

Intellectuals Rethinking Politics of Difference: A Pedagogical Project

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We live in an era marked by an ever-increasing anti-intellectualism that is manifested in almost every aspect of public and private life. From the flat rejection of theory in the ranks of teachers and educators to the vocalization and corporatization of higher education, to the conservative call for the oxymoron “political neutrality,” to the U.S. political debate where to be an “intellectual” is often considered a liability, we are witnessing the demise of intellectualism as a democratic force that should shape and inform all public spheres.

The present anti-intellectual epidemic is particularly acute in education. On the one hand, we have conservatives who adopt a positivistic and functionalist view of knowledge as a transparent vehicle of truth and the view of school and university as an apolitical public sphere. The very posture of viewing schools as “apolitical” sites constitutes, of course, a political act. By using the neutrality vehicle, these conservatives promote aggressively their own agenda, advocating for education as an a-historical banking model of handing down ideas, values, and canons to the new class of educated who, hopefully, will be the carriers of the same conservative message materially, ideologically, and discursively. On the other hand, these same conservative educators resent what they term as “unregulated intellectuals”—intellectuals who doubt their legitimacy and threaten the longevity of their conservative future.

The crisis of democracy in education is illustrated in the current debate concerning the teaching of Evolution in schools. Under the guise of “pluralism,” and the “inclusion of more voices” in the school curriculum, the Christian right stops short of overturning evolution altogether and introducing biblical accounts for the origins of life.¹ The conservative backlash that is now taking the form of censorship, as in the incident with University of Colorado professor Ward Churchill, becomes abundantly clear in the case of conservative students who target their liberal professors by opposing what they call “overwhelming liberal dominance of university faculties.”² At the same time, we also are witnessing the changing nature in the role of educators with the disappearance of a form of intellectual labor that is central to the nature of critical pedagogy and radical democracy—a pedagogy that infuses epistemological curiosity, independent thinking, and critique.

At a time when the need for such meaningful democratic interventions in the public sphere becomes more crucial than ever before in order to safeguard and extend democratic arenas, the work of the late Edward Said emerges as a major force to challenge us to reassert the critical role of public intellectuals in the educational endeavor. Given the present historical moment which is marked by a plethora of political, ideological, social, racial, cultural, religious, and other crises in the public terrain, there is, more than ever, a critical need to confront the rise of insignificance, apathy, political neutrality, and cynicism as these spread in the public realm. These crises are symptomatic of a deeper malady of contemporary societies, which invariably leads to the depoliticization of politics. Intellectuals need to find their point of departure in these

1. Peter Slevin, “Battle on Teaching Evolution Sharpens,” *The Washington Post* (3/14/2005).

2. Justin Pope, “Conservative Students Target Liberal Profs,” *Associated Press Education*, (12/25/2004)

very politics and shape their project within institutions of higher education as open public spheres.

Edward Said, the quintessential public intellectual in exile, “out of place” as he referred to his condition in his memoir bearing the same title, laid the groundwork for re-defining the nature, role, characteristics, functions, and responsibilities of public intellectuals in modern globalized societies.

An important point of departure in any discussion regarding the intellectual’s role is its public character. For Said, the intellectual is “an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion *to*, as well as *for*, a public.”¹ In that sense, he is clearly stating that the role of the intellectual must always be a public one. In other words, he refuses to view the intellectual as an individual in the ivory tower who relegates herself to a kind of narcissistic, egocentric, philosophical writing just to fulfill her personal aspirations. Said considers the intellectual as a secular being, an “amateur foray” into the public sphere who is “advancing human freedom and knowledge” with her ideals deeply rooted in the belief that “all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously.”² This is directly linked to Antonio Gramsci’s notion of the organic intellectual –an intellectual who is actively involved in the social life and has a specific public role in society. This role by no means should be seen as a profession, or as Said puts it, “intellectuals thinking of their work as something they do for a living, making themselves marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and ‘objective.’”³

