanuel Wallerstein’s assessment that world capitalism is actually in bad shape structurally, rather than enjoying a “new economy.”²³⁰ After five hundred years of existence, the world capitalist system is, for the first time, in true systemic crisis, and we find ourselves in an age of transition.

Wallerstein does not think that the global offensive of capitalism and so-called globalization has strangled our possibilities. He thinks that there is a spreading democratization of the world, evidenced by ever-expanding popular pressures for expenditures on health, education, and lifetime income guarantees, which have created a steady upward pressure of taxes as a share of world value created.

The 500,000 people who demonstrated in Barcelona against corporate Europe and neoliberal values are convinced that another world is possible. These activists rupture the inevitability and consensus of common sense because they understand freedom in a different context: the freedom to oppose, the freedom to talk back, the freedom to dissent. The people demonstrating in Barcelona, Seattle, Washington, Genoa, and other parts of the world know that the market (dis)order is not inevitable, that there are alternatives, and that the language of critique and intervention can be part of a political project to oppose neoliberalism--as was passionately suggested by Fidel Castro:

The market will dry up some day for the industry of lies; it is drying up already. If you really delve into the truth, you will realize that the political conception of imperialism, as well as the neoliberal economic order and globalization process imposed on the world, is orphaned and defenseless when it comes to ideas and ethics. It is in this field that the main struggle of our times will be decided. And the final result of this battle, with no possible alternative, will be on the side of truth, and thus on the side of humanity.²³¹

Education is the central arena in which humanity is going to be reinvented in our quest for decommodification and reclamation of the public sphere, and where a language that guarantees a political project for intervention will be cultivated. And this is where the need for a “counter-education” becomes a project for educators, cultural workers, artists, and activists. This type of counter-education, Castoriadis asserts, “call[s] for a new imaginary creation whose signification cannot be compared with anything similar in the past, a creation that would put at the center of human life significations other than the increase of production and consumption, that would set different goals that people would consider worth struggling for.”²³² And Wallerstein claims, “Such a world is possible. It is by no means certain that it will come into being. But then it is by no means impossible.”²³³

References

Introduction

- ¹ Carl Boggs, The End of Politics. (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), p. 12.
- ² David Croteau quoted in Boggs, The End of Politics (2000), p.12.
- ³ Zygmunt Bauman, Society Under Siege, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002), p. 56
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, In Search of Politics, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 84.
- ⁶ Boggs, End of Politics, 7.
- ⁷ “Registered Voter Turnout Improved in 2000 Presidential Election,” US Census Bureau Reports. <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/voting/000505.html>
- ⁸ Greg Palast, The Best Democracy Money Can Buy. (London, UK: Plume, 2003)
- ⁹ Edward Said, “American Elections: System or Farce?” *Z Magazine*, 1/23/01.
- ¹⁰ Richard Morin and Dan Balz, “Public Support Collapsing for Bush Foreign Policy,” *Washington Post*, Sept 2003.
- ¹¹ Lewis Lapham, “Cause for Dissent,” *Harper’s Magazine*, April 2003, pp. 35–40), p. 38.
- ¹² Bauman notes that “in Britain, an estimated 10 million 18-25 year olds were to vote for or against “Big Brother” competitors. That needs to be compared with 1.5 million people of the same age category expected to vote in the British general election”(Bauman 2002). In the United State 22.8 million viewers watched “Joe Millionaire,” 21.9 million watched “American Idol,” and 16.7 million watched “The Bachelorette” last season

(Kieseweter 2003). These reality shows largely promote individualism, human disposability, exclusion and eradication of any spirit of community and the collective since their motto is “life is a hard game for hard people.” As Bauman (2002:67-68) so poignantly argues, “what is tested now [in these shows] are the limits of deregulated, privatized and individualized spontaneity; the inner tendency of a thoroughly privatized world.”

¹³ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Dialectic of the Enlightenment. (New York, NY: Continuum, 1994), p. 137.

¹⁴ Ibid, 84.

¹⁵ According to Bauman the panopticon is “the major tool of keeping people together in what has come to be known as society” (In Search of Politics, p.70).

