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Reading Giroux Through a Deweyan Lens:  
Pushing Utopia to the Outer Edge

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...power is never uni dimensional; it is exercised not only as a mode of domination, but also as an act of resistance or even as an expression of a creative mode of cultural and social production outside the immediate force of domination. The point is important in that the behavior expressed by subordinate groups cannot be reduced to a study of domination or resistance. Clearly, in the behavior of subordinate groups there are moments of cultural and creative expression that are informed by a different logic, whether it be existential, religious, or otherwise (Giroux, 1983, p. 108).

Our faith is ultimately in individuals and their potentialities. In saying this, I do not mean what is sometimes called individualism as opposed to association. I mean rather an individuality that operates in and through voluntary associations. If our outward scene is one of externally imposed organization, behind and beneath there is working the force of liberated individualities, experimenting in their own ways to find and realize their own ends. The testimony of history is that in the end such a force, however scattered and inchoate, ultimately prevails over all set institutionalized forms, however firmly established the latter may be (Dewey, cited in Hickman and Alexander, 1998, Volume 1, p. 322).

### Overview

In articulating the potential of public education to fulfill the aspirations of a democratic ethos, both Henry Giroux and John Dewey have raised profound problems, in the midst of their visions, whether radical or reformist, about the relationship of schooling to society in a contemporary urban setting. The issues they have raised on the role of schooling in facilitating the realization of democracy in a "functional" corporate society have not been resolved in the twentieth century and are not likely to be so in the new millennium of the foreseeable future. Herbert Kliebard (1995) has persuasively argued that the primary forms of schooling that have emerged during the first half of the twentieth century are an accurate reflection of dominant societal and cultural forces. The various contestations over the curriculum, for example, are battles waged largely *within* the terrain of mainstream values and assumptions. Any impetus that might link democracy and education is perpetually constrained by a social order that in many ways mitigates against it.

This admission does not call for a stance of resignation given the plurality of views and the openness (within severely constrictive constraints) of evolving mainstream settings, which contain the elasticity to create variable space for modest reform within capitalism. That is, the broad contours of democratic capitalism circumscribe the political culture of American schooling within certain constraining frameworks that it cannot practically move beyond. Yet *within* such limits, there is an undetermined capacity for human empowerment. Both individuals and groups can expand what Dewey refers to as "the contacts, the exchanges, the communications, the

interactions by which experience is steadied while it is also enlarged and enriched" (Dewey, 1939, cited in Morris and Shapiro, 1993, p. 245). Dewey defines his concept of "growth" as "the ability to learn from experience; the power to retain from one experience something which is of avail in coping with the difficulties of a later situation" (Dewey, 1916, p. 44). On a collective level this definition underlies Dewey's view of democracy as "free and enriching communication" (Dewey, 1927, p. 184). However modest in relationship to the Girouxian ideal of a radical emancipatory pedagogy, the preservation and expansion of this Deweyan forcefield of growing human capacity is the immediate locus for the reconstruction of democracy on Dewey's vision.

It is the argument of this essay that Giroux's radical project serves as an *ultimate* utopian boundary grounded in the furthestmost ideals of freedom, liberty, and inclusiveness embodied within the American political tradition, which is severely constrained in our contemporary political culture. Considerable scaffolding from the historically given to the emancipatory vision is required to move, however minimally and ambiguously so, toward anything approximating Giroux's ideal in "real time" social milieus of the present and foreseeable future.

Dewey's concept of democracy as "full and free communication," leading to "the fullest possible realization of human potentialities" (Dewey, 1989, p. 100) represents a *nearer* term utopian project that could push trajectories *toward* Giroux's ideal, however piecemeal and episodic. Simultaneously, Giroux's emancipatory pedagogy serves as a perpetual yardstick to critique the Deweyan vision and goad it toward the fuller implications of a democratic culture even though the reality likely will fall considerably short of both Dewey's and Giroux's vision of democracy and education. Giroux's more *conservative* tendency, moreover, to seek space for human agency largely within mainstream social structures and institutions, somewhere *between* domination and resistance, could add significant force to a Deweyan cultural vision with its tendency to minimize ideological conflict in the quest for "reconstructive" growth.

There is no easy synthesis between Giroux's critical pedagogy and Dewey's pragmatic philosophy. The former starts from a utopian premise of emancipation within a postmodern, multicultural social context while the latter sought to expand potential tendencies resident within the given society, grounded in the modernistic sensibilities of the early twentieth century in the hope that a consensual liberal culture might prevail. This essay is clearly Deweyan in its emphasis on pragmatic opportunities to open up certain avenues for human enhancement at the center and at the periphery of mainstream social experience. However, it adheres to a postmodern sensibility against any foundational-like assumptions that progress toward such aspirations is inevitable or even likely. Although modest in scope, this space for limited reform within capitalism, that at least has the capacity to profoundly matter to those potentially affected, should not be lightly ignored. However limited from the perspective of critical pedagogy, it well may represent the "limit-situation" of what is feasible within the given American political culture, one that might be described as postmodern and multicultural that has no single point of reference.

With such a limitation in mind, I draw on Giroux's vision as a pragmatic strategy to keep maximally open the *plausibility* for greater democratization than would otherwise be available from only a Deweyan reconstructive angle. Giroux's vision serves as a heuristic, then, not only of critical analysis, but also as possessing a certain ontological force in changing reality, however

small. Whether Giroux would accept this I am unsure. As a Deweyan, I seek to appropriate the force of his critique and the passion of his vision to extend what in the final analysis would only be interpreted as modest reform within capitalism. While far from the more radical aspects of Giroux's utopian vision, this tempered space is still significant for an open social universe undergoing continuous reconstruction even within the context of historically conditioned constraints within capitalism. Any such impact of this Deweyan "middle ground" (Demetrian, 1997, 1998) may prove rather minimal on a socially statistical basis. Yet it very well could open up creative space for "humanization" within individual and local contexts that proves highly significant to historical actors.