In Said’s view, the intellectual must be by definition amateur, that is “a thinking and concerned member of a society, one [who] is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one’s country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens as well as with other societies.”⁴ His notion of professionalism is particularly important and relevant to the degree that it uncovers the manufacturing of a specific stratum of professional intellectuals. This type of professional intellectuals is understood by Noam Chomsky when he refers to them as “commissars” who “are performing a service that is expected of them by the institutions for which they work, and they willingly, perhaps unconsciously, fulfill the requirements of the doctrinal system.”⁵ Against a legacy of professional intellectuals who often sacrifice their principles in order to serve and reproduce the dominant power structure, Said embraces a form of intellectualism that guarantees not only a spirit of critique but also a necessary independence of thinking. In other words, Said, much like Paulo Freire, believes that an intellectual must always have the courage, the ethical posture to denounce so as to be able to announce a world informed by both hope and possibility. Amateurism also means refusing to support academic professionalization of social criticism while accepting the ever present risk to expose oneself and ideas to the public sphere through lectures, books or articles. In short, it means to speak truth to power. It also means not to align oneself with the interests of the powerful minority and not to submit to a system that constantly rewards individuals for obedience and their contribution to the reproduction of an inherently discriminatory, unfair, and undemocratic reality. The amateur intellectual is diametrically the opposite to the rise of a new class of “public intellectuals” as stars and mouthpieces of the system. This new class of populist intellectuals has largely compromised the spirit of oppositional discourse, while at the same time maintaining the image of well-respected figures who have something to say about “public life.” By providing an intellectual service designed to legitimize the dominant ideological order of a particular society, the populist intellectual reaps tremendous rewards from the system. Within the present commodification of intellectualism, populist intellectuals, as opposed to Said’s “amateurs,” not only have been bought out by the system and get rewards for the services they provide as professionals but, in some real sense, the commodification of the mind invariably reduces the populist intellectual to the status of a clerk of the empire. This type of “intellectuals” is often invited as “experts” to discuss vital issues related to public life in the major TV Networks. These “experts,” such as Francis Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington, Dinesh D’Souza, David Horowitz, and even Lynne Cheney and so forth, are often associated with conservative think and they are always willing, as Said notes, “to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn’t trust the evidence of one’s eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest mission civilizatrice”⁶. It is very rarely if not ever that critical independent thinkers like Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, or Gore Vidal will appear on Fox News or NBC.

Said correctly notes that to be an expert, you need to be certified by the proper authorities: they instruct you in speaking the right language, citing the right authorities, holding down the right territory. This becomes all the more interesting given the conservatives’ accusations that they are underrepresented in the university faculties and outnumbered by “Kerry-vot-

1. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p.11.

2. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 11.

3. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.74.

4. Ibid, p. 83.

5. Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on (Mis)education*. Macedo, D. (Ed.). (Boulder, Co: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). p.17.

6. Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), p. xxi.

ing” leftists who push their radical agendas on students. Students are now complaining that they only get “half the story” given the dominance of liberal professors in the academy. If, in fact this is true, where exactly are these radical leftist intellectuals and how come they are never represented in more popular venues such as media texts? Russel Jacoby challenges this bogus claim by suggesting that conservatives command the Presidency, Congress, Supreme Court, major news outlets and the majority of corporations. He suggests a trade to these conservatives: “you give us all this and we will give you every damned English department you want.”¹

Despite the numerical preponderance of liberal scholars in the academy over conservatives, these often lack the language of critique that is necessary to make interventions in the public life to the extent that liberalism does not necessarily translate into dissent given their often compromised wavering position concerning public issues that imply divestment of their class privileges. The issue of space/terrain emerges as another important factor in the intellectual’s function. Since the intellectual’s role is in fact “public” what kind of spaces s/he inhabits and how are these defined, redefined, and transformed? How does one inhabit a public space in a largely privatized and commercialized society and yet resist one’s own accommodation?

