

**PUBLIC VALUES, HIGHER EDUCATION  
AND THE SCOURGE OF NEOLIBERALISM:  
POLITICS AT THE LIMITS OF THE SOCIAL**

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With the advent of neoliberalism, or what some call free-market fundamentalism, we have witnessed the production and widespread adoption within educational theory and practice of what I want to call the politics of economic Darwinism. As a theater of cruelty and mode of public pedagogy, economic Darwinism undermines most forms of solidarity while promoting the logic of unchecked competition and unbridled individualism. As the welfare state is dismantled, it is increasingly replaced by the harsh realities of the punishing state as social problems are increasingly criminalized and social protections are either eliminated or fatally weakened. The harsh values of this new social order can be seen in the increasing incarceration of poor people of color and immigrants, the modeling of public schools after prisons, and state policies that leave millions of Americans in a state of poverty, despair, and insecurity. In the midst of exploding unemployment, home foreclosures, homelessness, and devastating poverty, the corporate state bails out the banks and other corporate institutions aligned with financial and political power. With over 15 million either unemployed or underemployed, market driven politicians call for reducing the taxes of the rich, expanding a war machine that has cost over a trillion dollars since 2001, and cutting crucial public and social services (see Herbert, 2001: A19; Cooper, 2010: A1, A11). The war against poverty and social misfortune has morphed into a war against the poor and the welfare state.

Not only does neoliberal rationality believe in the ability of markets to solve all problems, it also removes economics and markets from ethical considerations. In this discourse, economics drives politics, transforming citizens into consumers and social responsibility into an object of disdain. Long-term investments are now replaced by short term gains and profits, while compassion is viewed as a

weakness and democratic public values are scorned because they subordinate market considerations to the common good. Morality in this instance becomes painless, stripped of any obligations to the other. As the language of privatization, deregulation, and commodification replaces the discourse of the public good, all things public, such as public schools, libraries, and transportation are viewed either as a drain on the market or as a pathology.

Under such circumstances, to paraphrase the famed sociologist C. W. Mills, we are seeing the breakdown of democracy, the disappearance of critical intellectuals, and 'the collapse of those public spheres which offer a sense of critical agency and social imagination' (Mills, 2008: 200). Since the 1970s, we have witnessed the forces of market fundamentalism strip education of its public values, critical content, and civic responsibilities as part of its broader goal of creating new subjects wedded to the logic of self-interest, consumerism, and disposability. Tied largely to instrumental purposes and measurable paradigms, many institutions of higher education are now committed almost exclusively to economic growth, instrumental rationality, and preparing students for the workforce. The question of what kind of education is needed for students to be informed and active citizens is rarely asked (Aronowitz, 2008: 12). Also ignored is the issue of how matters of social responsibility and the value of the social good define the meaning and purpose of higher education. The heritage of critical thought, once considered to self-determination and critical citizenship, has now given way to market-driven values willing to subordinate education to training and the public good to corporate interests. Hence, it is not surprising, for example, to read that 'Thomas College, a liberal arts college in Maine, advertises itself as Home of the Guaranteed Job!' (Zernike, 1020: ED16).

The anti-democratic values that drive free market fundamentalism are embodied in policies now attempting to shape diverse levels of higher education all over the globe. The script has now become overly familiar and increasingly taken for granted, especially in the United States, United Kingdom, and increasingly in Canada. Shaping the neoliberal framing of public and higher education is a corporate-based ideology that embraces standardizing the curriculum, supporting top-down management, implementing more courses that promote business values, and reducing all levels of education to job training sites. For example, one university is offering a master's degree to students who commit to starting a high-tech company, while another allows career officers to teach capstone

research seminars in the humanities. In one of these classes, the students were asked to ‘develop a 30-second commercial on their “personal brand”’ (Zernike, 1020: ED16).

