Critical Pedagogy: Critical Thinking as a Social Practice
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Introduction

Much of the literature on critical thinking focuses on the ways in which human beings develop the capacity, through complex cognitive processes and skills, to evaluate or make sense of information. Within the formal educational context, it is often associated with pedagogical strategies aimed toward nurturing and developing learners' capacity for logical enquiry and reasoning. Though such insights are clearly very important, a narrow focus on what might be termed the "science of learning" can result in a negation of an obvious but very important point, namely, to what end and for what purpose should we be seeking to nurture critical thinking. Put another way, what is the moral, ethical, and political dimension of learning to think critically? And it is this question that forms the main purpose of the present chapter. By invoking the idea of critical thinking as a social practice, we examine the educational approach known as critical pedagogy and consider its relevance to higher education today. Critical pedagogy in its broadest sense is an educational philosophy that seeks to connect forms of education to wider political questions by arguing that processes or acts of learning and knowing are themselves inherently political.

Perhaps the most important figure that is associated with developing the tradition of critical pedagogy is the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (1921–1997). In the introduction to his famous book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Richard Shaull has summed up his approach when he argues that the starting point for Freire is that education can never be neutral; it either acts to socialize the learner into the "logic of the present system" or it becomes the "practice of freedom." Freedom here is understood as the capacity of the learner to "deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire 1996, 16). In this sense Freire's approach contains three key elements: the availability of education opportunities to the broad mass of people; the social and psychological processes that reinforce acts of educational inclusion/exclusion, both within and outside formal educational institutions; and the pedagogical strategies deployed by teachers.

In line with a range of progressive thinkers from the Enlightenment onward, Freire believed that education needed to be made available to men and women from all strata of society, rather than just the social elite. But his most significant contribution concerns the "critical" element within "critical pedagogy" and the pedagogical practices he developed and then wrote about in his many books. He sought to embody a participatory egalitarianism on one hand, but at the same time to create a classroom in which students could think about their life and other people's lives in a new and deeply critical way. For Freire, genuine criticality could not coexist within educational processes that were purely instrumental; hence the question of understanding the underlying purpose of teaching and knowing is a crucial starting point. We would argue that these

issues are still of crucial significance in talking about Freire's relevance today, even though it must at the same time be acknowledged that the form in which higher educationis offered now has changed enormously since he was working in the field. We are currently living through a period in which higher education is being transformed from its older incarnation as an elite system serving the interests of a privileged few, to a massively expanded global system, which is drawing in hundreds of thousands of people across the world (Cowden and Singh 2013).

The terrain of education today would have probably been unrecognizable to Freire, and given that one of his major attacks on conventional systems was directed at the way they excluded all but the wealthy, it could be argued by defenders of the present arrangements that the availability of education has been substantially democratized. There is no doubt that purely in terms of access, certainly in most developed countries, we do now have something resembling a mass higher education system (see, e.g., Usher and Medow 2014). Yet, ironically, at the same time universities have become much less democratic, both in relation to their internal management structures and their accountability. The reason for this is that the rationale for their expansion has not been concerned with the idea of education as a social good, but rather as a lucrative globally salable commodity. This approach has fundamentally reshaped both the form and the content of higher education. In a detailed analysis of the current and future consequences of this approach on the UK higher education (HE) titled Sold Out , the Oxford academic Stefan Collini concludes that a system with "a very good record" in terms of "universally acknowledged creativity, streets ahead of most of their international peers" and in being a positive force "for human development and social cohesion" (2013, 12) is being transformed in the image of the financial institutions that so spectacularly demonstrated their incompetence in the banking collapse of 2007–2008. In a similar vein, Andrew McGettigan (2013) in his forensic examination of the funding of UK universities argues that the introduction of large fees coupled with the transfer of funding from the state and direct taxation to private finance and loans systems is comparable to the "subprime" mortgage market, creating new classes of students with high levels of debt and "subprime degrees." Moreover, this subordination of the university to the logic of finance capital poses serious challenges to the project of critial thinking. In this sense the need for an educational practice concerned with the liberation rather than the domestication of students is as great as it has ever been.