Public spheres should be understood as open civic spaces, both ideological and material where free trade of ideas, knowledges, and practices take place, a reclaimed de-commodified territory where people should be able to exercise a truly democratic citizenship. Public spheres are highly political and should always aim at human self-governance while freeing people from the logic of the market. As Henry Giroux 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.”² To the extent that public and higher education come now under attack by neoliberals, fundamental Christians, and neoconservatives, it becomes all the more important to defend them as vital public spheres, a necessary ground where public issues can be taken up and discussed in a participatory and democratic way. These institutions should be the arenas for practicing civic life and democracy, and should necessarily be linked with public life. It is then the intellectuals’ responsibility to work to reclaim institutions of higher education as spaces where a project of revitalizing politics can take place.

In this paper, I want to explore the role of intellectuals who are university professors associated with institutions of higher education in modern globalized societies as it articulates on three levels: the intellectual’s interventionist role in the public sphere in the project of revitalizing politics, the intellectual as a witness in that s/he historicizes politics and the public sphere, and finally the pedagogical dimension of this project. Ultimately, the intellectual’s political project is necessarily a pedagogical one, to the extent that pedagogy must always be an act of intervention, a form of academic labor, an immanently political and ethical practice. In this respect, it is the intellectual’s responsibility to make the pedagogical more political by creating environments where students can translate private issues into public troubles.

INTELLECTUALS AND THE REVITALIZATION OF POLITICS

In the post-September 11 America, “otherness” has been largely redefined and filtered through new referents such as the Patriot Act and the ensuing curtailing of civic liberties in the name of “freedom,” the persecution of “suspected terrorists,” the proliferation of military aggression abroad with “preemptive wars,” the “exportation” of democracy in “barbaric” enclaves of the globe and so forth. At the same time, the war against terrorism has been supported by a domestic war against everything public: education, health-care, welfare, public services, in a word, a war against democracy.³ A repressive right-wing government with strong backing and influence from a Christian Right⁴ is massively redistributing wealth from the poor to rich individuals and powerful corporations through unjust tax cuts while it has mounted a vicious neoconservative attack in education, immigration, and the welfare state. In addition, neoliberalism, the slow but steady construction of a market society, the increasing commercialization and globalization now produce what Zygmunt Bauman calls “human waste,”⁵ refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers, and economic migrants that shape the new mosaic of human societies and, with their presence, heighten the dichotomy between “us” and “them.” The projected deepening schism between “us” and “them” brings to the fore an ongoing war against “otherness.” In this framework, “otherness” always takes

1. Russel Jacoby, “The New PC: Crybaby Conservatives.” *The Nation*, (April 4, 2005).

2. Henry Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture and Schooling*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), p. 236.

3. For a more detailed discussion see Henry Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

4. A Christian Right that is very similar to the Islamic extremism in fervor and righteousness, as Said has correctly remarked. See Edward Said, “The Other America,” *Al Ahrām*, 2003.

5. Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004).

on a negative value and it is the intellectual's responsibility to make the "war on otherness" visible and to question the common sense discourse of "they hate us because we are better." At a time when if "you are not with us, therefore you are against us," when dissent or raising alternative explanations is criminalized, it is crucial for everybody working in the academy, following Edward Said's example, to mediate, explain and deconstruct the way otherness is currently articulated as the "evil." Intellectuals need to move beyond the false dichotomy of "we" vs. "them" and to deconstruct the simplification of common sense discourses, to question how so-called "evil" identities and representations are shaped and reproduced culturally and ideologically as discourses "with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines"¹ and so forth. Unfortunately, after the hideous attacks of September 11 in New York, those critics who dared to consider alternative or more textured explanations for the 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."²