¹⁶ Bauman In Search of Politics, pp. 70-71.

¹⁷ Edward Said, “Global Crisis” in ZNet, (March 17, 2003).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The US Conference of Mayors reported an average growth of 14 percent annually in demand for shelter since 1998. Last year alone, shelter demand in America grew by 19 percent. Locally, the number of people without shelter increased last year by 23 percent.

<http://www.realchangenews.org/firstthingsfirst/ftffacts1.pdf>

²⁰ Damita Chambers “U.S.: Man Arrested for Wearing Peace T-Shirt at Shopping Mall” From *Associated Press*, (March 6, 2003).

²¹ Zygmunt Bauman, In Search of Politics. P. 7.

²² Henry A. Giroux Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence and Youth. (New York, NY: Routledge,1996)

²³ Stan Karp “The No Child Left Behind Hoax.” Rethinking Schools, 2003

http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/bushplan/hoax.shtml

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Manufacturing Consent (32-33 in Sarah Mills) *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind*, edited by Fons Elders (Souvenir Press, 1974), pages 170-187

²⁶ Norman Fairclough & Lilie Chouliaraki, Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 37.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ For more on “intertextuality, see the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

²⁹ J.P. Gee, Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses, Bristol, PA: Taylor and Francis, 1966: 131.

³⁰ Foucault, 1981:52-3.

³¹ Alain Badiou Ethics

³² Ibid

³³ Henry A. Giroux Impure Acts, p.10.

³⁴ Boggs, End of Politics, 16.

³⁵ Fairclough & Chouliaraki Discourse in Late Modernity, p.4.

³⁶ Ibid, p.5.

³⁷ Mouffe C. (Ed.) Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community. London: Verso, 1992:5.

Chapter 2

³⁸ Norman Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis: the Critical study of Language. (England: Longman, 1995),

-
- ³⁹ Lynne Cheney, "Teaching Our Children About America" Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, Dallas, TX, (October 5, 2001).
- ⁴⁰ "Losing America's Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century." American Council of Trustees and Alumni, February 16, 2000.
- ⁴¹ Restoring America's Legacy.
- ⁴² Edward Said, Global Crisis, ZNet, March 17, 2003.
- ⁴³ Lewis Lapham "Cause for Dissent," April 2003, p.36.
- ⁴⁴ You're either with us or against us,
<http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/> at CNNCom, (November 6, 2001).
- ⁴⁵ Antonio Gramsci, The Antonio Gramsci Reader. Edited by David Forgacs. (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 343.
- ⁴⁶ Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, "Schooling, Culture and Literacy in the Age of Broken Drama: A Review of Bloom and Hirsch," Harvard Educational Review 58, no.2 (May 1988), p.175.
- ⁴⁷ Donaldo Macedo, Literacies of Power: What Americans Are Not Allowed to Know (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994), p.65.
- ⁴⁸ Aronowitz and Giroux, "Schooling, Culture and Literacy," pp. 65 & 66.
- ⁴⁹ Aronowitz and Giroux, "Schooling, Culture and Literacy," p.66.
- ⁵⁰ For a detailed discussion see the work of Paulo Freire, especially Pedagogy of Freedom.
- ⁵¹ Marita Sturken, Tangled Memories
- ⁵² Sturken, p.2.

-
- ⁵³ Zygmunt Bauman, In Search of Politics. p.2.
- ⁵⁴ Thucydides, *Historiae*.
- ⁵⁵ Howard Zinn, *Columbus and Western Civilization*. Lecture delivered at Denver Colorado (Transform Columbus Day), October 10-13, 2003.
- ⁵⁶ Kyo Maclear. *Beclouded Visions: Hiroshima-Nagasaki and the Art of Witness*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999). p. 121.
- ⁵⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis. The Imaginary Institution of Society. (London: Polity Press, 1998). p. 185.
- ⁵⁸ Giroux, Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture & Schooling.(Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997). p. 12.
- ⁵⁹ See American Council of Trustees & Alumni (ACTA), “Losing America’s Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21st Century” February 2000. www.goacta.org
- ⁶⁰ “Teaching Our Children About America” – Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, Dallas, Texas, Oct. 5, 2001.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, p.3.
- ⁶² For a detailed list of U.S. military interventions see ZNET, *A Century of U.S. Military Interventions: From Wounded Knee to Afghanistan*.
- ⁶³ ACTA Survey, p. 3.
- ⁶⁴ Macedo Donald Literacies of Power: What Americans are Not Allowed to Know. (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1994). p. 45.
- ⁶⁵ See <http://www.ed.gov/>

