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Critical Pedagogy in and for the Age of the Digital Media



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Pedagogy of the Precariat

by PETAR JANDRIĆ and HENRY A. GIROUX

Haunted digital borders and alternative public spheres

Petar Jandrić: Thank you a lot for agreeing to this conversation, Henry! One of the central concepts in your work is border crossing, which “prompts teachers and students to raise new questions and develop models of analysis outside the officially sanctioned boundaries of knowledge and the established disciplines that control them” (Giroux and Searls Giroux, 2004: 102). This concept gains additional relevance with the advent of another border – the so-called electronic frontier (Rheingold, 1995). Could you please apply your concept of border crossing to learning in the age of information technologies?

Henry Giroux: When I first started thinking about the concept, one of the things that I was concerned with was the way in which various borders operate in various formations and ideological and political locations to basically shut people down from asking dangerous questions or pursuing questions outside of established paradigms. At the heart of that concern was the question of the political. How do you theorise the political in a world where borders are rapidly increasing? How do you theorise the political in a world where borders are really pushing people back into all kinds of silos – from those organised around prejudice and racism, to those organised around the instrumentalization of knowledge itself? And how are those borders organised in the ways that so limit what intellectuals and academics can do? At the university, academics often end up speaking in languages that are utterly abstract, languages that speak to five or six people. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that they have no sense what it means to speak to broader publics. At the same time, I was not arguing that difficult language is not sometimes necessary or that theory does not matter. On the contrary, I was arguing that theory needed to become worldly, unfettered by jargon, and be both accessible while addressing broader publics. Border crossing was a critique of theoreticism, theory for its own sake, unfettered by any interest in the larger world.

So the notion of border really took on several registers. One of the registers was political. How do you want to understand the notion of crossing borders in ways that expand the possibilities of people to be able to narrate themselves and understand the context in which they find themselves in order to, in some ways, both resist and overcome those kinds of barriers that shut down their capacity to be individual and social agents? The second issue is around the notion of social responsibility. What kinds of borders are put in play in ways that separate, for instance, instrumental knowledge from questions of social cost and larger social problems?

And I think, with regards to your question about how this applies to technology, that technologies are haunted by a ghostly presence to public memories rooted in a kind of mad instrumentalized culture of positivism and technological rationality. That presence extends everywhere from the genocide of Nazi Germany to the dominant instrumental rationalities of today. There is enormous sense that these rationalities can somehow be reproduced in a new language, but they still harbour positivist influences. And in lieu of these influences, they tend to remove themselves from ethical questions. So now the question is whether technology is efficient. Now the question is how you master technology, the question is how you open up new doors, behind which our perception of reality becomes understood in complex and general ways. Whereas for me, the real question is: What kinds of borders need to be erased and collapsed so that we can start arguing about the ways digital technology works to improve the human condition? How does digital technology open up possibilities and ways to solve real problems? What is the pedagogical function of digital technologies? In what ways does that pedagogy serve as a reminder of long-term technological potentials as opposed to what technologies can do in the short term?

When I say that digital technologies are haunted by the past – they are not just haunted by the past, they are also haunted by the present. They are haunted by the dark side of neoliberalism which wants to instrumentalize and subordinate everything to a regime of efficiency, profit making, privatisation, and deregulation. In many ways, that regime really short-circuits the potential that technologies have. So in that sense, the border crossing metaphor is useful. And in particular with the exposing a neoliberal logic that is overburdened by, what I think, is an instrumentalist logic. Remember, neoliberalism says: We do not deal with anything in the long term. We do not make long term investments. All we make are short-term investments. That is a pretty crippling and paralyzing paradigm for people working with digital technologies. Because what it basically says is: Look, these technologies are going to be used to make money. That's it. It does not matter how relevant they are, it does not matter whether they pollute the environment... that is all irrelevant. What really matters is the bottom line of profit making.

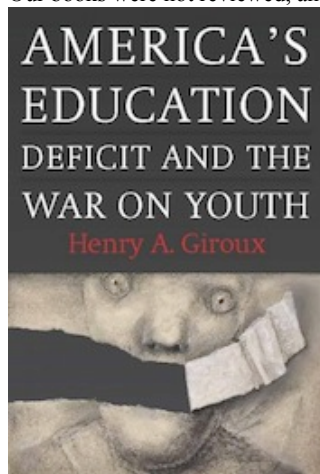
PJ: In [Border Crossings](#), you write:

In effect, this is a call for educators and cultural workers to become border crossers engaged in an effort to create alternative public spheres. In my mind, alternative public spheres are central not only for creating the conditions for “the formation and enactment of social identities,” but also for enabling the conditions “in which social equality and cultural diversity coexist with participatory democracy.” (Giroux, 2005: 14)

Can you assess the notion of the Internet as an alternative public sphere? More precisely, what are its potentials for development of participatory democracy?

HG: I think that the Internet has an enormous potential for development of participatory democracy. However, I think that what needs to be unmasked immediately is the precept position that the Internet is equal to democracy. I think this position is just nonsense, because it erases the questions of politics, power, and control. Once you say that the Internet is a site of struggle, then you are on a different terrain. Then you do not merely link the Internet to simple forces of moral, social, and political reproduction, but you also link the Internet to the possibilities for trying to understand what it might mean on the side of emancipatory politics and possibilities. Put differently, the Internet is both situated within the existing historical conjuncture and the power relations that define it and at the same time there is the question of how the Internet can be understood as a source of resistance, an sphere capable of narrating new voices, modes of representations, and establishing cross border modes of communication and educational and political alliances.

