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PUBLIC PEDAGOGY AS CULTURAL POLITICS: STUART HALL AND THE 'CRISIS' OF CULTURE

Abstract

This article argues that Stuart Hall's work provides an important theoretical framework for developing an expanded notion of public pedagogy, for making the pedagogical central to any understanding of political agency, and for addressing the primacy of public pedagogy and cultural politics in any viable theory of social change. Hall's work becomes particularly important not only in making education crucial to the practice of cultural studies, but also in providing a theoretical and political corrective to recent attacks on cultural politics, which cut across ideological lines and include theorists as politically diverse as Harold Bloom, Richard Rorty and Todd Gitlin.

Keywords

public pedagogy; cultural politics; governmentality; culture; power; education; higher education; public sphere

What does it mean to take seriously, in our present conjuncture, the thought that cultural politics and questions of culture, of discourse, and of metaphor are absolutely deadly political questions? . . . I want to persuade you that is so. And we ought to sort of preach on this occasion, no, not only to give up the bad habits of smoking and drinking and whoring and gambling, but to give up certain forms of political essentialism and the way in which it makes you sleep well at night.

(Hall, 1997a: 290)

WITHIN THE LAST FORTY YEARS, Stuart Hall has produced an impressive body of work on the relationship between culture and power, and its constitutive role as a political and pedagogical practice produced and mediated within different social contexts, spatial relations, and historical conjunctures.¹ Refusing to confine culture to narrow epistemological categories, the exclusive study of texts, or to matters of taste, Hall argues that cultural power is what distinguishes cultural studies from other disciplines and academic areas.² Cultural politics in this discourse 'combin[es] the study of symbolic forms and meanings with the study of power', or more specifically what he calls the 'insertion of symbolic processes into societal contexts and their imbrication with power' (Osborne and Segal, 1997: 24). According to Hall culture is central to understanding struggles over meaning, identity and power. Hall has written extensively on the importance of the political force of culture and the diverse ways in which culture deploys power to shape identities and subjectivities within a circuit of practices that range from the production and distribution of goods and representations to an ever growing emphasis on regulation and consumption.³

Hall's work provides an important theoretical framework for making pedagogy central to the theory and practice of cultural politics. His work is also crucial for understanding pedagogy as a mode of cultural criticism that is essential for questioning the conditions under which knowledge is produced and subject positions are put into place, negotiated, taken up, or refused. Hall also offers a critical and strategic challenge to the backlash against the pedagogy and the politics of culture that has emerged in the United States by ideologues as different as Harold Bloom, Richard Rorty and Todd Gitlin.⁴ Essential to this debate is not simply the issue of how we think about politics, understand the dynamics of culture within the shifting discursive practices and material relations of power, but also how we can, as Larry Grossberg suggests 'inquire into the conditions of the possibility of agency' (Grossberg, 1996a: 102). For theorists such as Hall, Grossberg, and others culture is a strategic pedagogical and political terrain whose force as a 'crucial site and weapon of power in the modern world' (Grossberg, 1996b: 142) can, in part, be understood in its contextual specificity. That specificity can be engaged only in relation to broader public discourses and practices whose meaning is to be found in culture's articulation with other sites, contexts, and social practices.

In what follows, I argue that Hall's attention to the relationship between culture and politics provides a valuable theoretical service to educators by contributing to a notion of public pedagogy that makes the pedagogical a defining principle of cultural politics. Moreover, Hall's work amplifies the role that educators might play as oppositional public intellectuals working in diverse sites and projects to expand the possibilities for democratic struggles. For Hall, such struggles are not predefined; rather they rest on the ethical and political imperative to find and use:

The intellectual resources in order to understand [and transform] what keeps making the lives we live, and the societies we live in, profoundly and deeply antihuman in the capacity to live with difference.

(Hall, 1992: 17–18)

But before I take up some of Hall's contributions to a politics of public pedagogy, I want to interrogate the recent attack on education and cultural politics that has cut across ideological lines. I also examine how such arguments undermine the possibility of making the political more pedagogical as part of a broader democratic project for radical change. Hall's work provides an important theoretical and political corrective to these discourses. I will conclude by exploring the implications of Hall's writings for those of us who believe that pedagogy is central to any notion of radical cultural politics and that the development of cultural politics is a crucial precondition for understanding the struggle over meaning, power, and identities in public spheres such as public and higher education.

Schooling and the refusal of progressive politics

These are hard times for educators and advocates of democratic schooling. Besieged by the growing forces of vocationalism and the neoconservative cultural warriors, prospective and existing classroom teachers are caught in an ideological crossfire regarding the civic and political responsibilities they assume as engaged critics and cultural theorists. Asked to define themselves either through the language of the marketplace or through a discourse of liberal objectivity and neutrality that abstracts the political from the realm of the cultural and social, educators are increasingly being pressured to become either servants of corporate power or disengaged specialists wedded to the imperatives of a resurgent and debasing academic professionalism.