⁶⁶“Paige Announces 49.6 Million in Grants to Improve Teaching of American History.”

United States Department of Education News, October 2, 2001. Available at

<<http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/>>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Teaching American History Program, Grant Information, available at <www.ed.gov/>

⁷⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, In Search of Politics. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). p. 136-137.

⁷¹ Chantal Mouffe “Rethinking Political Community: Chantal Mouffe’s Liberal Socialism” in Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial. Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham (Eds.) (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 169.

⁷² Chantal Mouffe. “Which Ethics for Democracy.” In The Turn to Ethics. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca Walkowitz (Eds.). (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 92.

⁷³ Mouffe, “Which Ethics for Democracy.” p.179.

⁷⁴ Judith Butler. “Explanation and Exoneration or What We Can Hear.” In *Theory & Event*, 5:4, (2002), p. 7

⁷⁵ Lewis Lapham “Cause for Dissent,” *Harper’s magazine* (April 2003), pp.35-40

⁷⁶ Edward Said, “American Elections: System or Farce?” in *ZMagazine*, 1/23/01

⁷⁷ Judith Butler. “Explanation and Exoneration”, p.11.

⁷⁸ Gramsci, p. 421 § 344..

⁷⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis. Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy. David Ames Curtis (Ed.). (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). p. 10.

-
- ⁸⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis. Time, (Ypsilon Publications, Athens, Greece, 2000). p. 98.
- ⁸¹ Giroux, H. Public Spaces Private Lives: Beyond the Culture of Cynicism. (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p.10.
- ⁸² Howard Zinn, “A larger consciousness” in *ZMagazine*, (October 10, 1999).
- ⁸³ Maclear. Beclouded Visions, p.121.
- ⁸⁴ Giroux, Public Spaces Private Lives, p. 22.
- ⁸⁵ Castoriadis The Imaginary Institution of Society p. 184.
- ⁸⁶ Castoriadis, Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy, p. 39.
- ⁸⁷ Castoriadis, The Imaginary Institution of Society p. 215.
- ⁸⁸ Herbert Marcuse. One-Dimensional Man. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). p. 99.
- ⁸⁹ James Young. At Memory’s Edge. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.2.
- ⁹⁰ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage. (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998). p. 66.
- ⁹¹ Maclear, Beclouded Visions, pp. 133-134.
- ⁹² Bauman In Search of Politics, p. ix.
- ⁹³ Castoriadis C.(1991). Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy. p. 41
- ⁹⁴ Mouffe, “Rethinking Political Community”, p. 182.
- ⁹⁵ Henry Giroux. Impure Acts: The Practical Politics of Cultural Studies. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000).
- ⁹⁶ Castoriadis, Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy. p. 4.
- ⁹⁷ Max Horkheimer. Critique of Pure Reason. (New York: Seadburry, 1974). p. 156.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid, 99.

⁹⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust. (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989). p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Giroux, Impure Acts.

¹⁰¹ Ortega y Gasset, J. (1930; reprint 1964). The Revolt of the Masses. (New York: W.W. Norton.)

¹⁰² Cornelius Castoriadis. The Rise of Insignificance, (Athens, Greece: Ypsilon Books, 2000). p. 126.

¹⁰³ Maclear Beclouded Visions, p. 121.

¹⁰⁴ Mouffe, Rethinking Political Community, p.180.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.180.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 198.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.181.

¹⁰⁸ Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 26.

Chapter 3

¹⁰⁹ Donaldo Macedo and Lilia Bartolome, Dancing With Bigotry: Beyond The Politics of Tolerance (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999).