In that sense, particularly in opening up alternative public spheres – where people can begin to write and say things that they could not do in the past – the potential of the Internet for democracy is enormous. Look, ten or fifteen years ago, many people on the left could not get published in liberal journals or in established academic publishers. All the major public and alternative spheres, rooted in print culture, refused to publish us. Our books were not reviewed, and my work in



particular was not reviewed for years in any large circulated public or academic source. To this day *The Nation*, *CommonDreams* and other sites refuse to publish or reprint my work. What has happened in the last fifteen years is an entirely different story. There is *Truthdig*, *Truthout*, *CounterPunch*, *Tikkun*, and other websites that are publishing important work and opening up a space for a generation of theorists and public intellectuals who were once considered quite dangerous in the past, and whose work you could not find so easily. There is also a new generation of activists, especially black youth who are creating multiple public spheres through the Internet and other elements of the digital world.

I have attempted in the last decade to create a number of outlets online that offer an opportunity, especially for academics to publish their work to a broader audience. I created the online Public Intellectuals Project (2015) both at McMaster University and at Truthout. Personally, I now publish almost all of my essays, academic and more editorially oriented work most online, and I publish a lot in places such as Truthout. My work is now published in Greek, Chinese, Spanish, and numerous other languages– and all over the world. This is only because of the Internet. People write to me ‘can I publish this’, and I say ‘absolutely’... I try to publish my work in as many sources as possible in order to reach as many diverse audiences as possible. I never charge for my work, because I think that it is a public service. I think this is what public intellectuals should do. If those social media, and networks, and technologies, did not exist, I would not be able to have a venue to be a public intellectual. I would simply not be there. I would be largely confined to in print culture, sending articles to liberal magazines who think that Obama is the essence of how to define progressive thought. So things have surely opened up. Look at Noam Chomsky – he writes an article practically every week, and his work is almost instantly spread over all over the globe. That is unbelievable. And all of a sudden, people all over the world know him as they have never known him before – because before the onset of the digital revolution he could not get published in the mainstream media, at least the vast majority of those outlets.

As the Internet opens important new public spheres, its presence presents new questions for your generation. Your generation cannot just simply learn how to read digital media critically. Your generation needs to learn how to produce digital media. Because the only way that the Internet is going to work for you is in alternative public spheres. It is not going to work in dominant public spheres, because they will not let you in. Or if they let you in, they will limit what you can do. I got interviewed the other day, in Toronto, in CBC. And the interviewer told me that he has a list

of words he cannot use. How is that? And he is on the left. He cannot say fracking, and some other words related to oil... and in Canada!

PJ: By opening up new public spheres, the Internet opens – literally and metaphorically – pastures new and unexplored for the whole humankind. Recently, Ana Kuzmanić and I showed that transfer of various human activities online strongly resembles traditional colonialism, and briefly outlined some postcolonial opportunities for resistance (Jandrić, 2014; Jandrić & Kuzmanić, 2015). In a very different context, your work is also strongly related to postcolonial theory. Could you please outline the possible contributions of postcolonial theory in regards to the relationship of education and information technologies?

HG: I don't consider myself a postcolonial theorist as much as it may be fair to say that some of the work I do is related hopefully to the best elements of that tradition. Postcolonial theory has made and is making enormous contributions around a number of things. First to reveal, and to make clear, how the West defines itself, and to expose all the ways in which the West takes for granted its own exceptionalism and its own colonialism, is an enormous intervention into the political. Postcolonial theory flips the script, and exposes how Western power relations have not been a force for democracy, in spite of the traditional claims, but a force for misery, exploitation, war, and diverse forms of violence. Post colonialism expands the political in ways that enable people to name oppression in new ways. And I think that is crucial. Second, postcolonialism helps people who have basically lost their voices, or their voices have been suppressed, to speak in terms that highlight their stories, sense of agency, and possibilities for collective struggles. It provides them with the ability to narrate themselves from the position of strength, and not from the position of weakness. And I think that is crucial. Third, particularly in relation to digital technologies, postcolonialism offers new possibilities for dialogue between people who are part of the West and the people who are not. And I think that creates a space for new kinds of inspiring, energizing, and collective alliances in the name of radical democracy.

The biggest problem with postcolonial theory – and this is a problem with every political theory – is that you need to be careful about political purity. There is a tendency in this broad based theoretical project to err on the side of political purity. Oppression does not offer political guarantees. History, public memory, and justice have to be struggled over and emerge by taking a detour through informed judgments, history, and theory. I think that focusing on differences, while essential, sometimes can fracture, in really detrimental ways, the possibility for broader social movements and broader political interventions. And I think that postcolonial theory has to deal with this, as do all theoretically defined political movements. Theorists such as Angela Davis (2012) understand this. However, there are a lot of identity-based movements that are caught in political silos where these questions of certainty, political purity, and guarantee, sometimes go too far and become counterproductive. I think that postcolonialism – in all of its diversity – needs to be a dialogue that is not only in touch with the West. As a mode of critique, postcolonialism needs to be in touch with itself, in terms of the ability to be self-reflective about its own potential drawbacks.