Against the backdrop of the wider context of HE this chapter is centrally concerned with setting out the distinctive contribution of critical pedagogy to the broader question of critical thinking. Much of our focus is on the work of Paulo Freire, but of course his approach does not emerge in a vacuum. For this reason we begin the chapter by revisiting the ideas of key figures within the European Enlightenment; postmodernist claims to his legacy notwithstanding, we feel we need to be absolutely clear that Freire's work stands on this legacy, though like Marx, one of his major influences, it was a legacy he both built on and challenged. We follow this with a discussion of a 1999 essay "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy" by Nicholas Burbules and Rupert Berk that specifically compares critical pedagogy with other concepts of critical thinking. We conclude

the chapter with a discussion of the importance of critical pedagogy in the context of the current reshaping of relationships between students and teachers in a neoliberal market model, arguing that Freire's work offers a framework for defending and expanding essential aspects of critical thinking that we regard as universal.

Theorizing criticality—a historical perspective

When we consider the history of the concept of "criticality," it is clear that it is crucial not just for theorizing the basis of education, but it is also, in a wider sense, deeply connected with a capacity for expression within a wider "public sphere," a space where ideas can be discussed and debated openly. The European Enlightenment, with its injunction that we "dare to know!" is crucial for initiating modern concepts of criticality. Immanuel Kant's 1784 essay What Is Enlightenment? famously defined "enlightenment" as the "exit of humans from their self-incurred immaturity" (Fleischacker 2013, 13), and this represents the elevation of a concept of criticality based above all on Reason. For Kant, Reason was a universal human capacity, and hence he regarded its denial as a denial of our humanity itself. He defines "thinking for oneself" as "seeking the highest touchstone of truth in oneself (i.e. in one's reason), and the maxim of always thinking for oneself is enlightenment " (Kant 1998, 146–147). Reason in a Kantian framework is understood not just as a universal human capacity but as the capacity for critical engagement, which represents something much greater that the amount of information one possesses. "Becoming enlightened" involves liberating oneself at the level of thought and feeling, and Etienne Balibar has argued that "from Kant onwards . . . modern idealism is above all a theory of the active self-construction of the subject" (1994, xv). The corollary of this, Balibar argues, is the "autonomy of the political," which he characterizes as "reminiscent of a long tradition in the definition of citizenship . . . namely the emergence of 'we the people' as a political subject" (1994, x). The Enlightenment definition of criticality was thus inherently political and social, and connected with concepts of popular sovereignty, democratic citizenship, and, in their absence, revolution. These ideas were of course crucial aspects of the intellectual background of the French, American, and the Haitian revolutions, and which continue to be important to this day. This relationship between the capacity to use reason in a public and critical way remains as true of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen as it was adopted in August 1789 by the French National Constituent Assembly, as it is of contemporary struggles for genuine popular representation manifest in the Arab Spring.

But where does Reason come from? While the establishment of this principle was one of the most important legacies of the Enlightenment, Hegel's major contribution to this was the idea that it had to be accompanied by the development of "critical self-consciousness." As Pavlides (2010) argues, "Hegel attempted to demonstrate the active role which the human mind played in the evolution of civilization and, at the same time, he became aware of the contradictory essence of things as the moving force behind their transformation" (83). It was by historicizing critical self-consciousness through his use of the "dialectical" method that Hegel established "the principle whereby stable

thoughts reveal their inherent instability by turning into their opposites, and then into more complex thoughts" (Houlgate 2005, 38). In this way of thinking Hegel demonstrated the importance of going beyond either/or forms of logic, thus overturning the perception that "things and concepts [were] either one thing or the other" (Houlgate 2005, 39). Hegel's approach radicalized criticality in the way it required a thinker to grasp "contradictions"—essential relationships between things that only appeared to be opposed to each other, but were, at a deeper level, essentially related.

It has almost become a cliche to reiterate Marx's claim to have turned the concept of the dialetic "on its head," but as Cyril Smith has noted, it is more useful to think of Marx as taking the method Hegel used for understanding philosophical contradictions as a means of understanding real material contradictions; in other words, Marx was "looking for the way to 'actualise philosophy' . . . Where Hegel's science sought to reconcile the conflicting forces of the modern world, Marx's science sets out from the necessity to actualise those conflicts and bring them to fruition" (1996, 147). This is demonstrated by the way Marx approached the question of religious belief. In common with most Enlightenment philosophy since Kant, Marx perceived uncritical religious faith as a major barrier to enlightened thought and existence. However rather than see this faith simplyas an "illusion" and thereby illogical, Marx argued that it needed to be understood as the inverted expression of real social contradictions:

Religious suffering is at one time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of an oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. (1975, 244)

Marx's description of religion as the "opium of the people" has often been misunderstood to mean that he was simply dismissive of religion. Rather, he saw it an analogous to an opiate, in that it dulled the pain of people's lives and allowed them to carry on, but without any fundamental change in the oppressive conditions in which they lived and worked. It was thus not the clarion calls for freethinking offered by Enlightenment philosophers that would undermine the appeal of religion, but "the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness" (Marx 1975, 244). After working extensively on his critique of Hegel in his early writings, Marx shifted his focus toward understanding "political economy" where the material causes of the denial of people's humanity were to be found. This shift is captured in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "the philosophers have interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx 1975, 423). This statement is remarkable for the way it encompasses criticality as a concept with inherently ethical, epistemological, and pedagogical dimensions, which themselves could only be realized through praxis, the unity of theory and practice.

In the twentieth century, as educational institutions expanded, debates around the significance of criticality moved more and more into the space of pedagogical practice. While the American pragmatist philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey did not see himself as a revolutionary in the way Marx did, he was equally concerned with the social implications of pedagogical practices. As Amsler notes, for Dewey:

[An] educator's decisions about what, how, why and where to teach

can never be based on purely technical skill or theoretical knowledge. Instead they emerge from theorizing the particular form of democratic life, articulating the practical role that forms of education could play in this life" (Amsler 2013, 67).
For Dewey education was not just about making a "good life," but also an essential component of a deepening practice of "democracy"that was predicated on the capacity of people at large being equipped with the skills to turn this into a reality. This is embodied in his oft-quoted statement that one should "cease conceiving of education as mere preparation for later life, and make it the full meaning of the present life" (Dewey 1916, 239).

The same questions about the social role of pedagogy are important in the early work of social theorist J u rgen Habermas, particularly his 1962 book The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1989). This work drew heavily on the pessimistic analysis of mass popular culture in the work of his Frankfurt School colleagues Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, but came to quite different conclusions. Returning to Kant's discussion in What Is Enlightenment? Habermas argued that the milieu of salons, coffee houses, and independent journals, which formed the context into which Kant's work was received, was very far from the context of the contemporary public sphere. He argued that this had developed primarily into a venue for entertainment where critical discussion was largely absent and social issues were framed in a language of "rational consensus" that was defined and dominated by powerful corporations and the simplistic slogans of political parties. As a result he argued that critical thinking had been "supplanted by manipulative publicity" (Habermas 1989, 178).
In order to prevent a resurgence of the sort of authoritarianism represented by both Nazi Germany and the USSR under Stalin, Habermas advanced the idea of "communicative competence." This concerned the capacity for a human subject to move beyond the dominant "rational consensus" and nurture a praxis whereby they could evaluate truth claims through a combination of reason, reflection, and critical thinking, thepurpose of which was to unveil hidden forms of domination. Habermas used the term "ideal-speech situations" to characterize this ongoing struggle for reflective understanding. In ideal-speech situations people were not told what to think, but had the opportunity to participate in a genuine interaction in which it was possible for them to independently evaluate their understandings and views on a particular issue. These ideas have had a major influence in contemporary discussions of the social role of universities and the place of pedagogy within them.
Ron Barnett's 1997 book Higher Education: A Critical Business is just one such discussion that develops a Habermasian defence of critical thinking in relation to HE in the UK. Barnett argues that it is not enough for university students to develop the capacity to reflect critically on knowledge; it is only through "critical reflection" and "critical action" that the learner can become a truly "critical being" capable of engaging "with the world and with themselves as well as with knowledge" (1997, 1).