In this essay, I will review key concepts in Giroux's project through a pragmatic "reconstructive" sensibility while maintaining Giroux's sense of radical possibility as an *ultimate* criterion of radical pedagogical reform. The latter remains critical even if his utopian project accomplishes nothing other than to block the hegemonization of an "end of ideology/end of history" world view, to keep hope and possibility alive. This is not to deny that it *may* accomplish more, but even if it does not, challenging the hegemonic ideology of democratic liberal capitalism, in itself, is a worthy, albeit a limited accomplishment in constraining its "totalizing" influence.

I will concentrate on Giroux's educational writings of the 1980s focusing on his concepts of resistance, the transformative intellectual, and literacy, critical pedagogy, and empowerment. Through these concepts, Giroux seeks space to move toward an emancipatory pedagogy, however piecemeal and partial amidst constraints that make the transformation of late capitalism practically impossible at least for the foreseeable future.

Through the exercise of "civic courage" radical critical educators endure to find creative spaces for emancipation against what can only be viewed as a greater sense of power for hegemonic, but not "totalizing" forces of domination. Giroux acknowledges this, but does not dwell on these constraints due to his motivational quest to locate hope and possibility in the elevation of human agency to "resist" and to construct creative counterspaces against the dominant logic and power of corporate liberal capitalism (Brosio, 1990). As a result, he seriously overestimates the power that people within specific "mainstream" settings possess so that his project has the potential of reinforcing the cynicism he so assiduously seeks to avoid. According to Richard Brosio (1990, p. 77):

It is important for educational theorists to realize that while there may be room for oppositional maneuvering within an advanced capitalist society, the great power of hegemonic capitalism must never be overlooked. We must resist making untenable motivational or inspirational claims for the power of teachers and students which ignore the massively greater power of capital and its allies. The politics of education continues to occur within the basic limits established by the capitalist economy.

While Brosio wants Giroux to come to terms with empirical social reality from a Marxist perspective, as a postmodern Deweyan (Demetrian, 1997, 1998), I also encourage him to account for reality, but from a different vantage point. I agree with Giroux that there is significant room for human agency in the mediation of social power, but only, practically speaking, within the "limit-situation" available through liberal, democratic capitalism. Within

this framework, Dewey's concepts of growth and democracy provide interpretive gist to flesh out some of the fuller potential of an American reform tradition that seeks to humanize some middle ground between a structural-functional Weberian dystopia that reifies the status quo and a neo-Marxian utopia of a transformed society. Giroux seeks to act out of a similar mid-range arena yet with the force and polemic of an "oppositional" logic, which belies some of his more temperate remarks that is not characteristic of Dewey's social philosophy. As Dewey put it:

As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is more responsible *not* (original emphasis) to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such that make for a better future society. The school is its chief agency for the accomplishment of this end (Dewey, 1916, p. 20).

The thesis of this essay is that the quest for such "a better future" is a challenging proximate goal for education in modern/postmodern America. Such a future would include, but not necessarily be shaped by Giroux's critique and vision as an authentic manifestation of any democratic contemporary voice. Rather, it would be more temporally premised on Dewey's gradualistic dynamic of "growth" as the reconstruction of experience through critical reflection and thoughtful action stemming from problems located in the present in the quest for proximate solutions that do not necessarily carry significant "radical" overtones.

Like I am, Giroux is wary of polarities which pit emancipatory and oppressive thought in oppositional terms, but his fear of cooptation pushes him toward a radical teleology. I agree with the *ultimate* trajectory of his vision for "constructing a new social order." Giroux seeks to situate the struggle for democracy in a utopian project, "one that presupposes a vision of the future grounded in the programmatic language of civic responsibility and the public good" (Giroux, 1988, p. 31). This view is shared by Dewey (1927, pp. 143-184) in his seminal essay, "Search for the Great Community." As an ultimate telos, I locate such a vision at the outer edge of American political discourse. Unlike Dewey who did so, Giroux needs much more fully to take into account the pragmatic tradition and a melioristic political project of gradualism. He also needs to more fully acknowledge the concomitant dilemma of cooptation in efforts to move from current realities to the emancipatory ideal in order to have praxeological influence, which is his intention. This would not discount "the *need* (emphasis added) for radical change" (Dewey, 1935 in Hickman and Alexander, 1998, Volume 1, p. 325). Yet, such an unequivocal acknowledgement would provide a framework for coming to terms with the limitations of radical reform in the profoundly nonrevolutionary political culture of the United States particularly in our turn of the century neo-liberal/neo-conservative era.

## Resistance and the Language of Possibility: "Making Hope Practical and Despair Unconvincing"

*Of course, conflict and resistance take place within asymmetrical relations of power which always favor the dominant classes, but the essential point is that there are complex and creative fields of resistance through which class-, race- and gender-mediated practices often refuse, reject, and dismiss the central messages of the schools (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, pp. 71-67).*

Giroux places his pedagogy in a tensive relationship to various Marxian, neo-Marxian, and progressive theories of schooling to extend space for agency, social justice, and "emancipation," while acknowledging the broad hegemonization of the institutions and cultural values of "late capitalism" to dominate, but not monopolize contemporary public life. He values the Marxian/neo-Marxian *critique* of contemporary American life in its articulation of the intrusion of capitalism into all aspects of social relations and culture, but rejects the implication that no viable countervoice or space is possible. Such "abstract negation [of Marxian/neo-Marxian discourse] gives way to unrelieved despair and...points to a mode of theorizing that belongs to the rationality of the existing administered system of corporate domination" (Giroux, 1983, p. 77). Such cynicism represents one of Giroux's most profound apprehensions.