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 concerning United States' historical participation in the world as an international terrorist. As a matter of fact, Said argues that most American intellectuals are not aware of the United States' powerful intervention in the rest of the world in order to protect the interests of its corporations even if it means sacrificing democratic ideas and principles. The long documented list of atrocities committed in Latin America by the U.S. military provides a true testimony of the U.S. propensity for aggression and violation of international rules and conventions. In reality, the ensuing, arrogant discourse of "with us or against us" that has led to two invasions against foreign countries under the current administration, coupled with the ongoing blind support of the American people for the president and his administration's foreign policy decisions (according to a poll on 2/8/05 conducted by USA Today 57% of Americans were shown to give their "commander in chief" his highest job-approval rating³) attests to the formidable lack of interventions and dissident voices that in turn, guarantees no one would question the "obvious rightness" of U.S. hegemony. According to Lewis Lapham "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."⁴ In the absence of a serious counter-discourse, public intellectuals seem to have an even more crucial work to do, especially given that dissent in the United States nowadays is not considered a particularly honorable vocation.

The intellectuals' intervention in the public arena seems critical if they are to revitalize a politics *of* and *for* the public. Said notes that "[p]olitics is everywhere; there can be no escape into the realms of pure art and thought or, for that matter, into the realm of disinterested objectivity or transcendental theory"⁵ Therefore, intellectuals cannot escape politics no matter how hard they try. If politics is, in a sense, the "ongoing critique of reality,"⁶ questioning this reality 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."⁷ Politics, in Cornelius Castoriadis' words, 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."⁸ 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. At the same time, we should be careful for the call to export democracy. Democracy cannot be exported. It is both a regime and a process intimately tied to specific cultural, political, historical and geographical 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. It also inevitably deepens the projected gap between the "civilized world" and those "uncivilized." Exportation of democracy as the new American "mission civilizatrice" is the quintessential of western barbarism. Politics as manifested in every democratic arena, constitutes a unique public sphere, a type of agora in which people come together, interact, make decisions, forge citizenship bonds, carry out the imperatives of social change, and ultimately search for the good society insofar as "justice belongs to the polis."⁹ Since politics finds its project in concrete historical situations, it is the intellectuals' ethical responsibility to bring concepts of justice and fairness to bear on actual situations. Consequently, intellectual work must always be root-

1. Edward Said, *The Edward Said Reader*. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin (Eds.) (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 68.

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

3. Jill Lawrence, "Bush Shows Highest Ratings in a Year," *USA Today*, 2/8/2005.

4. Lewis Lapham "Cause for Dissent," *Harper's Magazine* (April 2003), p. 35-40.

5. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 21.

6. Zygmunt Bauman, *Society Under Siege*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002), p. 56.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 84.

9. Carl Boggs, *The End of Politics*, (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), p. 7.

ed in a spirit of opposition rather than accommodation. Intellectual solidarity and effort must be grounded in politics in the service of the common good.

Along these lines, the late Pierre Bourdieu, an intellectual deeply committed to public interventions had wondered: Can intellectuals, and especially scholars, intervene in the political sphere? Must intellectuals partake in political debates as such, and if so, under what conditions can they interject themselves efficiently? What role can researchers play in the various social movements, at the national level and especially at the international level—that is, at the level where the fate of individuals and societies is increasingly being decided today? Can intellectuals contribute to inventing a new manner of doing politics fit for the novel dilemmas and threats of our age?¹

In order to responsibly address these questions, intellectuals in higher education as engaged social agents have a “fear-some form of social responsibility”²—a responsibility that inevitably consists of engaging in a permanent critique of the abuses of authority in the government, media and society, the construction of knowledge hierarchies, the discursive and material reproduction of exclusions. We need to connect the work we are doing in education with the greater needs of the society we live in and make this connection visible to our students. Universities should be sites where politics happen and professors should be agents of this project of revitalizing politics in order to create a more just, and more humane world, a world like Edward Said had envisioned in his last writings, where humanism is understood as a usable praxis. Part of this project is to bring history to the fore as a deeply political force, to demonstrate that, as humans, we are all actors of history and intimately involved in it.