What is surprising about the current attack on education, especially in light of the growing corporatization and privatization, is the refusal of many theorists to rethink the role academics might play in utilizing the university (and public schooling) as a crucial public sphere. Lost here is the attempt to imagine how this public sphere would foster new notions of courage and action and what it would mean to make the pedagogical more political in a time of growing conservatism, racism, and corporatism. Even more surprising is the common ground shared by a growing number of progressives and conservatives on basic educational issues. Refusing to address pedagogy as a political and moral practice, many educators fall prey to the seduction of methodological quick fixes – in which pedagogy is reduced to an abstract formalism aimed at decoding the text. Politics drops out of this type of pedagogical practice as meaning is disassociated from issues of power and social change. But the depoliticization of pedagogy is not limited to foggy deconstructionists. It is also evident in the theoretical work of many

conservatives, liberals, and progressives who completely remove pedagogical practice from the operations of ideology and power, though for different reasons. For instance, conservatives such as William Bennett reduce pedagogy to an unproblematic method for inculcating the virtues of beauty, truth, and civility. While few progressives support this position, many leftists such as Micaela de Leonardo believe that any form of cultural politics, including pedagogical interventions, either gets in the way of 'real politics', or that pedagogy can only function, as Tony Bennett suggests, within the school as a repressive, conservative and normalizing practice. More recently, however, the controversy over pedagogy bears resemblance to the broader attack on cultural politics itself and has generated resentment from right and left intellectuals alike.

The right-wing attack on culture as a site of pedagogical and political struggle is evident in the work of traditionalists such as Harold Bloom and liberals such as Richard Rorty, both of whom bemoan the death of romance, inspiration, and hope as casualties of the discourse of power, politics, and multiculturalism. For Bloom, literary criticism has been replaced in the academy by cultural criticism and the result is nothing less than the death of criticism. Bloom cannot bear the politics of what he calls 'identity clubs'; he argues that 'multiculturalism is a lie, a mask for mediocrity for the thought-control academic police, the Gestapo of our campuses' (Bloom, 1998: 27). Bloom wants to situate culture exclusively in the sphere of aesthetic transcendence, unhampered and uncorrupted by the politics of representation, the struggle over public memory, or the democratic imperative for self and social criticism. For Bloom, cultural politics is an outgrowth of cultural guilt, a holdover from the sixties that begets what he calls 'the School of Resentment'.⁵ But there is more at stake in delegitimizing the investigation of the relationship between culture and power for Bloom and his fellow conservatives. Eager to speak for disenfranchised groups, conservatives claim that cultural politics demeans the oppressed and has nothing to do with their problems. It neither liberates nor informs, but rather contributes to an ongoing decline in standards and civility by prioritizing visual culture over print culture, popular culture over high culture. For Bloom, replacing *Julius Caesar* with *The Colour Purple* is indicative of the lowering of such standards and the 'danger of cultural collapse' (Bloom, 1998: 28). By conflating cultural politics with popular culture and the decline of academic standards, Bloom conveniently cloaks the contempt he harbours for minorities of race, class, and colour and their 'uncivil' demands for inclusion in the curricula of higher education and the history and political life of the nation.

Although Richard Rorty does not reject the political as a meaningful category of public life, he does abstract it from culture, and in doing so legitimates a conservative reading of pedagogy and the aesthetic. According to Rorty, you cannot 'find inspirational value in a text at the same time as you are viewing it as a . . . mechanism of cultural production' (Rorty, 1996: 13). Rorty steadfastly believes in the rigid division between understanding and hope, mind and heart,

thought and action. He rejects the work of critical theorists such as Stuart Hall, Larry Grossberg, Paulo Freire, and others who believe that hope is a practice of witnessing, an act of moral imagination and political passion that partly enables educators and other cultural workers to think otherwise in order to act otherwise. Moreover, Rorty shares with Bloom, though for different reasons, the fall from grace narrative that seems to be the lament of so many well-established white male academics.

Rorty not only is scornful about situating texts within the broader politics of representation and understanding pedagogy as political practice, he is equally resentful of a cultural left that refuses to 'talk about money,' legislation, or welfare reform, and squanders its intellectual and critical resources on 'such academic disciplines as women's history, black history, gay studies, Hispanic-American studies, and migrant studies' (Rorty, 1998: B5). For Rorty, the cultural left needs to transform itself into a reformed economic left that addresses 'concrete' political issues such as reforming campaign finance laws, abolishing the local financing of public education, and fighting for universal health insurance. These are laudable goals for any left, but for Rorty they cannot be addressed through a cultural politics that complicates and burdens the terrain of political resistance through a discourse that addresses how power works 'as a territorializing machine'⁶ within popular culture or engages politics through the critical discourses and modalities of race, gender, sexuality. Nor can such goals be addressed by expanding the political field to include various social movements organized around issues such as AIDS, sexuality, environmentalism, feminism, and anti-racist struggles.

Rejecting social movements as important vehicles of social change, Rorty wants to recruit intellectuals from the English departments of America to constitute the vanguard of political reform. According to Rorty, these genteel professors of high culture are not only the most vocal left we have, but they seem perfectly willing to renounce the legacy of 'high theory' and 'get down' to developing alliances with bands of union workers in order to engage in affirming the positive in American life while struggling for incremental change. If this view were just another rhetorical jolt from the supreme philosopher of irony, it might appear as just one more instance of postmodern lite. Unfortunately, Rorty truly believes that literary professors represent America's most valuable hope for political change, that cultural critics and artists should provide more positive images of America, and that the genteel traditions of upbeat moralism and high culture is what is necessary to contain those leftist barbarians who not only indulge popular culture but dare to put the cultural ahead of 'real' politics. Similarly, Rorty believes that the university and public schools are not viable public spheres in which to wage political battles. For Rorty, the political does not include sites that trade in pedagogy, knowledge, and the production of identities. Culture, especially popular culture, is not a sphere in which political struggles can be effectively waged over broad visions of social justice. Within the narrow

confines of this discourse, cultural politics is tantamount to the politics of difference, degrading consumerism, and victim politics.⁷