Marc Bousquet rightly argues that central to this neoliberal view of higher education is a market-driven paradigm that supports ‘more standardization! More managerial control! A teacher-proof curriculum! . . . a top-down control of curriculum,... tenured management’ (2008: non-pag.) and the reduction of faculty to the status of part-time and temporary workers, if not simply a new subordinate class of disempowered educators. Faculty in this view are more and more regarded as simply another cheap army of reserve labor, defined largely as a subaltern class of low-skilled entrepreneurs, removed from the powers of governance, and subordinated to the policies, values, and practices within a market model of the university (see Faust, 2009: non-pag.). One blatant example of the disrespect, if not scorn, some colleges have for non-tenured adjuncts was recently illustrated by a college administration that decided to hand over the employment of adjuncts to a temporary services agency. One administrator defended the practice by insisting that adjuncts occupy the same status as clerical workers and thus should be hired by a temp agency (Jaschik, 2010: non-pag.). Reducing faculty with doctorates to the status of clerical workers surely is a mode of governance that is blinded by its own power and arrogance.

Needless to say, there is no talk in this view of higher education about shared governance between faculty and administrators, educating students as critical citizens rather than potential employees of Walmart. Nor is there any attempt to affirm faculty as scholars and public intellectuals who have both a measure of autonomy and power. Instead, faculty are increasingly defined less as intellectuals than as technicians, specialists, and grant writers. Nor is there any attempt to legitimate higher education as a fundamental public sphere for creating the agents necessary for an aspiring democracy. In fact, the commitment to democracy is beleaguered, viewed less as a crucial educational investment in public life and the common good than as a distraction that gets in the way of connecting knowledge and pedagogy to the production of material and human capital. In short, higher education is now being retooled as part of a larger political project to bring it in tune with the authority and values fostering the advance of neoliberalism. I think David Harvey is right in insisting that ‘the academy is being subjected to neoliberal disciplinary apparatuses of various kinds

[while] also becoming a place where neoliberal ideas are being spread' (in Pender, 2007: 14). Such modes of education do not foster a sense of organized responsibility and set of public values central to a democracy. Instead, they foster what might be called a sense of organized irresponsibility—a practice that underlies the economic Darwinism, public pedagogy, and corruption at the heart of both the current recession and American politics.

### **Higher Education and the Crisis of Legitimacy**

There is a general consensus among academics around the world that higher education is in a state of crisis. Universities are now facing a growing set of challenges arising from budget cuts, diminishing quality, the downsizing of faculty, the militarization of research, and the revamping of the curriculum to fit the needs of the market. In the United States, many of the problems in higher education can be linked to low funding, the domination of universities by market mechanisms, the rise of for-profit colleges, the intrusion of the national security state, and the lack of faculty self-governance, all of which not only contradicts the culture and democratic value of higher education, but also makes a mockery of the very meaning and mission of the university as a place to both think and provide the formative culture and agents that make a democracy possible. Universities and colleges have been largely abandoned as democratic public spheres dedicated to providing a public service, expanding upon humankind's great intellectual and cultural achievements, and educating future generations to be able to confront the challenges of a global democracy. A bare instrumental pedagogy rooted in the dictates of career building and workforce training has replaced those elements of critical pedagogy that stress preparing students for a self-managed life, the ability to understand the society and world in which one lives, and the desire to set the conditions for expanding and deepening an aspiring global democracy (Aronowitz, 2009: ix).

As a core political and civic institution, higher education rarely appears committed to addressing important social problems. Instead, many colleges and universities have become unapologetic accomplices to corporate values and power and in doing so increasingly make social problems either irrelevant or invisible. Steeped in the same market driven values that produced the 2008 global economic recession along with a vast amount of hardship and human suffering in many countries around the globe, higher

education mimics increasingly the inequalities and hierarchies of power that inform the failed financial monstrous banks and investment companies in particular--that have become public symbols of greed and corruption. Not only does neoliberalism undermine civic education and public values, confuse education with training, it also treats knowledge as a commodity, promoting a neoliberal logic that views schools as malls, students as consumers, and faculty as entrepreneurs. As the humanities and liberal arts are downsized, privatized, and commodified, higher education finds itself caught in the paradox of claiming to invest in the future of young people while offering them few intellectual, civic, and moral supports.