THE INTELLECTUAL AS WITNESS: HISTORICIZING THE POLITICAL PROJECT

*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.*³

As the United States assumes the role of a megapower aspiring to become the referent for the “reading” of the rest of the world as it insists upon setting the context in which world histories should be interpreted, there is a tremendous effort to rewrite and promote history from a hegemonic point of view, thereby securing a world order that is usually legitimized through the construction of a discourse of common sense. Conservatives push for a version of history that is hegemonically deemed “important” and promoted as, for example, E.D. Hirsh did through his work designed to impose a referent of common culture that all Americans need to know. Against a framework that prepackages historical facts even when it means distorting them, the intellectual as a historical witness, can, according to Said, “testify to a horror otherwise unrecorded” by historicizing the debate and making bare these perspectives and “subjugated knowledges” that otherwise would remain in darkness. As brokers of public memory, educators could and should contribute to unearthing and articulating dangerous memories that resonate with our notion of political agency, forcing us to move beyond a depoliticized comfort zone in order that we can assume subject positions as historical agents who are conditioned but not determined. In this respect, the role of intellectuals is instrumental in the project of reclaiming a politics of public memory. Giroux suggests that “transformative intellectuals need to begin with a recognition of those manifestations of suffering that constitute historical memory, as well as the immediate conditions of oppression. The pedagogical rationality at work here is one that defines radical educators as bearers of “dangerous memory,” intellectuals who keep alive the memory of human suffering along with the forms of knowledge and struggles in which such suffering was shaped and contested.” According to Giroux, dangerous memory has two dimensions “that of hope and that of suffering...”⁴ If, as Castoriadis has observed, “the history of humanity is not the history of class struggle but the history of atrocities,”⁵ dangerous memories in this instance recount the history of the oppressed, the human suffering, and the violence. This process mobilizes new types of subjectivities and community and, in this respect, dangerous memory generates hope.

The issue at stake here is how intellectuals negotiate the fact that they are part of a national group and the realization that they need to start and extent their critique to that group as well, that is, using Said’s metaphor, how to be in “exile” even when one is at home. National groups, he claims, “are not natural and god-given entities. They are constructed, man-

1. Pierre Bourdieu, “For a Scholarship with Commitment,” *Profession 2000*. (2000), 40.

2. Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope*, p. 105.

3. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1974), p.98.

4. Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope*, p.105.

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

ufactured, even in some cases, invented object, with a history of struggle and conquest behind it, that it is sometimes important to represent.”¹ Loyalty to a national group should not be used as an excuse to narcotize the intellectual’s critical sense so that s/he can acquiesce her/his role as public intellectual who has the responsibility “to universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered, to associate that experience with the sufferings of others and to affiliate the horrors with similar afflictions of other people.”² In other words, it is part of our ethical responsibility as educators, to mediate events through public memory and use disturbing memories to produce a kind of ethical referent for explaining the world without justifying it. It is not that accommodated intellectuals are unable to use certain memories historically, as it has been amply demonstrated with the Holocaust. The sad reality is the selective use of dangerous memories that sanitizes rather than problematizes historical facts. What is important is to utilize disturbing memories as a translative tool for understanding the conditions that shape our present existence and that of our students in the world we live in. For instance, 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”?³ Historicizing the debate these days would also mean, for example, to talk about the “earlier history of Saddam Hussein’s government which includes an extensive pattern of direct U.S support.”⁴ In his exploration of the relationship of the intellectual to the issue of national identity, Said concludes that, when in need of choice (and this happens more often than not), the intellectual must be more on the side of dissent. He insists that “this does not at all mean a loss of historical specificity, but rather it guards against a possibility that a lesson learned about oppression in one place will be forgotten or violated in another place or time.” Which leads Said to conclude “never solidarity before criticism.”⁵