Cultural studies in and for the age of digital cultures

PJ: A prominent place in your recent work is linked to the zombie metaphor and to the culture of cruelty (Giroux, 2011). Following the long tradition of inquiry into relationships between technology and human behaviour (i.e. Arendt, 1998), can you assess the role of information technology in the culture of cruelty?

HG: Information technology is not purely instrumental in the culture of cruelty because it is a question of how technology gets used in ways to reproduce that culture. Therefore, the real question for me is: How do digital technologies become complicit in acts of injustice, barbarism, and exploitation? Remember, information technologies operate within a set of particular political and social formations, and often take their cue from those formations. When you live in a culture which tells you that the only thing that matters is the 'survival of the fittest' ethic, that social Darwinism is the way that we should deal with each other, and that social combat is more important than social solidarity, you will find that technologies are open to an enormous abuse. Whether we talk about bullying, whether we talk about people who hide behind anonymity, or whether we talk about people who write dreadful comments about articles – comments that sometimes become so dreadful that I just stopped reading them. Or, for that matter a criminogenic finance culture that uses the new technologies and high speed computers to produce massive trades and engage in large scale corruption.

When I look at Fox News – that is the culture of cruelty. That is a culture of lies, misrepresentation, and cruelty. With the advent of the Internet, however, we need to be more attentive to that question, because technology has made it easier to hide and to be cruel at the same time. I think that people need to be really aware of this enormous influence in the new online cultural apparatuses that make up mainstream screen culture. Manufactured ignorance is the DNA of mainstream screen culture, spewing out hate, racism, misinformation, all the while engaging in a spectacle of violence and justifying American exceptionalism. As we all know, young people kill themselves because of online bullying! The far right uses digital technology in ways that are mind-blowing, because your question is actually predicated on another question. Your question is predicated on the educative role that the technology plays – on the fact that technology is basically a form of education. So the links between information technology and the culture of cruelty must reach far beyond simple instrumental logic and be deeply concerned with matters of power, wealth, economic control, etc. When you understand that, then the question becomes: What kind of education is at work here? How does that culture of cruelty get taken up and what are its effects. Listen to the racist rants by right wing fanatics such as Ann Coulter and the commentators on Fox News or read David Brooks in the New York Times who argues that poverty is the result of the poor not adopting middle class moral values. This stuff is more than ignorance, it is dangerous because it is distributed through powerful cultural apparatuses that produce modes of public pedagogy that shape identities, values, and desires.

PJ: In my opinion, your conclusion that technology is basically a form of education should be one of the basic pillars of contemporary critical pedagogy – and it requires as much dedicated attention as it can get. Can you please expand on it?

HG: Absolutely! How is anything that is cultural in its essence, also not in essence pedagogical? The Internet is a form of pedagogy, because it both produces knowledge and facilitates the exchange of knowledge and communications; it deals with the ongoing exchange and legitimation of values, it deals with dialogue, it deals with ways in which people produce meaning. As soon as we begin to talk about the production of meaning, we are also talking about the production of identities. So it seems to me that the Internet is just like other, narrower forms of education in that it is always part of a larger struggle over knowledge, power, modes of representation, and how the future is to be defined. What you really have here is the struggle over modes of identity, modes of agency, modes of social formations, modes of the political. In that sense, the Internet is enormously political and educational, and I would go further and argue that is one of areas that is least analysed.

There is too little understanding of the educative nature of such technologies. They are educative in the most fundamental political sense. They have an enormous reach, they have enormous power, they influence enormous amounts of people, and they constitute a power element of how

the political is constituted. One could argue that the ways people now read society, read culture, read politics, is almost entirely now through the Internet. My students, for the most part, they do not read print culture any more. They say they do, but the vast majority of time they are online for hours on end. There are studies now showing that kids use digital technologies almost eleven hours per day (Rideout, Foehr and Roberts, 2010)!

PJ: Mainstream critical pedagogy usually talks about schools and schooling. However, as people such as Ivan Illich (1971) and Everett Reimer (1971) have shown almost half a century ago, schooling is very different from human learning. Now, there is no doubt that the Internet offers a huge amount of information. Could you please relate access to information with access to learning? More precisely, could you please assess contemporary potentials for deschooling society through information technologies?

HG: If Ivan Illich's [Deschooling](#) today is read as an attack on public schools, the argument aids the right wing attack on all things public, but if it points to other sites of education outside of institutionalized schooling as sites of potential learning and struggle, I think it is useful. That said, I think public and higher education are under attack by the neoliberal avengers and the religious fundamentalists, at least in the United States and United Kingdom. So the real question is: If schools are under attack, what is it about them that seems so dangerous? And that question already provides a part of the answer. A part of the answer is that schools are public – they represent public spheres. A part of the answer is that schools offer the possibility for people to engage in dissent – to learn how to be critically engaged agents. School offer the possibility for dialogues, insights, knowledge that are impossible to get access to elsewhere. And schools often produce modes of sociality that are dangerous – where people work together, where people work collectively. I never liked the more limited notion of deschooling. I did not think that the issue was whether we should do away with public schools. I thought there were two issues. First, we should do everything to retain public schools and make them stronger, because they are absolutely vital to any democracy. Second, we have to broaden the notion of education, so that it is not restricted strictly to schools.