If the commercialization, commodification, and militarization of the university continues unabated, higher education will become yet another one of a number of institutions incapable of fostering critical inquiry, public debate, human acts of justice, and common deliberation. But the calculating logic of the corporate university does more than diminish the moral and political vision and practices necessary to sustain a vibrant democracy and an engaged notion of social agency. It also undermines the development of public spaces where matters of dissent, critical dialogue, social responsibility, and social justice are pedagogically valued-- viewed as fundamental to providing students with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the problems facing the nation and the globe. Such democratic public spheres are especially important at a time when any space that produces 'critical thinkers capable of putting existing institutions into question' (Castoriadis, 1997: 5) is under siege by powerful economic and political interests.

Higher education has a responsibility not only to search for the truth regardless of where it may lead, but also to educate students to make authority and power politically and morally accountable. Though questions regarding whether the university should serve *strictly* public rather than private interests no longer carry the weight of forceful criticism as they did in the past, such questions are still crucial in addressing the purpose of higher education and what it might mean to imagine the university's full participation in public life as the protector and promoter of democratic values.

What needs to be understood is that higher education may be one of the few public spheres left where knowledge, values, and learning offer a glimpse of the promise of education for nurturing public values, critical hope, and a substantive democracy. It may be the case

that everyday life is increasingly organized around market principles; but confusing a market-determined society with democracy hollows out the legacy of higher education, whose deepest roots are moral, not commercial. This is a particularly important insight in a society where the free circulation of ideas are not only being replaced by ideas managed by the dominant media, but where critical ideas are increasingly viewed or dismissed as banal, if not reactionary. Celebrity culture and the commodification of culture now constitute a powerful form of mass illiteracy and increasingly permeate all aspects of the wider cultural apparatus. But mass illiteracy does more than depoliticize the public; it also becomes complicit with the suppression of dissent. Intellectuals who engage in dissent are often dismissed as either irrelevant, extremist, or un-American. Anti-public intellectuals now dominate the larger cultural landscape, all too willing to flaunt co-option and reap the rewards of venting insults at their assigned opponents. At the same time, there are too few academics willing to defend higher education for its role in providing a supportive and sustainable culture in which a vibrant critical democracy can flourish.

These issues, in part, represent political and pedagogical concerns that should not be lost on either academics or those concerned about the purpose and meaning of higher education. Democracy places civic demands upon its citizens, and such demands point to the necessity of an education that is broad-based, critical, and supportive of meaningful civic values, participation in self-governance, and democratic leadership. Only through such a formative and critical educational culture can students learn how to become individual and social agents, rather than merely disengaged spectators, able both to think otherwise and to act upon civic commitments that 'necessitate a reordering of basic power arrangements' fundamental to promoting the common good and producing a meaningful democracy.

### **Academic Labor in Dark Times**

Understanding higher education as a democratic public sphere means fully recognizing the purpose and meaning of education and the role of academic labor, which assumes among its basic goals promoting the well-being of students, a goal that far exceeds the oft-stated mandate of either preparing students for the workforce or teaching them the virtues of measurable utility. Defining education as the mastery of measurable skills and preparation for the workforce

says little about the role that academics might play in influencing the fate of future citizens and the state of democracy itself. In addition to promoting measurable skills, academics are also required to speak a kind of truth, but as Stuart Hall points out, 'maybe not truth with a capital T, but ... some kind of truth, the best truth they know or can discover [and] to speak that truth to power' (2007: 289-90). Implicit in Hall's statement is an awareness that to speak truth to power is not a temporary and unfortunate lapse into politics on the part of academics: it is central to opposing all those modes of ignorance, whether they are market-based or rooted in other fundamentalist ideologies, that make judgments difficult and democracy dysfunctional.

Amy Gutmann broadens the truth-seeking function of universities by insisting that 'education is always political because it is connected to the acquisition of agency, the ability to struggle with ongoing relations of power, and is a precondition for creating informed and critical citizens' (1998: 42). For Gutmann, what is unique about academics is the crucial role they play in linking education to democracy and recognizing pedagogy as an ethical and political practice tied to modes of authority in which the 'democratic state recognizes the value of political education in predisposing [students] to accept those ways of life that are consistent with sharing the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society' (42). If higher education is to take its democratic ideals seriously, it must be recognized as more than an outpost of business culture simply there to do the bidding of corporate power (see Angus, 2007: 64-75). And it is precisely this democratic project that affirms the critical function of education and academic labor, while refusing to narrow its goals and aspirations to instrumental or methodological considerations. This is what makes intellectual labor different from other provincial notions of teaching, largely restricted to teaching the canon or the conflicts, and other narrowly defined pedagogical commitments. And it is precisely the failure to connect learning to its democratic functions and possibilities that creates the conditions for those pedagogical approaches that ignore what it means to receive a critical and empowering education (see Said, 2004).