The project of re-historicizing seems to be at the core of intellectual intervention. This project is particularly important in the United States where, according to Said, “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.”⁶ This leads to the creation of a false dichotomy between “old” vs. “new” history, which is never lost on policy-makers 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 and totally dependent on the 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 preemptive and illegal war, 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 becomes 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.”⁷

The use of false dichotomies such as “old” vs. “new” Europe by Rumsfeld, and George W. Bush’s discourse around “you’re either with us or against us,”⁸ is very much 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 order. In this respect, U.S. history becomes the referent for situating “good” and “evil” in the world and these are always defined, produced, and reproduced by the U.S. discourse around “otherness.” Obviously, otherness and sameness are historically and materially defined and they need to be challenged both as discourses and discursive practices if we want to understand how exclusions based on race, ethnicity, culture and other markers were able to manage and produce the construction of the “other” materially, discursively, politically, sociologically, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively. It has been the work and dissemination of a powerful discourse, along material practices that historically produced the picture of the “other” as we know it today in the U.S. However, the issue

1. Said *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 32.

2. Said *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 44.

3. Bauman *In Search of Politics*, p. ix.

4. Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

5. Said *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 32.

6. Edward Said, “Global Crisis,” ZNet, March 17, 2003.

7. Lewis Lapham “Cause for Dissent,” *Harper’s Magazine*, April 2003, p.36.

8. You’re Either With us or Against us, <http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/> at CNN.Com, (November 6, 2001).

here is not simply to acknowledge cultural diversity. As Homi Bhabha reminds us, cultural difference, as opposed to cultural diversity, 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.”¹

In light of these remarks, the project of re-historicizing is vital in our understanding of human suffering at home and abroad. It is necessary, for instance, to draw parallels between the half million children who died in the course of a decade since 1990 during U.S. sanctions in Iraq, and the over 3000 people dead in the World Trade Center on September 11. In this respect, the intellectual must gaze “historically” at situations and understand them, according to Said, as “the result of a series of historical choices made by men and women, as facts of society made by human beings, and not as natural or god-given, therefore unchangeable, permanent, irreversible.”²

INTELLECTUALS AND THE LANGUAGE OF CRITIQUE AND RESISTANCE

“What language to use in the work of resistance?” wonders Edward Said in one of his last writings before his untimely death.³ As I have tried to demonstrate so far, it is crucial for educators and scholars in higher education to open up a space where questions can be raised, a fertile terrain of critique where debates can be historicized and where politics could be revitalized. Just as important is the reinvention of a language of critique and possibility, a language that breaks the continuity and consensus of common sense. According to Giroux, as we strive for a pedagogy of responsibility and a politics of commitment we are challenged to recover the language of sociality, agency, solidarity, democracy, and public life as the basis for creating new conceptions of pedagogy, learning, and governance.

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”⁴ is also stressed by Chantal Mouffe when she argues 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.”⁵ The creation of alternative vocabularies would necessarily have to be linked to specific historical meanings and articulate concrete political projects that link education with the broader society. However, the mere existence of an alternative language does not guarantee a political project. Alternative discourses should be composed of practices, institutions, and discourses. 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.”⁶ Such vocabularies would also 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. With the help of these new vocabularies we can articulate a type of humanistic critique as expressed by Said, “to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us in labels and antagonistic debate whose goal is a belligerent collective identity rather than understanding and intellectual exchange.”⁷

These “vocabularies” can articulate what Bourdieu calls “clinical knowledge,” that is, the knowledge of how the social-historical works 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.”⁸ We can furthermore use this knowledge to redefine “otherness” in more humanistic terms and acknowledge that there is a difference between

1. According to Homi 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.

2. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.60.

3. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p. 72.

4. 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.180.

5. Mouffe, *Rethinking Political Community*, p.180.

6. *Ibid*, p.181.