Giroux challenges this perspective on two counts. First, he rejects the Marxian contention that material production is at the *base* of injustice. Instead, he points to racial and gender inequality as similarly important sources of oppression which cannot always be correlated to social class domination. This is important for two reasons. His deconstruction of any lingering neo-Marxist foundationalism enables him to identify other sources of social criticism and potential forces of reconstructionism than that based on class consciousness. This allows Giroux to accept the ubiquity of capitalism and still make space for human agency even within mainstream institutions within their varied "contested terrains" to construct at least traces of an emancipatory ideal. However, by discounting the importance of class oppression if not as the *base*, then at least as integrally linked to patriarchy and racism, Giroux puts in jeopardy a radicalism that requires a transformation of capitalism to move toward the fulfillment of the perpetually beckoning, emancipatory project.

Such space as Giroux identifies can, indeed, provide scope for human hope and possibility, but it is questionable on whether it can practically lead to the construction of "a critical socialist democracy" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, p. 218) in the United States, one of Giroux's fonder and more radical aspirations. Giroux's sense of resistance is caught among a web of contradictions between on the one hand, the longing for a critical socialist democracy and on the other hand, a quest for "liberated" space, however marginal within the "contested terrains" of mainstream schooling and society. In the broadest of terms, he has not resolved the tension between a radical vision to transform society in fundamental ways and a reformist quest to locate and construct limited emancipatory spheres within the daily fabric of mainstream institutions and social settings. Neo-Marxists encourage Giroux to break the contradiction by embracing the logic of their assumptions (Brosio, 1990). I suggest he acknowledge how closely he is aligned, at least in his more conservative moments, to the American reform tradition that incorporates the unfulfilled promise of liberal democratic capitalism and the ethos of the American Revolution in

its call for inclusion, pluralism, freedom, and justice. Within this framework, Dewey's emphasis on growth and democracy as the full realization of individual and social selves could carry considerable weight in making the pedagogical more political and be strengthened by a Girouxian "oppositional" rhetoric to counteract the apolitical tendencies within Dewey's thought. Such a move would fortify resistance against any "totalizing" domination of oppressive power within a reconstructed American reform tradition, a major objective of critical pedagogy. It would come to terms as well with a need and desire among oppressed minority groups to seek inclusion within the mainstream of American life, in part, by progressively humanizing it.

Dewey's thought encourages such gradualism, yet points to a utopian vision of "radical" democracy as well. Democracy, according to Dewey is less an ends in-itself than a means "that secure release and fulfillment of personal potentialities...only in rich and manifold association with others"" (Dewey, 1927, p. 150). On Dewey's account:

The task of this release and enrichment is one that has to be carried on day by day. Since it is one that can have no end till experience itself comes to an end, the task of democracy is that of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute (Dewey, 1939, cites in Morris and Shapiro, 1993, p. 245).

On this reading, politics is shaped by culture. This often then serves more as a critical sphere of potential resistance and reconstruction on Dewey's as well as Giroux's account, than overt political action in which opportunities are quite limited particularly in the current turn of the century neo-liberal/neo-conservative era.

Such a Deweyan project emphasizing individual and "associational" fulfillment, would require sustained effort. While some distance from the emancipatory ideal for which Giroux advocates, it has the capacity to increase the possibility of freedom, justice, and fulfillment among historically marginalized groups that incorporate their essentially nonradical quest for inclusion as a legitimate and worthy project of their cultural politics. I argue that this Deweyan vision is a nearer term utopian project worthy of much effort even as its more modest ideal is practically possible of only partial realization within the present time and foreseeable future. It can build bridges, moreover, for more radical possibilities, including some of what Giroux strives for, particularly in his more conservative aspirations of finding increased humanized space within the "contested terrains" of mainstream institutional life.

I am pessimistic about realizing anything like the more radical aspects of Giroux's vision of "reconstructing democratic public life so as to extend the principles of freedom, justice, and equality to all spheres of society" (Giroux, 1990 in Giroux, 1997, p. 218) in the near term. Rather, I view such a vision as a utopian boundary, also implicit in Dewey's more *idealistic* moments, that can sharpen the intensity of a Dewey-like vision of progressive reform with its accent on gradualism. How *far* such "radical" democratic influences can move *toward* the utopian vision and what are the "limit-situations" in the current political culture that blunt such progress, are critical issues that the school of critical pedagogy needs to confront. I am skeptical of the likelihood of any such movement beyond the framework of liberal capitalism in our contemporary setting. Rather, I maintain that Deweyan pragmatism provides an important means of pushing its boundaries to realize more of its "full" potential even while reinforcing some of



the inequalities and injustices that the more or less inevitable compromise with capitalism perpetuates.

In addition to rejecting the Marxian premise that economic materialism is at the base of the social order, Giroux also repudiates the notion that oppression is "reified." Instead, he argues that "domination *and* (original italics) resistance are mediated through the complex interface of race, gender, and class" (Giroux, 1983, p. 90) within asymmetrical relations of power. He does not deny the force of the Marxian/neo-Marxian critique. Rather, he seeks to move "beyond" it to make room for "struggle, diversity, and human agency" (p. 90) to allow the voices of the marginalized to be heard in all of their difference and counterlogic to the mainstream as well as in their various accommodations to it. Thus, Giroux maintains that even when the marginalized embrace the logic of domination they are enacting a sense of their own agency, which he views as an essential *starting point* for a critical emancipatory pedagogy that works *with* as opposed to *upon* the oppressed. Giroux does not repudiate the Marxian doctrine of "false consciousness" that the oppressed do not always act in their own interests, but neither does he elevate it as a central creed to explain the "cooptation" of the marginalized to the values of the status quo. Instead, Giroux identifies a continuum of "contested terrains" at the center and periphery of mainstream institutions and settings within asymmetrical relations of power in which the oppressed and the dominant struggle for influence and voice.