Critical thinking and critical pedagogy

The far-from-exhaustive survey demonstrates just how central the relationship between ideas about criticality and a concept of "the public sphere" is,

and even if such conceptualizations didn't explicitly articulate a pedagogical dimension, they certainly implied one. But what sort of pedagogy? This question is usefully explored by Nicholas Burbules and Rupert Berk's 1999 essay "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences and Limits ." Their focus is a comparative analysis of the way the term "critical" functions within these two traditions of "critical thinking" and "critical pedagogy":

> Each invokes the term "critical" as a valued educational goal: urging teachers to help students become more sceptical toward commonly accepted truisms. Each says, in its own way, "Do not let yourself be deceived." And each has sought to reach and influence particular groups of educators, at all levels of schooling, through workshops, lectures, and pedagogical texts. They share a passion and sense of urgency about the need for more critically oriented classrooms. Yet with very few exceptions these literatures do not discuss one another. Is this because they propose conflicting visions of what "critical" thought entails? Are their approaches to pedagogy incompatible? (Burbules and Berk 1999)

They argue that both traditions deploy the term "critical" as characterized by the defence and expansion of spaces where students are able to reach independent judgments with regard to commonly accepted truth claims, and also argue for "a critical education [which] can increase freedom and enlarge the scope of human possibilities" (Burbules and Berk 1999, 46). But while critical thinking traditions focus on a concern with uncovering faulty arguments in logic, reasoning, and the use of evidence, critical pedagogy's primary concern is "with social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic or oppressive institutions and social relations" (Ibid.).

Burbules and Berk illustrate these differences using the example of research that purportedly demonstrates that African Americans are "less intelligent" than other ethnic groups, based on the fact that they score lower in IQ tests (1999, 54). Within the critical thinking tradition, concerns about whether such conclusions are justified would be addressed through methodological questions about the reliability of the instruments used to test intelligence; the validity of the findings; and the clarity of key terms, such as the concept of "intelligence." For critical pedagogy, while the latter questions would be important, the underlying problems are not just about methodology and evidence; they would be concerned with the wider context of IQ testing and the role of particular modes of inquiry with respect to power relations—in this instance the role of "intelligence testing" within a context of racist practice and ideology. Hence for critical pedagogy questions such as who is making these assertions about the relationship between "intelligence" and "race," why are they being made at this point in time, who funds this research, and who benefits from the promulgation of these findings are central.

While Burbules and Berk avoid presenting the two traditions as binary opposites, this example demonstrates the different ways in which pedagogy is conceived. Within the critical thinking tradition, this is based on positivist and "unbiased" modes of reasoning and inquiry that allow different truth claims to be evaluated. The distinctive feature of critical pedagogy, by contrast, lies not simply in the process of equipping learners with the skills that enable

to them to think critically, but includes within this the idea that the production of knowledge and the identities of learners being themselves socially and ideologically mediated. In this sense the task is not one of seeking to be "unbiased"; instead we need to understand the way dominant frameworks define and constitute that which counts as "knowledge." Freire argues that the educator's knowledge is always inherently incomplete and therefore the "act of knowing" must be based on a critical dialogue between the teacher and student. What he is pointing to here is a way of understanding criticality as a process in which both the educator and the educated seek to "problematize" the basis of forms of existing knowledge, which could be personal and group experiences, "expert knowledges" based on existing research, policy, media perceptions, etc., with a view to looking at the way all these elements interact.

This points to the way the distinction between the two traditions outlined by Burbules and Berk can be read at two levels—that of epistemology and that of pedagogical practice. In terms of epistemology, the distinction between critical thinking and critical pedagogy can be read as a restatement of the differences between Kantian and Marxist approaches. Kant's work represents the beginning of classical liberal philosophy where the use of Reason acts as an expression of what Steutel and Spiecker have called "the autonomy of the individual" (2002, 63). For Kant, critical thinking is perceived as a necessary virtue of citizens and thus as a prerequisite for the sound operation of a society, which needs people who are able to participate in public debates about its overall direction and organization (Ibid.). By contrast Marx rejected the atomistic focus on "individual autonomy" as both philosophically confused and empirically false. He argued that as human beings are essentially social creatures, so social and economic theory must always engage with social totality: "Whenever we speak of production . . . what is meant is always . . . production by social individuals" (Marx 1975, 85). In other words Marx's conception of people working to create a material product is the same as people producing and reproducing particular sets of social relations. We can thus never be outside of social relations, whose shape and form have a profound influence on the forms of knowledge that are seen to be important or unimportant. Freire's conception of critical pedagogy draws on a similar understanding of the reproduction of social relations in schools and universities; hence their production of students whose "high level of intelligence" makes them fit to rule society; domesticated, unquestioning students whose knowledge never threatens the powerful; and poor "uneducable" students, excluded from participation in the system.