If Rorty is to be believed, the left can get itself out of its alleged political impasse only by giving up on theory (which has produced a few good books, but has done nothing to change the country) and shedding its 'semi-conscious anti-Americanism, which it carried over from the rage of the late 1960s'.⁸ Criticism that focuses on race, gender, sexuality, popular culture, schooling, or any other merely cultural issue represents not only a bad form of identity politics, but contains an unwarranted (unpatriotic?) 'doubt about our country and our culture' and should be replaced with 'proposals for legislative change' (Rorty, 1997: 19). Rorty wants a progressive politics that is colour-blind and materialist-based, a politics for which the question of difference is largely irrelevant to a resurgent materialism that defines itself as the antithesis of the cultural. In Rorty's version of politics, the pedagogical is reduced to old-time labour organizing which primarily benefited white men and failed to question the exclusions that constituted the conditions of its own making.

In the end, Rorty provides a caricature of the cultural left, misrepresents how social movements have worked to expand the arena of democratic struggle,⁹ and ignores the centrality of culture as a pedagogical force for making politics meaningful as a basis for making it an object of both critique and transformation. Moreover, liberals such as Rorty conveniently forget the specific historical conditions and forms of oppression that gave rise to the 'new left,' new forms of critical theory, and new social movements that Stuart Hall makes central to his arguments against a facile return to the totalizing politics of class struggle. Hall insightfully reminds us that in order to think politics in the 1960s, progressives had to confront the legacy of Stalinism, the bureaucracy of the Cold War, and the oppressive racist and sexist hierarchies within traditional left organizations (Chen, 1996: 484–503).

The attack on culture as a terrain of politics not only is evident in the works of conservatives such as Harold Bloom or liberals such as Richard Rorty, but also is gaining ground in the writings of a number of renegades from the New Left, the most notable of whom are Todd Gitlin, Michael Tomasky, and Jim Sleeper.¹⁰ Unlike Bloom and Rorty, Gitlin and his ideological cohorts speak from the vantage point of left politics, but display a similar contempt for cultural politics, popular culture, cultural pedagogy, and differences based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. In what follows, I highlight some of the recurrent arguments made by this group. I will also focus on the work of Todd Gitlin, one of its most prolific and public representatives.

For Gitlin, contemporary cultural struggles, especially those taken up by social movements organized around sexuality, gender, race, the politics of representation, and, more broadly, multiculturalism, are nothing more than a weak substitute for 'real world' politics, notably one that focuses on class, labor, and economic inequality.¹¹ According to Gitlin, social movements that reject the

primacy of class give politics a bad name; they serve primarily to splinter the left into identity sects, fail 'to address questions of economic equity and redistribution', (Butler, 1997: 52–53) and offer no unifying vision of the common good capable of challenging corporate power and right-wing ideologues.

Like Rorty, Gitlin's critique of social movements rests on a number of omissions and evasions. First, in presupposing that class is a transcendent and universal category that can unite the left, Gitlin fails to acknowledge a history in which class politics was used to demean and domesticate the modalities of race, gender, and sexual orientation by denying the autonomy and political significance of these social forces and movements. Marked by the assumption that race and gender considerations could not contribute to a general notion of emancipation, the legacy of class-based politics is distinguished by a history of subordination and exclusion toward marginalized social movements. Moreover, it was precisely because of the subordination and smothering of difference that social groups organized to articulate their respective goals, histories, and interests outside of the orthodoxy of class politics. Judith Butler is right in arguing 'How quickly we forget that new social movements based on democratic principles became articulated against a hegemonic Left as well as a complicit liberal center and a truly threatening right wing?' (Butler, 1997: 268). Moreover, not only does Gitlin limit social agency to the pristine category of class, he can imagine class only as a unified, pregiven subject position, rather than as a shifting, negotiated space marked by historical, symbolic, and social mediations, including the complex negotiations of race and gender. Within this discourse, the history of class-based sectarianism is forgotten, the category of class is essentialized, and politics is so narrowly defined as to freeze the open ended and shifting relationship between culture and power.¹²

Secondly, in reducing all social movements to the most essentialistic and rigid forms of identity politics, Gitlin fails to understand how class is actually lived through, what Stuart Hall has called, the modalities of race and gender. In Gitlin's discourse, social movements are merely particularistic; hence it is impossible for him to 'conceive of social movements as essential to a class-based politics' (Kelley, 1997: 113–114). For instance, Robin Kelley points out the failure of Gitlin and others to recognize how Act UP through its varied demonstrations and media-bltz campaigns made AIDS visible as a deadly disease that is now taking its greatest toll among poor black women (Kelley, 1997: 113–114). Nor is there any recognition of how the feminist movement made visible the dynamics of sexual abuse, particularly as it raged through the communities of poor black and white households. Nor is there any understanding of how a whole generation of young people might be educated to recognize the racist ideologies that permeate advertising, films, and other aspects of media culture that flood daily life.