Within such contexts, the oppressed sometimes embrace mainstream values and at other times reject them. More typically, there is neither a sharp embrace nor a total repudiation of the mainstream, but various combinations of accommodation and resistance in the sometimes contradictory quest for personal freedom, social justice, and legitimate power. While "false consciousness" plays a role in influencing marginalized groups, Giroux emphasizes more strongly a deliberate sense of personal and collective agency in the struggle to find a place within, as well as in opposition to, the oppressive structures that inhibit the emancipatory ideal. Through the work of a critical pedagogy to "interrogate" vestiges of oppression and false consciousness among the marginalized, Giroux seeks to move the "oppressed" toward an embrace of their "authentic" aspirations. On this reading:

...the ultimate value of the notion of resistance has to be measured against the degree to which it not only prompts critical thinking and reflective action, but more importantly, against the degree to which it contains the possibility of galvanizing collective political struggle around the issue of power and social determination (Giroux, 1983, p. 111).

It is this "notion of emancipation" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, p. 105) that is critical to Giroux's interpretation of resistance against merely "oppositional" behavior which often reinforces the dominant ideology, although such opposition can be mined for further reflection that *could* lead toward a more emancipatory direction (p. 106). The issue that remains unresolved in Giroux is how the *tensions* of the various agenic spaces that the "oppressed" occupy *between* accommodation and resistance which he acknowledges, but sublimates, to make room for a sharply demarcated emancipatory project, play out in concrete historical situations.

To put it in sharper terms, what Giroux acknowledges, but does not stress is the extent to which human agency is expressed in American life in an acceptance, however ambiguously, of a broad

set of mainstream beliefs linked to the "bourgeoisified" values of family, work, consumerism, voluntarism, and even religion. Giroux does not use this Marxian dispersion. Yet his acknowledgment of the extent to which human agency resides within the various interstices of mainstream institutions and society at least challenges a claim to a radicalism, which he also embraces, that moves beyond the ethos of liberal capitalism toward a critical socialist democracy.

Dewey never settled for any static adherence of the status quo, but neither did he embrace the radicalism of his time. Rather, he sought a middle way; the progressive reconstruction of democratic life and dominant institutions through:

[t]he liberation of individual potentialities, the evocation of personal and voluntary associated energies....Our faith is ultimately in individuals and their potentialities. In saying this I do not mean what is sometimes called individualism as opposed to association. I mean rather an individuality that operates in and through voluntary associations. If our outward scene is one of externally imposed organizations, behind and beneath there is working the force of liberated individualities, experimenting in their own ways to find and realize their own ends (Dewey, 1928, cited in Hickman and Alexander, Volume 1, 1998, p. 322).

In his emphasis on "voluntary associations," Dewey sought to realize what he viewed as the unfulfilled promise of American democracy. As he put it:

Every significant civilization gives a new meaning to "culture." If this new spirit, so unlike that of old-world charity and benevolence, does not already mark an attainment of a distinctive culture on the part of American civilization, and give the promise and potency of a new civilization, Columbus merely extended and diluted the Old World. But I still believed he discovered a New World (Dewey, 1928, cited in Hickman and Alexander, Volume 1, 1998, p. 322).

It is the argument of this essay that such "exceptionalism" as potent myth, which I link with the pragmatic philosophical tradition, is a critical component of any American reform ethos stemming from Deweyan energies. However naive from premises grounded in the Frankfort School of Social Research and postmodern, pluralistic sensibilities which partially inform Giroux's cultural politics, such American exceptionalism as Dewey supported cannot be lightly ignored as a praxeological taproot into progressive change within this culture. Giroux's critical pedagogy might be incorporated into such a reformist, pragmatic framework and by doing so, make it more radical as a twentieth century version of a Jeffersonian democracy that Dewey sought to reconstruct for the industrial era of his time. Yet it is exceedingly unlikely that critical pedagogy can "transcend" the pragmatic, reform ethos and sustain significant praxeological force particularly in the mainstream institutions and social systems Giroux seeks to change. Giroux needs to more forcefully acknowledge this limitation even while contributing toward a deepening of the democratic ethos, but *within* capitalism through a critical pedagogy that comes to terms with the limits of change and a deeper appreciation of American pragmatism as a significant methodological engine of reform.

## Teacher as Transformative Intellectual

...[M]aking the political more pedagogical means utilizing forms of pedagogy that treat students as critical agents, problematizes knowledge, utilizes dialogue, and makes knowledge meaningful, critical, and ultimately emancipatory. In part, this suggests that transformative intellectuals take seriously the need to give students an active voice in their learning experiences. It means developing a critical vernacular that is attentive to problems experienced at the level of everyday life, particularly as these are related to pedagogical experiences connected to classroom practice. As such, the starting point pedagogically for such intellectuals is not with the isolated student but with collective actors in their various cultural, class, racial, historical, and gendered settings, along with the particularity of their diverse problems, hopes, and dreams. It is at this point that the language of critique unites with the language of possibility. That is, transformative intellectuals must take seriously the need to come to grips with those ideological and material aspects of the dominant society that attempt to separate the issues of power and knowledge. Which means working to create the ideological and material conditions in both schools and the larger society that give students the opportunity to become agents of civic courage, and therefore citizens who have the knowledge and courage to take seriously the need to make despair unconvincing and hope practical (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, pp. 36-37).

Giroux carves out a daunting project in his quest to create space for his emancipatory vision within a highly constrained, neo-liberal/neoconservative social, political, and cultural milieu. What motivates him is less a neo-Marxian drive to help establish the classless society than an American protest against the many forces that impede the exertion of a vigorous personal agency and a quest for radical egalitarianism for oppressed minorities. His utopian project, in other terms, represents the radical fulfillment of the American Revolution for the late twentieth century with significant input from twentieth-century European social theory. In Giroux's project, the teacher as transformative intellectual exercises considerable "civic courage" to combat the erosion of teacher power within the schools. Moreover, it encourages such teachers to ally with like minded social workers, clergy, community activists, parent groups, and others across disciplines and roles for the purpose of working toward the emancipatory vision of a transformed society.