PJ: Such broadening is closely related to culture. Hence, it is hardly surprising that a lot of your work overlaps with the field of Cultural Studies. What happens to Cultural Studies in the age of digital cultures?

HG: Cultural Studies has always been concerned with the question how culture deploys power and vice versa. Information technologies add a different register to this question. So the register now is not just how culture in the traditional sense deploys power, but also how new information technologies and the spaces they are producing can be used in ways that are both political and pedagogical. Stuart Hall, just before he died, insisted that Cultural Studies was not there to produce high theory. Cultural studies was here to address the important social problems (Hall, 1980). So the question then becomes: How do information technologies become helpful in addressing important social problems? What modes of evaluation can we bring to information technologies in order to really understand and criticise what they do and what they do not do? How can they produce a language of critique and possibility which touches people lives, provides modes of identification, and points to new social and political possibilities?

PJ: A lot of your work is focused to the social role of teachers. Since your book [Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning](#) (1988), however, digital technologies have radically transformed our social landscapes – and, I would assume, such transformations cannot leave your analyses intact. Can you describe the notion of teachers as public intellectuals in and for the age of digital cultures?

HG: It really began somewhere in the 1990s, when all of a sudden the Internet explodes and changes the ways how knowledge is brought, produced, distributed and circulated. This placed all kinds of new responsibilities on the intellectuals. So they now needed not only to address important social problems, but they also need to address these problems in ways to get their work known – so that it might have an impact. There are people who are pushing the boundaries of particular kinds of knowledge, and they do important things that are strictly within their field. For instance, Susan Searls Giroux works a lot with health science people, and the results of this work are really impressive. New kinds of knowledge help people without access to open various doors, and that is important. However, I do not know what it means to be an educator and engage in any kind of scholarship without addressing the important social problems.

I think that the question we need to ask is: What kind of urgency now demands that we need people to master digital technologies? Given the attempt to eliminate the public intellectuals and to replace them with anti-public intellectuals, this question is particularly interesting. And not only that, I guess that another important question needs to be raised. Intellectuals *per se* need spaces to produce their work. They need to be able to justify the conditions of own labour. And the way that such justification needs to be done, I would think, is to make an appeal to the fact that their labour, in some way, addresses important public issues. And I think that information technology is absolutely essential in doing that.

PJ: In this series of articles, I held conversations with many of your dear friends and colleagues – Michael Peters, Peter McLaren... Writing up your biographies, one by one, I noticed an interesting pattern. After obtaining your first degrees, most of you had been working between five and ten years in primary or secondary education before embarking en route towards critical pedagogy and the academy. What is the role of your teaching experience in your academic work? How close or remote are you today from classroom trenches?

HG: When I was teaching in high school, I was just a young man who wanted to help young kids. That is why I wanted to teach. And I started using modes of teaching s that, in some way, I viewed as strictly methodological. They were not political for me. I used them to learn how to give lectures, how to repeat questions, how to test knowledge, that sort of thing. But I very early on found myself teaching in a largely poor school inhabited my minorities of class and colour, in which all the rules which suggested that pedagogy was an *a priori* exercise or methodologically driven completely evaporated, as the students just completely ignored the context in which such pedagogy found itself. I needed to think theoretically through what that all meant. And for me, that was the beginning of an exercise in what it meant to be able to theorize, the experiences that I was having. In terms of where I actually went in respect to questions of education, I think it had an enormous impact on me. From that point on, I recognized that matters of context mattered. Pedagogy begins with problems that arise in particular contexts, material, ideological, and ethical. And it is in those connections that as a teacher we learn to make education first meaningful in order to make it critical and transformative.

I never divorced education from questions of democracy, and I never divorced education from larger issues around questions about the development of agency, about the development of politics, the development of social values, modes of social responsibility, and ways of theorizing different kinds of pedagogical interventions. So that was the beginning for me. That was the groundwork. Actually, that was the experience which jolted me into a kind of theoretical world that I could not ignore if I wanted to take school experience seriously and if I wanted to be able to articulate that experience to others.

Digital imagination machines against the violence of organised forgetting

PJ: In an interview with Victoria Harper about your recent book [The Violence of Organized Forgetting: Thinking Beyond America's Disimagination Machine](#) (2012), you said: "We live in a historical moment when memory, if not critical thought itself, is either under attack or is being devalued and undermined by a number of forces in American society" (Harper, 2014). However, the Internet has brought the direct opposite of forgetting – the hive mind remembers so many things, and in such detail, that it becomes harder and harder to escape own history. Obviously, organised forgetting works on much subtler levels than mere access to information – as you say, it is about depoliticization, and lack of critical thinking, and even pure ignorance. What is the role of information technologies in the struggle against organised forgetting? How can they transform our cultural apparatuses from "disimagination machines" into "imagination machines"?

HG: Remember, digital technologies have the tendency to be 24/7. They operate in a space of highly intense speed and in doing so produce huge amounts of information that make it all the more difficult to assess knowledge critically. In many ways, what we are seeing are students, who are using digital technologies in a way so rapidly, and consuming so quickly, that what gets erased are the conditions for what we might call the extra-sizing memory. So that instead of memory, we get assaulted by information, and we quickly try to figure out exactly what it means. I think that simply because something stays online, or simply because something goes into data storage (for instance, in the National Security Agency (NSA), which stores everything) – that is not memory. That is about retrieval.