On speaking and remaining silent

This question of epistemology merges into the issue of the form of pedagogy. While there were egalitarian elements in Kant's thinking, he sees the pursuit of critical thinking as largely confined to formal, traditional intellectuals—those who, in Socrates's times, would have been deemed as "philosopher kings." A key theme in critical pedagogy by contrast is the need for an expanded and more egalitarian conception of intellectuality itself. The ideas of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci are important here since he is one of the first people to theorize the role of "intellectuals" in the production and reproduction

of power relations. Against the conventional understanding of intellectuals, whom Gramsci termed "traditional intellectuals," he counterposed what he called "organic intellectuals," who emerged from within and among the popular classes in society. The recognition of "organic intellectuals" linked together Gramsci's emancipatory vision of intellectuals and the idea of proletarian emancipation:

> For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world is a "philosophical" event, far more important and "original" than the discovery by some philosophical "genius" of a truth, which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals. (Gramsci 1984, 325)

While Paulo Freire also stands in a broadly Marxist tradition of social transformation, he develops this question differently from Gramsci through a focus on theorizing the mode of participation within the educational processes themselves. This expresses the way critical pedagogy seeks to foreground the impact of social relations of power, which could be at the levels of class, "race," and/or gender, and that act to silence those are who less powerful, in acts of what we might call (following Pierre Bourdieu) "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1994, 107–108). The point here is that the capacity of individuals to critically evaluate different truth claims takes place on a radically uneven terrain. Just as Marx argued that the religiosity of oppressed workers represented much more than their lack of enlightenment, so for Freire the passivity of the so-called uneducated cannot be seen as reflecting their lack of capacity for critical thought. Rather, this was an inevitable consequence of their construction within a political economy of entitlement ; a question of who is and who is not allowed to speak. As he notes, oppressed people

> suffer from a duality, which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized" (Freire 1996, 30).

For Freire, traditional didactic pedagogy produced silent, domesticated students for whom "learning" remained entirely separate to their consciousness and subjectivity, and he sought to challenge this by developing critical pedagogical methods that sought to give students the license to speak in their own voices and, in that process, develop critical insights into both themselves and the world they lived in. The distinction he develops is between what he calls "banking education" and "problem-posing education." Within banking education, students are conceived of as "receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher. Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (Freire 1996, 53). In contrast to this approach, Freire advocated a form of problem-based approach that sought to displace the traditional hierarchical model or teacher/pupil with a dialogical approach that enables both "the problems of human beings in their relations with the world [which] consists of acts of cognition, not transferals of information" (1996, 60–61).

As the quote from Freire above suggests, critical pedagogy involves a dialectic process where the teacher and the student are both engaged in teaching each other and learning from each other. This is not to deny the teacher's

knowledge, but this needs to be understood not as a private accumulation, but as work whose inherent social collectivity is realized through engagement with students. Freire's concept of "dialogue" thus represents much more than the inherent value of people talking with each other; it involves a dialectical interchange between theory and experience. Equally it would be a mistake to think of critical pedagogy simply as encompassed by participatory teaching methods. For Freire, critical pedagogy was about the nurturance of intellectual capabilities not just as a tool for developing literacy and understanding, but also as a means of overcoming the "symbolic violence" that situates a person as not entitled to speak. In a book that offers one of the best accounts of Freire's philosophy, Jones Irwin notes that "problematization" is so crucial because "it avoids fatalism and determinism, aspects of behaviour which Freire sees as plaguing the oppressed and their conditions as well as their possibilities for overcoming oppression" (2012, 60). "Speaking" in this sense is linked with the discovery of a capacity for agency.

This idea has been developed in interesting ways by the black feminist writer bell hooks, who worked with Freire in the 1990s. In her book Teaching to Transgress hooks begins by reflecting on her own different experiences of pedagogical practices, the first in black-only classrooms that were based on an explicit basis of nurturing critical capacity, compared to being bussed into integrated classrooms:

> All our teachers at Booker T. Washington were black women. They were committed to nurturing intellect so we could become scholars, teachers, cultural workers—black folk who used our "minds." We learned that our devotion to learning and the life of the mind was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonisation. (hooks 1994, 2)