Intellectuals of various types have particular social agendas and ideological motivations on Giroux's reading. Building on Gramsci's analysis, Giroux identifies critical, accommodating, hegemonic, and transformative intellectuals, all of which except the latter buttress dominant societal values in one way or another.

Critical intellectuals may posit a sharp critique against society, but in their detached posture, they tend toward a "consciously apolitical" stance. They view their intellectual activity beyond the fray of contemporary involvement, focusing instead on their professionalism and/or on their unique roles as "free-floating" intellectuals. Accommodating intellectuals "support the dominant society and its ruling groups" (p. 39) in their practices. By viewing its ideology as self-evident, they deny that their work has political power in "reifying" the taken-for-granted assumptions of the status quo. Hegemonic intellectuals "self-consciously define themselves through the forms of

moral and intellectual leadership they provide for dominant groups and classes" (p. 39). They may serve as consultants for corporations, teach in business schools or schools of education, or departments of psychology. Their purpose is to provide intellectual resources to make "the system" function more effectively.

On Giroux's reading only transformative intellectuals deliberately link their academic work with the emancipatory vision. For them "critical reflection and action become part of a fundamental social project to help students develop a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to overcome injustice and to change themselves" (p. 36). Giroux acknowledges that his "ideal-types" are "somewhat exaggerated" as "teachers...move in and out between these categories and defy placement in any one of them" (p. 36). This is an important point to ponder since "between the gaps" represents the more conservative dimension of Giroux's thought which he has not reconciled with his emancipatory vision. Instead, for Giroux, the sharp delineation of the "transformative intellectual" plays a significant rhetorical role in the articulation of his emancipatory project.

While Giroux acknowledges the ambiguity of the complex pluralism that gives shape to contemporary life so that even the "oppressed" are not uni vocal in their struggle against domination, the trajectory of his logic requires him to embrace the emancipatory vision of radical freedom and justice. Thus, on his reading, the responsibility of the "transformative intellectual" is to help create "oppositional public spheres" to challenge the hegemonization of dominant institutions even as Giroux is aware of a more complex pluralism that defies such domination. A "radical" option, therefore, is not required to break through any "totalizing" tendencies. Yet without a radical trajectory, Giroux believes there would be little to blunt an "end of ideology" world view linked to the taken for granted assumptions of liberal capitalism. Without an oppositional logic, the impetus of such hegemony would ultimately veer toward a "totalizing" tendency which, in turn, would constrain actual social practice and reinforce oppression.

This is a compelling argument, but blurs the ambiguity which also embodies Giroux's project as historical actors struggle for meaning and position somewhere *between* resistance and accommodation, and critique and possibility, within institutions shaped by asymmetrical relationships of power. A focus, instead, on the *tensions* among the intellectual "ideal-types" that Giroux depicts might disclose a closer approximation between ideas and social practice than his work provides, at the risk, however, of placing in jeopardy, his emancipatory ideal. Since so much of Giroux's work has a constructivist motivation than simply to illuminate the already existing social reality, this is no small matter.

Still, as William James put it, "The Will to Believe" requires "A live hypothesis...one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed" (James, 1896, cited in Wilshire, 1984, p. 309). A nearer term utopian project could start from the historically given as depicted in the American pragmatic tradition of James and Dewey, which might hold accommodation and resistance in more tensive, dialectical tension than is characteristic of Giroux's critical pedagogy which acknowledges it. In giving an edge to hope and possibility, however reformist and partial, largely within the framework of liberal capitalism, American pragmatism, particularly in the Deweyan vein, may provide a more compelling hermeneutical horizon to ground critical intellectual work in the American political culture.

Such work requires an embrace of oppositional logic, but also needs to come to terms with the quest for inclusion and empowerment within mainstream settings and institutions; the quest for *melioristic* change that shapes so much of the motivation of marginalized groups. A utopian project to reform democratic capitalism from within normative institutions and existing social power arrangements could provide some scaffolding for the more radical emancipatory project that Giroux seeks, however partial and constrained. It very well could fail, but without the effort, there seems no place for a Girouxian vision "to make despair unconvincing and hope practical" (Giroux, 1992, p. 105).

One of the more proximate goals for teachers as transformative intellectuals is the reestablishment of their power as curriculum decision makers against the "de-skilling" of teaching through administrative control of pedagogy. Thus, in the administered society curriculum is created *for* rather than by teachers. On Giroux's reading:

Schools are not seen as sites of struggle over different orders of representation, or as sites that embody particular configurations of power that shape and structure activities of classroom life. On the contrary, schools become reduced to the sterile logic of flow charts, a growing separation between teachers and administrators, and an increasing tendency toward bureaucratization. The overriding message here is that the logic of technocratic rationality serves to remove teachers from participating in a critical way in the production and evaluation of school curricula (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985, p. 27).

Teachers as intellectuals have a twofold implication for curriculum reconstruction, according to Giroux. The first is the need for teachers to reclaim their own authority as shapers of the curriculum. Equally important is that of educating their students as intellectuals to critically interrogate the schools and the broader society both to identify sources of oppression and to reconstruct the school as an emancipatory public sphere as well as to authenticate student popular culture. Giroux draws deeply on neo-Marxist discourse to name the many sources of oppression that he identifies. I will not rehash that effort here. Where Giroux remains relatively silent is in developing a discourse that educates students on living *between* the spaces of accommodation and resistance which may not necessarily result in an embrace of the emancipatory vision even though it could extend what Freire refers to as "humanization," however piecemeal and fragmentarily. What is missing is a pedagogy of ambiguity even though Giroux acknowledges the ambiguous political and epistemological space that characterizes the life-world of so much of working class student experience. This is understandable since a penetrating examination of such ambiguity could blunt the teleology of radical, critical pedagogy. It could put into question his entire project even as it might open up space for a more complex utopian vision that places accommodation and resistance in dialectical tension in quest of enhanced humanization through historical developmentalism rather than radical transformation without reifying the former.