So I think that the real questions here are: First, in what way do we have to learn how to engage digital technology, so that it is not constantly engaged in a kind of endless erasure of informed judgment that is no longer present in the most immediate of moments? How do we learn from the past? And how do we move away from the surface? And the other question is: In what ways do digital technologies hold the promise of reclaiming public memory? Digital technologies carry the inherent promise of reclaiming public memory. They develop archives, they offer huge amounts of knowledge, and they control access... But the real question here is that public memory is not just simply, about making information available but what kind of information matters and makes a difference in people's lives for the better. The question is: What are the larger political conditions that would take public memory seriously in the first place and hence shape digital technologies in ways in which they can contribute to that expanding the possibilities for a global democracy?

When I say that many digital technologies engage as dis-imagination machines, what I means is that they are often used to shut down knowledge considered dangerous to oppressive authorities. . They censor. They leave information out. They distort. They function under surface. They do not talk about historical narratives. They do not even talk about history as a liberating force. For instance, many school systems in the United States are rewriting curricula to support a neoliberal view of the world while at the same time eliminating the work of historians like Howard Zinn and others considered to be harbingers of dangerous memory. In many ways they talk about the present as an ever-ending machine of consumption. I think that you never want to forget, as many people have said, that all those questions need to be understood within the existing social and political formations. So the final question is: What formations are at work to distort digital technologies, in a world where questions of memory become at least irrelevant if not dangerous?

PJ: In [Empire](#), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have shown that internalisation was "a key component of proletarian struggles and progressive politics in general" (2001: 49) – the word even ended up as the working class anthem! Nowadays, however, the tables have turned, and contemporary precariat conceives globalisation and weakening of the nation state as the main causes of its oppression. In words of Hardt and Negri,

[o]ne might be tempted to say that proletarian internationalism actually "won" in light of the fact that the powers of nation-states have declined in the recent passage toward globalization and Empire, but that would be a strange and ironic notion of victory. It is more accurate to say, following the William Morris quotation that serves as one of the epigraphs for this book, that what they fought for came about despite their defeat. (ibid: 50)

Certainly, globalisation in the beginning of 21st century is very different from internationalism of the late 19th century. Nevertheless, contemporary precariat and ancient proletariat seem to share a similar tension between the local and the global. Could you please assess the tension between the national and the international in the context of contemporary critical pedagogy?

HG: I think that the greatest tension is something that we could never have imagined twenty years ago: the separation of power from politics. As Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out in a number of books, politics is local, and power is global. So what we have is a new kind of politics, in which the financial elites have no allegiance whatsoever to the social contract. They make no concession and at the same time politics, the ability to see what needs to be done is removed from the power to do it. And it seems, while problems new global elite produce often impacts different localities in very specific ways, and yet there is no way that these problems are going to be solved except on a global level. They are not going to be solved in any other way. You can resolve certain aspects of these issues in terms of short-term projects. For instance, we can reduce carbon output in Chicago – which is helpful. But the fact of the matter is that sustainable long-term solutions really need a politics that is both global, and a politics that is international.

Now, does that at the same time mean that the nation-state has disappeared? I think that is nonsense. I think that the nation state has been reconfigured in terms of its punitive and punishing qualities, as opposed to its social qualities. That is, the social state dies, because the global financial elite has no interest in investing in the social state because they do not believe the state has a responsibility to the social contract or for that matter any social responsibility whatsoever. What you have in its place is a state that has given up its sovereignty to corporate interests, and it now enforces corporate rules. That is the punishing state. Increasingly, the punishing state is what we are seeing, especially in the U.S. in the forms of a proliferation of state violence ranging from, the militarization of the local police to the militarization of schools, social services, and other public spheres. The punishing state is also based on mass surveillance, and on austerity measures that do everything in their power to basically transfer the immiseration and the misery caused by the punishing state onto working class people and the poor. So that is why the issue of disposability is something we never talked about in a way that we need to talk about now – because it includes a whole range of people, unlike it has in the past.

Almost fifty percent of young people in Greece, Spain, Croatia, and many other countries, are unemployed (Dietrich, 2012). These are the major issues. And in my estimation, what role the state will play in the future is problematic. But it is certainly not going to play the role it played in the past. I think the question of social democracy is dead. And I will tell you why. It is dead because social democracy argues for social provisions. As opposed to social democracy, radical democracy argues for redistribution of wealth, which is much more radical and much more necessary.

You cannot have the 80 richest people in the world now control as much as the globe! What do you say about that, in terms of its impact on everything? You have a financial elite now, who are buying land in New Zealand, and buying airplanes and landing stripes, because they would rather escape, they think, then do anything to deteriorate suffering they caused on the global level. That is unbelievable! That is beyond the culture of cruelty! That represents a kind of political and social psychosis produced by casino capitalism and its neoliberal offshoots, however diverse they might be.

PJ: Let us move back from global to local. Your working-class background has strongly shaped your academic work. As you said, however, the traditional notions of working class and middle class are nowadays quickly disappearing...