Third, Gitlin's appeal to majority principles slips easily into the reactionary tactic of blaming minorities for the current white backlash, going so far as to

argue that because the followers of identity politics abandoned a concern for materialist issues, they opened up the door for an all-out attack by the right on labour and the poor. At the same time, identity politics bears the burden in Gitlin's discourse for allowing the right to attack 'racialized rhetoric as a way of diverting attention from the economic restructuring that has been hurting most Americans' (Young, 1997: 47). Thoughtlessly aligning himself with the right, Gitlin seems unwilling to acknowledge how the historical legacy of slavery, imperialism, urban ghettoization, segregation, the extermination of native Americans, the war against immigrants, and the discrimination against Jews as it has been rewritten back into the discourse of American history may upset a majoritarian population that finds it more convenient to blame subordinate groups for their problems than to have to acknowledge their own complicity.

Against this form of historical amnesia, the call to patriotism, majoritarian values, and unity shares an ignoble relationship to a past in which such principles were rooted in the ideology of white supremacy, the presumption that the public sphere was white, and the prioritizing of a 'racially cleansed notion of class' (Butler, 1997: 248). If identity politics poses a threat to the endearing (because transcendent and universal) category that class represents to some critics, as the historian Robin Kelley argues, it may be because such critics fail to understand how class is lived through race, sexual orientation, and gender, or it may be that the return to a form of class warfare against corporate power represents simply another form of identity politics – an identity-based campaign that stems from the anxiety and revulsion of white males who cannot imagine participating in movements led by African Americans, women, Latinos, or gays and lesbians speaking for the whole, or even embracing radical humanism (Kelley, 1998).

Finally, Gitlin's materialism finds its antithesis in a version of cultural studies that is pure caricature. According to Gitlin, cultural studies is a form of populism intent on finding resistance in the most mundane of cultural practices, ignoring the ever-deepening economic inequities, and dispensing entirely with material relations of power. Banal in its refusal to discriminate between a culture of excellence and consumer culture, cultural studies becomes a symbol of bad faith and political irresponsibility. For theorists in cultural studies, Gitlin argues, it is irrelevant that African Americans suffer gross material injustice because what really matters is that 'they have rap' (Gitlin, 1997: 81). It seems that for Gitlin, cultural studies should 'free itself of the burden of imagining itself to be a political practice' (Gitlin, 1997: 82) since the locus of much of its work is the university – a bankrupt site for intellectuals to address the most pressing questions of our age. Rather than take responsibility for what Hall calls 'translating knowledge into the practice of culture', (Hall, 1990: 18) academics according to Gitlin, should put 'real politics' ahead of cultural matters, 'not mistake the academy for the larger world', [and] put their efforts into organizing 'groups, coalitions, and movements' (Gitlin, 1997: 82).

Gitlin's model of politics is characteristic of a resurgent economy rooted in

a totalizing concept of class in which it is argued that 'we can do class or culture, but not both' (Willis, 1998: 19). Within this discourse, social movements are dismissed as merely cultural, and the cultural is no longer acknowledged as a serious terrain of political struggle. Unfortunately, this critique not only fails to recognize how issues of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and class are intertwined, it also refuses to acknowledge the pedagogical function of culture in constructing identities, mobilizing desires, and shaping moral values. Ellen Willis rightly argues in opposition to positions such as Gitlin's that if people 'are not ready to defend their right to freedom and equality in their personal relations, they will not fight consistently for their economic interests, either' (Willis, 1998: 19). Questions of agency or resistance in Gitlin's version of cultural studies are dismissed as retrograde forms of populism, while cultural pedagogy is traded for an anti-intellectual and anti-theoretical incitement to organizing and pamphletering.

What is disturbing about this discourse is that it not only separates culture from politics, but it also leaves no room for capturing the contradictions within dominant institutions that open up political and social possibilities for contesting domination, doing critical work within the schools and other public spheres, or furthering the capacity of students and others to question oppressive forms of authority and the operations of power. For instance, when theorists such as Frances Mulhern suggest that cultural studies seeks to subordinate or subsume the meaning of the political into popular culture, he does more than misrepresent cultural studies, he unwittingly argues that where culture is merely educative it is not deliberate and therefore not political (Mulhern, 1995: 31-40) This is a reckless theoretical move, one that fails to grasp what Stanley Aronowitz has called the transformation of information as a new mode of production in the post-Fordist era and what Hall refers to as the centrality of culture in the formation of subjective and social identities.¹³ As Hall points out, the intellectual turn to popular culture is about more than providing an articulation between theory and the popular. On the contrary, the intellectual engagement with the popular 'is not an indulgence and an affirmation; it's a political, intellectual, pedagogical commitment. Everybody now inhabits the popular, whether they like it or not, so that does create a set of common languages. To ignore the pedagogical possibilities of common languages is extremely political' (Drew, 1998: 184). Mulhern has no vocabulary for examining the pedagogical and political task of engaging the educational force of popular culture. Nor does he appear to have any interest in understanding how pedagogical practices can be used to disrupt dominant forms of common sense and provide alternative categories, maps of meaning, and a range of possibilities through which people might imagine and define themselves as political and social agents.