However upon being bussed into integrated schools, she then had to learn that "obedience, and not a zealous will to learn was what was expected of us . . . We were always and only responding and reacting to white folks" (hooks 1994, 3–4). Hooks uses this starting point to develop an argument about the importance of critical pedagogy in creating a classroom in which the marginalization and silencing of women and black pupils was overturned. In this sense critical pedagogy explicitly seeks to enable a learner to move from self objectification — at the level of class, "race," or gender — to being a "critically conscious"' subject. McLaren and Da Silva develop this point still further, noting that:

> a major consideration for the development of contextual critical knowledge is affirming the experiences of students to the extent that their voices are acknowledged as an important part of the dialogue; but affirming these voices does not necessarily mean that the meaning students give to their experiences can be taken at face value, as if experience speaks romantically or even tragically for itself. The task of the critical practitioner is to provide the conditions for individuals to acquire a language that will enable them to reflect upon and shape their experiences and in certain instances transform those experiences. (1993, 49)

Concluding thoughts: criticality in the neoliberal world

The discussion throughout this chapter makes it clear that historically the ideal of education as a social good is inherently bound up with a concept of democratic citizenship. However, to come back to the present, the neoliberal model, which dominates the practice of universities across the globe, is based on a severance of this connection by promoting a narrowly instrumental notion of higher education. In that sense it represents a major breach with the classical liberal education tradition that has, until recent times, dominated the life of the modern university. Under this new political economy of higher education, students are increasingly treated not as people who are being invited to become members of an academic community, but rather as commodities acquiring a marketable value on the one hand and consumers of services on the other. Likewise, academic staff become less valued for their qualities as educationalists vested with a responsibility to nurture inquisitive critical thinkers, and more as "service providers."

While more traditional , socially elitist versions of academic education have been criticized for their lack of relevance, the new discourse of "relevance" now demanded of universities is one that, like the state itself, embraces a financially driven logic in which the demands of "the market" are paramount. Within this ideological context, the acquisition of knowledge and educational experience is presented largely as a commercial transaction, driven primarily for the benefit of individual students in terms of their employability in an increasingly ruthless labor market. As much as anything else, this undermines genuine criticality in universities, as open-ended educational processes are increasingly displaced by training the role of which is to produce new cadres of unquestioning domesticated students (Giroux 2007, 210). Alongside this, we are also seeing the managerialization of pedagogical practices whereby the sense of teaching as a craft and learning as a process of "drawing out" or self realization is undermined and replaced, rather like a fast food, by a series of standardized prepacked curricula. Elsewhere we have described this is as analogous to a Sat-Nav educational experience (Cowden and Singh 2013) where students are increasingly being taught what to think, but not how to think (Canaan and Shumar 2008). Just as universities as institutions are becoming increasingly defined by the demands of the financial markets to which they are becoming ever more beholden, so also the student experience will come to be defined by cycles of debt to which students are bonded (Cowden and Singh 2013; McGettigan 2013). It is thus what we call the "social context of criticality" or this sense of criticality as a practice that we see as most threatened by the neoliberalization of education.

The full consequences of this are still to emerge, but we see already the emergence of a dangerous paradox. The lives of people across the globe are increasingly beset by deep underlying problems that urgently require new thinking, such as increasing ecological crisis resulting from global climate change; escalating social problems that are almost entirely a consequence of a growing chasm of social inequalities, both within and between nations; multiple forms of violence and conflict, particularly those associated with gender, class, and ethnic/communal divisions; and the rise of authoritarian religious fundamentalism and new forms of racialized nationalism. If the crises brought about

by what David Harvey has called neoliberalism's "accumulation by dispossession" (2003, 158) are to be resolved in ways that do not destroy the social bonds that make societies viable and sustainable, we urgently need to nurture a socially engaged capacity for critical thinking. For all their problems, there is no escaping the fact that universities are unique in their capacity to contribute to this process. In the current climate it is not an exaggeration to assert that the defense of genuinely critical educational spaces is a defense of the idea of criticality itself. Moreover, in the face of the transforming of the mission of universities from democratic public institutions into businesses, it is equally important that new critical educational spaces, both physical and virtual, are developed outside the institutional structures. It is in this sense that we have sought to argue that critical pedagogy provides a means of nurturing criticality among students both as an intellectual pursuit and a social practice. And it is in the work of Paulo Freire that we see the most cogent articulation of a pedagogical project that is capable of enabling students to realize a deeper ethical dimension to learning and education, without which we are impoverished both as individuals and as a society.

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