HG: They are disappearing in two ways that I find interesting. First, when I hear candidates in the United States talking about how radical they are, you know what they say? “We are going to save the middle class.” And I often think, what happened to the working class? Are they so disposable, subject to a politics of erasure that they have even disappeared from the vocabulary? Are they so gone, that they are not even considered as agents of possibility, agents of investment, agents of change? Second, you have a lot of Marxists who want to believe that the question of historical agency is unproblematic, and that the workers of the world will rise up again. I think that belief is a bit overstated to the point that I do not even know where to begin with it! The workers are important in terms of any struggle – absolutely. But labour unions have become weakened, worker organisations have been dissipated, and I think that the real issue here is how we might link up workers and worker movements with social movements. Podemos did this in Spain, right? Syriza did this in Greece. What does this model teach us about a new kind of politics in which the very notion of alliances gets reworked, reinvented and becomes more expansive and willing to create a broad based political formation.

PJ: Peter McLaren’s argument, in brief, is that the working class has not disappeared – instead, it has merely relocated to the global South. Indeed, the working class barely exists in the global North these days – but that does not mean that the working class does not exist at all. (McLaren and Jandrić, 2014: 807)

HG: Peter is not entirely wrong – there certainly is a more politically conscious working class in Mexico, and Latin America, and Africa. But I think the real question here is: What have we learned from the failures of political movements that have been only relying only on worker movements? Where have these movements succeeded without getting into avant-gardism, without developing party systems that basically become absorbed in labour unions? I do think that no movement can exclude labour – that is impossible. But labour is not enough – that is my point. And, as Susan Searls Giroux often points out (2010), there is no guarantee that workers will indeed move to the left.

PJ: Actually, in Europe and in the United States, they seem to be moving to the right...

HG: Absolutely! And I think this global movement of workers towards the right, once again, speaks to the viability of the educative nature of politics. The left has to take seriously what workers’ needs are, and how to explain those needs to workers, in ways that are meaningful, critical and transformative. Just look, for instance, what has happened in France, with an influx of Muslim populations, when workers do not have a language to understand important events in critical and political terms? What happens to workers? They become fascists! That is what happens to them! This is really an important issue for the left.

What kind of work would that take? What does it mean not to just celebrate and romanticise workers, but also to recognise that, in lieu of changing historical and political conditions and colorations, we are losing workers? Politically, the left is losing workers – workers are becoming a force for the right. How do you want to talk about that? What demands does that make, pedagogically and politically? In what way does such loss force us to rethink the very nature of politics? And in what ways does it force us to rethink the very nature of the relationships between education and politics?

PJ: All around the world, we are witnessing growing polarisations: between the rich and the poor, between the debtors and the indebted, between the political right and the political left... Such growth of social polarisations cannot be sustained for much longer – and the humankind needs to reconcile about important issues such as the environment, access to resources, etc. Giddens and his ‘Third Way’ politics (Giddens, 2000) have definitely been exposed as right-wing and detrimental (Callinicos, 2001). Do you see any common ground for wide consensus about issues relevant for the whole humanity?

HG: There are three issues, to me, that are in play here. First is the ecological issue. If this continues, they will destroy the planet – that is for sure. Second, nation states now need to engage in permanent war economies as a part of the punishing status they created internationally. So the second great problem is around the possibility of the nuclear war – in Ukraine, Russia, we see all this Cold War rhetoric emerging once again. The third issue is massive poverty, in which resources are so concentrated in the hands of the rich. Here, the inequality becomes so overwhelming, and the distinction between the rich and the poor extends to such a degree, that you have traditional working class and middle class entirely disappearing. So you end up with what the Citigroup calls the plutonomy (Ajay, Macleod, and Singh, 2005 & 2006). On one level, there is the financial elite, and then there is the precariat, which is pretty much everybody else (Chomsky, 2012). Globally, the 1% vs. the 99% is not a fictional figure – it is stark reality.

Towards a pedagogy of the precariat

PJ: As a common result of these trends, the precariat is quickly becoming an important social force – even in traditional bastions of the middle class such as the academy. Would you agree with Guy Standing that the precariat needs to develop own class identity (Standing, 2014; Standing and Jandrić, 2015)? What is the role of information and communication technologies in development of such identity? What are the main similarities and differences between pedagogy of the oppressed and pedagogy of the precariat?

HG: That is an important question. I think that a pedagogy of the precariat suggests that you are talking about a pedagogy that recognises new distinctive economic, political and social registers. A pedagogy that is no longer rooted complete in 20th century formations, but in the 21st century. A pedagogy that takes on particularly the savagery of the regime of neoliberalism that has really altered the deck around the assault on the public, the assault on unions, youth, public goods, the environment, public values, and democracy itself. In many ways, the regime of neoliberalism has developed a public pedagogy rooted in poisonous values such as the unbridled belief in market values, radical individualism, and unchecked competition that so limits human possibilities by undermining all notions of the public, solidarity, the support for the common good, and care for others. In this form of market fundamentalism, human agency is reduced to a form of social combat and human relations

mimic the logic of exchange values, promoting only matters of self-interest. Such a reduction of human agency operates in ways which suggest that Paulo Freire's notion of pedagogy as always unfinished holds an enormously important number of insights. Like any social theory, like any ideology, like any worldview, critical pedagogy needs to adjust to circumstances in which it finds itself. And at this historical moment we find ourselves in a historical conjuncture that is quite distinctive in that finance capital now governs all of the major institutions of the United States, including the government, and the market is viewed as the a template for governing all social relations, not just the economy. I think that Paulo Freire would be the first to agree with the importance of understanding pedagogy as both a practice of freedom and as a powerful force for domination particularly as it currently relates to this current market driven historical conjuncture. You know, near the end of his life, Paulo did start talking about neoliberalism (Roberts, 2003).