In a democratic society, higher education should teach students how to be responsive to the conflicts of our times, identify anti-democratic forces in the wider society, and connect knowledge, power, and critical modes of agency to the task of imagining a more just world while demonstrating a willingness to struggle for it. If

faculty do not assume this important role, who will? Where are the democratic public spaces in a commercially driven society that can address this important pedagogical challenge? While alternative public spheres exist, they are too few and far between to take on this important task in the same way available to the institutions of public and higher education. What does such a challenge suggest for the engaged scholar and critical scholarship. What might it mean to replace what Herbert Marcuse once called 'scholarshit' with non-dogmatic forms of engaged pedagogy and scholarship.

In my view, academics have not only a moral and pedagogical responsibility to unsettle and oppose all orthodoxies, to make problematic the commonsense assumptions that often shape students' lives and their understanding of the world, but also to energize them to come to terms with their own power as individual and social agents. Higher education, in this instance, as Pierre Bourdieu, Paulo Freire, and Stanley Aronowitz have reminded us, cannot be removed from the hard realities of those political, economic, and social forces that both support it and consistently, though in diverse ways, attempt to shape its sense of mission and purpose (see also Giroux and Giroux, 2004). *Politics is not alien to higher education but central to comprehending the institutional, economic, ideological, and social forces that give it meaning and direction.* Politics also references the outgrowth of historical conflicts that mark higher education as an important site of struggle. Rather than the scourge of either education or academic research, politics is a primary register of their complex relation to matters of power, ideology, freedom, justice, and democracy.

Stanley Fish's now infamous smug call for academics to profess nothing or to 'save the world on their own time' is not an educational virtue but a form of surrender, a corrosive cynicism parading as a form of professionalism, an ethical refusal to educate students to question official dogma, to create the pedagogical conditions for them to become moral agents and critical citizens, and to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage the tension between the existing reality and the promise of democracy. The 'save the world on your own time' creed aligns too closely with the neoliberal incantation that 'there is no alternative' and in the end means complicity with the established order. Talking heads who proclaim that politics have no place in the classroom can, as Jacques Rancière points out, with a certain note of irony: 'look forward to the time when politics will be over and they can at last get on with political business undisturbed' (1995: 3), especially as it



pertains to the political landscape of the university. In this discourse, education as a fundamental basis for engaged citizenship, like politics itself, becomes a temporary irritant to be quickly removed from the hallowed halls of academia. In this stillborn conception of academic labor, faculty and students are scrubbed clean of any illusions about connecting what they learn to a world 'strewn with ruin, waste and human suffering' (Said, 2004: 50). As matters of power, politics, critique, and social responsibility are removed from the university, balanced judgment, according to C. Wright Mills, *becomes code* for 'surface views which rest upon the homogeneous absence of imagination and the passive avoidance of reflection. A... vague point of equilibrium between platitudes' (Mills, 2008: 199). Under such circumstances, the university and the intellectuals that inhabit it disassociate higher education from larger public issues, remove themselves from the task of translating private troubles into social problems, and undermine the production of those public values that nourish a democracy.

Fish's insistence that academics get out of the business of saving the world represents more than cynical contempt of a conservative thinker to reclaim the illusionary status of the scholar as a pure and disembodied intellect removed from matters of ethics, politics, and power. Fish is repulsed by the idea that the classroom could possibly be shot through with politics and power, and assumes that any suggestion of the sort or any pedagogy that describes itself as a moral and political practice is by default a form of indoctrination. What Fish repeatedly misses in his confused understanding of the project of critical pedagogy is that education is always a deliberate attempt to shape the knowledge, values, capacities, and identities of students. And rather than being reduced to a form of didacticism that errs on the side of indoctrination, one defining feature of its project is to reject any form of pedagogy that is unaware of the politics and values that guides its theory, practice, and mode of socialization.