¹¹⁰ Norman Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language. (New York, NY: Addison Wesley Longman Inc., 1995), p. 7.

¹¹¹ James Donald, "Language, Literacy and Schooling" In: The State and Popular Culture. (Milton Keynes: Open University Culture Unit, (1982). p. 32

¹¹² Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis, p7.

¹¹³ J. P. Gee, Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses (Bristol, PA: Taylor & Francis, 1996),

-
- ¹¹⁴ J. Derrida, Positions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁶ Donald, “Language, Literacy and Schooling”, p. 32.
- ¹¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
- ¹¹⁸ Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis, p. 221
- ¹¹⁹ According to Hommi Bhabha, cultural diversity is understood as the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; held in a time-frame of relativism it gives rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity. Homi Bhabha “Staging the Politics of Difference: Homi Bhabha’s Critical Literacy” In: Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial. ed by Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 15.
- ¹²⁰ Ferdinand de Saussure introduced the concepts of “langue” (underlying linguistic competence) and “parole” (linguistic performance, actual speech) in his classic book “Leçons de Linguistique Generale” (Paris et Lausanne: Payot, 1916).
- ¹²¹ Roland. Barthes, The Semiotic Challenge (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988).
- ¹²² Bhabha, “Staging the Politics of Difference,” p. 16.
- ¹²³ Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power.
- ¹²⁴ Ronald. Wardaugh, An Introduction to Sociolinguistics (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).
- ¹²⁵ Paulo Freire, The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1985).

¹²⁶ For a more detailed discussion of Black English see J. L. Dillard, Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States (New York: Random House, 1972).

¹²⁷ Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis, p. 94.

¹²⁸ Donaldo Macedo, Literacies of Power: What Americans Are not Allowed to Know (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), p. 45.

¹²⁹ Albert Memmi, “La Patrie Litteraire du Colonisé,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (September 1996), p. 12.

¹³⁰ Ngugi Wa’Thiongo, Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986).

¹³¹ Henry Giroux, Fugitive cultures: Race, Violence and Youth (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 120.

¹³² Jurgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

¹³³ Giroux, Fugitive cultures.

¹³⁴ Louis Althusser, Essays on Ideology. (London: Verso, 1971)

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Surprisingly, according to the “State of the World’s Children 1999” only the United States and Somalia have not ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child that ensures children the right to an education that prepares them for an active adult life and ensures elimination of ignorance and illiteracy. (UNICEF 1999)

¹³⁷ David Spener, “Transitional bilingual education and the socialization of immigrants” in Breaking Free: The Transformative Power of Critical Pedagogy ed. P. Leistyna, A. Woodrum, and S. Sherblom (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1996).

¹³⁸ Henry A. Giroux, Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1983).

¹³⁹ Antonia Darder, Culture and Power in the Classroom: A Critical Foundation of Bicultural Education (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1991).

¹⁴⁰ bell. hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 168.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 173.

Chapter 4

¹⁴⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, In Search of Politics (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 8.

¹⁴⁵ For a more detailed discussion, see Henry Giroux, “Something is Missing: From Utopianism to a Politics of Educated Hope,” in Public Spaces, Private Lives: Beyond the Culture of Cynicism (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001). For works of “neo-liberal utopianism,” see Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (Avon Books, 1993) and Dinesh D’Souza, The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society (Touchstone Books, 1996), among others.

¹⁴⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, The Rise of Insignificance (Athens, Greece: Ypsilon Books, 2000), p.122.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 122..

¹⁴⁸ Carl Boggs, The End of Politics (New York: Guilford Press, 2000).

¹⁴⁹ Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 85.