Arguments against the relevance of pedagogy in cultural politics is also evident in the work of Australian educator, Ian Hunter. In dismissing pedagogy as simply another instrument for reconciling the self with the dominant society,

he rejects any possibility for fashioning forms of pedagogical practice that call critical attention to the ways in which authority might be used to undermine the social and cultural reproduction of the dominant ideologies and practices that characterize public spheres such as public schools and higher education. Reducing all pedagogy to the imposition of dominant authority, Hunter can only imagine pedagogical authority working in the interest of moral regulation and social control. Self-reflexive dialogue drops out of his argument, as does the possibility of teachers and students becoming critical of the very institutional forms, academic relations, and disciplinary knowledge regulations that constitute the complex and varied spaces of schooling. Within this narrow understanding of the relationship between culture and politics, there is no possibility for imagining schools as a place to resist dominant authority, to unsettle the complacency of strategies of domination, or to re-elaborate institutional authority from a position of engaged self criticism and as an object of classroom analysis. That the legacy of such cultural regulation can be challenged, pedagogically turned in on itself, or used as a resource to refigure the basis of teaching as a deliberative practice in the service of a progressive cultural politics seems impossible within this discourse.¹⁴

This is not to suggest that critical educators should overlook the long history in which pedagogy and culture have been used to construct the state's version of citizenship and national identity. Or that institutional practices forged within dominant economic, cultural, and political conditions do not exercise enormous force in shaping the very conditions under which pedagogy takes place. But to acknowledge the latter, as Alan O' Shea has recently pointed out, does not legitimate the presupposition that power is entirely on the side of domination within schools, that teachers and students can only be complicitous with hegemonic power, however they challenge its structures, ideologies, and practices.¹⁵ In this updated model of reproduction theory, critique and contestation can only come from outside of institutional schooling, offered up by cultural critics 'uncontaminated' by the moral technologies such institutions impose on 'hapless' reformers and radicals. Such criticism rests on more than passé functionalist accounts of society and its social forms, it also legitimates a totalizing model of power that marks a retreat from making the political more pedagogical as it simultaneously celebrates the marginalized role of the detached critic. This represents more than the exhaustion of a bad version of Foucauldian politics, it also signals a form of theoretical paralysis (not simply anti-utopianism) that undermines the more crucial problem of how culture as a terrain of struggle functions pedagogically to shape the possibilities of political agency and critical engagement within dominant cultural and institutional forms. Lost here is any critical attentiveness to how teachers and students might construct and mediate pedagogical authority as a form of auto-critique or as a response to the particular histories, institutional formations and cultural forces that bear down on the sites in which they teach and learn.

This version of governmentality precludes an understanding of pedagogy as

the outgrowth of specific struggles that take place within varied contexts marked by unequal relations of power, differentiated opportunities, and varied resources for social change. Theorists such as Tony Bennett actually replicate the old models of social and cultural reproduction that were so prevalent among radical educational theorists in the United States in the 1970s and early 1980s (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1994). According to Bennett, radical classroom interventions are caught within the paralyzing grip of governmental institutions that normalize all pedagogical practices. Similarly, Bennett argues that radical educators overemphasize agency at the expense of institutional pressures, embracing what he calls 'all agency and no structure' (Bennett, 1998: 223). This criticism, however, does little to explore or highlight the complicated, contradictory, and determining ways in which the institutional pressures of schools and the social capacities of educators are mediated within unequal relations of power. Instead, Bennett simply reverses the formula and buttresses his own notion of governmentality as a theory of structures without agents. What Bennett ends up with is a great deal more conservative than even his characterizations of the shortcomings of radical educators whose work he argues neither challenges the institutional authority of the schools nor engages students in critical learning. For instance, Bennett calls upon radical educators to develop more complicated and context specific forms of resistance, but he seems entirely unaware of the theoretical debates that took place precisely around such issues among American and British educators in earlier decades.¹⁶ In the end, radical pedagogy for Bennett is simply about reinforcing conservative technologies of regulation, except for training intellectuals to engage in policy reforms. Given such cynicism, Bennett ironically suggests that cultural studies should be housed within the university, but he refuses to analyse how the pedagogical might become more political as an essential element of such a project. Ultimately, Bennett's pessimism collapses into something worse than the liberalism he accuses radical educators of emulating. Impervious to the increasing vocationalization of public and higher education, he invokes the stripped down metaphor of 'cultural technician' to describe the political role that educators should take up within the university. Astonishingly, he ends up sounding like the American conservative E. D. Hirsch in his defense of standardized testing and the pitting of knowledge and skills against democratic classroom relations. In this perspective, teaching is reduced to a form of knowledge production, and as Richard Johnson has pointed out, has little to say about teaching as a form of self-production that suggests that educators register their own investments in particular forms of knowledge and classroom social relations (Johnson, 1997: 55). In addition, he crudely characterizes the radical pedagogical imperative that educators connect what they teach to the histories, experiences, and understandings that students bring with them to the classroom as an uncritical and anti-intellectual form of romanticism. The notion that as teachers we need to make knowledge meaningful in order to make it critical and transformative appears lost on Bennett.

It is against the current onslaught on cultural politics and its attempt to discredit the role that educators might play as public intellectuals working in a diverse range of public spheres that Stuart Hall's work provides an important theoretical and political service. In what follows, I want to focus on some important elements in Hall's work that constitute what I loosely call a theory of critical public pedagogy.