Needless to say, pedagogy is always political by virtue of the ways in which power is used to shape various elements of classroom identities, desires, values, and social relations, but that is different from being an act of indoctrination. Writing about the role of the social sciences, C. Wright Mills had a lot to say about public intellectuals in the academy, and in fact directly addressed the argument that such intellectuals had no right to try to save the world. He writes:

I do not believe that social science will 'save the

world' although I see nothing at all wrong with 'trying to save the world'—a phrase which I take here to mean the avoidance of war and the re-arrangement of human affairs in accordance with the ideals of human freedom and reason. Such knowledge as I have leads me to embrace rather pessimistic estimates of the chances. But even if that is where we now stand, still we must ask: if there *are* any ways out of the crises of our period by means of intellect, is it not up to the social scientist to state them? ...It is on the level of human awareness that virtually all solutions to the great problems must now lie. (Mills, 2000: 193)

As I have suggested, the commitments academics enact are distinctively political and civic, regardless of whether they deny or willingly embrace such roles. University educators cannot ignore politics, nor can they deny responsibility for acknowledging that the crisis of agency and public values are at the center of the current crisis of democracy. At the very least, academics should be more responsible to and for a politics that raises serious questions about how students and educators negotiate the institutional, pedagogical, and social relations shaped by diverse ideologies and dynamics of power, especially as these relations mediate and inform competing visions regarding whose interests the university might serve, what role knowledge plays in furthering both excellence and equity, and how higher education defines and defends its own role in relation to its often stated, though hardly operational, allegiance to egalitarian and democratic impulses.

Although there are still a number of academics, such as Noam Chomsky, who function as public intellectuals, they are often shut out of the mainstream media or characterized as marginal, even subversive figures. At the same time, many academics find themselves laboring under horrendous working conditions that either don't allow for them to write in an accessible manner for the public because they do not have time—given the often almost slave-like labor demanded of part-time academics and increasingly of full-time academics as well—or they retreat into a highly specialized, professional language that few people can understand in order to meet the institutional standards of academic excellence. In this instance, potentially significant theoretical rigor detaches itself both from any viable notion of accessibility and from the possibility of reaching a larger audience outside of their academic disciplines.

Consequently, such intellectuals often exist in hermetic academic bubbles cut off from both the larger public and the important issues that impact society. To no small degree, they have been complicit in the transformation of the university into an adjunct of corporate and military power. Such academics have become incapable of defending higher education as a vital public sphere and unwilling to challenge those spheres of induced mass cultural illiteracy and firewalls of jargon that doom critically engaged thought, complex ideas, and serious writing for the public to extinction. Without their intervention as public intellectuals, the university defaults on its role as a democratic public sphere capable of educating an informed public, developing a culture of questioning, and constructing a critical formative culture connected to the need, as Cornelius Castoriadis puts it, 'to create citizens who are critical thinkers capable of putting existing institutions into question so that democracy again becomes society's movement' (1997: 10).

Before his untimely death, Edward Said, himself an exemplary public intellectual, urged his colleagues in the academy to directly confront those social hardships that disfigure contemporary society and pose a serious threat to the promise of democracy. He urged them to assume the role of public intellectuals, wakeful and mindful of their responsibilities to bear testimony to human suffering and the pedagogical possibilities at work in educating students to be autonomous, self-reflective, and socially responsible. Said rejected the notion of a market-driven pedagogy, one that created cheerful robots and legitimated organized irresponsibly and illegal legalities. In opposition to such a pedagogy, Said argued for what he called a pedagogy of wakefulness and its related concern with a politics of critical engagement. In commenting on Said's public pedagogy of wakefulness, and how it both shapes his important consideration of academics as public intellectuals, I begin with a passage that I think offers a key to the ethical and political force of much of his writing. This selection is taken from his memoir, *Out of Place*, which describes the last few months of his mother's life in a New York hospital and the difficult time she had falling to sleep because of the cancer that was ravaging her body. Recalling this traumatic and pivotal life experience, Said's meditation moves between the existential and the insurgent, between private pain and worldly commitment, between the seductions of a 'solid self' and the reality of a contradictory, questioning, restless, and at times, uneasy sense of identity. He writes:

'Help me to sleep, Edward,' she once said to me

with a piteous trembling in her voice that I can still hear as I write. But then the disease spread into her brain—and for the last six weeks she slept all the time—my own inability to sleep may be her last legacy to me, a counter to her struggle for sleep. For me sleep is something to be gotten over as quickly as possible. I can only go to bed very late, but I am literally up at dawn. Like her I don't possess the secret of long sleep, though unlike her I have reached the point where I do not want it. For me, sleep is death, as is any diminishment in awareness. ... Sleeplessness for me is a cherished state to be desired at almost any cost; there is nothing for me as invigorating as immediately shedding the shadowy half-consciousness of a night's loss, then the early morning, reacquainting myself with or resuming what I might have lost completely a few hours earlier. I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents like the themes of one's life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best, they require no reconciling, no harmonizing. They are 'off' and may be out of place, but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme. A form of freedom, I like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. That skepticism too is one of the themes I particularly want to hold on to. With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place. (2000: 294-99)

It is this sense of being awake, displaced, caught in a combination of diverse circumstances that suggests a pedagogy that is cosmopolitan and imaginative—a public affirming pedagogy that demands a critical and engaged interaction with the world we live in mediated by a responsibility for challenging structures of domination and for alleviating human suffering. As an ethical and political practice, a public pedagogy of wakefulness rejects modes of education removed from political or social concerns, divorced from history and matters

of injury and injustice. Said's notion of a pedagogy of wakefulness includes 'lifting complex ideas into the public space' (7), recognizing human injury inside and outside of the academy, and using theory as a form of criticism to change things. This is a pedagogy in which academics are neither afraid of controversy or the willingness to make connections that are otherwise hidden, nor are they afraid of making clear the connection between private issues and broader elements of society's problems.

For Said, being awake becomes a central metaphor for defining the role of academics as public intellectuals, defending the university as a crucial public sphere, engaging how culture deploys power, and taking seriously the idea of human interdependence while at the same time always living on the border -- one foot in and one foot out, an exile and an insider for whom home was always a form of homelessness. As a relentless border crosser, Said embraced the idea of the 'traveler' as an important metaphor for engaged intellectuals. As Stephen Howe, referencing Said, points out, 'It was an image which depended not on power, but on motion, on daring to go into different worlds, use different languages, and "understand a multiplicity of disguises, masks, and rhetorics. Travelers must suspend the claim of customary routine in order to live in new rhythms and rituals ... the traveler crosses over, traverses territory, and abandons fixed positions all the time' (2003: non-pag.). And as a border intellectual and traveler, Said embodied the notion of always 'being quite not right', evident by his principled critique of all forms of certainties and dogmas and his refusal to be silent in the face of human suffering at home and abroad.

Being awake means refusing the now popular sport of academic bashing or embracing a crude call for action at the expense of rigorous intellectual and theoretical work. On the contrary, it means combining rigor and clarity, on the one hand, and civic courage and political commitment, on the other. A pedagogy of wakefulness means using theory as a resource, recognizing the worldly space of criticism as the democratic underpinning of publicness, defining critical literacy not merely as a competency, but as an act of interpretation linked to the possibility of intervention in the world. It points to a kind of border literacy in the plural in which people learn to read and write from multiple positions of agency; it is also indebted to the recognition forcibly stated by Hannah Arendt that 'Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance' (1977: 149).

For public intellectuals such as Said, Chomsky, Bourdieu, Angela Davis, and others, intellectuals have a responsibility to unsettle power, trouble consensus, and challenge common sense. The very notion of being an engaged public intellectual is neither foreign to, nor a violation of, what it means to be an academic scholar, but central to its very definition. According to Said, academics have a duty to enter into the public sphere unafraid to take positions and generate controversy, functioning as moral witnesses, raising political awareness, making connections to those elements of power and politics often hidden from public view, and reminding 'the audience of the moral questions that may be hidden in the clamor and din of the public debate' (2001: 504). At the same time, Said criticized those academics who retreated into a new dogmatism of the disinterested specialist that separates them 'not only from the public sphere but from other professionals who don't use the same jargon' (2004: 70). This was especially unsettling to him at a time when complex language and critical thought remain under assault in the larger society by all manner of anti-democratic forces.