-
- ¹⁵⁰ Bauman, In Search of Politics, p. 127.
- ¹⁵¹ Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 87.
- ¹⁵² Susan George, “A Short History of Neo-liberalism: Twenty Years of Elite Economics and Emerging Opportunities for Structural Change” in ZMagazine (<http://www.zmag.org/CrissesCurEvts/Globalism/george.htm>) March 1999.
- ¹⁵³ Lawrence Grossberg quoted in Impure Acts: The Practical Politics of Cultural Studies by Henry Giroux (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 10.
- ¹⁵⁴ Zsuzsa Ferge, “What are the State Functions that Neoliberalism Wants to Eliminate?” in Not for Sale: In Defense of Public Goods, ed. Anatole Anton, Milton Fisk, and Nancy Holmstrom (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), p. 182.
- ¹⁵⁵ Ulrich Beck, “Redefining Power in the Global Age: Eight Theses,” Dissent (Fall 2001), p. 86.
- ¹⁵⁵ Bourdieu, Acts of Resistance, p. 32.
- ¹⁵⁶ Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957 [1944]), p. 73.
- ¹⁵⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Contre le Conformisme Generalisé: Stopper la Montée de l’Insignificance,” Le Monde Diplomatique (August 1998), pp. 22-23.
- ¹⁵⁸ Giroux, Public Spaces, Private Lives, p. 118.
- ¹⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁶⁰ Colin Leys, Market Driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest (London: Verso, 2001), p. 3.
- ¹⁶¹ Holy Sklar, Imagine a Country in Znet CrossCurrents (July 1997).

¹⁶² For a more detailed discussion, see Barbara Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001).

¹⁶³ “Strike Leaving Shelves, Snackers’ Wants Unfilled,” Boston Globe, March 20, 2000, Section A1.

¹⁶⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market. (New York, NY: The New Press), p. 96.

¹⁶⁵ Ferge, “What are the State Functions Neoliberalism Wants to Eliminate?” p. 182.

¹⁶⁶ Ulrich Beck, “Redefining Power in the Global Age: Eight Theses,” Dissent (Fall 2001), p. 86.

¹⁶⁷ Bourdieu, Acts of Resistance, p. 32.

¹⁶⁸ Beck, “Redefining Power in the Global Age,” p. 83.

¹⁶⁹ Bauman, In Search of Politics, p. 74.

¹⁷⁰ Beck, “Redefining Power in the Global Age,” p. 83.

¹⁷¹ Bauman, In Search of Politics, pp. 127-128.

¹⁷² Terry Eagleton, Ideology: An Introduction (London: Verso Books, 1991), pp.28-30.

¹⁷³ Susan George, “A Short History of Neo-liberalism,” on ZNet, <http://www.zmag.org/CrisesCurEvts/Globalism/george.htm>, (1999).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Milton and Rose Friedman, Free to Choose: A Personal Statement (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1980), p. 390.

¹⁷⁶ Bourdieu, Acts Of Resistance, p. 50.

¹⁷⁷ Giroux, Public Spaces, Private Lives, p. 56.

¹⁷⁸ Bourdieu, Acts Of Resistance, p. 29.

-
- ¹⁷⁹ Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 87-88.
- ¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 94.
- ¹⁸¹ Benjamin Barber, “Blood Brothers, Consumers, or Citizens? Three Models of Identity--Ethnic, Commercial, and Civic” in . Cultural Identity and the Nation State, ed. Carol Gould and Pasquale Pasquino (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 59.
- ¹⁸² Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, pp. 7-8.
- ¹⁸³ Derek Bok, The Cost of Talent: How Executives and Professionals Are Paid and How It Affects America (New York: The Free Press, 1993), p. 260.
- ¹⁸⁴ Bauman, In Search of Politics, p. 4.
- ¹⁸⁵ Friedman, Free to Choose, p. 65.
- ¹⁸⁶ Robert Reich, *The Future of Success* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2001), p. 217.
- ¹⁸⁷ Jeff Gates, “Modern Fashion or Global Fascism?” Tikkun 17, no. 1 (2002), pp. 30-31.
- ¹⁸⁸ Bauman, In Search of Politics, pp. 72-73.
- ¹⁸⁹ Data retrieved from www.inequality.org.
- ¹⁹⁰ Annamaria Lusardi, “Increasing Saving Among the Poor: The Role of Financial Literacy,” Joint Center for Poverty Research Newsletter 6, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 2002).
- ¹⁹¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁹² Fortune (Sept. 4, 2000) cited in www.inequality.org by Chris Hartman.
- ¹⁹³ Grossman cited in Giroux, Impure Acts, p.101.
- ¹⁹⁴ For a more detailed discussion, see Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed.
- ¹⁹⁵ Ehrenreich, Nickel and Dimed, p. 26.
- ¹⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 25-26.