PJ: So, how might we educate the next generation of Freirean teachers, scholars, social and political researchers?

HG: Maybe the best way is to try and understand that there has been an enormous shift in the ethical foundation for understanding and making pedagogy central to politics itself. Critical pedagogy is now seen as dangerous in its ability to create critically engaged citizens and its willingness to hold power accountable. It gets worse. We have infinite tolerance for bankers and financial elites, and we have zero tolerance for teachers, whistle-blowers, and anyone else willing to stand up, take a risk, and challenge the crisis of authority that we find ourselves in. Schools with their high stakes testing model have instituted a pedagogy of repression which when coupled with the curse of student debt on at the level of higher education is a recipe for killing off the potential of the radical imagination in an entire generation of students. Pedagogically, the question is: Why are we supporting an educational system that is based on oppression? We are not talking just about questions of evaluation – we are talking about genuine forms of critical and creative learning that educators students to address real problems and learn how to govern rather than be governed. Your generation needs to pay close attention to how oppression works not just structurally but also through the realm of ideas, knowledge, that is, intellectually. You need to comprehend how oppression works along a variety platforms and registers from schooling to a range of other cultural apparatuses – whether it is about intimidation, the imposition of a culture of fear, a politics of surveillance, ongoing forms of depolitization, or whether it is about the rise of the punishing state and the criminalisation of social behaviour. We need to understand these things through five major registers.

The first register is that we need to develop the analytical skills to know what this system does to people and how it works. Neoliberal capitalism is buttressed through a variety of fundamentalisms: economic, military, educational and religious ... we need to understand this. We need to understand the workings of these modes of oppression and how they interact with each other as ideologies, modes of governance, policies, and pedagogical discourses. If we do not understand them, we cannot challenge them. We need, in some way, to find ourselves thinking, acting, and working with a new understanding of the relationships between politics, power, and knowledge.

Second, we need to revive radical imagination. We need both the language of critique and the language of hope as a way to reimagine the promise of a radical democracy and the myriad conditions necessary to support it. We need to allow people to realize that capitalism is not all there is. That there is something else. That one cannot act otherwise, unless one can think otherwise. If we want to talk about Paulo Freire, let us be honest. Paulo was the guy who did not believe in reform. He believed in radical change! Paulo was not about reforming capitalist systems. He was about destroying them! He was about getting rid of them! Paulo talked about systems that worked because they are not built on massive amounts of inequity, inequality, wealth, and power. He understood that. So Paulo's notion of education was not simply about critical thinking. It was about conscientization – the move to educate in order to equip people with a sense of agency that that is collective and transformative. Paulo Freire understood the need to work with others and reclaim the questions of solidarity. For him, the pedagogical was always at the centre of the notion of solidarity.

Third, one of the things that need to be done in the name of Freirean understanding of politics is creating the new language for politics. As teachers, public intellectuals, writers, journalists, we need to create educational spaces in which we can generate these new vocabularies about freedom, trust, justice, equality, the public good, and the commons. The neoliberal pedagogical machine has subverted these terms by either distorting their meaning as when they define freedom as the freedom to consume or when they disparage them as in their disdain for all public values. And one of our obligations is to simply stop saying that we need to educate young people to be critically literate. Instead, we need to educate young people to be cultural producers, active agents for whom knowledge is linked to not simply a broader awareness of literary, cultural, and scientific treasures but to an expansion of one's sense of individual and social agency. It is not enough to read culture critically. It is not enough to say: We know how to read digital media. People need the ability to read digital media, for sure, but they also need to be able to produce digital media. They need to produce radio, television, and online programs that speak to real issues in a variety of genres.. They need to produce own journals. And some of them are already doing it! Because, without those skills, inside mainstream media, the people will be silenced.

Fourth, we need to teach people to have one foot in and one foot out. Never give your soul to the institution! Because they will demote your sense of agency, hope, and make you cynical and ultimately complicit with their own limited visions. When we understand that, we will be freer to act within these institutions to create the spaces that matter. Spaces of disruption. Spaces of resistance. Spaces in which we can model for young people what it means to speak up and take risk. Spaces in which we can eliminate islamophobia, the attack on immigrants and the demonization of the other. Spaces where we can speak about the violence that goes on in poor neighbourhoods and spaces where we can work in those neighbourhoods.

Finally, we need new political formations. I do not believe in the Republican and in the Democrat party. They are business parties. They are the heart and soul of corporate business and financial interests. So to expect that Hilary Clinton or Bernie Sanders will somehow address the question of finance capital and its influence on either party is a cruel joke.

PJ: Can you link these registers to information and communication technologies?

HG: Technological decisions are essentially normative and political. However, because of highly specialised knowledge in the field of engineering, important decisions have often been done without proper public consultation. Now that we are witnessing catastrophes arising from advances in plundering the earth's resources and their consequences such as global warming, technical questions are getting much more public attention. Unfortunately, the general population to often construct opinions on incomplete data and knowledge. So I think that more and more people in the technological community need to be aware of normative and political aspects of their work. Moreover, the general population should have much more knowledge about technology. Linking the two is an enormously important project for contemporary critical pedagogy.