Struggling over culture

For Hall, culture provides the constitutive framework for making the pedagogical political – recognizing that how we come to learn and what we learn is imminently tied to strategies of understanding, representation, and disruption. These strategies offer opportunities for individuals to engage and transform when necessary the ideological and material circumstances that shape their lives. One of Hall's lasting contributions has been to also make the political more pedagogical. By repeatedly pointing to the diverse ways in which culture is related to power and how and where culture functions both symbolically and institutionally as an educational, political, and economic force, Hall provocatively argues that cultural pedagogy is the outcome of particular struggles over specific representations, identifications and forms of agency. Both the urgency and relevance of such struggles become more clear in defining questions of identities and identifications. Such questions are defined, in Hall's words:

By using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.

(Hall, 1996: 3)

To Hall, public pedagogy as a struggle over identifications is crucial to raising broader questions about how notions of difference, civic responsibility, community, and belonging are produced 'in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies' (Hall, 1996: 4).

Such strategies are organized not only around the issue of how meaning is theorized, but also around the struggle implied in what Hall has recently called the 'governing of culture' (Hall, 1997c: 237). By this term, he means the struggle over the control, regulation, and distribution of resources that mediate the range of capacities and possibilities that enable individuals and social groups to choose, inhabit, and transform particular notions of identity, desire, and agency. Cultural politics, for Hall, is in part about the regulation and distribution of resources. But our capacity to think politics is also mediated by the ways in which culture

actually governs, the ways in which it actually shapes 'our conduct, social action, human practices and thus the way people act within institutions and in society at large' (Hall, 1997c: 232). Our capacity to think politics is also dependent on the ways culture establishes the terrain 'through which boundaries mark differences as potential sites of contestation over meaning, a politics of identity' (Hall, 1997c). In short, culture is constitutive of agency(ies) and politics because it provides the resources through which individuals learn how to relate to themselves, others, and the world around them.

For Hall, culture is neither free-floating nor unmoving. Highlighting the relationship between learning and social change, Hall does more than acknowledge that culture is a terrain of struggle. Throughout his career, he has insisted that cultural workers deepen the meaning of the political by producing pedagogical practices that engage and challenge those representational strategies, institutional formations, and technologies of power that condition and are conditioned by the indeterminate play of power, conflict, and oppression within society. Culture is the social field where power repeatedly mutates, where identities are in transit, and where agency is often located where it is least acknowledged. Agency in this discourse is neither prefigured nor always in place but is subject to negotiation. Agency – the linking of capacities to the ability of people to intervene in and change social forms – offers hope and a site for new democratic relations, institutional formations, and identities. How one 'deals with the place of cultural politics' remains essential to any viable notion of politics concerned with how individuals and social groups analyse and struggle to transform those existing social, economic, and educational forces that maintain dominant relations of power (Hall, 1997a: 289).

For Hall, the educational force of culture resides in the attention it pays to representations and ethical discourses as the very condition for learning, agency, the functioning of social practices, and politics itself. As a pedagogical force, culture is saturated with politics. In the broadest sense, culture offers both the symbolic and material resources as well as the context and content for the negotiation of knowledge and skills. Through this negotiation, culture enables a critical reading of the world from a position of agency and possibility, although within unequal relations of power. The changing nature of the representations, space, and institutions of culture in modern times is central to understanding its pedagogical function. On the one hand, culture is substantive in that as a complex of institutions, new technologies, practices, and products, it has vastly expanded 'the scope, volume, and variety of meanings, messages, and images that can be transmitted' through time and space (Hall *et al.*, 1997: 23). On the other hand, the explosion of information produced within the cultural realm registers the shift in thinking about knowledge as a primary form of production, if not the key productive force. Culture in these terms is more than either a text or a commodity, it is the site 'of the production and struggle over power' (Grossberg, 1992: 248).

Culture's primacy as a substantive and epistemological force highlights its educational nature as a site where identities are continually being transformed and power enacted. Within this context, learning itself becomes the means not only for the acquisition of agency but for the concept of social change itself.

Culture as public pedagogy

According to Hall, the educational capacity of culture redefines the politics of power, the political nature of representation, and the centrality of pedagogy as a defining principle of social change; it also broadens our understanding of the public reach of pedagogy as an educational practice that 'operates both inside and outside the academy', (Hall, 1992: 11) expanding its reach across multiple sites and spheres. As a performative practice, pedagogy is at work in all of those public spaces where culture works to secure identities; it does its bridging work negotiating the relationship between knowledge, pleasure, and values; and it renders authority both crucial and problematic in legitimating particular social practices, communities, and forms of power. It is precisely this legacy of both politicizing culture and insisting on the pedagogical nature of the political that makes Hall's work so important at the present time. If agency is negotiated, made and remade within the symbolic and material relations of power and enacted within diverse and changing historical and relational contexts, it cannot be removed from the self-reflexive possibilities of pedagogy nor can it be detached from the dynamics of cultural politics.

Hall's theory of articulation is of considerable importance to critical educators when analyzing how authority and power actually work in linking texts to contexts, ideology to specific relations of power, and political projects to existing social formations.¹⁷ For educators this is an important insight and points to the centrality of context in shaping cultural pedagogy as a form of practical politics. Not only do political projects emerge out of particular contexts, but because contexts change as the relations between culture and power shift, such projects become practical only if they remain open, partial, and incomplete. Central to Hall's work is the insight that public pedagogy is defined through its performative functions, its ongoing work of mediation and its attentiveness to the interconnections and struggles that take place over knowledge, language, spatial relations, and history. Public pedagogy for Hall represents a moral and political practice rather than merely a technical procedure. At stake here is not only the call to link public pedagogy to practices that are interdisciplinary, transgressive, and oppositional, but also to connect such practices to broader projects designed to further racial, economic, and political democracy, to strike a new balance and expand what Stuart Hall and David Held have called the 'individual and social dimensions of citizenship rights' (Hall and Held, 1990: 179).