In a society that remains troublingly resistant to or incapable of questioning itself, one that celebrates the consumer over the citizen and willingly endorses the narrow values and interests of corporate power, the importance of the university as a place of critical learning, dialogue, and social justice advocacy becomes all the more imperative. Moreover, the distinctive role that faculty play in this ongoing pedagogical project of democratization and learning, along with support for the institutional conditions and relations of power that make it possible, must be defended as part of a broader discourse of excellence, equity, and democracy. As Sheldon Wolin points out, 'For its part, democracy is ultimately dependent on the quality and accessibility of public education, especially of public universities. Education per se is not a source of *democratic* legitimacy: it does not serve as a justification for political authority, yet it is essential to the practice of citizenship' (161).

For education to be civic, critical, and democratic rather than privatized, militarized, and commodified, educators must take seriously John Dewey's notion that democracy is a 'way of life' that must be constantly nurtured and defended (see Dewey, 1954). Democracy is not a marketable commodity (see Keene, 2005: 92-114) and neither are the political, economic, and social conditions that make it possible. If academics believe that the university is a space for and about democracy, they need to profess more, not less,

about eliminating inequality in the university, supporting academic freedom, preventing the exploitation of faculty, supporting shared modes of governance, rejecting modes of research that devalue the public good, and refuse to treat students as merely consumers.

Higher education has wittingly and unwittingly produced and legitimated a neoliberal rationality that has spawned rapacious greed, grotesque levels of inequality, the devaluation of any viable notion of the public good, and far-reaching levels of human suffering. There seems to be an enormous disconnect between the economic conditions that led to the current financial meltdown and the current call to action of a generation of young people and adults who have been educated for the last several decades in the knowledge, values, and identities of a market-driven society. Clearly, this generation of young people and adults will not solve this crisis if they do not connect it to the assault on an educational system that has been reduced to a lowly adjunct of corporate interests and the bidding of the warfare state.

The economic Darwinism of the last thirty years has done more than throw the financial and credit system into crisis; it has also waged an attack on all those social institutions that support critical modes of agency, reason, and meaningful dissent. And yet, the financial meltdown most of the world is experiencing is rarely seen as part of an educational crisis in which the institutions of public and higher education have been conscripted into a war on democratic values. Such institutions have played a formidable, if not shameless role, in reproducing market-driven beliefs, social relations, identities, and modes of understanding that legitimate the anti-democratic institutions of a cut-throat capitalism. William Black calls such institutions purveyors of a 'criminogenic environment' - an environment that promotes and legitimates market-driven practices that include fraud, deregulation, and other perverse practices (Moyers, 2010: non-pag.). Black claims that the most extreme pedagogical expression of such an environment can be found in business schools, which he calls 'fraud factories' for the elite.

At the current moment, higher education faces a legitimation crisis - one that opens a political and theoretical space for educators to redefine the relationship between higher education, the public good, and democracy. Higher education represents the most important site over which the battle for democracy is being waged. It is the site where the promise of a better future emerges out of those visions and pedagogical practices that combine hope and moral

responsibility as part of a broader emancipatory discourse. Academics, artists, cultural workers, and progressive social movements have a distinct and unique obligation, if not political and ethical responsibility, to make learning relevant to the imperatives of a discipline, scholarly method, or research specialization. But more importantly, academics as engaged scholars can further the activation of knowledge, passion, values, and hope in the service of forms of agency that are crucial to sustaining a democracy in which higher education plays an important civic, critical, and pedagogical role. If democracy is a way of life that demands a formative culture, educators can play a pivotal role in creating forms of pedagogy and research that enable young people to think critically, exercise judgment, engage in spirited debate, and create those public spaces that constitute 'the very essence of political life' (see Arendt, 1999). The challenge of higher education in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada is that it signifies the notion of the public good and for the paragons of neoliberal culture it represents the limit of the social, a limit that has to be destroyed in order to remove any vestige of public values from the fabric of society. Education both as a form of schooling and as a public pedagogy provides the formative culture in which public spheres, public values, criticism, dialogue, and social movements in the interests of furthering the promise of democratic values and relations becomes possible. At stake here is the recognition, once held dear by the early theorists of cultural studies, that education is central not merely to learning but to politics itself.

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