From a postmodern perspective, there is no guarantee that such gradualism inevitably leads to any progressive evolution of social justice. Historically, transformative social change has proven the anomaly. I assume from a historicist perspective that the twentieth century reform tradition stemming from the Progressive Movement, the New Deal, the New Frontier, and the Great Society is the only realistic avenue for long-term social change in the United States of a

progressive nature. This is the tradition that has mediated significant reform in the Women's, Labor, and Civil Rights Movements throughout the twentieth century within the American political culture. It is difficult to identify a more radical root for prospective reform in *education* than this American progressive tradition in the foreseeable future and even this modest reform impetus is highly threatened in the neo-liberal/neoconservative era of the current era. Based on the assumption that the American reform tradition represents a powerful hermeneutic boundary in the United States, I argue that Deweyan pragmatism holds more potential than other ideological strands, including Giroux's "Pedagogy for the Opposition," to push this reform tradition to its undetermined limits. Within the hermeneutical framework of the American reform tradition, critical pedagogy could play a supplementary role in deepening democratic tendencies and tenets particularly if it accepts the "limit-situation" of democratic liberal capitalism as a boundary not likely to be crossed in the foreseeable future.

Giroux draws upon the progressive educational movement of the 1930s (even as he seeks to move beyond it) "to reclaim a democratic tradition presently in retreat" (Giroux, 1988, p. 175). His objective is to make the political more pedagogical and the pedagogical more political, in part, through the agency of teacher as transformative intellectual. Only by doing so does he feel he can schools move beyond the totalizing narrative of a functional ideology toward an interpretation of institutional space as "contested terrain" to be struggled and fought over for the sake of the emancipatory vision. By:

...empowerment [Giroux] means more than self confirmation. It also refers to the process by which students are able to interrogate and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social order (p. 189).

To do so, Giroux suggests a curriculum founded on a "cultural politics" that challenges dominant assumptions and opens up new possibility by critically exploring the marginalized space of student cultural experience. He suggests that the tension between "legitimate" power, language, history, and culture and those of students as a "*field of struggle*" (original italics) become incorporated into the curriculum to challenge normative standards of mainstream schooling. One would wish for Giroux to explore the *complexity* of such a "field of struggle." He openly acknowledges the ambiguous social space that characterizes the "lived experience" of the "oppressed" and the dominant alike as well as among those who might not so easily be characterized as oppressed or dominant. However, he does not press the critical analysis because of his motivational desire to keep focused on the emancipatory vision. Critical intellectual work remains in a subtler probing *between* the categories Giroux describes in the struggle among intellectuals to work through the tensions of power, knowledge, and ethics as they play themselves out in the institutions of schooling and other social arenas.

## Literacy, Critical Pedagogy, and Empowerment

Literacy...is not the equivalent of emancipation; it is in a more limited but essential way the precondition for engaging in struggles around both relations of meaning and relations of power. To be literate is *not* (original italics) to be free; it is to be present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history, and future (Giroux, 1988, p. 155).

A cornerstone of Giroux's project is the creation of oppositional counterspaces to challenge any totalizing influence of mainstream institutions. In terms of schooling, Giroux rejects the domineering impetus of the given curriculum; what he views as the sanitized messages of textbooks, and a "banking" school of education, where knowledge is deposited into the passive or receptive minds of students by the agents of the dominant class. In other places Giroux rejects such an oppositional polarity and stresses the varied responses of students along a "contested terrain" somewhere between accommodation and resistance and domination and empowerment. For Giroux, both his concept of oppositional logic *and* his awareness of the complexity of human action that cannot be subsumed within a polar framework, highlight his emphasis on human agency in different ways. His concept of human complexity, however, is underdeveloped due to his need to prioritize the radical impetus in his thought.

Giroux promotes a dialogical view of education that takes seriously the lived experience and cultural values of students. He does not embrace a student perspective uncritically, but views it as an essential starting point for dialogue. By focusing on the experiences and voices of students, Giroux's radical intentions are to reshape the curriculum, to deconstruct any "totalizing" construct of official schooling, and to establish within the schools an "oppositional public sphere." His more conservative objective is to find space for a range of "contested terrains" along the continuum of accommodation and resistance within a complex pluralism that acknowledges the asymmetrical power exercised upon schooling by its authorities.

On Giroux's reading, dominant discourses of schooling, whether conservative or liberal, repress the radical otherness of student experience. Moreover, in creating spheres of knowledge as "self-evident," they obfuscate the power/knowledge relationship intrinsic to any discourse. At the least, Giroux seeks to open such discourse to a critical analysis to make room for a more emancipated vision even within the asymmetrical power relationships of contemporary schooling.

Giroux's foremost desire is to transform schools into emancipatory public spheres that actively work toward the fulfillment of his liberatory vision. More realistically, he identifies schools as sites "where dominant and subordinate voices define and constrain each other, in battle and exchange, in response to the sociohistorical conditions 'carried' in the institutional, textual, and lived practices that define school culture and teacher/student experience" (p. 134). His nearer term project, then, is to make space for student experience and voice which mainstream schooling has historically marginalized. More radically, he seeks to elevate the ways in which students construct their own knowledge and experience as a key component of a transformed curriculum.

By such authentication, Giroux intends to deconstruct self-evident assumptions of schooling through an uncritical embrace of the dominant culture. For him, the focal point of the curriculum is not disciplinary subject matter, although Giroux does not deny its importance. The focal point, rather, is the emancipatory vision expressed in the hope of oppressed groups themselves for liberation and social justice as well as in certain aspects of mainstream schooling which may be mined for radical potential.