Many engineers are concerned with issues around privacy and security, and it is really important to have both the engineering skills and the language to be able to talk about these questions. The biomedical community is trying to create an interface to holistically understand the opportunities offered by technologies. There is no recourse to determine where life begins, where the machine ends, and what value is there in the production of zombies – people who have really low quality of life. In Europe, I think, there is a bit more attentiveness to these questions. Having said that, the engineers and activists have recently started working on a wide range of technical solutions for these problems. Unfortunately, they are still far from mainstream, and we need to work hard to push these questions and practices into mainstream.

PJ: A lot of your work is directly linked to the U.S. This is hardly a surprise, as you have clearly and continually asserted the importance of context. However, few decades after the end of the Cold War, contexts that characterised the 20th century are rapidly changing, and we are witnessing another historical large-scale regrouping. As Europe gets closer and closer to the U.S., Russia is on the rise, and Southeast Asia is about to become the largest world's producer of goods and user of natural resources such as oil. What needs to be done in respect to these developments? How can we make the message of critical pedagogy truly trans-national?

HG: I do believe that critical pedagogy offers a number of developments that are enormously crucial, and that people need to address. Critical pedagogy does take up the question of power and education. It does suggest that education in some ways is a moral and political practice. It does suggest that questions of context matter. It does speak about the role of education as a part of struggle over producing particular kinds of futures and particular kinds of identities. And it does mark the political as the one that suggests that the role of educating people is not just about creating good workers – that is training. So I think that critical pedagogy offers an enormous number of elements that are very important, very crucial, and I think – like anything else – that critical pedagogy evolves, as it incorporates new dimensions and takes on new different issues. These are important general principles that need to be understood within the specificity of particular contexts.

PJ: You completed your doctorate in education in 1977 – much before information technology has entered mass production. Nowadays, in 2015, we clearly live in the information society. As someone who has actively shaped contemporary critical pedagogy during these turbulent social transformations, could you please assess the relationships between information technologies and education from a historical perspective?

HG: We need to be careful about romanticising any technology in ways which might suggest that it wipes out the past. The idea that information technology is such a rupture from the past that the past no longer seems relevant – that idea just seems incredibly ignorant to me. To subscribe to that idea implies the inability to understand the impacts of the railroad, or the telegraph, or the printing press, and the ways they fundamentally changed the way the world functions. More importantly, to subscribe to that idea is to ignore the way in which societies are organised around technologies that truly produce massive societal change. People who celebrate digital technologies without the benefit of any public memory or historical consciousness need examine the massive changes various technologies caused in the past. What can we learn from these changes to try and understand the role that other technologies might play in the future?

One thing we can learn, for sure, is that the degree to which various technologies were taken over by the concentration of wealth is also the degree to which these technologies are abused and serve very narrow individual, political, and financial interests. The degree to which various technologies are taken over by forms of state monopolies, like in the Soviet Union, is the degree to which these technologies are abused. The way in which the Internet is up for grabs by corporate interests is indicative that such technologies cannot escape from the question of power and inequality. So it seems that studies of information and communication technologies really can learn from the question: How do we insert the notion of democracy into their language?

We hear all this stuff about the wonder of information technologies, right? But we do not hear enough about other important questions. First, people are constantly going online and giving up their privacy rights. They can't run fast enough from privacy – privacy is like a burden to them. In giving up their privacy, they become complicit with the surveillance state. Second, we have got a state that is now implementing all kinds of technologies around education in ways that I find dangerous. Putting monitors on kids to register their emotions, and to measure how they respond to certain stimuli in classes (Sung et al., 2005) – this is truly dystopian. New technologies now drive the circle of production and consumption, and they turned it into a 24/7 tornado. Questions of buying, consuming, and disposability, have been accelerated to such a degree that we are getting closer and closer to destroying the planet – to say the least. In the midst of that question, there is inference for romanticisation of technologies, and we witness some of the darkest moments in an authoritarian politics that we have seen since the 1930s. So, the question is certainly not about how wonderful digital technology is. The question here, I would think, is: Given the wonderful potentials that digital technology has, how and why is it now being used in such an abusive way, by whom, and whose interests does it serve. And how might we understand this as central to a new form of totalitarianism?

PJ: In the best tradition of critical pedagogy, you have always radiated optimism – even when dealing with tough topics such as the culture of oppression and violence. What is the underlying source of your optimism? Where do you gather strength for your positive attitude towards the future?

HG: Because I refuse to become complicit with the dominating and death dealing forces that surround me! And I think that becoming complicit is when you become cynical or worse. I cannot imagine not imagining different futures. I cannot imagine that people cannot rise up, even in the mist of the worst forms of domination. I cannot imagine that people cannot recognize that history is open and that power is never simply synonymous with domination. Marx said, amongst the many fabulous things, that history is open (Marx, 1973). And I believe that! I do not believe that history is closed. I do not believe that history just marches on unchanged by human beings. Of course, you have to struggle for agency – but this is exactly what Marx always said, and what a number of people have said. So, I really believe in the question of struggle. I believe in human ability to imagine a different future and to form future conditions through various forms of collective and political struggle. I believe that the contradictions have become so great, that resistance is not simply a possibility, one choice among man – it is hard wired into what it means to recognize that human beings are unfinished and that history does not simply repeat itself.

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