The concept of articulation does more than provide a theoretical rationale

for 'the making of a relationship out of a nonrelationship or, more often, the making of one relationship out of another one', (Grossberg, 1997: 259) it also reaffirms the political nature of cultural work that gives meaning to the resources that students bring with them to various sites of learning, while simultaneously subjecting the specificities of such meanings to broader interrogations and public dialogue. This is a crucial concept for any notion of public pedagogy. Central to such a project is the need to begin at those intersections where people actually live their lives and where meaning is produced, assumed, and contested in the unequal relations of power that construct the mundane acts of everyday relations. Public pedagogy in this context becomes part of a critical practice designed to understand the social context of everyday life as lived relations of power.

Hall has consistently insisted that cultural workers must critically examine how meanings work to resonate with ideologies that are produced in other sites. Cultural workers must also examine how meanings work to legitimate and produce particular practices, policies, and social relations. Educators cannot treat cultural texts as if they were hermetic or pure; such approaches often ignore how representations are linked to wider social forms, power, and public struggles. Engaging cultural texts as part of a critical public pedagogy means refusing to limit our analysis of popular texts by focusing on the polyphonic meanings at work in such texts or by employing formalist strategies to decipher what is perceived as a text's preferred meanings. On the contrary, a critical public pedagogy should ascertain how certain meanings under particular historical conditions become more legitimate as representations of reality and take on the force of common sense assumptions shaping a broader set of discourses and social configurations at work in the dominant social order. Hall's work emphasizes the need for educators to focus on representations as a mode of public exchange in order to explore, as Herman Gray attests, the ways 'these images, especially the historical and contemporary meanings they carry and understandings they express, are aligned and realigned with broader discourses' (Gray, 1995: 132). As public discourses, representations can be understood for the ways in which they shape and bear witness to the ethical dilemmas that animate broader debates within the dominant culture. The implications of this argument suggest a cultural politics that investigates how popular texts are articulated within structures of affect and meaning mediated by networks of power and domination bound to the specific historical, social and economic conditions of their production.

Public pedagogy as politics

I have argued that Hall's work supports a notion of public pedagogy that is interdisciplinary in its continual involvement with border crossings, transgressive in its challenge to authority and power, and intertextual in its attempt to link the specific with the national and transnational. The project underlying such a

pedagogy may take many forms, but its deepest impulse is rooted in issues of compassion and social responsibility aimed at deepening and extending the possibilities for critical agency, racial justice, and economic and political democracy.

Stuart Hall's work is refreshingly theoretical, contextual, and rigorous: it is accessible but refuses easy answers. But most important, Hall attempts to make hope practical and social justice integral to his approach to cultural politics and pedagogy. Hall's work both instructs and disrupts, opens a dialogue but refuses rigid adherence to a position that closes down deliberation and reflection.

Finally, Hall's writing has always refused to limit the sites of pedagogy and politics to those 'privileged' by the advocates of 'genuine' politics. Organizing labour unions, demonstrating in the streets for legislation to curb corporate crimes, and organizing workers to promote radical forms of social policy are important forms of political practice, but working in the public schools, the television industry, law firms, museums, or a vast number of other public spheres do not constitute for Hall a less reputable or less important form of political work. In fact, Hall has continually called for intellectuals to 'address the central, urgent, and most disturbing questions of a society and a culture in the most rigorous intellectual way we have available' (Hall, 1992: 11). He has urged cultural workers to take up this challenge in a variety of pedagogical sites, and in doing so he has opened the possibility for working within dominant institutions, while challenging their authority and cultural practices. For Hall, the context of such work demands confronting a major paradox in capitalist societies – that of using the very authority vested in institutions such as schools to work against the grain of such authority. Such strategies are not a retreat from politics as Gitlin and others believe but an expanding of the possibility of politics and critical agency to the very institutions that work to shut down notions of critical consciousness, and political action. Authority in this context resists the tendency to be complicit and opens up the possibility of being resistant, transformative, and contestable. This discourse locates public pedagogy and cultural politics 'on the dividing lives where the relation between domination and subordination continues to be produced, lines that extend into the academy itself' (Beverly, 1996: 352). Hall's call for a cultural politics necessitates a public pedagogy in which learning becomes indispensable to the very process of social change, and social change becomes the precondition for a politics that moves in the direction of a less hierarchical, more radical democratic social order.

Notes

- 1 An excellent bibliography of Stuart Hall's work can be found in a collection of his writings compiled by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. See David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (1996) (eds) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge.
- 2 This is not to suggest that Hall underestimates the importance of deconstructive

work with regards to analyzing various cultural texts. On the contrary, arguing against an exclusive focus on textuality, Hall writes: 'The text is abstracted from its institutional context, from its historical context-that form of what I would call 'literary cultural studies' is deeply troubling. You have to work on the text, but you also have to work on the context; you have to know something about the history of the society in which the institutions work as well as about what the technologies of the media are and how they're financed. So, I think there's been a kind of reduction to text in the narrow sense, not text in the broad sense, indicating what I call the discursive turn'. Stuart Hall cited in Julie Drew (1998) 'Cultural composition: Stuart Hall on ethnicity and the discursive turn', *Journal of Composition Theory* 18(2): 184.