While attaining a certain privileged rank as starting point for dialogue, Giroux rests uneasy on any perception that uncritically romanticizes or "celebrates" the voices and experiences of students. Rather, even the "oppressed" need to be "critically interrogated" through the prism of the emancipatory vision to undo the internalization of dominant discourses that remain embedded in the culture of the working class, the poor, and minority groups. "At issue here is the need to link knowledge and power theoretically so as to give students the opportunity to understand more critically who they are as part of a wider social formation, and how they have been positioned and constituted through the social domain" (p. 143)

In the construction of student voice, Giroux veers back and forth between an emancipatory rhetoric and an acknowledgment that students live ambiguously somewhere between accommodation and resistance and oppression and liberation. Thus, in his more utopian moments "literacy becomes a hallmark of liberation and transformation designed to throw off the colonial voice and further develop the collective voice of suffering and affirmation silenced beneath the terror and brutality of despotic regimes" (p. 154). Yet, students are shaped not only by their "own voice," but by a "school voice" and a "teacher voice" whereby students appropriate dominant discourses as well as those more innate to their "unadulterated" cultural experience. On Giroux's reading, students are conflicted between their own quest for social justice and emancipation linked in comradeship with like minded others and a passion for inclusion into the autonomous liberalism of mainstream culture. They may articulate various oppositional logic which may or may not be a form of resistance as well as experience a feeling of inferiority through an internalization of their marginalized class roles. Although Giroux *acknowledges* these tensions, the force of his vision toward the emancipatory pole minimizes their significance as they are enacted among students, themselves, in the social medium of American schooling.

His critical pedagogy, then, inhibits a more hermeneutical reflection that might take "lived experience" more seriously as a profound force field that constrains perception even as it opens space for development. As Richard Bernstein put it, drawing on Hans Georg Gadamar, "We always understand from our situation and horizon, but what we seek to accomplish is to enlarge our horizon, to achieve a "fusion of horizons" (Bernstein, 1983, p. 63). From such a critical hermeneutical perspective, a "folk psychology" wherein the "organizing principle is narrative rather than conceptual" (Bruner, 1990, p. 35) might provide another understanding of student voice and experience than Giroux's critical pedagogy. Such a perspective may be grounded more in the aspirations of students to locate themselves within a complex "mainstream" culture and society, seeking to "fit in" and achieve personal advancement, while maintaining as well a critical edge; a boundary identity. Thus, students veer back and forth between accommodation and resistance in search both for greater personal freedom and social justice within the broad contours of the given socio-political culture.

This hermeneutical folk psychology does not deny the possibility of social reconstruction, although it might prove wary of such an emphatic teleology as Giroux's. As Bruner puts it (p. 47), "...while culture must contain a set of norms, it must also contain a set of interpretive procedures for rendering departures from those norms meaningful in terms of *established patterns of belief*" (italics added). Bruner's "folk psychology" provides more legitimization for a phenomenological psychological interpretation than does Giroux's that privileges societal analysis over individual psychology without diminishing the concept of personal agency. Yet



Bruner's folk psychology is also a form of social analysis. The emphasis on individualism as part of an American folk psychology is less an effort to deny the socio-cultural construction of the self than an acknowledgment of the centrality of autonomy in the social psychology of this culture (Kegan, 1994).

Moreover, individualism in "the American grain" is rarely a hermetic phenomenon than a means by which to create a better fit between the self and some form of social belonging (Fowler, 1991). As Dewey put it, "Selfhood is not something which exists apart from association and intercourse. The relationships which are produced by the fact that interests are formed in this social environment are far more important than the adjustments of isolated selves" (Dewey, cited in Gouninlock, 1994, p. 116). Thus, the "myth" of American individualism might be reconstructed through a Deweyan sense of self-fulfillment whereby "independence of judgment, personal insight, integrity and initiative, become indispensable excellencies from the social point of view" (Dewey, cited in Gouninlock, 1994, p. 117). There is much within postmodern American experience where interests of self and society do not converge. Yet the mythology of a Deweyan social identity of the self, reinforced by the folk psychology described by Bruner, could provide a framework for galvanizing reformist energies. Such an impetus would stem more from the American republican tradition of civic virtue (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, and Tipton, 1985) that would not likely arise among a more radical "identity politics" espoused by Giroux and others. In this scenario, Giroux's critical pedagogy would be largely embodied within the framework of extending the democratic principles and practices within liberal capitalism rather than in opposition to it without denying the importance of a more critical voice as representing a legitimate, but outer perimeter of the American political culture.

Thus, Giroux's emancipatory vision might represent the *outer edge* of an American utopian ideology grounded in a quest for diversity and inclusiveness; pluralism pushed to its radical potential boundary as the perpetual longing for the fulfillment of aspirations articulated in the Declaration of Independence. Dewey's concept of growth as the enhancement of experience through critical reflection and democracy as "full and free communication" through "free social inquiry" would serve as a nearer term project for a reconstructed public sphere. This Deweyan vision, *supplemented* by Giroux's critical pedagogy would take place largely within mainstream institutions as a reform of liberal capitalism in settings such as the workplace, schools, civic groups, and social agencies (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, and Tipton, 1991). The impetus toward democracy would inevitably remain partial and ongoing in the quest for greater fulfillment of individual and social selves.

Given an overwhelming desire of marginalized groups to assimilate within American society in ways that authenticate their selves, the gradualism implicit in a Deweyan sense of self-realization and social fulfillment may indeed represent the "last best hope" for progressive reform in the United States for any foreseeable future. This is particularly so given the obdurate power of capital to maintain and extend its influence over public and private life in a manner that is not likely to change significantly in the foreseeable future. Within such a frame, Giroux's radical vision may help to sharpen such an impetus so that at the least, a Deweyan reform vision does not become coopted into a gloss for an unreconstructed support of the status quo.