7. Said, *Orientalism*, p. xxi.

8. Bauman, *In Search of Politics*. p.2.

knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand, knowledge—if that is what it is—that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency, and outright war. There is, after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of coexistence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion.¹

CONCLUSION: INTELLECTUALS AND THE PROMISE OF PEDAGOGY

What I have attempted to discuss so far, drawing from Edward Said's work and example, is the importance of redefining the role of public intellectuals within institutions of higher education, while at the same time reclaiming these institutions as vital public spaces. As I have argued earlier, this is a deeply pedagogical project where pedagogy becomes

a referent for analyzing how knowledge, values, desires, and social relations are constructed, taken up, and implicated in relations of power in the interaction among cultural texts, institutional forms, authorities and audiences. At stake here is acknowledging the productive, political and ethical character of pedagogy as a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge, experience and identities are produced within particular social formations and relations.²

Along these lines, the university should be seen as a site of debate, democratic practice, critical thinking, collective work, and social struggle. Within educational sites educators as public intellectuals need to open up pedagogical spaces that transcend methodologies and best practices. Spaces where students will take risks, ask dangerous questions, and move beyond their comfort zone to explore their evolving agency as the mediation between constraints and possibilities. Spaces where cultural texts are challenged. Spaces where we resist the reign of positivism and operationalism. In these messy and unpredictable pedagogical spaces students will be able to understand how power works within educational institutions to legitimize some forms of knowledge, namely westernized knowledge, at the expense of other subjugated knowledges, histories, identities, and discourses. They will be able to treat knowledge as a contested field and part of a project of politics and emancipation.

Furthermore, university teachers as public intellectuals need to make cultural difference a defining principle of knowledge production, development and research. In an age of globalization, liquid borders and fluid identities, scholars in the academy must make a firm commitment to cultural difference as central to the relationship between schooling and citizenship. Here cultural difference needs to be understood as "a particular constructed discourse at a time when something is being challenged about power or authority"³ and not just simply the notion of non-threatening multiculturalism. At the same time, engaged scholars need to dismantle and deconstruct the legacy of western supremacy while engaging in serious social criticism.

I am advocating here for a kind of "performative pedagogy" as the "the act of doing," the importance of understanding theory as the grounded basis for "intervening into contexts of power...in order to enable people to act more strategically in ways that may change their context for the better." In that sense, theory is valued as a political endeavor in that "it never aims simply at an increase of knowledge as such. Its goal is man's [and woman's] emancipation from slavery."⁴

Performative pedagogy challenges intellectuals who are "bound" to specific institutions of higher education and exemplifies the way they could function as amateur, exilic intellectuals who speak truth to power within a highly conservative and sometimes reactionary academic environment that is more and more embracing a form of technicism instead of intellectual pursuit. At this juncture, "institutions of higher education must be seen as deeply moral and political spaces in which intellectuals assert themselves not merely as professional academics but as citizens, whose knowledge and actions presuppose specific visions of public life, community, and moral accountability."⁵ With that in mind, we can imagine the public intellectual as somebody who does not treat knowledge as a commodity and learning as a technicality but rather "teaches the students a language of social criticism and responsibility."⁶ In concluding, Said's brilliant insights are a propos again here. He suggests that

1. Said, *Orientalism*, p. xix.

2. Henry Giroux, *Public Spaces Private Lives*, (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 83.

3. Bhabha "Staging the Politics of Difference," p.15.

4. Horkheimer quoted in Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope*, p. 44.

5. Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope*, p. 263.

6. Henry Giroux, *Impure Acts: The Practical Politics of Cultural Studies*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 35.

[i]t is incumbent upon us to complicate and/or dismantle the reductive formulae and the abstract but potent kind of thought that leads the mind away from concrete human history and experience and into the realms of ideological fiction, metaphysical confrontation, and collective passion. This is not to say that we cannot speak about issues of injustice and suffering, but that we need to do so always within a context that is amply situated in history, culture and socioeconomic reality. Our role is to widen the field of discussion, not to set limits in accord with the prevailing authority.¹

1. Said, *Orientalism*, p. xxiii.