- 3 Hall elaborates his theory of culture best in a series of books designed for the Culture, Media, and Identities Series at Open University and published by Sage in the United States. See, for example, Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus (1997), *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage); Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997); Stuart Hall, 'The Centrality of Culture: Notes on the Cultural Revolutions of Our Time', in Kenneth Thompson (ed.) *Media and Cultural Regulation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997).
- 4 Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1994); Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Richard Rorty, 'The inspirational value of great works of literature', *Raritan* 16(1): 8-17; Todd Gitlin (1995) *Twilight of Our Common Dreams* (New York: Metropolitan Books).
- 5 Harold Bloom (1994) *The Western Canon*, New York: Riverhead Books, p. 29. Bloom's position is rooted in a nostalgia for the good old days when universities taught the select few who qualify as talented writers and readers willing to carry on an aesthetic tradition purged of the contamination of politics, ideology, and power. Unfortunately, for Bloom, the universities are now filled with the stars of the School of Resentment, who debase themselves by teaching social selflessness.
- 6 Lawrence Grossberg uses this Deleuzian term as a way of theorizing the temporary points of belonging, investment, and identification that people inhabit and use as they are positioned by and mediate different force fields. See Lawrence Grossberg (1993) 'Cultural studies and/in new world', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 10: 1-23.
- 7 For a devastating critique of Rorty's critique of cultural politics, see Lindsay Waters, (1998) 'Dreaming with tears in my eyes', *Transition*, 7(2): 78-102.
- 8 Richard Rorty (1998) 'The Dark Side of the American Left', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 3: B6. This argument is repeated in greater detail in Rorty's *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in 20th-Century America*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- 9 For a brilliant rejoinder to this type of historical amnesia, see Robin D. G. Kelley (1997) *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!*, Boston: Beacon Press.

- 10 See Todd Gitlin (1995) *Twilight of Our Common Dreams*, New York: Metropolitan Books; Michael Tomasky (1996) *Left for Dead: The Life, Death and Possible Resurrection of Progressive Politics in America*, New York: The Free Press; Jim Sleeper (1990) *The Closest of Strangers*, New York: W. W. Norton.
- 11 Gitlin's most sustained development of this argument can be found in Todd Gitlin (1995) *Twilight of Our Common Dreams*, New York: Metropolitan Books.
- 12 For an insightful analysis of this position, see Lawrence Grossberg (1997) 'Cultural Studies: What's in a Name?' in *Bringing It All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 245–71.
- 13 See Stanley Aronowitz (1992) *The Politics of Identity*, especially the chapter 'On Intellectuals,' New York: Routledge, pp. 125–74. Stuart Hall (1997) 'The Centrality of Culture: Notes on the Cultural Revolution of Our Time,' in Kenneth Thompson (ed) *Media and Cultural Regulation*, Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage, pp. 207–38.
- 14 See Ian Hunter (1994) *Rethinking the School*, New York: St. Martin's Press. This position is also argued for in Tony Bennett (1996) 'Out in the open: reflections on the history and practice of cultural studies,' *Cultural Studies* 10(1): 133–53. Tony Bennett (1998) *Culture: A Reformer's Science*, Thousand Oaks: Sage. A particularly telling and theoretically sloppy example of this position can also be found in Maria Koundoura (1998) 'Multiculturalism or Multinationalism?' in David Bennett (ed) *Multicultural States*, New York: Routledge, pp. 69–87. Most of these critics appear to have little or no knowledge of the long history of debates within educational circles in the United States over issues of reproduction, resistance, and the politics of schooling. Koundoura is especially uninformed on this issue, citing one article to defend her attack on 'border pedagogy'. For a review of the resistance literature, see Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux (1994) *Education Still Under Siege*, Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey Press. An interesting critique of the work of Tony Bennett and Ian Hunter and the limits of governmentality as they apply it can be found in Toby Miller (1998) *Technologies of Truth*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, and in Alan O' Shea (1998) 'A Special Relationship? Cultural Studies, Academia and Pedagogy,' *Cultural Studies* 12(4): 513–27.
- 15 Alan O'Shea (1998) 'A Special Relationship? Cultural Studies, Academia and Pedagogy,' *Cultural Studies* 12(4): 513–27; another challenge to the governmentality model can be found in the brilliant article on pedagogy and cultural studies by Richard Johnson. See Richard Johnson (1997) 'Teaching Without Guarantees: Cultural Studies, Pedagogy and Identity,' in Joyce Canaan and Debbie Epstein (eds) *A Question of Discipline*, Boulder: Westview Press, pp. 42–73.
- 16 I take up these arguments in Henry A. Giroux (1983) *Theory and Resistance in Education*, South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey Press.
- 17 One of the most incisive commentaries on the meaning and importance of Hall's theory of articulation can be found in Lawrence Grossberg (1986) 'On Postmodernism and Articulation: an Interview With Stuart Hall,' *Journal of*

Communication Inquiry 10(2): 45–60. Also, see Stuart Hall (1980) 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structure in dominance,' in Unesco (ed), London, Unesco Press, pp. 305–44.

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