While Giroux's teleology may represent an ultimate direction for a pedagogy of the oppressed, a critical Deweyan pragmatism may hold more of a prospect for some modest, but significant improvement in the lives of many students in "real time." Consider Dewey's definition of democracy:

Democracy as compared to other ways of life is the sole way of living which believes wholeheartedly in the process of experience as end and as means; as that which is capable of generating the science which is the sole dependable authority for the direction of further experience and which releases emotions, needs and desires, so as to call into being the things that have not existed in the past. For every way of life that fails in its democracy limits the contacts, the exchanges, the communications, the interactions by which experience is steadied while it is also enlarged and enriched. The task of this release and enrichment is one carried on day by day. Since it is one that can have no end till experience itself comes to an end, the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and which all contribute (Dewey, 1939, cited in Shapiro and Morris, 1993, pp. 244-245 ).

This impetus toward democracy on Dewey's reading as a process of continuous "release and enrichment" is an inclusive ideal that may have more potency in the current political climate than Giroux's radical democratic vision grounded in an oppositional "identity politics" to effect change in the near term. However, the specter of cooptation remains a serious concern within Deweyan pragmatism to which the school of critical pedagogy is well attuned. Moreover, Deweyan growth as the continuous reconstruction of experience toward an inclusive democratic ideal may not be anymore realizable than Giroux's utopian vision of a multiculturally shaped democracy. Still, as *myth*, the thrust of his project may have more resonant power to stimulate a modest, but significant embrace of a civic consciousness, envisioned, for example, by Robert Bellah and his colleagues (Bellah et. al., 1985, 1991) against the privatism so characteristic of modern life. Given the paucity of alternatives such a Deweyan gamble may be worthy of our best efforts.

## Conclusion

Giroux has made a major point that critical pedagogy is not merely critique against dominant social forces. In addition, it opens creative space for marginalized groups to keep hope and possibility alive against despair and cynicism characteristic, according to Giroux, of certain neo-marxist interpretations of schooling. It is important to keep in mind that much of the locus of Giroux's vision is to take place within the "oppositional public sphere" of the American school system. This is the case even as he states that without broader social reform (and he means *major*), significant change within the public school is virtually impossible. While Giroux points to various liberatory moments and makes an important distinction between resistance as a conscious critique against the status quo and "opposition" which may carry considerable "false consciousness," the fundamental problem is that American society remains resistant to the kind of radical transformation to which he espouses.

The "cycle of American history" has included various reform movements, some more progressive than others, but any reformist impulse that has attained institutional stability has had

to come to terms with the limits imposed by liberal capitalism. Thus, there is a certain cooptation coterminous with the American reform tradition; a certain ambivalence between the quest for greater democratization on the one hand with the acceptance of and desire among marginalized groups to find a place within the institutions and values of liberal capitalism, on the other hand. This tension has characterized reform movements in labor, civil rights, and the women's movement, the most significant reform efforts of the twentieth century. More radical voices have been expressed in all of these movements, but with minor exceptions, they have been moved to the margins. The American reform movement is, for all practical purposes, circumscribed between the tension of radical democracy on the one hand and the quest for inclusion into the mainstream of liberal capitalism on the other, with the latter the stronger impulse. It remains, therefore, highly questionable whether the more radical impetus of Giroux's vision can have much practical force. This is not to suggest that its impact is totally nugatory.

As I have argued throughout this essay, a postmodern Deweyan pragmatism can provide some social, intellectual, and political scaffolding to move *toward* the Girouxian ideal "to develop a language, vision, and curriculum in which multiculturalism and democracy become mutually reinforcing categories" (Giroux, 1994, cited in Giroux, 1997, p. 248). This vision would remain vital as a utopian force that breaks into history at critical moments to sharpen the democratic tendencies within a liberal capitalistic society that contains powerful assimilating tendencies which mitigate against the more radical fulfillment to which Giroux subscribes. In the foreseeable future it is difficult to imagine much else than modest, but perhaps significant change as defined by historical actors, themselves, in quest of greater inclusiveness within the current social order that includes a desire to progressively humanize it. However, even this limited reformist space remains precarious in the neo-liberal/neo-conservative era of the new millennium. More may be possible. Yet Dewey's pragmatic space for "growth" and his peculiar interpretation of democracy as "conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it" (Dewey, 1927, p. 149), represents a nearer term utopian hope that resonates with key aspirations of the American political culture. It also accords with the more conservative aspects of Giroux's project. If even Dewey's vision remains an illusion (a very useful one, perhaps), which does not negate its importance as myth and as impetus for reformist energies of an undetermined scope, it is difficult to fathom how Giroux's more radical project can have practical influence short of a profound cultural transformation of public values. There is little in the American past or in the foreseeable future that points to any radical democratization of American public life which is not to deny the pragmatic importance that critical pedagogy may have in highly specific settings to effect change toward greater democratization.

My main argument is that as "myth," Deweyan pragmatism as described in this essay has more resonant power than Giroux's "oppositional" vision to stimulate change in American public life. This assertion is not meant to repress Giroux's "utopian" vision, but to locate it at the outer edge of the American political culture. American public life would be considerable enriched through a more extensive border crossing between neo-pragmatism and critical pedagogy philosophies than I have been able to articulate in this essay (Cherryholmes, 1988, and Stanley, 1992). As a postmodern Deweyan, I am suspicious as was Dewey and is Giroux of any inevitability toward progressively realizing the democratic vision of an increasingly just and free society for all. Yet, their optimism has almost teleological-like significance, as perhaps does my appropriation of

their thought to keep hope and possibility alive against the despair of cynicism and skepticism in face of the "hopelessness" of change. Thus, without Dewey's or Giroux's sense of hope and possibility, only critique, and resignation, or the acceptance of the end of history, remain, or so it seems.

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