-
- ¹⁹⁷ Paul Street, “The Economy is Doing Fine, It’s Just the People that Aren’t” in ZNet Domestic Policy <http://www.zmag.org/ZMag/articles> (November 2000).
- ¹⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹⁹ Barber, “Blood Brothers, Consumers, or Citizens?” p. 59.
- ²⁰⁰ Bok, The Cost of Talent, p. 258.
- ²⁰¹ Giroux, p. 133.
- ²⁰² Anatole Anton, “Public Goods as Commonstock: Notes on the Reading Commons,” in Not for Sale: In Defence of Public Goods, ed. Anatole Anton, Milton Fisk, and Nancy Holmstrom (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), p. 11.
- ²⁰³ Gates, “Modern Fashion or Global Fascism?”
- ²⁰⁴ Paul Street, “Free to Be Poor: The ‘Devil’s Gift’ at Millenium’s Turn” in Znet (June 2001).
- ²⁰⁵ Statistics retrieved from Sklar, Imagine a Country.
- ²⁰⁶ Friedman, Free to Choose, p. 66.
- ²⁰⁷ Bauman, In Search of Politics, p. 78.
- ²⁰⁸ Max Horkheimer, Critique of Pure Reason (New York: Seabury, 1974), p. 139.
- ²⁰⁹ Edward Said, “Thoughts About America,” Al-Ahram Weekly (March 2, 2002).
- ²¹⁰ Hanah Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harvest Books, 1973), p. 466.
- ²¹¹ Ibid, p. 466.
- ²¹² Henry Giroux, The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 3.
- ²¹³ Friedman, Free to Choose, p. 177.
- ²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 177.

-
- ²¹⁵ Anton, Public Goods as Commonstock, p. 2.
- ²¹⁶ Boggs, The End of Politics, p. 11.
- ²¹⁷ Henry Giroux, Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture and Schooling (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p. 236.
- ²¹⁸ Street, "The Economy is Doing Fine, It's Just the People That Aren't," ZNet (November 2000).
- ²¹⁹ Zygmunt Bauman In Search of Politics (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- ²²⁰ Barber, p. 59.
- ²²¹ Giroux, p. 53.
- ²²² Hommi Bhabha, Staging the Politics of Difference: Homi Bhabha's Critical Literacy in Race, Rhetoric and the Postcolonial, ed. Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 3-39.
- ²²³ Bhabha, *Ibid*, p. 29.
- ²²⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy, ed. David Ames Curtis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.77.
- ²²⁵ *Ibid*.
- ²²⁶ Giroux, Public Spaces, Private Lives, p. 53.
- ²²⁷ Barber, "Blood Brothers, Consumers, or Citizens?" p. 59.
- ²²⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, "De l'Autonomie en Politique," Le Monde Diplomatique (February 1998), p. 23.
- ²²⁹ Bauman, In Search of Politics, p. 4.

²³⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, “A Left Politics for an Age of Transition,” Monthly Review 53, no. 8 (January 2002), p. 18.

²³¹ Fidel Castro, “Cuba will Neither Negotiate nor Sell out its Revolution, Which has Cost the Blood and Sacrifice of Many of its Sons and Daughters. Interview with Federico Mayor Zaragoza in Intercambio (June 2000).

²³² Castoriadis, The Rise of Insignificance, p. 129.

²³³ Wallerstein, “A Left Politics for an Age of Transition,” p. 23.

Panagiota Gounari Vita

Panagiota Gounari is Assistant Professor in the Applied Linguistics Graduate Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Pennsylvania State University. Her primary areas of interest include cultural studies and language & literacy education, language policy and the analysis of language in its relation to social change and hegemony as well as its relation to democracy and human agency. She has co-authored [The Hegemony of English](#) with Donaldo Macedo and Bessie Dendrinos.